

LOGIC & TRANSCENDENCE



A New Translation with Selected Letters

FRITHJOF SCHUON

World Wisdom

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Logic and Transcendence

A New Translation with
Selected Letters

by

Frithjof Schuon

Includes Other Previously
Unpublished Writings

Edited by

James S. Cutsinger

World Wisdom



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Translated by Mark Perry, Jean-Pierre Lafouge,
and James S Cutsinger

Published in French as
Logique et Transcendance
Éditions Traditionnelles, 1970

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Schuon, Frithjof, 1907-1998.

[Logique et transcendance English]

Logic and transcendence : a new translation with selected letters / by Frithjof
Schuon ; edited by James S Cutsinger ; translated by Mark Perry, Jean-Pierre
Lafouge, and James S. Cutsinger

p. cm. -- (The writings of Frithjof Schuon)

Includes bibliographical references and index

ISBN 978-1-933316-73-4 (pbk alk paper) 1 Transcendental logic. I. Cutsinger,
James S., 1953- II. Title

BC122 S3813 2009

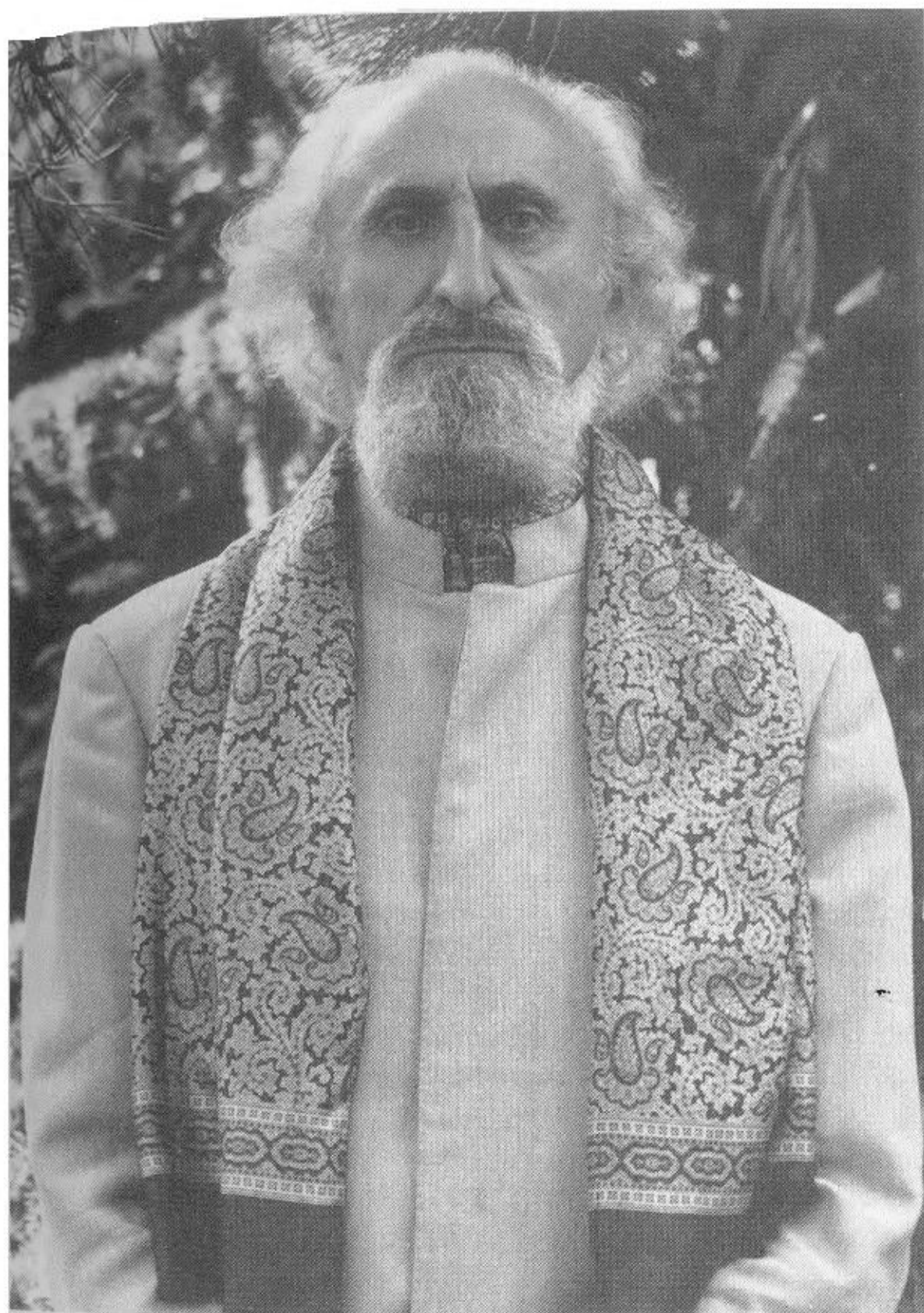
100--dc22

2009015919

Cover Art.
Traditional Persian illumination design

Printed on acid-free paper in the United States of America.

For information address World Wisdom, Inc
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www.worldwisdom.com



Frithjof Schuon in 1974

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EDITOR'S PREFACE

We are pleased to present this new edition of Frithjof Schuon's *Logic and Transcendence*.

Widely regarded as one of the greatest spiritual writers of the twentieth century, Frithjof Schuon (1907-1998) was an authority on an extraordinary range of religious and philosophical topics, and his books have been praised by scholars and spiritual teachers from many different traditions. He was also the leading representative of the perennialist school of comparative religious thought. Deeply rooted in the *sophia perennis*, *philosophia perennis*, or *religio perennis*—that is, the perennial wisdom, perennial philosophy, or perennial religion, as he variously called it—Schuon's perspective embodies the timeless and universal principles underlying the doctrines, symbols, sacred art, and spiritual practices of the world's religions.

Logic and Transcendence, Schuon's tenth major work, was published in Paris in 1970 by Éditions Traditionnelles under the title *Logique et Transcendance*; an English translation by Peter N. Townsend appeared with Perennial Books in 1975. The present edition is based on a fully revised translation of the original French.

Among the special features of this new edition is an appendix containing previously unpublished selections from the author's letters and other private writings. Throughout his life Schuon carried on an extensive correspondence, much of it in response to questions posed by the many inquirers and visitors, from a variety of religious backgrounds, who looked to him for advice; over a thousand of his letters have been preserved. He also composed nearly twelve hundred short spiritual texts for close friends and associates, compiled in his later years as "The Book of Keys". These and other private writings often contained the seeds of ideas that were later developed into published articles and chapters, and it is hoped that the selections included here will afford the reader a glimpse into a new and very rich dimension of this perennial philosopher's message.

The breadth of Schuon's erudition can be somewhat daunting, especially for those not accustomed to reading philosophical and religious works. The pages of his books contain numerous allusions to traditional theological doctrines, important philosophers or spiritual authorities, and the sacred Scriptures of the world's religions, but a

citation or other reference is not often provided. A series of editor's notes, organized by chapter and tagged to the relevant page numbers, has therefore been added to this new edition. Dates are provided for historical figures together with brief explanations regarding the significance of their teachings for Schuon, and citations are given for his frequent quotations from the Bible, Koran, and other sacred texts. The Authorized Version of the Bible has been used throughout; since the author made his own translations from the Koran, we have chosen to render his French for these passages directly into English, though the Pickthall interpretation of the Arabic has been given a certain preference when Koranic quotations appear in our editorial notes.

It is customary for Schuon to employ a number of technical terms in his writings, drawn from a multitude of traditions and involving several languages, including Arabic, Latin, Greek, and Sanskrit. A glossary has therefore been provided as well; here one will find foreign terms and phrases appearing both in Schuon's text and in our notes, together with translations and definitions.

James S. Cutsinger

INTRODUCTION

Writings falling outside the fields of science and modern philosophy tend to suffer from being associated with ideas that are usually inadequate, and they are immediately consigned by most people to categories having disparaging implications—whether rightly or wrongly—such as “occultism”, “syncretism”, “Gnosticism”, “intellectualism”, or “esoterism”.

Regarding the first of these notions, let us note that the word “occult” originates in the *vires occultae*, the unseen forces of nature, and in the *occulta*, the secrets relating to the ancient mysteries; as a matter of fact, however, modern occultism is reducible *grosso modo* to the study of extrasensory phenomena, which is one of the most hazardous pursuits because of its wholly empirical character and lack of any doctrinal basis. Occultism ranges from pure and simple experimentation to pseudo-religious speculations and practices; describing all authentically esoteric doctrines and methods as “occultism” involves but one further step in the same direction, and this step has been taken through ignorance, indifference, or carelessness—and without scruple or shame—by people whose interests are served by this sort of depreciation. It is as though one were to describe genuine mystics as occultists because they too are concerned with the unseen.

Similar remarks could be made on the subject of “Gnosticism”, but it is enough to remind ourselves here of the distinction between *gnosis* itself and historical and heretical Gnosticism, notably that of Valentinus. It is in the nature of things that *gnosis* should lie at the heart of all religion—whether in principle or in fact, and whatever its degree of actualization—and it should therefore not be argued about as if it were merely a matter of human invention or historical chance. *Gnosis* coincides with “esoterism”, except that esoterism may also include a dimension of volitive and emotional mysticism of the type of Hindu *bhakti*. Only the degree of *gnosis* represents a quasi-absolute esoterism, whereas the degree of love corresponds to a relative and conditional esoterism—though only as far as method is concerned, for like beauty love itself is a dimension of knowledge, and this degree forms a kind of bridge between *gnosis* and ordinary religious belief, exoterism. Christianity transposes the prescriptive Law—and along

with it Messianism itself—onto the inward plane, whence the fundamental lack of understanding between the Jewish and Christian religions; nascent Christianity was opposed to legalistic and formalistic Judaism, though not to Essenism, just as—under certain circumstances and in a certain respect—the “spirit” is opposed to the “letter” or as essence is opposed to form. Having shattered the formal Mosaic framework in the name of the essence, the Christian message acted as an esoterism, but it was an esoterism of love capable of becoming in turn an exoterism, though without necessarily losing—or being able to lose—its esoteric virtualities, including those of *gnosis*.

The terms “mystical” and “mysticism”, which we should not pass over in silence here, readily lend themselves to misuse insofar as they are applied to everything inward or intuitive, regardless of level; these words denote all inward contact with realities that are directly or indirectly divine, and not just an exclusively mental contact, and it is only natural that they should suggest above all a spirituality of love, for they are European terms, and Europe is Christian. Their association with the idea of the “irrational” is clearly false; spiritual intuition is suprarational, not irrational. In any case it seems to us that the only legitimate meanings one can attribute to the word “mystical” are on the one hand the meaning traditionally given it by theology and on the other hand an extended meaning based on etymological considerations, as we have just pointed out; this usage clearly has nothing to do with malicious intentions or a simple misuse of language.

We have mentioned the notion of “syncretism”, which has been applied arbitrarily to all spiritual knowledge that is in any way based on concepts belonging to diverse traditions and considered in light of a directly apprehended truth; now it is one thing to manufacture a doctrine by assembling scattered ideas as best one can and quite another to recognize, on the basis of what we willingly call the *Sophia Perennis*, the single Truth contained in various doctrines. Closely related to the imputation of syncretism is the criticism leveled against those who interpret foreign and seemingly unfamiliar ideas in light of familiar ones—for example, by placing Far Eastern concepts into European or Semitic molds; in certain instances this criticism may of course be legitimate, but it is not necessarily so just because a foreign concept is interpreted by means of a familiar one, for Truth is one and so is mankind. To concede that a given Mongol idea has no exact equivalent in the thought of white people is not at all the same thing as asserting

that it is inaccessible to them or that, when there is an equivalent, the idea cannot also be expressed in Sanskrit, Greek, or Semitic terms; no doubt there is no European word corresponding exactly to the North American idea of *wakan*, *manito*, or *orenda*, but this does not mean that a European is unable to grasp it or that it is beyond the descriptive resources of his language: however mysterious this notion may seem at first—like the Japanese *kami*, its near equivalent—one needs no more than a series of concordant examples to see that *wakan* is a more or less indirect theophany and that it consists in the manifestation of a particular “spirit”, which is at once cosmic and metacosmic; when adopting this metaphysically “pantheistic” viewpoint—the term is understood here in a positive sense—one tends to see within phenomena the “spirit” that goes beyond their accidentality and thereby constitutes a witness of Heaven. No one can tell us that white men’s brains are of no help when it comes to understanding North American Indians or Japanese; for mankind is extremely close-knit, and if modes of thinking nonetheless diverge—though never absolutely—passions and weaknesses exhibit a depressing monotony.

As for the criticism of “intellectualism”, what this means is that every interpretation of symbols is assumed to be artificial to the precise extent that the meaning ascribed is profound; this amounts to asserting that every religion can be reduced in its origins to the crudest possible concepts and that the very idea of symbolism is “intellectualistic” or “spiritualistic”, hence inauthentic and contrived. It is pointless for us to insist on the inanity of this hypothesis, presented as if it were a certainty; it is enough to take note of its existence.

To return to “esoterism”, we should add that it is an altogether extrinsic notion, one that is always and necessarily open to skepticism on the part of non-esoterists; it is a notion *pro domo*, and it is understandable for various reasons that exoterism—the literalist and exclusivist religion—has difficulty in admitting the existence and legitimacy of a dimension of this kind. In the cyclic period in which we live, however, the situation of the world is such that exclusivist dogmatism—we do not say dogmatism in itself since dogmas are necessary as immutable foundations and have inward and inclusive dimensions—has trouble holding its own, and whether it likes it or not it needs certain esoteric elements if it is to avoid exposing itself to errors much more problematic than *gnosis*. Unhappily, the wrong choice is made: one searches for a way out of certain impasses not on the side

of esoterism but on the side of the most erroneous and pernicious of philosophical and scientific ideologies, and spiritual universalism, the reality of which is confusedly noted, is replaced by a so-called "ecumenism", which consists of nothing but platitudes and sentimentality and accepts everything without discrimination.

The opposite position, that of narrowly literalistic belief, is still spiritually possible within a closed system knowing nothing of other traditional worlds, but in the long run it is untenable and dangerous in a universe where everything meets and interpenetrates; some have made much of the fact—quite unjustifiably—that according to Saint Paul "the things which the Gentiles sacrifice, they sacrifice to devils"; but such people forget first that Saint Paul was speaking of the genuinely pagan forms of worship with which the Mediterranean world then swarmed and which he knew personally and second that no one acquainted with the traditions and people of the East can possibly think they are all sworn to the devil or that, for example, the millions of Muslims who daily prostrate themselves before God do so entirely in vain, and have done so for centuries. Of course, Christian theology admits that every soul can be saved in secret by the grace of Christ, which is everywhere present, and it does not apply Saint Paul's words specifically to Muhammadan monotheists, but it does nothing to prevent such an application from being made; and it is in fact made precisely by those who, quite rightly rejecting a blind and dissolvent ecumenism, become increasingly rigid in their exclusivism—an exclusivism that is excusable in principle but hazardous and unrealistic in practice in our age of cultural contiguity. It has become impossible to provide an effective defense for a single religion against all the others by declaring the rest anathema without exception; to persist in doing so—unless one is living in a society that is still medieval, in which case the question does not arise—is a little like wishing to maintain the Ptolemaic system against the evidence of verified and verifiable astronomical data. All the same, we do not believe that the spiritual solidarity required by the facts can or should imply a complete, mutual understanding; it can stop halfway, at least for the average person, particularly since it is always possible to bracket the questions one cannot or does not wish to resolve. Let us stress once more that what we have in mind is not the idea of a widespread metaphysical and quintessential comprehension—this is in any case self-defeating in practice—but simply the possibility of an adequate understanding,

one that can serve to safeguard a religious patrimony against the temptations of a ubiquitous scientific mentality and that can bring about a perfectly logical and unsentimental solidarity between all those who traditionally accept transcendence and immortality.

In order to forestall the misunderstandings that sometimes result from such notions as “school” or “tendency”—and because we have had certain experiences—the reader ought to be warned that we do not necessarily subscribe to every assessment, conclusion, or theory formulated in the name of metaphysical, esoteric, or broadly traditional principles; in other words we do not espouse a theory simply because it belongs to a particular school, and we wish to be held responsible only for what we write ourselves. This question of “school” reminds us of a further term of classification, that of “traditionalism”; as with “esoterism”, there is certainly nothing pejorative about the word itself, and indeed it is a far broader term and even less open to argument than “esoterism”; as a matter of fact, however, it has come to be associated—arbitrarily and reprehensibly so—with an image that inevitably devalues its meaning, namely, “nostalgia for the past”; it is difficult to believe that such an idiotic and dishonest circumlocution would be freely employed as an argument against strictly doctrinal positions, or even purely logical ones. Those who look back longingly at some past age because it embodied certain vital values are criticized for adhering to these values because they are found in the past or because the critic would like to place them there “irreversibly”; one might as well say that the acceptance of an arithmetical proof is not the sign of an unimpaired functioning of the intelligence but of a morbid obsession with numbers. If to recognize what is true and just is “nostalgia for the past”, it is clearly a crime or disgrace not to feel this nostalgia.

The same applies to other accusations prompted by the idea of tradition, such as “Romanticism”, “aestheticism”, “folklore”; far from disclaiming any affinity for these things, we adopt them precisely insofar as they have a relationship with either tradition or virgin nature, thus restoring their legitimate and—at the very least—innocent meanings. For “beauty is the splendor of the true”; and since it is clearly possible to perceive this fact without lacking “seriousness”, we do not feel obliged to offer excuses for being particularly sensitive to this aspect of the Real.

The Contradiction of Relativism

Relativism reduces every element of absoluteness to relativity while making a completely illogical exception in favor of this reduction itself. Fundamentally it consists in propounding the claim that there is no truth as if this were truth or in declaring it to be absolutely true that there is nothing but the relatively true; one might just as well say that there is no language or write that there is no writing. In short, every idea is reduced to a relativity of some sort, whether psychological, historical, or social; but the assertion nullifies itself by the fact that it too presents itself as a psychological, historical, or social relativity. The assertion nullifies itself if it is true and by nullifying itself logically proves thereby that it is false; its initial absurdity lies in the implicit claim to be unique in escaping, as if by enchantment, from a relativity that is declared to be the only possibility.

The axiom of relativism is that "one can never escape from human subjectivity"; if this is the case, the statement itself possesses no objective value, but falls under its own verdict. It is abundantly evident that man can escape subjectivity, for otherwise he would not be man; and the proof of this possibility is that we are able to conceive of both the subjective and the surpassing of the subjective. This subjectivity would not even be conceivable for a man who was totally enclosed in his subjectivity; an animal lives its subjectivity but does not conceive it, for unlike man it does not possess the gift of objectivity.

Social relativism does not ask whether it is true that two and two make four but from what social background the man has come who declares this to be the case, and it does so without ever considering the fact that if the background determines the thought and takes precedence over truth, the same must apply in every case, which means that every background determines thought and every thought is determined by a background. If someone objects that such and such a particular background is favorable to the perception of truth, we could easily turn the argument around by referring to a different scale of values, which goes to show that this argument merely begs the question and that even on the most favorable showing it amounts to no more than an estimate of probabilities without any concrete significance. The same applies to historical relativism: since every human

thought necessarily occurs at a given moment in time—not with regard to its content but with regard to the mental process—every thought would have only a relative value and would be “outdated” and “obsolete” from the very moment of its birth; there would therefore be no point in thinking since man could never escape duration.

But the object of relativism—what is at stake in its claims—is not always truth as such; it can be any expression or modality of truth, especially a moral or aesthetic value; in this way all rectitude may be reduced to some contingent and more or less insignificant factor, and thus the door may be opened to all manner of misunderstandings, degradations, and deceptions. When applied to the facts of tradition, relativism is basically the error of confusing static and dynamic elements: one speaks about “epochs” or “styles” and forgets that what is in question here is the manifestation of objective and unwavering data, which are therefore definitive in their own way. In the growth of a tree, a given stage obviously corresponds to a given moment in time, but this does not prevent the trunk from being the trunk or branches from being branches or fruit from being fruit; the trunk of an apple tree is not simply one moment in relation to the apple, and the apple is not simply some other moment in relation to the trunk or the branch. The epoch referred to as “Gothic” had of its own nature the right to survive in its part of the world even to the end of time, for the ethnic givens that determined this epoch have not changed and cannot change—unless Latin-Germanic Christianity were to become Mongolian; Gothic, or Romano-Gothic, civilization was not left behind by “evolution” nor has it ceased to exist through some transmutation of itself; it was assassinated by an extra-Christian force, the neo-paganism of the Renaissance. Be that as it may, one of the noteworthy traits of the twentieth century is the confusion, now habitual, between evolution and decadence: there is no decadence, no impoverishment, no falsification that people do not try to excuse with the aid of the relativistic argument of “evolution”, reinforced as this is by the most inappropriate and erroneous associations. Thus relativism, cleverly instilled into public opinion, paves the way for all kinds of corruption while at the same time keeping watch lest any kind of healthy reaction might put the brakes on this slide toward the abyss.

While errors that tend to deny objective and intrinsic intelligence destroy themselves by propounding a thesis that is disproved by the very existence of the thesis itself, the fact that errors exist does not

in itself prove the inevitable fallibility of the intelligence, for error is not derived from intelligence as such; on the contrary it is a privative phenomenon that causes the activity of the intelligence to deviate because of an element of passion or blindness, though without being able to invalidate the very nature of the cognitive faculty.

A patent example of the classic contradiction in question here—a contradiction characterizing for the most part all modern thought—is provided by existentialism, which postulates a definition of the world that is impossible if existentialism itself is possible. There are only two alternatives: either objective knowledge—a knowledge that is therefore absolute in its own order—is possible, which proves that existentialism is false; or else existentialism is true, but then its own promulgation is impossible since in the existentialist universe there is no room for an objective and unwavering intellection.

* * *

If everything that can rightfully be described as human rests on merely psychological causes, one can—and indeed must—explain everything by psychology, whence the “psychology of religion” and the supposedly psychological criticism of sacred texts; in every case of this kind, we are dealing with speculations in the void because of an absence of the indispensable objective data—data inaccessible to methods of investigation arbitrarily defined as normal and inappropriately extended to cover all possible knowledge.

On the slippery ground of psychologism, the logic of Kantian criticism is now “outmoded”, all things considered, for “critique” has readily assumed the guise of “analysis”, and this fact is indeed symptomatic since the very notion of “critique” is doubtless still too intellectual for the demolishers psychologists intend to be—demolishers who blithely reduce metaphysics and even simple logic to questions of grammar. People wish to “analyze” everything in a quasi-physical or quasi-chemical way, and they would even analyze God if this were possible; indeed this is done indirectly when an attack is made on the notion of God or the mental and moral concomitances of this notion, or on the expressions—altogether out of reach as these really are—of a genuine intellection.

If Freudianism declares that rationality is merely a hypocritical cloak for a repressed animality, this statement—seemingly rational—

falls under the same verdict; if there were any logic to Freudianism, it would itself be nothing more than a symbolizing denaturation of psychophysical instincts. No doubt psychoanalysts will say that in their case reasoning is not a function of unacknowledged repressions; but we do not at all see why this exception should be admissible in terms of their own doctrine, nor why this law of exception should apply only in their favor and not in favor of the spiritual doctrines they reject with such animus and with so monstrous a lack of any sense of proportion. In any case, nothing can be more absurd than for a man to make himself not merely the accuser of some psychological accident but of man as such; whence comes this demigod who accuses, and whence his power to accuse? If the accuser himself is right, this must mean that man is not so bad and that there exists within him a capacity for adequation; otherwise it would be necessary to assume that the champions of psychoanalysis are divine beings unpredictably fallen from heaven—a somewhat unlikely proposition, to say the least.

Psychoanalysis begins by eliminating the transcendent factors essential to man and then replaces complexes of inferiority or frustration with complexes of complacency and egotism; it allows one to sin calmly and with assurance and to damn oneself serenely. Like all philosophies of destruction—that of Nietzsche, for example—Freudianism attributes an absolute significance to a relative situation; like all modern thought, all it manages to do is to fall from one extreme into another, incapable as it is of realizing that the truth—and the solution—it seeks is to be found in man's deepest nature, of which the religions and traditional wisdoms are precisely the spokesmen, guardians, and guarantors.

The mentality created and disseminated by psychoanalysis consists in refusing to engage in a logical or intellectual dialogue—which is alone worthy of human beings—and in answering questions by means of insolent conjectures; instead of trying to find out whether an interlocutor is right or not, questions are asked about his parents or blood pressure—to confine ourselves to symbolic examples of a fairly innocuous kind—as if such procedures could not readily be turned against their authors or as if it were not easy, by changing the mode of argument, to refute one analysis by means of another. The pseudo-criteria of analysis are preferably physiological or sociological, depending upon the craze of the moment; it would not be difficult to

find counter criteria and conduct a serious analysis of this imaginary analysis.

If man is a hypocrite, then one of two things: either he is so fundamentally, in which case no one could take note of the fact without passing miraculously, or divinely, beyond human nature; or his hypocrisy is only accidental and relative, in which case there was no need to wait for psychoanalysis to take this fact into account since health is more fundamental to the nature of man than illness and since, this being so, there have always been men who could recognize evil and knew the cure for it. Or again, if man is profoundly sick, it is impossible to see why psychoanalysis should alone have been able to notice this and why its explanation, which is perfectly arbitrary and indeed essentially perverse, should alone be the right one; of course, one could try to make sense of things with the idea of "evolution", but in this case it would be necessary to blind oneself to the qualities of our ancestors and the vices of our contemporaries, and this is to say nothing of the impossibility of demonstrating—or the absurdity of even assuming—that a sudden burst of intellectual and moral objectivity could ever come about in a merely biological and quantitative development.

For if a natural development led to a reflexive intelligence—to an act of awareness that perceived the development for what it was—this outcome would be a reality falling entirely outside the realm of the evolutionary process; there would be no common measure between this act and the wholly contingent movement preceding it, and therefore this movement could under no circumstances be the cause of the awareness in question. This argument is the very negation of the theory of transformist evolutionism, hence of every notion of man as a "link" or a "chance", and so also of every form of mysticism relating to a generative matter, a biosphere, a noosphere, or an "omega point".¹ Man is what he is, or else he is nothing; the capacity for objectivity

¹ Transformist evolutionism—let it be said once again—is simply a materialist substitute for the ancient concept of the solidifying and segmenting "materialization" of a subtle and suprasensorial primordial substance, in which were prefigured all the diverse possibilities of the *a posteriori* material world, the answer to evolutionism is the doctrine of archetypes and "ideas", with ideas relating to pure Being—or the divine Intellect—and archetypes to the primordial substance in which they are "incarnated" as it were by reverberation.

and absoluteness of thought proves the quasi-absolute—that is, the unwavering and irreplaceable—character of the creature that thinks; this is what is meant by the scriptural words “made in God’s image”.

This capacity for objectivity and absoluteness amounts to an existential—and “preventive”—refutation of the ideologies of doubt: if a man is able to doubt, it is because there is certainty; likewise the very notion of illusion proves that man has access to reality. It follows that there are necessarily some men who know reality and who therefore have certainty; and the great spokesmen of this knowledge and certainty are necessarily the best of men. For if truth were on the side of doubt, the individual who doubted would be superior not only to these spokesmen, who have not doubted, but also to the majority of normal men across the millennia of human existence. If doubt conformed to the real, human intelligence would be deprived of its sufficient reason, and man would be less than an animal, for the intelligence of animals does not doubt the reality to which it is proportioned.

* * *

Every science of the soul should be a science of the various orders of limitation or infirmity; now there are four essential orders to consider: the universal, the general, the individual, and the accidental.

This means that every man contains a universal limitation or “infirmity” because he is creature and not Creator, manifestation and not Principle or Being; then a general limitation or “infirmity” because he is an earthly man and not an angel or one of the blessed in Heaven; next an individual infirmity because he is himself and not others; and finally an accidental infirmity because he is beneath himself, unless he is perfect.

There is no science of the soul without a metaphysical basis and spiritual remedies.

* * *

Thought of the psychological type is always rushing ahead of itself; it sets out to be dynamic and effective before being true and to be a solution or remedy before being a diagnosis; moreover it readily indulges in a duplicitous form of reasoning in order to evade its intellectual responsibility. Imagine someone saying that every man must die, to

which he receives the reply that this is not true because it makes people feel sad or fatalistic or fills them with despair; and yet this is the way the man "of our time" likes to reason: his objections to truths he finds disagreeable are always beside the point and always involve evasions or confusions of level. If a man raises a fire alarm, it is said that he has no right to do so unless he knows how to extinguish the fire; and if someone maintains that two and two make four and thus disrupts certain prejudices or interests, it will be said that this calculation denotes not his ability to count but a complex of exactitude, contracted no doubt through an excessive attachment to "bygone days", and so forth: if these metaphors appear to be caricatures, it is only because of their simplicity or outspokenness, for the reality is often no less absurd than our simplifications. Psychoanalysis has succeeded in perverting intelligence by giving rise to a "psychoanalytical complex" that corrupts everything; if it is possible to deny the absolute in many different ways, psychological and existentialist relativism denies it within intelligence itself: intelligence is practically set up as a god but at the price of all that constitutes its intrinsic nature, value, and effectiveness; intelligence becomes "adult" by destroying itself.

There is a moral relativism that is truly odious: if you say that God and the beyond are real, this shows you are cowardly, dishonest, infantile, shamefully abnormal; if you say that religion is just make-believe, this shows you are courageous, honest, sincere, adult, altogether normal. If all this were true, man would be nothing, possessing the capacity for neither truthfulness nor heroism; and there would be no one even to note the fact, for a hero cannot be extracted from a coward nor a sage from a man of feeble mind—not even by "evolution". But this moralistic bias, ignoble or simply stupid as the case may be, is by no means something new: before it was applied to intellectual positions, it was used to discredit the contemplative life, which was described as an "escape", as if a man did not have the right to flee from dangers concerning him alone and—more important—as though the contemplative life and withdrawal from the world were not instead a pilgrimage toward God; to flee God as do the worldly is far more senseless and irresponsible than fleeing the world. To run away from God is at the same time to run away from oneself, for when a man is alone with himself—even though he may be surrounded by others—he is always with his Creator, whom he encounters at the very root of his being.

The prejudice for reducing religious attitudes to reflexes of fear or servility, hence of childishness and baseness, is completely in line with this intrusive and simplifying psychologism; one should begin by proving that religious fears are really ill-founded and then, failing that, seek to understand the real meaning and inward consequences of devotional attitudes.² We would point out first that it is not debasing to humble oneself before the Absolute, neither objectively nor therefore subjectively; but it is also important to address the issue of “who” prostrates or humbles himself: obviously it is not our transpersonal nucleus, the mysterious seat of the divine Immanence. In reality it is a question here of the relative being—the “creature”, if one prefers—becoming aware of its ontological dependence in relation to that One Being from whom it is derived and whom it manifests in its own way; this act of awareness will accidentally seem like a humiliation because of the congenital decadence of man, but this makes the awareness all the more effective. It is obvious that our deiform and immortal personality includes an aspect of majesty—quite visible already in the very form of the human body—and the religions have been the first to call attention to this fact, though they have been no more pardoned for this than for fostering the opposite attitude; but it is equally obvious that there is something in man that merits constraint and abasement. It is impossible for the ego, such as it is in its human animality, to be immune from all celestial reproof; disequilibrium and fragmentation have a debt to pay to Equilibrium and Totality, and not the other way round. To be conscious of this state of affairs is the first requirement of human dignity, which is little understood at a time when demagoguery has become a “categorical imperative” in all spheres of thought.

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Relativism engenders a spirit of rebellion and is at the same time its fruit. The spirit of rebellion, unlike holy anger, is not a passing state, nor is it directed against some worldly abuse; on the contrary it is a chronic malady directed against Heaven and against everything that

² The association of ideas that links childhood with fear overlooks the fact that there are fears peculiar to adulthood and conversely that there are illusions of safety belonging to childhood.

represents Heaven or is a reminder of it. When Lao Tzu said that "in the latter days the man of virtue appears vile", he had in mind the rebellious spirit that characterizes our time; but for psychological and existentialist relativism, which by definition always seeks to justify the crude ego, this spiritual state is normal, and it is its absence that amounts to disease, whence the abolition of the sense of sin. The sense of sin is the consciousness of an equilibrium surpassing our personal will and operating ultimately for the benefit of our integral personality and that of the human collectivity, even though occasionally wounding us; this sense of sin goes hand in hand with a sense of the sacred, which is an instinct for what surpasses us—for what should therefore not be touched by ignorant and iconoclastic hands.

Of course, the idea that one may merit damnation by "offending the divine majesty" is acceptable only if one feels what is at stake or knows it: Divinity is impersonal before determining itself as divine Person in relation to the human person, and on the plane of impersonality there is only an ontological and logical relationship of cause to effect between God and man; on this plane there can be no question of "goodness", for absolute Reality is what it is, and pure causality has nothing specifically moral about it. But it is on the plane of revelation as divine Person that Mercy can intervene, the Mercy that is the most marvelous of all the mysteries; it is precisely this intervention that shows us that the Absolute is not a blind power. Given their indolence of spirit and lack of imagination, it is true that men are only too ready to prescribe a stupid kind of humility, but this is no reason for believing that God requires it and that there is no possibility of manifesting our consciousness of causality and equilibrium in an intelligent way; nonetheless God prefers a stupid humility to an intelligent pride—a pride nourished, in other words, on an abuse of intelligence.

As limited and degraded as man undeniably is, he yet remains "the proof by contraries" of the divine Prototype and of all that this Prototype implies and determines in relation to man. Not to acknowledge what surpasses us and not to wish to surpass ourselves: this in fact is the whole program of psychologism, and it is the very definition of Lucifer. The opposite, or rather the primordial and normative, attitude is this: to think only in reference to what surpasses us and to live for the sake of surpassing ourselves; to seek greatness where this is to be found and not on the plane of the individual and his rebellious

pettiness. In order to return to true greatness, man must first of all agree to pay the debt of his pettiness and to remain small on the plane where he cannot help being small; the sense of what is objective on the one hand and of the absolute on the other does not go without a certain abnegation, and it is this abnegation precisely that allows us to be completely faithful to our human vocation.

Abuse of the Ideas of the Concrete and the Abstract

Normally the term “abstract” is applied to general ideas: considering a quality in itself means “abstracting” it from its manifestations. In the medieval controversy over universals, the Nominalists were not wrong in looking on general ideas as abstractions or points of reference for thought, because from the point of view of reason they do indeed play this role; they were wrong, however, in blaming the Realists for seeing concrete realities in universals since from the standpoint of their intrinsic nature general qualities coincide no less really with the “ideas” or principial roots of things.¹

But whereas with the medieval Nominalists only the general qualities as such were regarded as abstract, there is in modern thinking a significant abuse of the ideas of both the abstract and the concrete, the one error obviously being connected to the other: all reality not physically or psychologically tangible—although perfectly accessible to pure intellection—is described as being “abstract” with a more or less disparaging intention, as though it were a matter of distinguishing between dream, or even deception, and reality or healthiness of mind. Substance—that which exists of itself—is regarded as “abstract”, and the accidental as “concrete”; it is imagined that an idea of the supra-sensible is obtainable exclusively through abstraction, by prescinding from contingencies; while having a certain meaning on the logical plane, this is false at the level of direct intellection. Our certainty of the Absolute is not dependent upon a process of mental unwrapping; it is innate in our essential intelligence and can erupt into our consciousness without the aid of logical operations. If intelligence is the capacity to discern “substances” either through “accidents” or independently of them, “concretism” can only be described as a kind of philosophical codifying of unintelligence.

If the abstract is what presupposes the subtraction of something, namely the phenomena of experience, these phenomena are in turn

¹ With regard to universals, we need not consider such particular types as transcendentals, which refer to the divine nature alone, or predicaments, which are existential or even simply sensory categories, these distinctions run the risk, moreover, of being too restrictive, given that every universal is rooted in God

“abstract” in the sense that to consider them it is necessary to abstract them from their essences; seen from this angle it is the accidental or phenomenal that assumes the nature of an abstraction. The question of whether Being is or is not an abstraction poses an artificial alternative, for both are possible: if on the one hand Being appears as an abstraction to the mind and in relation to things, it constitutes on the other hand the objective and concrete reality that gives rise to the abstract notion, which means that it is the most concrete reality possible. The notion of Being is either a relatively direct reflection of Being in pure intelligence, or else it is an indirect trace of Being in the reason; in the second case we would say that Being is “abstract” because the thinking subject takes things that “are”, or more precisely things that “exist”, as its point of departure, abstraction without these things being inconceivable; but for direct intellection, which sets out from an innate and “pre-logical” certainty—this word is being used in a positive, that is, “emanationist” and not evolutionist, sense²—consciousness of Being is “something of Being” because it grasps a ray proceeding from it and is therefore something quite different from a rational operation. From this point of view Being reveals itself as a “consciousness” before appearing as a “notion”, and it is not necessarily associated with a phenomenal context: in the mirror of the Intellect, Being is dazzlingly evident, comparable at one and the same time to the geometrical point and to limitless space, the point implacable in its rigor and space serene in its emptiness. We would summarize by saying that Being is abstract in two ways, first when concealed behind phenomena and second when concealed behind rational conclusions, but it is concrete in itself and as a participative perception of the Intellect.

Similar remarks can be made with regard to other ideas described as “abstract”, such as freedom: what is freedom apart from free creatures or a particular instance of such a creature? It is the consciousness of an unlimited diversity of possibilities, and this consciousness is an

² Ordinary theology is unable to take the aspect “Substance-emanation” into account, for this theology is centered on the aspect “Being-creation”, which is at the metaphysically opposite extreme; in a similar way a given symbol of space cannot be both a cross and a circle at the same time, even though the two images may both be adequate. Integral truth requires a perspective capable of revealing the link between opposite but complementary points of view, each to a certain extent the corrective or guarantee of the other

aspect of Being itself; to those who maintain that only a given experience of freedom is concrete, such as that of a bird, and not freedom as such, which in their view is no more than a purely mental abstraction, we would respond—without denying the existence of abstraction in reason—that freedom as such is an immutable essence, in which creatures may either participate or not, and that a given experience of freedom is only an “accident”. Defined in positive terms freedom is the possibility of manifesting oneself fully or being perfectly oneself, and this possibility—or this experience—runs through the universe as a real, hence concrete, beatitude in which animate beings participate according to their natures or destinies; the animate universe is a being that breathes and that lives both in itself and in its innumerable individualized constituents; and deep within all of this there subsists the ineffable Freedom of the Infinite. Many notions that we label “abstract” for convenience because they lie outside our immediate or daily experience, or that we describe as “abstract” in a provisional way to serve the needs of our logic, correspond to experiences that are deeper and more real than our own, experiences that are lived by the cosmic consciousnesses, of which we are only exteriorizations or particles.

The notion of justice is an abstraction, it is true, but the universal equilibrium from which it is derived and which particular acts of justice manifest is as concrete as the Universe itself. But to return to the notion of freedom: when a bird escapes from its cage, we say it is free; we might just as truly say that freedom has burst forth from a particular point of the cosmic carapace or that it has taken possession of the bird, or again that it has manifested itself through this creature or form; liberation is something that occurs, but Freedom is that which is, which always has been, which always will be. The prototype of all freedom, and the reality expressed in every particular or “accidental” phenomenon of freedom, is the limitlessness of principial or divine Activity, or the consciousness God has of His All-Possibility.

* * *

Intelligence, Power, and Beauty are concrete realities not only insofar as they are qualities of perfect and immutable Being but also insofar as they are the universal roots of all the phenomena that manifest them in contingent mode and that are related to them as drops of spray to

the sea. The opposites of universal qualities do not possess aseity since they are mere privations and consequently have no essential existence; "pure" imperfection, imperfection "in itself" or "as such", would logically be nothing—logically and not in any other sense, for nothingness is not even imperfect: it has no sort of existence at all. Under no circumstances can the idea of imperfection, or the idea of a particular imperfection or privation, refer to an essence, universal essences being positive by definition; it refers to the accidental, since without accident there can be no privation. Should the notion of an imperfection, that of ugliness, for example, therefore be regarded as an abstraction pure and simple? On this point Nominalism is right—though without opposing Realism, which would not in this case disagree—since privative ideas are in fact merely generalizations of accidents, or reductions if one prefers, though it should be borne in mind that the spirits responsible for the various evils exist at the level of the non-formal roots of our formal world; it goes without saying that infernal realities can have no place at the level of the Divine. The spirits of evil, the demons, are the inverted shadows—inverted in the direction of nothingness, which is in itself nonexistent—of the Names of God; the "fall of the angels" indicates the cosmic manifestation of the principles of remotion, inversion, privation, and negation, as well as compression and volatilization.

Does this mean that the ideas of ugliness or vice are themselves a participation in ugliness or vice, as is the case with positive ideas? Clearly not, for the definition of vice is derived from virtue: goodness is the measure of evil; it is not because of stupidity that we know stupidity but because of intelligence, which makes recognition of this privation possible. If the intellectual perception of the Good is a participation in the Good, the perception of evil is always derived from this same participation, but in an extrinsic or negative sense; only vice itself—not the notion of vice—participates in the cosmic root of vice. There is no symmetry here since intelligence is a good; an intellection whose object is an evil always remains a good, intimately joined to the positive and immutable "ideas" of things and operating in their light and with their concurrence. Intelligence exists first of all to reflect the essences of things and secondarily to record the corresponding privations and infirmities; in the final analysis it is the fallen will alone that sustains the vices—fallen because of its separation from pure intelligence or because the intelligence has been perverted by its submission

to this will and is thus cut off from its transcendent center; in proportion to its gravity, an error has its roots either in the volitive or in the passional element, and this element is insidious—even to the point of being able to simulate intellection.³

We do not criticize modern “concretists” for insisting that different modalities should be taken into account and that it is not enough to apply principles in a blind and automatic way; we criticize them for maintaining that a truth is valid only at the level of the accidental, not of the essential, and in failing to understand that their “concrete”—which is merely the accidental or contingent—is contained *a priori* in what they label “abstract”. The fact that an application of the idea of “justice”, for example, requires gradations and even at times paradoxical modalities does not mean that the application is opposed to the idea, but rather that this idea in itself implies the existence of modalities and that an application without modalities amounts simply to a failure to understand the very notion of justice itself; that a poor man who steals a morsel of bread should be treated differently from a robber who steals a treasure is self-evident, not merely because of the accidental circumstances but because of the idea of justice itself. We would not have to blame the “concretists”, who in fact are capable of acting normally on the plane of applications—but who can make mistakes here as well because of their inadequate understanding of the idea—were it not for their fundamental tendency to oppose principles and to wish to reduce all effectiveness to an empiricism that clings to the accidental, a tendency that explains the anti-intellectual, and often profoundly unjust, abuses encountered in what is today haphazardly termed “psychology”.

* * *

Kierkegaardian “existence” nullifies itself because it lacks a sufficient reason; how is it possible to conceive of an “existential” morality, one “lived and not thought”—hence free from “abstraction”—at the level of terrestrial man, who is by definition a thinking being? This

³ *Errare humanum est*, said Saint Jerome, and according to Saint Augustine, *Humanum fuit errare, diabolicum est per animositatem in errore manere* “To err is human, but to remain in error out of stubbornness is diabolical”

alternative between "existence" and "thought-abstraction" is the fundamental misunderstanding in existentialism; and existentialism is simply a manifestation, one of the most aberrant, of what we might call Western "alternativism".⁴

The Western mind has always lived to a large extent on alternatives: either it has imprisoned thought and life within real but fragmentary and therefore destabilizing alternatives—pleasure and pain, for example—or else it has erected false alternatives in the course of its philosophical "researches" or in its destructive pursuit of originality and change. One of the most typical examples in fact is Kierkegaard's criticism of the "abstract thinker", who is guilty—or so it is made to appear—of "the contradiction of wishing to demonstrate his existence by means of his thought": "To the extent that he thinks abstractly he makes an abstraction of the fact that he exists," this philosopher concludes. Now in the first place, truly to think—to think intelligently and not merely to juxtapose images or question-begging propositions—is by definition "to think abstractly", for otherwise thought would be reduced to imagination; and in the second place, there is no fundamental opposition between the two poles "existing" and "thinking" since our existence is always a mode of consciousness for us, and our thought is a manner of existing; only error—not "abstraction"—is inadequate in comparison with the positive fact of existence, and only mineral existence—not our life—is completely separated from our consciousness, whether this consciousness congeals in thought or not. An element of truth is nonetheless contained in the existentialist criticism, for discursive knowledge is indeed separative by reason of the subject-object polarization; the conclusion to be drawn from this, however, is not that such knowledge is deprived of value on its own plane or that it is limited with regard to its content, but that it does not embrace all possible knowledge and that in purely intellective and direct knowledge the polarization in question is transcended.

Intelligent men, provided they have not been artificially corrupted, have certain ways of thinking and responding, while stupid men have other ways of acting; now existentialism has achieved the

⁴ What is one to say of a philosopher who "thinks" cheerfully about the insincerity or mediocrity of "thought" as such? Inept though his verbal tricks may be, whoever dwells in a crowded city never lacks an audience

tour de force or the monstrous contortion of presenting the commonest stupidity as intelligence and disguising it as philosophy while at the same time holding intelligence up to ridicule, that of all intelligent men of all times. Since "it must needs be that offences come", this manifestation of the absurd was to be expected: the opportunity was simply too good to be missed once it had become a possibility; and if it is original to elevate error into truth, vice into virtue, and evil into good, the same may be said of presenting stupidity as intelligence, and conversely; all that was needed was for someone to conceive the idea. All down the ages to philosophize was to think; it was left to the twentieth century not to think and to make a philosophy of it.

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No sooner does one thinker believe he has found the cause of phenomena than another philosopher comes forward to accuse him of failing to find the cause of the cause, and so on *ad infinitum*; this shows that when philosophy has become art for art's sake it is no more than a search for the cause of the cause of the cause, with no possible outcome and with utter mental deception, whereas in the case of genuine wisdom one knows beforehand that the complete truth can and must spring forth from any adequate formulation like a spark from flint, but that it will always remain incommunicable in its intrinsic infinitude. To search, as do modern thinkers and as did some of their ancient precursors, for completely adequate formulations capable of satisfying every need for explanation, the most artificial and the least intelligent included, is assuredly the most contradictory and the most fruitless of occupations; the "quest" of philosophers thus has nothing in common with that of contemplatives, for its basic principle—exhaustive verbal adequacy—is opposed to any liberating finality, to any transcending of the sphere of words. It is not surprising that after centuries of unsatisfied ratiocination—unsatisfied because in principle not capable of satisfaction—people have become weary of what is looked upon, rightly or wrongly, as "abstract" and have turned, unfortunately, not to the inward "concrete" that the sages of old and the saints always knew, but on the contrary to an outward—and at the same time hardening, dispersive, and altogether illusory—"concrete". The innovators, nihilists, and "constructivists" alike claim that they wish "to start from scratch" in every field, as if it were possible for man to create himself

again, to create the intelligence with which he thinks and the will with which he desires and acts—as if man's existence came from nowhere else than from our own opinions and desires.

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An obvious manifestation of concretism is the prejudice in favor of regarding the average as the norm—under the pretext that beauty, for example, is more or less the exception whereas mediocrity is almost the rule; a consequence of this is that decadence, because it is widespread, is presented as a model, and this in the name of “reality”, hence the “concrete”. We see from this example how concretism can distort thinking and therefore science to a certain extent; we also see the service it renders to democracy and the general support it gives the cult of mediocrity and vulgarity and even, in our day, of the abnormal and base. In the end even the people themselves are maligned by having defects attributed to them that we are asked to accept as qualities, and it is deliberately forgotten that under normal circumstances the people are the conveyors of values having nothing to do with their negative aspects of quantity, heaviness, and dispersion; these people are not identifiable purely and simply with the masses but preserve an aspect of substance that tradition—and tradition alone—can be expected to turn to good effect.

In this general context we should mention a philosophical thesis that asserts that every evil—whether on the cultural, social, or moral plane—comes from abstraction; now in certain spheres it is impossible not to think abstractly, that is, not to acknowledge the primacy of principles over facts, and it is therefore not a question of deciding between the abstract and the concrete but of assessing the value of one or the other in a given case. It is a fact that the most narrow-minded protagonists of the concrete are the most abstract in the bad sense—that is, the most unrealistic and most inhuman—when it comes to politics; conversely, those whose intelligence is abstract in the positive sense and who are thereby conscious of real principles are at the same time the most understanding in regard to human facts insofar as these facts can and should be taken into account.⁵

⁵ A general who must sacrifice the lives of a thousand soldiers cannot take into consid-



Certain arguments against eternal life are thoroughly typical of the “concretist” perversion of intelligence and imagination: to exist, they say, is to measure oneself against limits; it is to conquer resistances and produce something. They obviously have no conception of the possibility of an existence that is incorporated in active Immutability, or immutable Activity, and that lives by it; the touchstone of the real for the materialists is always gross experience together with a lack of imagination on the part of the “hylic”; on this level nothing but “boredom” can be seen in eternal life, which brings us to the monologue Kant metaphorically attributes to the divine Person, who in taking note of His eternity would logically be obliged to raise the question of His own origin.

At the opposite pole to this frankly materialistic concretism, a particularly unpleasant form of the same general tendency can be seen in religious concretism: it is said for example that Christianity does not just dream about some remote *nirvāna* but has its feet “firmly planted on the ground” and concerns itself with what is “real”; it is situated “in history”—in that which “is”; instead of pursuing some “abstract nothing” it maintains a “concrete dialogue” between creature and Creator, and so forth. Here we find on the one hand a strange betrayal of the fundamental intention of the Gospel and on the other an unconscious reaction against the sacred and the transcendent, which is due to an “inferiority complex” with respect to the world and its apparent effectiveness as well as its triumphant vulgarity; this explains the tinge of zealous and inverted hypocrisy—the effort to appear lower than any real Christian can be—which accompanies religious concretism despite all its affectations of sentimental piety. Since the Renaissance, for which the human Church—not the institutional

eration each individual concrete personality, and furthermore we do not see why all the lives saved, thanks to the victory, would not be concrete in turn or why the victory itself would not be concrete in regard to its benefits. To take a different example: the French Revolution with all its infamy, which is conveniently forgotten since it is in no one’s interest to remember it, could never have broken out if the law had not become too lenient—that is, too “concrete” where individuals were concerned—under pressure from humanitarian and anticlerical philosophers who were opposed to what was subsequently called the “old regime”.

Church—is chiefly responsible, there is something about Catholic language that fails to ring true whenever it speaks of the affairs of the world: the Latin Church seems incapable of disavowing that completely mundane thing called “civilization” without at the same time disavowing itself; it is the heavy debt of its past inconsistencies that prevents it from adopting a free and fundamental stand against the poisoned fruits of those same inconsistencies. Catholicism drags the Renaissance along with it like an iron ball, and this prevents it from acting in a perfectly consistent manner and thus from being perfectly itself, except within the increasingly isolated and precarious realms of theology and sanctity.⁶

Concretism coincides with what we might call “factualism” or the superstition of the fact, a fact being regarded as the opposite of a principle, the opposite therefore of what current prejudice regards as an abstraction. On the religious plane the emphasis is placed on moral facts at the expense of intrinsic spiritual realities instead of maintaining a humanly necessary balance between inward and eternal values and social applications, or between essences and forms.⁷

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Philosophical concretism, which is an inverted realism, has always been a temptation for a human mind that is forgetful of its own true nature and primordial vocation. The perverse concretism of the philosophers results from the naive concretism of sensory experience; but whereas the second remains neutral with regard to the suprasensible and supernatural, the first sets itself up as a universal and totalitarian doctrine. Sensory concretism does not result so much from the fact of sensation in itself as from our separation—caused by the original

⁶ It is largely to Bossuet, encouraged by Louis XIV, that one can trace this prodigious spiritual impoverishment, from which the Latin West has never recovered and from which has come religious “concretism”, with its appeal to a “sane” spirituality, to an inverted “good sense” and “realism”, and thus with its inability to affirm itself in the life of the world without thickening and falsifying the spirit.

⁷ Ruysbroek emphasizes that “holiness resides only in being, since our works, no matter how saintly they may appear, do not sanctify of themselves; they do so only to the extent that we are saintly and that our works issue from an interior, a center, that is holy. . . . This center sanctifies all that we do”

fall—from invisible realities, which then become mythological notions and objects of faith that differ widely in degree since both wisdom and childhood must be taken into account. Fallen man can be reduced to sensory experience and to the reason that registers and coordinates this experience, and he is able to extract the whole of his fallacious wisdom out of this situation—a natural situation in a certain sense but abnormal nonetheless since even fallen man possesses resources of knowledge other than sensation and reasoning.

The primacy of what is gross and accidental is not the invention of the Greeks alone; in ancient India the *Chārvākas* rejected both Revelation and the existence of all suprasensible reality; this was also the case with the *Ajīvikas*, who insisted upon an absolute and blind fatalism, totally devoid of any outlet in the direction of a liberating Absolute. Long before the days of Epicurus, Protagoras, or Pyrrho, the great Rama had to refute the materialism of Jabali; likewise Krishna, in the *Bhagavad Gītā*, refutes materialism in general, and the Buddha in turn rejected the naturalistic fatalism of Gosala. But whereas in India these aberrations never succeeded in becoming dominant and were eventually eliminated by a powerful orthodoxy, which was all the more effective because of the breadth of its outlook, in Greece they asserted themselves more easily and in a more damaging manner, thanks to the nearly universal prevalence of the profane mentality, which modern concretists commend as one of the glories of the classical heritage.

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As a matter of convention and without even thinking, people dismiss the most direct and palpable metaphysical perceptions as “speculations in the abstract”, perceptions that impose themselves not through demonstration but by their “superabundance of clarity”. The Intellect is infallible in itself, or else it is nothing; pure intellection is a subjective and immanent Revelation just as Revelation properly so called is an objective and transcendent intellection; intellection is guaranteed to the extent that the Intellect is able to operate without obstacles, and this presupposes conditions that are not only intellectual but also moral in the deepest sense of the word and that are therefore concerned with the virtues and not merely with social behavior. No doubt there will be those who question how the existence and effectiveness

of this knowledge can be proved: the only possible reply is that such proof is given by the expressions of intellection themselves; just as it is impossible to prove the validity of a given religion to every soul—a fact that in no way detracts from this validity—so also is it impossible to prove the reality of the Intellect to every understanding, which again proves nothing at all against this reality. All proof is relative by definition since an absolute proof would be identical with the thing to be proved; a proof is always more or less distinct from its object. There is something of the object in the proof, however, and this something compels faith; in every manifestation of liberating truth there is something self-evident, to which we may or may not be sensitive but which we grasp to the extent that our mind recognizes in this manifestation some latent content of its own substance. The proof of the truth of the Invisible is the recollection that the expression of this truth actualizes in minds that have remained faithful to their original vocation; the illuminative function devolves upon metaphysical argument, as well as upon symbols and miracles if consideration is given to all the modes and imponderables of the intelligence or the soul. To communicate intellection to the receptive spirit is to remind it of what it is and at the same time of the Being through which it exists.

Knowledge of the Absolute is absolute; we might even specify “absolutely absolute”—despite some easily foreseeable objections—so as to distinguish it from the “relatively absolute”; in other words, since knowledge of the relative could not be “absolutely relative”, which would be the equivalent of nothing, it is necessarily “relatively absolute” through its necessary participation in the One Knowledge.

Rationalism Real and Apparent

The effectiveness of reasoning depends essentially upon two conditions, one internal and the other external: on the one hand the acuity and profundity of the intelligence and on the other hand the value or extent of the available information; these conditions lie outside the sphere of rationalism, the first because it goes beyond the indirect processes of reason in calling upon pure intellection and the second because it implies, above and beyond simple sensorial and psychological facts, the supernatural—though in no way irrational—phenomenon of Revelation.¹ The rationalist is not someone who reasons adequately in light of the total and supralogical intelligence and on the basis of the necessary data—data that are of traditional origin when it comes to matters escaping the limitations of common experience; on the contrary he is someone who thinks he can solve every problem by means of logic alone on the basis of any arbitrarily exploited fact, even if it means denying the existence of the problem altogether.

This being so, all thoroughgoing rationalism is false by definition; and since nothing is ever rejected without being replaced by something else, individual tendencies come to supplant the missing intellection. A line of reasoning that is square in shape—if this image is permitted—will reject a spherical reality and replace it with a square error, and it will do so on the inner basis of a personal tendency that is opposed to the global reality of existence and the spirit; in other words profane thought is always the portrait of an individual even when it is mingled with some glimmerings of knowledge, as must always be the case since reason is not a closed vessel.

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Thus reason gives way to individualism and arbitrariness insofar as it is artificially divorced from the Intellect. This is exactly what hap-

¹ In the course of this book what we understand by this term, or rather in what way we understand it, will be made sufficiently clear. For the moment we would simply say that Revelation is a kind of cosmic intellection whereas personal intellection is comparable to a Revelation on the scale of the microcosm.

pens in the case of someone like Kant, who is a rationalist even while rejecting “dogmatic rationalism”; no doubt what he rejects is a form of rationalism, but Kantian criticism is even more so—in fact it is the very acme of rationalism. It is well known that for the critical philosophy metaphysics is not the science of the Absolute and the true nature of things but the “science of the limits of human reason”, and reason (*Vernunft*) is identified with intelligence pure and simple; this is an utterly contradictory axiom, for how could the intelligence limit itself, seeing that by its very nature it is in principle unlimited or else it is nothing? And if the intelligence as such is limited, what guarantee do we have that its operations, including those of criticism, will be valid? For an intellectual limit is a wall of which a given man is unaware; hence one of two things: either the intelligence by definition includes a principle of illimitability or liberty,² whatever the degree of its actualization, in which case there is no need to attribute limits to it—and certainly no excuse for the arbitrariness with which such limits are imposed, since the actual power of a particular individual intelligence or mode of intelligence is not necessarily a criterion for the appraisal of intelligence as such; or else on the contrary the intelligence includes—again by definition—a principle of limitation or constraint, in which case it no longer includes any certainty and can function no differently from the intelligence of animals, with the result that all pretension to a “critical philosophy” is vain.

If the normal functioning of the intelligence must be subjected to a critique, then the criticizing consciousness must be subjected to a critique in turn by asking, “What is it that thinks?”, and so forth—a play of mirrors whose inconclusiveness, proved in advance by the very nature of cognition, demonstrates its absurdity. A thought is “dogmatist”, or else it is nothing; a “criticist” thought is in contradiction with its own existence. A subject who casts doubt upon normal subjectivity thereby casts doubt upon his own doubting; and this is just what has happened to the critical philosophy, which has been swept away in turn and through its own fault by existentialism in all its forms.

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² The proof of this liberty or illimitability lies in the capacity to conceive the absolute and thereby the relative as such, as well as in the capacity for objectivity

According to empiricists, all knowledge is derived from sensory experience; theologians hasten to add that this applies only to our “natural” capacity for knowledge—a comment that does not render the opinion any less debatable—whereas extreme sensationalists go as far as to maintain that human knowledge can have no other source than the experience in question. This merely proves that they themselves have no access to suprasensory knowledge and are unaware of the fact that the suprasensible can be the object of a genuine perception and hence of a concrete experience; it is therefore upon an intellectual disability that these thinkers build their systems, and they do so without being in the least impressed by the fact that countless men as intelligent as themselves, to put it mildly, have thought otherwise. How could someone like Kant explain to himself the fact that his thesis, so immensely important for mankind were it true, was unknown to all the peoples of the world and had not been discovered by a single sage and that, on the contrary, men of the highest abilities had labored under lifelong illusions—which is what his thesis assumes—that were totally incompatible with these abilities, even founding religions, producing the fruits of sanctity, and creating civilizations? Surely the least one might ask of a “great thinker” is a little imagination.

* * *

Aside from the forms of sensory knowledge, Kant allows for the categories, which he regards as innate principles of cognition; these he divides into four groups inspired by Aristotle,³ while at the same time subjectivizing the Aristotelian notion of category; he develops in his own way the peripatetic categories that he chooses to accept while discarding others, without realizing that the highest and most important of the categories have eluded his grasp, Aristotelianism notwithstanding.⁴ The categories are *a priori* independent of all experi-

³ Quantity, quality, relation, and modality, the last of these no doubt replaces the Aristotelian “position”

⁴ Such as the principal and cosmic qualities that determine and classify phenomena and the universal dimensions that join the world to the supreme Essence and include, each in its own way, the qualities mentioned above. Aristotle had a right not to speak of them since his acceptance of God was assertorial—and not from a moralist and

ence since they are innate; Kant recognized this, but he thought they could be “explored” by a process he called “transcendental investigation”; but how will one ever grasp the pure subject who explores and investigates?

Another feature of this suicidal rationalism is the following: we are asked to believe that knowledge, thus reduced to a combination of sensory experiences and innate categories, shows us things as they appear to be but not as they are—as if the inherent nature of things did not pierce through their appearances; the whole point of knowledge is the perception of a thing-in-itself—an aseity—and without this the very notion of perception could not exist. To speak of a kind of knowledge that is incapable of adequation is a contradiction in terms and is disproved moreover by experience at every level of the knowable; it is obvious that our knowledge cannot become totally identified with its objects—insofar as these objects are relative⁵—but it is absurd to deduce from this fact that all speculations on the aseity of things are “empty and vain” (*leer und nichtig*). Converting this dictatorial conclusion into an argument against metaphysical “dogmatism”, far from unmasking the latter, serves only to demonstrate the “emptiness” and “vanity” of the critical philosophy, thus turning its thunderbolts against itself.

All the appalling pedantry of this philosophy becomes glaringly apparent in the notion of “subreption”: this is the name it gives to reasoning that is devoid of “empirical premises” and that allows us to infer something about which—or so it appears—we have no idea, as when we infer the reality of God from the existence of the world or the qualities it manifests. A philosopher who in other respects displays little of the poet nonetheless has enough poetic imagination to describe conclusions of this kind as “sophistical mirages” (*sophistische Blendwerke*); it apparently never crosses the minds of pure logicians that a line of reasoning might simply be the logical and provisional

empiricist angle—and therefore without any pretence to universality on the plane of the categories

⁵ What this reservation means is this: whereas our vision cannot exhaust the nature of a visible object, the Intellect—precisely because it can reach beyond the relative—is capable in principle of becoming identified with the absolute essence of the object in question

description of something that is intellectually self-evident and that the function of this reasoning might be the actualization of a self-evidence in itself supralogical.

This brings us to a point overlooked by every form of rationalism inasmuch as it replaces intellection with mere logic: with regard to intellection the rational faculty has two functions, one descending or communicating and the other ascending or actualizing. In the first case reason endeavors to formulate direct intellectual perceptions dialectically, making use of symbolical expressions or logical demonstrations, but without the perceptions themselves being in any way dependent on the dialectic; in the second case the reason of the hearer or reader for whom the teaching is intended participates in the intellection that is being communicated, not only to the extent that the logical operation appears irrefutable, but first and foremost—even if only *a posteriori*—because this operation actualizes the intellection in question through the instrumentality of the reason, however partial the actualization may be.

A rationalist is a person who upholds the primacy, or rather the exclusive worth, of reason against both intellection and Revelation, each of which he accuses of being “irrational”: he will claim, for example, that a miracle is irrational because it is contrary to reason, which is an altogether useless pronouncement since nothing in any religion is opposed to reason as such; the most one can say is that the supernatural is contrary to common experience and to certain subjective tendencies that have been systematized and then given the name of logic.⁶

* * *

We touched earlier upon an argument that we would now like to develop a little further: it is symptomatic that the initial error of the critical philosophy—the claim that the only valid experiences are sensory but that the human mind is inclined for some unknown reason to imagine others—is accompanied at least implicitly by a complete dis-

⁶ If the term “natural” is paradoxically extended to include everything subject to laws, then miracles are also “natural”, the only difference being that in their case the laws are not psycho-physical and hence are beyond the reach of human techniques

regard for an extrinsic factor to which the greatest attention ought to have been paid, namely, the unanimity of the sages, the saints, and the millions of believers of every nation, who for countless centuries have upheld all that this critical philosophy writes off with one stroke of the pen. If metaphysical—or more generally spiritual—convictions were a feature in the life of a few savage tribes alone, we could understand how someone with no spiritual knowledge might be tempted not to acknowledge them; but how is it possible to brush aside entirely the intellectual and moral qualities of the ancient sages and to put oneself blithely on the other side of the balance? If a maximum of intelligence and virtue and a maximum of error could coincide in one and the same consciousness, as the demolishers of the human spirit and its innate truths unhesitatingly take for granted, then man would be nothing, and the emergence of philosophical luminaries—supposing them truly to be such—would by the same token be impossible. If human reason is capable of criticism, then it has always been capable of it, and there was no need to await the appearance of some pedant in order for a capacity inherent in its nature to become manifest, assuming of course that a higher capacity is involved; it would be understandable if all previous thinkers had been *minus habentes*, but this conjecture bespeaks a monstrous lack of imagination and sensitivity and is belied at every turn—we repeat—by the intellectual and moral eminence of the men at whom it is aimed. One almost feels the need to apologize for drawing attention to something so obvious.

In other words, if reason is concerned, and can be concerned, only with the sensory order—since this alone is said to be real—how can one explain in good faith the fact that the greatest spokesmen of metaphysics, men so powerfully intelligent and so little given to deception of any sort, completely failed to perceive it? And let us remind those who may have lost sight of the fact that Christ himself is included in their number. This arrogant unconsciousness on the part of philosophers—this inability to sense the intelligence and greatness of those they would like to kill with their petty, vitriolic thoughts—is for us a criterion of the most damning sort, and one that is sufficient and decisive in itself. One glance at the Psalms, the Sermon on the Mount, or the *Bhagavad Gītā* should be enough to make even the most enterprising thinker aware that he cannot possibly be more intelligent or perspicacious than the authors of these texts, so steeped in intelligence and profundity.

It follows that the intellectual and human superiority of the demolishing philosophers would have to be indeed overwhelming if their systems were true. For if their superiority is not overwhelming, if it is not proportionate to the value their systems claim, which must be measured by the greatness of what they set out to destroy, then their systems are all the more false; and the flagrant character of the disproportion, along with the gravity of the attempted destruction, redounds upon their own heads.

* * *

It is impossible to stress the following point too much: what completely escapes the notice of the critical philosophy is that reason requires data if it is to function at all—data which it cannot extract from itself and without which its activity is illusory; here is the source of all the differences and misunderstandings between Greek rationalism and “Oriental dogmatism”: this dogmatism, far from being a product of imagination, credulity, and illogicality, proceeds essentially from suprarational knowledge, which it no doubt clothes in symbolic imagery but which nonetheless provides it with data that are strictly objective. The fact that this knowledge is inaccessible to the average intelligence and to empirical methods of investigation does not in the least alter its intrinsic certainty, nor of course does it hinder reason from basing its own operations on the knowledge in question, as indeed in certain cases it is compelled to do; it is just as impossible to reason about a country concerning which one has no knowledge as it is to reason about suprasensory realities without drawing upon the data that pertain to them, data supplied on the one hand by Revelation and traditional symbolism and on the other by intellective contemplation—when this contemplation is within the grasp of a given intelligence. Our principal criticism of modern philosophy and science is that they venture directly or indirectly onto planes beyond their compass and operate without regard to indispensable data; the most patent example of this is evolutionism, which replaces what we might call suprasensory “spaces” with fantasies projected into time. The position of science is exactly like that of a man who could grasp only two dimensions of space and denied the third because he was unable to imagine it; now what one spatial dimension is to another, so is the suprasensible to the sensible, or more precisely: so is the animic

to the corporeal, the spiritual to the animic, and the Divine to the humanly spiritual.

As a matter of principle, autonomous rationalism endeavors to “start from scratch”, that is, to think without any initial “dogma”;⁷ this is an illusion as much as it is an inconsistency, for rationalism itself starts fairly and squarely with a “dogma”, namely, its gratuitous axiom that nothing exists except what is supplied to us by the reason in its service to sensible perceptions. If we are told, by means of the now classic quibble, that the burden of proof belongs to whoever makes an affirmation—regarding for example the “existence of God”—we reply that the whole question here is to know what one means by “affirmation”; to apply this term to the thesis of the suprasensible alone and to present doubt or negation as being the normal and neutral attitude, in order to escape the obligation of furnishing a proof in one’s turn, is to adopt an entirely arbitrary position. In an environment where everyone acknowledges God, it is clearly atheism that stands out as the affirmation needing proof, and to claim that this is merely a question of external circumstances and that unbelief is the “in-itself” or *a priori* assumption of the intelligence is to compound the error by begging the question; it is the story of the blind man philosophizing about visibility. Whoever wants to be a realist must resign himself to the obvious fact that all thought has to start from an initial premise, which cannot come from thought itself but which must include an element of certainty whose soundness thought can delineate. People sometimes boast of the “cast-iron logic” of such and such an ideological system, but they forget the essential, namely, that without a point of departure that is in keeping with the integral nature of things, or quite simply the truth, all the logic and all the “cast-iron” in the world are of no avail.

Once again, it is by no means obvious why the peremptory denial of causes lying outside our sensory experience should be regarded as conforming to reason or why it should be reasonable to label things impossible merely because they appear improbable or extraordinary from the standpoint of current experience. Equating the supernatural and the irrational is characteristic in this respect: it amounts to claiming that the unknown or incomprehensible is the same as the

⁷ Which is not so in the case of religious rationalism or any other semi-rationalism.

absurd. The rationalism of a frog living at the bottom of a well is to deny the existence of mountains: perhaps this is “logic”, but it has nothing to do with reality.

* * *

Relativistic speculations on the “thing-in-itself” are a useless luxury, for the things perceived are situated at the same level of reality, hence relativity, as the perceiving subject; the “thing-in-itself” in an absolute sense is none other than absolute Reality, which is perceptible by the Intellect alone to the extent—or in the manner—that it coincides with its essential Object. To declare that our perceptions fail to convey the whole object amounts to saying that things are not perceived by the whole Subject; for if it were the divine Subject—in reality the only subject there is—who perceived the things or who perceived them on its own unconditioned plane, they would reveal themselves in their essences, which are the archetypes or “divine names”, or in their single essence as the conjunction of the pole Being and the pole Knowing. Between the relative perception of our senses and reason on the one hand and the pure Object on the other, there extends the whole hierarchy of the degrees of relativity, or degrees of reality if their positive contents are considered.

The objection that we cannot know things as they are in themselves utterly fails to do justice to the fact of cognitive adequation, hence to the very nature of knowledge; what is decisive here is that the whole purpose of knowledge is to become conscious of a given reality: it is not the mode that counts but the thing. Differences in the viewpoints of different spectators do not prevent their perception of one and the same object from being adequate and unanimous; the fact that a tree appears smaller when seen from a distance creates no difficulty as far as objectivity and certainty are concerned. Once there is a separation between subject and object—this is cognitive polarization—there can be no absolute knowledge, but this does not prevent relative knowledge from still being knowledge and not something else, and thus “relatively absolute”, if one may use such an expression.⁸

⁸ One is even obliged to use it, for otherwise real differences within relativity could not be distinguished. The same thing can be said about knowledge as about liberty

Had we five thousand senses in place of just five, we would see visible objects differently from how we see them now, but only in a certain respect since in another respect the perception would be identical—otherwise it would not be a perception at all but something else—and it is this adequation between subject and object that counts and that allows one to speak of knowledge. If we could have an absolute rather than a merely relative knowledge of a given thing, we would perceive the divine Substance within it, and we would do so through and beyond not only the angelic substance but other, intermediary cosmic envelopes; we have mentioned this already. Our knowledge of things is inevitably relative, and being relative it is also fragmentary; the cosmos is woven of relative objectivity and relative subjectivity; without relativity, there could be no existence.

* * *

Agnostics and other relativists dispute the value of metaphysical certainty; in order to demonstrate the illusory character of the *de jure* certainty of truth, they set it in opposition to the *de facto* certitude of error, as if the psychological phenomenon of false certainties could prevent true certainties from being what they are and from having all their effectiveness, and as if the very existence of false certainties did not prove in its own way the existence of true ones. The fact that a lunatic feels certain he is something that he is not does not prevent us from being certain of what he is and what we ourselves are, and the fact that we are unable to prove to him that he is mistaken does not prevent us from being right; or again, the fact that an unbalanced person may possibly have misgivings about his condition does not oblige us to have them about our own, even if we find it impossible to prove to him that our certainty is well founded. It is absurd to demand absolute proofs of suprasensorial realities that one thinks one ought to question while refusing in the name of reason to consider metaphysical arguments that are sufficient in themselves; for outside of these arguments the only proof of hidden realities—as we have already said—is the realities themselves. One cannot ask the dawn to be the sun or a

liberty is limited to the extent it is relative, but it is really liberty insofar as it is liberty and not something else

shadow to be the tree that casts it; the very existence of our intelligence proves the reality of the relationships of causality, relationships that allow us to acknowledge the Invisible and by the same token oblige us to do so; if the world did not prove God, human intelligence would be deprived of its sufficient reason. First and foremost—leaving aside any question of intellectual intuition—the very fact of our existence necessarily implies pure Being; instead of starting with the idea that “I think; therefore I am”, one should say, “I am; therefore Being is”: *sum ergo est Esse* and not *cogito ergo sum*.⁹ What counts in our eyes is most definitely not some more or less correct line of reasoning but intrinsic certainty itself; reasoning is able to convey this in its own way: it describes the certainty in order to show forth its self-evident nature on the plane of discursive thought, and in this way it provides a key that others might use in actualizing this same certainty.¹⁰

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In the wake of the critical philosophy people have come to the point of inventing axioms that destroy all possible axioms, and the most incredible thing is that they have failed to notice the fact. It is put forward as an absolute truth that no truth is absolute or as knowledge that no knowledge is possible, or that every idea has a merely psychic, passionate, and shifting origin—as if a total relativism were not a contradiction, and hence absurdity itself.

We are told that philosophy must reach out beyond all necessarily subjective and limited formulations and become a freely moving flow of immediate experience. This simply proves one is ignorant of what intelligence really is; thought by definition establishes a certainty, so that every coherent doctrine is a form of dogmatism; even the fiercest empiricism is no exception to this rule but simply the dupe of its illusion of escaping it. The fact that a dogmatic concept does not itself

⁹ Franz von Baader—a distant disciple of Boehme—proposed the formula *cogitor, ergo cogito et sum*. “I am thought (by God); therefore I think, and I am”, which is a pertinent expression of the causal or ontological relationship under consideration here

¹⁰ How well reason performs this function depends on our dialectical capacity as well as on the need for logical satisfaction—or the degree of understanding—of our interlocutor

constitute total truth has always been understood; only modern man has forgotten this: every traditional, non-theological dogmatism knows that it furnishes, and can furnish, only pointers or keys and that the inward discovery of pure truth is always a leap in the void—a leap incommensurate with mental premises, concepts, or other symbols.

We shall perhaps repeat ourself in the following reflections, but no matter. From the exclusive standpoint of a logician, the metaphysical doctrines of the Universe are open to two criticisms: first for being naive attempts at explanation and second for having been undertaken without previous investigation of our faculties of knowledge. The first criticism is based on the utterly false assumption that a metaphysical doctrine is a logical attempt at explanation; the second, which is Kantian, is flagrant nonsense, for if nothing proves that our intelligence is capable of adequation—and what then is the intelligence?—there is likewise nothing to prove that the intelligence expressing this doubt is competent to doubt. If the optic nerve must be examined in order to be sure vision is real, it is likewise necessary to examine what examines the optic nerve, an absurdity that proves in its own indirect way that knowledge of suprasensible things is intuitive and cannot be other than intuitive; and since philosophy by definition could never limit itself to the description of phenomena available to common observation, it is forced to admit—in good logic at least—the intuitive and supralogical character of the faculty of knowledge it claims to possess. What this means is that logic is perfectly consistent only when surpassing itself.

* * *

Our intention here is to show or recall not only what rationalism is in the strict sense of the term but also what it is not—or rather what is not it, certain similarities notwithstanding; this second task, which we now begin, may differ so considerably from the first as to give the impression of a change of subject. The synopses and comparisons to follow will be kept as succinct as possible, too succinct no doubt to cover the many questions involved but perfectly sufficient for our doctrinal intentions; to be simple is not necessarily to be simplistic, while the contrary is equally true.

Plato is sometimes included among the rationalists; this is unjust despite the unduly rationalistic style of his dialectic or his manner of

thinking in a way that is too geometrical. But what puts Plato in the clearest possible opposition to rationalism properly so called is his doctrine of the eye of the soul; this eye, he teaches, is mired in a slough from which it must extricate itself in order to mount to the vision of real things, namely, the archetypes. There can be no doubt that Plato has in mind an initiatic regeneration, for he says that in the case of the ordinary man the eyes of the soul are not strong enough to bear the vision of the Divine; this mysterial background helps to explain the somewhat playful character of the Platonic dialogues, for what we are most probably dealing with here is a deliberately dialectical exoterism destined to adapt sacred teachings for a promulgation that had become desirable at the time.¹¹ Be that as it may, all the speculations of Plato or Socrates converge upon a vision that transcends the perception of appearances and opens onto the essence of things; this essence is the "Idea", and it confers upon things all their perfection, which coincides in turn with beauty.¹²

In Plotinus the essence of Platonism reveals itself without reserve: here it is a question of passing from the passional body to the virtuous soul and from the soul to the knowing spirit, and then from the spirit—and through it—to the suprarational and unitive vision of the ineffable One, which is the source of everything that exists; in the One the thinking subject and the object thought coincide. The One projects the Spirit as the sun projects light and heat: this means that the Spirit, *Nous*, emanates eternally from the One and contemplates it, and by this contemplation it actualizes in itself the world of the archetypes or ideas—the totality of essential or fundamental possibilities—from which it produces the animic world; this in turn engenders the end point that is the material world, where the reflections of possibilities coagulate and combine. The human soul, brought forth by the One from the world of archetypes, recognizes these archetypes

¹¹ We are on the eve of the epic of Alexander Socratic-Platonic Pythagoreanism could not be withheld from the transmission, otherwise so equivocal, of Hellenic genius, and in Greece itself the baleful influence of the Sophists had to be neutralized. Plato's anti-sophistry proves moreover the fundamentally non-rationalistic tendency of this sage.

¹² The claim that Plato was heir not only to Pythagoreanism but also to the Egyptian tradition is perhaps not to be disregarded, in this case the wisdom of Thoth would have survived in alchemy as well as partially or indirectly in Neoplatonism—within Islam no less than in Christianity and Judaism.

in their earthly reflections, and it naturally tends toward its celestial origin.

With Aristotle we are much closer to the earth, though not yet so close as to find ourselves cut off from heaven. If we begin with the idea that rationalism is the reduction of the intelligence to logic alone—hence the negation of intellectual intuition, which in reality has no need of mental crutches even though they may have to be used for communicating self-evident truths of a supramental order—then we shall see that Aristotelianism is a form of rationalism in principle but not absolutely so in fact, for its theism and hylomorphism depend on intellection and not reasoning pure and simple.¹³ This is true of every philosophy conveying metaphysical truths; total rationalism is impossible except where these truths or intellections are absent.¹⁴

From the standpoint of this thoroughgoing rationalism, Aristotle has been criticized for stopping halfway and contradicting his own principle of knowledge; but this impression results from an illegitimate exploitation of Aristotelian logic, and it is the product of a form of thinking that is artificial to the point of perversion. A logical automatism, which the Stagirite would have been the first to repudiate, is set in opposition to Aristotle's implicit axioms, which his detractors are incapable of perceiving. On the contrary, if Aristotle is to be criticized it is because his formulation of metaphysics is governed by a tendency toward exteriorization, a tendency opposed to the very essence of all metaphysics; Aristotelianism is a science of the Inward expanding toward the outward and thus to the benefit of exteriorization, whereas all traditional metaphysics is invariably formulated for the sake of interiorization and is thus of no use for the expansion of the natural sciences, or at least not their excessive expansion. This flaw in Aristotelianism explains the superficiality of its method of

¹³ Hylomorphism is a plausible thesis, but what is much less plausible is this philosopher's opposition to the Platonic Ideas, of which his thesis is really only a prolongation, one that tends to exteriorize things to a dangerous degree owing precisely to the absence of these Ideas

¹⁴ The theism of Kant does not benefit from this positive reservation since for him God is merely a "postulate of practical reason", a claim that takes us to a point infinitely distant from the real and transcendent God of Aristotle

knowledge¹⁵ as well as the corresponding mediocrity of Aristotelian ethics—not to mention the resulting scientism, which proves the deviation of the epistemological principle in Aristotle's philosophy. Be that as it may, it is important to understand that Semitic or Semitized Monotheists could not have incorporated Aristotle into their teachings if he had been exclusively a rationalist; but in incorporating him they nonetheless became poisoned, and the partial or virtual rationalism—or rationalism of principle—that resulted has finally given way to totalitarian rationalism: a rationalism that is systematic and self-satisfied and therefore closed to every subjectively or objectively suprarational element.¹⁶

The Aristotelian Pandora's Box is scientism coupled with empiricism; it is through them that Aristotle deviates from Plato by replacing the interiorizing tendency with its opposite. It is said that the Church has kept science in chains; what is certain is that the modern world has unchained it, and as a result it has escaped from all control, and in the process of destroying nature it is headed toward "the destruction of man. For genuine Christianity, as for every other traditional perspective, the world is what appears to us empirically, and there is no reason for it to be anything else; here is the real meaning of the naiveté of the Scriptures and the trial of Galileo. To try to pierce the wall of collective, normal, age-old experience is to eat of the forbidden fruit; the euphoria engendered by a completely unrealistic self-divinization of man cannot but lead fatally to the loss of essential knowledge and earthly equilibrium.

* * *

Theology is certainly far from disdainning the assistance of logic; while it could never fall into rationalism pure and simple since it is based

¹⁵ This method was inherited by Thomism and there exploited as a religious pretext for limiting the intellective faculty, despite the fact that this faculty has a capacity in principle for absoluteness and thus the supernatural

¹⁶ It might seem surprising that Scholasticism chose Aristotle and not Plato or Plotinus, but the reason is plain: the viewpoint of objective faith has an interest in promoting a form of wisdom that offers no competition and that makes it possible to neutralize that spoilsport intellection while at the same time giving free rein to any theological contradictions that might come about by calling them "mysteries".

on Revelation, it nonetheless finds itself in a similar position insofar as its arguments display limitations in relation to both the subject and the object: in relation to the subject because the theologian relies on a certain kind of logic alone and not on intellection, and in relation to the object because the premises are reduced to fixed and exclusive conceptual forms, namely dogmas or their scriptural roots. Nevertheless the intrinsically supernatural character of the dogmas and a certain grace inherent in religion guarantee that correct theological reasoning will be free from the arbitrariness of profane thought, and they allow it to remain to a certain degree a vehicle of truth or at least a point of reference; the reasoning in question is nevertheless restrictive because of its exclusiveness, and it can even be aberrant in relation to total truth. In any case theology, whether Aristotelized or not, assumes a partially rationalistic form because of its fear of *gnosis*, a fear explained by the nonformal, supradogmatic, and in principle universalist character of this *gnosis*. From this follows the paradox of an intellectuality—or spirituality—with an interest in limiting the definition of intelligence, which it thinks can be reduced to a purely “natural” level, in order that the quality of the “supernatural” may be reserved for dogmas and “mysteries”, whether real or not.

When Christian polemicists set the “vain wisdom” of the Hellenists in opposition to the “wisdom of Christ”, they misuse the word “wisdom”, which cannot bear the same meaning in both cases; the wisdom of the Greeks, whether in principle or in fact, is an objective description of the nature of things—and if its highest concepts do not lead toward God, this does not prove the falsity of the concepts but the insufficiency of men—whereas the “wisdom” Christians want to oppose to Plato is a body of moral and mystical attitudes which, on the basis of dogmas and in concert with certain means of grace, leads man away from the world and up to Heaven; this is not “wisdom”, however, if the word is given the meaning of metaphysical knowledge, as one is obliged to do when speaking of Pythagoras, Plato, Plotinus, or Aristotle. The Christian invective against Hellenism can be explained by the equation of intelligence with the “natural” and by a prejudice that identifies only an ascetical and sacramental mysticism with the “supernatural”;¹⁷ it is also explained by a partisan exploitation—

¹⁷ When reading the Christian polemicists, even the greatest of them, it is not always

natural enough in this case—of Christ as the “light of the world”: if Christ is this light, there can be no light elsewhere, or at least no “supernatural” light, which is alone worthy of interest. It is true that the opposite conclusion could and should be drawn, namely, that the Word is present wherever truth is found and that truth is “supernatural” because of its content and not because of its confessional origin, but in general this conclusion is avoided for obvious reasons of religious subjectivism.¹⁸ “Spiritual nationalism”, which is altogether natural to man, plays a role in this, as does the corresponding instinct for self-preservation, examples of which can be found in all spiritual climates.

The dialogue form of Hellenic expositions, with their aspect of debate and hence profane tone, reinforces the impression Christians have that every Greek idea is simply a rational α opinion and not a certainty from above, and it likewise facilitates a confusion between sages and Sophists, despite the condemnation of the latter by the former. In order to better evaluate this Christian response, which is largely anti-rationalistic, let us recall here the general characteristics of the average Greek mentality during the “classical” period: partisans of the “Greek miracle” extol first the independence of Hellenic thinking and then

possible to avoid the suspicion that they are motivated in part by an unacknowledged feeling of jealousy, for there is something too lofty in Platonism and its characteristic serenity—not for Christianity certainly but for its zealots insofar as they are impassioned and sentimental and believe they have a right to be so. No doubt the divine Mercy accepts many things, but man for his part and before God does not have an absolute right to errors or weaknesses merely because they are in the nature of the average man, including the average among the elect. Hypatia, a great and noble figure who was not a Christian but a Neoplatonist saint and martyr, rises out of the depths of the centuries as an ineffaceable reproach and a witness to the truth.

¹⁸ Gregory Palamas, who does not shrink from basing an argument on the moral standards of Aristotle and even Plotinus—which in our view were normal in their context—in order to invalidate Hellenistic and even Neoplatonic wisdom, criticizes the philosophers for repeatedly contradicting themselves and for having nothing but their logical constructs as a foundation, this is plausible if one sees only logic and not truths in philosophy, but these truths are present nonetheless, and they coincide by definition with Christic truth to the extent that they are essential and Christic truth is essential. In any case, despite their logic—which is certainly no weakness in itself—the philosophers have no monopoly when it comes to controversy, there are also theological disputes, as Palamas had every reason to know since his principal work is a polemic against Barlaam, a Christian monk and not a pagan philosopher.

the artistic naturalism that expressed this tendency, everything converges upon man, and the ideal is the perfection of man and not the transcending of his spiritual inadequacy and earthly misery; the prescriptions for improvement are rational, moral, social, and political, and they stop short at a humanistic and profane perfectionism, which is truly stifling in the absence of spiritual motivations and means. The ideal is human and earthly equilibrium, which is deprived of a vertical dimension that pierces and transmutes; from this comes an unmitigated individualism, to which a mediocre moral "reasonableness" and the sentimental naturalism of the art bear witness. The esoterism of the mysteries stands at the antipodes of these tendencies; its spirit, to which Pythagoreanism testifies, breaks through in Platonism and to a lesser degree in Aristotelianism, and it is explicitly affirmed in Neoplatonism, which should no doubt be seen as a final reaction against the strictly "pagan" tendencies we have been describing.

These tendencies or flaws, however, do not justify the fideist opponents of Hellenism when they resort to arguments like the following, if we may speak metaphorically: Christ never said that two and two make four, and therefore anyone who says so is a miscreant or even a satanist;¹⁹ someone who did say so had a concubine, which is one more proof that two and two do not make four; and no logic please, since the pagans use it! Those who reason along these lines—which are to be taken *cum grano salis*—readily put holiness in place of intelligence and truth, as if we had to choose between them and as if man had no other resources but morality and mystical inspiration; as we said earlier, all intelligence is reduced to the "natural" in order that it might be debarred from performing operations of which it is perfectly capable but which interfere with the program of the fideists.²⁰ And when it is necessary for these fideists to make use of intelligence

¹⁹ An utterly bizarre accusation, from which the Hellenists have not been spared and which appears to be based on a declaration by Saint Paul that was aimed at the deviant cults of the Roman and Near-Eastern world. Its extension to every non-Christian intellectual or spiritual phenomenon is in any case an abuse that cannot be excused entirely, even in the case of men who profess to scorn intelligence.

²⁰ When considering the early, and indeed all fundamental, Christian theologians, it is difficult if not impossible to fix the boundary line between anti-Hellenism on the one hand and Aristotelian, Platonic, and Stoic influences on the other, especially since the latter do not exclude the former.

themselves, they refer to the Holy Spirit, whose assistance is modestly claimed on the grounds that they possess the right credentials, which are of a moral rather than an intellectual order.

* * *

Theological or, to be more precise, exoteric thought—the two do not always coincide exactly—generally shows itself incapable of grasping two divergent aspects of one and the same reality simultaneously: it works by readily moralizing alternatives, the more “pious” choice being the “truer” one in its eyes and the piety being determined by the characteristic perspective of the Revelation in question, even though this Revelation may not necessarily imply the same choice on the plane of pure truth. It is not Christ who is anti-Platonic; it is Christians who are—that is, insofar as they are: the anathemas hurled against Platonists in certain liturgical practices of the Greek Church, traditional though they may be, are nonetheless clearly derived from what we may call the “human margin”. Theologically, the alleged falsity of the Platonic thesis can amount to no more than a hypothesis, one that is all the more senseless since no theologian can dispute the fact that the principles of things necessarily pre-exist in the creative Intellect—or in Providence, if one prefers—and that each positive cosmic possibility is presided over by an angelic power, which is its prototype or “idea”. It is true that the dialectic of Plato leaves room for some ambiguity since it does not specify where the limit lies between the contingent and the essential, whether within things or archetypes; we would say that the archetypes represent only perfections and totalities, not privative and thus fragmentary manifestations, and that there are therefore earthly phenomena that are not to be found as such in the Platonic ideas precisely because they are either privative or existentially fragmentary as a result of privation. It must be added that normal human evaluations on this plane have nothing arbitrary about them; the sufficient reason for man is to be the measure of things or values, and because of this man is capable in principle of distinguishing between what is qualitative and what is privative, and between the total and the partial.

The protagonists of an unconditional anti-Hellenism, who wish to reduce all wisdom to a strictly voluntarist and emotional perspective, strangely lose sight of the overwhelmingly obvious fact that conceptualizing and speculative metaphysical thought is in the theomorphic

nature of man and that such thought cannot therefore by definition be "carnal" and "vain", and thus opposed to the penitential and mystically experimental "wisdom" they themselves advocate.

History and experience teach us that there is one thing human nature finds particularly difficult, and this is to be just; to be perfectly objective is in a way to die, either because the stakes are high or simply because the soul is little inclined to such impartiality. Religious zealots are the first to know the meaning of spiritual death, and one of the motives for their zeal is precisely their ignorance of the presence of this mystery among their adversaries; but there are different ways of dying and different degrees of death, and the death that does away with religious prejudice—to the extent one's information makes this possible and provided it is in the name of what constitutes the very essence of religion—is by no means the least of deaths, though it is certainly the least well known. "Die to oneself": this injunction has been followed by many, but all too often within the framework of a passion which, though it may have become victoriously detached from carnal things, has remained intact on a plane where it is in fact more difficult to address; here we are touching upon the mystery of the nature of the *pneumatikos* as distinct from that of the *psychikos*. And yet the polyvalent scope of "every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God" is such that spiritual excellence must be the concern, not only of those who possess it, but of every man insofar as he carries it in the depths of his being.

Concerning Proofs of God

The classical proofs of God seem suspended between two extremes lying beyond their reach—one in an upward and the other in a downward direction, or one through its richness and the other its poverty—namely: direct intellection and materialistic rationalism; there is nonetheless a sufficiently ample area between these two positions to justify the existence of arguments that aim to set forth evidence for the divine Being in the language of logic. No doubt one can immediately accept the supernatural and have no need of such proofs, *Deo juvante*, but it shows a lack of sense of proportion and a certain temerity—hardly compatible with true certainty and rather uncharitable toward the needs of others—to look down upon these proofs as if they were valueless in themselves and could have no possible usefulness; such an attitude would in fact be strangely presumptuous, especially since a logical demonstration in favor of the Eternal and of our own final ends always offers some insight and “consolation”,¹ even for those who already possess certainty through intellection or grace. Besides, a man’s spiritual behavior depends not only upon his conviction but also upon its perspicacity and depth.

To be sure, one must not underestimate the possibility of a spontaneous intuition: if authentic, it necessarily contains in an infused manner the certainty transmitted by the proofs of God or the supernatural; but under no circumstances is it acceptable for lukewarm people to claim that they are themselves *de jure* above syllogisms when there are so many who have lost their faith while imagining they could do without any sort of “scholasticism”. This shows that below a certain spiritual level—which it would be most imprudent to attribute to oneself *a priori*—one should beware, not exactly of intuitive faith as such, but of its seeming imperviousness to every test, for faith can be effective only insofar as it is sheltered *de facto* from temptations.

¹ Or some “reassurance” (*itmi'nān*), as Muslims would say, Muslims in fact bestow a canonical importance on the proofs of God, and knowledge of them—in the opinion of some—is even obligatory. Thus Fudali declares, “One is a believer (*mu'min*) only if one knows each of the fifty dogmas [nine of which concern the Prophet] with its particular proof”, this is an exaggeration, but not without its point.

Obviously doctrinal arguments do not constitute a complete safeguard for every intelligence or will, but this is not the question at issue, for neither do religions save those who reject them; what matters is that these arguments have their own value and constitute by their own nature a possible support, which is infallible from the intellectual or purely logical point of view; and *pax hominibus bonae voluntatis*.

In order to clarify the function of metaphysical proof, it is necessary to begin with the idea that human intelligence coincides in its essence with certainty of the Absolute; if this does not appear self-evident to the majority of our contemporaries, it is because an awareness of "accidents" has stifled the intuitive awareness of "Substance", and from this has come an intelligence that is systematically superficial, fixed upon a fragmentary reality. If anyone objects that the innateness of metaphysical ideas—assuming this is admitted—does not prove the reality of the content of the ideas, we reply that such an opinion is equivalent to the destruction of the very notion of intelligence and that, were it true, our intelligence could never prove anything at all; to speak of intelligence is to speak of innateness, for innateness is at the root of every intellectual and mental operation: man is obviously incapable of "starting from zero" since zero is nonexistent. The optic nerve cannot be replaced with some external light, and with all the more reason one cannot have a substitute for the Self or God, from whom are derived the notions inherent in the human spirit.

It is in light of these axioms that one should approach the question of the proofs of God; such proofs, far from being apologetic aids alone, can serve as keys for restoring to intelligence its characteristic and integral nature. First of all, however, it is necessary to respond to a curious objection put forward by rationalists, even though it has already been mentioned elsewhere in this book. The objection is this: whoever asserts that "God exists" is under an obligation to prove it, whereas the skeptic is in no way obliged to prove the contrary since—so it seems—only he who makes an affirmation owes his critics a proof, while he who denies it is under no such obligation; the skeptic therefore has a right to reject the "existence" of God without being required in his turn to prove the "nonexistence" of God. Now this line of reasoning is completely arbitrary, and for the following reason: a man who finds himself unable to verify a statement undoubtedly has the right not to accept it as certain or probable, but he has by no means the logical right to reject it without providing valid reasons

or doing so. It is not difficult to discover the basis of this objection: it starts with the preconceived notion that the affirmation of God is something “extraordinary” whereas the denial of God is “normal”; the skeptic obviously begins by thinking that the normal man is the atheist, and from this he deduces a kind of one-way jurisprudence.

In the spiritual order a proof is of assistance only to the man who wishes to understand and who, because of this wish, has in some measure understood already; it is of no practical use to one who, deep in his heart, does not want to change his position and whose philosophy merely expresses this desire. Some people suppose that it is up to religion to prove itself in the face of the utmost ill will—that “religion is made for man”,² that it must therefore adapt itself to his needs, and that through its failure to do so it has become “bankrupt”; one might as well say that the alphabet has become bankrupt in a class where the pupils are determined not to learn it; with this kind of “infralagic” one could declare that the law is made for honest people who are pleased to conform to it and that a new law is required for others, a law “adapted” to the needs of their maliciousness and “rejuvenated” in conformity with their propensity for crime.

* * *

To be able to accept the ontological proof of God, which deduces the existence of an objective reality from an innate concept corresponding to it, one must begin by understanding that truth does not depend on reasoning—obviously truth is not created by reason³—but that it reveals itself or becomes explicit thanks to the key provided by the mental operation; in every act of assent by the Intellect there is an element that escapes the thinking process rather as light and color elude the grasp of geometry, which can nonetheless symbolize them indi-

² Which is false if one does not immediately add that man is made for religion; the falsity is in the isolation of the proposition. Religion is made for man insofar as it must be accessible to him according to the measure of his goodwill—and not regardless of it since man is free—and man is made for religion insofar as it represents the sufficient reason for human existence

³ “Only thought can produce that which has the right to be acknowledged as Being,” one of the pioneers of post-Kantian totalitarian rationalism has dared to say.

rectly and remotely. There is no such thing as "pure proof", for every proof presupposes knowledge of certain data; the ontological proof—formulated in particular by Saint Augustine and Saint Anselm⁴—carries weight for the person who already has at his disposal some initial certainties, but it has no effect upon the willfully and systematically superficial mind. Such a mind no longer understands the profound nature of causality; it regards intelligence as proceeding not from the outward toward the inward but from the inward toward the outward, until it forgets the very reason for which understanding exists.

As is well known, those who belittle the ontological argument claim that the existence of a notion does not necessarily involve the objective existence of the content of the notion; the answer to this is that it all depends on the nature of the notion in question, for what is plausible in the case of a notion relating to a fact is by no means so in the case of a notion relating to a principle. Some will no doubt point out that Buddhism proves that the notion of God has nothing fundamental about it and that one can very well dispense with it in both metaphysics and spirituality; they would be right if Buddhists did not possess the idea of the Absolute or of transcendence, or of immanent Justice with its complement, Mercy; this is all that is needed to show that Buddhism, though it does not possess the word for God—or not our word—nonetheless possesses the reality itself.

* * *

The cosmological proof of God, which is found in Aristotle as well as in Plato⁵ and which consists in inferring the existence of a transcendent, positive, and infinite Cause from the existence of the world,⁶ finds no greater favor in the eyes of those who deny the supernatural; according to them the notion of God merely compensates for our

⁴ Some of the Scholastic philosophers were too Aristotelian to accept the usefulness of the ontological proof; they thought that reason leads to a certainty that is in some way new rather than to Platonic "recollection".

⁵ In Islam all the proofs of God—which, according to certain authorities, form a part of faith (*īmān*)—are basically developments of the cosmological argument

⁶ When the word "exist" is applied either explicitly or implicitly to the divine Principle, it has only a provisional logical function and means "to be real".

ignorance of causes; this is a gratuitous argument if ever there was one, for the cosmological proof implies a profound knowledge of causality and not a purely logical and abstract assumption. If we know what integral causality is—namely, the “vertical” and “descending” projection of a possibility through the various degrees of existence—then we can conceive the First Cause; otherwise we cannot. Here again we observe that the objection results from ignoring what is implicit: rationalists forget that at the level in question “proof” is a key or symbol, a means of drawing back a veil rather than of giving light; it is not by itself a leap out of ignorance and into knowledge. The principal argument “indicates” rather than “proves”; it cannot be anything more than a guideline or *aide-mémoire*, for it is impossible to prove the Absolute outside itself. If to “prove” means to know something only by virtue of a particular mental stratagem—without which one would necessarily remain in ignorance—then there are no possible “proofs of God”, and this explains moreover why one can do without them in symbolist and contemplative metaphysics.

Divine causality may be said to have two dimensions, one relating to the static nature of things, the other to their destinies: God is at once the cause of perfections and the cause of their ultimate limit; He makes the sun shine but also causes it to set, both phenomena being proofs of God.

This divine causality implies the homogeneity of the Universe, which brings us back to Substance, the divine fabric by virtue of which things are in God and God is in things with a kind of discontinuous continuity, if such a paradoxical ellipsis is permitted. This notion of Substance furnishes the key to eschatological mysteries such as the Last Judgment and the resurrection of the body: formal—hence both material and animic—Existence is like a desiccated substance that has become too compressed, and the final coming of God is comparable to rain, which causes seeds to germinate;⁷ Essence turns back toward form, Substance toward accident, the Center toward the periphery, Life toward death; the Inward vivifies the outward and resurrects the kernels of which we are composed—products on the one hand

⁷ On this subject the Koran says “And We send down from the sky blessed water whereby We give growth unto gardens and the grain of harvest . . . And We give life thereby to a land that is dead, so will be the resurrection” (*Sūrah* “*Qāf*” [50]:9, 11)

of creation but also, secondarily, of our own attitudes and actions. To speak in a metaphysically more adequate manner—although in terms further removed from the terrestrial aspect of things—it could be said that the outward flows back toward the Inward:⁸ *Ātmā* “breathes”, creation is renewed and expands, the divine proximity causes bodies to be reborn and gives them the forms that belong to them according to the measures of heaven, universal desiccation calling down the “blessed rain”; there can be no resurrection “unless a corn of wheat die”. All the seemingly senseless enigmas of the traditional eschatologies are explained in part—for nothing of this order ever gives up its whole secret—by the homogeneity of Substance, the divine *Māyā* or *Prakriti*, and by the rhythms proper to it, rhythms prefigured in the very nature of the relationship between the Principle and its manifestation. Human standards are shattered; divine standards endure.

According to the Koran all natural processes, such as the growth of creatures or the alternation of day and night, are “signs” or proofs of God “for those endowed with understanding”; the cosmological proof is combined with the teleological proof, which is founded not simply upon the existence of things but upon the inward order of creation, hence upon the immanent forethought governing it.

* * *

No proof can be founded on a void: those who dismiss the teleological proof of Socrates—and the moral proof related to it—should begin by finding out what universal harmony really implies and what human virtue is in its deepest meaning; since they know nothing of this,⁹ whether from a lack of doctrinal knowledge or a lack of intellectual intuition, the proofs founded upon universal order and the virtues remain inaccessible to them; this ignorance is no excuse, however, since it springs from a willful perversion of the spirit. Skepticism and bitterness have nothing spontaneous about them; they are the result of a supersaturated and deviant civilization—of a “culture” that sets

⁸ “We will bring them together,” says the Koran, or “to Us is the returning”, which indicates the flowing back of the periphery toward the Center.

⁹ As is proved *ad nauseam* by the “pessimism”—or “dysteleology”—of Schopenhauer, Haeckel, and the existentialists.

itself up as “art for art’s sake”—and they therefore presuppose a whole jungle of detours between man and the Real.

The teleological proof of God is supported, for example, by the extraordinary combination of conditions that make life on earth possible; another demonstration results from the biological homogeneity of the organic world and the equilibrium between species, an equilibrium derived from this homogeneity precisely. And this leads us to the Hindu myth of the primordial sacrifice of Purusha: all living beings issue from the sacrificed members of the celestial and “pre-material” body, and from this arises both the differences between creatures and the equilibrium of creation. Purusha contains all possibilities: luminous and dark, fiery and cold, violent and peaceful; from these comes the opposition between certain species in the world, an opposition—between carnivores and ruminants, for example—corresponding nonetheless to a biological equilibrium, which cannot be explained apart from the existence of an underlying unity. Man can upset this balance—at least abnormally—and he does this by means of his machines and serums, in short by all those inroads into nature that come about through the acquisitions and misdeeds of modern civilization; this does not prove that the teleological proofs lack validity but on the contrary that man has something of the divine about him, and this something—which in the preceding example is manifested in an evil form—shows that man is in reality an “exceptional” being, that his position is central because he is situated beneath the divine axis, and that his final end can therefore be found only beyond the material world. Man is made for what he is able to conceive; the very ideas of absoluteness and transcendence prove both his spiritual nature and the supraterrrestrial character of his destiny.

The teleological proof does not save believers who are not metaphysically minded from the difficulty posed for them by an awareness of the sufferings of this world: the weakness is not in the proof, which is perfect in its order and which no believer can take exception to; it is rooted instead in a superficiality of understanding, which is all too often the result of simple negligence or mental laziness. Some believers appeal to mystery and claim that our reason is inadequate to explain the imperfections present in creation, but this is entirely without justification, for in fact there is nothing incomprehensible or ineffable here; the fissures of the world cannot but exist since the world is not God and since this difference or distance cannot fail to be manifested

in varying degrees in the very flesh of creation; even Paradise could not be without the serpent. Atheistic rationalists respond to the religious argument based on the insufficiency of reason by saying that if this were true it would simply prove that our reason is also absurd since it falls short of its goal. Setting aside the fact that *ratio*, if truly inspired, can reach much further than some theologians suppose, it is nevertheless not its aim to storm the true mysteries, so that the rationalist objection in any case misses the mark, reason having no more than a provisional function, at least as far as the supernatural is concerned; it is in any case far from being the whole of intelligence. Marked as he is by the fall, man needs to proceed in a somewhat roundabout way in order to activate intellectual "recollection"; to be more precise, he must exteriorize for the sake of interiorization: to become wholly what it is or to become aware of its innate content, intelligence has to make detours through more outward modalities.

The teleological proof also embraces the "aesthetic" proof—in the profoundest sense of the term. In this form it is perhaps even less accessible than in its cosmological or moral forms, for to be sensitive to the metaphysical transparency of beauty, to the radiation of forms and sounds, is to possess already—as did Rumi and Ramakrishna—a visual and auditive intuition capable of ascending through phenomena to the essences and eternal melodies.

In the context of this particular aspect of the teleological proof, let us note that the modern world has been unique among civilizations in creating—on the foundations of Greece!—a world in which ugliness and triviality are the order of the day and are shamelessly put forward as the "genuine" and "real"; beauty and outward dignity are consigned to the sphere of dreams, luxuries, and playthings, whence the reproach associated with the words "poetic", "picturesque", "romantic", and "exotic". There is no such thing as chance, and the significance of this strange phenomenon is that it eliminates a natural argument in favor of God while at the same time eliminating the human capacity to be responsive to the argument. We would note in this connection the sharp distinction that is made between the "romantic" side of traditional civilizations and their "real" side, namely their misery; we would not dream of denying that such misery exists—it is in any case impossible that it should not—but to attribute "reality" to it, and to it alone, is quite simply diabolical. The devil indeed sees creation in a shattered or distorting mirror, and he always reduces the essential,

which is the symbol and which has the quality of beauty, to the level of some accidental infirmity; for him man is the body under its aspect of misery, and the world is impure, cruel, and absurd; beyond that there is nothing else: proportions and compensations do not count, nothing has any sense in it, everything is a kind of senseless play of chance, and only those who believe this to be true are accounted intelligent and honest. This way of seeing and feeling things is totally opposed to the nobility of soul presupposed by the teleological argument, which shows once again that every proof calls for a subjective qualification, not of an exceptional kind but simply normal according to the criteria of Heaven.

* * *

There remains the experimental or mystical proof of God. While one must admit that from a strictly logical standpoint and in the absence of doctrine it proves nothing to anyone who has not undergone the unitive experience, there is nonetheless no justification for concluding that it must be false simply because it is incommunicable; this was the error of Kant, who went so far as to give the name "theurgy" to what is simply a direct experience of the divine Substance. The mystical proof of the Divinity belongs to the order of extrinsic arguments and carries all the weight of these arguments: for the unanimous witness of the sages and saints—throughout the world and down the ages—is a sign or criterion that no man of good faith can belittle, unless he chooses to think that the human species has neither intelligence nor dignity; and if this were so, if truth had never been within its grasp, then it could not hope to discover truth *in extremis*. The idea of the absurdity of both the world and man, supposing it true, would remain forever inaccessible to us; if modern man is so intelligent, ancient man cannot have been so stupid. Much more is implied in this modest reflection than perhaps appears at first sight.

Before setting the mystical or experimental proof aside as unacceptable, one should therefore not forget to ask what kind of men have invoked it; there is no comparison between the intellectual and moral worth of the greatest of the contemplatives and the absurdity that their illusion would imply were it nothing but that. If we have to choose between some Encyclopedist and Jesus, it is Jesus whom we

choose; of course we would also choose some infinitely lesser figure, but we cannot fail to choose the side on which Jesus is found.

In connection with the mystical proof and in view of the assurance displayed by those who deny the supernatural—and who deny that others, whose principles of certainty completely elude them, have any right to a similar assurance—let us emphasize the following: the fact that a contemplative may find it impossible to furnish proof of his knowledge no more proves the nonexistence of the knowledge than the spiritual unawareness of the rationalist annuls the falseness of his denials; as we have already remarked, the fact that a madman does not know he is mad obviously does not prove he is not so, just as the fact that a man of sound mind cannot prove his sanity to madmen in no way proves his mind to be unsound; these are practically truisms, but their significance is too often missed by philosophers—as well as by men without their pretensions.

It has been claimed that a prophet has no possible proof of the authenticity and truth of the revelations he receives; this merely shows an ignorance of the criteria that the gift of prophecy itself implies, and it amounts in practice to saying that no proof of anything is possible since every argument can be invalidated verbally by some sort of sophistry. Those who maintain that nothing can confer absolute certainty on a celestial Messenger nonetheless do not require proof of their own conviction that they are not dreaming when they are awake and when their own interests are at stake; it is obviously possible to say in theory that—strictly speaking—no such proof exists, but it is impossible to deny that the conviction exists and that no one ever questions it in his own case.

* * *

Modern science denies in practice or in principle all that is really fundamental, and thus it rejects the “one thing needful”;¹⁰ it is therefore

¹⁰ Scientific atheism is affirmed indirectly by the postulate of empty space and thus of discontinuity, though this cannot be maintained with complete consistency. Now to deny plenitude and continuity, including rhythm and necessity—and thus the providential element—is to deny universal Substance, together with all its implications of homogeneity and transcendence.

like a planimetry, having no notion of other directions; it shuts itself up entirely in physical reality—or unreality—and there it accumulates an enormous mass of information while at the same time committing itself to ever more complicated conjectures. Beginning with the illusion that nature will eventually yield its ultimate secret and allow itself to be reduced to a mathematical formula, this Promethean science repeatedly collides with enigmas that invalidate its postulates and appear as unforeseen fissures in its laboriously erected system; these fissures get plastered over with fresh hypotheses, and the vicious circle continues unchecked—together with the threats one knows too well. Some of its hypotheses, such as the theory of evolution, actually become dogmas because of their usefulness or at least plausibility—a usefulness that is not only scientific but also philosophical or even political, according to the circumstances.

In reality, evolutionism—to stress this point once again—is a pale imitation of the traditional theory of emanation;¹¹ it consists on the one hand in denying the periphery-center relationship, hence the very existence of the emanationist Center, which is the source of the radii leading to it, and on the other hand in attempting to situate every hierarchical relationship along the curve that describes the periphery: instead of proceeding upward—starting from the corporeal level, passing through the animic sphere, and then mounting toward realities at first supraformal and finally principial or metacosmic—an evolving hierarchy is imagined, advancing from matter, through vegetable and animal life, to human consciousness, which is itself considered a kind of transitory accident. With a thoughtlessness that is infinitely culpable when they call themselves “believers”, some people imagine a superman who is destined to take man’s place and who would therefore render Christ’s humanity of no account;¹² moreover a cer-

¹¹ This must not of course be confused with the emanationist heresy, which has nothing metaphysical about it and which reduces the Principle to the level of manifestation or Substance to the level of accidents

¹² For God manifests Himself directly only in a support which marks by its very nature the presence of the Absolute in relativity and which for this reason is “relatively absolute” This “relative absoluteness” is the sufficient reason for the possibility *homo sapiens* Man could disappear if God wished, but he could not change into another species; the Platonic ideas are precise possibilities and not just swirls of fog each possibility is what it is and what it ought to be

tain "genius" imagines something which he is not ashamed to call "God" but which is no more than a pseudo-absolute decked out in a pseudo-transcendence, coming at the end of the evolutionist and progressivist chain; for the Eternal will always be Alpha and has always been Omega. Emanating from the Center and thus from on High—in a manner that is at once continuous and discontinuous—creatures are crystallized in the corporeal zone; they do not "evolve" by coming from matter, hence from the periphery and from below; at the same time, however—and beyond the reach of our human point of view—they are all "contained" in God and do not really come forth from Him; the whole play of relationships between God and the world is but a monologue of relativity.

The mystical proof of God is always in some degree a participation in the profound nature of things, and it therefore excludes and discredits all speculations that tend to falsify the image of the Real in us and that falsely transfer the divine Ideas of the Immutable onto the plane of becoming. Modern men want to conquer space, but the least of contemplative states, or the least of intellections bearing on metaphysical realities, carries us to heights from which the nebula of Andromeda appears scarcely more than a terrestrial accident.

* * *

These considerations permit us to underline certain points that have already been touched on. Promethean minds believe themselves to be creatures of chance, moving freely in a vacuum and capable of "self-creation", all within the framework of an existence devoid of meaning; it seems to them that the world is absurd, but no one notices—and this is typical—the absurdity of admitting the appearance within an absurd world of a being regarded as capable of noticing the absurdity. Modern men are fundamentally ignorant of what the most childish of catechisms reveals—doubtless in a pictorial and sentimental language, and yet a language entirely adequate for its purpose—namely, that we are inwardly connected to a Substance that is Being, Consciousness, and Life, of which we are contingent and transitory modalities; these men are therefore unaware of being involved in a titanic drama in comparison with which this world, so seemingly solid, is as tenuous as a spider's web. Invisible and underlying Existence is concrete and not abstract: it "sleeps" and "awakes"; it "breathes" and can make worlds

collapse; space, time, man—these are no more than minute fragments of a Being and a Movement that escape all our measurements and all we can imagine. The divine Substance cannot have the limiting properties of matter or those of an animic fluid: its homogeneity implies a transcending discontinuity, the traces of which are indeed apparent both around and within us—the body is not its life, and life is not intelligence—but which we cannot adequately grasp with our terrestrial categories.

Thus the great misconception is to believe that the basis of our existence is space and that the causes of our individual and collective destinies are somehow contained within it, whereas in reality this basis—at once immutable and in movement, depending on the relationship considered—is situated in a “supra-space”, which we can perceive only through the Heart-Intellect and about which those explosions of total Consciousness, the Revelations, speak to us symbolically; the error is to believe that the causes determining human history or carrying it to its conclusion belong to the same order as our matter or “natural laws”, whereas in fact the whole visible cosmos is resting upon an invisible volcano, though also—at a deeper ontological level—upon a formless ocean of bliss. Men imagine that the earth, mountains, bodies can be destroyed only by forces operating on their own level, by masses or energies belonging to our physical universe; what they do not see, however, is that this world, which is so compact in appearance, can collapse *ab intra*, that matter can flow back “toward the inward” through transmutation, and that the whole of space can shrink like a balloon suddenly emptied of air. They do not see that fragility and impermanence not only affect things within a space naively supposed to be stable; they also affect existence itself with all its categories. Human nature consists precisely in being able to escape in our innermost core and “unchanging Center” from the breaking apart of a macrocosm that has become too solid and in becoming reintegrated in the Immutable, whence we came; what proves this possibility is our capacity to conceive this Immutability, but it is proved as well, in a concordant manner, by the fact—at once unique and multiple—of Revelation.

* * *

To be shocked by the anthropomorphic character of the Biblical God is logically equivalent to being surprised by the very existence of man, for the Reality we call "God" necessarily assumes a human character on contact with the human being, though of course this cannot be taken to imply it is human in its own aseity.¹³ The source of our knowledge of God is at once the Intellect and Revelation: in principle the Intellect knows everything because all possible knowledge is inscribed in its very substance, and it contains absolute certainty because its knowledge is a "being"—or a participation in being—and not merely a "seeing"; but in fact man is a fallen being, who has lost access to his own transpersonal kernel, so that nothing remains to him but the faint light that is reason and, beyond this altogether indirect and discursive mode of intelligence, an intuition of the Intellect that is purely virtual and fragmentary; if an infant were left to grow up among wild animals, his knowledge of God would be no greater than his knowledge of language, which proves that man cannot draw everything out of himself, at least not under ordinary conditions. It is Revelation that confers spiritual knowledge at different levels, transmitting to some men truths of which they were unaware and awakening in others—by this means—an intellection that had hitherto remained latent; the most decisive truths concerning our existence—truths referring to the invisible Reality that determines us and to the destinies that await us *post mortem*—are not simply imposed upon us from without; they slumber within us, and with a self-evidence that is at once adamant and dazzlingly brilliant, they form a part of our very being.

For primordial man Revelation and intellection coincided: contingency was still transparent so that there were as yet neither "points of view" nor "perspectives"; whereas in later times Revelation is multiple because—geometrically speaking—the circumference implies many radii, the "point of view" of primordial man corresponded to

¹³ If the Scriptures describe creation—as they do—in a simple, synthetic, and pictorial language and not in the style of a scientific analysis, this does not mean that they are mistaken, but rather that we have no need of anything else on this level. All Promethean and profane science, even though neutral in principle as a source of exact information, is in fact harmful as far as its human effects are concerned, and this was the real significance of the trial of Galileo, which was the trial by anticipation of scientific euphoria, the machine, and the atom bomb. The theories of astronomy matter little themselves, but the fruit of the forbidden tree poisons humanity *de facto*

the entire circle; the center was everywhere. In the same way the unavoidably limiting aspect of expressions, forms, or symbols did not yet imprison minds; there was therefore no place for a diversity of forms, each expressing the same Truth in the name of the impersonal Self while excluding each other in the name of this or that particular manifestation of the personal God. Now that these diverse manifestations exist, what matters is knowing that intrinsically they speak in an absolute mode since it is the Absolute which is speaking, but that extrinsically they are clothed in the language of a particular mental coloring and a particular system of contingencies since they are addressed to man; now the man to whom they are addressed in this manner is already cut off from the inward Revelation that is direct and “supernaturally natural” intellection.

* * *

Of quite a different order from the intellectual proofs of God and the beyond is a type of proof that is purely phenomenal, namely miracles: contrary to what most people suppose, the conviction brought about by miracles—which are not in the least opposed to reason—is quite unlike that of a physical effect that may prove a given cause, for in this case the certainty offered would be only an approximation since miraculous causation is unverifiable;¹⁴ moreover this is the objection most commonly raised against the conviction in question, setting aside the habitual denial of the phenomenon as such. What a miracle seeks to produce—and what it does produce—is the rending of a veil; far from discussing things in the abstract, it operates like a surgical intervention, which removes an obstacle in a concrete way. A miracle breaks down the wall separating outward and fallible consciousness from inward and infallible consciousness, which is omniscient and blissful; by means of a “therapeutic shock” it frees the soul from its shell of ignorance. It would amount to nothing, however, if it sought to convince merely by a demonstration of phenomena, for then—as we have seen—many doubts would be permissible as to the level and significance of the prodigy.

¹⁴ There are magical phenomena that have every appearance of being miracles but without of course having any connection with miraculous causality

Given the supernatural on the one hand and the natural on the other, the miraculous phenomenon cannot help but exist; in any case the supernatural is not the contra-natural but rather what is "natural" on a universal scale. If the divine Principle is transcendent in relation to the world while at the same time embracing it within its unique substance, then miracles must occur; the celestial must sometimes break through into the terrestrial, and the center must appear like a flash of lightning on the periphery; to take an example from the physical realm, inert matter is of little worth, but gold and diamonds cannot fail to appear within it. Metaphysically a miracle is a possibility that must necessarily be manifested as such in view of the hierarchical structure of the total Universe.

This brings us back to the teleological argument: harmony or beauty—whether inward or outward—possesses something that produces conviction *ab intra* and results in deliverance; like a miracle, beauty possesses this alchemical and liberating capacity only when it is linked with truth and the sacred and only for those who are called to understand this language, which may truly be described as angelic. The *Avatāra* does not convince by his words and marvels alone; he also transmits certainty by the visible harmony of his whole being, which allows us to glimpse the shores of the Infinite and revives our deepest yearnings while at the same time satisfying them; it is a super-human harmony, one perpetuated in sacred art and having the power, without resorting to demonstrations, to seize souls at their center by penetrating the carapace that separates them from Heaven and makes them strangers to themselves.

The Argument from Substance

God is our Being,¹ and the Good and Being coincide logically and ontologically; our submission to Being—and religions ask for nothing else—is our concordance with total Good or the Good itself. If there is any good in us, it is because Being is good; if our sentiments are true, they cannot be opposed to total Truth; if there is such opposition, then these sentiments are false.

We are accident, not Substance. There is no good in us that does not belong to universal Substance; our freedom is nothing other than our conformity to this Substance, from which we spring and which is Freedom itself. Being is Equilibrium, immanent Justice; we are disequilibria. A drop of the ocean cannot rise up against water; if our sense of justice is not delusion, it comes from God. Our intelligence cannot be other than intelligence itself.

Two possible attitudes are open to us: we may revolt against the Norm in the name of our own particularity or deviation, or we may conform to it and reintegrate ourselves in Equilibrium; our deviation is obvious, for its stain can be seen in our existential and individual imperfections and terrestrial exile. To revolt against Being is to revolt against ourselves.

* * *

In the final analysis every spiritual doctrine expresses the relationship between Substance and accident: the creation and the end of the world, the particular Judgment and the Last Judgment, the paradisiacal and infernal destinies, and finally the *Apocatastasis*—all these “states” or “events” of the microcosm or the macrocosm are manifestations of the relationships that simultaneously connect and separate accident and Substance. To understand what Substance is and what the relationship is between Substance and accident and to grasp at the same time that every single thing participates in both while nonetheless being an

¹ God is also immensely more, but here it is a question of the “face” that is turned toward the world and man

accident in relation to the ultimate Substance is in principle to understand the meaning of all religions and all metaphysics.

We speak of "Substance" in order to underscore the gulf between what subsists in itself and what exists only secondarily, the profound cause of which lies in a greater and higher reality. We use the term in this context in preference to "Essence" because it is possible to conceive of a sort of continuity between Substance and accident—"all things are *Ātmā*"—whereas between Essence and forms there is no continuity. The "Substance-accident" relationship can therefore be compared to that between water and drops of water and the "Essence-form" relationship to that between kernel and fruit or between fire and the wood it consumes: "*Brahma* is not in the world." Substance can be compared to the center of a spiral and Essence to the center of a system of concentric circles; one could also say that the notion of Substance is nearer that of the Infinite and the notion of Essence that of the Absolute, or that there is in Substance an aspect of femininity and in Essence an aspect of masculinity.

Some people will see only pantheism in the argument from Substance, not realizing that ontological continuity, which proceeds from Being to things, is in no sense a material continuity and does not in any way abolish the relationship of transcendence or the incommensurability it implies. Because of the miracle of existence, the Universe is not nothingness, and for this reason there is something divine about it; possessing being, it is unable to leave Being behind. If this is a kind of pantheism, then we are obliged to admit that pantheism is not entirely without justification when considered from a particular standpoint, namely, that of the metaphysical homogeneity or solidarity of non-nothingness, non-unreality, or non-impossibility; in a certain sense all that is not nothing is God—not in its particularity but in and through ontological Substance.

* * *

In Buddhism, Substance is not regarded as the creative and determining cause of cosmic accidentality but as non-manifestation or non-existence in relation to the manifest world, or as "Void" in relation to the illusory plenitude of things; this explains why Buddhism does not possess the idea of "God", for this would mean—from the point of view in question—introducing something of the cosmic plenitude into

the transcendent Void or projecting something of manifestation into principial Reality. But since manifestation is a kind of nothingness in relation to the infinitely real Void—the constituent elements of manifestation have neither solidity nor permanence—it appears in turn as a “void”; considered from this point of view, Substance or Reality is indeed a “plenitude”, not of course in the sense of a spatial or other kind of materiality but by virtue of its very being, whose absoluteness allows no fissures.

From a diametrically opposite standpoint, Reality is personified, sometimes with an insistence that veils its nature as Substance, and this runs the risk—we are speaking of the concept—of compromising the transcendence of the Real; and yet it is Substance itself that is revealed in this personal aspect in keeping with the nature of the human receptacle; discussions as to the value of this or that traditional concept are therefore fruitless, especially since the esoterisms re-establish unanimity. If Monotheists possess esoteric notions equivalent to the Buddhist “Void”, Buddhists for their part possess notions equivalent to the Biblical or Koranic God: one thinks of Amitabha *Buddha*, for example, who is “true man” from one point of view and “true God” from another.

If water is taken as the symbol of Substance, it can be said that for Buddhists Substance is “non-wave” or “non-foam”, hence the unalterable nature of water, whereas for theists, Aryan as well as Semitic, water is the efficient cause of the waves and spray; there is nothing in these accidents that does not result from the nature of this element, which truly manifests in its own order the creative All-Possibility.² Buddhists consider this same Substance-accident relationship metaphysically, however, when they say that *samsāra* and *Nirvāna* are one.

* * *

Immanent Justice—the Law of *karma*—is explained only by the return of accident to Substance, a return that is necessary because of the very nature of accident and *a fortiori* the nature of Substance.

² Whence the use of water in rites of purification, which bring man back to Substance in a way that is at once potential and actual, according to the point of view.

The fact that we are accidents, since we exist without being absolute, explains the confrontation with Truth or the Sovereign Good; "evil" is a trace of the distance separating accident from What subsists in itself; "Judgment" is the inescapable meeting with What is, hence our Norm or Prototype. The Substance-accident relationship also explains the meaning of our devotional attitudes, such as worship, obedience, piety, love of God: if it is necessary to "worship" God, it is because we must become conscious of our accidentality and of the Substance upon which it depends in order to be conformed to What is; our mind is made for this consciousness and is nothing without it. To "revolt"—the expression of a Luciferian mentality—is to go against our profound nature and thus against the nature of the absolutely Real. We cannot reasonably revolt except against ourselves, or against our own revolt.

The beyond represents Substance—relatively or totally according to the degrees considered—in relation to the accident that is life on earth; paradisiacal or infernal survival is a definitive state in comparison with the ambiguity of life here below, though a definitiveness situated in a dimension we cannot imagine. It is essential never to lose sight of the fact that the relative, and even more so the formal, is always subject to limitations, which mark its "lack of absoluteness": if Heaven and hell have for us something infinite about them, it is because we can scarcely imagine their limits; there is no reason for this to trouble us, however, since the sufficient reason for monotheistic eschatology is precisely the opposition within our consciousness between the transitory and the definitive, doing and being, the changeable appearance and the immutable nature of things. Heaven opposes the definitive and immutable to all our vain pursuits, whatever the intrinsic possibilities of this unknown dimension.³

In connection with the notion of the beyond, it is sometimes said that time and space, as well as the other conditions of corporeal existence—form, number, and matter—belong to this world alone and that there can be no question of these conditions applying outside

³ From the transmigrationist point of view one would say instead that the relative opposes itself illusorily to the Absolute since the posthumous conditions also belong to relativity insofar as the individual modality is still in question; the beyond in a certain fashion forms part of the here-below; immutability belongs to the Principle alone, for everything else revolves around the divine Axis.

the limits of earthly life; now this opinion is only partially true: no doubt the modes will necessarily vary from one degree of existence to another, but even so the earthly categories have nothing fortuitous about them and cannot but mark universal principles of containment. Since everything in the Universe, both visible and invisible, requires both expansion and limitation, there is everywhere a kind of "space" and a kind of "time"; what varies is the mode and with it perhaps the nature of the diversity, for it is possible to conceive of a spatial or temporal condition subdivided differently from the way it is on earth; but the conditions of existence will always be in conformity with the inherent nature of expansion and limitation as also with the nature of the static and dynamic, the last two determinations in fact overlapping the two preceding ones.

The elect are an aspect of Substance—an aspect, hence a kind of accident; the damned on the contrary are a crystallization of accidentality—a crystallization, hence a kind of substance; they are creatures who refuse to be what they are. In other words Heaven and hell are said to be "eternal" because—leaving aside the didactic intention behind this expression—the element "substance" comes into play in each case: we are saved by Substance even though it is clothed in accidentality; on the other hand we are damned by accident because it arrogates to itself the quality of Substance or *materia prima*, pretending to be an end in itself. Substances entail perpetuity just as absolute Substance entails eternity; even on the physical plane the elements are indestructible and persist beneath all their modalities and combinations. The whole question is to know whether a sin is an accident that is contrary to the individual substance composing the ego or whether on the contrary it is a manifestation of that substance, although from another point of view sin—an act that is contrary to universal harmony and the profound nature of things—transforms our substance because it encloses and penetrates us; it makes us become what it is and thus absorbs us into its own perverted substance. Herein is its immense danger, and this is why it is described as "mortal" according to the actual extent of its hold; as for the sin that is said to be "venial", its danger lies precisely in the fact that it either prepares the way for a descent into mortal sin or itself becomes mortal by its permanence, hence by its substantiality; even a fault that is slight in itself becomes mortal when through habit it becomes ourselves.

The pre-eminent sin or sin in its essence is the absurdity of an accident wishing to be pure Substance, the Substance underlying all “accidental substances”. The error, from which all others are derived, consists in confusing substantiality with accidentality to the benefit of the latter or in the reduction of Being to things and therefore in the negation of Being; Being then appears as an “abstraction”—unless it is identified with existing things—which is much more than an abuse of language, for it amounts to saying that there is no Principle, no transcendence, no God. Moreover, this error or sin is in a certain way inherent in our fallen nature: the concupiscent ego is itself this “error of perspective”, and this is why we cannot love it once we know it for what it is; even though we may be aware of certain qualities that appear to be our own, we are incapable of measuring ourselves by the standards of the Absolute. No matter our worth, it is always nothing in comparison to the Divinity; we are therefore wasting our time mulling over nothingness. The only thing that has any meaning for us is a salvific consciousness of the Absolute or—humanly speaking what amounts to the same—a love of God.

Men have built a world made of artificial phenomena around themselves, within whose distorting framework all their errors and misdeeds take on the appearance of self-evident truths or glories; this artificial world is so constructed that evil appears as a good and good as an evil. The name “reality” is given to this world of sideshows and distorting mirrors, and all responsibility is imputed to this idol or scapegoat whenever one feels the need to do so; and if this “reality” begins to totter, one hastens to declare that God has made the world badly, that the world is what God is or what He would be “if He existed”, and so on. When faith and obedience are mentioned—attitudes that are perfectly comprehensible in light of the Substance-accident relationship and that are free of all sentimentality—men protest that they are not irresponsible children and can figure out for themselves what is true and what is not; but when divine sanctions are mentioned, they are quick to point out that they could not possibly deserve punishment since God made them the way they are. Now it is necessary for us to make a choice: either we are irresponsible and therefore fundamentally innocent, in which case let us accept the consequences and be like children, or we possess sovereign responsibility and freedom, but let us not then pretend to escape *de jure* from every “backlash”, the cause of which comes precisely from our responsibility.

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The whole question is knowing whether man possesses a “pre-logical” intuition of Substance or whether he is fundamentally bound up with accidentality; in the first case his intelligence is made for *gnosis*, and arguments—or imagery—confined to the accidental will in the final reckoning have no hold upon him. For the average man, existence begins with man placed on earth: there is space, and there are things; there is “I” and “other”; we want this, and another wants that; there is good and evil, reward and punishment, and above everything there is God with His unfathomable wishes. But for the born contemplative everything begins with Truth, which is sensed as an underlying and omnipresent Being; other things can be fully comprehended only through it and in it; outside of it the world is no more than an unintelligible dream. First there is Truth, the nature of things; then there are the consciousnesses that are its receptacles: man is before all else a consciousness in which the True is reflected and around which the True or Real manifests itself in an endless play of crystallizations. For the contemplative, phenomena and events do not constitute a compact and naive postulate; they are intelligible or bearable only in connection with the initial Truth.

It is necessary to make a distinction between the outer and the inner man: the first is turned toward the outward and lives in the “accidental”; the second looks inward and is nourished by Substance. On the one hand spiritual life awakens and develops the inner man, attaching him to the substantial axis in order to transmute him progressively or even instantaneously as the case may be, and on the other hand it establishes equilibrium between the inward and the outward, determining the second in light of the first. There are two poles of attraction here: it is necessary in the first place to look beyond the barrier of ice that man carries within himself—a barrier most commonly indicated by indifference toward Heaven—in order to discover the inward pole that draws us toward Substance; and then, with this pole freed and acting upon the soul like a magnet, it is necessary to know how to maintain this inward attachment, for by the very fact of this attachment the outward pole is transformed under the influence of the inward pole, and this by virtue of what we have often called the metaphysical transparency of phenomena. The spirit then discovers that everything is within itself and that everything is Substance.

The "Substance-accident" relationship is manifested in an explicit way on the plane of thought: there is unbalanced thought, which is contrary to Being, and there is balanced thought, which conforms to the ontological Substance from which it springs; but there is also contemplative silence, which surpasses thought as such, whether good or bad, so that the real question is not whether we are good or bad but whether we are or are not before What alone is.

If the highest function of the mental faculty is to transfer the inexhaustible aspects of Substance to the plane of accidentality and to recollect and extinguish itself in the silence of contemplation, the same applies *mutatis mutandis* to the mode of exteriorization and suggestion represented by symbolism and therefore by sacred art: apart from its purely didactic role, the essential function of sacred art is to bring Substance—at once single and inexhaustible—into the world of accident and to bring accidental consciousness back to Substance. We could also say that sacred art brings Being into the world of existence, action, or becoming and that in a certain fashion it brings the Infinite into the finite world or Essence into the world of forms; thus it suggests a continuity proceeding from the one to the other, a way starting from appearance or accident and issuing forth into Substance or its celestial reverberations.

The beauty of nature and art, like the beauty of the virtues, shows that Substance is fundamentally good and coincides with Goodness. Evil—a privative reality, which is always fragmentary and never total or integral—is an infinitesimal quantity within the totality of phenomena; it can never be more than a thin and ephemeral layer of ice floating on an ocean of generosity and beauty.

Man's problem is that he is at one and the same time accident and Substance; it is necessary to know in exactly what way he is the one or the other and how to turn this double nature to account.

God created the world out of nothing; this is the teaching of the Semitic theologies, and with this they answer the following difficulty. If God had made the world out of a pre-existing substance, this substance would be either itself created or else divine. The creation is not God; hence it cannot emanate from Him; there is therefore an unbridgeable hiatus between God and the world; neither can become the other, for the orders of magnitude or reality, or of perfection, are incommensurable.

The main concern of this reasoning is not a disinterested perception of the nature of things; the aim is to safeguard a simple and unalterable notion of God while favoring a mentality that is more active than contemplative. In place of a metaphysical statement that would fail to engage the will, or at least appear not to do so, the goal is to provide a key notion capable of winning over souls that are rooted in willing and acting rather than in knowing and contemplating; the metaphysical limitation is the result of giving priority to what is effective for governing and saving souls. This being so, one is justified in saying that Semitic religious thought is by force of circumstances a kind of dynamic thought with moral overtones and not a static thought in the style of Greek or Hindu wisdom.

From the Greek and Hindu point of view, the idea of emanation—not *creatio ex nihilo*—in no way compromises the transcendence or immutability of God; between the world and God there is at once discontinuity and continuity, depending on whether our conception of the Universe is based on a scheme of concentric circles or on one of the radii extending outward from the center to the periphery: according to the first mode of vision, which proceeds from the created to the Uncreated, the contingent and the Absolute have nothing in common; according to the second mode of vision, which proceeds from the Principle to its manifestation, there is but one Real, which includes everything and excludes only nothingness, precisely because nothingness has no reality whatsoever. The world is either a production drawn from the void and totally other than God, or it is a manifestation “freely necessary” and “necessarily free” of the Divinity or its Infinitude, liberty as well as necessity being divine perfections.

As for the objection that the creationist concept is superior to the so-called "emanationist" or "pantheistic" concepts because it is Biblical and Christic and that the Platonic doctrine cannot be true since Plato cannot be superior either to Christ or the Bible, this has the fault of avoiding the real fundamentals of the problem. First, what is rightly or wrongly called "emanationism"¹ is not an invention of Plato's but can be found in the most diverse sacred texts; second, Christ, while traditionally supporting the creationist thesis, nonetheless did not teach it explicitly and did not deny the apparently opposite thesis. The message of Christ, like that of the Bible, is not *a priori* a teaching of metaphysical science; it is above all a message of salvation, but one that necessarily contains an integral metaphysics in an indirect way and under cover of an appropriate symbolism. The opposition between the divine Bible and human philosophy or between Christ and Plato therefore has no meaning as far as the metaphysical truths in question are concerned; that the Platonic perspective should go farther than the Biblical perspective brings no discredit on the Bible, which teaches what is useful or indispensable from the point of view of the moral or spiritual good of a particular humanity, nor does it confer any human superiority on the Platonists, who may be mere thinkers just as they may be saints, according to how much they assimilate of the Truth they proclaim.

For Platonists it is perfectly logical that the world should be a necessary manifestation of God and without origin; if the monotheistic Semites believe in a creation out of nothing and in time, it is obviously not—as some have suggested—because they think they have the right or privilege to accept a thesis that is "suprational" and humanly absurd; for the idea of creation appears to them on the contrary as being the only one that is reasonable, hence the only one that can be logically demonstrated, as is proved precisely by the argumentation used in theology. Starting with the axiom that God created the world out of nothing, the Semites reason thus, *grosso modo*: since God alone has Being, the world cannot share it with Him; hence there had to be a time when the world did not exist; God alone could give it exist-

¹ Wrongly if one understands emanation in a physical sense, rightly if one acknowledges that it is purely causal while at the same time implying a certain consubstantiality since reality is one

tence. On the religious plane, which as far as cosmology is concerned demands no more than the minimum necessary or useful for salvation, this idea of creation is entirely sufficient, and the logical considerations supporting it are perfectly plausible within the framework of their limitation; for at least they convey a key truth that allows a fuller understanding of the nature of God—to the extent this nature is meant to be revealed in the monotheistic religions.

More than once we have had occasion to mention the following error: if God creates the world in response to an inward necessity, as is affirmed by the Platonists, this must mean He is obliged to create it and is therefore not free; since this is impossible, the creation can only be a gratuitous act. One might as well say that if God is One, or if He is a Trinity, or if He is all-powerful, or if He is good, He must be obliged to be so, and His nature is thus the result of a constraint, *quod absit!* It is always the same incapacity to conceive of antinomic realities and to understand that if liberty, which is the absence of constraint, is a perfection, then necessity, which is the absence of arbitrariness, is another.

If in opposition to the Pythagorean-Platonic perspective certain people wish to maintain the idea of an Absolute that is threefold in its very essence and thus devoid of the degrees of reality, which alone can explain the hypostatic polarizations—an Absolute that creates without metaphysical necessity and acts without cause or motive—and if at the same time they claim for themselves the right to a sacred illogicality in the name of an exclusive “Christian supernaturalism”, then they owe us an explanation of what logic and human reason are; for if in its very structure our intelligence is alien or even opposed to divine Truth, then what is this intelligence, and why did God give it to us? Or conversely, what sort of divine Message is opposed to the laws of an intelligence to which it is essentially addressed, and what is the meaning of the fact that man was created “in the image of God”?²

² We take the liberty of adding here, by simple association of ideas, the following consideration: according to Genesis, “God created man in His own image,” and “male and female created He them.” Now according to one Father of the Church, the sexes are not made in the image of God, only the features that are identical in the two sexes resemble God for the simple reason that God is neither man nor woman. This reasoning is fallacious, for although it is evident that God in Himself is not a duality He necessarily comprises principal Duality in his Unity, exactly as He comprises Trinity or

And what motive could induce us to accept a message that is contrary, not to our earthly materialism or passion, but to the very substance of our spirit? For what Saint Paul calls “wisdom according to the flesh” is not simply every form of metaphysics unaware of the Gospels, nor is it logic as such—for the Apostle was logical—but rather the arguments with which worldly men seek to prop up their passions and pride, such as those of the Sophists or Epicureans and in our day the current philosophy of the world; “wisdom according to the flesh” is also a merely gratuitous philosophy that does not lead us inward and contains no door to spiritual realization; it is philosophy of the type “art for art’s sake”, which commits one to nothing and is vain and pernicious for this very reason.

The inability of theologians to understand Platonic and Oriental emanationism arises from the fact that monotheism places the metaphysically essential notion of divine Relativity or *Māyā* in parentheses;³ this bracketing, and in fact this ignorance, prevents them from seeing that there is no incompatibility whatsoever between the “absolute Absolute”, Beyond-Being, and the “relative Absolute”, creative Being, and that this distinction is even crucial. Divine *Māyā*, Relativity, is the necessary consequence of the very Infinitude of the Principle: because God is infinite He includes the dimension of relativity, and because He includes this dimension He manifests the world. And we would add: it is because the world is manifestation and not Principle that relativity, which at first is only determination, limitation, and manifestation, gives rise to the particular modality that is “evil”; it is not in the existence of evil things that evil lies, nor in their existential properties, nor in their faculties of sensation and action in the case of animate beings, nor even in actions themselves insofar as they are the manifestation of a power; evil resides only in what is privative or negative with respect to good, and its function is to manifest within

Quaternity; and how can one refuse to admit that the Blessed Virgin has her prototype in God not only with regard to her humanity but also with regard to her femininity?

³ The fact that we have drawn attention to this Vedantic notion many times must not prevent our insisting on it once more, and we shall return to it again later. Let us here recall that the term *Māyā* combines the meanings of “productive power” and “universal illusion”; it is the inexhaustible play of manifestations, deployments, combinations, and reverberations, a play with which *Ātmā* clothes itself even as the ocean clothes itself in a mantle of foam, which is ever renewed and never the same.

the world the distance of this world from the Principle, contributing in this way to the equilibrium and rhythm required by the economy of the created universe. Although appearing wholly evil when considered in isolation, evil thus fits within a larger good, and it is dissolved as evil when considered within its cosmic context and in light of its universal function.

Platonists feel no need to try to “fill the gap” that may seem to exist between the pure Absolute and the determinative and creative Absolute; it is precisely because they are aware of relativity *in divinis* and of the divine cause of this relativity that they are emanationists; in other words, although Hellenists may not have had a word for *Māyā*, they nonetheless possessed in their own way the concept, and their doctrine of emanation proves it.

The notion of mystery and an obligatory anti-Hellenism have given rise in the Christian climate to the idea of the “natural” character of intelligence in itself; now if human intelligence is created “in the image of God”, it cannot be purely and simply, and therefore exclusively, “natural”, for the very substance of intelligence is opposed to its being so. The human mind is natural in its contingent operations but supernatural in its essence, and there is therefore no reason whatever for saying that human thought is incapable in principle of adequation to the transcendent Real; of course it could never attain the Real by its own powers, but this is merely an accidental infirmity. The very existence of theologies is proof of what we are saying; as soon as a dogma or mystery is called into question, theologians know very well how to defend it; whereas thought or logic is vilified as long as it is in the service of a foreign religion or a wisdom derived from that immanent Revelation which is the Intellect, it suddenly becomes something good, and the infallibility and prestige of the Holy Spirit clothe it in robes of purple.

To say that a truth is situated “beyond logic” can mean only one thing: in its formulation it does not provide the data that are necessary for logic to resolve an apparent antinomy; and if it does not provide these data, it is because they are too complex or subtle to be expressed in a single formulation and because it would be disproportionate and useless to provide them since the formulation in question has the virtue and aim of awakening intellection in those who are capable of it.

The possible role of the *intellectus agens* in relation to the *intellectus possibilis*—the first of which is expected to bring about an abstraction for the second—is eminently contingent, and so is reasoning in general in relation to intellection: discursive thought may or may not be necessary for a particular intuition of the real; it may eliminate an obstacle or attract the lightning flash of direct knowledge, but it cannot produce this knowledge; it thus has the character of an indirect cause, though it may already carry a part of knowledge within itself when it is adequate in its arrangement and content. The activity of the *intellectus agens* reminds one of magic, which works by cosmic analogies, or of alchemy, whose principles are similar: it conjures up the underlying substance of forms by means of affinities inasmuch as partial truth evokes its complement or totality.

* * *

In the Christian climate one may encounter two ways of supporting Semitic creationism as well as Trinitarianism: one appeals to logic, hence reason, while the other claims that transcendence has a mysterious right to absurdity; in other words, the “supernatural” appeals at once to human “good sense” and to a hypothetical divine illogicality. The fault of the first argument lies in thinking that the reasoning employed has an absolute validity and that it therefore invalidates the Platonic and Vedantic points of view; the fault of the second lies in thinking that when logic is placed in the service of Platonism or another non-Christian metaphysics its anti-spiritual character is thereby proved and in believing at the same time, and with absolutely no warrant, that this metaphysics is the product of the reasoning faculty alone.

It must be borne in mind that logic, on whatever plane it may be applied, is the capacity to draw conclusions from one or more premises; only something for which we have no evidence and about which we therefore have no knowledge at all is above logic. The divine Essence eludes logic to the extent that it is indefinable, but since we are conscious of this Essence, seeing that we can speak of it, it constitutes a premise, and this allows us to draw at least indirect and extrinsic conclusions. Everything that presents itself to our mind is therefore a premise in some respect, and as soon as there is a premise—whether direct or indirect, precise or approximate—there

is the possibility of a conclusion, hence of logic; to speak of concepts that are essential for us but that conceal themselves from our logic is a contradiction pure and simple, and in fact no doctrine has ever rejected the logical explanation of any notion, or not at least within the limits in which logic can operate. No religion has ever required, or could ever require, that the human mind accept an idea that logic is incapable of approaching in any way; religion addresses itself to man, and man is thought.

If logic is incapable of drawing out of itself the truths of the Invisible, this is obviously because it cannot draw anything whatsoever out of itself and because even the least of rational operations needs evidence furnished by the senses or the testimony of others, or by intellectual intuition; but intuition—and this is precisely the point—is unable to operate in the absence of the factors that actualize it. If sensory data are in principle easy to obtain in the spatial and temporal field accessible to us, the same is not true *a priori* of premises that pertain to suprasensorial reality; we say *a priori* because in principle the visible proves the Invisible by its complexity no less than by its simplicity, but this presupposes the actualization of pure intellection, which is difficult to realize in the spiritual conditions of the “dark age” and indeed impossible to realize outside a traditional spirituality. It would be ridiculous to maintain that Plato discovered his doctrine by force of logic, hence by reason alone; he belonged intellectually to the Aryan world, and his doctrine is like a distant modality of Brahmanism, setting aside what he was able to learn from the Egyptians.

This being said, it is plausible to think that there would, and could, be no human knowledge of the Invisible or Transcendent without Revelation since the principal result of the cyclical decadence of the human species has been the loss of spontaneous intellection. And if it is to be credible, Revelation must take into account a certain intellectual, rational, and passional predisposition, which explains the nature of its means and its effectiveness, at least extrinsically.

Reason is the faculty of knowing indirectly in the absence of a direct vision and with the help of points of reference; one who encompasses everything in a direct form of knowledge has no need of reason or *a fortiori* of points of reference; this is the case for angelic intelligences, whose limitations are of a different order: since they are not God, they cannot have an absolute knowledge of God; each manifests one particular divine quality to the exclusion of others and looks

upon things in relation to the quality it manifests. A man may know that there is a certain distance between one place and another and that a horse takes a certain time to travel this distance, and with the help of these premises or points of reference he can then work out that it will take him so many hours on horseback to arrive at such and such a destination; but an angel has no need of this reasoning or calculation, for it embraces in a single view all the givens of the situation.

Let us observe in passing that evolutionism provides a typical example of reasoning in the absence of sufficient evidence: modern scientism begins with the crude and arbitrary axiom that there is no reality outside sensory, or potentially sensory, experience—notwithstanding the highly relative exception of psychology, whose very limited domain can nonetheless be reduced philosophically to a subtle mode of the sensory; and since it starts with this axiom, it will reason in accordance with it, ignoring evidence that surpasses it. Now any such reasoning must obviously be false when dealing with a reality that does surpass the sensory and empirical order—one might just as well reason about a sparrow while denying the existence of birds—and it will demonstrate its falsity by replacing the missing evidence with purely functional hypotheses, which betray their chimerical nature by their monstrousness, as can be seen for example in the concepts of the ape-man or “hominization”. All this is truly sinister if one remembers that the essential truth can be grasped only in light of the transcendent Absolute and the suprasensible cosmos, or the extrasensorial character of the greater part of the cosmos, including our souls, which are part of this order precisely.

Two words express the essential here, and they are terms of ordinary speech: “God” and “beyond”. The genesis of our world can be explained only by these two terms: the beyond is dependent on God, and our world is dependent on the beyond; it is an almost accidental and barely noticeable coagulation of an immense beyond, which will one day burst forth and into which the terrestrial world will be reabsorbed when it has completed its cycle of material coagulation.

* * *

The theology of “transubstantiation”⁴ provides an example of how a revealed premise passes into the sphere of a particular logic; a logic is not particular in the way it functions, for two and two make four everywhere, but in its natural presuppositions, which among Roman Catholics have the characteristics of physical empiricism and legalism, whence the tendency toward peremptory equations and simplistic and irreducible alternatives. When Jesus, an Easterner, says: “This is my body; this is my blood,” what this means in Eastern parlance is that the bread and wine are equivalent to his body and blood within the context of divine inherence and salvific power, for these are precisely what give the body and blood their sufficient reason and value; in Western parlance, however, the words of Christ signify a rigorous and massive physical equation, as if such an equation offered even the smallest metaphysical or sacramental advantage.⁵ One must admit, however, that this dogmatism is nonetheless inevitable in a climate of emotional totalitarianism and that within this climate it therefore represents the most effective solution for safeguarding the mystery; one must also admit that the Lateran Council was right—however opportunistic its teaching may have been—inasmuch as the Eucharistic elements, though remaining what they are, obviously cannot be what they are in the same way they were before, and this is because bread that has been penetrated by a divine Presence or Power must thereby change its substance in a certain respect. This consideration leads us into the realm of the indefinite and inexpressible, however, and cannot wholly justify the logic of transubstantiationism; in any case the words of Christ, which are thought to require this formulation, do not in reality require it at all, for an Oriental ellipsis is not a mathematical or physical equation; “to be equivalent in a certain respect” does not necessarily mean “to be the same thing in every respect”.

We could also approach the problem this way: if in truth the Eucharistic species have literally become the body and blood of Jesus, what is the benefit for us of this “magical” operation, since the value of this body and blood lies precisely in their divine content and since

⁴ The Orthodox Church speaks more prudently of a “transmutation”

⁵ If every word of the Gospel had to be interpreted literally, it would be necessary to believe that Christ is a vine or door, and it would be necessary to hate one’s father and mother or to pluck out one’s eye

this same content can penetrate bread and wine without any “transubstantiation”? For we can neither desire nor obtain anything greater than the divine Presence; if this Presence were in a tree, the tree would then be equivalent to the body of Christ, and there would be no need to ask whether the wood was something other than wood or to conclude that it was a tree without being one or that it was a “form” that contradicted its substance, and so forth. It is not the body of Jesus that sanctifies God; it is God who sanctifies this body.⁶

Let there be no misunderstandings: we have no preconceived opinion about the idea of transubstantiation, but if anyone says that the proof of this idea is in the words of Christ, we have no choice but to respond that these words themselves do not imply the meaning attributed to them. It can be admitted, however—setting aside any question of intrinsic truth—that the idea of transubstantiation has the value of an impelling argument, well suited to forestall any naturalistic or psychological interpretation of the mystery in a society all too easily led into this kind of betrayal.

* * *

Trinitarian theology gives rise to a comparable hiatus between a very subtle and complex transcendent reality—described as “inexhaustible” by Saint Augustine himself—and a logic that is dogmatically coagulative and piously unilateral, a logic determined by the need to adapt the mystery to a mentality more volitive than contemplative. The theology of the Trinity does not constitute an explicit and homogeneous revelation; it results on the one hand, like the concept of transubstantiation, from a literalistic and quasi-mathematical interpretation of certain words in the Scriptures and on the other hand from

⁶ The luxury of being precise concerning modalities of the “Real Presence” has not prevented people from forgetting the differences in significance and effect between the Eucharistic species themselves—as if in this order of greatness there could be differences having no meaning or concrete relevance. The bread visibly refers to the formal order and perfection, and the wine to the supraformal and infinity, we say “visibly” because the message of the symbols results from the nature of things and because wine has always been an image of celestial nectar and of passage to the “greater mysteries”.

a summation of different points of view that are related to different dimensions of the Real.

The first paradox of the Trinitarian concept is the assertion that God is at the same time absolutely one and absolutely three; now the number one alone manifests absoluteness, while the number three is necessarily relative, unless it is assumed that three can be found within one in a purely undifferentiated and potential manner, but then it is this distinctive way of looking at the matter that represents a relative point of view, exactly as in the case of the Vedantic *Sat* (Being), *Chit* (Intelligence), and *Ānanda* (Bliss). The second paradox of the Trinitarian concept is the assertion that the divine Persons are distinct from one another but that each is nonetheless equal to the Essence; this is a claim whose difficulty no explanation of relationships can mitigate since no theologian can admit that in one connection the Persons are inferior to the Essence and that in another they are indistinguishable. Finally, the third paradox is the assertion that the Persons are only relations and that outside these relations they are the Essence, but this amounts to saying that they are nothing, for a pure and simple relation is nothing concrete. One of two things: either the relation gives the Person a certain substance, and then it is by this substance that the Person is distinguished from the other Persons; or else the relation does not confer a substance, and then it is a pure abstraction about which it is useless to speak—unless the relation is attributed to the Essence and the Essence is said to contain relations that render its nature explicit, but this would lead us to the modalism of the Sabellians.⁷

There is still a fourth difficulty with Trinitarianism, and this is its exclusiveness from a numerical point of view, if so inadequate a term is permitted; for if God incontestably comprises the Trinity that the Christian perspective discerns in Him, He also comprises other so to speak numerical aspects, and these are taken into account by other traditional perspectives;⁸ it is precisely this diversity that indicates in

⁷ Rejected because of an inability to combine it with the complementary thesis. The truth is here antinomic, not unilateral. the *hypostases* are at the same time three modes of one divine Person and three relatively distinct Persons

⁸ According to Hindu doctrine, the Divinity is unitary insofar as it is *Brahma* or *Ātmā*, it is binary insofar as it is *Brahma nirguna* (“unqualified”) and *Brahma saguna* (“qualified”) or *Para-Brahma* (“supreme”) and *Apara-Brahma* (“non-supreme”), or in an-

its own way the relativity—in the most exalted sense possible—of the Trinitarian conception and above all of the “divine dimension” that conditions this conception.

Christianity is based on the idea—and reality—of divine Manifestation; if it were not a religion but a sapiential doctrine, it could rest content with describing why and how the Absolute manifests itself, but since it is a religion it must encompass everything within its fundamental idea of Manifestation; it is therefore necessary to consider the Absolute itself only in connection with this idea, and this is precisely what leads to the Trinitarian doctrine, not only as such but also in its theological, hence totalitarian and exclusive, form.

* * *

According to a first possible interpretation of the Holy Trinity, the Father is the Absolute whereas the Son and Holy Spirit are related to Relativity and are as it were its foundations; this interpretation is irrefutable, because if the Son were the Absolute he could not be called “Son” and could not even have become incarnate, and if the Holy Spirit were the Absolute it could neither proceed nor be sent or delegated. The fact of the incarnation proves the relativity of the Son with respect to the Father but not with respect to men, for whom the Son is the manifestation of the Absolute; it is true that some theologians attribute the words of Christ expressing his subordination to his human nature alone, but this delimitation is arbitrary and interested, for the human nature is bound by its divine content; if it is a part of

other context *Purusha* and *Prakṛti*; it is ternary insofar as it is *Brahma nirguna*, *Brahma saguna*, and *Buddhi*, and it is also ternary at each of these three levels, namely, as *Sat-Chit-Ānanda* at the two unmanifested levels and as *Trimūrti* (“Triple Manifestation”) at the level of manifestation: *Buddhi* insofar as it is *Brahma*, *Vishnu*, and *Shiva*. The divine Quaternity is the central idea of the American traditions. Divinity essentially possesses the positive qualities of the four cardinal points, Purity or Strength belonging to the North, Life or Felicity to the South, Light or Knowledge to the East, Water or Grace to the West, the eight Guardians of the Universe in Hinduism are related to the same reality, at once metacosmic and cosmic, though doubtless in a less pronounced manner. The same holds for the *Dhyāni-Buddhas* and *Dhyāni-Bodhisattvas*, who in theistic language represent divine aspects, though in this case it is the number five or the number ten that expresses the polarization of the divine Substance through *Māyā*.

the Son, it must manifest him. The fact that this human nature exists and that its expressions manifest its subordination and thereby the hypostatic subordination of the Son shows that the interpretation of the Son as the first Relativity in relation to the purely Absolute Father is not contrary to Scripture and is inherently irrefutable.

But there is another interpretation of the Trinity, horizontal in this case and conforming to another real aspect of the mystery: God is the Absolute, and He is a single Essence, whereas the three Persons are the first Relativities insofar as they actualize the indivisible characteristics of the Essence on a plane that is already relative. This interpretation is also irrefutable and scriptural, for there are formulations in the Scriptures that can be explained only with its help, and it is this interpretation that justifies the assertion that the divine Persons are equal, even though they are necessarily unequal in a different connection. What makes it possible to concede that they are equal to the single Essence is precisely the fact that the Essence includes three Qualities or Powers, which are called "Persons" *a posteriori* on the plane of diversifying Relativity, and this it does in a manner that is principial, synthetic, and without differentiation; from this standpoint it is evident that each "Person" is the Essence in a direct and total sense; the relative has its root in the Absolute—otherwise it would be impossible—and it is thus a dimension of the Absolute, one that is either intrinsic or extrinsic depending on whether it is considered in its pure possibility or as a projection.

What we have just said implies that the Trinity expresses itself on three planes; because of its concern for a simplifying synthesis and for what is psychologically opportune in connection with certain human tendencies or weaknesses, exoterism confuses these planes and cannot do otherwise than confuse them. As we have seen, the first plane is that of the Essence itself where the Trinity is real, since the Essence permits no privation, but undifferentiated, since the Essence permits no diversity; from this standpoint one could say that each Person or each Quality-Principle is the other, which is just what one cannot say from the standpoint of diversifying relativity. The second plane is that of divine Relativity, of creative Being, of the personal God: here the three Quality-Principles are differentiated into Persons; one is not the other, and to claim without metaphysical reservation that they are the Essence is to pass without transition—either by virtue of a purely dialectical ellipsis or through lack of discernment and out of mystical

emotion—to the plane of absoluteness and non-differentiation. One could also envisage a third plane, already cosmic but nevertheless still divine from the human point of view, which is the point of view that determines theology, and this is the luminous Center of the cosmos, the “Triple Manifestation” (*Trimūrti*) of Hindu doctrine and the “Spirit” (*Rūh*) of Islamic doctrine; the Trinity is also present here, radiating and acting. To repeat: the first metaphysical plane is the Essence or Absolute; the second is the diversified Personality or metacosmic Relativity; and the third is the diversified and manifested Personality or cosmic Relativity, which is nonetheless still divine, hence principal and central. It will have been noticed that these three planes themselves also correspond respectively to the three *hypostases*, with each plane in turn comprising the Ternary in its own way.

* * *

Saint Augustine poses two questions with the aim of demonstrating that the Son must be equal to the Father: “Did God not want to have a Son who would be equal to Himself, or was He unable to have such a Son? If He did not want to, He is jealous; if He could not, He is incapable.” It is important to see that this line of reasoning, while it may have a certain symbolical value *pro domo*, begs the question, for it proceeds on the theoretical assumption that these possible obstacles to a divine “Will” or “Power” can only be deficiencies; this is arbitrary since these apparent deficiencies become qualities if based on different motives. One could in fact respond to these questions: yes, God is “jealous”, but of His Uniqueness; yes, He is “incapable”, but of not being He who is! To deny the first proposition would be polytheism; to deny the second, atheism. One sees that the terms “jealous” and “incapable”, which were chosen with a preconceived conclusion in view, are not sufficient to displace total truth, which surpasses Trinitarian exclusivism, and that this truth is strong enough to impose itself on these terms by providing them with another, positive meaning, one conforming moreover to Biblical language; if indeed the Essence is unable to engender a Manifestation equal to itself, it is because no manifestation can be the Essence.

As proof that the Son is equal to the Father, this saying of Christ has been quoted: “All things that the Father hath are mine”; but this is to lose sight of the fact that if this saying is to be understood in an

absolutely literal sense, then fatherhood and innascibility—hence the quality of principle or origin or the fact of not being engendered—must also pertain to the Son; if they do not, this is proof that the equality in question—apart from its underlying and impersonal reality, which is unfettered by hypostatic determination—is such only by participation or reflection and that it is therefore not absolute, though this clearly does not deprive it of its own intrinsic reality. In a certain sense the reflection of the sun in a mirror is equal to the sun: “everything that the sun has it has”; all the same it is not the sun, even though it is the light of the sun and nothing else.

Every relation indicates a substance, for otherwise it would represent nothing positive or intrinsic; if it is equivalent to a substance, it is obviously so in a relative sense, rather in the same way that the color green is a different substance from the color red, unlike the luminosity that makes them both visible and is their common substance. A *hypostasis* is a substantial mode of the unique Substance, or it is nothing; we may paraphrase the Augustinian questions and answers quoted above in an opposite sense by saying that if the Son cannot bear to be subordinate—since he is engendered—to the Father, he must be “proud”; if this argument proves nothing, neither does that of Saint Augustine; if Saint Augustine’s argument has the merit of supporting the real unity of Essence between the Father and the Son, ours has the merit of supporting the no less real subordination of the Son to the Father; but in both cases the poverty of the argument outweighs the merit of the intention.

Once Revelation decided that the Word made flesh should be called “Son”, it took upon itself the responsibility and the consequences of this designation; if the quality of Son implies no subordination at all, hence on no plane—and for as long as one distinguishes a Son from a Father—then the term was ill-chosen, and a different one ought to have been proposed. But since the Word intended to be called “Son”, it is from the starting point of a relationship of subordination that one must envisage a transcendent dimension of equality or unity of Essence: not only does this not contradict Scripture; it preserves all possible glory, but without abolishing subordination in the dimension to which it belongs.

* * *

We could also express ourself in the following way, though without its being possible to spare the reader from some repetition, which is inevitable in a subject of this kind: in order to give Trinitarian metaphysics a dogmatic face, it is necessary to make the modes of its differentiation explicit, for otherwise one could say nothing about it; but one is then obliged to interrupt the sequence of ideas at the decisive moment and return without transition to the initial assertion that the Essence is one, even though this assertion in no way addresses the meaning of the differences between the Persons. Thus it is said that the Father possesses divinity as Principle whereas the Son possesses it by generation, or that the Father is Light and Life and Wisdom in the manner of a source whereas the Son is these same things in the manner of a stream, or that the Father is the generator of greatness whereas the Son is himself greatness. From this it is concluded that the Father and the Son differ, but then one hastens to add—in order to nullify the consequences implied by this conclusion—that they do not differ in Essence but only in “origin”; this seems to overlook the fact that “origin” necessarily reflects an aspect of Essence—that is, something *ad se* and not *ad alterum*—for otherwise it would be a pure and simple nothingness; to say that each divine Person possesses an Essence of its own, an Essence that reflects its origin, is not to deny the single Essence that “subsists” in what one could call the “Essence of Person”, for this is simply a mode of affirmation of the single Essence.⁹

The inherence of one substance in another and their essential identity ought to cause no difficulty whatever, for there are numerous examples of it in nature herself: every individual has inherited from his parents his constitutive elements, but this does not prevent his being concretely distinct from them—not merely abstractly as the theological notion of “relation” would have it—even though he is of the same species and race as his forbears; similarly, a light of a certain color is neither a light of another color nor colorless light, but it is nonetheless light and nothing else, and it illuminates because it is really

⁹ When *hypostases* are defined as “modes”, an objection immediately presents itself, which is the following alternative if they are modes, they are therefore not Persons—as if there were an irreducible incompatibility; in fact modes can perfectly well have a personal nature, and this tri-personalism in no way prevents God from being a unique Person, to the extent that, or on the plane on which, this definition can properly be applied to Him.

light and not because it is red or green. An apparent antinomy that is not absurd in the simple natural order, which is so narrowly logical and so easily verifiable, is obviously no more so in the supernatural and divine order.¹⁰

Here is a further illustration: ice is water and nothing else but water, but it is at the same time a new substance of sorts, for otherwise it would be called water, not ice; ice is not the mere notion of freezing and nothing else. Without changing in any respect the nature of water, the process of freezing nevertheless adds to it a mode that makes ice at the same time both water and other than water; if ice were in no way distinct from water, nothing having arisen to modify its substantial nature, there would be no difference between a running stream and one transformed into a frozen block. When Christ proclaims his identity with God, he cannot mean that apart from the relationship of filiation he is absolutely God; and when he bears witness to his subordination, he cannot be saying something by virtue of his human nature that he would not say by virtue of his divine nature, for this would mean identifying human nature with God. In his divine nature the Son is therefore at once different from the divine Essence and identical with it; filiation is not merely a "relationship of origin" without concrete content, but determines at the same time a substantial reality, and this reality is precisely the Person, if the word is to have a meaning.¹¹

If someone objects that the contradiction contained in the Trinitarian concept is the mark of an antinomism that is inevitable in the

¹⁰ Saint John says first: "the Word was with God", and then: "the Word was God". He thus indicates two modes of identity and thus two substances, or more precisely a single Substance in two different aspects, one relative and the other absolute.

¹¹ A typical line of reasoning: the three divine Persons are equal, for if they were not, they would not have the same Essence and would not be one single God—as if hypothetical determinations were in any way comparable to the essentially Undetermined, which is the Absolute. In any case it is arbitrary for Saint Thomas to attribute the subordination that the Scriptures attribute to the Son to the earthly Jesus alone, what the Gospel shows is that the Son is at once subordinate and equal to the Father, and this antinomy is precisely what opens up to us—in an indicative manner—the mystery of *Relativity in divinis* "God became man that man might become God": the Absolute became Relativity that the relative might become absolute. Our paraphrase of the Patristic formula suggests, with no more and no less success than the formula itself, a metaphysical situation it would otherwise be difficult to express in a few words.

realm of the mysteries, we respond that this antinomism is the result of a dialectical ellipsis, which could have been avoided in principle, and that it requires above all the recognition that God is just as much One single Person-Substance as He is Three Persons in One single Substance; the exclusive point of view of Unity even takes precedence over the point of view of Diversity, for reasons that should be apparent enough. And since the virtues of antinomism are thrust upon us when it is a question of concealing the fissures in a theological formulation, we would permit ourself to observe that the only perfectly disinterested antinomism is the kind that allows for apparently incompatible aspects of a transcendent Reality, while pious prejudice contents itself with hurling anathemas.¹²

When Saint Thomas says that in God the relations are the Essence itself since there are no accidents in Him, he is right insofar as the *hypostases*—produced by *Māyā*—have their roots in the Essence, which by definition is single; but we cannot support him when he presents an equation that passes over the difference in the degree of reality between the *hypostases* as such and their common foundation in the Essence. For Saint Thomas, when the relation is compared to the Essence, the only difference is within our reason; this feat of ingenuity is by no means self-explanatory, and it serves no purpose once it is understood that the divine nature includes degrees, unless one assumes that the Essence alone should be referred to as “God”,¹³ in which case there are no longer any “Persons”, and the world itself, completely cut off from God, becomes unintelligible. To explain the hiatus between “Essence” and “Person”, Thomism makes the nature

¹² It should be remembered that more than one heresy was worthy of interest and could have been usefully developed if the dogmatic point of view were not narrow by definition. The whole problem with Trinitarianism is that divergent realities had to be fitted into a formula that necessarily—and bluntly—presented them as convergent; dogmatic expediency thus nipped in the bud certain intermediate truths that are metaphysically indispensable

¹³ Similar opinions are encountered among Muslims, in order to safeguard the unity of God, which is really in no way threatened, they will assert for example that diversity in the divine order exists only in the human reason; but if this were true, the world would also be distinct from God only in our reason. If the existence of the world does not threaten the unity of God, then the diversity of divine qualities—clearly prefigured in the Essence in an undifferentiated manner—does not threaten it either

of human reason intervene like a *deus ex machina*; this mysterious *ratio* then becomes a substitute for the universal principle of relativity, separativity, illusion.¹⁴

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In its theological elaboration, which is at once contradictory and totalitarian, Trinitarianism is “accepted” by God as a “spiritual means” in the sense of the Buddhist term *upāya*, of which we have often spoken: a restrictive dogma may be given or accepted by Heaven as an *upāya*, but it will be providentially contradicted by other *upāyas* precisely because of its limitation, whence religious divergences, which are at once a scandal and a blessing. The limitlessness of *Ātmā* necessitates a plurality of *upāyas*; every limit requires a repetition, which completes it while apparently contradicting it.¹⁵

Now whatever the effects of *Māyā in divinis* may be, the divine Substance remains what it is, so that God remains “always and everywhere” God; but this simultaneity of antinomic aspects is repugnant to volitive alternativism, which will hasten to deny relativity *in divinis* with the intention of safeguarding the absoluteness of God—which is in no way under attack—especially since the devotional mentality tends to confuse the metaphysical absolute with the human sublime.

In exoteric formulations, questions of psychological expediency or viability—hence of strictly human interest—play a role that is in some respects determinative, leading to a totalitarianism that is more mystical than metaphysical; Trinitarian theology provides examples, but

¹⁴ Thomism is a quasi-rationalism in assuming that we derive our knowledge from sensible things and apply it to God as best we can, but it is eminently more than that in its dogmatic content, which provides the Thomistic method with suprarational premises and in this way actualizes intellections properly so called.

¹⁵ The Trinity “Father, Son, and Mother”, which the Koran attributes to Christianity, has three meanings: first, it expresses a psychological situation *de facto* since Mary is much more present to Christian people than is the Holy Spirit as far as a truly divine function is concerned, second, it implies that the Blessed Virgin is identified with the Spirit insofar as she is the Wisdom that was “set up from everlasting, from the beginning, or ever the earth was” (Proverbs 8.23); third, the Koranic formulation is obliged to stress the exoteric incompatibility of Christian Trinitarianism with Islamic Unitarianism

so does the unitarian theology of Muslims. Trinitarianism is not content to acknowledge three aspects in the divine Unity; it is necessary for these aspects to enter into the very definition of Unity itself, as if Unity were no longer Unity outside the Trinity and as if the Absolute could be defined by any number other than One. On the other hand unitarian Islamic theology is not content to acknowledge that the One is the cause of all; it is necessary to follow this up with a denial of secondary causes—more particularly natural laws—by declaring, for example, that fire does not burn but that it is God who makes it burn, as if one were incompatible with the other; and the contrary point of view is termed “hypocritical” since—according to this opinion—the assertion that “there is no God save the only God” requires a denial of intermediate causes if it is to be sincere.

Whatever the necessity or expediency of Trinitarian theology may be, it appears from a purely metaphysical standpoint to give relativities the quality of absoluteness; Hinduism shows us by all sorts of examples that the divinization of a relativity can be a way or *upāya*, a “provisional means”, which is relatively illusory but nonetheless effective and accepted as such by the Divinity, even though other aspects of the Real retain all their rights; this being so, it is understandable that Islam should have come to stress the metaphysical foundation of monotheism and to re-establish in this way a certain equilibrium in the total manifestation of the monotheistic Idea. Only Unity as such can be a definition of the Absolute; in the realm of number unity alone represents an element of absoluteness, as does the point or center in space and the instant or present in time—or as the circle or sphere, which is simplicity or perfection, does in form and as ether, which is subtlety or purity, does in matter. The *Vedānta* teaches that the Absolute, *Ātmā*, comprises the Trinity *Sat-Chit-Ānanda*, “Being-Intelligence-Bliss”; it does not assert that this ternary constitutes *Ātmā* in an absolute fashion or that *Ātmā* has no reality apart from this ternary.

In monotheistic theology, truths that should retain their internal metaphysical fluidity are readily presented as exclusive coagulations: the ocean is reduced to a piece of ice, which is doubtless symbolic and intrinsically truthful but not exhaustive all the same. Dogmatism—or exoterism—is essentially a planimetry, not a complete geometry; the missing dimension is replaced by notion-symbols that cannot avoid paradox or even contradictions in every case, and this is precisely because they are merely solutions by substitution; this is what gives

certain zealots an opportunity to speak of sacred illogicality and to malign the intelligence they label “natural”.

* * *

When Christian theology seems to attribute absoluteness to the divine Persons, it is referring consciously or unconsciously to the relative absoluteness possessed by every uncreated reality with regard to creatures as such, unless its intention is to affirm elliptically the unity of the Essence, which—whether one likes it or not—transcends the hypostatic Divinity as it is in itself;¹⁶ but to assert, as we have heard, that the Trinitarian relationships do not belong to this relative absoluteness but to the pure and intrinsic Absolute, or to the absoluteness of the Essence, is like asking us to accept that two and two make five or that an effect has no cause, which no religious message can do and which the Christic message has certainly never done. A celestial message that would radically offend the intelligence one finds in men of the best intentions, who are disposed to accept every miracle, would be gravely tainted by imperfection; it would not in fact be a celestial message.

Let us summarize in order to be as clear as possible. First: in the Absolute, which is the Essence, the Persons are not discernible as Persons, although they are comprised within it in a certain non-distinctive manner since the Essence is necessarily the archetype of each possible Person, and this means that the Essence includes aspects without itself being differentiated; in the divine Relative, however, the Persons are present as such, and for man this Relative functions in practice as the Absolute. Second: there is but one single divine Person having three modalities, though according to another aspect the modalities appear in turn as Persons. Third: the three Persons are distinct from one another, but in this respect they are not identical with the Essence. Fourth: each Person is identical with the Essence, and in this respect

¹⁶ The reservations expressed by the words “as such” and “as it is in itself” are strictly necessary in the first case because the Intellect surpasses the creaturely condition in a certain respect since it can have the notion of the uncreated, and in the second case because the hypostatic realities belong to the Essence and are detached from it only by virtue of the differentiation assigned to them by the root-relativity, the first of relativities

each is in the Essence, which makes it permissible to say that in a certain way each Person is in the other two or—speaking paradoxically and elliptically—that it is identified with them, the One Essence being each Person in the undifferentiated Absolute.

* * *

“Our Father”: this opening invocation of God in the Lord’s Prayer establishes the doctrine of the Trinity in the following way: it teaches us first of all that we are “children” of God and not merely “slaves”, that “deified” man constitutes as it were a divine dimension, manifested in the first place by Christ and then inaugurated by him for men. For men, God is “Our Father”; for Christ He is “My Father”, and He is “Our Father” through Christ and in him; we are “children” in the “Son” and through him, and not outside the *Logos*. Christianity fulfills the perspective of divine Fatherhood, hence of human sonship: man is saved by his sonship in relation to God and thus because of the divine attribute that is designated in fact by the term “Paternity”; it is said that the crowns of the elect are made of uncreated light, which indicates the deification of man in Christ. The Holy Spirit is like divine blood, which unites the Son with the Father and man with God insofar as man places himself in the Son; and the Virgin is an aspect of Christ: she personifies the passive and receptive qualities of the divine Substance—if Christ is the “spirit”, she is the “soul”—and this means that man cannot be integrated into Christ without first being integrated into the Virgin, for there is no “vertical” illumination without the corresponding “horizontal” perfection.

This entire mystical constellation is prefigured in God Himself: there can be no manifested Son without the principal “pre-existence” of the Son in God; and this confrontation *in divinis* also presupposes the “pre-existence” of the Holy Spirit, for duality requires a link betokening its essential unity. This is the doctrine of the necessary adoption of man by the *Logos*: there is no way to God without such an adoption or without the theophany that makes it possible.

* * *

It is contradictory to suppose that the Absolute as such produced that tissue of contingencies which is the Bible; the existence of the Scrip-

tures, and above all the existence of the world, proves the element of relativity in God. If there is anything relative in God, then relativity is divine; hence the Universe is divine¹⁷—not just the psycho-physical universe of animal existence, as pantheists imagine, but the total Universe with its Root at once transcendent and immanent. If one refuses to allow for relativity in God, then relativity is fundamentally evil—the world is fundamentally evil—and one falls into Manichaeism.

Relativity has essentially two dimensions: distance and difference. It is by virtue of the “vertical” dimension of distance that Being becomes crystallized *in divinis* on this side, so to speak, of Beyond-Being and that the world becomes separated from God because of this hypostatic polarization, intellectual Substance engendering animic Substance, which in turn engenders material Substance; and it is by virtue of the “horizontal” dimension of difference that Omnipotence is distinguished from Omnibenevolence or that a rose is distinguished from a water lily on earth. The whole Universe is woven of these two dimensions: all phenomena can be explained through their infinitely varied combinations; what unites them is Existence and—in the final analysis—a Reality at once absolute and infinite, the only Reality there is.

* * *

As the Taoists have said, “Error alone is transmitted, not truth”: “error” in the first place means form, which is restrictive by definition and therefore exclusive, and then contingencies of temperament. This is *upāya*, the net that imprisons and then saves; it is the half-truth that is a key to total Truth. “Why callest thou me good?” asked Jesus himself; this is the very definition of an *upāya* in its formal aspect—a saving form certainly, but nonetheless a form, hence a limitation, and for some a two-edged sword.

On the subject of relativity being rooted in the divine order itself, we might also express ourself in the following way—at the risk of repetition, no doubt, but without in any case having to fear an excess of clarity. One of two things: either we set the creature and the Creator

¹⁷ This highly conditional truth gave rise—by deviation and massive coagulation—to the cosmology of the ancient Mediterranean peoples

face to face in their relationship of reciprocity or causality, in which case both terms are situated in *Māyā*—regardless of the requirements of a simplifying and devotional totalitarianism—or else we consider God in His pure essentiality or absoluteness, in which case He is the Subject-Principle of which the Universe is the objectification or radiation.¹⁸ This radiation is fundamentally nothing less than an aspect of the supreme Subject, for “all things are *Ātmā*”; *Māyā* is the endlessly subdivided veil of the infinite Self, which alone is the pure Absolute.¹⁹

* * *

If one insists on maintaining that certain truths are inherently supra-logical, it should be made clear that this does not mean that they are intrinsically absurd *de jure* but simply that they are by their nature inexpressible; even when it is put this way, however, the claim remains contestable, for if we speak of a truth it is because we are conscious of it, and as soon as we are conscious of it we can *ipso facto* express it one way or another and without coming into collision with common sense, provided we are willing or able to take the trouble to express ourselves otherwise than by ellipses or antinomies. To repeat, the logical absurdity of certain spiritual pronouncements is merely dialectical and elliptical; every formulation whose illogicality results from motives of profundity can be reduced to logical formulations of a subtle and complex character; doubtless there will always remain the gap of the inexpressible, but the inexpressible does not necessarily express itself in an illogical manner; silence is not an illogicality. The fact that logic is limited because of some personal characteristic or some particular ignorance in no way implies that what surpasses it is illogical or has any metaphysical right to be so; on the contrary logic manifests in its own way the very essence of Truth. God includes

¹⁸ Eckhart, Silesius, and others understood this well. A truth is never in itself either Eastern or Western but belongs to anyone who can grasp it

¹⁹ For there is a relative Absolute, and this is whatever is absolute in relation to a lesser reality. For the creature as such, the Creator is the Absolute, but from the point of view of the Absolute in itself, the Creator is the first of relativities “All things were made by him, and without him was not anything made that was made” (John 1:3)

aspects that are independent of all restrictive logic, and it is from them that the cosmic play and musical aspects of things arise, but there is nothing in God that opposes the principles of non-contradiction and sufficient reason, which are rooted in the divine Intellect. God is not limited by what we call “good”, but He is essentially its Principle: therefore He is Goodness itself. The knowledge that God cannot be limited by the relativity of our goodness in no way permits the conclusion that God is evil, *quod absit*; as in the case of any positive quality, one must not confuse—where logic is concerned—the positive essence with the existential limitation or the substance with the accident. If logically correct conclusions can be false, it is not because logic is worthless; it is either because it is accidentally equipped with insufficient data or because its mechanism is directed by some passion and for this reason chooses false starting points.

It is clear enough that we must not demand of logic what it cannot provide us; where logic is no longer applicable, symbolism steps in, for many things that logic cannot express in a satisfactory way can be suggested effectively by symbolism. Logic is concerned with the “mathematical” and not the “musical” aspect of things, but this in no way means that logic is to be despised; colors are not the same things as shapes, and a drawing is not a melody. If in the case of some dogma or mystery one were in principle and *de jure* in a supposed domain of meaningless supralogic—a hypothesis that permits denominational bias or sentimentalist absurdity to give rise to all sorts of supernaturalization—then Revelation itself would be a mistake because it would be of no use to us, or else it was a mistake to give us intelligence.

Strictly speaking, one could say that antinomies between religions are situated “beyond logic” since the logic of each dogmatism is impeccable, though in practice inoperative outside its own framework; but this is pure convenience, for if there is a reason and circumstances allow one can always demonstrate that these antinomies are in fact complementary opposites arising from an identical substance.

The inexpressible is what can be approached more or less closely in a thousand different ways without ever being able to be touched at its center. A suggestive image is that of a spiral with a centripetal movement progressing indefinitely toward a center that is never reached but that can nonetheless be grasped—speaking now of the reality symbolized—by intellection, which is itself as ineffable as its content.

Oriental Dialectic and Its Roots in Faith

When comparing the literatures of East and West, one often has the impression that the critical faculties of Orientals and Westerners are situated on different planes; Westerners cannot help feeling shocked by certain peculiarities and inconsistencies in the dialectic of Eastern peoples: these include the use of weak arguments to support a strong thesis while ignoring strong arguments, or developing them insufficiently, as well as a common tendency—at least among some groups—toward exaggeration. It is tempting to conclude that spiritual zeal and a critical sense are mutually exclusive; it is quite obvious that this cannot be so in principle since two positive qualities are involved, but one is forced to admit that it is largely so in practice, and this is because of the unequal distribution of natural gifts in a humanity far removed from primordial perfection. In brief, the difficulty consists in combining spiritual subjectivity, which is concerned with salvific efficacy, and outward objectivity, which is concerned with the exactness of phenomena; we say “outward” and not “metaphysical” since metaphysical objectivity is included in spiritual subjectivity and in fact conditions it; otherwise it would not be spiritual. It goes without saying that this incompatibility—which is always relative—concerns collectivities and not necessarily individual people, but since it is present in the collective mentalities, it affects traditional language and even the most gifted of individuals.

Be that as it may, when the Westerner confronts certain extravagances of language in Muslim texts—for the Near East is more especially in question here—it is clearly not wrong for him to notice the existence of these imperfections, whether real or apparent; he is seriously deceiving himself, however, if he imagines that *homo occidentalis* is endowed with a critical sense fully operative on every plane or that the critical sense—or need for logical satisfaction—typical of the ancient Greeks in particular and Europeans in general is operative in every realm and thus constitutes an overall superiority. To be sure, the critical sense that prevents us from accepting an inconsistency, even one that is strictly verbal, is a mode of discernment; but it is not discernment as such, which operates on the most essential planes of human existence in such a way as to bring this existence into accord with its sufficient reason. The Westerner possesses a sense of exact-

ness and proportion on the plane of facts and their expression—setting aside any question of ignorance or prejudice—but he makes it impossible for himself to benefit from this gift at the level of his ultimate interests; the most striking proof of this is the disintegration of Western civilization in general and modern thought in particular.

The implicit and symbolic nature of Oriental dialectic coincides in a certain way with sacred dialectic as such; as for the hyperbolism that is so frequently used, it may be a legitimate rhetorical means of spiritual suggestion, but at the emotional level it results from the temptation of the exiled soul when faced with the supernatural and its marvelous and immeasurable aspects. Pious exaggeration believes it may violate the principle of measure—which requires that a thing be expressed in conformity with the means of expression—because the essences to be expressed elude the narrowness of the terrestrial world and language; but the expression is at fault—strictly speaking—as soon as it attributes the limitlessness of essences to sensible forms, especially when it does so in a quantitative and unthinking manner. Perfect symbolism adopts an intermediate attitude: like a miracle it projects the marvelous into the formal order; but a miracle is not disproportionate, nor does perfect symbolism fail to maintain the measure proper to the formal order while showing forth the marvelous; it thus avoids appearing arbitrary, improbable, or absurd—all the qualities a certain type of religious emotionalism seems to have difficulty escaping.

At the level of sacred dialectic the Gospel provides us with examples of hyperbolic symbolism: when Christ says that it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of heaven or that it is enough to have faith no larger than a grain of mustard seed in order to move a mountain, he is expressing himself in a typically Semitic manner. The point on the one hand is that it is impossible for the soul to enter Glory directly as long as it remains attached to perishable things—for it is attachment, not possession, that makes a vice out of wealth—and on the other hand that faith, insofar as it is sincere, contains within itself a supernatural and therefore humanly immeasurable power. Formal exaggeration has the function of suggesting a *conditio sine qua non* of salvation as far as wealth is concerned and a quality of effective participation in absoluteness in relation to faith. Similar remarks could be made concerning the injunctions to turn the other cheek and refrain from passing judgment,

as well as other expressions of this kind, all of which are examples of an isolating dialectic in which a particular relationship is implicit.

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According to certain devotees of Vishnuism, the Name of Rama is greater than Rama himself, and this is because "it is only by the power of this Name that the Lord is accessible". There is no point in denying the flagrant contradiction contained in this proposition or in trying to cloak it in euphemisms; on the other hand one cannot in good conscience blind oneself to the obvious fact that the function of the formulation is to isolate a particular element of spiritual reality—in this case the Name of Rama—and then to underline its pre-eminence in connection with salvific effectiveness. It is as if one dared to assert that the Eucharistic host is greater than Christ because the host is in fact what confers grace in an immediate and quasi-material manner; this is an extraordinarily ill-sounding and paradoxical ellipsis, to say the least, and it can scarcely be justified by the desire to offer special devotion to the sensible manifestation of a saving *hypostasis*. In fact the Western mentality tends to be resistant to such contortions, and its restraint—considered in itself—is unquestionably a quality one would like to see given its full value in an equivalent spiritual realism.¹

The traditions of India, Assyria, and Egypt provide us with examples of what has been called henotheism, which is a cult involving several divinities, each of whom is looked upon as the supreme God—while it is worshiped.² When the Name of Rama is regarded in practice as the major divinity, one ends up replacing the worship of the transcendent God with that of the efficient God—to speak analogi-

¹ It should not be forgotten, however, that Christianity itself is Oriental. The cult of the "Heart of Jesus" is at the very least an example of what happens when worship is directed toward a single aspect of the *hypostasis*, if not of the subordination of essence to form. In the expression "Mother of God"—the intention of which was to strike a blow against Arianism—the ellipsis is of the most daring kind since it seems to subordinate the Absolute to the relative, and it is scarcely less extraordinary than the Vishnuite hyperbole exalting the Name of Rama.

² The term "henotheism" is from Max Müller; the expression "kathenotheism", proposed by the same author, seeks to bring out the successive nature of worship in these cults.

cally and to the extent that such a distinction can be meaningful; only the emotional subjectivism of *bhaktas* could explain so great a “stroke of ingenuity”. If the Name of Rama possesses any effectiveness, it is only because it “is Rama”, an elliptical formulation that is as daring as possible within the framework of what is logically permissible; obviously the greatest homage one can render this Name is to recognize that it can be identified with the Named, not that it is more than the Named.

If henotheism is a phenomenon proper to certain religions of antiquity—though in Hinduism it is still alive—in a broad sense the henotheist mentality is characteristic of the entire East to one degree or another; we notice it whenever a single aspect is cut off from its context within a larger whole—the point being to stress some specific relationship—and then presented as a superlative within the limited framework of this same relationship. Thus the superlativism of Arab dialectic consists in emphasizing a given quality or defect by means of a logically unacceptable hyperbole while remaining silent about the particular relationship that makes the superlative intelligible; this is not unconnected with the importance the Arab and Islamic mentality attaches to the image of the sword and the experience of instantaneity: in sayings that begin “the best of things is . . .” or “the worst of men is . . .” or “he will have the greatest reward who . . .” or “he will have the greatest punishment who . . .”, thinking is comparable to the stroke of a sword; it is an act rather than a vision.

According to Islam, all the Prophets are equal in their dignity of prophecy and character of impeccability, though some are greater than others in relation to a particular grace; Muhammad is their synthesis, and since he is thus the first in his celestial reality he is the last in time, according to the principle of inverse reflection. What this means is that a certain aspect of the Muhammadan phenomenon—one that seems quite contingent—is interpreted as manifesting a unique and supereminent quality; now this is entirely in line with henotheist logic, for it is in just the same way—because of a given quality shared with the Absolute—that Vishnu, Shiva, or other divinities become alternatively or separately the supreme God. This obviously presupposes that the quality in question is really prefigured in a certain manner in God or that it indicates the supereminence in question by direct or inverse analogy; the degree of this supereminence may be directly divine as in

the case of the Hindu gods or more relative as in the case of the Arab Prophet. The fact that this Prophet was the last founder of a world religion—and from a criteriological point of view it is sufficiently remarkable that he foresaw this fact since in his time Islam amounted to nothing, humanly speaking—is an objective sign, precisely; in the case of a phenomenon of this order of grandeur, a henotheistic interpretation is clearly acceptable, though of course only for Islam and not in every cosmic sector.³ In a similar manner, if a given God or Goddess of Brahmanism appears as the supreme Divinity, this is because he or she rules a cosmic sector extending all the way from the devotee, through the particular Heaven of the God or Goddess, and right up to *Paramātmā* and including—on the earthly side—the whole form of worship offered to the specific Divinity.

Just as the chronological posteriority of the Arab Prophet may—or must—be interpreted in the cosmic sector of Islam as marking the principal anteriority of the Muhammadan *Logos*, so the human femininity of the Blessed Virgin, hence her subordination, can indicate a real celestial superiority in a particular connection: given the spiritual and cosmic supereminence of the personage, femininity appears in this case as the inverted reflection of pure essentiality, which amounts to saying that in her “transcendent body” (*dharmakāya*) the Virgin is the virginal Mother of all the Prophets; she is thus identified with divine Femininity or the Wisdom that was “in the beginning”.⁴

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³ This leads us to mention in passing a subject of the greatest importance: every Revealer inwardly perceives his identity with the total *Logos*, though he does not necessarily perceive himself as having the same degree of identity as other Revealers unless the perspective he incarnates requires it; he will therefore see the others as carrying out particular functions not only of the total *Logos* but of himself as well since he knows he is concretely identified with this *Logos*; this is the source of the notion of the “mandate of Muhammad”, for example, which is understood as including all celestial Messages.

⁴ A Sufi—probably Ibn Arabi—has written that the divine Name “She” (*Hiya*), not in use but nevertheless possible, is greater than the Name “He” (*Huwa*), this refers to the Indetermination or Infinitude, both virginal and maternal, of the Self or “Essence” (*Dhāt*).

When Junayd opines—with a logic that has now been sufficiently described—that a moment's forgetfulness of God compromises a thousand years of obedience, the very extravagance of the proposition allows one to see immediately that sincerity of faith is the premise from which he deduces the obligation to remember God always; to believe that God is One—to believe it sincerely and therefore totally—is not to forget it even for a moment; it is to plunge one's whole existence into this conviction. To lose sight of Unity is to place oneself outside of unitary faith, hence outside of Islam, whence the invalidity of the rites accomplished in the past, even if they were performed for a thousand years. This totalitarianism or ostracism recalls *mutatis mutandis* that of Saint Symeon the New Theologian, who maintained that Baptism remains valid only in the context of a spiritual perfection that is renewed every instant: just as sanctity proves the efficacy of Baptism for Symeon, so perpetual mindfulness of God proves the sincerity of faith for Junayd;⁵ the unicity of God demands the totality, perpetuity, and ubiquity of faith. When compared to the reality of the Essence, Junayd believes, all other things must shrink to the point of never excluding a consciousness of the One—if they do not in fact disappear altogether.

The following two examples bear witness to the same state of mind: a certain believer asks God for various favors not because he wishes to obtain them but “to obey the divine command” expressed in the Koran—as if in commanding or permitting personal prayer God was not considering the ends of this prayer and as if He could appreciate a form of obedience that disregarded the sufficient reason for the act commanded or permitted! In this case “command” is actually a rather grand word, for in reality God does not command us to have needs or make requests of Him but rather invites us out of mercy to ask Him for what we lack; we can pray for our daily bread or for a cure just as we can pray for inward graces, but there is no question of praying for the sake of praying because God ordered for the sake of ordering. The second example is the following: another believer, unlike the first, begins with the idea that everything is predestined,

⁵ In a similar way a Muslim author has maintained that fasting is valid only if it is accompanied by various kinds of inward abstinence, this opinion is unacceptable, however, from the point of view of the Law

and he therefore abstains from formulating any prayers, in spite of the “divine command” this time, because “everything that must happen will happen anyway”—as if God would give Himself the trouble of commanding or permitting superfluous attitudes and as if prayer too were not predestined! To be sure, man is a “servant” (*abd*), and servitude (*ubūdiyyah*) includes obedience, but it is not just a matter of “art for art’s sake”; servitude exists only for the sake of its contents, especially since man is “made in the image of God”; to forget this is to empty the very idea of man of all its substance.

What the first of these believers undoubtedly has in mind is the virtue of obedience: he wishes to show that this virtue—or “mystical taste” (*dhawq*)—has priority over all logical motivations and secondary ends; looked at this way, obedience is obviously of greater importance than obtaining some desire. Disobedience is the very nature of the worldly man (*dunyāwī*); hence it is necessary to carry out an initial inversion or conversion (*tawbah*) and then to repeat it at every moment. The spiritual man is thus the perfect servant, even to the point of “disappearance” (*fanā*); things have value only through obedience.

The same thing is true in the second example: it too signifies that one must not set any personal wish in opposition to divine decrees. Logically such an intention is absurd and unrealizable, but spiritually it means that the soul should seek to maintain itself in what might be called an ontological attitude; only the divine Will is real, and it is necessary to put oneself at the disposal of this sole Reality—an impracticable attitude, strictly speaking, but one that may have its value when considered as an intention or tendency. On the other hand one is in danger here of an individualism in reverse, leading in turn to an irresolvable sentimentalism and moral automatism, which are in fact incompatible with the metaphysical consciousness they are meant to convey; Christian humilitarianism offers numerous examples of the contradictions involved in an annihilation of self that is in fact an emotional inflation of the ego. In Islamic terms it could be said that even indirect individualism is a sin of “association” (*shirk*)—the association of something else with God—as well as a sin of “hypocrisy” (*nifāq*), and this is true from the moment one claims to acknowledge that “there is no divinity apart from the sole Divinity” and to extinguish oneself for this very reason, while in fact merely indulging in a noisy drama of annihilation.

But let us return to the perfect obedience, or fideism, that renounces any wish to understand beyond a certain intuition that has been deemed sufficient: according to this way of seeing and feeling, the attitude of intellectual—hence neutral and apparently “uncommitted”—observation is pervaded by a compromising undercurrent of outwardness and profanity, even impiety; from this point of view the critical spirit appears as something more or less sacrilegious and seems for this very reason to disrupt peace of heart and serenity of soul; it is therefore said that one must be contented with the taste of Truth, which has no need of the proofs required by doubt. Moreover, from the standpoint of fideism there is no need to verify “from without”—by a profane mental intervention—what is certain “from within”; the door must not be opened to the temptation of doubt and the vicious circle of an unproductive and finally destructive philosophical restlessness; thought will never satisfy thought. There is in this sentiment an incontestable truth—although in practice it favors an emotionalism lacking all sense of proportion—for discursive thought entails a grave danger, and this is because its own nature gives it no motive to stop, ratiocination being without end; its movement is like that of a spiral, and it can never exhaustively attain the Real.

Mental movement is quieted only in faith, which rejects it, or in *gnosis*, which integrates it and realizes its positive content; in both cases further movement may or may not come about, and if it does—as at some point it must—it will in any case have a purely descriptive and provisional function, limited by either dogma or *gnosis*. The points of reference furnished by traditional doctrines have nothing to do with any sort of philosophical “research”, a research without serenity and without end and unaware of the very purpose of intelligence.

It is undeniable that fideism opens a door to sentimentality, but this does not conflict with spiritual effort, which is precisely what counts here; be that as it may, man is free to choose a path that is in conformity with his nature and with the role sentiment plays in it. And this is important: when a sentiment neither contradicts nor limits truth in any way—we mean spiritually sufficient truth—it is entirely legitimate; in this case it does not represent a natural fact that is simply to be tolerated but a passive mode of intuition or participation. If this

were not so, the symbolism of love would not be conceivable nor would the use of music or poetry.⁶

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Christian humilitarianism, which we mentioned above, presupposes an unfortunate equation of intelligence with pride;⁷ it tends to reduce spirituality to alternatives that are too narrow when compared with the possibilities of human nature, and thus it excludes certain types of sanctity, even favoring inverted substitutes for these unfulfilled vocations. Like the obediencialism and sincerism of Muslims, humilitarianism is not unconnected with the absence of the notion of *Māyā*: in fact the prejudice that reduces spirituality, practically speaking, to the conviction of being the most vile of men presupposes an absolutization of human reality, and from this there is no escape—in the absence of an intellectual alchemy—except by a psychological crushing.⁸ This amounts to saying that man is incapable of objectivity and that the soul never takes on the aspect of an objective phenomenon in relation to the intelligence; if someone counters that humility is precisely the fact of being objective with regard to oneself, we would reply that this is certainly so in principle but not in conventional, ascetic humili-

⁶ It is sometimes claimed that Oriental music—Hindu music in particular—is not sentimental but intellectual, which is ridiculous, music is sentimental by definition—which is not a criticism and still less an insult—but within this framework it acts as a vehicle for spiritual modalities transcending the level of psychic phenomena.

⁷ Originally directed against the “wisdom of the flesh”, this equation could have been salutary, but because of its sentimental exploitation it has tended instead to favor the rationalist reaction.

⁸ According to Olier, humility means “wishing to be not only known but also treated as vile, abject, and contemptible. . . . The truly humble soul does not believe anyone can despise it because it sees itself as beneath words. . . . It suffers with affliction the least things that are done for it and that appear to suggest it is held in some esteem” (*Introduction à la vie et aux vertus chrétiennes*, Chapter 5). An awareness of our ontological nothingness and personal limitations is here transposed into the language of sentimental individualism; this attitude, which is as contradictory as the most excessive obediencialism, reduces mysticism to an infantile level, impoverishing it in the same way that Asharism damages theology. Let us recall that Asharism has a tendency to reduce the divine nature to Omnipotence alone, forgetting that while God can certainly do everything He wishes, He nonetheless does not wish to do everything He can.

tarianism, which imposes on the soul—on every soul—the conviction of being not only relatively but fundamentally bad, and to a greater degree than any other soul. The fact that this formulation can be given a plausible meaning as a notion-symbol—in the sense that every sin is in a certain way sin as such—does not alter the fact that in passional mysticism humility leads to a moral automatism without intelligence and is generally applied with a sentimental prejudice devoid of every nuance of objectivity.

Within the framework of a real contemplativity—one so imperious to the world and ambition that the world withdraws from it—the question of knowing whether we are good or bad pertains to *Māyā*; it is fundamentally insoluble and thus a matter of indifference; although we cannot help seeing evil in ourselves and indeed must endeavor to do so—though without involving our soul to the point of falling into fruitless individualism—the only thing that counts definitively is the element of absoluteness determining our spiritual life. And it is the very insistence on the positive elements of spirituality that regulates what is morally problematic; unable as we are to solve the insoluble question of our own worth, it is God who solves it for us, and this He does through the elements of absoluteness to which we give pride of place.

To see in this doctrine an invitation to relax in our effort is to lose sight of two things: first, that the struggle for virtue is not an end in itself and that there must therefore be a spiritual context within which virtue takes precedence over struggle; second, that it would be senseless to struggle toward a goal that virtue itself would forbid us to attain. All these considerations converge upon the crucial problem of the encounter—in part inevitable and in part contradictory—between religious individualism and universal Reality.

* * *

There is an element that opposes the critical sense—in fact if not by right—and this is what we might call “inspirationism”: it consists in piously abstaining from corrective and questioning mental interventions when one is receiving the flow of even ordinary inspiration—which is necessarily produced whenever a person writes with sufficient authority on a spiritual subject—and not just of inspiration in the highest sense of the term. The idea that God dictates what

we must write—by virtue of our vocation—may lead to a degree of negligence or carelessness regarding the form and even the value of arguments as well as to a corresponding insensibility to these things; the extreme opposite would be a meticulous logic devoid of any inspiration—treating things from the outside with neither sufficient knowledge nor a “mandate from Heaven”—and this is the case with philosophy in the current sense of the word. Given all its dialectical risks, inspirationism is a two-edged sword—in principle if not always in fact—but it is understandable in the case of Semites of the nomadic type, who with their prophetic mentality are as if suspended from the divine Word as it descends from Heaven.

Quite apart from any question of Western incomprehension, it seems to us that most of the things in Oriental texts that seem arbitrary, absurd, and “unreadable” are to be ascribed to inspirationism, positively or negatively as the case may be; and when the cause is positive, this is because there really is inspiration. Semitic revelationism and Aryan intellectionism: from these are derived respectively inspirationism and objective dialectic, then imperturbable fideism and a critical sense, and finally—at an extreme limit, which is excessive and disproportionate—the blind automatism of religious moralism and a philosophical logic devoid of all normally human intuition and thus much more aberrant than the moralism. This asymmetry between two opposed but in a certain sense complementary extremes is explained by the fact that there is an inequality between their positive sources, namely, Revelation and Intellection or objective and formal religion and immanent and supraformal religion; since the supraformal is the quintessence of the formal, its weakening in human consciousness results in counterfeit and perversion—*corruptio optimi pessima*—whereas the most unintelligent fideism does not in principle cut itself off from either truth or grace. This allows one to understand the fideists’ condemnation of the philosophical point of view, even when they are wrong in detail; they reject truths that are in fact inaccessible to them, but in doing so they condemn a tendency.

We are well aware in saying this that many arguments could be turned against us to invalidate our thesis, which is only an approximation; but it is a necessary approximation, without which important phenomena that are troubling at first sight would remain unexplained and might even seem inexplicable—unless they were explained in the most erroneous manner, as has happened in fact, or were concealed

beneath euphemisms in themselves detestable and in the long run more compromising than useful.

* * *

Muslim hagiography is one of the fields that cause the gravest difficulties for the Western reader; too often the impression is given that pure and simple facts, in their exact and measurably outward aspect, are of little importance to the authors; only moral and mystical intentions seem to count, and history appears to be reduced to a sort of didactic ideography, which must be as incisive as possible. The great virtues dominate everything: sincerity, poverty, generosity, trust; the saints are there simply to demonstrate these virtues, not to be humanly credible; and God is all-powerful. The content of the facts, their moral and spiritual purpose, and their effectiveness against hypocrisy are what is important; facts in themselves are mere signs, like the letters of the alphabet.

One of the characteristic features of Islam is its insistence on total trust in God and an almost exclusive recourse to Him; the saint wishes to depend on God alone. A certain type of hagiography seeks to illustrate precisely this, using a whole series of transparent and striking images that are nonetheless *de facto* excessive and unintelligible; their gratuitousness seems intended to compensate for their extravagance, and conversely. It will be said that legends are legends, but this evasive generalization does not take into account the problem of the form of the symbol; for it is not enough that a symbol should signify or transmit something: it must do so in a way that does not conflict with common sense.⁹ We should doubtless pay tribute to the spiritual idealism of the hagiographers in question, but we also have to admit that the reaction of the Western reader is justified, for he is unlikely to be receptive to the attractions of a hyperbolism he will readily describe as infantile, rightly or wrongly as the case may be.¹⁰

⁹ Lest there be any misunderstanding, we are in no doubt as to God's capacity to restore the life of a camel that has died in the desert, but we do doubt His willingness to perform a miracle on behalf of someone who refuses human help in the name of an easily reversible mystical scruple.

¹⁰ According to Ibn al-Anf, who merely recounts what he himself had heard, certain

The conclusion to be drawn from these considerations is that Oriental consciousness, deeply anchored in the mystery of a salvific faith that is nearly irresistible, more readily accepts the risk of a minor contradiction than a lack of faith; for illogicality and improbability with regard to detail harm neither the unitary truth, which guarantees every possible truth, nor the perfection of faith, which together with truth leads to salvation; on the other hand an overly meticulous logic and a too demanding critical sense contain the poison of doubt—at least at the level of the average man—and seem to set themselves directly against unconditional faith and divine Omnipotence;¹¹ it is therefore better to exaggerate and accept the risk of absurdity than to run the risk of apostasy. Truth is static whereas faith is dynamic: this difference explains why the Muslim, and even the Oriental in general, attaches more importance to faith—short of immutable truth itself—than to exactness of facts; fideism does not conflict with intelligence, since it is not opposed to contemplation, but with doubt, profanity, and pride, which are all the greater in the case of a diminished intellectual stature. The equilibrium between truth and faith is similar to that between doctrine and method or between mind and soul; the well-disposed mind accepts truth abstractly, but this is a very different thing from the soul's accepting it concretely to the same degree or according to the same rhythm; the following words are addressed much more to the soul than to the mind: "Blessed are they that have not seen, and

accomplished saints had the power to cause a mountain to disappear simply by making a sign, it might well be asked: first, what sort of a saint would want to do this, second, what circumstances would make the disappearance of a mountain desirable, and finally, what God's motive might be in granting so exorbitant a charism (*karamah*); but one must go further and endeavor to discern the same mystery of faith that is expressed in Christ's words about the grain of mustard seed, the mountain, or the sycamine. Basically it is a question of depicting the "possible impossibility" involved in moving from the relative to the Absolute. "The things which are impossible with men are possible with God" (Luke 18 27). Hyperbolism nonetheless remains a two-edged sword and a most problematical resource unless it is handled with circumspection; the literal meaning does exist after all and has its rights, whatever lack of sensibility may be shown in this respect by symbolist narrators, who slip from biography into parable

¹¹ "The ignorant man, the man without faith, and the man given to doubt are destined to perdition. Neither this world, nor the next, nor felicity are for the man who is given to doubt" (*Bhagavad Gītā* 4 40).

et have believed." Over and above its particular content, faith is our disposition to believe divinely possible what is humanly impossible.

Some have felt compelled to conclude that the sacred history of Islam does not merit belief, but it is the opposite that is true, for in sacred history facts themselves are held to be so sacred that exactness is part of faith. No one is more meticulous—we would almost say more pedantic and rationalistic—than the Arab when it comes to questions of genealogy and the transmission of sayings and events, whether canonical or simply neutral; in the first case it is piety itself that compels exactness, and in the second it is indifference;¹² the human margin, which permits enthusiasm to mix symbolic or didactic stylization with historical truth, appears only *a posteriori* when the sacred facts have been guaranteed. As for this difference in principle between the sacred foundations and the subsequent human margin, the situation is roughly the same in both Christianity and Judaism, for this is a phenomenon that results from the very nature of religions apart from any question of psychology.

In speaking of the poison of doubt, we are in no way referring to a specifically intellectual doubt, that is, a doubt arising from the nature of intelligence and relating to things that are subject by their very nature to a possible uncertainty; on the contrary, the doubt we are thinking of comes from a prejudice that is basically passionate, for in all rationalism reason seeks to be absolute and revolts against its limitations; like hatred, doubt can be cold, but even so it remains rooted in a sort of passion. Faith is peace of heart arising from an almost boundless certainty, and by its very nature it therefore falls outside the jurisdiction of doubt; human intelligence is made for transcendence, for otherwise it would be nothing more than an increase in animal intelligence. Apart from the content that completes it, faith is our disposition to know before knowing; indeed this disposition is already knowledge in that it is derived from innate wisdom, which it is precisely the function of the revealed content of faith to revive.

Following these generalities, let us return to hagiography. Besides the absurd, which in religious literature may be the shadow of a sub-

¹² Arab historians—who are scarcely preoccupied with hagiography—display an exemplary exactness to the point of having provoked the accusation of dryness, lack of imagination, and sterility, Ibn Khaldun is a typical and distinguished example

We have spoken about a *de facto* incompatibility between the zeal of faith and a certain critical sense among average men at all levels;¹⁵ faith is adequate, hence objective, in its essential content, but it is not necessarily so on the surface, whereas a critical sense can be accompanied even in the most important spheres by the narrowest subjectivity, hence by illusion, and logically this prohibits it from attacking the minor weaknesses of believers. The situation is somewhat similar in art, where symbolism and naturalism are in certain ways opposed to each other: no one would think of criticizing a sacred image for its lack of anatomical precision; expression and sacred value are what take precedence. It is not impossible for a sacred image to coincide with nature without thereby losing its hieratic quality, but this is a quite precarious possibility, requiring the convergence of a variety of conditions that in fact are very hard to realize;¹⁶ human nature being what it is, it is more common for a naturalistic work to be the fruit of a visual and artistic experience that is profane in character and for a sacred symbol to remain within the holy childhood of an ideogram. Be that as it may, there is a metaphysical principle that prevents a manifestation of the sacred from reaching the extreme of total perfection so that the flow of the formless is not arrested; this principle explains many discrepancies in the Scriptures and liturgical arts, and it is not unrelated to the imperfections of expression we often encounter in traditional dialectics.

In all fairness we would like to insert the following points concerning the thorny problem of pious illogicalities: whatever price must be paid for the impulsivity and occasional lack of reflection in Arab idealism, a Muslim never loses contact with the fundamental tenor of his religion, at least as long as he is a believer; by contrast it is easy for the religious Westerner to lose touch in practice with the

¹⁵ It should be stressed that we are speaking here about the average, though it should nevertheless not be forgotten that there are also extrinsic absences of discernment, which become conventional and are unconsciously accepted even by minds that are otherwise perfectly objective, indeed on the secondary plane with which we are concerned, effective discernment is very often dependent upon exceptional circumstances.

¹⁶ Perfect naturalism in a sacred portrait would require above all else that the image represented the quasi-superhuman model as it was in reality, it is precisely traditional stylization that makes up for the absence of this possibility

analyzing paradoxes of the sort that Zen Buddhists call *kōans*: the inward tension ends sooner or later with the tearing of a veil, unity invades the soul, and duality disappears with hypocrisy. There is obviously a prefiguration or anticipation of this liberating grace in pure intellection inasmuch as it introduces an element of impersonality into the soul, which presupposes that we are concerned—subjectively as well as objectively—with something other than an inoperative philosophy: for only the truth delivers, and only contemplation purifies the heart.¹³

Whatever the general style of Islam as a Semitic monotheism, it is nonetheless astonishing that many Sufis—in fact the majority, though perhaps not the greatest among them¹⁴—express themselves in the style of a voluntarist and emotional individualism, whereas Sufism itself is by definition founded on *gnosis* and fashioned by it; the reason for this is that the majority of men, even at the level of sanctity, are “psychics” and not “pneumatics” and are therefore subject indirectly to the regime of fear, and it would be hypocrisy or temerity on their part to express themselves otherwise than they do; it is true that many of them could subsequently have changed their mode of expression, but they sought to remain faithful to what their individual substance demanded of them at the start, especially since it is better to appear less than one is than to be less than one appears. Two other factors to consider here are religious solidarity, which demands or favors a common language, and the symbolism of love, which readily rejoins the language of sentiments and emotions.

* * *

¹³ This is especially the tendency of the Imam Shadhili and his successors. As his direct disciple, Shaykh Abu al-Abbas al-Mursi said “Knowledge is inherent in the heart, just as whiteness is in white and blackness in black”

¹⁴ These are not necessarily the most famous, though they doubtless are in most cases. Niffari, a wandering dervish of the tenth century who was highly esteemed by Ibn Arabi, was a pure adept of *gnosis*, but he is less famous than certain contemplatives of the passional type.

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fundamental tenor of his faith, entrenching himself behind the simple alternatives of morality and the demands of religious practice while betraying—because he is “civilized”—the very tendencies that serve as the foundation for these alternatives and this practice. A machine is a good thing as long as one loves God, and a republic is good as long as it favors religion; but it does not seem to enter the minds of the vast majority of believers that a machine *de facto* kills the love of God and that a republic *de facto* stifles religion. When these evil effects are finally acknowledged, the blame is placed first of all on human nature and then on some imagined decadence of religion; it is never placed on the real causes, which are considered *a priori* neutral because they are outside the simplistic moral alternatives and practical rules to which religion has been reduced, as well as outside pure theology. Irreversible material factors have caused the world of the machine—which some people suppose to be “Christian” since a machine does not commit adultery and since everything effective must come from Christianity—to be imposed everywhere, and this favors the secular element throughout the globe as well as a technocratic worldliness, which is clearly the antithesis of any love of God.

This utilitarian worldliness—whether frankly impious or deceitfully Christian—cannot be established by normal dialectics; it requires arguments that endeavor to replace reality with imaginative suggestions of the most arbitrary kind. The falsely moralizing tendency so common in modern language is at least as obnoxious as thoughtless hyperbolicism, and much more so in certain cases: it consists in seeking to justify an error or evil by applying flattering labels and in seeking to compromise a truth or positive fact by applying derogatory labels—often using false values such as “youthfulness”—without the labels having the slightest connection with the things to which they are applied.¹⁷ Another dialectical vice or abuse of thought is the inversion of causal and logical relationships: people say that it is time to invent a new ideal that will stir the hearts of men or that a new mentality must be forged that is capable of finding the world of machines beautiful and the world of sanctuaries ugly or that prefers the new mass or the new religion to the old mass or the religion of all time. Like the

¹⁷ Propaganda in favor of theological and liturgical innovations—and against those who are not taken in by them—is a particularly sickening example of this technique.

moralizing tendency, this inverted and inverting form of reasoning is totally foreign to Oriental dialectic and traditional dialectic in general, for obvious reasons.

We would also call attention in passing to “dynamic” reasoning, which subordinates the discernment of a fact to finding a practical solution—as if truth did not have its own reason for being and its own value—and utilitarian reasoning, which subordinates truth as such to the material interests of physical man. None of this is in fact incompatible with a certain critical sense on some outward planes; and if this is so, the opposite must also be possible, namely, a disproportion between spiritual discernment and a rashly impulsive and hyperbolic language.

One further digression may be permitted here on the subject of scientism since we have already mentioned the extraterritoriality represented for the European Christian by what he calls “civilization”: if the Bible does not specify that the earth is round, this is simply because it is normal for man to see it as flat and because collective man cannot tolerate even the idea of a spherical earth, as history has more than sufficiently proven.¹⁸ Science is natural to man, but what is most important is to choose between the different levels in light of the axiom: “My kingdom is not of this world”; all useful observation of the here-below expands science, but the wisdom of the next world limits it, and this means that every science of the relative that does not have a limit determined by the absolute, hence by the spiritual hierarchy of values, ends in supersaturation and explosion. *

This said, let us now return to the question of Oriental dialectic.

* * *

¹⁸ If Galileo had been sensitive to the fundamental intention of the Christic message, there would have been no reason for him not to notice that the earth turns—assuming he would still have discovered this—but he would never have demanded that the Church immediately insert this fact into theology before the discovery had been brought to the attention of the learned world of his time, to say nothing of the common people. Be that as it may, one should not seek to inflict the movement of molecules on theology or pretend to “leave God outside the laboratory”; what one must do is prevent the molecules from becoming a religion and science from being left outside of God

The elliptical or synthetic character of the expressions of Revelation may lead in certain climates to a rather incongruous sort of thinking, which registers, transmits, and emphasizes rather than reasoning in accordance with the rules of an explicit and horizontal logic. For example, one may be surprised to read that the Prophet, after expounding some of the principles of Islam to a group of Bedouins, adds that certain kinds of vessels—including gourds—are forbidden; in order to understand this disproportion, it is necessary to take into account the general style of the Islamic Revelation, which proceeds in an occasionalist fashion, if one may put it this way, and which at the same time—as if by compensation—expresses profound things by means of commonplace things. Like the Koran, the whole *Sunnah* is comparable to a rain of highly disparate signs, symbols, and supports, which are provoked by occasional causes and thus appear without order, emanating instead from a homogeneous and invisible network of important factors; a Muslim is aware of this occasionalism, which rests on the surface of a profound homogeneity, and this is why he willingly refrains from seeking to impose a mental order on the heavenly rain of truths both great and small and of rules both directly and indirectly salvific.

It is reasonable to assume that this outwardly disparate and discontinuous mode of revelation has determined the style of Sufi dialectic to a certain extent, a dialectic that readily conforms to celestial paradigms and proceeds by vertical inspirations rather than horizontal links; one sees this, for example, in writings such as the *Futūhāt al-Makkīyah* of Ibn Arabi as well as in poetical works like the *Ilāhī Nāmāh* of Farid al-Din Attar and the *Mathnawī* of Jalal al-Din Rumi. A Muslim loves to mingle the small with the great, the incidental with the essential, metaphysics with semantics—according to inspiration and occasion; his style of literary expression is the style of carpets with varied and uneven patterns, and not that of the masterpieces of architecture; one could say that he mistrusts the grandiose, which seems to him to suggest the titanic and luciferian, rather as the Bedouin of the desert mistrusts the equivocal glories of large towns, which are for him disturbing replicas of legendary Babylon.

It is appropriate to recall three factors that must never be forgotten when reading Muslim authors; we have referred to these elsewhere. First there is ellipsis, which concerns the question of implicit relationships; Arabs—always including Arabized peoples—have the habit

of not specifying the precise connection they have in mind, a connection that nonetheless gives a sentence its entire meaning,¹⁹ and this is precisely because the connection is something of which not even the author is conscious, rather in the same way that the visual background may not impinge as such on the consciousness of an onlooker who is fascinated by some spectacle. Then there is hyperbolism: the image is exaggerated for the sake of its percussive force, hence its effectiveness. Finally there is symbolism: one must interpret the constitutive elements of the image—which may be absurd—in order to uncover the truths it conveys and seeks to communicate, truths that justify the formal absurdity from the point of view of the Oriental author. In the case of Sufi authors it is also necessary to keep in mind their use of symbolic expressions, whose keys must be known, as well as the games they play with the semantic values of verbal roots or the numerical value of letters; but these difficulties are perhaps not as important as the others we have mentioned.

A secondary but by no means negligible element of Muslim language is a certain preoccupation with symmetry and ornamental embellishment: instead of limiting himself to expressing his thought in a direct and simple manner, a Near-Eastern writer often feels the need to wrap it up in all sorts of allusive flourishes, rather as a craftsman covers a jug or tool with ornamental designs. Ornamentation—the play of forms—is an innate need of man, and the whole question is to know where and when it is possible or appropriate to apply it; from the purely utilitarian point of view, which condemns on principle all ornamental treatment of objects or words, it is profane in its tendency and wrong in its conclusions; it amounts in fact to a misunderstanding not only of the spiritual and the sacred but even simply of the human. Far from being a vain amusement as this point of view believes, however, decoration is related to the “musical”—not the “mathematical”—pole of universal Substance: it is derived from the “divine play” (*līlā*), and its role is to communicate an influence that would seem to cause matter to vibrate and become transparent. Ornamentation is a

¹⁹ Non-vocalized Semitic texts, in which it is impossible to distinguish the active from the passive voice and sometimes even one word from another, prefigure this habit in their own way, as does Kufic script, which omits diacritical points and thus confuses consonants, the very pillars of the language

characteristic feature of sacred style, whether in relation to objects or words; of course this style also—and even essentially—includes modes of simplicity, but there is no doubt that in a considerable number of its expressions it manifests a tendency to give sensible form to the musical vibrations that unfailingly accompany the truth and are communicated by it in an implicit manner; every liturgy is meant to reflect the majesty and inner infinitude of sacred things. In this spirit the Muslim writer, who never departs from the religious style, makes his thoughts at once heavier and lighter by means of Koranic or poetic detours, especially in the introductory parts of his texts; the Westerner is not particularly sensitive to this if only because he makes much less a cult of language than the Arab.

Finally, the tendency to occultation in many Muslim texts—if one may call it that—is explained in large measure by a preoccupation with not revealing a truth in a situation where its immediate delivery might seem to put an end to its meaning; it is important to avoid exhausting the basis of a given thought and to preserve an element of enigma, which serves to ensure both life and freshness. A propensity to describe the infinitely varied aspects of the relationship between the Creator and the creature is then added to this somewhat diffident and veiling dialectic; to observe this play of reciprocities, whose combinations are multiple, is no doubt a very special way—in keeping with a certain spiritual temperament—of deepening one's knowledge of God and the soul, and it permits an unhurried, gradual, and cautious assimilation of truths that are considered too precious or striking to be handed over all at once.

* * *

The movement back and forth in Sufi writings between the point of view of proximity and that of distance or between the obvious and the baffling or between everything and nothing—this chain of paradoxes and indefinitely divisible and multipliable shades of meaning—stems above all from the confrontation of the individual as such with the Absolute as such. This confrontation is at once impossible and inevitable; in any case it obliges us to combine extremes in one fashion or

another.²⁰ Islam expresses the extremes separately and independently of each other, hence by antinomianism: its dialectic is one of signposts pointing to an unexpressed center. With a didactic or moral concern from which they never waver, Muslims readily acknowledge that the Prophets themselves tremble in the face of death and Judgment; in saying this, their aim is simply to highlight the incommensurability of the relationship between the contingent and the Absolute and to show that the Prophets, who are not and cannot be the Absolute, are obliged to play the role of contingency on the stage of the religious cosmos. But one also finds references to privileged souls to whom God has shown in advance their place in Paradise and to whom other graces of this kind have been granted, and this proves that the trembling of the Prophets is only an illustration of our human nothingness before God and in no way excludes the most remarkable favors; the paradox—from which, moreover, no exoterism can escape—is that ontological relationships are expressed in psychological terms and by means of an isolating dialectic, which as a matter of principle passes over in silence opposing and complementary aspects.

Islam appeared in an ethnic environment that knew only violent wills and chivalric virtues; the men of the desert possessed certain religious concepts but knew nothing of doctrinal speculation. Early Muslims, like Semitic peoples of the nomadic type in general, put the accent on faith, act, virtue and not *a priori* on thought as an independent and disinterested intellectual phenomenon, whence the underlying question: what sort of thinking is the most "pious", the most obedient, the most meritorious, and thus the most salvific? It is as if truth as a whole were anticipated by faith; to think about it is to interpret it, and according to the Koran interpretation (*ta'wīl*) belongs only to God; thought is like a scission in faith, a dualistic process that appears to set itself up against the divine Evidence. Christianity shares this point of view to a certain extent, *mutatis mutandis*, as is proven especially by its polemical monologues against the Hellenists and also, more intrinsically, by certain excesses of theology, where an initial

²⁰ Christianity eases or even suppresses this dilemma by humanizing God, thus simplifying Him in a manner of speaking, but in this way it creates difficulties of another order, difficulties resulting from Trinitarian theology and lying at the origin of the divergences between Catholics, Orthodox, Arians, and Monophysites

rejection of thought is combined with an obligation to think—with the help of a sometimes questionable reference to the Holy Ghost

* * *

It has been said and said again that the asceticism of Sufis did not originate in the Koran or *Sunnah*, to which it seems to be foreign, but in Christian or Hindu influences;²¹ the root of this misunderstanding can be traced to the fact that Sufis recommend not only poverty, which the Prophet practiced, but also abstinence,²² which the Prophet did not habitually practice; the Westerner considers such counsels or rules in light of a moral alternativism, which cannot be applied to Muslim asceticism. According to Sufis, the enemy of spiritual progress is the “soul inciting to evil” (*al-nafs al-ammārah*), the passional soul; the mortification of the passional soul is not motivated by the intrinsic evil of natural pleasures, which Christianity in practice accepts,²³ but by the more or less profound perversion of this soul, which is incapable in fact—though not in principle—of grasping the sacramental quintessence of the experiences of our earthly nature. The Prophet is not an example of methodical mortification, which he did not need, but of a contemplative alchemy of the pleasures inherent in human life,²⁴ which obviously has no connection with the distractions of the

²¹ This second hypothesis is excluded for historical reasons

²² The majority of Muslims do not speak of sexual abstinence—marriage being “half the religion”—but in practice Sufis impose abstinence on their disciples by subjecting them to conditions that make conjugal life impossible, or they submit themselves to such conditions. None of this has in fact any connection with Christianity.

²³ Let us note that Christ was not opposed to marriage and that the penitential sentiment, which wrongly objectifies a subjective weakness of fallen nature, has its origin in a passage from Saint Paul—one not dictated by the Spirit, as the Apostle makes clear. A minority of Muslim ascetics shared the Pauline point of view, arguing that men and women were better at the time of the Prophet than in the ages of decadence.

²⁴ This thesis appears to the average Christian as a baseless speculation, he should nevertheless keep in mind that for the Muslim it is of an almost pre-logical clarity, for not to accept it is to condemn oneself in advance to understanding nothing of Islam. To pretend that Islam is a religion directed toward the pleasures of this world is in fact a simple calumny, for what it essentially advocates is poverty, almsgiving, fasts and vigils, and frequent prayer, and it proscribes music, dancing, profane poetry, and theatrical performances, if it accepts sexuality, it is because of the fundamentally

world; the retrospective proof of the contemplativity of the Prophet in every aspect of life is precisely the existence of Sufi asceticism, for there is no effect without a cause, and if the Prophet were not the cause there could be no other in this system of compossibles. In order to imitate the Prophet, hence to follow the *Sunnah* perfectly, the ordinary man—whose heart has not been “washed by the angels”—needs to mortify soul and body insofar as his will and intelligence have been perverted by passion;²⁵ in this way Sufi asceticism reconnects with the *Sunnah* by the simple logic of things.

We have dealt with this important point in this context because it demonstrates the implicit or elliptical quality of the Eastern mentality, which in turn helps to explain why it is so easy for misunderstandings to occur, misunderstandings of the sort that have led to more than one erroneous and fruitless theory.

* * *

The question of the miracles of Muhammad is a stumbling block—and by no means the least—for the Westerner: on the one hand it has been falsely concluded that the Koran denies the Prophet the gift of miracles while on the other hand the only miracle that ever seems to be considered is the cleaving of the moon. First of all a few words need to be said concerning miracles as such: there is nothing mysterious or problematic about these phenomena in themselves; the so-called “natural” laws of a lower degree of Existence can always be suspended through the intervention of a higher degree, whence the perfectly logical term “supernatural”; but this higher degree has its own laws, which means that the miracle is “natural” on a universal scale while being “supernatural” on an earthly scale. The purpose of the miraculous phenomenon is the same as that of the Revelation it accompanies

sacramental character of union and because of the generosity it implies and develops, Islam actualizes this characteristic by its religious dispositions and combative heroism, love and death being in a certain way complementary

²⁵ The situation is the same, for example, in the case of Vishnuite ascetics who worship Krishna, the divine lover of the *gopīs*. A purgative discipline must not in any case be confused with an ascetic way of life, which a contemplative may not in any way feel to be a privation

or as a result of which—or in the shadow of which—it is produced; to elicit or confirm faith.

If someone objects that a miracle in itself proves nothing and that the truth as such is sufficient, we would reply that this is indeed true but that it is not the point. What counts here is the *de facto* effectiveness of a phenomenon in the interest of truth, or rather in the interest of the soul to whom the truth is addressed; it is similar to the case of holy war—legitimate holy war, not its counterfeit—where the end really justifies the means, which implies that the means must not exceed the limits assigned to them by the spiritual nature of the end. It is not a question of knowing whether it is logical to accept a truth because of a miracle: what matters is that a miracle has the gift of actualizing a liberating and quasi-existential intuition in support of the truth; the truth makes itself tangible to man through the miracle and unveils dimensions that the reason and imagination of earthly man have difficulty grasping; in this sense the miracle is a manifestation of mercy.

But there is still the problem of the particular nature of miraculous facts; here we shall limit ourself to distinguishing sensory miracles from active miracles. An active miracle is one of healing, destruction, transformation, changing of place; a sensory miracle is one of vision or audition; and this brings us to the most misunderstood of the miracles recorded in the *Sunnah*, namely, the cleaving of the lunar disk mentioned in the *Sūrah*, “The Moon”. This miracle is similar to the one related in Chapter 10 of the Book of Joshua, in which the sun and moon stand motionless for an entire day, and it is similar as well to the solar miracle at Fatima in Portugal, which occurred in the twentieth century no less: in cases such as these the miracle does not alter the form or movement of the heavenly bodies but rather the trajectory or distance—as the case may be—of the luminous rays;²⁶ the miracle is enormous since no man has power over light, but it does not affect the

²⁶ It will be said that this is simply a question of interpretation, perhaps, but even so it seems to us that the theory of miracle must take into account the possibility we have just described, especially since “it is not for the sun to overtake the moon, nor doth the night outstrip the day They float each in a [determined] orbit” (*Sūrah* “*Yā Sīn*” [36] 38-39)

cosmic order.²⁷ It is important to consider the following principle. God does not perform a miracle for nothing, and He does not exceed certain proportions, whatever the appearances may suggest; the miracle must remain proportionate to man, and this would not be the case if the earth stopped turning, given the unheard of physical consequences that would logically be brought about by so great a departure from the natural order and the disproportionate chain of miraculous interventions this departure would require. The question remains as to where exactly the limits of the disproportionate are situated in relation to heavenly Action, whether in some specific case or in a general manner; "and God is wiser."

* * *

The works of Ibn Arabi offer an especially paradoxical example of Oriental dialectic and esoteric thought, and this consists in what we might call a hermeneutics of inversion: what this means is that he contrives to reverse the meaning of Koranic verses that have a negative content in order to extract the most profound meaning possible. This paradox, which we cannot leave unmentioned here, obliges us to consider certain preliminary questions of a general nature.

Exoterism consists in identifying transcendent realities with the dogmatic forms—and if necessary with the historical facts—of a given Revelation, whereas esoterism refers in a more or less direct manner to these same realities. But since the relationship of a symbol to its content is that of a manifestation to its principle, there is at once analogy and opposition between the two levels: esoterism supports exoterism because it is its substance, but it also contradicts it in some respects because it goes beyond it; in reality the contradiction is from the outset on the side of exoterism, just as creation is at the same time in conformity with God and opposed to Him. Nevertheless, just as the All-Reality does not abolish the logic of cosmic situations, so the apparently paradoxical prerogatives of esoterism cannot abolish the

²⁷ In the case of Joshua, it is probable that the miracle did not affect the rays of light but the temporal state, which is extendable and reducible in relation to a given subjectivity—whether singular or collective—and thus without a disruption of the cosmic environment

axioms of exoterism on its own plane, unless perhaps in a fragmentary fashion and in isolated cases.

From this aspect of opposition or this contradictory dimension, Ibn Arabi seems to draw the following conclusion: since the Absolute is One and this One is infinite and perfect, the supreme Truth must be one and positive, and it therefore cannot contain antinomies such as good and evil or heaven and earth in its substance; the Koran contains these antinomies only secondarily and extrinsically but not in its uncreated substance. For every verse expressing an opposition or evil, there is an interpretation that cancels it; this means that for every negative sentence there is a positive interpretation referring directly or indirectly to the ever virginal Essence. When the Koran speaks of the fire of hell, Ibn Arabi—without wishing or being able to reject the immediate meaning—does not hesitate to interpret it on the plane of quintessential Truth as the fire of divine Love; for ultimate Truth can encompass only the essential, namely, Beauty and Love. Leaving aside all metaphor, it may be said in fact that the fire of hell is a mode of the quality of love inherent in the one Substance but that it is experienced “in the cold state” and by inversion because of the perverted nature of a given human receptacle; this line of thought leads us in fact to the Islamic doctrine of causality, according to which there is only one single Cause, one single Object, one single Subject. There is only one single Heat that burns, one single Fluidity that flows, one single Breath that penetrates and animates; this is the meaning of the Hanbalite and Asharite negation of secondary causes and natural laws. Every burning, whether beneficent or not—depending on its cosmic degree and mode—is therefore derived from the divine Fire, which cannot but be positive and beatific; the ocean symbolizes the divine Passivity, the receptive, virginal, and maternal pole of Being, and for this very reason it is identified from an essential and participative standpoint with the divine Ocean.

The quintessential exegesis of the Koran, of which we have just cited an example, is in itself independent of every question of dialectic, but what is not independent is this author’s use of ellipsis: Ibn Arabi often refrains from taking the precautions that might have prevented a misunderstanding of his intention, and the result is that divergent interpretations—one esoteric and the other exoteric—come close to being confused with each other, or at least they give the impression of being confused, to the detriment of the immediate and

plausible meaning of the sacred text. One could no doubt explain this by saying that this author always writes under inspiration, according to his own testimony, and inspiration ignores oratorical precautions and often even logical links.²⁸

Nonetheless, the argumentation of the *Shaykh al-Akbar* is not always up to the level of its metaphysical intention. His thought is sometimes too hasty or expeditious even though his soul may be gripped by a perception of the one and only Beauty, which penetrates and absorbs everything. It is this perception—concrete and permanent—of the Divine Beauty that constitutes “faith” for Ibn Arabi, for in Islam the notion of faith extends from simple fervor to the most elevated of spiritual stations, and it is therefore attributed to both angels and the elect.²⁹

It is important to distinguish between an outright paradox and an ellipsis that merely resembles one: it is more than probable, not to say obvious, that the elliptical character of many Oriental formulations aims to leave it to the hearer or reader to discover the implicit meaning and that it provides in this way a means of spiritual dissection, for “science is not for everyone”, as Dionysius the Areopagite says.

* * *

In Muslim spirituality of the non-sapiential type, the classical alternative between Paradise and God leads to the compulsive reasoning of a unilateral logic, such as is expressed in the intention not to desire Paradise but to desire only God or to prefer to go to hell by the will of God than to go to Heaven by our own will—an alternative that

²⁸ According to the Egyptian hagiographer Abd al-Wahhab al-Sharani, the ideas of Ibn Arabi have been poorly interpreted simply because of the subtlety of their expression, and one should examine these ideas only after having traversed the stages of initiatic *asceticism*, or else lose faith or die as a result. This opinion is plausible in itself, though it is flawed because of a certain voluntarist and characteristically Semitic bias, for the rights of the intelligence are inalienable when it is sufficiently acute and sufficiently informed to function in a given realm.

²⁹ Whereas for Christianity, which is founded on the mystery of love and not directly on that of faith—although there is here no essential difference—faith comes to an end in Heaven since the elect enjoy the beatific vision.

may catalyze a thirst for the Absolute in some souls in heroic mode but conceals the fact that there is not only distinction but also identity of essence between the created and the Uncreated, namely Beatitude, whatever its modes or projections. The "Garden" is not only what is other than the "Gardener"; it is above all a plane of reverberation of the divine Beauty: every paradisiacal phenomenon transmits the divine Substance, Heaven being the place of the beatific vision and of all modes of participation and union. One could say that there is a degree of Paradise that is situated in God³⁰ and an aspect of God that is situated in Paradise;³¹ this is the mystery of reciprocity between the created and the Uncreated, which is visually expressed by symbols such as the Chinese *Yin-Yang* or the primordial interlacings transmitted by Nordic art. When the Koran promises Paradise it imposes no restriction as to the possible degree of union; on the other hand overstating a wish for the divine Gardener at the expense of the heavenly Garden logically amounts to wanting to be God; now the mystery of identity—of "unity of being" (*wahdat al-wujūd*)—should not be expressed in this way, for it cannot be the object of an individual and emotional wish.

Certainly the expressions in question have plausible meanings: to wish for God alone is to refrain from turning something else into the object of a passionate inclination, hence of a desire in the proper sense of the word; for to "wish" is not necessarily to "desire". Accepting help from God alone means not considering the giver or gift in isolation from God; it is thus a question of concrete perspective and not outward behavior. When Sufis choose the "Gardener" and not the "Garden", they intend to show that their fundamental tendency is toward the Uncreated and not the created, since it is in the Uncreated that our immortal nature has its roots, and one can accept this way of speaking. But one has a right not to accept the abuses of language found in some authors, who mix unrealistically what is proper to human individuality with relationships that go beyond it and do not concern it directly.

³⁰ An ineffable degree, which has been designated by the phrase "Paradise of the Essence" (*Jannat al-Dhāt*)

³¹ We cannot forestall the probable objections of theologians, for lack of time, we are sometimes condemned to ill-sounding syntheses

There is a key to this kind of paradox, however, and it is spiritual heroism; to this can be added another, no less significant key, namely the disposition to ecstasy; catalyzing paradoxes are related to this disposition, as is musical emotion in a different sector.³² Some may conclude that this justification invalidates our earlier criticisms, but the point of view we put forward then retains an intellectual right to existence, and therefore it had to be formulated; if there is a justification for paradox, it is in any case relative and not absolute, subjective and not objective.

In Muslim esoterism there is a margin of subjective improvisation situated between volitive and sentimental individualism and intellectual contemplation; this margin leads to confusions of level, disproportionate juxtapositions, and extravagant misconceptions, all of which reflect the perplexities and vicissitudes of the naturally dualistic mental faculty and the just as naturally passionate soul when it attempts to grasp the Transcendent and Immutable. The Imam Shadhili is one leading figure who remained untouched by this normally problematic margin: he did not assume that sincerity implies the obligation to wear a patched garment (*muraqqa'ah*) or that it entails wanting God alone and accepting help only from Him even on a plane where we clearly depend on relative values and intermediate causes;³³ like every adept of *gnosis*, he did not suppose that in the world of multiplicity we could or should escape the law this world represents; to try to do so is to disguise an existentially unavoidable pluralism as a form of unitarianism. Placing himself in opposition to the margin of individualism that is in question here, Ibn Arabi remarked with pertinence that humility is too noble a quality to be exhibited before men.

In this realm of ideas one is tempted to say—in a quite simplified and approximate fashion and as an indication, not a definition—that Christians are Trinitarian at the expense of a sense of the Absolute

³² According to Dhu al-Nun, music can lead to God or impiety depending on our way of listening to it. The same is true *mutatis mutandis* for poetry, dance, figurative art, and sexuality, whence the divergent possibilities of religious and spiritual methods

³³ He himself represented this attitude in that he wore costly garments, advised his disciples to remain in their professions even when these were administrative and lucrative, accepted the fact of wealth as long as it was accompanied by sobriety and generosity, and forbade begging, and yet at the same time he was a saint "knowing through God" (*'arif bi'llāh*)

whereas Muslims are unitarian to the point of jeopardizing common sense: on the one side there is a humanization of the divine through a divinization of the human, and conversely, while on the other there is an obsession with being consistent coupled with the fact that inconsistency is inescapable.

* * *

Platonists and Vedantists are interested first and foremost in the Real—in what truly is rather than in what we can or must or will do; they do not dwell on the subjective accidents of realization; they provide an objective formulation of the principles of realization, as they must, but this is not emphasized in a definitive manner; on the contrary the emphasis is placed on a metaphysical description of the Real and its gradations. Semites, on the other hand, stress a subjective way of attaining what is; the Real is enclosed in a dogma, and the whole emphasis is placed on the unfolding of the subjective experiences of realization. There are certainly exceptions on both sides, with or without reciprocal influences, but *grosso modo* the intellectual differences between Aryans and Semites—these terms are employed with obvious reservations—is as we have just described them.

One must distinguish between inspiration and intellection: the first comes from the “transcendent Other” and the second from the “immanent Self”, which is the Intellect; it would be a mistake to describe inspiration as “supernatural” to the detriment of an intellection described as “natural”, for while it is true that intellection is innate in the man who possesses it, it is still a grace, though a static and not a dynamic one. In the case of the Aryan it is a tendency to intellection that seems to predominate—rationalism being the caricature of this—whereas it is a tendency to inspiration that characterizes the mind of the Semite: Hindu wisdom presents itself above all as an intellection even—and already—in the *Upanishads*, which nonetheless incontestably depend on inspiration; on the other hand Semitic wisdom readily takes an inspirational form, and this should be remembered when confronting the discontinuities and extravagances that are so frequently a feature of the spiritual dialectic of Muslims.³⁴

³⁴ Ibn Arabi declares, “The composition of the chapters of the *Futūhāt* is not the result

As we have pointed out more than once, instead of presenting things in their static and impersonal simultaneity, this mode of expression seems designed to provoke inspiration in the reader—at least an elementary or virtual inspiration—by means of powerful and striking suggestions.

* * *

There are two further points we wish to emphasize in conclusion. The first concerns an unfortunate lack of proportion that is characteristic of theological thought: it is because of the passional human type—the “psychic”—that God must appear as completely inscrutable and because of the irrational willfulness of man that an arbitrary will has been attributed to God. Anything we may find displeasing in a given theological portrait of the divine Nature is simply the indirect projection of the faults of man onto God: God can appear illogical to the extent man is absurd; having abandoned the obliging idols of paganism and having come to understand that the role of God is to be master and not accomplice, impulsive and insatiable man ends up respecting only a seemingly despotic Divinity. The picture of God painted by “psychics” or intended for them exhibits elements of unintelligibility that are directly connected to the intellectual and moral blindness of man.

The other point we wish to mention is this: for many Westerners—in some places in fact the majority—logic or criticism becomes an automatism having no relationship with the object of investigation; people declare a given example of Oriental thought to be lacking in logic while simply ignoring certain obvious truths inherent in it, and this is something completely different from a critical sense that is adequate to its object and able to identify real inconsistencies in full awareness of what is involved. It should go without saying that a critical sense is of value only insofar as it flows from real knowledge; remove this knowledge, and there remains only a corrosive poison;

of a free choice on my part or of a deliberate reflection. In fact God dictated everything to me, and I wrote by the angel of inspiration.” And he specifies that the passages that seem to interrupt the logical sequence of the exposition corroborate in fact its deepest meaning.

this is precisely the origin of the profane outlook arbitrarily called the “Greek miracle”. Completely opposed to this is what might justifiably be called the Hindu or Vedantic miracle, which consists in a sense of proportion that is perfectly balanced with a sense of the sacred.

The Demiurge in North American Mythology

In all the variants of North American mythology there appears a sort of demiurge below the Supreme Spirit or Great Mystery, who is both beneficent and terrible and who functions as both an initiatic hero and a buffoon—even a demon. We find the same characteristics in Hermes, Hercules, Prometheus, Epimetheus, and Pandora, and in Nordic mythology in Loki—half-god and half-giant, at once the enemy and friend of the other divinities—as well as in the terrible Susano-wo-no-Mikoto of the Japanese pantheon, who is spirit of the tempest and in some ways the *princeps huius mundi*. There seems to be no mythology from which the jesting or mischievous demigod is wholly absent, but it is perhaps in the mythology of the North American Indians that this figure has attracted the most attention on the part of ethnologists and missionaries; indeed Nanabozho or Minabozho of the Algonquins has come to be regarded as a typical example of the kind of divinity in question.

Our aim is not to go into details, but to state the principle and explain its essential meaning; it is therefore sufficient to begin by saying that the demiurge, who is also the founding hero—hence the inventor or discoverer, and thus the initiator—of a given material and spiritual civilization, appears in the form of an animal or a man, or of some mysterious and indeterminate creature.¹ His myth is a series of acts or adventures—often grotesque and unintelligible—that constitute

¹ The demiurge often appears as the “Great Hare”; for the Sioux he is the “Spider”—a dethroned god, like Susano in Shinto—while for the Blackfoot he is the “Old Man”, who becomes “Old Man Coyote” for the Crow. In Iroquois mythology the beneficent demiurge Teharonhiawagon has a twin brother, Tawiskaron, who incarnates the tenebrous aspect, Tawiskaron always tries to imitate Teharonhiawagon but ends up being killed by him after a terrible combat. We should note that for the Sioux the presence of Iktomi, the “Spider”, does not alter the fact that the demon as such is Iya, the “Cyclone”, and that the “cultural hero” (*Kulturheros*) is a feminine divinity of luminous character, namely Pte San Win, the “White Buffalo Woman”, in this mythology, as in certain others of the same type, the demiurgic function is thus incarnated in three or more personifications, depending on whether it is “passional”, “tenebrous”, or—on the contrary—“luminous”. In any case, as long as one remains at the level of simple images, it is impossible to give an account of these shifting forms of symbolism in exhaustive terms or in a systematic manner.

so many symbolical teachings, sometimes of an esoteric significance. The demiurge may appear as a sort of emanation from the creator; he has been described as the life embodied in all beings, and he therefore assumes all their possibilities, struggles, destinies. There is something protean, chaotic, and absurd about him, and in him the divine is combined with the tenebrous; a desire for dissimulation and “occultation” has been attributed to him, and in this respect he appears like a wise actor deliberately playing the fool;² his acts are incomprehensible, like the *kōans* of Zen. It must be remembered that the bizarre and even shocking often act as a protective veil for the sacred, and this is why there are dissonances in the revealed Scriptures and also—on a more outward level—why there are grimacing monsters on the doors of sanctuaries.

In order to penetrate the enigma of the demiurge-buffoon and get to its very root, one must turn first to the Vedantic notion of *Māyā* and second to the idea of the sacrifice of Purusha. *Māyā* comprises three *gunas*, three cosmic qualities or tendencies: the ascending (*sattva*), the spreading or expansive (*rajas*), and the descending (*tamas*); now the demiurge is identified first with primordial chaos and then becomes the prototype of all things, both good and evil; the diversity and inequality of earthly creatures—ranging from the sublime to the nightmarish—attest to this fact. As for Purusha, his fragmented body—in passing from the celestial Substance to a sort of universal coagulation—has become the sum of all creatures, the good as well as the bad, for some parts of his body pertain to *sattva*, others to *rajas*, others to *tamas*.

The Semitic religions tend to make a clear distinction between the personification of evil and the Sovereign Good, but the opposite perspective is not entirely absent from the theologies of these religions, for it is said that God “hardened the heart of Pharaoh”, and other formulations of the same kind can be found; while one must obviously allow for a metaphysical explanation—though this is not the issue—such expressions nonetheless shock a certain “moral logic”. The presence of the serpent in the earthly Paradise is a similar enigma, and so is the pact that seems to exist between God and the devil on

² This causes some Indians to say that the creator-initiator “disguises himself” as a crow, a coyote, or a hare

the subject of mankind. the devil has the right to seduce men, and God "permits" evil without positively "willing" it. All these difficulties are resolved in light of the doctrine of *Māyā*.

* * *

The key to the doctrine is basically this: by definition Infinitude requires the dimension of the finite; this dimension, while "gloriously" manifesting the inexhaustible possibilities of the divine Self, projects them right up to the limits of nothingness, if one may put it this way; nothingness "is" not, and yet it "appears" in relation to the real, which projects itself in the direction of the finite. To move away from the divine Principle is to become "other than it" while necessarily remaining in it since it is the only Reality; this means that the world necessarily includes the privation of reality or perfection that we refer to as "evil", though in a relative fashion, of course, since nothingness does not exist. On the one hand evil does not come from God, for being negative it cannot have a positive cause; on the other hand evil results from the unfolding of divine manifestation, but in this respect—and this is precisely the point—it is not "evil"; it is simply the shadow of a process that is positive in itself. This is what the myth of the demiurge-buffoon expresses in its fashion.

Finally, if we consider the quality of "obscurity" or "ignorance" (*tamas*) in *Māyā*, insofar as this quality is manifested in nature in general or man in particular, we are compelled to see in it what might be called the "mystery of absurdity": the absurd is whatever lacks a sufficient reason—in itself or as such, not with regard to its metaphysical cause—and manifests no more than its own blind accidentality.³ The genesis of the world in the first place and then the unfolding of human events appear as a struggle against absurdity; the intelligible is

³ The crafty and incalculable character of a certain aspect of *Māyā* can also be seen in Sophocles' *Antigone*, in this respect the gods do not differ from the playful and unintelligible semi-divinities of North American shamanism. This is what Hindus call *līlā*, the "divine play", in its lower modalities, this play exists to be overcome by the sage, and his victory coincides precisely with the upper modalities—which are perfectly intelligible since they are related to *sattva*—of the same eternal and inexhaustible drama. One could say that "everything is absurd except God", recalling that "everything is perishable except the Face of Allah"

affirmed by contrast with the unintelligible. Without the presence of incomprehensibility—even blind chance—there would be no world and likewise no soul; the soul is a microcosm and obeys the same laws as the universe. Our prototype is Adam, “made in the image of God”, but this does not prevent our carrying within ourselves all the absurdity of the Fall, as did this first image of God. In its own way the demiurge of shamanism serves as a reminder of this truth.

* * *

The chaotic quality of the Red Indian demiurge—a quality shared by numerous sacred Texts of the first importance—calls for a few remarks on the enigma of prophecies. It is virtually impossible for a prophecy that concerns itself with the development of the whole human cycle—hence with a complex of facts and not just one particular fact—to be entirely accurate and thus to complete the future before it actually arrives; what is changed or concealed or even confused in such cases is obviously not the facts insofar as essentials are concerned, but their sequence and proportions.⁴ It is as if prophecy were a broken stained-glass window that had been reassembled without regard for the logical placement of the fragments; the message is conveyed, but the form is broken, for “only God knows the hour”. What this means is that no complex prophecy can be taken literally, except for the essential facts and the general meaning of the process; God always reserves unforeseeable modalities for Himself, and though He is bound by His word, He nonetheless retains a margin of freedom, the effects of which can be foreseen by no one.⁵

⁴ Sometimes different events—or personages—merge into one because of their functional identity, or designations of persons and events express only analogies, as well as other ellipses of this kind

⁵ The story of Narasinha, the fourth *Avatāra* of Vishnu, provides an example of this law: Hiranyakashipu, having obtained from Brahma the promise that he would be killed neither by day nor by night and by neither man nor animal, thought he could do as he pleased—until Vishnu intervened in the form of a man with a lion’s head, “neither man nor animal”, and killed the tyrant at the moment of dusk, “neither night nor day” Shakespeare took this subject or doctrine for his theme in *Macbeth*: the same sequence of prophecy, false assurance, pride, and “divine ruse” in the punishment

Something similar can be found even in the different religions since, as revelations, they correspond in a certain way to prophecies; their very diversity proves that at the level of appearance—though not in their essential content—they inevitably include an element not unlike the “trickery” of the demiurge; this element does not appear from the point of view of each religion in itself—unless one contrasts exoterism, considered as limitation, with esoterism, which alone is absolutely true—but it does appear from the point of view of the *religio perennis*, which penetrates all revelations and is not imprisoned in any. The sole Revealer—the *Logos*—plays with mutually irreconcilable forms while offering a single content of dazzling self-evidence.

* * *

This allusion to prophecies allows us to point out that there is one kind of absurdity that is merely apparent, and this is the accidental unintelligibility of wisdom, which can be found for example in the Koranic account of the meeting between Moses and al-Khidr:⁶ according to the esoteric interpretation of the passage, the apparent absurdity conceals a dimension of depth having no relation to the platitudes of the profane world; in a similar way Saint Paul describes true wisdom as “foolishness” in the eyes of the world. Since “extremes meet”, the highest wisdom sometimes adopts the bearing of its opposite; numerous stories of the saints confirm this. From a somewhat different point of view, one might ask what the meaning is of “tricksters” such as Till Eulenspiegel, or Nasreddin Hoja among the Turks; perhaps the role of these pranksters, who are at once popular and classical—as well as the role of the fictional people corresponding to them—is to exhaust the possibilities of absurdity contained in earthly *Māyā*, in much the same way as a carnival seeks to neutralize subversive tendencies by deploying all the resources of human imbecility.⁷ But there

⁶ *Sūrah* “The Cave” [18] 65-82

⁷ In the Middle Ages, the feast of fools on New Year’s Day led to excesses of buffoonery that verged on sacrilege—a layman dressed up as a bishop gave the benediction and derisively proclaimed indulgences, people ate on the altar and played soldiers’ games on it; the pseudo-bishop indulged in all manner of silly behavior. Abuses like this reveal a characteristic lack of equilibrium in the European mentality, which has the

is another very important aspect here, which is related to the function of the court jester, and this is the right to utter or inculcate truths that social convention tends to hide, to make people aware of the stupidity—the “lack of imagination”, we might say—that is so typical of conventional life, to pierce its smug opacity with living caricatures that are ceaselessly scathing.⁸

The apparent madness of the Sioux *heyoka*—which belongs to a completely different order, at least intrinsically—raises the question of hidden wisdom or the initiatic concealment of “pearls” before “swine”: the *heyoka* were men who, having been honored in a dream by a vision of the “Thunder-Birds”, had in this way incurred the obligation to humble themselves and hide their consecration; their case was similar in certain ways to that of the dervishes known as the “people of blame” (*malāmātiyah*), who sought to attract the criticism of the profane and hypocritical while realizing inwardly the most perfect spiritual sincerity.⁹ For the sake of humility the *heyoka* condemns himself to perform virtually all actions the wrong way around and to be a man “upside down”—for example, by pretending to shiver when it is hot or to be stifled with heat when it is cold—in order to arouse the mockery of simple or mediocre people; at the same time, however, he is considered the recipient of mysterious powers, and he may come to be deeply respected as someone “apart” and “special”, who no longer belongs entirely to this world of pedestrian logic. Moreover—we have already mentioned this—the behavior of the *heyoka* amounts to an initiatic language, comprehensible only to sages, and expresses a sacrificial vocation, that of being “living-dead”, in which one is called to re-establish inwardly the bridge between the world of matter and the world of the spirit and immortality.

tendency to swing from one extreme to the other. It is true that grotesque parodies are meant to exhaust dangerous lower psychic possibilities in a harmless manner, but the very fact that this process is needed, to say nothing of the excesses to which it leads, proves that there is a latent contradiction in the collective soul.

⁸ There was something of this in Omar Khayyam, who was a sort of “court jester” of spirituality

⁹ In the Christian world Saint Benedict Labre was one of the most typical cases of this kind. What is involved here is not a spiritual norm, certainly, but a vocation and a very particular function

The Algonquin Nanabozho was no doubt the cosmic originator of good and evil, but he was also the first *heyoka* and the first “fool God”.

The Alchemy of the Sentiments

Among the strictly individual modes of intelligence—namely, reason, memory, imagination, and sentiment or emotion—sentiment is the most essentially subjective in character in the sense that the element “subject” is manifested most directly. Intelligence itself is objective by definition, for its whole reason for being is the adequation of consciousness to a reality situated empirically “on the outside”; but in its essence—in the *intellectus increatus et increabilis*—intelligence is identified with its transcendent object, pure Reality, which is the source of all possible phenomena; this Reality is in a way the very substance of the transpersonal Intellect, if one may express oneself in an elliptical manner. In other words the Intellect contains in its very substance everything that is knowable just as each ray of the sun conveys the whole sun, which is mirrored in every surface capable of reflecting it; in His ontological as well as His supra-ontological Reality, God is pure Knowledge of Himself—or of Self—and the Intellect is none other than a ray, at once direct and indirect, of this immutable Knowledge.

Below the level of pure Intellect, intelligence undergoes in man the quadruple separation we mentioned above, and it does this because of individuation. Reason is at the summit: it is still objective, though already indirect and discursive, which indicates precisely its state of individuation in relation to intelligence as such; next comes memory, which is likewise objective, but in a more subjective manner—this is no contradiction—in that its contents must be the experiences of a given individual; as for imagination, it is not so much the memory of a “subjective objectivity” as of a “subjectivity still objective”, whereas sentiment is subjectivity pure and simple, insofar as such definitions are valid on a plane where everything is more or less connected; for it must not be forgotten that a sentiment can also be in its own way a kind of adequation since it may conform to its object; and it is always possible for a supernatural element, hence a factor of truth and thus of objectivity and universality, to intervene.

The realm of emotional feeling is a realm of oppositions, but its positive content is love, whose spiritual object is God as Beauty and as Goodness; love of the divine Beauty calls to mind the love of a bride for a bridegroom whereas love of Goodness is similar to the love of a child for its mother.

In conjunction with love—though not otherwise—hatred may also assume a spiritual function, doubtless secondary and negative though nonetheless real; it is common to speak of hatred of sin and disdain for the world out of love of God. "Hate thine own soul," said Meister Eckhart, and Saint Bernard defined humility as a virtue by means of which one "becomes despicable in one's own eyes".

Love includes joy and sadness; each can have an active or a passive character depending on whether it refers symbolically to the future or the past. In the first case joy is fervent: it is confidence and hope; in the second case it is calm and contemplative—the happiness of grace, saturation, possession. So too for sadness: it may refer to the past, and then it is the memory of a Paradise lost,¹ but it can also refer to the future, and then it is a nostalgia for divine Beauty. The maternal Paradise is behind us, and the virginal Paradise up ahead.

Fear and anger are connected to hatred: spiritually, one fears the divine Rigor and the worldly seductions leading to it; one fears sin because one fears God. Holy anger is provoked by the falseness and corruption of the world, but this anger is directed primarily against the world within us, against the attachment of the soul to sensory objects and its own glory.

As Ghazzali said, all those who love in God—who love their neighbor for his love of God and because he is loved by God—must also hate in God: they hate their neighbor for his hatred of God and because he is hated by God; but this "hatred" is not at all passionate, and it is expressed through perfectly logical and salutary attitudes alone; nor could it be otherwise, for the Prophet said: "The believer does not know hatred," and "hatred consumes good works as fire devours wood." It is therefore out of charity toward the immortal personality of each and every man that Ghazzali says: "Just as one may hate a believer (*muslim*) because he disobeys God, so one may love the same man because he is a believer"; and he concludes that no man is lovable or hateful in every respect, which is a clear condemnation of passionate hatred applied to individuals.²

¹ This type of sadness is often found in Japanese poetry, where it is derived from the Buddhist doctrine of the ephemeral nature of things

² Christ did not hesitate to say that one must "hate father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea, and his own life also", but he was clearly not

Sadness is traditionally linked with repentance and the “gift of tears”; turned toward the past, it is opposed to desires, which are obviously projected into the future and draw the soul toward a mirage as yet unrealized. The situation is entirely different in the case of natural and passional sadness: far from being opposed to desires, it risks becoming an end in itself; according to Muslims melancholy comes from the devil, which is entirely plausible since in practice it usurps the place of truth and the love of God.³ But to return to spiritual sadness: “Blessed are they that mourn, for they shall be comforted,” says the Gospel; and also “Blessed are ye that weep now: for ye shall laugh”;⁴ and the Psalms: “They that sow in tears shall reap in joy.”⁵

In order to understand these passages fully, the gentleness and humility of sadness must be taken into consideration: sadness is opposed to pride and hatred and is close to love; it is important to realize that noble feelings symbolize attitudes situated above and beyond the emotional plane. Seen in this light, sadness is by no means opposed to the impassibility of the sages; on the contrary it is an attitude of spiritual “gravity”, an “alchemical” quality that brings our substance into conformity with contemplation of the Immutable; for this gravity—and this is the important point—has the same virtue as tears, which means that like them it excludes hardness, levity, dissipation. If sadness were a weakness, we would find no trace of it in the Divinity; but if it has a positive side—and it does—it must be prefigured in God; now in God there is no suffering, but there is a sort of grave and merciful gentleness, which is not unconnected with the gift of tears in man.

As for joy, it is hope, trust, peace, or bliss; here again there are modes and degrees, the highest of which are independent of feeling, without necessarily excluding sentimental concomitances. One should never confuse feeling, which is a natural fact, with the excesses of sentimentality, which come about when feeling replaces intelligence

thinking of their immortal persons, as is shown in fact by the final words, which are the very negation of all egoism, hence of all hatred in the ordinary sense of the term

³ It was for this reason that Saint Francis of Sales could say, “A saint who is sad is a sad sort of saint” (*Un saint triste est un triste saint*)

⁴ Matthew 5.4, and Luke 6.21

⁵ Psalm 126.5

and truth; these may determine sentiment but not conversely. Joy is like an earthly trace of bliss, but whereas bliss is an intrinsic happiness sufficient unto itself, the feeling of joy is like all natural feelings in having an external cause and in being an opposite. In the Scriptures the sentiments are like axes extending from the human to the Divine, and they therefore include every level: "I will be glad and rejoice in Thee: I will sing praise to Thy Name, O Thou most High," as the Psalmist said, and "Be glad in the Lord and rejoice, ye righteous: and shout for joy, all ye that are upright in heart." "For our heart shall rejoice in Him, because we have trusted in His Holy Name."⁶

Knowledge is beyond the sentiments, but the sentiments can be modes of indirect knowledge depending on the reality of their content; nor could it be otherwise, for the element "knowledge" penetrates everything, just as ether is everywhere present in the sensible realm.

* * *

Hatred of the world, love of God; but there is a degree that goes beyond both, and this is certainty of the Real. Certainty is an aspect of knowledge and is therefore situated beyond the domain of feeling, but on the individual plane it nonetheless possesses a fragrance that permits us to think of it as a sentiment. One can also speak about a feeling of doubt, though doubt is nothing but the void created by a missing certainty, and this void readily gives way to the false plenitude of error.

It is appropriate to distinguish between two modes or degrees of certainty: certainty of truth and certainty of being; the first refers to a form of knowledge that is no doubt direct in relation to reason but nonetheless indirect in relation to union; and it is to union that certainty of being refers. It is illogical to try to oppose this second certainty—and even the first, for that matter, since it is also infallible—with the elements of a phenomenal or passional certitude; it is as if "accidents" wanted to take issue with "substance" or as if raindrops wanted to teach water what they are made of. The certainty of the Intellect comes from the fact that it "is" what it knows; no one can

⁶ Psalm 9.2; 32.11, 33.21.

add anything whatsoever to its essence or take the minutest particle away from it.

Gnosis goes beyond the mental realm and *a fortiori* the realm of the sentiments; this transcendence results from the “supernaturally natural” function of the Intellect—from its contemplation of the Immutable, of the “Self” that is Reality, Consciousness, and Bliss; stray drops of this Felicity, fallen into our world of separate and ephemeral crystallizations, become the love and happiness of earthly creatures. To wish to transcend the sentiments out of sheer ambition is totally opposed to truth and contemplation; apart from the fact that contempt for the sentiments is itself sentimental—a frigid sentimentality being no more intellectual than one that is hot—it is contradictory to wish to escape from individuality in an individualist context. In metaphysics there is neither prejudice nor ambition; each thing is put in its place in such a way as to conform to the ordinances of the “Great Architect of the Universe”; the question is less one of knowing what we are than of knowing what God is, for in fact the first question has no meaning except in relation to the second. If “to know oneself is to know one’s Lord”, it is because the pure “being” of phenomena reduces them to their universal roots: *ad majorem Dei gloriam*.

The Symbolism of the Hourglass

The hourglass is usually a symbol of time and death: the flowing sand, which measures duration, does indeed suggest time in its fatal and irreversible aspect—a slipping away that nothing can stop and whose finalities no one has the power to annul. Moreover the sterility of sand evokes the nothingness of things as mere earthly accidents, and the cessation of movement reminds us that the heart will stop and life will end.

From another point of view the symbolism of the hourglass is drawn mainly from its very form: the two compartments that compose it represent the high and the low, heaven and earth,¹ and the movement of the sand indicates a pole of attraction, that of the lower, which is the only pole the physical plane can offer us; but in reality there are two poles, one earthly and one heavenly, so that heavenly attraction should be represented by an ascending movement of the sand toward the upper compartment; since this is physically impossible, what symbolizes it in fact is the act of turning the hourglass upside down, an action that in a sense manifests the object's very reason for being. Spiritually, a movement toward the higher is always a sort of turning upside down, for the soul turns away from the world, which imprisons and disperses it, thus reversing the movement of its will or love.²

The expression "pole of attraction" calls to mind the image of two magnetic centers, one above and one below, though this may lead to the objection that heaven and earth are not "points" but "spaces";

¹ We might point out that in Muslim countries there are drums having the same shape as an hourglass, one side called "earth" and the other "heaven"; in the Far East there are similar drums, which are marked on their two skins with a sign derived from the *Yin-Yang*, a visual symbol composed of two compartments with different colors, each of which contains a point of the opposite color.

² The conical tent of the nomadic Indians of North America contains the same symbolism: in the Indian tipi, the poles are placed in such a way that the ends extend considerably beyond their point of junction or crossing, and this represents the heavenly dimension; the point where the poles cross is not unlike the Gordian knot or the labyrinth, and it is considered by the Indians to be the passage along which souls escape to the Beyond.

the response, however, is that above and below—and by extension inward and outward—each possesses two aspects, one reductive and one expansive: the world attracts like a magnetic center, but at the same time it is diverse and it disperses; the “Kingdom of Heaven” also attracts like a magnet, but at the same time it is infinite and it expands. What is opposed to the space “world”—or what this space opposes—is the point “spirit”: the “strait gate”; and what is opposed to the space “spirit”, to the “Kingdom of Heaven” that is “within you”, is the point “world”: sin, luciferian and passional contraction.³ There is no point of contact between the world as such and Heaven as such: each will always appear as a bottleneck or prison to the other. At least this is so at the level of moral alternatives, though beyond this plane an immediate encounter—or a sort of coincidence—does come about between the two opposed points or between the spaces, especially in contemplative alchemy and by virtue of the metaphysical transparency of things; in this case, however, there is no longer an opposition but simply a difference of degree, mode, manifestation. Clearly earthly beauty cannot be identified with sin; it manifests heavenly Beauty and may for this reason serve as a spiritual leaven, as sacred art and the innocent harmony of nature both prove.

The compressive force of sin is the inverted shadow of the beatific attraction of the “strait gate” just as passional dispersion is the inverted shadow of inward expansion toward the Infinite. The “lower compartment” is made of either inertia or weight, agitation or volatilization; inverting the hourglass—that is, choosing the other pole of attraction or changing direction—is pacification for the agitated soul and activation for the languid soul.

Spiritual reality implies both the calm of the “motionless mover” and the life of the “central fire”; this is what the Song of Solomon expresses when it says: “I sleep, but my heart waketh.”

* * *

³ “Scripture, Faith, and Truth bear witness that sin is nothing else on the part of the creature than the fact of turning away from the unchangeable Good and turning toward the changeable good, the creature turns away from the Perfect in order to turn toward ‘what is partial’ and imperfect, and most often toward itself” (*Theologia Germanica*, 2)

There is an analogical relationship between the "high" and the "inward" and between the "low" and the "outward" what is inward is manifested by height, and conversely, depending on the planes or circumstances; the same is true *mutatis mutandis* for outwardness and depth, taking these words in their cosmic sense. When Christ or the Virgin depart from the visible world, they begin by "ascending" whereas the angels "descend", and Christ will come again by "descending"; one speaks of the "descent" of a Revelation and an "ascension" into Heaven. Height suggests the abyss between man and God, for the servant is below and the Lord above; inwardness refers more to Selfhood or the Self: the outward is the shell or form; the inward is the Kernel or Essence.

Tending toward the higher thus also means living toward the inward; now the inward unfolds from the point at which the outward is abolished or on the basis of a mental or moral "concentration". The "strait gate" is *a priori* a sacrificial annihilation, but it also signifies—and more profoundly—a beatific annihilation. One recalls the analogy between death and love, *mors* and *amor*. like love death is a giving up of self, and like death love is generous; each is the model or mirror of the other. Man must "die to the world", but the world may also "die to man" when he has found the beatific mystery of the "strait gate" and has seized it; the "strait gate" is then the seed of Heaven, an opening toward Plenitude.⁴

The "strait gate" reveals its beatific quality when it appears not as a dark passageway but as the Center or Present—as the point of contact between the world or life and the "divine Dimension": the

⁴ "Verily with hardship goeth ease," says the Koran (94 5, 6), and this is a further allusion to the mystery of the "strait gate", especially since the same passage begins with the words "Did We not expand thy breast?"—that is, the "inward" Other Koranic passages refer to the same symbolism "He produced the two seas that meet. Between them is an isthmus they cannot cross" (55 19-20) "And it is He who produced the two seas, one sweet and palatable, the other salt and bitter, and He put between them an isthmus and a closed barrier" (25 53) According to the non-canonical Book of Esdras, "The sea is set in a wide place, that it might be deep and great But put the case the entrance were narrow, and like a river, who then could go into the sea to look upon it, and to rule it? if he went not through the narrow, how could he come into the broad? . . . Then [after the fall of Adam] were the entrances of this world made narrow, full of sorrow and travail for the entrances of the elder world were wide and sure, and brought immortal fruit" (2 Esdras 7 3-5, 12-13)

Center is the blessed point beneath the divine Axis, and the Present is the blessed instant that leads us back to the divine Origin. As the neck of the hourglass shows, this apparent contraction in space and time, which seems to desire our annihilation, opens in reality onto a "new space" and a "new time" and thus transmutes both space, which surrounds and limits us, and time, which sweeps us along and eats away at us: space is then situated as if within us, and time becomes a circular or spiral river flowing round a motionless center.

* * *

In the hourglass one compartment empties, and the other fills: this is the very picture of spiritual choice, a choice that is inescapable because "no man can serve two masters"; it is in the nature of things that a superficially heterogeneous element may sometimes be combined with a spiritual attitude—for a man outwardly rich can be "poor in spirit"—but with regard to the very center of our being it is never possible to place ourselves simultaneously on two incompatible levels.

Another aspect of the symbolism of the hourglass—in this case cosmological—is the following: the flow of the grains of sand can be compared to the unfolding of all the possibilities included in a cycle of manifestation; when these possibilities are exhausted, the movement stops, and the cycle is closed.⁵ This is true not only of cosmic cycles but also—and in fact above all—of the divine Cycle, which comes to an end in the *Apocatastasis* after the passing of myriad subordinate cycles; from this point of view the shower of sand indicates the exhaustion of possibilities and, conversely, their final and total integration in the divine or nirvanic Dimension.

The key doctrine of the hourglass is briefly this: God is One; now the number 1 is quantitatively the smallest of all, appearing in fact as the exclusion of quantity, hence as the extreme of poverty; but beyond number and at the level of principles, which number reflects in an inverted sense, Unity coincides with the Absolute and therefore

⁵ At the beginning of the flow, the movement of sand is imperceptible whereas toward the end it becomes quicker and quicker, this phenomenon is strictly analogous to what occurs in the unfolding of a cycle

with the Infinite, and it is precisely numerical indeterminacy that reflects in its way divine Infinity. All the positive qualities that we notice in the world are limited; they are like the extreme and in a certain sense inverted points of essences, which unfold beyond our sense experience and even beyond all earthly consciousness. The "strait gate" is inversion and analogy, darkness and light, death and birth.

* * *

The hourglass also suggests a division of universal realities—or the sensory orders representing these realities—into two compartments, if one may express it this way; in other words the fundamental distinction between the relative and the Absolute, the outward and the Inward, the earthly and the Celestial may assume the following forms:

One may distinguish between the material or visible world and the immaterial and invisible world; *grosso modo* this is the perspective of shamanists, in which the animic powers are considered prolongations of Divinity.

A second distinction places the line of demarcation between the world and God beyond the animic domain and at the threshold of the angelic domain: in this perspective the angels are essentially divine aspects.⁶

A third way of distinguishing between the two great dimensions of the Universe is to draw the line of demarcation in such a way as to separate the material, animic, and angelic domains from the archangelic and divine domains:⁷ the divine Spirit, which appears at the center of the cosmos and which is as it were the Heart-Intellect of the world, encompasses the Archangels, who are its essential functions, and this Spirit is the Face of God turned toward the world; this

⁶ When the Essence has been forgotten in practice, the result is an angelolatry or a form of polytheism in the ordinary meaning of the word

⁷ Polytheism may come about in this case as well, and in fact it usually has its origin in the distinction in question, it must not be forgotten, however, that the Archangels have their roots in the divine Qualities or "Names", hence in Being itself, it is therefore impossible to assign a clearly determined metaphysical plane to the polytheistic deviation properly so called

perspective is to some extent adopted by Semitic monotheists, whose points of view vary in different cosmic or theophanic contexts. The Spirit of God is the great mystery the Koran refuses to define:⁸ this Spirit is either uncreated or created; it is the *Logos* or Word or Book, the archetype of every Revealer and every Revelation, containing the *Dhyāni-Buddhas* and their prolongations or functions as embodied in the great *Bodhisattvas*.

According to a fourth perspective, which is metaphysical and represents the essential and invariable perspective of Semitic and Vishnuite monotheists, it is necessary to distinguish between manifestation and Principle, the existent cosmos and existentiating Being, creation and Creator—in short, between the world and God; a distinction is then drawn within God between the Qualities and the Essence.

A fifth perspective, which is that of Shaivite Vedantists, distinguishes between *Māyā* and *Paramātmā*: God the Creator is also included in *Māyā*, for *Paramātmā* alone is purely Absolute; but *Ātmā* encompasses at one and the same time the pure Absolute and the Absolute clothed in relativity: *Para-Brahma*, the “Supreme”, and *Apara-Brahma*, the “Non-Supreme”.

To summarize, the human mind is capable of making an essential distinction between the material or visible and the Immaterial or Invisible; or between the formal—matter, soul, spirits—and the angelic Non-formal, rooted in the Divine; or between the peripheral—extending from the physical cosmos to the angelic cosmos—and the Central, the manifested Spirit of God with its archangelic functions and metacosmic root; or between existence and Being, the created and the Creator, together with its Essence, which is Beyond-Being; or finally between Relativity—metacosmic as well as cosmic—and the Absolute as such.

But there are also two non-distinctions, one from below and the other from above. For the first, everything is God, and we are therefore parts of God; this amounts to pantheism unless one compensates for this perspective by emphasizing its transcendent complement, as does shamanism but not philosophical pantheism. According to the second non-distinction, nothing is except *Ātmā*; this is the Vedantic

⁸ *Al-Rūh*, the Angel who is greater than all the others put together; in Hebrew, *Ruah Elohīm*

thesis, which never excludes distinctions wherever these can and should apply; it is also the Sufic thesis, according to which the world is Allah as *al-Zāhir*, the Outward.⁹ The same teaching is likewise found in *Mahāyāna* Buddhism: *Samsāra* is *Nirvāna*, and *Nirvāna* is *Samsāra*; Existence is an aspect of Beyond-Existence, the supreme “Void”, and it is for this reason that every consciousness contains in its substance a point of access to the “Void” or the Infinite, which is pure Beatitude. The interpenetration of the two Realities is depicted by the movement of the sand in the hourglass; but Reality is one just as the grains of sand are identical, and it is only differences of situation, if one may express it this way, that give rise to a disparity whose terms are incomparable, a disparity that is unilateral since one of the terms, even though it appears as “inward” in relation to the outwardness of the related term, is simply What is.

⁹ It is this doctrine that allows Christ to identify “one of these little ones” with himself, hence with Divinity

The Problem of Qualifications

It is natural and understandable that every lofty aspiration, insofar as it prompts a man to surpass himself, requires a corresponding qualification. In order to be complete, a spiritual aptitude that is properly suited to *gnosis* requires not only an intellectual qualification, which is the capacity for discernment, penetration, and assimilation, but also a moral qualification, which is the tendency toward interiorization and which involves the fundamental virtues. In a concrete esoterism—for example, that of the Sufis—the intellectual requirement never predominates over the moral requirement; on the contrary an interiorizing contemplativity accompanied by the virtues predominates over a discerning intelligence.

Another, perhaps unexpected, conclusion is this: the majority of minds are closed to sapiential esoterism not so much because of an intellectual limitation—we may find this in fact at the heart of the most fervent esoterism—as by a kind of wish not to understand; this in turn comes from individualism and thus from an attachment to the formal order with which the individual is bound up, and in many cases a passional tendency toward outwardness and dispersing activity is also involved, whence a sort of ill-inspired instinct of self-preservation and a “nationalism of the human” that is resistant to every “excess of objectivity”, if one may call it that; all these attitudes end up being combined with the habits of a given environment, a need for psychological comfort, a desire for a reassuring if not always easily achieved equilibrium.¹ But there is more: God did not choose every man for wisdom, and it is incontestably better to be a saint who is ignorant and

¹ Given the gigantism of the Renaissance, sometimes cold and sometimes sensual, it is no surprise that a glorification of creative or sentimental passion—a passion intent upon usurping the place of intelligence—has entered more and more into the way of life of what used to be Christendom. People delight in exalting the passional dynamism—real or imaginary—of “our saints”, and they even attribute this quality to Christ; and there are “intellectual” Christians who do not hesitate to call themselves “fiercely patriotic”, as if this were not a cynical and irresponsible admission, the only excuse for which is stupidity. This is the best way to adulterate religion and compromise it in the eyes of other peoples, who are not impressed by the luxury of such subjective options, with a modicum of doctrinal *gnosis*—so abhorred in certain quarters—one would be less exposed to this kind of euphoria and its inevitable repercussions.

poorly endowed intellectually than a metaphysician who is humanly mediocre and therefore lacking in sanctity. What needs to be emphasized here, however, is that the human species is not divided into two camps, one of which is intellectually qualified while the other is not, and that it is not intellectual disqualification alone—whether accidental or substantial—that may obstruct access to *gnosis*. If one insists on making a fundamental distinction between men, it should be between the worldly and the spiritual.

* * *

In a man such as Aristotle we have a classic example of a qualification that is exclusively intellectual, and therefore unilateral and necessarily limited—even on the level of his genius—since perfect intellection *ipso facto* involves contemplation and interiorization. In the case of the Stagirite, the intelligence was penetrating but the tendency of the will was exteriorizing, which is consistent with the cosmolatry of most ancient Greeks; this is what enabled Saint Thomas to support the religious thesis regarding the “natural”—because neither revealed nor sacramental—character of the intelligence and in turn the reduction of intelligence to reason illumined by faith, faith alone being granted the right to be “supernatural”. Not that Saint Thomas thereby excluded direct intellection—which would indeed have been impossible for him—but he all but enclosed it within dogmatic and rational limits, whence the paradox of an interiorizing contemplativity armed with an exteriorizing logic.

At the opposite pole from Aristotle, we find more than one contemplative of both East and West who talks metaphysical nonsense because his qualification is unilaterally moral and not intellectual, interiorizing and not discerning. An extenuating circumstance of some significance—one that is certainly not accidental—is the fact that religions themselves appear in a form that appeals explicitly to the volitive soul and only in an implicit manner to the intellective soul; the reason for this is obvious: a religion must be understandable in terms of what the souls of all men have in common. It must therefore take into account many limiting factors, such as passion, individualism,

and formalism, including the narcissism proper to every human collectivity.²

One is bound to admit that the two great qualifications—intellectual and moral—rarely coincide; this precariousness explains the ambiguity and excessive polyvalence of the notions of “wisdom” and “sanctity” as well as the unfortunate and very human temptation to underestimate or even despise intelligence in the name of piety, or virtue in the name of intellectuality.

Truth is neither pious nor impious, which means that its piety—this can be said without any misuse of language—is in its purity and impartiality, not in the sentimental or volitive blinders imposed upon it; truth in itself has no need for virtue, but man needs virtue in order to assimilate truth. Virtue for its part does not enjoy such independence: no doubt it always expresses a truth indirectly, but animals and plants do as much; in order to be truly human and spiritually effective, virtue must be integrated into the human norm, which reflects our status as *pontifex* between earth and Heaven. If virtue belongs to a man and not an animal, it must be human in the sense that it must be attached to a knowledge of God and to a will that is connected to this knowledge: it is faith that gives virtue its vital sap of absoluteness and infinity. Man is central, and in all things he must be an extension of God.

* * *

The idea of a moral qualification brings us to the question of the meaning of morality itself—the meaning of the distinction between what is “good” and what is “evil”. Independently of anything we may have heard on this subject, we would say this: in normal conditions something may be considered good if it is in conformity with divine Attraction and universal Equilibrium and if it produces a positive result in relation to man’s ultimate destiny; and it may be considered evil if it is contrary to divine Attraction and universal Equilibrium and

² “Everything national is ours”, and everything that is ours is incomparable, irresistible, sublime. Do individually what is good, but only on condition of believing that everything done by the collectivity is good!

produces a negative result. These are concrete realities and not sentimental evaluations or other reactions of human subjectivity.

In any case the sense of what is good or evil may be derived quite simply from the fact that Heaven has ordered or permitted some things and forbidden others; it would be pointless to speak about cosmic Equilibrium or divine Attraction to an Asharite or Hanbalite theologian, for in their eyes divine Law takes precedence over every other possible motivation—to such an extent that metaphysical explanations almost take on the appearance of impieties. From the point of view of philosophical morality, it is the logic of things that determines the sense of good and evil:³ a world without morality would be a madhouse, and a man without morality would be a monster; philosophical morality and the judgments it sets out to explain are sufficiently justified by these facts, although the basis of this wholly profane morality is not proportionate to the total nature of man. The great fault of the secular moralists is to cut man off from his priestly substance and thus ultimately to suppress morality itself—at least intrinsic morality, for man can always invent false utilitarian justifications and false equilibriums; every society of criminals has its own code of morals while necessarily maintaining a minimum of true morality.

Morality has two sources, the revealed Law and the voice of conscience: the Law—for example, the Decalogue—is for the sake of the Attraction and Equilibrium of which we have spoken, and it takes the form of an adaptation to a particular world; conscience for its part naturally takes into account the legitimate interests of the neighbor or the collectivity as well as the interest of the soul before God; in other words the conscience of the normal man, though it is determined by a sacred Law, is nonetheless founded on the self-evident fact that the “other” is also an “I” and that our own “I” is also “another”, a truth that bears fruit insofar as a man is impartial and generous;⁴ but even

³ If moral awareness were not a reality natural to man, there would be no such thing as moral insanity, an infirmity that can afflict men who are otherwise intelligent

⁴ “Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me Inasmuch as ye did it not to one of the least of these ye did it not to me” (Matthew 25:40, 45). With these words—which identify every ego with the divine Ego—Christ testifies to the oneness of the Self, which dwells in every subjectivity.

more fundamentally there is the equally obvious fact that man is not an end in himself but depends, like the rest of the world, on a Cause that determines everything, is the measure of everything, and cannot be escaped—a Cause through which man draws closer to happiness and in separation from which comes his loss.

There is an intrinsic morality and an extrinsic morality: the first concerns innate laws, those ordained for the sake of the priestly nature of man and the equilibrium of society;⁵ the second concerns particular laws, which are laid down in keeping with the objective and subjective conditions of a given traditional humanity. Intrinsic or essential morality is made up of virtues; extrinsic morality, which alone is relative, is concerned with actions. The confusion of actions with inward values is what constitutes moralism and leads to hypocrisy,⁶ and it goes without saying that moral qualification does not refer to actions as such but to virtues.

The two great dimensions—one vertical and the other horizontal—are interdependent: one cannot follow divine Attraction without conforming to cosmic Equilibrium, and one cannot conform to this Equilibrium without following divine Attraction, whence the two supreme commandments, namely, love of God and love of neighbor, in which are found “the Law and the Prophets”.

If there is a volitive or sentimental meaning connected to the notions of “good” and “evil”, it comes from the subjective and inevitably self-interested nature of man; the same is true for the idea of the “I” as well as for several other notions that are fundamental and therefore innate to man, such as the notion of “sin”. The natural subjectivity of man is not a meaningless game; it takes account of real situations, for the divine Attraction exists, as does universal Equilibrium, and both are for our benefit; if it were not so, there would be no question traditionally of rewards and sanctions in the next world. The same thing is true regarding the notion of “duty”, for its subjectivity

⁵ “Therefore all things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them for this is the Law and the Prophets” (Matthew 7 12)

⁶ A typical example of moralism is the altruism of Vivekananda with its absurd notion of “egoistic salvation” it is in the nature of heresy that it would obstinately inflate a relative principle whose meaning has been forgotten and whose nonsensical exaggeration is presented as an end in itself

reflects an objective reality it is necessary for a creature endowed with free will to conform to whatever role universal Equilibrium directly or indirectly assigns him; a society needs warriors, and the warrior must be faithful to his charge insofar as it is incumbent upon him, while nonetheless acting in harmony with the dimension of celestial Attraction; a warrior must kill while being generous when the situation permits or requires it. Or again: to be noble is to sacrifice one's own interests for the sake of the truth and thus for the sake of the "duty" defined by that truth, whence the notion of "honor", which is much more contingent but by no means unreal; nobility is the natural conformity of the will and sensibility to the demands of Equilibrium and Attraction—it is to see things "from above" and without any baseness—while honor is the social obligation never to betray this attitude or not to betray the trust that has been placed in us because of our rank in society, whence the saying *noblesse oblige*.⁷

A problem remains in that the two poles of morality—the spiritual and the social or the intrinsic and the extrinsic—may be reflected simultaneously on different levels in such a way as to create a divergence; in this case it is the higher interest that takes priority, whatever the appearances. It goes without saying that morality is not a blind automatism; if it becomes such, one may speak of conventionality, hypocrisy, sentimental moralism, but of nothing else.

It is natural for a man to experience a certain satisfaction when he accomplishes an act that is in keeping with the universal Norm;⁸ it is equally natural for this feeling to become habitual and for the various sentiments he has experienced in this domain to constitute a moral memory, so to speak, and a particular dimension of his psychic life; this is not connected with *gnosis*, but neither is it opposed to it, for the two realms are strictly incomparable; in any case, when one speaks of the "sleep of the just", it is much more than an empty phrase.

⁷ "When one has been born of an illustrious family, one must teach one's children that if the public is disposed to honor in them the merit of their parents, it expects to find traces of this merit in the descendants, the respect generally accorded to birth is far from gratuitous *Noblesse oblige*" (Pierre Marc Gaston, Duke of Lévis, *Maximes et Réflexions sur différents sujets de morale et de politique*)

⁸ In the Law of Manu each action is assigned a sentiment that indicates its moral quality and refers to the three cosmic qualities or tendencies the luminous or upward (*sattva*), the fiery or horizontal (*rajas*), the dark or downward (*tamas*)

* * *

Socratic morality does not refer *a priori* to a revealed Code but to conscience as a function of the Intellect. This immanentist character does not mean that Socratic morality should be confused with secular moralism; it is precisely its reference to the Intellect that prevents this. According to Socrates, virtue is the science of the good: to have a true notion of the good—for example, of justice—is to be good. The good is identical to total effectiveness, which is our spiritual destiny; whoever bases himself on the good can never be thwarted since God is the Good. Socrates insists on the virtue of obedience: the justice of earthly authorities may be fallible, but it is nonetheless sacred because of the eternal Law, which the sage himself represents. The attitude of Socrates regarding the mysteries of the Beyond is that of Confucius: the guarantee of a favorable afterlife lies in conforming to the universal Norm; this conformity takes precedence over conceptualizations of *post mortem* states.

Another moral code that is independent of the Decalogue is that of India: it is founded on the notions of *dharma* (“universal Law”), *rita* (“determination” or “behavior”), and *karma* (“action”). It is because of *dharma* that each thing and each being behaves in accordance with its nature; the notion of *rita* is perhaps less principal: it expresses behavior itself, including ritual actions, although in other respects *dharma* and *rita* are synonymous. *Karma* is related to *dharma*; depending on whether *karma* is in conformity or nonconformity with the cosmic and divine Order, it generates a particular destiny within transmigration. Violation of the Norm or Law is “sin” (*pāpa*); impurity determining or accompanying the act of sin is “evil” (*dosha*). One must distinguish further between the “amoral” (*nirdharma*) and the “immoral” (*adharma*): just as the “supernatural” is not “contranatural” but simply a transcendent “nature”—in this way extending the internal logic of the “natural” to the invisible Universe—so the “amoral” is not “immoral” but a transcendent “morality”, which means that it is much more far-reaching than what is usually called moral, and possibly contrary to it. Furthermore, Hinduism strongly insists that works should be accomplished without regard to their fruits (*nishkāma-karma*): this is the point of view of pure or quintessential morality as an unconditional participation in cosmic Equilibrium and divine Attraction; awareness of human “duty” is replaced in

this case by a requirement that comes not from our self-interest but from divine Beauty, to put things quite simply.

These examples serve to underscore the fact that morality is not of a purely Semitic origin, though this has often been claimed, whether with an approving or disapproving intention; it is nonetheless true that the Semitic mentality is the most specifically moralistic. While the Aryan tends to reduce morality to truth, the Semite tends to reduce truth to morality, speaking in a very approximate way; this is why the average Asian will refuse at first to see anything sublime in the Semitic revelations; on the other hand it is also one of the reasons for the failure of Semiticized Europeans to understand Platonism, or for their unwillingness to do so.

In any case moral qualification is not some innate tendency to adopt certain socially opportune attitudes in a purely automatic or reflexive way; it is a tendency to conform to the universal Law on every level, if necessary by sacrificing lesser duties or interests in favor of those imposed by a greater obligation and in keeping with the spiritual hierarchy of values.

* * *

Regarding the question of intellectual qualification, we would point out that the speculative or operative transcending of forms entailed by *gnosis* is not some luxury composed of pretension and ingratitude: whatever its value may be, every form has by definition something limited and therefore exclusive about it in one respect or another; while it is abundantly clear that the religions—with their particular perspectives and dogmas—are strictly indispensable, it is no less true that none of them is absolutely perfect in its formal expression. The celestial Word, once it has descended into the human dimension, becomes a human cosmos with regard to its form; now “it takes all kinds to make a world”. The extrinsic imperfection of the religions is the price of their realism, which allows them to implant themselves in a lasting manner in human soil.

Since *gnosis* implies the idea of the esoteric unity of religions, a few short remarks on ecumenism and the problem of conversions will not be out of place. There is a false ecumenism, as sentimental and vague as you please, which for all intents and purposes abolishes doctrine; in order to reconcile two adversaries, one strangles them both, which is

certainly the best way to make peace. True ecumenism can exist only on two levels: either it represents an agreement among religions based on their common interests in the face of a danger threatening them all, or it brings into play the wisdom that can alone discern the one sole truth under the veil of different forms. The first form of ecumenism is urgently needed, and it would actually be easy to bring it about if the arguments used were clear and realistic;⁹ the second form cannot be imposed, but it is nonetheless desirable wherever it is able to establish itself and exert some influence. All this has absolutely nothing to do with “dialogues”, which can only be a pretense or betrayal and which in any case are merely monologues in front of a mirror.¹⁰

As for the problem of conversions, several possible motives may be considered, setting aside those that are more or less illegitimate. The first motive is a lack of energy and effectiveness in the religion of origin, as in the case of pagan conversions to Christianity and Islam. A second motive is the conviction that the creed of the new religion is truer than that of the old, or rather that it alone is true; if we accept the existence of exoterisms, as indeed we must, the possibility of sincere conversions on this basis cannot be rejected. The third motive is empirical: a man who is seemingly lukewarm may be seized by the radiance of a sanctuary or of a saint belonging to another religion or by some other manifestation of spiritual perfume, understood in the sense of the Arabic word *barakah*, “blessing”; this in fact is what justifies every form of preaching to all the nations—provided the preaching is sincere and regardless of the value of the autochthonous religion. It is true that by its psychological style a given religion addresses itself to some ethnic groups more than others, and yet in a certain way it addresses itself equally to every man, at least in principle, and this

⁹ It would also be necessary to break free from the nationalist and civilizationist prejudices that adulterate religions and falsify relationships between ethnic and cultural groups, though this point is not necessarily connected with the question of ecumenism

¹⁰ Objectivity toward the perspectives and spiritual ways of other peoples is too often the result of philosophic indifferentism or sentimental universalism, and in such a case there is no reason to pay it homage, indeed one may well ask whether objectivity in the full sense of the word is really involved. The Christian saint who fights Muslims is closer to Islamic sanctity than the philosopher who accepts everything and practices nothing

explains why preaching to all can be justified. Although the best conversion, or rather the only valid conversion, is that which causes the soul to pass from a state of worldly dissipation to one of spiritual zeal, it sometimes happens that this essential conversion coincides with a change of religion—history offers us numerous examples—and in this case it would be pointless to bring forward arguments concerning the validity of the religion of origin; on this plane there are destinies that cannot be analyzed, either theologically or from the point of view of the principal equivalence of the traditional systems.

After these digressions, let us return to the problem of the strictly formal and therefore extrinsically limited aspect of the great religious phenomena: the fact that each religion is in its way a totality does not preclude a certain fragmentariness, for God alone is pure Totality—He who is beyond all forms. Christians will say that their Messenger is divine, born of a sinless and ever-virgin mother, whereas the Messenger of Islam was only a man—a man who was a merchant, a polygamist, and a warrior;¹¹ Muslims for their part will say that their Message is absolute Truth since it is founded on the absoluteness of God and on the essential, not accidental, nature of man—this nature implying an intelligence that is total, hence capable of objectivity and transcendent knowledge, and a will that is free, hence capable of detachment and saving activity—whereas the Christian Message, they will say, is relative since it is founded on two relativities: a manifestation of God, whence the Trinitarian idea, and the sinful nature of man, whence the narrowly penitential way. Just as the absoluteness of the Message is for Muslims a proof of the transcendent substance of the Messenger, a substance that imparts a quasi-celestial quality to every act, so for Christians—in an inversely analogous manner—the Divinity of the Messenger is a guarantee of the perfection of the Message, which must contain all wisdom since the Messenger is Wisdom

¹¹ Be that as it may, a man fitting this description alone could not have drawn from nothingness—and in a very short time—one of the greatest empires of history or a religion that has established and maintained itself for nearly a millennium and a half in a quarter of the inhabited globe. The spiritual and earthly results of the work of the Prophet prove that there was no reason for this man to be other than he was, whereas the whole point of Christianity is the superhumanness of the Messenger.

itself.¹² A Christian sees everything in relation to the divinity of Christ: what does intelligence matter when there is the Miracle? Meanwhile a Muslim sees everything in relation to absolute Truth: what do wonders matter when there is the Evident?¹³ As Ibn Arabi puts it, *gnosis* is the “religion of the heart”; this would mean nothing if it were merely a question of philosophy or poetry, but it means everything when one is concerned with a supernatural reality that has become inaccessible to man in his state of natural dissipation.

In its most general expression—which does not exclude other modes or transpositions—Christian spirituality seeks the most complete sacrifice for the most precious Good; it is an encounter between the sacrificial love of the sinner and the saving Love of the Redeemer. What Muslim spirituality seeks—in the final analysis and at the heart of all vocational particularities—is the most exclusive concentration on the most inclusive Truth: an extinctive and unitive concentration of the intelligence-will on Truth-Power, with Beauty or Love as its essential content.¹⁴

The different religious perspectives appear irreconcilable, but this is only because we do not perceive the unspoken bond that unites them; they are no more contradictory than points located on the same circle, which appear to be divergent or opposed only when we do not see the circle and thus their underlying reality and common essence. As for the extrinsic imperfections of the religions—elements that are too fragmentary or are overly emphasized—we could say that they possess a perfect substance in much the same way as imperfect objects

¹² In seeing the sun reflected in a pane of glass in its full radiant form and with the full force of its brilliance, the Christian will say that it is the sun while the Muslim will say that it is a pane of glass. Christ combined the two perspectives, not only the first but also the second. “Before Abraham was, I am” (John 8:58) and “Why callest thou me good?” (Matthew 19:17). It is arbitrary to reduce these two aspects simply to the difference between his two natures.

¹³ Jews necessarily had the same point of view before Muslims. On Sinai, as in the Burning Bush, God proclaimed his Unity without attaching any particular condition to it; His Word or Law—the *Torah*—is for all eternity and not just for a certain period, no miracle can invalidate these fundamental and unshakable facts.

¹⁴ If in each of these confrontations we mention the Islamic position second, it is not only because Islam came after Christianity but also because it is the Islamic point of view—so seldom grasped—that most needs explaining to the Western reader

made of gold retain the full value of this precious metal; this is a rather simplistic image, but it nonetheless helps to suggest a reality that is difficult to express in a few words.

Esoterism is what lays bare the relativity of an apparent absoluteness or the absoluteness of an apparent relativity: seen from high above, the absolutism of a given form reveals its limits whereas the existential contingency of a given phenomenon reveals on the contrary its essential absoluteness. As a result, one and the same sacred element, having lost the formally absolute character attributed to it by the exoteric perspective, assumes so to speak another absoluteness, or rather reveals it: that of the archetype it manifests. The Gospel appears absolute insofar as it compels recognition among Christians as the unique word of God; the esoteric vision of things not only helps us to detect the limits of this totalitarianism but also to discern in this very Gospel the absoluteness of the divine Word as such, from which all the Revelations are derived.¹⁵

* * *

It is perhaps not superfluous to insist again on the two-fold significance of the notion of morality—on the distinction between what is good according to the law and what is good according to virtue; the two do not always coincide, for a base man can obey the law if only because of constraint, whereas a noble man, faced with an exceptional situation, may be obliged to break a law for the sake of virtue—for example, to place pity above duty.¹⁶ Legal or objective morality has its source in a given Revelation as well as in the realities of social existence, whereas innate or subjective morality is derived from our theomorphic substance—or from the Intellect, as Socrates would say—and

¹⁵ A Cabalist once told us that the *Torah* comprises a specific number of letters, these may be rearranged in various ways so as to become the Gospel or some other sacred Book, but it is not possible to add another Book to the unique *Torah*, for the number of celestial letters must always remain the same

¹⁶ Or on the contrary to place spiritual duty above social duty—and to do so without pity—when the alternative is forced upon him “Honor thy father and thy mother,” but also: “If any man come to me, and hate not his father, and mother he cannot be my disciple” (Luke 14 26) In other words “He that loveth father and mother more than me is not worthy of me” (Matthew 10 37)

it is obviously this intrinsic morality we have in mind when we speak about moral qualification.

If intellectual qualification is the discernment that can pass from appearances to reality, from forms to essence, and from effects to cause, then faith is the propensity to pass from the concept to the thing itself or from knowing to being; we speak of the propensity and not the passage itself since the latter depends on spiritual means and grace. Faith is moral qualification insofar as it allows itself to be determined by salvific truth and in this way comes to realize its whole vocation.

It is important not to confuse moral qualification with partial and peripheral qualities such as honesty or courage, which taken alone do not constitute the fundamental nobility demanded by faith; for this nobility encompasses all the essential virtues, beginning with impartiality toward oneself and generosity toward others; when they are given their full scope by salvific truth, these virtues open themselves to the divine influx and in this way acquire a supernatural dimension. Faith requires the virtues and at the same time deploys them; it is through faith that natural nobility, in harmony with cosmic Equilibrium, becomes spiritual and thus responds to the divine Attraction.

Obedience to God-Legislator, love of God-Love, and knowledge of God-Truth: esoterism embraces the last two attitudes without excluding the first, which nevertheless does not belong to it as such since this attitude demands no moral qualification other than what is necessary for obeying the Law. It will have been noticed that only in the first case is there a relationship of opposition inasmuch as obedience responds to the Law; but at the higher two levels, that of inclusive esoterism and exclusive esoterism—love and *gnosis*—the reciprocity is parallel or participative: human love is immersed in divine Love, of which it is an echo, and human knowledge participates in divine Knowledge; in a certain respect—though not in every respect—the two modes are like projections or prolongations of the Archetype, which is at once transcendent and immanent. And this proves that the highest spiritual aptitude resides in man's capacity to surpass himself in relation to God; this capacity is nothing without grace, but grace requires this capacity just as wine requires a chalice.

Implications of the Love of God

The "love of God" suggests a sentiment addressed to a human person, though this would seem to contradict the non-formal and transcendent character of Divinity as well as the spiritual and supernatural character of contemplative love; but in reality there is no contradiction: first of all because God does in fact assume a human aspect in relation to man—if and when this is needed and without limiting Himself to this aspect—and second because spirituality, since it is human, necessarily includes the affective faculty of the soul, whatever place or function may be assigned to this faculty. When we set aside this legislating and merciful humanization of the Divine and this canalization of human sensibility toward spiritual ends, however, we shall see that the "love of God" in itself has nothing restrictive about it with regard to its object and nothing specifically sentimental with regard to its subject, for in its essential nature it is nothing other than our choice of the "inward dimension"—in keeping with the words of the Gospel: "The Kingdom of Heaven is within you."

What is fundamentally at issue here is a choice between the "outward" or the "world" and the "inward" or God:¹ the "outward dimension" is the domain of multiple things, dispersion, impermanence, and also—correlatively—limitation, egoistic compression, "hardness of heart"; the "inward dimension" is by contrast the domain of unity, synthesis, permanence, and also—correlatively—of limitlessness, spiritual dilation, "melting of the heart". At the stage of "conversion", love of God thus appears as a fundamental change of emphasis or tendency or as the reversal of an initial movement which, though natural, was mistaken because of the perversion of our original nature; this conversion must constantly be renewed even when the love of God has become second nature, for the power of the ego remains, and movement toward the Inward always retains the flavor of a separation from the outward, or at least from contact with phenomena that are *a priori* external. In any case the man who "loves God"—whether he is a monotheist or a Buddhist—is one who "dwells in the Inward"

¹ Or *Nirvāna*, for what counts in this case is not the aspect of personality, but that of absoluteness, infinitude, and salvation.

and "toward the Inward"; in other words he remains motionless in his contemplative inwardness—or in his "being", if one prefers—even while moving toward his infinite Center. Spiritual immobility is here opposed to the endless movement of external phenomena whereas spiritual movement is opposed to the natural inertia of the fallen soul, to the "hardness of heart" that must be cured by "grace" and "love", the remedy being all that softens, transmutes, and transcends the ego.

* * *

Love of God not only implies that man should turn away from the outward dimension as such and from those things directly expressing this outwardness, but also that within this dimension—viewed now as the mirror of the Inward—he should love some things and not others, that he should love those very things that manifest Inwardness; in other words love of God is to be projected indirectly upon those things that serve as its symbols or vehicles and that in this way prolong the Inward in the outward—a projection that is all the more understandable in that nothing is really situated outside God, outwardness at root being merely an appearance. Thus the contemplative man is inclined in principle to prefer nature—its quasi-paradisical virginity and solitude—to urban agglomerations and all their human commotion; if someone objects that such a man should also love other men and their human activities, we would respond that in addition to his love of nature and solitude the contemplative also necessarily loves the company of spiritual men and sanctuaries that have been made by the hand of man. Among human works the sanctuary is divine: it is as if virgin nature manifested itself—in all its reflected divinity—within the very framework of human art, transposing this art onto the divine plane; virgin nature and sacred art may thus be likened to the alpha and omega, for they confront each other in a complementary manner like the earthly Paradise and the heavenly Jerusalem. Each in its own way manifests the Inward in the outward, and each contributes to bringing about a return to the Inward within the soul.

What the symbolism and beauty of virgin nature and sacred art offer us is far from being reducible to "sensible consolations", as the theologians might say; this moralistic notion, which is concerned with sentimental subjectivity alone and which fails to consider the metaphysical transparency of phenomena, is much too outward and

superficial.² Earthly forms with a celestial character offer a great deal more than a merely passional satisfaction: there is something of the divine archetypes in them, which they manifest under the aspects of both truth and beauty. As “exteriorizations of the Inward”, they favor an “interiorization of the outward”, and in this way they retrace the function of Revelation and the *Avatāra*, which is to “descend” in order to “raise”, to divide in order to unite, to become human in order to deify.

* * *

It is impossible for a “lover of God” not to have an instinctive love for virgin nature, that mirror of Heaven; his love for it is not exclusive, however, since as we have seen he also loves—in principle—the sanctuaries made by man; and his love for the solitude of nature and sanctuaries is again not exclusive since he also loves the company of saints³—men whose tendencies converge upon inwardness and who are firmly established in an Inward that is already divine.

Under normal—and normative—conditions, conjugal love synthesizes the elements “virgin nature”, “sanctuary”, and “spiritual company”, for man himself combines these three elements.⁴ If sexuality can be rejected because of its aspect of “outwardness” or “exteriorization”, it can also be integrated into the “love of God” because of the quality of inwardness that belongs to man as such and to union as such; Islam emphasizes the second perspective, Christianity the first. ✦

² Only the prodigious insufficiency of this notion can explain why people accept art as opaque as that of the Renaissance and the Baroque—art devoid, in other words, of all transparency and alchemy—let alone present-day aberrations, where a truly infernal formalism no longer has anything to do even with the order of “sensible consolations”

³ This is what Hindus call *satsanga*, a word that signifies an “association” with the “ascending quality” (*sattva*) or “being” (*sat*)

⁴ This is why it can be said in Islam that “marriage is half the religion” If in Christianity marriage is a sacrament, it is not simply for the sake of procreation, which pertains to this world, but also—more esoterically—for the sake of love as such, which is celestial in essence and which possesses in principle an interiorizing virtue, as is indicated by the very idea of “God-Love”

Virgin nature is the art of God, and sacred art springs from the same divine Source; solitude is the gateway to inwardness, and spiritual company represents a collective solitude and an interiorization through mutual influence. This proves that spiritual attitudes are never really privative limitations or prejudices; they are always realized on the plane of what seems to be their opposite, which means that every village and town is normally the extension of a sanctuary and should remain such and that every human collectivity is normally a spiritual association and should therefore realize "collective solitude" by being the vehicle of an interiorizing tendency.⁵

It is also important to distinguish between the quality of inwardness proper to specific outward phenomena and an inward or interiorizing way of looking at all things: the first point of view is objective and the second subjective, but neither affects the validity of the other; indeed nothing is more false than to pretend that since only the "spirit" counts all things must be of equal worth in all respects; this amounts to maintaining that the qualities of things have no sufficient reason or effectiveness. But in fact the things we choose should be in conformity with the love of God as far as possible, and we should then seek to realize this love—this is the second phase—within the context of whatever is imposed upon us by our destiny; on the basis of the necessary distinctions, a man can always achieve integration or synthesis and thus a transcendent indistinction; without this basis, however, non-differentiation is simply confusion, stupidity, or hypocrisy—even pride—and one would be justified in preferring the attitude of the ordinary man, composed as it is of natural attractions and aversions.

The problem of the "love of neighbor" is obviously contained within that of the "love of God" inasmuch as the first is essentially an exteriorized aspect of the second: charity between men retraces in the "outward dimension" something of the "inward dimension"; the crucial importance of this charity results from a certain complementarity between "God in the Inward" and "God in the world" or from the fact that there must be an equilibrium between the outward and

⁵ Islam seeks to realize precisely this by making each man a priest and each home a mosque and by plunging all social existence into the sea of religion without leaving room for any purely profane element.

the Inward. To express this somewhat differently: one cannot enter the inward dimension through egoism; now to transcend oneself in order to meet God is to see oneself—and in a certain manner God—in others; conversely, to strive to see oneself in others in the name of Truth is to contribute powerfully to contemplative interiorization. In the absence of other men—in the case of a hermit, for example—the ego of the contemplative becomes the ego as such, and in this way it includes all individualities; its deliverance is virtually that of all believers, whence a sort of analogical magic, which scatters its invisible blessings like dew.

What we have said may be summed up as follows: there is a relatively inward outwardness, and this is the ego, which is made up of images and desires and which is thus the world transposed into the “I”; in the same way there is an outward inwardness, and this is everything in the world that reflects the Inward. The ego itself, as a subjective kernel or individual “heart”, is an “inward outwardness” insofar as it is hardened and consequently immersed in the world, but it is an “outward inwardness” if it melts in response to the attraction of the divine Center and plunges its roots therein.

* * *

Love of God depends essentially on faith: without the intrinsic integrity of faith, love cannot be real. There are many possible kinds of concentration—pride too involves a sort of contraction—but there can be no spiritual interiorization without the objective and intellectual element that is truth.

Interiorization depends on metaphysical discernment, on the idea of the absolute and the infinite; it would obviously be better to stop short at this idea than to concentrate without it and thus fall into a trap a thousand times worse than the pure and simple distraction of the neglectful believer. It is truth that removes all taint of egocentricity from self-withdrawal; it is truth that neutralizes the ego by introducing into contemplative alchemy a taste of death, in conformity with the saying: “Whosoever will save his life shall lose it.” *Amor Dei* is at the same time *mors Deo*; the analogy between love and death is nowhere more real than in the presence of God.

* * *

“Women, perfumes, and prayer”: these three things, according to a famous *hadith*, “were made worthy of love” for the Prophet. Here we have an example of how “spiritual magic” may operate by means of analogy: woman, synthesizing virgin nature, the sanctuary, and spiritual company, is for man what is most lovable; in a certain respect she represents the projection of merciful Inwardness in barren outwardness, and in this sense she assumes a function that is sacramental or quasi-divine.⁶ As for “perfumes”, they represent non-formal qualities, as does music—we could easily say that perfume is the music of silence—which means that side by side with the formal projection of Inwardness there is also a complementary non-formal projection. As for “prayer”, the third element mentioned in the *hadith*, its function is precisely to lead from outward to Inward and to consecrate and transmute the values of the outward realm.

Thus one can see that the ternary contained in this Muhammadan saying is in no way arbitrary or worldly, which is what people think who are ignorant of Oriental symbolism in general and the Islamic perspective in particular; on the contrary it provides a perfectly homogeneous doctrine, one founded not on a moral or ascetical alternative⁷—this should go without saying—but on the metaphysical transparency of phenomena.⁸ Moreover one could clarify the nature of the three elements of this ternary by means of the notions—listed in the corresponding order—of “beauty”, “love”, and “sanctity”; beauty and love are what reflect the Inward in the outward world, and sanctity or the sacred is what establishes a bridge—leading in both directions—between the outward and inward planes.

These considerations—or even simply the notion of “loving God”—lead us to a related question having to do with the connection between the divine Person and our capacity for love: what is the

⁶ It is not by chance that in Arabic and other languages the theophanies bear feminine names, such as *Barakah* (the radiant and protective “Benediction”), *Sakinah* (the “Real Presence”), *Haqiqah* (the esoteric “Truth”), *Layla* (the liberating “Night” of *Gnosis*)

⁷ Principle: to realize God it is necessary to reject the world since it leads us away from God in so many ways

⁸ Principle everything having a natural and positive character is compatible with spirituality, at least in principle if not always in fact, no natural or positive thing leads us away from God by its very nature, it does so only insofar as this fault is imposed by our own attitude

meaning, someone might ask, of the masculine character attributed to God by the Scriptures, and how can a man—the male—accord all his love, which is naturally centered on woman, to a divine Person who seems to exclude femininity? The answer is this: the masculine character of God in Semitic monotheism does not mean that divine Perfection could possibly exclude the feminine perfections, for this is unthinkable; it simply means that God is totality and not a part, and this totality has the human male as its image, whence his primacy with regard to woman—a primacy that is either relative or nonexistent in other respects; it is of course important to understand that the male is not a totality in the same way God is and that woman is not a part in some absolute manner, for each sex, being equally human, shares in the nature of the other.

If each of the sexes constitutes a pole, God can be neither masculine nor feminine, which means that it would be a mistake for language to reduce God to one of two reciprocally complementary poles; but if on the contrary each sex represents a perfection, God cannot but possess the characteristics of both, though active perfection always takes priority over passive perfection. Whether one likes it or not, the Blessed Virgin assumes in Christianity the function of the feminine aspect of Divinity, at least in practice and in spite of every theological precaution; this observation is not intended as a criticism, for the fact in question has a positive significance. In Islam as well as in Hinduism it is sometimes said that man is feminine in relation to God; but from another point of view the doctrine of the divine Names implies that Divinity possesses all conceivable qualities and that human qualities that are distinctively feminine necessarily have their origin in these archetypes. "All that is beautiful comes from the Beauty of God," says a *hadīth*; Muslims readily affirm the link between beauty and love and show little inclination to dissociate these two elements, which for them are simply two faces of one and the same reality; to say beauty is to say love, and conversely. The *hadīth* we just quoted contains the whole doctrine of the earthly implications of the love of God, together with this other *hadīth*: "God is beautiful, and He loves beauty"; here is the very doctrine of the metaphysical transparency of sensory things.

These observations do not mean that a contemplative man needs the help of sensations, for countless examples of a deliberately ascetic holiness prove otherwise; nonetheless the sensory world does offer

a certain category of contemplatives the benefit of secondary or concomitant supports for realization, and this follows from the very nature of things since the world must in fact manifest divine qualities; in doing so, however, it renders them ambiguous, and this means that the very same factors may either elevate a man or cast him down depending on his nature and the objective and subjective conditions of the sensory experience.

There can be no spirituality without asceticism or without renunciation and detachment, and there can be no spirituality that does not involve the acceptance of at least some positive support from sensory things; the difference is one of partial—never total—emphasis, and yet it is sufficient to allow us to distinguish between an exclusive standpoint and an inclusive standpoint within the human sector.

We have mentioned the ambiguity with which universal qualities are invested when they are manifested in earthly phenomena; taking our stand on the positive term of the alternative—by virtue of which a thing that manifests inwardness possesses in principle an interiorizing quality—we would conclude by saying this: everything in the world around us that implies our love for God or our choice of the “inward dimension” is at the same time an implication of the love God bears toward us or a message of hope from the Kingdom that is within us.

Understanding and Believing

It is commonly accepted that a man can believe without understanding; people are much less aware of the opposite possibility—that one can understand without believing—and it may even appear to be a contradiction since faith does not seem necessary except for those who do not understand. But hypocrisy is not merely the dissimulation of a person who pretends to be better than he is; it also appears as a disproportion between certainty and behavior, and in this respect most men are more or less hypocritical since they claim to accept truths they only feebly practice. On the plane of simple belief, to believe without acting on one's belief corresponds—on the intellectual plane—to an understanding that is devoid of faith and life; for real belief means identifying oneself with the truth one accepts, whatever the level of this adherence. Piety is to religious belief what operative faith is to doctrinal understanding or—we may add—what sanctity is to truth.

If we begin with the idea that spirituality contains essentially two factors, namely, discernment between the Real and the illusory and permanent concentration on the Real—the *conditio sine qua non* being the observance of traditional rules and the practice of the accompanying virtues—we shall see that there is a relationship between discernment and understanding on the one hand and between concentration and faith on the other; whatever its degree, faith always means a sort of existential participation in Being or Reality; to make use of a fundamental *hadīth*, it is “to worship God as if thou sawest Him, and if thou seest Him not, yet He seeth thee”. In other words faith is the participation of the will in the intelligence: just as a man adapts his action on the physical plane to the conditions determining its nature, so also on the spiritual plane he should act in accordance with his convictions, and he should do so by inward activity even more than outward activity, for “before acting one must be”, and our being is nothing other than our inward activity. The soul should be to the intelligence what beauty is to truth, and this is what we have called the “moral qualification” that must accompany the “intellectual qualification”.

There is a relationship between faith and symbol; there is also one between faith and miracles. In the symbolic image as in the miracu-

lous fact, it is the language of being, not of reasoning, that speaks; man must respond with his own being to a manifestation of being on the part of Heaven, and this he does through faith or love—these are two aspects of one and the same reality—though without in this way ceasing to be a creature who thinks. Practically speaking, one might wonder what basis or justification there could be for an elementary faith that is disdainful, or nearly so, of any attempt at comprehension; but we have just provided the answer, namely, that such a faith is based on the illuminating power that belongs in principle to the symbols, phenomena, and arguments of Revelation:¹ the “obscure merit” of this faith consists in our not being closed to a grace for which our nature is made. On the human side there is room for differences regarding modes or degrees of receptivity as well as intellectual needs; these needs do not in any sense mean that the thinking man lacks faith; they merely show that his receptivity is sensitive to the most subtle and implicit aspects of the divine Message; now what is implicit is not the inexpressible but the esoteric, and this has a right to be expressed.² We have already drawn attention to the relationship between faith and miracles; in fact perfect faith consists in being aware of the metaphysically miraculous character of natural phenomena and therefore in seeing the trace of God in them.

The fault of unbelief or absence of faith does not therefore lie in a natural lack of special aptitudes, nor is it due to the unintelligibility of the Message, for then there would be no fault; it lies in a passional stiffening of the will and in the worldly tendencies that bring this about. The merit of faith is fidelity to the “supernaturally natural” receptivity of primordial man; it means remaining as God made us and remaining open to a Message from Heaven that might be contrary to

¹ These are the “signs” (*āyāt*) of which the Koran speaks, which may even be natural phenomena envisaged in light of the revealed doctrine. It should be pointed out that the insensibility exhibited by those who believe in an intrinsically orthodox religion toward the arguments of another religion does not in any sense come into question here since the motive for refusal is in this case a positive factor, namely, an already existing faith that is valid in itself.

² It goes without saying that the implicit is to be found even on the plane of the literal meaning, but this mode of instruction causes practically no problems and is not at issue here.

earthly experience but incontestable in light of subjective as well as objective criteria.³

It is related that Ibn Taymiyyah,⁴ when coming down from the pulpit after a sermon, once said: "God comes down from Heaven to earth as I am coming down now";⁵ there is no reason to doubt that he meant this to be taken literally—with a literalism defying all interpretation—but his attitude nonetheless has a symbolic value independent of his personal opinions: the refusal to analyze a symbol with discursive and separative thought—in order to assimilate it directly and as it were existentially—does in fact correspond to a possible perspective and one that is therefore valid in the appropriate circumstances. We see here a coincidence between "blind faith" and an attitude that is at once its opposite and its analogue, namely, the assimilation of truth through a symbol and by means of the whole soul, the soul as such.

* * *

As a quality of the soul, faith is the stabilizing complement of the discerning and as it were explosive intelligence; without this complement, intellectual activity—not pure intellection—lets itself be carried away by its own movement and is like a devouring fire; it loses its balance and ends either by consuming itself in an irresolvable restlessness or simply by exhausting itself and becoming sclerotic. Faith implies all the static and gentle qualities, such as patience, gratitude, confidence, generosity; it offers the mercurial intelligence a stabilizing element and thus achieves—together with discernment—an equilibrium that

³ To say that Abraham and Mary had the merit of great faith means that they were sensible to divine criteria despite the apparent impossibility of the Message; this means also that the men of old were by no means credulous, if we may be allowed to make this remark in a context that clearly goes beyond the level of ordinary humanity, since we are speaking of prophets.

⁴ Arab theologian of the thirteenth century, Hanbalite by origin, and the protagonist of an extreme exoterism.

⁵ With reference to the *hadīth* of "the Descent" (*al-Nuzūl*) "Our Lord—Blessed and Exalted be He—cometh down each night unto the earthly heaven (*al-samā' al-dunyā*) when the last third of the night yet remaineth, and He saith Who calleth upon Me that I may answer him? Who asketh of Me that I may give unto him? Who seeketh My forgiveness that I may forgive him?"

is like an anticipation of sanctity. In Islam the complementary terms “blessing” (or “prayer”, *salāh*) and “peace” (or “greeting”, *salām*) are applied to this polarity at its highest level.

We would like to stress again that an intellectual qualification is not fully valid unless accompanied by an equivalent moral qualification; this is what explains all the fideist attitudes, which seem bent upon limiting the force of intelligence. The supporters of tradition (*naql*) pure and simple during the first centuries of Islam were deeply conscious of this, and Ashari himself must have sensed it—although it took him in the opposite direction since he ventured onto the plane of theological reasoning—when he attributed to God an unintelligibility which, in the final analysis, could signify only the precariousness of man’s intellectual resources before the dimension of absoluteness.

One can meditate or speculate indefinitely on transcendent truths and their applications; this in fact is what we ourselves do, but we have valid reasons, and it is not for ourselves that we do it. Indeed one can spend a whole lifetime speculating on the suprasensory and the transcendent, but all that matters is the “leap into the void”, which is a fixation of the intelligence and soul in an unthinkable dimension of the Real; this leap, which in itself cuts short and completes a chain of formulations that is in principle endless,⁶ depends on a direct understanding and a grace, and not on having reached a certain phase in the unfolding of doctrine, for this unfolding—we repeat—has no logical end. This “leap into the void” we can refer to as “faith”; it is the negation of this reality that gives rise to every philosophy that is simply an “art for art’s sake” and to all thought that believes it can attain an absolute contact with Reality by means of analyses, syntheses, arrangements, filterings, and polishings—thought that is mundane because of this very ignorance and because it is a “vicious circle”, which not only provides no escape from illusion but even reinforces it through the lure of a progressive knowledge that is in fact nonexistent.⁷

⁶ Without this completion there would be no such thing as doctrines since doctrines are by definition forms, delimitations, mental coagulations

⁷ A valid doctrine is a “description”, and its author—basing himself on a direct and supramental knowledge—is therefore under no illusion as to its inevitable formal limitations, on the other hand a philosophy that claims to be a “research” is a mere nothing, and its apparent modesty is no more than a pretentious negation of true wisdom,

we must write—by virtue of our vocation—may lead to a degree of negligence or carelessness regarding the form and even the value of arguments as well as to a corresponding insensibility to these things; the extreme opposite would be a meticulous logic devoid of any inspiration—treating things from the outside with neither sufficient knowledge nor a “mandate from Heaven”—and this is the case with philosophy in the current sense of the word. Given all its dialectical risks, inspirationism is a two-edged sword—in principle if not always in fact—but it is understandable in the case of Semites of the nomadic type, who with their prophetic mentality are as if suspended from the divine Word as it descends from Heaven.

Quite apart from any question of Western incomprehension, it seems to us that most of the things in Oriental texts that seem arbitrary, absurd, and “unreadable” are to be ascribed to inspirationism, positively or negatively as the case may be; and when the cause is positive, this is because there really is inspiration. Semitic revelationism and Aryan intellectionism: from these are derived respectively inspirationism and objective dialectic, then imperturbable fideism and a critical sense, and finally—at an extreme limit, which is excessive and disproportionate—the blind automatism of religious moralism and a philosophical logic devoid of all normally human intuition and thus much more aberrant than the moralism. This asymmetry between two opposed but in a certain sense complementary extremes is explained by the fact that there is an inequality between their positive sources, namely, Revelation and Intellection or objective and formal religion and immanent and supraformal religion; since the supraformal is the quintessence of the formal, its weakening in human consciousness results in counterfeit and perversion—*corruptio optimi pessima*—whereas the most unintelligent fideism does not in principle cut itself off from either truth or grace. This allows one to understand the fideists’ condemnation of the philosophical point of view, even when they are wrong in detail; they reject truths that are in fact inaccessible to them, but in doing so they condemn a tendency.

We are well aware in saying this that many arguments could be turned against us to invalidate our thesis, which is only an approximation; but it is a necessary approximation, without which important phenomena that are troubling at first sight would remain unexplained and might even seem inexplicable—unless they were explained in the most erroneous manner, as has happened in fact, or were concealed

In adopting the alchemist's distinction between a "dry path" and a "moist path", the first corresponding to "knowledge" and the second to "love", it is important to realize that the two poles "fire" and "water"—to which these paths correspond—are both reflected in each path, so that "knowledge" necessarily contains an aspect of "moisture" and "love" an aspect of "dryness".

Within the framework of a path of love, "dryness" or "fire" is doctrinal orthodoxy, for it is common knowledge that there can be no spirituality without the implacable and immutable bulwark provided by a divine expression of salvific Truth; in an analogous and yet opposite fashion, "moisture" or "water"—the feminine aspect, which is derived from the divine Substance (*Prakriti*, the *Shakti*)—is indispensable to the path of "knowledge" for the obvious and already mentioned reasons of equilibrium, stability, and effectiveness.

As for comparing the quality of "knowledge" with fire, this comparison cannot perfectly and exhaustively account for the nature of the metaphysical intelligence and its realizational activity: apart from its qualities of luminosity and ascension, fire in fact includes an aspect of agitation and destructiveness, and this aspect—the very one that the fideist opponents of *kalām* have in mind—proves that "knowledge-fire" is not self-sufficient and therefore has an imperative need for "knowledge-water", which is none other than faith, together with all its stabilizing and soothing virtues.⁸ Even the most penetrating intelligence, if it relies too much on its own strength, runs the risk of being abandoned by Heaven; forgetting that the knowing Subject is God, it closes itself to the divine influx. Any thought that is ignorant of metaphysical and mystical truths is profane,⁹ but so also is any thought that knows these truths well enough in theory and yet approaches them in a disproportionate way, that is, without a sufficient adaptation of the soul; unlike the first kind of thought, the second is not profane by definition, but it is so secondarily or morally, and it leaves itself seriously open to error, for man is not merely a mirror: he is a

⁸ "There is no lustral water like unto knowledge," says the *Bhagavad Gītā*; in this case water, not fire, is related to *jnāna*.

⁹ "Metaphysical" concerned with universal realities considered objectively. "Mystical" concerned with the same realities considered subjectively, that is, in relation to the contemplative soul insofar as they enter operatively into contact with it.

complex and fragile cosmos. The connection—often affirmed by tradition—between Knowledge and Peace shows in its own way that in pure intellectuality the mathematical element is not everything and that fire by itself could never be the symbol of intellectuality.¹⁰

The combination of the two principles “fire” and “water” is none other than “wine”, which is both “liquid fire” and “igneous water”;¹¹ liberating intoxication comes precisely from this alchemical and as it were miraculous combination of opposite elements. Wine, not fire, is thus the most perfect image of liberating *gnosis* considered not only in its total amplitude but also in the equilibrium of its virtual modes, for the equilibrium between discernment and contemplation can be conceived at every level. Another image of this equilibrium or concordance is oil; it is moreover through oil that fire is stabilized and becomes the calm and contemplative flame of the lamps in sanctuaries. Like wine, oil is an igneous liquid, which “would almost glow forth (of itself) though no fire touched it,” according to the famous Verse of Light (*āyat al-Nūr*).

From a certain elementary point of view, there is a connection between the emotional path of “warriors” and water, which is passive and “feminine”, just as there is a connection between the intellectual path of “priests” and fire, which is active and “masculine”; but it is abundantly clear—we would stress this again—that water has a sacerdotal aspect of peace and that fire has a warlike aspect of devouring activity, and that each path necessarily contains a “dry” pole and a “moist” pole.

¹⁰ Shankara describes “inward Wisdom”—with which he identifies himself—as “That which is the stilling of mental agitation and the supreme assurance . . . That which is the pool Manikarnika . . . That which is the Ganges”; each of these images refers to water not fire. Islam for its part associates coolness, the color green, and streams with Paradise.

¹¹ When the American Indians called alcohol “fire-water”, they were expressing a profound truth without knowing it: the alchemical and quasi-supernatural coincidence of liquidity and combustion. According to the *Bṛhadāranyaka Upanishad* and the *Shatapatha Brāhmana*, the divine Fire (*Agni*) is engendered within the undifferentiated Self (*Ātmā*) by the tension between igneous Energy (*tejas*) and the Water of Life or Elixir (*rasa*); *Agni* is “churned” and “born of the Waters”, or “born of the Lotus”, he is the Lightning hidden in celestial Waters

All of these considerations bear upon the problem of the relationships between speculative intelligence and faith: faith is a pure and calm “water”; intelligence is an active and discriminating “fire”. To say that water is pure amounts to saying that it has a virtual quality of luminosity and that it is therefore predisposed to be a vehicle for fire and to be transmuted into wine, as at the marriage in Cana; when considered with regard to its possibilities, water is a virtual wine since it already possesses luminosity because of its purity and in this sense is comparable to oil; like wine, oil is igneous by its very nature, but at the same time it does not correspond exactly to wine except when combined with the flame it feeds, whereas wine has no need of any complement to manifest its nature.

* * *

It follows from all we have said that faith and intelligence can each be conceived at two different levels: faith as a quasi-ontological and pre-mental certitude ranks higher than the discerning and speculative aspects of intelligence,¹² but intelligence as pure intellection ranks higher than a faith that is no more than a sentimental adherence; this ambivalence is the source of numerous misunderstandings, but it also makes possible an exo-esoteric language that is both simple and complex. Faith in its higher aspect is what we might call *religio cordis*: it is the “inward religion” that is supernaturally natural to man and that coincides with *religio caeli*—or *perennis*—that is, with universal truth, which is beyond the contingencies of form and time. This faith needs little to be contented: unlike an intelligence that favors exactness but is never satisfied in its play of formulations—passing from concept to concept, from symbol to symbol, without being able to settle on any—faith of the heart is capable of being satisfied by the first symbol

¹² This higher faith is completely different from the irresponsible and arrogant informality so characteristic of the profane improvisers of Zen or *jnāna*, who seek to take short cuts by stripping themselves of the essential human context of all realization, while in the East—and in the normal conditions of ethical and liturgical ambience—this context is largely supplied in advance. One does not enter the presence of a king by the back door.

that providentially comes its way and of living on it until the supreme Encounter.¹³

The faith in question, which we have called *religio cordis*—the subjective and immanent side of *religio caeli*—includes two poles, which conform to the distinction between the “dry” and “moist” paths; they are represented in northern Buddhism by Zen and *Jōdo* respectively. Both turn away from verbal comprehension, the first to plunge into our very being and the second to plunge into faith: for Zen, truth must coincide with reality, which is our existential and intellectual substratum; whereas for *Jōdo*, truth-reality is attained in perfect faith—in abandonment to universal Substance, which is Mercy and which appears to us in a given Sign or Key.¹⁴

The spiritual dimension symbolized by wine or intoxication is represented in *Mahāyāna* by the union of the two poles *Vajra* (“Lightning” or “Diamond”) and *Garbha* (“Matrix”)—or *Mani* (“Jewel”) and *Padma* (“Lotus”)—or by the conjunction between expressed Truth (*Upāya*) and liberating Knowledge (*Prajñā*); the “great Bliss” (*Mahāsukha*) resulting from the union of the two poles evokes the Beatitude (*Ānanda*) of *Ātmā*, in which “Consciousness” (*Chit*) and “Being” (*Sat*) meet. According to its most outward meaning, this directly or indirectly sexual symbolism expresses the equilibrium between mental knowledge and virtue; on this basis the equilibrium may be between doctrinal investigation and spiritual practice or between doctrine and method. All these modes can be brought back to the confrontation between “knowing” and “being” or between intellectual objectification and volitive or quasi-existential participation, or we might say between a mathematical or architectural dimension and an ethico-aesthetic or musical dimension, taking these terms in the most comprehensive sense they can bear and keeping in mind that phenomena have their roots in the divine order. It is true that

¹³ In the lives of saints, the spiritual career is often inaugurated by an outward or inward incident that precipitates a particular and definitive attitude in the soul with regard to Heaven, the symbol in this case is not the incident itself but the positive spiritual factor the incident serves to bring out

¹⁴ In Amidism faith is ultimately based on an intuition of the essential Goodness of the Absolute, which is divinely “Other” in relation to the existence-bound subject, in Zen, on the contrary, what we call “faith” is based on an intuition of the essential reality of our “Self”, our subjective, transpersonal, and nirvanic Essence

from a certain point of view the element “being” is more than a complement: it combines the elements “knowing” and “willing”, and in this case it represents the synthesis of sanctity underlying the polarity “intelligence-beauty”, which brings us back to the symbolism of love and wine and to the mystery of faith coinciding with *gnosis*.

The cult of a goddess, of a *Shakti* or *Tārā*—of a “Lady”, one might simply say—may indicate the predominance of a perspective of love or a dogmatic and methodic *bhakti*, but it may just as well be a sign, within the very perspective of *gnosis* or *jnāna*, that emphasis has been placed on the element “faith” in the higher sense of the term, the sense considered by Zen and *Jōdo*, precisely, the first according to the “dry path” and the second according to the “moist path”. This is also what Ibn Arabi meant—and in his case there can be no doubt that the perspective was that of *gnosis*—by the “religion of love”, which he identified with *al-islām*, the essential conformation of the intelligence and soul with the divine nature, beyond forms and oppositions.

The Servant and Union

The Imam Abu al-Hasan al-Shadhili said: "Nothing removes man further from God than the desire for union with Him." This statement may seem surprising at first, coming from someone who was one of the great proponents of esoterism in Islam; but everything becomes clear once it is understood that it refers to the ego and not the pure Intellect. Indeed the "servant" (*abd*) as such can never cease to be the servant; therefore he can never become the "Lord" (*Rabb*); the polarity "servant-Lord" is irreducible by its very nature, for the nature of the servant or creature is in a certain sense the sufficient reason for divine intervention under the aspect of Lord. Man cannot "become God";¹ the servant cannot change into the Lord; but there is something in the servant that is capable—though not without the Lord's grace—of surpassing the axis "servant-Lord" or "subject-object" and of realizing the absolute "Self". This Self is God insofar as He is independent of the "servant-Lord" axis and every other polarity: while the Lord is in a certain manner the object of the servant's intelligence and will, and conversely, the Self has no complementary opposite; it is pure Subject, which means that it is its own Object, at once unique and infinite, and innumerable on the plane of a certain diversifying relativity. *Māyā*, which breaks up and diversifies both Subject and Object, is not opposed to the Self, of which it is simply an emanation or prolongation in illusory mode; and this mode proceeds from the very nature of the Self, which implies the possibility—through its Infinitude—of an "unreal reality" or conversely an "existing nothingness". The Self radiates even into nothingness and lends it—to express oneself provisionally in a more or less paradoxical manner—its own Reality, which is made of Being, Consciousness, and Life or Beatitude.²

¹ Although formulations of this kind are sometimes encountered, they are elliptical and not meant to be taken literally. When Saint Irenaeus and others speak of "becoming God", they have in mind the Essence, which means that they place themselves intellectually outside the polarity in question; no doubt they also have in mind—and perhaps even a *prion*—an indirect or potential union that is nonetheless already a kind of participation in Union in the advaitic sense.

² This is the Vedantic ternary *Sat, Chit, Ānanda*. In using the word "Being" we do not mean the sole ontological Principle—which is *Īshvara* and not *Sat*—but

Thus the way of Union does not at all mean that the servant as such is united with the Lord as such or that man comes to the point of identifying himself with God; it means that that something in man—beyond his individual outwardness—which is already potentially and even virtually divine, namely, the pure Intellect, withdraws from the “subject-object” complementarity and resides in its own transpersonal being, which, never entering into this complementarity, is none other than the Self. To the objection that the Self is an object of human intelligence and therefore fits perfectly into the “subject-object” polarity, it must be answered that only the notion of the Self is such an object and that the existence of this notion proves precisely that there is in the human mind something that already is “not other” than the Self; it is by virtue of this mysterious inward connection with the Self that we are able to conceive of the Self objectively. If this something *increated et increabile* were not within us,³ it would never be possible for us to escape from the “servant-Lord” polarity in the center of our being.

Monotheistic theology, like the doctrine of the *bhaktas*, is in fact strictly bound up with this polarity; it is therefore unable to surpass it, and for this reason theology will always reduce the Intellect to an aspect of the servant; its general and as it were “collective” language cannot be that of sapiential esoterism any more in the East than in the West. The Self is conceivable in a Christian climate only within the framework of a “theo-sophy”, for it is the element *sophia* that indicates an emergence from the domain of polarities and a surpassing of them; as for Muslims, they will not say that the Intellect (*aql*) is “uncreated” in its essence, but that the divine Intellect (*ilm*, “science”) takes possession of—or puts itself in place of—the human Intellect, which amounts to the same thing metaphysically; and this mode of expression is in conformity with the divine *hadīth* according

pre-ontological Reality, which is the complementary opposite of the pole “Knowing” (*Chit*). Instead of *Chit* Sufis would say *ilm* (“Science”) or *Shuhūd* (“Perception”), the second term being the equivalent of the Vedantic *Sākshin* (“Witness”), for *Sat* they would say *Wujūd* (“Reality”) and for *Ānanda*, *Hayāt* (“Life”) or *Irādah* (“Will”, “Desire”).

³ *Et hoc est Intellectus* (Eckhart). “God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life” (Genesis 2:7).

to which "I (Allah) will be the ear by which he shall hear, the sight by which he shall see".⁴

* * *

It would be completely wrong to speak of the Lord "and" the Self, for God is One. If we speak of the Self, there is neither servant nor Lord: there is only the Self alone, possible modes of which are the Lord and the servant, or what are so called from a certain standpoint; and if we speak of the Lord, there is no Self in particular or different from the Lord; the Self is the essence of the Lord of the worlds. The "Attributes" (*Sifāt*, in Arabic) of the Lord concern the servant as such, but the "Essence" (*Dhāt*) does not.

It follows that man can speak to the Lord but not realize Him and that he can realize the Essence or Self but not speak to it; with regard to the Self, there is neither opposite nor interlocutor, for the Self or Essence—let us repeat—is entirely outside the axis "Creator-creature" or "Principle-manifestation", although in this relationship it appears hidden within the Creator; but it does not concern us as creatures or servants, and we are unable to attain it on the plane of this polarity, apart from the possibility of conceiving it, a possibility granted by the Lord by virtue of the universal nature of our intelligence and the universality of the Self. In other words, if we are able to attain the Self outside this polarity, it is solely by the will of the Lord and with His help; the Self cannot be realized in defiance of the Lord or in defiance of the relationship "Lord-servant". Or again: although the object of unitive realization is the supra-ontological Essence and not the Lord, it cannot be achieved without the Lord's blessing; and although the true subject of this union is the suprapersonal Intellect and not the servant, it cannot be brought about without the servant's participation.⁵

⁴ "In Eternity", declares the Sufi Abu al-Hasan Kharaqani, "man shall see God with divine eyes", and again "I have neither body, nor tongue, nor heart, only God, and God is in me" And let us mention also the saying of Bayazid (Abu Yazid al-Bastami) "'I and Thee' signifies duality, and duality is an illusion, for Unity alone is Truth [*al-Haqq* = "God"] When the ego is gone, God is His own mirror in me "

⁵ Bayazid. "The knowledge of God cannot be attained by seeking, but those who seek it find it "

The ego, which is “accident”, is extinguished—or becomes absolutely “itself”—in the Self, which is “Substance”. The path consists in withdrawing the intelligence into its pure “Substance”, which is pure Being, pure Consciousness, pure Beatitude.

* * *

The subject of the realization of the Self is strictly speaking the Self as such: the essence of the servant “returns” to the Essence of the Lord by a cosmic detour through a sort of “divine respiration”; this is why it has been said that “the Sufi is not created” or again that the process of union (*tawhīd*) is “a message from Him by Him to Him”.⁶ Realization of the Essence or Self is achieved not so much by the servant as through the servant; it comes about from God to God through man, and this is possible because, in the perspective pertaining to the Self—which has no opposite and of which *Māyā* is an emanation or “descent”—man himself is a manifestation of the Self and not some sort of opposite located on a separative axis. “There are paths going from God to men,” states Abu Bakr al-Saydlani, “but there is no path from man to God”; this means not only that the servant is unable to attain the Lord but also that the path of Union is not traveled by the servant as such;⁷ on the other hand, when Abu Bakr al-Shibli affirms that “in the realization of God there is a beginning to be savored but not an end”, he is referring on the one hand to the irruption of Grace as experienced by the servant and on the other hand to the Essence, which is itself infinite and therefore cannot be compared with the initial and fragmentary experience of man.⁸

⁶ Dhu al-Nun al-Misri: “True knowledge is knowledge of the Truth through the Truth just as the sun is known through the sun itself.” “The true knower (*ārif*) exists not in himself but by God and for God” “The end of knowledge is that man comes to the point where he was at the Origin.” Bayazid: “He who knows God by God becomes immortal.”

⁷ Junayd: “The Sufi is someone who comes to have no [personal] attributes and meets God.”

⁸ Bayazid: “The knower receives from God as reward God himself.” “Whoever enters into God attains the truth of all things and becomes himself the Truth [*al-Haqq* = od]; it is not a cause for surprise that he then sees in himself, and as if it were he, everything that exists outside God.” Similarly, Shankaracharya: “The *yogin*, whose intel-

As we have said, there is no confrontation between a Principle and a manifestation from the standpoint of the Self; there is nothing but the Self alone, the pure and absolute Subject, which is its own Object. But—it will be asked—what then becomes of the world, which we cannot help still perceiving? This question has already been answered to some extent, but it will perhaps be useful to enlarge upon this crucial point: the world is *Ātmā*—the Self—in the guise of *Māyā*; more especially it is *Māyā* insofar as *Māyā* is distinct from *Ātmā*, which goes without saying, for otherwise the verbal distinction would not exist; but while being *Māyā*, it is implicitly and necessarily *Ātmā* in much the same way that ice is water or is “not other” than water. In the Self in the direct or absolute sense, there is no trace of *Māyā*—except the dimension of infinitude, to which we have referred and from which *Māyā* indirectly proceeds—but *Māyā* is “not other” than the Self at the degree of *Māyā*;⁹ it is not the servant, for the polarities are surpassed. *Māyā* is the reverberation of the Self in the direction of nothingness,¹⁰ or the totality of the reverberations of the Self; the innumerable relative subjects “are” the Self under the aspect of “Consciousness” (*Chit*), and the innumerable relative objects are once again the Self but this time under the aspect of “Being” (*Sat*); their reciprocal relationships—or their “common life”, if one wishes—constitute “Beatitude” (*Ānanda*), but in a manifested mode, of course; this Beatitude is made up of everything in the world that is expansion, play, or movement.

According to the perspective “servant-Lord”, as we have said, the Essence is implicitly “contained” in the ontological Principle—whence the infinite Majesty of that Principle¹¹—but this is the mystery of all mysteries and in no way concerns us; in order to illustrate more clearly the diverse angles of vision included in the science of the supernatural, the perspective of discontinuity or separativity may be represented by

ligence is perfect, contemplates all things as dwelling in himself, and thus he perceives by the eye of Knowledge that everything is *Ātmā*”

⁹ This is why it is said in *Mahāyāna* that *samsāra* “is” *Nirvāna*

¹⁰ Nothingness cannot exist, but the “direction toward” nothingness does exist, and indeed this observation is fundamental in metaphysics

¹¹ The “Personal God” is in fact none other than the personification of the Essence

a system of concentric circles—or polygons, if one prefers¹²—which are so many isolated images of the center. We have seen that according to the perspective of the Self, everything “is” the Essence and that if we nonetheless establish a distinction on this plane—as our existence obliges us to do—it is between the Essence as such and the Essence as “I” or “world”;¹³ this is the perspective of continuity, of universal homogeneity or immanence, represented by such figures as the cross, the star, the spiral; in these figures the periphery is attached to the center, or rather the whole figure is simply an extension or development of the center; the entire figure is center, if one may put it this way, whereas in the figures with discontinuous elements the center is for all intents nowhere since it is without extent.

What then is the practical consequence of these affirmations as far as our spiritual finality is concerned? Just this: if we consider the total Universe in connection with separativity, according to the axis “Creator-creature”, no union is possible, unless it is a union of “grace” that safeguards or maintains the duality; but if we consider the Universe in relation to the Unity of the Essence or Reality—that is, in relation to the homogeneity and indivisibility of the Self—union is possible since it “pre-exists”, and separation is only an illusory “fissure”. This “fissure” is the mystery, not the union,¹⁴ but it is a negative and transitory mystery, an enigma that is an enigma only from its own point of view and within the limits of its subjectivity; it can be resolved intellectually and with all the more reason ontologically.¹⁵

* * *

¹² In this case the dimensions or constitutive structures of the worlds and microcosms would be taken into account, not just their existence.

¹³ Pantheism is the error of introducing the nature of *Ātmā-Māyā* into the polarity “Lord-servant” or denying this polarity on the very plane where it is real.

¹⁴ For Vedantists *Māyā* is in a sense more mysterious, or less obvious, than *Ātmā*

¹⁵ The intellectual solution is the notion of contradictory or privative possibility, a possibility necessarily included in All-Possibility or in the very nature of Infinity. It would be absurd to object that this notion is insufficient since anything more adequate belongs to the order of “being”, not “thinking”

Since Paradise affords perfect beatitude, how and why would anyone desire anything else or anything more, namely, a realization that transcends the created and reintegrates the individual accident in the universal Substance? To this question, which is justifiable in certain psychological cases, we respond that it is not a question of choosing this and scorning that but of following our spiritual nature as God has willed it or of following grace in the manner in which it concerns us; it is impossible for the born metaphysician—the *pneumatikos*—not to accept the consequences implied by the scope of his intelligence: man follows his “supernatural nature” insofar as it is inalienable and with the help of God, but man as servant will take what the Lord grants him. It is true that Sufis, in order to emphasize the absolute transcendence of supreme Union, have not hesitated to describe Paradise as a “prison” and to make use of other metaphors of the kind,¹⁶ but they have also called this Union the “Paradise of the Essence”,¹⁷ an expression that has the advantage of conforming to scriptural symbolism; in this case the word “Paradise” or “Garden” becomes synonymous with “supernatural beatitude”, and though it specifies no degree of reality, it also implies no limitation.

The question mentioned above might be answered equally well by pointing out that it is impossible to assign limits to the love of God; it is therefore unreasonable to ask why a given soul, possessing

¹⁶ For Bayazid, “The true knowers are the ornaments of Paradise, but for them Paradise is a place of torment.” Or again: “Paradise loses its value and brightness for one who knows and loves God”, a statement possessing an impeccable metaphysical logic since from the standpoint of happiness, as in every other respect, there is no comparison between the created and Uncreated. The verbal audacities encountered in Bayazid and others are justified by a persistent concern to escape from all inconsistency and “hypocrisy” (*nifāq*), and basically they do no more than follow the line of the great Testimony of Islam: “There is no God if it is not the only God”; despite its positive aspect of “nearness” (*qurb*), the “Garden” is not God; there is therefore a negative element of “remoteness” (*bu’d*) in Paradise. Moreover Bayazid provides the key to his language when he specifies that “the love of God is what causes thee to forget this world and the beyond”, and in a similar way Ibrahim ibn Adham counsels renunciation of both; in the same spirit, Abu Bakr al-Wasiti expresses the view that “a devout person who seeks Paradise intends to accomplish the work of God, but he accomplishes only his own”, and again, Abu al-Hasan Kharaqani charges us to “seek the Grace of God, for it surpasses alike the terrors of hell and the delights of Heaven”.

¹⁷ Or “Garden of Quiddity” (*Jannat al-Dhāt*).

an intuition of the Essence, tends toward the Reality it senses through the existential darkness; such a question is empty of meaning not only in relation to the “naturally supernatural” aspirations of the gnostic but also on the plane of the affective mystic, where the soul aspires to everything it can conceive above itself and to nothing less. It is obviously absurd to wish to impose limits on knowledge: the retina of the eye catches the rays of infinitely distant stars; it does so without passion or pretension, and no one has the right or power to hinder it.

The Nature and Function of the Spiritual Master

The Vedantic ternary *Sat*, *Chit*, and *Ānanda* can serve as a key in considering a wide variety of topics; here it will be applied to the spiritual master, not because there is no other way of approaching this subject, but because it provides in this connection an especially appropriate means of access. Indeed the master represents and transmits: first a reality of being (*Sat*), second a reality of intelligence or truth (*Chit*), and third a reality of love, union, happiness (*Ānanda*).

The element "being", without which the master would be as if deprived of reality or existence, is the religion to which he belongs and by which he is mandated, or else a spiritual organization within the framework of this religion; the religion, or the esoteric cell that sums it up and offers us its essence, confers upon man the "being" without which there can be no concrete and effective path. The function of the founders of religion is to restore to fallen man his primordial "being"; the first condition of spirituality is to be virtually "reborn" and thus to realize the quasi-ontological basis of the two constituent elements of the path, namely, discernment or doctrine on the one hand and concentration or method on the other.

Representing *a priori* a "substance" or "being", *Sat*, the spiritual master is *a posteriori* and on this very basis the vehicle of an "intellection" or "consciousness", *Chit*, by which is to be understood a providential doctrine determining the tone or style of every subsequent formulation. It needs to be stressed that this doctrine depends on Revelation, in the direct and plenary sense of the word, and that its orthodox ramifications therefore have a quality of absoluteness and infinitude that makes all recourse to extraneous sources unnecessary, although it is certainly possible for formulations originating in such a source to be extrinsically adopted by a given master and integrated into the perspective he incarnates insofar as they are mentally compatible with the dogmatic or mythological system in question. A noteworthy example of this is provided by the Neoplatonic concepts adopted by Sufis or by Christianized Aristotelianism; it would be wrong to see a form of syncretism here, for the foreign concepts are accepted only because they can be assimilated, and they can be assimilated only because of their inward concordance with the tradition in question, and because Truth is one. Another aspect of this issue of intellectu-

ality is infallibility: the master is in principle infallible with regard to the revealed doctrine he represents, and which he even personifies by virtue of his “being” or “substance”; but this infallibility, which is not unconnected with grace, is conditioned by the equilibrium between spiritual science and virtue or between intelligence and humility.

Thus the master must realize the ternary “being”, “discernment”, “concentration”: by “being” must be understood “new substance”,¹ “consecration”, or “initiation”; by “discernment” we mean the truth that distinguishes between the Real and the illusory or between *Ātmā* and *Māyā*;² and by “concentration” is to be understood the method that allows the “consecrated” contemplative to fasten himself, at first mentally and later with the center of his being, upon the Real, the self-evidence of which we carry within ourselves. As a reality of union and thus of “love” and “bliss”, this fastening corresponds analogically and by participation to the element *Ānanda* in the Vedantic ternary.

The importance in spirituality of what may be called the existential element results from the principle that it is impossible to approach God or the Absolute or the Self without the blessing and aid of Heaven: “No man cometh unto the Father, but by me” (Christianity), and “no one will meet Allah who has not met His Messenger” (Islam); “he that gathereth not with me scattereth abroad,” and “without me ye can do nothing” (Christianity); and “ye will not, unless Allah willeth” (Islam). This *conditio sine qua non*, whose central elements are first and foremost “consecration” and “orthodoxy”—which we have connected respectively to *Sat* and *Chit*—explains why a spirituality deprived of these bases can only end up as a psychological game without any relation to the unfolding of our higher states.

Since the profane man is “nonexistent” from the point of view at issue here, the master gives him “spiritual existence” by affiliation or consecration; next he gives him doctrine—or “intelligence” if one prefers—and finally he gives him “life”, that is, a spiritual means pertaining to the element “concentration”. Now these means, which are an engagement “unto death”—for in order to “live” inwardly one must “die” outwardly—are essentially a gift from the master and Heaven, for otherwise they would be lacking in the indispensable

¹ “Put on the new man,” says Saint Paul.

² Or between *Nirvāna* and *samsāra* in Buddhist terms.

Grace; doubtless there have been very exceptional cases in which other modalities came into play, but these have always involved persons whose sanctity guaranteed purity of intention and protected the spiritual means from any profanation.³

In a word, we can make use of a spiritual means only if we enter into a concrete and solemn engagement, thereby acknowledging that Heaven disposes of us according to its good pleasure; and this engagement is irreversible: the way is one of no return.

* * *

As a guide for the disciple's personal path—which is always inscribed within the general path traced out by divine authority through tradition—the spiritual master becomes in a sense a continuation of the disciple's ego. Every spiritual alchemy involves an anticipated death and therefore also losses of equilibrium or periods of obscurity, in which the disciple is no longer fully master of his "self"; he is no longer completely of this world nor yet of the other, and his experience seems to call into question all the existential categories of which we are as if woven. In these "trials" and the "temptations" accompanying them—for lower *Māyā* or the downward quality (*tamas*) takes advantage of the slightest fissure—the spiritual master plays the role of "motionless center": he brings objective, immutable, and incorruptible truth to bear in opposing the temptation of giving rational form to irrational troubles. The same is true with regard to temptations of the opposite kind, when the disciple, submerged by some contemplative state beyond his usual reach—and such a state may only be accidental and is not a proof of any realization—may think that he has become superhuman to some degree; in this case lower *Māyā*—or the devil, which here amounts to the same thing—will not fail to suggest to the disciple that he should declare himself master or give way to some other pretension of this kind. The case is rather like that of a drunken man, who no longer perceives the true proportion of things; the master for his part has realized "sober drunkenness",

³ The seeds of sanctity are fear of God and a sense of the sacred, at the very least. It must be recognized that these qualities are totally absent from the general mentality of "our time", all criticism of which is taboo.

his human substance being adapted to his spiritual state, for mastery is precisely “keeping a cool head”—but without the least pretension—within the beatific experience. All that has just been said shows clearly that faith is an indispensable quality in a disciple; without faith there is no spiritual continuity and thus no traversing of “hells”, nor any possible victory over the ego.

In a certain sense *gnosis* transcends and abolishes faith, but only when faith is understood as a quasi-moral acceptance of revealed truths and not a concrete presentiment of the Inexpressible; certainly *gnosis* is a “vision” and not a “thinking”, but it is so only in a certain respect, for it never completely does away with the veil separating the earthly creature from pure Being.⁴ Understood in this way, faith—the *shraddhā* of the Hindu *chela*—is a necessary element of spiritual development; faith in the master is of the same order insofar as he incarnates the knowledge to be attained.⁵ The master, being a living man and not a logical demonstration, relates moreover to precisely that element of non-fixation and limitlessness that is present everywhere in the cosmos and is indispensable for the subjective actualization of theoretical data.

The above clearly shows that spiritual mastership is a very special function and that it is therefore false to describe every teaching authority as a “spiritual master”. The functions of “doctor” and “master” often coincide, but it is also possible for them not to do so in the same person; the master does not necessarily write treatises, but he always possesses a sufficient doctrinal authority.⁶

* * *

The spiritual master is not obliged to reveal all his knowledge nor all the graces he has received; here is the whole problem of secrecy and

⁴ To think otherwise is to misinterpret certain ellipses in sacred teaching.

⁵ Sri Shankara: “My refuge is neither my mother nor my father, nor my children nor my brothers, nor anyone else. May my supreme refuge be the foot my *guru* has placed on my head” (*Svātmanirūpana*, 146, 148)

⁶ The case of a saint with the quality of a *Pratyeka-Buddha* (Buddhism) or a *Fard* (Islam) should be remembered here, he has no spiritual posterity properly so called but nonetheless acts by his presence.

asymmetry,⁷ or of inward limitlessness and the laws of life. On the one hand a plant needs an invisible element, its roots, and on the other hand it manifests the potentialities of this element in a way combining strictness with play or the determinate with the indeterminate; a spiritual teaching should not aim to fully unveil or expend the truth that inspires it nor to give it the implacable and exhaustive form of a mathematical equation. One must not seek to introduce a quasi-absolute element of conclusiveness, hence of petrification and sterility, into the very expression of truth; strictly speaking, this is no doubt an impossibility, but it is certainly possible to express a doctrinal teaching concerning the most intimate aspects of the spiritual life—as distinct from generalities or concomitances—with a prolixity having no relation to the recipient's power of concrete assimilation; this is condemned traditionally as creating a disequilibrium between doctrine and method. In other words theoretical teaching must not exhaust in advance the capacities for awareness it aims to awaken in the disciple; the disciple needs light, but he also needs an element of obscurity that will act as a leaven in connection with the light received and that will help him release the element of light he carries within his own substance; instead of "obscurity" we might also say "generative disequilibrium", for which the *kōans* of Zen Buddhism doubtless provide the best example.

Verbal demonstrations are certainly indispensable, but the symbol—with its power of direct, total, and unlimited suggestion and its double function of unveiling (re-velation) and veiling—retains all its rights in the subsequent phase of contemplative realization. We should also mention teaching by sign or gesture: where the spoken word is insufficient, the master makes a "gash" in the soul of the disciple, marking it with the red-hot iron of the pure symbol; this sign, which may well coincide with a humiliation, is meant to release the necessary awareness in the disciple and at the same time to actualize the corresponding virtue. One must take care not to fall into either extreme: one must neither despise words, which are venerable when

⁷ According to an old adage, presumably Chinese, "He who knows ten must teach only nine." But this law of the secret also concerns the disciple as a contemporary Hindu master has observed, "The *sādhaka* must not reveal his spiritual experiences except to his *guru* or a saint "

they are what they ought to be—otherwise man would not possess the gift of speech—nor imagine that one can do everything with them; here as always wisdom consists in putting everything in its proper place. God instructs the collectivity *a priori* by the revealed Word, but He instructs the individual *a posteriori* by destiny; this principle is reflected in a particular way in every spiritual method.

* * *

A question arises that has often been debated: can the function of a spiritual master extend beyond the boundaries of a given religion? This cannot be ruled out categorically, but it is nevertheless a very precarious possibility because of the high degree of spirituality it demands on the part of the master as well as because of the difficulty with which he may be faced in assessing facts situated in a traditional world other than his own; moreover, in such a case he would act as the vehicle of a foreign *barakah*, and this presupposes a spirituality concretely transcending the world of forms; it is necessary to add the word “concretely”, because universalist verbiage is one thing and realization of the Essence is another. In a case of this kind there must also be a sufficient reason of overriding significance: such reasons do exist accidentally, as is shown for example in the relationship between the young Ibrahim ibn Adham and the monk Symeon, a master of *gnosis*, and as indicated in a passage in “The Life of the Russian Pilgrim”, which acknowledges that in the absence of a *starets* a seeker may receive instruction “even from a Saracen”, with the help of Heaven. Such an encounter is conceivable only if the two parties are in full conformity with their respective traditions, for the Christian must be really Christian and the Muslim really Muslim, however paradoxical this may seem in view of the spiritual communion to be established between them;⁸ since it is necessary for their mutual understanding to be based on more than a philosophical abstraction, it must incorporate points of departure that are extrinsically and provisionally separative,

⁸ The situation may appear in a somewhat different light in the case of Hindus and Muslims in India. In our day, however, modernistic influences seriously compromise the advantages of the spiritual climate of India.

not because they are separative or exclusive but because they guarantee a true intuition of unity by their intrinsic veracity.

This seeming paradox is comparable to the paradox involved in our relationship with the Infinite: this relationship cannot be unitive without first having been separative or, to be more exact, without being separative at its base and in our individual consciousness, for there is at once an order of succession and a parallelism; the most accomplished gnostic or the perfect *jnānin* "prostrates himself at the feet of Govinda", which implies a separation. From a more contingent point of view, the station of unity means that a sage has transcended the level of forms and hence also of doctrinal formulations; while these formulations are sacred and always remain valid in their own sphere, it is to be noted that this station is not dependent upon a master's being informed about a given religion other than his own; in this particular connection the state of union does not imply a *de facto* attitude but a capacity in principle.⁹ This means that the spiritual master must manifest both the particularity of the form and the unity of the spirit while taking into account the nature of their different levels; he must conform to holy separation at the base so as to be able to realize holy union at the summit;¹⁰ one can reach this summit only by first perceiving the element of unity in the revealed form itself and by loving this form as a quality of the Non-formal. For every sacred form is *Shūnyamūrti*, "Manifestation of the Void".

* * *

Since the very term "spiritual master" often gives rise to disproportionate and ill-sounding associations, it may be useful to say a few words on the question of hierarchical differences; all told, the misconceptions, whether serious or slight, are simply another form of the very common error which, analogically speaking, assimilates the

⁹ The inward and essential knowledge of a theologically exclusive Muslim may be infinitely closer to the Christic mysteries, for example, than is the mental and sentimental universalism of a profane despiser of "separatist dogmas"

¹⁰ "When one has attained [perfect] Love, one must not despise social rules [institutions and rites], but rather conform to them [without attachment to their fruits]" (*Nārada Sūtra*, 62).

circle to the sphere on the pretext that both figures are round; this is a type of error found in the most diverse domains, but above all in history and psychology. One of two things: either we apply the term "spiritual master" to the founders of religion, in which case the term can no longer be applied to the sages who succeed them and who are not prophets in the proper sense of the word, or else it is the sages whom we call "masters", in which case it would be improper to use the term "spiritual master" to refer to such beings as the founders of religion—or the *Avatāras* of Vishnu—for this would be a tautology, undermining their supereminent dignity by comparing them with their representatives. For a similar reason it might also be asked whether *mutatis mutandis* the qualifier "master" is appropriate for the greatest of these representatives, such as Christ's Apostles, since their greatness is proven by the fact that they alone were the direct disciples of the "Word made flesh" and that they participate instrumentally in the Revelation;¹¹ this scruple is entirely legitimate in the present context, but there are also reasons that permit one to disregard it in certain cases, as we shall see.

In comparing a Benedictine master or abbot—of the fifteenth century, for example—with Saint Benedict, and then comparing the latter with Saint John, we obtain a sufficiently clear picture of the principal degrees, not of spiritual mastery in itself, but of its manifestation in breadth, for it is important not to confuse what might be called the cosmic function with inward knowledge; certainly the most eminent saint or sage is always in possession of the "greater" or the "whole" by virtue of his traditional position, but a less eminent sage does not necessarily represent something "less" with regard to his inward reality, although even on this level there are relationships of "dimension" or "breadth" to be taken into account in favor of the most glorious figures of the traditional "iconostasis". This factor is of special importance when the figure concerned incarnates a non-supreme mode of spirituality, as is the case for someone like Ramanuja or Confucius—the function of Confucius, incidentally, being greater than that of Ramanuja—since one might be tempted to place these

¹¹ On the one hand Saint John is not Christ, and on the other hand no Christian mystic could equate himself with the author of the Fourth Gospel and the Apocalypse. The relationship between the Prophet, his son-in-law Ali, and the Sufis is similar

eminent figures below a *jnānin* of lesser breadth; this would be an optical illusion, especially in the case of the Chinese revealer, whose inward reality necessarily and immensely transcended the role assigned to him by Providence.

Be that as it may, in comparison with the worldly and profane—and from their standpoint—every true master is quite close not only to the great teachers of “apostolic” rank, but even to the founding *Avatāra*, and this is a compensatory truth that allows us to appreciate more fully the cult of the master in India and elsewhere. The cosmic breadth of the *Avatāra* and his direct extensions obviously presupposes spiritual perfection, but conversely this perfection does not imply the cosmic rank of the very greatest, whence the disparities that have been mentioned.

It is doubtless not always possible or even necessary to avoid every ambiguity—to settle the question, for example, of whether there is a real difference between the “apostolic” degree of someone like Nagarjuna and certain later but particularly eminent manifestations, such as Padma Sambhava in Tibet and Kobo Daishi in Japan, who may be said to represent central reverberations of the spiritual Sun in a new world;¹² but it is always possible and even necessary in other cases to take factual evidence and traditional opinion into account in order to show respect for the irreplaceable majesty of divine manifestations.¹³

But these considerations must not cause us to lose sight of the compensatory truth just mentioned: namely, that every spiritual master—by his knowledge and function and by the graces attached to them—is mysteriously identified with his prototypes and, both through them and independently of them, with the primordial Prototype, the founding *Avatāra*. At the level of this synthesis, it could

¹² Saint Francis of Assisi and Saint Bernard are similar cases, for the first was “adopted” directly by Christ and the second by the Virgin.

¹³ One of the worst abuses is the presumption of “psychologically” analyzing an *Avatāra*, basing oneself on deeds and gestures, when in fact one is in the presence of an order of greatness that completely eludes profane investigation. It may be noted that Ramakrishna often used the term *Avatāra* in a wide sense, including all the avatic modes—“total”, “partial”, “major”, and “minor”—and in this he is hardly to be blamed, not only because he clearly defined in his teaching the transcendent nature of the “God-Man”, but also because he himself was effectively situated within the “divine Ray”.

even be added that there is but one sole Master and that the various human supports are like emanations from Him, comparable to the rays of the sun, which communicate one and the same light and are nothing without it.

The Delivered One and the Divine Image

Iconoclasm is not a new phenomenon in India: from the beginning of modern times there have been Hindus—or supposed Hindus—who no longer wished to understand the true role of their sacred images; it seems that a serious consideration of this issue is often eclipsed by a concern to escape superficial and humiliating or even insulting accusations and to conform to a moralism that is all the more oppressive for being insuperably conventional. We are not thinking here of those who fully adopt a traditional perspective that excludes images in the name of a particular mental approach to the Absolute, such as the perspective of Islam; Muslim objections to images are certainly not justifiable directly or objectively—that is, from the Hindu point of view—but they are justified indirectly or subjectively insofar as they are linked to a spiritual attitude of “abstraction”; when this attitude is fully conscious, the “temple of idols”—to use the words of Ibn Arabi—may symbolize a “heart” sheltering the divine realities.¹

Moreover, had it not been for Arabian idolatry and the memory of Mesopotamian and Mediterranean idolatry, Islam could have shown itself less exclusive in principle; what counts, however, is the intrinsic value of its attitude, which is to be found—methodically as well as incidentally—even in the heart of those civilizations most given to figurative symbolism.² Be that as it may, our criticism of iconoclasm is obviously not aimed at a particular traditional perspective, but at those

¹ The following *hadīth* furnishes the key to a universality that is limited by no question of form: “In the thought of my servant, I (Allah) am what he thinks I am. Let him then meditate (on Me) according to his highest aspirations!” This *hadīth* may be compared to the following passage from the *Bhagavad Gītā*: “Whatever [Divine] form a believer seeks to worship with faith, I [Krishna-Vishnu] make his faith unwavering. Moved by such faith, he [the believer] engages in worship of that form, and thus he attains the fruits he desires and that I have ordained for him” (7 21-22). What this means is that God renders firm a man’s faith to the extent that it is sincere, which it can hardly be in just any perspective; the chances of sincerity diminish in proportion to the degree of intrinsic heresy.

² Cistercians and Zen Buddhists are examples of this in a relative sense. On a profane level, which may exist *de facto*, Islam more or less tolerates images that “do not cast a shadow”—in other words, paintings—as long as they do not portray God or the face of the Prophet.

who submit, should the occasion arise, to an influence incompatible with the tradition to which they belong—in this case the tradition of Hinduism, for it is of Brahmanical India we wish to speak; and we are thinking less of Muslim influence—since in this regard it is fairly slight outside of pure and simple conversion—than of Western influence, which alone carries with it a “civilizing” reproach and a Protestant “angelism”³ and which alone creates a corresponding psychological complex. Whatever may have been the influence of Islam in various Hindu spheres in the past, Hindu iconoclasm of the twentieth century is indisputably the result of modern inspiration, whence precisely its half-scientific, half-puritanical flavor.

In this mental climate there is an opinion that seems to have been accepted as a sort of self-evident truth in all too many spiritual circles in India, namely, that the presence of one who is “delivered in this life” (*jīvan-mukta*)⁴ in an *āshram*⁵ can render superfluous or even intolerable the presence—and even more so the worship—of sacred images, even when one of those images is that of the divine Prototype to whom the “delivered one” belongs, whether by his method or even by right of “Incarnation”. This attitude would be warranted if it resulted from a purely methodic exclusion motivated by an advaitic viewpoint—just as the replacement of ritual prayers by a single, quint-essential orison can be justified on such a plane—but as soon as the rejection of images begins to take on the air of religious ostracism or rationalistic reflex, it is quite obviously inadmissible in a society possessing a sacred art with a figurative style.

With regard to the object, the true function of sacred images is to represent a transcendent Reality both symbolically and sacramentally, and with regard to the subject it is to promote a habitual concentration on this Reality by means of a mental fixation on the symbol, a process that can be conceived in a devotional as well as an intellectual mode or in both ways at once.⁶ In connection with the question of one

³ Catholics and Orthodox Christians, though they are not opposed to the veneration of images, naturally reject the form it takes in Hinduism; here it is a question not of principle but of content.

⁴ Really or supposedly, but this is not the question here

⁵ A sort of hermitage, where a *guru* lives and where disciples and pilgrims gather

⁶ “Although Vishnu is the inner soul of all that exists, he nonetheless humbles himself

“delivered in this life”, we would add the following: in reality and by its own nature, a divine image is the complement of a holy man, and it is related in one way or another to the divine Prototype it materializes or sensorializes: if the saint “is Rama” in accordance with the pole of *Ātmā* corresponding to “Consciousness” (*Chit*)—that is, in accordance with the “inward” or subjective reality—the corresponding sacred image will be identified with Rama in accordance with the pole “Being” (*Sat*), or in accordance with the objective aspect of reality, since the two manifestations, both the inward and the outward, coincide in “Beatitude” (*Ānanda*), which is the third element of *Ātmā*; for both the saint and the divine image manifest Rama, hence Divinity. The element “Beatitude” is what directly produces the spiritual manifestation, for “Beatitude” transposes the Divine into the phenomenal world, and by means of what one might call its dynamic character it sets “in motion”⁷—or causes to “shine”—the static poles of the Self, which are “Being” and “Consciousness”.⁸

Some may object that the body of the one “delivered in this life” manifests the “divine form” or the aspect “Being” and that this corresponds to the “Consciousness” realized by the sage, but it must be replied that the sacred image is much more truly the body of this “Consciousness” than the human body that incarnates it, or that is thought to incarnate it; only in the case of the great *Avatāras* themselves, such as Rama, Krishna, or the Buddha, does the body manifest *Sat* as directly as it does *Chit*, whence their superhuman beauty, charged with the supernatural, to which traditional accounts bear wit-

to enter into a ritual image (*archā*) Just as burning fire penetrates all things, though its power to burn is not perceptible and becomes plainly visible only when it is produced by the rubbing together of two sticks, even so Vishnu, who penetrates all, is not perceptible to the ordinary man but becomes visible in the symbol through the effect of the *mantra*. It is for this reason that one must adore Vishnu with all one’s heart by means of images made by human hands and in conformity with the prescriptions of the Sacred Books” (*Padma Tantra* 3:26, 2-7) According to the Eastern Church, an icon is not properly speaking a human work but rather a manifestation of the heavenly Model itself. The icon has been compared to a window from earth to Heaven and from Heaven to earth; the gold background of the paintings reflects the celestial aura, the luminous substance enveloping deified beings and thus recalling in certain respects the symbolism of the “light of Tabor”

⁷ For this is *l’Amor che muove il sole e l’altre stelle*, as Dante said

⁸ One can see the similarity between this doctrine and Trinitarian theology

ness. If a holy man or woman happens to possess physical beauty, this appearance is nonetheless of an entirely different order—if not in all, then at least in most cases—and within the framework here considered it in no way renders the devotional worship and contemplative use of the sacred image superfluous; features that are a necessary aspect of the *Avatāra* may be merely a contingent aspect of the spiritually realized man.

* * *

But in order for the image to truly serve as the body of the “delivered one”—in order for it to be *Ātmā* as he is or, more precisely, for it to be *Sat*, “Being”, even as he is *Chit*, “Consciousness”—it must conform to what may be called the cosmic laws of divine representation.

It is important to understand above all that the purpose of art is not *a priori* to provoke aesthetic emotions but to transmit, together with these emotions, a more or less direct spiritual message,⁹ hence influences emanating from—and leading to—liberating truth. Certainly art belongs by its very definition to the formal order, and perfection of form means beauty; to claim that art has nothing to do with beauty on the pretext that its immediate aim is spiritual is as false as the contrary, namely, that beauty is the exclusive aim of a work of art. Beauty essentially includes both a container and a content: the container is conformity to the laws of harmony or regularity of structure whereas the content is a manifestation of “Being” or “Knowledge”, or again of “Beatitude”—which brings us back to the ternary of *Ātmā*—or more precisely an unequal combination of these three elements; moreover these contents are what determine the container *a priori*. To speak of

⁹ Although profane art is not sacred art, it should nonetheless not be identified with anti-traditional art, it may fully respect at least the negative rules of universal art, and it may assume a function similar to sacerdotal art even while being much less central, there are in any case intermediate modes between sacerdotal and profane art. Let us add that an artist’s initially subjective preoccupation with a particular aesthetic value—if he has one—is in no way opposed to the profound function of art nor therefore to the spiritual perfection of the work, since all things are interrelated it goes without saying that aesthetic emotion may convey a spiritual intuition—as in the case of Ramakrishna—or even a truth the artist may not necessarily be conscious of but that is transmitted nonetheless

beauty "pure and simple" with a pejorative connotation is a contradiction in terms since it is impossible for beauty not to manifest truth or an aspect or mode of it; if sensory harmony "delivers" after its own manner and in certain conditions, it is because it is truth.

Let it be said in passing that certain theorists of art have arrived at the conclusion—worthy of Zeno of Elea—that the beauty of a beetle is not inferior to that of a man nor the beauty of a shed to that of a cathedral, and this is proclaimed on the pretext that everything perfect in itself and on its own level, or every work "well made", possesses all the beauty of which it is capable; in short it is assumed that beauty permits degrees only within the same order and not by virtue of the nobility or baseness of the order in which it manifests itself—a necessary manifestation in fact since beauty appears wherever there is the fulfillment of a possibility, regardless of how inferior it may be. This is to forget—from an excess of zeal, no doubt—the nature or indeed the very notion of beauty: as we have already said, beauty is not only a matter of formal rectitude but also of content, and the content of beauty is its wealth of possibilities and its cosmic generosity, which means that there is a beauty that possesses or envelops and a beauty that bestows or overflows. Harmony of form is not merely the trueness of a square or triangle, as certain simplistic and frigid theories would have it; insofar as a form is all that it is capable of being, it is also—and essentially—the manifestation of an internal infinitude.

The first aim of sacred art is didactic, whether it is a pictorial catechism for use by the unlettered or a metaphysical or mystical doctrine suggested by symbols, and the two are by no means incompatible; sacerdotal art seeks to express a symbolism that is either simple or complex,¹⁰ and in doing so it transmits at the same time an influence of beauty, hence a "flowering"—inevitably so since its language is one of form; if it tried to seek visible harmony for its own sake, it would fall into arbitrariness and the individualistic and sterile impasse that constitutes naturalism. The error of naturalism is certainly not that it is blind to aesthetic qualities; the problem is that naturalism lacks a sufficient reason insofar as it takes itself for an end in itself—that

¹⁰ An image is simple to the extent that it represents a specific heavenly reality and complex to the extent that it includes—as may be the case—an entire constellation of symbols, which refer for example to various attributes or functions

is, insofar as it attributes glory to the artist or the sensory model alone—and it violates the rules resulting from tradition and from the nature of things.

Naturalism in art violates tradition because it is unaware that style is a providential discipline proceeding from a genius that is at once spiritual and ethnic and developing according to the laws of organic growth and in an atmosphere of contemplative piety, which is not in the least individualistic or Promethean; and it violates the nature of things in painting because it treats the plane surface as if it were a three-dimensional space and the immobility of the surface as if it could contain movement; and it does the same in sculpture because it treats inert matter as if it were living flesh and as if it were in motion, and it sometimes treats one material as if it were another without regard for the soul of each substance.¹¹ To paint is to recreate a vision by adapting it to a plane surface, any movement being reduced to its essential type, and to sculpt is to recreate a vision by adapting it to inanimate matter or a particular kind of matter, any movement being reduced to a particular phase that is as if static; at the same time it is to recreate the object rather than copying it or to copy it while recreating it according to an inner vision that is at once traditional and personal, or according to the life we project into it by virtue of our knowledge, or again according to the life it projects into us by virtue of its ontological and divine content.

All these considerations serve to underline the fact that in acting as a complement to one “delivered in this life” an image can be “divine” only if it is sacred in form and by virtue of its genesis; and this

¹¹ In a stylized painting such as an icon or Vishnuite miniature, the absence of three-dimensional vision and movement does not trouble us, for the painting presents itself as a painting precisely and not as a substitute for the objective world, it is not merely this or that but above all a work of art. In naturalistic art, by contrast, the objective accuracy of the drawing and subtlety of the shading intensify the absence of space and movement: the figures seem to be transfixed in a void without atmosphere. In statuary, where inert matter and immobility create a similar impression, the contrast between model and copy becomes intolerable and confers something spectral upon the work. Naturalism partakes of the nature of deception and magic, but the reaction against it, since it comes from below, leads to much worse aberrations that are truly perverted—with the exception of a few works, or categories of work, which nonetheless do not form a school.

means that one must be mindful of the spiritual and technical rules that tradition alone can guarantee.

* * *

Sometimes this concept of "image" can be understood in a larger sense, beyond the question of works of art: in the case of Sri Ramana Maharshi, for example, one could say that the sacred mountain of Shiva, Arunachala, served as a permanent symbol of the Principle, which was simultaneously "incarnated" in the sage and was thus his true body; on the other hand one could also say that the body of the Maharshi was a manifestation in human mode of Arunachala, the earthly *lingam* of Paramashiva. In much the same way it was possible for the disciples of Ma Ananda Moyi to consider her a human manifestation of the Ganges in its aspect of "Mother", which means that the atmosphere of devotion that grew up around this saint could coincide—in the absence of other supports—with the traditional worship of Mother Ganga. As for Ramakrishna, no doubt the image that represents him most suitably and is the most adequate for purposes of worship is the image of *Shakti*, not so much in her terrible aspect as in her aspect of beauty and maternal love, precisely as she appeared to the saint.¹²

It will perhaps not be out of place to mention an abuse that often accompanies iconoclasm: the disparagement of *Avatāras* in the interest of exalting living sages, even false ones. Wishing to highlight the worth or merits of a particular contemporary master, the disciple finds no better way of doing so than to affirm that the personage in question is superior to Shankara and even to Krishna or Vyasa, whose supposed

¹² "Kali is verily *Brahman*, and *Brahman* is verily Kali. It is one and the same Reality. . . . When it engages in these activities [of creation, preservation, and destruction], then we call it Kali or *Shakti*. . . . When there was neither creation nor the sun, moon, planets, and earth, and when darkness was enveloped in darkness, then the Mother, the Non-formal One, *Mahā-Kali*, the Great Power, was one with *Mahā-Kāla*, the Absolute. . . . *Shyāmā-Kali* has a somewhat tender aspect . . . She is the Dispenser of boons and the Dispeller of fear" (*The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* [New York, 1942]) "As the Mother, She [Kali] is no longer grim and fearful as in Her dance of death but appears to Her devotees in a majestic, gracious form full of sweetness and love, showering benediction upon all and opening up their understanding" (*Life of Sri Ramakrishna* [Calcutta, 1936])

limitations and whose no less imaginary demerits are then enumerated with an astounding lack of spiritual instinct, traditional knowledge, and sense of proportion; in prefaces or other texts devoted to *gurus* we have too often witnessed this sort of ignorance and presumptuousness in relation to spiritual ancestors who are infinitely, and as it were ontologically, superior to all that our own age can produce or offer and who cannot be equaled because of their very degree of cosmic manifestation. It must be said that this kind of abuse is especially typical of our century, where a belittling and degrading psychology is mingled with an incessant concern for demagoguery; notable in this connection is the singular incapacity of our contemporaries to imagine the Apostles, whose "simplicity" is confused with the kind one knows from ordinary experience and which is merely a type of vulgarity. People in India readily compare someone like Gandhi—who was not himself responsible for this—to the Lord Buddha, whereas in fact there is no comparison between them, to say the least.

But let us return to the question of images: on the plane of spiritual values no two things are more divergent than wisdom, which is inward, and art, which is outward; all the distance separating essence from form is between them. Nonetheless "extremes meet", and nothing is closer to wisdom and sanctity than sacred art or liturgy, in the widest sense of these terms, and this explains the value, which is in no way disproportionate, that traditional civilizations attach to these disciplines. The image of the Divine—and we are thinking here of sacred calligraphy as well as anthropomorphic representations¹³—is like the visible face of the Truth: in a language at once direct and multileveled, it renders transparent what spirituality hides in the depths of hearts.

The greatest of all miracles is theophany; in other words there is in reality only one miracle, from which all others are derived, and this is contact between the finite and the Infinite or the unfolding of the Infinite in the bosom of the finite. The divine image is a sacramental crystallization of this miraculous meeting, whence its lightning-like self-evidence, resembling that of the inward miracle.

¹³ Recalling also such categories of art as the Buddhist *mandala*, where geometry combines with calligraphy and in some cases with human figures.

Truths and Errors Concerning Beauty

Beauty has been rightly defined as the harmony of diversity, and a distinction has been made for good reason between beauty of form and beauty of expression as well as between the beauty of art and that of nature; similarly, it has very justly been said that the beautiful is distinguished from the useful by the fact that it has no purpose beyond itself or beyond the contemplation of which it is the object; from the agreeable by the fact that its effect surpasses mere pleasure; and finally from truth by the fact that it is grasped in immediate contemplation and not by means of discursive thought.¹ But it should not be maintained unequivocally—as some have done—that beauty of expression is always more important than beauty of form, for this is to underestimate form or possibly to overestimate the importance of the moral factor on the aesthetic plane. It is true that expression has priority over form when an interior beauty coincides with an exterior beauty, but the case is quite different when interior beauty is superimposed on ugliness, for then it belongs to the sphere of morality rather than to that of pure aesthetics; there is also good reason for thinking that expression takes precedence over form when a loss of beauty in one sense gives rise to a new kind of beauty, as may be the case with the elderly when age has simply transposed a pre-existing beauty onto another plane or even created physical beauty; we also acknowledge the primacy of expression in the artistic representation of living beings, where beauty is portrayed by means of a stylization far removed from nature and where form is not obliged to copy the specific beauty of life.²

But as a general rule form takes precedence over aesthetic expression—unless ugliness is accentuated in the expression—since the normative character of form, hence its regularity of substance and

¹ Truth in the current sense of the word—as a correspondence between a state of fact and our consciousness—is indeed situated on the plane of thought, or at least it applies *a priori* to this plane. As for pure intellection, its object is “reality”, of which “truth” is the conceptual clothing. But in practice the terms “reality” and “truth” usually merge into each other.

² Looked at in this way, all art is “abstract”, the stylized image is in effect a new being side by side with its living model, and it realizes in this way a beauty of an entirely different kind.

proportions, constitutes the prime condition of aesthetic value; for wherever harmony or balance are lacking in the form itself, beauty of expression no longer appears as a decisive factor on the level of sensible beauty, for this level is by definition that of formal perfection or truth in form. Beauty of soul can certainly enhance the beauty of the body—it can even assert itself so intensely that it submerges or extinguishes the bodily dimension—but it cannot simply replace the beauty of the body as though the body did not exist and did not itself have a right to the perfection that is its existential norm.

If it is wrong, on the basis of some favorable prejudice, to attribute beauty to things that are outwardly disharmonious, it is no less wrong to deny it—for similar but opposite reasons—to things that unquestionably possess it; one should say to oneself in the first case that ugliness is merely an earthly shadow and in the second case that beauty, even when its bearer is an unworthy creature, nonetheless praises the Creator and belongs to Him alone.

Moralists would no doubt maintain that the expression of a face is ugly when an individual gives way to the passions, even when his face is well proportioned; but this seemingly plausible opinion is in reality in serious danger of error, for the expression of those who are young is often beautiful thanks to the cosmic beauty inherent in youth; in this case it is youth itself that manifests beauty and not a particular creature who happens to be young. Passions readily assume the impersonal and innocent beauty of the forces of nature, but they are limiting and privative since we are intellectual creatures and not birds or plants; our personality is not restricted to bodily beauty or to youth, and it is not made for this lower world even though it is condemned to pass through it. It is for this reason that beauty and youth desert a man in the end; if he has identified himself with his body, he is then left with nothing except physical degradation, ugliness of greed and hardness of heart, the vanity of regrets, and the emptiness of a wasted life; but none of this has anything to do with beauty as such—the real beauty the man may have once possessed—any more than with the Creator, whose Beatitude this beauty reflected. However convenient these confusions may be from this or that self-interested point of view, attempts to moralize beauty and ugliness must be opposed.³

³ There are people who denigrate beauty because their favorite saint did not possess it or who adopt the opposite attitude and falsify the notion of beauty so as to require that their saint be beautiful; it is enough to know, however, that the saints are beautiful in

Another very widespread error—not moralist this time but relativist and subjectivist—suggests that beauty is no more than a mere question of taste and that the canons of aesthetic perfection vary according to country and period, or rather that the variations that in fact do occur prove the arbitrary and subjective character of beauty or of what has come to be called beauty. In reality beauty is essentially an objective factor, which we may or may not discern or may or may not understand but which like all objective reality or like truth possesses its own intrinsic quality; it thus exists before man and independently of him. Man does not create the Platonic archetypes; it is they that determine him and his understanding; the beautiful has its ontological roots far beyond all that a science restricted to phenomena can comprehend.

* * *

Beauty—even the beauty of a simple object, a modest flower, or a snowflake—suggests a whole world; it liberates, whereas ugliness as such imprisons; we say “as such” since compensations can always neutralize ugliness, even as beauty can lose all its prestige. Under normal conditions beauty evokes limitlessness as well as an equilibrium of concordant possibilities; in this way it reminds us of the Infinite and—in a more immediately tangible way—of the nobility and generosity flowing from the Infinite: a nobility that scorns and a generosity that gives unstintingly. There is nothing stingy about beauty as such; it contains neither agitation nor avarice nor constriction of any sort. ✦

The archetype of beauty, or its divine model, is the superabundance and equilibrium of the divine qualities and at the same time the overflowing of the existential potentialities in pure Being; in a somewhat different sense beauty comes from divine Love, which is the will to deploy and bestow itself—to realize itself in “another”—and this is why “God created the world by love”. The result of this Love is a totality that realizes a perfect equilibrium and beatitude and therefore constitutes a manifestation of beauty—the first such manifestation, in which all others are contained; this manifestation is the creation or

eternity and that ugliness, or something approaching it, can be a means of sanctification here below—as indeed beauty can, though in a different way

world, which contains ugliness in its disequilibria but which is beauty in its totality. The human soul achieves this totality only in holiness.⁴

Thus beauty always manifests a reality of love, deployment, limitlessness, equilibrium, beatitude, generosity; love, which is subjective, responds to beauty, which is objective, but at the same time beauty, which is deployment, springs from love, which is limitlessness, gift of self, or overflowing and which for this reason attains a kind of infinitude. Universal Substance—*materia prima*—is pure Beauty in Being; the creative Essence, which transmits to Substance the archetypes to be incarnated, is the divine Intelligence, which possesses Beauty as an eternal complement.

Because Beauty is essentially a deployment, it amounts to an “exteriorization” even *in divinis*, where the unfathomable mystery of the Self is “deployed” in Being, which in turn is deployed in Existence; Being and Existence—*Īshvara* and *Samsāra*—are both *Māyā*, but Being is nonetheless God whereas Existence is already the world. All terrestrial beauty is thus—by reflection—a mystery of love: “whether it likes it or not”, it is love congealed or music turned to crystal, while retaining on its face the imprint of its internal fluidity, beatitude, and liberality; it is measure in overflowing and contains neither dissipation nor contraction. Men are rarely identified with their beauty, which is merely lent to them and moves across them like a ray of light; only the *Avatāra* is himself this ray *a priori*: he “is” the beauty he “manifests” in his body, and this beauty is Beauty as such, the only Beauty there is.⁵

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Although taste does not create beauty, it nonetheless has a natural role to play since it indicates an affinity with some modality of the beautiful, though not with the beautiful as such; it is entirely possible

⁴ It is said that the *Buddhas* save by their radiant beauty as well as by other *upāyas*; now a *Buddha* or *Avatāra* synthesizes the entire universe in his person, and the beauty of the macrocosm is therefore his.

⁵ When the Psalmist sings, “Thou art fairer than the children of men” (Psalm 45:2), these words cannot but apply to the body of Christ, so also with regard to the Blessed Virgin: “Behold, thou art fair, my love, behold, thou art fair”; “Thou art all fair, my love; there is no spot in thee” (Song of Solomon 1 15, 4:7).

for an aesthetic ideal not to be embodied in a given object of our personal choice, and we know in such a case that our choice is not determined by a maximum of beauty but by a maximum of complementary typological kinship. Affinity, which determines the choice of a complement—hence a harmonious opposite—is explained by our *de facto* limitation to a given type, which by definition must exclude something; it is normal for a man to make choices that satisfy his need for equilibrium, plenitude, or perfection, but intellectually it is not legitimate for him to confuse what stabilizes his own nature or compensates for his limitations with perfection itself. It is psychologically possible to have tastes without objectifying them inappropriately, that is, without drawing the false conclusion that some particular form alone is beautiful or on the contrary that no form is beautiful in an objective sense.

Along the same line of thought, the claim that “the beautiful is the useful” is doubly false. In the first place, what determines the utility or purpose of an object in an absolute way if not the spiritual hierarchy of values, which is precisely what utilitarians entirely ignore? In the second place, if only the useful were beautiful, what would be the point of decorative art, which for thousands of years has been applied to tools everywhere, or of stylization, which transfigures crude objects and, being universal and immemorial, is natural to man? In a world that lives by the creation and perpetuation of artificial needs, the notion of utility becomes especially arbitrary;⁶ those who exploit this notion owe us at the very least some explanation not only of the ornamental arts we have already mentioned but also of the figurative arts as well as music, dance, and poetry, for they too are beautiful without being useful in a crudely practical sense. The arts should not be identified with either practical work or any kind of tool, and for this reason they go beyond the narrow sphere of the “useful”; even architecture and the art of clothing are almost nowhere reduced to pure and simple utility. We are not denying that a tool as such possesses, or can possess, a beauty arising from the intelligibility of its symbolism, nor are we maintaining that ornamentation or stylization are conditions of its aesthetic value; we are simply rejecting the claim

⁶ Too often things that some people call “useful” are anything but useful in their results. “Progress” is healing a paralytic while depriving him of his sight.

that the beautiful is the useful; what ought to be said is that the useful can be beautiful and that it is so to the extent that the tool meets a need, whether one that is simply normal and legitimate or exalted in the hierarchy of values and functions.

At the opposite pole from this utilitarian sophism is a second error, which paradoxically resembles the first in its exaggeration and intolerance and which, in keeping with the undulating pattern of so-called progress, has even contributed to its development;⁷ this is the error of "classical" and "academic" aestheticism. According to this prejudice, there exists a unique and exclusive canon of human and artistic beauty—an "ideal beauty"—in which beauty of form, content, and kind all coincide; now this third element is contestable if not wholly mistaken, for a "kind" comprises a whole scale of perfect types in direct proportion to the elevation of its rank, and though these types are diverse with regard to their mode they are aesthetically equivalent; there can therefore be no question of sifting through individuals in order to obtain a single ideal type, whether within humanity as a whole, where the point is self-evident since there are different races, or even within a single race since the races are complex. Canons of beauty are either a matter of sculptural or pictorial style or of taste and habit, if not of prejudice; in this last case they are more or less connected with the instinct of self-preservation of a given racial group, and the question is therefore one of natural selection, not of intelligence or aesthetics; aesthetics is an exact science and not the mental expression of a biological inevitability.

These general remarks apply *mutatis mutandis* to the whole domain of the beautiful, and they have a bearing even beyond this domain in the sense that there may be affinities—and a need for complementary compensations—on every plane of intelligence and sensibility, and notably on the plane of spiritual life.

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⁷ It has also provoked the art called "abstract", which proves once again that the "evolution" of the West consists in falling from one extreme into another. It is absurd to ridicule "academicism" in the name of the art currently accepted as "modern", all such judgments depend on fashion and have no objective criterion. Critics no longer use anything but wholly extrinsic pseudo-criteria, such as relevance or novelty, as if a masterpiece were a masterpiece for some reason outside itself.

It has been said that beauty and goodness are two faces of the same reality, one outward and the other inward; thus goodness is internal beauty, and beauty is external goodness. Within beauty it is necessary to distinguish between appearance and essence: from our perspective, to love beauty does not mean to be attached to appearances but to understand those appearances in relation to their essence and thus to be in touch with their quality of truth and love. To understand beauty in depth—and this is what beauty invites us to do—is to pass beyond the appearance and to follow the internal vibration back to its roots; when properly directed, aesthetic experience has its source in symbolism and not idolatry. This experience must contribute to union and not to dispersion, and it must bring about a contemplative and liberating dilatation and not a passional compression; it must calm and relieve, not excite and weigh down.⁸

Some people doubtless think that beauty, whatever possible merits it may possess, is not necessary for knowledge; to this we respond by saying first that, strictly speaking, no contingency is in principle indispensable to knowledge as such, but neither is any contingency completely separate from it; second that we live among contingencies, forms, and appearances and therefore cannot escape them, especially since we ourselves belong to this order; third that pure knowledge surpasses everything else in principle but that beauty—or the comprehension of its metaphysical cause—can in fact reveal many truths, thus contributing to the knowledge of someone who possesses the necessary gifts; fourth that we live in a world where almost all the forms are saturated with errors and that it would therefore be a great mistake to deprive ourselves of a “discernment of spirits” on this plane. It is not a question of introducing inferior elements into pure intellectuality but on the contrary of introducing intelligence into an appreciation of the forms among which we live, of which we are made, and which determine us more than we know. The relationship between beauty and virtue is most revealing in this connection: virtue is beauty of soul as beauty is virtue of forms; and the Angels or the *Devas* are not only states of knowledge but also states of beauty comparable to the phenomena we admire in nature or art.

⁸ Everything Saint Paul says in his magisterial passage on love (1 Corinthians 13) also applies—in a transposed sense—to beauty.

Under normal conditions, spiritual life is plunged in beauty for the simple reason that the environment is thoroughly traditional; within such a framework, harmony of forms is as ubiquitous as air and light. In worlds like those of the Middle Ages and the Orient man could not escape beauty,⁹ and the material forms themselves of every traditional civilization—buildings, clothes, tools, sacred art—prove that beauty is wholly unsought, which means that in such a civilization the question of seeking it does not arise; we could make a similar observation concerning virgin nature—the direct work of the Creator—which nothing can prevent from being beautiful and which is not so by chance. The aesthetic environment of traditional man plays an indirectly didactic role; it “thinks” on his behalf and furnishes him with criteria of truth, if he is capable of understanding them, for “beauty is the splendor of the true”; in short, a certain beauty that might be called “average” is part of the traditional man’s very existence; it is a natural aspect of truth and the good.

* * *

One could perhaps hold the opinion that the question of beauty is secondary from the standpoint of spiritual truth—this is at once true and false—but it is impossible not to see that beauty is strangely absent from an entire civilization, namely, the one that surrounds us and that tends more and more to supplant all the others. Modern civilization is in fact the only one that resolutely places itself outside the spirituality of forms or the joy of spiritual expression, and obviously this must have some significance; it is also the only civilization that feels the need to proclaim that its ugliness is beautiful or that beauty does not exist. This does not mean that the modern world in fact knows nothing of beautiful things or completely repudiates them—nor that traditional worlds know nothing of ugliness—but it produces them only in passing and relegates them more or less completely to the realm of luxury; the “serious” realm remains that of the ugly and

⁹ Nor ugliness insofar as it is part of life and truth; but then it is a natural ugliness carrying no suggestion of a diabolical profession of faith. One might say that natural ugliness is framed in beauty.

trivial, as if ugliness were an obligatory tribute to what is believed to be "reality".

Every normal civilization is "romantic" and "picturesque"—words that have a perfectly honorable meaning for us—and if in our day these terms are used in a pejorative sense, like "folklore" and other notions of this kind, it is because of the need people feel to console themselves as best they can and because of the temptation that always exists to make a virtue out of an inevitable misery. The same is true of "aestheticism": as long as it is not extravagant, it is sufficiently explained and justified by an elementary need for beauty or even—in certain cases—for intellectual satisfaction.

* * *

As we have said, beauty and goodness are two faces of the same reality, one of them "outward" and the other "inward", or at least this is so when these words are understood in their most ordinary sense; from another point of view, however, goodness and beauty are on the same level, and in this case their inward face is beatitude; and beatitude is inseparable from the knowledge of God.

"Extremes meet": it is therefore understandable that the notion of beauty, which is attached *a priori* to the appearance or outwardness of things, reveals for this very reason a profound aspect of what is situated at the antipodes of appearances; in a certain sense beauty reflects a more profound reality than goodness in that it is disinterested and serene, like the nature of things, and without purpose, like Being or the Infinite. It translates the inward release, detachment, and gentle grandeur that are proper to contemplation, hence to wisdom and truth.

To speak of "interior Beauty" is not a contradiction in terms: it is to place the emphasis on the existential and contemplative aspect of the virtues and at the same time on their metaphysical transparency; it is to accentuate their attachment to the divine Source, which by reverberation invests them with the quality of being an "end in themselves" or of majesty; and it is because the beautiful has this quality that it relaxes and liberates. Beauty is inferior to goodness as the outward is inferior to the inward, but it is superior to goodness as "being" is superior to "doing" or as contemplation is superior to action; and in

In this sense the Beauty of God appears as a mystery even more profound than His Mercy.

The Vow of Dharmakara

The notion of myth usually evokes a picture of traditional stories replete with a wealth of symbolism and more or less devoid of historical foundation; in defining myth, however, one should not lay too much stress on this supposed lack of a historical basis, for the function of myth is such that once it has been properly understood the question of historicity ceases to have any practical importance. What guarantees the spiritual function of a sacred story is its symbolism and traditional character: in the case of stories belonging to the *Mahāyāna*, it is the Buddha who ensures the reality and thus the efficacy of the story; if he does not absolutely guarantee the historical truth of the facts, at least he guarantees the certainty of their spiritual truth, which takes precedence over historicity,¹ as well as their salvific power, which is the very reason for the myth's existence. In saying this we in no way mean to cast doubt on the earthly existence of the *Bodhisattva* Dharmakara; our object is simply to stress the fact that the story in question is above all else a manifestation of the principle of the saving coincidence of Mercy and faith, a manifestation brought about by the *Buddha* Shakyamuni; and we would assert that by offering this story Shakyamuni was in truth speaking about and offering an aspect of himself: as a personification of the total *Logos* he was able to endow his own power of Mercy with the name Amitabha, "Infinite Light", and to describe the mystery of the coincidence we have mentioned by means of the story of Dharmakara and his Vow. But Shakyamuni's transfer of his power to a previous *Buddha* does not conflict with the possibility of historical fact; in his capacity as "absolute *Buddha*" or *Ādi-Buddha*, Shakyamuni has the power not only to define and actualize himself by means of a story-symbol but also to connect himself concretely and salvifically to the work of a *Buddha* who preceded

¹ If this were not the case, it would be impossible to explain why the four Gospels can contradict one another on certain details or why the early Christians were not troubled by this fact, or how it is that the visions of the saints can differ. This same principle of the primacy of spiritual reality explains—with all the more reason—the existence of "mythical" differences between religions.

im historically and who represented more particularly the aspect of Mercy.

In the cosmic sector of Islam—and not outside it—the Arabian Prophet wields a similar power in relation to the Semitic Prophets who preceded him. In much the same way, in his quality of *Logos-Essence* or *Logos-Synthesis*, Shakyamuni is able to actualize the illuminative or salvific powers of other *Buddhas*, who are considered in this case from the point of view of their differing qualities and not their common essence; whether we are then speaking of different *Buddhas* or different qualities of the only *Buddha* becomes for all practical purposes no more than a matter of perspective or even dialectic.

We have not cited an example from Islam because it is the only one possible but because in this case the analogy is especially direct; in Christianity the use of the Psalms provides an example of the same order: Christ, “Son of David”, projects himself as it were into this preceding Revelation and makes it his own, and as a result the Psalter has become something like an authentic song of Christ, who was moreover prophetically sensed by David, for the relationship is reversible. In this case, however, the analogy with Buddhism is less direct because the emphasis remains focused on Christ, whereas in Buddhism it is laid upon Amitabha, that is, on the predecessor; nonetheless, in order to have access to the grace offered by Amitabha, it is necessary to take refuge in the historical Buddha and submit to his Law and enter his Community.²

* * *

On the very threshold of *Nirvāna*, the *Bodhisattva* Dharmakara made a Vow not to enter therein unless—once he had become *Buddha*, that is, “Enlightened”—he could offer a Paradise of Purity to all those who pronounced his Name, henceforth understood to be nirvanic or divine, with an unmixed faith and with the conviction of being unable to save themselves by their own merits. Having become *Buddha* under the name of Amitabha, the celestial personage keeps his word: through his Name he saves multitudes of believers, and the *Buddha*

² This constitutes the “Triple Refuge”—*Buddha*, *Dharma*, and *Sangha*—by means of which one becomes a Buddhist.

Shakyamuni shares in this work by bringing it to the knowledge of the men of this world or cycle.

In this sacred story there is first a confrontation between the *Bodhisattva* Dharmakara and *Nirvāna*; what follows is their fusion in the person of the *Buddha* Amitabha. It may be asked with good reason what sense it makes to suppose that this Vow could exert a kind of pressure on nirvanic Reality: "If you do not grant me what I demand"—this is essentially what Dharmakara says to infinite Reality and supreme Bliss—"I refuse to enter You"; what is the significance of this refusal as a matter of principle and of the pressure it implies? For it is metaphysically obvious that there is no common measure between man and the Absolute: the Absolute is able to determine all things, whereas man has no power over the Absolute. This is self-evident, but it does not prevent there being a sense in which the relative itself is included in the Principle—for "everything is *Ātmā*"—such that the relative appears as a kind of internal dimension of all-inclusive Absoluteness; this response is insufficient, however, apart from a further argument, which in fact results from the preceding one: *Nirvāna* includes—on the basis of what has just been said—a pole or mode that we could describe as "feminine" or "receptive", a pole corresponding to the divine *Prakriti* or primordial Substance, which is here envisaged according to the Buddhist perspective of Emptiness and Enlightenment. When things are viewed from this angle—that is, on the basis of the "relative absoluteness" of manifestation and in light of the "femininity" of the already relative pole of the divine Principle—one is prepared to grasp the meaning of the Vow.

There is a well-known Far-Eastern symbol suggesting the reciprocity in question in a particularly effective manner: this is the *Yin-Yang* diagram, which shows first a white field and a black field and then a black spot in the white field and a white spot in the black field. Applying this symbol here we may say that *Nirvāna* comprises a sector of relativity that is open to the cosmos whereas the *Bodhisattva* possesses an element of absoluteness that integrates him in a certain respect in the absolute and metacosmic nature of *Nirvāna*.³ By virtue

³ This is the "secret" (*sirr*) of the heart in the language of Sufis. If blasphemies against the "Father" and the "Son" can be forgiven but not those uttered against the "Holy Spirit", this is because the Spirit alone is concretely present in the soul inasmuch as

of its relativity, *Nirvāna-Prakṛiti*—without which there could be no possible contact between Heaven and earth—“desires” man; to speak of the attractive power of Heaven is to imply the dimension of relativity it comprises; now this dimension is none other than Goodness, and without a world there is no Mercy. Man, who as such is relative, looks toward the Absolute; but in its relative aspect *Nirvāna* does not want to absorb relative man; instead it desires him because of his mystery of absoluteness; in other words it desires the *Bodhisattva* in order to give birth to the *Buddha*.

This reciprocity, where the higher desires the lower by virtue of an element of inferiority and the lower determines the higher by virtue of an element of superiority, enables us to understand either directly or indirectly why “joy shall be in heaven over one sinner that repenteth, more than over ninety and nine just persons, which need no repentance” and also why “the Heavens resound with his glory” when a *jīvan-mukta* leaves this world; the saying that a *brāhmaṇa* commands the *devas* and other paradoxes of this kind have a similar meaning. Finally, the *Buddha* Amitabha would not descend with his two archangelic *Bodhisattvas* and all his celestial court if his chosen one did not contain a nirvanic and metacosmic element that the cosmos-facing *Nirvāna* might “desire”.⁴ This extrinsic *Nirvāna*, which attracts and creates Mercy, is “Virgin” and “Mother” or even—as the Song of Solomon expresses it—“Sister” and “Spouse”: it radiates and absorbs simultaneously, both enlightening and desiring. Insofar as Heaven becomes *Prakṛiti* in turning toward the cosmos, the cosmos becomes *Purusha* in its relation to Heaven,⁵ not of course by virtue of the cosmos itself but because of the divine *Purusha*, with which the cosmos is identified through Grace and *Gnosis*. The feminine Divinity, who loves the masculine God, also loves the reflected image of that

it inspires us; hence a wrong done to the Spirit cannot be due to ignorance or error. It may also be pointed out that the prostration of the Angels before Adam, which is related in the Koran, is not unconnected with the mystery of the element of absoluteness in the Heart-Intellect.

⁴ This global mystery has led to many ill-sounding assertions, the most common of which is the claim that “God could not exist without man”, this statement is not without its profound meaning, of course, but the drawbacks of such a formulation greatly exceed its advantages.

⁵ *Purusha* and *Prakṛiti*: the active and passive poles of Being.

God in the cosmos and seeks to deliver this image by appropriating it to herself, hence absorbing it and rendering it divine.

* * *

At first sight the Vow of the *Bodhisattva* Dharmakara, the fulfillment of which falls to the *Buddha* Amitabha, appears to be a very special and unusual favor, strangely remote in character; in fact it signifies nothing other than the divine Principle of universal attraction, hence of Mercy. In other words, if “remembrance of Amitabha” gives access to the “Pure Land”, this is because the Name of this *Buddha*, which is a Name of the one *Buddha*,⁶ is truly the vehicle of nirvanic Power.

The guarantee that this is so resides in the fact that this Name has been uttered by the historical *Avatāra*, and here we return to a principle already mentioned above: the fact of Revelation guarantees both the truth and the effectiveness of a means of salvation. Thus, if the Name of God is “holy”, it is not because it is a word referring to God but because it has been revealed by God Himself and thereby conveys something of the divine Power, and in principle even all of the Power that the meaning of the Name suggests: the Name *Allāh*, revealed at the origin of the Arabic language and confirmed by the Koranic Revelation, contains no limitation, whereas the Names of Mercy convey mercy precisely but not the terrible aspects. Whether one is concerned with Islam or Buddhism—or any other cosmic sector—to say that the saving Name is a divine gift, and that it really saves, means first that it contains the divine Absoluteness, which is exclusive; second—and more directly—that it contains the divine Infinitude, which is inclusive; and this Infinitude in turn reveals yet a third aspect, which the Name most directly conveys and transmits: Mercy, which attracts.

It is said that the Name *Amitābha* contains both the Savior and the saved: for the saved has no power of his own since even his faith in Amitabha is conferred upon him by this Name; it is enough for us to hear this Name and when hearing it to continue pronouncing it and when pronouncing it—or hearing it—to avoid closing ourselves to the faith it contains and communicates to us. This is not said to absolve

⁶ Whence the almost “henotheist” absoluteness attributed to Amitabha by his own adepts.

us from effort—without effort no life and *a fortiori* no spiritual Way is possible—but in order to convince us that no merit belongs to us in our own right and that we should not compromise our self-abandonment to the “Other” by any accentuation of our ego. In Christian language we would say that it is necessary to put Christ in place of our spirit and the Virgin in place of our soul.

* * *

The salvific quality of the Name *Amitābha* is a result of its holiness: to say that the Name is holy means—as we have seen—that it has been revealed and that it thereby proves its divinity with regard to both origin and substance, and therefore also its qualities of Absoluteness, Infinitude, and Mercy. Now the holiness of the celestial gift requires an initial sanctification of man, which reflects this holiness in a certain manner, and this sanctification takes the form of a ritual consecration and a spiritual vow.

Purity of intention—which the vow expresses and confirms—embraces the fundamental virtues of the soul; it clearly prevents the spiritual means from being employed for a purpose below the level of its content, such as the pursuit of extraordinary powers, the wish to be famous and admired, or the secret satisfaction of a sense of superiority; purity of intention also prevents this means from being used for purposes of experiment or for the sake of tangible results or other profanations of this kind. This is precisely what the vow is intended to avoid, and this follows very clearly from the Islamic promise—made to the Prophet Muhammad by his Companions and mentioned several times in the Koran—to “fight in offering their goods and their lives” (*bi-amwālihim wa-anfūsihim*),⁷ which amounts to saying that there is no spiritual path properly so called without a consecration and a vow.

⁷ It will be noticed that the first term concerns attachment to the world and the second attachment to the ego: it is necessary to give oneself to God with all one “possesses” and all one “is.” In Amidism the human response to the celestial Gift is the “Triple Attitude” “sincere intention”, “perfect faith”, and the “wish to be born in the Pure Land”, which is a cosmic anticipation of *Nirvāna* or its liberating projection

The need for this vow throws light on what we have called—without the least intention of insinuating doubt—the “myth” of the *Buddha* Amitabha, for it is not hard to see that the earthly or human vow is basically an answer to a celestial or divine vow: if man must commit himself to Heaven, it is because Heaven has committed itself through Revelation to man; one promise must respond to the other. The pure intention implied by every spiritual vow contains two essential components, one strictly human and the other purely spiritual, and they are far from excluding each other: in the first place the aim of the Way is the salvation of the soul, in whatever manner we understand it; but for any one capable of grasping it the goal is also simply “What is”: Truth in itself or the omnipresent reality of the nirvanic Principle.⁸

* * *

It is profoundly significant that the Buddha—in the *Amitāyur Dhyāna Sūtra*—told the story of Dharmakara-Amitabha to a woman in distress, the queen Vaidehi, for this indicates that the celestial gift is offered to pure receptivity and presupposes a consciousness of our samsaric distress; it is also significant that he allowed Vaidehi to behold the various Paradises of the *Buddhas* and that it is she who chose the Paradise of Amitabha over all the others, thus collaborating in her own manner in the subsequent Revelation. According to the traditional interpretation, Vaidehi represents the spiritual pilgrimage of man, and this is regarded as leading into the Way of Amitabha since the perspective of the Pure Land *sūtras* is Amidist; Vaidehi’s vision of other “*Buddha-Lands*” and

⁸ It is in this sense that Saint Bernard could say, “I love because I love”, and not “because I wish to be saved”; obviously there is no incompatibility here, for the two attitudes are situated on different planes. The superior attitude is not unconnected with the theophany of the Burning Bush “I am that I am”. In the Evangelical counsels, the vow of “poverty” refers to separation from the world, that of “obedience” to separation from the ego, that of “chastity” to the choice of heavenly Beatitude alone. Obedience (*perinde ac si cadaver essent*) is founded on Christ’s invitation, “Follow me”, which proves that the vow implies something very different from a merely moral discipline: Christ, who must be followed, is in practice “inwardness” for the sake of the Kingdom of Heaven, which is “within you”, as well as “emptiness” for God *vacare Deo*; when combined, these two attitudes are the equivalent of “chastity”

her choice of the "Land" of Amitabha symbolize in this perspective the very process of Enlightenment or the degrees of the spiritual life.

There have been differences of opinion as to whether queen Vaidehi, as co-revealer of the *Amitāyus Sūtra*,⁹ was a *Bodhisattva* or an ordinary mortal and whether the doctrine of the "Pure Land" is addressed to superior men or the common run of people; each opinion can be justified by some passage in the sacred Texts. We would say that Vaidehi was a *Bodhisattva*, who was destined to personify ordinary mortals in all the distress of their samsaric exile, and that the Pure Land *sūtras* are addressed at one and the same time to "pneumatics" and simple "psychics"—in the language of *gnosis*—for one does not exclude the other: extremes meet, and wisdom and holy childlikeness are joined.¹⁰

We are in the presence here of the whole mystery of simplicity: nirvanic Emptiness is simple, and so is childhood; between the two extremes—if so schematic a treatment can be applied to the incommensurable—lies all the complexity of universal possibilities, whether good or evil, including the complexity of human arguments. Simplicity is neither ignorance nor platitude: the decisive factors of our spiritual destiny are discernment between the Real and the illusory and permanent union with the Real; wisdom is simple to the extent that its expressions converge upon What alone is, and it has the gift of simplifying; but for this very reason it also includes all the sanctifying riches that human souls—which are so diverse—may need in their pilgrimage toward the Immutable.

* * *

Absoluteness or exclusive Reality, Infinity or inclusive Reality, Goodness or liberating Substance, Revelation or constraining Manifestation: all the Doctrine is to be found in these words. If in our daily experience we are confronted by things that are real at their own level—if "such and such" realities actually exist in the world—this is because

⁹ *Amitāyus*, "Eternal Life", is an aspect or complement of *Amitābha*, "Infinite Light"

¹⁰ Were this not so, it would be impossible to explain how minds like Shan Tao, Honen, and Shinran could have chosen the Path of "Pure Land" and made themselves its champions

before all else there is Reality "as such", which is not the world but by which the world comes to be. And if the world exists, it is because Reality as such, or the Absolute, includes Infinity or All-Possibility, from which the world is a consequence and of which it is a content.

If the world is the world, it is because it is not God: unable to be either Absoluteness or Infinity, it is relative and finite, whence the presence of evil, which by its privative nature proves *a contrario* that the cosmic Substance, and therefore and *a fortiori* the divine Nature, is essentially Goodness. And if there is necessarily both good and evil in the world and if the good by definition manifests the divine Qualities and therefore Goodness, it is necessary for Goodness also to manifest itself as such, and it does this through Revelation; and once it exists it compels assent, for man cannot but choose the good. In and through Revelation, man returns to saving Goodness; to the Infinite that includes all; to the Absolute, which is What it is and which alone is.

From the viewpoint of *Māyā* the Absolute appears as a kind of contraction, which is intrinsically impossible since no limiting determination can apply to it; one may therefore say—to speak as simply as possible—that Absoluteness in the sense of an extrinsically contractive Reality necessarily contains a compensating aspect possessing an expansive nature, and this is Infinity. Now Infinity, which includes all, requires an apparently negative dimension, which is creative Manifestation, and this is positive insofar as it expresses the Absolute, though it is nonetheless privative because of the relativity of its nature and productions. Creative Manifestation in turn requires salvific Manifestations, which are the Prophets and Revelations; and these Manifestations demonstrate a new *hypostasis*: the essential Goodness of divine or nirvanic Reality. Infinity flowing from Absoluteness; creative Manifestation flowing from Infinity; saving Manifestation likewise flowing from Infinity, though also—and by this very fact—flowing from the essential Goodness inherent in the Infinite: it is with liberating Mercy, which leads back to the Absolute, that the circle of divine Deployment closes. The Universe is like a Revelation of the divine Nature or like a play, in which nirvanic Reality reveals itself to itself and is mirrored in its own inexhaustible dimensions.

Man and Certainty

Human intelligence is distinguished above all by its centrality and totality—that is, its capacity to conceive of the Absolute—and from this arises a further capacity, that of objectification, which coincides with a sense of the relative. Without the contemplation of the Absolute on the one hand and an intellective penetration of contingencies in reference to this Absolute on the other, man ends up living beneath the level of his intelligence and therefore beneath his humanity. To say man is to say intelligence capable of the Absolute and of objectification or relativization; an animal has neither the sense of the Absolute nor therefore a sense of contingency.

An intelligence capable of the Absolute necessarily implies free will; the will is free insofar as the intelligence is total, and the intelligence is total in man as such, independently of its accidental obscurations; in other words every man of sound mind possesses a sense of the Absolute to the degree necessary for using his will for the sake of the “one thing needful”. If the normal and ultimate object of the intelligence is the Principle, the Absolute, the Infinite, then the normal object of the will must be what conforms to this supreme Reality, which means that the fundamental or quintessential function of the spirit is discernment between the Real and the illusory and contemplative concentration upon the Real—in other words, truth and union.

Like container, like content, and conversely: in nature a container is made for a corresponding content, and it proves the reality of this content, which in turn serves to show that such proof, though not necessary for every understanding, has a secondary and provisional usefulness. A human womb proves the existence of human seed just as a feline womb proves the existence of feline seed; similarly, the human Intellect proves its essential and total content, namely, absolute and therefore transcendent Reality and—together with it—the reverberations of the Absolute in the contingent. The nature of our total or integral intelligence proves the existence of everything intelligible.

Whatever knows matter, and knowing it defines it as such, cannot itself be matter, nor can it be subject to the laws of matter; our immortality is therefore evident to “those who have ears to hear”. The

conscious subject is too vast and profound, or too real, to be at the mercy of a fact as contingent and accidental as death.

Man, we have said, is able to conceive of the Absolute and to will freely; in the same way—and as a result—he is capable of a love that surpasses phenomena and opens onto the Infinite and of an activity whose motive or object is beyond earthly interests. The specifically human abilities—or those that are noblest and most completely human—prove in their own way what their objective is, just as the wings of a bird prove the possibility of flight and thus the existence of a space in which the bird can fly.

Free will entails the possibility of a mistaken choice and therefore of a passional obscuration of the intelligence, for whoever chooses illusion has an interest in finding his happiness there, and man becomes what he chooses. To say total intelligence is to say freedom, and to say freedom is to say possibility of error, whence the fall and the necessity of Revelation, which restores the “lost Word”. And Revelation, which amounts to a “reminder” for humanity—or a given humanity—proves in its particular way the innateness of total Truth and therefore of all decisive truths.

* * *

We could also express ourself in the following manner: an animal gives proof of intelligence by the complexity of its adaptation to its environment and, in a higher sense, by its own type of contemplativity, which is passive of course but nonetheless connected to the universal Intellect; man, however, proves his intelligence—or the total character of human intelligence—by his consciousness of total Reality and of his situation within that Reality as well as by his contemplativity, that is, by his being fixed in “being” and not in “doing”, whatever the nature of his outward activity. There are four different aspects here: comprehension, concentration, discernment, and contemplation; in the last of these, “knowing” becomes “being”. Conceptual understanding is the doorway to discernment, and concentration, united with discernment, is the doorway to contemplation.

Man is surrounded by a bewildering multitude of phenomena; perfect intelligence consists in perceiving their homogeneity and outwardness in reference to a transcendent unity and unified inwardness: the world then appears not as an incoherent mass of quasi-

absolute phenomena but as a single veil into which the phenomena are woven; in this veil they are joined but not confused, distinct but not separated. In the center resides the discerning and unifying intelligence—an intelligence that is conscious of the Principle; it is thanks to this consciousness alone that the phenomenal world can appear both in its substantial homogeneity and in its contingency, outwardness, nothingness.

From a somewhat different point of view, which is connected with the experience of time—hence with the perspective of our life—the phenomenal world seems like a stream, in the midst of which intelligence abides as a motionless center: intelligence then becomes identical with the permanent present, with the sacred moment that belongs to God: it is consciousness of eternity.

These two spiritual dimensions also have a purely inward application insofar as the soul itself is the world and life, the “veil of *Māyā*” and the “stream of phenomena”; it expands and at the same time unfolds itself before the impersonal and inviolable gaze of the Intellect, which itself resides at the center and in the present and which becomes actual with the “remembrance of God” and on the basis of a metaphysical discernment between total Reality and its contingent reverberations, illusory as these are in the sight of the Absolute. For the Intellect or for the spiritual act conforming to it, there is no difference between the outward and the inward: the outward is also within since the soul is everywhere the soul, on the macrocosmic scale as well as within the microcosm, and the inward in turn has an aspect of outwardness since phenomena are everywhere phenomena, whether within or around us. Practically—and “alchemically”—it is therefore impossible to speak of the world and life without considering the soul and the flux of thought; the world is the soul, and the soul is the world. From this it follows—and here is the whole point of a distinction that may seem tautological—that in acting upon the inward we act upon the outward: we hold both the world and our life within our own soul. Nevertheless, when we speak about the “world”, the question of knowing whether we are thinking of the outward or inward does not arise, for outward things come before inward things; our earthly environment existed before we were born, and a tree exists prior to our looking at it. The world is always *a priori* the realm of existence surrounding us; unless expressly specified, it is never our inward cosmos alone. The argument that the objective world is virtually identical to

the sensations of the subject is invalid here, for these sensations—and the intelligence governing them—convey to us precisely the phenomenon of objectivity, in keeping with the real relationship; to deny this is to call into question the whole possibility of knowledge.

* * *

Human life is studded with uncertainties; man loses himself in what is uncertain instead of holding onto what is absolutely certain in his destiny: death, Judgment, Eternity. But besides these there is a fourth certainty, which is immediately accessible to human experience, and this is the present moment, in which a man is free to choose either the Real or the illusory and thus to ascertain for himself the value of the three great eschatological certainties. The consciousness of a sage is founded upon these three points of reference, whether directly or indirectly and implicitly, through the “remembrance of God”.

Besides the dimension of sequence, however, one must also consider the dimension of simultaneity, which is based on spatial symbolism: the world around us is full of possibilities presented to our choice, whether we wish it or not; it is thus full of uncertainties, not successive as in the flux of life but simultaneous like the things offered to us by space. Whoever wishes to resolve these uncertainties must once again lay hold of what is absolutely certain, and this is what stands above us: God and our immortality in God. But even when we are confronted with the multitudinous and bewildering possibilities of the world here below, there is something absolutely certain—something of which sacred forms represent so many exteriorizations—and this is metaphysical truth and the “remembrance of God”: the center that is within us and that places us, insofar as we participate in it, beneath the “vertical” axis of Heaven, of God, of the Self.

Man finds himself in space and in time, in the world and in life, and these two situations contain two eschatological and spiritual axes, one static and “vertical” and the other dynamic and “horizontal”—or more or less temporal; this is how a contemplative man conceives of contingency in its relation to the Absolute, in its attachment to it, and insofar as it leads back to it. But these various points of reference are considered only insofar as a sage is necessarily conscious of contingent situations; they characterize his manner of taking account of his own relativity. Within this whole context—though entirely independent

of it and not in any “localized” sense—resides the mystery in which knowing is being and being is knowing; what we mean is that these certainties of “succession” and “simultaneity”, of “life” and “world”, form the necessary framework of contemplation; they are like points of reference that serve to free us from the world and life or that facilitate this liberation. In the final analysis exoterism, which is the necessary basis of esoterism, is centered precisely on the elements that concern our final ends, namely, Heaven and God, or death, Judgment, and Eternity, as well as on our own earthly attitudes insofar as they bear upon these realities.

The important thing to grasp here is that the actualization of consciousness of the Absolute—“remembrance of God” or “prayer” insofar as it brings about a fundamental confrontation of creature and Creator—anticipates every station along the two axes: it is already a death and a meeting with God, and it places us already in Eternity; it is something of Paradise and even—in its mysterious and “uncreated” quintessence—something of God. Quintessential prayer brings about an escape from the world and life, and in this way it bestows a new and divine life upon the veil of appearances and the current of forms and a fresh meaning to our presence amid the play of phenomena.

Whatever is not here is nowhere, and whatever is not now will never be. What this moment is in which I am free to choose God, so will be death, Judgment, Eternity. And in this center, this divine point that I am free to choose when confronted by an immeasurable and multiple world, I am already in invisible Reality.

* * *

We have seen that the world, life, and human existence show themselves in practice to be a complex hierarchy of certainties and uncertainties. If someone asks us what are the most important things a man should do, placed as he is in this world of enigmas and fluctuations, we would reply that there are four things to be done or four jewels that should never be lost from sight: first, to accept the Truth; second, to keep it in mind continually; third, to avoid whatever is contrary to Truth and the permanent consciousness of Truth; and fourth, to accomplish whatever is in conformity with Truth. All religion and all wisdom is reducible—extrinsically and humanly—to these four laws: in every tradition we see indeed an immutable truth; then a law of

“attachment to the Real”, of “remembrance” or “love” of God; and finally prohibitions and injunctions. Here we have a fabric of elementary certainties that encompasses and resolves every human uncertainty and in this way reduces the whole problem of earthly existence to a geometry at once simple and primordial.

APPENDIX

Selections from Letters and Other Previously Unpublished Writings

1

One should not reproach a science for not being what it does not want to be or for not providing what it does not want to provide. In this respect one should not criticize modern chemistry insofar as it studies the phenomena it intends to study, for on its limited plane it remains within adequation and is not exceeding its strengths; nor can one blame it for remaining within the strictly human perspective in relation to matter, for it need not go beyond this point, and indeed no physical science needs to do so.

This last point is of capital importance, and it allows me to mention the following: the universe of an insect does not interest us, for this perspective is peripheral whereas ours is central, so that all we need to know is that lower perspectives exist; our perspective must contain that of the insect and even that of the plant in a certain manner. As for the world of an angel, this perspective differs from ours only insofar as the angel does not intervene in human affairs; in itself it is derived from the universal essences—which no sensible man will attempt to “imagine”—but when it is correlated with the human world the angelic perspective makes itself human; the angel sees us as we see each other when he has a reason to look at us; and on the same level he sees the universe as we see it.

Since “limitation” does not mean “falsehood”, the specific limitation of the human state is completely separate from the question of scientific errors. For one of two things: either we are God, and then we are aware of pure and total Reality, or else we are not God, and then our vision of things is limited, as is the object of our vision; a cosmic science “at the level of God” would be an absurdity. Nonetheless the possibility of adequation exists at our level: if we say that two plus two equals four, this is true; if we say that two plus two equals five, this is false, and the abyss between the two assertions is absolute. Either I know what is behind me, or I do not; if I know there is a tree five meters behind me, my science is adequate for what it intends to include; the question of the metaphysical meaning of the tree or the

“horizontal” limitation of all knowledge is irrelevant; and if I believe my tree is the only tree there is or if I deny that it can flower when in fact it can, then it is not my momentary and concrete science of the tree that is false but the hypothesis I pinned to it; this is more or less what happens with modern science. Therefore, when it comes to determining the value of a given opinion of this science, there is no need at all to resort to the argument of the ontological limitation of the human mind, for traditional men also give their sciences an objective scope; all we need to know is whether in fact modern science is wrong on the plane it is studying or whether any of its claims are unwarranted.

Modern science is only partially wrong on the plane of physical facts; on the other hand it is totally wrong on higher planes and in its principles. It is wrong in its negations and in the false principles derived from them, then in the erroneous hypotheses deduced from these principles, and finally in the monstrous effects this science produces as a result of its initial Prometheanism. But it is right about many physical data and even about some psychological facts, and indeed it is impossible for this not to be so, given the law of compensations; in other words it is impossible for modern men not to be right on certain points where ancient men were wrong; this is even part of the mechanism of degeneration. What is decisive in favor of the ancients or traditional men in general, however, is that they are right about all the spiritually essential points.

2

The substance of knowledge is Knowledge of the Substance; in other words the substance of human knowledge is Knowledge of the divine Substance; “he who knoweth his soul knoweth his Lord”.

The substance of the intelligence is indeed the perception of the substantial, not the accidental. When the intelligence perceives the accidental, it must do so in relation to the substantial.

Stupidity is confusion between the secondary and the essential, hence in the final analysis between accidents and substance, which means that only the sage is completely intelligent; he alone has a perfect sense of causality. Impiety is a kind of stupidity, and stupidity is a kind of impiety.

The divine Substance itself is essentially beyond the polarity subject-object; it is nonetheless accessible, whether by an objective or conceptual path or by a subjective or unitive path; the two paths must combine, for there is no union without discernment, no realization without truth.

3

Regarding the question of transubstantiation, which I address briefly in *Logic and Transcendence*, the Oriental character of the words in question can be seen in their use of ellipsis: Christ did not say, "I am like a vine, like a door", but he said, "I am the vine, the door"; likewise he did not say, "This conveys divine power in the same way my body conveys divine power", but he said, "This is my body". In the formula of consecration, "this" can mean "that which, having been consecrated, is no longer bread pure and simple but bread infused with the divine presence or power, even as my body is infused with this presence or power, so that in practical terms there is no longer any difference between them; hence this is my body." But the formula of consecration does not necessarily refer to "that which has all the appearances of bread". Such an interpretation of the pronoun "this" is a theological commentary, no doubt necessary from the point of view of a certain psychological expediency—in the broadest and most profound sense of the term—but nonetheless limited from the purely metaphysical point of view. Be that as it may, the fact that Christ did not specify "this bread" but instead used a pronoun does not mean that he wished to say that this bread is no longer bread; in a similar way the fact that the voice of the Father did not specify "this real man" during the baptism of Christ but instead used a pronoun—"this" in Matthew and "thou" in Mark and Luke—does not mean that He intended to claim that this man is not a real man, as certain monophysites believed.

What Christ said can be interpreted as follows: "Just as divine power dwells within my body, so it now dwells within this bread; and just as my body, which conveys divine power, is not a body like others, so for the same reason this bread is no longer bread like other bread." Hindus, whose dialectic readily uses antinomies, would say that the consecrated host is "neither bread nor non-bread", but Semitic and Western alternativism requires definitions that are simple,

exclusive, and dogmatically employable, hence devoid of nuances that are psychologically dangerous for the average man.

Even if one agreed that the transubstantiationist interpretation was metaphysically exhaustive and impeccable—which is not necessarily the case—one would not be able to justify it logically by referring to the word-for-word formulation of Christ; if it can be justified some other way, fine, but one should not claim this results from the words “this is”.

4

Either we understand something through intellection or inspiration, or by rational deduction if the subject permits, and then we can formulate it, or else we do not understand it, and then we must give up trying to do so; for reason must not seek to breach the gates of Heaven. If we understand only half of something, we must have the greatness of soul—and the realism—to let go of the “missing link”; otherwise there is a risk of going around in circles from the effects of mental *māyā*. If it is a question of exegesis, then the importance of the thing becomes quite relative, and it is highly probable that we shall lack sufficient facts in many cases; a syllogism is possible only when the premises are complete.

Several interpretations of the Biblical account of creation are possible. Biblical language is never systematic. One notes that the Koran is also filled with irregularities, anachronistic enumerations, and so forth. In any case, the first man is not the principal archetype; he is its manifestation. But why does it matter to us what this or that Biblical word may mean in a given relationship as long as we know the essentials of the cosmogonic process? In any case it is inappropriate to claim that a given metaphysical or cosmological explanation of Genesis is exclusively valid and obligatory. Better to leave the interpretation of the Bible to the cabalists!

5

You ask me why I wrote in my latest book that modern man “does this by means of his machines and serums”—why I speak specifically of serums and not chemical products in general. I wrote “serums” to be more concrete or imaginative, but in fact it is serums that are responsible for the overpopulation of the earth, and the rest of chemical

production is more or less the consequence of this calamity. People seek to increase food production tenfold or a hundredfold—thanks to chemical products—and they do this precisely in order to forestall the dangers resulting from overpopulation. I could have spoken of mechanical constructions and chemical products or of technology and science, but I preferred to stay with two concrete images: machines and serums.

6

The heliocentric system is not exclusively modern; I will not be telling you anything new in recalling here that Aristarchus of Samos and Hipparchus—and later al-Battani—taught it; nonetheless one understands why the ancients finally preferred the geocentric system: this system corresponds to immediate experience, hence to sacred symbolisms, whereas the opposite system is beyond most men's capacity for assimilation and entails serious dangers—it “troubles the repose of the Gods”, as the opponents of Aristarchus said—which does not mean it is astronomically incorrect. In any case, pushing scientific curiosity too far—to the detriment of contemplation and the inward knowledge of appearances—is imprudence and Luciferianism, and it is partly for this reason that the ancients instinctively retained the geocentric doctrine.

It goes without saying that the knowledge of realities that are normally unknown and contrary to current experience is a matter of indifference from the point of view of pure intellectuality and esoterism; if I bring it up here, it is simply because the context more or less requires it.

7

Existentialism and psychoanalysis, without forgetting socialism, are mainly what killed basic intelligence in the West. When someone affirms that two plus two equals four, his pulse is taken, and he is asked what social milieu he comes from. Logic is replaced by relativistic psychology, which is in fact false at its root, and then by a so-called sociology. People claim there is no truth, and they assert this as true; they say that man can know nothing, but this is something they think they know; they claim that “life” takes precedence over thought, and yet this is something they think! People are so stupid they do not notice these contradictions.

8

Three factors alone are of concern to us: Truth, Way, and Virtue. God will hold us accountable for these three points; He will not hold us accountable for the modern world or for understanding His motives in having allowed a given evil.

Metaphysical Truth, with all the discernments deriving from it and required by our encounters with phenomena; next the Way, which is prayer in general and invocation in particular; and finally Virtue, which means the absence of all the defects that demean and mar the soul: this is all. Nothing and no one in the modern world prevents you from understanding and accepting metaphysical Truth or from distinguishing what is real from what is false or right from wrong; nothing and no one prevents you from invoking God every day; and nothing and no one prevents you from being virtuous.

There is no question of living in our times as men lived in the Middle Ages. In the first place this is impossible, and besides there is no reason for doing so. The Truth—or God—could never ask something unreasonable or impossible of us. If someone said to me that Truth, Way, and Virtue cannot be followed in the modern world, I would respond that there is no reason they cannot and indeed that there are thousands and even millions of men who do so. Spirituality, at whatever degree, makes no distinction between ancient man and modern man, for it is not concerned with “such and such men” but with “men as such”—in other words with the unchanging factors that define man or human nature. In this respect, which is the only one that matters, there is no difference between the men who lived during the period of the Council of Nicaea and those alive during the pseudo-Council of Vatican II. Likewise, two plus two have always equaled four, in the age of the Apostles as in our own. This is all that matters.

9

When a distinction is made between the impersonal Divinity and the personal Divinity, what this signifies is that God in a sense individualizes Himself for the sake of creation and in relation to man; one does not mean to deny that the Divinity is pure Consciousness, hence pure Personality, in its very Essence—in other words that it is the Self, whence are derived within Relativity all created consciousnesses.

This is what explains polytheism: from the moment that God is Personality as such, it is obvious that each of His modes or each of His manifestations possesses a personal character; in God there is nothing unconscious.

This also explains Trinitarianism: there is no need to protest disdainfully—against Sabellius—that the *hypostases* are not modes but persons; divine modes are necessarily—and by definition—persons as soon as the divine Nature is personal; this is not because the divine Essence could have an individual character but because it is pure Consciousness and is therefore capable of individualizing itself in relation to man.

10

I read in an unpublished letter of Coomaraswamy's that "Jili had a vision of Plato filling all space with light" and that Meister Eckhart called Plato "the great priest". This may not be to the liking of S., who persists in his perfectly absurd anti-Platonism in his new article; it is a veritable perversion of intelligence. I do not recall where I read that some Sufis, perhaps including Rumi, called Plato "Sayyidna Aflatun" and that his tomb—near Konya if I am not mistaken—is venerated by certain *fuqarā'*. Coomaraswamy also notes, "Plato approved of the fixed types of the Egyptian Gods, but rejected the (Greek) painters and sculptors who produced likenesses or worked according to their own imagining." This is most significant.

In my youth I read somewhere that the Greeks called Plato "the divine" and even attributed a virginal birth to him; this second fact may have only a symbolic meaning. Be that as it may, if I were asked to choose between the "purely human" or "purely natural" wisdom of Plato and the "supernatural" wisdom of the anti-Platonist theologians—I have in mind those who revile Plato and Plotinus while claiming for their theology a right to holy absurdity—I would choose Platonism without hesitation, the logic of which does not trouble me in the least; for metaphysics is not true because it is logical but is logical because it is true. It is unnecessary to add that the Gospels are not intrinsically responsible for the abuses to which I have just referred; the "wisdom of the world" or "wisdom according to the flesh" is rationalism tending toward worldliness, not intellectuality tending toward the Absolute; Christian *gnosis* proves it. The attenuating cir-

cumstance for theologians is that they are *bhaktas*—I am speaking of doctrine—as well as exoterists.

11

What do we see around us? Beings with their thoughts and desires, forms and contents. Everywhere there is nothing but forms and contents: forms unaware that they reflect Form as such, the universal Receptacle of the divine Presence, and contents unaware that they should be this Presence and that they indirectly reflect this Content.

The universal, primordial, and normative form is the pure and perfect ego—body and soul—and the universal, primordial, and normative content is the Intellect or contemplation, or the spiritual activity it involves. We could also say that the perfect form is the soul emptied of everything except spiritual content; this content is the revealed Symbol, the divine Name, which is the support of both discernment and concentration, both truth and love.

By remembering God, man no longer lives in his own form, strictly speaking; he lives in all forms, which means that he lives in none or that he is identified with the universal Form and thereby lives in the divine Content. Man must not seek to live in himself; he must let God live in him.

The perfect container is simple in and through the Remembrance of God, for not having any individual form there is nothing to distinguish it in particular; it is unique, for being every form—in and through the primordial Form—it is without a second; it is central, for not wandering from one phenomenon to another it is “here” and not “elsewhere”; it is actual, for being neither “before” nor “after” it is always “now”; and it is subtle, for not having a substance made opaque and heavy by individual coagulation it is transparent and light, which caused a Hindu sage to say that the delivered one possesses only a subtle body. In this way the perfect container realizes poverty in form, number, space, time, and substance, symbolically speaking.

12

The “doctrine of Awakening” presented briefly at the beginning of your book is correct in principle; this is obvious. But it becomes totally false and therefore spiritually inoperative—to say the least—once it

becomes “agnostic”, “iconoclastic”, and “anti-religious”, for in this case any religious dogmatism is more real or less false than it.

It is the religions that provide an adequate basis for the “doctrine of Awakening”, and they do this in their esoterisms. As messages of salvation, they are of course situated within the dream world, but this does not mean that they are just anything, for distinctions must be made even here: within the dream these messages realize in a symbolical and horizontal way what “Awakening” is totally and vertically, and thus they represent an indispensable point of departure for “Awakening”. It is impossible to escape the dream without the Will of Him who dreams—*Brahma saguna*—and without the Grace of Him who, within the dream, reflects Him who dreams. This reflection is the *Avatāra*, and it is only through the *Avatāra*—and therefore through God—that we can escape the dream; otherwise our “doctrine of Awakening” is nothing more than inoperative philosophy and spiritual suicide.

“Without me ye can do nothing”, and also “He that gathereth not with me scattereth abroad”. The *Avatāra*—whether Christ or Muhammad or the Buddha—is *Shūnyamūrti*, “Manifestation of the Void”, hence of “Awakening”; following the Buddha, for example, does not mean imitating some model as it appears in books; it means entering the Buddhist *Sangha* in one of its traditional forms—hence the “Triple Refuge”—and integration into the *Theravāda* or, on the Mahayanic side, into *Jōdo-Shinshū* or Zen, with all the liturgical consequences this implies. An “Awakening” without the *Avatāra*, hence without religion, will turn into Satanism; the dream itself will play the “Awakening”, and this leads nowhere.

Furthermore, I absolutely do not see what harm there could be in salvation simply because it is still part of the dream—but it is the summit of the dream!—for this dream, all things considered, is not an unintelligible chaos; if it were, there would be no qualitative differentiations, and the notion of “Awakening” itself would not exist. Before one can leave the dream, one must prostrate oneself before the Lord of the dream, who is God, and before His central reflection and spokesman in the dream: the Revealer, the *Avatāra*.

13

In speaking of the "obscure merit of faith", one has in mind an effort that makes up for the absence of objective certainty: faith is a merit because we do not see God and because it is difficult for the exteriorized and passionate man, who is therefore worldly in nature, to believe in what he does not see. When the Koran speaks of those who are close to God in Paradise and who "believe in Him", it is referring to the element of approbation or fervor, or adoration, which is the very substance of the attitude of faith and is independent of the earthly accident that is relative ignorance.

In metaphysics, good dialectic is what draws the virtuous man toward realization, hence a perfume of holiness; bad dialectic on the contrary is what blocks the way by suggesting to a man, if he lacks objectivity, that he is terribly intelligent. Beauty and doctrine do not have the function of satisfying an insatiable and therefore profane need for logical satisfaction—nor in the case of beauty of satisfying a need for harmony that is no less insatiable on the strictly earthly plane—but of bringing about a liberating intuition of essences, or Platonic remembrance if one prefers.

Faith means that love of God is the necessary complement of certainty, just as the Infinite is the complement of the Absolute.

The very act of faith is the remembrance of God; now "to remember" is *recordare* in Latin—that is, *re-cordare*—which indicates a return to the heart, *cor*. As an act of faith, invocation in fact actualizes the immanent and paracletic certitude of the heart. The heart is faith.

Faith requires us to keep ourselves before God and to look straight ahead in the direction of God—neither to the left or right, nor into the abysses of the world, which lead to vertigo and precipitate falls. It is necessary to walk straight ahead on the crest of faith and say "yes" to the Sovereign Good, which lights our way and is the Goal.

14

Earthly existence is full of ambiguities because it manifests God while yet being "other than He". Man is suspended as it were between abstraction and analogy, rejection and participation, transcendence and immanence: we encounter on the one hand the limitations and imperfections of phenomena—and in some cases their seductive

magic—and on the other hand their metaphysical transparency and ennobling and interiorizing quality; the “Eternal Feminine” is both Eve and Mary. By force of circumstance—the average man being what he is—exoterism tends toward a prudent and suspicious moralism; esoterism alone possesses, in one of its dimensions, a breadth permitting it to spiritualize “sensible consolations”, which the exoteric perspective tends to ostracize, and thus—beyond the alternative “flesh or spirit”—to restore to the means of aesthetic expression, such as music and dance, their celestial intentions.

15

Someone once told me that when he entered a mosque he felt constricted by the religious form; this is nonsense, of course, for if this were the case one could never take pleasure in any beautiful color but would appreciate only pure light; one would not see that a pure color also transmits light, though in a particular mode. When I enter a sanctuary, whatever the religion to which it belongs, I perceive with gratitude the particular *barakah*, and then in and through it the primordial *barakah*. And this takes nothing away from the fact that the sanctuary proper to the *Religio perennis* is God’s free Nature.

There are people who adopt the dogmatic narrowness of a religion—its theological eccentricity and bias of soul—because of its symbolism and beauty; on the other hand there are people who reject the symbolism and beauty of a religion because of its narrowness. And yet in every religion there are both beauties and forms of narrowness, even in religions that are in a way prolongations of the Primordial Religion.

The *Religio perennis* is the body; the *Religio formalis* is the garment; each has its meaning, and each can be combined with the other in sundry ways.

16

The value of the ontological argument as a proof lies less in our capacity to conceive of the Absolute than in the transcendent and unique nature of the object of this capacity, which is precisely the Absolute; in other words the notion of the Absolute is absolute. It is in this sense, and not otherwise, that the ontological argument contains a proof of God, and this proof is irrefutable.

Some object that if the argument were valid anything we conceive of or imagine—no matter what—would be real *ipso facto*; this is a specious objection, for the quality of the argument as a proof lies—let us repeat—not in our mental or intellectual capacity alone but above all, and in an unconditional way, in the supreme object of this capacity; it is man's reason for being because this supreme object is.

This does not mean that the Absolute needs rational proofs, for there is pure and direct intellection; nonetheless reason has its rights: it can help to actualize a virtual intellection and then express an effective intellection. Once again, if reason and the Intellect did not have these capacities, their existence would be inexplicable.

17

The blanket of snow presently covering our region reminds me of the spiritual significance of snow as a crystalline element: it is illustrative of heavenly blessing, heavenly descent—falling snow has indeed something paradisiacal about it—and a purifying heavenly Presence, far removed from the throes of passion; this is how I experience the Call to Prayer in Islamic countries, as it floats down from Heaven and extinguishes as it were all earthly noise.

Speaking of the winter miracle of Nature, I would also like to say something about the other forms water takes. First about rain, which the Koran compares to life-bestowing Grace: it symbolizes vertical enlightenment coming down directly from Heaven; this is distinct from Tradition, which conveys the Sacred in a horizontal and indirect way and is symbolized by the river. The river in turn comes from the spring—that is, the historical, once-occurring Revelation—whereas rain has no determinable earthly origin; “the wind bloweth where it listeth”; in this way rain signifies the timeless or ever-actual Grace of the Spirit. This Grace “falls from Heaven”, and this Heaven is “within you”.

The lake conveys a message similar to that of the snow, which blankets all in its peace: it is heavenly Presence, the Presence of the Sacred, far above all that is petty, and it is *Sakīnah*, even closer to life and earth than the blanket of snow and yet altogether holy in its contemplative repose and stillness. Water lily and swan are akin to the lake, as are rushes and weeping willows and the reflection of the moon, or by day the golden path of the sun.

And then there is the sea, which bears witness to the Infinite itself; it is divine primordial Power, and yet also Peace in its immeasurable motionlessness; it is not without meaning that all rivers flow into the ocean.

18

I know with certainty that there are phenomena and that I myself am one of these phenomena.

I know with certainty that underlying the phenomena, or beyond them, is the one Essence, which the phenomena manifest only because of a quality of this Essence, that of Infinity, hence Radiation.

I know with certainty that the Essence is good and that all goodness or beauty in phenomena manifests this.

I know with certainty that the phenomena will return to the Essence, from which they are not really separate since fundamentally there is nothing except the Essence; that they will return to the Essence because nothing phenomenal is absolute or therefore eternal; and that Manifestation is necessarily subject to a rhythm just as it is necessarily subject to a hierarchy.

I know with certainty that the purpose of religions is to recall these truths and that religions are truthful and legitimate because they recall these truths.

I know with certainty that these truths are inscribed in the Intellect and that there is a religion of the Heart, which prefigures all religion.

I know with certainty that our reason for being is to discern the Essence in phenomena and then to return to the Essence, and this we do by abstaining from what is opposed to it and by practicing what draws us near to it; the quintessence of what draws us near the Essence is the fixation of our thought, and in a certain way our entire being, upon the Essence, which at once produces and attracts us.

I know with certainty that only the religion of the Heart is perfect, for it contains no limitation or contradiction; how could other religions be perfect since they contradict each other?

I know with certainty that in order eventually to gain access to the religion of the Heart we must take one of the revealed religions as our starting point; if this were not necessary, why would they exist?

I know with certainty that the outward manifestation of the religion of the Heart is virgin nature, for it is a book that contradicts no book and can be contradicted by none.

I know with certainty that the soul is immortal, for its indestructibility results necessarily from the very nature of intelligence.

I know with certainty that underlying the diverse consciousnesses there is only one Subject: the Self, at once transcendent and immanent, which is accessible through the Intellect, the seat or organ of the religion of the Heart; for the diverse consciousnesses exclude and contradict one another, whereas the Self includes all and is contradicted by none.

I know with certainty that the Essence, God, affirms itself in relation to phenomena, the world, as Power of Attraction and Will of Equilibrium and that we are made in order to follow this Attraction vertically, which we cannot do without conforming horizontally to the Equilibrium, which sacred and natural Laws take into account.

I know with certainty that all phenomena, inward as well as outward, reflect the Essence, whether in itself or in relation to a particular aspect; that they reflect it in a manner that is either direct or indirect, positive or negative; that this is necessarily so since there is only one Reality, that of the Essence; and that our vocation as intelligent and free creatures is to perceive and choose the True, the Beautiful, and the Good, both in ourselves and around us.

I know with certainty that evil is derived from what is illusorily other than the Essence and that it cannot not exist since the Infinity of the Essence implies Radiation, hence Manifestation; now to say Manifestation is to say alterity and remotion; but evil, which is always fragmentary, is superabundantly compensated for, and even definitively nullified, by the good, which always expresses totality and reality, that of the Essence, which alone is.

The Theological and Metaphysical Ambiguity of the Word *Ex*

In integral cosmology it is important to distinguish between a causality that is "horizontal" or "natural" and one that is "vertical" or "supernatural".

The expression *creatio ex nihilo* refers to the first, and the expression *creatio ex Verbo* to the second; the first—horizontal and continuous—places the cause on the same plane as the effect, and the second—vertical and discontinuous—maintains the transcendence and virginity of the cause in relation to its effect. In other words, for horizontal causality the effect is a production that affects the cause since both are situated on the same plane, but for vertical causality the effect is properly speaking a reflection, which cannot affect the cause; the planes of cause and effect are therefore incommensurable.

The purpose of the expression *creatio ex nihilo* is to deny the pantheistic or deistic idea of a *creatio ex mundo*. For this idea, which corresponds to no reality, the word *ex* indicates that God drew something new out of a pre-existing substance—not from a substance that He created *ex nihilo* but precisely from a substance that He did not create, one that pre-existed in an absolute manner. In the expression *creatio ex Verbo*, the word *ex* does not mean that God took something from Himself in order to make something else but that the thing created—supernaturally or "miraculously" irrupting on its own existential plane—has a given archetype in the divine Intellect as its transcendent cause. But in this case too the creation is *ex nihilo* precisely because the cause is transcendent, hence "absent" and not connatural—not of the same nature.

In order to describe the creative process, the Bible employs the expression "God said"; for example, "And God said, let there be light; and there was light." It could not have expressed itself this way: "God drew forth a created light from His uncreated Light"; for the aim is to stress the transcendence of the cause and the discontinuity between it and the effect, a discontinuity that indirectly corroborates the expression *ex nihilo*, which thus has two meanings, one "horizontal" and the other "vertical", the first being explicit and the second implicit. In other words—let us repeat—creation is *ex nihilo*: on the one hand

because it is not drawn from a pre-existing substance and on the other hand because it is not drawn “materially” from the divine Substance, which remains transcendent; the fact that the word *nihil* may be used esoterically to designate this very Substance and may thereby assume a positive meaning is an altogether different question. To return to the literal or immediate meaning of the formula: like the Bible, the Koran declares: “It sufficeth for Him to say: Be! and it is”: the thing did not exist previously, and as for its archetype it is not situated on the same level; and no theologian denies divine foreknowledge.

These two meanings of the word *ex*, the horizontal and the vertical, correspond respectively in geometric symbolism to concentric circles and a star: according to the first image, *ex nihilo* indicates the discontinuity between the circles and the central point—notwithstanding the adequacy relating them to it—whereas according to the second image, *ex Verbo* indicates the “essential”, not “material”, continuity between the center and its radii. Here is the whole difference between the relationship of transcendence and that of immanence; and it is important not to overstress one to the detriment of the other.

Of course, *ex nihilo* may signify “out of nothing that could be external to God”, but this meaning is strictly esoteric because it presupposes an understanding of the doctrine of All-Possibility, hence of the homogeneity of the possible; but such an understanding could never be part of the exoteric perspective, which essentially demands a clear and sharp separation between God and the world. Given the intellectual possibilities of the average man, trying to impose upon exoterists an understanding of the “aspects” of reality and their corresponding “points of view”—hence all the mysteries of *Māyā*—would be opening the door *de facto* to an inoperative pantheism and closing it to an elementary intuition of the Absolute.

In a certain respect, God is omnipresent; in another, “*Brahma* is not in the world.” One sacred text affirms that all is in God; another affirms the contrary: God is independent of everything, transcends everything, is free from all impurity—all the more so in that He alone is real. It is important not to overemphasize either the transcendent or the immanent point of view, even if only in appearance—not to stress unilaterally, for example, that everything is “in God”. For there is something singularly disturbing about the idea that all hateful things are *in Deo*, and repugnance toward accepting it already shows that there must be a perspective, hence a dimension of the Real, that

excludes this idea; it is necessary to know that things are not contained within the divine order in every respect. It is also necessary to know that the term "God" has more than one meaning; it becomes differentiated in the metaphysical dimension, where one is no longer limited to considering only the divine Person, who creates and legislates; and it is precisely the expression "divine order" that takes this complexity of metacosmic Reality into account.

EDITOR'S NOTES

Numbers in bold indicate pages in the text for which the following citations and explanations are provided.

Introduction

1: *Valentinus* (second century A.D.), the most influential of the early Gnostics, taught that the material world was created by an inferior deity and is therefore intrinsically evil and that redemption depends on a saving knowledge (*gnosis*) of this cosmogonic myth.

2: *Essenism* is the doctrine of the Essenes (the “holy, pious ones”), an ancient Jewish ascetical sect, known for their communitarian life and emphasis on celibacy and simplicity.

3: As indicated in the text, the Sioux word *wakan*, the Algonquin *manito*, and the Iroquois *orenda* are more or less synonymous, each referring to a spiritual power, or spiritual powers, belonging to a higher plane of reality but manifest in the world of space and time. Elsewhere the author writes, “It is true that the word ‘spirit’ is rather indefinite, but it has for that very reason the advantage of implying no restriction, and this is exactly what the ‘polysynthetic’ term *Wakan* requires” (“The Sacred Pipe”, *The Feathered Sun: Plains Indians in Art and Philosophy* [Bloomington, Indiana: World Wisdom Books, 1990], p. 46). In the Japanese Shinto tradition, the term *kami* has almost exactly the same meaning, designating a mysterious sacred power, at once singular and plural, pervading the world and embodied in mountains, seas, rivers, rocks, trees, birds, animals, and extraordinary human beings.

4: “*The things which the Gentiles sacrifice, they sacrifice to devils, and not to God; and I would not that ye should have fellowship with devils*” (1 Cor. 10:20).

5: “*Beauty is the splendor of the true*” is an axiom the author attributes to Plato.

The Contradiction of Relativism

8: *Kantian criticism*: Immanuel Kant (1724-1804), the founder of the “critical” philosophy and an immensely influential modern thinker, insisted that man’s knowledge is limited to the domain of empirical objects and that the idea of God is no more than a postulate of reason having no objective certainty.

9: Friedrich *Nietzsche* (1844-1900), a German atheistic philosopher known for his uncompromising attacks on Christianity, claimed to instruct his readers in “how to philosophize with a hammer”, the subtitle of his book *Twilight of the Idols* (1889).

10: “*Omega point*”: Pierre Teilhard de Chardin (1881-1955), a Jesuit paleontologist and heterodox theological writer, claimed that traditional Christian theology, especially its teachings concerning the creation and fall of man, had been rendered outmoded by modern evolutionary biology and that Christ should be reconceived as the “Omega Point”, the culmination of a universal development beginning with matter.

11: “*Made in God’s image*”: “God created man in His own image, in the image of God created He him; male and female created He them” (Gen. 1:27).

14: *Lao Tzu* (sixth century B.C.) was the founder of Taoism and author of the *Tao Te Ching*, which speaks of a time when “high Virtue looks like an abyss, great whiteness looks spotted; abundant Virtue looks deficient; established Virtue looks shabby; solid Virtue looks as though melted” (Chapter 41).

Abuse of the Ideas of the Concrete and the Abstract

20: Note 3: *Jerome* (c. 342-420), one of the most learned of the early Church Fathers, is best known for translating the Bible into Latin (the Vulgate); *Augustine* (354-430), Bishop of the North African city of Hippo and author of such classic works as *The City of God* and *Confessions*, was the most prolific and influential of the Western Church Fathers.

21: According to Søren *Kierkegaard* (1813-55), a Danish philosopher and theological writer who is often regarded as the father of existentialism, “To demonstrate [a man’s] existence on the grounds that he is thinking is a strange *contradiction*, because to the extent that he thinks abstractly he abstracts to the same degree precisely from his existing” (*Concluding Unscientific Postscript to the Philosophical Fragments*, Book 2, Part 2).

22: “*It must needs be that offenses come*; but woe to that man by whom the offence cometh” (Matt. 18:7; cf. Luke 17:1).

24: For *Kant*, see editor’s note for “The Contradiction of Relativism”, p. 8.

25: Note 6: Jacques Bénigne *Bossuet* (1627-1704), a French bishop, theologian, and widely celebrated preacher, was also a leading figure at the court of *Louis XIV* (1638-1715), the King of France.

Note 7: Jan Van Ruysbroek (1293-1381), a Flemish priest and mystical writer who was greatly influenced by Dionysius the Areopagite and Meister Eckhart, was the author of *The Spiritual Espousals*, among many other works.

26: The *Chārvākas*, regarded by traditional Hindus as "extreme heretics", believed that matter is the only reality; the *Ajīvikas* were a heterodox sect founded by Makkhali Gosala (a contemporary of the Buddha), who taught that there is no free will.

Epicurus (c. 341-271 B.C.) propounded an empiricist theory of knowledge and a hedonistic, hence "Epicurean", ethics, based on the conviction that the gods have no influence over human life.

Protagoras of Abdera (c. 481-c. 411 B.C.) was a leading Sophist, known for his maxim that "man is the measure of all things"

Pyrrho (c. 360-c. 270 B.C.) was a Greek skeptic, who maintained that all knowledge, including the evidence of the senses, is uncertain.

In the *Rāmāyana* (Book 4), the *Avatāra Rama* encounters a skeptic named *Jabali*, who ridicules the idea of duty and maintains that there is no future life.

Like Rama, *Krishna* is an *Avatāra* of the Hindu God Vishnu; his refutation of materialism in the *Bhagavad Gītā* includes the key observation that "nothing of nonbeing comes to be, nor does being cease to exist; the boundary between these two is seen by men who see reality" (2:16).

Rationalism Real and Apparent

29: *Kant* (see editor's note for "The Contradiction of Relativism", p. 8) rejects "dogmatic rationalism" and lays the groundwork for his claim that metaphysics is merely the "science of the limits of human reason" in his *Critique of Pure Reason* (1781).

30: The ancient Greek philosopher *Aristotle* (384-322 B.C.) distinguished ten *Categories* in his book by that name: substance, quantity, quality, relation, place, time, position, condition, action, and passivity.

38: "I think; therefore I am": René Descartes (1596-1650) propounded a philosophical method based upon the systematic doubting of everything except one's own self-consciousness, as summed up in the Latin phrase *cogito ergo sum*.

Note 9: *Franz von Baader* (1765-1841), a German Catholic philosopher and theologian, was deeply influenced by the writings of Meister Eckhart, Paracelsus, and Jakob *Boehme* (1575-1624), a Lutheran mystic and esoterist.

39-40: *Plato* (427-347 B.C.), greatest of the ancient Greek philosophers and the pupil of *Socrates* (c. 470-399 B.C.), taught that “when the *eye of the soul* is sunk in the barbaric *slough* of the Orphic myth, dialectic gently draws it forth and leads it up” (*Republic*, 533d).

40: *Plotinus* (c. 205-270), founder of the Neoplatonic school, endeavored to synthesize the teachings of Plato and Aristotle in his monumental *Enneads*, a collection of discourses compiled by his disciple Porphyry.

Note 11: *Alexander* the Great (356-323 B.C.) was emperor from 336 B.C.

The ancient Greek *Sophists* were teachers of rhetoric, much criticized by Socrates for their specious arguments and seeming indifference to truth.

Note 12: *Thoth*, believed by the ancient Egyptians to be the inventor of writing, was the messenger of the other gods and thus the equivalent of the Greek *Hermes*, who in turn—under his epithet *Trismegistus* or “thrice greatest”—was the patron of the Hermetic sciences and their alchemical and astrological applications.

41: *Hylomorphism* refers to the Aristotelian idea that the body is related to the soul as matter (*hylē*) is related to form (*morphē*).

Note 14: *Kant* claimed that man cannot know whether God exists but that a sense of moral duty can be explained only if this existence is assumed and God is thus treated as a “*postulate of practical reason*” (*Critique of Practical Reason*, “Dialectic”, Chapter 2).

42: *Galileo Galilei* (1564-1642), an Italian physicist, mathematician, and astronomer, was tried by the Church for propounding the Copernican theory of heliocentrism as if it were the only way to account for the facts of experience.

Note 15: *Thomism* is the doctrine of Thomas Aquinas (c. 1225-74), a giant among the medieval Scholastics, who followed Aristotle in teaching that “the principle of knowledge is in the senses” (*Summa Theologica*, Part 1, Question 84, Article 6).

43: Regarding the opposition between *Christian polemicists* and *Hellenists*, see the author’s chapter “The Dialogue Between Hellenists and Christians” in *Light on the Ancient Worlds*, ed. Deborah Casey (Bloomington, Indiana: World Wisdom, 2006).

“*Vain wisdom*”: “In simplicity and godly sincerity, not with fleshly wisdom, but by the grace of God, we have had our conversation in the world” (2 Cor. 1:12).

"*Wisdom of Christ*": "We preach Christ crucified . . . unto them which are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God, and the wisdom of God" (1 Cor. 1:24).

Pythagoras of Samos (c. 569-c. 475) was one of the greatest sages of ancient Greece, teaching a doctrine that was at once philosophical, mathematical, astronomical, and musical.

44: "I am the *light of the world*; he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life" (John 8:12).

Note 17: *Hypatia* (c. 375-415), a philosopher and mathematician and the head of the Neoplatonic school in Alexandria, was tortured and killed by a Christian mob.

Note 18: *Gregory Palamas* (c. 1296-1359), a monk of Mount Athos and later Bishop of Thessaloniki, wrote his *principal work* (*The Triads*) *In Defense of the Holy Hesychasts* and their psychosomatic contemplative techniques.

In contrast to Palamas, *Barlaam* of Calabria (c. 1290-1348) maintained that the mystical light experienced by the Hesychast monks was a created phenomenon and not an aspect of God's own uncreated energies.

46: On the first Sunday of Great Lent, it is common in many Greek—that is, Orthodox—churches to read the *Synodikon*, an ancient liturgical text containing a number of *anathemas* directed against Christians with Platonic sympathies.

47: "It is written, Man shall not live by bread alone, but by *every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God*" (Matt. 4:4; cf. Deut. 8:3).

Concerning Proofs of God

48: In the author's original French, the term rendered "evidence" in the phrase *evidence for the divine Being* is *évidence*, which includes the idea of obviousness or self-evidence, while at the same time suggesting corroboration or proof.

Note 1: Muhammad ibn al-Shafii al-Fudali (d. 1821) assembled a Muslim catechism, or "creed".

49: "Gloria in altissimis Deo et in terra *pax hominibus bonae voluntatis*" is the Vulgate text of Luke 2:14, "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to men of good will."

51: For *Augustine*, see editor's note for "Abuse of the Ideas of the Concrete and the Abstract", p. 20, Note 3; *Anselm* (c. 1033-1109), Archbishop of

Canterbury, formulated the most famous version of the ontological argument (*Proslogion*, Chapter 2), defining God as “that than which nothing greater can be conceived”.

Aristotle (see editor’s note for “Rationalism Real and Apparent”, p. 30) developed a form of the *cosmological proof* in his *Metaphysics*, Book 12; *Plato* (see editor’s note for “Rationalism Real and Apparent”, pp. 39-40) formulated such a proof in *The Laws*, Book 10.

53: “Verily, verily, I say unto you, Except *a corn of wheat* fall into the ground and *die*, it abideth alone: but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit” (John 12:24).

“Eat ye and pasture your cattle; most surely there are signs in this *for those endowed with understanding*” (*Sūrah “Tā Hā”* [20]:54, *passim*).

The teleological proof of Socrates (see editor’s note for “Rationalism Real and Apparent”, pp. 39-40) is recounted in *Plato’s Phaedo*, 99b-c.

Note 8: “How will it be with them when *We will bring them together* on the Day about which there is no doubt; and when every soul will be paid in full what it has earned, and they shall not be wronged?” (*Sūrah “The Family of Imran”* [3]:25, *passim*); “And they have broken their religion (into fragments) among them, (yet) *to Us is the returning*” (*Sūrah “The Prophets”* [21]:93).

Note 9: *Arthur Schopenhauer* (1788-1860), a German Kantian philosopher, believed that man is fundamentally determined by a will to exist, which is just as fundamentally doomed to disappointment; *Ernst Haeckel* (1834-1919) was a German biologist, physician, and philosopher, who championed the Darwinian theory of evolution.

55: *Jalal al-Din Rumi* (1207-73), a Sufi mystic and poet and founder of the Mevlevi order, is well known for his insistence on spiritual love as the proper basis for the seeker’s relation to God.

Ramakrishna (1834-86), a *bhakta* of the Hindu Goddess *Kali*, was one of the greatest Hindu saints of modern times.

56: For *Kant*, see editor’s note for “The Contradiction of Relativism”, p. 8.

57: “*One thing needful*”: “One thing is needful: and *Mary* hath chosen that good part, which shall not be taken from her” (Luke 10:42).

59: The “*genius*” in question is *Pierre Teilhard de Chardin* (see editor’s note for “The Contradiction of Relativism”, p. 10).

61: Note 13. For *Galileo*, see editor's note for "Rationalism Real and Apparent", p. 42.

The Argument from Substance

65: "All things are *Ātmā*": "*Ātmā* was indeed *Brahma* in the beginning. It knew only that 'I am *Brahma*'. Therefore It became all. And whoever among the gods knew It also became That; and the same with sages and men. . . . And to this day whoever in like manner knows 'I am *Brahma*' becomes all this universe. Even the gods cannot prevail against him, for he becomes their *Ātmā*" (*Brihadāranyaka Upanishad*, 1.4.10)

66: According to the Athanasian Creed, Christ is "true God and true man, of a reasonable soul and body, equal to the Father as touching his Godhead, and inferior to the Father as touching his manhood".

Evidence and Mystery

72: In the author's original French, the term rendered "evidence" in this chapter's title is *évidence*, which includes the idea of obviousness or self-evidence, while at the same time suggesting corroboration or proof.

73: *Plato* (see editor's note for "Rationalism Real and Apparent", pp. 39-40) taught that the visible things of this world are but shadows or copies of invisible and eternal forms, which themselves reflect the supreme reality of the Good.

74: *Man was created "in the image of God"*: "And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness" (Gen. 1:26).

Note 2: "*God created man in His own image, in the image of God created He him; male and female created He them*" (Gen. 1:27).

Maximos the Confessor (c. 580-662) was *one Father of the Church* who taught that "instead of being men and women, clearly divided by sexual distinctions, we are properly and truly only human beings", made in the image of a God who transcends all such divisions and unites us to Himself "through the abolition of the distinction between male and female" (*Ambigua*, Chapter 2).

75: "*Wisdom according to the flesh*": "In simplicity and godly sincerity, not with fleshly wisdom, but by the grace of God, we have had our conversation in the world" (2 Cor. 1:12).

The ancient Greek *Sophists*, placing their rhetorical skills at the service of a materialist philosophy, taught their students how to gain political power; according to the *Epicureans*, man is a strictly physical being, whose highest good consists in the cultivation of secure and lasting pleasure (see editor's

ote for Epicurus in “Abuse of the Ideas of the Concrete and the Abstract”, p. 26).

77: To explain the process of knowing, Thomas Aquinas (see editor’s note for “Rationalism Real and Apparent”, p. 42, Note 15) and other medieval Scholastics distinguished between two faculties of the soul: the *intellectus agens*, or agent Intellect, which is responsible for abstracting intelligible forms from the data of sense, and the *intellectus possibilis*, that is, the possible or potential Intellect, which is actuated or informed by these forms and thus led to the act of understanding.

78: The *dark age* is the *Kali Yuga* of Hindu chronology, the last and most corrupt of the ages.

Aryan is used by the author to refer to the intellectual and spiritual world of the noblest castes—*ārya* means “noble” in Sanskrit—in ancient Persia and India.

In this context, *Brahmanism* is the doctrine of Hindu Brahmins or priests.

80: “And as they were eating, Jesus took bread, and blessed it, and brake it, and gave it to the disciples, and said, Take eat; *this is my body*. And he took the cup, and gave thanks, and gave it to them, saying, Drink ye all of it; for *this is my blood* of the new testament, which is shed for many for the remission of sins” (Matt. 26:26-28; cf. Mark 14:22-24, Luke 22:19-20).

At the Fourth *Lateran Council* (1215) the word “transubstantiation” was used for the first time in an official Roman Catholic definition of the Eucharist.

Note 4: In the Eucharistic prayer of the Liturgy, the Orthodox priest calls upon God to effect this *transmutation* with the words: “Make this bread the precious Body of Thy Christ, and that which is in this cup the precious Blood of Thy Christ, changing (*metabalōn*) them by Thy Holy Spirit.”

Note 5: “I am the *vine*” (John 15:5); “I am the *door*” (John 10:9).

Hate one’s father and mother. “If any man come to me, and hate not his father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple” (Luke 14:26).

Pluck out one’s eye. “And if thine eye offend thee, pluck it out, and cast it from thee” (Matt. 18:9; cf. Mark 9:47).

81: In the last book of his work *On the Trinity*, *Augustine* (see editor’s note for “Abuse of the Ideas of the Concrete and the Abstract”, p. 20, Note 3)

confesses, "There is nothing that I dare to profess myself to have said worthy of the ineffableness of that highest Trinity."

82: According to Thomas Aquinas, the divine *Persons* are distinguished from each other only by the acts defining their *relations*: paternity, filiation, spiration, and procession.

Modalism or Sabellianism was an ancient Trinitarian heresy, which claimed that each Person is merely a temporary mode or mask of an essentially unitarian Deity.

83: Note 8: The *eight Guardians of the Universe in Hinduism*, each of whom rules one of the eight spatial zones, are Indra (East), Varuna (West), Kubera (North), Yama (South), Agni (Southeast), Niruthi (Southwest), Isana (Northeast), and Vayu (Northwest).

85: "All things that the Father hath are mine" (John 16:15).

88: Note 10: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God" (John 1:1).

Note 11: *Saint Thomas* teaches that when Christ says, "My Father is greater than I" (John 14:28), and when he asks, "Why callest thou me good? There is none good but one, that is, God" (Matt. 19:17), "he hereby gave us to understand that he himself in his human nature did not attain to the height of divine goodness" (*Summa Theologica*, Part 3, Question 20, Article 1).

"God became man that man might become God" is the formulation of Irenaeus (c. 130-c. 200) and Athanasius (c. 296-373), among other Church Fathers.

89: According to *Saint Thomas*, "It is clear that in God relation and essence do not differ from each other, but are one and the same" (*Summa Theologica*, Part 1, Question 28, Article 2).

90: Note 15: *The Trinity "Father, Son, and Mother"*, which the Koran attributes to Christianity: "They surely disbelieve who say: Lo! God is the third of three. . . . The Messiah, son of Mary, was no other than a messenger, messengers (the like of whom) had passed away before him. And his mother was a saintly woman. And they both used to eat (earthly) food" (*Sūrah "The Table Spread"* [5]:73, 75).

91: The first part of the *Shahādah*, or "Testimony" of faith in Islam, consists of the words *there is no God save the only God*.

94: *Manichaeism* is a dualistic, and syncretistic, religion based on the heretical Gnostic idea that spirits from a transcendent realm of light have become imprisoned in the darkness of matter and can be liberated from their bondage

only by agents sent by the “Father of Light”, who in different versions include Zoroaster, the Buddha, the prophets of Israel, Jesus, and the founder of the sect itself, Mani (c. 216-76).

“*Why callest thou me good?* There is none good but one, that is, God” (Matt 19:17, Mark 10:18, Luke 18:19).

95: Note 18: Meister *Eckhart* (c. 1260-1327), a German Dominican writer, was regarded by the author as the greatest of Christian metaphysicians and esoterists; *Angelus Silesius*, that is, the “Silesian Angel”, was the penname of Johannes Scheffler (1624-77), a Roman Catholic priest and mystical poet who was greatly influenced by the teachings of Eckhart.

Oriental Dialectic and Its Roots in Faith

98: “*It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of heaven*” (Matt. 19:24, Mark 10:25, Luke 18:25); “*If ye have faith as a grain of mustard seed, ye shall say unto this mountain, Remove hence to yonder place; and it shall remove; and nothing shall be impossible unto you*” (Matt. 17:20; cf. Luke 17:6).

Turn the other cheek: “*Unto him that smiteth thee on the one cheek offer also the other*” (Luke 6:29); *refrain from passing judgment:* “*Judge not, that ye be not judged*” (Matt. 7:1).

99: *Rama* is the seventh *Avatāra* or incarnation of the Hindu God Vishnu and the hero of the *Rāmāyana*, the oldest of the Hindu epics.

Note 1: It is a dogma of the Christian tradition, formally defined at the Council of Ephesus (431), that the Blessed Virgin Mary is *Theotokos*, or “*Mother of God*”; according to the heresy of *Arianism*, Christ is a creature, not God.

Note 2: Friedrich *Max Müller* (1823-1900), a German philologist and Orientalist, is often credited with creating the discipline of comparative religion.

101: The feminine figure of *Wisdom*, with whom the *Virgin* is symbolically and liturgically identified in the Christian tradition, speaks of herself as follows: “*The Lord possessed me in the beginning of His way, before His works of old. I was set up from everlasting, from the beginning, or ever the earth was*” (Prov. 8:22-23).

Note 4: Muhyi al-Din *Ibn Arabi* (1165-1240), the author of numerous works including the *Futūhāt al-Makkīyah*, or “*Meccan Revelations*”, and the *Fusūs al-Hikam*, or “*Bezels of Wisdom*”, was a prolific and profoundly influential Sufi mystic, known in tradition as the *Shaykh al-Akbar*, the great master.

102: Abu al-Qasim al-Junayd (830-910), known for his insistence that Sufism should be firmly based on exoteric Muslim law and practice, taught that the ultimate return of all things into God is anticipated in the experience of *fanā*.

Symeon the New Theologian (949-1022), widely regarded as the greatest of Eastern Christian mystical writers, says in his *Discourses* that ascetic practice represents both an effect and a deepening of the initiatic mystery of *Baptism*.

103: "*Made in the image of God*": "And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness" (Gen. 1:26).

105: Note 7: "*Wisdom of the flesh*": "In simplicity and godly sincerity, not with fleshly wisdom, but by the grace of God, we have had our conversation in the world" (2 Cor. 1:12).

Note 8: Jean-Jacques Olier (1608-57), founder of the Society of Saint-Sulpice, wrote his *Introduction to Christian Life and Virtues* primarily for use in the spiritual formation of fellow priests.

Asharism is the doctrine of the Muslim theologian Abu al-Hasan al-Ashari (873-935), who taught that God creates all human acts, thereby determining them, men nonetheless acquiring these acts and being thus responsible for them.

108: Note 10: *Ibn al-Arif* (1088-1141), an Andalusian Sufi master, was best known for his writings on the science of the virtues.

109: Note 10 (cont.): "If ye have faith as a *grain of mustard seed*, ye shall say unto this *mountain*, Remove hence to yonder place; and it shall remove; and nothing shall be impossible unto you" (Matt. 17:20); "If ye had faith as a *grain of mustard seed*, ye might say unto this *sycamine tree*, Be thou plucked up by the root, and be thou planted in the sea; and it should obey you" (Luke 17:6).

109-110: "Jesus saith unto him, Thomas, because thou hast seen me, thou hast believed: *blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed*" (John 20:29).

110: Note 12: Abd al-Rahman Ibn Muhammad *Ibn Khaldun* (1332-1406) was a Muslim historian and philosopher, and the author of *Kitāb al-'Ibar*, "The Book of Examples [from the History of the Arabs and the Berbers]".

112: Note 13. *Imam Hasan al-Shadhili* (1196-1258) was the founder of the Shadhiliyya Sufi *tariqah*, an initiatic lineage from which are derived a number of other Sufi orders, including the Alawiyya and Darqawiyya

Shaykh Abu al-Abbas al-Mursi (1219-86) was the successor of the Imam al-Shadhili as head of the Shadhiliyya order.

Note 14: *Al-Niffari* (d. c. 970), one of the earliest Sufi writers, was the author of “The Book of Spiritual Stations” and “The Book of Spiritual Addresses”, works well known for the density and obscurity of their style.

115: “*My kingdom is not of this world*” (John 18:36).

Note 18: For *Galileo*, see editor’s note for “Rationalism Real and Apparent”, p. 42.

116: *Farid al-Din Attar* (c. 1142-c. 1229), one of the most renowned of the Sufi poets and author of the *Ilāhī Nāmāh* (“Divine Book”), is best known for his *Mantiq al-Tayr*, or “Language of the Birds”, an allegory of the spiritual journey based on *Sūrah “Sad”* [38]:20: “And the birds assembled; all were turning unto Him.”

The *Mathnawī* of *Rumi* (see editor’s note for “Concerning Proofs of God”, p. 55) is a Persian poem in rhyming couplets, said to comprise the essence of the Koran.

We have referred to these [three factors] elsewhere: See for example “Ellipsis and Hyperbolism in Arab Rhetoric” in the author’s book *Sufism: Veil and Quintessence*, ed. James S. Cutsinger (Bloomington, Indiana: World Wisdom, 2006).

119: In the author’s original French, the term rendered “evidence” in the phrase *divine Evidence* is *évidence*, which includes the idea of obviousness or self-evidence, while at the same time suggesting corroboration or proof.

Polemical monologues against the Hellenists: See “The Dialogue between Hellenists and Christians” in the author’s *Light on the Ancient Worlds*, ed. Deborah Casey (Bloomington, Indiana: World Wisdom, 2006).

Monophysites taught that there is only one *physis* (Greek for “nature”) in Christ, namely his Divinity.

120: Note 22: “*Marriage is half the religion*” (*hadīth*).

Note 23: *A passage from Saint Paul:* “I speak by permission, and not by commandment. For I would that all men were even as I myself. . . . I say therefore to the unmarried and widows, It is good for them if they abide even as I. But

if they cannot contain, let them marry for it is better to marry than to burn" (1 Cor. 7.7-9).

121: "*Washed by the angels*": "God's Apostle said, While I was at Mecca the roof of my house was opened and Gabriel descended, opened my chest, and washed it with Zamzam water" (*hadīth*).

122: *Cleaving of the lunar disk*: "The hour drew nigh, and the moon was rent in twain" (*Sūrah* "The Moon" [54]:1).

Chapter 10 of the Book of Joshua: "Then spake Joshua to the Lord in the day when the Lord delivered up the Amorites before the children of Israel, and he said in the sight of Israel, Sun, stand thou still upon Gibeon; and thou, Moon, in the valley of Ajalon. And the sun stood still, and the moon stayed, until the people had avenged themselves upon their enemies. Is not this written in the book of Jasher? So the sun stood still in the midst of heaven, and hasted not to go down about a whole day. And there was no day like that before it or after it, that the Lord hearkened unto the voice of a man: for the Lord fought for Israel" (Joshua 10:12-14).

An apparition of the Blessed Virgin at *Fatima in Portugal* on 13 October 1917 was accompanied by a *solar miracle*, in which the sun appeared to change colors and rotate.

124: *Hanbalite* refers to the teaching of Ahmad Ibn Hanbal (780-855) and *Asharite* to the teaching of Abu al-Hasan al-Ashari (873-935), both of whom accentuated a literal interpretation of the Koran.

125: For the *Shaykh al-Akbar*, see editor's note for this chapter, p. 101, Note 4.

Dionysius the Areopagite, a disciple of Saint Paul (Acts 17:34, though dated c. 500 by many scholars) and perhaps the greatest of all Christian masters of apophatic theology, writes that "the divine *science* is vast and yet minute . . . and is revealed in its naked truth to those alone who pass right through the opposition of fair and foul" (*Mystical Theology*, Chapter 1).

Note 28: *Abd al-Wahhab al-Sharani* (d. 1566) was the author of numerous works on Islamic law and Sufism.

127: Note 32: *Dhu al-Nun al-Misri* (c. 796-859), regarded as the *qutb*, or spiritual "pole", among the Sufis of his time, was a gifted poet and a leading authority on *ma'rifah*, that is, *gnosis* or metaphysical knowledge.

The Demiurge in North American Mythology

131: The Latin phrase *Princeps huius mundi* means “the prince of this world”, that is, Satan, and comes from the Vulgate text of John 12:31, 14:30, and 16:11.

132: “The Lord *hardened the heart of Pharaoh*” (Exod. 9:12; cf. Exod. 10:20, 11:10, 14:8).

133: Note 3: The ancient Greek playwright *Sophocles* (c. 496-406 B.C.) wrote the tragedy *Antigone* c. 442.

“*Everything is perishable except the Face of Allah*” (Sūrah “The Story” [28]:88).

134: “*Made in the image of God*”: “And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness” (Gen. 1:26).

“*Only God knows the hour*”: “But of that day and hour knoweth no man, no, not the angels of heaven, but my Father only” (Matt. 24:36; cf. Mark 13:32).

Note 5: The story of *Narasinha* is recounted in several of the Hindu *Puranas*, including the *Shrīmad Bhāgavatam*, Canto 7.

Shakespeare took this subject or doctrine for his theme: “Macbeth shall never vanquish’d be until/ Great Birnam wood to high Dunsinane hill/ Shall come against him. That will never be/ Who can impress the forest, bid the tree/ Unfix his earth-bound root? Sweet bodements! good!/ Rebellion’s head, rise never till the wood/ Of Birnam rise, and our high-placed Macbeth/ Shall live the lease of nature, pay his breath/ To time and mortal custom” (*Macbeth*, Act 4, Scene 1); “The spirits that know/ All mortal consequences have pronounced me thus:/ ‘Fear not, Macbeth; no man that’s born of woman/ Shall e’er have power upon thee.’ Then fly, false thanes,/ And mingle with the English epicures:/ The mind I sway by and the heart I bear/ Shall never sag with doubt nor shake with fear” (*Macbeth*, Act 5, Scene 3).

135: “We preach Christ crucified, unto the Jews a stumbling-block, and unto the Greeks *foolishness*” (1 Cor. 1:23).

Till Eulenspiegel was a medieval German trickster and fool, whose pranks were designed to expose human vices; *Nasreddin Hoja* is *mutatis mutandis* his Turkish equivalent.

136: “Give not that which is holy unto the dogs, neither cast ye your *pearls before swine*, lest they trample them under their feet, and turn again and rend you” (Matt. 7:6).

Note 8: Umar al-Khayyam—*Omar Khayyam* (1048-1125)—was a Persian astronomer, mathematician, and poet, whose *Rubā'īyyāt* (“quatrains”) conceal a mystical apprehension of God under a veil of seeming skepticism and hedonism.

Note 9: *Benedict Joseph Labre* (1748-83), a mendicant Roman Catholic saint, spent much of his life traveling on foot to sites of Christian pilgrimage, begging for his food and sleeping in the open.

The Alchemy of the Sentiments

138: *Intellectus increatus et increabile*: Meister Eckhart (see editor's note for “Evidence and Mystery”, p. 95, Note 18) taught that *aliquid est in anima quod est increatum et increabile . . . et hoc est Intellectus*: “There is something in the soul that is uncreated and uncreatable . . . and this is the Intellect” (The Bull *In agro dominico* [1329]).

139: *Bernard of Clairvaux* (1090-1153) was a Cistercian monk and author of numerous homilies on the Song of Songs.

Abu Hamid Muhammad al-Ghazzali (1058-1111) was an Islamic jurist, philosopher, and theologian before entering upon the Sufi path.

Note 2: “If any man come to me, and *hate* not his *father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea, and his own life also*, he cannot be my disciple” (Luke 14:26).

140: Note 3: *Francis of Sales* (1567-1622), whose most important spiritual writings include an *Introduction to the Devout Life* and a *Treatise on the Love of God*, was a leading figure in the Counter-Reformation and the founder of the Visitation Order.

142: “*To know oneself is to know one's Lord*” (*hadīth*).

The Symbolism of the Hourglass

144: “Enter ye in at the *strait gate*: for wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat: because *strait* is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it” (Matt. 7:13-14).

“The *kingdom* of God is *within you*” (Luke 17:21).

The “*motionless mover*”, or Unmoved Mover, is Aristotle's (see editor's note for “Rationalism Real and Apparent”, p. 30) classic expression for the divine Principle, as in the *Metaphysics*, 1072b.

“*I sleep, but my heart waketh*” (Song of Sol. 5:2).

Note 3 The *Theologia Germanica* (“German Theology”) is an anonymous treatise of the late fourteenth century, which follows in the mystical tradition of Dionysius the Areopagite (see editor’s note for “Oriental Dialectic and Its Roots in Faith”, p. 125) and shares the fundamental vision of Meister Eckhart (see editor’s note for “Evidence and Mystery”, p. 95, Note 18).

146: “No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon” (Matt. 6:24).

“Blessed are the *poor in spirit*: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven” (Matt 5:3).

149: Note 9: “Take heed that ye despise not *one of these little ones*; for I say unto you, That in heaven their angels do always behold the face of my Father which is in heaven” (Matt. 18:10).

The Problem of Qualifications

151: *Aristotle* (see editor’s note for “Rationalism Real and Apparent”, p. 30) is known as the *Stagirite* because he was born in the Ionian city of Stagira in Chalcidice.

For *Saint Thomas Aquinas*, see editor’s note for “Rationalism Real and Apparent”, p. 42, Note 15.

153: For *Asharite or Hanbalite theologian*, see editor’s note for “Oriental Dialectic and Its Roots in Faith”, p. 124.

The *Decalogue* consists of the “Ten Commandments” given by God to Moses (Exod. 20:3-17).

154: Note 6: Swami *Vivekananda* (1863-1902), a disciple of Ramakrishna, was greatly influenced by the ideas of such modern Western social theorists as John Stuart Mill, which led to his joining the *Brahmo Samāj*, a nineteenth century Hindu reform movement.

155: Note 7: *Pierre Marc Gaston* (1764-1830), a French politician and aphorist, published his *Maxims and Reflections on Various Moral and Political Topics* in 1808.

Note 8: The *Law of Manu* (*Mānava Dharma Shāstra* or *Manu Smriti*) is a collection of traditional Hindu precepts concerning every important aspect of social and religious life.

156: *Socrates* (see editor’s note for “Rationalism Real and Apparent”, pp 39-40) insists on the virtue of obedience throughout Plato’s dialogue the *Crito*.

158: *Preaching to all the nations:* "Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit" (Matt. 28:20).

160: For *Ibn Arabi*, see editor's note for "Oriental Dialectic and Its Roots in Faith", p. 101, Note 4.

161: Note 16: "*Honor thy father and thy mother*" (Exod. 20:12, Matt. 19:19, Mark 10:19).

Implications of the Love of God

163: "*The kingdom of heaven is within you*": "The kingdom of God is within you" (Luke 17:21).

165: Note 4: "*Marriage is half the religion*" (*hadīth*).

167: "For *whosoever will save his life shall lose it*: and whosoever will lose his life for my sake shall find it" (Matt. 16:25; cf. Mark 8:35, Luke 9:24, John 12:25).

Understanding and Believing

171: *We have called the "moral qualification"*: see the author's chapter above, "The Problem of Qualifications".

172: "*Obscure merit*" of *this faith*: "The merit of faith consists in this, that man through obedience assents to things he does not see" (Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, Part 3, Question 7, Article 3).

173: Taqi al-Din *ibn Taymiyya* (1263-1328) set himself in opposition to Sūfis, philosophers, and others who did not measure up to his literalistic interpretations of the Koran and the *Sunnah*.

Note 3: *Abraham and Mary had the merit of great faith*: "By faith Abraham, when he was called to go out into a place which he should after receive for an inheritance, obeyed; and he went out, not knowing whither he went. . . . By faith Abraham, when he was tried, offered up Isaac; and he that had received the promises offered up his only begotten son" (Heb. 11:8, 17); "And Mary said, Behold the handmaid of the Lord; be it unto me according to thy word" (Luke 1:38).

Note 5: *Al-samā' al-dunyā* is a Koranic expression signifying, not the lowest of the seven Heavens, but the terrestrial firmament.

174: For *Ashari*, see editor's note for "Oriental Dialectic and Its Roots in Faith", p. 105, Note 8 and p. 124.

176: Note 8. “There is no lustral water like unto knowledge” (*Bhagavad Gītā*, 4:38).

177: *The famous Verse of Light*: “God is the Light of the heavens and the earth. The similitude of His light is a niche wherein is a lamp. The lamp is in a glass. The glass is as it were a shining star. (This lamp is) kindled from a blessed tree, an olive neither of the East nor of the West, whose oil *would almost glow forth (of itself) though no fire touched it*. Light upon light, God guideth unto His light whom He will. And God speaketh to mankind in allegories, for God is the Knower of all things” (*Sūrah* “Light” [24]:35).

Note 10: *Shankara* (788-820), the pre-eminent exponent of *Advaita Vedānta*, was regarded by the author as the greatest of all Hindu metaphysicians.

According to Hindu tradition, the sacred waters of *the pool Manikarnika*, which lies in close proximity to the river *Ganges* in the city of Benares, are the perspiration that flowed from Vishnu when he finished creating the world.

178: “And the third day there was a *marriage in Cana* of Galilee. . . . And when they wanted wine, the mother of Jesus saith unto him, They have no wine. . . . And there were set there six waterpots of stone. . . . Jesus saith unto them, Fill the waterpots with water. And they filled them up to the brim. And he saith unto them, Draw out now, and bear unto the governor of the feast. And they bare it. When the ruler of the feast had tasted the water that was made wine, and knew not whence it was (but the servants which drew the water knew), the governor of the feast called the bridegroom, and he saith unto him, Every man at the beginning doth set forth good wine; and when men have well drunk, then that which is worse: but thou hast kept the good wine until now” (John 2:1-10).

180: For *Ibn Arabi*, see editor’s note for “Oriental Dialectic and Its Roots in Faith”, p. 101, Note 4.

The Servant and Union

181: For *the Imam Abu al-Hasan al-Shadhili*, see editor’s note for “Oriental Dialectic and Its Roots in Faith”, p. 112, Note 13.

Note 1: For *Irenaeus*, see editor’s note for “Evidence and Mystery”, p. 88, Note 11.

182: For the Latin phrases *increatedum et increabile* and *et hoc est Intellectus* (see author’s note 3) in the teaching of Meister Eckhart, see editor’s note for “The Alchemy of the Sentiments”, p. 138.

183: Note 4: *Abu al-Hasan Kharaqani* (c. 962-1034), a Sufi with a reputation for great ascetical rigor, was an illiterate peasant, initiated not by a living master but by the spirit of *Abu Yazid al-Bastami*.

Bayazid (Abu Yazid) al-Bastami (d. 874), known as the "sultan of the gnostics", is said to have been the first of the great Sufi masters to teach the doctrine of *fanā'* or spiritual extinction in God.

184: *Abu Bakr al-Saydlani* was an early eleventh century Sufi about whom very little is known; described simply as a "righteous man", it is said that he tended a cemetery where other Sufis were buried and that he was obliged to give special attention to one particular gravestone, repeatedly engraving the name of the person who was buried there, only to have the stone disappear every time; perplexed about this, al-Saydlani consulted a fellow Sufi and was told, "That *shaykh* preferred anonymity in the world." This anecdote may help to explain al-Saydlani's own obscurity, and it bears closely upon the author's theme in this chapter.

Abu Bakr al-Shibli (c. 861-945), an important Sufi of Baghdad and the author of a number of paradoxical aphorisms, was a high government official before entering the spiritual path.

Note 6: For *Dhu al-Nun al-Misri*, see editor's note for "Oriental Dialectic and Its Roots in Faith", p. 127, Note 32.

Note 7: For Abu al-Qasim al-*Junayd*, see editor's note for "Oriental Dialectic and Its Roots in Faith", p. 102.

Note 8: For *Shankaracharya*—or Shankara—see editor's note for "Understanding and Believing", p. 177, Note 10.

187: Note 16: *Ibrahim ibn Adham* (d. c. 790), born into a royal family at Balkh in Central Asia, renounced his life of worldly wealth and power and is credited with having made the first Sufi classification of the stages of the ascetical life.

Abu Bakr Muhammad al-Wasiti (d. after 932), praised by later Sufis as a "leader of *tauhīd*" and "the master of the East in the science of subtle allusions", was well known for his pungent aphorisms.

The Nature and Function of the Spiritual Master

190: "I am the way, the truth, and the life: *no man cometh unto the Father, but by me*" (John 14:6).

"*No one will meet Allah who has not met His Messenger*" (*hadīth*).

“He that is not with me is against me; and *he that gathereth not with me scattereth abroad*” (Matt. 12:30).

“I am the vine, ye are the branches: He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for *without me ye can do nothing*” (John 15:5).

“*Ye will not, unless Allah willeth*. Lo! Allah is Knower, Wise” (Sūrah “Man” [76]:30).

Note 1: “*Put on the new man*, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness” (Eph. 4:24); “Lie not one to another, seeing that ye have put off the old man with his deeds; and have *put on the new man*, which is renewed in knowledge after the image of Him that created him” (Col. 3:9-10).

192: Note 5: For *Shankara*, see editor’s notes for “Understanding and Believing”, p. 177, Note 10.

194: For *Ibrahim ibn Adham*, see editor’s note for “The Servant and Union”, p. 187, Note 16.

“*Even from a Saracen*”: The *Russian pilgrim* is told by a hermit, “The holy Fathers assure us that if with faith and right intention one questions even a Saracen, he can speak words of value to us. If on the other hand one asks for instruction from a Prophet, without faith and a righteous purpose, then even he will not satisfy us” (*The Way of a Pilgrim: The Pilgrim Continues His Way* [trans. R. M. French], Chapter 7).

195: “*Prostrates himself at the feet of Govinda*”: In the Hindu tradition, Govinda, literally “cow-finder”, is a devotional epithet for either the God Vishnu or the Lord Krishna, the eighth of the *Avatāras* of Vishnu.

196: “And the *Word* was *made flesh*, and dwelt among us” (John 1:14).

Benedict of Nursia (c. 480-c. 550), known as the father of Western monasticism, drew upon the Desert Fathers and John Cassian in composing a short *Rule* for the communities of monks in his charge, a rule that came in time to define the spiritual practices of the Order associated with his name.

According to tradition, *John*, the disciple “whom Jesus loved” (John 13:23 *passim*) and to whom he gave the care of the Blessed Virgin (John 19:26), is the author of the Fourth Gospel, the Apocalypse, and the three Epistles that bear his name.

Ramanuja (1017-c. 1137) is widely regarded as the classic exponent of *Vishishtā Advaita*, that is, the Hindu *darshana* or perspective of “qualified non-dualism”, in which emphasis is placed on the personal nature of God.

Although the teachings of *Confucius*—the Latinized form of Kung Fu Tzu, “the great master Kung” (c. 552-479 B.C.)—are often thought to be of a “merely” ethical nature, the sage himself regarded his teachings as religious in character, emphasizing that “Heaven is the author of the virtue that is in me” (*Analects*, Book 7, Chapter 22).

197: *Nagarjuna* (c. 150-250), founder of the *Mādhyamaka* or “middle way” school of Buddhism and widely regarded in the *Mahāyāna* tradition as a “second Buddha”, is best known for his doctrine of *shūnyatā*, or “emptiness”, and for the correlative teaching that *Nirvāna* and *Samsāra* are essentially identical.

Padma Sambhava (eighth century A.D.), invited to Tibet by King Trisong Detsen on the strength of his reputation for magical and dialectical prowess, is credited with subduing the demons of that land and establishing Buddhism as the dominant religion of Tibet.

Kobo Daishi—meaning “great teacher Kobo”, the posthumous title of the Japanese monk and scholar Kukai (774-835)—brought the Shingon, or esoteric, school of Buddhism from China to Japan.

Note 12: *Francis of Assisi* (1181/2-1226), founder of the Order of Friars Minor, or Franciscans, took the admonition to abandon all for God (Matt. 10:7-19) as a personal call to poverty and holiness and was noted for bearing the stigmata of Christ.

For *Bernard of Clairvaux*, see editor's note for “The Alchemy of the Sentiments”, p. 139.

Note 13: For *Ramakrishna*, see editor's note for “Concerning Proofs of God”, p. 55.

The Delivered One and the Divine Image

199: For *Ibn Arabi*, see editor's note for “Oriental Dialectic and Its Roots in Faith”, p. 101, Note 4.

201: *Rama* and *Krishna* are the two most important *Avatāras* of the Hindu God Vishnu.

Note 6: The “*light of Tabor*” is the uncreated light in which Jesus, Moses, and Elijah were enveloped during Christ's Transfiguration on the Holy Mountain of Tabor and in which, according to the Eastern Church, the deified saints also come to participate: “And after six days Jesus taketh Peter, James, and John his brother, and bringeth them up into an high mountain apart, and was transfigured before them: and his face did shine as the sun, and his raiment was white as the light. And, behold, there appeared unto them Moses and

Elias talking with him Then answered Peter, and said unto Jesus, Lord, it is good for us to be here: if thou wilt, let us make here three tabernacles, one for thee, and one for Moses, and one for Elias. While he yet spake, behold, a bright cloud overshadowed them: and behold a voice out of the cloud, which said, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased; hear ye him. And when the disciples heard it, they fell on their face, and were sore afraid. And Jesus came and touched them, and said, Arise, and be not afraid. And when they had lifted up their eyes, they saw no man, save Jesus only. And as they came down from the mountain, Jesus charged them, saying, Tell the vision to no man, until the Son of man be risen again from the dead" (Matthew 17:1-9, cf. Mark 9:2-8, Luke 9:28-36).

Note 7: Dante Alighieri (1265-1321) was the author of the *Divine Comedy*, one of the summits of world literature, which concludes with a celebration of *l'Amor che muove il sole e l'altre stelle*, "the Love that moves the sun and other stars" (*Paradise*, Canto 33:145).

202: Note 9: For *Ramakrishna*, see editor's note for "Concerning Proofs of God", p. 55.

203: *Zeno of Elea* (c. 490-c. 430 B.C.), one of the pre-Socratic philosophers of ancient Greece, is best known for his paradoxes, which were designed to show that multiplicity and change are illusory.

205: *Ramana Maharshi* (1879-1950), widely regarded as the greatest Hindu sage of the twentieth century, experienced the identity of *Ātmā* and *Brahma* while still a young man, and the fruit of this experience remained with him as a permanent spiritual station throughout his life.

Shiva or *Paramashiva* ("supreme Shiva") is the third god of the Hindu trinity—*Brahma* being the first and *Vishnu* the second—and is associated with the powers of generation and destruction.

Ma Ananda Moyi (1896-1982)—or *Anandamayi Ma*, meaning "bliss-filled Mother"—was known for her intense and long-lasting states of *samādhi* and is venerated by many Hindus as an incarnation of the Goddess *Kali*.

For *Shankara*, see editor's note for "Understanding and Believing", p. 177, Note 10.

Vyasa, traditionally regarded as the compiler of the *Vedas*, is regarded by many Hindus as an incarnation of *Vishnu*.

Note 12: *Kali*, worshipped by *Ramakrishna* (see above) as the supreme deity, is the destructive and transformative manifestation of the Hindu God-

dess Parvati, consort of Shiva; *Mahā-Kali* is "great Kali", and *Shyāmā-Kali* is "black Kali".

206: Mohandas K. *Gandhi* (1869-1948) is a well-known Indian spiritual and political leader.

Truths and Errors Concerning Beauty

213: Note 8: "*Magisterial passage on love*": "Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and have not love, I am become as sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal. And though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries, and all knowledge; and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, and have not love, I am nothing. And though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, and have not love, it profiteth me nothing. Love suffereth long, and is kind; love envieth not; love vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up, doth not behave itself unseemly, seeketh not her own, is not easily provoked, thinketh no evil; rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth in the truth; beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things. Love never faileth: but whether there be prophecies, they shall fail; whether there be tongues, they shall cease; whether there be knowledge, it shall vanish away. For we know in part, and we prophesy in part. But when that which is perfect is come, then that which is in part shall be done away. When I was a child, I spake as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child: but when I became a man, I put away childish things. For now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face: now I know in part; but then shall I know even as also I am known. And now abideth faith, hope, love, these three; but the greatest of these is love" (1 Cor. 13:1-13).

214: "*Beauty is the splendor of the true*" is an axiom the author attributes to Plato.

The Vow of Dharmakara

217: In *Mahāyāna* tradition, *Dharmakara* was an ancient king who renounced his throne and became a monk, devoting himself to good deeds and the service of others and vowing, were he to become a Buddha, to establish a perfect world, a Pure Land, for all those who invoked his *Buddha* name, *Amitabha* (Sanskrit) or *Amida* (Japanese).

Shakyamuni, "Sage of the Shakya clan", is one of the traditional titles of *Siddhartha Gautama*, the founder of Buddhism.

219: "*Everything is Ātmā*": "*Ātmā* was indeed *Brahma* in the beginning. It knew only that 'I am *Brahma*'. Therefore It became all. And whoever among the gods knew It also became That; and the same with sages and men. . . . And to this day whoever in like manner knows 'I am *Brahma*' becomes all

this universe. Even the gods cannot prevail against him, for he becomes their *Ātmā*" (*Bṛihadāranyaka Upanishad*, 1.4.10).

Note 3: *Blasphemies against the "Father" and the "Son" can be forgiven but not those uttered against the "Holy Spirit"*: "All manner of sin and blasphemy shall be forgiven unto men: but the blasphemy against the Holy Ghost shall not be forgiven unto men" (Matt. 12:31; cf. Mark 3:29, Luke 12:10).

220: "Joy shall be in heaven over one sinner that repenteth, more than over ninety and nine just persons, which need no repentance" (Luke 15:7).

"Thou hast ravished my heart, my *sister*, my *spouse*; thou hast ravished my heart with one of thine eyes, with one chain of thy neck. How fair is thy love, my *sister*, my *spouse*! How much better is thy love than wine, and the smell of thine ointments than all spices! Thy lips, O my *spouse*, drop as the honeycomb: honey and milk are under thy tongue; and the smell of thy garments is like the smell of Lebanon. A garden inclosed is my *sister*, my *spouse*; a spring shut up, a fountain sealed" (Song of Sol. 4:9-12).

220: Note 3 (cont.): *Prostration of the Angels before Adam*: "And when We said unto the angels: Prostrate yourselves before Adam, they fell prostrate, all save Iblis. He demurred through pride, and so became a disbeliever" (*Sūrah* "The Cow" [2]:34).

221: The *Names of Mercy*, invoked in the *Basmalah*, are *Rahmān*, "the Beneficent", and *Rahīm*, "the Merciful".

222: "Those who believe and leave their homes and *fight in offering their goods and their lives* in the way of God are of much greater worth in God's sight. These are they who are triumphant" (*Sūrah* "Repentance" [9]:20, *passim*).

Note 7: *Amidism* refers to the Buddhist *Jōdo* or Pure Land sect, whose central spiritual practice is the invocation of Amida, the Buddha of "infinite light" (see editor's note above for p. 217).

223: Note 8: For *Bernard of Clairvaux*, see editor's note for "The Alchemy of the Sentiments", p. 139.

On Sinai God appeared in the form of a *Burning Bush* and spoke these words to Moses: "*I am that I am*: and He said, Thus shalt thou say unto the children of Israel, I AM hath sent me unto you" (Exod. 3:14).

The three *Evangelical counsels* of *poverty*, *obedience*, and *chastity*, also known as the "counsels of perfection", gave rise to the traditional vows of the monk.

The Latin phrase *perinde ac si cadaver essent* ("as if they were a corpse") comes from the *Constitutions* of Ignatius Loyola (1491-1556), founder and first general of the Society of Jesus: "Those who live under obedience must let themselves be led and ruled by divine providence through their superiors, as if they were a corpse, which allows itself to be carried here and there and treated in any way."

"And he saith unto them, *Follow me*, and I will make you fishers of men" (Matt. 4:19 *passim*)

The Kingdom of Heaven, which is "within you": "Behold, the kingdom of God is within you" (Luke 17:21).

224: Note 10: *Shan Tao* (613-81), an early Chinese proponent of Pure Land Buddhism, was among the first to emphasize *nien-fo*, or recitation of the Name of Amida (Amitabha) *Buddha*, as the most important of spiritual practices.

Honen Shonin (1133-1212), founder of the Pure Land or *Jōdo* school in Japan, taught that everyone without exception can be reborn into Amida's paradise simply by faithful repetition of his Name.

Shinran (1173-1262), a disciple of Honen and founder of the *Jōdo-Shinshū* or "true pure land school", rejected all "ways of effort" and advocated complete reliance on the "power of the other" as manifest in the Name *Amida*, a single pronunciation of which is sufficient for rebirth into paradise.

Man and Certainty

226: "*One thing needful*": "One thing is needful: and Mary hath chosen that good part, which shall not be taken away from her" (Luke 10:42).

"*Those who have ears to hear*": "He that hath ears to hear, let him hear" (Matt. 11:15, *passim*).

Selections from Letters and Other Previously Unpublished Writings

235: Selection 1: Letter of 22 June 1964.

236: Selection 2: "The Book of Keys", No. 474, "The Substance".

237: Selection 3: Letter of February 1976.

The author discusses *the question of transubstantiation* above in "Evidence and Mystery", pp. 80-81, as well as in "The Enigma of the *Epiclesis*" in *Christianity/Islam: Perspectives on Esoteric Ecumenism*, ed. James S. Cutsinger (Bloomington, Indiana: World Wisdom, 2008).

“*I am the vine*, ye are the branches: He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without me ye can do nothing” (John 15:5); “*I am the door*: by me if any man enter in, he shall be saved, and shall go in and out, and find pasture” (John 10:9).

“And as they were eating, Jesus took bread, and blessed it, and brake it, and gave it to the disciples, and said, Take, eat; *this is my body*” (Matt. 26:26; cf. Mark 14:22, Luke 22:19, 1 Cor. 11:24).

“And Jesus, when he was baptized, went up straightway out of the water and, lo, the heavens were opened unto him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove, and lighting upon him: And lo a voice from heaven, saying, *This is my beloved Son*, in whom I am well pleased” (Matt. 3:16-17).

“And it came to pass in those days, that Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee, and was baptized of John in Jordan. And straightway coming up out of the water, he saw the heavens opened, and the Spirit like a dove descending upon him: And there came a voice from heaven, saying, *Thou art my beloved Son*, in whom I am well pleased” (Mark 1:9-11); “Now when all the people were baptized, it came to pass, that Jesus also being baptized, and praying, the heaven was opened, And the Holy Ghost descended in a bodily shape like a dove upon him, and a voice came from heaven, which said, *Thou art my beloved Son*; in thee I am well pleased” (Luke 3:21-22).

Monophysites taught that there is only one *physis* (Greek for “nature”) in Christ, namely his Divinity.

238: Selection 4: Marginalia in a letter from a correspondent concerning the Book of Genesis, October 1975.

Cabalists are Jewish esoterists and mystics.

Selection 5: Letter of 31 August 1972.

“Man can upset this [biological equilibrium]—at least abnormally—and he *does this by means of his machines and serums*, in short by all those inroads into nature that come about through the acquisitions and misdeeds of modern civilization”; see above “Concerning Proofs of God”, p. 54.

239: Selection 6: Letter of 22 June 1964.

Aristarchus of Samos (c. 310-c. 230 B.C.) and *Hipparcus* (c. 190-c. 120 B.C.) were Greek astronomers and mathematicians; Muhammad ibn Jabir al-Harrani *al-Battani* (c. 850-929)—known in the West as Albatgenius—was a Muslim astronomer and mathematician.

Selection 7. Letter of 13 April 1974.

240: Selection 8: Letter of 9 December 1985.

The *Council of Nicaea*, the first of the Ecumenical Councils of the early Church, took place in 325; *Vatican II* met from 1962 to 1965.

Selection 9: "The Book of Keys", No. 540, "God is Consciousness".

241: *Sabellius* (fl. c. 215), a priest, theologian, and heresiarch of the early Church, taught that the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are *modes* or "masks" of an essentially unitarian Deity (see editor's note for "Evidence and Mystery", p. 82).

Selection 10: Letter of 31 July 1975.

Ananda Coomaraswamy (1877-1947), for many years curator of Indian art in the Boston Museum of Fine Arts and one of the founding figures of the perennialist school, was the author of numerous books and articles on art, religion, and metaphysics from the point of view of the primordial and universal tradition.

Abd al-Karim al-*Jili* (c. 1365-c. 1412) systematized the teachings of Ibn Arabi, notably in his most important work, *The Universal Man*, which is concerned with both cosmological and metaphysical questions.

For *Plato*, see editor's note for "Rationalism Real and Apparent", pp. 39-40.

For *Meister Eckhart*, see editor's note for "Evidence and Mystery", p. 95, Note 18.

For *Rumi*, see editor's note for "Concerning Proofs of God", p. 55.

For *Plotinus*, see editor's note for "Rationalism Real and Apparent", p. 40.

"*Wisdom of the world*" or "*wisdom according to the flesh*": "Where is the wise? where is the scribe? where is the disputer of this world? hath not God made foolish the wisdom of this world?" (1 Cor. 1:20); "I beseech you, that I may not be bold when I am present with that confidence, wherewith I think to be bold against some, which think of us as if we walked *according to the flesh*" (2 Cor. 10:2); "In simplicity and godly sincerity, not with fleshly wisdom, but by the grace of God, we have had our conversation in the world" (2 Cor. 1:12).

242: Selection 11: "The Book of Keys", No. 83, "Contents and Containers".

Selection 12: Letter of February 1971.

243: “I am the vine, ye are the branches: He that abideth in me, and I in him, he same bringeth forth much fruit: for *without me ye can do nothing*” (John 15:5).

“He that is not with me is against me; and *he that gathereth not with me scattereth abroad*” (Matt. 12:30).

One enters into the Buddhist tradition by taking “*Triple Refuge*” in the Buddha, the *Dharma*, and the *Sangha*.

244: Selection 13: “The Book of Keys”, No. 676, “Faith Is to Say ‘Yes’”.

“*Obscure merit of faith*”: “The merit of faith consists in this, that man through obedience assents to things he does not see” (Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, Part 3, Question 7, Article 3).

Selection 14: “The Book of Keys”, No. 1076, “Beyond an Alternative”.

245: Selection 15: Letter of 19 October 1980.

Selection 16: “The Book of Keys”, No. 1140, “The Argument”.

For the author’s discussion of the *ontological argument*, see “Concerning Proofs of God”, pp. 50-51.

246: Selection 17: Letter of 18 January 1982.

The Koran compares [rain] to life-bestowing Grace: “And We send down rain as a blessing from heaven, whereby We cause gardens to spring forth, and the grain of harvest” (*Sūrah “Qāf”* [50]:9, *passim*).

“*The wind bloweth where it listeth*, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth: so is every one that is born of the Spirit” (John 3:8).

This Heaven is “within you”: “Behold, *the kingdom of God is within you*” (Luke 17:21).

247: Selection 18: “The Book of Keys”, No. 449, “The Message of Certainty”.

The Theological and Metaphysical Ambiguity of the Word *Ex*

249: “The Theological and Metaphysical Ambiguity of the Word *Ex*” has never been published in the original French; it first appeared in *The Eye of the Heart: Metaphysics, Cosmology, Spiritual Life* (Bloomington, Indiana: World

Wisdom Books, 1997), an English edition of the author's *L'Œil du Cœur* (Paris: Gallimard, 1950; Paris: Dervy-Livres, 1974).

"And God said, let there be light; and there was light" (Gen. 1:3).

250: "God createth what He will. If He decreeth a thing, *it sufficeth for Him to say: Be! and it is*" (Sūrah "The Family of Imran" [3]:47).

In a certain respect, God is omnipresent; in another, "Brahma is not in the world": Elsewhere the author writes: "It is useless to seek to realize that 'I am *Brahma*' before understanding that 'I am not *Brahma*'; it is useless to seek to realize that '*Brahma* is my true Self' before understanding that '*Brahma* is outside me'; it is useless to seek to realize that '*Brahma* is pure Consciousness' before understanding that '*Brahma* is the almighty Creator'. It is not possible to understand that the statement 'I am not *Brahma*' is false before having understood that it is true. Likewise it is not possible to understand that the statement '*Brahma* is outside me' is not precise before having understood that it is; and likewise again it is not possible to understand that the statement '*Brahma* is the almighty Creator' contains an error before having understood that it expresses a truth" (*Spiritual Perspectives and Human Facts: A New Translation with Selected Letters*, ed. James S. Cutsinger [Bloomington, Indiana: World Wisdom, 2007], p. 116).

A posteriori (Latin): literally, “from after”; proceeding from effect to cause or from experience to principle.

A priori (Latin): literally, “from before”, proceeding from cause to effect or from principle to experience

Ab intra (Latin): “from inside”; proceeding from something intrinsic or internal.

Ad alterum (Latin): literally, “toward another”; defined in relationship to something else, in contrast to *ad se*.

Ad majorem Dei gloriam (Latin): “to the greater glory of God”.

Ad se (Latin): literally, “toward itself”; defined solely by or with respect to itself, in contrast to *ad alterum*.

Advaita (Sanskrit): “non-dualist” interpretation of the *Vedānta*; Hindu doctrine according to which the seeming multiplicity of things is regarded as the product of ignorance, the only true reality being *Brahma*, the One, the Absolute, the Infinite, which is the unchanging ground of appearance.

Amor Dei (Latin): “love of God”.

Ānanda (Sanskrit): “bliss, beatitude, joy”; one of the three essential aspects of *Apara-Brahma*, together with *Sat*, “being”, and *Chit*, “consciousness”.

Apara-Brahma (Sanskrit): the “non-supreme” or penultimate *Brahma*, also called *Brahma saguna*; in the author’s teaching, the “relative Absolute”.

Apocatastasis (Greek): “restitution, restoration”; among certain Christian theologians, including Clement of Alexandria, Origen, and Gregory of Nyssa, the doctrine that all creatures will finally be saved.

Ascesis (Greek): “exercise, practice, training”, as of an athlete; a regimen of self-denial, especially one involving fasting, prostrations, and other bodily disciplines.

Āshram (Sanskrit): in Hinduism, a center for meditation and religious study.

Ātmā or *Ātman* (Sanskrit): the real or true “Self”, underlying the ego and its manifestations; in the perspective of *Advaita Vedānta*, identical with *Brahma*.

Avatāra (Sanskrit): the earthly “descent”, incarnation, or manifestation of God, especially of Vishnu in the Hindu tradition.

Barakah (Arabic): “blessing”, grace; in Islam, a spiritual influence or energy emanating originally from God, but often attached to sacred objects and spiritual persons.

Basmalah (Arabic): traditional Muslim formula of blessing, found at the beginning of all but one of the *sūrah*s of the Koran, consisting of the words *Bismi ’Llāhi ’r-Rahmāni ’r-Rahīm*, “In the Name of God, the Beneficent, the Merciful”.

Bhakta (Sanskrit): a follower of the spiritual path of *bhakti*; a person whose relationship with God is based primarily on adoration and love.

Bhakti or *bhakti-mārga* (Sanskrit): the spiritual “path” (*mārga*) of “love” (*bhakti*) and devotion; see *jnāna* and *karma*.

Bodhisattva (Sanskrit, Pali): literally, “enlightenment-being”; in *Mahāyāna* Buddhism, one who postpones his own final enlightenment and entry into *Nirvāna* in order to aid all other sentient beings in their quest for Buddhahood.

Brahma or *Brahman* (Sanskrit): the Supreme Reality, the Absolute.

Brahmā (Sanskrit): God in the aspect of Creator, the first divine “person” of the *Trimūrti*; to be distinguished from *Brahma*, the Supreme Reality.

Brahma nirguna (Sanskrit): *Brahma* considered as transcending all “qualities”, attributes, or predicates; God as He is in Himself; also called *Para-Brahma*.

Brahma saguna (Sanskrit): *Brahma* “qualified” by attributes and predicates, God insofar as He can be known by man; also called *Apara-Brahma*.

Brāhmaṇa (Sanskrit): “Brahmin”; a member of the highest of the four Hindu castes; a priest or spiritual teacher.

Buddha (Sanskrit): “enlightened one”; any being who has awakened to the truth; the title of Gautama Shakyamuni, the historical founder of Buddhism.

Buddhi (Sanskrit): “Intellect”, the highest faculty of knowledge, distinct from *manas*, that is, mind or reason.

Chela (Sanskrit): in Hinduism, the student or disciple of a *guru*, in whom complete trust is required.

Chit (Sanskrit): “consciousness”; one of the three essential aspects of *Apara-Brahma*, together with *Sat*, “being”, and *Ānanda*, “bliss, beatitude, joy”.

Corruptio optimi pessima (Latin): “the corruption of the best is the worst”.

Creatio ex mundo (Latin): “creation out of, or from, the world”; a cosmogony in which creatures come forth from the world itself, which is either identified with God or considered independent of Him.

Creatio ex nihilo (Latin): “creation out of nothing”; the doctrine that God Himself is the sufficient cause of the universe, needing nothing else; often set in contrast to emanationist cosmogonies.

Creatio ex Verbo (Latin): “creation from the Word”; the cosmogony implicit in the Prologue of the Fourth Gospel: “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. . . . *All things were made by him; and without him was not any thing made that was made*” (John 1:1, 3).

Deo juvante (Latin): “God helping”; with God’s help.

Deva (Sanskrit): literally, “shining one”; in Hinduism, a celestial being; any of the gods of the *Vedas*, traditionally reckoned as thirty-three.

Dharma (Sanskrit): in Hinduism, the underlying “law” or “order” of the cosmos as expressed in sacred rites and in actions appropriate to various social relationships and human vocations; in Buddhism, the practice and realization of Truth.

Dhyāni-Bodhisattva and *Dhyāni-Buddha* (Sanskrit): *Bodhisattva* and *Buddha* “of meditation”; a *Bodhisattva* or *Buddha*, such as Amitabha (Amida in Japanese), who appears to the eye of contemplative vision but is not accessible in a historical form.

Fanā (Arabic): “extinction, annihilation, evanescence”; in Sufism, the spiritual station or degree of realization in which all individual attributes and limitations are extinguished in union with God; see *Nirvāna*.

Faqīr (Arabic, plural *fuqarā*): literally, the “poor one”; in Sufism, a follower of the spiritual path, whose “indigence” or “poverty” (*faqr*) testifies to complete dependence on God and a desire to be filled by Him alone.

Fard (Arabic): “alone”; in Sufism, one who realizes the truth on his own and without membership in a *tarīqah*, or even without belonging to a revealed religion, receiving illumination directly from God.

Fātihah (Arabic): the “opening” *sūrah*, or chapter, of the Koran, recited in the daily prayers of all Muslims and consisting of the words: “In the Name of God, the Beneficent, the Merciful. Praise to God, Lord of the Worlds, the Beneficent, the Merciful. Owner of the Day of Judgment, Thee (alone) we worship; Thee (alone) we ask for help. Show us the straight path, the path of those whom Thou hast favored, not (the path) of those who earn Thine anger nor of those who go astray.”

Fuqarā (Arabic): see *faqīr*.

Gnosis (Greek): “knowledge”; spiritual insight, principial comprehension, divine wisdom.

Gopī (Sanskrit): literally, “keeper of the cows”; in Hindu tradition, one of the cowherd girls involved with Krishna in the love affairs of his youth, symbolic of the soul’s devotion to God.

Guna (Sanskrit): literally, “strand”; quality, characteristic, attribute; in Hinduism, the *gunas* are the three constituents of *Prakriti*: *sattva* (the ascending, luminous quality), *rajas* (the expansive, passional quality), and *tamas* (the descending, dark quality).

Guru (Sanskrit): literally, “weighty”, grave, venerable; in Hinduism, a spiritual master; one who gives initiation and instruction in the spiritual path and in whom is embodied the supreme goal of realization or perfection.

Hadīth (Arabic, plural *ahādīth*): “saying, narrative”; an account of the words or deeds of the Prophet Muhammad, transmitted through a traditional chain of known intermediaries.

Heyoka (Lakota): in Sioux culture, a “holy fool” or “sacred clown”.

Hypostasis (Greek, plural *hypostases*): literally, “substance”; the transcendent form of a metaphysical reality, understood to be eternally distinct from all other such forms; in Christian theology, a technical term for one of the three Persons of the Trinity.

In Deo (Latin): “in God”.

In divinis (Latin): literally, “in or among divine things”; within the divine Principle; the plural form is used insofar as the Principle comprises both *Para-Brahma*, Beyond-Being or the Absolute, and *Apara-Brahma*, Being or the relative Absolute.

Intellectus agens (Latin): “agent Intellect”; in Aristotelian and scholastic epistemology, the faculty of the mind responsible for abstracting intelligible forms from the data of sense.

Intellectus possibilis (Latin): “possible or potential Intellect”; in Aristotelian and scholastic epistemology, the faculty of the mind actuated by intelligible forms and thus prompted to an act of understanding.

Īshvara (Sanskrit): literally, “possessing power”, hence master; God understood as a personal being, as Creator and Lord.

Japa-Yoga (Sanskrit): method of “union” or “unification” (*yoga*) based upon the “repetition” (*japa*) of a *mantra* or sacred formula, often containing one of the Names of God

Jīvan-mukta (Sanskrit): one who is “liberated” while still in this “life”; a person who has attained a state of spiritual perfection or self-realization before death; in contrast to *videha-mukta*, one who is liberated at the moment of death.

Jñāna or *jñāna-mārga* (Sanskrit): the spiritual “path” (*mārga*) of “knowledge” (*jñāna*) and intellection; see *bhakti* and *karma*.

Jñānin (Sanskrit): a follower of the path of *jñāna*; a person whose relationship with God is based primarily on sapiential knowledge or *gnosis*.

Jōdo (Japanese): “pure land”; the untainted, transcendent realm created by the *Buddha* Amida (Amitabha in Sanskrit), into which his devotees aspire to be born in their next life.

Jōdo-Shinshū (Japanese): “true pure land school”; a sect of Japanese Pure Land Buddhism founded by Shinran, based on faith in the power of the *Buddha* Amida and characterized by use of the *nembutsu*.

Kalām (Arabic): literally, “discourse, speech”; in Islam, the science of theology, based upon a reasoned exposition of the Koran and *Sunnah*.

Karma, *karma-mārga*, *karma-yoga* (Sanskrit): the spiritual “path” (*mārga*) or method of “union” (*yoga*) based upon right “action, work” (*karma*); see *bhakti* and *jnāna*.

Kōan (Japanese): literally, “precedent for public use”, case study; in Zen Buddhism, a question or anecdote often based on the experience or sayings of a notable master and involving a paradox or puzzle that cannot be solved in conventional terms or with ordinary thinking.

Lingam (Sanskrit): “sign, symbol”; in Hinduism, the symbol of masculine generative energy, associated with Shiva.

Logos (Greek): “word, reason”; in Christian theology, the divine, uncreated Word of God (cf. John 1:1); the transcendent Principle of creation and revelation.

Mahā-Kāla (Sanskrit): literally, “the great black one”; in Hinduism, ultimate or absolute Reality; see *Brahma Nirguna*.

Mahāyāna (Sanskrit): “great vehicle”; the form of Buddhism, including such traditions as Zen and *Jōdo-Shinshū*, which regards itself as the fullest or most adequate expression of the Buddha’s teaching; distinguished by the idea that *Nirvāna* is not other than *samsāra* truly seen as it is.

Mandala (Sanskrit): “circle”; in Hinduism and Buddhism, a symbolic representation of the universe, used in religious ceremonies and meditation.

Mantra (Sanskrit): “instrument of thought”; a word or phrase of divine origin, often including a Name of God, repeated by those initiated into its proper use as a means of salvation or liberation; see *japa-yoga*.

Materia prima (Latin): “first or prime matter”; in Platonic cosmology, the undifferentiated and primordial substance that serves as a “receptacle” for the shaping force of divine forms or ideas; universal potentiality.

Māyā (Sanskrit): “artifice, illusion”; in *Advaita Vedānta*, the beguiling concealment of *Brahma* in the form or under the appearance of a lower reality.

Māyā in divinis (Sanskrit and Latin): literally, “illusion within or among divine things”; an expression of the metaphysical teaching that relativity, and thus a certain degree of illusion, can be found even within the divine Principle, beginning with the personal God or “relative Absolute”; only *Brahma*, the Absolute as such, is fully real.

inus habentes (Latin, singular *minus habens*) literally, “those who have less (wit, intelligence)”, dimwits, morons

ors Deo (Latin): “death in God”.

Nembutsu (Japanese): “remembrance or mindfulness of the Buddha”, based upon the repeated invocation of his Name; same as *buddhānusmṛiti* in Sanskrit and *nien-fo* in Chinese.

Nirvāna (Sanskrit): “blowing out, extinction”; in Indian traditions, especially Buddhism, the supremely blissful state of liberation resulting from the extinction of the fires of passion, egoism, and attachment.

Nous (Greek): intellect; the highest faculty in man, by which truth can be directly known.

Paramātmā (Sanskrit): the “supreme” or ultimate Self; see *Ātmā*.

Para-Brahma (Sanskrit): the “supreme” or ultimate *Brahma*, also called *Brahma nirguna*; the Absolute as such.

Pneumatikos (Greek): a “spiritual man”; one in whom the element spirit (*pneuma*) predominates over the soul and the body (cf. 1 Thess. 5:23; 1 Cor. 2:14-15).

Pontifex (Latin): literally, “bridge-maker”; man as the link between heaven and earth.

Prakṛiti (Sanskrit): literally, “making first” (see *materia prima*); the fundamental, “feminine” substance or material cause of all things; see *Purusha*.

Pratyeka-Buddha (Sanskrit): “independent *Buddha*”; in Buddhism, one who attains enlightenment without a teacher and who makes no attempt to instruct disciples.

Princeps huius mundi (Latin): “prince of this world”; Satan, the devil.

Pro domo (Latin): literally, “for (one’s own) home or house”; serving the interests of a given perspective or for the benefit of a given group.

Psychikos (Greek): one in whom the element soul (*psyche*) predominates over the spirit and the body (cf. 1 Thess. 5:23; 1 Cor. 2:14-15).

Purusha (Sanskrit): literally, “man”; the informing or shaping principle of creation; the “masculine” demiurge or fashioner of the universe; see *Prakṛiti*.

Quod absit (Latin): literally, “which is absent from, opposed to, or inconsistent with”; a phrase commonly used by the medieval Scholastics to call attention to an idea that is absurdly inconsistent with accepted principles.

Rajas (Sanskrit): in Hinduism, one of the three *gunas*, or qualities, of *Prakriti*, of which all things are woven; the quality of expansiveness, manifest in the material world as force or movement and in the soul as ambition, initiative, and restlessness.

Ratio (Latin): literally, “calculation”; the faculty of discursive thinking, to be distinguished from *intellectus*, “Intellect”.

Religio caeli (Latin): “religion of heaven”.

Religio cordis (Latin): “religion of the heart”.

Religio formalis (Latin): “formal religion”.

Religio perennis (Latin): “perennial religion”.

Rita (Sanskrit): “order, rule, justice”; in Hinduism, the underlying harmony or order of the universe, which is to be both imitated and sustained through appropriate rites and actions.

Sādhaka (Sanskrit): in Hinduism, one who follows a *sādhana*, or spiritual path, especially a path involving the use of a *mantra* and visualization of the chosen deity.

Samsāra (Sanskrit): literally, “wandering”; in Hinduism and Buddhism, transmigration or the cycle of birth, death, and rebirth; also the world of apparent flux and change.

Sangha (Sanskrit, Pali): literally, “gathering”; in Buddhism, the spiritual community of all those who follow the teaching of the Buddha.

Sat (Sanskrit): “being”; one of the three essential aspects of *Apara-Brahma*, together with *Chit*, “consciousness”, and *Ānanda*, “bliss, beatitude, joy”.

Sattva (Sanskrit): in Hinduism, one of the three *gunas*, or qualities, of *Prakriti*, of which all things are woven; the quality of luminosity, manifest in the material world as buoyancy or lightness and in the soul as intelligence and virtue.

Shahādah (Arabic): the fundamental “profession” or “testimony” of faith in Islam, consisting of the words *lā ilāha illā 'llāh, Muhammadan rasūlu 'llāh*: “There is no god but God; Muhammad is the messenger of God.”

hakti (Sanskrit) creative “power”, expressed in Hinduism in the form of ivine femininity.

Sharī'ah (Arabic): “path”; in Islam, the proper mode and norm of life, the path or way willed and marked out by God for man’s return to Him; Muslim law or exoterism.

Shraddhā (Sanskrit): literally, “application of faith”; in Hinduism, an offering to the sages, the gods, or the ancestors; the trustful obedience of the Hindu *bhakta*.

Shūnyamūrti (Sanskrit): “the form or manifestation of the void”; traditional epithet of the Buddha, in whom is “incarnate” *shūnyatā*, ultimate “emptiness”, that is, the final absence of all definite being or selfhood.

Sophia (Greek): “wisdom”; in Jewish and Christian tradition, the Wisdom of God, often conceived as feminine (cf. Prov. 8).

Sophia Perennis (Latin): “Perennial Wisdom”; the eternal, non-formal Truth at the heart of all orthodox religious traditions.

Starets (Russian): literally, “old man”; in the Christian East, a spiritual father or guide.

Sunnah (Arabic): “custom, way of acting”; in Islam, the norm established by the Prophet Muhammad, including his actions and sayings (see *hadīth*) and serving as a precedent and standard for the behavior of Muslims.

Sūrah (Arabic): one of the one hundred fourteen divisions, or chapters, of the Koran.

Sūtra (Sanskrit): literally, “thread”; a Hindu or Buddhist sacred text; in Hinduism, any short, aphoristic verse or collection of verses, often elliptical in style; in Buddhism, a collection of the discourses of the Buddha.

Tamas (Sanskrit): in Hinduism, one of the three *gunas*, or qualities, of *Prakriti*, of which all things are woven; the quality of darkness or heaviness, manifest in the material world as inertia or rigidity and in the soul as sloth, stupidity, and vice.

Tārā (Sanskrit): “star”; in Hinduism, an epithet for many goddesses, notably Parvati, consort of Shiva; in Buddhism, the name given to a diverse group of female *Buddhas* and *Bodhisattvas*.

Tarīqah (Arabic): “path”, in exoteric Islam, a virtual synonym for *Sharīah*, equivalent to the “straight path” mentioned in the *Fātihah*; in Sufism, the mystical path leading from observance of the *Sharīah* to self-realization in God; also a Sufi brotherhood.

Tawhīd (Arabic): “unification, union”; in Islam, the affirmation of divine unity as expressed in the first phrase of the *Shahādah*, “There is no god but God” (*lā ilāha illā ’Llāh*); in Sufism, the doctrine of mystical union; see *fanā’*.

Theravāda (Pali): “teaching of the elders”; the oldest surviving school of Buddhism.

Torah (Hebrew): “instruction, teaching”; in Judaism, the written law of God, as revealed to Moses on Sinai and embodied in the Pentateuch (Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy).

Trimūrti (Sanskrit): literally, “having three forms”; in Hindu tradition, a triadic expression of the Divine, especially in the form of Brahma, the creator, Vishnu, the preserver, and Shiva, the transformer.

Upanishad (Sanskrit): literally, “to sit close by”; hence, any esoteric doctrine requiring direct transmission from master to disciple; in Hinduism, the genre of sacred texts that end or complete the *Vedas*; see *Vedānta*.

Upāya (Sanskrit): “means, expedient, method”; in Buddhist tradition, the adaptation of spiritual teaching to a form suited to the level of one’s audience.

Vacare Deo (Latin): literally, “to be empty for God”; to be at leisure for or available to God; in the Christian monastic and contemplative tradition, to set aside time from work for meditation and prayer.

Veda (Sanskrit): “knowledge”; in Hinduism, the body of sacred knowledge held to be the basis of orthodoxy and right practice.

Vedānta (Sanskrit): “end or culmination of the *Vedas*”; one of the major schools of traditional Hindu philosophy, based in part on the Upanishads; see *advaita*.

Yin-Yang (Chinese): in Chinese tradition, two opposite but complementary forces or qualities, from whose interpenetration the universe and all its diverse forms emerge; *Yin* corresponds to the feminine, the yielding, the

moon, liquidity; *Yang* corresponds to the masculine, the resisting, the sun, solidity.

Yoga (Sanskrit): literally, “yoking, union”; in Indian traditions, any meditative and ascetic technique designed to bring the soul and body into a state of concentration; one of the six orthodox *darshanas*, or perspectives, of classical Hinduism.

Yogin (Sanskrit): one who is “yoked or joined”; a practitioner of *yoga*.

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Frithjof Schuon

Born in Basle, Switzerland in 1907, Frithjof Schuon was the twentieth century's pre-eminent spokesman for the perennialist school of comparative religious thought.

The leitmotif of Schuon's work was foreshadowed in an encounter during his youth with a marabout who had accompanied some members of his Senegalese village to Basle for the purpose of demonstrating their African culture. When Schuon talked with him, the venerable old man drew a circle with radii on the ground and explained: "God is the center; all paths lead to Him." Until his later years Schuon traveled widely, from India and the Middle East to America, experiencing traditional cultures and establishing lifelong friendships with Hindu, Buddhist, Christian, Muslim, and American Indian spiritual leaders.

A philosopher in the tradition of Plato, Shankara, and Eckhart, Schuon was a gifted artist and poet as well as the author of over twenty books on religion, metaphysics, sacred art, and the spiritual path. Describing his first book, *The Transcendent Unity of Religions*, T. S. Eliot wrote, "I have met with no more impressive work in the comparative study of Oriental and Occidental religion", and world-renowned religion scholar Huston Smith said of Schuon, "The man is a living wonder; intellectually apropos religion, equally in depth and breadth, the paragon of our time". Schuon's books have been translated into over a dozen languages and are respected by academic and religious authorities alike.

More than a scholar and writer, Schuon was a spiritual guide for seekers from a wide variety of religions and backgrounds throughout the world. He died in 1998.

James S. Cutsinger (Ph.D., Harvard) is Professor of Theology and Religious Thought at the University of South Carolina.

A widely recognized writer on the *sophia perennis* and the perennialist school, Professor Cutsinger is also an authority on the theology and spirituality of the Christian East. His publications include *Advice to the Serious Seeker: Meditations on the Teaching of Frithjof Schuon*, *Not of This World: A Treasury of Christian Mysticism*, *Paths to the Heart: Sufism and the Christian East*, *The Fullness of God: Frithjof Schuon on Christianity*, and *Prayer Fashions Man: Frithjof Schuon on the Spiritual Life*.

FRITHJOF SCHUON (1907-1998), the author of more than 25 books on religion and spirituality, is the foremost representative of the "Perennialist" or "Traditionalist" school of comparative religious thought. This new edition of *Logic and Transcendence*, his most important philosophical work, is a fully revised translation from the French original and contains:

- ❖ an extensive new appendix of previously unpublished selections from Schuon's letters and other private writings;
- ❖ comprehensive editor's notes by James S. Cutsinger;
- ❖ a new glossary of foreign terms and phrases, and an index.



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