The Path of Cinnabar

Julius Evola

Foreword

The autobiography of Julius Evola, Il Cammino del Cinabro, was first published in 1963, and then again in a revised and updated edition in 1972 by Vanni Schweiller. Until 2010, this book, absolutely essential for understanding the work of J. Evola, was only available in translation in one language, French. An American translation of Il Cammino del Cinabro was recently published under the misleading title of The Path of Cinnabar.

Note :

The pages that I am about to write find a certain justification in the hypothesis that the work I have elaborated over the course of the past eight decades may one day be the subject of a different kind of attention than that which it has generally received in Italy until now.

This eventuality is quite problematic, given the current situation and the cultural and political climate we can expect in future. In any event, my intention is to provide a guide to those retrospectively interested in my work and activities as a whole, and who wish to orient themselves and establish what, in this activity, may have a significance that is not only personal and episodic.

The fact is that this eventual analysis may encounter some difficulties. Firstly, we must consider books I wrote during different periods of time, and if they are not considered according to the cultural context in which they were written, they may seem peculiarly contradictory. Not least because of this, a guide is necessary.

Furthermore, and more importantly, what is essential in my activity, which has had different phases and has explored different domains, must be separated from the accessory, and especially as regards my earliest writings, one must take into account the necessarily incomplete preparation which I had at that time, as well as the influences of the cultural milieu which I was subject to, and which I only rid myself of later, bit by bit, as I acquired a greater maturity.

As a rule, one must see that, to a great extent, I had to open a way by myself. I did not receive the inestimable help which, in other times, and in other milieux, in the development of an activity of the same kind as mine, others who were from the very beginning attached to a living tradition could have benefitted from. Like one who is lost, I had to strive by my own means to rejoin an army moving further and further away, often across uncertain and dangerous terrains ; a positive juncture only occurred later. In its essential and valid part, what I thought I must express and affirm belongs, in fact, to a world different than that in which I have lived. Therefore, firstly, what guided me were solely my own innate aptitudes ; the ideas and goals only became clearer and more precise afterwards with the broadening of my experience and knowledge.

The Personal Context and the First Experiences

The best way to provide a guide to my works is therefore to say a few words on their genesis, their premises, as well as on my intentions in writing them. If some autobiographical allusions are inevitable, they shall be reduced to the indispensable minimum and will serve especially to explain what is incidental in my works. In general, it behoves us to describe at this point what we may term my “personal equation”, not without first making some preliminary remarks.

Fichte has written that one professes a given philosophy according to what one is, and we know how “social conditioning”, individual background, and “position” have assumed an important place in a certain kind of contemporary criticism. We must express certain reservations about all of this. To exclusively adopt this kind of criticism can only be legitimate in the case where all a person thinks, believes, writes and does, has a purely individual character. This is indeed the case for almost all the authors of our time ; but that in no way means that there may not be more complex cases, in which this manner of seeing and explaining things is inadequate and superficial. A given “equation” or personal disposition may even serve solely as a condition, an occasional cause, as a means – contingent in itself – of expression for contents intrinsically superior to the individual (it is not even necessary that the latter even realise it).

To explain this further by a comparison : if one were to bombard a city, it is clear that on a practical level it would be best to employ people who, as individuals, have destructive tendencies rather than a humanitarian and philanthropic disposition ; in that case, the disposition of the first corresponds to the pre-established plan, without this giving any indication as to the possible higher character of the latter.

There is the part that the personal equation may sometimes have on the intellectual terrain, and on the spiritual domain itself. Be that as it may, with respect to the personal equation, two dispositions seem to characterise my nature. The first is an aspiration to transcendence, an aspiration which manifested itself from my early youth. From there, the detachment from the human, which has been mine for a long time. Some have suggested that this disposition came from a residual prenatal memory. That is also the feeling I had. The aspiration I have just mentioned only appeared in an authentic form once I had abandoned the plane of aesthetic and philosophical experiences. Yet, even beforehand, a person competent in these matters had been surprised to find in me, even were it but a seed, in that respect, an inner orientation which, generally, does not result from abstract speculation, but from a change of state caused by certain processes, to which I shall often have occasion to mention later on.

I could thus speak of a pre-existing tendency, or of a hidden heredity, which was revived by various influences throughout the course of my existence. It is from there that stems the fundamental autonomy of my development. It is probable that, at a given moment, two characters exerted a stimulating influence, imperceptible but real, upon me. But the fact that I only became aware of this after a number of years only proves that the influence in question was not something completely foreign to me. A natural detachment from the human, from the majority of things which, particularly in the affective domain, are considered normal, appeared in me from a very early age, I would say, especially at that age. As to the negative aspects, each time this disposition manifested itself in a confused manner, and only involved my individuality, it provoked in me a certain insensitivity and a certain coldness. But, in the domain that matters the most, it allowed me to directly recognise the unconditioned values which are completely alien to the manner of seeing and of feeling of my contemporaries.

We may qualify the second disposition as the tendency of a Kshatriya, to use a Hindu word. In India, the word designated a human type inclined to action and to affirmation, a “warrior” type, in the general sense, as opposed to the religious-sacerdotal or contemplative type of the Brahmana. This orientation was mine also, even if it only gradually became clearer. It may have originated from a second hidden heredity, from an obscure memory. In the first period of my life, this disposition manifested itself in a raw state, and provoked within me an excessive affirmation of the self, which was expressed in a speculative manner in the doctrine of power and of autarchy that I formulated. But it was also the existential basis which allowed me to perceive with absolute clarity the values and realities of another world, despite their anachronism, the world of a hierarchic, aristocratic and feudal civilisation. It also allowed me to rid myself of the existential basis of my immanent critique of transcendental idealism and to go beyond it by a theory of the Absolute Individual. Lastly, as a general mental disposition, it is the reason for my taste for clear and intransigent positions, a kind of intellectual intrepidity which expressed itself, outside of polemical attitudes, by coherence and logical rigour.

There is no doubt that there was a certain contradiction between the two predispositions, while the aspiration to the transcendent provoked within me a feeling of extraneousness to reality, and, in my youth, a kind of desire of liberation or escape, which was not without mystical inclinations, the Kshatriya disposition inclined me to action, to the free affirmation of the self. It may be that the fundamental existential task of my entire life has been to mitigate these two tendencies. I only managed to accomplish this, and thereby avoid a breakdown once I had consciously seized the essence of both of these tendencies on a higher level. On the terrain of ideas, their synthesis is at the base of the formulation I gave to “traditionalism” in my later works, as opposed to that of René Guénon and the guénonian current, more intellectualist and orientalising.

The dispositions which I have mentioned cannot be attributed to environmental influences or hereditary factors (in the common biological sense). I owe very little to my environment, to my education, and to my own blood. To a great extent, I have been opposed to the predominant tradition of the West – Christianity and Catholicism – as well as to contemporary civilisation, the democratic and materialist “modern world”, the dominant culture and mentality of the land where I was born, Italy, and, lastly, to my family environment. If any of these had any influence on me whatsoever, it was of an indirect, negative kind, which I reacted against.

That accounts for my “personal equation”. At the beginning of my adolescence, while I pursued technical and mathematical studies, a deep and natural interest in the experiences of thought and art grew within me. In my youth, after a period of reading adventure novels, I had the idea, along with a friend, to write a condensed history of philosophy. On the other hand, if I already felt attracted to such writers as Oscar Wilde and Gabriele D’Annunzio, my interest quickly spread from there to the ensemble of contemporary art and literature. I spent entire days in the library, maintaining a sustained but free regimen of reading.

What had a particular importance to me was the encounter with such thinkers as Nietzsche, Michelstaedter and Weininger. This only fuelled a fundamental tendency which I already possessed, even though it was first and foremost confused, and in part deformed, due to the mixture of positive and negative elements to be found in those authors. As far as Nietzsche is concerned, my encounter with him had two principal consequences.

First of all, an opposition to Christianity. Born into a Catholic family, this religion had never meant anything to me at all in its specific themes – the theory of sin and redemption, the doctrines of love, of divine sacrifice, of grace, deism and creationism – I felt it as absolutely alien, and it was thus that I continued to consider it, even when my point of view had ceased to be influenced by idealist immanentism. If I recognised later on that there may be some valid or “traditional” aspects in Catholicism, I only did so for intellectual reasons, through an obligation to objectivity, for the quid specificum of Christianity still evoked no response from my nature. As to Catholicism as a positive religion in general, I personally witnessed the deplorable effects of its dissolution into forms which were religious, sentimental, moralistic, and on the fringe of bourgeois society, and its total lack of interest in shedding light on the foundations of a true sacrality and of a superior ascesis, or the inner meaning of symbols, rites and the sacraments. The way which, as a supramundane and supernatural spirituality, surpasses profane modern thought and its prevarications, I thus had to open by myself outside of that tradition, after putting an end to those experiences in which an innate aspiration to transcendence had grafted itself onto a trunk which was at heart problematic and suspect, that of transcendental idealism.

The next point of encounter between Nietzsche and the second disposition I have mentioned, that of the Kshatriya, was his revolt against the bourgeois world and its petty morals, against moralism, democratism, and conformism, and his affirmation of principles of an aristocratic ethic and the values of the being who frees himself from all bonds and is a law unto himself. (Needless to say, Stirner also numbered among my first readings.) On the other hand, I was but little influenced by the Nietzschean doctrine of the Superman in its inferior aspects – those individualist, aesthetic, or biological ones which are relative to the exaltation of “life” and to which, both at that time as well as later, many have assimilated the Nietzschean message. What turned out to be more positive for me was the influence of Michelstaedter, a tragic figure of precocious philosophy, who was then almost unknown and whose thought brought out a stripped-down and extreme theory of “being”, of self-sufficiency and autonomy. But I shall return to that later. (As to the rest, I was friendly with a cousin of Michelstaedter’s who followed his ideas and came to the same end as him : he committed suicide.)

From that moment on, in the private and personal domain, an anti-bourgeois tendency informed my entire existence, even in its concrete aspects. Until the end, I have thus remained free of all the constraints of the society in which I have lived, a stranger to routine, be it professional, sentimental or familial. For example, in my youth, I made a point of not obtaining a diploma, even though I had almost completed the relevant studies. The idea of officially being a “doctor” or “professor”, for all intents and purposes, seemed intolerable to me, and yet later on, I would continually be attributed all sorts of titles which I did not possess. The Kshatriya would express solidarity on this subject with that member of an ancient Piedmontese family who paradoxally declared : “I divide the world into two categories : the nobility and those who have a diploma.”

Outside of those authors I have previously mentioned, I must note the influence exerted on me in my adolescence by the movement which, on the eve of the First World War and its early stages, circled around Giovanni Papini and the journals Leonardo and Lacerba, and later, in part, La Voce. This was the only true Sturm und Drang which our nation ever knew, under the impulse of forces allergic to the stifling climate of the petty-bourgeois Italy of the beginning of the twentieth century. Contrary to general opinion, I hold that it was only at that period that Papini had any real importance. He had opened up a breach. It is to him and his group that we owe for coming into contact with the most diverse and most interesting foreign movements of thought and of avant-garde art, which had the effect of a renewal and widening of horizons.

Aside from the aforementioned journals, there were initiatives such as the “Cultura dell’Anima” collection, which, directed by Papini, allowed the youth that we were to know about a series of writings both ancient and modern of a particular importance, and which thus indicated to us some paths to follow later on. Furthermore, it was also the “heroic” period of Futurism, which, for a time, was close to Papini’s Florentine group. But what gave us even more enthusiasm at that time was Papini himself ; paradoxal, polemical, individualist, iconoclastic and revolutionary, because despite the brilliant and sulphurous aspects of his writings, we thought that he took his work seriously. We enthusiastically joined his attack against official academic culture, against the great names, against the values and morals of bourgeois society, despite the unease which his neo-realist style inspired in us, and his airs of a Florentine boor transposed to the intellectual and polemical plane. We also believed in the sincerity and authenticity of what he had written in his autobiographical novel A Failure (Un Uomo Finito). The nihilism of that work, which spared only the bare individual, disdainful of all support and closed to all desire of escaping reality, could not help but make an impression on young people. It was only later that I would notice that what was involved was but an intellectualism without deep roots, not without a certain exhibitionism. It was thus to be expected that Papini would not maintain his stances, even if his later conversion to Catholicism must have been just as superficial as his previous attitudes, in the absence of a genuine spiritual crisis. That is what very clearly appears in his Life of Christ, to which Papini essentially owed his notoriety and material success.

In that book, there is nothing transfigured or transfiguring. We do not sense the slightest change in existential level ; the style is flat and nothing evokes the deep dimension of Catholicism and its myths. It is a banal, apologetic work, based on the most external, catechistic and sentimental bases of that faith. And yet it had been Papini who, beforehand, had introduced us youth to such mystics as Meister Eckhart, and sapiential writings which would have allowed one to discover entirely different horizons had there been a genuine overcoming, in the traditional sense, of anarchic and intellectualist individualism. On the other hand, it is an indication of the level of contemporary Catholicism and of our culture that such a mediocre work was considered a masterpiece and a great human testimony. But let us return to our subject.

Certain writers or artists of Papini’s circle would later, in one way or another, compromise and fall into line, considering as simple experiences of youth what they had done in that revolutionary period. In the domains of painting and music, the “reversions” and notorious conversions to neo-classicism were not long in coming. Thus, insofar as a general vision of life is concerned, I am not boasting but simply stating an objective fact when I say that I was the only one in the period of the Italian Sturm und Drang to hold firm and seek positive points of reference, without any sort of compromise with the world we had then rejected.

In that period of my youth, I had personal relations with certain representatives of Futurism, given that it was practically the only avant-garde artistic movement in Italy. In particular, I was friendly with the painter Giacomo Balla, and I knew Marinetti. Even though I was principally interested in the matters of the spirit and in the vision of life, I also painted, for since childhood I had shown an innate disposition for drawing. However, I was not long in realising that, outside of its revolutionary aspect, the orientation of Futurism was little in accord with my inclinations. What bothered me in Futurism was, on the one hand, its sensualism, its lack of interiority, its noisome and exhibitionist side, its vulgar exaltation of life and instinct oddly mixed to that of machinism and to a kind of Americanism, and on the other, its penchant for the chauvinistic forms of nationalism.

As far as this last point is concerned, the divergence clearly appeared to me at the beginning of the First World War, due to the violent campaign led by the Futurists and the Lacerba group in favour of interventionism. It was inconceivable to me that all these people, to begin with Papini the iconoclast, could espouse, in such a light-hearted manner all the most tired patriotic slogans of the anti-Germanic propaganda, and could seriously imagine that this was a war for the defense of civilisation and freedom against the barbarian and the aggressor. Since I had not yet left Italy, I had only a vague idea of the hierarchic, feudal and traditional structures that remained in Central Europe and which had almost entirely disappeared in the other regions of Europe because of the ideas of 1789.

I knew nonetheless very precisely where my sympathies lay, and instead of a pacifist and neutralist abstention of Italy, I wished for intervention on the side of the Triple Alliance. It goes without saying that this way of seeing things was not in the slightest way influenced by an academic admiration for German Kultur – the “Herr Professor” sort of intellectualism – which, on the contrary, informed the neutralism of various bourgeois Italian intellectuals (including Benedetto Croce), who did not realise that the object of their admiration was something secondary and inferior with respect to the most essential tradition of those peoples, which was to be sought instead in their conception of the State, in the principles of order and discipline, in the Prussian ethic, in the clear and healthy social divisions which still existed, in spite of the revolution of the Third Estate and of Capitalism, which only had a partial effect.

I recall having written an article at that time in which I maintained that even were we to wage war on instead of fighting alongside Germany, we ought to do so by espousing German principles, and not in the name of nationalist and irredentist ideology, or the democratic, sentimental and hypocritical ideologies of the Allied propaganda. After reading that article, Marinetti told me verbatim : “Your ideas are further removed from my own than are those of an Eskimo.” Since that distant year of 1915, my attitude on the subject has remained unchanged and was only further consolidated by my first-hand knowledge of the realities of Central Europe.

On the other hand, the war seemed necessary to me as a purely revolutionary act. In the beginning, Papini’s group shared this idea – Italy had to wake up and renew itself by combat – and Marinetti had coined the famous phrase : “War – the world’s only hygiene.” But both of them gave in to motivations which I found inconsistent.

I took part in the war after following an accelerated training course for student artillery officers. I was first sent to the front lines in the mountains, near Asiego. I continued my studies as best I could. However, I did not draw from my experiences of war and of military life everything they might have given me in other circumstances, if only because I did not take part in any major military operation.

In the years following the war, having returned to Rome, my hometown, I went through a deep crisis. Having become an adult, I could stand even less the ordinary life to which I had returned, and the sense of the inconsistency and the vanity of the ambitions that are normally at the centre of human activity sharpened within me. The innate aspiration towards transcendence manifested itself within me in a confused though intense manner. In this context, I should evoke the effect of certain inner experiences I confronted, initially without precise technique and without being aware of the goal, with the aid of certain substances, not the most common narcotics, and whose use demands from most people that they overcome the natural repulsion of their organism and that they exercise a particular control over this last. In this way I approached forms of consciousness that are partially separated from the physical senses. I often passed close to the realm of visual hallucinations, and perhaps even to madness. Yet a fundamentally healthy constitution, the authentic nature of the impulse that had led me to these adventures and a spiritual fearlessness carried me further.

These experiences were not without certain positive results, especially with respect to what was to happen to me afterwards. They provided me with points of reference which I would perhaps have had difficulty obtaining otherwise, including on the doctrinal plane, as to an understanding of the hidden face of certain forms of neo-spiritualism and contemporary so-called occultism. We shall return to this in due course.

However, the repercussions of these experiences only aggravated the crisis I mentioned earlier. In certain traditions, this is what is called “the bite of the serpent”. It is a need of intensity and the absolute to which any ordinary object seems inadequate. From thence also, a sort of “cupio dissolvi”, a tendency to disperse and to lose oneself. Things came to such a point that I decided to freely put an end to my life – I was then about twenty-three years old at the time. This problematic solution, the same which, though in a very different context, brought Weininger and Michelstaedter to catastrophe, was avoided thanks to something akin an illumination I had while reading an ancient Buddhist text (Majjhima Nikaya, 1, 1). It is the discourse in which the Buddha enumerates in ascending order the identifications from which the “noble son” on the path to Awakening must free himself. It consists of identification with the body, with feelings, with the elements, with nature, with the deities, with the Supreme, and so on, ever higher, towards absolute transcendence. The last term in the series, which corresponds to the supreme proof, is given by the idea of “extinction”. The text says : “He who perceives extinction as extinction, and having perceived extinction as extinction, thinks extinction, thinks of extinction, thinks “my extinction” and delights in extinction, I say that he does not understand extinction.” Suddenly a light flashed within me. I felt the tendency to disperse myself, to dissolve myself, was a fetter, an “ignorance”, in opposition to true freedom. A change must have occurred within me at that moment and I acquired the ability henceforth to resist all crises.

As an individual, for me the problem remained to control a force which had awakened and that could not be used up in ordinary activities. This force manifested itself by a tendency to push every experience to the end, to the extreme limit, to go further. A maxim by Simmel indicates the only solution in this situation : that to carry life to a maximum of intensity, which, thanks to a shift of polarity, leads to “more than life”. But it is not an easy undertaking. The problem, for me, did not disappear over time. In any case, I have been able to withstand the often exhausting tension, and the repercussions of this existential situation – here “existential” may be taken in the sense that the current that has made itself its standard-bearer (and which I only learned about much later) has given it : in that of existentiality as paradoxal coexistence as an act of the conditioned and the unconditioned, of which Kierkegaard, Jaspers and Heidegger have spoken. Insofar as any violent solution had been excluded by the aforementioned experience my orientation was essentially this : to seek to justify my existence by tasks and activities that did not have a purely individual character, or at least, seemed as such to me, and, insofar as possible, to question what is commonly known as fate, putting it to the test in everything that concerned my existence taken as a whole.

I have now spoken enough of personal factors. It would perhaps be useful to add a remark on the aforementioned experiences that I obtained with the help of external means. These means produce differing effects according to the individual disposition and the motivation that drives their use. Thus, alcohol, if it did enable experiences of an ecstatic and sacred order in the context of the Thracian Dionysian cult and other currents, also contributes to the dumbing down and spiritual anaesthesia of the regressive human types, which constitutes the vast majority of modern humanity, such as the North Americans. Amongst the contemporaries, outside of the cases cited by William James, the exceptional experiences obtained by Aldous Huxley with mescaline and that he assimilated to the fundamental experience of mysticism, have an obvious relationship with his preparation. Furthermore, the fact that these experiments began and ended in my youth proves that, in my case, they were nothing more than purely external means. I did not become their slave, and afterwards neither felt the need nor the desire; what I had been able to derive therefrom lasted naturally throughout the rest of life, because all of this had been linked to something pre-existing and innate.

The Speculative Period – Magic Idealism and the Theory of the Absolute Individual

My ‘artistic’ period was followed by a ‘philosophical’ one, which lasted roughly from 1923 to 1927(even though some of the books I wrote during this period were not published until 1930). In the same way that, for me, art emerged from a non-artistic background, so philosophy emerged from a non-philosophical one.

I have mentioned that my interest in philosophy went back to my early teens. However, as time went by, this interest merged increasingly with one in teachings regarding the supernatural and transcendent. I had been vividly impressed, as a young boy, by some of the novels of Merezhkovsky, such as The Death of the Gods and The Resurrection of the Gods, with their background of gnostic ideas and heathen wisdom. (Dmitry Sergeyevich Merezhkovsky (1865-1941) was a founder of the modernist movement in Russian literature. Volume 1 of his trilogy Christ and Anti-Christ, The Death of the Gods : Julian the Apostate, appeared in 1896, followed by The Resurrection of the Gods : Leonardo da Vinci in 1901, and Anti-Christ : Peter and Alexisin 1905 – ed.) Immediately following the war, my attention turned directly to sapiental doctrines, particularly Eastern ones, but largely only in terms of what had been published about them by spurious contemporary theosophical and ‘occultist’ currents, which purported to present the ancient wisdom as an antidote not only to modern materialism, but also to merely dogmatic or devotional religion. These were extremely bastardised texts, in which what prevailed was preconceptions, ramblings, and the poor material provided by supposed ‘revelations’ and ‘clairvoyance’. Nevertheless, in circles of that kind, I also gained the opportunity of meeting some personalities of actual value, quite distinct from the theories they supported. I will recall here Decio Calvari, president of the Independent Theosophical League of Rome ; Giovanni Colazza, who ran an Anthroposophical (that is, Rudolf Steiner) centre, also in Rome ; the poet Arturo Onofri, who was a former member of the avant-garde art movement and who, after a spiritual crisis, also joined the Anthroposophists ; the Dutch Orientalist Bernard Jasink ; and the painter and ‘occultist’ Raul dal Molin Ferenzona.

Owing to my insufficient preparation, there was no shortage of references in my first philosophical works, especially in ‘Saggi sull’idealismo magico’, to the above-mentioned dubious sources, and these references should be treated with caution and separated from the main body of my work. However, on the whole, I remained independent, and my attitude to these currents of modern ‘occultism’ was in fact quite often distinctly critical and negative. For me at that time these sources assumed the only function which they can have in general in the current world : the useful but humble one of mere points of departure. It is the interior qualification, possessed by the student who is attracted to the teachings interpreted by these currents, which determines whether he continues to rely upon this extremely mixed and diversionary material, or whether he finds his way back by one route or another to the genuine sources of traditional wisdom, acknowledging all the cases in which ‘occult’, anthroposophical, theosophical, etc., speculations have served to discredit rather than to enhance this wisdom.

I chose without any doubt the second alternative. For example, I owe to Decio Calvari the first pieces of information I received on Tantrism. But, after strenuous successive efforts, I contacted Sir John Woodroffe (Arthur Avalon), the main serious expert on that current, directly, and, from his works and from original Hindu texts published by him, I drew the material which became the basis for my L’Uomo come potenza (1925, renamed Lo Yoga della Potenza in 1949).

Objectively considered, therefore, the first writings of my philosophical period (as well as my essays and lectures from that time) show the effects of the mixture of philosophy with the aforementioned doctrines – a mixture which sometimes seemed to contaminate, not the former, but the latter, which, as I was to acknowledge clearly later, were subjected to a forced, extrinsic, rationalisation. Apart from that, however, the contribution of this approach to the resolution of some incipient speculative problems peculiar to contemporary thought, and to an essential broadening of horizons, became clear.

Thus, the system which I called ‘Magical Idealism’, and also ‘The Theory of the Absolute Individual’, took shape. As is well known, the first title had already been used by Novalis. But, even though Novalis was one of my favorite authors, and some of his intuitions had had essential value for me, the orientation of my system was very different.

The anteriority, or rather the priority, of the extra-philosophical background over the speculative is well illustrated by the fact that my first book, published just after the artistic period, was a presentation of Lao Tzu’s Tao Te Ching. It is with references to this ancient master of far eastern Taoism – some perhaps rather questionable – that I prefigured some essential ideas of my system, and the book constituted a sort of hyphen between the two phases, since some anti-rationalistic and paradoxical aspects of Lao-tzu are not devoid of a certain affinity with the positions of Dadaism, though obviously of an absolutely different background. This booklet was published in 1923 by the publisher Carabba as Il libro della Via e della Virtu. This version depended mainly on the text provided by A. Ular, and left much to be desired. What is to be noted here is the ‘valency’ given by me to the text, although my claim to evaluate it ‘critically’ in terms of ‘modern thought’, by using certain stereotypes of Western idealist philosophy, must be set aside as frivolous. In the Chinese master I liked the “calm, the transparency, of a thought which does not know the contaminations of feeling” ; I felt that he had managed to outline a metaphysic of the divine, a model for a superior, self-realised being, in a magical and bright impassibility, beyond any mysticism, any faith. I presented the essence of this metaphysic in the conception of the Path, the Tao, as the process of a ‘being’ which realises itself in realising ‘non-being’. The world, the creation, is seen as an eternal flowing and producing, brought about by an extra-temporal act in which the Principle distances itself from itself, ’empties’ itself, thus fulfilling itself in a supra-substantiality (the symbol of ’emptiness’), which is the sub-stratum, basis and sense of all existence, in the same way that the emptiness of a wheel’s hub is its essence, the centre of gravitation.

Naturally, the temptation was strong to draw these concepts, belonging to a sapiental pattern, nearer to modern absolute idealism. However, even if it was not clearly formulated yet, the fundamental tendency by means of which the system which I built later distinguished itself from idealistic philosophy emerged, mediated by Lao Tzu. As a matter of fact, Lao Tzu’s ‘non-acting’ definitely opposed the immanent identification of the subject with the act, of the act with the fact, an identification which I was to fight harshly, both as such, and in its historical applications. The basically aristocratic principle of detachment and impassibility was on the contrary uppermost here. In imitation of the divine model of Perfection, the Taoist ‘realised man’ or ‘transcendent man’ does not identify himself with what is external, nor intervene directly, which would make his ‘I’ external by self-affirmation, but practices on the contrary the active renunciation of ‘being’ and ‘acting’ in the direct and conditioned sense. In this way he realises the essential element, enters the Path, makes himself ungraspable, inexhaustible, invulnerable, no longer susceptible to deflection or disempowerment ; but capable of exerting a subtle, invisible, magical action (the wei-wu-wei, the ‘acting-without-acting’, the sovereign and irresistible spontaneity), which is the action or quality – te – of the Path, of the Tao.

All these themes I was able however to deal with again, with greater accuracy, purity, and conformity to the sources, in a second presentation of the same text, written about thirty years later, in 1959, at the request of a friend of mine, which was published by the publishing house Ceschina with a different title : Il Libro del Principio e della sua azione. It is preceded by a long essay on Taoism in general. The text is itself much modified, and closer to scientific requirements. But, above all, my idealistic philosophical ideas and interpretations, and all other references to modern Western thought, are completely removed, and instead the text is placed back in the context of far eastern spirituality to which it belongs, and is clarified and interpreted in ‘traditional’ terms, according to the tendency peculiar to my third period, the post-philosophical one.

As for the reading of 1923, at that time it had not yet been given to me to have any direct and genuine experience of the spiritual climate of this wisdom. It is true that I had avoided the glaring stereotypes of those who had talked about the ‘passivity’ and the ‘quietism’ of Taoism, and that I had essentially grasped its higher, metaphysical dimension. However, there was no shortage of discrepancies – for instance, I had talked more than once of an exclusion of transcendence, having obviously in view the hypostatic transcendence of some Western philosophies or theologies. It is only in the second reading that it is properly explained that Taoism is rather about an “immanent transcendence”, about the direct presence within being of non-being (in its positive meaning, as supra-ontological essentiality), of the infinitely distant (the ‘sky’) in what is close, of what is beyond nature in nature. This conception is as far removed from pantheistic immanence as it is from transcendence as a merely speculative concept, and it is so because of a direct experience, due to the specific existential structure of the man of the origins.

In all of this youthful work, the opposition between the common ‘I’ and the ‘Absolute Individual’ was already set. However, in spite of some references, and an appendix, on Matgioi (Count Albert-Eugene Puyou de Pouvourville, 1861-1940 – ed.), interpreted in the esoteric terms of far eastern doctrines, I did not highlight sufficiently the essentially initiatory nature of Taoism and of its ideal of the ‘realised man’, the ‘transcendent man’. I wrote at that time : “Once the mass of the opaque clouds of anxiety, doubt, and passion, of our external humanity, has been torn away, he (Lao Tzu) sets forth, in a cold and calm atmosphere with few individual features, the anatomy, the inner logic, of the Divine, reveals it as the very rationality of the Real, and thus reveals its spiritual truth, in the sense of identifying it with the very nature of Man as Absolute Individual, as the Perfect. Any subsequent religion or philosophy, far from going beyond his positions, has seldom managed even to reach the clear and pure bareness in which these lived in the mind of the great Chinaman. Beyond these, in history, only scattered and uncertain fires of various mysticisms remain.” The one-sidedness of the last sentence is obvious ; leaving aside the “various mysticisms”, a rather ambiguous reference, other traditions of an equally metaphysical character, which I was to address one by one later, were not taken into account. The idea of offering this transcendent wisdom, almost as a medicine for the modern consciousness in crisis, was thus naïve. I wrote : “Most religions and morals have only managed to insult man, because they have considered him as what he is not, as a creature… However, all this has become inadequate for modern consciousness, which has begun to realise the sense of absolute reality, and of the solitude of the person. However, the price of this conquest has been the loss of everything which previously made up man’s life and his faith : his illusion. Thus, man appears today like a shipwrecked person, clinging to that ‘I’ which he is still unable to understand without staining it, but which he nevertheless holds to be his only certainty ; without religion, faith, or enthusiasm ; between a science which is itself disintegrative, and a philosophy reduced to a formal, empty sufficiency ; thirsty for liberty, and yet automatised by his perpetual clash with a nature, a society, and a culture in which he can no longer recognise himself.” It is in this context that I attempted to show the topicality of Lao Tzu’s doctrines (and I developed a similar basic theme also in lectures, and in the beginning of Saggi sull’idealismo magico). “Modern man must gain knowledge of that ‘I’, of which he is as yet only able to produce such deformed images as the Unique Man of Steiner, the Social-Ideological Man of Marx and Lenin, the ‘I’ of Absolute Idealism, or the lyrical subject of avant-garde aesthetics” (in this list, the even worse Nietzsche had been forgotten).

I presented the path of Lao Tzu as a positive point of reference, interpreting it as that of the Absolute Individual. Although the basic theme of the crisis of modern man was correct (and I developed all of these early hints much further in my subsequent books), the ambiguity inherent in including an initiatory ideal in a historical ‘situation’, and in reducing it almost to a general formula, was nevertheless obvious, this ideal being essentially a-temporal, and having nothing to do with any given society or culture – and, as far as realisability is concerned, being further from the ‘modern man’ than from the man of any other time. These things I could not yet see with enough clarity. I had not yet overcome the elements in myself affected by the modern culture and mentality. But this encounter with Lao Tzu awoke in me elective affinities. The ideal of Olympian superiority, as opposed to any Western activism and vitalism, was already sensed.

I must next turn to the systematic works of philosophy which were written by me after these prefigurations. The impulse to express, in a systematic manner, with all the appropriate scholarly apparatus, and in the conventional technical academic jargon, my vision of the world, and of the values which had already taken shape in me, was due, partly, to a desire to engage in controversy. In my philosophical studies, my interest had turned to the current of post-Kantian transcendental idealism. Contrary to most disciples of this school, however, I saw clearly the non-philosophical, pre-rational, background to this current. To me, this background was the will to power. An author of that time, Grünbaum, had already recognised this rather clearly in his essay Amore e dominio quali temi fondamentali delle visioni filosofiche del mondo (later, the existential analysis of philosophical systems, as prefigured by Nietzsche, or even their psycho-analytical study, would come into vogue), while professional idealist philosophers, who thought they followed a pure ‘objective’ line of speculation in elaborating this philosophy, did not realise this. Thus, the influence of one of the two components of my ‘personal equation’ of which I spoke at the beginning, manifested in my aforesaid preference (for the view based on the will to power – ed.). At the same time, I was convinced that the current of transcendental idealism represented the highest form reached by critical reflection in regard to the problem of certainty and knowledge (the gnoseological problem). I felt it almost as a mission to recapitulate the positions which had been reached along these lines, and then to go beyond them, getting to the essence of the matter in strict adherence to the original need which had given birth to this philosophy. I would subsequently discover that this was also the way to the immanent auto-transcendence of philosophy in general, and subsequently the philosophical works written by me now appeared as a sort of propaedeutics towards possible access to a domain which was no longer that of discursive thought or speculation, but rather that of inner realisatory action, intended to go beyond the human limit, a matter discussed in the teachings which I had got to know in the meantime. It is not by chance that I chose as the opening motto of Saggi the following words by J. Lagneu : “Philosophy is the thinking which ends up acknowledging its own insufficiency, and the need for an absolute action from within.”

It was so important to me, on a quite impersonal level, to take this further step, that when the main work written by me, with no little labour if for no other reason than the extremely vast specialised preparation required, Teoria e Fenomenologia dell’Individuo Assoluto, encountered some initial problems in getting published, owing to its size and difficulty, I suggested that a well-off friend of mine publish it at his own expense and under his own name. The offer was not followed up, since the person in question proposed making various additions and changes, something I naturally could not permit. What mattered to me was that these limits of modern thought be set, rather than my own person as author.

As for the spur of controversy, which I mentioned previously, it arose from the fact that, at that time, Italy was dominated by Crocean, and subsequently more or less Gentilean, neo-Hegelianism. I had been in contact with representatives of this current and I detested their unprecedented pretentiousness : despite in reality being mere intellectuals, they posed as pontiffs of critical thought, and as heralds of the advent of Absolute Spirit, and they looked down upon, and accused of dilettantism, thinkers dear to me, who had disdained to give their profoundly experienced and utterly distinctive intuitions and visions the systematic character required by what Schopenhauer called “pedagogical philosophy for philosophy teachers”. It was really a world of overblown rhetoric. Besides, it was repellent to me to contrast the petit bourgeois type of the salaried, married, conformist teacher, with the theory espoused by him, of the Absolute Individual, free creator of the world and of history. I need hardly say that, to these persons, the sapiental doctrines with which I had begun to deepen my acquaintance were only ‘superstitions’, remnants, which had been long ago overtaken by the deployment of ‘critical consciousness’ : this view of course was natural to them, since secular ‘illuminism’ was, despite subsequent appearances, their true mental background.

Therefore, I wanted to settle accounts, and, to this end, I began to systematically study the original texts of the classics of idealist thought, from Kant to Hegel and the latter Schelling. I had to learn German, part of their work not having been translated at that time. After these studies, the incomparable poverty and emptiness of the Italian epigones of this philosophy, which they had reduced to absurdity by treating it as a sort of dice game involving a couple of picayune categories, became clear to me. In addition to this, in Gentile, there was a woolly prosopopeia, and an unbearable, paternalistic pedagoguery. Whatever their intrinsic solidity, what a difference with respect to the classical works of idealism, such as Schelling’s philosophy of nature and mythology, Hegel’s ‘Phenomenology of Spirit’ and his ‘Encyclopedia’, or the various doctrines of science of Fichte, if only from the point of view of genius, of cleverness, of a creative impulse, of the powerful effort to span in a well-structured manner the many varieties of reality and of the matter of experience! Croce, in a letter, honoured me by describing a subsequent book of mine as “well presented and reasoned with accuracy.” For my own part, although I saw in Croce (whom I knew personally) a greater refinement and clarity than I perceived in Gentile, I could not help but note the low, purely discursive level of his thought, which in the end abandoned the plane of great speculative problems and wasted itself upon essay writing, literary criticism, and secularly, liberally oriented historiography.

In any case, thanks to these studies I was now able to throw my hat into the ring against them on their own ground. I had learned their jargon, which to them was a guarantee of seriousness, up-to-dateness and ‘scientific’ thought.

As regarded the contents of my work, I did not limit myself to the basic idealist theme of strict observance. Apart from what was inspired by non-discursive knowledge, as I have said, the contributors to the basic tendency which shaped my speculative constructions were primarily Nietzsche and Michelstaedter ; in addition, a certain part was played by my knowledge of the French ‘personalists’, such as Lachelier, Sécretan, Boutroux, Lagneau, Renouvier, Hamelin, and Blondel himself, and their treatments of the concept of true liberty ; these thinkers were all ignored or hardly touched upon by Italian idealists, whose culture, in this and other respects, was usually extremely narrow and provincial, being limited to the immediate forerunners of their own solitary Hegelian current, these being often not known in the original texts, either.

I Saggi sull’idealismo magico, published in 1925 by ‘Atanor’, constituted a prefiguration of the content of Teoria e Fenomenologia dell’Individuo Assoluto – a prefiguration for the public, at least, since this latter work had already been almost brought to completion, but I could not see how I was going to publish it. Because of this, I need not give an account of this book separately. Leaving aside its critical and constructive core, only two aspects are worth mentioning. The first pertains to the extensive references to sapiental and initiatory doctrines, which, to the common reader – especially to the lover of common philosophy – could not but give an impression of weirdness and eccentricity. In a certain limited sense, this was a prefiguration of what I would expound, ex professo, in a more appropriate form, and having eliminated all of the dross and the dubious and indirect sources, in the works of my subsequent, post-philosophical, period. At this earlier time, however, I made an extreme effort to systematise, and to present according to their own immanent logic, experiences, disciplines and realisations appropriate to high asceticism, yoga, magic, and initiation. This discussion made up most of the content of the long chapter ‘L’essenza dello sviluppo magico’, and was resumed and developed in the last part of Fenomenologia dell’Individuo Assoluto. Other essays published separately, such as ‘La purità come valore metafisico’ (ed. Bilychnis), showed the same rationalising and systematising tendency, and, taken as a whole, they represent an almost unique attempt : no one else was ever interested in applying speculative and dialectical thought to the unusual and, for many, discredited field of the supra-normal, except for Marcuse, von Baader, Haman, and Schopenhauer in some of his essays.

Finally, in the last chapter of the book, which was called ‘ The moderns’ need for magical idealism’, I considered a group of significant modern thinkers with a view to “identifying the deep motive which shapes their conceptions”, and “showing how, if this motive was given free rein in their system … it would lead to the positions of magical idealism,” as outlined in other parts of the book. These thinkers were C. Michelstaedter, O. Braun (in his case, we have only the scanty traces of a lived experience, preserved in the diary of this teenager who fell in the First World War), G. Gentile, H. Hamelin, and H. Keyserling. I conducted a sort of immanent critique, intended to demonstrate the need for the shift to the conceptions I had proposed, and also to facilitate the separation and collection of elements from these authors’ works which could be useful from my own point of view. Naturally, in these authors (whose series could have been extended), there was more to be discussed than simple critical idealism. The only one who did not merit in fact the attention which I gave him was H. Keyserling. Knowing him personally made me realise clearly that I was dealing with a mere ‘armchair philosopher’, vain, narcissistic, and presumptuous beyond words. What had attracted me in his books was the conception of the “creative knowledge,” which involved a shift in the plane of consciousness, so as to activate the function of the ‘sense’ or meaning which invests things and facts, animates them, and uses them as material for its own free expression, within a frame which is not solely subjective (as are, for instance, lyricism and art) since the substratum of reality could be and should be regarded in this way as well, so as to remove its necessity and its opacity. Not without reference to Eastern doctrines, Keyserling created a ‘School of Wisdom’ in Darmstadt, which, after a very short and ephemeral life, vanished without leaving any trace whatsoever. As a matter of fact, its creator was, as a person, the least qualified for the dignity of a Master. Everything came to him in sporadic intuitions, devoid of any strong basis, such as are frequently encountered in Slavs (Keyserling was a Balt).

As for my own system, it proceeded from an immanent criticism of transcendental idealism, and of its claim or presumption to constitute the ultimate limit of ‘critical’ thought – I would say, more accurately, the thought of the crisis of modernity. I applied to all this Hegel’s dictum that “any philosophy is idealism and, if it appears as a non-idealism, it is only an idealism not fully aware of itself.” Gradually, I brought to light the inner meaning and irrational root of idealism, which consists, as I have said, in the will to be and to dominate, which, according to the special sense given by me to this term (I will go back over this later), is an essentially ‘magical’ impulse. I indicated as a manifestation of this tendency the fact that “the need for immanent and absolute certainty” had been the basis of and stimulus for all the developments of transcendental critical philosophy. “In the negation of any ‘other,’ as the result of logical research into the possibility of knowledge, and as equally essential condition for a system of absolute certainty, there is the apparition, reflected into the world of ideas, of a profound effort at self-affirmation and dominion.” This was a sort of existential analysis of idealism, or rather of the root of the gnoseological problem. I concluded by saying that “Nietzsche, Weininger and Michelstaedter explain Descartes, Berkeley, Kant, and Fichte.”

But the impulse in question had undergone a syncope, or rather a reversal, in idealism. Here I could have spoken of a process of dissociation and ‘self-alienation’ ; the ideal cherished by such philosophers had projected itself and ‘realised’ itself (I mean this term in the sense that psychiatry uses it, to refer to the act of hallucination) on the abstract, speculative, plane, dissociating itself from the real individual, from the living wholeness of the person, which was itself increasingly excluded and debased. I showed that, to the extent that idealism had been able to proceed from phase to phase towards the solution of its speculative problem, by seeking knowledge in pure immanence and in the elimination of transcendence, it had proceeded further and further into this ‘alienation’.

There is no need to reproduce my arguments here. I will limit myself to a brief discussion. In a way, the ‘positing’ of idealism is summarised in Berkeley’s formula : esse est percipi, that is to say, that the only being of which I can can speak in concrete terms and sensibly is that which corresponds to my perception, to my thought or to my representation. Of any other being I do not know anything, and thus it is as if it did not exist. This position has been expanded (something to which I contributed myself) by regarding it not only as applicable to perception, but as the common background of any faculty which is constituted by an elementary act of consciousness. Absolute idealists have given to this ‘act’ the character of a ‘positing’. If Schopenhauer had said, following Kant, “The world is my representation,” those who followed in Fichte’s footsteps said, “The world is my positing”, while the epigones even spoke of “creation”.

Anyone of ability will be able to understand that the ‘I’ knows only indirectly, by means of objects, life lived in association with others, culture, history, etc. However, the fundamental, basically trivial fact remains, that if you take away from all this its character of being the content of my consciousness, of my thought, of my experience, or whatever else you want to call the function of ‘through me’, it vanishes into thin air. The circle is closed.

One issue that hardly any idealists managed to get the bottom of, for reasons which were less theoretical than moral, was the negation of any reality of their own to other subjects, other ‘I’s. Various speculative devices had been used to turn this knotty point, and to avoid the chilling perspective of the cosmic solitude of the Unique in the middle of a world of Maya comprising not only nature, objects and skies, but also other human beings. However, I refused to be deterred by this, and showed the inevitability of so-called ‘solipsism’ (a somewhat inadequate term) if one holds tight to idealist gnoseology. Besides, apart from speculative arguments, does dream not show us the example of other beings, which seem real, which accomplish unpredictable things, and which can even terrify us, all the while being only projections of our imagination? The matter becomes more disturbing still, if the coherence and logic which we claim to find in the ‘real world’, as opposed to that of dream, is considered, for all this orderliness, as opposed to the disordered oneirical experience, presupposes in fact the conditioning use of categories of reason which, as we have known since Kant, exist only in us, in the transcendental subject : without this, everything would remain in the same incoherent state of madness and dream. On the purely gnoseological, that is, critical-cognitive plane, once again, the circle is closed.

The world can only be ‘my’ world. Even if there was something more, something ‘objective’, I could never know it : upon my coming to know it – just as things turned into gold as soon as touched by Midas – it would turn into MY thought, my experience, my representation : it would be subjected, that is, one way or another, to my conditionality. On this basis, all doubt seemed removed, the door of mystery was shut, and the ‘I’ was provided with a solid and unassailable rock, where it could feel free, secure and dominant.

However, it was easy for any sufficiently rigorous and honest thought to discover the deep fissure within this system. It is one thing to affirm that the ‘world is my representation’, my experience, my ‘thought’, but it is another thing to say, “The world is my ‘positing’ or ‘creation’.” The ‘I’ of idealists is one thing, but the ‘I’ to which everyone else can refer in concrete terms, not in theory or in philosophy, but in practice, is something quite different. Once the world, not only the world of the true ideas, or the world of feelings, but also the world of things and beings in space and time, has been considered real and certain only as thought and function of thought, one may still enquire about the situation of the ‘I’, in the end, in this ‘immanentised’ world, in front of the function which ‘posits’ it. If the ‘I’ consisted of nothing but the abstract faculty of thinking, the difficulty would still be surmountable. The ‘I’ could be conceived of as a sort of impersonal transcendental machine which generates and possesses within itself all that it sees and experiences as parading in front of it, more or less as occurs in dream, in which however we are rarely aware of being not just the spectator but also the creator of what the automatism of our imagination makes us see and experience. But to reduce the ‘I’ to this alone is just not possible, even with respect to the psyche of the most dazed and stupefied of human beings. What had happened was that, like another Atlas unloading his cosmic burden, the idealist had deserted the burdens of the real ‘I’, and taken his rest in the so-called ‘transcendental I’ or ‘Absolute Spirit’, also called Logos, Idea or Pure Act, crediting it with cosmogonic powers, and not hesitating to state that, in front of this ‘I’, the concrete personality of the individual is only an illusion and a fiction – a ‘puppet of imagination’, Gentile once even called it. Thus, one would partake of truth, certainty, reality, ethicalness, spirituality and historicity only insofar as one identified with this entity.

It is here that my criticism attacked. The ‘I’, I said, is not defined so much in terms of mere ‘thought’, ‘representation’ or ‘gnoseological subject’, as in terms of liberty, action, and will, and to put these values at the centre is enough to create a crisis in the whole system of abstract idealism. As a matter of fact, if the ‘transcendental I’ of the idealists was not to become merely another name for the same Creator God in the sky who was considered by these philosophers to be a superstitious and uncritical hypostasis and a mere ‘positing’ of our own thought, if it was to be referred in any manner to our real being, the consequence was a paradoxical, regressive collapse.

In the first place, a great part of thought, in the ‘transcendental’ sense, (that which corresponds to the world of objective ‘appearances’) I can attribute to me (to the point of considering this world as ‘posited’ by me) only if I consider this ‘positing’ itself to be an unconscious function. E. von Hartmann had already brought this point to the fore in a piece of serious realist criticism, which the idealists naturally ignored as completely as if it did not exist. The characteristics of non-intentionality, non-predictability, and contingency must then be added to that of unconsciousness, since no idealist will ever be able to say beforehand, for instance, what ‘his’ thought will ‘posit’ in specific relation to the man he will meet at the street corner or to the words his interlocutor will speak. A further characteristic is passivity. Here I inserted my criticism of the famous Hegelian formula of the identity of the real and of the rational, “Everything real is rational and everything rational is real”, the analogous post-Kantian formula of the identity of the real and the intended, of the fact and of the act, and the consequent theory of the so-called ‘concrete will’. Looking at these formulas, indeed, one had to wonder whether what was said to be real was said to be so because it was rational, or whether what was said to be rational was said to be so because it was real ; and, similarly, whether what happened was said to be real because it was intended (and thus real only insofar as it can really be said to have been intended, since otherwise it retains the unreality appropriate to a privation of the will) or whether it was said to have been intended (as ‘fact of the act’, as ‘posited’, etc.), only because it was already real, that is to say, because of the simple and irrational fact of its being or occurring.

It was clear that, for the vast majority of the ‘positing’ or ‘creating’ activity of the transcendental ‘I’, only the second alternative was possible ; among absolute idealists, it is reality which determines what they assume to be rational and intended, which amounts practically to their acknowledging the fundamental passivity of the true ‘I’, which allows things, history, contingencies, etcetera, to determine what one ‘freely’ intended all along. To reduce the aforementioned formulas to the absurd, I added a drastic argument : an idealist put to torture would have to consider his situation ‘rational’ and ‘intended by him’ (by the true ‘I’), simply because of its ‘reality’, or alternatively he would have to consider his own horror and suffering to be a mere hobby or irrational velleity on the part of the empirical subject, the ‘puppet of imagination’ of the true ‘I’. This situation repeats itself throughout the vast majority of human theoretical and practical experience. In a chapter of a book published much later, ‘Men among the Ruins’, I was to expose the immorality of this doctrine in its historical and political applications in some detail.

Generalising, I laid down a fundamental and basic distinction between the really free act and the ‘passive’ act, which I also referred to as mere ‘spontaneity’. In the free act, there is a gap between the possible and the real, and an excess of the former with respect to the latter, in the sense that a power precedes and dominates the act, as the ultimate reason for its taking place or not, for its being this and not another act. In the passive or spontaneous act, this gap is lacking : there is a direct and imperative movement towards action (or perception, representation, etc.), as in an automatism, and the possible is exhausted without residue in the real, in what happens, what one feels, sees, etc. That is why, with respect to such a ‘spontaneity’, as in the case of emotions and passions, it is possible to speak of something which is indeed ‘mine’, but which is not ‘me’, since I cannot say that I cause it directly, and I am not in a relationship of unconditional causality or possession with respect to its determinations. I thus arrive at this conclusion : it is one thing not to be determined by the other (by what is exterior), but it is another thing to be really, positively, free. In Teoria dell’Individuo Assoluto, I devoted a long chapter to criticism of all the various false concepts of liberty – criticism which, I believe, has not been conducted by anyone else in so radical a manner.

The Approach to the East and the ‘Heathen’ Myth

It is not easy to place appropriately in the various periods of my activity the following books, because their date of publication does not coincide with the period to which they actually belong. As I said, I had finished writing ‘Teoria e fenomenologia dell’Individuale Assoluto’ (‘Theory and phenomenology of the Absolute Individual’) around 1924. But ‘Fenomenologia’ could only come out in 1930, when two other books of mine, ‘L’Uomo come potenza’ (‘Man as Power’) and ‘Imperialism[o] pagano’ (‘Heathen Imperialism’), had already been published.

Not chronologically, but in terms of content, L’Uomo come potenza served, in a certain way, as a connecting link between the systematic speculative period and the next. It contained residues of the former, but, in essence, this was the presentation of doctrines which are neither philosophical nor accidental, the Hindu doctrines of Tantrism.

The subtitle of the first edition was precisely: ‘I Tantra nella loro metafisica e nei loro metodi di autorealizzazione magica’ (‘The Tantras in their metaphysics and their magic self-realisatory methods’). To a certain extent, the writing of the book was agreed with the publishing house Atanor, that counted on good sales on account of the suggestive and novel nature of the argument, whereby they did not hesitate to publish it in 1927.

A second, completely revised, edition of this work was published by Bocca in 1949, under a different title: Lo Yoga della potenza (The Yoga of Power) and with a simplified subtitle: ‘Saggio sui Tantra’ (‘Essay on the Tantras’).

Only in this second edition did I indicate the proper place of the Tantras in the development of the Hindu tradition. Their basic themes refer back to the substrate of aboriginal traditions and cults predating the Aryan conquest, to a cycle of civilisation that was essentially ‘gynecocratic’, which means that it identified the essence and the sovereign power of the universe with a female principle, a goddess. On the cultural and mythological plane, the goddess had both terrifying and destructive, luminous, beneficent, and maternal characters. Correspondences with the great goddesses of similar cycles of the archaic Mediterranean world are evident. But, in the symbiosis that followed the Aryan conquest of India, these original themes underwent a metaphysical transposition. As the goddess possesses the essential character of Shakti, which also means ‘power’, there emerged the doctrine according to which power is the ultimate principle of the universe, and from there Tantrism. It is at that time that it caught my attention in some of its particular forms, that is, as Shakti-tantras.

The first edition of my book began with a section that was removed from the second edition, the latter having been developed in the period in which I had come to clarify conclusively all these problems. It was called ‘Lo spirito dei Tantra in relazione ad Orient e Occidente’ (‘The spirit of Tantras in relation to the East and the West’) and consisted in a study of the relationship between the Eastern spirit and Western spirit aimed at ‘defining clearly the point of view from which the doctrine of the Shakti-tantras is examined (in the book) and the order in which it may possibly be used for a development of the value inherent to the most recent European culture.’ To this end, as a method (fortunately only applied in part) I decided to translate in terms of speculative thought the foundations of the Eastern system that drew their evidence not from a speculation, but from spiritual experiences, and were expressed mostly in images and symbols; only in this way – I said – could the East act creatively on the West.

As can be seen, certain whims persisted that were due to a culture from which I had not yet fully freed myself. As for the problem of East and West, I examined the theories of Hegel, of Steiner, and of Keyserling on the relations between the Eastern and the Western worldviews and their related ideals. Although some of the points that I developed were intrinsically valid, it was clear that it was inappropriate to refer to writers, such as Steiner and Keyserling, not worthy of being taken seriously. However, the result of the discussion was the elimination of the banality that the whole East would have escapistically denied the world, whereas the West would have instead affirmed it and would have offered the ideal of self-conscious and domineering personality. No doubt, I later deemed completely absurd some of the concessions I had then made. For instance, I spoke of a ‘progress of Western spirit beyond Christian pessimism and dualism’, with the gradual emergence, first humanistic, and then immanentist and active, of man, which would only be awaiting an integration by means of an Eastern input. But, apart from these whims, the antithesis, which I established, between two fundamental ideals, that of ‘liberation’ and that of ‘freedom’, remained valid, with the reservation that, if India has especially cultivated the former, and the West the latter, the Tantric system, with its view of the world as power, is opposed to any abusive generalisation of this antithesis and that, as regards the path to a transcendent affirmation of the I, it has been known to a far greater extent by the East, so that, in comparison, one should speak of an ‘unrealism’ with regard to the contemporary Western man and his seemingly active and affirmative civilisation.

Besides, it could have been pointed out that the East also includes Iran, then China and Japan, civilisations that in many aspects do not show at all these ‘escapist’ characters which are related, at most, to certain aspects of India. However, I noted that the Tantras depart decisively from the Vedantic-type doctrines of the world as illusion. In Shakti these have seen a kind of ‘active Brahman’, instead of the pure infinity of consciousness. Maya gives way to Maya-Shakti, that is to say, the ‘power’ that manifests and affirms itself, like a magic cosmogony. There is also a kind of Tantric historiography, according to which this system has put forward the claim that it presented the truths and the ways appropriate to the end times, the last of the four ages of traditional teaching, the so-called Kali-yuga, or ‘dark age’. Because of a profound change, general existential conditions in this age are different from the original ones, in relation to which the wisdom of the Vedas had been expressed. Elemental forces now predominate, man is united to them and he can no longer retreat; he must confront them, dominate them, and transform them, if he wants liberation, and even freedom. The way to achieve this cannot be the purely intellectual, ascetic-contemplative, or ritual one. Pure knowledge must lead to action, whereby Tantrism has defined itself as a sādhana-Shastra, that is, as a system based on techniques and realisatory effort. According to its view, knowledge must serve as a means to the real realisation and the transformation of the being. A text says: ‘Every (doctrinal) system is a mere means: it is useless, if one does not yet know the Goddess (i.e.: if one is not yet united with Shakti, with power), and it is useless to the one who knows her.’ Another text says : ‘It is in the nature of woman to strain to establish superiority through discursive arguments and it is in the nature of man to conquer the world with his own power.’ The analogy with medicines is recurrent: the truth of a doctrine must be proven by its fruits and not by concepts. As can be seen, the ‘East’ in question is absolutely different from the stereotypical one pictured by many Westerners. I was the first to make it known and promote it in Italy, developing a work parallel to that to which Sir John Woodroffe had devoted himself in the English language.

As a rule, the Tantras emphasise a fundamental orientation of Eastern metaphysics, namely an experimentalism that is not limited to sensory and empirical experience. Here I encountered precisely the widening of the ‘possible experience’ of Kant which I had sought to found speculatively in the books I have previously mentioned. In this respect, in L’Uomo come potenza I formulated the main themes of my critique of the knowledge of the modern scientific type and of power based on its technical applications, declaring both of them illusory and irrelevant: a knowledge and a power assorted to a utilitarian and democratic ideal, not based on any inner superiority of the individual, on any transformation of his existential state, of his actual, direct relations with the world and of the meaning of his life. ‘Rhetoric’, in the Michelstaedterian sense, of power in the modern civilisation: man remains the same, or rather he is ‘alienated’ more than ever, a mere shadow that has his principle outside himself, even if knowledge focused on the physical and phenomenal world were to allow him to destroy a planet at the mere pressing of a button. These were the issues which I was to resume and develop in the course my critique of civilisation, but which, in those formulations of 1927, anticipated in part what various thinkers acknowledged only later, even though they lacked the positive points of reference capable of giving a real bite and a solid basis to that critique. To have them, it would have been and still is necessary to refer to a world that goes completely beyond their horizons.

Tantric literature is extremely vast and multifaceted. As I said, my attention was brought essentially to the Shakti-tantras, to the Tantras of power. Here, in the so-called Left Hand Path, in the circles of Kaula, Siddha, and Vira, the aforementioned general worldview was combined with a supermanism that would have made Nietzsche turn pale. The East had generally ignored the fetishism of morality: on an higher plane, to the East, any morality is only a means to an end. Typical is the Buddhist image of law as a raft that is built to cross a stream, but is not carried further.

For the Vira, for the ‘heroic’ Tantric type, it was about breaking all ties, overcoming any opposition of good and evil, honor and shame, virtue and guilt. It was the path of absolute anomia, of the shvecchacarî, a term that means ‘the one whose law is his will’. Here, what was proposed was a special interpretation of the symbol of washing or undressing, as well as that of the ‘virgin’: the ‘virgin’, as pure will, detached, through special disciplines, from all that is not itself, inviolable and invulnerable. There were Tantric texts which indicated the main bonds to be broken: piety, the tendency to be disappointed (equanimity in the face of success and failure, of happiness and misfortune, etc.), shame, sense of sin, and disgust, all that is connected to family and to caste, every convention and ritualism, the domain of sex being no exception (a Kaula, it is said, must not shrink even before incest). This revealed how little the East – a certain East – had to learn from the Western ‘free spirits’ and ‘superatori’ [‘those who go beyond’]: with the difference that, here, none of this remained confined to a circle of anarchist individualism, of a Stirnerian ‘Unique’: it was instead directed at an actual self-transcendence, or presupposed it. Even liminal forms of ‘immanentism’ developed in the East, and specifically in the Tantras. While, in the West, given Christian-theistic and creationist premises, the theme of ‘self-deification’ appeared as blasphemous and luciferian, in the East the identity of the deep I, the Atma, with Brahman, with the absolute principle of the universe, and the related formula ‘I am Brahman’ or ‘I am him’ (so’ham, which, in Tantrism, became sa ham = ‘I am her’, i.e., Shakti, power) – as truths of the path of knowledge and of the destruction of that ‘ignorance’ (avidya) which alone leads man to believe that he is only human – were almost commonplace, in a context devoid of any tenebrous and titanistic colouring.

In both editions, my book was divided into two main parts. The first was entitled ‘La dottrina della potenza’ (‘The doctrine of power’). This was the metaphysical part: it described the process and the succession of stages, states, and modifications that, starting from the top, from the unconditioned, through the world of the elements and nature (considered not only in its physical aspects), has to limit the human condition. One of the terms for this process is pravrtiti-marga, the path of attachment, of identification with forms and determinations. It is followed by nivritti-marga, the path of detachment, of revulsion, of transcendence, with man as a starting point. With which we moved from metaphysics to practice and yoga.

In essence, the general pattern of my phenomenology of the absolute individual had not been different. As to the first part of my book, I believe that the attempt to consider the whole complex Hindu and tantric theories of elements – tattva – led to an intelligibility of the subject rarely found in Orientalist presentations. In the correspondence I had with him, Woodroffe, who had spent thirty years in India in direct contact with several tantric pandits, even happened to acknowledge the validity of some interpretations that I proposed.

As to the second part, in the first edition it was entitled ‘La tecnica della potenza’ (‘The technique of power’), in the second, ‘Lo Yoga della potenza’ (‘The Yoga of Power’). Perhaps the former title was more appropriate, since actual yoga was only part of the matter, a set of preparatory disciplines, as well as the so-called ‘secret ritual’, with particular forms of sacralisation and of transformation of naturalistic and constrained existence, were also considered. In the field of yoga, I expounded essentially that particular form, regarded as closely related with Tantra, which is called Hathayoga (or violent Yoga) and Kundalini Yoga. Unlike dhyana-yoga, or jnana-yoga, this yoga does not have a purely contemplative and intellectual character. Although it presupposes an adequate psychological and mental training, it takes the body as the basis and instrument: not the body as known by Western anatomy and physiology, but the body in relation to its deepest, transbiological, energies, which are usually not apprehended by ordinary consciousness, especially by that of the man of today, and which correspond to the elements and the powers of the universe, studied by that thousand year-old hyperphysical physiology whose development was no less systematic in the East than the study of human organism in the West. As to the designation ‘kundalini-yoga’, it is indicative of a method that uses kundalini, i.e. ‘power’, Shakti, present, albeit in latent form, at the root of the psycho-physical organism, for deconditioning and liberation.

About the spirit of Tantrism, one of its significant formulas is that of the unity of bhoga and yoga, explained as that of enjoyment (enjoyment of experiences and possibilities offered to man by the world) and of liberation, or asceticism. Tantric texts state that in the other schools the two things are mutually exclusive, that he who enjoys is not a liberated one, or an ascetic, and he who is a liberated one, or an ascetic, does not enjoy. This is not the case in Tantrism. ‘In the path of the Kaula enjoyment becomes perfect yoga and the world itself becomes the place for liberation.’ The texts add: ‘Without power liberation is a mere joke.’ It is about a paradoxical opening to the world and the experience of life, including in all its most intense and dangerous aspects, while remaining detached. Finally, the texts speak of the ‘transformation of poison into medicine’, that is, of the use, for the purpose of liberation and enlightenment, of all the forces and experiences which in any other case would lead to greater attachment, ruin and perdition. So it is in this complex that the ideal, not of ‘liberation as escapism’, but of real and immanent freedom, which, in the West, was cultivated and proclaimed in every way, but, basically (in comparison) either only in abstract, intellectualised, or degraded, materialised and trivial forms.

In the second edition of the book I added much more material: for example, with respect to the so-called Vajrayana, Tantric Buddhism, which I overlooked in the first edition, because, when I wrote it, I knew little about it. Several points were corrected or clarified, various ‘critical’ appendages removed, certain parts greatly developed. This applies, for example, to the long chapter of the second edition dealing with Tantric sexual practices, which had been a cause of scandal to many Western ‘spiritualists’, including Blavatsky, who, because of this, was to define Tantrism as ‘the worst kind of black magic’ (this is one of the examples of what the Theosophists, and Anthroposophists, know of the Eastern doctrines). This chapter already contains some basic ideas that I was to resume and develop in one of my latest works, The Metaphysics of Sex.

Finally, it is worth mentioning one aspect of the overview peculiar to the second edition, which involved a certain shift of the center of gravity away from ‘power’. Actually, referred to the supreme principle, the use of the term Shakti could give rise to a misunderstanding. It is true that the texts often speak of Maha-Shakti, the Great or Supreme Power, as the ultimate basis of everything, but, in reality, this principle rather represents something like the Plotinian One, embracing all possibilities. In general, in keeping with any sapiental and esoteric teaching, Shakti, or power, in Hindu metaphysics and mythology, is taken as the eternal feminine principle, whose counterpart is the eternal masculine principle, in Tantrism is symbolised mainly by the figure of Shiva: a still, bright, detached, principle, just as Shakti is instead dynamic, productive, changing. Just as, in the cosmogonic myth, the universe is born out of a symbolic union of the two principles, of Shiva and Shakti, so the mystery of the transformation of the human being and the principle of greater freedom are referred to the union, in man, of the two principles, and not to his self-abandonment to Shakti as pure unrestrained power.

The practical significance of this relativisation of Tantric perspectives was evident: it involved an ‘olympianisation’ exorcising any ‘titanic’, pandemic, and vaguely ecstatic deviation. It prevented guidelines likely to lead to a catastrophe. Only for those who had the nature of Shiva, the Path of the Left-Hand and of Kaula was not that of destruction and regression. For my part, in this way, a continuity was then established with values already forefelt when I first presented Lao-tzu, and even Dadaism, as I had interpreted it.

Misunderstandings and dangers that have just been mentioned, on the natural non-Western ground of the disciplines which I considered, were quite reduced by means of particular existential premises and a system of checks and positive traditions. In general, the guidance of a spiritual teacher, of a guru, was presupposed, although it was also stated that, at the end of his path, the Tantric disciple ‘must have the master under his feet’, i.e. make himself free. The dangers concerned rather those Westerners who were introduced to this wisdom, which, oddly enough, apparently met their demand. I must admit that, in this respect, I had not taken the necessary precautions in writing the conclusion to L’Uomo come potenza, in the original edition of the work. Indeed, I praised therein almost in Nietzschean terms the vision of life of the Tantric adept, opposing it especially to Christianity. I wrote: ‘In contrast to the conception of countless beings that, out of an unconscious despair, seek each other, love each other, huddle together like children in the storm, seeking in the common bond and in the forgiveness of the Lord Almighty the semblance of that value and that life they lack, there is the conception of free beings, of the Saved from the Waters, of the Race without King, of Those-Who-Breathe, solar and self-sufficent beings who trample on the Law and “exist by themselves”, who do not ask but give abundantly power and light, who do not stoop to equal and to love, but, autonomous, in a resolute life, head for an increasingly dizzying existence along a hierarchical order that does not come from above but from the dynamic relationship of their intensity. This race with a fearsome gaze, this race of Lords does not need consolations, needs no gods, does not need a Providence . . . It moves freely in his world “no longer stained by spirit” – that is, free from the crust of feelings, hopes, doctrines, beliefs and values, sensations, words and passions of men, and led back to its nude nature made of pure power. And, in front of it, who does not see how weak and cadaverous is the wisdom and the « virtues » of the « servants of God », of these creatures that get depressed by « sin » and a « guilty conscience » and have only one aim: to level everything, to pool and to tie everything together?’ And so on.

All this was quite ‘Western’ and reflected some very problematic aspects of the ideal of the Absolute Individual. In the second edition of the book I recognised the opportunity to make, in this regard, ‘specific reservations’, recalling that an anagogic (= upward) and ‘transfiguring element’ and a metanoia, a change of polarity, were the essential premise all this system.

It is in these terms that the limit, albeit extrinsic and contingent, of this group of my writings, remains given. If Western man, who, if not intellectually, at least existentially, is less qualified for this adopted directly, other than as mere theories, doctrines like that, the almost inevitable effect would be a destructive short circuit, madness and self-destruction. With adequate reservations, it is in the same way that I was inclined to explain the fate of Nietzsche, Michelstaedter, Weininger and others, although they had not even assumed these truths in their extreme content. More generally, my three philosophical books could give rise to the erroneous idea of a possible continuous development almost in time (the ‘progressivity’, to which, for systematic reasons, I had attached much value) even with eschatological traits: while the main thing was basically an existential break in level; it was the return to a doctrine of the multiple states of being, a change of polarity. Even in the following period, in my works on traditional sciences, it is only little by little that I indicated these basic points with all the required clarity.

The limit of this problematic radicalist, almost Nietzschean, development can be indicated by one of my writings which first came out in French under the title ‘Par delà Nietzsche’ in the second volume (1926-1927) of 900, published by La Voce and edited by C. Malaparte and M. Bontempelli (who, at that time, flirted with ‘magical realism’), and which then formed the second part of the book L’Individuo e il divenire del mondo (The Individual and the Becoming of the World), excerpts of which were included in the anthology of contemporary Italian philosophers by A. Tilgher.

The essay had been written in a kind of intellectual lucid vertigo; so that, despite a strained style, questionable from a literary standpoint because of the abuse of terms and excessive images, it contained ‘charges’, for I read it as a conference – gradually evoking in me the state I was in when it was written – and someone happened to have visions or hallucinations. This writing developed first the Nietzschean ideas about the positive solution, under the sign of ‘Dionysus’, of absolute nihilism. I accepted to a large extent the Nietzschean interpretation of Apollo and Dionysus that I was to reject later wherever it did not have a simple agreed value, but wanted to be based on the actual and deeper meaning that those two gods had in the ancient world. What followed, as a ‘myth’, was a special interpretation of the fall: the individual who is born in the act of breaking away from being, from immortality, from life (from ‘God’), and of asserting himself as the highest value, as the ‘Lord of yes and no’, or of the ‘Two Natures’, of he who ‘is superior to the gods because, with the immortal nature, to which these are bound, he combines the mortal one, and with the infinite the finite.’

But of this act, which ‘represents the collapse of a whole world’, the individual was incapable. He was gripped by a fright that overwhelmed and broke him: only then his act became a ‘fall’. From this terror and fall, I figured out the main forms in which the world was to present itself to him: it is these that create space, visual exteriority, the objective limit of things, of ‘reality’ in space (‘an incorporation, almost a syncope of fear that stops and blocks the incapable being on the edge of the abyss of Dionysian power’), then the dependance on this reality, which creates time and becoming, the system of ‘causality’ and of ‘finalities’, and so on – all are creations of the original fear, of the horror for the void, and of the lenitive Apollonian illusion.

In contrast to this, what was however proposed was the path of the one who destroys that fear, regains his original will, eliminates all creations and symbols of his incapacity. In that direction, everything which is sin and infringement may even acquire for him a positive value, that of a test; in my writing, I also alluded to ancient sacrificial killings, then to the transposition on an inner plane of the tragic act of the sacrificer, in terms of progressive action on oneself, on the root of one’s own life; I also referred to the techniques employed to eliminate, in the perception, the ‘Apollonian’ guise of things, and, once broken, the limit set by the original terror, to make contact ‘dionisycally’ with elementary forces, in accordance with the absolute freedom that caused the whole thing.

A characteristic feature of this writing was the referring to mysteric wisdom the truth of those who have not been broken by the fall, and who intend to stand up, as well as the violent antagonism, Nietzschean in an increased sense, between this wisdom and Christianity; not without a historical reference (the alternative that would have arisen in Antiquity between Christianity and the mysteries of Mithra). Everything was pretty one-sided and not without distortions. Most useful footholds were provided to those who would have wished to stigmatise as Luciferianism, or worse, the mysteric tradition (although the aforementioned theory of the power on the two natures is actually evidenced in some of its branches). Then, from an inner individual standpoint, to assume, in the spirit that pervaded this writing of mine, initiatory teachings, in most cases, could in fact have had the catastrophic effects I mentioned before. Nevertheless, leaving aside what was accessory, rhetorical and excessive, some basic meanings retained their validity; these were those that characterised the aforementioned ‘Left Hand Path’, which I later discussed adequately. As for the rest, it was a strong dramatisation of the fundamental ideas whch had already appeared in my speculative books.

Completing the retrospective examination of what in my writings felt the effect of similar limitations, I should speak here also of ‘Imperialismo pagano’. But this book already leads to another domain, that of experiences on the margin of political ideologies and requires some preliminary clarifications. Besides, as I mentioned, the books of those years cannot be put in their proper place from an outer standpoint. Indeed ‘Imperialismo’ came out when the ‘Ur Group’ was alredy organised, while I still had not been able to have Fenomenologia published.

At that time I came to be acquainted with some other personalities, among whom was Arturo Reghini, a curious and interesting figure. Older than me, a pure blood Florentine, he had also been close to the Lacerba group, and it seems that contacts with him resulted in the frivolous attempt which Papini mentions in his autobiography Un Uomo finito (A Finished Man), when he told he had retired to a lonely place ‘to become God’ – by means of a two-week crash course. When I met him, Reghini was a 33rd degree Freemason of the Scottish Rite, had written a remarkable book on the sacred words and passwords of the first degree of this sect, in which he demonstrated an uncommon qualification. A mathematician, a philologist and a critical mind, he applied to the study of the initiatic heritage a seriousness and objectivity absolutely nonexistent in the ramblings of ‘occultists’ and Theosophists, at whom he never get tired of lashing out with the most biting sarcasm. It is to my contacts with Reghini (and soon after with Guénon, to whom he called my attention) that I owe firstly the final liberation from some slag derived precisely from those milieux, and secondly the final recognition of the absolute heterogeneity and transcendence of initiatic knowledge with respect to all secular, especially modern, culture, including philosophy.

Reghini had cherished the idea of a Western (and even ‘Italic’, due to certain problematic references to Pythagoreanism) esoteric tradition, and, on that basis, he had also strove to revive Masonic symbols and rituals. In addition, he was an exalter of ‘pagan’ Rome, in which he refused to see a merely political and legal reality in the framework of superstitious cults and practices, as in most current opinion; instead he had set himself to highlight the sacred, if not outright initiatic, background of various aspects of it; in this way he defended a Roman wisdom and vision of life and of the sacred, and contrasted it in the most drastic way to Christianity. Given that context, such contrast had obviously a very different character than that peculiar to an anti-Christianity of the Nietzschean kind. To Reghini, Christianity was an exotic belief, founded on an ambiguous spirituality, appealing to the irrational, sub-intellectual and emotional layers of the human being; it was the religion of a ‘spiritual proletariat’, inseparable from Judaism, entirely foreign to the style, ideals, ethics, severe sacredness of the best Romanity.

As is known, a similar synthesis had been highlighted by other authors, for example, and in a masterly way, by L. Rougier in the broad introduction to his edition of the preserved fragments of Celsus’ work Against the Christians. In Reghini there was, in addition, the reference to the sapiental and mysteric dimension discoverable in classical antiquity, should it be studied in its inner aspects. But what was also clear, even though I did not quite realise it when I followed Reghini on that line, was a certain ‘idealisation’ of Romanity itself: which would not have succumbed to Christianity, had it not been, at the rise of the latter, already undermined, had cults, conceptions and orientations also of non-Roman, Asian origin not already increasingly taken hold in its area.

The ideas of Reghini, in part I already shared, in part found a suitable ground in me. It is in this context that the first descent of the Absolute Individual occurred from the rarefied stratosphere of pure ‘value’ in the domain of history, traditions, and philosophy of civilisation. In ‘heathenity’ as interpreted in this way an ideal congenial to it was embodied. Finally, with the attempt of Imperialismo Pagano, there was a quite chimerical effort to act on the political and cultural currents of the time.

Until then I had kept myself completely out of the political world. With all the existing political parties in a country like Italy, I could not have anything in common (up to the time of writing these notes, I have never joined a political party, nor have I ever voted in any election). My first political writing resulted from an invitation of Duke Giovanni Colonna di Cesaro, with whom I was in friendly relations, to put down something in writing for his magazine, that, if my memory serves me right, was called L’Idea democratica. I replied that I could only write a demolition of democracy – and he accepted, saying that the privilege of ‘democratic freedom’ consisted precisely in this.

Among the troubles of the First World War Fascism had taken shape. The March on Rome occurred and Mussolini came to power. Of course, I could not but sympathise with anyone who fought against the forces of the Left and against the democratic regime. It was, however, about seeing in the name of what exactly such a fight was undertaken. When talking about the period of my early youth I mentioned how I abhorred nationalistic infatuation. Then there were certain prejudices not unrelated to those that the so-called ‘noble corps’ – artillery and cavalry – in which I had served, had harboured during the war for those assault troops, often made up of very suspicious elements, that resurfaced in the ‘black shirts’. The real revolution to make would have been to me the ‘revolution from above’, led by the sovereign, who should not have allowed Mussolini to present himself as the exponent of ‘the Italy of Vittorio Veneto’, but should have claimed that dignity and acted decisively in consequence to restore the state and curb rampant subversion.

Apart from the socialist and proletarian origins of Mussolini, the republican and secular tendencialities of pre-march Fascism are known. The fusion with nationalism on one side corrected these tendentialities, on the other curtailed the revolutionary vis of Fascism, gentrifying it greatly, because Italian nationalism was only an expression of the middle class and of a sluggish Catholic-oriented and conformist traditionalism. A strong Right with an aristocratic, monarchical and military basis, such as that which, for example, had estabished itself in Central Europe, was absolutely nonexistent in Italy. However Mussolini had avoided the worst, and, when he subsequently sought to espouse the ideal of the Roman state and imperium, when he thought of opposing those forces that had come to predominate in Europe as a result of the upheaval of the war and of shaping a new kind of Italian, disciplined, manly, and combative, the critical point seemed to have passed.

Imperialismo Pagano arose from my relationship with Giuseppe Bottai. He was my age, and had served as an artillery officer in my own regiment and had also participated in the Futurist movement (which, as is known, adhered to Fascism immediately after the war). He cared about being one of the ‘intellectuals’ of the movement and led the magazine Critica fascista, which allowed itself a fairly wide freedom of speech. It is in some of my conversations with Bottai that the idea was born of ‘getting things moving’ by launching a revolutionary program that would invest the plane of the Fascist vision of life and would lead to tackle the problem of compatibility between Fascism and Christianity. Bottai found the idea exciting. So I wrote for his magazine articles to that effect. But as soon as the ultimate goal of the move became visible and the idea of a ‘heathen imperialism’ was formulated as the only conceivable approach to a consistent and courageous Fascism, a true ruckus arose. Given the unofficial character of Bottai’s magazine, the organ of the Vatican, L’Osservatore Romano, asked categorically explanations about the extent to which such ideas were tolerated in Fascism. What immediately followed was a veritable avalanche of attacks from a chain printing [a number of newspapers that receive news from the same agency and publish simultaneously or in rapid succession the same items], while the scandal was echoed abroad. For similar disproportionate reactions there was a reason: the Concordat had not been signed yet and it was feared that someone, behind the scenes, wanted to spoil the game.

Given that the going got tough, Bottai even then showed me the same loyalty he was to show Mussolini later, during the crisis of fascism: he left me in the lurch, did not even give me any chance to respond to the most absurd accusations from the Guelph press, and washed his hands of the whole matter, saying that those articles, ‘while reflecting the Fascist travail’ (?), engaged the sole responsibility of their author.

So I faced things alone. In a book – precisely in Imperialismo Pagano, published in 1928 – I reaffirmed and developed the thesis of those articles, responding also to all my opponents. The book, now unobtainable, was subtitled ‘Il fascismo dinanzi al pericolo euro-cristiano – con una appendice polemica sulle reazioni di parte guelfa’ (‘Fascism before the Euro-Christian Peril – with a polemical appendix about the reactions of the Guelph party’). Its prologue was in the sign of ‘Antieuropa’, an approximate anticipation of what I was later to call properly the ‘revolt against the modern world’. Here are some of the sentences of the first pages:

Current Western civilisation awaits a substantial upheaval, without which it is bound, sooner or later, to collapse. It has realised the most complete perversion of every rational order of things. Reign of matter, of gold, of machine, of number, there is neither breath, nor freedom and light in it. The West has lost the sense of command and obedience. It has lost its sense of Contemplation and Action. It has lost its sense of values, of spiritual power, of men-gods. It no longer knows nature . . . nature has lapsed into an opaque and fatal exteriority whose mystery profane sciences seek to ignore with petty laws and petty hypotheses. It no longer knows Wisdom . . . the superb reality of those in whom the idea has become blood, life, power . . . it no longer knows the state: the state-value, the Imperium as a synthesis of spirituality and royalty . . . What war – war desired in itself as a superior value and a path to spiritual realisation – is . . . these formidable ‘activists’ in Europe no longer know . . . who do not know warriors but only soldiers . . . Europe has lost its simplicity, has lost its centrality, has lost its life. Democratic evil corrodes it in all its roots – whteher in law, in sciences, or in speculation. Leaders – beings that do not stand out through violence, through gold, through skills of exploiters of slaves, but instead through irreducible qualities of life – there are none. It is a big anodyne body, which throws itself here and there driven by dark and unpredictable forces which inexorably crush anyone who wants to oppose it or only to escape the gear. All this Western ‘civilisation’ has been able to do. This is the vaunted result of the superstition of ‘Progress’, beyond Roman imperiality, beyond bright Hellas, beyond the ancient East – the great Ocean. And the circle tightens ever more around the few who are still capable of disgust and the great revolt.

After other considerations, I asked myself this question : ‘Can fascism be the beginning of an anti-European restoration? Has Fascism enough strength to be able, today, to assume the awareness of this responsibility?’ I recognised that ‘Fascism arose from below, from confused needs and brutal forces unleashed by the war in Europe’, that it ‘has fed on compromises, fed on petty ambitions of petty people. The state organism that it has built is often uncertain, clumsy, violent, unfree, not without ambiguity.’ (it should be noted that, in the deprecated atmosphere of dictatorial Fascist ‘oppression’, similar things could be said and printed). But I observed that, if we turned our gaze around, we could not find anything that could be ‘a basis and a hope’. So: would Fascism assume a similar task?

In the book, in what followed – I must acknowledge – the impetus of a radicalist thought making use of a violent style combined with a youthful lack of measurement and political sense and with an utopian unawareness of the state of affairs. In the various chapters, I thus pointed out the conditions whereby Fascism could be a true and necessary revolution, not simply in the political-social field, but above all in the field of the general view of life, of the world, as well as of the divine. So not only was an attack launched against any democracy and any egalitarianism, while the negative tendencies (such as the merely nationalistic one, the Mazzinian one, the neo-Hegelian one) that Fascism had for me were not spared, but the values to be opposed to the type of modern economy, science, and technology, and of ‘Faustian’ activism, were also indicated: castes were tackled, there was even a reference – a quite inappropriate and counterproductive reference, given the cultural horizons of the milieux which I intended to approach – to spaiental or Oriental ideas.

But the bite of the book consisted mainly in the religious problem, and the clear consistency of my thesis was what aroused many alarmed reactions. I asked to what extent the essential values of ‘Fascist’ ethics were compatible with Christian ethics: whether it was not an obsolete rhetoric to recall Rome and its symbols without reviving also their inseparable counterpart, the spirituality of ‘paganism’, irreducible to Christianity. I rejected in the clearest manner the identification, dear to Guelphism, of Roman tradition with Catholic tradition, denouncing instead, in this respect, an usurpation (‘Catholic Romanity’). And I reiterated the thesis of my scandalous articles in Critica Fascista: ‘The assumption is that, in its purest strength, Fascism identifies with a will to empire; that its recalling of the Eagle and the Fasces cannot be merely rhetoric, that, in any case, this is the condition for it to represent something new, not a laughable (sic) revolution, but an heroic resurrection.’ Once these premises were given, I stated: ‘If Fascism is a will to empire, by reverting to the heathen tradition, it will truly be itself, it will ardere di quell’anima [untranslatable poetic expression, literally: ‘burn of a soul’] which it still lacks and which no Christian belief can give it.’

With a final dilemma, I already became a champion of ‘Ghibellinism’: ‘Fascism is confronted with this dilemma: either to stop at the empire as a raw material organisation – and then there is room for the Church in it, it can tolerate it, thus confirming the prerogative of those things of the spirit that are alien to the empire, which therefore, in this respect, will be subordinate to it. Or to reach the true idea of empire, which, in primis et ante omnia, is an immanent spiritual reality – and then the Church is deprived of authority, subject to the state within the limits of the generic tolerance that such state may grant temporally international associations of that kind.’ This was the political aspect. The other aspect was the inherent and unavoidable antithesis in terms of values and worldview. Evidently, the center, passing through Ghibellinism and Romanity, was already shifting toward what I was to call later, in general, the ‘traditional’ state, bringing together at its summit both political power (imperium) and an actual spiritual authority.

The lack of these broader points of reference and the accentuation of the anti-Christian polemic constituted one of the essential limits of that combat booklet of mine, limits which were already visible in its title, because, in reality, it was not appropriate to speak of ‘imperialism’, since this modern term designates a negative trend almost always associated with an exasperated nationalism, and because ‘heathen’; a derogatory term used by Christians, is to be dismissed. Rather, I should have spoken, in terms of historical reference, of a ‘Roman traditionalism’. No less ambiguous was the reference to a poorly defined ‘Mediterranean tradition’: an idea which, however, I soon abandoned or rectified.

The appeal constituted by Imperialismo Pagano was, practically and politically, as if it had not been launched. Of course, Mussolini did not read the book: someone must have provided him a fleeting and tendentious overview of it. One preferred to silence it, so, in a regime-controlled press, the few reviews or repercussions appeared only in second-rate newspapers and periodicals. Since the book was more or less sold, the direct adhesion of some independent Fascist circles could have been expeected: but that was the case only to a very small extent. Reghini himself was very reserved, and disapproved of my having taken up and developed, also, some of his ideas, although, in this respect, there had been a tacit agreement between us.

Nevertheless, the repercussions were different abroad, especially in Germany. It was assumed that the book was the product, not of a kind of captain without troops, but of an important current of Fascism, whose leader I was, a current akin to some of those which, in Germany, increasingly tended to set the ‘struggle for the worldview’; at the center of the political battle, finding there a far more suited soil than the Italian soil. I then gained the reputation of being the leader of ‘Ghibelline Fascism’. This fame was consolidated in 1933 when Imperialismo Pagano was published in German translation (by Armanen-Verlag in Leipzig), but in a greatly expanded, revised and even modified text, many basic ideas being formulated so as to apply also to Germany (the translator warned that ‘theses with a general value and which therefore can act as creative forces even within German culture, were highighted’): Ghibellinism, too, was highlighted with a more concrete reference to Swabian tradition, and the problem of the relationship between the two civilisations, between Roman civilisation and Germanic civilisation (Ghibellinism, the real Nietzsche, and the hierarchical idea were the three main points mentioned by the publisher of the book as a suitable ground for a constructive discussion) was tackled. The symbol of the ‘anti-European’ revolt was broadened: as a basic myth for the restoration I pointed to the ‘Two Eagles’, the Northern Eagle and the Roman one and, more specifically, a return to what had already appeared with the Triple Alliance. This could seem like an anticipation of the idea of the Axis. But also, irrespective of the fact that the German translation of my book came out before National Socialism and Hitler came to power, to think so would be simplistic and inaccurate, given the great diversity of the planes. At this point in these notes, there is no need to discuss the parts of Imperialismo Pagano added and changed in German, because in many respects these are an anticipation and adaptation of ideas from one of my main works, which I started to write only after 1930 and that was published only in 1934, Revolt against the Modern World. Of these ideas, as well as of the true meaning of the Roman-Germanic myth for me, and, finally, of the corresponding activities that I was to play, I will therefore speak later.

The Group of ‘Ur’

Therefore, going back to the period in which the Italian edition of Heathen Imperialism was written, this book came out when the Ur Group had already been formed (at the beginning of 1927) (the word “Ur” was taken from the archaic root of the term “fire”, but there was also an added nuance, in the sense of “primordial”, “original”, which it has as a prefix in German). This brings us back to the domain of esotericism. Already Reghini, as director of the magazine Atanor and then Ignis (two publications that had a very short lifetime), had proposed to treat the esoteric and initiatory disciplines with seriousness and rigour, with references to authentic sources and with a critical spirit. The “Group of Ur” resumed the same demand, but with a greater emphasis on the practical and experimental side. Under my direction, it issued monthly issues of monographs intended to be gathered in volumes and yet coordinated so that there would be, to a large extent, a systematic and progressive development of the subject. The principle of anonymity was adopted by the collaborators, who all signed with a pseudonym. because – it was said in the introduction – “their person does not count, what they can say that is valid is not their creation or contrivance but reflects a super-individual and objective teaching”. In the reprint of the monographs in three volumes, with the title Introduzione alla Magia (Introduction to Magic), which took place in 1955 by the publisher Bocca, not even my name appeared. If among the collaborators there were some known personalities, who, too, accepted the rule of anonymity, there were also people who had never written before and of whom I myself had noted down some of the teachings, giving them a suitable form, subject to their final approval of the text. But I must also state that some names were purely symbolic; they embodied, so to speak, given directions which, by identification, we tried to expose in specific expressions. Moreover, for the sake of unity and completeness, but also of literary form, I very often contributed to one or the other monograph.

In the introduction, as a starting point, the existential problem of the Ego, the crisis of those who no longer believe in current values and everything that usually gives, both intellectually and practically, a meaning to existence, was once again raised. The further presupposition was that, faced with such a crisis, one did not give up, one did not resort to soothing remedies, but neither did one collapse, that on the basis of the irreversible fact by now determined, one was instead absolutely determined “to dispel the fog, to open up a path”, turning towards “self-knowledge and, in oneself, the knowledge of Being”. This knowledge was presented as a transcendent knowledge, presupposing “a change of state”, and as an absolutely positive realisation. The opus transformationis, “the mutation of one’s deepest nature is what alone counts for higher knowledge”. Well, it was stated that for such a work there was already a science, “a precise, rigorous, methodical science, transmitted in unbroken chains even if rarely evident to the layman; a science which, though not dealing with external things and phenomena, but focusing on the deepest forces of human interiority, proceeds experimentally, with the same criteria of objectivity and impersonality as those of the exact sciences”. It is linked to “a unique tradition that in various forms of expression can be found in all peoples, alternatively as the wisdom of ancient royal and priestly elites, and as knowledge overshadowed by sacred symbols, myths and rites, whose origins are lost in primordial times, by mysteries and by initiations”.

As I mentioned, when they were collected as a volume and then in their re-edition seventeen years later the overall title of the monographs was Introduzione alla Magia (subtitled “quale scienza dell’Io” – “as science of the Ego”). In this regard, in the text, but already in the introduction, we took care to warn that the term “magic” was to be taken in a translated sense, not corresponding to the popular one and not even to that which it had in antiquity, because it was not a matter of certain practices, real or superstitious, aimed at the production of some paranormal phenomenon or other. By magic, rather, what was meant was that the group’s attention was brought essentially to that special formulation of initiatory knowledge that obeys an active, sovereign and dominant attitude with respect to the spiritual (on the historical implications of this orientation, I will say more below).

The monographs of the “Group of Ur” wanted to give hints, suggestions, directions in regard to the above mentioned science, first and foremost with the “exposition of methods, disciplines, techniques” together with a deepening of the symbology, secondly, “relations of effectively lived experiences”, thirdly, “the republication or translation of texts, or parts of texts, rare or little known, from the traditions of the East and the West, suitably clarified and annotated” (we published, for example, the first Italian translation from the Greek of the Mithriac Ritual of the Great Papyrus Magic of Paris, some chapters of a Tantra, hermetic texts such as the Turba Philosophorum, some songs of Milarepa, the Pythagorean Golden Verses, passages of the Buddhist Milindapahña, extracts from Meyrink, Kremmerz and Crowley, etc.), fourthly “concise doctrinal frameworks” and critical set-ups. Multiple guidelines from various schools were presented, so that the reader could choose according to his particular predispositions or inclinations.

The monographs were published for three years, from 1927 to 1929. In the mentioned re-edition for Bocca (later taken over by Feltrinelli), in three volumes of over 400 pages each, the subject matter was revised and expanded, with the exclusion of monographs whose content had been subsequently developed in separate books. However, several others were added, for appropriate completion. Overall, Introduction to Magic can well be called a unique work of its kind, not least for a way of dealing with the arguments different from the rambling and uncultured one prevailing in conventicles and sects. I believe that it will continue to represent an important document and source for all those interested in such disciplines.

Unfortunately, towards the end of the second year, a split in the group occurred, for obscure reasons, but mainly as a result of an underhanded attempt to take the publication out of my hands in order to have it controlled by elements who, as was openly declared later on, when this was no longer politically risky, kept Freemasonry alive despite its suppression in the Fascist period. The attempt having failed, a further attempt was made to prevent me from continuing to publish the papers. But this did not succeed either. The only regrettable effect was the defection of one of the most worthy, though not the most assiduous, collaborators, because of his personal susceptibilities and obscure ties that bound him to a suspicious individual.

It is, of course, impossible to present the vast and varied contents of those three volumes; moreover, there is no need to do so here, because it is not my sole activity. I will point out an extensive demolishing analysis, from the initiatory point of view, of the psychoanalytic views with which Jung claimed to “scientifically emphasise” the doctrines of ancient sapiential traditions and to interpret their symbols, with his related confusion about the famous “collective unconscious”, the archetypes”and the “process of individuation”; the exposition of the theory of knowledge as pure experimentalism proper to the initiatory knowledge; the first part of a well-documented investigation into the initiatory content of the ancient Roman tradition; a stance against Guénon’s views on “initiatory regularity” and on the relationship between contemplation and action; a clarification of the limits of Christian mysticism; another clarification about ethnology, and so on. This, for the properly doctrinal part. But the greater number of writings concerns the techniques, practical directions, with corresponding clarification of the symbology, especially of the hermetic one.

Particular emphasis was given to the initiatory doctrine of “conditional immortality”, already treated by me in one of the Saggi sull’idealismo magico (Essays on magical idealism). The theory of the existence in everyone of a soul naturaliter and by right “immortal” was accused as an illusion belonging only to exotericism (to the “external knowledge”), unknown to a superior wisdom. The latter is instead characterised by the distinction, first of all, between simple survival and true immortality, then by the rejection of the alternative of punishment or reward in the afterlife, according to moralising criteria, for the “immortal soul”, by posing, instead, the alternative between surviving in a divine form or not surviving at all or only in larval and temporary forms, the first possibility being conditioned by initiation or by another procedure equally aimed at rescinding, in one way or another or degree, the condition which the body and the sensory experience represent for the sense of the unity of the ego, a unity which is normally relative and transient. In this respect, the antithesis existing, in general, between exotericism and traditional internal doctrines (esotericism) acquired a particular significance in the face of the “spiritualistic” conception that had come to predominate, in terms of a fideistic, optimistic and democratic unrealism, with Christianity, while the opposite view (conditional immortality) referred back to the pagan conception of exceptional and privileged Olympic immortality. This hint will dispense me from returning to the discussion of the same subject, which is found in my later books, e.g., in The Hermetic Tradition and in my new presentation of the Tao-te-ching of Lao-tze (in esoteric Taoism the doctrine of conditional immortality, in a way to be “constructed”, had a classic expression).

One might ask where the “Absolute Individual” was going, since we were now talking about a mortal ego conditioned by the body. The contradiction is only apparent. Evidently giving away to everyone the ego of the “Absolute Individual” was even more absurd than giving him the naturaliter immortal soul of the “spiritualists”. On the contrary, the initiatory view agreed very well with the theory of the two opposite ways, indicated and deduced in my Teoria: the condition of the “mortal soul” was that proper to the “way of the other” or of the “object”. The progress with respect to the abstract philosophical exposition concerned the reference to concrete traditions and operative tasks: the world of the “non-immortal soul” was the same as that which in India was called samsāra, in the Far East the current of transformations, in which there is only the passage from one conditioned and contingent state to another, without a real continuity. It was also the so-called “way of the fathers” as opposed to the “way of the gods”. As for the other way, the new element, beyond the speculative overview of Fenomenologia, was absolute realism acting as a premise. It is necessary to recognise, no less starkly than materialism and positivism, what the “I” is that each person attributes to himself, before being able to go further towards the “Self” (hence, among other things, the true sense of the Buddhist doctrine that denies the existence of an “I”). As a point fixed once and for all, it was therefore declared that because of its exclusively ontological character, the problem of initiation (the opus transformationis) disregards any moralism, every need for sentiment and every “value of culture” to the same extent as positive science and technology/technique. This orientation naturally horrified the theosophists and the neo-spiritualists, who were not slow to accuse us of immoralism and “black magic”.

Starting with the second volume, Introduction also addressed the problems of “Tradition” and its forms. I will say more about this below, in relation to my personal contribution and my resizing of the views of Bachofen, Wirth and Guénon. Regarding the “Group of Ur”, I will finally mention that an attempt was made to create a “chain” through collective practices. The criteria followed and the corresponding instructions have been set forth in two monographs of Introduction. Among the members of this operative group, two elements at least were endowed with real powers. As for the purposes, the most immediate one was to awaken a superior force to serve as an aid to the individual work of each, a force of which each could eventually make use. There was, however, also a more ambitious purpose, namely the idea that onto the kind of psychic body that one wanted to create could be grafted, by evocation, a real influence from above. In such a case, the possibility of exerting, from behind the scenes. an action even on the predominant forces in the general environment of the time, would not have been excluded. As for the direction of such action, the main points of reference would have been more or less those of Heathen Imperialism and of the “Roman” ideals of Arturo Reghini.

Nothing of the sort was ever achieved (out of a sense of honesty, I must say that some of the phenomena reported in Introduction, in relation to the group, should not be dismissed without being explored in greater depth). The operative group was already dissolved in the second year, also in relation to the schism that had occurred. As the premises were not realised, that imperceptible influence to be exerted on the outside was no longer thought of, while there were, especially on my part, reservations about any kind of collective operations. However, it may be interesting to mention that, in another context, Mussolini for a moment believed that one wanted to act magically on him.

This happened a little later, if I remember correctly, around the 30th or 31st. All of a sudden some newspapers for which I was writing were ordered from above to withdraw my collaboration. I was able to trace the origin of the measure. In one of our polemics in Introduction we had taken position against those who, in order to admit the reality of supernatural powers, asked us not to throw, for example, the Himalayas into the Pacific but only an “irrelevant” phenomenon such as making a letter opener rise a few inches from a desk. We retorted that from the purely physical point of view such a power was certainly superior than that needed to dislodge some molecules or fibers from a brain, so as to cause a brain hemorrhage, and therefore the death of the person; that, if this power was “objective”, in this respect a particular brain would obviously have been in the same condition of helplessness as any other – it could therefore also have been that of a “head of government”. Thus, we concluded, we could see what consequences for an entire nation and for its history that “irrelevant” power required as evidence could have, if it were really free and absolute, not like the unconscious, subpersonal, unintentional and sporadic ones of mediums and the like.

Well, someone tendentiously referred this argument to Mussolini, hinting that by “a head of government” we meant him; and as some rumour was perhaps added about our now non-existent chain of Ur, the Duce thought of an intention to act magically on him. Once he knew how things really were, Mussolini ceased to interfere. In fact, Mussolini, in addition to being suggestible, was quite superstitious (as a counterpart of a mentality, after all, closed to true spirituality). For example, he was genuinely afraid of “jinxes”, whose name he forbade even to be uttered in his presence.