

JULIUS EVOLA

THE MASK AND FACE OF CONTEMPORARY  
**SPIRITUALISM**



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Arktos

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## Translator's Introduction

IN 1932, JULIUS EVOLA, still then a youngish man fast upon the brink of those ideas that would render him famous (or infamous) in time to come, published a book of ostensible critique on the variety of "spiritualist" forms, schools, cults and teachers which then was much in vogue in his society and in the wider West, entitled *Maschera e volto dello spiritualismo contemporaneo*. The book was destined to be quickly overshadowed (not to say eclipsed altogether) by his subsequent publication, just two years later, of *Revolt Against the Modern World*, and, despite being twice republished by Evola himself with certain suggestive alterations, was finally after his death to settle to the level of what are largely and rather passively considered Evola's secondary works. For us in the Anglophone world, the easiest index of this unofficial hierarchy is given by the order in which Evola's books have received translation; this reflects, not certainly the inherent worth of these books, but rather the importance which is more or less granted them by primarily Italian Evolian criticism today. It is then not particularly inspiring to realize that the present work has been one of the last of all Evola's works to find its way into English.

Yet what we have just said bears emphasis: the assumption that a given Evolian work is "secondary" often enough reflects less the quality of the book itself, than the misconceptions of its readers and critiques, owing in many cases to the nature of the time in which we live and the suspicion and carelessness which has attended to Evola's name (whenever it has been considered) almost since the end of the War. Even more glaring examples could be given of such misunderstandings, but we limit ourselves to consideration of the present book. *Mask and Face of Contemporary Spiritualism* has been relegated to the lesser works of the Evolian oeuvre, we may suppose, for two principal reasons: first, it was originally published as a compilation of previously published essays, rather than as an independent and original whole; second, it treats of specific historical phenomena, and thus might appear outdated. Before we set out to uncover points of reference for approaching the book itself, it would be opportune to dispel both of these motives for that underestimation which the present work has so unjustly suffered.

As to the first notion, that *Mask and Face* (as indeed several of Evola's works) was originally a compilation of essays rather than an independent and original work, the implication being that it therefore deserves less consideration than a book written all at once and at a go, as it were — I have argued before (in my introductions to *Recognitions* and *The Bow and the Club*) that the mere fact that these books employ already published material hardly entitles us to take these works as mere compendia, of a level with, for instance, the great many posthumous volumes of Evola's essays. These latter works have value in the *pieces*; but any work organized by Evola himself has value as a *whole*. To speak of no other concerns, the mere assembly of these essays demanded of Evola a certain discrimination and planning, unless we are to suppose that he went about their selection and ordering altogether haphazardly, on a whim, taking names at random and piling them one on top of another, just so — a notion which mocks itself in its very utterance, so ludicrous is it. The very act of choosing *these* essays, and not others, of placing them in *this* order, and not another, suggests that the book as a whole must be conferred a higher dignity than some miscellaneous arbitrary of "shorter writings."

This to say nothing of the fact that Evola never merely "compiled essays," leaving the matter at that. The books that he formed of previously published material always included emendations, expansions, reworkings of the material in question, at Evola's own hand; this fact forces us to consider the changes in question and to evaluate them — which is equivalent to saying that we must take these works as independent works, and not as echo-filled repetitions or representations of prior statements.

What we have said so far, despite the logic in it, might appear to have a flavor of mere supposition. Fortunately, we are not constrained to leave the matter at mere hypothesizing; we have definite biographical knowledge which comes to our aid here, to demonstrate the validity of what we have asserted. *Mask and Face* was not published just once, in 1932, but three separate times, once again in 1949, and yet again toward the end of Evola's life in 1971, just three years before Evola's demise. This fact alone attests to the importance which Evola ascribed to this book; but there is more. The first publication, though it did indeed employ prior essays, included also some totally new material, as the chapter on Catholicism. Both



reprintings, too, came with additional material, original chapters which were added in each case, including a second conclusion. Nor can these merely be taken as “bringing the book up to date” with the newest follies in the world of neo-spiritualism, since the first major change in 1949 came with the addition of a key chapter on Nietzsche and Dostoevsky, both of whom had been dead for about half a century or more. In 1972, on the other hand, Evola added the chapter on Satanism, which, in the figures of Anton LaVey and the brief mention made of Charles Manson, certainly represented mere “recent developments”; less so, however, that of Aleister Crowley, who had already ascended to some higher plane twenty-five years before the third publication of this book. More: the additional material was *not* merely tacked on to the end of the book, as an afterthought, in final chapters or in appendices, as one would expect had the book itself been merely pasted together just so. The new chapters were rather interposed each time between the last and the penultimate. All of this attests to a unified, overarching, clear-sighted structure which Evola had in mind for this book, and one which absolutely nullifies the thesis that this book can be taken *a priori* as a work of secondary or marginal importance merely on account of its material.

But what of that other charge — namely, that this book treats of a subject matter which has grown stale, speaking as it does of currents, movements, schools, etc. which are no longer much in fashion among the “spiritual seekers” of our time? Or, to phrase this argument otherwise: what was “contemporary” at the publication of this book on “contemporary spiritualism,” is no longer contemporary to us; we are living a fundamentally different circumstance, and the “trends” and dangers for us have altered, so that Evola’s treatment, while it might be interesting from the standpoint of, say, historical studies, cannot have a great deal of relevance for us today. Why then should we read this book at all, supposing that particular historical investigation does not interest us?

There are three responses which may, and must, be opposed to this claim. The first of these has already been suggested: Evola’s intentional addition to this book of material relating to figures from the last century suggests that his idea of what is “contemporary” cannot be reduced to an arc of time containing but a decade here or there of the past century. The contemporary issues from certain

principles, founts, roots; these origins, so far from being the spontaneous, superficial, ephemeral outgrowths of some mere moment, are in fact deeply bound to modernity itself, to an entire epoch and an entire turning of the cycle; and the identification of these sources therefore gives us the ability to evaluate all the manifestations that they produce within that cycle, within *our* time.

The second response is but the empirical testimony of the first: for in point of fact, the critiques that Evola makes in this work are exceedingly relevant to our day, as anyone will be able to perceive who has spent any quantity of time amongst the “spiritual seekers” of today, and who has considered Evola’s critique in a more than simply superficial way. The names will have changed — fewer today speak of Madame Blavatsky or Rudolf Steiner, and Krishnamurti is perhaps less known among our youths than, say, John Lennon (a sad commentary, to be sure); LaVey’s fifteen minutes of fame have surely come and gone, and, despite any number of vulgar television programs that might suggest the contrary, the furor for parapsychic research and mediumship is not what it once was. Yet anyone who knows anything at all about these figures or schools or practices, or who attentively reads Evola’s own exposition on them, will easily be able to find their parallels today. The “New Age” movement is strong as ever, and names like Carlos Castaneda, Edgar Cayce and Sogyal Rinpoche still crop up among the “studies” of the young; Jung, Gurdjieff, and Crowley (men considered in this book) are still topical; the need and the aching hunger of any number of individuals for something deeper than materialism, something solidier than science, something more meaningful than technology, is palpable in any number of turns taken by certain tentacles of the modern world; and the figures that arise today to fulfill this need are but the faded echoes or wan watermarks of those that Evola critiques, which were, for all their failings, nonetheless at least more vivid than their present-day counterparts. The relevance of Evola’s words to our situation will be manifest to anyone who does not let himself be deceived by the fact that the mere individuals of whom he speaks have all found the grave.

The final response to this dismissal of *Mask and Face* will form, in a certain sense, the remainder of our introduction. The idea that *Mask and Face* is a dated piece of purely critical work implies the necessary corollary that there is nothing “positive” in this work, no

message beyond the merely censorious attempt to deconstruct this or that man or edifice. This work, to speak popularly, “tears down without building up.”

Let us see how far this estimation holds water.

## **The Criticism and the Purpose of *Mask and Face***

*The Mask and Face of Contemporary Spiritualism* is the only book in the Evolian oeuvre to bear the word “spiritualism” in its very title. Evola wrote a great number of works dedicated to specific facets, schools, or doctrines of the spiritual problem (Hermetism, magic, Yoga, Taoism, etc.), but none about spiritualism as an overarching problem. It would appear that the present work, then, can in some sense be taken as his treatment of spiritualism as such.

This would appear to be qualified, however, by the fact that this book treats, not of spiritualism as such, but of *contemporary* spiritualism. This would suggest that the subject of the book is not in fact the problem of spiritualism as such, so much as a simple refutation or critique or analysis of the modern spiritualistic misdirections. The name of the book would indeed appear to implicate a kind of unmasking, a revelation of the charlatanism and mendacity which is the true substratum of any number of contemporary “spiritualistic” movements. Evola, to be sure, was one of the few men of his generation competent to submit such a critique, given that he knew the Tradition with an intimacy and immediacy which few others could boast, and at the same time knew the contemporary world, in all its aspects, with a directness that perhaps no other man of his level could, or rather say *would*, match. We will return to this last circumstance, but suffice it here to say that the close attention that Evola gave to all manner of contemporaneous developments in culture and politics at practically every level of his society was something *sui generis* for a man of his rank and orientation. Thus it is meet that it should be Evola to carry through this “unmasking.”

At first glance, therefore, *The Mask and Face of Contemporary Spiritualism* enters decidedly into that category of Julius Evola’s writing which might be called, for the convenience of taxonomy, his



critical work — that is, it is a book which would seem to deal with the books, the thought, the schools, the teachings of men other than Evola himself — as opposed to a work of Evola’s own thought, conceptions, and philosophies. To that extent, it cannot simply be called his work on spiritualism.

Yet this neat division almost immediately collapses the moment one lays hands upon it. In the first place it must be recognized that, with the possible exceptions of Evola’s yet-untranslated works on the Absolute Individual, and, perhaps, his *Synthesis of the Doctrine of Race*, nothing written by Evola can be considered “original” in the degraded, para-Nietzschean sense that we like to use that word — which is to say, in the sense of something created *ex nihilo*, something which originates of itself, and is itself a first origin. Indeed, this very idea is deeply inimical to the entire purpose and cast of Evola’s life work, which was nothing if not an attempt to reclaim the true, unchangeable doctrine from under the rubble of the contemporary world — that doctrine, uncreated and unspoiled by man or by man’s small and ephemeral personality; that doctrine which springs like cool crystalline water from hidden founts: that doctrine which alone is capable of bringing the individual to a greater self, a greater awareness, a truer personality. That is to say, Evola’s “original” work truly is original, but original in the *original* sense: it gets us back to the origins, the ever-living fount from which alone man too might become, at least comparatively, at least in some aspect of his contingency and his caducity, deathless.

In this light, all of Evola’s work must be regarded as referring back to something which is “not his own”; all of his work is to that extent is a “critique.” Yet this too is a problematic statement: Evola himself might prefer to say that the doctrine he sought belongs precisely to what is most *truly* his own, most truly belonging to his *personality* in the Evolian sense, and that he was certainly not submitting a critique of the Tradition in the sense of attempting to understand its failings as well as its strengths, since it and it alone is the standard by which any failings can be rightly measured, and without it as standard man necessary freefalls into an abyss of relativism and nihilism. (See Evola’s critique of Nietzsche in Chapter VIII of the present work.)

Thus the distinctions which we are pleased to draw in literature begin to sheer apart the moment they begin, wave-like, to beat up against the rock of Evola’s thought.

Let us renew the attempt. One part of Evola's work would seem to be dedicated to reclaiming, recapturing, and publishing (within the natural limits imposed by language and by the special duties of the exoteric promulgator) the teachings of a perennial tradition, while another part would seem to be dedicated to critiquing and "deconstructing" the ideas, errors, and actions of the contemporary world. The barrier is of course somewhat permeable, as both categories admit aspects of the other; but While *Revolt Against the Modern World* or *Ride the Tiger*, for instance, present positive visions, *Fascism Viewed from the Right* or *The Myth of the Blood* are primarily, if not negative, then certainly neutral in their rigorous presentation of certain ideas. And *Mask and Face of Contemporary Spiritualism*, by this new taxonomy, belongs to this latter category.

Yet even here the distinction does not long abide. With the single exception of *The Myth of the Blood* (and, as I indicate in my introduction to my translation of that work, it is dubious to what extent even it is an exception; if one takes it, as Evola himself did, as the first half of a longer work with his *Synthesis* as its coping stone, then it is *far* from being an exception), *there is no work penned by Evola in a spirit of simple critique alone*. It can be taken indeed as a rule of thumb that critique in Evola is always but the means to some higher goal; Evola was eminently a philosopher in this sense, for he was without doubt one of the most judicious and fairest men of his time, and could not look upon even the most inimical philosophies or positions without arriving at a balanced assessment of their virtues and their faults. But the philosopher, unlike the critic, does not judge for the sake of judging; he judges to attain the higher view, a more complete vision, some nearer approximation of the truth, which transcends the realm of merest critique, and leads one a step nearer to a positive vision. More yet: Evola was not *merely* a philosopher; he transcended philosophy by demonstrating its limits — and thereby overreaching them. (This, primarily, in this untranslated work on the Absolute Individual; let it also be noted that the distinction here applies mostly to academic or to modern philosophy; it begins to dissolve when one approaches the highest philosophers, as Plato, Plotinus, — Nietzsche?) Evola was a "spiritualist," an exotericist, a Traditionalist. For this reason alone, never could the criticism be brought against Evola which is often enough, for instance, brought against Nietzsche (to what extent fairly

is question for another place): namely, that he tore down without building up. Evola's from start to finish is nothing *but* a positive position, and critique is only incidental to the expression or in some cases the revelation of this positive vision.

What is the nature then of that critique? Why should such critique be at all necessary, if the positive vision is present all along? Why not, in other words, have recourse directly to the positive vision of the Traditional world, and send the "revolt against the modern world" to the devil, where it would seem to belong?

One possible answer to this question is suggested by the arc and thrust of the present work. The knowledge, awareness, and direct connection to the positive Traditional vision depends decisively in the individual on an induction into that knowledge, which in the past was rigorously supplied by any number of regular initiatory orders, or, in high civilizations, by the socio-religious order itself. In both cases, promulgation of the exoteric teaching was left in the hands of the competent authorities, wise both in the Tradition and in the nature of their historical moment, while the inner teaching could be revealed to those who were drawn to it through that magnetism or inner vocation which some men are, for reasons mysterious, born possessing.

Our day is not such a day. It is needless to speak of society itself, nor the order and structure of our governments; the utter and even proud detachment from spiritual things on the governmental level (the so-called "secularism" and "separation of Church and State") leaves no room to doubt its relation — or lack thereof — with any transcendent dimension; and official and organized religions have likewise faltered in this respect. (See Chapter VII below, in which Evola submits a deep critique of Catholicism and Christianity, and presents some of his clearest statements on them both in any of his published work.) As for the initiatic route — and this fact, which it is easy to pass over, forms in truth one of the great fateful transformations of our contemporary West — it has been, if not utterly abolished in the West, then sharply reduced in its centers and its scope. Evola himself in *The Bow and the Club* said that he had an ongoing friendly debate with a certain esotericist of his time as to whether or not there were *any* true initiatic orders left in the West, or if they had not rather, confronted with the crisis of our times,

withdrawn to the East, where moreover they became closed to and suspicious of Western newcomers (see Chapter 17 of that work).

This fateful change has brought about two related consequences. In the first place, any man of the West who is presented, without any preparation whatsoever, with some element, teaching, doctrine, or viewpoint of the Tradition, will be utterly unable to recognize it for what it is, will easily confound it with the “system” or the “teaching” of this or that mountebank, will stare upon it uncomprehending and pass over it in indifference, nor necessarily for any fault of his own. Likewise, those who sense the penury of the times, who see our gross, glittering, tumescent modernity for the hollow monster that it is, and perceive that anywhere one presses too hard upon its golden, gem- and light-studded exterior, one might easily bore a hole in it that threatens to deflate the entire thing — anyone, I say, with even the least intimation of this truth, is bound to seek out something with which to fill this profane and terrifying void yawning behind the gaudy exterior. Some will proceed to the “traditional” Western forms, become Catholics or Protestants or what have you; others, skeptical of “established religion” for any number of reasons, both good and bad, or perhaps merely infected with the contemporary love of novelty and its tacit despite of the West, will turn to the “East” — meaning, of course, those poor Western simulacra of a deep, rich, right Eastern Tradition which have migrated into our societies in the form of “Buddhist temples” and “Zen centers” and “Hare Krishna movements” and any number of like notions ported into the West like tourist memorabilia, all of which, rather than bringing Eastern substance to Western emptiness, have rather brought Western emptiness to Eastern forms. Yet others will turn away completely, seeking their fare and fortune by other routes entirely — through the teachings or revelations of this or that spiritist, medium, anthroposophist, “guru,” etc. etc.

All of these men, guided and forced on by a vague, undefined longing within them, will cast about blindly until they have set their hands on some bauble or other in the dark, of uncertain worth and dubious content. Having no clear idea of what it is they seek, how ever can they find it? How many of them will be able to attain it — and in those few cases that succeed, will it finally be luck or some secret inner gravity or the intercession of some god to lead them

hence? And how many of them rather will succumb to the dangers lurking secretly in the deep places about them?

These are the conditions which determine Evola's approach: Evola, as any master, must adapt the teaching to the day in which he lives. Useless would it be (and perhaps worse than useless) to publish simple descriptions or investigations of the Tradition as such, with no preparatory work standing behind it, disconnected from every form of pedagogy or propaedeutic: for almost no one would be of a grade to recognize it, and even many of those who were would be able to draw no right worth from what they saw, or else would draw the *wrong* conclusions and would stray dangerously as a consequence, since they, conditioned by the errors of the day, should begin with only the most vulgar and externalistic appreciation of all of this. There is wanted an education, which is *experiential before it is intellectual*; and this book is eminently the preparation for such an education, in the sense of inducting those who are ready willingly and consciously into ever higher points of view.

But this answer to the question of Evola's reason for providing this education does not alone suffice. Well might it be asked why Evola should care for the stragglers — those of us who, despite perchance some inner promise or potential, have nonetheless not succeeded, like him, in penetrating the veils? Or, if this is too cruel a question — for it is normal enough for a human being to love those who are or could become his ilk — let us generalize it: why should Evola care at all for his floundering civilization? Why not himself become a monk, an anchorite, withdrawing to the fastness of some mountain cavern or the exclusiveness of some occult brotherhood to pass his days in the most rigorous asceticism, letting the torrent of the West find its own level?

This question will press us toward the soul of the book, which is itself a window into one of the deepest, most characteristic, and most intriguing problems regarding Evolian spiritualism, and Evola himself.

## **The Theme of Evasion**

The central theme of this book, by Evola's proclamation, is *evasion* — in Italian *evasione*, a word which might also be translated as “escapism,” though I have avoided this temptation, first because

“escapism” is all too Freudian a term, and then because, in the attempt to overcome “escapism,” one tends to return precisely to the world which Evola would force us to overcome: the very overcoming of “escapism,” insofar as it suggests the necessity of a coming-to-terms and peace-making with life as it is, is itself a form of *evasion* in the Evolian sense. Evola treats the question of evasion elsewhere than in this book alone; it is a guiding thread of *Men Among the Ruins* and *Ride the Tiger*, and he dedicates an entire (and most interesting) chapter of his *Bow and the Club* to the question of what he calls the “man of evasion.” But in no other book than *Mask and Face of Contemporary Spiritualism* could evasion be called the central theme: here alone does Evola say that it is “the impulse toward evasion with which we here intend to occupy ourselves” (Chapter I).

In the first place, there is evasion involved in letting oneself be carried away by this or that “spiritualistic” current of our day. Now, any one who has set off down such a path has clearly seen that there is something in modernity which is awry; perhaps such a one has intuited, laid his hand for but a wrathful moment, on its frozen core — and burned by the touch of it, has withdrawn, startled and ashamed, suddenly unsure, uncertain, suddenly plagued by innumerable vague and restless doubts. And such a one, be he rightly constituted, is fain sooner or later to turn away from Modernity, as much as his poor powers will allow, to seek some cure to the illness he has divined in it.

The first and most obvious danger, which shows the full depth of the problem of evasion, is that such a one is often liable to throw his blame on the fact that he lives in such and such an age, without noting the ways the *age* lives in *him*: he does not see that, by merely turning away from this time, seeking refuge in this or that group or cult or church, or, in extreme cases, fleeing hence even to different climes and other lands altogether, he merely bears the illness with him, to feed upon him elsewhere, in some cases more rapidly and fully. He is thus — though little beknownst to him — the prime prey of charlatans, arrogant fools, and secret dark powers.

The first part of Evola’s work in this book, then, is to reveal to the evader the vanity of his evasion. *The varieties of spiritual evasion* — that might even serve as the subtitle to this book — are myriad in our day, and Evola with a sure instinct roots them out: from spiritism to



Satanism, from parapsychic research to anthroposophism, from theosophy to mysticism, from primitivism to conventional religious faith, and also other domains yet which seem at first to be but tangentially connected, such as Freudianism, Nietzscheanism, the fiction of Dostoevsky — in all of this, Evola does his job of unmasking with a deftness and a precision of which only the Baron is capable, showing the blind alleys and the dead ends, the traps and the pitfalls, the misunderstandings and misinterpretations, and the occult dangers which lurk in many of these “systems” and their practices. This, then, is the negative work of *Mask and Face*.

Yet, as ever, Evola does not leave the matter at its negative aspect. Indeed, as he says at the close of what might be considered the prefatory material of this book (interestingly, there is no Evolian Preface, properly speaking):

Only after having seen [the descent brought by modern spiritualism] very clearly can one formulate the idea of another, antithetical spiritual direction — a direction which can serve as a measure of what might be valid in “spiritualism,” and which can be proposed to him who, having a particular vocation and qualification, seeks “transcendence,” something higher than that which the modern vision of man and of the world offers — the space for a superior liberty beyond the conditionings and the senselessness of today’s existence, beyond the residual forms of the religious confessions (Chapter I).

This is the second, the fundamental aspect of Evola’s work here, and it is this which differentiates him from the “damned Saint” Nietzsche, and which permits him to transcend where Nietzsche failed to transcend. Evola goes so far as to state, in Chapter VIII, that Nietzsche engaged in “the systematic destruction of the world of evasion,” which he undertook and achieved with the excellence native to him; only that, having come to the end, having gotten to the other side of nihilism, “the original tragic conception is reconfirmed, in the sense that the final result is the vision of the world as a whole complex of forces which, at bottom, have no object, but rotate so to speak around themselves, without a purpose and without a sense” (Chapter VIII). Nietzsche attempts to substitute this emptiness with the will to power, embodied in the figure of the overman, which Evola, in one of his piercing formulations, summarizes as an “asceticism for asceticism’s sake,” and which, with his usual clairvoyance, he perceives embodied in one of the major characters of Dostoevsky’s work: no, not in Raskolnikov, as so many have thought, nor in those

premonitions of the overman, Nikolai Stavrogin and Ivan Karamazov, nor even in the underground man; but rather in Kirillov of *Demons* — Kirillov, the obsessed man (it is useful here to note that *ossessionato* in Italian can also mean “possessed,” possessed, that is, by demonic powers), who in thinking out the Godless universe to its ruthless logical finale, has convinced himself that he must murder himself so as to demonstrate once and for all that man has become a god. The man-god augured by Nietzsche, that figure who was to be the redemption of man, cannot do other than destroy that which he would redeem; and the “overcoming of nihilism” is naught but the reification of the same.

What, then? Evola does not denounce Nietzsche’s act: only his failure to overcome his act. It is (to speak very loosely) Nietzsche’s *lack of will to power* that Evola critiques; his failure to get really and finally to the bottom of things, his uncritical acceptance of major founts of modernity (scientism in the form of evolutionism, and secularism in the form of atheism) and his acquiescence to the modern project. Nietzsche did not break through, because he *could* not break through, since his godless presuppositions, that militant atheism of which he is often accused, prohibited him from perceiving that, in order to realizing “the true overman,” “[a]t a certain point the disciplines and the development conducted with the forces of the individual alone must be grafted with influences of another order” (Chapter VIII).

As we have noted, the chapter on Nietzsche was added in the second publication of this book; it was interposed between the chapter on Catholicism and that on high magic. It might seem curious — as Evola himself recognizes — that Nietzsche should figure in a book on “spiritualism”; and this is not the place to query what may rightly be called Nietzsche’s own idea of religion or god, which indeed has nothing to do with Evola’s positioning. More to the point is Evola’s striking characterization of Nietzsche as a “damned Saint” — that is, a man who might have been a Saint, a man who, had he but started from a different premise, might have risen to the heights which his spirit never ceased craving. What is essential here is that Nietzsche represents for Evola the culmination of an attempt to overcome modernity *without reference to the transcendental*. Nietzsche represents the boundary limit of the godless modern project, the last and final striving that man may undertake by his

own powers alone — that point at which modernity, turning against itself, comes hard upon its limitations, and, like a bird against the panes of its glass cage, must either beat itself to death or folly — or burst the cage asunder.

## **The Hierarchy and Order of *Mask and Face***

This leads us to awareness of a special aspect of this book which we might call its *ascending quality*. Generally speaking, and with certain exceptions which are due in general to the necessary, strictly logical organization of Evola's material, we are set in this book upon a rising path, which begins with the lowest, most dangerous or most worthless forms of contemporary spiritualism (Evola identifies *precisely* one single valuable point in both spiritism and parapsychic research) and rises, level for level, to the boundary limit of "godless transcendence" which we have just discussed, and *through* that, to "Satanism," to the "Left-Hand Path," which represents one possible form of true revolt against the bourgeois, until coming at last to the realm of high magic, in which the critical character of Evola's analysis *almost* falls away, in which there is almost an identification of Evola's thought and that of the men he speaks about — or at the very least, an open recognition of their worth and the validity of their path. This begins already from his discussion of Aleister Crowley, then of Gurdjieff, and finally three figures, two of whom are perhaps less known to the English-speaking world, but whose views are evidently held in highest regard by Evola: Giuliano Kremmerz (pseudonym of Ciro Formisano), Gustav Meyrink, and Éliphas Lévi.

With this observation, it would be well to return to the title of Evola's book. There is an ambiguity hidden in the title of this work, which is however clarified decidedly by the book itself: namely, whether or not the "spiritualism" of which the book treats is a true spiritualism or a false spiritualism. We have said that the title suggests the unmasking of hypocrites, imposters, or frauds, and to that extent, "contemporary spiritualism" is but a hollow, void endeavor with few redeeming features; yet the same term, "unmasking," might as easily indicate the gradual removal of layers, an unveiling, the shedding of the false, the exoteric, the apparent, so as to reveal the true aspect of something which itself might be of great worth, or even those elements of incomplete, corrupt, or

misguided doctrines or men which nonetheless transcend their degradation. In a certain sense, the entire esoteric path is nothing *but* a continual unmasking — unmasking simultaneously of reality and of the exoteric veils of tradition — an unmasking which is identical to an *ascending*; just as one who, floating vertically upward from the surface of this Earth, gradually finds more and more of the landscape below him revealed to his eyes, whereas before it was concealed to him by his frog's perspective. Certainly, much of the “spiritualism” which Evola critiques is but the product of an empty and sickened age, its shallow, weak, immature pawing at a realm whose walls it cannot breach. But Evola himself has recognized the pit of worth in all these movements — a seed, to be sure, of varying dimensions, but one which might nonetheless sprout out given the right spiritual soil and conditions. That is the *true* spiritualism of our time, and it is contained, not in this variety of movements, currents, schools, and cults, but rather *in the individuals who are drawn to them*.

As we have already seen, it is to these last that Evola speaks. Fairly can we ask, then, what is his prescription to these men? — And in this question, we finally come to the true purpose of the book, the true face of spiritualism in our day.

For there is a burning question in this book which heaves beneath the surface with growing intensity the further one proceeds, like a lava burst pressing beneath the bedrock: and that is the question of initiation. *The* link between the individual and Tradition has been severed in our time, for, as Evola states it, “today [the entry into a regular initiatic chain] is not easy, given that the larger part of the spiritual centers have ‘withdrawn,’ to let Western man go whither he will, without measuring out his chain to him” (Chapter VIII). The best of those who fall into the snares of “spiritualism” in our day will be those who are seeking out, to the best of their instinct and whatever magnetic pull they might have centered in their souls, some means of reconnecting to the truth, the transcendent, or the tradition, through a given teaching or teacher, cult or culture. But it is equally undeniable that, having no sense of what it is they are looking for, they are confronted rather primarily and most urgently with a stinging sense of lack; theirs is not an act of love so much as of despite and escape. *Even these men, these spiritual seekers*

*themselves, are moved first and foremost by evasion.* As Evola states it:

As [neo-spiritualism's] most perspicuous trait, one might indicate a general impulse toward *evasion*. In one of its aspects, the role of neo-spiritualism is doubtless analogous to everything which the man of today attempts to employ in his evasion from the world surrounding, from the suffocating forms assumed by civilization and the culture of the modern West; and along this path he comes, in extreme cases, even to the use of drugs, to anarchical bombings, to the present pandemic of sex, to diffuse and various forms of neurotic overcompensation.

The critique of “contemporary spiritualism” is thus necessarily a critique of evasion. But if this is so, then the “mask” that this spiritualism wears, that the *truest* of this spiritualism and spiritual seeking wears, is evasion itself; to strip this spiritualism down to its face, Evola as Nietzsche before him must himself submit the “the systematic destruction of the world of evasion”; only he, unlike Nietzsche, does not stop there. It is evident that Evola alone cannot provide a compensation for the lack of regular initiatic orders in the West in our day. Yet their absence seemed to Evola throughout his life, and particularly toward the end of it (see Chapters 11 and 35 of *The Bow and the Club* and *Recognitions*, respectively), one of the gravest problems confronting Western man today, and most urgently in need of some kind of resolution.

We have already mentioned the most suggestive *petit fait*, that this book was the last that Evola published before he brought his magnum opus *Revolt Against the Modern World* to the press. More generally, *Mask and Face* can be seen as his last published work before he set forth down that path which was to characterize his career: his warriorly confrontation with modernity; his great campaign of defense on behalf of the Tradition, and his attempt to graft modernity upon Traditional roots, wherever this was possible. He had of course been working on *Revolt* for years before the publication of *Mask and Face*, and it cannot be asserted with any certainty that he intended this “biographical order” of his books; yet there is something exceedingly meet about it, and it has the feel of the intervention a higher will on Evola's part. *Revolt Against the Modern World* is not a book one picks up on a lark and reads through without having any prior idea of Evola or any prior orientation, be it ever so tenuous and inchoate, toward the Tradition; again, leaving aside those rarest exceptions who might profitably

take *Revolt* in such a way, without any prior preparation at all, finding in this work itself the revelation they never knew they were seeking, yet for most men who might gain something of that book, there is wanted some such preparation precisely.

With this word, we can return to the distinction that we attempted and failed to establish earlier in our introduction. There are indeed two broad categories of Evolian books, albeit with many intersections and interpenetrations. There are, first in order of their importance, those books which are dedicated to explicating the Tradition as Evola understood it. In this category are to be found, for instance, *Revolt Against the Modern World* and *Synthesis of the Doctrine of Race*. There are then those books which are dedicated to orienting the best men of his fallen West toward that forgotten Tradition, like a magnet toward the poles. In this category are to be found, for instance, *Recognitions*, *The Myth of the Blood* and the present work. *The Myth of the Blood* and *Synthesis of the Doctrine of Race* are surely the clearest example of this division, as they contain these two categories as the two neat halves of two distinct books: *The Myth of the Blood* prepares its reader for the leap he shall need to bridge the chasm, to land on the solid ground of traditional teachings. Analogously, *The Mask and Face of Contemporary Spiritualism* prepares its reader (from the spiritual as opposed to the political, metaphysical, or artistic side of the question) for the leap he will need to undertake *Revolt Against the Modern World*.

More than that: this book was Evola's own stepping back, his own preparation for his own leap — his leap against Modernity, his casting himself, in all his formidable force and power, against the “modern theme,” against every aspect of a world in decline — his noble, peerless effort to raze these godless edifices to the ground, that the incorruptible structures of a higher past might burst forth from beneath these clouds of dust and heaps of rubble, and temple-like take their rightful place once more at the center of the life of that mysterious creature man, the Microcosm, who stands, as the ancients affirmed, twixt beast and god.

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It is most telling that this book does not conclude with the beautiful expression which closes Chapter X, and which would have been surely a powerful way to close the whole. The book rather closes on a



conclusion which is not strictly a chapter of the book itself. It does not bear, for instance, the Roman numerals of the other chapters, it bears no name other than the simply generic “Conclusion,” and it is not even listed in the Table of Contents in the edition that Evola himself oversaw. It was indeed a later addition in one of the two subsequent republications. What is the relation of these closing remarks to the whole?

If what we have said is correct — namely, that the plan of this book is hierarchical in nature, and meant to lead the reader from the least, and least promising, aspects of contemporary spiritualism, to the highest and most promising, bearing in mind ever our present historical circumstances (which are recalled to us already from the very *title* of the book itself), then we might liken this book to a mountain which we have been invited to scale. Supposing we have followed Evola well — supposing we have not, for instance, been waylaid by some mountain tempest, nor overthrown by a raging hill giant, nor cast off the heights by a false move on some friable rock — nor indeed enchanted by some alpine vision which has left us gaping in paralyzed awe at the glories of our vista, premature and low though it be yet — supposing we have followed Evola so far, so high as this, then we find ourselves at a new vantage point, from which a great many things might appear clear to us which hitherto were hidden by the vales and clouds and and tricks of perspective.

This Conclusion begins almost with an apology, in which Evola recognizes that his words might be fundamentally depressing or alienating to a great many people, who are wont to seek out comfort in their spiritualism, and who think that it is the greatest aim of a “transcendent vision” to make them feel more at home and better at their ease in the world. That Evola not only resists this temptation, but does not seem to *feel* it at all, should be most revelatory: for what is wanted in our modern world most of all, *the* condition for our awakening to any degree whatsoever, is an initial realization that *we are asleep, are lost, are already all too much at our ease and comfort*. The contemporary world itself exists in a kind of utter and nigh impenetrable complacency, believing itself to be the most progressed epoch of the ages, the most aware, the most scientifically advanced, the most philosophically mature, the most socially just, the most humane, and most historically circumspect, etc. etc. — we should expend all the ink at our disposal were we to heave up a

complete list. Certain ideas, like the immortality of the personal ego, the necessary evolution of human spirituality, the educative power of reincarnation, the existence of a kind of cosmic school overseen by benevolent divine schoolmasters through which all of us *must* pass, whether we will or no, can do nothing but thrust us back and perhaps irredeemably into our smallness and complacency. Modernity is like that runtish and ridiculous Bantam rooster that, surrounded by great old chanticleers, nonetheless thinks himself their better because he is standing on a stool, and crows to no end about his “superiority.” We needs must break free of all this puffed up arrogance, and what is most urgently required toward this end is a ruthless and thoroughgoing assault on all the elements of this impossible fantasy castle within which we all of us live. This has been known to the foremost spiritualists of our time: men like Guénon, Gurdjieff, Ouspensky. And that is the first reason for the harshness of Evola’s critique, the first point of view that we should have attained in ascending this mountain with him: we must turn an evil eye upon our age and time, above all, that aspect of it which exists and has its life *within* us. *We must declare war on all of this, within and without.*

More yet: that war itself already presupposes a certain level of spiritual awareness, spiritual attainment even; it requires, as Evola would put it, certain orientations within the soul, a certain (albeit initially crude) clarity about what it is one is seeking, and what it is one must attempt to break free of. Nor — and this is essential — can one permit oneself to linger in the exhilaration of “breaking free” itself, for this is but evasion once more, but slavery once more, but *modernity* once more. We are in need, as Evola never tires of telling us in his works, employing a Hegelian dictate, of *negation of the negation*.

This means that the work we must submit is inner *at the same time* that it is outer; not for nothing does Evola speak, in the last chapter of a deep book charmed with seven spells to veil the eyes of the profane, of *active regression*. And this is the second aspect of the hierarchy in this book; simultaneously as it is a movement upward, from the low to the high in spiritual teachings, it is a movement downward, ever deeper into the soul, a “an elimination of successive psychic strata, up to the point of ridding oneself of them entirely, of emptying the conscious of every human detritus” (Chapter X).

This is work, both the “ascending and the descending,” that Evola cannot do for his reader. But any man who approaches this neglected jewel of Evolian literature with spirit just and forthright, will see his way to some higher view through it.

*The Mask and the Face of Contemporary Spirituality*, though it itself is not a path to initiation, is an opening of that path; it is an “orientation” of the reader toward the only meaning that initiation might still have in our day, in this decaying and crumbling West, for the majority of those with any spiritual potential. It is revelation of the one way remaining to most of us, who would break the bad gravity of our time and our world, to send ourselves plummeting perchance toward destruction, perchance toward a nihilistic loss of ourselves in the black void spaces of the universe, but perhaps also — who knows? — to liberation, *the* liberation, the only liberation which means anything to man, the “Great Liberation.” *Mask and Face* is itself, not only a path leading us hence, but an *example* of the kind of work that is required: it is precisely in the direct, fearless, honest, aware, and non-evasive struggle against our time and our world, both outside of us and within, that we might at last transcend. Such is the *Via Evolae*, the Evolian path: we who would be free must make ourselves warriors.

JOHN BRUCE LEONARD  
Cagliari, June 2018



# The Supernatural in the Modern World

The hour at hand favors the equivocal ventures of every false mysticism, which curiously mix spiritualistic confusion with materialistic sensuality. Spiritual forces are invading everywhere. It can no longer be said that the modern world is lacking in the supernatural: every species and variety makes its appearance. And the great ill of today is no longer materialism, scientism, but an unleashed spirituality. But the true supernatural is not recognized in consequence of this in greater measure.

‘Mystery’ envelops everything, settling in the dark regions of the ego,<sup>1</sup> which devastates it, and at the center of reason, which crushes it under its dominion. Everywhere men are ready to reintroduce mystery, except into the divine order, where it truly resides.

**T**HUS WROTE THE CATHOLIC HENRI MASSIS, in an uneven and by now somewhat dated work;<sup>2</sup> but these are words which even today carry their weight. Indeed, even today, many and luxuriant are the groups, the sects, and the movements which consecrate themselves to the occult and to the “supernatural.” Such currents, enlivened by every new sharpening of the crisis of the Western World, gather adherents in substantial numbers: spiritism alone can count millions of them. Exotic doctrines of every kind are imported, and the more these present characteristics of strangeness and of mystery, the more they exert a fascination. Well might it be said that every concoction finds its place in the recipient of “spiritualism” — adaptations of Yoga, varieties of a spurious mysticism, “occultism” at the margins of Masonic lodges, neo-Rosicrucianism, naturalistic and primitivistic regressions of a fundamentally pantheistic kind, neo-gnosticism and astrological divagations, parapsychology,

mediumism and such like — not to speak of the aspect of pure mystification in all this. In general, it is enough that something varies from what one is pleased to call normality, it is enough that it presents characteristics of the exceptional, of the occult, of the mystical and of the irrational, for a substantial quantity of our contemporaries to become interested in it, with an ease much greater than ever before. Finally, even “science” has made its move: in some of its branches, like psychoanalysis and “deep psychology,” it has often wound up in promiscuous evocations at the border regions of the ego and the conscious personality. The following paradox has moreover become apparent: precisely certain representatives of those “positivistic” disciplines who, in order to justify and organize themselves, give themselves over to a systematic negation of every vision of the world containing supersensible elements — precisely these men, in another sphere, today not rarely indulge in primitive forms of neo-spiritualism. And so the reputation that they have acquired for seriousness in their fields of competency is adopted as a validation of these forms, and transmutes into a dangerous instrument of seduction and propaganda. A typical case is that of the physicists, Crookes and Lodge, with respect to spiritism. And thus broad segments of the Western world are inhaling a spiritual chaos which makes them strangely alike to the Asiaticized world of Hellenistic decadence. Nor are we lacking in our own Messiahs, in various editions and formats.

Before all, it is necessary to orient ourselves and to see what the principal causes of this phenomenon are.

As its most perspicuous trait, one might indicate a general impulse toward *evasion*. In one of its aspects, the role of neo-spiritualism is doubtless analogous to everything which the man of today attempts to employ in his evasion from the world surrounding, from the suffocating forms assumed by civilization and the culture of the modern West; and along this path he comes, in extreme cases, even to the use of drugs, to anarchical bombings, to the present pandemic of sex, to diffuse and various forms of neurotic overcompensation.

At the same time, there are motivations here which one must recognize as partially legitimate. Not by accident are the beginnings of neo-spiritualism coeval with the affirmation of the materialistic-positivistic vision of man and of the world, in its squalor and in its

soullessness, as well as rationalism, the pretense that abstract reason might banish or regulate everything which belongs to the deepest strata of being or of the psyche. At the same time, we must indicate the dearth of the forms of a traditional civilization in the superior sense, capable of effective openings toward the heights. We are speaking above all of the religion which has come to predominate in the West, Christianity, and of the fact that it itself has ceased to appear as something living, has ceased to offer points of reference for a true transcendence, and has reduced itself rather, in Catholicism, to a confessional devotionism and to a moralism of petite-bourgeoisie character — so much so that one has come to speak of the “death of God” and to formulate the need for a demythologization of religion, which would reduce religious content to social practice (as for example in so-called “atheistic Christianity”).

But supposing that positive religion has therefore failed in its higher function, supposing it has offered little enough to those who, more than a “faith” and a moralistic bourgeois and social domestication of the human animal, sought, though ever obscurely, a liberating spiritual *experience*: supposing all this, still it is clear that nothing apart from impatience and rebellion could come from the subverting maxims of the latest ideologies, according to which the principle and the end of man are on this Earth, and the goal is a society of production of well-being of the mass — a society doomed, moreover, to become insipid and boring, and to pay its way by conditioning and in various ways mutilating the personality.

Barring the intervention of processes of a fundamental degradation, there subsists in the depths of the human nature the need for “something else” and, at the limit, something supernatural. This can be suppressed in every human being only up to a certain point. In the latest times,<sup>3</sup> the vice-grip has closed, by way of the factors we have just mentioned. There thus arises in many an impulse which faithfully seeks its fulfillment and its outlet in everything which neo-spiritualism claims to offer, to a certain degree in a new way, through ideas which seem to grant access to a vaster reality, not only theoretically, but above all as a lived spiritual experience. In the latest times one has come to recognize, if ever so sporadically, the “extranormal,” as the manifestation of energies, laws, and possibilities beyond those admitted in the late positivistic



period; and this fact constitutes another factor in the particular orientation of the impulse toward evasion with which we here intend to occupy ourselves.

A final, not irrelevant factor in all of this is the awareness, no longer constrained to a specialized superior culture, of doctrines of a predominately Oriental origin, which promised more than what the positive Western religions have been able to offer, above all in their latest emptied and enervated forms.

This, in brief, is the “situational” juncture to which we might refer the diffusion of neo-spiritualism. This neo-spiritualism, as we have noted on another occasion, presents in general the characteristics of what Oswald Spengler has called the “second religiosity,” which manifests itself, not in the luminous original period, at the center of an organic, qualitative, and spiritual civilization, but rather at the margins, in a twilight civilization in dissolution; specifically, it appears as a phenomenon peculiar to that which Spengler has termed “the decline of the West.”

In light of this, it is necessary to fix several fundamental points of reference which permit a discriminating stance before the varieties of neo-spiritualism, and of every current akin to it.

In this connection, we must underline that we are above all interested in the part of this spiritualism which does not reduce itself to theories, but which, often without knowing or willing it, includes tendencies favoring the conjuration of forces from “the other side,” bringing individuals and groups into contact with these through the cultivation of extranormal modalities of consciousness.

The premise, obviously, is that these influences and these modalities really exist, every bit as much as the forms of physical reality and of the ordinary psyche. One way or another, this has always been recognized by every normal and complete civilization; it has been denied only for some decades by Western “positivism.” As of today, one must however go beyond a simple recognition in psychological or, better say, psychologistic terms, as happens, for example, in the domain of psychiatry and generalized psychoanalysis. So far as our own concerns here go, this “spiritual” must be understood rather in ontological terms, which is to say, precisely as reality. Otherwise the problem of the danger of the “spiritual” (or of spiritualism) and of the “extranormal” is either not posited at all, or else ends up taking on a quite banal character. One

might then speak of fetishes, of paranoias, and of the chimera of unbalanced and “cracked” minds, regarding all of which there is not much reason to be alarmed.

Here we must refer to the *personality* in the proper sense. The contact with the “spiritual” and its emergence can represent a fundamental risk for man, in the sense that it can result in a maiming of his interior unity, of his belonging to himself, of his power of clear presence to himself and of clear vision and of autonomous action, which themselves define the essence of the personality.

In its current form, the personality finds itself right at home, on solid ground in the world of tangible and measurable things, of sharply formed logical thoughts, of practical action, and more generally of whatever has relation to the physical senses and to the brain. In the world of the “spiritual,” on the other hand, it runs a continual risk, it returns to the problematic state, because in that world there no longer exist any of the supports to which it is accustomed — supports of which it has need, insofar as it is personality conditioned by a physical body.

It is no accident that many of those who today cultivate “spiritualism” are beings without a pronounced spirituality (the large percentage of women in these ranks is significant), while those who give sign of strong and conscious personality restrain themselves to “positive” things and harbor an invincible repulsion for the supersensible; and they are ready to create every kind of excuse for this repulsion. We must understand that this reaction is naught but the unconscious manifestation of an instinct of spiritual defense. The weakest personalities, in which such an instinct is lacking or is attenuated, are ready to accept and to imprudently cultivate ideas, tendencies, and evocations, whose danger they do not realize.

Such people believe that anything transcending the world to which they are accustomed, constitutes *ipso facto* something superior, a higher state. The moment the need for “something else” acts in them — the impulse toward evasion — they take any road whatever, without realizing how often they enter thus into the orbit of *forces which are not above, but below, man as personality*.

This is the fundamental point: to see as clearly as possible the situations in which neo-spiritualism might effectively have a *regressive* character, notwithstanding every appearance and every mask, and in which the “spiritual” might not be a “supernatural” so

much as an “infranatural” — and to see this concretely and existentially, apart from every confusion, every doctrinal and intellectual deviation.

In order to have an idea of the influences which we might be dealing with when such an opening toward the low and not toward the high occurs, in a shift which is descending and not ascending, it will be necessary to indicate what the word “nature” must mean, in a broad and complete sense. When one speaks of “nature” today one generally intends the physical world, known via the physical senses of every waking person, and measurable by the exact sciences. In reality, this is only *one* aspect of nature, an image which forms itself in relation to the human personality, and indeed at a certain phase of his historical development, as an experience belonging to that development rather than to other possible phases and forms of existence. Man perceives nature in such definite forms of physical reality because he has detached himself from nature itself, because he has liberated himself from nature and dissolved his bonds with it, so far as to feel it finally as something exterior, as the “not-I.” Nature *in itself* is not this apparition in space: it is instead grasped at that point where this sense of exteriority attenuates, and where the state of lucid waking consciousness attenuates to the same degree, to be replaced by states in which objective and subjective, “inside” and “outside,” are confounded. Here begin the first domains of an “invisible” and “psychic” world, which, to be such, does not cease to be “nature,” indeed is eminently “nature,” and not at all “supernature.” With objective scientific investigation into material or energy, man basically moves in a species of magic circle which he himself has drawn. The only one to leave this circle and to reach nature will be the man who retreats from his formed personal consciousness into the subconscious, via the road which commences with obscure organic sensations, with the emergence of complexes and psychic automatisms in their free state (released, that is, from cerebral control), and which then continues by descending into the depths of the physical subconscious.

Some recent research has furnished certain elements for identifying this process of regression, even from a positivistic point of view. Following the experimental provocation of certain local anesthesia, a state arises just as in the psychic functions, when the strata of the cerebral cortex are progressively neutralized, from the

most external and recent to the most internal and ancient, until the entire action of the brain has been eliminated and one passes into the sympathetic nervous system — which, as has been demonstrated, is still connected to certain forms of consciousness. The first things to disappear are the concepts of space, time, and causality, that is, the concepts which uphold the waking experience of nature and the logical concatenation of thoughts in the conscious personality. In relation to the deeper strata, ordinary consciousness itself, distinct from the “ego,” disperses, and we stand on the threshold of subconscious functions, in an immediate relation with vegetative life. This precisely is the end of the “person” and the threshold of the impersonal, of “nature.”

That to which antiquity gave the name of *genii*, of spirits of the elements, of the gods of nature and so forth, cannot be reduced to mere fables, apart from certain superstitious popular and folk assumptions and poetic appositions. Certainly, all of this involved “fantasies” — that is, forms produced in determinate circumstances by a faculty analogous to that which acts in dreams through the sympathetic nervous system. These “fantasies,” however, originally dramatized the obscure *psychic* experiences of contact with certain forces in a variety of ways, and precisely in the same way as dreams; and the forms, the beings and the visible laws of nature are nothing but manifestations of these forces.

Similarly, the phenomena of so-called “natural” clairvoyance, which is to say somnambulistic clairvoyance, are tied to the neutralization and exclusion of the brain, and to dependency on a reduced consciousness, which in certain beings subsists thanks to special circumstances: that is, these phenomena are tied to the sympathetic nervous system. The principle plexi of this, and above all the solar plexus, are then transformed into a sensorium and assume the functions of the brain, which they exercise without the help of the instrument of the physical senses in the strict sense, on the basis of stimuli and sensations which come no longer from outside, but from within. Naturally, depending on the case, the products of this activity have a more or less direct character, that is, are more or less intermixed with the forms that they use to translate themselves and to become conscious, which are more or less informed by the spatio-temporal element proper to the brain.<sup>4</sup> But, however much scoria it might contain, an incontestable margin of

objectivity subsists in these phenomena, as is verified, sometimes even lucidly, through the correspondence of the data furnished by that path, with other data which are controllable on the basis of those physical perceptions sifted and organized by the waking consciousness.

This already furnishes a point of orientation. There exists a whole “psychic” zone, “hidden” with respect to ordinary consciousness, which is in its way real (and not mere “subjective illusion” or “hallucination”), but which should not be confused with the “spiritual” in the sense of value, and still less with the “supernatural.” It would be fitter here to speak of the infra-natural; and he who opens himself passively, “ecstatically,” to this world, in reality regresses, forces his internal level to descend from a higher grade to an inferior grade.

Every positive measure for a man’s true spirituality must be the clear, active, and distinct consciousness: that which he possesses when he objectively scrutinizes exterior reality or exterior form in terms of a logical reasoning, of a mathematical deduction, or when he makes a decision in his moral life. This is his conquest, that which defines him in the hierarchy of beings. When he passes rather into the states of a nebulous mysticism or of a pantheistic shattering, when he proceeds into that phenomenology — amazing though it seems — which arises in the conditions of regression, of psychic collapse, of trance, he does not ascend, but *descends* along the ladder of spirituality, passing from more spirit to less. He does not surpass “nature,” but he gives himself to it once again, indeed he makes himself the instrument of the lower forces which are enclosed in its forms.

Only after having seen this point very clearly can one formulate the idea of another, antithetical spiritual direction — a direction which can serve as a measure of what might be valid in “spiritualism,” and which can be proposed to him who, having a particular vocation and qualification, seeks “transcendence,” something higher than that which the modern vision of man and of the world offers — the space for a superior liberty beyond the conditionings and the senselessness of today’s existence, beyond the residual forms of the religious confessions. *In principle, we must posit the necessity of a road leading to experiences which, far from “reducing” consciousness, transform it into superconsciousness;*

*which, far from abolishing the distinct presence that conserves itself so easily in a healthy and wakeful man amongst material things and practical activities, raises this presence to a higher degree, in such a way as to not adulterate the principles which constitute the essence of the personality, but rather to integrate them.* The road toward experiences of this kind is the road toward the true supernatural. But this road is neither comfortable nor, for the many, alluring. It presupposes precisely the contrary attitude to that of the enthusiasts of “spiritualism,” and of whomever is driven solely by a confused impulse to evasion: it presupposes an attitude and a will of *ascesis*, in the original sense of this word, distinct from the assumptions of the devotional, mortifying and monastic order.

It is not easy to bring the modern mentality back to both consider and adjudicate in terms of interiority, rather than appearance and “phenomenon” or sensation. Still more difficult, after the devastation brought about by biologism, by anthropology and by evolutionism, to bring it back to the sense of that which was even once, and nominally is still, a Catholic teaching: the dignity and the *supernatural* destination of the human person.

Now, this is precisely the fundamental point for that order of things which we will address. Indeed, only he who possesses such a sense can recognize that *everything immaterial there exist two distinct domains, indeed two antithetical domains.* One, corresponding to the forms of consciousness inferior to the level of the waking state of a normal human person, is the *natural* order, in the wider sense. The other order alone is the *supernatural*. Man finds himself between the one and the other of these two domains, and whoever escapes a condition of stasis or of precarious equilibrium might gravitate toward the one or toward the other. According to the aforementioned doctrine of the dignity and supernatural destination of man, such a one does not belong to “nature,” neither in the materialistic sense of evolutionism and Darwinism, nor in the “spiritualistic” sense of pantheism and like conceptions. As *personality* he already rises out from of the world of mystic souls and of things and elements, from out of the depths of an undifferentiated “cosmicity”, and his vision of clear physical things, raw in their outlines, objective in their space, just as his experience of thoughts which are quite clear and logically concatenated, expresses already almost a kind of catharsis and of liberation from the world,

notwithstanding the limitation of his horizons and of the possibilities that derive from it.<sup>5</sup> When on the other hand he returns, he abdicates and betrays his supernatural destination: he gives way to his “soul.” He takes, consciously or unconsciously, the descending path, whereas if he were but faithful to his end, it would eventually be given to him to go beyond every conditioned state, “cosmic” though such might be.

This schematic framework already suffices for a preliminary orientation in the confrontation with the various currents of “spiritualism.” The development of this critique will come to clarify, and bit by bit to integrate, these views, so far as to make visible, at the same time, what their positive points of reference might be.



## Spiritualism and “Psychic Research”

**S**PIRITISM CONSTITUTES THE AVANT-GARDE of the new spiritualism. It has raised the call to revolt against materialism, and was immediately afterward followed in this by Theosophism; even now, these two split the large majority of those who are passionate about the invisible. It is not irrelevant to note the detail that both these movements were born in Protestant Anglo-Saxon countries, and that certain women — the Fox sisters for the one, Helena Petrovna Blavatsky and then A. Besant for the other — played a fundamental role in their origins.

Spiritism was the first to bring the attention of the general public back to an order of phenomena which, in all honesty, were well-known to antiquity, but which were later denied and considered phantasms and the fantasies of superstitious mind, because they departed from the framework of the “positivist” vision of the world which consolidated itself in the last century. *The entire worth of spiritism begins and ends here.*

Spiritism did not limit itself to drawing attention to the reality of these phenomena, but sought in every possible way to favor them and to provoke them, discovering the so-called mediums and proposing for itself the task of developing latent mediumistic faculties. It also sought an explanation for these phenomena; and insofar as it relates them to the action of “spirits” (broadly, the “spirits” of deceased humans) and claims to furnish, by this route, a kind of experimental proof of the survival of the soul,<sup>6</sup> or even of the



soul's immortality, the resulting position is spiritism properly understood.

The examination and the production both of these phenomena and of all others of an extranormal character, without an obligatory theoretical and interpretive superstructure, and above all under rigorous scientific control and with an attitude analogous to that which is assumed for the exploration and the classification of "natural" phenomena in the reduced sense of the word, constitutes rather the object of so-called "psychic" or "metapsychic" or "parapsychic research." This research, organized in a more recent period and heading up numerous institutes and societies, has reclaimed and integrated the positive aspect, as we deem it, of spiritism, in the sense that thanks to its assessments, it is no longer possible to doubt the reality of the extranormal. However, for this research as well, its entire worth begins and ends here.

Moreover, limiting ourselves to the order of phenomena on which spiritism especially focuses its attention, and to that part of psychic research which is not mere study, but rather a favoring and cultivation of mediumship (even if it is with the simple intent of obtaining an ever broader material for investigation), it must be said that we find ourselves before a current which in its whole presents the typical aspect we have already mentioned by which "spiritualism" constitutes a danger for the spirit. *Mediumship* might be defined as a method for favoring or emphasizing the disintegration of the internal unity of the person. Having partially freed a certain group of subtler elements from the body, man, as medium, becomes the organ for the manifestation in our world of forces and of influences of an extremely diverse, but always subpersonal, nature. The medium cannot control these forces and influences in any way, since his consciousness either captures only certain effects, or else slides directly into sleep, into a trance, into catalepsy.

Nor do matters stand otherwise with the others — that is, with the spiritists who await the manifestation of the dead on the one hand, and on the other hand with those who scientifically control the sittings. The last of their worries is having a just sense and judgement regarding the spiritual conditions which favor these manifestations. For the first group, all of this has value passively as "revelation," and what essentially counts for them is the "sensational" and whatever seems to confirm their "spiritic"

hypotheses, thus satisfying their sentimental needs. For the second, that is for the “psychic researchers,” man counts as a producer of “phenomena”; phenomena are appreciated insofar as they are unusual and controllable, and one gives little thought to what happens from the internal point of view. They too would have no scruples in using all kinds of means, hypnotic procedures and special substances, to artificially provoke or intensify mediumship, so as to produce “subjects” fit for their experiments and their findings.

Now, in the random opening which occurs in the person of the medium, in these points of contact with the invisible, if something should stir and impose itself, the danger is far from being limited to an attempt against the spiritual unity of the medium. Neither the common man nor the “optimists” today have any idea of the dark and impersonal forces which linger at the borders of that reality from which they have been excluded. The medium, by making himself the instrument for the manifestation that they crave, literally has the function of a center of psychic infection for his environment. He acts precisely as medium, that is, channel, through which these forces might exercise an action on our world and on our minds, which stand defenseless before them. The manifestations that are obtained in these “sittings” are only a part of the consequences, and are often negligible and innocuous as compared to that which slips through the ajar doors of the “netherworld.” One could likewise, if only one had intelligence to apprehend certain occult laws acting through the weave of common experience, identify certain grave effects both for individuals and for collectives, in relation to the conditions involuntarily and inconsiderately created in these sittings, be they of “spiritic,” “scientific,” or pseudo-initiatic type. To mention only a single case in passing, it would be both interesting and alarming in equal measure to disclose the part that conjuration in general had, in a period before the birth of contemporary spiritualism and of spiritism, in the processes of infiltration and degradation in certain secret organizations, which in turn played a principal role in the revolutionary European subversion.

If one considers that the number of those who actively practice spiritism in Italy is in the thousands, and in the world in the millions, one might form an idea of the spiritist danger, not only in the realm of superstitious credence and intellectual deviance, but above all in the realm of an insensible action of corrosion of those barriers which,

by closing men off from the beyond, permit them a certain residual margin of security and autonomy.

Moreover, *every saturation of “nether” influences which is produced in life by these or other roads, acting between the weft and weave of consciousness, is today more worrisome than it has ever been, because our day almost completely lacks the counterpart to those influences in an opposite sense — that is, effectively supernatural influences, which the great traditions knew how to attract and to graft invisibly onto our intentions, our thoughts, and our actions.* From the Renaissance onward, Western man has desired to be “free”: he has been indulged in this desire, he has been let go, the spiritual has withdrawn — and he has been abandoned to himself, which amounts to saying: he has been excluded from those connections with the high, by which he might arm himself for his internal defense.

Now, as regards spiritism in particular, one might think these comments somewhat exaggerated. Many will even deny the danger altogether, until they find themselves standing before something which belongs to the domain of the “sensational”: mysterious illnesses, inexplicable accidents, mental aberrations, catastrophes in their existences and so forth and so on. Today we are so far gone that the only thing we consider serious any longer is whatever menaces our fortune, our corporeal existence, or, at least, our physical health and our nerves. One does not give mind to the rest. That which regards the spirit is a private matter; it falls into the field of opinions and “moral” judgements, not in the field of reality. Ideas of the kind, in their primitivism, *are precisely what is necessary to confirm the aforementioned state of defenselessness of today’s man in the face of subtler forces.*<sup>7</sup> Possession in the broad sense — not belonging any longer to oneself — is one of the most diffuse forms in which the action of the aforementioned influences on the human personality is manifested and realizes itself. Something is substituted for the free person, something which, without giving any warning of its constrictions, obstructs or perverts every higher aspiration. The personal principle, maimed, recedes “ecstatically” (we will later consider the sense of this word more closely) into the promiscuous and collective principle — and the collective, the psychically formless, reveals a typically destructive eruption. Evidently, one cannot speak any longer of mediums in the strict, spiritistic sense,

nor only of those who form a new kind of cult around these mediums. It is a broader action, one of whose points of departure can nevertheless be identified in hotbeds of this kind. Now, the modern world has no need of further pushing in this direction. And any man of keen vision sees how many things converge here, *almost as if they were the elements of the same plan*; in perceiving this, one also gains the means to understand the direction and the effective sense of certain phenomena.

The considerations we have laid forth at the beginning apply both to militant spiritism, as well as to that branch of psychic research which considers the same phenomena, not limiting itself to observing them and recording them wherever they occur, but tending also to produce them and to multiply them, thus approving and valorizing mediumship. Yet in the second case there is an almost automatic limitation of the danger. Indeed, when the scientific attitude is truly maintained, with the diffidence and the methodic doubt which inheres to it, it acts more often than not as a negative and paralyzing factor on mediumship and on the production of “phenomena,” since these require an *ad hoc* psychic atmosphere for their full execution: the result is like a vicious circle, proceeding from the inadequacy of its method with respect to the material to which it would apply itself.<sup>8</sup>

After which, it remains to us to examine the hypotheses and the speculations of the two tendencies. We will have to limit ourselves here to a few essential points.<sup>9</sup>

As has been said, mediumistic phenomena for the “spiritists” count as an experimental proof of the survival, or even of the very immortality, of the souls of the dead. Setting aside the dogmas of faith, they believe that by this route they can confute the agnosticism and the materialism of the moderns, since the phenomena of which they treat arise on the very ground of “facts,” of tangible proofs.

However, we must be very cautious before saying that it is the personality of the dead who operate on mediumistic phenomena, even only in determinate cases. In reality, both the spiritists, as well as “psychic researchers,” have absolutely no means at their disposal to ascertain the true causes of these phenomena. Hypothetically, mediumship, as well as other analogous states in which “subjects” arise, are reduced or paralyzed states of consciousness; they are states in which the power of vision and the *internal* control of the

ego do *not* accompany the change in level through which the causes of such phenomena and extranormal manifestations are aroused. While one falls into a trance, the others remain “outside” to look on or to feel, moved or enraptured, or else equipped with exceedingly precise recording instruments, awaiting the manifestation of something which, in its rough materiality, cannot ever assume a definitive face. Now, an exceedingly wide variety of causes can produce one and the same phenomenon (for instance, the phenomenon of levitation might be the work of a medium, a saint, a sorcerer, or an initiate and a yogi). And the lack of a solid doctrinal basis, the presence of suggestions and of sentimental predispositions (above all in the restricted and human sense that everything modern possesses), guarantee not only that the whole thing will reduce itself to hypotheses, but that the hypotheses in question will be amongst the most ingenuous and one-sided — when one is not dealing, that is, with affirmations disguised as a true *credo*, which is no less intolerant than those religious credos which it claims to supersede by means of “experimental proofs.”

As for “psychic research,” or in particular metapsychic research, the inadequacy of the method once again must be indicted: it adopts the same attitude which positivistic science has for physical or biological phenomena, not least of all because the many are moved by the tacit persuasion that one is dealing here not with the “spirit” or the supersensible in the proper sense, but rather with an order of “natural” laws that are not yet well known, just as not so long ago the laws of electricity and magnetism were not well known. To guarantee the absence of “tricks” and of mystifications — this is the positive contribution of such investigations.<sup>10</sup> Leaving aside professional malfeasance, the fount of the methodological misunderstanding here is to be sought in the perceptible aspect of these manifestations. If this aspect were not present — and if the “spiritualists” did not insist so much on the “positivistic” validation of their theses — one would never have dreamed of applying the “experimental” method to this order of things, just as no sane mind would apply it for example to the products of genius or of aesthetic creation (naturally, before the overbearing demands accomplished even here by a certain materialistic psychology and by psychoanalysis). It is really singularly obtuse to fail to comprehend that, if one is dealing truly with the “spiritual,” adequate knowledge cannot come from

measurement and from exterior assessments, but only and uniquely by identifying oneself with the same process, by following its genesis and its development actively, until one reaches, at last, a possible sensible manifestation, which is nothing other in each individual case than a part that takes its very sense from the whole.

It is often debated in metapsychics whether certain extranormal phenomena should be explained through unknown faculties of the mediums and of other subjects, or if one should rather refer also to external, extraindividual agents. But this question loses a large deal of its relevance when one brings the unconscious or the subconscious into consideration, because by definition this belongs to the subpersonal; it is the psychic region in which the individual and the non-individual are separated by a permeable frontier, and this region might extend itself to contain even zones populated by every sort of influence, by “errant thoughts” and even by forces that do not always have any correspondence in the world of incarnate beings and sensible reality. In the most recent metaphysics, the strictly “spiritistic” hypotheses of earlier times are held to be primitive and superseded. But with this one falls into the opposite excess, because in the case of a particular class of mediumistic manifestations there is reason to believe that within the influences we have spoken of there might be also “spirits” of the dead, with the caveat that the term “spirit” be given the ancient sense, according to which these are far from being equivalent to “souls.” “Spirits” are the vital energies, qualified both in a mental sense (memories, complexes of ideas, etc.), and in the “organic” sense, and also in the dynamic sense (impulses, complexes of the will, habits, etc.); energies which the soul, *if it survives death*, leaves behind, precisely as it has done with the physical body, whose elements pass to a free state. Such vital elements pass to the free state just as the remains of the cadaver, devoid that is of their essential unity of being, around which they were organized under the form of “second personality” or also — more often and more simply — of mnemonic complexes, of monoideisms, of entity-tendencies and kinetic virtualities which have become impersonal. After entering this free state, these elements come to incarnate themselves in the medium and, through this vehicle, to produce certain varieties of extranormal phenomenology, which the most ingenuous take for experimental proofs of the survival of the soul.<sup>11</sup> In reality, we are dealing here, not



with the soul in the true and traditional sense of the word, but rather with residual vital forms, destined themselves to be extinguished after more or less brief a term.<sup>12</sup>

There is more. There are cases in which certain non-human forces incarnate in these residues, conserving something similar to the deceased in the guise of a kind of “double”; they animate them and move them, provoking the apparitions and the phenomena that might most draw one into error, but which, at the same time, have the most sinister character when one discovers the true nature of the forces which resurrect such larval and automatic residues. Yet it is these cases which have predominately furnished spiritism the incentive to become a new macabre religion, without realizing how much mockery and seduction manifest themselves in phenomena of the kind — mockery and seduction which could be defined without exaggeration as being Satanic.<sup>13</sup> And yet reasons for suspicion are not lacking, in this sphere, even for those who restrain themselves to the point of view of simple metapsychic observations.<sup>14</sup> One example will suffice. The study of the relationship between mediumship and fraud have led to some very interesting results. Through this study, it has been verified that in many cases mediumistic fraud in no way emerges from the medium’s intention as conscious falsifier. This of course might also happen, even as it might happen that, as has already been mentioned, the experimenters themselves might sometimes push the medium, through their insistency, to a semi-conscious fiction. But in these last cases fraud arises *as a fact which is itself already mediumistic and spiritic*, as a manifestation in the medium of an influence which one can characterize no better than with the well-known expression “spirit of deception.”

Not long ago we expressed the caveat: *if the soul survives death*. This, in reality, is not so frequent and general as the non-materialists commonly think; they are working under certain recent Western religious beliefs, which are either mutilated or taken at the letter or, finally, counterfeited in view of certain special pragmatic aims.

Without trying to get to the bottom of all this here, we will mention only the puerility of involved in positing the problem as a dilemma — “either mortal or immortal” — and likewise the simplicity of both the “materialistic” solution and also the “spiritualistic” solution. The recurrent idea in the traditional teachings, be it implicit

or explicit, is rather that there are some who die with or after the death of the body, and there are some who survive, passing into different states. And among those who survive, there is finally a small portion who attain the privileged condition of true immortality. No outcome can be predicted for man in general: the outcome varies from person to person and depends on what each man is. In general, he survives who already in life, in one way or another, has operated either an actual or virtual separation of his spiritual principle from the conditions imposed on the consciousness by the body or by the sensible experience of waking — which, in theological terms, would be equivalent to saying: he survives to the degree to which he has, already on Earth, effectively directed his soul toward the supernatural end. As for the various possibilities which await the survivors (not to be confused with the *immortals!*) in the *post-mortem*, these depend both on the inclinations that one's internal conduct has impressed on the soul in life, and on one's initiative, on the comportment and on the direction of which the soul itself is capable at the moment of death — *in extremis* — or in the face of situations, tests and experiences, that are no longer of this world. On this last point, whoever is interested might take his bearings by the Lamaist teaching contained in the *Tibetan Book of the Dead (Bardo Tödol)* which furnishes a genuine science, superior to any particular religious confession in the Western sense, of the states of the *post-mortem*, and gives the logic of various destinies proceeding from the spiritual actions to which the soul is called in these states.<sup>15</sup>

With respect to those who have not reached a condition for survival, after death they decompose into their psychic and vital elements, into their “spirits,” and not a single residue of true conscious spiritual unity remains. From here, in certain traditions, the idea of the “second death,” and the invocation: “May you escape the second death,” or else the curse: “May the second death take you.” Turning therefore to spiritism, it must be said that in general it is “spirits” — that is, the aforementioned de-individualized psychic residues, or “larvae,” masks and facsimiles of personalities, vitalized by nether influences in the way already mentioned — which lend themselves to enthusing spiritist circles or to rendering them strong in their faith, or to furnishing material to the collectors of “phenomena” and to the metapsychic archives. As for the other possibility — that is, the case in which it is actually the souls



liberated from the dead to furnish this material — it must be said that this case is so rare, that one can almost exclude it *a priori*. Those souls sojourn in such transcendent spiritual regions (i.e. states) that they no longer have any relation with the world of bodies and with the deeds and the feelings of men. And when, in order to perform some “mission,” they abandon these states in favor of some manifestation within the conditions of space and of time, the last place in which this manifestation should be sought is amongst those phenomena which fall to the hands of the metaphysicians and the spiritists: capricious phenomena, confused, aimless, devoid of every greatness, not rarely mocking, of an intelligence much more often inferior than superior, or simply equal to that which one might expect, not from a transfigured soul, but from a person of average culture of this world. Guénon rightly notes that the nature of such phenomena should leave no doubt as to the nature of the forces that produce them. Apart from the admixture of organic repercussions and of other elements or images furnished by the irrational and infra-conscious part of the conjurers and mediums themselves, it is clear we are dealing, not with souls transfigured by death or by truly supernatural influences, but of subhuman forces and errant psychic complexes, standing in greater or lesser relation to the “nether” element of nature; or else with larvae or residues that no longer belong to the ascended souls; or yet again, with products of decomposition of those souls that have not even survived. This is what appears to be the case, judging by a vision conforming with reality.

As for the last case, this is the literal meaning of the notion that *it is the dead* who act in that the order of things of which we are speaking. And one might add, in a likewise literal sense, that the medium *follows the path of the dead*: with trance and other states akin to death, he evokes the first degrees of that reduction of consciousness and of that progressive dissociation of the spiritual unity, such as that succumbed to by *those who really die*. Along this path — the path of Hades — he encounters the residues of the dead, which are traversing that road in the other direction in their attempt finally to manifest themselves in the world from which they were excluded upon the destruction of their bodies. In the psychic order, such residues play a role similar to that of the products of putrefaction, which transform themselves into so many hotbeds for

the infection of living organisms. The Ancients, the Orientals and even certain populations which are today called “primitive,” knew more of these things than all the spiritists and all the presidents of the “Society for Psychic Research” put together. For this reason, conjuring the dead almost always was condemned as a grave crime. Past times sought to definitively distance the spiritual remains of the dead from the living: or else they acted so as to “placate” them or to bind them. This alone was the secret reason for many traditional funerary rites, which cannot be reduced to mere “ceremonies,” but which exercised, in that period, an effective necessitating action on those psychic forces which had passed to the free state with the undoing of the physical organism. Commerce, not with those residues, but with the souls of the dead, with the aim of hearing “revelations” from them, was considered an absurdity. Even in our days, a lama, when told by David-Néel that the English believe in things of this kind, responded: “And this is the people which has conquered India!”<sup>16</sup>

All of this might be instructive regarding the error and the danger presented by mediumistic practices, not only for oneself, but also for others. Even when they do *not* have anything to do with the “dead” (which is to say, in the majority of cases), things are no different: it is necessarily the first thing to arrive which will manifest itself in these openings, which are practiced at random. Moreover there are laws — today unknown, but not for this less real — of “sympathy” and of “analogy”: since the final possibility of contacting the transfigured souls of the dead is conditioned by the possibility of elevating oneself to essentially superindividual states, so too in states of subconsciousness (as mediumistic states are) only those forces and influences might be attracted which in the cosmic order play the same role that the obscure subsoil of the subconscious and of the prepersonal play in man. All of this, let us repeat, cannot do other than act destructively on formed personality and spiritual unity. In the order, then, of a wider action, which we have already mentioned, it can do nothing other than resolve itself into a factor of disorder, imbalance and deviation in the collective psyche.

On an ancient Etruscan tomb painting, near to an altar, which was considered the outlet of nether forces, one finds depiction of a man armed with a sword. He is the symbol of an attitude exactly contrary to the medium’s.

In antiquity there existed an art for creating, on the basis of the aforementioned laws of analogy, internal and external conditions to *consciously* attract and direct a *determinate* order of influences, among the variety of those that populate the “behind” or the “inside” of visible reality, of the phenomenal world. Amongst the spiritualists of today, nothing is known of this art (though certain echoes of it can be perceived in the Catholic ritual and sacramental tradition). The spiritists take the road of superstition and sentimental consolations, and the researchers the path of “scientific” research, and none of them realizes the insanities that they might avoid, the many things they might come to know, if they were to radically change their attitude and method; if they returned to the study and to the comprehension of the traditional teachings; if, before searching for “spirits,” they sought the *spirit*, and forged themselves as spirit.

But let us return a moment to metaphysics, in order to bring two points into relief. The first is that in the vast documentation of phenomena which it has gathered, we remain forever on the plane of *by-products of the extranormal*, insofar as we are dealing with phenomena of a “spontaneous,” sporadic, irrational, unintentional character — certainly this is so in the case of so-called ESP (“extra-sensory perception,” including psychometry, telepathy, clairvoyance, precognition, etc.), and yet even more in the case of phenomena called “paraphysical,” which have objective effects in the field of the physical world that do not admit of any normal explanation. This is obvious enough, because whoever truly has the power to produce phenomena of a different, intentional, and voluntary character, on the basis of a spiritual qualification — let us say, an initiate, a true yogi or also a saint, since such a qualification appears to be almost without exception the constant counterpart of such power — would not ever permit it to so much as enter his mind to put himself at the disposition, as a “subject,” of profane parapsychological research. This research, therefore, cannot count on anything other than a spurious, sparse, and random material, which does not carry with it any precise orientation. In the field of metaphysics, when one refers to the extranormal faculties of the subject alone, or even to his contacts with an undefined *quid*, the impossibility of examining these phenomena as they are willfully and freely produced, is in general without exception recognized, and is considered an insuperable handicap<sup>17</sup> for “experimental” research.

There is more — and this is the second point to bring into relief: it has been verified that the process of extrasensorial perception and of other parapsychic faculties is, in its essential part, unconscious; that the manifestations are tied at least to a “reduction of consciousness” (recently, this has been underlined, for example, by Tyrrell and by Rhine), to a limit-state between dream and waking, similar in part to the trance of the medium: so much so that in certain attempts to experimentally activate those faculties one has sought recourse to the hypnosis of the subjects. All of this tells us that in this field we are dealing with a species of the extranormal which, from the point of view of the values of the personality, has a regressive sub-personal character. Thus there have been a great many researchers, such as Wasiljev and Tenhaeff, who have formulated the hypothesis of “phylogenetically regressive” states: regression of the subject into the condition of the primitive psyche corresponding to the level of savage populations, with extranormal faculties which have been lost — it is supposed — in the successive development of the human psyche, of logical thought, etc. Since metapsychics, with regard to “paraphysical” phenomena, does not yet know how to rationally explain the phenomena on the line of “extrasensorial perception,” including precognition, hypotheses have been formulated which sometimes trespass into spiritualism. We are not speaking of the “collective unconscious” so dear to Jung, which at bottom cannot carry one beyond the psychological domain, but rather of a species of “universal consciousness,” comprising perfect consciousness of present, past, and future occurrences. In this connection, certain authors, namely C. A. Mace and H. H. Price, have even spoken of a psychic aether<sup>18</sup> (which recalls closely enough the Hindu notion of the *âkâça*), a most scientific designation used by the most recent metaphysics, which has adopted a similar hypothetical explicative principle, calling it however “PSI field”: a *quid* of simultaneously physical and psychic character which supposedly resumes and transcend the conditions of space and of time. It is supposedly thanks to contact with this “field” that the subject is rendered capable of extrasensorial perceptions. It has been noted however that in this case one might as well speak simply of the “supersensible,” the admission of which would impose the necessity of rather disturbing revisions in the current scientific and established conceptions regarding space, time, nature.<sup>19</sup>

But all this is of nothing other than theoretical interest. Whether this supersensible *quid* is admitted or not, we wish to observe that even in those cases one might partially believe that contacts have been made with it by certain subjects — even then, according to that which we have before noted and which even metapsychics has recognized, these contacts are observably established in the subconscious or in the unconscious, in conditions of a more or less reduced consciousness, along analogous lines to what occurs in mediumship and hypnosis — therefore, along a descending rather than ascending path, toward a lowering of personal psychic level rather than toward a raising of the same toward superconsciousness.

The limit we have mentioned above has therefore been confirmed.



## Critique of Psychoanalysis

IT IS NO ACCIDENT THAT, after spiritism and psychic research, we pass on to consider *psychoanalysis*. Psychoanalysis, as a general impulse, had the possibility of providing the first overcoming of the attitude proper to both of those two currents.

Indeed, in principle, this discipline no longer proposes a simple verification or provocation of psychic phenomena; it would rather proceed to the depths (hence the oft used designation “depth psychology,” *Tiefenpsychologie*), in order to explore the subterranean zone of the soul, and the forces that dwell and act therein.

Psychoanalysis, to be sure, no longer considers unusual manifestations like those in mediumship or metapsychics (there have been only a few sporadic recent attempts to apply psychoanalysis also to this field). It has rather taken form in the study of neuroses, hystericism, and other psychic disorders, developing originally as a new branch of modern psychotherapy. This specialized field, however, was quickly transcended. Psychoanalytic conceptions have been abusively generalized, their validity extended well past a particular clinical casology,<sup>20</sup> so far as to include man and the life of the soul in general. From here, psychoanalysis rapidly trespassed into domains that have nothing to do with medicine and with psychopathology, and exerted itself to discover a more or less neurotic phenomenology in phenomena and cultural and social manifestations of every kind, even in morality, art, sexology, religion, mythology — indeed even in sociology and politics. However, this has meant, rather than the assumption of a serious and rigorous “depth

psychology,” precisely an abusive application of the hypotheses and the principles which the psychoanalysts have formed with respect to pathological cases: hypotheses and principles which are — let us say it already from the start — precisely as obsessive<sup>21</sup> as those “complexes” which they seek to discover beneath the ordinary waking consciousness of neurotics. Thus psychoanalysis finds a way of proceeding to aberrant and contaminating interpretations (presented ever as “realistic” analyses which arise thanks to some new, keener insight) of a quantity of phenomena which are traced back, in their roots, to the shallows<sup>22</sup> of the unconscious. For this reason, there are some who have spoken in this connection of a “delerium of interpretation,” delerium in the psychiatric sense of mania, of “obsession”: the mania of supposing and of discovering, everywhere one looks, a turbid and dark background. This holds also for the individual analyses of the dreams, impulses, tendencies, etc. of persons who consider themselves to be normal.

We will leave aside psychoanalysis as simple psychotherapy. It is claimed that the latter has achieved, that it is achieving even now, numerous successes. But among psychologists there are some who ask themselves if these successes, irrespective of that which they owe to the suggestibility of their subjects (a problem which arises in nearly all psychotherapy), might have been accomplished by procedures which do not share the dogmatic presuppositions of psychoanalysis. We, however, are not interested in the therapeutic field, but rather in the anthropological one, that is, the psychoanalytic theory of man, psychoanalysis as a cultural phenomenon; above all, we are interested in what the “climate” of psychoanalysis, its suggestions, its “ethic,” might provoke along similar lines to the dangers of neo-spiritualism, which we have already indicated in the previous chapter. We shall take our bearings above all by the so-called “orthodox” school of psychoanalysis, which is to say, by the principal ideas of its founder, Sigmund Freud. We will consider the views of other psychoanalysts, such as Adler, Jung, and Reich, only secondarily, in the development of this or that point.

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Let us note before anything else that psychoanalysis was not in fact the first to first discover *the unconscious*. The idea of a zone which, despite being psychic, is not illuminated by the light of clear



consciousness, had already received its rights of citizenship in modern psychology, especially after the research into hypnosis and dissociation of personality. And not only in this area: all of this was known to traditional ancient doctrines. To cite only a single example, those doctrines referred to by yoga and Buddhist practice (in their notions of the *samskâra* and the *vasâna*) recognized in the unconscious itself (better to say: in the subconscious) other broader and deeper stratifications. Nor was the imperative toward “exploration of the depths” and the accompanying method poorly defined – an exploration intended to throw light on zones of the psyche, and in general, of the being, which usually fall outside the field of even the most peripheral waking consciousness.

But the modern discovery of the subconscious has not been without a certain polemical strand, which was turned against the intellectualism of the epoch which immediately preceded it. Indeed, the psychology of this period based itself on the fiction of a life of the soul centered solely on conscious phenomena, which moreover was generally supposed to have a material basis. Apart from purely philosophical theories, like those of Eduard von Hartmann, the main forms of a more comprehensive psychology were rather vague and spiritualistic, such as that of William James regarding the subconscious in the variety of religious and mystic experiences, or of Myers on the “subliminal” (i.e. that which lies beneath the threshold of consciousness). Other, more technical formulations followed, and one began to speak not so much of the subconscious as of the *unconscious*. Here is what Le Bon has to say in this connection:

Conscious intellectual life represents only a minimal part with respect to the unconscious life of the soul. The subtlest analysis, the most penetrating observation, reaches only a small number of the conscious motives of the life of the soul. Our conscious acts derive from an unconscious substratum which is created in particular by hereditary influences. This substratum contains innumerable atavistic traces, which constitute the soul of race. Behind the avowed motives of our actions there are doubtlessly secret, unavowed ones; but behind these others yet, more secret still, are concealed, the existence of which we do not even suspect. The greater part of our actions day to day are only the effect of hidden motives which escape our awareness.<sup>23</sup>

Already here an anti-intellectualistic reaction can be detected which, however, visibly misses the mark with any healthy and normal humanity. Another point to bring into sharp relief in this modern



discovery of the subconscious is the tendency to hypostasize it, to conceive of it as a distinct entity — a tendency which goes so far as to create a genuine dualism in the human being. This appears whenever one speaks of the “unconscious” rather than the “subconscious” or the “preconscious.” Indeed, the unconscious, as such, does not represent a reduced degree of consciousness, but another domain altogether, which in principle excludes the possibility of every direct consciousness. This scission and substantialization of a part of the human entity, which is characteristic of psychoanalysis, had already taken on a dynamic character in schools like those of Coué and Baudouin. If one speaks now of the unconscious and at other times of the subconscious, one proceeds, in any case, yet a further step towards the dualistic direction, because this principle is considered as an entity which has its own laws and which almost always ends up victorious when coming into conflict with the ego. According to these schools, there is only a single way to influence the subconscious, and this is through *suggestion*, ceasing to employ one’s will and using rather one’s imagination. This means counterposing a *method of conscious self-suggestion* to the passive suggestions which are obeyed by the better part of the ordinary life of the soul. Woe if the will confronts the unconscious and the imagination directly. Not only will it have the worst of this encounter, but the energy of its effort will actually reinforce its adversary (“the law of converted effort”).

From this one sees already the danger of the road which has been taken. While the “subliminal,” as we have indicated, was known to the explorers of the soul of other times, long before being “discovered” by the moderns, these others did not make of it a principle in itself. According to the very expressive symbolism of certain Medieval texts, the conscious and subconscious represented the two parts of a *broken sword* which was to be reforged, so as to reawaken the original state of a superior human type. The modern schools — let us say it from the start — do nothing other than exasperate the fracture, and invert the hierarchical relation between the two principles.

To return to the doctrine of Freud, its defining characteristic is, in the first place, to be found in its locating in the unconscious the principal motor force of the psyche, in mechanistic and deterministic terms. The impulses, the instincts, the complexes of the psychic underground supposedly have a “fatal charge” (the technical term is

*Besetzungsenergie*) which *must* discharge; if this does not occur, the entire human being will suffer the consequences to a greater or lesser degree. From here, too, the characterization of the unconscious as *id* and the fundamental opposition between the ego (*das Ich*) and the *id*.<sup>24</sup> The term *id* (*Es*) is derived from forms of the German language in which the impersonal pronoun *es* acts as the subject of phrases expressing states, movements, and sensations which are experienced as having a more or less compulsory character. As a typical example, one might adduce the phrase *es treibt mich* as “I feel pushed” or “transported,” because from the verb *treiben* meaning to push or move, comes the expression *Trieb* meaning impulse, the force of instinct-tendency, used in psychoanalysis to designate the mode in which the *id* manifests itself and acts. Already from a lexical analysis of Freudian psychoanalysis we can therefore clearly see the inversion of the values which characterizes it: the *id*, the unconscious, is the subject, the *agens*;<sup>25</sup> the ego becomes the object, that which is acted upon. Therefore, psychoanalysis not only sees in the *id* the primary force of the human person, but it conceives of the relations between it and the ego as relations of pure *causality*, as something similar, in psychic life, to the necessitation or coercion which one might suffer from without on account of a physical force. The *Triebe*, the impulses, the dynamisms and the “complexes” of the *id* “move” and act in this way. As has been said, these are forces which, in one way or another, *must* have their manifestation, they must resolve their “charge.”

In the second place Freudianism is characterized by its seeing in the libido, in that impulse to pleasure (*Lustprinzip*) which manifests principally in sexual pleasure, the fundamental root of the unconscious. And here the whole mythology of the “complexes” comes into play that every man more or less ineluctably, whether he knows it or not, harbors in himself, beginning with the famous Oedipus complex, and proceeding to all the others which are fabricated by a more or less fanciful interpretation, ever in the sexual key, of the life of a child (or else of certain customs of savages, along the lines of what is undertaken in the book *Totem and Taboo*); these tendencies translate themselves finally into atavistic constellations of the human unconscious, both individual and (above all in the theories of Jung) collective.

The characteristic position of Freudianism is *the disavowal, in man, of the presence and of the power of any sovereign spiritual center, which is to say of the I<sup>26</sup> as such*. In the face of the unconscious, the I is overthrown. The I, in its acceptance as a principle capable of recognizing true values and of giving autonomous norms, would be an illusion, possibly itself produced by some “complex.” That which generally acts in man at the conscious moral level is the so-called “super-ego,” which is defined by “introjection” of all prohibitions, taboos, and limitations existing in the environment (i.e., by taking these things on as a second artificial nature), through an action of censure, of blockage and of repression of the demands of the unconscious. A kind of conformist and at the same time hysterical puppet therefore takes the place of the true self. And, as has been indicated, even the manifestation of a “complex” might play a part in its construction — a complex (such as a Narcissus complex or an “autistic” complex) derived from earliest infancy, from the phase of infantile eroticism, when the child (according to the suppositions of psychoanalysis) satisfied its own libido without having recourse to other people, thereby attaining a sense of self-sufficiency and, we would almost say, of autarchy. In a transposed form this complex might be a fundamental aspect of the brink and the limit-form of the ego that Freud calls the *Ichideal* (the “ego ideal”): the “introjected” values and the external norms are affirmed absolutely, despotically, through a *libido sui generis*. And this might in turn produce the illusory sense of the autonomy of the ego, and an opposition between the ego and that which man effectively is, in relation to other and more authentic expressions of the libido and of the id.<sup>27</sup> On the other hand, nothing remains to the conscious principle in all of this except the role of a kind of *solicitor* for the instinctual part of one’s being. Just as the dyad super-ego and unconscious (or libido) are supposed to define the fundamental structure of man, the contrast between the one and the other is supposed to furnish the key for an interpretation not only of typical neurotic facts, but even of a great deal of behavior which is considered normal.

As has been said, the “charge” of the unconscious *must* discharge. Thus the only choice one has is to guide the corresponding impulses in such a way that their explication, in opposing the needs of the environment and social reality (of which the super-ego is the internal

avenger),<sup>28</sup> does not carry one to undesirable or even disastrous consequences. In this connection, a *modus vivendi*<sup>29</sup> is offered to avoid creating grave conflicts: namely, through the transposed and varied satisfaction of this unconscious charge: the detachment of the impulses from their immediate objects by directing them toward other objects, ends, or persons which take their place. This is the process of “transposition” or of “sublimation.” Thus whoever is battling, let us say, with an incestuous complex can “discharge” it by deviating the charge of the libido, for example onto the Fatherland conceived as a “Mother.” The greater part of these processes of substitution are carried out in the unconscious; the individual is not aware of them and believes he is obeying noble sentiments and superior ends, until psychoanalysis opens his eyes. If on the other hand, either on account of the barriers of the environment, or the inhibitory, even unconscious action of the super-ego and the “social anguish” experienced directly by the individual, one opposes oneself to the impulses and one represses them, they enter into the unconscious, barricading themselves therein, either enriching it with new complexes or else awakening other latent ones, which are present both as an archaic heredity and as the articulations of the infantile libido.<sup>30</sup> Situations of the kind poison conscious life with varying degrees of neuroses. Eventually that which Freud calls the “principle of *nirvâna*” intervenes: one seeks refuge in evasions which permit one to withdraw oneself from intolerable tensions (psychoanalysis makes a similarly grotesque use of the metaphysical Buddhist concept of *nirvâna* itself, presuming perhaps to clarify the genesis of this concept, also sexually). In many other cases however these tensions are simply juggled about, so that the impulses of the psychic underground satisfy themselves despite everything by acting out at those moments when, as in the experiences of dreams, the ego’s faculties of control and of censure are reduced or suspended. In other cases yet they actively intervene so as to provoke an exclusion of the consciousness or of memory,<sup>31</sup> or even to provoke psychophysical disorders. More generally, they await the right moment to assume a mask, to “move” in the desired direction and to discharge their energy in one way or another, possibly through the aforementioned procedure of sublimation.

There are furthermore the possibilities offered by “states of folly.” Following Le Bon, Freud observes that in these states the individual, feeling himself to be part of the mass, loses his “social anguish,” and with it the sense of his own responsibility and his own impotence in the face of the environment, which permits repressed impulses to burst forth in their original form.

In this context, one might mention the psychoanalysis of Adler (which he calls *Individualpsychologie*). Adler takes a different point of reference; the *Geltungstrieb*, that is, the impulse of the individual to be of worth, to affirm himself, but with analogous unconscious mechanisms which intervene when the individual is impeded by the conditions of the environment, by his situation or by his weakness. At that point the famous “inferiority complex” is born, which acts as a sophisticated alibi for self-justification; or else one resorts to “overcompensation,” which is to say, to transposed affirmations and vicarious hysterias of the same impulse, meant to hide one’s own impulse from oneself in both situations, and to avoid acting. As a humorous example of how far one might go along these lines, a female disciple of Freud and Adler psychoanalyzed masculine despotism in the history of civilization, as well as the supposed superiority of man as compared to women, which she regards as absurd. The basis for both these things, she claims, is a neuropathic, hysterical fact, a neurotic “overcompensation” owing to an unconscious “inferiority complex” deriving from the fact that man, in contrast to woman, is not able to give himself uninterruptedly to the sexual act. To compensate for this sense of painful inferiority in the face of woman, man creates the pretense of a superiority in other fields, and he hysterically constitutes himself as the “strong” and dominating sex...<sup>32</sup>

Returning to the general anthropology of Freudianism, it already appears clearly from what has been said that Freudianism recognizes no ethical conflicts in the proper sense. Every conflict of the soul loses any ethical character and reveals itself as the effect of a hysteroid fact. When the conscious personality opposes and combats the impulses of the other part of itself, this is not in any way the manifestation of a superior law, but a species of family conflict, or of a clash of complexes, because, as has been indicated, when the ego thinks it is acting for itself as an autonomous and despotic legislator, it is merely suffering the effects of a self-sadistic variety of the

“autistic” complex: even in those cases in which it tackles a catastrophe or faces death itself so as to keep itself standing, in truth it has been played, it has been moved; it does not act, but it is the id which acts in it. Wherever there is no conflict and explicit neurosis in the life of the soul, there is however always the possibility of these things, since the ego can enjoy peace and harmony only on the basis of adaptations, transpositions, and sublimations, all of which occur more or less unconsciously. But any given trauma suffices to produce “regression” — that is, the revival of the impulses and the complexes in their original forms, in their original ends, and in their original objects.<sup>33</sup>

After this, we can proceed to a fundamental critical clarification. First of all, Freud has been accused of “pansexualism” on account of the Freudian characterization of libido as the fundamental root of the unconscious. He sometimes sought to exonerate himself from this charge. He writes: “We call by that name the energy (regarded as a quantitative magnitude, though not at present actually measurable) of those instincts which have to do with all that may be comprised under the word ‘love.’” He says that this includes even the love of the poets and attachment to concrete objects or abstract ideas. But he adds immediately that “psycho-analytic research has taught us that all these tendencies are an expression of the same instinctive activities; in relations between the sexes these instincts force their way towards sexual union, but in other circumstances they are diverted from this aim or are prevented from reaching it, though always preserving enough of their original nature to keep their identity recognizable (as in such features as the longing for proximity, and self-sacrifice).”<sup>34</sup> Therefore, when Freud says that whoever happens to desire or prefer a less crude expression can speak of *eros* in the generalized Platonic sense, rather than of libido, it is clear that he is playing on a misunderstanding. And in reality everything he claims regarding the genesis of the fundamental complexes both in infantile life and in that of the savages and the “primordial herd” is devoid of all basis, save as one supposes the closest ties between libido and sexuality.<sup>35</sup>

In fact, psychoanalysis in its essential part resolves into a general interpretation of individual and collective existence in the sexual key, so much so that one suspects it could have emerged only in the mind



of a person for whom sex constituted a true monomania. Freudianism reflects that pandemic of sex or obsession with sex which plays so great a role in the contemporary epoch, and it is precisely to this that it owes a great part of its success, by serving in its turn as the corroborator and pseudo-scientific framework for this pandemic. In “orthodox” psychoanalysts, sex is a true *idée fixe*, something which as a *Trieb* or a complex of their id “presses” them coercively, impeding them from seeing anything else, precisely in the same way that they claim it is a function of the id to inhibit the consciousness of the neurotic, to prohibit him from seeing and recognizing whatever he does not want to. This must be stated, and must be stated decisively, whenever the psychoanalysts go so far as to brazenly claim that every opposition to their doctrine signifies that they have hit the mark, since every objection betrays an internal resistance which he who is anti-psychoanalysis is unable to conquer, so that before speaking of such things he himself should submit to psychoanalysis. Exactly the opposite is true.

This is not a matter of contesting the great role that sex plays in human existence. It is rather a matter, in the first place, of setting limits, the disrespect of which transforms sexual interpretations into something absurd and contaminating. In the second place, it is a matter of recognizing that Freud has focused attention on sex only in its lowest and darkest (and also “dirtiest”) aspects, in its effectively sub-personal aspects, in the framework of a species of demonry<sup>36</sup> of sex and of the libido. Now, sex also has another dimension, apart from the aspects of an elementary power of the psychic underground: that of a possible transcendence, which can be identified through a suitable and truly in-depth analysis of various significant phenomena of the erotic current. This has been recognized explicitly in manifold traditions, to such an extent that these traditions attributed sacral, mystico-ecstatic, and magical possibilities to sex, in terms totally different from those of the transposition and the sublimation theorized by psychoanalysis, because the essence here was something truly elementary and transcendent: an almost metaphysical transcendence of order, rather than the compulsive and blind force of the libido and of the eros which yokes the individual and carries him away. And a metaphysics of sex might even come to realize that the most turbid, nether forms of sex are an involutive degradation of that superior impulse.<sup>37</sup>

Thus it can be seen that, while Freudianism on one hand goes too far when it gives itself over to a generalized sexual hermeneutics in the field of the human psyche, on the other it stops itself up only halfway, by recognizing only one part of sex, and confounding the remainder with this part, or reducing the remainder to it. A certain widening of horizons was attempted by an ex-disciple of Freud, Wilhelm Reich, insofar as he in a certain way lifted sex out of the abjection of Freudian case-analysis and brought it back to an energy almost of a cosmic character, which he called orgone or orgasmic energy (because he held that it was displayed nakedly in the orgasm). He applied the psychoanalytic theory of blockage to this energy, speaking of repressions and of the pathogenic “armor” worn by the ego so as to protect it from this energy. But this widening is more quantitative and intensive than it is qualitative: in essence, the “nether” quality of sexuality conceived in a Freudian sense persists, and the lack of authority of every superior power of the psyche is even emphasized.

Two other points should be considered. Freudianism’s ascribing a generalized character to the libido would be to its advantage with respect to the vaguest and most spiritualistic conceptions of other “unorthodox” positions of psychoanalysis regarding the fundamental root of the subterranean prepersonal life, since the possibility would then arise of returning to a traditional, fundamental teaching, to the idea that “desire” or “yearning” is the root of “natural” life as such. In this connection, it is necessary however to carry oneself anew to a metaphysical plane. That profound alteration, that crisis and that irrational perturbation wherein the spirit ceases to “be” itself, but loses itself in the enjoyment of itself and in yearning identifications, was considered by a prenatal and preconceptional metaphysics both in the Occident (for example in the Neoplatonic exegesis of the myth of Narcissus) and in the Orient (especially in Buddhism), as the principle and the primary force, or *dynamis*, which carries one to the conditioned world, and, in particular, to one’s birth as a mortal man. While it was affirmed at the same time that “desire” is the substrate of mortal life in general, one did not stop up at the subjective aspects of this desire (that is, neither at the special case of sexuality, nor at the other forms of the affective and passional field). On the contrary, an elemental force, an id, was recognized, which acts in the very consciousness of things, in any experience itself of the external



world: *bhoga* (a Sanskrit term which signifies making use of, enjoying the object of a desire) constitutes the canvas on which the human experience in the most general sense forms itself. Every perception contains *kâma* (desire) and *bhoga*: it is an identification, through desire or “thirst” of the knower with the known, it is a turbid and avid mixture of the two which gives rise to the initial fall, as allegorized in the myth of Narcissus. For this reason, man does not know what pure consciousness might be, neither as consciousness of himself nor of things.<sup>38</sup> Moreover, in the Christian idea of original sinfulness or *cupiditas* (not unrelated to sexuality),<sup>39</sup> which men since Adam carry within themselves, and which would be the basis of all their “natural” works, save as they are “reborn” and “redeemed” — in this Christian idea, even if in a moral-religious and not a metaphysical form, one might rediscover the traces of the same teaching.

It appears therefore that with “pansexuality,” the theory of the sexualized id or libido, Freudianism once again takes the part for the whole, the derived for the originating. In the framework indicated, sexuality indeed constitutes naught else but an episode with respect to something considerably vaster, and, if you will, considerably more dangerous. It is significant, moreover, that there has today been a presentiment of this truth only in the primitivistic terms of the Freudian theory of the libido.

Another point merits clarification in the sexological field. Against the accusation of pansexualism, it has also been proposed that Freud later recognized that, beyond the *Lustprinzip*, the impulse toward the pleasure of the libido, there acts also a *Todestrieb*, an impulse toward death, which would reflect a general tendency of the organic to return to the stasis of the inorganic world. More generally, we are speaking of an impulse toward destruction.<sup>40</sup> The matter is not entirely clear, nor have the disciples of Freud developed it in a single direction alone. For the most part, Freud held that the two impulses are independent from one another, but not to such a point that the second has no sexual value. Indeed, he used the death principle to explain the phenomena of sadism and masochism: if in its manifestation as the destructive impulse it is directed toward the subject himself, this gives place to masochistic tendencies; if it is directed instead toward others, to sadistic tendencies.

But certain psychoanalysts have claimed that the second impulse derives from the first: it is, according to them, the repression of the pleasure impulse which gives way neurotically to the destructive impulse, as in a certain kind of anger. The introverse, self-destructive form would bring one also to the aforementioned “principle of *nirvâna*.” This continues, moreover, into wider generalizations, because aggressiveness as such is referred to “discharges” imposed by the pleasure impulse (in Reich, this imposition is attributed to orgasmic energy), at those points that this principle is repressed and polarizes itself in the direction of the destructive impulse. There are many applications of this idea on the typological, sociological, and socio-political plane: the tendency toward authority, command, dominion, despotism, is related back to the sadistic manifestation of that impulse; the tendency to obey, to follow, to serve, to sacrifice oneself, is related back to its masochistic manifestation. Thus, following Freud, the two complimentary components which would constitute the existential base of every non-democratic system have been interpreted in the key of repression and of sexual pathology. In the domain of socio-political applications one can also observe that an author who has received a deal of publicity as of late, one Herbert Marcuse, after having depreciated and criticized the present system of highly developed industrial and consumeristic society, sought to indicate (in his book *Eros and Civilization*) the foundations of the society which ought to substitute it in the attempt to liberate man; and in this he kept himself strictly to the presuppositions of the most orthodox Freudianism, to the double impulse of pleasure and destruction, to their derivatives and to the outlets offered on one hand by sublimations, on the other by the loosening of the repressive system. Thus one sees how far the distorting influence of the Freudian and para-Freudian *idées fixes* can go.

Returning to the psychological field, the admission of the second impulse, of the *Todestrieb*, might constitute a step forward toward a deeper erotology, supposing it does not uncouple itself from the pleasure impulse, indeed, supposing it is seen to act in tandem to greater or lesser extent with this last, thereby disregarding its supposed derivation from repressions. It is a profound truth that every sexual libido, every yearning desire, *already in itself* is “ambivalent,” already contains also an unconscious destructive and “mortal” charge. But this is to be understood in a different sense than

the tendency toward destruction and toward a stasis analogous to that of the inorganic world. In every sufficiently intense voluptuousness there is a voluptuousness of self-destruction — and of destruction: an externalization both of hatred and of love.<sup>41</sup> It is for this reason — as we have observed in our treatment of this whole phenomenology<sup>42</sup> — that in the ancient Roman world Venus as Libitima (from the same root as libido) counted, at one time, as the divinity of sexual love and of death; that the same thing held for Priapus; that in Dionysianism there is a well-known mixture of orgiastic voluptuousness and a destructive and self-destructive paroxysm; that, finally, in the Orient Kâma, Mâra, and Durgâ are likewise divinities both of desire, and of death.

Once more teachings of a higher order can therefore be indicated, which are only confusedly adumbrated by the psychoanalysts. Now, if one refers to this superior order of ideas regarding the libido and the rest, departing the field of the purely human and even neuropathic assumptions about sex in which Freudianism is enclosed, one might recognize that various apparently iconoclastic aspects of the Freudian critique of reality might even have some justification, if only they were to lose, so to speak, their unconscious tendentiousness.

Indeed, the first step toward a truly spiritual development is to become aware of the non-spirituality of many things which are held to be spiritual by men, the recognition in these precisely of transpositions, of sublimations, and of surrogates which have very little to do with the higher nature of being. This applies eminently to the framework of a civilization of an entirely “human” type, such as the modern one: in it there are indeed all too many “values” explicable on the basis of a deduction of the psychoanalytic genre. Surely these take the guise of refuges and compensations of repressed forces, and above all of the impotence and of the fear which the individual has before reality and before himself. The limitations imposed by social conventions and by all the hypocrisies of Western morality do the rest: and so necessity transforms itself into a virtue, weakness takes the name of strength of character, while by way of the same state of scission, of contrast, and of inadequacy with respect to the deep forces of life, today more than ever those subconscious processes are at work which generate neuroses, overcompensation and autistic hysterisms, and psychic traumas.

To explode all these pseudospiritual superstructures, to bare the subterranean force of our deepest and most subconscious life, could however form a principle for whomever is firm in his absolute will to overcome. This however is certainly not the case for psychoanalysis: just as mediumship, psychoanalysis, once it has unlocked the door of the “nether things,” offers no means of defense, no method of effective control. Hence the danger that it constitutes for the many.

Indeed, given the inconsistency of the man of today, this approach reduces the possible paths to two at most: either to return, be it only in conscious form, to the compromise of transpositions, sublimations, and other methods of evasionistic or compensatory dislocation — or else to recruit the impulses of libido and of the id, making himself their advocate, the conscious and rational instrument for their direct satisfaction.

Both of these paths represent an abdication. Psychoanalysis can counsel nothing else. The second path is affirmed above all by the school of Adler, which desires that the ego, after having eliminated every inferiority complex, should assume every responsibility and affirm its will in the world, modeling it in a suitable way. But, given the premises, what sense might “responsibility” and “modeling the will” even have? Wherever the idea of personality as an autonomous principle is lacking, a principle higher than the naturalistic order, all these other concepts are devoid of every foundation. And indeed, at that point the “therapeutic” claim might give way to the revolutionary social one. This is the direction which Reich and his followers have most recently followed, in their polemics against Freud. Reich has observed, with indisputable consistency, that if the primary cause of the neurotic life (the life that is genuinely neurotic and which psychoanalysis in general attributes to multiple behaviors of man) is a “repression” imposed by the “system,” by the environment and by the ideas of the environment, then we should not go kicking the can about the bush with half-measures, with various palliatives of our individual invention, all of which permits the primary, objective and social cause of the evil to subsist; but rather we should destroy this evil in its right place, blowing the structures and the orders of the ruling system sky high, despite Freud’s recognition of and timorous respect for them: hence the transition to open protest and revolution is indicated as the true radical and general therapy. And from the form already enacted of

the so-called “sexual revolution,” of which Reich himself was the principle apostle, it would be necessary to pass to further anarchoid emancipations, so that a “repressive” society can give way ever more to a “permissive” society. The problem of discrimination — and let no one proclaim here that “everything is permitted” — is not so much as touched upon; it seems that with an almost Rousseauian ingenuity (observable, moreover, also in classic anarchism) one believes that after every dam has been breached, that which will surface in the unconscious will be only pleasant, beautiful, healthy, to such an extent that the only remaining possibility is some positive social order. In truth, Freud was more realistic in this connection: recognizing the turbid character of the elements prevailing in the psychic underground of the many, he admitted also the limits imposed by that which he called the “reality principle.”

But the most important point can be indicated with reference to a saying: to be “unchained” does not at all mean to be free. We must expose those situations in which the interior counterpart of the protesting and revolutionary demands, indeed their evident premise, represents a capitulation; so also the identification of oneself with one’s own instinctual and sub-rational being, or one’s giving oneself over deliberately and uninhibitedly to that being as a solution to the crisis. In the psychological and psychoanalytic domain, the school of C. G. Jung here enters into the question; Jung is considered the “spiritualist” among the psychoanalysts, because his morality, painted in spiritualistic hues and thus rendered acceptable for those to whom the views of Freud seem too crude, is that the ego must “come to terms” with the id, and man with his unconscious, both the individual and the archaic-collective unconscious, through a harmonization and a kind of narrowing of the limit between the one and the other. One cannot speak of a surpassing of this limit, because the presupposition is ever that the “other” is an unconscious, and not a subconscious. Let us give the word here to Jung himself:

Strip yourself of that which you have and then you will receive: following this ancient mystical precept, one needs must abandon the better part of one’s dearest illusions. Only then will something more beautiful, more profound, more comprehensive arise, because only the mystery of the sacrifice of the self permits one to renew one’s soul. These are the precepts of an ancient wisdom which come to light again in psychoanalytic treatment, and it is curious above all to note that, having reached the present level of our civilization, we have need precisely of that

kind of psychic education which is comparable, in more than one respect, to the Socratic method.<sup>43</sup>

These are pretty words. Let us see however what their true meaning might be. However much Jung shunned the radicalism of the Freudian libido and gave the collective unconscious the indeterminate characteristics of “Life,” he could not change the situation: this life is understood as a reality in itself and as the primary element, and an ego must “integrate itself” in it, else it will be “uprooted,” shifting the center of gravity toward “a virtual point situated between the conscious and the unconscious.”<sup>44</sup> This is also the essence of that which Jung calls “the process of individuation,” which has as its key the *mysterium conjunctionis* — expression, for him, of a yet mythical thought which “scientifically” alludes to the wedding (the union) between the conscious and the unconscious. And it is also characteristic of his thought that even this union, or perfection, which is supposedly adumbrated in the ideal divine figures of the religions, has a coactive character for Jung, pressing toward itself the cogent, potentially vengeful force of an “archetype,” of an id, since the conscious here too has a passive role — all of this, rather than considering this union as an exceptional, free vocation. Here is the true sense of the psychoanalytic mystery of sacrifice, of the surrender of “the better part of one’s dearest illusions” which would allow one “to renew one’s soul.” And this would be the modern reevaluation of the “precepts of an exceedingly ancient wisdom.” If we had to describe a method for possession, we would want words not so very different from these. This is the resolution of all conflict which is obtained through the undoing, the cessation of every moral tension. And the sense of liberation and of satisfaction given to this *détente*, which comes by unburdening oneself of the weight of the ego and of the task of spiritual form and autonomy, is mistaken for the sense of a “detached consciousness,” the breath of a “more beautiful, profound, and comprehensive” existence.

We will have occasion to return to revolutions of this kind in later chapters. Here it is important to observe that in the psychoanalytic practice, the psychoanalyst, who comes to play more or less the same role that the spiritual Master once took before the disciple and the confessor before the devout, actively intervenes, helps the subject to realize this self-sacrifice, this catharsis, through the various

techniques of the *transfert*, of whom we will make mention further on. Guénon is therefore not mistaken in seeing something diabolic in this practice. In truth, whoever knows how to peer beyond the curtains of the sensible shall hear, at the precise point that these subjects feel that they have been liberated through a psychoanalytic catharsis, the same mocking laughter which he might catch whenever the spiritists confound mediumistic phenomena for revelations of a higher world, and larvae for the personality of the dead.

However, to return to the point from which we departed, in the consideration of the internal state of modern man, it is difficult to conceive the possibility that he might avoid both of the abdications of which we have spoken, once psychoanalysis has opened his eyes. On the whole, a crisis is precipitated by this process which in most cases can only have a negative outcome. It is known that to awaken a somnambulist marching along a ravine is the best way of causing him to plummet into it. Ignorance, in some cases, is a strength: once it has been removed in the interests of surmounting some pathological form of the conflict between the ego and the subconscious, it cannot be reinstated in those other cases that an illusion of personal autonomy would be salutary — cases in which this illusion can be pragmatically efficacious and, given certain premises, might even serve as the basis for a higher development. Moreover, the attention which psychoanalysis brings and concentrates onto the roots of the will to pleasure or to death, together with all the suggestions of a sexual-demonic order,<sup>45</sup> exerts a true fascination,<sup>46</sup> which multiplies the routes of entry into the already undermined recesses of the ego, thus favoring the emergence of the darkest and most contaminated influences lying in wait in the “subliminal.” These observations grow all the more persuasive when psychoanalysis transforms into a state of soul which, as has occurred in certain circles, has something collective about it, or when it appears even in sociological and ideological applications of the kind that we have hitherto indicated.

Here then is the precise point of reference: *apart from certain exceedingly special cases of psychotherapy, psychoanalysis is dangerous insofar as it does not premise itself on a discipline dedicated to forming a spiritual unity, a true personality in place of that external and inconsistent one created by social conventions, by upbringing, by environment, by heredity — and also by the*



*mediocre fragments of an assumed and domesticated desire and by hysteroid outbursts of the “autistic” type. In other words: psychoanalysis as “depth psychology” can have a positive value only when it is preceded by a kind of “asceticism”; and this in turn appears inconceivable, devoid of any kind of point of support, save as one first rejects Freudian anthropology, the Freudian conception of man, which, as has been seen, is characterized by degeneration and by the disavowal of reality and the possibility of the ego as the central and autonomous center. But then in the field of the psychoanalytic technique itself, this would impose a fundamental mutation and broadening of perspective.*

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In fact, this technique more or less moves along the same lines as the practice of mediumship: it consists in removing the “censor,” the unconscious and semiconscious inhibitions, favoring states in which unconscious impulses and complexes betray themselves by means of spontaneous mental associations of memories, of dreams, of analogies, of involuntary movements and so forth. As regards the subject, everything reduces itself therefore to the practice of a faculty of *détente* and of “regression,” which, once acquired, constitutes a condition which is exactly opposite to that of the integration of the personality. There is more. The very technique of the *transfert* and the part that the psychoanalyst has in these procedures constitute a further movement against this integration. The ego not only opens the doors of his “underground,” but he does this by abandoning himself to another person; and this often conducts him to equivocal and pathological situations as far as the rapport between psychoanalyst and psychoanalyzed is concerned.<sup>47</sup> So far as awareness of the unconscious goes, the identification of the various impulses is not made directly by the subject; it is essentially the psychoanalyst who carries it out through an inductive and hermeneutic procedure, which is to say, a procedure that is always hypothetical, based on material furnished him by the subject in the states we have just mentioned; the subject can, at a later moment, “as if awakening,” recognize the truth of that which the psychoanalyst tells him; but here we must acknowledge the entire influence which the role of suggestion could potentially have in this process. In any case, one cannot ever speak here of direct



consciousness; this, as has been said, is already excluded a priori when one begins to consider the id as an *unconsciousness*.

The first step in the path of integration of the personality, as opposed to the path of “analysis,” would be to have a sense of the “other” that the ego carries in its very breast; Jung, here, speaks with good reason of an *anima*, an irrational and demonic creature contrasted to the *animus*, which would be the properly personal principle. The question is first how to separate oneself from this “other.” Subsequently, one should dissolve, so far as it be possible, the amalgams which desire has established between him who experiences and the material of his experience, both internal and external. So far as one is identified,<sup>48</sup> one cannot have consciousness of that which acts: by detaching oneself, and freeing oneself from the obstructions established in the self, we find that self, so to speak, before us.

At that point one could proceed into a field which, to their credit, the psychoanalysts (but also certain studies on hypnotism, for example those of post-hypnotic suggestion)<sup>49</sup> have brought to attention. Indeed, psychoanalytic investigation brings one to awareness not of one, but of *two* kinds of unconscious. Beyond the unconscious and active dynamisms of the id, there is an unconscious which acts in a subtle and intelligent way on the fabric of waking consciousness itself. The various processes of censure, of barring, of inhibition, of repression, and also of sublimation in defense of the ego are themselves carried out in the shadows, and it is only through the taxing psychoanalytic procedure that one comes to discover its existence and reconstruct its modalities.<sup>50</sup> Only that the active “influences” in processes of this kind go well beyond those having to do with the relations between the ego and the libido. In certain cases, these can even carry us to a much more general plane, resuming moreover the occult genesis of theories, of suggestions, and of “myths” that are habitually judged “spontaneous” in the history of civilization, or else which are explained with reference to extrinsic, two-dimensional factors. But in one way or another, one might raise a salutary alarm through this aspect of psychoanalysis. We must, that is to say, ascertain *the existence of a “logic of the underground” acting between different forms of conscience, a logic that is distinct from the genuine subconscious*. Now, in a discipline of true

overcoming and of consolidation of the personality, one tends toward a refinement of direct perception, as against the technique of psychoanalysis; this refinement, by almost creating new senses, permits one to catch unawares those subtle and infra-conscious actions that determine certain processes, judgements, and resolutions of the waking consciousness. In a subsequent phase, this permits one to reach — through a direct vision — the extra-individual emanation of such actions. By freeing oneself from the limitations of the fictitious ego, the threshold of ordinary consciousness is removed. Beyond the emergent forms of the external consciousness one can therefore discover its roots, which were hitherto concealed in the deep and murky waters of the subliminal.

Disciplines of this kind were known in traditional civilization in the form of a *science*. Psychoanalysis, which presumes “to go much more deeply into the depths” (Jung), has made in reality only the first steps. — Now, we must proceed to speak of the genuine subconscious and of its exploration — or better say its *destruction*. In this regard we must limit ourselves to a brief indication, as we will return to this subject in a later chapter. Apart from the agent in the “logic of the underground” we have just mentioned, the subconscious contains very distinct layers and “regions.” To begin with, we must consider the zone of the subconscious whose principle is “desire” or *cupiditas* in the super-individual, metaphysical sense already indicated: it is the force which brought the fall from the state of “being” and which first conducted bodies and becoming into the world. Cosmologically, it is the region of the “demonic” in general, in all its various forms. The taproots of the souls of the races, not to speak of the roots of the instincts and of the human passions, fall within this layer of the subconscious. When certain psychoanalysts speak of the dramatizations of the collective and “phyletic” unconscious under the form of symbol-type — when Jung, in a kind of psychoanalytic-irrationalistic reformulation of the Platonic doctrine of the Ideas, treats of the so-called “archetypes” — it is to this zone of the id that we are referred.

Now, this unconscious was always thought to have the character of a barrier. One should only make contact with it so as to cross it, conquer it and surpass it. This has been symbolized in myth in a variety of ways. The “hero” who descends into the “netherworld” or penetrates into the “cavern” and confronts the serpent, the dragon or

the bull, expresses in an allegory the conscious principle integrated through that ascesis which crosses the threshold and confronts the originating impulse. In myth, the victory of the “hero” over the symbolic wild creature, and his killing of it, brings him to a rebirth, to a *vita nova*;<sup>51</sup> a resurrection, or the possession of the “water of life” or of a “beverage of immortality” follows the descent into the “netherworld”; spikes of life<sup>52</sup> are born from the mortal wound inflicted upon the Mithraic bull; a “virgin” is liberated from the dragon; the fruit of immortality or some other equivalent symbolic object is reached (the myth of Heracles, of Jason, etc.), and so forth. Here we are not dealing with sexuality, no matter what extension one wishes to give to this concept; we are dealing rather with a transcendental action on the force which puts and maintains consciousness under the condition of an animal body — an action toward the end of reintegrating the person into that state of “being,” with respect to which common human existence was traditionally compared to a state of the fall, of torpor, of drunkenness, of paralysis.

This state of “being” is the true supernatural, the “metaphysical” state. And the reestablished contact with it is *awakening*. So the way opens toward the resolution and the elimination of that which, as “unconscious,” modern psychologists have erroneously conceived of as a principle in itself. In truth, in the still deeper depths, beyond the region of “desire,” this unconscious exists alone, so to speak, as *the task of a higher consciousness*. Its layers or grades correspond exactly to potencies of grades of the superconsciousness, of the integration of the personality, of the “reforging of the broken sword.”

To proceed in these higher regions signifies above all recognizing that the surpassed world of the unconscious, real though it be with respect to the world of men and things, corresponds on the cosmological plane exclusively to the reign of sleep, of dreams, of hallucinations, of obsessive monoideisms in the individual. Metaphysically, it appears as the world of dreams and of ghosts, to which already Homer opposed the realm of truthful vision. When it is the *superconscious* to bring itself to those depths, the nightmare is resolved, the mists clear, the ghosts disappear, every residue is overcome to its deepest roots.<sup>53</sup> At the limit of what would otherwise

be a dreamless deep sleep, the very consciousness of superreality opens to it (the ὑπερκοσμία<sup>54</sup> of the Ancients, the “intelligible forms” of the real world), in its various grades. The forms are what first determine, in general, the experience of a world — that experience which in the commoner in appearance<sup>55</sup> is formed without the intervention of his ego and his will.<sup>56</sup> Afterward, it is the passage of the cosmic mirage itself into the state of pure metaphysical meanings, something which corresponds, to a certain degree, to what has sometimes been called its realization *sub specie aeternitatis*.<sup>57</sup>

It is hardly worth mentioning that all of these horizons are completely unknown to psychoanalysis. Having not so much as knowledge of the personality in the true sense, still less can it have any sense whatsoever of the ideal of the superconscious personality (or else it conceives of it as an extreme hysterical-autistic exasperation of the *Ichideal*). As method, its “depth psychology” does not extend beyond an uncertain grazing of the question, which immediately deforms whatever it touches — rather than developing itself into a *transcendental psychology*. As morality, it reduces itself, in the best of cases, to a mysticism of instinct and of the irrational; as a vision of life, to a mere naturalism. As regards modern man, psychoanalysis raises an alarm, poses a problem — but does nothing for the formation of that superconsciousness and of that superindividuality such as might truly resolve this problem; such as might eliminate those dangers of the analysis, which, even on the material plane, could well be grave;<sup>58</sup> such as might bring one to recognition in a direct way of the nature and the variety of the subterranean forces with which one is dealing. Wherever it then presses its borders and thinks itself capable of throwing light on the primordial and the archaic, whenever it refuses to remain amidst the chimera of the abnormal, of hysterics and neuropathics, running rampant in that field along the courses of the various complexes of the sexualized libido, which appear to it as the supreme explicative principle of the world of symbols and myths, as well as of every spiritual phenomenon — whenever it behaves in this way, it presents one of the most piteous, or most worrying, spectacles amidst a host of such spectacles which the learned ignorance of our days sets before our eyes.

As for the fact that orthodox psychoanalysis is the creation of a Jew and that, among psychoanalysts, the percentage of Jews is exceedingly high — let each person draw from this the consequences that he believes fit, depending on the point of view that he takes regarding the Jewish question in general.<sup>59</sup> It is certain, in any case, that if we were to psychoanalyze psychoanalysis as a general phenomenon, at its bottom we would find a *Schadenfreude*, a malign pleasure in demoralizing and contaminating, applied not only to others and to the spiritual world but, in the general vision of life, also to oneself: almost as if one of those self-sadistic complexes of which we have already spoken acted here under the guise of “science.” It could also be called the counterpart of the Darwinian myth: it manifests the same tendency, the same unconscious joy in being able to reduce the higher to the lower, the human to the animal and to the primitive-savage, which manifests in the so-called theory of “evolution.” Thus — as has already been said — psychoanalysis as a general phenomenon is a symbol, a sign of the times. It lies wholly to Western man — his possibility of reintegration or on his being definitively yoked to a process of spiritual regression which has already been in course for centuries — whether tomorrow this psychoanalyst myth will be proven true or false.

## IV

# Critique of Theosophism

IT IS NECESSARY TO PREMISE any examination of contemporary theosophy on the distinction between contemporary theosophy and ancient and traditional theosophy.

The latter, as the word itself suggests, proceeds from the exigency of an awareness — σοφία — of the “divine” (θεός). It therefore goes beyond the religious devotional position because it does not limit itself to “believing,” to a mythology or a theology, but affirms the possibility of an effective experience and of a *knowledge* of the “divine.” Its superior dignity with respect to simple faith can be expressed by means of this just observation by Schopenhauer: “[faith] is so by virtue of its containing what we *cannot* know. If we could know also this, then faith would appear as something quite useless and even ridiculous, just as if a dogma were set up over the themes of mathematics.”<sup>60</sup>

In almost all the great currents of ancient spirituality, both those of the East and those of the West, “theosophy” has played a prominent role. One might even say that a tradition is truly complete only if it includes a *theosophy* in the sense just indicated. In original Christianity itself, the preeminence of theosophy was recognized when the Greek patristics, especially Clement of Alexandria, counterposed the *gnosticos*, he who knows, to the *pistikos*, he who simply believes.

But it is not with traditional theosophy that we will occupy ourselves here. The theosophy which we will consider is a new current, formed in 1875 in Anglo-Saxon country, by deed of one Mrs. Elena Petrovna Blavatsky, as a strange mixture of Oriental and



wisdom motifs on the one hand, and of Western prejudices on the other. This current developed under the sign of a reaction against the then dominant materialism (as indeed did spiritism), however displaying at the same time a polemical strain against the Church, which it judged incapable of offering anything more than dogmas and confused hopes to the spiritual thirst of humanity.

Precisely on the pretext of offering something more, the movement under consideration appropriated to itself the designation of theosophy. But let us repeat it: we are dealing here with something very different from theosophy, and to clearly distinguish the two it is opportune to employ here the term *theosophism*, which was already adopted by Schelling for similar currents, and more recently taken up again by Guénon.

Theosophism's mixed character does not facilitate our critique of it. In any case, one must distinguish between ideas and persons: between the ideas of theosophism in themselves and the various deformations which these have suffered in the overall mixture; between certain exigencies and certain directives of spiritual development of the personality on the one hand, and the absence of their application on the other.

The first reservation which we must make regards the origin "from the heights" that the theosophists love to attribute to their movement. "In the face of the mental limitation of the moderns," wrote Besant, "the Great Custodians of Humanity, in their wisdom, determined that the ancient truths should be proclaimed anew in a form fitting to the man of these new times."<sup>61</sup> According to this conception, certain mysterious beings — *Mahâtmâ* — that have sometimes manifested even as visible persons, transmitted the doctrine to the founders of the movement. — We are of the opinion that this might even reflect a certain reality, but that the theosophists here, in believing that they were dealing exclusively with the "Great Custodians of Humanity" (?), have betrayed an attitude which is not so very different from that passive, credulous, and ingenuous attitude proper to the spiritists and to the mediums. The fact that something comes from behind the curtains — let us say it yet again — does not simply mean that it should be taken exclusively as coin of a pure mint. *Someone* might have infused certain "revelations" in the first theosophists, making use of them to create a specific collective psychic current: but who this "someone" was, and what his effective

aims might have been, is matter for discussion. And the discussion cannot do other than base itself on the intrinsic value of his communications.

Blavatsky has written: "Mediumship is the opposite of adeptship; the medium is the passive instrument of foreign influences, the adept actively controls himself and all inferior potencies."<sup>62</sup> This is exactly right: but the fact is that Blavatsky, for her part, is better located in the first group than the second. It should also be recounted that, as in the case of many mediums, already from her childhood she involuntarily provoked around herself certain paranormal phenomena, so that some even attributed this to the heredity of her ancestor, Vseslaf, who had had the reputation of being a kind of wizard. Many affirm that analogous phenomena were produced also when Blavatsky founded the Theosophical Society. She composed many parts of her bulky and chaotic works semi-consciously, in a state almost of "automatic writing"; it happened that many citations were found in them to books she had never read. Thus the origins of theosophism remain obscure. On the doctrinal side, we are often dealing with outcroppings of visions from "errant" mental complexes, in which one might discern a strong Eastern component, with manifest contributions from the dominant themes of the collective Western psychology of the time. Moreover, various assumptions and re-elaborations were imprinted by various individuals on this *materia prima* of original theosophism, especially after the schism which occurred in the Theosophical Society in 1898. And some individuals were able, both in Italy and abroad, to lift themselves somewhat beyond its primitive level, and to recognize theosophism as a mere incitement toward something better, something autonomous.<sup>63</sup>

The distinction between what is valid and what is negative in the theosophistic complex can generally be traced back on the one hand to a part which takes its inspiration from the great metaphysical visions of the past and of the East, and on the other hand to a part which is rather owed to the Western mentality, to the influences of the epoch and to the personal factor of the adherents, for whom the doctrine constitutes a symptomatic fact; and this brings us back to what has already been mentioned, namely, the prevalence of the female sex. Also relevant is the part played by the infatuation with democracy and egalitarianism, since from the start the aims of the



Theosophical Society included that of promoting the formation of “a Universal Brotherhood of Humanity without distinction of race, creed, sex, caste or colour.”

The first accusation to bring against theosophism is that it wound up, rather than in a true *theosophy*, in a heteroclitic and syncretistic complex of elements of various doctrines, without any kind of critical scrutiny, admixed with data which were derived from visions and from personal experiences and which supposedly had the character of higher truths. These, to be sure, sometimes indicate higher paths, to practically raise oneself up to a certainty of a kind very different from that which any given theory might provide. But — as has been mentioned in the case of Blavatsky, and as can be repeated for the Leadbeaters, the Besants, the Baileys of the world,<sup>64</sup> and so forth and so on — even they who perchance indicate the right paths to supernormal development, personally too often remain in attitudes of the type of mediumship and of visionarism: attitudes, given which there can be no criterion of true control, no principle of discrimination between the fallacious evidence of a hallucination (subjective, or induced by psychic influences external to their persons) and the effective super-human, or theo-sophic, consciousness. So far as the vast majority of the other attitudes goes, they limit themselves to blindly accepting the “revelations” and the syncretistic complexes presented as the “secret doctrine,” often on account of irrational and sentimental motivations. For these reasons theosophism, rather than carrying the individual, as would the true theo-sophy, beyond “beliefs,” often substitutes one belief or religion for another, whenever it does not simply add on an abominable and acritical philosophy filled with the echoes of the ideas of modern science.

This should not however impede our recognition that *whatever, in theosophism, takes its bearings despite everything from the need for a true theosophy, has in principle a positive value.* And a method which seriously aimed for a direct spiritual *experience*, which obeyed the will to remove the habitual level of consciousness, to transform oneself by strengthening self-consciousness so far as to make contact with the invisible reality, so as to bear witness to it at the same time through concrete forms of power — such a method would deliver the overcoming both of the attitude of “psychic research” and of psychoanalysis. The words of a certain vulgarizer of theosophism,

one Chévrier, are therefore entirely correct: “There is no true *knowledge*, save where *power* attests it. All the rest is naught but second-hand documentation, without profundity and without any other profit than the satisfaction of a curiosity which, in the end, must come up short, the moment that it tires of being deluded.”<sup>65</sup>

This exigency corresponds to another programmatic cornerstone of the early Theosophical Society, namely that of promoting the “occult” development of man according to his latent possibilities. But to truly conform itself to such an exigency, given the inclination of the modern Westerners to carry everything back to abstract and inane speculations, theosophism should have followed an entirely different style: one similar, for example, to that of early Buddhism, which as description and “theory” of the occult and of the transcendent said very little indeed. It limited itself to positing the *problem* of “awakening,” furnishing at the same time in all its details a technique apt to deliver it and thus to make one directly experience the very thing it had kept mum and enclosed in a negative designation (*nir-vâna*).<sup>66</sup> Theosophism, rather than silence and practice, rather than the *post laborem scientia*<sup>67</sup> recalled even by the Western hermetists, has rather preferred an aimless roving through invisible planes and bodies, “planetary journeys,” intricacies, evolutions and involutions of entities of every kind, visions of the destinies of worlds, Masters, races, under-races, cosmic epochs, and so forth, not even to speak of the seasonings of humanitarianism, of optimism, and of progressivism. Unfortunately, it is to speak generally this last above all which fills the heads and the books of the theosophists.

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So far as its doctrine goes, theosophism, as has been indicated, intended to bring the attention of the moderns back to the truths of a forgotten knowledge, the founts of which are referred above all to the Orient and in particular to India. Upon what teachings of real value might theosophism draw attention? And what incomprehensions and deformations have been superimposed onto these teachings, in the adoption and vulgarization of theosophism?

Here we will limit ourselves to the examination of two notions which act as hinges to the theosophistic conception: that of *karma* and that of *reincarnation*.

In the Hindu tradition, *karma* signifies “action.” A fundamental viewpoint of this tradition is that “by action (*karma*) this world was created, by action it is sustained, and by action it will be dissolved.” In particular: “According to activity (*karma*) being arises. Heirs of the actions are the beings.”

These sayings in themselves are clear. They allude to a general — and elementary — law of causality. It is only necessary to note that here the term “action” — *karma* — is not applied only to action in the strict, material sense, but embraces a much vaster genre. Every thought, every desire, every acquired habit is likewise *karma*. *Karma* is moreover extended to orders of influences which are intangible for the common man; it connects effects to remote causes from very diverse planes; it goes beyond the limits of the visible and of a single form of existence and, in contrast to the law of physical causality, it does not unfold itself in the dimension of time alone. Nevertheless, there remains in it the character, well visible in the laws of nature, of impersonal relations following necessary sequences. Thus, when one is dealing with man, the law of *karma* does not say whether one should do or should not do, but enunciates simply the product of an effect, once a given cause has been created. It warns, it does not command. One is free, for example, to light or not to light the fire, but one cannot demand that the fire, once lit, will not burn. As regards *karma*, this notion should be extended to everything which exists in the manifested world — the world both as corporeal world and as psychic, moral, intellectual and spiritual world, both in the ways of men and in those of the invisible forces and of the “gods.” According to the doctrine in question everything forms itself, transforms itself, or passes over in this way, in the heights as in the depths: by pure relations of cause and effect.

We find ourselves therefore in the order of a universal determinism, which does not however exclude liberty, indeed presupposes it as a first cause, and moreover as a principle capable of producing new causes, new series of tendencies, of actions and of reactions, either solidary or else antagonistic with respect to those already enacted. *Karma* excludes the ideas of “chance,” of “destiny,” and also of “providence” in the anthropomorphic sense of a principle of interventions or divine sanctions having a moral character.<sup>68</sup> Action and liberty therefore exhaust this vision of the world. Every being is that which it has been made. *Karma* does nothing but draw

consequences from created causes, and the ego in the current of its life follows only the river bed that it itself, knowingly or not, has dug for itself. Thus there exists no fault at all — in the Western sense — just as there exists no merit; there exists no sin and there exists no virtue. There are certain “actions,” be they material, psychic, or spiritual, that will necessarily bring certain conditions, be they material, psychic, or spiritual. *A priori*, all roads are open, both the high and the low. Having set oneself upon one of them, nothing is to be hoped for nor feared, save that which will proceed impersonally from the nature of this road. In the most absolute sense, everything and every being are left to themselves.

This teaching brings a purification of one’s gaze. It accustoms one to consider everything according to a clarity and a law of *reality*, analogous to the laws that reign in the free world of things. It frees one from the phantasms both of fear and of hope. It carries one back to oneself as to something simple and strong, something that rests on itself. And this is the premise of every higher realization.

Such is the sense of *karma* according to the tradition, to which the notion legitimately belongs. But what has become of it in theosophism?

Before anything, *karma* passes over from the framework of liberty to that typically modern framework of a kind of evolutionistic determinism. The multiplicity of free paths — which from the point of view of the individual is the elementary truth, every further conception belonging to the metaphysical plane<sup>69</sup> — is substituted with the single direction of a mandatory “progress,” and one’s only alternative is to walk this path sooner or later.

Indeed, according to the theosophistic views, the “gods” and the adepts are beings who have gone further ahead in their “evolution”; the animals, “our lesser brothers,” are less “progressed.” But it is only a matter of time: everyone will come to port, those who are further ahead “sacrificing themselves” for the others; and the varieties of *karma* serve only as an instrument in “universal progress.” As is clear, all of this cannot be considered other than an arrant and adulterated addition of the theosophists to the authentic notion of *karma*. However it should be no wonder if this notion from the plane of a transcendental realism often passes to that of a more or less philistine moralism, becoming a kind of Sword of Damocles suspended over the head of whomever does not conform to the “law

of evolution” and to the relative corollaries professed by the movement, be they altruistic, humanitarianistic, egalitarianistic, vegetarian, feminist, etc. And so too the practical value, the liberating potentiality of this teaching, which we have lately mentioned, is completely lost.

In theosophism, *karma* stands in a specific connection with *reincarnation*. Theosophism boasts that it has brought the attention of the West back to this other “teaching of an ancient knowledge.” In reality, given the limitation of the horizons of modern men, for whom this existence is the beginning and the end of everything, and who see nothing before and after it apart from vague religious ideas of the beyond, which in turn no longer constitute anything living to these men — given this limitation, it would certainly be well to arouse in these men the sense of their having come *from far away*, of having lived many other lives and many other deaths and of being able to proceed yet again, from world to world, beyond the wilting of this body. The trouble is that everything in theosophism reduces to a monotonous series of terrene existences, separated by intervals of a more or less attenuated corporality. Thus the limitation of modern man is almost not removed at all. Theosophism here claims to rest on an ancient doctrine, but in reality it rests on nothing whatsoever, and refers entirely to exoteric, popular forms of that doctrine — and yet once again, lacks all sense of the order of things to which it should carry itself.

To resolve the problem of reincarnation one must commence by clarifying the problem of survival, with which theosophism does not in the least concern itself, so certain is it of its positive “spiritualistic” solution and the personal survival of every human soul. It is perhaps in the Vedânta that one finds the idea of reincarnation nearest to that which the theosophists profess. But the Vedânta provides a basis for this idea: it has the theory of the Self, of the immortal and eternal *âtmâ*, identical to the *Brahman*, to the metaphysical principle of every thing. This theory refers to a spiritual state of the consciousness of man, one which no longer should be sought, not only in the men of today, but already even in the humanity of the Buddhistic period. In Buddhism we find indeed the doctrine of the *anâtmâ*, that is of the negation of the essentiality of the soul and of any kind of continuity for it whatsoever. Comparing the Vedânta to Buddhism, we are not dealing with two philosophical opinions which

stand in contrast to one another, but rather two theories which are different only because they refer to two different spiritual conditions. The soul (*âtmâ*) that Buddhism negates is not the same as what the Vedânta affirms. The soul of the Vedânta is nothing other than that which Buddhism considers, not as a reality present in every man, but rather as an end which only exceptionally, through asceticism, might be reached. Here one might establish a relation with the esoteric sense of many traditional teachings and myths, some also of Western origin, as for example that of the “fall.” It is a question of observing, at a given moment, the identification of the personality with a psychic form which is conditioned and determined essentially by the body: from here comes the birth of the ego to which a modern might refer — the ego, whose caducity and irreality Buddhism forcibly affirms on the basis of reason, on the basis of a metaphysical realism.<sup>70</sup>

Now, reincarnation might have had a certain sense for that man in whom the self held more or less directly as a universal principle, superior therefore to every particular individuation (*âtmâ* = *brahman*, Vedânta); but this is not the same as the sense that the same doctrine might have if brought back to an ordinary human ego, one enclosed in itself, such as the ego of the most recent times: for this last kind of ego, the contacts have been severed, there is no longer anything which, as an unalterable thread of silk, might cross and unite an indefinite series of pearls representing individual existences. The sense of self is bound unilaterally to the support of a body and of a brain, and the consequence might well be the definitive impairment of that continuity of individuated consciousnesses, which has been dealt a serious blow already at birth (event which, in general, extinguishes the memory of all anterior experiences).<sup>71</sup> In braving this existence, the spirit as “personality” also braves a fundamental risk. And we are no longer dealing with reincarnation in the Vedântic sense: we are dealing rather with the alternative between “salvation” and “perdition,” which, to a certain extent, is decided here on this Earth. Perhaps this is the sense and the concrete, historical *raison d'être* of the teaching regarding salvation and perdition, which has succeeded in more recent traditions, such as for example the Catholic and the Islamic traditions.<sup>72</sup>



For the average Western man, this teaching is therefore true, while reincarnation in the Vedântic sense is not. Thus if one still wishes today to speak of reincarnation, one can no longer speak of it for the soul as personality, but only for other principles included in the human entity, and always in a sense which excludes, for the many, a true continuity of personal consciousness. It might be said that that which in the present conditions is perennial and which is transmitted from being to being is no longer the “immortal *âtmâ*” (the superpersonality), but rather is only “life” as “desire,” in the Buddhistic sense of the term.<sup>73</sup> It is the profound and animal will to live, in the terms of a kind of subpersonal entity that creates ever new births, and which is the matrix of every mortal ego; and this will is, at the same time, the barrier to higher worlds. We are therefore brought back to a number of things which we have already discussed in our treatment of psychoanalysis. If we would like therefore to continue to speak of reincarnation and of *karma*, we must seek the vision conforming to reality in teachings of the Buddhistic type, which has in view precisely the caducous soul on the one hand, or the exceptional soul which is released from the state of *nirvâna* through asceticism on the other.

According to Buddhism, the man who has not reached awakening and spiritual illumination nonetheless generates, through his thoughts, his words, and his actions (*karma*), another being or “daemon” (called *antarabhâva* or also *vijñana*), which is materialized through its unmitigated yearning for life;<sup>74</sup> and this daemon receives its fundamental tendencies from that yearning. This being generally survives death. The fatal force of the inclinations which compose it and which after death are no longer held back by any will, brings it back to Earth, toward a body and a life conforming to its nature; adjoining itself to physical and vital elements furnished by its parents, it constitutes the basis for the manifestation, under the species of man, of other entities which, themselves adulterated by “desire,” join and assimilate to it according to laws of affinity, foregoing other states of existence. In such a guise a *new* human consciousness is born, in the form of an entity much more complex than what is commonly believed, composed of various heredities; and this entity has no true relationship of personal continuity with the entity of the dead. This is so, notwithstanding the fact that a law of cause and effect (*karma*) might on the one hand locate in a

previous life the origin of that which, as a specific form, is due to the *antarabhâva*, or on the other hand might also explain why the composite fatally attracts the new being that it incarnates.<sup>75</sup>

Apart from “spirits,” the psychic larvae and fragments of which we have spoken in our critique of spiritism; apart from the *antarabhâva*, the blind creature protruding from the trunk of desire — nothing else survives death, in terms of a personal continuity, in that man who already in life has not attained a certain level of enlightenment. If on the other hand this level has been reached — only then can one speak of a survival for the *soul*: the soul, conserving its continuity of consciousness, can face even the experiences of the afterlife, for which we have already cited a Lamaist teaching and whose entirety one might designate with the term *purgatory* — can face these experiences, in a way so as to be able to attain one or another state of existence beyond the human and sub-human world. On Earth, in any case, nothing returns save that which belongs to the Earth. The “soul” does not come from other bodies, but from other worlds, that is from other conditions of existence; and it does not go into other bodies, but, if it cheats the “netherworld” by conforming to its supernatural end, it goes into other “worlds.” The repeated passage of the soul (and not of this or that psychic complex of which the soul is composed, as the soul of a mortal man) in the condition of a human body represents an absolutely exceptional case. For the soul there can therefore be *transmigration*: something entirely distinct from *reincarnation*, which might occur only through inferior principles, broadly collective and impersonal ones, of the human composite.

Generally speaking, this is how matters stand for reincarnation with relation to present-day man. What echo is there of this in the doctrine affirmed by theosophism? Every theory or superstition — let us say it again — is always, in some aspect, a barometrical measure of the times. It can be said that “reincarnation” is a correct idea, if it is referred solely to that irrational being which, at the decay of the body, in its uniform and unexhausted thirst for life, passes to other bodies, never elevating itself to a higher plane.

Since in our day the commencement and the end of life of the greater part of men exhausts itself in a similar way of being, and the case of “liberation” appears ever more anomalous, it can therefore be said that for the humanity of the present period reincarnation, in the



sense of a perennial terrestrial repullulation, has a certain degree of truth to it — apart, naturally, from the optimism which is added to this in the ideas of “evolution” and of “progress,” and apart from the supposition, entirely gratuitous, of an “immortal ego,” in place of which there is rather an entirely “natural” and subpersonal being with all its creatures, unconnected to one another in any true continuity, and with its *appetitus innatus*,<sup>76</sup> the root of all temporal becoming, leading into that which the Orient calls *samsâra*.

Even in this connection one might indicate as a characteristic of theosophism the lack of any truly supernatural view. From the point of view of the human state of existence, there can be nothing truly supernatural without a premise of dualism such as was affirmed by every superior civilization, and the “evolutionistic” conception of theosophism roundly contrasts with this premise. As in the Catholic tradition there is a neat delineation between the temporal order and the eternal order, thus in the Oriental traditions there is a neat distinction between the limitless series of possibilities and of “rebirths” subordinated to becoming and to desire (possibilities which comprise “divine” states as well as human and “infernal” ones) and true liberation. That series is portrayed as a perpetual circle (a concept which is to be found in the Hellenic tradition: ὁ κύκλος τῆς γενέως)<sup>77</sup> and here every “progress” is illusory; one’s mode of being does not substantially change even when one reaches forms of existence far above the common level. Liberation corresponds rather to an exceptional path, a path which is “vertical” and “supernatural,” equally distant and equally near with respect to any given point of being and of time. But theosophism abolishes this opposition: the two terms are placed on the same plane; the supreme aim is conceived of as the end of an “evolutionary” development through a limitless series of rebirths in the conditioned world. Thus, where it speaks of development, it cannot have the personal soul in sight, but rather the natural and animal stock of “humanity”; and its “spiritualism,” at bottom, reduces to a mystical appendix of the utopias of collective social progress, particularly in those of its exigencies and preoccupations which, from a higher point of view, seem to better merit the name of animal husbandry than of ethics. As for the immortal “ego” which is supposed to be gifted to any given person, one needs nothing more than this to fall into a slumber, to

detach oneself from the alternative realities — the alternative between *salvation or perdition*, which is to be resolved in *this* existence: one needs nothing more than this to preclude oneself therefore from the way to a true liberation.

This is not the only point in theosophism at which such an antisupernaturalistic spirit is revealed. Among the principles held by the movement is that of the immanence of a “One Life” in every form and in every being; there is, at the same time, the principle of the task, on the part of single “egos,” to conquer an independent self-consciousness. With a strange application of the anti-aristocratic conceptions proper to certain new moralities, there has even been talk of a renunciation of the primitive divinity, which one “possessed without meriting it,” so as to then reconquer it, “fair and square,” through struggle and the hard experiences of reiterated immersions in “matter.” This, in the reformed theosophism of Steiner, corresponds to a plane all its own, in which “Ahriman” and “Lucifer” have been appropriately enrolled. Thought through to the end, these views should bring as their logical consequence that the “One Life” — that is, the aspect of “oneness” in life — represents a “less,” the substrate, or *materia prima*, from which every being, in forming itself, should differentiate itself as a distinct principle, thereby positing as the value precisely of a law of difference and articulation. But no: the “One Life” becomes the aim, the perfection. Despite various appeals to the traditional paths of superhuman conquest, despite the entire occultistic armory gathered from the most diverse sources, the idea of the development of theosophism is colored with mystical tints, and inclines toward the degenerative direction of a simple intermixing with the substrate of an undifferentiated “One Life,” warding off the “illusion of separation” and of the “ego.” Here, too, we are dealing with confusions that proceed from the incomprehension of the metaphysical teaching we have just glimpsed: for the purely metaphysical notion of the “supreme Identity” has nothing to do with that of the “One Life.” It is a grave error to confuse the promiscuous *pantheistic One*, in which, to speak with Hegel, everything becomes equal, even as “the night in which all cows are black,”<sup>78</sup> with the *metaphysical One* which is the integrating apex of a well articulated whole, differentiated and ordered with forms, of a *κόσμος* in the Greek sense; and it is an error moreover that is likewise committed by certain present-day neo-

Vedântic currents, which are distinct from theosophism and which take their bearings directly by the indiscriminate teachings of certain of today's gurus, the epigones of Hinduism. The possible effective point of reference in theosophism can be seen, moreover, in its consequences: in the corollary of democratic ideals of brotherhood, of love, of equality, of universal solidarity, of the leveling of the sexes and of the classes. All of this replaces that virile law of hierarchy, of difference and of caste which the great traditions have always known when they took the right direction as their living axis: that of integration of the supernatural dignity of man in the supersensible. And this is one of the determining reasons why, even in an already exterior sphere, and leaving aside mere doctrinal confusions, the theosophistic current together with various other "spiritualistic" currents which are akin to it, constitutes a factor in the crisis of contemporary civilization — a factor which joins a great many others, working on multiple planes, moving precisely in the sense of a regression into the collective and the promiscuous.

We ought to say various other things regarding theosophism: but these will perhaps reappear in our treatment of the remaining spiritualistic currents. And in any case it is not with the details (which could perhaps have, in and of themselves, a certain value), but with the general sense commanding the whole of the new currents, that we concern ourselves here.

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Theosophism ascribes to itself the merit of having reawoken interest in the West for the spiritual East. Indeed, through theosophism, many views of a universal tradition, which however above all in the East have been conserved in distinct forms, have been diffused in numerous European and American circles. But which views, precisely? Already in the brief overview we have made, we find aught to convince us that the true Eastern spirituality is not known to a greater degree now than it was before. It is rather a counterfeit that has taken the place of, and has been confused with, the Orient — and it is a counterfeit moreover in which certain typically modern prejudices have had occasion to reaffirm themselves.

Since this is how matters stand, a doubt arises, and one which is certainly very grave. *What is the true "invisible" origin of theosophism? What effective intention or plan has commanded the*

appearance of this theosophism in the modern world? Are we dealing with “influences” which truly want to vivify the West, by bringing it into contact with a spirituality of a higher kind in the spirituality of the traditional East, as compared to the modern world? And are the falsifications in it therefore only the consequences of the incapacity of the single individuals who have acted as intermediaries here? Or are we in fact dealing with influences of the opposite kind? *Of influences that want to neutralize a danger, to preemptively close certain doors, to prejudice and prevent a salutary influx, such as the East might exercise — by deviating one of the highest aspirations?*

The fact is that if today various persons, not devoid of culture, nourish certain prejudices against the Orient, this is owed in part precisely to adulterating “spiritualistic” divulgations, but also to certain modern Easterners who work in adaptations and vulgarizations — individuals who seem to understand little enough of their own traditions but who, precisely by virtue of being Oriental, make an impression on the profane. For example, apart from the rightness of certain exigencies which are expressed in it, the book of Massis, from which we cited a few sentences at the beginning, represents a typical example of the consequences which might derive from confusions of this kind: the curious ideas of Massis on a “defense of the West,” wherever they are in good faith, can be explained only on the basis of the aforementioned counterfeits of an Oriental wisdom.<sup>79</sup> And it is a sinister thing, this inclination of certain militant Catholic circles to go fishing in muddy waters, profiting from all this confusion to secure the monopolistic ends of their apologetic myopia. They do not realize that to discredit the tradition of some — in this case of the East — signifies sooner or later condemning also their own tradition to attack; the very tradition which they intended to exalt by such a path.

But, to return to theosophism, it is too grave a matter for us to assume the responsibility of responding to the problem mentioned above, relative to the true objectives which this theosophism has obeyed. Let it suffice here to have posed it, in order that whoever is capable of such a thing might keep his eyes open, recalling that certain matters are much more serious than is generally believed, even when they take on a flamboyant appearance.

## V

# Critique of Anthroposophy

ANTHROPOSOLOGY EMERGED IN 1913 through the work of an Austrian, Dr. Rudolf Steiner, the then secretary of the Theosophical Society, as an attempt at a kind of reform of the original theosophic movement. Anthroposophy found its footing above all in the German countries, from which it passed into France and Italy. In Dornach, Switzerland, he created a center wherein he held courses on various branches of the knowable, from an anthroposophic point of view. And truly, the activity of Steiner was remarkable. One can say that there is not a single discipline — from medicine to theology, from art to natural science, from history to sociology, from biology to cosmology — which he did not seek to give his word on. The number of conferences he held is incredible. On the other hand Steiner does not precisely present the characteristics of a *medium* or of a lunatic. In certain respects, it can even be said that he sins in the opposite direction, that of a spirit which must be scientific-systematic at any cost. If many of his conceptions are no less fantastical than those of theosophy, still, in contrast to these, one can say with Shakespeare that “there is method to his madness.”<sup>80</sup>

Various components must be distinguished in the Steiner phenomenon. The first — and predominant — shares its origin with theosophism, from which multiple elements have been taken. The second component is connected to Christianity. There is then a final factor, which would seem to correspond to a positive element, to the need for a “spiritual science.” The weft of these components, forcibly bound in the chainmail of a system that, in terms of its ingenuity, is almost on a level with the “nature philosophies” of the German

romantics, forms the characteristic of anthroposophy. As in so many specific points of the anthroposophic teaching, so too in the whole of the very personality of Steiner, one has the painful sensation of a straight and limpid direction which has been broken by unexpected and tyrannical visionary fluxes, and by irruptions of collective complexes. Steiner's is a typical example, highly instructive of what might happen when one adventures alone in the world of the supersensible without a connection to a regular initiatic tradition and without a protective chrism, utilizing a variety of practices, cultivating for example the so-called "thought detached from the senses."

In anthroposophy as a conception of the world we see definitely at work the first of the aforementioned components. Thus we find those same incomprehensions regarding the law of *karma* and a transmigration reduced to "reincarnation," those same "evolutionalistic" superstitions, those same "excursions" on planets incarnated on other planes, through spirits, angels, races, bodies both subtle and non-subtle, and so forth, that we have critiqued in theosophism. Indeed, the mesh of a historic-providential determinism here closes yet more tightly: the "evolution of the world" is here a fatal, predetermined, supreme law. Every occurrence, every formation and every transformation, finds in itself its *raison d'être* and its naturalistic-rationalistic explanation — the future and the past are displayed on the screen of history as in a film, which exists already in all its scenes and which can be seen with "clairvoyance" before it has been projected. Even as Hegel developed a history of the world from the intrinsic necessity of the "Idea," so too does Steiner; however, in contrast to Hegel, Steiner does not attempt a logical deduction, but gives us a species of natural science of the spirit, a description of mere *facts* which succeed one after the other — facts to which man supposedly owes his present physical and spiritual state, preordained, in its turn, by other "evolutionary" forms that await it in the future, and so forth. Still less than in theosophism is there here to be found therefore any trace of the opposition between history and superhistory, between temporality and eternity, between natural order and supernatural order. The category of time dominates everything despotically. Steiner, more than the theosophists, strives to enclose every end of man in *history*, to exclude every truly transcendent possibility, to channel all natural

and extranormal energies in the direction of man — indeed, not even of man, but of the human collective, of humanity. The substitution of the term *anthroposophy* for the term *theosophy* expresses already the clearer consciousness of this intention: rather than other, “surpassed” wisdoms, the teaching that the truth is given to us in knowledge (*sophia*) of the “divine” (*theos*), the knowledge (*sophia*) of man (*anthropos* — whence anthroposophy) will rather be the center, the principle and the end of the new wisdom announced by Steiner.

The demon of Western “humanism” therefore also dominates the Steinerian “spiritualism” from the roots up. But it is a singular fact that *Christianity* works as its accomplice. Has not the Christian revelation declared that “God has made himself man”? We today observe this truth from much too close up, albeit neither in a Christian, nor in a Steinerian, sense. In any case, we see how it is that Christ might graft himself onto anthroposophic evolutionism. In contrast to the Catholic teaching, Steiner holds that the descent of Christ was not an arbitrary determination of divine grace, such that even in some other historical moment the redemption of sinful humanity might have occurred. The descent of Christ rather occurred in an exact, predestined moment, and already an entire evolution, which was not only human, but cosmo-planetary, mineral, vegetal, and animal, was oriented toward it and put itself to work, slowly elaborating a body (with its various “subtile” components) suitable for rendering the incarnation of that “Solar Logos” (that is, of Christ) possible.<sup>81</sup> Now that this incarnation has come, the divine is no longer “outside” of man, but within man himself, and therefore anthroposophy is substituted for theosophy. Thus with the coming of Christ the spiritual man is supposedly born. Before him, no impersonal, dreaming, diffuse spirituality existed: man was like a medium and had his spirituality, indeed even his ego, outside of himself, in the gods. Today, he has it instead within himself, whence a *self-initiation* might take place, an autonomous, lucid, purely individual method of internal development. Whence the idea of a modern initiation, called however also “Rosicrucian”<sup>82</sup> — which would counterpose itself to everything which came before; and anthroposophy in its practical aspect seeks to steer one toward this initiation. For Steiner, the occurrence at Golgotha split the very spiritual history of the world in twain. Moreover, the passive



submission to the influence of the ideas of the Christian creed is here clear, and in this respect anthroposophy finds itself beneath theosophism, which had seen in Jesus simply one of the various “great initiates” or divine envoys. For Steiner on the other hand Christ (albeit demoted from “the son of God” to the “Solar Logos”) is, precisely as for the Christian religion, an unrepeatable figure, and his appearance is a unique and decisive occurrence for the entirety of universal history.

Judged in terms of reality, the anthroposophic speculations appear to be *mental* constructions, substantially similar to those which, beginning from Hegel, the academic current of the “philosophy of history” produced so as to attain the best brutalization of whomever follows it and swears to it. One might “believe” or not — everything remains as it was before, apart from the limitations pertaining to a conception, such as the historicist conception in general. But whoever is capable of working a kind of purification of the aforementioned anthroposophic views of historical temporality might come upon something valid. One would find then, in the abstract, a scheme proper to three stages, which we already have used as the point of reference for our critical considerations: the stage of a prepersonal spirituality (“Pre-Christic,” for Steiner), characterized by the lack of active and visionary-mediumistic self-knowledge; the stage of common personality, which, however, in feeling itself distinctly and in seeing clearly what surrounds it, already announces the principle of true spirit (this is, in Steiner, the gift of the “ego” that “Jesus Christ” supposedly made to men); finally, the stage of a superconsciousness and of a superpersonality (the “conscious initiation” of the anthroposophists). The error of Steiner, owing to his submission to a mental form diffused in his epoch, is to have “historicized” and collectivized these stages, to have materialized them, making of them “evolutional” stages of “humanity,” rather than seeing in them the permanent possibility of every historical point and of every single consciousness. From here, in his “philosophy of civilization,” things arise which have place neither in heaven nor on Earth<sup>83</sup> — things which leave one speechless, a true wilderness of falsifications, of deformations, of aprioristic enormities, worse still than those that Hegel committed in order to bring everything beneath his pre-established dialectic of thesis, antithesis, and synthesis, *an sich, für sich, an sich und für*



*sich*. It is naturally the ancient, pre-Christian world which suffers most from this, since it is not authorized, given the verdict of Steinerian clairvoyance, to possess any form of truly individual and active spirituality. Steiner effectively refused to acknowledge to that world, and thus also to the Orient, any true comprehension, and if someone truly followed him in this, the result would be a much more serious and systematic disavowal of spiritual founts than that which theosophism submits.

Is it possible to separate this inferior part from the rest of the anthroposophical doctrine? In the person of the greater part of its adherents, such a task is not easy. They swear *in verba magistri*,<sup>84</sup> and woe to him who touches even a single detail of the doctrine of the Master. On the other hand, it is all too natural that at a certain level it is more convenient to settle for the vision of cosmic evolution and all the rest, than to dedicate oneself practically to the method of “individual initiation.” But, doctrinally, the distinction can be made, in the sense that one might recognize that Steiner has given here or there certain practical teachings and certain valid criteria of discrimination (except that they are neither new, nor proper only to the post-Christian West, as he supposes), which might be used with full independence from the remainder: from “evolution,” from reincarnation, from Christ who now operates in us after having acted magically on the “Soul of the Earth” through the blood he shed at Golgotha, from the ideals of mystical collectivity and of the inevitable “love” which here becomes even the very aim of the present cycle on Earth, and so forth and so on.<sup>85</sup> It is also worth recognizing the fact that Steiner indicated methods based on a solid internal preparation: however one must not entertain too many illusions as to the scope of these in the framework of “individual initiation,” that is of an self-initiation, a path by which the simple human forces of the individual would be sufficient unto themselves, and the connection to a regular initiatic “chain” or organization would be superfluous.

Steiner comprehends the fundamental point and expresses it distinctly: it is necessary above all that man fully realizes the power of clear and distinct perception, of logical thought, of objective vision. He recognizes the antithesis between initiatic spirituality and mediumship. The Steinerian ideal is an *exact science of the supersensible*: a vision of superreality which is as clear, distinct, objective, as is that which the experimental sciences of nature offer

to the sensible reality. An anthroposophical saying has it that religion must become “scientific” in this sense of clearness and of consciousness, while science must become “religious,” that is, must be capable of embracing and of giving in real terms that same spiritual or “divine” order which generally speaking is the exclusive object of devout sentiments, of dogmatic formulae, of confused mystical or ecstatic experiences. It is also a just requirement that mere intellectual work does not suffice for this, but a transformation of one’s attitudes is necessary, of one’s own reactions, of one’s general conduct of life. In this connection Steiner is even able to overcome moralism, recognizing that the value of certain almost universal moral precepts is, for the disciple, only instrumental: these are the means for objectively forming the interior man and the organs of a superior consciousness.

If therefore one might pay the tribute of a positive recognition to Steiner’s “spiritual science” as an *idea*, as *content* and as practical example, one is led to think that Steiner preaches well but practices rather badly. To swallow the aforementioned theosophistic panorama whole as “spiritual science,” though this panorama finds absolutely no reflection in the great traditional views of the East and the West — this is something that one cannot ask even of the strongest stomach. Moreover, so far as the *formal* side of the exposition goes, such as the contents of the book *Geheimwissenschaft*, one finds in it the aggravating factor an attitude which is proper, not to spiritual science, but to naturalistic science. As we have said, Steiner simply *reports*. He relays a kind of chronicle of a fabulous and spirited cosmic tale, precisely as a physicist would relay the phases of the material evolution of the planets. To be sure, we are dealing with the substitution of “thinking” with “seeing”: but the “seeing” of a true spiritual science is an intellectual seeing, thus a seeing which is simultaneously a comprehending, not a seeing as a mere observation of facts and of phenomena which pass before us in the same way as those of the sensible world. This holds even when the whole is not reducible to a system of digressions, fantasies, and hallucinations. Steiner speaks continuously of the necessity to form new organs for oneself, new senses beyond the physical ones, and does not realize that this in and of itself is unimportant. Will we call a blind man less spiritual for the simple fact that he has one sense fewer than other men? It is less a

matter of creating this or that clairvoyant or clairaudient faculty so as to perceive other orders of phenomena, than of an internal transformation, for which one no longer “sees” only, but one *understands*, one no longer perceives “phenomena,” but rather the meanings and symbols of spiritual essences.<sup>86</sup> It therefore must be said that in the anthroposophic “science-spiritual” complex, even in its attitude, we are dealing much more with science, in the esterioristic-natural sense, than spirit; and yet the correct idea is immediately neutralized, not to say discredited, the moment one glimpses it.

Passing to practice, anthroposophy has re-elaborated certain theosophistic conceptions regarding the doctrine of the various “bodies” of man. The positive contribution of such views is to make one understand that man is considerably more complex a being than those men believe who make him appear simplistically as a soul-body dyad. No ancient tradition has ever taught anything of the kind. In one way or another, explicitly or by way of symbols, intermediate forms and energies between pure spirituality and pure corporality, between the immaterial and the material, have always been admitted.

Theosophism took up theories of this sort, but it immediately materialized them; it therefore spoke of various “bodies,” not troubling itself that already the term “body” would bring about misunderstandings; it discoursed on them in any case, as one might discourse on the various substances of a compound. The number of the “bodies” of the theosophists generally amounts to seven: the *physical* body, the *etheric* (or “vital”), the *astral* (of the instincts, the passions, and the emotions), the *mental* (intellectual dynamisms), then three other “bodies” designated usually with Sanskrit expressions (*manas*, *buddhi*, and *âtmâ*), corresponding to superior states. According to the theosophistic mode of seeing, these “bodies” supposedly exist all together in every being: the clairvoyant differentiates them into a hierarchy in ever subtler forms, which proceed from material to Divinity.

Anthroposophy takes up this theory, and sometimes does not merely leave it in its form of materialistic classification, but even materializes it yet more — as when it teaches that “superior bodies” exist objectively “outside” (?) of the physical body, that in sleep the astral and mental bodies “depart” (?) from the same, and so forth —

treating these “bodies” precisely *as* bodies, that is as things, whereas they are nothing but modalities of being. But at other times it is able finally to see things *sub specie interioritatis*,<sup>87</sup> so that something of the right view comes out of it. As a point of reference, it posits the completed ego of a normal modern man, who has reached the point of consciously possessing and controlling all his mental processes (“mental body”). Against this ego, as a zone which glides slowly in the subconscious, there are the three lower “bodies”: first and foremost the passions, the tendencies, and the emotions that, however much they might be superficially illuminated by the consciousness, to a large extent escape the control of the ego (astral body); then those already subconscious psychic-vital complexes, connected to the nervous and glandular system, which we have already mentioned (etheric body); finally the pure unconscious of the physical form, along with the forces which manifest themselves in it and prop it up. This is the concrete datum. The first rational development of the anthroposophic view is to be found in the relationship between these three inferior “bodies” (astral, etheric, and physical) with three states: dream, sleep, and apparent death. The second development is in the relationship of the superior “bodies” (those designated with the Sanskrit terms) with three tasks and spiritual conquests that the “occult disciple” can propose to himself in relation precisely to the three states of reduced consciousness, to which the three kinds of body are made to correspond. In other words, the “occult disciple” can propose to reach a self-consciousness and a direct dominion not just in the order of his thoughts (mental body) but also in his emotional and instinctive life, in the vital energies and the very potencies which are behind the biochemical and physical processes of his body. The three states of spiritual illumination and of superconsciousness which permit this are surely nothing other than the three superior “bodies,” badly divulged in the doctrine of the theosophists. Such bodies would stand, however, in direct relation to that destruction of the unconscious of which we spoke in our critique of psychoanalysis.

Such a view as this has the merit of somewhat dematerializing things, and of indicating at the same time a scheme, the objective stages of the path to transcendent realization. The distance which already separates these horizons, no matter how encumbered it might be with rubble, must be cleared of psychoanalysis and psychic

research. And one can also specify the meaning and the scope of the problem proposed in the terms indicated above. We have said that the ego of which the common modern man commonly speaks, with reference to a given datum of consciousness, is neither any longer the soul as simple and incorporeal substance of the scholastic philosophers, nor the incorruptible *âtma* of the Vedânta. It is rather the functional unit of a complex of psychic process, of tendencies, habits, memories, and so forth, which is more or less at the mercy of other functions and forces; one may little act on these things, as the common consciousness and the “will” would not have any idea how to reach them. The body contains these forces, at the same time giving the soul a basis in the sense of its personal unity, which it thus conditions. Therefore, in considering this bodily conditioned personality, it might be said that the soul, in a certain sense, though not being the product of the body alone, is born and dies with it. We therefore admit the possibility of the process described above, which extends degree by degree downward, toward the corporeal, self-consciousness, and possession. It is clear that with such a process the I would control the very physical and “vital” conditions of the personality. This is the same process as the exploration and dominion of the deep strata of being, of which we have spoken in reference to psychoanalysis, and which in Hermetic symbolism corresponds to the formula: *Visita interiora Terrae rectificando invenies occultum lapidem veram medicinam.*<sup>88</sup>

If anthroposophy on the one hand evokes these views of an ancient wisdom, on the other we see it almost repent of this, returning to its evolutionistic obsessions. Let this single observation suffice: the three superior “bodies,” rather than being understood as atemporal and superhistorical states to which one might aim only exceptionally, become three conquests that the whole of humanity, duly guided by archangels and other beings of the kind, will realize in time on three future planets, which follow the present one as the reincarnations of the “soul of the Earth”!

Nor is this all. At one point in his book *Initiation*, Steiner declares that during the spiritual development of the “occult disciple,” he will find himself at a crossing. He will be presented, that is, with the possibility of putting his acquired faculties to the service of human evolution, or of retiring to transcendent worlds. For Steiner, those who decide for the second alternative belong more or less to the

“Black Lodge,” and never will a “true” initiate have anything to do with them.<sup>89</sup> This is, once again, a clear index of the intellectual level of such currents. Even granting them this, indulging in “altruistic” preoccupations of the kind, still it is clear: they have not even the least suspicion that to roll up one’s sleeves and to put oneself to work for humanity is not the only way of aiding it; that whoever truly realizes transcendent states and makes of them his stable residence transforms himself by that fact alone into a mighty hearth of energies, much more efficacious than those of the imaginary anthroposophic and Rosicrucian initiates who “renounce,” dedicating themselves to the service of humanity.

But yet once again, speaking more generally, it is the evolutionistic error here that constitutes the testing stone for metaphysical insensitivity, for the lack of a true sense of the supernatural and of the eternal. The traditional teaching has never known anything of the kind. Well do we know (because we have ourselves had the amusing experience of it) that there are disciples of Steiner who, when one fails to find evidence for the entire system in the traditional teaching, have the impudence to retort by asking what we authorize us to say that their Master has not seen more deeply than all the “great Initiates” that preceded him; just as another follower has presented his para-Steinerian ramblings as something that “goes beyond the Yoga, beyond the Zen” of the Tradition. The anthroposophic infatuation goes so far as that! But as to this particular issue: according to the traditional teaching, beyond any given “evolution,” there stands a cycle — the Hindu theory of the *kalpa*, the classical concept of the “cosmic years” or aeons. The cyclical conception is the nearest to the supreme conception because, as was emphasized by Plato, Plotinus, and Proclus, cyclical time makes itself into a kind of image and symbol of eternity; for which, in the hierarchy of the degrees of consciousness, this conception is the final limit which separates one from the destruction of the cosmic mirage, and from the realization of an absolutely super-temporal order. And it might be said that the individual is bound to the cyclical law also materially, in a kind of “eternal return,” which however has nothing to do with reincarnation, so long as he is not capable of this leap, which is identified with “awakening” and with the “Great Liberation”; a leap in a perpendicular direction — a vertical



direction — with respect to the horizontal direction of every temporality and every becoming.

What are we to say, standing before horizons such as these, regarding the obsessions of “evolutionism” and of the “development of humanity”...

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These points will suffice to form a comprehensive idea of the scope and nature of anthroposophy. Much more than the other currents we have already considered, there is in it an essential part which is merely the personal construction of its founder, who as we have seen has visibly been acted upon by motifs proper to the Western mentality: the Christian myth; an attitude which despite everything remains naturalistic, along the lines of a “science of nature”; evolutionism re-elaborated into a philosophy of history; a rationalistic system. Regarding the fantastical panoramas of reincarnation, of anthropogenesis, and of Steinerian cosmogenesis, these often recall theosophism, from which Steiner took a great deal, despite the fact that he himself makes appeal to a personal clairvoyance. Thus we can clearly see the contagion of the same influences which constituted the occult background of theosophism. We must positively judge the need for a *science* of the supersensible (if understood on the level of “gnosis”) and of a conscious method opposed to mysticism and mediumship; but, as we have seen, this has practically remained at the level of merest need. The ideal of an “active” initiation might be valid, within certain limits and under certain conditions, in particular by setting aside the fixation that, through a simple system of individual “exercises” with no superior influence, along the lines of a “self-initiation,” one can attain something essential and serious, and that one is somehow sheltered from those dangers from which the “Master” himself, Steiner most clearly did not escape — insofar as one can speak effectively of his “occult” experiences.<sup>90</sup>

The presence of these positive points in anthroposophy, alongside a formal systematic apparatus, might perhaps explain in part the singular fact that anthroposophy has been entertained even by persons who — contrary to the better part of the theosophists — are gifted with an intellectual culture of a not negligible kind. We have however said “in part,” because it is incomprehensible how they have



evidently denied the existence of errors in Steinerianism which are so massive that one can touch them with one's hands, not to speak of its foundation in fantasies which often have something delirious about them — all of which, being inseparable from the whole, ought to suffice to make one decidedly reject it despite everything. However, even these men must be subject to particular suggestions, which generate something like intellectual scotomata, those marks in the visual field which pathologically impede portions of one's perception.

## VI

### Neomysticism. Krishnamurti.

IN RELATION TO THE DISTINCTIONS which occupy us here, it might be useful to briefly consider the “mystic” phenomenon, in its widest acceptation. The term “mystic” originates from the world of the ancient Mysteries, but subsequently it was used to designate an orientation of religious man who seeks to have an interior experience of the object of his faith, the limit to this experience being constituted by what is called ecstasy. So far as this latter is concerned, one has proceeded to a generalization on the basis of which the “mystical” has become synonymous with an enthusiastic empathy, no longer restricting itself to the religious domain in the proper and positive sense.

This is not the place to investigate the character of religious mysticism, which moreover includes many variants.<sup>91</sup> For our purposes it will suffice to return to the summary distinction of two attitudes in the face of the “spiritual” and to the two modalities of its experience. It might be said that “mysticism” is characterized by its pronounced subjective, irrational, and “ecstatic” element. The experience has worth essentially for its sensible content and for the rapture with which it unites. Thus, in general, it excludes every demand for lucid control, for clarity. The acting principle is more the “soul” than the “spirit.” One might indicate the state of “intellectual intuition” as being the contrary of the mystical state; the former is as a fire which consumes the “mystical” form of an experience, objectively gathering from it, through clarity and not as “revelation,” its content of ineffable transcendence and submersion. It is,

moreover, active, just as mystical experience is passive and “ecstatic.”

It is, in general, the principle of a traditional wisdom that in order to know the essence of a thing one must *become* that thing. “One knows only that with which one identifies,” by removing the law of a duality which governs common experience. But precisely in this regard one must keep well in mind the distinction between a lucid mastery of experience toward the end of a clear superrational perception, and the losing of oneself within the experience. Therefore, one cannot recognize to the mystical experience as such a true “noetic” character. What Schelling said in evaluating similar attitudes holds also for this: the mystic chances upon whatever he chances upon; he does not know how to firmly place his object before himself, he does not know how to make it reflect in himself as in a clear mirror. Seized by the “ineffable,” rather than mastering the object, he himself becomes a “phenomenon,” that is, something which is in need of explanation.<sup>92</sup>

Having spoken of “ecstasy,” it is necessary for our purposes to indicate phenomena which, although having no bearing on religious and transcendent horizons, repeat the character of “ecstasy” on other planes. In this connection, we might take up an order of ideas presented by P. Tillich as a means of orienting ourselves.<sup>93</sup>

Tillich notes that in the physical world every reality exists already with its own form and its own unity; form and unity are visibly etched into being and as being, as the reality of things. This is not so in the interior world. That which in this world corresponds to the form and to the unity presented by material things — the personality, the ego — is an invisible principle which tends to be fulfilled, and which, insofar as it fulfills itself, to that extent counterposes itself to being, tending toward independence from being and toward liberty.

But the following can occur: that even as a stronger and swifter current bursting upon another weaker one might absorb it and transport it in its own path, so, in certain special conditions, a given or ideal object might provoke in man a kind of rupture in the direction of the principal tendency, which ceases to direct itself toward its natural end, concentrating itself instead onto this object. The object furnishes thus a center, and so the process of internal formation is interrupted. This is “mystical” identification with an object: it provides a way for the personality to dissolve and to

effectively depart from itself. It is therefore like a liberation and a destruction at the same time. That which transports one also grants a sense of liberty, awakens a higher and seductive sensation of vital force, disconnected from form.

One then understands how there might be a mysticism of profane things. Fundamentally, any object whatsoever can produce a mystical identification and a correlating degree of “ecstatic” rapture — an enthusiasm which moreover can also be creative. The fundamental structure remains the same. The fact that the mystical object is no longer a divinity but an ideology, a political party, a given personality, even a sport or a “profane religion” of our times, is not indifferent from the point of view of the nature of the influences to which the “mystical” state opens the way, though from the objective point of view it does not constitute a disparity. There is always a spiritual destruction here, the substitution of a form and a unity which is not that of the subject, along with the consequent sense of release, of *détente* and of ecstatic animation.

Consideration of the mystical phenomenon taken to this extent would carry us very far from our theme: from psychoanalysis once again to the psychology of the masses, to the varieties of the new collectivism and to the techniques of subversion and of demagogy. We will limit ourselves here to a few indications.

Psychoanalytic practice officially recognizes and desires the phenomenon of the so-called *transfert*. In this, the psychoanalyst, as has been said, comes in a certain way to substitute himself for the subject, in the sense that he furnishes a point of reference to discharge, to liberate him from the tensions that rend his personality, to help him “vomit up” everything which has accumulated and been repressed in his subconsciousness. Now, apart from any possible therapeutic results that might follow from this, the counterpart to it from the spiritual point of view might be precisely that abandon and that interruption of tension toward a true fulfillment of the personality of which we have spoken. Indeed, it is interesting that such “indentifications” might be accompanied by the phenomenon of *ambivalence*: love which intermixes with hatred or which inverts into hatred. This phenomenon is significant because one grasps here, in reduced dimensions, the sense of what often occurs in a magnified way in collective phenomena *transfert* and of “ecstasy.” Even these might carry an “ambivalence” with them,

because the subconscious sentiment of intimate violation might affirm itself as hatred after the transport and the exalting rapture awoken by the liberating identification. Even recent history shows us characteristic examples of this.

The technique of demagoguery rests generally on a *transfert* in the grand style and on “ecstatic” liberation. The explicative hypotheses of the psychoanalysts, which here draw upon a reliving of the sexually interpreted experiences of savages (the supposed ancestors of the entirety of humanity), are nothing but rubbish. There remains however the framework of the *transfert* and of the projection of one’s own center outside of oneself, with the concomitant and here quite visible phenomenon of an enormous psychic-vital potential which passes to the free state. Wherever demagogic leaders, taking up the so-called “charismatic” character, are able to produce a mystical identification, there arise sweeping mass movements, which cannot be stopped, and in which the individual believes he is living a higher life. Freed from his ego, happy to transfer to others even his capacity to think, to judge, and to command, he might effectively manifest gifts of courage, of sacrifice, and of heroism which go beyond what is possible to each normal person, and even to himself when he is detached from the whole. In modern times — perhaps from the French Revolution and onward — such phenomena have presented a sinister character, because those who determine and guide these collective currents for a certain period of time frequently are themselves more or less the instruments of dark forces.

One particular case of “mysticism” is constituted by the *Messianic phenomenon*. The Messiah as savior is nothing, at bottom, but an unconscious ideal presented to the individual as realized in another being, which “ecstatically” diverts the forces of the personality from the realization of their end. Even in such a case the phenomenon of the *transfert* is produced, through a syncopation of the process of formation and of integration of the ego, and with the consequent, already indicated sense of discharge or of liberation (this is the atmosphere of liberation which is formed around the Messiah).

Naturally, one cannot exclude the case of superior personalities whose forces might graft themselves onto those other forces extending out of “Messianic” expectation — a grafting which leads, not to adulteration of, but to completion of the process of internal

formation, guiding these individuals toward themselves, toward the conquest of their form. This case is as real as that of an effective elevation of the individual “by participation,” when he consciously forms part of a traditional hierarchy centered on effective representatives of the spiritual authority.

In a reduced form, the Messianic phenomenon is not at all infrequent in our days: wherever one looks, the search is on for *Gurus* or presumed *Gurus*. In the greater part of spiritualistic currents, when it is not the strangeness and the fascination of “occult” doctrines which attracts these souls, it is precisely a vague Messianic desire, which concentrates on the heads of sects and of schools and surrounds them with the miraculous halo of “Master” and “Adept.” In theosophism, this has taken on a conscious and systematic character. Convinced of the necessity for a new “Teacher of the World,” it dedicated itself to preparing for his advent, constituting a global association to that end — the *Order of the Eastern Star* — which, according to the oracle of Besant, finally designated a young Hindu, suitable to incarnate the long-awaited entity.

We are referring to J. Krishnamurti — the same Krishnamurti who, moreover, having attained his majority and consciousness of himself, in an indisputable sign of character and in a totally unexpected turn of events, resolutely took a new direction, the ambiguity of which was itself characteristic of the new spiritualism. And thus it is worth our while to briefly examine it here.

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In the campground of Ommen in Holland, in 1929 Krishnamurti dissolved the *Order of the Eastern Star*, declaring at the same time its unmitigated credo. Here are some of his words:

I have only one purpose: to make man free, to urge him towards freedom, to help him to break away from all limitations, for that alone will give him eternal happiness, will give him the unconditioned realization of the self...

[...]

You are accustomed to authority, or to the atmosphere of authority, which you think will lead you to spirituality. You think and hope that another can, by his extraordinary powers — a miracle — transport you to this realm of eternal freedom which is Happiness.

[...]

You want to have your own gods—new gods instead of the old, new religions instead of the old, new forms instead of the old—all equally valueless, all barriers, all limitations, all crutches. [...] [Y]ou have been preparing for me for eighteen years, when I say all these things are unnecessary, when I say that you must put them all away and look within yourselves for the enlightenment, for the glory, for the purification, and for the incorruptibility of the self, not one of you is willing to do it. There may be a few, but very, very few. So why have an organization?

[...]

I maintain that Truth is a pathless land, and you cannot approach it by any path whatsoever, by any religion, by any sect.

[...]

But those who really desire to understand, who are looking to find that which is eternal, without beginning and without an end, will walk together with a greater intensity, will be a danger to everything that is unessential, to unrealities, to shadows.<sup>94</sup>

In and of itself, this would have been a salutary reaction, not only against theosophistic Messianism, but also, more generally, against the extrovert attitude about which we have recently spoken. However, two points must be brought into relief.

The first is that, despite these declarations of Krishnamurti, things changed very little; as before, there were conventions and gatherings in the grand style of his enthusiasts, who took him as their center; a “Krishnamurti Foundation” was created, which proposed also the acquisition of a fund in England whence to constitute, according to the desire of Krishnamurti himself, a center for the diffusion of his ideas; books came out with titles like *Krishnamurti, World Teacher* (by L. Renault), *Krishnamurti, Mirror of Men* (by Y. Achard), *Krishnamurti, Psychologist of the New Era* (by R. Linssen) and so forth. Thus the “myth” was reconstituted, Krishnamurti continued to act as “Master,” in his capacity as announcer of a new vision of life. It might be objected that this is inexact, since the new Krishnamurti does not claim to substitute the individual, but rather wishes to incite him to grasp a deeper consciousness of himself in an autonomous way, and thus presents himself as an example and acts only as a “spiritual catalyst” on whomever goes to listen to him. Now, something of the kind could be conceived in the case of restricted and select centers, as certain Hindu *Açram* and certain initiatic



groups in which a superior personality might effectively create an almost magnetic atmosphere, without any preaching. It is rather difficult however to conceive of such a thing when one sets oneself to holding conferences in every part of the profane world, and for a vast public, even in theaters and universities, ultimately having even excited the snobbist interest of a public standing between the intellectual and the mundane. The least that one can say is that Krishnamurti has lent himself to all this, discharging the usual role of a “Master” even if he was the one to proclaim that there was no need to seek a Master.

The second point to observe is that Krishnamurti, notwithstanding everything, sets out a teaching, a doctrine, which has remained more or less the same from the beginning up until today, and which is characterized by extremely dangerous ambiguities.

To liberate Life from the Self — this is at bottom what Krishnamurti proclaims. Truth for him signifies Life; and Life signifies Happiness, Purity, Eternity and various other things still, all given nearly as synonyms. Moreover, to liberate Life and to liberate the Self are also almost synonymous, because Krishnamurti at the root insists on the distinction between a false personal self and an eternal Self, the latter which then unifies itself with Life and, in it, with the principle of everything. Man has imposed on this Self, which is to say, on Life, every kind of limitation: beliefs, preferences, atavistic habits of the heart and mind, attachments, conventions, religious scruples, fears, preconceptions, theories, barriers and exclusivities of every kind. All these things are barriers which must be blown sky-high in order to find oneself, to realize that which Krishnamurti calls “the individual uniqueness.” But as for this “oneself” — given that it is equivalent to the “self of all — that absolute union with all things which brings to an end the sense of separation,”<sup>95</sup> is it in any way distinct from something like the Bergsonian *élan vital* or the object of the exceedingly new, more or less pantheistic and naturalistic religions of the irrational and of becoming? With what right can one call it the “Self”? And is that which really can be called the Self in Krishnamurti at bottom not perhaps only a negative principle, a superstructure which, created by prejudices, fears, and conventions, suffocates that Life which alone is real: precisely as in psychoanalysis and in irrationalism?

Krishnamurti says nothing to help us understand what sense his talk of a “self,” of an “individual uniqueness,” finally has, when perfection and the goal are conceived of as mere undifferentiated life, protean — similar, according to his own words,<sup>96</sup> to running water which ever proceeds and never is calm, to flame deprived of definite form, labile, mutable from moment to moment, and thus undiscrivable, not circumscribable by anything, indominable. To grant to Life, on this basis, the attribute of Happiness, of free and ecstatic joy after every conflict is overcome, when no limit, no dam constrains it any longer, so that it might manifest itself and expand itself effortlessly, as pure spontaneity<sup>97</sup> — all of this is certainly possible. It is not possible to speak at the same time of incorruptibility, of eternity, of true liberation from the law of time. One cannot desire simultaneously that which becomes and that which is, that which perennially changes and that which is eternal and invariable. Always has every wisdom teaching indicated two regions, two states: world and superworld, life and superlife, fluency and flight of forms (*samsâra*) and permanency of the center. Krishnamurti mixes the two things into a strange dough, a kind of translation of the Hindu teaching *âtma* = *brahman* into the terms of Western irrationality of becoming.<sup>98</sup> And to think that, if this was indeed the deepest need, then in one of the traditions of his own country, in the Mahâyâna, he would have been able to find everything necessary to presage in what sense something superior to that opposition might effectively exist.

Krishnamurti is right to say that man must abolish the distance between himself and the goal, becoming himself the goal,<sup>99</sup> not letting flee any longer like a shadow situated between past and future that which is real, that in which alone he might possess himself and awaken himself: the present moment, that moment from which one never exits. This could indeed be a salutary reaction against the already indicted evolutionistic illusion, which pressed onward, to a time yet to come, that fulfillment which verily can only be reached superhistorically, beyond time. But could not the ecstatic reduction to mere instantaneity, the inebriation of a self-identification which destroys every distinction and every spiritual substantiality, be the same?

To express the principle that one should not depend on anything beyond oneself, is not to say enough. It is also necessary to explain in what relation one stands with this “self”; it is necessary to establish if, with respect to this self, one is capable of dominion and of conscious, free direction, or else if one is incapable of differentiating oneself from that which moment to moment, through pure spontaneity, the “free Life” desires, actuates, and creates in us, electing such a state even as an ideal. If one then refers to the task of giving oneself a form and a law in a personal being, it might even happen that on a certain plane it is the limit which testifies to liberty.

Krishnamurti speaks, it is true, of a kind of revolt which is illusory, because it expresses a concealed self-indulgency and impatience.<sup>100</sup> He says that to understand what he means by liberty of life, it is necessary to set as a goal liberation even *from* life.<sup>101</sup> He observes that, if true perfection has no laws, this must not be interpreted as a state of chaos, but as superiority both to law and to chaos, as a convergence toward the germ of everything, from which arises every transformation, and on which all things depend.<sup>102</sup> In the end he affirms that we must create a miracle of order in this age of disorder and superstition — on the basis, however, of an internal order of our own, and not on that of an authority, of a fear or of a tradition.<sup>103</sup> But these suggestions, which in general might indicate a right spiritual direction, are little convincing given the spirit of the whole, and they are aided by no concrete indication of method and discipline because, as has been seen, Krishnamurti is contrary to every pre-established way: he thinks that there exist no paths for the realization of the Truth, that is, of Life; he thinks that a desire and an aspiration toward a happiness which is so intense as to eliminate every particular object one by one, a limitless disindividualized love, not for *a* life, but for *life itself*, not for a given being, but for any given being, suffice to lead one to the goal.

Beyond this, the only path he indicates is the suspension of the automatisms of the ego and of its contents, the arrest of the mental flow in a kind of spiritual “resolution of continuity.” When there are no longer barriers, when there is no longer anything in us which is determined by the past and by the already known, nothing which tends toward something — in this moment one might have the consciousness of the true Self, the apparition of that which

Krishnamurti sometimes mystically calls “the Unknown,” as a spontaneous fact and with a sudden character, not as the “result” of a discipline, of a method and of an initiative of the ego, because it would be absurd if the ego itself might “suspend” and “kill” itself; every one of its efforts would come to enclose it in itself. After this hypothetical awakening the ego disappears, it is no longer the ego, it “becomes Life.”

Such views would seem to present analogies (apart from the so-called Christian quietism, wherein however the concept of grace has an essential part) with those of Taoism and of one of the two principle schools of Zen, which however Krishnamurti seems to know very little, given that in a recent declaration he included Zen itself (together with Hinduism, the Christian method and “all the systems”) among the “poppycock,” repeating that a mind which operates on the basis of any given system or method “is incapable of comprehending that which is true.” In fact, the aforementioned analogies are only relative; Taoism and Zen have very different background and historico-existential implications. Perhaps one must take into consideration however the partially explicable excess of a reaction against the cumbersome theosophistic edifice and the relative baggage of beliefs, of “initiations,” of “exercises,” of planes and “bodies” and so forth.

Regarding the confusions indicated above, it is also possible that these words betray the thought of Krishnamurti and that the very character of his personal experience together with the lack of a solid doctrinal preparation impeded more adequate formulations. However these expressive confusions could also reflect the ambiguity of his very experience, with the result that no true orientation is given.

In general, the fact remains that Krishnamurti is characterized by the absolute and indiscriminate rejection of every authority (which could also be explained psychoanalytically, since Krishnamurti had to suffer a crass paternal despotism in his family), the negation of every tradition — thus, an individualism and an anarchism in the spiritual field, but also, at the same time, a species of fierce bitterness toward that which is “ego”; he puts the construction of the ego, of “that illusion which is the ego,” on the same plane as the “original sin” of which the Christians speak. Now, on this point we must come to an understanding. The right reference might be given by the

initiativ maxim: "Ask yourself if it is you to have the ego or it is the ego to have you." Undoubtedly, one must liberate oneself from a certain ego; the *via remotionis*,<sup>104</sup> the destruction of the "ancient man" (who however from another point of view is nothing but the "new man," the most recent man) is a condition which has always been recognized for spiritual reintegration. But at the same time one must underline a fundamental continuity and not insist on rigid antitheses. It would therefore be appropriate to take our bearings by alchemic Hermetism, which contemplates rather a cleansing in a "water of Life" which destroys and dissolves, cautioning however that the substances which one might wash in such a bath must contain a *grain of indestructible gold* (the symbol of gold refers to the ego principle) destined to reaffirm itself over that which it has dissolved and to reemerge in a superior potency; without which, the perfection of the "Great Work" does not follow, and one is arrested at the so-called phase of the *albedo* which stands under the sign of woman, indeed of the dominion of the feminine over the masculine.<sup>105</sup> This scheme is much more oriented toward developing that which is intermixed with the ambiguous ideas of Krishnamurti, in the order of which the negation of the ego would derive from the fact that the ego itself is supposed to be a static factor, "an inert packet" which opposes itself to that continual mutation and to that continual transformation which is supposed to constitute the ever new and incoercible essence of the Real.

On a more contingent plane, Krishnamurti ought not to have forgotten a maxim of the tradition of his land, which, together with every other, he would like to cast overboard: "Let the sage with his wisdom not unsettle the mind of those who do not know." To go about proposing ideas which are true, if at all, on the level of a true "liberated one," to those deviants who, as modern men, already have more than enough incentives toward chaos and toward the evil of anarchy, is certainly not wise. The fact that often spiritual and wisdom traditions, symbols, ritual and ascetic structures are no longer anything other than surviving hollow forms, should not impede one from recognizing the positive function that they might have had and that they might have once again in the framework of a more normal civilization, and with reference to the few who still know how to understand, for whom alone it is worthwhile to speak, and who might also conceive an authority which is not at all a

principle of repression or of alienation. Such action might explode the superstructures, the supports and the barriers (often built also to uphold) of whomever already feels capable of keeping his feet. Krishnamurti seems not to bother himself with this: he democratically incites everyone to the great revolt, not those few for whom alone it might become salutary and truly liberating.

It is significant enough that after 1968 one can observe a certain receptivity for the ideas of Krishnamurti in circles of those students of many great universities who passed over to “protest,” to the rejection of all traditional systems and values, in the name of a “free attainment of one’s being.”<sup>106</sup> On the other hand, we have also observed the phenomenon of the so-called “mystic Beat,” the Beat attracted to Zen by way of the irrational aspects and the almost nihilistic and iconoclastic negation which this initiatic doctrine presents. This confirms the troubling and distorted sense in which certain ideas might act today, when one fails to understand the plane which conditions every one of their legitimate formulations.

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This allusion to certain circles of young Westerners who have recently been attracted also to the ideas of Krishnamurti carries us also to observe a more general phenomenon which, if it does not fall within the field of “spiritualism,” yet falls equally along the lines of “ecstatic” opening of which we have spoken, and which we have also observed in the phenomena of collective exaltation.

In its most evident form, we are dealing with an orientation precisely of the Beat and Hippy milieus of the most recent times, in which the impulse toward evasion through openings obtained through various techniques of a chaotic but sometimes even savage ecstasy. Here the use of drugs — of LSD, of marijuana, and of hashish — is associated to the use of a jazz which takes up and exaggerates obsessive rhythms analogous to those of the evocatory and ecstatic ceremonies of the Negroes, sometimes adding “psychadelic” spectacles and dances to them which, once again, recall those employed by savages as ecstatic instruments. The intermixing of Negroes in these circles is also significant; furthermore, in jazz and in bop, the most sought-after performers and improvisers, those who most elicit frenetic enthusiasm, are themselves often also drug addicts, and in these gatherings, in which thousands of youths of

both sexes convene, not rarely urged on almost compulsively to sexual couplings, an atmosphere of collective possession is established, which acts in individuals as a “liberation”: precisely as in the other phenomena which we have considered.

We are here interested in considering all of this from the particular point of view of possible involuntary evocations of “nether” forces, as in the other cases. In point of fact, regarding group phenomena, one is led to see an analogy with the *macumba* and the *cadombé*, ceremonies which are carried on above all in Brazil, and which aim consciously toward provoking phenomena of possession. That which must be emphasized is precisely that in the Beats, in the Hippies and in every other individual who follows those profane rituals, the whole of this might not reduce itself to a simple ecstatic or frenetic liberation of a psychic underground alone; equally possible is the incorporation in him also of extraindividual “nether” forces, to which, by these very paths, a door has been opened. Certain criminal and absurd actions undertaken at the margins of this world should be explained by reference to these forces, rather than being attributed to the individual and to the simple influences of an ideology which negates every concept of guilt and which leads therefore toward the plane of a truly “liberated” life.



## VII

# Parentetical on Esoteric Catholicism and on “Integral Traditionalism”

WE HAVE ALREADY OBSERVED that one of the causes which has favored the diffusion of neo-spiritualism is to be sought in the very character of the religion which has come to predominate in the West: Christianity and in particular Catholicism. By presenting itself essentially as a theological-ritualistic system on the one hand, and on the other as a devotional and moralizing practice, it seems to offer very little to the need for the supernatural, as has been sensed by many persons in recent times, who for this reason have been attracted to other doctrines which seemed to promise something more.

Naturally, in such a case one views the supernatural as an *experience*; Catholicism is without doubt characterized by the claim of having, more than any other religion, its own true theology of the supernatural, with reference to the conception of a personal God detached from all the natural world, standing over this world. But it was not for any theology that these individuals went searching, and the theistic Catholic conception of God-person seemed to be inadequate already from the start, since it admitted, in principle, only a “dual” relation, between “I” and “You,” between the creature and the Creator. It is true that there exists also a Christian mysticism and that Catholicism has had its monastic Orders, which intended to cultivate a life of pure contemplation. But apart from the fact that

these presupposed extremely specific vocations, and that moreover in its removal of the distance deriving from the conception of the God-person, Orthodoxy sees a dangerous heresy in the mystic life itself (thus strictly limiting the concept of a *unio mystica* or a “unitary life”), Catholicism of modern times, practically speaking, has emphasized all of this to an ever lesser degree. The so-called “pastoral cure of the soul” has become its principal preoccupation — not to speak of certain recent post-Council revolutions toward “modernization” and “opening to the left,” which have brought to the foreground mere social or socializing claims intermixed with well-known and squalid humanitarian, pacifist, and democratic ingredients. All that which might have had a character of true transcendence has thus been sidelined, or at least has not been encouraged in the least. From here, the emptiness which, along with the crises of the modern world, has pressed many to seek elsewhere, more or less along the lines of contemporary neo-spiritualism, exposing themselves to the danger that dark forces might pervert their highest aspirations.

But in an objective analysis certain recognitions must be made.

If we are referring to early Christianity, this religion presents itself as a typical religion of the *kali-yuga*, of the “dark age,” which in the Western formulation of the same teaching corresponds to the “iron age,” in which Hesiod believed that the destiny of the many would be “to extinguish themselves without glory in Hades.” Christian preaching, addressed originally above all to the masses of the dispossessed, and to those lacking the tradition of the Roman *ecumene*, took as their presupposition a type of human much different from that which traditions of a higher level had in mind: a type who, so far as access to the divine went, was in desperate straits. Thus this Christianity took the form of a *tragic doctrine of salvation*. The myth of “original sin” was affirmed, and the alternative between eternal salvation or eternal perdition was indicated — an alternative which was to be decided once and for all for everyone on this Earth, and which was sharpened by awesome depictions of the afterlife and with apocalyptic visions. This was a way of arousing in certain natures an extreme tension, which, especially if it was associated to the myth of Jesus as “Redeemer,” might also bear its fruit — if not in this life, at least at the brink of death or in the afterlife, whenever

these indirect means, working on human emotionality, succeeded in profoundly modifying the basic forces of the human being.

In addressing itself to the broadest masses, later Catholicism concealed, to a certain degree, the extremistic crudeness of these views, preoccupying itself with furnishing certain supports for the human personality, of him who had recognized the supernatural destination, and to exercise a subtle action on his deepest being by means of the power of rite and sacrament.

In this context, one might indicate the possible pragmatic, practical *raison d'être* for several aspects of Catholicism. Already certain principles of the Catholic-Christian morality, such as that of humility, *caritas* and the renunciation of one's will, if understood in the right way and in the right place, might have been formulated as a corrective teaching, in light of the closure and the individualistic self-affirmation toward which Western man often inclined. In view of the same limitation on the intellectual plane, and of the corresponding "humanization" of every capacity of vision, it might have been desirable to present in the form of a dogma, and through an authority, that which is situated above the common intellect, but which, at a higher level and at least for an elite might rather become knowledge, direct evidence, *gnosi*. It is possible that for a similar reason it was thought desirable to speak of "revelation" and of "grace": to underline the character of relative transcendence of the true supernatural with respect to the possibilities of a more or less fallen human type which would demonstrate itself ever more prone to every kind of rationalistic and humanistic abuse. In the end we have already mentioned that the relations of simple "faith" in a theistic framework, with the distance that these allow, while they are certainly limiting (for which in more complete traditions they have always been addressed to the inferior strata of a civilization), might be such as to guarantee the integrity of the person — that individual who, amidst pantheistic mysticisms and forays into the supersensible, as has been said various times, can no longer find any solid ground.

These are the limitations of the Catholic doctrine, which have potentially positive aspects, useful with respect to the great mass of men, in light — let us repeat it — of the negative conditions of the latest epoch, of the "dark age." Given that one holds to this level, ideas like those of the Catholics, such as H. Massis and also A. Cuttat,

might also be justified: Catholicism represents a defense of Western man — while every no longer dualistic-theistic form of spirituality (and in this connection one often delights in referring to the Orient) might represent a danger for him. But when one no longer keeps to that level, the question alters, and significantly. If one aims at positive openings to the supernatural, and one has in sight, as an end, that which might be called the superpersonality, which is to say the integrated personality beyond common human conditionalities, then Catholicism (we are not speaking, however, of the Catholicism of our days) is no longer a limitation which protects and preserves, but a petrifying factor which destroys itself<sup>107</sup> for the reactions which its intolerance and sectarianism might provoke and have provoked in whomever aims toward that other realization of self, whomever has brought attention to non-Western and non-Christian traditions or doctrines in which the metaphysical or initiatic content is more visible than its religious, dogmatic or ritualistic reduction in the form of a rigid theistic mythology.

Today, it is highly unlikely that the potential of original Christianity, the “tragic doctrine of salvation” of which we have spoken, might be re-actualized, save exceptionally in certain men and through dangerous existential crises. For whomever has long been such a one, the problem does not present itself at all, and we shall furthermore state that if individuals, who have known nothing else than the exceedingly vain constructions of philosophy and of the profane plebeian-university culture, or the contaminations of various contemporary individualisms, aestheticisms, and romanticisms, were to “convert” to Catholicism and to live truly *at least* in faith, with a total devotion and if possible in a “sacrificial” attitude, this would signify not an abdication but already, despite everything, a progress.

However, here we must keep ourselves to the special problem that we have indicated for a different type of human and for a different vocation. Then we might ask: *are a conception and an adoption of Catholicism possible, which do not constrain one to seek another path elsewhere?*

There are spiritualist circles which have considered this possibility in the framework of that which is called Christian esotericism and “integral tradition.” Let us see how matters stand.

To begin with, it would be well to distinguish the concept of Christian esotericism from that of a Christian initiation, the first having a doctrinal character, the second an operative or experiential character. As to whether or not there has ever existed a Christian initiation, this is a controversial question which regards (if anything) other times than our own, and which in our opinion admits of an essentially negative response. If one is clear on what initiation means in the integral and authentic sense of the term, one cannot help but observe, to begin with, an opposition between Christianity as a doctrine centered on faith on the one hand, and the initiatic path on the other. In its origins, there might have been intermingling brought by the interferences of the ancient mystery traditions and of their proximity; thus one might find traces of them in the Greek Patristics. While dealing with theosophism, we have indicated, for example, the distinction made by Clement of Alexandria between the *gnostikos*, who has some traits of the initiate, and the *pistikos*, he who simply believes. But every precise retrospective assessment in this regard is difficult, indeed is impossible, and everything which has been adopted by certain of men who sustain the existence of a hypothetical Christian initiation, referring above all to the Eastern Orthodox Church and not to Roman Catholicism, seems to have a less an initiatic character than of the simple imparting of “blessings.” Even those who think otherwise have been induced to maintain that any Christian rites which originally have an initiatic character were later lost, and nothing of them was passed down save a merely religious and symbolic reduction and transcription: this, beginning already from the Council of Nicaea. Apart from this, the only thing that remains is the world of mysticism. Within the Church, there is no trace at all of an initiatic transmission, which by its own nature should be rigorously superordinate to that of the existing apostolic hierarchies.

As for claims of a Christian initiatory tradition outside the Church and in our own day and age, these, whenever they are not merely mystifications, have as their basis spurious combinations in which Christianity is nothing but a single ingredient, without any true root of traditional transmission. This holds also for those who still today identify as Rosicrucians.

However the problem, not of a verifiable Christian initiation in the present or the past, but rather of a “Christian esotericism,” remains

open; that is, the possibility of integrating what is present in Catholicism (and not in some vague Christianity) into a wider system, so that the deepest meanings of structures, symbols, and rites might be indicated with respect to it. Integration, as has been said, has above all a doctrinal character. It is not even necessary to state that the plane to which one necessarily refers is that of the “esoteric Christianity” of Besant and Leadbeater, not to speak of the exegeses of the Gospels which Steiner carried out by heaping impossible absurdities one on top of another. Here the question is rather that which might furnish the current of “integral traditionalism” — that “integral traditionalism” which was essentially founded by René Guénon. The basic idea is the notion of a *unitary primordial metaphysical tradition* standing beyond every particular tradition or religion. The term “metaphysical” here is taken not in the abstract sense that it has in philosophy, but rather with reference to a knowledge regarding the “non-physical” in the widest sense, a reality which transcends the merely human world with all its constructions. Such a tradition has had in various particular historical traditions as many relatively complete manifestations, with adaptations to the various environmental, historical, and racial conditionalities, realizing itself by paths that evade profane research. This presupposition would open the possibility of rediscovering constant or homologous elements in the teachings, in the symbols, and in the dogmas of these particular historical traditions, so as to take one’s bearings by a superior plane of objectivity and universality. Ideas of this kind made appearance also in theosophism and in certain milieus of Masonry, though in an inadequate form; it is precisely the Guénonian school which has succeeded in presenting them and developing them in a serious and rigorous way, with the corresponding thesis of a “transcendent unity of the religions” (the expression is F. J. Schuon’s, and is also the title of one of his interesting books). We must emphasize here that we are not dealing with a “syncretism,” nor with those correspondences, sometimes effective but always empirical and exterior, which might be observed in the historical current of the religions. The presupposition is a contrary, deductive method, based on fundamental knowledge and on principles which, almost as the theorems governing individual cases might be deduced from the definition of the triangle, likewise give a means of understanding how under certain conditions and in

relation to a variety of possible expressive forms, as well as in view of various exigencies, one might arrive, starting from certain meanings and symbols of the tradition, at one or the other *corpus* of teachings, beliefs, dogmas, mythologems, and even superstitions — these “constants” that persist in the teeth of every diversity and even of every apparent contrast.

Now, the initial “esoteric” integration of Catholicism supposedly consists precisely in this: beginning with the doctrines and the symbols of the Church, one must know how to perceive that in them which, to be truly “Catholic,” must be universal (*katholikos* means universal); one must go beyond Catholicism, gathering also illuminating nexuses of an intra-traditional character, so to speak. This would require, not an alteration of those Catholic doctrines, but rather a valorization of their essential contents on a plane superior to simple religion, on a metaphysical plane and with realizational perspectives which might aid whomever aspires to the transcendent.<sup>108</sup> Yet one must be sure to not invert the procedure — as unfortunately has already happened — by assuming Catholic doctrines as the primary element, in their specific limitations, juxtaposing some “traditional” reference onto them. It is rather these references which should constitute the primary element and the point of departure.

It is not necessary to state that in this “traditional” (or supertraditional) perspective alone can the axiom of the Church hold: “*Quod ubique, quod ab omnibus et quod semper,*”<sup>109</sup> not of course on the plane of that Catholic apologia which one could easily call “modernistic,” insofar as already from the start it insists fanatically on the character of novelty and of the uniqueness of Christianity, with the single reservation of those anticipations and “prefigurations” stemming from the Jewish people, the people chosen by God. “Novelty” might be conceivable only with regard to a particular adaptation of a doctrine, one which is new only because it refers to new existential and historical conditions (understanding that these conditions impose an exposition of the teaching in a form which is anything but superior). To be able to sensibly affirm the Catholic axiom cited above, one’s attitude ought to be the opposite; rather than insisting on the “novelty” of the doctrines, almost as if this were a claim to merit, one should tend to bring to light its *archaicness* and its *perennialness*, precisely by demonstrating the



degree to which these doctrines might be brought back, in their essences, to an extraordinary body of teachings and of symbols which is truly “catholic” (universal); one should avoid being enclosed in a given time or in a given particular formulation, by proceeding to the bottom of each of these doctrines both in the pre-Christian and in the non-Christian worlds, Western and non-Western, both in extinct traditions and in those which have passed over to involutive and nocturnal forms, as is the case for those beliefs which often are conserved among savage populations. Catholicism admits the idea of a “primitive” or “patriarchal revelation” given to human kind before the coming of the flood and the dispersion of peoples.<sup>110</sup> But the uses to which it put these ideas have not carried it beyond the aforementioned limitations. The single exception is perhaps constituted by the Catholic ethnologist, Father W. Schmidt, who in his powerful work *The Idea of God* has made use of it on the plane of ethnology. Catholicism remains therefore characterized by a uniform closure and a sectarian exclusivity.

The conception of the theosophists, who see everywhere the personal action of “Masters” and “Great Initiates,” is too simplistic as regards the origin of those contents which in Catholicism are susceptible of a “traditional” acceptance, and also as regards singular correspondences between those contents — in mythologems, names, symbols, rites, institutions of festivals and so forth — and many other traditions dispersed through time and space. These correspondences bring one to suppose something more than simple accident, more than that which might arise from the efforts of empirical and historical research. Rather it would behoove us as well to take into account an action which is not perceptible, not always tied to persons — a “subliminal” influence which, without ever being suspected by the founders of the Catholic tradition, might have brought these men, who often believed they were doing something completely different or even thought they were being forced to act by exterior circumstances, became the instruments of the tradition’s conservation, by transmitting certain elements of a primordial and universal wisdom which — as Guénon says — can thus be found in a “latent state” in Catholicism, hidden by its religious, mythical, and theologico-dogmatic form. Indeed, the Catholic orthodoxy might in part accept such a view; save that they understand the action of the Holy Ghost in more concrete terms; it is the action which throughout

the history of the Church supposedly uncovered the primitive “revelation” by being invisibly present in and inspiring every Council. In the formation of every great current of ideas, one must take into account how much of it might be owed to influences of this kind (albeit of another nature), much more than the common man might imagine.

From the point of view of present-day Catholicism, the founder of this very religion, Jesus Christ, presents a grave difficulty for the traditional integration of which we are speaking, because, as has been said, the idea that his person, his mission and his message of “salvation” have a unique and decisive character in universal history (whence, precisely, the exclusivistic claims of Catholicism) cannot be accepted; while it constitutes the first article of faith for Christianity in general.

The same conception of Jesus Christ’s function as the savior or redeemer, to the degree to which it is presented in the terms of a “vicarious experience,” that is of an expiation, on the part of an innocent, for the sins committed by others (in this case, for “original sin” burdening the line of Adam), presents an intrinsic absurdity. The presupposition here is evidently a basically materialistic and deterministic conception of the supersensible. Indeed, the theory that a sin cannot be erased unless someone expiates it, implies a recognition of a species of determinism or fatalism, a species of *karma*: almost as if the sin had created a sort of charge that in any case *must* discharge, if not on one, at least on another individual, so that the sacrifice of an innocent or a stranger might be worth as much, objectively, as the expiation in the guilty person. All of this falls into an order of ideas which stand very far from that religion of supernatural grace and liberty which Christianity would like to be, in contrast to the ancient Jewish-Pharisaic religion of the Law. Already in the first centuries, the adversaries of Christianity justly observed that if God wished to ransom men, he would have been able to do it with a simple act of grace and power, without being forced to sacrifice, by way of a vicarious expiation, his son — giving to men with this act the occasion to commit a new horrendous crime; as if forgiveness were an almost physical iron law, against which God can do nothing.<sup>111</sup> This indicates the difficulties which arise for whomever holds, with respect to the story of Christ, to the exoteric-religious point of view, and does not know how to separate the

internal and essential side of the doctrine from motifs which originate in inferior conceptions, and which only on the basis of sentimental needs (divine sacrifice for humanity, love, etc.) have succeeded in passing into the foreground and constitute themselves in Catholicism itself as “articles of faith.”

The problem of the historical reality of the Gospels is, at bottom, irrelevant. From the point of view we are here considering, it would be important rather to establish the degree to which the life of Jesus — in the same way as various myths relative to the demigods or “heroes” of the pagan world — might be interpreted *also* as a series of symbols which are referred to phases, states, and acts, consonant with a given path toward the development of being. We have said “also” because in the case of determinate historical occurrences or figures, certain occult convergences can bring it about that reality is symbol and symbol is reality. Thus the life of a real being might have simultaneously the value of a dramaticization or sensibilization of metaphysical teachings, almost as in the dramatic representations of the classic Mysteries, destined to awaken profound emotions in the initiate, suitable to direct him toward himself completing determinate transformations in his being.

Only that the esoteric point of view, in these possible meetings of symbol and reality, places value, not in the aspect of reality — which, from this perspective, has an instrumental and contingent character — but rather the aspect of symbol, through which one might reach something universal, something superhistorical and illuminating.

Already the Church Fathers had conceived a symbolic interpretation of the material of the Gospels, and in part also of the Old Testament; but this stopped up on the moral plane, and, at most, on the mystico-devotional plane. This was the case also for the so-called “imitation of Jesus,” in which Jesus is presented, historical facts aside, precisely as a model to reproduce, as the indicator of the way. It should however be noted that it has been declared a heresy to attribute to Jesus this meaning, namely, neglecting his historical reality and the belief in his magical action of the redemption of humanity. Moreover, also with respect to the “imitation of Christ” and of the utilization of this figure *sub specie interioritatis* one must ever keep in mind the distinction between the mystico-devotional plane and the plane of a metaphysical realization, onto which one can also graft oneself, according to the perspective of “integral

traditionalism.” There remains however the fact that in general the highest Christian ideal is ever the basically moral and non-ontological ideal of the Saint, of the *sanctificatio*, and not of the *divinificatio* to the Greek Patristics still sometimes mentioned:<sup>112</sup> it is the ideal of “salvation” and not of the “Great Liberation.”

So far as the esoteric interpretation goes, in the terms of “spiritual science” it may be said to be nonexistent in the orthodoxy, at least in the earliest times; there, consideration is given almost exclusively to moral and allegorical meanings. The sense of the “Virgin,” of the so-called “immaculate conception”<sup>113</sup> and of the divine babe,<sup>114</sup> the awaiting for the “Messiah,” the *curious* correspondence between the name Bethlehem, the place of the birth of Christ, and the name Bethel, the name given by Jacob to the place where he, sleeping under a *stone*, had the well-known vision and the knowledge of the “threshold of the skies”; the “walking on the Waters” (not without relation to Saint Christopher, who helps baby Jesus cross the “river”); or still again, the dressing in the false regal mantel and thereafter being denuded of it; the crucifixion in the middle of a *double* cross; the blow of the lance to the heart, the issuance of water and *red* blood; the darkening of the “sky” and the opening of the “earth”; the “inferno” into which Jesus descends to visit, as Aeneas, the “dead”; the fact that no cadaver was found in the sepulcher, and the rising again and the ascension to the “heavens,” followed by a descent of the Holy Spirit (Pentecost) and the gift of tongues; what the spiritual body and the “resurrection of the flesh” might mean, the water that slakes one’s “thirst” forever, baptism, no longer by water but by “Fire” and “Spirit” and, finally, the “having no bones broken” and the “judgement of the living and the dead”; the question as to why there should be twelve disciples, three Kings (which is the true significance of those figures), forty days and nights in the withdrawal to the desert and — once more — forty hours of resting in the sepulcher — and so forth. To give an explanation to all of this *sub specie interioritatis* by connecting it systematically to a body of esoteric doctrine is a task which one cannot carry out so long as one firmly upholds the limitations of the faith, of division, and of everything else which is proper to the simple religious consciousness.

Perhaps it would be well to make a clarification regarding “miracles,” also because, as has been said, it is above all the

“miraculous” which impresses modern spiritualism. One does not go too far if one admits the reality of miracles, starting from those of Jesus. It is known that the representatives of the ancient Roman tradition found no scandal and astonishment in the miracles attributed to Christ: in ancient civilizations, certain extranormal possibilities were always admitted, and were considered susceptible of a *sui generis* science (magic in the strictest sense), for the production of certain “phenomena”; and it is only the “free thinker” of our times who could see in such things anything greatly questionable, just as it is only the masses to draw from the “miracle” the reason for a faith. But Catholicism justly does not satisfy itself with this. It distinguishes between miracles and miracles, and does not posit the “phenomenon” as its criterion, but rather the cause which — as we have already observed with respect to spiritism — might be very different even for one and the same phenomenon. However, so far as Catholicism’s criterion goes for making this distinction, its position remains weak. To say that “occult” phenomena are owed to diabolic forces or to latent forces, though in every case to “natural” ones, in man and things, while the true miracle is owed to “God,” does not suffice to furnish a sure and practical criterion: among other things, it would be necessary to begin by objectively specifying what limits “nature” has, and to completely neglect what is said in the Gospels, namely that the Antichrist will have the capacity to produce “signs” of equal potency to those of the “Son of Man.” One winds up on a rather low level if one posits the condition, on the other hand, that the phenomenon must serve for conversion or else for ethical purposes. The only element needed to maintain consistency here is the requirement of a meaning, of an illuminating force, which is connected to the phenomenon in an essential way and, moreover, its relation to a truly superior personality.<sup>115</sup>

This brings us to the criterion proper to the metaphysical point of view, according to which *a phenomenon is truly “supernatural” when it presents simultaneously, as the indivisible parts of a whole, three aspects: magical, symbolic, and of internal transfiguration.* One can explain this by means of an example. “Walking on the Waters” is not unique to Christianity; it is an esoteric symbol for a determinate meaning and for determinate conditions of existence. *Over* the “waters” is equivalent to *over* the “torrent of forms,” above

the mode of being of those natures which are subject to becoming, composed of a yearning which alters life and deprives it of any stability. Now, it is possible to imagine that in specific circumstances the integral realization of that symbol's meaning on the part of a personality might be accompanied by the realization of a magical power, which imbues one with the effective possibility of walking on waters without sinking, such that the symbol transmutes into a fact, which in its turn is symbol, as the signal and witness to a reality and a law of a superior order. It is known that the example we have chosen corresponds to one of the wonders of the Gospels. Other examples of the same kind might be found both in those texts, as well as in the texts of other traditions.<sup>116</sup> It is the capacity to understand things from such a point of view which might elevate whomever wishes to discover the metaphysical content latent in the "sacred history" taught by Catholicism, and to reach the sense in it which is truly "supernatural" and not phenomenistic. He might then learn to read these, not only in the Gospels and in the Bible, but also in many dogmas and many Catholic theological doctrines: he might understand that — as Guénon has observed — much of what is said theologically about the angels holds metaphysically for transcendent states of consciousness — states to which ascesis might lead, the reawakening and interior rebirth; while the "demons" symbolize forces and states below the human level.

In an examination of Catholicism one must further account for everything in it, beyond its doctrinal part, which, to have sense and an objective scope, refers us back to *magic* in the strict sense. Magic is based on the existence of subtle forces, of a psychic and vital character, and on the possibility of a technique which might act on them and through them, with the same character of necessity and of impersonality as that shown by the technology of material forces, independently of any moral gifts in the object and the subject. Now, such characteristics are visible in everything attributed to the rites and the sacraments of orthodox Catholicism, in which truly nothing is "arbitrary" and "formal." Consider the rite of baptism, which is held to be capable of inducing a principle of supernatural life in whomever undergoes it, regardless of any given intention or merit; also, the quality established by the ordination of the priest, which is not destroyed even when the priest stains himself with moral indignities; finally, the power of absolution, both ordinary and *in*



*extremis*,<sup>117</sup> which is that, at bottom, of dominating and suspending the law called, in the Hindu tradition, the law of *karma*. These are only a few cases in which Catholicism would refer us back to a plane of *spiritual objectivity*, which is superior to the unreality of sentimentality and human morality: to the plane, precisely, of magic. Without a reference point of the kind, the defense of Catholicism is bound to be weak against those who, with the profane and rationalistic mentality of the moderns, indicts the superstitious and even “immoral” side of this sacramentalistic aspect.

But it is rare that a Catholic might adopt such a point of view. It is rather to be supposed that all rite and sacrament, even when it might once have had a true “magical” potentiality, has lost this potentiality, and remains in Catholicism on the plane of religious facsimiles which only formally repeat the structure of magical or initiatic rites.

Precisely in this context the Catholic doctrine of the so-called effects *ex opere operato*<sup>118</sup> should be examined. Strictly speaking, this doctrine, if rightly understood, rules the aforementioned objective character of the forces that act in the rite; and these forces, once the required conditions have been established, act by themselves, creating a necessary effect, independently of the operator (not *ex opere operantis*) almost as in the case of a natural phenomenon. However, just as for the production of natural phenomena, so here too certain premises must be present. The structures of the rite, in themselves, are as inefficacious as the articulations and mechanisms of a motor into which no electrical energy is carried. To act, that is to create certain conscious or infraconscious psychic effects, the rite must be *vitalized*, that is, there must exist a state of rapport with that supersensible plane which furnishes simultaneously the consciousness of primordial and non-human symbols and the magical force that give efficacy to ritual operations: and, as one aspect of this, the notion of the “Holy Spirit” is really nothing other than this, especially if it is brought back to its origins, when it was not yet theologized. Without this, the ritual and sacred *corpus* is simply superstructure — and at that point, one might as well bring religion to the foreground, in its “faith” and morality, as Protestantism has consistently done by dismissing all the rest.

An irregular and sporadic relationship with the metaphysical plane might come through states of exaltation, of “holy enthusiasm”



of the soul, so long as the adequate orientation is maintained, such as to preserve one from the conjuring of invisible forces of an inferior character. Generally speaking, when one is dealing with a tradition, a figure is needed who acts as a stable and conscious bridge between the visible and the invisible, between the natural and the supernatural, between man and the divine. According to the etymology of the word itself, this was the *pontifex* (= maker of bridges). The *pontifex* constituted precisely the point of contact which rendered the manifestation of efficacious and real influences from on high possible in the world of men. And the chain of the pontiffs — which in the higher and most original forms of traditional civilization was strictly identical to the chain of representatives of the “divine regality” — guaranteed the continuity and the perennity of this contact, constituting thus the axis of the *tradition* in the literal sense, that is of the transmission of a “presence” and of a vivifying and illuminating sacred force,<sup>119</sup> which, through participation, might benefit a regularly ordered sacred body — a force without which, as has been said, every rite is inoperative and decays into mere ceremony or symbol.

The pontificate, an institution which existed already in Ancient Rome, is nominally a part of Catholicism and stands at the vertex of its hierarchy. But one ought to ask oneself what subsists in it of its original function and of the overall tradition. The prophetic hope of Joachim of Fiore in the coming of an “angelic Pope” with the traits almost of an initiate and inaugurating a new “Kingdom,” a Kingdom of the living Holy Spirit, active and vivifying, has unfortunately remained a utopia. And if we want to take our bearings by the contingencies of the most recent times, the figure of the last two Popes above all, John XXIII and Paul VI, in the climate of “bringing Catholicism up to date” and modernization, along with the growing aversion to Catholic “integralism” and the so-called “Medieval vestiges,” seem to put the seal definitively on a disastrous outcome.

Thus, considering the matter in a wider framework, it would appear that there do not exist those conditions which could give a positive response to the question which we formulated at the beginning, of the susceptibility of Catholicism to furnish that which many have sought elsewhere, and which often has pushed them into the confusions and errors of neo-spiritualism. After all that has been said, it is problematic that despite everything the Church, “the

mystical body of Christ,” might be the carrier and the administrator of a true supernatural power, objectively acting through rites and sacraments which might benefit whomever becomes a member, yet aspiring nonetheless to experiences beyond the confessional religious, and seeing the supreme end in something more than so-called “holiness.”

Let us recognize however that Catholicism contains, despite everything, the traces of a wisdom which might serve as the basis for an “esoteric” adoption of various contents on the part of one or the other personalities in the aforementioned framework of “integral traditionalism”; in that case, the statement by one of the exponents of this current might hold as the watchword: “The fact that the representatives of the Catholic Church understand so little of [the internal dimension of] their own doctrines must not bring it about that we ourselves betray the same incomprehension.” Apart from this, one finds only all the impediments and all the limitations which we have considered in the preceding, and which are removed only with difficulty. Setting aside secular Catholicism, one might refer to the Catholic ascetic above of the ancient monastic traditions, with reference to what concerns, if not an initiation, at least an interior discipline toward transcendence, an approach to the supernatural. But here too a fatiguing labor of purification and essentialization would have to be imposed, given the co-existence of devotional elements and of specifically Christian complexes, for which it is perhaps difficult to gather together valid instruments for interior action, without knowledge also of that which other traditions offer.

*A Catholicism raised in level to a truly universal, unanimous and perennial tradition, in which faith might be integrated into metaphysical realization, the symbol into awakening, rite and sacrament into an action of power, dogma into expression of a consciousness which is absolute and infallible because it is non-human, living as such into beings who have dissolved the terrestrial bond through an asceticism, whence the pontificate once more might assume his original mediating function — such a Catholicism as this could supplant every “spiritualism,” present or future.*

But, considering reality, is this anything other than a dream?

## VIII

# Primitivism — The Possessed — The “Overman”

THE SUBJECT OF THIS CHAPTER might seem not to have any direct bearing on the question of “spiritualism.” As our point of departure we will consider an attitude which, in appearance, constitutes its opposite: that is, the *naturalistic revolution* of a great part of Western humanity. Indeed, in what follows, we will deal with ideas that seem to fall rather within the philosophical domain. Here we are speaking nonetheless of experiences whose extreme consequences, as shall be seen, carry us back to a sphere which presents dangers analogous to those of spiritualistic conjurings. Several of the considerations which we will here undertake will also aid in further clarifying various points which we have already mentioned, constituting a natural segue into the material which we will treat in the next chapter.

Before all we must observe the singular facility with which Western man has become inured to an ever more degraded conception of himself. In the first place, he has to a large extent accepted the idea of being a simple “creature,” separated as such by an unspannable distance from his creator and from the principle of every reality. In the second place, with the Renaissance and Humanism, he has become ever more inured to the idea of belonging to this Earth alone, albeit as a being armed with a superior consciousness and with every kind of creative faculty in the field of thought and of the arts. In the end, a few decades of scientism, of Darwinism, and of evolutionism have sufficed to bring Western man,

in a great majority of cases, to seriously believe that he is nothing more than the exemplar of a given biological species, at the forefront, if you will, of natural selection, but without any other substantial difference with respect to the various other animal species.

This reduction, however, is not something that could go on indefinitely, something that could occur without producing more or less grave internal crises and upheavals. In various cases it has become clear that one has set off down a dead end, and that the its closure is indeed of the kind that produces short circuits.

All of this as a general premise. And now let us take, as the first phenomenon we will consider, the *return to nature*. The return to nature, which has arisen in the most recent times, represents in its essence a form of evasion, and itself sends one back to conventional suggestions and to obscure influences. All of this began on the eve of the French Revolution, with the Enlightenment and Encyclopedism. In that period, there was a widespread myth of nature conceived of as the normal, sane and wise order, a nature to which man belongs in fact and by right; an order, moreover, before which civilization with all its laws and its positive forms of political organization supposedly represents something artificial and deleterious. It is here that for the first time the concept emerged of the “noble savage” with the relative exaltation of peoples still living in direct contact with “nature.”

As with all the myths of the Enlightenment, this one, too, obeys a suggestion which was widely in circulation at the time, and which had in its view precise practical goals. This “naturalistic” theory, which had as one of its integral parts the reclamation of the so-called “natural right,” in reality almost immediately threw off its mask, revealing itself as the instrument of subversion, which then descended to the field to undermine and dig out all those residual forms of authority and of traditional organization which still sustained Western man as personality. We are speaking then of a corrosive influence, supportive of various others of a different kind, which we will have occasion to mention. All of this can be clarified through a brief glance at the concept of natural right, which more or less acted as the foundations of the notorious Jacobin proclamation of “the rights of man and of the citizen.” The reclamation and affirmation of such a right constitutes a phenomenon of regression and of primitivism. The classic formulation given to natural right by Ulpian, and the identical use that the Catholic Church has made of it,

do not hinder the expert eye from recognizing its spurious origin. It is the merit of a brilliant scholar of the world of the origins, J. J. Bachofen, to have brought into strong relief the fact that the conception of naturalistic equality of all human beings, with its relative juridical and sociological corollaries, in reality directs us to the “truth” proper only to matriarchal civilizations, to which the idea of a true supernatural was alien, and which constituted a species of substrate, against which civilizations of a Uranic and virile type took shape, through the work of other races. These civilizations knew and affirmed a very different idea of right with respect to their well differentiated social organizations, announcing at the same time the true, heroic and antinaturalistic ideal of personality.<sup>120</sup> From this one might therefore see to what end the circumspectly suggested reclamation of “natural right” leads, when this right is supposed as the universal and original right proper to “every being having a human semblance,” wherever this right appeared evident only within a certain inferior humanity.

This regards one side of the naturalistic revolution. For the other side, we must however observe that things stand precisely contrary to the manner in which the above-mentioned Enlightenment mythology presents them, which is to say: that “nature” which was exalted and to which man was supposed to return, so as to become healthy and normal once again, is really something artificial and abstract. It is indeed neither nature as *cosmos*, as a living entity shot through with meanings and supersensible energies, as the ancient traditional man could still perceive it and conceive it, nor that particular dimension of the whole, of which we have spoken in the first chapter. It is essentially a rationalistic construction. For the normal modern man, this nature is, and cannot help but be, an aggregate of disanimate forms and of physical forces, something exterior and far removed from the whole; something, therefore, in which one might feel at home only if one internally operates an analogous separation and disintegration of the spiritual unity of the personality, and concentrates the sense of self precisely on the physical part of one’s own being. So it is that even when the rationalistic myth of “nature” exhausts its original subversive task, the modern forms of its reclamation in an atavistic, salutistic,<sup>121</sup> and even sportive sense likewise demonstrate a process of regression; they take as their intimate presupposition the need to discharge

themselves of the weight of unsustainable, or at least disturbing, spiritual tensions. That this return of modern man to nature, which in certain cases brings him even to a kind of infatuation, might be accompanied by a distension, by a reinvigoration, and almost to a biological galvanization — that therefore this revolution might appear as positive and desirable on the large scale to those for whom a species of animal husbandry exhausts the essence of human development — all of this is comprehensible, but does not in the least touch the core of the matter. Delusions might emerge here only if one agrees not to consider man on the basis of the values of personality, but on the basis of his “nerves” and his physical organism, both the one and the other which are more or less ruined in the life of modern cities, and needful of reintegration and biological compensations. This, in many cases, is however only the most exterior side of a process which has also its internal, subtle counterpart, in connection to which we need modify nothing in what we have just said. And everything becomes extremely visible when we consider the human type who takes form on the modern naturalistic-sportive direction: this is an indisputably primitivistic and regressed type, as virile and athletic in his body as he is eunuch and empty in spirit.<sup>122</sup>

If the Enlightenment reclamation of “natural right,” according to what has already been said, represents a primitivism, the Encyclopedist myth of the “noble savage” was the precursor of another kind of primitivism, the moment one no longer relied on vague notions of these savages, but began to study them close up. The new myth which was born of this is that savage peoples are “primitive” peoples, that is, the subsisting remnants of humanity as it was originally. They are therefore our ancestors, remaining, thanks to special circumstances, in an almost pure state.

As a matter of fact, the progressivist myth often intervened here: the civilized humanity of today has supposedly “evolved” from that primitive state. But this is not always the accepted way of thinking, especially since it has been verified, thanks to the magisterial works of Durkheim and Lévy-Bruhl, that “primitive” mentality and modern, or “civilized” mentality do not represent two “evolutionary degrees,” but are two essentially heterogeneous mentalities, each irreducible to the other.

The truth of the matter corresponds however neither to the one point of view nor to the other, and, once again, after De Maistre, it is Guénon who has contributed to shedding some real light on the question. But as biological race and as civilization, the savages, the greater part of the time, are twilight vestiges of cycles of a humanity which is so ancient, that we have often lost even the name and the memory of it. Thus they do not represent the beginning, but the end of a cycle; not youth, but extreme senility. They are the last degenerated offshoots, and so are precisely the contrary of “primitives” in the sense of original peoples.

As for the relation between the *true* original humanity and the not yet “evolved,” but normal, humanity, these show a much higher degree of continuity than might be easily believed. We understand by normal humanity that humanity corresponding to the great traditional civilizations, which even in historical times, both in their sensibility and in their conception of the world and of institutions, conserve the legacy of the vanished world of the origins.

Since things stand in this way, anyone can see the consequences deriving from taking one’s bearings by supposed primitives, as by the ancestors of, we shall not say a superior, but even simply a normal, humanity. Here we leave aside that which derives from primitivism in the sphere of a certain kind of modern art, which in some cases, especially in music and dance, has even had vast collective repercussions; we leave aside also certain consequences of a politico-social order (in the United States, there are those who seriously think that the influence of blacks has had an action of revival on the race and civilization of that continent, to such an extent that they have fought for so-called “integrationism” and against the “racism” of the Whites).<sup>123</sup> We will rather bring attention to certain contemporary currents and schools, emphasizing for example that without these primitivistic superstitions the ground itself would be lacking for such aberrant interpretations as those undertaken by Freud in his book *Totem and Taboo*, or also in *Group Psychology and Analysis of the Ego*. One knows indeed what is the sense of such interpretations: there is first the idea of Darwin, that the so-called “primordial herd” represents the original form of human association; then there is the conviction that certain forms of savage life, themselves deformed by way of sexualistic psychoanalytic interpretation, represent the primary heredity that every person is supposed to carry within



himself, and that it alone furnishes the explanatory principle for collective groupings.<sup>124</sup>

The so-called “sociological” and “ethnological” interpretations of religions move along analogous lines, though not so low as these, which likewise resolve into a myopic reduction of the superior to the inferior, making wide use of a material which is every bit as spurious and degraded. This has extended itself to the domain of mythology and symbology. It is painful to see the contemporary researchers in this domain, who wish to distance themselves from the previous trivial naturalistic interpretations (myths and symbols as mere allegories of natural phenomena), but who do not know how to put their hands on the so-called ethnological material, composed for the most part of vestigial representatives of the traditions of the savages and of their folklore; and so they associate to it for example the theory of the “collective unconscious” (as happens in Jung), which itself sends one back to primitivistic and “vital” strata of the human being.

An example will show us the end to which such errors might lead. In one of its polemics, German neo-paganism accused the Catholic Church of being reducible, in its essence, to a community centered superstitiously on the figure of an omnipotent medicine man,<sup>125</sup> which is as much as to say, a sorcerer of the savages. With this, it meant to suggest that the pontifical idea and the doctrine of rite in Catholicism should be explained precisely as the surviving traces or the transpositions of the magical superstitions of the savages. This is exactly the contrary of the right approach. The right approach would indeed consist in grasping the meaning that given ideas conserve in certain superior traditions, in considering this meaning as their primary element and, commencing from it, in explaining which involutive processes have led us to arrive at the superstitions and the tenebrous psychism of the savages and of their medicine men.

Since we have mentioned the neo-paganism of the Germany of yesterday, it might be of aid to us to put our finger on a second case of primitivistic deviation, whose scope is unfortunately not enclosed in the field of theories. A certain Teutonic current has been induced to consider as the original Teutonic tradition a whole group of views and a climate which, apart from gratuitous additions, were characteristic only of a decadent phase in the primordial Nordic tradition, and which moreover had in relation to that tradition

precisely the sense of vestiges. We are speaking essentially of the *pathos* of the “twilight of the gods,” and the so-called “tragic heroism,” observable above all in the epic of Nibelungen and in certain fragments of the *Edda*, if these are taken in isolation. This is almost like a heroic will which knows of its defeat, but goes nonetheless to face it, feeling it as a destiny that it must assume and realize. Now, it would be interesting to see by what paths these views, deprived of light, passed into the collective subconscious of the Germany of yesterday, and how they contributed to its catastrophe, following their departure from the sphere of Teutonic rehearsals and their diffusion by means of Wagnerism. Indeed, there is no person, armed with refined sensibility, who did not sense this atmosphere of “twilight of the heroes”<sup>126</sup> and of a “tragic heroism” deprived of every way out, in many mass manifestations of National Socialism, as the dark omen of a fatal direction; it appeared in manifestations under the sign of a presumed reclamation of the Nordic-Teutonic idea, in which, however, an “ecstatic” process in the sense already given played an essential part. We have already indicated in another work<sup>127</sup> that even in its doctrinal sketches, that current of “paganism” succeeded in taking up and affirming only spurious and degraded elements; this was already a precious incentive for the sectarian polemic of Christian apologetics against the ancient traditional world. In that same work we have also demonstrated how the result was a mixture of naturalism and rationalism which recalls to no small extent precisely the Enlightenment myth of “Nature.” These same hybrid characteristics, moreover, have been evinced by a certain racism associated with neo-paganism, in which the qualitative and aristocratic concept of race has been degraded to something oscillating between modern scientific biologism and a collectivistic nationalistic myth. But this is not the place to linger on this topic, which we have already treated on other occasions.

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Up to now we have considered certain developments of the naturalistic myth which have resulted, from the point of view of the values of the personality, in a regressive crumbling.<sup>128</sup> Now we shall consider and follow another possibility, and that is the case of those who, once they have made the naturalistic myth their own, stop still,

affirm the personality and carry this affirmation to its extreme consequences.

Merejkowski has observed that the Western affirmation of Christianity in its renunciatory aspects, monastic and inimical to life, has brought about, in the end, as a reaction, the development of an immanentistic, humanistic and naturalistic tendency which is equally one-sided: in the West, man has ever become the center of attention and exaltation, the center and the criterion of every value has been shifted to him, and “life” and the here-and-now<sup>129</sup> have been glorified. Opposed to Christ, the Antichrist has thus arisen; the epoch of God-man has been supplanted by that of Man-god which culminates in the doctrine of the *Overman*. Regarding this doctrine, Merejkowski refers above all to Friedrich Nietzsche and to Fyodor Dostoevsky.<sup>130</sup>

This framework is precise, and the reference to these two authors is meet. Nietzsche above all should not be considered as an isolated thinker, but as a symbolic figure; in the various stages of his thought or, better say, of his experience, one might recognize the very stages of the path trodden by modern Occidental man, as well as the final sense of this path, which is not clearly perceived by the many.<sup>131</sup> So far as Dostoevsky goes, the ideas that he, a tragic and lacerated figure, projects onto the most significant characters of his novels have relation above all to that latter sense, and to that limit of the path of immanence.

We will here bring into relief only certain points of Nietzsche’s doctrine, which have direct relation with the issue we are dealing with. For a wider critique, we refer our reader to another of our works.<sup>132</sup>

Nietzsche presents himself as typically modern figure; that is, he presents himself as a strongly defined personality, but one completely deprived of the sense that personality itself is only the contingent expression of a superior principle. Thus a kind of closed circuit was realized in him: his strength accumulated, differentiated, exhausted itself, and sought desperately some liberation. Nietzsche effectively had no comprehension of the great spiritual traditions of the past. We are not referring here to his violent anti-Christian polemic, in part justified, and explicable in terms of that reaction which we have discussed. But also the deeper, metaphysical side of

the classic traditions, for which he even had great interest, escaped him, not to speak of certain of his evaluations, such as of Buddhism. Nietzsche incarnates therefore the type of those who wish to be “free” as human individuals, and have let themselves get to the bottom of this vocation of theirs. After he has spoken to the Hermetic saint, the Nietzschean Zarathustra, distancing himself, says: “Could it be possible? This old saint in the forest has not heard anything of this, that *God is dead!*”<sup>133</sup> One could not indicate in a more evocative way the point of departure.

*The Birth of Tragedy* is one of Nietzsche’s very first works, and yet it contains already the essence of all the successive developments of his experience. Nietzsche at that point took as his basis the Schopenhauerian conception of the world. Schopenhauer had asserted that the deepest substance of the world is “will,” *der Wille*. In truth, he should have spoken of “desire,” because the force in question is a blind, yearning, insatiable will, having necessity as its law. This yearning has nothing outside of itself, it has therefore only itself as its proper object; it feeds, so to speak, on itself, and thus is affected by a fundamental rending and contradiction. Here one can recognize clearly enough a philosophical transcription of the traditional notions which we have already recalled, above all that of *samsâra* and the *appetitus primigenius*.<sup>134</sup> Except that this is not conceived of as a law valid uniquely for one mode of being, for one state, for one “region” of the world, but rather as a universal principle. However, as is known, Schopenhauer falls into contradiction with himself the moment he conceives for this yearning the possibility of negating, of overcoming itself. Moreover, only at this point, that is with reference to this possibility, can one speak of “will” in the proper sense, as a faculty of the human personality. But then, to be consistent, one should not put the Schopenhauerian *Wille* as the beginning, but rather a principle one and double at the same time, as for instance “nature that enjoys itself and nature that dominates itself,” to use the formula of an ancient Hermetic papyrus.

In Nietzsche, the problem presents itself thus: on one hand there is the clear, unmitigated vision of the world as “will” in the Schopenhauerian sense, thus as something fundamentally irrational, tragic, and contradictory. On the other hand, there is man as “will,” now in the proper sense, that is as a force which might posit values

and choose a way. But what are the ways that might be chosen? There are but two: to love and to will the world despite everything, or else to evade, discharging an intolerable tension by becoming “pure eye,” enclosing oneself in a world of forms and of aesthetic contemplation, almost as in a mirage and in a hypnosis which distracts from oneself and makes one forget the tragic and irrational world.

Already in *The Birth of Tragedy*, the description of the two ways, derived from the ancient Hellenic world, betrays a misunderstanding and the limit of the entire Nietzschean conception. The first way, that of identifying oneself with the irrational, and even willing it up to its extremest forms, “tragically,” is called the way of *Dionysus*. It is the essence of that which Nietzsche will later call “keeping faith with the Earth.”<sup>135</sup> The second way, that of contemplative evasion in the world of pure forms, is called the way of *Apollo*.<sup>136</sup> This constitutes a total disregard of the essence of ancient Apollonism and, in part, also that of ancient Dionysianism. Indeed, so far as Dionysianism is concerned, it was aware also of something more than the drunken and paroxysmal identification with the naked forces of life; it was aware also of the solutions of liberation, of the critical points in which, to use the terminology of Simmel, the “*Mehr-Leben*,” living “Dionysically,” changes polarity and brings one to something more than mere life, to a “*Mehr-als-Leben*” and therefore to something supernatural and incorruptible. — So far as Apollo goes, on the other hand, apart from the aestheticizing assumptions proper above all to the figurative arts, his original cult takes on precisely to the contrary of evasion: Apollo is the Hyperborean god of immutable light, of spiritual virility, of a “solar” force, central and without a twilight. And if Nietzsche had had any suspicion of what the Hyperborean tradition was, the scales would have fallen from his eyes and he would have seen that which should truly be considered as “overman.”

Returning to the views of Nietzsche, the Dionysian man does not lose himself in identification. And in Nietzsche’s later works it can clearly be seen that the center shifts ever more from “will” in the Schopenhauerian sense to will as autonomous power which manifests itself as pure determination, as “will to value” and, finally, as “power.”



It is here that the net slowly begins to close about Nietzsche. We have a double development. On the one hand there is the systematic destruction of the world of evasion, understood now not only as that of “Apollonism,” but, in general, as that of every “idol,” above all of the moralistic idols, of “good” and of “evil,” of the rationalistic and spiritualistic myths, going so far as to include even the world of faith and of religion. In short, there is the demolition of everything which could serve, or could have served, as an exterior support to will and to the personality, which could have kept it on its feet through the reference to an other and to values or laws supposed absolute. Here, in Nietzsche, almost as in an ontogenetic recapitulation of phylogeny,<sup>137</sup> we find again the essential stages of Western “critical thought,” up until its extreme conclusion, complete nihilism. And the original tragic conception is reconfirmed, in the sense that the final result is the vision of the world as a whole complex of forces which, at bottom, have no object, but rotate so to speak around themselves without a purpose and without a sense.

The other side of this development is the aforementioned motif of a *sui generis* ascesis of the will, which seems to be understood, by Nietzsche, as a force which can, indeed *must* resist itself, must say “no” to itself and precisely in this to feel and to realize its highest power. The two points then, in a certain way, intersect, because the capacity to take on the aforementioned nihilistic truth without batting an eye, to resist and to keep oneself on one’s feet in a world deprived of every meaning, no longer veiled by the irrationalism of ends and values — and not only this, but the capacity to say “yes” to this world, to affirm “It is precisely this that I want” — this constitutes the extreme proof of pure will.

But this is also a turning point. The concept of “value” as meaning, taste of life, remains despite everything the center of the Nietzschean experience. And if all these objective values vanish and show themselves to be fallacious, there is only one solution: to conceive of one’s own pure will as *legislator*, as the creator of values and giver of sense to life. It has with reason been noted that, despite every appearance, Nietzsche the “immoralist” does nothing other than carry to the depths the current of so-called absolute, or formal, or autonomous morality. The sole anchor which remains is the principle of Kant’s “categorical imperative” itself, detached from every affective and sensible element, from every “heteronomous” and

“eudaimonistic” element; save that, in Nietzsche, this principle is truly “pure,” it avoids that deception through which Kant, at the point of formulating a concrete norm, let the humanitarian views of the current morality slip in unseen.<sup>138</sup> Nietzsche created above all a series of theories and points of view for overcoming these moralities one after the other, and thus for confirming the sovereignty and the unconditionality of the will.

But this constant going forward, this burning behind oneself, one by one, all one’s bridges and ships, finds its limits in the problem: How can a new “table of values” really be defined? What object will the pure legislative will adopt to form, from a *chaos*, a *cosmos*? It is here that, in the late Nietzsche, we find the false biological turn. In searching for an anchor he submitted to the myth of “nature” and precisely according to those biologico-evolutionistic and selectionistic undertones proper to his epoch. “Keeping faith with the Earth,” “not evading,” favored this deviation: Nietzsche believed that in the world deserted by values and gods, the single real thing, the only thing which does not lie, is life as biology. Hence the new valuation: all that which affirms, confirms, and exalts life is good, is beautiful, is just; all that which humiliates and negates it is bad, is decadence. The supreme manifestation of life is *the will to power*. The incarnation of the highest will to power is the *overman*. The overman in *Zarathustra* was presented as an end goal, as the term of an evolution, a term which will justify humanity and give a sense to it and to the world. After the awareness that “God is dead,” the epoch of affirmation of the world and of life begins, which gravitates toward the coming of the overman. And present-day humanity is not justified save as it affirms the gospel that “Man is something which must be overcome,” and prepares the way for the coming of the overman.

And here the circle is closed. What this overman might be, positively speaking, remains quite confused in Nietzsche. In his middle period he had taken as his paradigm this or that despotic and dominating figure of the past, above all in the times of the Renaissance. But these are secondary and contingent references. The “biological” myth itself should not be taken very seriously; it is a superstructure, and nothing can lead one further into deception than the unhappy reference to the “magnificent beasts of prey.” For Nietzsche, the way of the overman is, at bottom, the contrary to any



given naturalistic immediacy. Let us repeat it, it is the way of a continual, inexorable overcoming of the self, of a commanding of the self, of a disdain, not only pleasure, but happiness itself, of knowing how to say no even when an enormous force in us would like to say yes. The overman might do anything, open himself to every kind of passion; but the passions in him are no longer “passions,” they are as mighty chained beasts which leap up and are affirmed only when he wishes. The intimate essence of the overman might rather be defined as *an ascesis for ascesis’ sake, as an extreme quintessential accumulation of the will to power understood as a value and an end in itself*. But whenever this direction is inflexibly maintained and, along with it, one “keeps faith with the Earth” — which is to say, whenever the conditionalities proper to the human person remain firmly in place — this saturation might have as its effect a short circuit, because the “children of the Earth” can tolerate only a limited potential charge. Merejkowski, in this connection, has offered a felicitous image: if those beings who, leap after leap, having reached a peak, wish to carry themselves beyond it *without knowing how to fly*, should they advance further they will plummet into the chasm that gapes beyond.

A great deal of foolishness has been uttered on the illness and the end of Nietzsche. It has even been supposed that his pathological state underpins his experiences and his conceptions, when if anything the contrary is true.<sup>139</sup> One must not forget that doctrine was Nietzsche’s life, and that if his exterior existence shows nothing of the antics of a theatrical overman, his interior life was entirely composed of overcomings, of continual, quintessential affirmation, of pure will. In reality, Nietzsche’s end should be compared with the end or the tragedy of various others, some known to the public, as Weininger, Michelstaedter, perhaps also Hölderlin, others more or less unknown, who have trodden an analogous path. For all of these men one might use the expression of *damned Saints*. They are the Western exponents precisely of “ascesis for ascesis’ sake,” which the traditional teaching considered to be a great spiritual danger, a way that produces neither Free men nor Freed men, but often only chained titans or “the possessed.”

*The Possessed*<sup>140</sup> is actually the title of a novel of Dostoevsky, in which ideas are to be found that act as the counterparts to the Nietzschean ones. There is an element visible in Dostoevsky however

which in Nietzsche betrays itself almost only in its effects; namely, one sees more clearly that the will to absorb man into something *supernatural* is the producer of crisis. But the intimate force which renders Nietzsche's "integral nihilism" and "asceticism for asceticism's sake" possible should not be conceived in a different manner; it is the effort to insert something which, at bottom, "is not of this Earth."

The views of Dostoevsky that here interest us are contained in the creed of Kirillov, one of the principle characters of *The Possessed*. The point of departure, which confirms what we have just said, is Kirillov's affirmation that "man cannot exist without God." — We will then say: a "God" must exist. But Kirillov adheres to the persuasion that God does not exist and cannot exist. Then, to be able to keep himself on his feet, there remains only a single way: *man must discover that he himself is God*. The history of humanity is thus divided into two epochs. The first includes a humanity which — as Nietzsche would say — does not yet know that "God is dead," and which acts, thinks, creates, fights only to numb itself, to suffocate the presentiment of this awareness and to continue living. In Nietzschean terms, this would be the pre-nihilistic world wherein live the "idols," "good" and "evil" and the various mirages of Apollinism. The second epoch commences with the awareness of the nonexistence of God and with the assumption of divinity on the part of man, in a development through which he must become another being, spiritually and physically. These are the very horizons of the "overman."

Man does not yet dare to know that he is God. For this reason he is unhappy. He is afraid of assuming the heredity of the "murdered God." And he is not God only because he is afraid. Fear, and with it pain, is that which condemns him to misery and to unhappiness. When he overcomes fear and pain, all roads will open to him. The point of departure is to demonstrate to oneself the supreme attribute of divinity, of free will. Man can do this when his "yes" and his "no" do not concern a particular sector of life, but life taken in its totality. By saying "no" to all of life, killing oneself, he can demonstrate to himself "his new terrible liberty," he can demonstrate that God does not exist and that he himself is God. Kirillov performs this species of metaphysical suicide to seal his doctrine and to open the way to the new man, to Man-God.

This act of a character in a novel, naturally, has but a symbolic meaning. However, one cannot fail to see in it an extreme, logical consequence of the life of “asceticism for asceticism’s sake,” the final self-overcoming of man as the quintessential will to power; and one can establish an intimate relationship between this symbol and the tragedy, or the collapse, of all those that we have called “damned Saints.”

In Dostoevsky, one might say that the door is ajar, but not more than ajar. He grasped only flashings of a higher truth, which immediately were obfuscated by his “humanistic” assumption. This is the point to which we must turn our principal argument.

The doctrine of the overman, formulated essentially on a cerebral plane, has not been translated into a “spiritualistic” practice. One must nonetheless bear in mind that it indicates, as has been said, a fatal developmental direction for the Western man who “does not evade,” nor sets off down some regressive path. Thus we must keep this doctrine before us in all its dangers. The “overman” constitutes a limit, something like walking on the razor’s edge. At the highest vertex of “asceticism for asceticism’s sake,” it takes almost nothing at all to transform the “overman” into one of the *possessed*, at which point a superior human type becomes a dangerous instrument of obscure forces. This danger is greatest at that point where man, made of pure but untransfigured will, exits from a kind of paralysis and acts. And this action, practically and technically, is for him a species of necessity; in the world of the “overman” certain *discharges* are necessary under the form of actions “beyond good and evil” and of experiences of an extreme intensity, both of which might give rise to as many *conjurations*. To analyze this order of things would lead us rather distant — in part, we will return to it in the next chapter when we speak of the danger of certain forms of magic. Contacts with the supersensible and with the “spiritual” might be established on the path of the “overman,” even without wishing it and without realizing it, because one proceeds along the limit which separates that which is individual and human from that which is no longer individual and human. As opposed to the cases which we will mention, and also to what happens in certain special methods of development,<sup>141</sup> here there is also the exacerbating circumstance that the “overman” by hypothesis knows nothing of the supersensible, has therefore no true

defense before it, is left to himself, “without excuses” as Sartre would say, for which he truly is “living dangerously.”

Merejkowski, developing the schema already indicated in a quasi-Hegelian sense, sees the solution of the problem in the synthesis and in the reciprocal integration of symbols of the two epochs, that is, in an encounter of Man-God with God-Man. It is certain that there is only a single way out: *to open a path up to transcendence*, to recognize that the supernatural order is the single order in which the true ideal of the overman can be realized. This is the only way of advancing, continuing the ascesis, rather than falling into the precipice, rather than splitting apart or collapsing, after having reached the last peak with the strength of the human personality alone. And then the “overman” will not be the extreme limit and the extreme empowering of the “human” species, but will be of another nature, a different species, a “*no longer man.*” The point of separation is not the suicide of Kirillov, but that which the traditional teaching has conceived of as “initiatory death.” There is a single solution to the tragedy of the titan, to the overcoming of possession, to the true realization of the precept that “man is something that must be overcome”; and this is the path of the traditional initiations. Then certain positions proper to overmanism will also lose their blasphemous tint, they will be rectified and they will bring one back to universal teachings of a higher wisdom.<sup>142</sup>

In closing, we will make several observations of a practical order. It might be said that within the current of the “overman” the doctrine of will and of ascesis acts as an oar and gives counterweight to the evasionistic, mediumistic and mystical direction of the larger part of contemporary spiritualism. However, those who, having journeyed roads analogous to that of the “overman,” aspire to undertake the leap beyond the profane order, must realize that, as predisposition, they find themselves almost always in a disadvantaged situation with respect to any effective realization of the supernatural. They have cultivated an exaggerated, closed sensation of their personality. Moreover, whoever has worked the catharsis proper to the destructive critique of every “idol” up to the point of integral nihilism is, in general, an intellectual, and has his center in abstract thought; this almost always has as its consequence an atrophy or a neutralization of subtler faculties which are required for starting off toward the supersensible. The faculty of thinking not in concepts or

in words, but by forming and animating plastic images, is particularly stricken. And this too is a serious disadvantage.

On the occasion of our critique of anthroposophy we said that one must not suffer any illusions regarding “individual initiation.” Save as there is present a special, privileged disposition owing to the subsistence of a sensibility or of a not completely obstructed memory of the human limit, the individual by his strength alone cannot follow the initiatic path beyond a certain point. Thus, while certain disciplines indicated by anthroposophy and by similar such groups might have a positive side wherever they reinforce the personality and self-consciousness, and limit every determination on the part of the external world and of instinctuality, yet they can present the dangers of “asceticism for asceticism’s sake” when they are exaggerated and one does not succeed in “breaking through.” Here there appears once more the danger of circuits deprived of transformations, in which one accumulates too great a potential. The contradictory facility with which, through the aforementioned disciplines, many “occult disciples” become the victims of hallucinations and of suggestions and transform into fanatics of this or that “spiritualism,” deprived of every critical discernment, is to be explained on this basis, and brings us to the same situation by which, on a different plane, the overman might give place to the possessed.

*At a certain point those disciplines and the development conducted through the forces of the individual alone must be grafted onto influences of another order.* Only then does there arise a resolution to tension, and it is then that the current will proceed in a truly ascending direction. The circumstances in which such a vivifying, integrative, and “anagogic” graft might occur are extremely divers. The most regular case would be to enter into contact with qualified representatives of an authentic initiatic tradition. But today this is not easy, given that the larger part of the spiritual centers have “withdrawn,” to let Western man go whither he will, without measuring out his chain to him. In this connection, as the theosophists would say, the man of today has to come to terms with a kind of collective *karma*.

To conclude: since we have spoken of “ascetics of evil,” whoever has familiarity with the family feuds among the various lodges and spiritualistic sects, whoever knows how often these go about launching accusations against one another of “black magic,” might

well ask: Could this be an extension of “overmanism”? An “overmanism” extended into the supersensible?

Here we must not fall into confusions. With respect to “spiritualism,” above all theosophistic “spiritualism,” there is a most visible tendency to stigmatize as “black magic” every attitude which diverges from an image of altruism and humanitarianism, and we have seen how Steiner goes so far as to call the “black path,” that of any initiate who does not renounce *nirvâna* so as to put himself at the service of the “evolution of the world and of humanity.” These are, naturally, nothing but fantasies, and in general, one must clarify that whatever belongs to the initiatic order by definition — and this order defines itself by that which stands beyond the individual and the human — knows neither “egoism” nor “altruism,” neither “good” nor “evil” in the current sense.

Can one therefore speak of “ascetics of evil”? One can, but not in the moralistic sense. The reign of “evil” corresponds, metaphysically, to that which Guénon has called *counter-initiation*. On the lowest plane, there are certain influences which we have already referred to as “nether,” influences which, by way of their own nature, act destructively on the entirety of form and personality. But, higher up, there are intelligent forces, whose goal is to deviate, pervert, or invert every tendency of man to reconnect himself with the true supernatural. This is an order that one might call “diabolic” and, in its limiting case, *Satanic*. Nor should it be conceived abstractly, but rather in relation to real beings, sometimes also to determined centers and to a kind of occult association. Even this is a plane which is not simply human; and the concept of the “ascetics of evil” is defined precisely with respect to it, in determinate cases. However, we are speaking of an order of things which is too “special” to be spoken of here, beyond the mention we have just made of it.<sup>143</sup>

## IX

# Satanism

RATHER THAN THIS, by descending a step and keeping ourselves more closely to the material which is the object of the present book, we might examine that Satanism which represents, so to speak, the extreme point of the modern tendencies toward the supernatural, with possible convergences in involuntary evocations of which we have spoken at the end of the sixth chapter of the present work. It can be said that Satan and Satanism today are in fashion, exercising a singular fascination. They have furnished the material for various writings, novels, film, even a particular category of “graphic novels.” On the other hand there are groups which openly profess themselves “Satanic” and which claim to practice black magic: this is a special case in the pullulation of the circles of men who go hunting for the sensational and the occult, finding in the “Satanic” a more exciting ingredient for their experiences. After having given just now sufficient points of reference for what regards a specialized domain, as for instance that of counter-initiation, we see how to orient ourselves before this modern “Satanism,” with its widespread, peripheral, and often ephemeral character.

In the interests of rigor, it would be necessary to commence from the definition of the concept itself of the “Satanic.” In our cultural area, Satan has had in the first place the significance of “adversary” (which, however, should be rendered, more in line with its etymology, in the word *diabolus*) and of “the Prince of Evil” (the Evil One). But the genealogy, if one might call it such, of Satan, is complex. The concept of Satan and of the principle of evil finds place only in a religion which has as its vertex a “moralized” God, that is a



God defined solely by everything which men hold to be good, luminous, creative, providential. Then whatever does not present such a character (and which, however, one must nonetheless acknowledge when considering various aspects of reality and of nature) might reunite, materializing and personalizing itself in an anti-God, precisely in the devil. However, in a metaphysical conception of the Principle, this dualism (which has had its clearest expression in the ancient Persian religion, in Mazdaism, with Ahriman opposed to Ahura Mazda) does not represent the extreme case. The supreme Principle dominates the “moralized” god, embraces also “the other half,” both poles, manifesting itself both in the luminous and in the tenebrous, both in the creative and in the destructive, for which the Western and Christian concept of Satan gives place to that of another face of God. If by referring to such a vaster conception or theology, one defines Satan only as a destructive force, he would lose his tenebrous character, and would fall instead within a “dialectic of the divine.”<sup>144</sup> As an example one might adduce the Hinduistic conception of the Trimurti, the triple face of divinity, from which is derived a cult of God as much a creator and conserver of the universe (Brahmâ and Vishnu) as a destroyer (Shiva). For which it is only with specific reservations that one might hold the characterization of the Satanic or of the diabolical to the terms of a destructive force alone. It is necessary to add “wickedness.”

In the margins of the Islamic and Persian world there existed a sect of “worshippers of the devil,” the sect of the Yezidi. Here we find a different view, one visibly affected by the theology of certain currents of ancient Christian gnosticism. The antithesis gives place to a hierarchical stratification. “God” is recognized, but relegated to an absolute transcendence. It is Satan who governs this world, a god of a lower order; and whoever lives in the world and pursues mundane ends, whoever desires success and happiness in the world, must turn, not to that detached divinity, but “to the competent authority,” precisely to the devil, *princeps huius mundi*,<sup>145</sup> who does not have particular negative connotations. The Yezidi have a cult and rites about which little is known, as they have been kept secret; and naturally, a shadowy character has been attributed to them. We will notice certain correspondences of this view of the Yezidi with certain fanciful forms of Satanism of our days.

The true characterization of Satanism is obtained by referring, not to the idea of “evil” — this being a generic term, with variable content due to its sociological and historical conditionality — but rather to *a pleasure in perversion as such*, to the impulse, not so much to destroy as to contaminate, with blasphemy and sacrilegious outrage. Thus so-called black magic and sorcery are not necessarily “Satanic”; they might be practices for the achievement of ends which are adjudged morally wicked by a given society, and the incidence of “Satanism” can only regard forces activated toward that end.

Now, that which interests us is not the operative plane, but that of evocations and of lived experience. It seems that there still exist, especially in Scotland, witches,<sup>146</sup> that is, women dedicated to magic and to enchantments, who moreover do not correspond to the repellent image of the old Medieval witches, since they might also be young and comely. One might recognize an authenticity to that which is attributed to them, their practices being connected to traditions and to consecrations transmitted through the generations. The situation is otherwise for those persons who in an approximate way today take up certain rituals extempore, without any kind of regular transmission and with the “Satanic” only as a spicy addition. Thus in the northern part of the state of New York there once existed a group called “WITCH” (a word which in and of itself does not necessarily have the repellent sense we have just mentioned) but the letters of which act as the initials of nothing less than *Women’s International Terrorist Conspiracy from Hell*. Other sparse groups are known which celebrate animal sacrifices for magical ends, using the blood of the victims in special ways. Now, despite the spurious and often grotesque character of all this, it cannot be excluded that sometimes these practitioners arrive at experiences which permit the incorporation of “nether” and “diabolical” forces. One is induced to think as much, for example, for a case which in the period of this writing has aroused much uproar, namely, the murder of the actress Sharon Tate and of other persons at the hands of the “family” of Charles Manson. This Manson claimed sometimes to be “god,” other times “the devil.” Sex and drugs seem to have played a role in the religion of his “family,” and the authors of that crime (among whom were to be found three young women who seem to have called themselves also “the slaves of Satan”) were unable to give any kind of sensible justification for it (the sociological motive, that acts of the

kind are “protest” against the system of a society which judges and controls, appears to be quite insignificant); it would seem they attributed to it a ritual character. All of this effectively leaves one to suspect a substrate of possession, owing to those involuntary conjurations of which we have already spoken.

This bears the same characteristics as a phenomenon which has had its greatest historical expression in Marshal Gilles de Rais. Gilles de Rais had fought alongside Joan of Arc without having ever given any sign of abnormality; all at once he transformed into a monster without peer, who enjoyed shadowy and savage ecstasies, connected, by his own admission, with supernatural apparitions, in the sadistic contamination and the slaughtering of innocent children without number. The phenomenon of an abrupt demonic invasion in him seems to be confirmed by his contrition, a species of transformation in the very semblance of Gilles de Rais, before his execution; almost as if the forces that had taken possession of him had abandoned him.

If, as we have said, the character of blasphemy, of sacrilege, of contamination, and not “evil” in general and destruction, is essential to the Satanic, certain of the so-called black masses enter in line with it, to the degree that they consist of a blasphemous parody of the Catholic ritual, with upside-down crosses, black candles, prayers spoken in reverse, desecrated hosts, consecrations to the “devil” and so forth — but not to the degree that they consist rather of a distorted and grotesque reclamation of certain pre-Christian ceremonies. There is moreover much talk today about these black masses, predominately with sex as an important ingredient, since it is supposedly a tradition that in these black masses, a young woman, completely nude, serves as acolyte, altar, or host.

While it is doubtlessly true that in many cases the diabolic and even mystical apparatus serves only as a pretext for sexuality, there are yet two points which should be considered. The first is the role that sex and the orgasm might have in processes of conjuration, even involuntary ones; sex is the “greatest magical force in nature” which man has at his disposal, beyond any profane and libertine use of it. The second point regards a particular historical circumstance. Speaking of the genesis of the Western concept of Satan, we have said that this concept condensed the entire rejection of the conception of the moralized God. Now, in this conception of Christianity, a strong component of “sexophobia” was present; sex

was stigmatized as something sinful, as the enemy of the spirit and of the sacred; thus it passed automatically into the “other half,” it was associated with the diabolic, with the “enemy,” with the “Great Tempter.” It was natural, therefore, that, both in the Sabbath, and in other real ceremonies or ceremonies with the character of “psychodramas,” the orgiastic unleashing of sex should accompany Satanism. But in the present climate of sexual liberty and of “sexual revolution,” this circumstance being by now to a large extent nonexistent, there is the danger that Satanism too often acts merely as a bit of piquancy for whomever essentially has sex in mind, and who, if anything, seeks an ingredient for the enjoyment of certain intenser sensations.

The distances to which contemporary Satanism might go is indicated by the case of the “Church of Satan,” founded in California by Anton Szandor LaVey, on the last night of April 1966, which is the famous Walpurgisnacht, sacred to the ancient ceremonies of the Sabbath.<sup>147</sup> There is something amusing in the fact that in the United States, this Church, which has its baptisms, its marriages, and its obsequies, all celebrated under the sign of “Satan,” has been recognized by the authorities; that its grand priest, LaVey, has had himself photographed together with his faithful, not at all demonic consort and his dear offspring, precisely as a good bourgeois family; and that the press was allowed to attend the rites (!) in which, apart from various tedious discourses and a certain ceremony, the single scandalous point (which is moreover truly tame in the epoch of those stripteases<sup>148</sup> which have become almost the common fare of consumption), is a naked woman on the “Satanic” alter, “the focal point on which one concentrates one’s attention during the ceremonies” — however, “not in an immodest position,” as the journalist reports — because the woman is supposedly “the natural passive receptacle, and represents Mother Earth”:<sup>149</sup> all of which is vaguely reminiscent of the ancient “Mysteries of the Woman,” in which moreover there was quite little of the specifically Satanic.

In other respects, one might partially rediscover in this “Satanism” the conception of the Yezidi, which we have indicated, of the devil as the competent authority for things in this world, associated however with a species of rather banal paganism. Satan is the “adversary,” not in the cosmic realm (as the enemy of God or

anti-God) but simply in the moral realm: he is the god of a religion of the flesh and of Life, opposed “to all the religions which humiliate and condemn the natural instincts of man.” Satanism reduces itself therefore to affirming and consecrating everything which such religions consider as sin: its gospel is to “make the most of life, here and now! There is no heaven nor hell, except here on Earth. Say unto thine heart, ‘I am my own redeemer.’”<sup>150</sup> Here a Darwinism or a Nietzscheanism of the worst kind is added: “Blessed are the strong, for they shall possess the earth — Cursed are the weak, for they shall inherit the yoke!” One reads, in the *Satanic Bible*: “I am a Satanist! Bow down, for I am the highest embodiment of human life.” And here is a sample of its invocations: “In the name of Satan, the Ruler of the earth, the King of the world, I command the forces of darkness to bestow their Infernal power upon me! Open wide the gates of Hell and come forth from the abyss to greet me as your brother (sister) and friend!”<sup>151</sup>

There is the danger, however, that all of this reduces to words alone; for, if one seeks a doctrine which limits itself to exalting the “natural human instincts” and to encouraging their satisfaction, a religion of Life and of the flesh, of strength and of immanence without anything precisely perverse and blasphemous (apart from the negation of the Christian morality) it would suffice to take one’s bearings by the worst Nietzsche or by Nietzsche’s anti-Christian polemic, or even by the ideas of H. D. Lawrence, without bothering “Satan” at all, and without this entire Satanic theatricality; it would suffice to proclaim an atheism and a “paganism” (in the most profane sense of this word). Not Satanism, but precisely a neo-paganism, without any substrate of transcendence and of transfiguration, would be the right and honest name for this Gospel of LaVey.

The suggestion that Satan is “a dark and hidden force which operates in processes for which science and religion do not give an explanation,” is here not developed in the least. There is no talk of experiences, even if only in the sense of obscure ecstasies. One keeps to the same populist line as those tales of characters who turn to the “devil” and make a bargain with him to obtain the satisfaction of their desires or to destroy their enemies. Regarding the operative rites employed in the “Church of Satan” (in which there appear also formulae of a hypothetical “tongue of Enoch” transmitted by “an

unknown hand”), we should be extremely cautious before asserting that they might have some effective evocative power. It must not be excluded however that, despite everything, something “is moved” when strong charges of emotion and suggestion are activated.

To conclude, an orientation can be furnished for this general scheme. Every tradition corresponds to a process, by way of which a form is impressed on something inform. This material subsists within the form and beneath the form. It is possible to activate it, to liberate it, to make it emerge and to reaffirm it by destroying the order of the traditional forms. This is the essence of demonic evocations, voluntary and involuntary. There is, however, an alternative: that offered by a superordinate use of the substrate and of its liberation, by which *that standing beneath form might be used to achieve that standing above form*, that is, a true transcendence. But this possibility falls within the initiatic sphere; it forms part also of the Tantric *vâmâcâra*, of the so-called “Left-Hand Path,” the hazard of which is however easy to perceive, for anyone who does not possess an exceptional qualification, a non-equivocal interior orientation, and, as some maintain, even a “protective chrism.”

To close this summary overview of “Satanism,” we will include a word on Aleister Crowley, also as a way of passing to the material which we will treat in the next chapter. Crowley was a man whose personality certainly towers over those figures we have so far considered. If here we associate him with the line of Satanism, it is because he himself invites us to do so. Indeed, he gave himself the title of “the Great Beast 666” who is the Antichrist of the *Apocalypse*, while to the woman that he by and by selected he used to give the title of the “Scarlet Woman” — the name of the figure who, also in the Johannine *Apocalypse*, is the “Great Whore” associated to the “Beast.” The status of “the most perverse man of England,” granted him by a judge in London in relation to a certain judiciary case, must have pleased him exceedingly, such was his taste in scandal; indeed, in line with that taste, he did not eschew masks and mystifications of every kind.

Invocations used in ceremonies presided over by Crowley, of the following kind:

*Thou spiritual Sun! Satan! Thou eye, thou lust. Cry aloud! Cry aloud! Whirl the wheel, O my Father, O Satan, O Sun!*



... would seem to confirm his Satanism without a doubt, though not without other admixtures (consider the reference to the “spiritual Sun”). There is however reason to believe that Crowley did not put Satan in the place of God, given the high consideration he held for traditions, such as the Kabbala, which venerate a divinity, albeit one metaphysically and not religiously conceived. Ultimately, as in the other cases considered, Crowley’s ostentatious Satanism is defined only in terms of an antithesis to Christianity as a doctrine which condemns the senses and the integral affirmation of man — affirmation here, however, not with a naturalistic substrate, but rather an initiatic and “magical” one. If dangerous forces were conjured, it seems that in the specific case of Crowley, the aforementioned conditions to face such experiences were present, in the first place because Crowley had an exceptional personality and was predisposed in a natural way to contact with the supersensible (apart from his possessing a particular “magnetism”), in the second place for his connection with very serious organizations of an initiatic character. We are referring, in the first place, to the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn, of which Crowley was a member, even if later he broke off, constituting the Ordo Templi Orientis (the O.T.O., with a name reminiscent of the Templars, and even reviving the Templar’s Baphomet). However, this Order used many of the magical rituals of the Golden Dawn, which were thought to communicate with the so-called “Secret Masters” and with specific entities or “intelligences.” Crowley, too, aimed at this, to such an extent that he would attribute the genesis of the *Liber Legis*, a compendium of his doctrines, to an entity which he evoked in Cairo, Aiwass, supposedly a manifestation of the Egyptian Hoor-Paar-Kraat, the “Lord of Silence.” There is reason to believe that, on the whole, this cannot entirely be reduced to fantasies; certain contacts between Crowley and a mysterious supersensible world were evidently real.

This is not the place to linger on the life of Crowley, which was extremely eventful and prestigious, because, beyond cultivating magic (as he put it, “I rehabilitated magic and I determined it in the course of my own life”), he was a poet, painter, mountaineer (who attempted, among other things, the highest peaks of the Himalaya, K2 and Kinchijunga), and an experimenter of drugs (he even wrote a *Diary of a Drug Fiend*, published in 1922).<sup>152</sup> Here we will limit



ourselves to briefly indicating his doctrines and his techniques. In the *Liber Legis*, we can disregard the anti-Christian and paganistic polemic, which is *de rigueur* in books of such a tendency. Here one reads, among other things (II, 22): “Be strong, o man! lust, enjoy all things of sense and rapture: fear not that any God shall deny thee for this.” But, concretely speaking, a doctrine is indicated for the individual which is encapsulated in three principles. The first is: “Do what thou wilt shall be the whole of the Law.” But one must not stop at the letter of this law, almost as if it prescribed doing everything that one likes (as in Rabelais’ *Fay ce que voudras*), because Crowley refers to the *true* will, which must be discovered within oneself, and then realized. This discovery and this realization would be the essence of the Work (the disciple had to swear an oath before the “Great Beast 666” to dedicate himself to it), since — as Crowley asserted — only those who attain to such are truly men and lords, all others being “slaves” (presumably above all from the interior point of view). Furthermore, Crowley spoke also of a self-discipline, at least in his own case, of “a morality more rigorous than any other, despite the absolute liberty with respect to every conventional code of conduct.” The corollary that “The word of sin is Restriction,” a restriction evidently with respect to the will, is to be understood from the same point of view.

The second principle is that “every man and every woman is a star,” in the sense that in them a principle manifests or incarnates itself, which is in a certain sense transcendent, which carries them, in general, beyond a mere “pagan” naturalism. One might resort here to the theory of the “Self” as distinct from the simple ego. However there is an evident connection with the special concept which we have just indicated of the will. Among other things, Crowley takes up again the ancient theory of the “two demons”; he speaks of a way of living understood as evoking the “good demon,” not ceding to the temptations which would rather put him at the mercy of the other demon, bringing him to ruin and to damnation, while by the first he would be inspired regarding the right use of magical techniques. In a dramatized form, it would seem we are dealing here once again with the profound principle postulated in the conception of the human being as “a star” (or as a “god”), which conception constitutes the presupposition for confronting the risky experiences of this path.

Finally, the third principle is: “Love is the law, love under will,” love here being understood essentially as sexual love. This brings us from the doctrinal domain to that of technique, where the aspects of Crowleyism which might most alarm the profane present themselves, conferring to Crowley’s doctrines a problematic orgiastic hue (even if for this alone one cannot yet speak of something “Satanic” in the proper sense).

On the path announced by, and traveled by, Crowley, the use of sex, along with that of drugs, plays a leading role. However one must recognize that, at least in its intentions, we are dealing with a “sacred” and magical use of sex and of drugs, one which was also employed in various ancient traditions. The end, consciously pursued, is to obtain experiences of the supersensible and contact with certain “entities.” In this respect, these things appear in a very different light than what occurs at the margins of the contemporary world, in the simple key of evasions, of sensations and of “artificial paradises.” “There exist drugs,” says Crowley, “which open the thresholds of the world hidden behind the veil of matter,” this formulation being however imperfect, because in principle one should not speak of drugs *sic et simpliciter*<sup>153</sup> (whatever drugs these might be) but rather of an exceedingly special *use* of them, connected to specific and not easily realizable conditions.

The same thing holds for sex as a technique, beyond the generalities of the “orgastic religion” announced by the *Liber Legis*, with a reference even to “great god Pan.” For Crowley, the sexual act had the meaning of a sacrament, of a sacred and magical operation; in intercourse one aimed, at the limit, at a kind of “break in level” for which one found oneself “face to face with the gods”: that is, openings to the supersensible occurred. It is important that, in this and in other contexts, Crowley spoke of things “which are poison to you, even poisonous to the highest degree” being “transformed into nourishment,” and that, to explain the deleterious outcome caused in some of his disciples by the path he indicated, he referred to “doses of poison too high to be transformed into food.” Once again, the condition constituted by an exceptional personality here intervenes; it is said, referring to drugs, that they are a food only for the “kingly man.” As for sex magic, the technique was that of excess: in orgasm and in inebriation one must arrive at a state of exhaustion, carried to the farthest limit “compatible with the power of continuing to

live.”<sup>154</sup> Also in the field of evocative ceremonies, the “magic dagger” which was employed, together with the entire traditional armament of signs, formulae, accoutrements, pentacles, etc., stood as “a symbol of being ready to sacrifice everything.”<sup>155</sup> In the secret ritual of the Crowleyan *Ordo Templi Orientis* called *De arte magica*, in §XV one reads of a “death in orgasm” called *mors justi*.<sup>156</sup> The farthest limit of orgasmic exhaustion and inebriation was indicated also as the moment of a possible magical lucidity, of the clairvoyant trance reached by man and by woman. Thus in the *Magical Record of the Beast 666*, there is talk of ardent and wild young women who all at once, “without any warning, passed into a state of profound calm indistinguishable with prophetic trance, in which they began to describe what they saw.”<sup>157</sup>

As is to be expected, it is impossible to establish what issued from experiences of this kind, or with what invisible planes contact might have been made. It is certain that in Crowleyism there was a specific grafting of special magico-initiatic pursuits;<sup>158</sup> from the plane of chaotic, deviant, and reckless experiences through wild sex, and with the drugs proper to circles of youths on the margins of the contemporary world, one passes over to something more serious — but, precisely for this reason, something more dangerous as well. Crowley had certain disciples who, if entirely within the framework announced by the “Law of Thelema,” were subjected to trials and disciplines of every kind (in 1920, he even founded a “Magical Abbey” in Cefalù, Sicily; with the advent of Fascism, however, he was immediately expelled from Italy, on account of the rumors surrounding what supposedly went on in this Abbey). But their destinies do not seem to have been all of a kind. Those who were strong enough to hold fast, to not deviate, claimed that they had been renewed and integrated by these experiences with the Great Beast 666; however there were likewise other persons, especially women, who broke apart, who ended up even with illnesses; it seems that there were some suicides. In these cases Crowley said that they had not been able to operate the magical transmutation of the forces that had been evoked or which had been given free reign (or that the doses of poison were too high to be transformed into food); for this reason, they had been torn apart. As for Crowley himself, he was able to keep himself on his feet to the end, closing his life in 1947 at

seventy-two years of age, with every one of his faculties lucid and normal. Apart from his disciples, various personalities, even some of a certain rank (for example, the well-known general Filler of the armed division), kept contact with him; and given the general climate of our days, it is to be expected that his figure should continue to exercise a strong fascination, and that his ideas should often be cited.

If the Crowleyan horizons seem troubling and dark to many, nonetheless objectively speaking the properly “Satanic” element, despite everything which the Great Beast 666 so theatrically displayed, does not seem to us to be very significant. The coloratura corresponding to Satanism does not have as much prominence in Crowley as that which, at bottom, presents a magical, and in part an initiatic, character.

For this, as we have said, the present words on Crowley can serve us as a segue, to pass to the considerations of modern currents in which that element stands unambiguously in the foreground, without the admixtures identified in this chapter.

# X

## Initiatic Currents and “High Magic”

IN THE MODERN WORLD, outside of “spiritualism” of a theosophic, anthroposophic, neo-mystical kind and of similar trends, the tendency toward the supernatural has also acted in certain currents which have a character that one might call *initiatic* and *magical*. In this field too there are notable deviations, especially when the “occultistic” attitude is attached to them, which is to say the taste in obscure language, in pronouncing *ex cathedra* and *ex tripode*<sup>159</sup> with an ostentatious tone of mystery and authority, saying things halfway so as to give us to understand that one “knows,” while in the large part of these cases one knows nothing at all, and one aims only at creating for oneself, in the eyes of the ingenuous, the halo of “Master,” possessor of who knows what tremendous arcane knowledge. While it must be admitted that it is better not to go blurting out certain teachings in the presence of those who do not have the capacity to comprehend them, but only to twist them, this necessary and healthy reservation (moreover one adopted by analogous schools of past times) is far from having anything to do with the “occultistic” style now mentioned, from which unfortunately, certain circles of French Hermetists are not exempt.

One could well respond to the objection that “secretiveness” is necessary given the perilousness of certain teachings regarding practice. For it must be said that in such cases there exists almost always a “self-defense,” in the sense that whoever does not have a certain qualification will realize precisely nothing through such

practices, while whoever has such a qualification and is well directed will find himself already capable of facing possible dangers.

The combination in the overview that follows of magical tendencies with initiatic ones might seem arbitrary, if we do not clarify the special concept of “magic.”

“Magic” may take on two aspects. There exists a magic which is an experimental operative science *sui generis*, and there exists a magic — “high magic” — as a special attitude within the initiatic domain.

We have already mentioned magic taken in the first sense in what we have said above. This is an art of consciously activating and directing certain subtle energies, whose place and field of action is the domain standing behind “form” — that which has form, both in the psychic field, and in the field of an external reality upheld by the laws of nature. This magic, if authentic, carries one beyond both mediumship and also modern “metapsychics”; it is a forcing of the doors of the invisible, by knowing the laws of the invisible and the way of attracting or rejecting, of choosing, of creating causes and effects in the two aforementioned domains — interior and exterior — of that which stands behind form. In antiquity, and still today in certain areas, magic in this strict sense was practiced even as a “profession” (here we cannot pause to indicate in what the difference between white magic and black magic or sorcery consisted, in objective rather than moralistic terms).

It is important to note that the featuring of magic in popular superstitions or among exotic and savage populations should not induce one to one-sided judgements. In point of fact, every rite which does not wish to be mere symbolic ceremony has a “magical” component. Thus in its place we have indicated that without the presuppositions of magic the Catholic ritual-sacramental doctrine itself would appear empty and foundationless. But, occupying ourselves with such a doctrine, we have also indicated what is the presupposition for a magically operative rite; this presupposition should be recalled in the case of those modern circles that have set themselves to cultivate that magic called “ceremonial” magic, which is to say a magic in which an essential part is constituted by formulae, signs, evocative structures, etc. We said however that even as a motor does not act if there is no motive force, so the entire magical apparatus does not operate on its own, but requires a real power of its operator, be it innate to him or transmitted. Magic

cannot be improvised by extemporaneously exhuming it, by laying one's hands on ancient rituals found in books or libraries.

Passing over to the second possible sense of magic, we have said that it is defined essentially as an attitude of the spirit. It expresses a form of supernormal integration of the personality in which the virile and active element comes to the foreground, for which, at bottom, it particularly underlines that which in general initiatic realization opposes every ecstatic, pantheistic and vaguely spiritualistic form: the removal of that ego which bars the access to deeper forces of being, by provoking, not a descending, but an ascending transcendence. There is a relationship between magic understood in such a sense and the regal tradition and initiation, as distinct from the priestly. Hence this "high magic" brings one back to the discipline which was called in the Hermetic tradition the *Ars Regia*,<sup>160</sup> and has a certain relation also to the ancient *teurgia* and with that magic which in previous centuries was understood specifically as "divine magic" as opposed to "natural" and also "celestial" magic.

So much for a general orientation. Magic can be freed from various preconceived ideas, from the "occultistic" aspect and from the miraculistic and superstitious, from the association with lodges and shadowy personages, and brought back to these essential meanings.

There remains to examine certain teachings of a magico-initiatic teaching which have been formulated in the modern epoch by certain personalities. Having already mentioned the "magical" component which was present, despite everything, in the ideas and practices of Aleister Crowley, we will now say a few words on the views of George Ivanovich Gurdjieff, of Giuliano Kremmerz (pseudonym of Ciro Formisano) and of what emerges from the writings of Gustav Meyrink, gathering moreover certain elements from an author of the last century, Éliphas Lévi — in whom, however, what is valid and what most interests us is intermixed with not a little "occultistic" dross.<sup>161</sup>

Proceeding by stages, we will speak first of all of Gurdjieff. He is part of the gallery of rather enigmatic personalities to appear in recent times. Originally from the Russian provinces of the Caucasus, Gurdjieff made his first appearance in St. Petersburg in 1913, having been in contact before that, it would seem, with Eastern masters,



repositories of an ancient initiatic wisdom. Later, he undertook his activity in Western countries, transmitting his teachings to his disciples, founding his center in the castle of the Prieuré near Paris, instituting “work groups” which transplanted themselves also to other nations. He died in 1949.

Of the teachings of Gurdjieff nothing is known save by indirect routes, and almost exclusively from two books of P. D. Ouspensky, who had been one of his disciples.<sup>162</sup> Gurdjieff’s single thick volume, published in English in 1950, *All and Everything*, is nothing but a mass of divagations, sometimes even fabulous ones, a confused agglomeration from which it is very difficult to extract any valid element (this did not prevent an American from paying a large sum to have a glance at a part of the corresponding manuscript). As in the case of other personalities, anyone who judged them from their writings would judge awry; it is what they have communicated directly and the influence they exercise which is essential.

The teaching of Gurdjieff does not regard so much contacts with the supersensible as a possible interior development of the human being. There is a reminiscence here of the Buddhistic theory of the *anâtmâ*, that is, the negation of a true, substantial ego in the common man. Gurdjieff taught precisely that man is nothing but a “machine,” a complex of automatisms, and that the first step is to realize this fact. Everything which man does, his thoughts, his feelings, his habits, are the effect of influences and external impressions. He passes his entire existence in a kind of “waking sleep.” Passivity is the constant note, despite every appearance to the contrary. One is not present to oneself, one identifies oneself with the experiences that one has, one loses oneself in them. Thus one is “vampirized” continuously, Gurdjieff says: from the landscape that one gazes upon to the cigar that one smokes, to the pleasure that one takes from a woman or from suffering itself, to the attitudes in which I indulge, and so forth. There is no true “being” behind all of this. Thus the fact that “I do not exist,” in the widest sense, is the point which Gurdjieff’s disciple had to begin to recognize, not theoretically but in a direct personal experience. Beyond this, the path indicated is that of “freeing oneself from identification” and of “memory” — the memory of oneself, as a new dimension to insert into the course and the contingencies of one’s entire existence. Here too there is something reminiscent of Buddhism, insofar as in Buddhist asceticism

the term *satipatthâna* indicates precisely the constant active and lucid presence of the self to itself. And while Buddhism speaks of “awakening,” evidently this expression fittingly indicates the opposite condition to that of the “waking sleep” associated, by Gurdjieff, with the common existence of those who, according to him, are not men but only sketches of men (“the true man is the man awakened to himself”).

Gurdjieff’s teaching carries us a step further when it considers the duality of “person” and of “essence.” In every individual the “personality” corresponds to the ephemeral being defined in relation to the external world and to its environment, to that which it has apprehended and has constructed for itself, to that which one might call its mask and which, according to Gurdjieff, is a lie. The “essence” is rather that which would be truly his own, the dimension in the depths of his being. In general, there is a discontinuity between the two principles, so that there might exist men whose “personality” is very developed and cultivated, while the “essence” is atrophied, the development of the “personality” capable of bringing a suffocation and a depression of “essence.” Gurdjieff claimed to know procedures of an ancient and secret art, the hypnosis known in the West representing but a fragment, to experientially produce the momentaneous separation of “personality” from “essence” in a given individual, so as to permit the appearance of the state of both of them. And he asserted that there are men in whom the essence is dead, that he recognized beings in the streets who, while living, were already dead in their essence in some such sense. One can understand how Gurdjieff, in demanding from his disciples that all of this be not simply thought but *realized*, could provoke also exceedingly grave crises, with disastrous outcomes. This, all the moreso as Gurdjieff’s manners and his language were often brutal; he did not refrain from insulting and from pronouncing destructive judgements (the intent with this, or the excuse for it, was to provoke certain indicative reactions by this means). He recognized that to ascertain this “non being” could make one go mad, and that to be able to face this vision with impunity it was necessary to be already, in a certain way, on the “Path.”

Consequently the transfer of the center of one’s being from the “personality” to the “essence” and the development of the “essence” appear to be the key for realization advocated by Gurdjieff. For him

this was also the condition for survival, so as to conquer death. We find here thus the theory of “conditioned immortality” of which we have already spoken and which we will see professed likewise by the other authors whose teachings we will shortly consider. He sometimes spoke of a species of astral body, not in the theosophistic sense: a body not existing, but to be created through an almost alchemical work of fusion, unification, and crystallization of the elements of one’s own being, which otherwise in common existence unite, divide, re-associate in various labile combinations, as detached particles enclosed in a receptacle subject to continual shaking, without forming anything permanent. The development of that entity, in all probability as a germination from the soil of its “essence,” would be the condition to not die in dying. But, for Gurdjieff, one must not fall into any illusions: “exceedingly few are the immortal Selves.”

Not much is known of the concrete practices proposed by Gurdjieff on a case by case basis. He held an ardent desire for liberation to be a general condition, a desire such as to make one ready to sacrifice everything, risk everything. “A sacrifice is necessary; if nothing is sacrificed, nothing can be gained” (in particular, this would mean a renunciation of “identification,” the principal obstacle to “self-remembering”). The interior work and struggle can be “terribly hard”; states might arise in which one is led even to put an end to one’s existence (as we have recently indicated). He emphasizes that only extraordinary efforts count; but he doubted that these could have any continuity without the control of another person “who is ruthless and who possesses a method.” Most probably this refers us back to the so-called “work groups” and to surveillance on the part of the figure who imparts the teaching.

It should be observed that while Gurdjieff seems not to have had any interest in an extranormal phenomenology, so too the work he envisaged toward a visibly initiatic orientation did not focus only on an absolute and exclusive transcendence. Thus he would also speak of a “harmonious development of the man” and of a work of personal integration, which addressed the question of the coordination of the three fundamental “centers” of the individual: the intellectual center, the emotional center, and moving center, removing the automatisms established in one’s own being. Toward this specific and non-transcendent end Gurdjieff used also exercises assuming the

character of a kind of “sacred pantomime” and having a hidden significance which escapes the profane (having to do, Gurdjieff claimed, with very ancient traditions of the East). In these, every movement was rigorously defined and had to be developed up to the limits of one’s strength. So far as the background music goes, some had the rather profane impression of a sort of “very forced jazz.” However, a fundamental moment came in immobilizing oneself in the position in which one found oneself, at a “Stop!” pronounced by the Master. In all probability, this was a matter of grasping and fixing a certain interior state.

These summary comments on the teachings of Gurdjieff will suffice. As did Crowley, Gurdjieff had contact with various personalities, also some of a certain rank. Despite the lack of direct systematic and clear statements (as has been said, we have referred almost exclusively to what Ouspensky has related, the doctrines comprehending moreover cosmological conceptions and of “secret natural science” — such as the strange theory of multiple “hydrogens,” which present a rather rambling character), there is continual talk of him and, as happens in cases of the kind, a certain “mythification” of this mysterious personality has not been lacking.

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Passing now to the group of the other authors mentioned above — Meyrink, Kremmerz, and É. Lévi — in their method, these men confirmed the principles of a realism and an experimentalism in confronting the problem of the “spiritual.”

“Do not believe,” says Kremmerz. “Distance yourselves from mysticism and from the act of faith. It is better to know that one does not know, than to believe.” He adds: “Spiritualism is poetry — ours is pure experimental method.” Criterion: “Either something is, or it is not.” Meyrink says likewise: “They *believe* in a good and an evil — we *know* that good and evil do not exist and that there is only a true and a false”; he teaches then that we are not dealing with “ecstasy,” but of a “brightening of the spirit, a going toward the light, until the point of vision.”

The basis of the doctrine is the relation between magical integration and the conquest of immortality. The premise is the same as positivism (Kremmerz), and through positivism the come arguments which convince one of the impossibility of the survival of

every personal consciousness. The authors in question admit that fundamental parts of elements of the human composite survive and even “reincarnate” in the sense which we ourselves have clarified. But positing the problem, not for that which is impersonal and derived, but rather for the soul as true and proper personality, they think this death — as Kremmerz says — might effectively be an “expiring”; that is, a restoration of the spirit to a homogeneous mass in which it is destined to dissolve almost as air in air. The fact is that they believe, with Gurdjieff, that so far as the great mass of men is concerned such a personality does not even exist among the living; these living are already as the dead. The “magical” analysis of human nature has anticipated and preempted psychoanalysis, thus carrying one to much vaster horizons. The result of this analysis is that when one speaks vulgarly of personality, in reality one alludes to nothing other than the *historical individual* (Kremmerz), to an aggregate of tendencies, impressions, memories, habits and so forth, the better part of which belong neither to our consciousness nor to our responsibility. Tracing over the components of such an individual, one arrives in part at the uterine life (subconscious individual in the proper sense), but in part one issues into the collective, intertwined moreover with vestiges, with sympathies, and with habits drawn from others or from other modes of existence. Meyrick speaks of a species of “coral-like rock,” which is our body, the work of habits passed down by instinct for entire epochs and of “thoughts” which stand behind our own thoughts. In one way or another, a state of affairs is recognized, given which, in all this talk of a “personality,” one speaks really of nothing but a mirage and a ghost: from which Meyrick draws the logical consequence, that one would seek the “souls” of the dead in the afterworld in vain, and that if “the spiritists knew who it is that really obeys their call, they would perhaps die of fright.” Éliphas Lévi, for his part, speaks of a species of abyssal current, carried by a blind and eternal impulse, to which souls return and from which they arise anew, in endless series, until the supreme form of the *awakened man* is produced, the mage. These are ideas — as anyone might see — which carry us back to what we have already said when speaking of Life as “yearning” and *appetitus innatus*, of the doctrine of cycles and other kindred notions of the traditional teaching.

These premises might seem to be pure materialism. But precisely materialism is a necessary premise, if one wishes to adequately comprehend a “supernatural” task, as that which magic proposes. *What is a man — what might a man be — beyond “historical individual”?* This is the problem. The problem of the “hereafter” exists already in the here-and-now. “Those who do not learn to see *here*, certainly will not learn *there*” (Meyrink). Immortality is awakening, awakening is “interior growth beyond the threshold of death,” that is in states independent of exterior impressions and of the multiple internal heredities. The “Awakened” are the “Living,” the only ones, both in this and in other worlds, who are not ghosts. Meyrink: “In the afterlife there is not one of them that departed blind from this World.”

The “magical” character of such views is found in the fact that beyond the historical individual one does not place — as is usual — the universal, the Whole, “God,” but rather the place proper to the realization of the true personality. This order of ideas is no different from that which we have already seen in Gurdjieff. The magical discipline is supposed to liberate one from the slag of the collective an independent personal principle, and to give it a form. This concept of the *spiritual form* remains the fundamental point for the esoteric problem of immortality. Kremmerz says that the initiate, at his death, emits, not an inform “spirit,” but a “spirit” in which, so to speak, he has sculpted another self, an immaterial man, eternal and indestructible, gifted with determinate powers that constitute the integration of those that make germinal appearance in mortal man. The same author observes that the spiritists, straying from the point, “think that this miracle is achieved naturally, that all men in dying exit into a new life with this subtler body that the Hermetic philosophers and the mages in their philosophy glimpse as being creatable only exceptionally.” An Meyrink: “Truly immortal is the man who is thoroughly awake. The stars and the gods slip away; only he remains and can do what he will. Above him there is no god. This existence itself is naught but a layer. His incurable blindness fixes him before a barrier that he does not dare to climb. He creates an image in order to adore it, rather than transforming himself in it.”

The magical ascesis consists in a progressively and actively baring oneself of the elements and from the aggregates of the historical ego, “so that every detachment counts as an interior formation, as a

growth beyond the ground of that ego.” The first step toward this task would be what Kremmerz calls “conscious neutrality”: a state of consciousness which is serene, intact, balanced, inaccessible to instinctive reactions, to good and evil, separated from the sensations and from inclinations and ready to judge them without any interest whatever, as they are and not as they are filtered by worries, by affects, by habits and by memories, finally, by the entire ancestral and organic heredity. Éliphas Lévi, analogously, spoke of isolating oneself from the currents and the “soul of the Earth” and emphasized the aspect of “trials,” that is of resisting tendencies which reduce to manifestations of the very elemental forces of things (these are the trials of the Four Elements, known also the the Classical Mysteries), of emancipating oneself internally from every need, exercising oneself to use everything and to abstain from everything at will, since — he said — the task and the key of every power are in the formation of an “extranatural agent.” In essence, these are the same rules that are to be found in every ascetic-entiatic tradition and which particularly in the texts of original Buddhism are given in purified and methodical form, shorn of every trace of moralistic or religious justifications or ends. Here it is interesting only to observe the relation between the degrees of this denudation and the degrees of an active regression, that is of an elimination of successive psychic strata, up to the point of ridding oneself of them entirely, of emptying the conscious of every human detritus. Having reached the threshold of preconceptional and pre-uterine life, and then overstepping it, one is released from the bounds of human individuality: it is the “vision,” the awakening — that which in the Greek traditions was called “memory.” On the basis of this point, the center of gravity of being falls in another sphere, whence will shine like a sun the incorruptible core of the personality in the absolute sense, or superpersonality. Here another form might come into play, drawn from the corporeal, which itself does not belong any longer to nature, on the basis of the transformation that in certain circumstances “awakening” might induce in the forces of nature acting in the body.

At that point, as application, certain magical possibilities in the strict sense might be opened. Meyrink speaks of the “magical domain of thought.” In truth, more than of thought we are dealing here with that which acts as the secret fount to this thus-renewed



consciousness. The point of departure is the idea that the brain is not the generator of thought, but only the receiving apparatus, more or less sensitive to influences, which in it, transforming themselves, take the form of thoughts. With the direct perception of these influences one obtains the integration of the common thought in “interior word” and in visions of “divine” images.<sup>163</sup> Regarding the first point, Meyrink writes: “As the common man thinks, by unconsciously muttering words to his brain, thus the spiritually renewed man speaks a mysterious language of new words that give no room to conjectures and to errors. And his thought is entirely new, it is a magical instrument and no longer a poor means of expression; and it brings him to know, no longer by means of concepts, but simply *by seeing*.” And Kremmerz: “*Coelum* comes from *coelare*, to hide, to make occult as a veil. The gods are all in the ‘sky,’ at that point of the horizon where our memories fall silent and there opens before us the surprising mine of the unknown within this moment, which was once our life and our breath.” To free the consciousness from the sediments of the historical ego, is to bare deep and hidden (*coelum*) forces that act on the unconscious human organism, but at the same time in nature: the “gods.” These, no longer transformed now into “thoughts” of the brain, free themselves and appear in grandiose divine figures. There follows an interpretation of the ancient traditional mythologies in terms, so to speak, of an experimental metaphysics: “I hold the study of mythology, in its essence, as containing the initiation of the powers of our organism; it is the search for a rare science into the possibilities of baring an arcane question” (Kremmerz).<sup>164</sup>

Now, if one wishes to refer to operative magic, its essence on this plane consists in grafting a determinate “efficacious direction,” decreed by the integrated personality, onto these energies which cross it — energies which in given circumstances might also dramatize themselves in various apparitions, as in their plastic symbols or momentary incarnations. But, be it by direct or indirect routes, the “contact” of these subterranean forces with the interior principles of the adept is always necessary: for this contact instills a quality of freedom in those forces, which permits them to manifest themselves in a different manner to that necessitated by and tied to their nature, by way of which the world takes the appearance of a reality held up by physical, invariable, and automatic laws.

This is the place for a critical word on *ceremonial magic*, all the moreso since in the school of Kremmerz it played a substantial role. The school of Kremerz — the *Myriam* — was constituted in fact as a true and proper magical unity, organized by rites, marked by symbols, by degrees of initiation and by ceremonials. It is out of the question that all of this might have been created *ex novo* by Kremmerz: we are dealing here rather with the reemergence of a vein in a pre-existing tradition, whose origin is not easy to identify. This unity aimed toward stabilizing a magical force in a community, and toward the production through its rites of effects of illumination, or even therapy, in the adherents or for the adherents, similar to what we have already mentioned when speaking of the Catholic Church and its rites. But in this connection we must make a few observations. The separation of the ego from the aggregates of the historical individual might act fragmentarily and, so to speak, experimentally, by way of magical rite, leading thereby to vision; other effects, too, might be produced — as for example, evocations of entities and of “divinities,” toward the ends of consciousness or else for the imposition of specific goals, and so forth. Here, two points must be borne in mind.

Every effect has its cause. Therefore, when one arrives at a given effect, not by a direct way, that is through the integrated personality, but by way of a rite, this implies the evocation and the employment of something which is the cause of the effect; the rite comes to establish a relation between man and this force, which, to whomever follows the path of “ceremonial magic” appears to be distinct from his own forces. This creates something which in antiquity was called a “pact,” for which the Goethean saying holds, that “from those spirits which you evoke, never can you free yourself.” Thus an energy is grafted onto the personality, which is alien to its form. This procedure might be conscious and desired: voluntarily belonging to a “tradition” in which one recognizes the principle of one’s own light and one’s own power, in magical terms, corresponds precisely to such a case. In conjurational-ceremonial magic in a broad sense, the relation is not exclusively with those forces determined by or condensed in a collective; but the principle is the same.

What shall we say of this? It is evident that we are dealing with a path which is not without its negative aspects. From the metaphysical point of view, magical evocation is naught other than

an indirect way of making impersonal powers emerge in the consciousness, in forms that assume the illusory appearance of individuality — impersonal powers which in the last analysis exist in the deepest layers of being. In any “apparition” the process is the same by which a latent tendency or idea might manifest itself in a corresponding symbolic image in a dream. Thus, when the evoker believes these apparitions to be real — and the entire ceremonial situation makes them appear as such — he makes, so to speak, a myth of himself, and he divides himself, he sets a barrier between a part of himself and another part of himself: the same barrier, at bottom, that limits his waking consciousness and opposes it to another part hidden by the subconscious. Meyrink expresses the impairment that derives from this, from the point of view of action, in this way: “Wretched are they who evoke an idol and are fulfilled. They lose themselves, because they cannot any longer believe themselves to have been fulfilled by themselves.” And in his novel *The Angel of the West Window*, the principle motif is the tragic odyssey lived by whomever has given himself over to this illusion.

This is the limitation of ceremonial magic. In the metaphysically integrated person, he who commands and he who obeys are in one and the same subject; in ceremonial magic, there are rather two separate subjects, and the practitioner believes that he has in front of himself another being, “god” or “demon.” Such a distinction, on par with that proper to faith and to love on theistic bases, presents, to be sure, an advantage: it preserves the sense of the personality, which in these operative ceremonial forms continues to be supported by the body — but it has the disadvantage of limiting that personality. We have already had occasion to mention a series of experiences and trials that, in certain cases, are presented *post mortem*. And according to the Tibetan teaching, consciousness would experience nothing but itself in these trials, its entire real content, and it alone would be called to recognize itself in the various apparitions that, so to speak, present it with as many myths of its transcendental nature. Here, that which it believes itself to be, the various relations of distance which it has established with the objects of its cult, plays a fundamental role, acts as an active force which confirms or destroys the separation; it brings total integration, the “Great Liberation,” closer, or it distances it. For whomever puts himself on such a path of magic moved by a spiritual aspiration and not by material ends, the

same thing must be said: because the path of awakening is the same for the living and for the dead, *post mortem* experiences are equivalent with those that the initiate encounters in the course of his trials. But the habit incurred through ritual evocatory actions creates a spiritual barrier: the integration of all powers in a single center is undermined by it, and one proceeds along the frontiers of regions which do not exclude illusion and possession.

Having indicted this danger, we may mention another, of an opposite nature, presented by *identifications*. Having abolished that illusion of appearance as real individualities which deep forces might assume, and having assumed these forces directly in their “formless” aspect, it is necessary to bear in mind their possible nature. In ceremonial magic, and markedly in the magic of past times, there is often talk of “elementals” and of other entities or forces which, while not presenting necessary a “demonic” character, also do not have a transcendent character, but belong to a world inferior to the one which, in principle, ought to characterize the level of the true man. One speaks moreover also of their urgent yearning to incarnate. This is moreover the Buddhistic teaching regarding the “gods,” conceived, in this doctrine, likewise without a supernatural character. But Éliphas Lévi goes so far as to say that the “angels aspire to make themselves men, and a perfect man, a man-god, stands over all the angels.” And Kremmerz: “There is a mighty flock of spirits desirous of immortality; and you are, by a fatal condition of the path, more greatly in contact with them, because they are all elementals of fire, they are thirsty, and you have the water to slake their thirst.” Thus the quality of a being reintegrated in the invisible would act as a magnet and a condenser. Éliphas Lévi speaks precisely a psychic vertex which, analogous to that which the waters form by whirling around an immobile and indestructible pillar, is constituted around the mage.<sup>165</sup> And it is a question of having strength enough to not be carried away, to not become the instrument for the desired incarnation of these energies which surround the adept and which issue from his now superconscious body. It is a question of reaching a point of conquering and radically transmuting their mode of being. It is then that these forces might compose, so to speak, organs and members of the incorruptible man. They unite intimately with the nucleus of the renewed soul, which, when necessary, might dispose of them even as it used, and still uses, its organs and physical

members: to act directly, or under the guise of apparently normal phenomena — which is to say, to create those “signs,” saturated with an illuminating power, of which we have already made mention when speaking of “noble miracles.” Moreover, in all this we are speaking of nothing but practical applications, and whoever thinks of these alone is destined to let the essential thing get away, as well as the right way which might conduct him to their realization. In the traditional teaching, as in the schools in question, which have taken that teaching up, the search for “powers” in itself was considered as a deviation and a great danger. We have said at the beginning that magic as spiritual attitude, “high magic” or theurgy, is to be distinguished from magic as art of powers and of “phenomena.” In the mage, in the highest type of the mage, one should essentially see a being that has been released from the two bonds — from the human bond and from the divine bond — and who, whatever be the aspect that he assumes externally, resides with his forces and his “form” effectively and stably in a region which lies beyond both this, and any other “world.” By definition,<sup>166</sup> the profane cannot penetrate the ways, the ends, and the path of such a being.

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Those who put forth doctrines of the kind do not put forth anything other than the teachings of a wisdom which, as a secret vein — the “chain of awakening,” as Meyrink calls it — runs through the weft of history, carrying one back ever to primordial times. And connected to this at bottom is the supreme interpretation of the various interpretations — not excluding one another or contradicting one another, but hierarchized — of which every material of true traditional spirituality, without regard to time and place, is susceptible. It is the virile aspect of that “primordial tradition” of which we have already spoken.

Today, when there is almost not a single form of evocation and evasion which has not found place in the chaos of the unleashed Western “spirituality,” it has been perhaps necessary to cast light on some parts of this teaching, almost unveiled, in their integrity. We say “almost”: because is their appearance side by side with so many extravagancies not perhaps the best way of confounding him who does not have a right view? In this connection, and in place of a

conclusion of these critical considerations, a few clear words are wanted.

That which was the soul and axis of every great past civilization cannot be destroyed by a few centuries of modern superstition. *Quite otherwise than as a datum of faith or as a mere dogma, there exists a supernatural reality, there exists a “kingdom of the heavens,” and also the liminal possibility of transmuting in it the fallen human personality into that of a semigod, participant in Olympic immortality.* But — to express ourselves with traditional symbols, whose sense we hope will be by now clear to the reader — after the “fall” the way to such a region is barred by an angel with a flaming sword, and it is not for everyone — nor however for no one — to make oneself a vanquisher of angels and to use with impunity that violence which, according to the evangelical word, the kingdom of heaven may incur.

The path of high magic has always been the path of the exceedingly few. But nowadays the mentality, the education, the heredity, the external circumstances and the internal preoccupations, the entire way of feeling, of acting, of seeing and of desiring, constitute as in no other epoch an adverse condition with respect to that which, already in favorable times, constituted an exceptional realization. One should not delude oneself: “power,” with which it is easy to confound the theurgic ideal, seems the watchword of the day, the “myth” proper to this age. In reality, things stand otherwise. There is an irreducible difference of plane. *True magic, in the sense of high magic or theurgy, is a supernatural value. The modern aspiration to power is rather in everything and for everything naturalistic and profane.* It is a “Luciferian” phenomenon, it manifests the hubris of the overbearing man who, without ceasing to be man, which is to say a terrene and animal creature, attempts to enslave those forces of the world by which he himself does not cease to be constituted and conditioned.

Thus it is that the characteristics for which the magical ideal would seem almost to reflect itself and anticipate itself in modern man (so much so that that there has even been a book recently on the *Matin des Magiciens*),<sup>167</sup> in reality constitute the most rigid barrier to every one of its realizations. In North America, “the origin of a new world,” as the salon philosopher Keyserling has called it, yoga and analogous disciplines have already regally culminated in the art

of “healing through psychic means,” in the petty method of becoming “magnetizers” and “dominating characters” so as to prepare for oneself the surest “road to success” in matrimony, in business, in politics and so forth. Given these developments, it might tomorrow come to pass that certain subtle extranormal forces might even be able to enter into currency as the others have done, enrolled in the “social service” or else enslaved to the hatreds and the profane ends of individuals and the masses. And thus we will have a condign “masculine” consort for mystical, humanitarian, vegetarian, democratic and feminist “spiritualism” overseas.

“Man is something that must be overcome.” The principle remains true, but its sense is enclosed in the deeps; and, as we have seen, the tragic destiny of the solitary of Sils Maria seals it with a silent admonition for the few who can yet understand. As for the others...

To read “spiritualist” works, to attend circles of theosophy, to meditate on the Maeterlinckian “unconscious guest”, to perform one’s twenty minutes of daily concentration like a good child, full of moving faith in the reincarnation which will permit every soul to continue its “evolution” in a new existence, wherein it will harvest the fruits of the good humanitarian *karma* it has accumulated — this is truly a fine comfortable regime of “overcoming.” The original Christian doctrine, according to which one lives a single time and in this single life every fate is decided, including that of an eternal salvation and an eternal damnation — and which does not justify present life without a constant reference to “God” — sounds already as a salutary reveille against such slumbering mediocrity, such “spiritualistic” illusion and languor. And yet here we are still not dealing with anything but “religion”; and for that matter, remaining in the religious domain, as but a simple term of comparison, how many “spiritualists” of today would be disposed to leave the secular life for the cloister and monastic oath?

Thus, we must not delude ourselves before displays of initiation and “magic.” Let them serve as the lines of the mountain range, as liminal points of reference — to clearly establish the distances — and not as the instruments of flattery and vanity. Let there be, together with these teachings, other teachings still borne ever in mind, whence holds the prohibition of the occult, the saying that “one cannot see God without dying of the sight,” and that he who “has been bitten by the serpent of the spiritual world” was thereafter



painted as a damned man. If there exists a right to ask any higher truth beyond this, such a right is measured inexorably by the capacity for a transfiguring conversion, for detachment and an absolute overcoming. It is an aristocratic right. The only right that the mob cannot ever usurp, not today, nor in any other epoch of the world.

# Conclusion

HAVING ARRIVED AT THE TERM of these critical notes, many will feel perhaps disoriented, disappointed in their desire for a comforting truth and an easy path, after the suggestions offered by so many sects and movements. It is possible that these will feel even disturbed on account of the doctrines that here or there we have been constrained to take up and to make known, so as to put various things in their right place. These doctrines, indeed, often can play the killjoy with respect both to the sectarian spiritualist and his critic; for this reason, we do not hope to have attracted the sympathies of the one or the other. Such is the notorious way of things when one follows only the point of view of the truth, without any regard for sentimental and irrational factors, in questions to which strong internal tensions are connected.

Whoever complains of not having had sufficient positive points of reference should keep in mind the nature of the regions in which we have had to move. To say something that appears “positive” to the many, we would have had to consider only the values that are applicable to the domain of the visible and the normal — in the conventional sense of these terms — to the zone closed both to “nether” influences which might arise in the spiritualistic evocations, and also to that other sphere, to the sphere of those initiatic possibilities and the disciplines of a high contemplative ascesis, reserved only to the few.

We would have had to speak of the simple personality in its human form, and to say of this whatever might fortify it in relation to the present state of civilization. It would have been necessary to confront, then, essentially, the problem of the *vision of the world*, because this is the principle of everything. Even in the order of a spiritualism, in itself well oriented, it is a grave error to believe that one might reach something serious through isolated practices, without having beforehand radically changed the way of feeling oneself, the others, the world, and without having also changed, in consequence, the manner of each one of our reactions. Much has

been written in this field from the time that one first began to speak of the crisis of modern civilization: but almost always without any solid principle. In truth, there exists but a single way for the defense of the personality, and this is the *reclamation of the traditional vision of the world and of life, united to an internal "revolt against the modern world."* Now, in that work of ours which bears precisely this title, we have already given everything which was in our power to give in that direction, without entering into special domains.

But in the present book our task was another. Here the question was essentially to furnish the precise sense of the two directions, the one toward the subpersonal, the other toward the superpersonal. This is indeed the indispensable condition to be able to orient oneself before contemporary spiritualism, to be able to verify that which is *mask* in it, and that which is *face*; to be able to overcome both philistine prejudices, as well as the flatteries of so many presumed "revelations."

From the start we have recognized that a certain widening of horizons is now needed. To insist on prejudices and on limitations that even yesterday might have had their pragmatic *raison d'être* is not prudent today, and is perhaps even dangerous: they might produce on the contrary the opposite effect, as experience itself has demonstrated. Let this be said above all to those who defend a religious tradition in the restricted, routinarian,<sup>168</sup> devotional and conformist sense. They — let us repeat it — ought to understand that the moment has come to awaken, if they wish to prove worthy of the task which in principle is incumbent on them. Once more, something vaster and more universal must be considered as tradition, something considerably less "human" than all that which they know and affirm. And this is possible without producing confusion, without weakening their positions — indeed, by reinforcing them. Guénon, with respect to Catholicism, has made this point clear.

The horizons should be widened, not only in this field, but also in all the others we have touched upon in the preceding critical considerations. It is indeed a precise task for whomever has his eyes open to *prevent*, actively and expeditiously, all that which might occur in this sense through the work of uncontrollable influences. But then a test is imposed on modern man: *that of knowing the limit which defines and sustains the sense of self before these widened horizons; that of knowing how to calmly close the great many doors*

*which Luciferically<sup>169</sup> stand ajar, or which might open above or below him.* Let us say it yet another time: in the greater part of these cases, the personality is not a datum, but a *task*. Today, in this epoch of the irrational and of the demonry of the collective, there are already all too many forces which one must resist and combat so as to approach such a task and to demonstrate a character and a line, without adding to them as well the hazards of “spirituality.”

*The “spiritual” has worth today as an awareness,<sup>170</sup> not as a temptation.* It must serve put the claims of the entirety of science and scientism to their place, to relativize the scope of not a few values of humanistic civilization, to remove *idées fixes* and mental deformations which have established themselves within many disciplines, and thus to enrich their possibility of development. The “spiritual” must also give us a way of repossessing precious parts of a forgotten and unknown heritage; it must, that is, give us the possibility of reading through the symbols and the myths of the great traditions of the past, something equivalent to reawakening new spiritual senses. The true “spiritual man” ought to arrive at feeling spirituality as a present reality, not exceptional but natural, not miraculous or sensational but evident in the framework of a sensation of the vaster, freer, more complete world. How far this spirituality then stands away from man, as something properly “supernatural,” is of no importance. What is important is the clarity and the naturalness of the awareness. To arrive so far as this would already be much. And yet it would be nothing more than a return to normalcy. To the degree to which the new spiritualism truly accommodates a revolution of the kind, precisely on account of that deviousness which is betrayed behind various of its forms, the Goethian saying holds good for it: it does good despite willing evil. The only means for favoring this revolution is to keep the traditional teachings clearly in sight, as teachings that act as rectifying or integrating counterpart to the ideas which today are widespread of spiritualism, including those of the pseudo-science of the “unconscious.”

We have spoken not long ago of the protective function of the traditional conception of the world. Single in its essence, that is in its values and in its fundamental categories, this vision admits however of various formulations and expressions. One can therefore inquire which of these formulations might be of most aid to the man of today

when, with wider horizons, he comes to consider the supreme things. The many will think perhaps that it is the Christian formulation. We are not of this opinion. A formulation of the kind for the average man of today is either too much or too little. It is too little if one takes up a watered down Christianity of the confessional and socializing sort, which we have discussed already; it is too much, if one takes it in the tragic-desperate direction of the spirit, which we have also discussed, a direction which today either would not be felt, or would lead one to dangerous imbalances. It should be underlined that here we are speaking expressly not of doctrinal elements or of theology but precisely of that which a given formulation might give for an adequate, comprehensive vision of life.

It is habitual to emphasize what Catholicism presents as a defense of the person. And in the preceding chapters we ourselves have had occasion to make, here and there, certain recognitions in this connection. We are dealing, moreover, with values that Catholicism did not take from pure original Christianity, which was characterized by a desperate *pathos* for redemption and salvation united to every kind of suggestion and emotional complex; the values in question are rather better attested by the best vein of the *classical tradition*. And the problem presents itself as to whether those values, those elements of a vision of life, are not more fit and effective for the task indicated above, wherever they are liberated from a superstructure of faith and of dogma and reformulated with a greater adherence to their original root. We hold that precisely this is the case: we think, in other words, that it is from the classical conception of life that one might draw elements which are simpler, clearer, more neutral and deprived of “tendencies,” which the man of today might make his own toward renovating and broadening his mentality. This might occur in an autonomous way, without reference to a specific religious confession, to theories and philosophies.

In the classical vision of life “daemons” and “gods” had their place — the world was considered, that is, in its totality, comprehending both the subnatural and the supernatural in the sense indicated at the beginning of the present book. At the same time, as perhaps in no other civilization, there was a living sense of the personality as a force, form, principle, value, task. It knew the invisible, but at its center it celebrated the ideal of “culture,” that is of spiritual formation, of the centralization almost of living and

achieved works of art. As is known, one concept in particular had a primary role in the classical ethics, that of the *limit*, πέραις, which brings us back precisely to what we recently stated: namely, our fundamental need to actively and consciously circumscribe the sphere in which one might truly be oneself, and to realize an equilibrium and a “partial perfection,” distancing oneself from the flatteries of the romantic and mystico-ecstatic paths toward the formless and limitless. It is thus that even with regard to the supreme things one might maintain an Apollonian tranquility of gaze. If classical man did not delude himself “spiritualistically,” if he therefore knew the double destiny — the road to Hades and the road toward the “Isles of Blessed” — even as he knew the law of the inferior world — the eternal “cycle of generation” — he knew at the same time that serenity, for which the hereafter created no vertigo, nor “fate” the least anguish; he knew that intimate bearing of soul that soothes the insatiable thirst of the “things that flee,” and by virtue of which he too, as Epicurus, could affirm: “One time alone is one born, and one does not return to exist ever again,” rejecting the idea of the gods as caretakers of men. And departing, he could say that he “regretted not in the least that he should be departing a perfect life.”

In the essence, it precisely this kind of clear and calm heroism, united with dominion of oneself, with that equilibrium and “neutrality” in the sense indicated when speaking of Kremerz, and made into a need in the life of the many — it is precisely *this* dominion which prevents new awarenesses from acting in a negative way. It is similar to knowing how to sustain oneself without supports, but with one’s gaze open and one’s soul free of the bond of “overman-like” haughtiness. It is knowing how to look into the distances, but without vertigo. It is knowing how to form oneself intimately with a free activity, without the agitations of hope or fear, or the anguish which is betrayed in the various existential “crisis philosophies” which have become fashionable today. It is knowing how to love discipline and limit in themselves, never forgetting that dignity for which we are responsible and without excuses — up until that point at which a superior, austere vocation in someone might succeed in gathering all its strength, even to the most intimate, most abyssal roots of life, for the leap which might carry one beyond the human condition.

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## Notes

[ ←1 ]

The Italian for this Freudian concept is the capitalized version of its first person subject pronoun: *Io*. Evola uses this same word in many contexts, however, in which the use of the Freudian “ego” would be frankly inappropriate. I have therefore translated this word as “ego” whenever Evola is speaking explicitly of Freud or psychoanalysis, while in all other cases I have rendered it sometimes with “ego,” sometimes with the word “self,” and on rare occasions with the English first-person pronoun I. (N.B. All notes, unless otherwise indicated, are Evola’s.) —*Trans.*

[ ←2 ]

H. Massis, *Défense de l'Occident*, Paris, 1927, p. 245.

[ ←3 ]

The Italian is *tempi ultimi*, one of Evola's common ways of referring to these latter days. The Italian is ambiguous, and, given the entire thrust of Evola's thought, surely deliberately so: it means on the one hand "the most recent times," and on the other "the last times." I have translated it throughout as "the latest times." —*Trans.*



[ ←4 ]

Cf. A. Schopenhauer (*Parerga und Paralipomena*, ed. 1851, v. I, pp. 231–233).  
Schopenhauer already saw this point clearly.

[ ←5 ]

Buddhist teaching is related to these views; according to that teaching, the “gods” (understood as “natural” powers), if they want to attain “liberation,” must first pass into the human state and therein attain to “awakening.” This then is corroborated by the hermetic teachings regarding the superiority of man over the gods as “lord of the two natures,” but also regarding the continual danger in which he finds himself. It should be noted — and in what follows we will look closely at this — that against the ideal of “liberation,” identical to that of the complete realization of the supernatural destination of man, the concept of “nature” embraces also cosmic and non-human states, which nonetheless fall within the conditioned world.

[ ←6 ]

Evola uses the Italian *anima* here; I have everywhere translated this word as soul. Be it known, however, that the translation is imprecise, or at least less than ideal; the Italian word derives from the Latin, and has the sense of an animating principle, rather than the somewhat more complex notion contained in the English “soul,” which has been overlain with both Pagan and Christian meanings and intentions. Evola’s use of the word indicates the complex of natural elements, rooted in the body, that make up a human being. This helps one understand what he means when he speaks in other places (and also in some parts of what follows) of the soul’s fragmentation and dispersal after death and the survival of the spirit, when it is precisely the “soul,” if anything, that an English speaker might indicate as potentially surviving death. —*Trans.*

[ ←7 ]

It is not without reason that the Inquisition condemned not only him who was a “support” for phenomena similar to spiritist ones, but also those who denied the existence of such phenomena altogether: these last fell under the suspicion of being instruments of the same “nether” influences on another front, precisely by encouraging the “concealment” of these influences.

[ ←8 ]

The inhibiting effect we have mentioned becomes disastrous when at the sittings there are not only people intent on supervising and preventing tricks, but people who, so to speak, are “carriers” of the true supernatural. Then the effect not rarely is a true and proper hysterical and convulsive crisis of the medium, which cannot help but bring to mind things that sometimes occur in rites of exorcism.

[←9.]

For the correspondence in points of view, we shall refer the reader, in this connection, also to the work of R. Guénon, *L'Erreur Spirit* (Paris, 1st ed., 1923).

[ ←10 ]

Leaving aside those cases in which precisely the attitude of control and obstinacy in wanting to will these phenomena into existence force the mediums to unconscious “tricks,” when they are not able to produce them spontaneously.



[ ←11 ]

This view suffices to explain also other presumed proofs of personal survival adopted by the spiritists: haunted houses, spontaneous apparitions, premonitions of relatives or their communications at the moment of death, and so forth. Only that here other conditions enter into play, conditions which change from case to case, and which render the manifestation of “spirits” possible without a true medium.

[ ←12 ]

From here the notion of *Hades* of the Greco-Roman traditions; of the *Niflheim* of the Nordic traditions; of the *pitr-yana* (opposed to the “way of the gods” — *devayana*) of the Hindu tradition, and so forth — all places of a larval existence, an existence of reabsorption. In Christianity itself, *Gehenna*, referred to by the Evangels as the “damned” (in Hebrew *Gué Hinnom*, the Gehenna of Fire) designated originally the place wherein the refuse of the city was *destroyed*: and it is said: “Fear him, which after he hath killed hath power to cast into hell [Gehenna]; yea, I say unto you, Fear him” (Luke 7:4).

[ ←13 ]

On this, G. Meyrink has written a number of very suggestive pages in his novel  
*The White Dominican*.

[ ←14. ]

Reading *punto di vista* (point of view) where the MS has *punto di vita* (point of life); the latter is, I presume, an *erratum*. —*Trans.*

[ ←15 ]

This teaching has been summarized in the appendix of our *Yoga of Power*; cf. also our compendium *Introduction to Magic*, Volume II.

[ ←16 ]

- A. David-Néel, *Mystiques et Magiciens du Tibet*, Paris, 1930, p. 237. The ancient cult of the ancestors would require its own consideration, insofar as it was not a simple expression of piety. Here we will mention only that such cults essentially had in view a unity of the living and of the dead, under the sign of the generative force of the race (the *genius*), which it sought to keep alive and present: a force of superindividual character, as appears above all in the aristocratic, patrician forms of this cult, in which the *genius* was identified with the “archegate Hero,” assuming a “divine,” luminous character. But the idea of obscure, nether forces often subsisted in the common Roman conception of the *Lares*.

[ ←17 ]

Evola uses the English word “handicap” here. —*Trans.*



[ ←18 ]

“Psychic aether,” too, is given in English. —*Trans.*

[←19.]

For these various hypotheses, for the corresponding problems, and also for an exhaustive and up-to-date survey of everything which has been up to now ascertained regarding the extranormal phenomena of metapsychics, cf. M. Ryzl, *Parapsychologie* (Genf 1970).

[ ←20 ]

The Italian word here is *casuologia*, which is either a typographical error in the original, or else a term which I can only presume must mean the study of cases, in the psychiatric sense. I have used an equivalent neologism in English. —*Trans.*

[ ←21 ]

The Italian is *ossessiva*, “obsessive,” which is also used in the present work in the sense of “possessive,” that is, having the quality of being possessed by a spirit, demon, external power, etc. In later chapters I have translated it using the latter translation, but in the present context this would not work. Let it be known to the reader, however, that Evola here might be indicating that there is some element of possession, not in the various aspects of the human subconscious, but in the methods and hypotheses of psychoanalysis itself. — *Trans.*

[ ←22 ]

Evola's Italian expression — *bassifondi* — could also mean “slums,” a double meaning which we can well assume is intended in the present case. —*Trans.*

[ ←23 ]

G. Le Bon, *La psychologie des foules*, Paris, 1909, p. 13.

[ ←24. ]

Freud, *Ich und Es*, Wien, 1923.

[ ←25 ]

*Agens* is Latin for “actor” or “agent” — that which acts, rather than that which is acted upon. —*Trans.*



[ ←26 ]

As noted in Chapter 1 above, the Italian for the Freudian concept “ego” is simply the first person singular in capital letters (“*Io*” as opposed to “*io*”). This obviously lacks a great many of the connotations implicit to our English word “ego,” which, when it is not used in an explicitly Freudian context, nonetheless preserves hints of Freudianism, or else carries a predominately negative sense (as when we say that a man has an “enormous ego”). It would thus be misleading to translate “*Io*” as “ego” throughout. At the same time, Evola’s use of a single word in a variety of different contexts is meaningful and intentional. I have used variously “ego” (in Freudian contexts), “self” (which however has another Italian equivalent, *sé*), and “I” (used as a noun, rather than a pronoun) depending on the context. The reader is invited to recall that all these words are to be referred back to one and the same concept, and that Evola is in fact engaging (among other things) in a deep critique of the Freudian ego when he attempts to elicit other designations or connotations to the idea of the human self. —*Trans.*

[ ←27 ]

The *Ich-Ideal*, or “ideal ego,” in its pretense to sufficiency, joins together all the exigencies of the environment that the ego cannot satisfy: thus the ego, in its discontent with itself, might find in the “ideal ego,” differentiated from it, the satisfaction which it does not find in itself. The feeling of *guilt* would be nothing other than an expression of the tension between the ego and the “ideal of the ego.”

[ ←28 ]

Italian: *di cui interiormente anche il super-Io si fa vindice* — a striking, if somewhat curious, phrase. The sense is presumably that the superego, according to the Freudian system, is the part of the self which imposes the will or the norms of the collective, so that in any case that one attempts to struggle against it, it will act on behalf of that will or those norms. — *Trans.*

[←29.]

Latin: “way of living,” implying particularly an agreement which permits two conflicting parties or individuals to live peacefully. —*Trans.*

[ ←30 ]

A well-known pillar of Freudian psychoanalysis is the so-called “polymorphous infantile perversion”: thesis that, were it true, would even be agreeable as a reaction against the mawkish bourgeois attitude of the cult of the child, which sees in every infant a “little angel.” For Freud, the child combines, albeit in unconscious and embryonic form, so many variants of the libido that every perverted adult seems disfigured and one-sided in comparison. And this supposedly belongs to the heritage of the “unconscious” which everyone carries in himself, which in so-called “regressions” is susceptible to reactivation.

[ ←31 ]

According to Freudianism, there is nothing, or almost nothing, random in dreams. In the images and in the actions of the dream, impulses, which are repressed in waking life, manifest themselves or satisfy themselves. The insignificance or the incoherency of these images or actions are dressed up so as to elude “censure” and to facilitate their being smuggled in. In other cases it happens that the dream, or parts of it, are not even recalled. Memory, that is to say, is inhibited. These are processes which, according to psychoanalysis, are repeated to varying degree in the diurnal life of the soul, and which then culminate in the experiences of neurotics.

[←32]

S. Lazarsfeld, *Wie die Frau den Man erlebt*, Wien, 1929.

[ ←33 ]

For example, the forms of tenderness are for Freudism nothing but transpositions and dilutions of impulses which, in the moment of a crisis, “regress” and take up the form of incestuous, homosexual, narcissistic-homicidal instincts, and so forth.



[←34.]

S. Freud, *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego*, London, 1949, pp. 37–38.

[ ←35 ]

Regarding pansexuality without the veils of psychoanalytical milieus, a disciple of Freud, Silberer, gave a clever variant of the first words of the Gospel of John as the motto of a book dedicated to the psychoanalytic interpretation of symbols and of myths: not “In the beginning was the Word,” but *Im Anfang war penis und vulva*, that is, “in the beginning were the masculine and feminine genital organs.”

[ ←36 ]

The Italian here is a properly Evolian term, *demonía*, which pops up in many of Evola's works (it occurs again in the last chapter of this book), and appears to be of his own coining. Surely it is derived from the Ancient Greek δαιμόνια, meaning "inferior divine beings" (from the same word which was used, for instance, for Socrates' sign), but also "evil spirits"; it is more in this last sense that Evola generally employs it. I have translated it in the present work as "demonry," a word coined in deference to Evola's own neologism. — *Trans.*

[←37]

On all of this, see our book *Eros and the Mysteries of Love: The Metaphysics of Sex*, New York, 1983.

[ ←38 ]

Cf. for example the *Bhagavad-gîtâ*, III, 39–40: “Consciousness is coated in that which, under the form of desirable, is an insatiable fire... It resides in the senses, in intelligence and in reason and by means of these, and, coating the consciousness, alters the spirit.”

[←39.]

Latin: “longing, desire, lust.” — *Trans.*

[ ←40 ]

S. Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*.

[ ←41 ]

And in this context both the sadistic tendency and the masochistic tendency appear to be congenital elements of the sexual libido itself; they are not “derived,” but they form a part of its very essence. They have the character of derivations only when they are absolutized, conditioning the entire erotic process.



[ ←42 ]

Cf. our book, which we have already cited: *Eros and the Mysteries of Love: The Metaphysics of Sex*.

[←43]

C. G. Jung, *L'Inconscient dans la vie psychique normale et anormale*, Paris, 1928, p. 43.

[ ←44. ]

Cf. C. G., Intr. To *Das Geheimnis der goldenen Blüte*, München, 1929, pp. 35–60. For a deeper critique of the views of Jung, cf. the essay contained in the collection *Introduction to Magic* (3rd ed., Edizioni Mediterranee, Roma, 1971, v. III, pp. 383).

[ ←45 ]

One can see, with this example, how far the theory of the “censor” which inhibits the conscious and the memory might go: a psychoanalyst can ask you in all seriousness if you have ever experienced incestuous or homosexual feelings, even in images in dreams. If you respond that you have not, perhaps he will judge you a “serious case”: if nothing of the kind has reached your consciousness, this means that those impulses are so strong that they impose radical measures of censorship, so much so that nothing of them reaches consciousness. — Think of how far a man who is easily accessible to suggestion might be carried along such a this path.

[ ←46 ]

Our English fascination, as the Italian *fascino*, derives from the Latin *fascinatio*, meaning “an act of bewitching.” —*Trans.*

[ ←47 ]

An American psychoanalyst, Smith-Jelliffe, went so far as to propose, as a method of “affective transfer,” a three-way situation; the psychoanalyst is supposed to have a female psychoanalyst as an assistant, so that the psychoanalyzed has at his disposal both the one sex and the other as the object on which, by transposition, his complexes can “discharge” — the male psychoanalyst participating if these impulses are homosexual and the female if instead a surrogate is required for the incestuously hungered-for sister or mother —. The fees for psychoanalytic treatment are almost always very steep. But one must allow that in this case at least one is offering one’s “complexes” a service with perks!

[ ←48 ]

Italian: *Finché si è identificati*. The meaning is surely, when the experiencer identifies himself with the experienced, when he fails to establish right boundaries between himself and that which he experiences. —*Trans.*

[ ←49. ]

Here, we are dealing with a subject who, put into a hypnotic state, is commanded to perform a certain act. He performs it and finds almost always reasons to persuade himself that he has done it from his own free will.



[ ←50 ]

In Freudian terminology, this is the “preconscious,” distinct from the “unconscious.”

[ ←51 ]

Latin: “new life.” This was the name of Dante’s autobiography. —*Trans.*

[←52]

Italian: *spighe di vita*, where *spighe* means spikes or ears of wheat. —*Trans.*

In the “experimental” field, one might, moreover, recall the interesting results of studies such as those of O. Kohnstamm (*Medizinische u. philosophische Ergebnisse aus der Methode der hypnotischen Selbstbesinnung*, München, 1918, cit. by R. Rosel). In the midst of hypnosis, three states of the subconscious have been observed: the “subconscious orderer” (which notion might take up again the same “logic of the underground”), the “subconscious that experiences” (the emotive subconscious, which might extend itself to the “nether” zones), and finally the “deep subconscious.” Subjects feel this last, “at bottom, as something which does not belong at all to their person,” as “impersonal” and “superpersonal.” It should be recognized that if, for the lack of a better term, one wants to call it an “ego,” it is however absolute different from the ego of the conscience which usually keeps vigil. While the other two “unconsciouses” might be influenced by affects and complexes, the “deep subconscious” is “absolutely objective and truthful.” In special states of hypnosis, it is drawn from its latency, that is, it is made conscious. — These are already significant adumbrations of the aforementioned “metaphysical descent into the depths.”

[ ←54 ]

Ancient Greek: the over-cosmos, or that which stands beyond or above or behind the intelligible order which inheres into the world surrounding us. —  
*Trans.*

[ ←55 ]

The Italian here is ambiguous: *quell'esperienza che nell'uomo comune in apparenza si forma*. This could mean either “that experience which in the common man is apparently formed” or “that experience which in the man common in appearance is formed.” I have used the (somewhat inexact) English word “commoner” here to preserve the ambiguity. —*Trans.*

[ ←56 ]

The so-called Western critical-idealistic philosophy, through gnoseology (or the “theory of knowledge”), has reached the idea that the experience of the external world rests essentially on forms (“categories”) and functions which reside in the ego. It is the merit of E. von Hartmann to have strictly demonstrated that such a view no longer holds, if one no longer conceives of the place of such forms and functions as the unconscious. The traditional teaching, especially in its Hindu formulation, is analogous: an unconscious is recognized as the “internal organ” which determines the experience of the world.

[←57.]

Latin: “under the sign of eternity.” —*Trans.*



[ ←58 ]

The psychoanalysts admit that the consciousness of the world world of the id, apart from various forms of neurosis, might have the consequence of mental alienation, suicide, the slow preparation of causes which — even through seemingly fortuitous accidents — bring one to death. Let the variety of the aforementioned morbid relations between subjects and psychoanalysts be added to this, especially in those cases when the subjects are women.

[←59.]

However, Jung, whose views, albeit subtler and more spiritualistic, are not less dangerous than the others, is not Jewish; while, in the field of psychotherapy, one of the best critiques of psychoanalysis, undertaken from the point of view of a method which has in view the value of the personality, was written by a Jew (V. Franckl, *Aerztliche Seelsorge*, Wien, 1946).

[ ←60 ]

A. Schopenhauer, *Parerga and Paralipomena*, (New York, Oxford University Press: 2000), Vol. I, p. 143.

[ ←61 ]

A. Besant, *Le leggi fondamentali della Teosofia*, Italian trans., Turin, 1929, p.  
3.

[ ←62 ]

E. P. Blavatsky, *Abrégé de la Doctrine secrète*, Paris, p. 2.

[ ←63 ]

So far as Italy goes, we might cite, in this connection, the group of the *Independent Theosophical League* (*Lega teosofica indipendente*) led by Decio Calvari, who even published a journal, *Ultra*.

[ ←64. ]

Charles Leadbeater, Annie Besant, and Alice Bailey were three prominent theosophists. Besant was even the president of the Theosophical Society for a time. So far as Evola's points in this paragraph go, it might be noted that Leadbeater "attained clairvoyance" through certain practices of Kundalini yoga, and later supposedly helped Besant to gain the same gifts. Leadbeater would claim that this gave him, among other things, the ability to perceive atoms. Besant, meanwhile, is the same to "find" J. Krishnamurti, of whom Evola speaks at some length below. As for Bailey, suffice it to say that she is one of the key figures in New Ageism, and has even been called its founder by some. —*Trans.*

[ ←65 ]

G. Chévrier, *La Dottrina Occulta*, Italian translation, Milan, 1928, p. 10.



[ ←66 ]

Cf. J. Evola, *The Doctrine of Awakening* (work on the Buddhist ascesis), 2nd ed., Milan, 1965.

[ ←67 ]

Latin: “knowledge (or wisdom) after labor.” This was indeed a Hermetic saying.

—*Trans.*

[ ←68 ]

As a conception, moreover, it is not exclusive to the Oriental teaching. In the classic traditions the notion of “providence” itself did not have a “moral” character, with relation to the care of a theistically conceived god, but it was thought to be a complex of conditioning and impersonal laws, like to the warnings that the objective science of a doctor might furnish on what to do and what not to do — to use a Plotinian analogy (*Enneads*, III, 3, [5]).

[ ←69. ]

Indeed, the traditional teaching contains the idea of a superior order, to which the far-Eastern notion of the “Path of Heaven” (*Tao*) corresponds, as well as the Hindu idea of *Rta*, the Hellenic idea of κόσμος. But it is an idea which is valid precisely only in the metaphysical realm, and which therefore must not be confounded with the human notion of “purpose.” It is through images alone that an allusion to the relations between this superior order and the plane of liberty and of causality (*karma*) is given (if it is given at all); De Maistre gives an example of such an image when he states that the universe is comparable to a watch which, though the wheels turn each by itself and alone, always shows the right time; or like that Chinese saying, that order is the sum of all disorders. There is therefore no tangible interference.

[ ←70 ]

It is interesting to observe that the epoch of the birth of Buddhism (around 600 B.C.), which affirmed the doctrine of the *anâtmâ*, coincides with that of the rise of philosophical and naturalistic thought in the East and above all in the West (Greece): that is, with the manifestations of logical consciousness connected to the brain; these take the place of anterior and superior forms of consciousness, which constituted the existential basis of doctrines like the Vedântine.

It is of the utmost importance to realize that the great traditional doctrines are not mere human inventions, and that their differences are not arbitrary, but relative to the adaptation of their teaching to effectively diverse historico-spiritual states of affairs.

[ ←71 ]

One comprehends therefore why Catholicism, in relation to the period for which it was formed, declared the doctrine of the soul's preexistence with respect to the body to be a heresy. In reality, the soul, as a merely "human" soul (and today one cannot speak, in general, of any other kind), is born with the birth of the body.

[ ←72 ]

The exacerbation of the alternative between salvation and perdition, which can be observed in Protestantism as opposed to Catholicism, is to be explained with the ever more physical character which the ego assumed in the still more recent times of the Reformation, contemporary with the rise of so-called "*humanism*."

[ ←7.3 ]

As has already been mentioned, translated into moral terms, this notion corresponds in Catholicism to the theory of heredity of “sin” which the flesh of man bears, as *cupiditas* or *appetitus innatus*.



[ ←74. ]

Italian: *sostanziato con la sua immedicata brama di vita*, lit. “substantiated through its unmedicated/uncured yearning for life.” —*Trans.*

[ ←75 ]

One might designate the irrational form, with which a soul identifies itself and which remains the basis of the various human psycho-vital functions, with the term *daemon*, in the classic sense, and recall the Plotinian teaching, that the soul “has chosen from the first its daemon and its life,” in conformity to the nature of the tendencies that it has developed in itself (*Enneads*, III, 4, [5–6]).

*Antarabhâva*, literally, means “that which exists between the two”; it alludes that is to that which takes the place of the ego in the discontinuous interval between one and the other terrestrial (but strictly speaking not only terrestrial) existence. For all of this, see Evola, *The Doctrine of Awakening*.

[ ←76 ]

Latin: “innate appetite,” an inherent desire or craving. —*Trans.*

[ ←77 ]

Ancient Greek: “the cycle of births.” —*Trans.*

[ ←78 ]

A reference to Hegel's *Phenomenology of the Spirit*, Preface, Part 4 §16, where Hegel critiques the idea that "in the Absolute all is one."

[←79.]

Cf. R. Guénon, *Orient et Occident*, Paris, 1925.

[ ←80 ]

Taken from Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, Act 2, Scene 2. —*Trans.*

[ ←81 ]

Steinerian evolution does not leave even the real or mythical personalities in peace, those that were oriented so clearly toward the supernatural, such as Buddha, Zarathustra, Hermes, and so forth and so on; Buddha, for example, was supposedly not at all liberated from the world of *nirvâna*; even he, instrument of the “evolution of humanity,” evidently contributed to the preparation of Christianity, and his mission was to elaborate certain forces, that would be reincarnated in Jesus. In general, anthroposophy adheres *mutatis mutandis* to the presumption of that Christianity, to which it is imagined that all the pre-Christian religions were but preparations and “prefigurations.”



[ ←82 ]

It is hardly worth observing that the reference of Steiner to the Rosicrucians is as gratuitous and illegitimate as that of a given degree of the Masonry of the Scottish Rite and of various contemporary fraternities. The true Rosicrucians were one of those initiatic groups that already “withdrew” from the West before the French Revolution, when they had verified the situation of the epoch.

[ ←83 ]

Italian: *non stanno né in cielo né in terra*. This is a common idiom in Italian, which I have translated literally despite the fact that the English idiom would be quite another. The sense of the expression is something like our “neither here nor there,” only much stronger: it indicates that something has literally no place at all, and so should not exist. I have translated the phrase literally here, since it seems to me that Evola is using a common expression with a double sense — a game he often plays with idiomatic expressions, much to the delight of his translators. —*Trans.*

[ ←84. ]

Latin: “in the words of the master,” in the sense of taking the master at his word, obeying and trusting the words of the master. The original Latin is Horace’s, from his First Epistle, lines 14 to 15: *Nullius addictus iurare in uerba magistri, / quo me cumque rapit tempestas, deferor hospes*: “As nothing obliges me to swear my oath to a master, / wherever the storm may carry me, I arrive as a guest” (translation mine). —*Trans.*

[ ←85 ]

The works of Steiner, which can be indicated for this positive aspect, are: *Wie erlangt man Erkenntnisse über die höheren Welten?* and, in part, *Initiaten-Bewusstsein*, translated also into Italian in the Laterza edition with the title *L'Iniziazione e Coscienza di Iniziato*.

[ ←86 ]

This is the opposition which runs between that which the scholastics called *intellectual intuition* and “clairvoyance,” which furnishes naught other than mere “visions” and does not have, at bottom, any truly spiritual value.

[←87]

Latin: “under the sign of interior things.” —*Trans.*

[ ←88 ]

Latin: "Visit the interior of the Earth; by rectifying, you will find the hidden stone, the true medicine." —*Trans.*

[←89.]

It is possible that the basis for this view is to be found in certain popular expositions, taken literally, of Mahâyânic Buddhism, in which the *bhōdisativa* renounces *nirvâna* and gives himself to the aid of the world — almost as if *nirvâna* were a house which might enter or exit, rather than a state which, once achieved, is inalienable.



[ ←90 ]

Regarding “clairvoyance,” those who claim to possess it are wary of giving any positive proof of it. Rather than roving through the “Akasha Chronicles” and referring to every kind of cosmic saga and exceedingly distant evolutionary stages, both past and future, they would do well, in the first place, to credit their claimed faculty through some banal but verifiable fact. It is said of Steiner, who reads in the cosmic aeons and in the occult future of the universe and of humanity with his clairvoyance, that he did not so much as notice that his center, the Goetheanum, was going up in flames. Whenever such persons have risked some verifiable prediction, things have gone badly — precisely as when the anthroposophists predicted that if man were to leave the Earth’s atmosphere, he would be disintegrated, he would be annihilated by tremendous occult cosmic powers — while, for example, human voyages to the moon are by now taking on an almost touristic character. Regarding the fixation with “self-initiation,” it would be difficult to nominate a single anthroposophist who owes one of his exceptional qualities to the corresponding “exercises,” rather than possessing it already from the start.

[ ←91 ]

For this see our book *The Bow and the Club* (Arktos Media Ltd. 2018), and the essay contained in *Introduzione alla Magia* (Introduction to Magic), Milan, vol. III, p. 274 and passim.

[←92]

W. J. Schelling, *Zur Geschichte der neuen Philosophie*, S. W. (I), Volume X, pp. 187–189.

[←93 ]

P. Tillich, *Das Dämonische*, Tübingen, 1926.

[ ←94 ]

I have reproduced the order of these comments as Evola presents them; though in point of fact the last two fragments of the speech both occur well before all the others. —*Trans.*

[←95 ]

J. Krishnamurti, *La Vita Liberata*, Trieste, 1931, p. 15. [*Translator's note*: The Italian work appears to be a compilation of various Krishnamurti writings or utterances. I have here supplied the English original for the quotations — taken from *Life in Freedom*, Star Publishing Press 1928 — and for the others I have left the references to the Italian.]

[←96 ]  
Ibid., pp. 113, 122.

[←97.]  
Ibid., p. 17.



[ ←98 ]

Italian: *irrazionalismo diveniristico*, where the latter word is a rare one reserved primarily for strictly philosophical contexts. It is the adjectival form of the verb *divenire*, to become, to develop. Somehow, “becomistic irrationalism” simply doesn’t ring as nicely in English, and so I have made do. —*Trans.*

[←99.]  
Ibid., p. 69.

[[←100](#)]

Journal *Ananda*, I, p. 5.

[[←101](#)]

*La Vita Liberata*, cit., p. 49.

[ ←102 ]

In the Appendix of I. de Manziarly and C. Soares, *Saggio su Krishnamurti*,  
Genova, 1929, p. 83.

[ ←103 ]

*La Vita Liberata*, p. 52.

[←104] ]

Latin: "path of removal." —*Trans.*

[ ←105 ]

On this Hermetic teaching, cf. our work *The Hermetic Tradition*.



[ [←106](#) ]

R. Linssen, *Krishnamurti, psychologue de l'ère nouvelle, Paris, p. 41*. By A. Niel another book entitled *Krishnamurti et la révolte* has also been written.

[←107.]

Italian: *che si giustizia da sé*, lit. “which executes itself” in the sense of being its own executioner. —*Trans.*

[ ←108 ]

V. Gioberti spoke of a “transcendent Catholicism” (*Della Riforma Cattolica*, Turin, 1856, pp. 317–318): “True universality is not found elsewhere than in transcendent Catholicism. Vulgar, practical Catholicism, being restricted to a place, a time, a determinate number of men, has always more or less the semblance and the traits of a sect. Catholicism is therefore not truly Catholic, save as it is transcendent. And vulgar Catholicism cannot call itself Catholic except insofar as it unites itself with the transcendent.” Gioberti, however, remaining in a philosophastic ideology of the Hegelian type, and one steeped moreover in politics, was surely the last who might have an adequate idea of the essence of “transcendent Catholicism.”

[←109.]

Latin: lit. “what everywhere, what by everyone, what always [has been believed],” a saying of the fifth-century Christian monk Saint Vincent of Lérins. Born in Gaul, Vincent, wrote his most important work, the *Commonitory*, with an eye to finding a rule capable of distinguishing truth from heresy, and it was to this project that he devoted the better part of his working life. He was, interestingly, a great foe of St. Augustine. —*Trans.*

[ ←110 ]

These events are not “mythic,” save in the form in which they are presented in the Old Testament, which regard, moreover, only a specific historical cycle. The tale of the “flood” should be considered as the echo of the memory of those catastrophes which destroyed the original centers — the arctic and the Nordic-Atlantic — of the prehistorical race which took as its heritage the unified primordial tradition, leading therefore to a fracture and to a dispersion. On this, see Evola, *Revolt Against the Modern World* and also *Synthesis on the Doctrine of Race*, Milan, 1941.

[ [←111](#) ]

The law of expiation, which is a particular case of the law of causality, effectively has validity only on a certain plane of reality, in which it justifies the various rites of ancient non-superstitious peoples; it can no longer hold however with the characteristics of ineluctability, for the divine order, if one understands this as having something of true supernaturality.

[ [←112](#) ]

Both terms are Latin: “sanctification” and “divinification,” respectively. By the former is intended the granting of holiness to a human being *qua* human being, a divine chrism which is given to him in an act of grace; by the latter is rather intended the transfiguration of the human material itself into something higher – the transformation of the human being into a divine being. —*Trans.*

[ ←113 ]

Even the date of Christmas might be integrated into a larger whole with a cosmic background given that it corresponds approximately to that of the winter solstice, point of the rekindling of the light in the turning of the year – turning which was also the basis of a primordial sacred symbolism already in Nordico-Atlantic prehistory. Outside of Christianity, it is known that “pagan” Rome, in a certain relation with Mithracism, likewise knew that date as *Natalis Domini = Natalis Solis Invicti*.



[ ←114 ]

The literal interpretation of this birth, which is the article of faith of the Christian community and which constitutes the basis for the Mariology or the “Marian cult,” betrays the absurdity of the most opaque exotericism. Apart from the implementation of the sexual theme in relation to the exaltation of physical virginity, it is difficult to see why one must have recourse to an abnormal family in which a married woman remains a virgin; nor is any exceptional proof of merit or of excellence indicated in the Gospels, for which this “Virgin,” Mary, should be preselected, and, after having served instrument-like for the incarnation, should be raised to a divine figure as “Queen of the Skies,” with all the attributes which are found in the Catholic liturgy. The fact is that in Mary a mythology bursts forth once again, one already existing in the Mediterranean prehistory (corresponding to the Mother with divine child even in ancient Egyptian iconography) in a predominately “gynocratic” framework.

[ ←115 ]

On the distinction between psychic phenomena and miracles from the Catholic point of view, one might consider the book of the Jesuit G. Bilchmair, *Okkultismus und Seelsorge*, Innsbruck, 1926, where one might find certain just critiques of the various forms modern spiritualism.

[ ←116 ]

Compare Evola, *The Doctrine of Awakening*, in which other examples are indicated in our discussion of Buddhism, with the distinction between “Arya” (noble, holy) miracles and “non-Arya.”

[ ←117 ]

Latin: “in extreme conditions,” meaning, in the Catholic tradition, at the brink of death. —*Trans.*

[ ←118 ]

Latin: “from the work worked,” meaning that grace comes, not from him who carries through the sacraments, but from the right carrying out of the sacraments, which then attract grace from without — meaning, from God, specifically through the intercession of Christ. This is contrasted with the second Latin phrase in this paragraph, *ex opere operantis*, “from the work of him who works,” meaning that the power of the work comes directly from the agent of the work itself, as, for example, in the spell cast by a sorcerer. — *Trans.*

[←119.]

The “Holy Spirit” in Christianity, dwelling in the Church, is the *shekinah* of the Kabbala (*kabbala*, moreover, literally means precisely “transmission”), the *prâna* or *brahman* brought by the Brahman caste, the “glory” — *hvarenô* — donned like a “celestial flame” of “victory” by the Persian kings, and so forth. Given the nature of the present work, we must omit the consideration of the relations between spirituality and the regal tradition on the one hand with spirituality and the priestly tradition on the other. On this, see Evola, *Revolt Against the Modern World* (cit.). Considerations of the kind cannot help but bring to light the function, even the negative function, which Christianity and Catholicism had in the Western world, as historical forces.

[[←120](#)]

See J. J. Bachofen, *Das Mutterrecht*, Basel, 1870, and also our own essay, *Ist das "römische Recht" römische?* in *Europäische Revue*, no. 3, 1942.

[[←121](#)]

Italian: *salutistico*, meaning “health” in the adjectival sense that we speak of “health food” or “health regimes.” —*Trans.*



[ ←122 ]

It is interesting to compare the modern concept of sport with that which corresponds to it in antiquity, the “games” and the variety of actions in the *certamina*, in the sacred games. For this, see Evola, *Revolt Against the Modern World*, cit., I, §10.

[ ←123 ]

In this specific case one can nevertheless speak of elective affinities. Another of the errors of our days is to consider the North-Americans as a “young people,” insofar as these are to be traced back to the latest offshoot and almost to the regurgitation of the ancient European races. And thus it is that who has a keen gaze does not see youth, so much as *infantilism*, in the sense of regressions that occur in senility, in multiple aspects of the American soul. It should however come as no surprise that the two extremes of the cycle meet.

[←124.]

One “masterpiece” in this direction is the book by Vergin, *Das unbewusste Europa* (Wien, 1926), in which the various European political ideas are interpreted as the effect of a reemergence of “complexes” of the infantile psyche and of the psyche of savages.

[[←125](#)]

“Medicine-man” is in English in the original; also at the end of this same paragraph. —*Trans.*

[ ←126 ]

Evola here speaks of “twilight of the heroes,” and not of the gods, though the latter phrase is the more widely known, deriving as it does from the *Edda* and from Norse mythology. It is difficult to say if this was an error on his part, or intentional. —*Trans.*

[[←127](#)]

*Synthesis of the Doctrine of Race*, Milan, 1943.

[ ←128 ]

Italian: *sfaldamento*, a flaking off of layers. —*Trans.*

[←129.]

The Italian is *aldiquà*, which is the explicit alternative to the *aldilà*, the afterlife.

“Here-and-now” is thus to be taken as the explicit contrast of “hereafter.” —  
*Trans.*



[ ←130 ]

D. Merejkowski, *Tolstoi e Dostojewskij*.

[ ←131 ]

Cf. R. Reininger, *F. Nietzsches Kampf um den Sinn des Lebens* (Wien-Leipzig, 1925), p. 37: “The person (of Nietzsche) is at the same time a cause. It is the cause of modern man, for whom here we fight, of this man who, uprooted from the sacred ground of tradition... seeks himself, that is wishes to reconquer a satisfying sense of his existence, which has been by now entirely lost to itself.” The work of Reininger was published also in Italian translation with our introduction, under the title *Nietzsche e il senso della vita* (ed. Volpe, Roma, 1971).

[←132]  
See *Ride the Tiger*.

[ ←133 ]

*Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, Prologue, §2. Translation by Walter Kaufmann. —  
*Trans.*

[←134.]

Latin: “the eldest appetite,” literally “the first-born appetite.” —*Trans.*

[ ←135 ]

See *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, Prologue, §3. Translation by Walter Kaufmann. —  
*Trans.*

[←136]

In *The Birth of Tragedy*, Nietzsche rightly sought an intermediate solution, and believed he had found it in the type of the *Dionysian artist* who, as creator, remains united with the irrational substrate of reality but, as artist, liberates himself at the same time and participates in contemplative catharsis. But this equivocal conception was soon overcome by Nietzsche, who, in various forms, affirmed ever more decidedly the opposition between the two directions.

[←137]

Taken from the formulation of Ernst Haeckel that “ontogeny recapitulates phylogeny,” meant to indicate the theory that the embryo in its fetal form passes through all the various phases of the hierarchy of life, from the simplest vital forms up to its own. Thus the human embryo, for instance, passes through phases in which it seems to recall simple organisms, fish, birds, mammals, etc., before finally taking the form of a human being. Similarly, Nietzsche has followed the entire “historical development” of Western thought up to its very end, its final consequences. —*Trans.*



[ ←138 ]

In the West, it is perhaps only Max Stirner, with his theory of the “Ego and its Own,” to have gone beyond Nietzsche; his idea however had only a social scope. In any case, it is certain that the exponents of another current, about which a great deal of noise has lately and senselessly been made, did not go further than him; that is, *existentialism*. Here one commences likewise from the idea of the irrationality of the world, which is such, however, *a parte subjecti*, that is on account of the incapacity of the strength of human reason to see beyond it (Kierkegaard). This irrationality is assumed as pure fact, as “existential reality.” Man, before it, is entrusted only to himself, to his pure “responsibility” (Jaspers). But a way to discharge is found through a reference, partially irrational, to the unknown and unattainable God. Even Sartre, who in contrast to the other existentialists is an atheist, and who rather than responsibility speaks of man’s “not having an excuse,” remains on an intensive level quite far below Nietzsche’s. On existentialism, see our already cited work, *Ride the Tiger*.

[←139.]

In reality, from the psychiatric reports that have been unearthed, it appears that Nietzsche's case had "atypical" traits, in all probability psychogenic ones. — Dostoevsky's epilepsy is beyond doubt; however it remains to be seen up to what point it *conditioned* and up to what point it had *determined* certain of his spiritual experiences. Certain illness sometimes have the function of producing gaping holes in a dividing wall, without which, for the persons in question, the vision of what lies beyond it might not have been possible.

[ ←140 ]

The Italian title of this work is *Gli Ossessi*, which means also “the obsessed”; this is a fundamental point that Evola makes later on. The wordplay is lost in English, but should be born in mind throughout the passage which follows, as well as when Evola returns to the term later on. So far as Dostoevsky’s novel goes, its title has also been translated into English as *Demons*, in what is, in the opinion of the translator, the best English edition yet produced — that of Richard Pevear and Larissa Volokhonksy. —*Trans.*

[[←141](#)]

We allude to those methods, having their most typical expression on the so-called “Tantric Left-Hand Path.” Cf. Evola, *The Yoga of Power*, essay on Tantra. [See also Chapters 12 and 18 of *Recognitions*; Arktos Media Ltd. 2017. —*Trans.*]

[ ←142 ]

For example, when Kirillov says that man must realize that he himself is God, and when the Nietzschean Zarathustra marvels about him who does not yet know that “God is dead,” they are doing nothing other than representing in a twisted form the Upanishadic teaching of the “destruction of ignorance” and the truth announced in the Evangelical saying: “Is it not written in your law, I said, Ye are gods?” [John 10:34 —*Trans.*].

[ ←143 ]

One might see R. Guénon, *The Reign of Quantity and the Signs of the Times*, Paris, 1945, toward the end, Chapters 38 and 39, in which he recalls also the Islamic notion of the “Saints of Satan” (*awliyâ esh-Shaytân*) who are in a certain way the opposite of true saints (*awliyâ er-Rahman*).

[ ←144. ]

In this connection, see M. Eliade, *Mephistopheles and the Androgyne*, Sheed and Ward (1965), in which he speaks of various mythologems in which the opposites find themselves reunited in the divine.

[ ←145 ]

Latin: “prince of this world.” —*Trans.*



[ ←146 ]

Evola uses the English word “witches.” —*Trans.*

[←147]

A. S. LaVey, *The Satanic Bible*, Avon, New York, 1969.

[ ←148 ]

Evola uses the English word “stripteases.” — *Trans.*

[←149.]

LaVey, *op. cit.*, p. 134.

[ ←150 ]  
Ibid., p. 33.

[←151 ]  
Ibid., p. 144.

[ ←152 ]

For the biographical side of Crowley, cf. J. Symonds, *The Great Beast: The Life of Aleister Crowley*, 3rd ed., London, 1952; for some details on his doctrines, see, by the same author, *The Magic of Aleister Crowley*, London, 1958 and the essay “The Face and Mask of A. Crowley” in *Inquiry*, no. 4, 1/6, 1949. In the meantime, many other works on Crowley have been published, which attests to the interest which he has aroused even after his death. It seems that, at least in part, Somerset Maugham was inspired by Crowley in his novel *The Magician*.

[←153 ]

Latin: “so and simply,” drugs *qua* drugs. —*Trans.*



[←154.]

*The Magic of A. Crowley*, cit., pp. 48, 130–131.

[ ←155 ]  
Ibid., p. 215.

[←156 ]

Ibid., p. 131. [The Latin phrase means “death of the just one” of “death of the righteous one.” —*Trans.*]

[ ←157 ]

For other indications on sexual magic, cf. our book *Metaphysics of Sex*, cit., pp. 348 (with references also to Crowley).

[ ←158 ]

Italian: *istanze*, a very difficult word to translate. It is often used in bureaucratic or juridical contexts to mean an appeal, an application, a request. — *Trans.*

[←159.]

Latin: “from the chair” and “from the oracle,” respectively. The latter is fairly self-explanatory; the first refers in particular to the proclamations which the Catholic Pope gives *as* Pope; all Papal utterances given *ex cathedra* are considered to have issued directly from the Pope’s transcendent connection to the Holy Spirit – hence the famous, oft misunderstood, and much debated “Papal infallibility.” Evola’s point is that many of the “spiritual gurus” or “teachers” of present times please themselves obscure statements which are supposed to carry all the authority of some ill-defined divinity. — *Trans.*

[[←160](#)]

Latin: "Royal Art." –*Trans.*

[ ←161 ]

The principle works of Kremmerz were at first not in circulation. We might indicate *Avviamento all Scienza dei Magi* (Milan, 1938, republished); *La Porta Ermetica* (Rome, 1928); and *I Dialoghi sull'Ermetismo* (Spoleto, 1929). The best known works of Éliphas Lévi are *Transcendental Magic, its Doctrine and Ritual* (1854–1856; English trans. 1896) and *La clef des grands mystères* (*The Key to the Great Mysteries*, 1861). For Meyrink, see the novels: *The Golem* (1915), *The Green Face* (1917), *Walpurgis Night* (1917), and *The White Dominican* (1921). We will draw the principle elements of these works in what follows.



[ ←162 ]

P. D. Ouspensky, *Fragments d'un enseignement inconnu*, 2nd ed., Paris, 1961; *L'évolution possible de l'homme*, Paris. See also Pauwels, *Monsieur Gurdjieff: Documents, témoignages, textes et commentaires sur une société initiatique contemporaine*, Paris, 1934.

[ ←163 ]

However, not always “divine.” In Meyrink’s novel, *Walpurgis Night*, there are very suggestive pages regarding the forms of possession which are realized, above all in the thought moved by passion, without the common man’s being aware of this.

[←164.]

Analogously, Meyrink, taking up ancient ideas, such as those of Sebastian Franck, writes: “We see in the Bible not only the chronicle of occurrences in remote times, but also a long path stretching from Adam to Christ, and this is the path that we propose to tread again inside ourselves, from *name* to *name*, with the magical virtue of each name, from the expulsion to the resurrection.”

[ ←165 ]

It is for this reason that, according to some, to approach a magical center might be hazardous, so that the Masters of high magic often practiced it in strict isolation. This regards the influences which remain free, part of which might liken to the radioactive byproducts which liberate themselves near those places where the artificial fission of atomic nuclei is produced.

[ ←166 ]

Italian: *per ipotesi*, literally “by hypothesis.” But the literal translation, it seems to me, would be misleading here. Evola uses this expression often, but it is essential to bear in mind that his use of the word almost certainly has little to do with the by now established notion of a “scientific hypothesis” — that is, a kind of proposal which must then be tested by experience. Still less then does he intend the kind of commonplace idea of “hypothesis” as mere supposition or guesswork. Evola uses the word rather in its original acceptance, as a necessary premise for a certain line of thought. —*Trans.*

[←167]

Translated into English as *The Morning of the Magicians*, this book by Louis Pauwels and Jacques Bergier is a conglomeration of a great variety of material on the occult, the paranormal, the spiritual, the alchemical, the historical, etc. etc. It includes, by the admission of the authors themselves, “a lot of silliness.” —*Trans.*

[ ←168 ]

The Italian is *abitudinario*, which unfortunately has no right English translation: it means the quality of one who falls into a given habit or routine and will not, but will not come out of it. Its noun equivalent in English would perhaps be “creature of habit.” I have attempted to render the adjective with a neologism. —*Trans.*

[←169.]

The Italian is equally abnormal, if somewhat less cumbersome: *luciferinamente*.  
—*Trans.*



[ ←170 ]

The Italian is *conoscenza*, which means also “knowledge, understanding, consciousness.” I have translated this word in various ways throughout the present text depending on the context, which usually to some extent clarifies which of its acceptations is intended. In the present case, however, there is a deal of ambiguity; I have translated the word with “awareness” here and in what follows, but the reader is invited to recall the wider significance of the word, which surely is intentional on Evola’s part. —*Trans.*