

The Great Triad



René Guénon

The Great Triad

RENÉ GUÉNON

Translated from the French

by

PETER KINGSLEY



QUINTA ESSENTIA

Translation © Quinta Essentia 1991

This book is copyright under the Berne Convention
No reproduction without permission. All rights reserved

This edition first published 1991 by
Quinta Essentia, 5 Green Street, Cambridge CB2 3JU, UK

Distributed by Element Books Ltd
Longmead, Shaftesbury, Dorset SP7 8PL, UK

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data
The great triad.

1. Symbolism

I. Title II. La grande triade. *English*

306.4

ISBN 1 870196 06 6

ISBN 1 870196 07 4 pbk

Typeset by Goodfellow & Egan, Cambridge
Printed by St Edmundsbury Press

ERRATUM

page 59, line 15,
for '5 the number of Heaven'
read '3 the number of Heaven'

Contents

	<i>Foreword</i>	3
1	Ternary and Trinity	11
2	Different Types of Ternary	16
3	Heaven and Earth	24
4	<i>Yin and Yang</i>	30
5	The Double Spiral	36
6	<i>Solve et Coagula</i>	43
7	Questions of Orientation	51
8	Celestial Numbers & Terrestrial Numbers	58
9	The Son of Heaven and Earth	65
10	Man and the Three Worlds	70
11	<i>Spiritus, Anima, Corpus</i>	75
12	Sulphur, Mercury and Salt	82
13	The Being and the Environment	88
14	The Mediator	97
15	Between the Square & the Compasses	104
16	<i>The Ming T'ang</i>	110
17	<i>Wang: The King-Pontiff</i>	116
18	True Man and Transcendent Man	124
19	God, Man, Nature	129
20	Distortions in Modern Philosophy	135
21	Providence, Will and Destiny	139
22	Triple Time	145
23	The Cosmic Wheel	152
24	<i>The Triratna</i>	158
25	The City of Willows	163
26	The Middle Way	169

Foreword

DOUBTLESS there are many who will realise just from the title of this study that it is concerned primarily with the symbolism of the Far-Eastern tradition. We say 'doubtless', because the role played in this tradition by the ternary composed of the terms 'Heaven, Earth, Man' (*T'ien-Ti-Jen*) is widely and well enough known; and it is precisely this ternary—which people have become accustomed to refer to by the name of 'Triad', even if they do not always exactly understand the meaning or significance of the term—that we now propose to explain, while at the same time also indicating the correspondences to be found in other formal traditions. We have already devoted a chapter of another study to this subject,¹ but it deserves to be treated at greater length.

It is equally well known that there exists in China a 'secret society'—or at least something generally alluded to as such—which in the West has also been given the same name 'Triad'. As it is not a specific part of our intention to concern ourselves with this organisation, it will be just as well to say a few words about it now so as to avoid having to come back to it in the course of our exposition.²

The true name of the organisation in question is *T'ien Ti Hwei*, which can be translated as 'Society of Heaven and Earth'—provided that, for reasons explained elsewhere,³ all due reserva-

1. *The Symbolism of the Cross*, translated by Angus Macnab (London, 1958), chapter 28.

2. Details of the organisation in question, and of its ritual and symbols (particularly the numerical symbols it uses), are to be found in the work by Lieutenant-Colonel B. Pavre on *Les Sociétés secrètes en Chine* (*Secret Societies in China*). Although writing from a lay point of view, the author has at least begun to discern the outline of certain things which as a rule are completely overlooked by sinologists; and even though he has not come near resolving all the questions he has thereby raised, he deserves full credit for having at least posed these questions clearly. See also Matgioi, *La Voie rationnelle*, chapter 7.

3. *Aperçus sur l'Initiation*, chapter 12.

tions are made regarding use of the word 'society'. This is because what is in question here is something which, although admittedly of a relatively external order, is very far from presenting all the characteristics inevitably evoked by this word in the modern Western world. It will be noticed that only the first two terms of the traditional Triad appear in the title. The reason for this is that the organisation itself (*huei*), by virtue of its members understood in a collective as well as an individual sense, takes the place of the third term. This will become clearer later on.⁴

One of ten finds it said that this same organisation is also known by quite a large and varied number of other names, including some in which the idea of the ternary is explicitly mentioned.⁵ In fact, however, this is not strictly accurate. The designations in question actually refer only to particular branches or to various temporary 'emanations' of this organisation, which appear at such-and-such a moment in history and disappear as soon as they have finished playing the specific role for which they were brought into being.⁶

We have already indicated elsewhere the true nature of all organisations of this kind.⁷ In the last analysis they must always be considered as deriving from the Taoist hierarchy, which gave rise to them and which invisibly guides them for the purposes of a more or less outward activity in which it cannot itself intervene directly owing to the principle of 'non-action' (*wu wei*). According

4. It should be noted that *jen* means both 'man' and 'humanity', and that in its application to the social order it also signifies the 'solidarity' of the race—the practical achievement of which is one of the contingent aims set for itself by the organisation in question.

5. For instance the 'Three Rivers' (*San Ho*) and the 'Three Points' (*San Tien*). The use of this last expression is evidently one of the factors that have prompted certain people to search for connections between the 'Triad' and Western initiatory organisations such as Masonry and the Compagnonnage.

6. Anyone intending to consult the above-mentioned book by Lieutenant-Colonel B. Favre should on no account lose sight of this essential distinction. Unfortunately the author ignores it, to the extent that he seems to consider all these names as pure and simple equivalents of each other. In fact most of the details he provides about the 'Triad' really only refer to one of its emanations, the *Hong Huei*; and in particular it is the *Hong Huei* alone, and most definitely not the *T'ien Ti Huei*, which might at the earliest have only been founded towards the end of the 17th or the beginning of the 18th century—in other words, at a very recent date.

7. See *Aperçus sur l'Initiation*, chapters 12 and 46.

to this principle the role of the hierarchy is essentially that of the 'motionless mover'—in other words, of the centre that governs the movement of all things without participating in it.

All of this is naturally lost on most sinologists. Given the particular standpoint from which they approach their subject, it is hardly surprising that their studies fail to inform them that everything of an esoteric or initiatic order in the Far East necessarily derives, to a greater or lesser degree, from Taoism. Even so, it is still somewhat strange that the same scholars who have detected a Taoist influence in the 'secret societies' should have failed to carry the matter any further and draw any important conclusions from it. Instead, noting simultaneously the presence of other elements—notably Buddhist—they hasten to dismiss the whole matter with the word 'syncretism'. Little do they seem to realise that this word designates something altogether opposed, on the one hand to the eminently 'synthetic' mentality of the Chinese people, and on the other hand to the initiatic spirit from which the organisations in question obviously derive—even if in this respect we are only dealing with structures situated at a fair distance from the centre.⁸ Certainly we do not wish to claim that all the members of these relatively external organisations are necessarily aware of the fundamental unity of all traditions. Yet those who stand behind these organisations, and inspire them, most certainly do possess this awareness in their capacity of 'true men' (*chen jen*), and it is this that allows them—when circumstances deem it appropriate or advantageous—to introduce into the organisations formal elements that strictly belong to other traditions.⁹

In this connection we must dwell a little on the usage of elements of Buddhist origin. This is not so much because they are without a doubt more frequently encountered than any others (a fact easily explainable as due to the extensive diffusion of Buddhism in China as well as the entire Far East) as because there

8. Cf. *Aperçus sur l'Initiation*, chapter 6.

9. This sometimes even includes traditions such as Christianity that are utterly foreign to the Far East, as can be seen from the case of the association called 'Great Peace' or *T'ai P'ing*, which is one of the more recent emanations of the *Pai Lien Hwei* that we shall be mentioning in a moment.

happens to be a deeper reason for this usage which gives it a very special significance. Indeed, without this other factor the diffusion of Buddhism just mentioned might quite possibly not have occurred.

We could easily find numerous examples of this usage. However, apart from those which themselves only possess a more or less secondary importance, and whose value lies precisely in their ability (mainly through their sheer number) to attract and hold the attention of the external observer and thereby divert it from what is of a more essential nature,¹⁰ there is at least one very clear example which has a bearing on something more than mere details.

We are referring to the use of the symbol of the 'white lotus' in the title itself of the other Far-Eastern organisation which stands on the same level as the *T'ien Ti Huei*.¹¹ In fact *Pai Lien Chai* or *Pai Lien Tsung*, name of a Buddhist school, and *Pai Lien Chiao* or *Pai Lien Huei*, name of the organisation in question, designate two completely separate entities. Yet there is a kind of intended ambiguity in the adoption of this particular title by this organisation of Taoist origin, just as there is also in certain rites of outwardly Buddhist appearance, or again in the 'legends' in which Buddhist monks almost constantly play a more or less significant role.

It can be seen quite clearly from an example such as this how Buddhism can serve as a 'cover' for Taoism, and how it has thereby proved able to save Taoism from running the risk of externalising itself to a greater degree than would be appropriate for a doctrine which by definition must always be restricted to a limited élite. This is why Taoism could favour the diffusion of Buddhism in China, without there being any grounds for invoking affinities of origin which only exist in the imagination of certain

10. The notion of the so-called 'syncretism' of Chinese 'secret societies' is one particular example of the results obtained by this route, when the external observer happens to be a modern Westerner.

11. We speak of it as 'the other' because in effect there are only two. All the associations known from outside are, in reality, merely branches or emanations of either the one or the other.

orientalists. Moreover, it was even better able to facilitate the diffusion of Buddhism because the two parts of the Far-Eastern tradition—the esoteric and the exoteric—had formed themselves into two branches of doctrine as far apart from each other as Taoism and Confucianism, and it was easy to find room in between the two for something of a basically intermediate nature. Another result of this, it may be added, was that Chinese Buddhism was itself influenced by Taoism to a considerable degree. This can be seen from the adoption by some Buddhist schools (notably the *Ch'an*¹² school) of certain techniques of clearly Taoist inspiration, and also from the assimilation of certain symbols, no less essentially Taoist in origin, such as *Kuan Yin* for example. It is hardly necessary to point out that through these assimilations Buddhism became even more eminently qualified to play the role which we have just outlined.

There also exist other elements whose presence even the most ardent advocates of the theory of 'borrowings' could hardly dream of explaining away as 'syncretism'; in the absence of initiatic knowledge on the part of those who have attempted to study Chinese 'secret societies', these elements must remain for them an insoluble enigma. The factors we are referring to are those responsible for similarities, quite often striking, occurring between the organisations in question and organisations of the same kind belonging to other formal traditions. In this connection some writers have gone so far as to entertain, in particular, the hypothesis of a common origin for both the 'Triad' and Freemasonry; hardly surprisingly, they have not been able to support their hypothesis with reasoning of any substance. This is not to say that the idea is to be rejected altogether, but just that it needs to be understood in a completely different sense from the way in which it is usually understood: that is, it needs to be phrased not in terms of a historical origin of greater or lesser antiquity, but solely in terms of the identity of principles governing every initiation—whether it be of the East or of the West. In fact, to discover the real

12. A Chinese transcription of the Sanskrit word *Dhyana*, meaning 'contemplation'. This school is more commonly known by its name of *Zen*, which is the Japanese form of the same word.

explanation for this similarity would require going back well beyond the beginning of history—to the primordial Tradition itself.¹³ As to certain similarities of a more specific nature, we will simply say that factors such as the use of numerical symbolism, to take one example, or the use of ‘building’ symbolism, to take another, are in no way peculiar to this or that initiatic scheme. On the contrary, they are merely some among the many elements to be encountered everywhere (with minor differences due to adaptation) because they relate to sciences or arts that exist equally, and possess the same ‘sacred’ character, in all traditions. Really, then, they belong to the domain of initiation in general, which means that where the Far East is concerned they will fall specifically within the province of Taoism. If the adventitious elements—Buddhist or otherwise—are basically a ‘mask’, these other elements on the contrary belong to what is truly essential.

This brings us to a matter that requires further clarification. When we speak here of Taoism, and when we say that such-and-such a thing falls within the province of Taoism (which will be the case with most of the issues we will be examining in this study), this is to be understood with reference to the Far-Eastern tradition in its present state. We mention this because people who are too prone to view everything ‘historically’ might be tempted to conclude that it is a question of concepts not to be met with prior to the development of what is strictly called Taoism; whereas in fact, very far from this being the case, these same concepts are to be found constantly throughout the entire Chinese tradition as it is known, starting from the earliest period which it is possible to go back to—in short, from the time of Fu Hsi. The reason for this is that in reality Taoism has made no ‘innovations’ whatever in the esoteric and initiatic domain—just as, for that matter, Confucianism has

13. It is quite true that initiation as such only became necessary at a certain period in the cycle of terrestrial humanity, as a consequence of man’s widespread spiritual degeneration. However, prior to that point in time all the constituent elements of initiation formed the superior or higher part of the primordial Tradition, just as—by analogy and with reference to a cycle much more limited in time and space—everything implicit in Taoism formed from the very beginning the higher part of the one and only tradition which existed in the Far East prior to the splitting in two of its esoteric and exoteric aspects.

made none in the exoteric and social domain. Both Confucianism and Taoism are, each in their own way, merely 're-adaptations' necessitated by conditions which had led to the tradition in its original form no longer being understood in its entirety.¹⁴ From that time on, one part of the previous tradition entered into Taoism and another part into Confucianism, and this is the state of affairs that has continued down to the present day. To refer this notion to Taoism, or that notion to Confucianism, is therefore in no way to attribute them to something more or less comparable to what Westerners would call 'systems'. Fundamentally it simply amounts to saying that they belong respectively to the esoteric and the exoteric parts of the Far-Eastern tradition.

We shall not be returning explicitly to the subject of the *T'ien Ti Hwei*, except when necessary in order to deal with certain particular points, because this is not part of our plan. However, what we shall be saying in the course of this study will, besides its much more general scope and bearing, demonstrate implicitly the principles on which—as even its title indicates—the organisation is based. This will permit the reader to understand how, in spite of its external nature, the organisation has a genuinely initiatic character that guarantees its members at least a potential participation in the Taoist tradition. In fact, to be more specific, the role assigned to man as the third term of the Triad is, at one level, that of 'true man' (*chen jen*) and, at another level, that of 'transcendent man' (*chün jen*), thus indicating the goals of the 'lesser mysteries' and the 'greater mysteries' respectively—in short, the goals of all initiation. Doubtless this organisation, taken in isolation, is not to be numbered among those that effectively allow these goals to be attained. None the less it is at least capable of preparing for the final stages those who are so 'qualified', however far they may stand from the goal; and this makes of it one of the 'forecourts' that are able to provide access for these individuals to the Taoist hierarchy—the degrees of which are none other than the degrees of initiatic realisation itself.

14. It is well known that the formation of these two separate branches of the Far-Eastern tradition dates from the 6th century B.C., this being the time of Lao Tzu and Confucius.

I | Ternary and Trinity

BEFORE we commence our study of the Far-Eastern Triad, it will be just as well if we take the trouble to put ourselves on guard against the general confusion and false comparisons and identifications that are prevalent in the West. These are chiefly the result of people's desire to discover, quite indiscriminately, in any and every traditional ternary a more or less exact equivalent of the Christian Trinity. This error is not only due to theologians, who after all have some excuse for wishing to make everything conform to their own particular point of view. What is most remarkable is that it is even made by people who do not belong to—or are actually hostile to—all religions, Christianity included. Owing to the environment in which these people live, they are more conversant with Christianity than with any other formal tradition (which is not to say that their understanding of it is basically much greater than their understanding of any other tradition) and as a result they have more or less unconsciously made it a kind of basis for comparison to which they attempt to relate everything else. Of all the numerous examples one could give of these misguided comparisons, one of those most frequently encountered is the case of the Hindu *Trimurti*, which it has even become common practice simply to refer to by the name of 'Trinity'. Yet, if misunderstandings are to be avoided, it is essential that this latter term be reserved exclusively for the Christian concept which it has always specifically been intended to designate. Undeniably in both examples we have cases of a grouping of three aspects of divinity; but in reality, that is where the resemblance ends. The aspects are not the same in the two cases; in no way can it be said that their differentiation reflects the same point of view; and it is therefore quite impossible to bring the three terms of the one ternary into conformity with the three terms of the other.¹

1. Of the various different ternaries envisaged in Hindu tradition, perhaps the

If one were to consider comparing in a serious way two ternaries belonging to different traditions, the first prerequisite would be the possibility of being able to establish a valid correspondence between the ternaries, term by term. In other words, it would be necessary for there to exist a genuine relationship either of equivalence or of similarity between the two sets of terms. Even so, however, the fulfilment of this precondition would not in itself be sufficient to permit of a pure and simple identification of the two ternaries. It is quite possible for a correspondence to exist between two ternaries which, although consequently being of the same type, so to speak, might none the less belong to different levels either in the scale of principles or in the scale of manifestation, or even in both at once.

Admittedly these remarks apply just as much to ternaries postulated within one and the same tradition. However, in this case it is easier to be on one's guard against a mistaken identification, for it will be quite obvious that the ternaries in question are not just duplicating each other or merely performing interchangeable functions. On the other hand, when it is a question of different traditions the temptation is then all the greater to establish correspondences—which may have no justification in reality—as soon as appearances seem to lend themselves to such an assumption.

Be that as it may, there is no error more serious than the mistake of identifying ternaries with each other when they have nothing whatever in common outside of the fact of their both being ternaries; that is, they are both of them sets of three terms, and yet the relationship between the three terms is completely different in both cases. To get to the truth of the matter therefore requires from the very outset a correct assessment of the type of ternary one is dealing with in each case—and this before even starting to look into the question of what order of reality it belongs to. If two ternaries are of the same type, then a correspondence

one that could in certain respects most valuably be compared with the Christian Trinity (although naturally the point of view will still be very different) is the ternary *Sat-Chit-Ananda*. See *Man and his Becoming according to the Vedanta*, translated by Richard C. Nicholson (London, 1945), chapter 14.

will exist between them. If in addition they both belong to the same order—or, to be more precise, the same level—of reality, it may then be a case of identity (provided they are formulated from the same point of view) or at the very least a case of equivalence (if the standpoint is different).

It is first and foremost due to the failure to draw the essential distinctions between different types of ternary that the situation has arisen of people making all sorts of fanciful comparisons which have not the slightest bearing on reality. This is especially the case with the comparisons that occultists delight in making: they have only to come across a group of three terms—no matter where, no matter what—and they can hardly wait to bring it into correspondence with all the other groupings containing the same number of terms which they happen to have found elsewhere. Their works are filled with tables drawn up in this way—some of them veritable prodigies of incoherence and confusion.²

As we shall see more fully in due course, the Far-Eastern Triad belongs to the type of ternary composed of two complementary terms plus a third term resulting from the union—or, if it be preferred, the reciprocal action and reaction—of the first two. Using as symbols images taken from the human sphere, the three constituents of a ternary of this kind can as a generalisation be described as Father, Mother and Son.³ Now it is clearly impossible to make these three terms correspond to the three terms of the Christian Trinity. In the latter, the first two terms are not complementary in the least, nor are they in any way symmetrical; on the contrary, the second derives from the first alone. As for the

2. What we are saying here with reference to groups of three terms applies just as much to groupings containing other numbers of terms. These are just as frequently brought into association with each other in the same arbitrary way, merely because the number of terms they consist of happens to be the same; the true nature of the terms is simply not taken into consideration. There are even those who, for the sake of discovering imaginary correspondences, will go so far as to fabricate artificially groupings that traditionally have no meaning whatever. A typical example of this is the case of Malfatti of Montereggio, who gathered together in his *Mathesis* the names of ten completely heterogeneous principles taken from here and there in the Hindu tradition and thought he had found in them an equivalent to the ten *Sephiroth* of the Hebrew Kabbalah.

3. The ancient Egyptian triads—of which the most famous is that of Osiris, Isis and Horus—also fall within this class of ternary.

third term, although it does indeed proceed from the two others, this derivation is most certainly not conceived of as an act of generation or filiation. However one might choose to try and define it—a matter which there is no need for us to go into here in any greater detail—it is a question of another relationship of an essentially different kind.

What could give rise to some uncertainty is the fact that, in the Christian Trinity as well, two of the terms are referred to as Father and Son. Firstly, however, the Son is the second term and not the third. And secondly, there is no conceivable way that the third term could be made to correspond to the Mother: even if there were no other reasons to fall back on, the fact that it comes after the Son, not before, would alone be sufficient to make this identification impossible. It is true that certain more or less heterodox Christian sects have made the Holy Spirit out to be feminine—often with the specific intention of providing it with characteristics comparable to those of the Mother. Yet it is highly probable that in this they were influenced by a spurious assimilation of the Trinity to some ternary of the type we have been discussing, which would show that errors of this kind are not confined to people of today. Furthermore, and still restricting ourselves to the subject under consideration, the feminine character ascribed in this way to the Holy Spirit is not in the slightest accord with the completely contrary role—fundamentally masculine and ‘paternal’—which it incontestably plays in the ‘generation’ of Christ. This observation is of particular significance for us because it is precisely here, in the begetting of Christ, and not in the Trinity concept at all, that we are able to discover something in Christianity that corresponds (in a certain respect, and with all the reservations demanded, as always, by the difference in points of view) to ternaries of the same type as the Far-Eastern Triad.⁴

In fact the ‘working of the Holy Spirit’ in the generation of Christ corresponds precisely to the ‘actionless’ activity of *Purusha*

4. Let it be mentioned in passing that there is no truth in the apparently generally held belief that the Christian tradition has no conceptions of any ternary apart from the Trinity. In fact many other ternaries could be cited to give the lie to this belief, and here we actually have one of the prime examples.

or, to use the language of Far-Eastern tradition, of 'Heaven'. The Virgin, on the other hand, is a perfect image of *Prakriti*, which the same tradition calls 'Earth'.⁵ As for Christ himself, his identity with 'Universal Man' is even more obvious.⁶

Should we wish therefore to find a correspondence here, it will be necessary to say—using the terms of Christian theology—that the Triad bears no relation whatever to the generation of the Word *ad intra* (which is implicit in the concept of the Trinity), but is closely related to the generation of the Word *ad extra*—or as Hindu tradition would say, to the birth of the *Avatar* in the manifested world.⁷ Nor is this difficult to understand for, taking as it does its point of departure from *Purusha* and *Prakriti* (or their equivalents), the Triad must inevitably situate itself on the side of manifestation—the two poles of which are identical with its first two terms.⁸ We could in fact say that the Triad embraces manifestation in its entirety for, as we shall see later, Man figures in it as the veritable synthesis of the 'ten thousand beings'—that is, as the synthesis of everything contained in the totality of universal Existence.

5. This is particularly evident in symbolic representations of the 'Black Virgin'—the colour in this case symbolising the total absence of differentiation in the *materia prima*.

6. In this connection we will repeat once again that we have not the slightest intention of disputing the 'historicity' of certain particular events. On the contrary, we view the historical events as themselves symbols of a reality of a higher order, and on this basis alone do they possess any significance for us.

7. The mother of the *Avatar* is *Maya*, which is the same thing as *Prakriti*. We shall not press the connection that certain people have wished to establish between the two names *Maya* and *Maria*, but mention it merely as a curiosity.

8. See *Man and his Becoming according to the Vedanta*, chapter 4.

2 | Different Types of Ternary

WHAT we have just said has in fact already established how the Triad is to be understood, and at the same time it has also demonstrated how necessary it is to make a clear distinction between ternaries of different types. These various types of ternary could certainly be multiplied almost indefinitely, because it is obvious that three terms can be grouped together in all kinds of different relationships.

However that may be, we shall be focussing in what follows only on the two principal types of ternary. This is not just because these are the ones that present the most general features, but also because among all the different types of ternary they have the most direct bearing on the particular subject of this study. And furthermore, the observations they give rise to will in addition allow us to rule out of court once and for all the crass error committed by those who have claimed to discover a 'dualism' in the Far-Eastern tradition.

Of the two types of ternary we are referring to, one consists of a first principle—that is, first in at least a relative sense—which gives rise to two opposite or mutually opposing terms. To be more

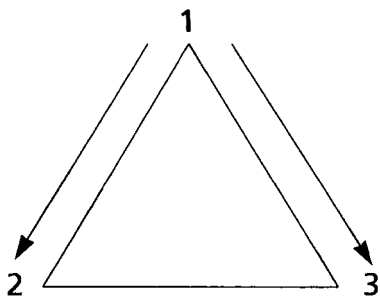


Figure 1

correct it would be better to say 'complementary' rather than 'opposite', because wherever appearances present us with an opposition—which will be valid at a certain level or in a certain domain—there we always find that complementarity corresponds to a point of view which is more

profound and consequently more truly in accord with the real

nature of the phenomenon in question. A ternary of this type can be depicted in the form of a triangle with its apex situated at the top (figure 1).

The other type of ternary, as mentioned earlier, consists of two complementary terms plus their product or resultant. It is to this type of ternary that the Far-Eastern Triad belongs. In direct contrast to the first type, it can be depicted in the form of a triangle with its base at the top (figure 2).¹

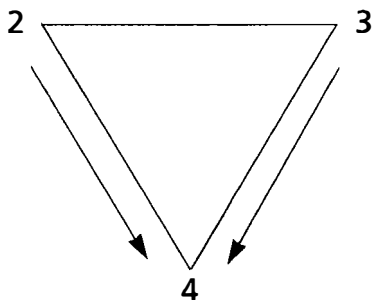


Figure 2

If we compare these two triangles it becomes apparent that the second is as it were a reflection of the first.

This points to the existence between the two ternaries of an analogy in the true sense of the word—that is, one that has to be applied inversely. And indeed if we start off with the two complementary terms—which are necessarily in a symmetrical relationship to each other—we see that in the first case the ternary is brought to completion by their originating principle and in the second case it is brought to completion by their resultant. This means that the two complementary terms occur respectively after and before this other term which, being of an altogether different order, stands as it were in isolation from them.² At any rate it is quite clear that this third term is the factor that gives the ternary its meaning and significance.

Now there is one fact that we need to have a clear grasp of before we can proceed any further. This is that there can be no

1. It will soon become clear why in the second diagram we number the three terms 2-3-4 instead of 1-2-3 as in the first diagram.

2. This is made even clearer in the two diagrams by the direction of the arrows: in the first diagram these point downwards from the apex at the top to the base, and in the second diagram they point downwards from the base to the apex at the bottom. One could also view the number (3) of the terms as breaking down into $1 + 2$ in the first case and $2 + 1$ in the second, which makes it very clear that if these two configurations are equivalent to each other from a quantitative point of view, from a qualitative viewpoint they most certainly are not.

question of 'dualism' in any doctrine unless two opposed or complementary terms (and they would naturally tend to be conceived of as opposed rather than complementary) are posited at the very outset, and are regarded as ultimate, irreducible and not capable in any way of being derived from a common principle. Clearly this excludes any ternary of the first type, which means that only ternaries of the second type could be found in such a doctrine. Yet, as we have already pointed out, ternaries of this second type never have any application outside of the domain of manifestation, and this makes it immediately evident that any 'dualism' is of necessity also a 'naturalism'.

However, the mere fact of acknowledging the existence of a duality and situating it where it truly belongs is in no way tantamount to 'dualism', so long as the two terms of this duality derive from a single principle belonging as such to a higher order of reality. And this is precisely the case with, first and foremost, the primary duality of all, namely that of Essence and universal Substance. These derive from a polarisation of Being, or original Unity, and through their interaction all manifestation is produced. In Hindu tradition the two terms of this primary duality are called *Purusha* and *Prakriti*; in Far-Eastern tradition, Heaven (*T'ien*) and Earth (*Ti*). And yet in using these terms neither of these traditions, any more than any other orthodox tradition, ever loses sight of the higher principle from which they both derive.

We have on other occasions fully explained the facts as far as the Hindu tradition is concerned. As for the Far-Eastern tradition, it is no less explicit in its postulate of a common origin of Heaven and Earth,³ which it calls the 'Great Extreme' (*T'ai Chi*). In it Heaven and Earth are indissolubly united in the state of 'non-separation' and 'non-distinction'⁴ prior to all differentiation.⁵ It is pure Being, and as such is identical to the 'Great

3. And also, needless to say, of all other dualities of a more particular nature. In the last resort these are merely specific versions or instances of the duality Heaven-Earth, and consequently they all ultimately derive from the same principle, whether directly or indirectly.

4. This principal non-distinction is not to be confused with the potential non-distinction which is the unique property of Substance, or *materia prima*.

5. It should be understood that there is no question at all of priority in time, or of succession in a sense involving duration.

Unity' (*T'ai I*).⁶ And this is not the end of the matter: *T'ai Chi*, transcendental Being or Unity, itself presupposes another principle—*Wu Chi*, Non-Being or the metaphysical Nought.⁷ But it is impossible for this principle to enter into relationship with anything besides itself in such a way as to become the first term of a ternary, for no relationship of this sort could possibly exist prior to the affirmation of Being or Unity.⁸

To sum up: we have first of all a ternary of the first type, consisting of *T'ai Chi*, *T'ien* and *Ti*, and only then do we have a ternary of the second type, consisting of *T'ien*, *Ti* and *Jen*. It is this second ternary that people have become accustomed to refer to as the 'Great Triad'. These being the facts of the matter, one is completely at a loss to understand how certain people could possibly believe themselves justified in ascribing a 'dualistic' nature to the Far-Eastern tradition.

Consideration of two ternaries such as the ones we have just been discussing, both of them sharing in common the same two complementary principles, leads us on to several other important observations.

The two inverted triangles that represent the two ternaries can be regarded as having the same base. Now if we imagine them joined together by this common base we perceive two things. Firstly, the combination of the two ternaries creates a quaternary, for two of the terms are the same in both ternaries and this means that in fact we are only dealing with four distinct terms. Secondly, the final term of the quaternary is located on the vertical descending from the first term, and as it occupies a position exactly symmetrical to this first term from the point of view of the base, it

6. The character *chi* is the one used to designate the 'roof-top' or 'pinnacle' of a building. As for *T'ai I*, it is symbolically located in the pole star which is in fact the 'pinnacle' of the visible heavens and as such is naturally qualified to represent the 'pinnacle' of the entire Cosmos.

7. *Wu Chi* corresponds to the neuter, supreme *Brahma* of Hindu tradition (*Para-Brahma*), and *T'ai Chi* to *Ishwara* or the 'non-supreme' *Brahma* (*Apara-Brahma*).

8. Above all other principles there still remains the *Tao*. In its most universal significance *Tao* is simultaneously Non-Being and Being, while at the same time not really being anything apart from Non-Being. For Non-Being contains Being which, as the first principle of all manifestation, polarises into Essence and Substance (or Heaven and Earth) so as actually to produce this manifestation.

can therefore be regarded as a reflection of the first term. The plane of this reflection is the base itself, which is simply the

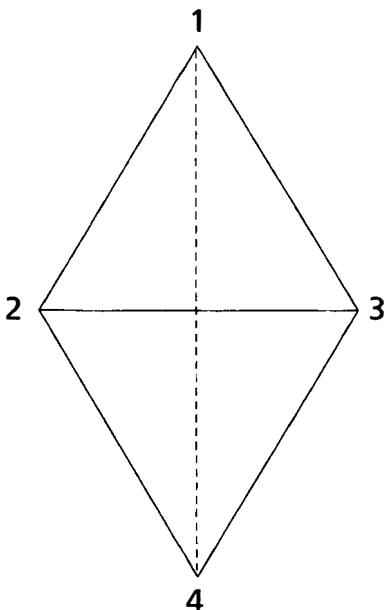


Figure 3

median plane connecting the two complementary terms that originate from the first term and in turn produce the last (figure 3).⁹

This is basically quite easy to understand. On the one hand the two complementary terms are contained within the first term *qua* their principle; accordingly their different natures, even when seemingly opposed to each other, are really just the result of a differentiation of the nature of that principle. On the other hand the final term, *qua* product of the two complementary terms, participates in the nature of both. This amounts

to saying that in a sense it combines within itself the nature of both of them and is consequently, at its own particular level, a kind of mirror image of the first term.

9. The configuration produced in this way possesses certain rather remarkable geometrical properties which may be mentioned in passing. The two equilateral triangles, facing each other across their shared base, are inscribed in two equal-sized circumferences each of which passes through the centre of the other. The chord joining the points of intersection of the circumference is of course the shared base of the two triangles; the two arcs subtended by this chord, and marking off the area common to the two circles, create the figure called *mandorla* (almond) or *vesica piscis*, which is well known in the architectural and sigillary symbolism of the Middle Ages.

In ancient English Operative Freemasonry, the total number of degrees of these two circumferences ($360 \times 2 = 720$) supplied the answer to the question concerning the length of the 'cable-tow', a peculiar word which by virtue of its phonetics possesses a double meaning: by assimilation to the Arabic *qabiltu* it is suggestive of the initiatory commitment, and consequently could be said to convey the idea of a 'bond' in every sense of the word.

On the basis of these considerations we can proceed to an even more exact formulation of the relationship existing between the different terms. We have just seen how the two terms of the quaternary that are furthest apart from each other are the first term of the first ternary and the last term of the second, and we have also seen how both of these terms by their very nature play a fundamentally mediatory role between the two others. This they do for opposite reasons in each case: both of them combine and reconcile within themselves the elements of the complementarity, but one does this *qua* principle, the other *qua* resultant.

To make this intermediary role more tangible we can arrange the terms of each ternary in a linear form.¹⁰ In the first case, the first term now occupies the central place on the line joining the two other terms, and from here gives rise to those other terms simultaneously through a centrifugal movement that proceeds in both directions. This can be called its polarisation (figure 4). In the second case the two complementary terms are sources of a

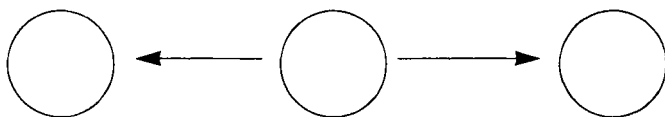


Figure 4

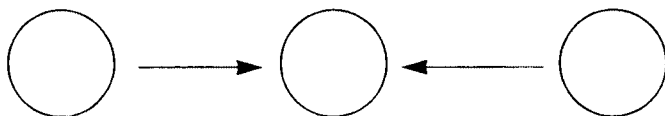


Figure 5

centripetal movement which originates from them both simultaneously to produce a resultant—the final term; and this too occupies the middle of the line uniting the complementaries (figure 5). So principle and resultant both occupy a central position in relation to the two complementary terms, and this fact is especially worth bearing in mind in view of the observations we shall be making later.

10. This schema can be considered as resulting from the projection of each of the earlier triangles onto a plane perpendicular to its own, and passing through its base.

One other thing needs mentioning here. As we have already explained elsewhere,¹¹ two opposed or complementary terms (and they will always be found at bottom to be complementary in their essential reality rather than opposed) can, as the case may be, stand in opposition to each other either horizontally (opposition between right and left) or vertically (opposition between higher and lower). Horizontal opposition occurs between two terms which share the same degree of reality and are, so to speak, symmetrical in every respect. Vertical opposition indicates, on the contrary, a hierarchical relationship between the two terms. Although still symmetrical in the sense of being complementary, they are related in such a way that one of them must be considered to be higher, or superior, and the other lower, or inferior.

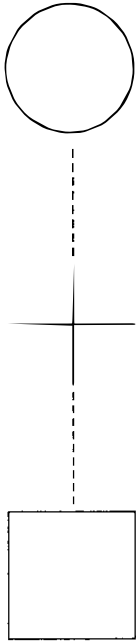


Figure 6

It is important to notice that in a vertical opposition the first term of a ternary of the first type cannot be placed between the two complementaries or in the middle of the line that joins them: this can only be done with the third term of a ternary of the second type. The reason is that a principle can never be situated at a lower level than one of the two terms that derive from it; it is necessarily higher than, or superior to, them both. The resultant, on the other hand, is a true intermediary in this respect as well. As this is the case with the Far-Eastern Triad, we can re-arrange it in the form of a vertical line (figure 6).¹² It is indeed a fact

that Essence and universal Substance are, respectively, the upper and the lower pole of manifestation, and to describe the former as being above all existence and the other as below all existence

11. *The Reign of Quantity and the Signs of the Times*, translated by Lord Northbourne (London, 1953), chapter 30.

12. In this diagram we use a circle to represent the upper term (Heaven) and a square to represent the lower (Earth)—a practice that is in conformity with the Far-Eastern tradition, as we shall see. To depict the median term (Man) we use a cross, which, as we have explained elsewhere, is the symbol of 'Universal Man'. (See *The Symbolism of the Cross*.)

is quite accurate. Further, when we call them by their names Heaven and Earth, this even translates itself with the greatest of precision into the sensory appearances that serve as their symbols.¹³

All manifestation, then, occurs between these two poles; and naturally the same applies to Man. For not only is he a part of this manifestation: symbolically he represents its very centre, which means that he is a synthesis of all that it contains. So, situated as he is between Heaven and Earth, Man must in the first instance be viewed as the product or resultant of their reciprocal influences. But then, by virtue of the dual nature he inherits from both, he becomes the median term or 'mediator' which unites them: using a symbolism we shall return to later, he is as it were the 'bridge' passing from the one to the other.

These two different viewpoints can be expressed by simply modifying the sequence in which the terms of the Triad are enumerated. If we present the Triad in the sequence 'Heaven, Earth, Man', Man assumes the guise of Son of Heaven and Earth. But if we present it in the sequence 'Heaven, Man, Earth', he assumes the role of Mediator between Heaven on the one hand and Earth on the other.

13. Hence the reason why the 'pinnacle of Heaven' (*T'ien Ch'i*) is also, as pointed out in an earlier note, the pinnacle of the Cosmos in its entirety.

3 | Heaven and Earth

‘HEAVEN covers, Earth supports.’ So runs the traditional formula that defines with the greatest of precision the roles of these two complementary principles and symbolically demarcates their positions, respectively above and below, in relation to the ‘ten thousand beings’—that is, the totality of universal manifestation.¹ Here we find postulated on one hand the ‘actionless’ quality of the activity of Heaven, or *Purusha*;² and on the other hand the passivity of Earth, or *Prakriti*, which strictly speaking is a ‘ground’ or ‘support’ for manifestation,³ and consequently also a plane of resistance and halting for the celestial forces and influences acting downwards from above. Furthermore, this is applicable at any level of existence, for essence and substance can always be envisaged as principles that in a relative sense—that is, in relation to each particular state of manifestation—correspond to universal Essence and universal Substance in their relation to the totality of manifested existence.⁴

Within the Universal, and viewed from the side of their common principle, Heaven is ‘active perfection’ (*Ch’ien*) and

1. We have explained elsewhere the reason for the choice of the number ‘ten thousand’ as a symbolic representation of the indefinite (*Les Principes du Calcul infinitésimal*, chapter 9). As for Heaven’s ‘covering’, we will recall that an identical symbolism is contained both in the Greek word *Ouranos*, which is equivalent to the Sanskrit *Varuna* and derives from the root *var*, ‘to cover’, and also in the Latin *Caelum*, which comes from *caelare*, ‘to conceal’ or ‘cover’: see *The Lord of the World*, translated by various hands (Ellingstring, Yorks., 1983), chapter 7.

2. In theological language the ‘working of the Holy Spirit’ which we mentioned earlier is sometimes given the name *obumbratio* (‘overshadowing’), and this is fundamentally an expression of the same idea.

3. Compare the etymological meaning of the word ‘substance’: literally ‘that which stands beneath’.

4. This will help us in particular to understand later on how the role of ‘mediator’ can in fact be ascribed to ‘true man’ as well as to ‘transcendent man’. Otherwise, without this observation one might have assumed that it should be applied to the latter alone.

Earth is 'passive perfection' (*K'un*). Neither of these is Perfection in the absolute sense: a distinction already exists, and distinction inevitably implies a limitation. Viewed from the side of manifestation, they are merely Essence and Substance, which necessarily possess a lesser degree of universality because they only appear as such precisely in relation to manifestation.⁵ But whatever the viewpoint, and regardless of the level from which they are observed in their correlation with each other, Heaven is always an active principle and Earth always a passive principle. Alternatively, to use one of the symbolic contrasts most frequently employed in this context, they are a masculine principle and a feminine principle; and here we have the most classic of all examples of complementarity.

Generally speaking it is from this basic polarity that all the other characteristics of Heaven and Earth derive, these being in one way or another secondary to it. However, it is advisable to be on the alert here for certain exchanges of attributes which could give rise to misunderstandings, and which in fact can occur fairly frequently in traditional symbolism wherever relationships between complementary principles are involved. This is a point we will later have to come back to when we deal with the numerical symbols attributed to Heaven and to Earth.

It is common knowledge that in the case of a complementary relationship between two terms where one is viewed as active and the other as passive, the active term will generally be represented symbolically by a vertical line and the passive term by a horizontal line.⁶ At times Heaven and Earth are also depicted symbolically in this way; but in this particular case the two lines do not cross each other to form a cross as they usually would, because it is obviously appropriate that the whole of the symbol of Heaven should be placed above the symbol of Earth. This gives us a perpendicular

5. See *The Symbolism of the Cross*, chapter 23. The first of the two viewpoints indicated here is strictly speaking metaphysical, while the second is more of a cosmological order—or to be more precise, it actually represents the 'point of departure' for every traditional cosmology.

6. See *The Symbolism of the Cross*, chapter 6.

with the horizontal at its foot,⁷ and these two lines can be viewed as the altitude and base of a triangle, the sides of which descend from the ‘pinnacle of Heaven’ to determine the real extent of the surface of the Earth—that is, to mark off the ‘ground’ that serves as the support for manifestation (figure 7).⁸

Be this as it may, the kind of geometric representation most frequently encountered in the Far-Eastern tradition is one that

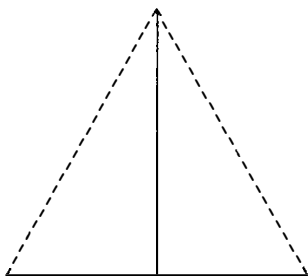


Figure 7

associates circular shapes with Heaven and square shapes with Earth, for reasons we have already explained elsewhere.⁹ Suffice it here to say that if we consider the cycle of manifestation—and by this we refer to any cycle that can be conceived of, ranging from the most extensive in size to the smallest—the descending movement in the cycle proceeds from the upper pole,

Heaven, to the lower pole, Earth; if only a specific cycle is being considered, it will naturally be a question of whatever else happens to represent these poles from a relative point of view. This descending movement can be regarded as taking its point of departure from the least ‘specific’ of all shapes—the sphere—in order to arrive finally at the shape which is by contrast the most ‘fixed’ of all—the cube.¹⁰ It can be added that the first of these two shapes has an eminently ‘dynamic’ property, while the second is

7. We shall see later that this perpendicular has other meanings as well, each of them corresponding to a different point of view. For the moment, however, we are only considering the geometrical representation of the complementary relationship between Heaven and Earth.

8. The figure produced by arranging the vertical and horizontal in this way is also a well-known symbol even today in Anglo-Saxon Freemasonry, although it is not among those retained by the so-called ‘Latin’ Freemasonry. In building symbolism in general, the vertical is represented by the perpendicular, or plumb-line, and the horizontal by the level. A similar arrangement of the two letters *alif* and *ba* in the Arabic alphabet also corresponds to the same symbolism.

9. *The Reign of Quantity and the Signs of the Times*, chapter 20.

10. The sphere is of course the equivalent in three-dimensional geometry of the circle, and the cube of the square.

eminently 'static'—which corresponds once again to the polarity of active and passive. Also, there is a sense in which this representation can be linked to the preceding one by viewing the horizontal line in the first figure as the trace of a plane surface, the 'measured' area of which will be a square,¹¹ and by viewing the vertical line as the radius of a hemispherical surface that meets the terrestrial plane along the line of the horizon. And in fact, according to sensible appearances Heaven and Earth meet at their periphery or their outermost borders—namely on the horizon. It should be noted, however, that the reality of which these appearances are symbols must be viewed the other way around, for in terms of that reality they are united not at the periphery but at the centre;¹² and if we consider Heaven and Earth in the state of relative separation required for the Cosmos to be able to come into being between them, they communicate with each other along the axis which passes through that centre.¹³ This axis simultaneously unites and separates them, or in other terms it measures the distance between Heaven and Earth—that is, the extension of the Cosmos in the vertical direction which indicates the hierarchy of the states of manifest existence. Yet at the same time it also links Heaven and Earth across this multiplicity of states, and viewed from this perspective these states appear as so many rungs by which a being on the way of return to the Principle may raise himself from Earth to Heaven.¹⁴

It is also said that Heaven, which envelops and embraces all

11. We should also view in this light the fact that in the symbols of certain grades of Freemasonry the degree of opening of the compasses—the legs of which correspond to the sides of the triangle in figure 7—measures a quarter of a circle, and the chord of this is the side of the inscribed square.

12. Through a similar application of the principle of inversion the terrestrial Paradise, which also happens to be the point of communication between Heaven and Earth, appears to be simultaneously at the farthest edge of the world according to the 'outward' point of view, and at the very centre of the world according to the 'inward' point of view. See *The Reign of Quantity and the Signs of the Times*, chapter 23.

13. This axis is of course identical to the vertical radial in the preceding diagram. But if viewed from this perspective, the radial will not correspond to Heaven itself but will merely represent the direction in which the influence of Heaven acts upon Earth.

14. Hence the reason why, as we shall see later, the vertical axis is also the 'Way of Heaven' (*T'ien Tao*).

things, presents a 'ventral'—that is to say inward—face to the Cosmos while the Earth that supports all things presents a 'dorsal' or outward¹⁵ face. This can be easily grasped by simply looking at the diagram below, in which Heaven and Earth are respectively represented by a concentric circle and a square (figure 8).

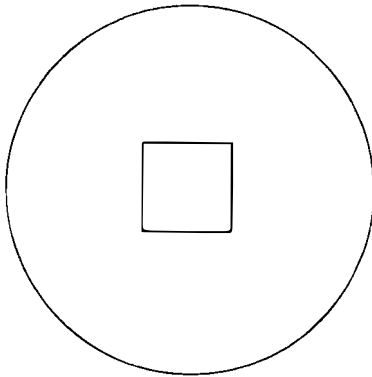


Figure 8

It will be observed that this diagram reproduces the shape of Chinese coins, which also happens originally to have been the shape of certain ritual tablets.¹⁶ The part that the characters are inscribed on—that is, the solid area between the circular outline and the square empty space in the centre—clearly corresponds to the Cosmos comprising the 'ten thousand beings'.¹⁷ The fact that this area is bounded by two voids is a symbolic expression of the fact that what is not between Heaven and Earth is for that very reason not a part of manifestation.¹⁸

Nevertheless, there is a point on which this diagram can appear inaccurate, and which actually reflects a flaw that is necessarily inherent in every sensible representation. For if one were to go only by the apparent positions of Heaven and Earth (or rather of what represents them), it could seem that Heaven is on the

15. This equation would be immediately self-evident in a language such as Arabic, in which the abdomen is *al-baṭn* and the 'inward' *al-bāṭin*, the back *aḏ-ḏahr* and the 'outward' *aḏ-ḏāhir*.

16. On the symbolic value of coins in traditional civilisations in general, see *The Reign of Quantity and the Signs of the Times*, chapter 16.

17. It is hardly necessary to point out that the characters are the names of the beings, and consequently represent them in a totally natural way—especially in the case of an ideographic script such as the Chinese language.

18. The expression *T'ien hsia*, literally 'beneath Heaven', is generally used in Chinese to denote the totality of the Cosmos.

outside and Earth on the inside. But the truth is that here again we must not forget to apply the analogy inversely. In reality 'inwardness' always pertains to Heaven and 'outwardness' to Earth, whatever the perspective; and we will come back to this fact again a little further on. Besides, even taking the diagram just as it stands, we can see that because Heaven and Earth are the outermost boundaries of the Cosmos they actually only have one face as far as the Cosmos is concerned; and that this face is inward in the case of Heaven and outward in the case of Earth. As for their other face, it can only exist in relation to the common principle in which they are unified, and in which all distinction between inward and outward disappears, along with all opposition and even all complementarity, so that nothing apart from the 'Great Unity' remains.

4 | Yin and Yang

THE Far-Eastern tradition in its strictly cosmological branch attributes a fundamental importance to the two principles, or 'categories', which it calls *yang* and *yin*. Everything active, positive or masculine is *yang*; everything passive, negative or feminine is *yin*.

In a symbolic sense these two categories are associated with light and shade: the bright side of anything is *yang*, the dark side *yin*. But as neither can ever be found without the other, they are far more commonly presented as complementary rather than opposed.¹ This connotation of light and darkness occurs for example at a literal level in the determination of geographical sites.² As for the more general and extensive significance of the terms *yang* and *yin* which identifies them with the two components of every complementarity, this has countless applications in all the traditional sciences.³

Inasmuch as all complementarities—however specific or particular—derive from the two primary complementaries, Heaven and Earth, it will be obvious from what has already been said that *yang* is whatever proceeds from the nature of Heaven and

1. It would therefore be quite wrong to interpret the distinction here between light and darkness in terms of 'good' and 'bad', as is sometimes done elsewhere, for example in Mazdeism.

2. At first sight it may seem strange that in the case of a mountain the *yang* side will be its southern slope, but in the case of a valley it will be the northern side, or the northern bank in the case of a river. (The *yin* side will of course always be the one opposite.) But one need do no more than consider the direction of the sun's rays—coming from the south—to appreciate that in each case the side described as *yang* is the side receiving the light.

3. Traditional Chinese medicine in particular is based more or less entirely on the distinction between *yang* and *yin*. All illness is due to a state of imbalance—that is, to a preponderance of one of the two factors over the other—and it will therefore be a question of strengthening the weaker element so as to re-establish the lost equilibrium. This approach enables one actually to get to the cause of the illness, instead of merely restricting oneself to the treatment of what are just external and superficial symptoms, as is the case with the secular medicine practised by modern Westerners.

yin whatever proceeds from the nature of Earth. From this we can see immediately why the terms *yang* and *yin* have been equated with light and shade. The *yang* aspect of beings in fact corresponds to their 'essential' or 'spiritual' nature, and it is common knowledge that Spirit is identified with Light in the symbolism of all traditions. By way of contrast, the *yin* aspect of beings is what attaches them to 'substance'; and 'substance', by virtue of the 'unintelligibility' implicit in its indistinction or its state of pure potentiality, can quite accurately be described as the dark root of all existence. Keeping to this same perspective we can also (using Aristotelian and Scholastic terminology) define *yang* as everything that is 'in act' and *yin* as everything that is 'in potency'. Or, alternatively, we can say that every being is *yang* to the extent that it is 'in act' and *yin* to the extent that it is 'in potency', for both these aspects will necessarily be found together in every manifested thing.

Heaven is entirely *yang* and Earth entirely *yin*, which is tantamount to saying that Essence is pure act and Substance pure potency. However, this applies to Heaven and Earth alone, as the two poles of universal manifestation; in all manifested things there is no *yang* without *yin* and no *yin* without *yang*, for everything by nature partakes simultaneously of both Heaven and Earth.⁴

Now if we consider *yang* and *yin* specifically in the light of their roles as masculine element and feminine element, we are justified in saying that owing to this participation we have just spoken of, every being is in a certain sense and to a certain degree 'androgynous'; and we can add that the greater the state of equilibrium of these two elements within it, the more 'androgynous' it will be. In other words, the masculine or feminine characteristics of an individual being (or to be more precise, its predominantly masculine or feminine characteristics) can be seen as being due to the preponderance of either the one element or the other. Obviously it would be out of place here to attempt to follow through all the consequences that can be deduced from this statement. Yet it

4. Hence the reason why, according to the Masonic formula, the initiate must know how to 'discern the light in the darkness (the *yang* in the *yin*) and the darkness in the light (the *yin* in the *yang*)'.

requires only a moment's thought to obtain a fairly clear idea of their significance, particularly for all the sciences that are concerned with the study of man as an individual from the various standpoints from which he can be viewed.

We have seen earlier that Earth displays its 'dorsal' face and Heaven its 'ventral' face; and this is why *yin* is 'outward' and *yang* 'inward'.⁵ In other words only terrestrial influences (being *yin*) are susceptible to sense perception; celestial influences (being *yang*) elude the senses and can only be grasped by the faculties of the intellect. This is one of the reasons why *yin* is generally mentioned before *yang* in traditional texts. Such a practice could seem incompatible with the hierarchical relationship between the principles of Heaven and Earth to which they correspond, in that these two principles are, respectively, the upper or superior pole of manifestation and the lower or inferior pole. But this reversal of the order of the two complementary terms is typical of a particular cosmological point of view, which is also that of the Hindu *Sankhya*: here, likewise, *Prakriti* appears at the start of the list of *tattvas*, and *Purusha* at the end. In fact this point of view proceeds, so to speak, from the lower to the higher, in the same way that the construction of a building starts at the base and is completed at the top. It begins with what can be grasped most immediately and proceeds towards what is more hidden; in other words it goes from the outward to the inward, or from *yin* to *yang*. In this it is exactly the opposite of the metaphysical perspective which proceeds from the inward to the outward, starting from the principle and arriving at the consequences. This difference in direction is a clear indication that the two different perspectives actually correspond to two different degrees of reality. In addition, we have seen elsewhere that in the unfolding of the cosmogonic process, darkness—equated with chaos—is 'in the beginning', whereas the light that brings order into this chaos and out of it produces

5. Explained in this way, the matter is immediately comprehensible to the Far-Eastern mentality. But we have to acknowledge that without the explanations provided earlier, the connection established here between these two propositions would be extraordinarily disconcerting for the logic peculiar to Westerners.

the Cosmos comes 'after the darkness'.⁶ This amounts yet again to saying that, in this particular context, *yin* effectively comes before *yang*.⁷

Considered independently from each other, *yang* and *yin* are represented in linear form by the symbols called the 'two determinations' (*ü-l-i*). These are the solid and broken lines that are the constituent elements of the trigrams and hexagrams in the *I Ching*, and this in such a way that these trigrams and hexagrams represent every possible combination of these two terms—combinations which taken together make up the entirety of the manifested world. The first hexagram, *Ch'ien*, and the last, *K'un*,⁸ consist of six solid and six broken lines respectively, and therefore represent the fullness of *yang* (equated with Heaven) and the fullness of *yin* (equated with Earth). All the other hexagrams are placed between these two extremes: in them *yang* and *yin* are combined in different proportions, and so they correspond to the unfolding of all manifestation.

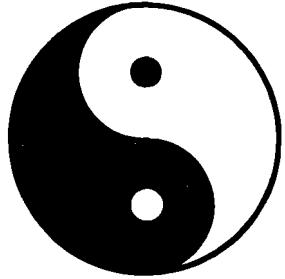


Figure 9

When these two terms *yang* and *yin* are united they are represented by the symbol called, precisely, *yin-yang* (figure 9).⁹ We have already studied this symbol elsewhere from the particular standpoint according to which it

6. *Aperçus sur l'Initiation*, chapter 46.

7. Something analogous to this is to be seen in the fact that, according to the symbolism of the chain of cycles, the lower states of existence are viewed as antecedents of the higher states. Hence the Hindu tradition represents the *Asuras* as existing prior to the *Devas*, and also describes the cosmogonic sequence of the three *gunas* as occurring in the order *tamas*, *rajas*, *sattva*—that is, as proceeding from darkness to light. See *The Symbolism of the Cross*, chapter 5, and also *L'Ésotérisme de Dante*, Chapter 6.

8. These are also the names of the first and the last of the eight trigrams (*kua*), which in a similar fashion consist of three solid lines and three broken lines. Each hexagram is created by the superimposition of one trigram on another (the two trigrams can be either the same or different), giving sixty-four combinations in all.

9. As a rule this symbol is placed at the centre of the eight trigrams, which are arranged in a circle around it.

portrays the ‘circle of individual destiny’.¹⁰ In accordance with the symbolism of light and darkness, the light section of the diagram is *yang* and the dark part *yin*. As for the central dots—dark in the light part, light in the dark—they are reminders that in reality *yang* and *yin* are never found independent of each other. Inasmuch as the *yang* and *yin* are already differentiated although still united (which is precisely why the diagram is called *yin-yang*), the figure is also a symbol of the primordial ‘Androgyne’ because it is made up of the masculine and feminine principles. It is also, according to an alternative traditional symbolism that is even more widespread, the ‘World Egg’ whose two halves have not yet separated to become Heaven and Earth.¹¹

If, on the other hand, we look at the diagram from another point of view as forming an indivisible whole¹² (which is in fact how it would appear from the principal standpoint) it then becomes the symbol of *T'ai Chi*, which we therefore see at once to be the synthesis of *yin* and *yang*. But here we must add the proviso that this synthesis, because it is the primal Unity, exists prior to the differentiation of its elements and is therefore absolutely independent of them. In fact there can strictly be no question of any *yin* and *yang* save in reference to the manifested world, which itself derives entirely from the ‘two determinations’.

These two alternative perspectives according to which the symbol can be viewed are summed up in the following formula:

10. *The Symbolism of the Cross*, chapter 22. According to this viewpoint, in relation to a given state of existence (such as the state of an individual human being) the *yin* part will represent traces of the lower states and the *yang* part the reflection of the higher states. This agrees exactly with what has just been said concerning the relationship between the chain of cycles and the question of *yin*'s priority to *yang*.

11. Viewed as a plane surface, the figure corresponds to the diametrical section of the ‘World Egg’ at the level of that particular state of existence in relation to which the totality of manifestation is to be conceived.

12. The two halves are marked off from each other by a line that curves, which indicates an interpenetration of the two elements; if on the other hand they were divided by a diameter one would be inclined to deduce a simple juxtaposition. It is worth noting that this curved line consists of two semi-circumferences whose radius is half the radius of the circumference forming the outline of the whole diagram. Accordingly the total length of the line is equivalent to half the total length of the circumference, which means that each of the two halves of the diagram is contained by a line equal in length to the line containing the whole diagram.

'The ten thousand beings are produced (*chao*) by *T'ai I* (which is equivalent to *T'ai Chi*) and modified (*hua*) by *yin-yang*'. Indeed, all things derive from the principial Unity,¹³ but their modifications in the process of 'coming to be' are due to the reciprocal actions and reactions of the 'two determinations'.

13. *T'ai I* is the *Tao* 'that has a name', which in turn is 'the mother of the ten thousand beings' (*Tao Te Ching*, first chapter). The *Tao* 'that has no name' is Non-Being and the *Tao* 'that has a name' is Being: 'If one has to give a name to the *Tao* (although really it cannot be named), he will call it (as an approximate equivalent) the Great Unity'.

5 | The Double Spiral

WE feel it would be not altogether without interest for the reader if we were to make a digression here—or at least an apparent digression—to take a look at a symbol that is closely related to the *yin-yang*. This is the symbol of the double spiral (figure 10), which plays an extremely important role in the traditional art of the most diverse cultures, but particularly in the traditional art of ancient Greece.¹

This double spiral ‘can’, as has been said very aptly, ‘be viewed as the projection onto a plane surface of the two hemispheres of

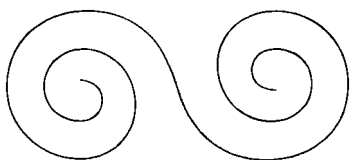


Figure 10

the Androgyne, providing an image of the alternating rhythm of evolution and involution, birth and death—in short, as portraying manifestation in its dual aspect’.²

This symbol can be interpreted both ‘macrocosmically’ and ‘microcosmically’; and owing to the analogy between these two perspectives it is always possible to switch from the one to the other by making the appropriate transposition. However, it is primarily with the ‘macrocosmic’ viewpoint that we will be specifically concerning ourselves here. For it is by comparing the double spiral with the symbolism of the ‘World Egg’ (which has already been mentioned in connection with the *yin-yang*) that the most notable parallels reveal themselves.

1. In conformity with modern trends there are naturally those who choose to see in this symbol nothing but a ‘decorative’ or ‘ornamental’ motif. However, they forget—or are simply ignorant of the fact—that in its origin all ‘ornamentation’ possessed a symbolic character even though it may well have continued to be used by a sort of ‘survival’ process during later periods when this aspect of it was no longer understood.

2. Elie Lebasquais, *Tradition hellénique et Art grec*, in the December 1935 issue of *Études traditionnelles*.

From this macrocosmic point of view the two spirals can be considered as indicative of a cosmic force acting in an opposite direction in each of the two hemispheres. In their broadest application the hemispheres are of course the two halves of the 'World Egg', and the points around which the two spirals coil themselves are the two poles.³ One can see at once the close connection between this and the two directions of rotation of the *swastika* (figure 11), which essentially represent one and the same revolution of the world around its axis, viewed now from one of the poles and now from the other.⁴ In fact these two directions of rotation express very well the dual action of the cosmic force with which we are concerned: a dual action which is basically identical to the duality of *yin* and *yang* in all their aspects.

Returning to the *yin-yang* symbol in general, and in particular to the two semi-circumferences that together make up the line dividing off the light and dark sections of the diagram, it is not hard to perceive that these semi-circumferences correspond exactly to the two spirals, while the central dots—dark in the light part, light in the dark—correspond to the two poles. This brings us back again to the idea of the 'Androgyne' that we drew attention to earlier; and here we will repeat once more that the two principles of *yin* and *yang* must always be thought of as complementary, even if the ways they both act in the various realms of manifestation might give the outward appearance of being opposed. Accordingly, we may speak either (as we were doing above) of the dual action of a single force or else

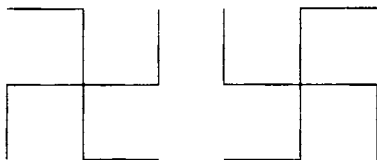


Figure 11

3. The double spiral is the main element in certain types of talisman that are very widespread in Islamic countries. In one of its most complete forms, the two points in question are represented by stars symbolising the two poles; situated on a median vertical which corresponds to the plane dividing the two hemispheres we find, above and below the line connecting the two spirals, the Sun and Moon; and at the four angles are four quadrangular devices corresponding to the four elements: these are therefore the four 'angles' (*arkan*) or foundations of the world.

4. See *The Symbolism of the Cross*, chapter 10.

of two different forces, deriving from the polarisation of this single force and centred on the two poles, and bringing about in turn, through those very actions and reactions that result from their differentiation, the development of the virtualities contained or 'enveloped' in the 'World Egg'. This development comprises all the modifications of 'the ten thousand beings'.⁵

It is worth drawing attention to the fact that these two forces are also depicted in a different—although fundamentally equivalent—way in other traditional symbols. The most notable example is the portrayal of the forces by two helicoidal lines coiling in opposite directions around a vertical axis. This can be seen for instance in certain forms of the *Brahma-danda* or Brahminical staff, which is an image of the 'Axis of the World' that clearly shows the relationship between this double coiling action and the two contrary orientations of the *swastika*. Within the human being, these two lines are the two *nadis* or subtle currents—right and left, positive and negative (*ida* and *pingala*).⁶

Yet another, identical motif is the two serpents of the caduceus. This is related to the general symbolism of the serpent in its two mutually opposing aspects;⁷ and viewed from this angle, the double spiral itself can also be regarded as portraying a serpent coiled around itself in two opposite directions. The serpent in question will therefore be an 'amphisbaena'⁸—its two heads corresponding to the two poles, and equivalent in itself to the two opposing serpents of the caduceus combined.⁹

5. Those who take pleasure in trying to discover points of contact with the profane sciences could—as an example of a 'microcosmic' parallel—compare these symbols with the phenomenon of 'caryokinesis', which is the initial stage in the division of cells. As far as we are concerned, however, it goes without saying that we attach a very limited significance to comparisons of this kind.

6. See *Man and his Becoming according to the Vedanta*, chapter 20. Due to their analogical correspondence to each other, the 'World Axis' and the axis of the human being (represented in physical terms by the spinal column) are both designated by the term *Meru-danda*.

7. See *The Reign of Quantity and the Signs of the Times*, chapter 30.

8. See *The Lord of the World*, chapter 3. (Translator's note: *Amphisbaena*—literally, 'moving in both directions'—was the Greek name for a mythical two-headed serpent or dragon.)

9. There is a story which explains the formation of the caduceus: Mercury saw two serpents fighting each other (an image of chaos) and separated them (differentiation of

In pursuing these analogies we have not let ourselves be sidetracked from the subject of the 'World Egg', for the simple reason that in various traditions the 'World Egg' is frequently linked with the symbolism of the serpent. One has only to think of the Egyptian *Kneph*, depicted in the form of a serpent producing the egg out of its mouth, which is an image of manifestation being produced by the Word;¹⁰ or of the druidic symbol of the 'serpent's egg'.¹¹ On the other hand the serpent is often specifically described as living in the waters, as in the case of the *Nagas* in the Hindu tradition; and floating on these very same waters we find the 'World Egg'. These waters symbolise possibilities, and the development of these possibilities is represented by the spiral: hence the close association that sometimes exists between the spiral and the symbolism of the waters.¹²

In certain cases, then, the 'World Egg' is a 'serpent's egg'; but it can also sometimes be a 'swan's egg'.¹³ We are thinking here particularly of the symbolism of *Hamsa*, the vehicle of *Brahma* in the Hindu tradition.¹⁴ But it is also not at all uncommon (especially in

the opposites) with a stick (determination of an axis along which chaos will organise itself in order to become the Cosmos) around which the serpents coiled themselves (equilibrium of the two opposing forces acting symmetrically relative to the 'World Axis'). An additional point worth noting is that the caduceus (*kerukeion*, insignia of the heralds) is the characteristic attribute of the two complementary functions of Mercury or Hermes: on the one hand the function of interpreter or messenger of the Gods; on the other, the function of 'psychopomp' guiding beings through their changes from one state to another, or in their passage from one cycle of existence to another. These two functions in fact correspond to the descending and ascending directions (respectively) of the currents that the two serpents represent.

10. See *Aperçus sur l'Initiation*, chapter 47.

11. We happen to know that the spiral was represented by a fossilised sea-urchin.

12. This association has been drawn to this association of images by Ananda K. Coomaraswamy in his study of the relationship between the *Devas* and *Asuras*, called 'Angel and Titan: An Essay in Vedic Ontology', *JAOS*, LV (1935), pp. 373-419. In Chinese art the motif of the spiral occurs chiefly in representations of the 'double chaos' of the upper and lower waters (that is, of supra-formal and formal possibilities), and often in conjunction with the symbolism of the Dragon. See *The Multiple States of Being*, translated by Joscelyn Godwin (N.Y. 1984), chapter 12.

13. We may add that the swan is also reminiscent of the serpent because of the shape of its neck. In some respects this makes it a kind of amalgam of the two symbols of the bird and the serpent, which often appear together in a relationship either of opposition or of complementarity.

14. As regards other traditions, it is also common knowledge that the symbol of the swan was closely linked to the symbolism of hyperborean Apollo.

Etruscan art) to encounter the double spiral surmounted by a bird. This bird is clearly the equivalent of *Hamsa*, the swan that sits on the *Brahmanda* upon the primordial Waters; and *Hamsa* in turn is none other than the 'spirit' or 'divine breath' (for *Hamsa* also means 'breath') that, according to the opening of the Hebrew Genesis, 'was borne upon the face of the Waters'. No less worthy of mention is the fact that according to the Greeks the Dioscuri, Castor and Pollux, emerged from the egg of Leda which was engendered by Zeus in the form of a swan. Symbolically Castor and Pollux correspond to the two hemispheres, and therefore also to the two spirals we are considering. They will therefore represent the differentiation of the two hemispheres within this 'swan's egg'—in short, the splitting of the 'World Egg' into its upper and lower halves.¹⁵

To attempt to elaborate further on the symbolism of the Dioscuri would be outside of our scope. It is a very complex matter—as indeed is the symbolism of all comparable couples comprising one mortal and one immortal, one of them often depicted as white, the other as black,¹⁶ just like the two hemispheres of which one is illuminated while the other remains in darkness. We will confine ourselves to observing that this symbolism is basically very close to the symbolism of the *Devas* and *Asuras*.¹⁷ Here the opposition is bound up with the dual significance of the serpent, depending upon whether it moves in an upwards or a downwards direction around a vertical axis, or alternatively on whether it is uncoiling itself or coiling around itself, as in the image of the double spiral.¹⁸

15. To make this symbolism more explicit the Dioscuri are shown wearing hemispherically-shaped caps.

16. An example of this symbolism is provided by the names *Arjuna* and *Krishna*, which represent respectively *jīvātma* and *Paramātmā*, the ego and the Self, individuality and personality. They can, accordingly, also be associated with Earth, in the case of *Arjuna*, and with Heaven in the case of *Krishna*.

17. This can be read in the light of our remarks in an earlier note on the subject of the chain of cycles.

18. See the study by Ananda K. Coomaraswamy already referred to above. In the well-known symbolism of the 'churning of the sea', the *Devas* and *Asuras* pull in opposite directions on the serpent coiled around the mountain, which represents the 'World Axis'.

In ancient symbols the double spiral is occasionally replaced by two groups of concentric circles drawn around two points which once again symbolise the poles. At least in one of their more general connotations they represent the celestial circles and the infernal circles. The latter are a kind of inverted reflection of the former,¹⁹ and they both have their exact correspondences in the *Devas* and *Asuras*. Expressed slightly differently, they represent the higher and the lower states relative to the human state, or the subsequent cycle and the previous cycle relative to the present cycle—which is ultimately just another way of saying the same thing using a ‘sequential’ symbolism. This provides further corroboration of our interpretation of the *yin-yang* as a plane projection of the helix that symbolises the multiple states of universal Existence.²⁰ The two symbols are equivalent, and one can be considered as simply a modification of the other—except that the double spiral is unique in depicting the continuity between the cycles. One could also describe it as presenting things in their ‘dynamic’ aspect, in contrast to the concentric circles which present things from a more ‘static’ point of view.²¹

In referring here to a ‘dynamic’ aspect we of course still have in mind the dual action of the cosmic force, particularly in its relationship to the opposing and complementary phases of all manifestation which, according to the Far-Eastern tradition, are due to the alternating predominance of *yin* and *yang*. Accordingly we have ‘evolution’ (de-velopment, ‘unfolding’)²² on the one

19. We have already drawn attention to this relationship in *L'Ésotérisme de Dante*.

20. See *The Symbolism of the Cross*, chapter 22.

21. Of course, this does not prevent the circle itself from possessing a ‘dynamic’ aspect in relation to the square, as we mentioned above. The question of ‘dynamic’ and ‘static’ viewpoints always implies—as the very fact of their correlation shows—a factor of relativity.

If instead of considering the totality of universal manifestation we were to confine ourselves to one single world—that is, to a state corresponding to the assumed horizontal plane of the image—then the two halves of the symbol would always represent, on the one hand, the reflection of the higher states and on the other the traces of the lower states in that world: in other words, exactly the same situation that we have already commented on in relation to the *yin-yang*.

22. Needless to say, we use the word ‘evolution’ only in its strictly etymological sense. This has nothing whatever in common with the way the term is employed in modern ‘progressive’ theories.

hand and ‘involution’ (en-velopment, ‘winding up’) on the other; or, to express the same thing in another way, ‘catabasis’ or ‘going down’ and ‘anabasis’ or ‘going up’; departure into the manifested, and return to the non-manifested.²³ This double ‘spiration’—and one will observe the very significant kinship between the actual name ‘spiral’ and the term *spiritus* or ‘breath’ that we spoke of earlier in connection with *Hamsa*—is the universal ‘expiration’ (or exhalation) and ‘inspiration’ (or inhalation). In the language of Taoism these produce the ‘condensations’ and ‘dissipations’ that result from the alternating action of the dual principles of *yin* and *yang*; in Hermetic terminology they are the ‘coagulations’ and ‘solutions’. For individual beings they are births and deaths—what Aristotle calls *genesis* and *phthora*, ‘generation’ and ‘corruption’. For worlds, they are what Hindu tradition calls the days and nights of *Brahma: Kalpa* and *Pralaya*. And at all levels of reality, on the ‘macrocosmic’ as well as ‘microcosmic’ scale, corresponding phases occur in every cycle of existence, for they are the very expression itself of the law that governs the sum total of universal manifestation.

23. It is strange, to say the least, that Léon Daudet should have chosen the symbol of the double spiral as a ‘schema of the ambience’ (*Courriers des Pays-Bas*: see also the diagram in *Les Horreurs de la Guerre* and his remarks on the ‘ambience’ in *Melancholia*). He views one of the two poles as a ‘point of departure’, the other as a ‘point of arrival’. This means that to travel from one end of the spiral to the other would involve a centrifugal movement on one side and a centripetal movement on the other, which accurately corresponds to the two phases of ‘evolution’ and ‘involution’. As to what he calls ‘ambience’, it is basically nothing other than the ‘astral light’ of Paracelsus, which consists precisely of the sum of the two opposing currents of cosmic force that we are considering here.

6 | *Solve et Coagula*

AT the end of the last chapter we made a passing reference to the Hermetic ‘coagulation’ and ‘solution’, and even though we have discussed them here and there on various occasions it will perhaps be useful to clarify once again certain related concepts which are more or less immediately relevant to our exposition up to this point.

The formula *solve et coagula* is regarded as containing in a certain respect the entire secret of the ‘Great Work’, inasmuch as this reproduces the process of universal manifestation with its two inverse phases that we have just been discussing. The term *solve* is often indicated by a sign depicting Heaven, and the term *coagula* by a sign depicting Earth.¹ In other words the first term is identified with the action of the ascending current of the cosmic force (or the action of *yang*), the second with the action of the descending current (or the action of *yin*).

Every expansive force is *yang*, every contractive force is *yin*. Accordingly, the ‘condensations’ which give birth to individual composite beings are due to terrestrial influences whereas the ‘dissipations’ that return the elements of these composite beings to their originating principles are due to celestial influences. If we wished, we could speak here of the effects produced by the attraction of Earth on the one hand and of Heaven on the other. For so it is that ‘the ten thousand beings are modified by *yin* and *yang*’ from the moment of their appearance in the manifest world up to their return to the non-manifest.

We should add that it is very important to realise that the order of the two terms depends upon one’s particular standpoint when

1. We are here alluding primarily to the symbolism of the signs in the 18th degree of Scottish Masonry, as well as to the symbolism of the ‘calumet’ rite of the North American Indians. This rite comprises three successive movements which relate to Heaven, Earth and Man respectively, and which can be summarised by the terms ‘solution’, ‘coagulation’ and ‘assimilation’.

viewing them. This is because the two complementary phases that they correspond to not only alternate but are also simultaneous: hence the order in which they present themselves will depend as it were on which state is taken as point of departure. So, if we were to start from the state of non-manifestation and proceed to the manifest (which is the strictly ‘cosmogonic’ point of view²), we would naturally find the ‘condensation’ or ‘coagulation’ occurring first. The ‘dissipation’ or ‘solution’ will come next, as a movement of return towards the non-manifest—or at least to something that, in a relative sense, corresponds to the non-manifest at a particular level.³ If on the other hand we were to take as our point of departure some specific state of manifestation, first we would have to envisage a process tending towards the ‘solution’ of whatever is contained in that state, followed by a subsequent phase of ‘coagulation’ involving a return to another state of manifestation. We should add that in this case the stages of ‘solution’ and ‘coagulation’, corresponding respectively to the earlier state and the later state, can in reality be simultaneous.⁴

There is another factor involved here, which is even more important: namely that things are seen in reverse according to whether they are viewed from the standpoint of the Principle or from the standpoint of manifestation which we were adopting a moment ago. It results from this that what is *yin* from the one side is *yang* from the other, and the other way around—although it is only in a manner of speaking which is not strictly correct that one can speak of or imply a direct relationship between the Principle itself and a duality such as *yin* and *yang*. In fact, as we have already pointed out elsewhere,⁵ it is the ‘expiration’ or movement of principal expansion which determines the ‘coagulation’ of mani-

2. The sequential order of the two phases from this particular point of view also demonstrates once again why, in cosmogony, *yin* comes before *yang*.

3. This has numerous applications in the domain of the traditional sciences. At one of the lowest levels we find it in the ‘summoning’ and ‘dismissal’ of the ‘errant influences’ at the start and end of a magical operation.

4. This is the case when ‘death’ to one state and ‘birth’ into another are considered as the opposing and yet inseparable aspects of one and the same modification of the being. See *The Symbolism of the Cross*, chapter 22, and *Aperçus sur l’Initiation*, chapter 26.

5. *Aperçus sur l’Initiation*, chapter 47.

festation, and the ‘inspiration’ or movement of principial contraction which determines its ‘solution’. It would come to exactly the same thing if, instead of using the symbolism of the two phases of respiration, we were to use the symbolism of the double movement of the heart.

As to the incorrectness of expression we mentioned just a moment ago, it only requires a quite simple observation for us to circumvent it. Heaven, as the ‘positive’ pole of manifestation, is directly representative of the Principle insofar as manifestation is concerned;⁶ but Earth, as the ‘negative’ pole, can only present an inverted image of the Principle and no more. This means that the ‘perspective’ of manifestation will naturally ascribe to the Principle itself what really belongs to Heaven. Accordingly the ‘motion’ of Heaven (motion understood in a purely symbolic sense, of course, for there is nothing spatial about it) will in a way be ascribed to the Principle itself, in spite of the fact that the latter is by definition immutable.

Basically it is more accurate to speak, as we were doing above, of the different attractions exerted in opposite directions by Heaven and by Earth. All attraction gives rise to a centripetal movement, hence a ‘condensation’; this will be balanced at the opposite pole by a ‘dissipation’ governed by a centrifugal movement that aims at re-establishing—or rather maintaining—the total equilibrium.⁷ One consequence of this is that what from the point of view of substance is ‘condensation’ is, on the contrary, ‘dissipation’ from the point of view of essence; whereas, inversely, what from the point of view of substance is ‘dissipation’, will from the point of view of essence be ‘condensation’. This means that all ‘transmutation’ (to use the term in its Hermetic sense) will consist precisely of ‘dissolving’ what was ‘coagulated’ and simultaneously ‘coagulating’ what was ‘dissolved’. In appearance these two operations are inverse; in reality they are merely two complementary aspects of one single operation.

6. Hence the reason why *T'ai Chi* appears to us as the ‘pinnacle of Heaven’ even though it is above both Heaven and Earth and prior to their differentiation.

7. This can be related to the explanations in *Les Principes du Calcul infinitésimal*, chapter 17.

Here we have the reason why the alchemists frequently say that ‘the dissolution of the body is the fixation of the spirit’, and the other way round: for ultimately there is no difference between spirit and the ‘essential’ aspect of being, and between body and the ‘substantial’. This saying can be understood as referring to the alternation of ‘lives’ and ‘deaths’ in the broadest sense of these words, and if we interpret it in this way we have an exact correspondence to the ‘condensations’ and ‘dissipations’ of Taoist tradition.⁸ We therefore end up with the statement that what is life for the body is death for the spirit, and vice versa. This explains why the process of ‘volatilising (or dissolving) the fixed and fixating (or coagulating) the volatile’, or ‘spiritualising the body and embodying the spirit’,⁹ is also defined as ‘extracting the live from the dead and the dead from the live’; and this happens to be a Quranic expression as well.¹⁰

To some degree,¹¹ then, ‘transmutation’ implies a kind of reversal of ordinary relationships (by which we mean relationships as viewed from the standpoint of the ordinary man), although in reality this reversal is more than anything else a re-establishing of normal relationships. We will confine ourselves here to the bare comment that this question of ‘reversal’ is particularly important in relation to initiatic realisation. But we are not in a position to elaborate on this statement here, as to do so would involve examining matters outside the framework of the present study.¹²

8. According to the commentators on the *Tao Te Ching*, this alternation between states of life and death is ‘the to-ing and fro-ing of the shuttle on the cosmic loom’. See *The Symbolism of the Cross*, chapter 14, where we have also recorded the other comparisons made by the same commentators with breathing and with the lunar cycle.

9. The statement ‘to hide the manifest and manifest the hidden’ also has the same meaning.

10. Quran VI:95. For the alternation of lives and deaths, and the final return to the Principle, see II:28.

11. To understand the reasons for this qualification, see our comments in *Aperçus sur l’Initiation*, chapter 42.

12. At the highest level this ‘reversal’ finds a close parallel in what in Kabbalistic symbolism is called the ‘displacement of the lights’, as well as in the saying which Islamic tradition puts into the mouth of the *awliyā*: ‘Our bodies are our spirits, and our spirits our bodies’ (*ajsāmnā arwāḥnā, wa arwāḥnā ajsāmnā*). This ‘reversal’ also means that in the spiritual order of things it is actually the ‘inward’ that surrounds and embraces the ‘outward’; and here we have the justification for what was said earlier

Viewed from another angle, the dual operation of 'coagulation' and 'solution' corresponds with the utmost precision to what in Christian tradition is described as the 'power of the keys'. This power is dual as well, incorporating as it does both the power to 'bind' and the power to 'loose'. Now 'binding' is clearly the same as 'coagulating', and 'loosing' the same as 'dissolving':¹³ comparison with different traditional symbols confirms this correspondence beyond doubt. It is well known that the power in question is most commonly portrayed in the form of two keys, one of gold, the other of silver. The golden key refers to spiritual authority, or the priestly function; the silver one to temporal power, or the royal function. In the context of initiation, the two keys refer respectively to the 'greater mysteries' and the 'lesser mysteries'; and this is the sense in which they were understood by the Romans when they made them the attributes of Janus.¹⁴ Alchemically, the two keys refer to analogous operations carried out at two different levels: on one level the 'whitening', corresponding to the 'lesser mysteries', and on another level the 'reddening', corresponding to the 'greater mysteries'.

These same two keys, which in the language of Dante are the keys to the 'celestial paradise' and the 'terrestrial paradise', are often crossed in a way that is reminiscent of the *swastika*. When this is the case, each of the two keys must be thought of as possessing the double power (at the particular level at which each operates) of both 'opening' and 'closing', or 'binding' and 'loosing'.¹⁵ But there is actually another, more comprehensive way of

about the relationship between Heaven and Earth.

13. Latin also has the expression *potestas ligandi et solvendi* (the power to bind and loose). The idea of 'binding' re-occurs in a literal sense in the magical use of knots, which has its counterpart in the usage of the points in the 'dissolution' process.

14. See *Autorité spirituelle et pouvoir temporel*, chapters 5 and 8, and also, for the relationship between the 'greater mysteries' and the 'priestly initiation' and between the 'lesser mysteries' and the 'royal initiation', *Aperçus sur l'Initiation*, chapters 39 and 40.

15. Even so, it can still be said that in a certain sense the power to 'bind' is predominant in the key corresponding to the temporal, while the power to 'loose' is predominant in the key corresponding to the spiritual. The rationale behind this is that, in relation to each other, the temporal is *yin* and the spiritual *yang*; even outwardly this can be justified by connecting 'constraint' with the temporal domain and 'freedom' with the spiritual.

depicting the keys according to which, for each of the two different functional levels, the two contrasting powers are represented by two keys, one opposite the other. This configuration is known as the 'claviger' *swastika*, precisely because each of its four limbs is shaped like a key (figure 12);¹⁶ this gives us

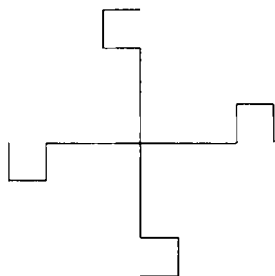


Figure 12

two keys lying opposite each other along a vertical axis, and another two facing each other along a horizontal axis.¹⁷ Interpreted in terms of the annual cycle (and the close relationship between this cycle and the symbolism of Janus is well known), the former of these two axes is a solstitial axis, the second equinoctial.¹⁸ Here the vertical,

or solstitial, axis corresponds to the priestly function, and the horizontal, or equinoctial, axis to the royal function.¹⁹

The connection between this symbol and the symbol of the double spiral is confirmed by the existence of another version of

16. There are various versions of this schema. The one we are reproducing here can be found for example, alongside an ordinary *swastika*, on an Etruscan vase in the Louvre Museum. A Christian motif that approximates to the 'claviger' *swastika* can be seen in Mgr Devoucoux's introduction to the *Histoire de l'antique cité d'Autun* by Canon Edme Thomas, page xlvi.

17. Strictly speaking we should talk of two axes that are *relatively* vertical and *relatively* horizontal with regard to each other, because the *swastika* itself should be imagined as lying on a horizontal plane: see *The Symbolism of the Cross*, chapter 10.

The key is essentially an 'axial' symbol, as is the staff or sceptre which in certain representations of Janus is substituted for the one of the two keys that symbolises temporal power, or the 'lesser mysteries'.

18. In the most common representations of Janus (*Janus Bifrons*) the two faces symbolise (along with other meanings) the two solstices. But other representations of Janus also exist which show him with four faces (*Janus Quadrifrons*). These correspond to the two solstices plus the two equinoxes, and they present a quite remarkable resemblance to the *Brahmā Chaturmukha* in the Hindu tradition.

19. Certain inferences could be drawn from this regarding the significance of the predominance attributed to the solstices in some traditions and to the equinoxes in others, particularly for the purpose of fixing the start of the year. We will simply say here that the solstitial point of view is always more 'primordial' than the equinoctial point of view.

the *swastika* that has curved limbs which look like two intersecting 'S's. The double spiral can of course be equated either with the vertical or with the horizontal part of the *swastika*; and although it is quite true that the double spiral is most often drawn horizontally (so as to bring out the complementary, and in a sense symmetrical, nature of the two currents of cosmic force²⁰), it is also true that the curved line which corresponds to it in the *yin-yang* is generally drawn vertically. So either of the two positions is a possibility, depending on the particular situation; and both of the positions can be found together in the version of the *swastika* with the curved limbs. These limbs will therefore correspond to the two respective domains in which the 'power of the keys' is exercised.²¹

Another analogy to this 'power of the keys' can be found, in the Hindu and Tibetan traditions, in the double power of the *vajra*.²² The *vajra*, as is generally known, is the symbol of the thunderbolt.²³ Its two tips, consisting of points shaped like flames, correspond to the two contrasting aspects of the power which the thunderbolt embodies: generation and destruction, life and death.²⁴ If we think of the *vajra* symbol in terms of the 'World

20. This symmetry is also strongly evident in the case of the two serpents of the caduceus.

21. The art of medicine, which for the ancients was an offshoot of the 'priestly art', will accordingly correspond to a vertical positioning of the double spiral inasmuch as it activates the dual forces of *yang* and *yin* as indicated above. This vertical double spiral is represented by the serpent coiled in an 'S' shape around the staff of Asklepios; in this particular case the serpent occurs alone, so as to indicate that medical science only employs the 'beneficent' aspect of the cosmic force.

It is worth noting that the term 'spagyry' (a designation for Hermetic medicine) expresses by its composite formation the double operation of 'solution' and 'coagulation'. So the exercise of traditional medicine is indeed precisely an application, within a specific domain, of the 'power of the keys'.

22. *Vajra* is the Sanskrit word; the Tibetan form of it is *dorje*.

23. It actually has a double meaning: 'thunderbolt' and 'diamond'. In both these meanings it is an 'axial' symbol.

24. Certain double-edged weapons also have the same connotation: for example the double axe in ancient Greek symbolism, which has a significance comparable to that of the caduceus. In Scandinavian tradition the thunderbolt was represented by the hammer of Thor, which can be equated with the Master's mallet in Masonic symbolism. Hence the mallet or hammer is also an equivalent of the *vajra*; and indeed just like the *vajra* it has the double power to mete out life and death. This is shown on the one hand by its role in initiatory consecration, on the other hand by its role in the legend of Hiram.

Axis', these two tips correspond to the two poles, as well as to the solstices.²⁵ This points to a vertical alignment of the *vajra*; and indeed its role as a masculine symbol,²⁶ plus the fact that it is essentially a priestly attribute,²⁷ both confirm this. In a vertical position, the *vajra* represents the 'Middle Way', which is also (as we shall see later) the 'Way of Heaven'. But it can also be tilted to either side, and the two positions that result from this tilting correspond to the two Tantric 'paths' of the right and left hand (*dakshina-mārga* and *yāma-mārga*). This 'right' and 'left' can, in turn, be related to the equinoctial points, just as 'up' and 'down' relate to the solstitial points.²⁸

Clearly there is a great deal more we could say about all this, but rather than deviate too far from our main subject we will make do with these few observations and conclude our remarks by noting that the power of the *vajra* (or the 'power of the keys', which in essence is exactly the same thing) implies the ability to handle and apply the forces of the cosmos in their dual aspect of *yin* and *yang*. This means that ultimately it is no less than the power of control over life and death itself.²⁹

25. In the spatial correspondence of the annual cycle they are equivalent to North (winter) and South (summer), while the two equinoxes correspond to East (spring) and West (autumn). From the point of view of ritual, these correspondences possess great significance, particularly in the Far-Eastern tradition.

26. Its feminine counterpart in the Hindu tradition is the conch (*shankha*). In the Tibetan tradition its counterpart is the ritual bell (*dilbu*), which of ten has depicted on it a feminine figure who represents *Prājñā-pāramitā* or 'transcendental Wisdom'. The bell is her symbol, just as the *vajra* is the symbol of the 'Method', or the 'Way'.

27. The Lamas hold the *vajra* in their right hand and the bell in their left. These two ritual objects must never be separated from each other.

28. Sometimes in Tibetan symbolism one can come across a configuration consisting of two crossed *vajras*. This is clearly an equivalent of the *swastika*, which means that the four tips correspond exactly to the four keys of the 'claviger' *swastika*.

29. In ancient manuscripts originating from Operative Masonry, mention is made without any further explanation of a certain *faculty of abrac*. This enigmatic word *abrac* has given rise to a number of different interpretations, all of them more or less totally fanciful. Obviously it is a word that has become corrupted. It would seem quite clear that it must have had the meaning of 'thunderbolt' or 'flash of lightning' (*ha-baraq* in Hebrew, *el-barq* in Arabic), so that here again it would be another instance of the power of the *vajra*. All this makes it easy to grasp the kind of symbolism that has so often induced the most varied of peoples to see in the power to cause storms a kind of consequence of initiation.

7 | Questions of Orientation

IN the primordial age man was perfectly balanced in himself in terms of *yin* and *yang*. What is more, he was *yin* or passive in relation to the Principle alone, and *yang* or active in relation to the Cosmos, or the totality of manifested things. Hence he naturally turned to the North, which is *yin*,¹ as the complementary to himself.

By way of contrast, as a result of the spiritual degeneration occurring in the descending course of the cycle, the man of later ages became *yin* in relation to the Cosmos. He must therefore turn to the South, which is *yang*, to receive from it the influences of the principle complementary to the one which has become predominant inside him, and to restore as much as possible the equilibrium between *yin* and *yang*.

The first of these two orientations can be called 'polar', in contrast to the second which is 'solar'. In the first, man faces towards the Pole Star, or 'pinnacle of heaven', with the East to his right and the West to his left. In the second case he faces towards the Sun at the meridian, with the East to his left and the West to his right. Here we have the explanation for an apparent anomaly in the Far-Eastern tradition which can be very disconcerting for those who are not aware of its cause.²

It so happens that in China the side generally given pre-eminence is the left. We say 'generally' because this has not always been the case throughout the course of history. In the time

1. Here we have the reason why in Masonic symbolism the Lodge is supposed not to have any windows opening onto the North (this being the side that never directly receives solar light), whereas it does have windows opening onto the other three sides, which correspond to the three 'stations' of the Sun.

2. In Chinese maps and plans the South is placed at the top and the North at the bottom, the East on the left and the West on the right, in agreement with the second orientation. This usage is not as exceptional as one might suppose: it also existed among the ancient Romans and even survived in the West into the Middle Ages.

of the historian Szu-ma Ch'ien (that is, in the second century B.C.) it would appear that the right had gained the upper hand over the left, at least where the hierarchy of official posts and functions was concerned.³ It seems that, in this domain at least, some kind of attempt was made at this particular time at a 'return to the origins'. This attempt will doubtless have coincided with a change of dynasty, for changes of this kind in the human sphere are traditionally always brought into correspondence with certain modifications in the cosmic domain itself.⁴

At an earlier period, however—although certainly at a period already far removed from primordial times—it was the left that predominated. We can see this for example from the following passage in Lao Tzu: 'In matters that are favourable (or of good omen) the left is placed uppermost, but in affairs that are ill-omened, the right.'⁵ And at approximately the same period we also find it said that 'Humanity is the right, the Way is the left',⁶ which clearly shows the inferiority of right compared to left. So left was *yang* in relation to right, and right *yin* in relation to left.

Now the proof that all this is a direct consequence of the particular orientation adopted in turning towards the South can be found in a treatise ascribed to Chuang Tzu, who is thought to have lived in the seventh century B.C. In the treatise we are referring to, the following saying occurs: 'Spring gives birth (to creatures) on the left, autumn destroys on the right, summer gives increase in front, winter puts into reserve behind'. According to the universally admitted correspondence between the seasons and the cardinal points, spring corresponds to the East and autumn to the West, summer to the South and winter to the North.⁷ This means that South here is in front and North behind,

3. The 'counsellor on the right' (*iu-ts'an*) then played a more important role than the 'counsellor on the left' (*tso-ts'an*).

4. To give an example, the succession of the dynasties corresponds to a succession or sequence of the elements in a specific order, while these elements themselves are related to the seasons and to the cardinal points.

5. *Tao Te Ching*, chapter 31.

6. *Li Chi*.

7. This correspondence is in perfect accord with the true nature of things and is therefore common to all traditions. This being the case, one is at a loss to understand

East to the left and West to the right.⁸ Of course if one were to orientate oneself by turning towards the North, the left-right as well as the front-rear correspondence would be reversed. But whichever orientation is adopted, the side that has pre-eminence—whether it is on the left or the right—will always, invariably, be the East. It is this that is the crucial factor, because it shows that the Far-Eastern tradition is basically in perfect agreement with all other traditional doctrines, which always view the East as the ‘luminous side’ (*yang*) and the West as the ‘dark side’ (*yin*). The change in the values ascribed to right and left is conditional upon a change of orientation, and is therefore perfectly logical and involves no contradiction whatever.⁹

Even so, these questions of orientation are extremely complex. Not only is there a danger of confusing different sets of correspondences or correlations; there is also the possibility that, in one and the same correlation, right or left will prevail according to different points of view. This second danger is very clearly demonstrated in a text such as the following: ‘The Way of Heaven has preference for the right; Sun and Moon move towards the West. The Way of Earth prefers the left; water flows towards the East; both can equally be placed at the top (that is, both of the two sides have their claim to pre-eminence).’¹⁰

why people of today who take an interest in symbolism should so often substitute for this correspondence alternatives which are purely fanciful and completely unjustifiable. To give just one example, the table of quaternaries supplied at the end of Oswald Wirth’s *Livre de l’Apprenti* correctly correlates summer with the South and winter with the North, but makes spring correspond to the West and autumn to the East. The same table also gives other correspondences, especially relating to the different ages of human life, which are almost hopelessly muddled.

8. We may also compare the statement from the *I Ching* that ‘The Sage faces towards the South as he listens to the echo of what is beneath Heaven (that is, the echo of the Cosmos). He illumines it and governs it.’

9. Naturally, other modes of orientation can also exist in addition to those we have just mentioned. These will of course require different adjustments to be made, but it is always easy to see how the various adjustments tally. If for example in India the right-hand side (*dakshina*) is the South, this is because the orientation is arrived at by facing towards the Sun as it rises—that is by turning towards the East. But this current mode of orientation in no way precludes recognition of the primordially of the ‘polar’ orientation arrived at by turning towards the North, which is referred to as the highest point (*uttara*).

10. *Chou Li*.

This passage is particularly interesting, because it links pre-eminence of the right with the ‘Way of Heaven’ and pre-eminence of the left with the ‘Way of Earth’; that the reasons it gives for this correlation are more in the nature of ‘illustrations’ drawn from sensory appearances is immaterial. Now the ‘Way of Heaven’ is by definition superior to the ‘Way of Earth’. One could say that it is because men have lost sight of the ‘Way of Heaven’ that they have ended up conforming to the ‘Way of Earth’: a clear indication of the difference between the primordial age and the succeeding ages of spiritual degeneration. Another reason why this passage is so interesting is that it allows us to infer an inverse relationship between the movement of Heaven and the movement of Earth¹¹ which is in strict conformity with the general law of analogy. This inversion will always occur when it is a question of two terms opposed to each other in such a way that one of them is as it were a reflection of the other—a reflection that is reversed, just as the image of an object in a mirror is reversed in relation to the object itself, so that the right of the image corresponds to the left of the object and vice versa.¹²

While on this subject we will add one observation which, however elementary it may seem in itself, is far from insignificant. This is that, particularly when it is a question of right and left, the greatest care must always be taken to specify the perspective from which the opposites are being viewed. When for example someone refers to the right and left of a symbolic figure, is he really referring to the right and left of the figure itself or to the right and left of a spectator observing it from a position directly in front of it? In fact either alternative could be the case. When one is dealing with the figure of a human or some other living being, there is hardly any room for doubt as to which side we should call its right and which side we should call its left; but the situation is no longer the same when we turn to some other object—to a geometrical

11. We will repeat here once again that this ‘movement’ is a purely symbolic description.

12. Just the same applies in the case of two people facing each other, which explains the statement ‘You will worship your right side, which is the left of your brother (the side of his heart)’ (*Fan-k’ua Tu*, quoted by Matgioi, *La Voie rationnelle*, chapter 7).

figure for example, or a monument. In these cases right and left are normally determined by adopting the point of view of the observer,¹³ and yet this is by no means always the case. Sometimes right and left can be ascribed to an object or figure viewed in isolation and in its own right, and this will of course give a perspective exactly contrary to an observer's point of view.¹⁴ In short, in the absence of precise indications in each particular case one can be drawn into committing quite serious errors.¹⁵

Another question directly related to the subject of orientation has to do with the direction of the ritual 'circumambulations' in the various formal traditions. It is not hard to see that the direction will in fact be determined on the basis of whether the orientation is 'polar' or 'solar' (using these words in the sense in which we used them above). If we study the diagrams overleaf,¹⁶ we will see that the first of them shows the direction in which the stars appear to orbit the pole when we face towards the North (figure 13). By way of contrast, the second shows the direction of the apparent movement of the Sun for an observer facing towards the South (figure 14). In the first case the circumambulation is performed keeping the centre to one's left; in the second (called *pradakshinā* in Sanskrit), keeping it to one's right. This second modality is the

13. So, for example, in the Kabbalistic diagram showing the 'sephirothic tree', the 'right pillar' and the 'left pillar' are respectively to one's right and to one's left as one looks at the diagram.

14. For example, Plutarch relates that 'the Egyptians think of the East as the front of the world, of the North as its right side and of the South as its left' (*Isis and Osiris*, chapter 32). In spite of appearances to the contrary, this actually coincides exactly with the Hindu description of the South as the 'right side', for it is easy to visualise the left-hand side of the world extending off to the right of the person observing it, and vice versa.

15. Here, to give one example, lies the origin of the divergences that arose in Masonic symbolism concerning the respective locations of the two pillars situated at the entrance to the temple of Jerusalem. But the problem itself is easy enough to resolve if we refer back directly to the biblical texts and provided we know that 'right' in Hebrew always denotes the South, and 'left' the North. This points to a method of orientation that involves facing towards the East, just as in India; and in fact this very same mode of orientation was also the one used in the West by builders during the Middle Ages for determining the orientation of churches.

16. The cross drawn inside a circle (a symbol about which we shall have more to say later) indicates in this case the direction of the four cardinal points. North is placed at the top in the first diagram, South in the second, in accordance with what was said above.

one adopted chiefly in the Hindu and Tibetan traditions, while the former is encountered mainly in the Islamic tradition.¹⁷

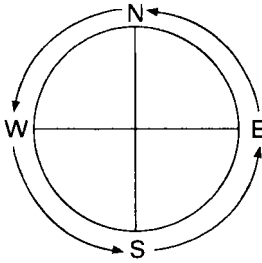


Figure 13

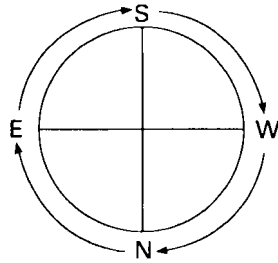


Figure 14

Also bound up with this difference in direction is the question of whether the right foot or the left foot is the first to be moved forward in the ritual walk. If we look back at the same diagrams it will become obvious that the foot which has to be put forward first will be the one opposite to the side facing in towards the centre of the circumambulation: that is, the right foot in the first case (figure 13), the left foot in the second (figure 14). This sequence is generally adhered to even when it is not strictly speaking a question of circumambulation as such, simply because it is an indication of the predominance of either the ‘polar’ or the ‘solar’ perspective. This predominance may be associated with a particular traditional form, or it can sometimes even vary at different periods in the span of existence of one and the same tradition.¹⁸

So all these matters are far from being merely more or less

¹⁷. It will perhaps not be altogether without interest for the reader if we mention that the direction of these circumambulations—from right to left in the first diagram (figure 13) and from left to right in the second (figure 14)—also corresponds to the direction of writing in the sacred languages of these same traditions. In Masonry in its present form, the direction of the circumambulations is ‘solar’; but it would seem that in the ancient Operative ritual it was originally ‘polar’: then the ‘throne of Solomon’ was set not in the East but in the West, so as to allow its occupant to ‘behold the Sun at its rising’.

¹⁸. The transposition in this sequence of steps that has occurred in certain Masonic Rites is all the more remarkable for its obvious conflict with the actual direction of the circumambulations. The information we have just supplied clearly provides the correct rule to be followed in all cases.

insignificant details, as those who know nothing of either symbolism or rites might tend to believe. On the contrary, they are bound up with a whole body of ideas that play a fundamental role in all traditions, and it would be possible to give many other examples besides those already provided. As far as the question of orientation is concerned, there would also be good grounds for dealing as well with matters such as its relationship to the course of the annual cycle¹⁹ and to the symbolism of the 'gates of the zodiac': here once again we would find another case of the inversion which we already noted in the relationship between the 'celestial' and the 'terrestrial'. But to go into these matters here would require too long a digression, and doubtless they will find a place in other studies.²⁰

19. An example of this cycle being portrayed in the form of a circumambulation will be found in our discussion of the *Ming Tang* further on.

20. For the qualitative aspect of spatial directions—which is the founding principle on which the whole traditional significance of orientation is based—and also for the relationship between spatial and temporal determinations, we may refer the reader to *The Reign of Quantity and the Signs of the Times*, chapters 4 and 5.

8 | Celestial Numbers & Terrestrial Numbers

THE *yang-yin* duality also applies to numbers. According to the *I Ching* odd numbers are *yang*—that is, masculine or active—while even numbers are *yin*, feminine or passive. In fact there is nothing in this at all unique to the Far-Eastern tradition; on the contrary, these correspondences agree exactly with the teaching of all traditional doctrines. In the West, they are familiar to us through Pythagoreanism: in fact we have no doubt that there are people who think this way of categorising numbers is the exclusive property of Pythagoreanism and would be quite amazed to learn that exactly the same correspondences are to be found as far afield as China—without there being the slightest evidence of any ‘borrowing’, either by the West or by the East. It is, quite simply, a question here of a fundamental truth that will inevitably be perceived and accepted wherever the traditional science of numbers exists.

Because they are *yang*, odd numbers can be termed ‘celestial’; even numbers, because they are *yin*, can be described as ‘terrestrial’. But apart from this broad generalisation there are certain individual numbers that have a specific affinity either with Heaven or with Earth, and this fact calls for explanations of a different kind. To begin with, it is worth emphasising that it is chiefly the *first* odd number that is traditionally viewed as the number of Heaven and as an expression of the nature of Heaven—just as it is chiefly the first even number that is viewed as the number of Earth and as an expression of the nature of Earth. The reason for this is not hard to find: it is simply that each of these two numbers holds pride of place at the head of its own particular ‘order’, so that all the other numbers are in a sense merely derivatives of them, holding second place in relation to them in the particular series to which they belong. In other words, we could say that the first odd

number and the first even number are, respectively, representative of *yang* and of *yin* to the highest degree; or (which amounts to the same thing) we could say they are the purest expressions of the nature of Heaven on the one hand, and of the nature of Earth on the other.

Now what we must also bear in mind is the fact that unity, or the number one, is strictly speaking the principle of number and so cannot be counted as a number itself. The reality which it stands for must in fact be prior to the differentiation of Heaven and Earth; and we have already seen that this reality is none other than the principle common to both: namely *T'ai Chi*, that Being which is none other than the metaphysical Unity itself. So while the first even number is 2, the first odd number is considered to be, not 1, but 3.

2, then is the number of Earth, and 5 the number of Heaven. But this means that because the number 2 comes before the number 3, Earth appears before Heaven, just as *yin* appears before *yang*. In other words, in these numerical correspondences we find yet another, although fundamentally identical, expression of the cosmological point of view that we mentioned earlier when discussing *yin* and *yang*.

What would seem less easily justifiable is the additional fact that other numbers are also linked either with Heaven or with Earth, but in such a way as to produce—at least apparently—a kind of inversion. This is the case with 5, an odd number, which is attributed to Earth; and with 6, an even number, which is ascribed to Heaven. Here again we have a case of two consecutive numbers within the series of numbers, the first of which (following the order of this series) corresponds to Earth and the second to Heaven. But apart from this one characteristic shared by the pair of numbers 2 and 3 with the numbers 5 and 6, how can it possibly be the case that an odd *yang* number is associated with Earth and an even *yin* number associated with Heaven?

In this particular connection a 'hierogamic'¹ exchange of attributes between the two complementary principles has been

1. From the Greek *hieros gamos*, 'sacred marriage'. (Translator's note)

suggested.² All in all, this explanation is quite appropriate; in fact the specific case of the numbers 5 and 6 is by no means an isolated exception, and many other similar examples could be cited from traditional symbolism.³ However, it is actually necessary to carry the generalisation one step further. The reason for this is that the word ‘hierogamy’ can strictly only be applied to two complementary terms envisaged as masculine and feminine in relation to each other, and although this is the case with the example we are dealing with, we also find virtually the identical phenomenon occurring in situations where the complementary relationship between the two terms is of quite a different order. We have already discussed this elsewhere in connection with time and space and the symbols associated with them in the traditions of nomadic peoples and sedentary peoples.⁴ It should be quite obvious that in a case such as this (where a temporal element and a spatial element are viewed as complementary) there can be no question of simply assimilating the relationship between masculine and feminine. It is, admittedly, quite true that this particular relationship, just like all other relationships between complementaries, is in a sense bound up with the relationship between Heaven and Earth. In this case, time is linked with Heaven through the idea of cycles—an idea that essentially has its basis in astronomy. As to space, its relationship to Earth is due to the fact that at the level of sensible appearances there is no better representative or embodiment of quantifiable extension than the earth’s surface. But, granted these correspondences, it would still be wrong to conclude on the basis of them that all complementary

2. Marcel Granet, *La Pensée chinoise*, pp.154–5 and 198–9. As we have already mentioned elsewhere (*The Reign of Quantity and the Signs of the Times*, chapter 5), this book contains a wealth of highly interesting information, and the chapter devoted to numbers is of special value. Even so, it is important to consult it strictly from a ‘documentary’ point of view, and not to attach any importance to the author’s ‘sociological’ interpretations. This is because as a rule his interpretations turn the true relationships between things upside down. It is not that the order of the cosmos was conceived on the model of social institutions, as Granet believes, but, on the contrary, these institutions were founded on the basis of analogy with the cosmic order.

3. We will come across an example of this kind—also from the Far-Eastern tradition—further on when we come to deal with the set square and compasses.

4. *The Reign of Quantity and the Signs of the Times*, chapter 21.

pairs can be reduced to one single type: hence the reason why it would be a mistake to speak of 'hierogamy' in this particular instance. The most that can actually be said is that all complementary pairs, whatever type they may be, are alike in having as their principle the first of all dualities which is the duality of universal Essence and universal Substance; or, in the symbolic language of the Far-Eastern tradition, the duality of Heaven and Earth.

Now what we need to understand very clearly if we are accurately to appreciate the different significance of the two pairs of numbers mentioned above—in both of which one number is ascribed to Heaven and the other to Earth—is that an exchange such as the one in question can only occur when the two complementary terms are considered not in themselves and as separate units, but in relationship to each other or (if it is a genuine case of 'hierogamy') as actually united with each other. From this we see that whereas 2 and 3 represent Earth and Heaven in themselves, 5 and 6 represent Earth and Heaven in their reciprocal action on and reaction to each other. In other words, 5 and 6 represent Earth and Heaven from the standpoint of manifestation, which is in fact the product of this action and reaction. We find this very clearly expressed, for example, in the text that says: 'In 5 and 6 we have the central union (*chung ho*, that is, the union occurring at their centre⁵) of Heaven and Earth.'⁶

The truth of what we are saying here emerges with even greater clarity if we look at the actual constitution of the numbers 5 and 6. Both numbers alike are formed from 2 and 3; but in the case of 5, these two numbers are combined by addition ($2 + 3 = 5$) whereas in the case of 6 they are combined by multiplication ($2 \times 3 = 6$). Here we have the reason why 5 and 6, both of them products of the union of even and odd numbers, are very commonly regarded in the symbolism of completely separate traditions as each having a fundamentally 'conjunctive' nature.⁷

5. The reader will here recall our earlier remark to the effect that Heaven and Earth can only really unite at their centres.

6. *Ch'ien Han-chu*.

7. For the Pythagoreans 5 was the 'wedding number', because it was the sum total

To carry our explanation a stage further, we need now to ask ourselves why, in the case of Earth envisaged in its union with Heaven, the two numbers 2 and 3 are added together, whereas in the case of Heaven envisaged in its union with Earth the numbers are multiplied. The answer is that although each of the two principles receives through this union the influence of the other in such a way that that influence becomes as it were a part of its own nature, each principle receives this influence from the other principle in an altogether different way. The action of Heaven on Earth gives rise to a straightforward addition of the celestial number 3 to the terrestrial number 2, for the simple reason that the action of Heaven is strictly 'actionless',⁸ and can be described as an 'action of presence'. As to the reaction of Earth with regard to Heaven, this gives rise to multiplication of the celestial number 3 by the terrestrial number 2, because the potentiality inherent in substance is the very root of multiplicity.⁹

It can also be said that whereas 2 and 3 are an expression of the intrinsic nature of Heaven and Earth, 5 and 6 are merely an expression of their 'measure', or extension. This is just another way of stating that, as mentioned earlier, the numbers 5 and 6 represent Heaven and Earth viewed not in themselves but specifically in relation to manifestation: for as we have explained elsewhere,¹⁰ the very notion of 'measure' is directly associated with manifestation. As and in themselves, Heaven and Earth cannot be measured for they do not belong to the domain of

of the first even, or feminine, number and the first odd, or masculine, number. As for the 'conjunctive' nature of the number 6, we have only to think of the meaning given to the letter *waw* in Hebrew and in Arabic, or of the symbol of the 'Seal of Solomon' which is the equivalent of the number in geometrical terms. For the symbolism of the numbers 5 and 6 see also *The Symbolism of the Cross*, chapter 28.

8. See above, chapters 1 and 3.

9. The interchanging of even and odd is of course a direct consequence of this particular way in which the two numbers are produced: for the product of an even number added to an odd number will always be odd, whereas the product of an even number multiplied by an odd number will necessarily be even. The sum total of two numbers will only be even if either both of the numbers are even or if both of the numbers are odd. If the product of the multiplication of one number by another is to be odd, then both of the two numbers will have to be odd themselves.

10. *The Reign of Quantity and the Signs of the Times*, chapter 3.

manifestation. We can only speak of 'measure' in relation to the visible determinants of Heaven and Earth which enable manifested beings to perceive them;¹¹ and these determinants can be referred to as celestial influences and terrestrial influences or, in other words, as the actions or effects of *yang* on the one hand and of *yin* on the other.

To gain a clearer picture of how this idea of 'measure' is to be applied, we must cast another look back at the geometrical symbols for these two principles. As we have already seen, the geometrical shape corresponding to Heaven is the circle, and the shape corresponding to Earth is the square.¹² Now the square is the prototype of all rectilinear shapes, and these are measured by 5 as well as by multiples of 5; circular shapes, on the other hand, are measured by 6 and its multiples. When we speak of the multiples of these two numbers we have in mind primarily the first of these multiples—that is, twice 5 or 10 and twice 6 or 12. In fact the natural way of measuring straight lines is by using a decimal division, while the natural way of dividing circular lines is duodecimal. It is not difficult to perceive in this the reason why these two particular numbers—10 and 12—are made the bases for the principal systems of numbering. In fact both systems are sometimes employed concurrently, and this is precisely the situation in China. The reason for their being used concurrently in this way is that they actually have quite different applications, so that their co-existence—even within one and the same formal tradition—has absolutely nothing arbitrary or superfluous about it.¹³

By way of bringing these observations to a close we would like also to point to the significance attributed to the number 11. As

11. This 'perception' must be understood as operating at an intellectual as well as a sensory level. Which of the two levels applies will depend upon whether it is a question of terrestrial influences (which are 'external') or of celestial influences (which are 'internal'): we have explained this distinction earlier in this book.

12. Here we meet with the compasses and the set square (of which more later) as instruments of measurement—from a 'celestial' perspective (that is, in terms of celestial influences) in the case of the compasses, and from a 'terrestrial' perspective (in terms of terrestrial influences) in the case of the set square.

13. It may be noted that yet another exchange of attributes occurs here, for in certain cases the number 10 is ascribed to Heaven and the number 12 to Earth. This is a further indication of their mutual interdependence relative to manifestation or the

the sum of 5 and 6 it is the symbol of that ‘central union of Heaven and Earth’ that we mentioned above. Consequently it is ‘the number that establishes the perfection (*ch’eng*)¹⁴ of the Ways of Heaven and Earth.’¹⁵ This significance, ascribed both to the number 11 and to its multiples, is also a point on which—as we have already shown on another occasion¹⁶—the most diverse of traditional doctrines are in complete agreement; although for reasons that are not very clear this fact goes largely unnoticed by those moderns who claim to study numerical symbolism.¹⁷

There is virtually no end to the lengths to which we could go in developing these basic observations on numbers. So far we have only concerned ourselves with the subject of Heaven and Earth, the first two terms of the Great Triad. It is time now to pass on to a consideration of the third term of this triad: Man.

cosmic order (understood in its strict sense), in the form of a double inversion of both spatial and temporal relations. But we will not emphasise this point any further, as to do so would lead us too far afield. Instead, as a particular example of this exchange, we will merely draw attention to the fact that in the Chinese tradition the days are counted in decimal periods and the months in duodecimal periods. Now, ten days are ‘ten suns’ and twelve months are ‘twelve moons’, which means that the number 10 is being linked to the Sun—which is *yang* or masculine and corresponds to Heaven, fire and the South—while the number 12 is being linked with the Moon, which is *yin* or feminine and corresponds to Earth, water and the North.

14. In the *I Ching*, this word *ch’eng* is the final term in the tetragrammatic formula of Wen Wang. See Matgioi, *La Voie métaphysique*, chapter 5.

15. *Ch’ien Han-chu*.

16. See *L’Ésotérisme de Dante*, chapter 7.

17. In the Hermetic and the Kabbalistic traditions 11 is the synthesis of the ‘microcosm’ and the ‘macrocosm’, the ‘microcosm’ being symbolised by the number 5 and the ‘macrocosm’ by the number 6. In another closely related context, these same two numbers refer respectively to individual man and to ‘universal Man’, or—if we are to bring this into line with the terminology of the Far-Eastern tradition—to terrestrial man and celestial Man.

As we have been speaking of the numbers 10 and 12, we will also mention the importance from a Kabbalistic point of view of their sum total 22 (two times 11, or its first multiple); for as is well known, 22 is the number of letters in the Hebrew alphabet.

9 | The Son of Heaven and Earth

‘HEAVEN is his father, Earth his mother.’ So reads the formula—always exactly the same wherever it occurs, regardless of time or place¹—that defines the nature of the relationship between Man and the other two terms of the Great Triad by describing him as ‘Son of Heaven and Earth’. The very fact that it is an initiatic formula is itself a clear indication that, if we are to understand it in its fullest sense, it must not just be thought of as referring to the ordinary man who is the product of present world conditions, but as describing the ‘true man’ all of whose possibilities the initiate is called upon to realise within himself.

This particular point deserves a little further explanation, however, because it could be objected that as manifestation in its entirety is, and can be nothing other than, the resultant of the union of Heaven and Earth, it follows that every man—indeed every being we might choose to think of—is equally a son of Heaven and Earth because by nature he or it will contain something of the nature of both.

In a sense this is true. Every being consists of both an essence and a substance (using these terms in a relative sense): a *yang* aspect and a *yin* aspect, a side that is ‘in act’ and a side that is ‘in potency’, an ‘interior’ and an ‘exterior’. And yet the precise extent of this participation is a matter of degree, for in manifested beings the celestial and terrestrial influences clearly combine in many different ways and in many different proportions: this after all is what produces their endless diversity. But as to what it is that all beings are, to varying degrees and in various ways, that is none

1. We even find traces of it in the ritual of Carbonarism, an organisation that has become totally identified with external activity. The survival of elements of this kind—of course completely misunderstood in a case like this—is clear evidence of the original genuinely initiatory status of organisations that have now sunk to the lowest level of degeneracy. See *Aperçus sur l’Initiation*, chapter 12.

other than Man. And by Man here we mean 'true man',² for in our state of existence he and he alone is fully and pre-eminently Man, just as it is he alone who among his other privileges is given the capacity of actually being able to recognise Heaven as his 'True Ancestor'.³

What we have just said is a direct and immediate consequence of man's 'central' position in relation to his own state of existence.⁴ To be more precise we ought to speak of the 'central' position which man should (normally and in principle) occupy. Here, in the very fact that we have to make a distinction between the place man actually occupies and the place he should occupy, we are confronted with the difference between ordinary man and 'true man'. From the traditional point of view it is 'true man' alone who is worthy of being described as normal. He is given the name 'true man' to show that he truly possesses the fullness of human nature, due to the fact that he has developed within himself every aspect of the possibilities implicit in his humanity. As to other men the best that can be said is that they possess, so to speak, a human potentiality. This potentiality will be more or less developed in some of its aspects, and particularly in those aspects corresponding to the simple corporeal modality of the individuality; but in any case it will be far from being totally actualised. It is this predominant characteristic of potentiality which makes these men sons of Earth far more than sons of Heaven, and it is also what makes them *yin* in relation to the Cosmos.

For a man to be truly the 'Son of Heaven and Earth', the 'act' in him must be equal to the 'potency'. This implies nothing short of the full and complete realisation of his humanity—that is, the state of 'true man'. It is the reason why 'true man' is perfectly balanced in terms of *yang* and *yin*; it is also why at the same time he is *yang* in relation to the Cosmos, for the heavenly nature neces-

2. We shall not speak here of 'transcendent man' as we wish to reserve treatment of him for later. Consequently our discussion here will necessarily be confined to the subject of our particular state of existence as opposed to universal Existence in its totality.

3. The expression 'True Ancestor' is among the designations applied to the *T'ien Ti Hwei*.

4. See *The Symbolism of the Cross*, chapters 2 and 28.

sarily has supremacy over the terrestrial wherever the two are actualised in equal measure. This, and this alone, is what makes him capable of fulfilling effectively his 'central' role as man; yet he can only truly fulfil this role provided he is man in the fullest sense of the word, which means that for all other manifested beings 'he is the image of the True Ancestor'.⁵

Now it is very important to bear in mind that 'true man' is also 'primordial man'. In other words, the condition of 'true man' is the condition that was natural for humanity at its origins. Since then, humanity has distanced itself little by little from that original state as it moved through its terrestrial cycle, and the end result now is the state in which what we have called ordinary man finds himself—although fallen man would be a more appropriate term. This spiritual decline, which as it increases produces a greater and greater imbalance between *yang* and *yin*, can be described as a gradual moving away from the central position occupied by 'primordial' man. The further removed a being is from the centre, the less *yang* he is and the more *yin*, for the 'outward' begins to prevail over the 'inward' in exact proportion to the distance he moves away from the centre. This is why we said above that he ends up virtually a 'son of Earth' alone: 'in act' if not 'in potency' he becomes less and less distinguishable from non-human beings sharing the same level of existence. 'Primordial man', on the other hand, was not merely one more being among the rest: he was the living synthesis of them all in his fully realised humanity.⁶ By virtue of his 'inwardness', which embraced his entire state of

5. *Tao Te Ching*, chapter 4. The man in question here is he who is 'made in the image of God'—or, to be more precise, in the image of *Elohim* or the celestial powers. This man can only truly be what he is because he is the 'Androgyne' constituted by the perfect equilibrium of *yang* and *yin*. In the words of Genesis itself (1:27), '*Elohim* created man in His own image (literally 'His shadow', i.e. His reflection), in the image of *Elohim* created He him; male and female created He them'. In esoteric Islam this has its correspondence in the numerical identity between *Adam wa Hawā* and *Allah* (see *The Symbolism of the Cross*, chapter 3).

6. As we mentioned earlier, the Chinese word *Jen* can mean interchangeably 'Man' or 'Humanity'. 'Humanity' here must be understood as meaning primarily human nature as opposed to the mere collectivity of humankind. In the case of 'true man', 'Man' and 'Humanity' are one and the same thing, because 'true man' is the complete realisation or fulfilment of human nature in all of its possibilities.

existence just as Heaven embraces all manifestation (for in reality the centre contains everything), he included these beings in himself as particular possibilities inherent in his own nature.⁷ So it is that Man, as the third term of the Great Triad, effectively represents the totality of all manifested beings.

The 'place' occupied by this 'true man' is the central point where the powers of Heaven and Earth converge and unite. This means that 'true man' is the direct, culminating product of their union. And here again we see why other beings—because in a sense they are merely secondary and partial products of the union of Heaven and Earth—will necessarily proceed from him in a line of indefinite gradation determined by their greater or lesser distance from that central point. This is the reason why, as we pointed out earlier, 'true man' alone deserves the designation 'Son of Heaven and Earth': the title is pre-eminently his, and it is his to the highest degree possible. Everything else in existence is only entitled to the name by virtue of participation; and the necessary means of this participation is 'true man' himself, for only in him are Heaven and Earth directly united—if not Heaven and Earth themselves, then at least in the form of the influences they both exert in the sphere of existence to which the human state belongs.⁸

As we have explained elsewhere,⁹ initiation falls into two parts. Its first part, which constitutes what are called the 'lesser mysteries', is concerned specifically with the possibilities of the human state and has as its object the restoration of the 'primordial state'. This means that through this initiation, if it is effectively realised,

7. This is why, according to the symbolism of Genesis (2: 19–20), Adam was able to give all the creatures of this world their true 'name'—that is, he was able to 'define' in the fullest sense of the word (implying not only to determine but also to actualise) each particular being's individual nature, which he recognised immediately and inwardly as being dependent on his own nature. In this as in all things, the Sovereign necessarily plays in the Far-Eastern tradition a role equivalent to that of 'primordial man': 'A wise prince gives to things the names that belong to them, and each individual thing must be treated in the ways signified by the name that he has given it' (*Lün Yü*, chapter 13).

8. This final qualification is required if we are to honour the distinction between 'true man' and 'transcendent man', or between the individual man who has perfected himself and 'Universal Man'.

9. Especially in *Aperçus sur l'Initiation*, chapter 39.

man is brought back from the state of 'off-centredness' which he now occupies to the central position which normally should be his; and once there, all the prerogatives inherent in this central location are restored to him.

In other words, 'true man' is the person who has effectively reached the goal of the 'lesser mysteries', and this goal is nothing else than the perfection of the human state. The man who has achieved this finds himself established once and for all at the 'Unchanging Centre' (*Chung Yung*). He has now escaped the vicissitudes of the 'cosmic wheel', for the centre does not move like the rest of the wheel but is the fixed and stationary point around which the movement occurs.¹⁰

When he has arrived at this point, 'true man' has not yet attained the highest degree which is the final goal of initiation and the term of the 'greater mysteries'. But he has passed from the circumference to the centre, from the 'outer' to the 'inner', and so truly fulfils the function of 'unmoved mover' in relation to the world that is his.¹¹ And the 'action of presence' belonging to this function imitates in its particular domain the 'actionless' activity of Heaven.¹²

10. See *The Symbolism of the Cross*, chapter 28, and *Aperçus sur l'Initiation*, chapter 46.

11. One could say that really he no longer belongs to this world, but on the contrary it belongs to him.

12. It is, to say the least, strange to find Martines de Pasqually—in the West, and in the eighteenth century—claiming for himself the rank of 'true man'. Regardless of whether his claim was justified or not, one would still like to know how he became acquainted with this typically Taoist expression, which in fact seems to have been the only one he ever used.

10 | Man and the Three Worlds

WHEN we compare different traditional ternaries with each other, we may find it possible to establish a genuine correspondence between them term by term. However, it would be wrong to conclude automatically from this that the corresponding terms are actually identical; and we must be no less wary of jumping to such conclusions even in cases where some of the terms have very similar names or designations, for it is quite possible that these designations are in fact being applied by analogical transposition at completely different levels.

These comments are especially relevant when comparing the Far-Eastern Great Triad with the Hindu *Tribhuvana*. The *Tribhuvana*, as is well known, comprises 'three worlds'—Earth (*Bhū*), Air (*Bhuvā*) and Heaven (*Svar*). And yet this Heaven and this Earth are most certainly not the *T'ien* and *Ti* of the Far-Eastern tradition, for which the equivalents in the Hindu tradition are *Purusha* and *Prakriti*.¹ In fact, whereas *T'ien* and *Ti* (or *Purusha* and *Prakriti*) are outside of manifestation, and indeed are the immediate principles behind manifestation, the 'three worlds' signify the totality of manifestation itself, divided into its three basic categories—the realm of supra-formal manifestation, the realm of subtle manifestation and the realm of gross or corporeal manifestation.

Once this necessary distinction has been observed, we are still left with the apparently awkward fact that we are obliged to use the same terms—'Heaven' and 'Earth'—in both cases. But to justify this dual application or connotation of the same terms we need only point out that the supra-formal realm of manifestation is clearly the realm in which celestial influences are predominant, while terrestrial influences will obviously predominate in the

1. See *Man and his Becoming according to the Vedānta*, chapters 12 and 14.

gross realm. (We are here using the expressions 'celestial influences' and 'terrestrial influences' in the specific sense we gave them earlier.) We can also say—and in fact this amounts to saying the same thing in a different way—that the supra-formal realm is closer to essence while the gross realm is closer to substance, although of course this in no way entitles us to identify them with universal Essence and universal Substance themselves.²

As for subtle manifestation, this is the 'intermediary world' (*antariksha*) and therefore the middle term in the schema we have just outlined. It derives from a combination of the two different classes of mutually complementary influences, balanced and intermingled to such an extent that it is impossible—at least when speaking of this intermediary world as a whole—to say which set of influences is stronger than the other. Admittedly its enormous complexity means it must contain some elements which may tend more towards the essential side of manifestation and others which may tend more towards the substantial side. Yet the fact remains that all these elements, regardless of their specific nature, are always on the side of substance relative to supra-formal manifestation, and always on the side of essence relative to gross manifestation.

On no account must this middle term of the *Tribhuvana* be confused with the middle term of the Great Triad, Man. This is by no means to assert that they have nothing in common: in fact a definite connection between them does exist which (as we shall soon show) is no less real for the fact that it is not immediately apparent. But even so, there are certain respects in which the roles they perform are not the same. To be specific: the middle term of the Great Triad is strictly speaking the product or

2. It seems appropriate to mention here in passing that we sometimes find the 'paternal' and 'maternal' functions which we spoke of in the last chapter transposed in a similar fashion. When, for example in certain Arabic treatises, we come across expressions such as 'the Fathers above' and 'the Mothers below', the 'Fathers' are the Heavens (i.e. the supra-formal or spiritual states from which a being such as the human individual derives its essence), while the 'Mothers' are the elements that make up the 'sublunar world' (that is, the corporeal world represented by the Earth insofar as it gives the same being its substance). Of course we are here using the terms 'essence' and 'substance' in a purely relative and particularised sense.

resultant of the two extremes, hence its traditional designation 'Son of Heaven and Earth'. But as for subtle manifestation, this derives from the supra-formal realm alone, and gross manifestation derives in its turn from subtle manifestation. In other words, if we take each term of the *Tribhuvana* in a descending order, it will have as its immediate principle the term that precedes it.

So we see that a valid concordance between the two ternaries cannot be established from the standpoint of the order of their production. Such a concordance can only be established so to speak 'statically'—that is, at the stage when all three terms have already been produced. In this case the two extremes of both ternaries can be thought of as corresponding in a relative sense to essence and substance within the realm of universal manifestation, provided we consider universal manifestation in its entirety as constituted analogously to a particular being—that is, provided we view it as the 'macrocosm' in the strict sense of the word.

There is no need to go to any great length here on the subject of the analogy between the constitution of 'macrocosm' and 'microcosm', for we have already covered this ground fully enough in other studies. But there is one particular aspect of this analogy which does deserve restating, and that is that a being such as man must, as a 'microcosm', necessarily participate in the 'three worlds' and therefore contain elements corresponding to each. In fact the same broad ternary division applies to him as well: through his spirit he belongs to the realm of supra-formal manifestation, through his soul to the realm of subtle manifestation, and through his body he belongs to the realm of gross manifestation. We will return to this tripartite division later on and develop it further, as this will help us to throw into clearer relief the relationship between several of the most important ternaries.

This brings us to another point, which is that the expression 'microcosm' truly applies to man—and by 'man' we mean above all 'true man', or man fully self-realised—more than to any other living being. The reason for this lies, yet again, in that 'central' position of his which makes him a kind of image, or 'summation' in the sense of the Latin word *summa*, of the totality of mani-

festation. Man's nature, as explained earlier, is a synthesis of the nature of all other living beings, and this means there is nothing to be found in manifestation which does not have its correspondence and equivalent in man. This last statement is not just a mere 'metaphor', as people today would be only too ready to believe; on the contrary, it is the expression of an exact truth which happens to be the foundation for a considerable portion of the traditional sciences. And here, incidentally, we have the explanation of the correlations which exist, in the most 'positive' fashion, between modifications in the human order and in the order of the cosmos. Perhaps no other tradition attaches more importance to these correlations than the Far-Eastern tradition, which is unmatched in its thoroughness in deducing and then applying in practice all the consequences that they logically entail.

Looking at the subject from a slightly different angle, we have already mentioned that there is a particular correlation between man and the 'intermediary world', which is what could be called a correlation of 'function' as we will now explain. We have seen earlier that man occupies a position mid-way between Heaven and Earth—regardless of whether these terms are understood in their principal sense (as in the Great Triad) or in the more specialised sense of spiritual world and corporeal world (as in the *Tribhuvana*). The fact that man by his constitution participates in both of them means he plays an intermediary role in relation to the Cosmos as a whole which is comparable to the role played in a living being by the soul as the intermediary between spirit and body. The crucial point to be noted here is that this intermediary domain—which when viewed as a whole is called the 'soul' or 'subtle form'—is also the location of the element characteristic of human individuality as such: namely the 'mental faculty', or *manas*. We can therefore say that this specifically human element occupies the same place in man that man himself occupies in the Cosmos.

It should now be obvious that the functional factor which we mentioned above as being the basis for the correlation between man and the middle term of the *Tribhuvana*, as well as with soul which corresponds to this middle term in the case of a living

being, is strictly a 'mediatory' function. In fact the animic principle, or principle of soul, has often been described as the 'mediator' between spirit and body;³ and similarly as far as man is concerned he is the true 'mediator' between Heaven and Earth, as we will explain later in greater detail. In this respect only (and not because of man being 'Son of Heaven and Earth') a term-by-term correspondence can be established between the Great Triad and the *Tribhuvana*, but on the understanding that this correspondence in no way implies an identification of the terms of the one ternary with the terms of the other. Earlier we called this point of view a 'static' one, to differentiate it from what could be called the 'genetic'⁴ point of view which is concerned with the sequence in which the terms are produced. From this second point of view a correlation between the two ternaries is no longer possible; and our next chapter will show even more clearly why this must be so.

3. One thinks here especially of Cudworth's 'plastic mediator'.

4. Although the opposite of 'static' is usually 'dynamic', we have preferred not to use the word 'dynamic' here, for although it is not categorically wrong it does fail to convey with sufficient clarity the meaning required.

I I | *Spiritus, Anima, Corpus*

A ternary division is the most common and also the most basic way of defining the constitution of a living being, and in particular the constitution of man. The Cartesian dualism of ‘spirit’ and ‘body’ which has managed to infiltrate all of modern Western thought has no basis whatever in reality; we have laboured this point often enough elsewhere and there is no need to go into the matter yet again.

On the other hand, the triple division into spirit, soul and body has been unanimously accepted by all the traditional doctrines of the West, both in antiquity and in the Middle Ages. The fact that at a later age people came to forget it so completely that they began treating ‘spirit’ and ‘soul’ as little more than rather vague synonyms and using the terms interchangeably, even though they refer to realities of a totally different order, is perhaps one of the most striking examples one could give of the confusion that is so typical of the modern mentality. Unfortunately the consequences of this error are not all purely theoretical, and this makes it even more potentially dangerous.¹ However, this is a question that does not immediately concern us here, and our aim in this chapter will be purely to draw attention to a few aspects of the traditional ternary division that are directly relevant to the theme of this study.

The distinction made between spirit, soul and body has been applied to the ‘macrocosm’ as well as to the ‘microcosm’. This is hardly surprising if we consider that the constitution of the one is by definition analogous to the constitution of the other, meaning that we are bound to come across elements in either ‘macrocosm’ or ‘microcosm’ which correspond exactly to elements in the other. Among the Greeks this kind of thinking is chiefly to be found in

1. See *The Reign of Quantity and the Signs of the Times*, chapter 35.

the cosmological doctrine of the Pythagoreans, who were in fact only 're-adapting' teachings that were much more ancient. Plato took much of his inspiration from this doctrine and adhered to it far more closely than is generally believed. It was partly through him as intermediary that something of this teaching was transmitted to later philosophers such as the Stoics, although the approach of the Stoics was much more exoteric and this resulted only too frequently in the ideas being mutilated and distorted.

To return to the Pythagoreans: their basic conception was of a quaternary consisting first of all of the Principle, which relative to the Cosmos is transcendent, then of universal Spirit and universal Soul, and finally of primordial *Hyle*, or Matter.² It is important to note that because this final term represents pure potentiality, it cannot simply be equated with the body: it would be more to the point to compare it with the 'Earth' of the Great Triad than with the 'Earth' of the *Tribhuvana*. On the other hand, universal Spirit and universal Soul clearly correspond to the *Tribhuvana*'s other two terms. As for the transcendent Principle, in some respects it is equivalent to the 'Heaven' of the Great Triad; and yet there is also a sense in which it is identical to Being or metaphysical Unity—*T'ai Chi*. No clear distinction seems to be made here, but this was perhaps hardly necessary given the perspective which gave rise to the quaternary, which was much more cosmological than metaphysical. One thing which is quite certain is that as soon as this teaching fell into the hands of the Stoics it was distorted by being placed in a 'naturalistic' framework. The transcendent Principle lapsed into oblivion, leaving behind only an immanent 'God' whom the Stoics simply identified with the *Spiritus Mundi*. We say with the *Spiritus Mundi* and not with the *Anima Mundi*, as certain modern interpreters who have been misled by the contemporary confusion between spirit and soul would seem to believe. In fact both for the Stoics as well as for those who were more faithful to the traditional doctrine, the *Anima Mundi* has never had any other than a purely 'demiurgic' role (using the word

2. The beginning of the *Rasā'il Ikhmān aṣ-Ṣaḫā'* contains a very clear exposition of this Pythagorean doctrine.

'demiurgic' in its strictest sense), in the elaboration of the Cosmos out of the primordial *Hyle*.

We have just spoken of the elaboration of the Cosmos, but perhaps it would be more accurate—for two reasons—to speak of the formation of the *Corpus Mundi*. The first reason is that the 'demiurgic' function is strictly a 'formative' one;³ the second, that in a sense universal Spirit and universal Soul are themselves parts of the Cosmos. We say 'in a sense', because universal Spirit and Soul can actually be considered from two different viewpoints comparable to what in our last chapter we referred to as the 'genetic' and the 'static'. From the first of these points of view they are 'principles', although in a strictly relative sense; from the second they are themselves constituent 'elements' of the 'macrocosm', the reason being that in manifested Existence we are 'this side' of the distinction between Essence and Substance. From the 'essential' point of view, Spirit and Soul are 'reflections' at different levels of the Principle of manifestation itself. But from the 'substantial' point of view they appear as 'productions' drawn from the *materia prima*, although they themselves will determine its subsequent productions in a descending order.⁴ The reason for this is that if universal Spirit and universal Soul are to have an effective role in manifested existence they must necessarily become an integral part of universal manifestation themselves. The interrelationship between these two different perspectives can be depicted symbolically in terms of the complementary relationship between a ray of light and the plane of its reflection. Both are needed to produce an image, for on the one hand the image will be a true reflection of the source of light itself, and on the other hand it will be situated at the level of reality corresponding to the plane of reflection.⁵ Using the terminology of the

3. It is important to note that we say 'formative', not 'creative'. The difference between these two terms can best be appreciated if one remembers that the four constituent terms of the Pythagorean quaternary can be correlated with the 'four worlds' of the Hebrew Kabbalah.

4. We will recall here that according to Hindu doctrine *Buddhi*—which, as pure Intellect, corresponds to *Spiritus* and supra-formal manifestation—is the first of the productions of *Prakriti*, but is also the first stage in the manifestation of *Atma* or the transcendent Principle. See *Man and his Becoming according to the Vedanta*, chapter 7.

5. See *The Symbolism of the Cross*, chapter 24.

Far-Eastern tradition, the ray of light will correspond to celestial influences and the plane of reflection to terrestrial influences, and this brings us back once more to the distinction between the 'essential' and 'substantial' aspects of manifestation.⁶

It goes without saying that these remarks apply not only to the 'macrocosm' but also to the location and function of spirit and soul in the 'microcosm'. It is only the body which can never be truly considered a 'principle' because, as the end-point or final term of manifestation (at least as far as our world or our state of existence is concerned), it is solely a 'product' and is in no way capable of becoming a 'producer'. Through this characteristic, the body is the fullest expression possible in the sphere of manifestation of the passivity of substance. But at the same time this characteristic very clearly distinguishes it from Substance itself, which as a 'maternal' principle co-operates in the production of manifestation.

From what has been said it can be seen that the ternary spirit-soul-body is different from ternaries which consist of two complementary—and as it were symmetrical—terms plus a product of these terms occupying an intermediate position between them. In the case of the spirit-soul-body ternary (as, of course, in the case of the *Tribhuvana* which it corresponds to exactly), the first two terms are both situated on the same side relative to the third term. As to the third term itself, even though it can still in a broad sense be considered the product of the other two terms, those two terms no longer play a symmetrical role in producing it. The body has its immediate principle in the soul, but it only derives from the spirit indirectly and through the intermediary of the soul. Only when we view the being as fully constituted—that is, from what we earlier called a 'static' viewpoint—are we able to equate its 'essential' aspect with the spirit and its 'substantial' aspect with the body, and so discover a symmetry. But it will be noted that this symmetry is not between the first two terms of the ternary, but between the first and the third: in other words soul

6. The ray of light corresponds exactly to the vertical line symbolising Heaven, the plane of reflection to the horizontal line symbolising Earth: see above, figure 7.

is here the intermediary between spirit and body, and this justifies its designation as a 'mediating' principle which we mentioned earlier. Even so, however, as the second term it is necessarily prior to the third,⁷ which means that it cannot possibly be regarded as a product or resultant of the other two terms at either extreme.

A further question is likely to be raised here. How can it be that in spite of this lack of symmetry between spirit and soul, the two terms are still sometimes thought of as in a sense complementary, spirit being regarded as a masculine principle and soul as a feminine one? The answer is that because the spirit is closer than anything else in manifestation to the pole of essence, the soul when considered in relationship to it will become identified with substance: in relation to each other spirit will be *yang* and soul will be *yin*, which is why we often find spirit symbolised by the Sun and soul by the Moon—an analogy which is further corroborated when we consider spirit as the light that emanates directly from the Principle, while soul presents no more than a reflection of this light. It is worth adding that the 'intermediary world', which can also be called the 'animic' domain, is the sphere in which forms are elaborated, and this elaboration is essentially a 'substantial' or 'maternal' function. It is carried out through the action, or rather the influence, of the spirit, which therefore plays here an 'essential' or 'paternal' role—although it must of course be stressed that this action or influence of spirit is solely an 'action of presence' which imitates the 'actionless' action of Heaven.⁸

While on this particular subject we will touch briefly on the

7. It goes without saying that the priority here is essentially logical: the three terms are being considered simultaneously as constituent elements of the being.

8. These remarks can be seen as providing the explanation for the fact that in the Hermetic symbolism of the 28th degree of Scottish Freemasonry, *Spiritus* is represented by the figure of the Holy Spirit and *Anima* by the Virgin. As we mentioned at the beginning of this book, such an interpretation is less universal in scope than if we were to equate *Spiritus* and *Anima* simply with *Purusha* and *Prakriti*. But we should add that in this particular case the product of the two terms is conceived of not as the body but as something of a completely different order—the Philosophers' Stone, which in fact in symbolical terms is often identified with Christ. Viewed in this context, the relationship between the two terms is even more strictly complementary than in the case of the production of corporeal manifestation.

principal symbols used to represent the *Anima Mundi*. One of the most common is the serpent, and the reason for this will be readily appreciated if we remember that the animic world is the domain of cosmic forces, and that although these forces also act in the

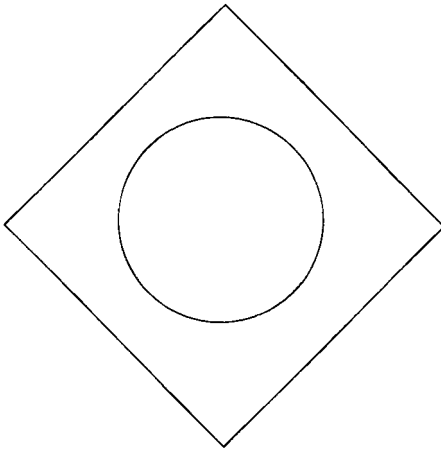


Figure 15

corporeal world they themselves belong to the subtle realm. This links up with what was said earlier about the symbolism of the double spiral and of the caduceus. One further detail worth mentioning here is that the dual aspect of cosmic force corresponds closely to the intermediate nature of this animic world, which makes it a meeting place for both celestial and terrestrial influences.

When used as a symbol of the *Anima Mundi*, the serpent is most commonly depicted in the circular form of the *Uroboros*. In fact this form is a very appropriate way of depicting the animic principle: for when viewed from the corporeal world this principle is on the side of essence, whereas when viewed from the spiritual world it is on the side of substance. In other words it may take on the attributes of either essence or substance, depending on the viewpoint from which it is being considered, and this so to speak gives it an apparently dual nature.

The combination of these two aspects recurs in a quite remarkable way in another symbol of the *Anima Mundi* which was used in medieval Hermetism (figure 15). This is the figure of a circle within an 'animated' square—that is, a square standing on one of its corners to suggest the idea of movement, as opposed to the

stability expressed by a square resting on its base.⁹ What makes this figure especially interesting from our particular point of view is that the circular and square shapes which it is composed of have exactly the same meaning as they have in the Far-Eastern tradition.¹⁰

9. See *The Reign of Quantity and the Signs of the Times*, chapter 20.

10. A comparison of this figure with figure 8 will show that the schematic representation of the 'intermediary world' is a kind of 'reversal' of the image of the Cosmos as a whole. Several significant conclusions bearing on the laws of subtle manifestation could be deduced from this observation, but this is not the place to go into such matters.

12 | Sulphur, Mercury and Salt

ANALYSIS of the ternary spirit, soul and body leads us on quite naturally to a consideration of the alchemical ternary Sulphur, Mercury and Salt.¹ The two ternaries are in many ways compatible, in spite of the fact that each is the expression of a somewhat different perspective. This difference emerges clearly from the fact that in the case of Sulphur, Mercury and Salt the complementary aspect of the first two terms is much more strongly marked: this produces a symmetry which, as we saw earlier, simply does not exist in the case of spirit and soul.

One factor that makes for perhaps the greatest difficulty of all in trying to understand alchemical or hermetic texts in general is the way in which the same terms are frequently used in different senses, each sense corresponding to a different perspective. Sulphur and Mercury are no exceptions to this rule; and yet this does not affect the central fact that Sulphur is consistently viewed as an active or masculine principle, and Mercury as a passive or feminine principle. As for Salt, it is so to speak neuter, or neutral; and that it should be so is altogether appropriate for a product of two complementary terms which by its very nature counterbalances and neutralises the opposing tendencies inherent in those terms.

Without entering into details which would here be quite out of place, we will simply state that Sulphur, because of its active nature, must be considered an igneous principle, and that fundamentally it is a principle of inner activity which, in the case of an individual being, can be thought of as radiating outwards from its very centre. In man (or on the basis of analogy with man) this inner

1. It should hardly be necessary to point out that these terms refer to something quite different from the sulphur, mercury and salt of ordinary chemistry; nor for that matter do they have anything to do with physical substances of any kind, for what they refer to are not bodies, but principles.

force is often equated with the power of will. But this equation will only be valid if we understand 'will' in a much deeper sense than its usual psychological connotation. Instead, we would have to think of it analogously to the way it is used for example in the phrase 'Divine Will',² or in the Far-Eastern expression 'Will of Heaven'. The reason for this qualification is that the origin of will lies at the 'centre', and yet psychology is exclusively concerned with things of a 'peripheral' nature and ultimately is only concerned with superficial modifications of the being.

It is no mere accident that we have just mentioned the 'Will of Heaven', for although Sulphur cannot actually be equated with Heaven itself, its inwardness clearly places it in the category of celestial influences. As for equating Sulphur with the will, this is not really justifiable in the case of the ordinary man whom psychology makes the exclusive object of its investigations. However, in the case of 'true man' the equation is totally justified, for the place of 'true man' is at the centre of all things and this means his will is necessarily one with the 'Will of Heaven'.³

Turning now to Mercury, its passive nature when contrasted with the active nature of Sulphur has led to its being viewed as a principle of humidity.⁴ It is also represented as reacting from outside, thereby playing the role of a centripetal and compressive force in opposition to—and also in a sense limiting—the centrifugal and expansive action of Sulphur. All these complementary attributes—activity and passivity, inwardness and outwardness, expansion and contraction—make it clear that in the language of

2. It may be mentioned here that the Greek word *theion*, besides being the term for Sulphur, also means 'divine'.

3. We shall deal with this question of will in more detail when we come to look at the ternary 'Providence, Will, Destiny'.

'Transcendent man'—that is, man who has realised within himself 'Universal Man' (*al-insānal-kāmil*)—is himself referred to in the language of Islamic Hermeticism as the 'red Sulphur' (*al-kabrūt-al-ahmar*), which is also represented symbolically by the Phoenix. The difference between 'transcendent man' and 'true man' (or 'primordial man': *al-insānal-al-qadim*) is the same as the difference between the stages of 'reddening' and 'whitening', which themselves correspond to the two different stages of realisation marked by the 'greater mysteries' and the 'lesser mysteries' respectively.

4. Hence we find among the various descriptions of it the expression 'basic humidity'.

the Far East, Sulphur is *yang* and Mercury *yin*, and that if Sulphur is to be classed among the celestial influences, Mercury must be included among the terrestrial.

Be this as it may, we must be careful here to avoid locating Mercury in the corporeal realm. Its rightful place is in the subtle or animic domain, and its outward nature entitles us to view it as representing the ‘ambience’, by which we mean the totality of the currents of the dual cosmic force that we spoke of earlier.⁵ The dual nature or dual aspect of this force is an inherent characteristic of everything belonging to the ‘intermediary world’, and this is why Mercury—although primarily a principle of humidity as we mentioned above—is sometimes described as an ‘igneous water’ or sometimes even as a ‘liquid fire’.⁶ These paradoxical expressions are chiefly used to describe Mercury when it is being subjected to the influence of Sulphur, which ‘elicits’ this dual nature by causing it to pass from potency to act.⁷

From the combined inward action of Sulphur and outward reaction of Mercury, a kind of ‘crystallisation’ takes place. This creates a common boundary, so to speak, between inward and outward, or a neutral zone in which the opposing influences are able to meet and stabilise. The product of this ‘crystallisation’ is Salt,⁸ which is represented by a cube, not only because this is the

5. The reader will recall our earlier remarks about the double spiral as a ‘schema of the ambience’. Fundamentally the Hermetic Mercury and Paracelsus’ ‘astral light’ are one and the same, and both can be equated with what more recent writers such as Éliphas Lévi have (not altogether inappropriately) termed the ‘great magical agent’. We must add however that in the traditional sciences the role of the Hermetic Mercury is by no means confined to the inferior sphere of magic (understanding ‘magic’ in the strict sense of the word); on the contrary, it has a far larger sphere of application, as our earlier discussion of the Hermetic ‘solution’ and ‘coagulation’ should have made clear. For some further comments on the distinction between Hermetism and magic, we refer the reader to our *Aperçus sur l’Initiation*, chapter 41.

6. The currents of subtle force can actually create this impression when perceived. Here we have one very possible cause of the illusion of ‘fluidity’ so often associated with them; but this is not to exclude reasons of a different kind which have also played a part in giving rise to this illusion or perpetuating it. See further *The Reign of Quantity and the Signs of the Times*, chapter 18.

7. We then have what in Hermetic language is called ‘animate’ or ‘dual’ Mercury, as opposed to the ordinary Mercury viewed purely in isolation.

8. There is an analogy here with the formation of a salt (using this word in its

classical example of crystalline structure, but also because it is a symbol of stability.⁹ Because, from the point of view of the individual manifestation of a being, it marks the separation between inward and outward, this third term represents a kind of 'envelope' which on the one hand gives the being contact with the environment but on the other hand isolates it from it. In this it corresponds to the body, which in the case of the human individuality plays precisely this 'bounding' role.¹⁰ The reasons for associating Salt and body become even clearer when we remember the obvious relationship between Sulphur and the spirit on the one hand, and Mercury and the soul on the other. But, here again, we must be very much on our guard when comparing one ternary with another, for although the terms of one ternary may closely correspond to certain terms in the other when viewed from

chemical sense), which—similarly—is produced by the combination of an acid, the active element, with an alkali, the passive element. In this particular case the acid element would play a role comparable to Sulphur, the alkali a role comparable to Mercury—but with the essential difference that, unlike Sulphur and Mercury, they are bodies and not principles. The salt produced from the combination of the two common elements is neutral and generally occurs in a crystalline form, which can be seen as one further justification for the hermetic transposition of the term.

9. This is the 'cubical stone' or 'perfect ashlar' of Masonic symbolism. But it is important to note that it is the ordinary 'cubical stone', not the 'cubical stone on end' which symbolises the Philosophers' Stone, as the pyramid surmounting the cube represents a spiritual principle that establishes itself on the foundation provided by the Salt. It is also worth noting that the two-dimensional outline of this 'cubical stone on its end' is a square with a triangle on top, which is identical to the alchemical sign for Sulphur except that the cross has been replaced by a square. The two symbols have the same numerical correspondence ($7 = 3 + 4$), and in both cases the septenary is made up of an upper (relatively 'celestial') ternary plus a lower relatively ('terrestrial') quaternary. The substitution of a square for the cross in fact represents the 'fixation' or 'stabilisation' as a permanent 'entity' of what only existed in the ordinary Sulphur in a purely 'virtual' state. The only way that Sulphur can effectively realise this state of virtuality is by using the resistance offered to it by Mercury (as the 'material of the work') as a fulcrum.

10. From what was said in the previous note the reader will be able to appreciate the importance of the body (or whatever 'terminating' element corresponds to the body in the conditions prevailing in another state of existence) as a 'support' for initiatic realisation. In this context it is worth adding that while Mercury, as we said above, is the 'material for the work' to begin with, its place is taken at a later stage (and from a different perspective) by Salt, as is shown by the formation of the symbol for the 'cubical stone on its end'. It is to this that Hermetists refer when they draw a distinction between their 'primary matter' and 'subsequent matter'.

one perspective, from another perspective they may not. Hence, when viewed as 'animic principle' Mercury corresponds to the 'intermediary world' or the median term in the *Tribhuvana*, and Salt when viewed as equivalent (if not identical) to the body occupies the same terminal position as the sphere of gross manifestation. And yet when these two terms are viewed from a different angle their roles are apparently reversed, with Salt becoming the median term. It is this standpoint which is truest to the specifically hermetic conception of the ternary in question, because of the symmetrical role it attributes to Sulphur and Mercury. Salt is then intermediary between the two, firstly because it is in a way their resultant, and secondly because it occupies a borderline position between the 'inner' and 'outer' domains to which the two terms correspond. It is in this respect, even more than in relation to the process of manifestation, that 'Salt' can be represented as a 'terminating' factor, although in reality the one does not exclude the other.

These observations will, we hope, have made it clear why Salt cannot be equated with the body without qualification or reservation. The most we can say without the sacrifice of accuracy is that the body corresponds to Salt if viewed from one perspective and provided we interpret the alchemical ternary in one particular way. In another, less restricted application Salt will correspond to the individuality as a whole.¹¹ In that case Sulphur is always the internal principle of the being, and Mercury is the subtle 'ambience' of a given world or state of existence. The product of the encounter between the internal principle and the surrounding 'ambience' will—assuming that we are dealing with a state of formal manifestation such as the human state—be the individ-

11. From this point of view the transformation of the 'rough-hewn stone' (or 'rough ashlar') into the 'cubical stone' (or 'perfect ashlar') will represent the development that ordinary individuality must undergo if it is to become capable of serving as a 'support' or 'basis' for initiatic realisation. The 'cubical stone on its end' will then represent the addition to that individuality of a principle of a supra-individual order, which constitutes the initiatory realisation itself. As this realisation is analogous in its different degrees, it can be represented by the same symbol; these degrees will always be obtained by means of processes which correspond to each other, but at different levels. An obvious example of this is the 'whitening' and 'reddening' of the alchemists.

uality. One can say that the being manifested in this way is as it were 'enveloped' in the individuality, just as at a different level the individuality itself is 'enveloped' in the body. If we turn again to the symbolism we used earlier, Sulphur can be compared to the ray of light, Mercury to the plane of its reflection, and Salt to what is produced when the light meets that plane. This raises the whole question of the relationship of a being to the environment in which it manifests, and this is a subject which deserves a more detailed treatment of its own.

13 | The Being and the Environment

IN the individual nature of every being there are two elements which need to be differentiated clearly, although at the same time it is also important to show as precisely as possible how they are interrelated.

In the first instance this individual nature proceeds or originates from what the being is in itself. In the second instance it proceeds from the sum total of the influences exerted on it by the environment in which it manifests. The first element represents the inward or active side of the being; the second its outward or passive side. It must of course be understood that when we speak of an individual being we are referring to its integral individuality; otherwise we risk forgetting that its corporeal modality is only the outermost aspect of its being.

The individuality's constitution is determined by the action of the first of the above two elements on the second; or in alchemical terms, Salt is the result of the action of Sulphur on Mercury. To understand this we can refer back once again to our geometrical representation of the ray of light and its plane of reflection.¹ To appreciate the relevance of this scheme we need to equate its vertical axis with the first of our two elements and the horizontal axis with the second. We then see that the vertical axis represents the link connecting all the different states of manifestation of one and the same being, and that this link necessarily symbolises that being's mode of expression—or, if you prefer, the mode of expression of its 'personality', in that it represents the direct line of projection used by this 'personality' to reflect itself at every level of its existence. As to the horizontal axis, this will represent the domain of one specific state of manifestation, understood here in

1. For a detailed study of this geometrical representation refer to our book *The Symbolism of the Cross*.

a 'macrocosmic' sense. It follows that the manifestation of the being in this state will be determined by the point of intersection of the vertical axis with the horizontal plane.

This being so, it is obvious that there can be nothing arbitrary about this point of intersection. In fact it is determined automatically by the vertical in question, inasmuch as this vertical is distinct from every other vertical. What this amounts to is that every being is what it is as opposed to being anything else that also happens to be manifesting in the same state of existence. Another way of putting this is to say that it is the individual being itself which by its own nature determines the specific conditions of its manifestation. Obviously we need to qualify this statement by adding that these conditions can in any particular case only be a specification of the general conditions of the state in question, because its manifestation must necessarily be a development of possibilities contained in that state as opposed to any other. Geometrically, this qualification is represented by the prior determination of the horizontal plane.

To recapitulate and also carry our analysis further: a being will manifest itself by clothing itself, so to speak, in elements taken from the environment, and the 'crystallisation' of these elements will be determined by the influence exerted on the environment by that being's own inner nature. As far as this inner nature itself is concerned, the fact that it acts in a vertical direction shows it to be something essentially supra-individual, and this is a point worth bearing in mind.

In the case of the individual human state, it is obvious that the environmental elements we just referred to will belong to the different modalities of that specific state: that is, some will be corporeal, others subtle or psychic. This point needs to be grasped clearly if we are to avoid running into certain difficulties arising from wrong or incomplete notions. For example, if we take the case of heredity, we can say that there is not only a physiological heredity, but also a psychic heredity. The two kinds of heredity have exactly the same explanation, both being due to the presence in a person's make-up of elements derived from the particular environment into which the individual was born.

There are, however, some people in the West who refuse to admit a psychic heredity. Knowing nothing beyond the psychic domain, they believe that the psychic element contains the essential nature of the being itself and represents what it is completely independently of all environmental influence. Conversely, there are others in the West who grant the existence of psychic heredity but believe themselves justified in taking this to mean that the being is totally and exclusively determined by the environment: in other words, that it is nothing more than nor less than what the environment makes it. The reason for this second belief is the same as the reason for the first: the failure to conceive of anything outside and beyond the corporeal and psychic domains. In other words, we have here two apparently opposite misconceptions which both stem from the same fundamental error. Adherents of the first position as well as the second reduce the being in its totality to nothing more than its individual manifestation, and both are equally unaware of any principle transcending this manifestation. Behind all these modern theories regarding the human being there still lurks the Cartesian dualism of 'body' and 'soul'.² In practice this boils down to a physiological and psychic duality that is—quite incorrectly—viewed as being irreducible, ultimate, and capable of embracing the whole being within its two terms. In fact the two terms represent only the superficial and external aspects of the manifested being and are no more than simple modalities of one and the same state of existence—that is, the state of existence represented by the horizontal plane we have been considering. In short, the physiological and the psychic are just as contingent as each other, and the true being is beyond them both.

Returning now to the question of heredity, we should add that it is not a full expression of the influences exerted on an individual by the environment, but only refers to those influences that are most readily apparent. In reality these influences extend much further; indeed we can say quite literally and without the slightest

2. We deliberately use the terms 'body' and 'soul' rather than 'body' and 'spirit' because, in the cases we are concerned with here, soul is mistaken for spirit, which itself remains completely ignored.

exaggeration that they extend indefinitely in every possible direction. In fact the cosmic environment, which is the domain of the state of manifestation we are considering, can only be conceived of as a whole of which each part is linked to every other part without any break in continuity. To try to conceive of it otherwise would be to assume the existence of a 'void', but this is not a possibility of manifestation and can have no place in the Cosmos.³ It follows that there must necessarily be relationships—which is basically to say that there must be reciprocal actions and reactions—between all the individual beings which are manifested in this domain, either simultaneously or successively.⁴ From the nearest to the most distant (and by that we mean distance in time as well as space), it is essentially just a question of differing proportions or degrees. As for heredity, whatever its relative significance compared with everything else, it now appears as just one particular case among many others.

Quite irrespective of whether we are dealing with hereditary or other influences, our initial statement at the beginning of this chapter holds true: a being's situation in the environment is in the last analysis determined by the nature of that particular being, and the elements which it takes from its immediate surroundings, as well as the elements—both subtle and corporeal—which it draws to itself from the indefinite totality of its particular domain of manifestation, will necessarily correspond in some way to that nature. If this was not the case it would be impossible for the being to assimilate those elements in such a way as to make them secondary modifications of itself. Here we have the explanation for that 'affinity' which dictates that a being coming into manifestation will only take from the environment whatever conforms with the possibilities which it bears within itself, and which belong to it alone and to no other being. In other words, as a result of this conformity it will take whatever is necessary to provide the

3. See *The Multiple States of Being*, chapter 3.

4. This is the case when we adopt the perspective represented by the horizontal axis in the geometrical analogy. If we view things according to the vertical axis, this solidarity between all beings is seen to be a consequence of the principal Unity from which all existence necessarily proceeds.

contingent conditions which will allow these possibilities to develop or 'actualise' themselves in the course of its individual manifestation.⁵ It should in fact be self-evident that for any relationship between two beings to be real it must necessarily be the expression of something inherent in the natures of both. So, the influence that a being might appear to undergo from the outside and to receive from another being is never anything else, when looked at from a more profound point of view, than a sort of translation in relation to the environment of a possibility inherent in the nature of the being itself.⁶

However, there is a sense in which it can be said that a being in its manifestation is in a very real way subject to the influence of the environment. But this is only the case when that influence is viewed in a negative light as representing a limitation for that particular being. This is an immediate consequence of the conditioned nature of every state of manifestation, in which the being inevitably finds itself subject to certain conditions which have a limitative role. These will consist in the first instance of the general conditions that serve to define the state in question, and in the second instance of the special conditions that define the particular mode of manifestation of that being in that state. It should be obvious that limitation as such has no positive existence, whatever the appearances, and amounts to no more than a restriction excluding certain possibilities, or a 'privation' in relation to what is thereby excluded. In short, however we may choose to express it, it is something purely negative.

There is of course another side to the coin, for fundamentally these limiting conditions are intrinsic to one specific state of manifestation and can only apply to whatever is included in that

5. The contingent conditions referred to here are what are sometimes called 'occasional causes'. But it goes without saying that they are not causes in the true sense of the word, although they may appear to be so when looked at from the most outward point of view. To discover the true causes of everything that happens to a being we must always look to the possibilities inherent in the very nature of the being—that is, they are always of a purely inward order.

6. We refer the reader to our remarks elsewhere (*Aperçus sur l'Initiation*, chapter 14) on the subject of disabilities of an apparently accidental origin and their bearing on the necessary qualifications for initiation.

state. That is, there can be no question of these conditions attaching to the being itself and following it into another state. Needless to say, to allow it to manifest in that other state it will encounter another set of conditions which will be analogous to the first; but these new conditions will be different to the conditions it was subject to in its previous state. Also, it will never be possible to describe those new conditions in terms suited to describing the old. Human language, for example, is incapable of describing conditions of existence different from those of the state to which it corresponds, for the simple reason that it is determined and, as it were, moulded by those conditions themselves.

This point may seem simple enough, but it is not so easy to grasp it fully. People usually have no trouble accepting that the elements drawn from the environment to contribute to the make-up of an individual human being (technically the stage of 'fixation' or 'coagulation' of these elements), must be restored to the environment (the stage of 'solution') when that individuality has terminated its cycle of existence and the being passes to another stage. Everyone can witness this process directly for themselves where the corporeal elements are concerned.⁷ But what seems less easy to accept, although the two things are closely linked in reality, is that on transferring to another state the being leaves behind completely all the conditions to which it was subject as a human individual.⁸ The inability to grasp this fact is doubtless due primarily to the impossibility of visualising (if not conceiving of) conditions which belong to a totally different order of existence and cannot be compared to anything belonging to the state of existence in which we live.

One major implication of all this is related to the fact that every individual being belongs to a certain species, such as the human

7. We should add that, strictly speaking, bodily death does not necessarily coincide with a change of state, and may just represent a change of modality within one and the same state of individual existence. But relatively speaking we can say that the same considerations apply in both cases.

8. Or alternatively only a part of the conditions to which it was subjected if it is just a case of a change of modality, such as in the transition to an extra-corporeal mode of the human individuality.

species. Obviously there must be something intrinsic in the nature of that being which has caused it to be born into one particular species as opposed to any other;⁹ and yet once it has been born into that species, from that moment onwards it will be subject to the conditions which are implied in the very definition of a species and which will be included among the special conditions of his mode of existence as an individual. Here we find side by side both the 'positive' and the 'negative' aspects of the specific nature: positive in the sense of being the domain of manifestation for certain possibilities, negative in the sense of being a restrictive condition of existence. But it is extremely important to understand that it is only as an individual manifested in the state under consideration that the being actually belongs to the species in question; in every other state the being escapes entirely from that species and no longer maintains any connection with it whatever. In other words, species is a purely 'horizontal' factor: that is, it only applies within the domain of one particular state of existence. For it to intervene in a vertical sense—that is to say when the being passes from one state to another—is altogether out of the question. Naturally what we have said here about species applies with even greater force to factors such as race and family—that is, to all the more or less restricted parts of the individual domain in which the being finds itself included by the conditions of its birth, at least for the duration of its manifestation in that particular state.¹⁰

By way of rounding off our comments on this subject, we would

9. It is significant in this respect that the Sanscrit word *jāti* means not only 'birth' but also 'species' or 'specific nature'.

10. Of course the question of caste is no exception here. On the contrary, it is the clearest of all possible instances of what we are speaking of, because by its very definition caste is nothing else than an expression of the individual nature (*varna*), and in fact is virtually identical to that nature. This merely goes to show that caste has no reality or existence unless the being is perceived within the limits of the individuality. As long as that being remains within those limits, so long does caste exist; but there can be no question of it continuing to exist for that particular being beyond those limits. The whole justification of its existence lies exclusively within them and could not possibly be transposed to another domain of existence, where the individual nature in question would no longer correspond to any possibility.

like to say a few words on the subject of what are called 'astral influences'. In the first place it needs emphasising that this expression is not to be understood primarily—let alone exclusively—in terms of the influences exerted on us by such-and-such a star or stars. Admittedly and without any doubt these influences—like any other influence exerted by anything else—are real enough in their own domain. And yet what the expression really means is that—chiefly symbolically—the stars represent the synthesis of all the various kinds of cosmic influences (primarily subtle rather than corporeal) to which individual beings are subject. When we say that the stars represent these influences 'symbolically', this is to be understood as meaning that they do so not in an 'idealised' or merely figurative way but because of real and precise correspondences based on the structure of the 'macrocosm' itself.

The usual way of regarding 'astral influences' is to think of them as factors that rule the individuality. However, this is only the most outward way of viewing the matter. If we consider the question from a more profound point of view, the truth is that if the individuality is connected with a clearly defined group of influences it is because this group of influences is the one that is consonant with the nature of the being that happens to be manifesting in that individuality. In other words, although 'astral influences' might appear to determine what the individual is, this is only the appearance, not the reality. The truth of the matter is that these influences do not determine the nature of the individual, but are merely an expression of it owing to the accord or harmony that necessarily exists between the individual and his environment. As we saw earlier, it is this harmony alone which makes it possible for the individual to realise the possibilities of which the entire course of its existence is simply a development.

In other words the real determination does not come from outside, but from the being itself. This brings us back to our earlier statement that in the production of Salt the active principle is Sulphur, whereas Mercury is only the passive principle. The outward signs simply make it possible—for those who know how to interpret them correctly—to discern the determination by, as it

were, giving it a sensory expression.¹¹ In practice what has just been said does nothing to modify the results that can be obtained from studying the ‘astral influences’; but from a doctrinal point of view it seems essential to clarify the true nature and function of these influences—in other words, the true nature of the relationship between the being and the environment in which its individual manifestation is actualised. The keypoint to bear in mind here is that the indefinite multitude of the various elements which together make up the environment in its totality is expressed through these influences in an intelligibly co-ordinated form.

We feel there is no need to elaborate any further on this subject, since we have already said enough to convey the essential fact that in a sense every individual being has a dual nature. In alchemical terms we could say that inwardly it is ‘sulphurous’ and outwardly ‘mercurial’. It is the fact that ‘true man’ alone is capable of fully realising and perfectly balancing this dual nature that makes him actually as well as potentially the ‘Son of Heaven and Earth’. At the same time, this dual nature is what qualifies him for fulfilling the function of ‘mediator’ between these two poles of manifestation.

11. Here, in broad outline, we have the fundamental principle that lies behind every application in the traditional sciences of so-called ‘divinatory’ techniques.

14 | The Mediator

‘It rises from Earth to Heaven and comes down again from Heaven to Earth, and so acquires the power of things above and the power of things below.’ This statement, from the Hermetic *Emerald Tablet*, can be applied word for word to Man as median term of the Great Triad: that is, it can be applied to Man in his role as ‘mediator’ responsible for maintaining communication between Heaven and Earth.¹

This ‘rising from Earth to Heaven’ is symbolised in the rituals of many different traditions by the actual ascent of a tree or pole, representing the ‘World Axis’. This ascent, inevitably followed by a re-descent, gives rise to a dual movement or process which corresponds to the stages of ‘solution’ and ‘coagulation’; and whoever genuinely realises the full implications of this rite thereby succeeds in assimilating the influences of Heaven and bringing them down into this world, where he then unites them with the terrestrial influences. At first this merging of influences takes place inside him; later, by participation and by a sort of ‘radiation’, in the whole surrounding Cosmos.²

1 The words can also be understood in a strictly initiatic context as an accurate delineation of the two aspects of realisation: one ‘ascending’, the other ‘descending’. But this is another point which it is impossible to elaborate on here.

2. It is incidentally worth mentioning in this connection that the fundamental significance of rites apparently aimed at ‘rain-making’ emerges quite clearly when one remembers that rain is frequently used to symbolise this descent of celestial influences. Obviously that significance will be totally independent of the ‘magical’ application which people assume to be the only one it has; and while of course we have no intention of denying the validity of this application, we wish merely to reduce it to its true value at a very contingent level.

It is interesting to observe that this rain symbolism has even been preserved—via the Hebrew tradition—in the Catholic liturgy itself: ‘Drop down, ye heavens, from above, and let the skies pour down righteousness’ (Isaiah 45:8: ‘*Rorate Coeli desuper, et nubes pluant Justum*’). The ‘righteousness’ alluded to here can be thought of as being the ‘mediator’ who ‘comes down again from Heaven to Earth’; equally it can be equated with that being who, in full and conscious possession of his celestial identity, appears in this world as the *Avatar*.

The Far-Eastern tradition, along with many other traditions,³ states that to begin with Heaven and Earth were not separate; in fact they are necessarily united and ‘undifferentiated’ in *T'ai Chi*, their common principle. But to allow for manifestation, a polarisation in Being has to occur. This polarisation gives rise to Essence on the one hand and Substance on the other, producing what can be called a ‘separation’ of these two complementary terms, the first of which is symbolised by Heaven, the second by Earth. The reason for this separation is to allow manifestation to take place in between the two, or (if such an expression is permissible) in the ‘interval’ between them.⁴

Once this separation has occurred, communication between Heaven and Earth can only be established along the axis connecting the centre of each state of existence to the centre of every other state of existence. In other words this axis—linking together the indefinite multitude of states of existence in a hierarchical whole to form universal manifestation—extends from one pole to the other, that is, from Heaven to Earth; and as we explained earlier, it can be viewed as a kind of measure of the distance between them in the vertical direction that marks the hierarchy of the states just mentioned.⁵ The centre of each state can therefore be considered as the trace of this vertical axis on the horizontal plane which, in geometrical terms, represents that particular state. Each such centre is in fact the ‘Invariable Middle’ (*Chung Yung*), which means it is the one and only point in that particular state where celestial and terrestrial influences are united. It is at the same time the only point from which direct communication with other states

3. Basically, the agreement extends to all traditions without exception. However, the specific point we wish to make here is that even the mode of expression used by the Far-Eastern tradition in this instance is not exclusive to it alone.

4. These comments can also be applied analogically at different levels, according to whether what is being considered is universal manifestation in its entirety, or only a particular state of manifestation (that is, one particular world) or even a more or less limited cycle in the existence of that world. In each case there will always be to begin with something that corresponds—in a more or less relative sense—to the ‘separation of Heaven and Earth’.

5. For further comments on the meaning of this vertical axis see *The Symbolism of the Cross*, chapter 23.

of existence is possible, because communication between the different states can only take place along the vertical axis.

So far as our own state of existence is concerned, its centre is man's normal 'place'. This of course is just another way of saying that 'true man' and this centre are identical, so that the union of Heaven and Earth in our state will take place exclusively in and through him. Here we have the reason why everything which is manifested in this state proceeds entirely from him and depends entirely on him, and only exists as it were as an outward and partial projection of his own possibilities. It is he who, by his 'action of presence', maintains and preserves the existence of our world,⁶ for he is its centre and without a centre nothing could actually exist. This basically is the reason for the existence in every tradition of rituals which affirm in a tangible and perceptible form man's intervention for the purpose of maintaining the cosmic order. Ultimately, all these rites are just so many different expressions of the function of 'mediation' which is essentially his.⁷

There are many traditional symbols which depict Man located between Heaven and Earth, where, as the middle term of the Great Triad, he fulfils his role of 'mediator'. We may as well mention at the outset that this is the broad significance of the trigrams in the *I Ching*. Each of the three lines of which they are composed corresponds to one of the three terms of the Great Triad, as we shall explain in greater detail later: the top line symbolises Heaven, the central line Man, and the bottom one Earth. As for the hexagrams, the upper and lower trigrams of which they are composed also correspond as units to Heaven and to Earth respectively. In this case the median term is no longer visibly depicted, but this is because the hexagram as a whole is an expression of the role of 'mediator' inasmuch as it unites the

6. In Islamic esotericism such a being is described as 'upholding the world just by breathing'.

7. Our use of the word 'expressions' is justified to the extent that these rites represent symbolically the function in question. However, we must not forget that it is by actually performing these rites that man truly and consciously fulfils this function. This is a direct consequence of the efficacy inherent in the rites and rituals—a fact that we have sufficiently explained elsewhere (particularly in *Aperçus sur l'Initiation*) to make any further repetition here unnecessary.

celestial and terrestrial influences. There is an obvious comparison to be drawn here with the 'Seal of Solomon', which is also made up of six lines (although arranged in a different fashion) and which, according to one of its meanings, consists of an upright triangle representing celestial nature and an inverted triangle representing terrestrial nature. The figure as a whole is therefore a symbol of 'Universal Man', who unites these two natures in himself and so is the perfect 'mediator'.⁸

Another well-known Far-Eastern symbol is the tortoise, placed between the upper and lower halves of its shell just like Man between Heaven and Earth. Not only the position but even the shapes of the two halves of the shell have their significance: the upper half, which 'covers' the animal, also corresponds to Heaven because of its rounded shape, while the lower half which 'supports' the animal corresponds to Earth by virtue of its flatness.⁹ Viewed as a whole, the shell is therefore an image of the Universe,¹⁰ while the tortoise itself, between its two parts, naturally represents the median term of the Great Triad, which is Man. Additionally, the withdrawal of the tortoise inside its shell symbolises concentration in the 'primordial state', which is the state of 'true man'; also, this concentration itself denotes the realisation of human possibilities in all their fullness. For although it can appear that the centre is merely a point devoid of extension, in fact when viewed from the principal standpoint it actually contains all things.¹¹ This is why 'true man' contains within himself every-

8. In specifically Christian terminology, this is the union of the divine and human natures in Christ, who in fact is a perfect embodiment of this 'mediatory' role: see *The Symbolism of the Cross*, chapter 28.

In the concept of 'Universal Man' this role — played by 'true man' solely in relation to one particular state of existence — is applied by analogical transposition to manifestation as a whole.

9. A plane surface as such is of course directly related to a straight line, which is an element of the square. In a purely negative way, plane surface and straight line can both be defined by the absence of any curvature.

10. Which is why the chart called *Lo Chu* was, according to tradition, presented to Yü the Great by a tortoise. Here we also have the origin of the use of the tortoise in some specialised applications (chiefly of a 'divinatory' nature) of the traditional sciences.

11. On the relation between point and extension see *The Symbolism of the Cross*, chapters 16 and 29.

thing that is manifested in the state of existence with whose centre he is identical.

We find a symbolism comparable to that of the tortoise in the case of the clothing worn by the ancient princes of China. As we have mentioned elsewhere,¹² this clothing was traditionally rounded in shape at the top (that is, at the collar) and square in shape at the bottom—roundness denoting Heaven and squareness Earth. Here we can add that this symbol is very closely related to that other one (on which more shortly) which locates Man between the square and the compasses, for these are the instruments used to draw a square and a circle respectively.

From this disposition of the clothing we also see that prototypal man—represented by the prince—was depicted in his role of effecting the union of Heaven and Earth as touching Heaven with his head while his feet rested on the Earth. We will have more to say about this further on, and will merely add here that it was not only the clothing of the prince or ruler that was given a symbolic meaning, but every action that he performed in his daily life. Everything he did down to the very last detail was determined and governed by ritual, and this meant that, as we just mentioned, he was regarded as the representative of prototypal man in all possible circumstances. Originally, of course, he will actually have been a ‘true man’; subsequently, as a result of the conditions of growing spiritual degeneracy that later affected humanity, this ideal could no longer be lived up to, but even so the ruler in exercising his function always continued in a sense to ‘incarnate’ ‘true man’ and take his place ritually, quite independently of what he might be in himself. That he continued to do this was all the more necessary in view of the fact that (as we shall see more clearly in due course) his function was essentially that of ‘mediator’.¹³

If we were to give a typical example of ritual actions of this kind, we could do no better than cite the Emperor’s circumambulation

12. *The Reign of Quantity and the Signs of the Times*, chapter 20.

13. We have already emphasised on other occasions the fundamental importance of making a general distinction between a traditional function and the being fulfilling it. The effectiveness of the first is strictly independent of the intrinsic worth or the worth as an individual of the second. See especially *Aperçus sur l’Initiation*, chapter 45.

of the *Ming T'ang*. As we will be dealing with this subject more fully later on, we will confine ourselves here to saying that the *Ming T'ang* was a kind of image of the Universe,¹⁴ concentrated as it were in a place that represented the 'Invariable Middle': the very fact that this central location was also the Emperor's place of residence automatically made him a living representation of 'true man'. Furthermore, the *Ming T'ang* was an image of the Universe not only in a spatial but also in a temporal sense, because in it the spatial symbolism of the cardinal points was directly associated with the temporal symbolism of the seasons and the annual cycle. Now the roof of his building was circular in shape while its base was either square or rectangular, and between the roof and the base (like the tortoise between the upper and lower halves of its shell) lived the Emperor as representative of Man situated midway between Heaven and Earth. This type of architectural design is also to be found, and with the identical symbolic meaning, in many other traditional forms. One has only to think of the Buddhist *stupas* or the Islamic *qubbah*, to name just two examples. Perhaps in future we will bring all these examples together in a separate study, and this certainly would be a project well worth undertaking, because it touches on a subject that is of the greatest relevance for an understanding of the initiatic meaning of building symbolism.

There is one other symbol that is interchangeable in terms of meaning with the symbols we have been discussing. This is the symbol of the commander in his chariot. With a circular canopy (representing Heaven) and a square-shaped floor (representing Earth), this chariot was in fact constructed on the same 'cosmic model' that was used for traditional buildings such as the *Ming T'ang*. Also, both canopy and floor were connected by a pole, which of course is an axial symbol;¹⁵ and a small section of the

14. In this it resembles the tortoise, with which it was in fact connected in the diagram of *Lo Chu* giving the plan for the building. We will have more to say about this shortly.

15. Although this axis is not always given visible form in the traditional buildings we have just mentioned, it always plays a fundamental role in their construction, which is regulated entirely with reference to it.

pole projected above the canopy¹⁶ as if to show that the 'pinnacle of Heaven' is really beyond Heaven itself. This pole was regarded as measuring symbolically the height of the prototypal man to whom the commander was assimilated—a height given by numerical proportions that varied according to the cyclic conditions of the period. In this way man himself was identified with the 'World Axis' so that he could effectively link Heaven and Earth. Strictly speaking we should add that this identification of man and axis will only have its full meaning and effectiveness in the case of 'transcendent man'. By contrast, 'true man' only corresponds to one point on the axis—that is, to the point which is the centre of his own state of existence—and his identification with the axis itself is only virtual. But this question of the relationship between 'true man' and 'transcendent man' requires a more detailed analysis which will find its natural place later in this book.

16. This detail also recurs in a number of other examples (especially in the case of the *stupa*). It has a far greater significance than at first sight it might seem to possess, for from the initiatic point of view it has to do with the symbolic representation of the 'departure from the Cosmos'.

15 | Between the Square and the Compasses

THERE is one particular subject which on examination reveals a most remarkable parallelism between the Far-Eastern tradition and the initiatic traditions of the West. This is the question of the symbolic values attached to the compasses and the square. As we pointed out earlier, these clearly correspond to the circle and the square;¹ that is, they correspond respectively to the geometrical figures representing Heaven and Earth.² Masonic symbolism, in conformity with this correspondence, normally places the pair of compasses on top and the square underneath.³ Between the two symbols we usually find the Blazing Star which is a symbol of Man⁴ and, more specifically, of 'regenerate man':⁵ with it, the Great Triad is completed. It is also stated explicitly that 'a Master Mason always finds himself between the square and the compasses'—in other words in the very 'place' in which the

1. In Chinese, as in English, the same word—*fang*—denotes both the instrument and the figure.

2. The different ways of positioning the compasses and square in relation to each other in the three degrees of Craft Masonry each have their own significance. To begin with, the celestial influences are portrayed as dominated by the terrestrial influences; then they are shown gradually detaching themselves, and finally as dominating the terrestrial influences in turn.

3. When these positions are reversed the symbol has a specific meaning that is to be compared with the inversion of the alchemical symbol for Sulphur as a sign that the 'Great Work' has been accomplished. Compare also the symbolism of the 12th Tarot trump.

4. The Blazing Star has five points, and 5 is the number of the 'microcosm'. This correlation is also explicitly affirmed in cases such as the Pentagram of Agrippa, which shows the star containing the actual figure of a man—head, arms and legs each corresponding to one point in the star.

5. According to an old ritual, 'the Blazing Star is the symbol of the Mason [one could equally well say of the initiate in general] ablaze with light in the middle of the darkness [of the profane world]'. This description is obviously an allusion to the statement in the Gospel of St. John: 'And the light shineth in darkness, and the darkness comprehended it not'.

Blazing Star is inscribed. As this 'place' is none other than the 'Invariable Middle',⁶ this means that the Master is being equated with 'true man' exercising the function of 'mediator' midway between Heaven and Earth. This equation is all the more exact because—at least symbolically and 'virtually' if not in actual fact—Mastery represents completion of the 'lesser mysteries'; and the goal of these mysteries is, precisely, the state of 'true man'.⁷ In other words, what we have here is a set of symbols that is strictly equivalent to the symbolism we have already encountered in various different forms in the Far-Eastern tradition.

We would like to mention another point while on the subject of Mastery. The characteristics of Mastery as we just described them correspond to the final grade in Freemasonry, and this fits in perfectly with the fact we have drawn attention to elsewhere,⁸ that the craft initiations (along with the initiations derived from them) all relate to the 'lesser mysteries'. This is certainly not to deny that in the so-called 'higher grades' (themselves composed of elements of very mixed origin) we find several allusions to the 'greater mysteries'. At least one of these allusions can be traced back directly to the ancient Operative Masonry, and this shows that originally Freemasonry was capable of opening perspectives onto regions that lay beyond the bounds of the 'lesser mysteries'. What we are specifically referring to here is the distinction made in Anglo-Saxon Freemasonry between Square Masonry and Arch Masonry. In the transition 'from square to arch'—or 'from triangle to circle',⁹ to use the terms adopted by eighteenth century

6. It is no coincidence that the Lodge of the Masters is also called the 'Middle Chamber'.

7. For its bearing on the Masonic formula just quoted, it is worth pointing out that the Chinese expression 'beneath Heaven' (*T'ien hsia*) which we mentioned earlier as a term for the cosmos as a whole is also open to another interpretation when considered from the strictly initiatic point of view. It then corresponds to the 'Temple of the Holy Spirit, which is everywhere' and which is the meeting-place of the Rosicrucians—who are also the 'true men' (see *Aperçus sur l'Initiation*, chapters 37 and 38). We will also mention in this connection that 'Heaven covers' and that Masonic activities must be carried out, precisely, 'under cover', so that the Lodge itself becomes an image of the Cosmos. See *The Lord of the World*, chapter 7.

8. *Aperçus sur l'Initiation*, chapter 39.

9. The triangle is here substituted for the square for the simple reason that both are

French Freemasonry to describe the same thing—we come back once again to the fundamental opposition between square (or, more generally, rectilinear) figures as representative of Earth, and circular figures as representative of Heaven. There can therefore be no doubt that we are concerned here with the passage from the human state represented by Earth to the supra-human states symbolised by Heaven (or the Heavens).¹⁰ In other words, what is being described here is transition from the domain of the ‘lesser mysteries’ to the domain of the ‘greater mysteries’.¹¹

To return to the parallelism between Western and Eastern tradition, we should add that the compasses and square are not only *implicitly* present in the Far-Eastern tradition in the sense that they are the instruments used for tracing the circle and the square: they also feature there explicitly. Perhaps the most important single example is their use as attributes of Fu Hsi and Niu Kua. Although we have already mentioned this fact before,¹² we did not then offer any explanation for one feature which at first sight could seem a strange anomaly. What we are referring to is the fact that—as a ‘celestial’ symbol and therefore *yang* or masculine—the pair of compasses should strictly speaking belong to Fu Hsi, and the square—a ‘terrestrial’ symbol and therefore *yin* or feminine—to Niu Kua. But in fact when Fu Hsi and Niu Kua are depicted together, linked by their serpent’s tails which correspond exactly to the two serpents of the caduceus, it is Fu Hsi who holds the square and Niu Kua who holds the compasses.¹³ We do not have to look very far for the cause of this

rectilinear figures and therefore interchangeable. The symbolism itself is not affected in the least.

10. Strictly speaking these terms do not have the same meaning that they do in the Great Triad—or rather, they correspond to the terms as used in the Great Triad but at a level which is internal to the manifested universe. In this respect they correspond to the terms used in the *Tribhuvana*, with the one exception that Earth here (i.e. Earth as symbolising the human state as a whole) should be understood as comprising both the Earth and the Atmosphere—or ‘intermediary region’—of the *Tribhuvana*.

11. The vault of heaven corresponds to the ‘canopy of perfection’ alluded to in certain grades of Scottish Freemasonry. We hope in a separate study to be able to examine in greater detail the architectural symbolism involved.

12. *The Reign of Quantity and the Signs of the Times*, chapter 20.

13. On the other hand no such inversion of attributes occurs in depictions of the

inversion, because what we have here is the same exchange of attributes that we mentioned earlier in relation to 'celestial' and 'terrestrial' numbers: an exchange which in cases such as this can very appropriately be described as 'hierogamic'.¹⁴ Otherwise it would hardly be possible to explain how the compasses could belong to Niu Kua, especially when we bear in mind that the specific sphere of activity ascribed to her defines her function as primarily one of maintaining the world's stability.¹⁵ What is more, this function allies her with the 'substantial' aspect of manifestation, and stability is expressed in geometrical symbolism by the cube.¹⁶ As far as the square is concerned, admittedly it could be argued that in a sense it is also an appropriate symbol for Fu Hsi in his capacity as 'Lord of the Earth', and serves as the instrument which he uses to measure it.¹⁷ He will then correspond to 'the Worshipful Master who rules by the square', as he is described in Masonic symbolism.¹⁸ But if this is so it is because—

Hermetic *Rebis*: here the compasses are held by the masculine half (associated with the Sun) and the square by the feminine half (associated with the Moon). As for the correspondences with Sun and Moon, it is worth recalling our comments in an earlier note on the numbers 10 and 12, and also the words of the *Emerald Tablet*: 'The Sun is its father, the Moon its Mother'. This statement refers precisely to the *Rebis* or 'Androgyne' which is the 'single thing' containing in itself the combined 'virtues of Heaven and Earth'. The 'Androgyne' is of course 'single' as far as its essence is concerned; so far as its outward aspects are concerned it is dual—*res bina*—just like the cosmic force we spoke of earlier. The symbolic serpent's tails with which Fu Hsi and Niu Kua are portrayed are of course also reminiscent of this cosmic force.

14. Granet himself (*La Pensée chinoise*, p.363) specifically acknowledges this interchange between compasses and square, as well as between odd and even numbers. Unfortunately this has not prevented him from making the mistake of defining the pair of compasses as a 'feminine emblem', as he does elsewhere (p.267, note).

15. See *The Reign of Quantity and the Signs of the Times*, chapter 25.

16. This interchange of attributes between Fu Hsi and Niu Kua can be compared with the situation in the third and fourth Tarot trumps, where a celestial symbolism (stars) is ascribed to the Empress and a terrestrial symbol (cubical stone) to the Emperor. Also, in position and sequence the Empress is associated with the number 3, which is odd, while the Emperor corresponds to the even number 4: the same transposition expressed in a different way.

17. We will return to this idea of measuring the Earth when we discuss the lay-out of the *Ming T'ang*.

18. As organised and governed by Fu Hsi and his successors, the Empire was constituted—just like the Masonic Lodge—in such a way as to present an image of the whole Cosmos.

in himself and no longer in association with Niu Kua—he is himself *yin-yang*, re-integrated in the state and nature of ‘primordial man’. From this new perspective the square itself acquires a different significance. The fact that it contains two arms set at right angles to each other invites us to interpret it as the reunion of the horizontal and the vertical; and as we have seen earlier, horizontal in one of its senses corresponds to Earth, or *yin*, and vertical to Heaven or *yang*. This is precisely the reason why, in Masonic symbolism as well, ‘the Worshipful Master’s square is regarded as the union or synthesis of level and perpendicular.’¹⁹

We would like to add one final comment on the stylised depictions of Fu Hsi and Niu Kua. Fu Hsi is shown on the left, Niu Kua on the right.²⁰ This of course agrees with the pre-eminence generally attributed in the Far-Eastern tradition to the left over the right, which we explained earlier.²¹ But also, Fu Hsi holds the square in his left hand while Niu Kua holds the compasses in her right. Here the connotations of the symbols themselves call to mind the saying we have already quoted: ‘The Way of Heaven has preference for the right; the Way of Earth prefers the left’.²²

By way of summary, an example such as this shows very clearly how perfectly coherent traditional symbolism always is. But at the same time it also shows that it will never lend itself to any form of more or less rigid ‘systematisation’. The reason for this is that

19. Level and perpendicular are also attributes of the two Wardens and consequently are brought into relationship with the two terms of the complementarity represented by the two pillars of the Temple of Solomon.

It is also worth noting that whereas Fu Hsi’s square is depicted with arms of equal length, that of the Venerable One’s normally has arms of unequal lengths. Generally speaking it could be assumed that it is just a question here of the difference between a square and an elongated rectangle; but in fact the inequality of the arms is also related specifically to a ‘secret’ of Operative Masonry regarding the formation of a right-angled triangle with sides proportional to the numbers 3, 4 and 5. Later in this study we will have more to say about the symbolism of this triangle.

20. Here of course ‘right’ and ‘left’ are meant to indicate the right and left of the figures themselves as opposed to the right and left of an observer.

21. By way of contrast, in the *Rebis* figure the masculine half is on the right, the feminine half on the left. Also, the figure only has two hands; the right one holds the compasses, the left the square.

22. *Chou Li*.

traditional symbolism must remain capable of responding to and reflecting each and every one of the countless varying perspectives from which everything in existence can be viewed. Thanks to this, it opens up possibilities for understanding which are literally unlimited.

16 | The Ming T'ang

TOWARDS the end of the third millennium B.C. China was divided into nine provinces,¹ and these provinces were arranged geometrically as in the following diagram (figure 16).

This division of the provinces—one at the centre, and the remaining eight at the four cardinal points and the four intermediate points—is ascribed by tradition to Yü the Great (*Ta Yü*).² The story goes that he travelled across the world to 'measure the Earth'; and as he did his measuring in the form of a square, we see here the use to which the square was put as the instrument ascribed to the Emperor as 'Lord of the Earth'.³

4	9	2
3	5	7
8	1	6

Figure 16

Legend says that Yü the Great derived the inspiration for his division into nine from a diagram called *Lo Chu*, the 'Writing of the Lake'. This diagram was brought to him by a tortoise,⁴ and it shows the nine primary

1. The China of that time was apparently the territory between the Yellow River and the Blue River.

2. The extraordinary similarity between the names and epithets of Yü the Great and *Hu Gadarn* in Celtic tradition is curious, to say the least. Are we to suppose subsequent 'localisations' of one and the same 'prototype' which itself goes back much further in time — perhaps even to the primordial Tradition itself? In fact, however, this parallel is no more striking than the parallelisms we noted elsewhere when discussing the 'island of the four Masters' visited by Emperor Yao—the very same Emperor whom Yü the Great originally served as minister. See *The Lord of the World*, chapter 9.

3. This particular square (as we mentioned earlier) had arms of equal length, for the simple reason that both the Empire itself and its divisions were regarded as being perfect squares.

4. The other traditional diagram is the *Ho Tu* or 'River Scene'; the numbers in it are arranged in an intersecting 'cross' shape. As the *Lo Chu* is associated with Yü the Great and the tortoise, so the *Ho Tu* is linked with Fu Hsi and the dragon.

numbers arranged in the form of the so-called 'magic square'.⁵ By applying this division to the Empire, Yü the Great turned it into an image of the universe.

In this 'magic square'⁶ the central place is occupied by the number 5, which is itself the 'middle' of the nine primary numbers.⁷ It is also, as we saw earlier, the 'central' number of Earth, as 6 is the 'central' number of Heaven.⁸ The central province corresponding to this number was where the Emperor lived; its name was the 'Middle Kingdom' (*Chung Kuo*).⁹ Later, as we are supposed to understand, this term was applied by transference to China as a whole.

However, there are grounds for calling into question this notion of subsequent transference of the designation 'Middle Kingdom' to the whole of China. In fact just as the 'Middle Kingdom' occupied a central position in the Empire, so from the very beginning the Empire itself in its entirety could be conceived of as occupying an analogous position in relation to the world as a whole. This is after all an immediate logical consequence of the fact that the Empire was constituted, as we just said, in such a way

5. We have no choice but to use this expression for the simple reason that no better way of describing it exists. However, it has the disadvantage of highlighting only one—very specialised—use of numerical squares of this kind, i.e. their use in connection with the making of talismans. The basic property of these squares is that the numbers on every line—vertical, horizontal and also diagonal—always add up to the same number, which in this particular case is 15.

6. If we replace the number at the centre by the *yin-yang* symbol (figure 9), and the other numbers by the eight *kua* or trigrams, we end up with a square or 'terrestrial' equivalent of the usual circular or 'celestial' diagram. This contains the *kua* arranged either in the 'primary Heaven' (*shen T'ien*) format associated with Fu Hsi, or in the 'secondary Heaven' (*kou T'ien*) format attributed to Wen Wang.

7. 5 multiplied by 9 is 45, and the sum total by addition of all nine numbers in the square—of which the number 5 is the 'centre'—is also 45.

8. It is worth recalling here our earlier comments on $5 + 6 = 11$ as expressing the 'central union of Heaven and Earth' (above, chapter 8). In the square, every number added to its (symmetrically) opposite number produces $10 = 5 \times 2$. Also worth noting is the fact that the odd, or *yang*, numbers occupy the central position on each side of the square (the cardinal points) and form a cross (dynamic aspect). On the other hand, the even or *yin* numbers occupy the corners of the square (the intermediary points) and define or delimit the square itself (static aspect).

9. Compare the Kingdom of *Mide*, or 'Middle' Kingdom, in ancient Ireland. However, in this case the kingdom was surrounded by only four other kingdoms, each one corresponding to one of the cardinal points. See *The Lord of the World*, chapter 9.

as to form an image of the universe. The fundamental significance of this fact is that in reality everything is contained in the centre, for in an 'archetypal' sense everything that is to be found anywhere in the entire universe can be discovered in the centre. This allows for the possibility of an entire series of similar¹⁰ images, arranged concentrically and on an ever-decreasing scale, and culminating at the very centre in the Emperor's place of residence.¹¹ As for the Emperor himself, we have already seen that he occupied the position of 'true man', and fulfilled the function of 'true man' as 'mediator' between Heaven and Earth.¹²

This 'central' position attributed to the Chinese Empire in relation to the world as a whole should cause no surprise. After all, we find the identical phenomenon in every single country where the spiritual centre of a particular tradition was established. In each case the centre was an emanation or reflection of the highest spiritual centre—that is, of the centre of the primordial Tradition itself, from which all legitimate formal traditions are derived through adaptation to circumstances of time and place. Thanks to this process of derivation and adaptation, each subsequent centre was created in the image of this supreme centre, with which in a virtual sense it was identified.¹³ That is why each country containing such a spiritual centre became a 'Holy Land', and hence the symbolic names given to these countries such as 'Centre of the World' or 'Heart of the World'. For anyone belonging to the tradition that had its home in such a country these names were a living reality, because it was through the secondary centre corresponding to that tradition that communication with the supreme

10. This word should be understood in the same technical sense that we find in geometry in the expression 'similar figures'.

11. This central point was not exactly the same as what the formula used in Western initiations calls *centrum in trigono centri*; rather, it could be described as *centrum in quadrato centri*.

12. Other traditions also have comparable cases of a 'concentration' in successive stages. In *The Lord of the World* (chapter 6) we mentioned one from the Hebrew Kabbalah: 'The Tabernacle of the Holiness of *Jehovah* in which the *Shekhinah* resides is the Holy of Holies, which is the heart of the Temple, which in turn is the centre of Zion (Jerusalem), just as holy Zion is the centre of the Land of Israel and the Land of Israel is the centre of the world'.

13. See *The Lord of the World*, and also *Aperçus sur l'Initiation*, chapter 10.

spiritual centre was possible.¹⁴ The place where this secondary centre was established was destined—in the language of the Hebrew Kabbalah—to be the place of manifestation of the *Shekhinah* or 'Divine Presence'.¹⁵ In Far-Eastern terminology it is the point where the 'Action of Heaven' is directly reflected: that is, as we have seen, it is the 'Invariable Middle' at the meeting-point between the 'World Axis' and the realm of human possibilities.¹⁶ It is crucially important to observe here that the *Shekhinah* has always been depicted as 'Light', just as the 'World Axis'—as we have already pointed out—is symbolically described as a 'ray of light'.

We mentioned a short while ago that just as the Chinese Empire as a whole was an image of the universe owing to its method of arrangement and division, so also a similar image should be discoverable in the central location marked by the Emperor's residence. This was indeed the case. The name of this central image was *Ming T'ang*, which certain sinologists—unable to see beyond its most external aspect—have translated as 'House of the Calendar'. In fact, however, the name literally means 'Temple of Light'. The connection between this and what we said a moment ago about the *Shekhinah* and the World Axis should hardly need emphasising.¹⁷ The Chinese character *ming* is in fact

14. In the note before last we cited the Land of Israel as one example of a country being identified with the 'Centre of the World'. To give just one other example, we will cite the case of ancient Egypt. According to Plutarch (*Isis and Osiris*, chapter 33), 'the Egyptians call their country *Chemia* [*Kemi*, or 'black earth': hence the word 'alchemy'] and compare it to a heart'. Whatever geographical or other justifications for this comparison may have been provided at an exoteric level, its true justification lies in Egypt's being identified with the 'Heart of the World'.

15. See *The Lord of the World*, chapter 3; *The Symbolism of the Cross*, chapter 7. This is exactly the role ascribed to the Temple of Jerusalem in the Hebrew tradition. Hence the Tabernacle or Holy of Holies was called *mishkan*, the 'divine abode', and only the High Priest himself was allowed to enter it, with the specific purpose of fulfilling—just like the Emperor of China—his function as 'mediator'.

16. The determination of a location actually capable of representing this 'Invariable Middle' was essentially a task reserved for the traditional science which on other occasions we have referred to as 'sacred geography'.

17. It is not out of place here to compare this meaning of the term *Ming T'ang* with the identical sense implicit in the word 'Lodge', which we have already commented on elsewhere (*Aperçus sur l'Initiation*, chapter 46. Hence the Masonic expression 'place of great illumination and decorum': see *The Lord of the World*, chapter 3). Also, both *Ming*

made up of two different characters, one of which represents the Sun, the other the Moon. It therefore expresses the idea of light in both its modes of manifestation: direct on the one hand, reflected on the other. The reason for this is that although light in itself is essentially *yang*, in order to manifest itself it must—like everything else—assume two complementary aspects, one *yang*, the other *yin*.¹⁸ In the sphere of manifestation, *yang* can never be found without *yin* or *yin* without *yang*, and while the Sun corresponds to *yang*, the Moon corresponds to *yin*.¹⁹

The *Ming T'ang* was designed on exactly the same lines as the division of the Empire explained above (figure 16). It contained nine different rooms arranged in exactly the same pattern as the nine provinces—with the one difference that the *Ming T'ang* and its rooms were not exact squares but rectangles of varying degrees of elongation. These degrees of elongation varied from dynasty to dynasty, just like the height of the chariot pole that we mentioned

T'ang and Lodge are images or symbols of the Cosmos (or *Loka*, taking this Sanskrit term in its etymological sense), viewed as the realm or 'field' of manifestation of the Light: see *The Reign of Quantity and the Signs of the Times*, chapter 3.

It is also worth noting the way that the *Ming T'ang* is reproduced in the initiation places which belonged to the *T'ien Ti Hwei* (cf. B. Favre, *Les Sociétés secrètes en Chine*, pp. 138–9, 170). One of the principal mottoes of this organisation is 'To destroy the darkness (*ching*) and restore the light (*ming*)', just as the Master Masons must work to 'spread the light and gather in what is scattered'. The narrow interpretation of this motto in recent times as referring on the principle of 'homophony' to the *Ming* and *Ch'ing* dynasties only applies to one contingent and temporary goal assigned to certain exoteric 'emanations' of this organisation which worked purely in the social and even political domain.

18. We have already discussed the initiatic meaning of 'Light' in sufficient detail elsewhere: see *Aperçus sur l'Initiation*, especially chapters 4, 46 and 47. As far as the 'central' position of Light in manifestation is concerned, it is also worth recalling our earlier remarks on the Blazing Star as a symbol of regenerated Man, whose place is at the 'Centre' between the square and the compasses which, like the base and the roof of the *Ming T'ang*, correspond to Earth and Heaven respectively.

19. In the Hindu tradition Sun and Moon are the two eyes of *Vaishvanara*, associated with the two currents of subtle force. The Sun corresponds to the right-hand current (the *yang* aspect of the cosmic force that we spoke of earlier), the Moon to the left-hand current (the *yin* aspect of the same force): see *Man and his Becoming according to the Vedanta*, chapters 13 and 21. The Far-Eastern tradition calls the Sun the 'eye of day' and the Moon the 'eye of night'; it should hardly be necessary to repeat that day is *yang* and night *yin*.

earlier. Without going into details²⁰—for it is the principle alone that concerns us here—it will be sufficient just to state that these variations were connected with the different cyclic periods to which these dynasties corresponded.

There were twelve entrances to the *Ming T'ang*, three on each of its sides; the rooms at the centre of each side had only one entrance, while the corner rooms had two. These twelve entrances corresponded to the twelve months of the year: the three on the east side to the three months of spring, the three on the south side to the months of summer, the three on the west to the months of autumn and the three on the north to the winter months. The twelve doors accordingly made up a zodiac.²¹ In this respect they corresponded exactly to the twelve gates of the 'heavenly Jerusalem' as described in the Apocalypse,²² which also is both the 'Centre of the World' and a symbolic image of the Universe in both a spatial and a temporal sense.²³

During the course of the annual cycle, the Emperor completed a circumambulation of the *Ming T'ang* in what we earlier called the 'solar' direction (figure 14). He would proceed in turn from one station to the next, each station corresponding to one of the entrances; and at each of the twelve stations he would pronounce the edicts (*yüeh ling*) appropriate to that month. In this way he identified himself in turn with each of the 'twelve suns', which are the twelve *adityas* of Hindu tradition, and also the 'twelve fruits of the Tree of Life' according to the symbolism of the Apocalypse.²⁴ This circumambulation always included a return to the centre,

20. They are discussed by Granet in *La Pensée chinoise*, pages 250–75.

The ritual of marking off the area for a building such as the *Ming T'ang* was equivalent to the determination of a *templum* in the original and etymological sense of the word. See *Aperçus sur l'Initiation*, chapter 17.

21. This square format is strictly speaking a terrestrial projection of the circular form of the celestial zodiac.

22. See *The Lord of the World*, chapter 11; *The Reign of Quantity and the Signs of the Times*, chapter 20. The 'Heavenly Jerusalem' is also laid out in the form of a square.

23. At the end of each cycle time itself is also 'changed into space' so that all of its separate phases can then be viewed simultaneously. See *The Reign of Quantity and the Signs of the Times*, chapter 23.

24. See *The Lord of the World*, chapters 4 and 11; *The Symbolism of the Cross*, chapter 9.

marking the midpoint of the year.²⁵ Exactly the same procedure was followed when the Emperor visited his Empire: he would go from province to province in the corresponding sequence, and then return to his residence at the centre. And according to Far-Eastern tradition it was the same again with the Sun itself, which after completing a cycle—whether the cycle of a day, a month or a year—always goes back to rest on its tree. This tree of course stands for the ‘World Axis’, just as does the ‘Tree of Life’ situated at the centre of the ‘terrestrial Paradise’ and the ‘heavenly Jerusalem’.

From all this it will be apparent that the Emperor’s role was that of ‘regulator’ of the cosmic order itself. This role naturally presupposes that the influences of Heaven and Earth will achieve union either in him or through him. As we mentioned earlier, there is a sense in which these influences correspond respectively to the temporal and spatial determinations which we find co-ordinated and directly related to each other in the *Ming Tang*.

25. If the year begins at the spring equinox, this annual mid-point falls at the autumn equinox. As a rule this was generally the case in the Far-Eastern tradition, although at certain periods alterations occurred in line with the changes in orientation which we mentioned earlier. That the year should begin at the spring equinox is after all only to be expected when we consider the geographical localisation of this particular tradition, given that East corresponds to spring. It is perhaps worth repeating here that the East-West axis is equinoctial, whereas the North-South axis is solstitial.

17 | Wang: The King-Pontiff

THERE are some other points that still need going into before we can say we have fully explained the royal function in the Far-Eastern tradition. In fact even to speak of 'royal function' is itself a misnomer that is only too likely to mislead: for although the *Wang* is effectively the King in the true sense of the word, he is also something else besides.

To see why and how this is the case, we have only to look at the character *wang* itself (figure 17). It is made up of three horizontal strokes that correspond to Heaven, Man and Earth, just as in the case of the trigrams we studied earlier. Also, uniting the three strokes at their centres is a vertical stroke, for—as the etymologists explain—'the function of the King is to unite'. The positioning of the vertical stroke indicates that by 'union' here we are primarily meant to understand the uniting of Heaven and Earth.



Figure 17

From this we see that the character as a whole is a symbol of Man: Man as the median term of the Great Triad, and specifically Man in his role as 'mediator'. So as to be even more precise, it is worth adding that the character is a symbol not just of 'primordial man', but of 'Universal Man'. The vertical stroke stands for the axis effectively uniting every state of existence; but the centre where 'primordial man' is situated—marked by the point of intersection of the vertical stroke and the horizontal stroke—corresponds to only one state: the individual human state.¹ Fur-

1. Granet seems not to have understood the relationship between axis and centre. He states (*La Pensée chinoise*, p.104) that 'The concept of the centre is far from primitive; it was simply substituted for the concept of the axis'. But the two symbols have in fact always co-existed; they are in no sense equivalent to each other, and are consequently not interchangeable. This is a good example of the misconceptions that can result from the biased approach of insisting on viewing everything 'historically'.

thermore, the part of the character that strictly refers to Man is—remembering that the top and bottom horizontal strokes correspond to Heaven and Earth—the vertical stroke plus the central horizontal stroke; and these two strokes form a cross, which is the supreme symbol of ‘Universal Man’.² This identification of *Wang* with ‘Universal Man’ is confirmed yet again by texts such as this excerpt from Lao Tzu: ‘The Way is great, Heaven is great, Earth is great, and the King also is great. In the middle there are four great things, but of these only the King is visible’.³

Because the *Wang* is essentially ‘Universal Man’, it follows that whoever is his representative and fulfils his function must at least in principle be a ‘transcendent man’—that is, someone who has realised the final goal of the ‘greater mysteries’. For the reasons we gave earlier, this means he is capable of identifying himself effectively with the ‘Central Way’ or ‘Middle Way’ (*Chung Tao*). In other words he can identify himself with the axis itself—whether that axis is represented by the chariot pole, the central pillar of the *Ming T’ang*, or any other equivalent symbol. Because he has developed all his possibilities in both a vertical and a horizontal sense, he can fittingly be described as ‘Lord of the Three Worlds’⁴—each world corresponding to one of the three horizontal strokes of the character *wang*.⁵ Viewed specifically in his relationship to the world of men, he is also the ‘One and

2. Hence our reason for depicting the middle term of the Great Triad in figure 6 in the form of a cross.

3. *Tao Te Ching*, chapter 25. It is worth noting in passing that this text alone is enough to refute those orientalist who, because they insist on interpreting everything in a ‘material’ sense, fail to distinguish between the symbol and the thing symbolised and so assume that Heaven and Earth in the Far-Eastern tradition are only the visible heaven and earth.

4. See *The Lord of the World*, chapter 4. For the reader interested in the parallels with other traditions, we will mention that here lies the explanation of Hermes’ title *trismegistos*, ‘Three-times Greatest’; furthermore, Hermes is also described as both ‘king’ and ‘pontiff’. The title ‘Three-times Greatest’ applied to Hermes can also be compared with the title ‘Three-times Mighty’ which is used in the ‘grades of perfection’ of Scottish Freemasonry and which strictly speaking refers to the delegation of a power that is to be exercised within the Three Worlds.

5. This requires a change of perspective analogous to the one we described earlier when defining the relationship between the *Tribhuvana* and the Far-Eastern Triad.

only Man' who is the synthesis and integral expression of Humanity, as Humanity in turn is the synthesis of the 'ten thousand beings'—in other words of the totality of the beings in this world;⁶ we refer here to Humanity as a specific nature from the cosmic point of view, and as the human collectivity from the social point of view. This is why such a man is the 'regulator' of both the cosmic order and the social order, as we mentioned earlier.⁷ When he fulfils the function of 'mediator', really it is all men who fulfil it in his person. This is the reason why in China only the *Wang* or Emperor was allowed to perform the public rites associated with this function. Chief among these rites—in fact the one on which all the others were patterned—was the sacrificial offering to Heaven, because here more than anywhere else the function of 'mediator' is affirmed most clearly.⁸

To the extent that the vertical axis can be equated with the *Wang* himself, one of its names is the 'Royal Way' (*Wang Tao*). On the other hand it is also the 'Way of Heaven' (*T'ien Tao*), as can be seen from figure 7 where the vertical stands for Heaven, and the horizontal for Earth. It follows from this that the 'Royal Way' and the 'Way of Heaven' are one and the same;⁹ and in fact the role of

6. The title 'Lord of the Three Worlds' corresponds here to the vertical perspective, while the role of 'One and only Man' corresponds to the horizontal.

7. Etymologically speaking, the Latin word *rex*, 'king', is itself an expression of this 'regulatory' function, even though this role of the king is usually only taken to apply at a purely social level.

8. As a matter of fact the sacrifice to Heaven also features in initiatic organisations; but there the rites are not public and so there can be no question of any 'usurpation'. When the emperors themselves were initiates they could only adopt one attitude to these sacrifices and that was simply to ignore them, which in fact is what they did. However, it often happened that rulers who were not initiates did what they could to stamp them out—without much success. Their reason for attempting to do so was their failure to understand that others apart from themselves were effectively and 'personally' what they themselves only were symbolically, by virtue of exercising the traditional function with which they had been invested.

9. Regarding the 'Way of Heaven' it is worth citing this passage from the *I Ching*: 'To establish the Way of Heaven: that is *yin* plus *yang*. To establish the Way of Earth: that is soft (*jou*) plus hard (*yo*). To establish the Way of Man: that is humanity plus justice (or kindness plus equity)'. Applied to the three terms of the Great Triad, this refers to the neutralising and unifying of the pairs of complementaries which results in the return to the principal indistinction. (It is worth noting that the two complementary terms which refer to Man are identical to the two pillars on either side of the Sephirothic Tree in the Kabbalah: Mercy and Severity.)

Wang can only be conferred on someone who has been granted the 'mandate of Heaven' (*T'ien ming*),¹⁰ which in practical terms means that he is recognised as the legitimate Son of Heaven (*T'ien Tzu*).¹¹ There is of course only one way that this mandate can be received: down the vertical axis. This—the one and only and invariable direction of the 'Activity of Heaven'—is both opposite and complementary to the direction in which the 'mediatory' function itself operates. To be the recipient of this descending influence presupposes at the very least the capacity of 'true man', if not of 'transcendent man', effectively established in the 'Invariable Middle': for there is no other point of intersection between the axis and the human domain apart from this central point.¹²

The vertical axis can also be described in different terms. According to one particular form of symbolism common to most traditions, it is the 'bridge' connecting Earth to Heaven (as in the case we have just been discussing); or connecting the human state of existence with other, supra-individual states; or linking the sensory world to the world beyond the senses. Each of these possibilities is just a different expression of the same, fundamental idea of the 'World Axis': sometimes viewed as a whole, sometimes—depending on the universality of the application—limited to a section of it of varying extent. What emerges clearly is that the 'bridge' must be understood as being essentially vertical¹³—a point of considerable significance which we will perhaps

10. The word *ming*, 'mandate', is a homophone for the word meaning 'light', as well as for other words signifying 'name' and 'destiny'. The power of the Sovereign derives from the power of the Principle. It is Heaven that chooses who is to be the Sovereign' (*Chuang Tzu*, chapter 12).

11. We refer the reader to our comments earlier in this book on Man as 'Son of Heaven and Earth'.

12. It is generally accepted that the 'mandate of Heaven' can only be received directly by the founder of a dynasty, who then transfers or transmits it to his successors. However, if as a result of degeneration those successors lose the mandate because of their lack of 'qualification', that particular dynasty must automatically come to an end and be replaced by another. In this way every dynasty follows a descending curve in the course of its existence; from its relative point in time and space, this curve corresponds in a certain way to the descending course in the great cycles of terrestrial humanity.

13. Compare *āl-Širaṭ al-Mutaqūm* in the Islamic tradition (see *The Symbolism of the Cross*, chapter 25). Another example worth citing is the *Chinwat* bridge in Mazdeism.

expand on in a later study. We can now understand why the *Wang* is, precisely, the *Pontifex* in the strictly etymological sense of the word.¹⁴ To be even more specific, the fact that he is identified with the axis means that he is not only the builder of the bridge but the bridge itself. Taking this one step further, it could also be said that this bridge—making possible as it does communication with the higher states and, through them, with the Principle itself—can only be established by someone who is effectively identified with it. Hence our insistence on using the expression ‘King-Pontiff’ as the only adequate translation of the word *Wang*, for the simple reason that it is the only one which fully describes the function implied by the term. From this it will be seen that the function has a double aspect: it is both a priestly and a royal function at the same time.¹⁵

The reason for this double aspect is quite easy to understand. Whether or not a particular *Wang* is actually a ‘transcendent man’ (as in principle he should be), or just a ‘true man’ who has completed the ‘lesser mysteries’, he will in either case have already attained that ‘central’ position which is beyond any distinction between spiritual and temporal power. Speaking in terms of ‘cyclical’ symbolism, he could be described as being ‘prior’ to this distinction through his reintegration in the ‘primordial state’. On the one hand this state precedes the differentiation of specific functions; on the other hand it contains in itself the possibilities of every conceivable function, because it represents the integral

14. Cf. *Autorité spirituelle et pouvoir temporel*, chapter 4.

15. The question could well be asked why we speak of a ‘King-Pontiff’ rather than a ‘Pontiff-King’. ‘Pontiff-King’ would at first sight seem more logical: the ‘pontifical’ or priestly function is by its very nature superior to the regal function, and this would suggest that it would be appropriate to mention it first. However, the expression ‘King-Pontiff’ also has its justification: the regal function is obviously more ‘outward’ than the priestly, and the traditional practice is to refer first to the ‘outward’ and only then to the ‘inward’, as in the case of the expression *yin-yang* which we discussed earlier. In fact the priesthood is *yang* relative to royalty, and royalty *yin* relative to the priesthood, as Ananda K. Coomaraswamy has shown so well in his book *Spiritual Authority and Temporal Power in the Indian Theory of Government* (New Haven, 1942). The symbolism of the keys also points to the identical conclusion, for the key corresponding to the priesthood is vertical, made of gold, and associated with the Sun, whereas the key representing royalty is horizontal, made of silver, and associated with the Moon.

fullness of the human state.¹⁶ In every case, and even when he is 'One and only Man' in just a symbolic sense, by virtue of the 'mandate of Heaven'¹⁷ he represents the very source or common principle of the two differentiated powers. From this one principle, spiritual authority and the priestly function derive by a direct line of descent, while temporal power and the royal function derive from it indirectly via the spiritual and the priestly. This principle can with every justification be called 'celestial'. From it, through the priestly and the royal functions, the spiritual influences descend gradually along the axis, first into the 'intermediary world' and then into the terrestrial world itself.¹⁸

As we have explained, the *Wang* receives the 'mandate of Heaven' either directly or indirectly. If he receives it directly, this means he identifies with the axis in its ascensional aspect actually and through himself; we have already mentioned the rites corresponding to this ascension, so there is no need to discuss them again. If on the other hand he only receives the mandate indirectly, he also identifies himself with the axis in the same ascensional direction, but only virtually and as a result of carrying out his function; in this case it is obvious, for example, that rites such as the sacrifice to Heaven are 'ascensional' in their action. Whichever the case, the *Wang* becomes as it were the 'channel' through which the influences descend from Heaven to Earth.¹⁹

16. Cf. *Autorité spirituelle et pouvoir temporel*, chapter 1 and, on the 'return' of the cycle to the 'primordial state' in the 'lesser mysteries', *Aperçus sur l'Initiation*, chapter 39.

17. This means he holds the mandate by transmission, as we indicated earlier. This is what allows him when performing his function to assume the role of 'true man', or even of 'transcendent man', without necessarily having realised these states 'personally'. We have a comparable situation in the transmission of the spiritual influence or *barakah* in Islamic initiatic organisations: the fact of transmission permits a *khalifah* to take the place of the *Shaykh* and legitimately fulfil his function without actually having attained to the *Shaykh's* own spiritual state.

18. Cf. *Autorité spirituelle et pouvoir temporel*, chapter 4.

19. In using the word 'channel' here we are referring to a symbolism found in more than one tradition. It should be sufficient to cite the *nadis* or 'channels' which in the Hindu tradition are the means of circulation of the currents of subtle force in a human being, and also—and even more relevantly—the 'channels' of the Sephirothic tree in the Hebrew Kabbalah, through which the spiritual influences spread and communicate from one world to another.

This mode of action of the spiritual influences shows a clear double or alternating movement, ascending and descending in turn. At the lower level of psychic or subtle influences we have a correspondence to this double movement in the dual current of cosmic force that we discussed in an earlier chapter. In the case of the spiritual influences, the movement occurs along the axis itself, which is the 'Middle Way'; for as the *I Ching* says, 'the Way of Heaven is *yin* together with *yang*'. This means that the two complementary aspects are inseparably united along this same 'central' channel. On the other hand, the psychic realm is further removed from the principal domain, and for this reason the differentiation of *yang* and *yin* gives rise to two distinct and separate currents. We have already mentioned several of the symbols applied to these currents; for our purposes here it is enough simply to state that they can be viewed as being respectively on the 'right' and 'left' of the 'Middle Way'.²⁰

20. At the microcosmic level, the 'Middle Way' corresponds to the 'subtle' artery called *sushumna* in the Hindu tradition. This terminates in the *Brahmarandhra*, which is symbolised by the point where the chariot pole emerges from the canopy, or where the central pillar in the *stūpa* emerges from the dome. At the macrocosmic level the 'Middle Way' corresponds to the 'solar ray' which is also called *sushumna*: the ray and the artery are in constant communication. As to the two opposing currents of cosmic force, we have already explained that they correspond to the right- and left-hand *nāḍīs*—*idā* and *pingalā*—in the human being. See also *Man and his Becoming according to the Vedānta*, chapter 20.

It is worth comparing as well the Tantric distinction—which we mentioned earlier when discussing the *vajra*—between the right-hand and left-hand 'ways'. But the fact that these two ways are depicted simply by tilting the axial symbol in either one direction or the other suggests that they are actually only secondary variations of the 'Middle Way' itself.

18 | True Man and Transcendent Man

So far we have continually been using the terms ‘true man’ and ‘transcendent man’, and it is now time to be more specific in our understanding of these terms. The first point to be made is that some writers have taken to ascribing the title ‘transcendent man’ to someone who in fact is only a ‘true man’ (*chen jen*). This practice is of course incorrect: while ‘true man’ is simply someone who has attained to the fullness of the human state, the word ‘transcendent’ can only be applied to what is beyond that state. Hence the need to reserve the title ‘transcendent man’ for the very special case of ‘divine man’ or ‘spiritual man’ (*chiün jen*), as he is sometimes called. ‘Transcendent man’, ‘divine man’, or ‘spiritual man’ are alternative names for someone who has achieved total realisation and attained the ‘Supreme Identity’. Strictly speaking he is no longer a man in an individual sense, because he has risen above humanity and is totally liberated not only from its specific conditions¹ but also from all other limiting conditions associated with manifested existence.² He is therefore, literally, ‘Universal Man’, whereas ‘true man’—who has only reached the stage of identification with ‘primordial man’—is not. But even so, it can be said that ‘true man’ is already ‘Universal Man’, at least in a virtual sense. There are no longer any other states that he needs to traverse in a differentiated fashion, because he has passed from the circumference to the centre.³ Consequently, the human state

1. We refer the reader to what we said earlier about the question of species in its relation to the being and the environment (above, chapter 13).

2. ‘Occupying a man’s body, he is no longer a man . . . What makes him still a man is something infinitely small [i.e. the ‘trace’ we will be mentioning shortly]; what makes him one with Heaven is infinitely large’: *Chuang Tzu*, chapter 5.

3. This is the idea expressed in Buddhism by the term *anagami*, i.e. ‘he who does not return’ to another state of manifestation, see *Aperçus sur l’Initiation*, chapter 39.

will be for him the central state of the total being, even though it is not yet so effectively.⁴

'Transcendent man', as final goal of the 'greater mysteries', and 'true man' as goal of the 'lesser mysteries' are the two highest grades in the Taoist hierarchy, which also contains three lower grades.⁵ These lower grades of course represent different stages of the 'lesser mysteries':⁶ the highest is 'man of the Way' (*Tao jen*, i.e. the man who has entered the Way), the next down is 'man of talent' (*ch'u jen*), and the lowest is 'wise man' (*cheng jen*). The wisdom in question in this last grade is certainly something more than just 'learning', but it is still of an external order; and in fact this lowest of the grades in the Taoist hierarchy is identical to the highest grade in the Confucian hierarchy. It is the connecting link providing the continuity between Taoism and Confucianism—and in just the way one would expect, considering that Taoism is the esoteric and Confucianism the exoteric part of one and the same tradition. Here we see that Taoism begins where Confucianism ends.

The Confucian hierarchy consists of three grades in all. Beginning at the bottom, we have the 'man of letters' (*chu*),⁷ followed by the 'learned man' (*hsien*) and finally the 'wise man' (*cheng*). We find it stated that 'The *chu* looks to [i.e. takes as his model] the *hsien*, the *hsien* looks to the *cheng* and the *cheng* looks to Heaven'. In the perspective of the 'wise' man, situated at the boundary-point between the domain of the exoteric and the realm of the esoteric, everything above him is indistinguishable from Heaven itself.

This last point is particularly important here, because it provides a valuable clue to the cause of the frequent failure to distinguish between the roles of 'transcendent man' and 'true man'. This confusion is not just due to the fact that 'true man' is

4. See *The Symbolism of the Cross*, chapter 28.

5. The clearest enumeration of these grades is to be found in a Taoist text that can be dated to the 4th or 5th century A.D.: *Wen Tzu* 7:18.

6. It is worth mentioning by way of contrast that the possible stages of attainment in the 'greater mysteries' are not distinguished from each other, because in terms of human language they are strictly speaking indescribable.

7. This grade includes the entire hierarchy of official functions, which therefore only correspond to what is most external in the exoteric order itself.

virtually what ‘transcendent man’ is actually. Nor, for that matter, can it be explained by the fact of a correspondence between the ‘lesser’ and ‘greater mysteries’—a correspondence which is mirrored in Hermetic symbolism by the analogy between the stages of ‘whitening’ and ‘reddening’. There is yet another factor involved. Stated simply, this is that the only point on the axis which is situated in the domain of the human state is the very centre of that state. Consequently the axis itself cannot be perceived directly by anyone who has not attained this centre: it can only be perceived through the point which is its ‘trace’ on the plane representing that domain. This of course is just another way of stating our earlier point that direct communication with the higher states of the being takes place along the axis and so is only possible from that centre. As far as the rest of the human realm is concerned, the most that is possible is an indirect communication produced by a sort of refraction emanating from the centre. What this means is that the being who is established at the centre can effectively play the same role of ‘mediator’ in relation to the human state that ‘Universal Man’ plays in relation to the totality of the states; and this does not necessarily require that that being should be identified with the axis. On the other hand, the being who has transcended the human state by rising up the axis to the higher states is, so to speak, ‘lost to view’ to everyone remaining in that state who has not yet reached its centre (and this includes everyone who is an initiate, but at a lower grade of initiation than the grade of ‘true man’). For all such people there is no possible way of distinguishing between ‘true man’ and ‘transcendent man’. From the human state, ‘transcendent man’ can only be seen by his ‘trace’,⁸ and this trace is identical to the figure of ‘true man’: from this perspective the one is indistinguishable from the other.

This should explain why in the eyes of ordinary men—and even in the eyes of initiates who have not yet completed the ‘lesser mysteries’—not only ‘transcendent man’ but also ‘true man’

8. In the language of the Western tradition this ‘trace’ is what would be called the *vestigium pedis*. We simply mention this point in passing, because it involves an entire symbolism that would require a great deal of explanation if we were to do it full justice.

appears as a 'proxy' or representative of Heaven. Heaven is as it were made manifest to them through him. Because his action, or rather his influence, is 'central',⁹ it imitates—and from the point of view of the world of humanity it also 'incarnates'—the 'Activity of Heaven'. This influence is 'actionless', which means that it does not involve any external activity. The 'One and only Man' exercises his role as 'unmoved mover' from his position at the centre. He controls everything without intervening in anything, just as the Emperor maintains order in all the regions of the Empire and regulates the course of the annual cycle without ever leaving the *Ming T'ang*. In the words of Chuang Tzu, 'To be concentrated in non-action—that is the Way of Heaven'.¹⁰

The rulers of old abstained from any action of their own, and allowed Heaven to govern everything through them. At the pinnacle of the universe, the Principle exerts its influence over Heaven and Earth, which then act as transmitters of this influence to every being. In the world of men this influence becomes sound government, which brings all talents and abilities to fruition. Inversely, all prosperity derives from sound government just as sound government derives its effectiveness from the Principle through the intermediary of Heaven and Earth. Accordingly, the rulers of old wanted nothing and the world was filled with abundance;¹¹ they did not act, and everything was modified in accordance with the norm;¹² they remained sunk deep in meditation, and the people kept themselves in perfect order. As the ancient saying sums it up: Everything prospers for whoever unites himself to Unity, and even the genii submit to whoever has no self-interest.¹³

9. In this respect the axis is indistinguishable from the centre, which is its 'trace'.

10. *Chuang Tzu*, chapter 11.

11. In the West we find a fairly close parallel to this in Dante's conception of the Emperor, according to which the primary vice of all bad government is greed. See especially *Convito* IV:4.

12. Similarly in the Hindu tradition the *Chakravarti* or 'universal monarch' is, literally, 'he who sets the wheel in motion' without himself participating in its movement.

13. *Chuang Tzu*, chapter 12.

In short, from the human perspective there is no apparent distinction between ‘transcendent man’ and ‘true man’—in spite of the fact that in reality there is no common measure between them, any more than there is between the axis and one of its points. This is because what differentiates them lies beyond the confines of the human state. In practice this means that if ‘transcendent man’ manifests himself in this state—or, more accurately, manifests himself in relation to it, because obviously there can be no question of this manifestation involving a ‘return’ to the limiting conditions of human individuality—he can only do so by appearing as a ‘true man’.¹⁴ It must be emphasised that the total and unconditioned state of ‘transcendent man’, or ‘Universal Man’, and the highest possible conditioned state—whether individual or supra-individual—are altogether beyond comparison when viewed in terms of what they really are in themselves rather than as they appear from the strictly human perspective.

It is worth mentioning here a general rule that holds good for every possible level in the spiritual hierarchies—which are simply the hierarchies of effective initiation. This is that each grade can only perceive everything that is indistinctly above it and receive its higher influences via the grade immediately above it. Naturally, whoever has attained a certain grade is always capable (if he wishes, and if the need arises) of ‘situating’ himself at any lower level below his own. This apparent descent will not affect him in any way, because *a fortiori* and so to speak by superaddition he possesses all the corresponding states, which for him are no longer anything more than so many accidental or contingent ‘functions’.¹⁵

So it is that in the human world ‘transcendent man’ can perform what strictly speaking is the function of ‘true man’. On the other hand, so far as this same world is concerned ‘true man’ is as it were the representative or ‘substitute’ for ‘transcendent man’.

14. This remark can be understood as providing an additional and final explanation of our comments in *Aperçus sur l’Initiation* (chapter 38) on the Sufis and Rosicrucians.

15. See *The Multiple States of Being*, chapter 13. In the words of Dionysius the Areopagite, ‘In every hierarchic constitution the higher levels possess the light and faculties of the lower, but the lower levels do not possess the perfection of the higher levels’ (*The Celestial Hierarchy*, chapter 5).

19 | God, Man, Nature

IN this chapter we will compare the Far-Eastern Great Triad with yet another ternary which, although it has its roots in the Western traditional ideas that were current in the Middle Ages, was also to exert its influence in the exoteric and purely ‘philosophical’ domain.

This ternary is expressed in the formula *Deus, Homo, Natura*: God, Man, Nature. Speaking quite generally, these three terms obviously stand for the three basic objects associated with the different kinds of knowledge which Hindu tradition describes as ‘non-supreme’—in other words, every kind of knowledge that falls short of pure and transcendent metaphysical knowledge. The middle term in the ternary—Man—is clearly the same as the middle term in the Great Triad. But it remains to be seen in what sense and to what extent the two remaining terms—God and Nature—are equivalent to Heaven and Earth.

The first thing which needs saying is that ‘God’ in this context cannot be the Principle itself, which is beyond every distinction and cannot possibly be correlated with anything whatsoever. The very way in which the ternary is presented implies a correlation—even a complementary relationship—between God and Nature. We are therefore dealing with a perspective that, relative to the Cosmos, is immanent rather than transcendent. God and Nature are as it were the two poles of the Cosmos, and even if they are beyond manifestation as such, they can only be considered as distinct within the context of manifestation.

In terms of those kinds of knowledge that used once to be grouped under the heading of ‘philosophy’ (understanding this word in its original sense) God was only the object of what was then called ‘rational theology’, which was sharply distinguished from ‘revealed theology’. Strictly speaking ‘revealed theology’ is also only concerned with the ‘non-supreme’; however it does

represent a certain knowledge of the Principle in the exoteric—or more specifically religious—sphere. In other words it stands for knowledge of the Principle to the extent that such knowledge is possible after due allowance has been made for the intrinsic limitations of the exoteric domain, and for the special forms of expression that have to be used for adapting the truth to that particular point of view.

‘Rational’ means whatever relates exclusively to the exercise of individual human faculties. It will be clear that whatever is ‘rational’ is altogether incapable of reaching the Principle itself; even under the most favorable conditions¹ the most that it will be capable of will be of grasping the truth of its relationship to the Cosmos.² From this it is easy to see that (providing allowance is made for inevitable differences in perspective) the Principle for it will be precisely what the Far-Eastern tradition calls Heaven: for according to that tradition, if we try to reach the Principle from a position in the manifested universe we can only do so through the intermediary of Heaven.³ In the words of Chuang Tzu, ‘Heaven is the instrument of the Principle’.⁴

1. These conditions are fulfilled by an authentic traditional exotericism as opposed to the purely secular conceptions of modern philosophy.

2. Needless to say, this will be a relationship of *subordination* of the Cosmos to the Principle, not a relationship of *correlation*. This point needs emphasising so as to avoid even the slightest possibility of any appearance of contradicting what we have just said.

3. Hence the fact, which we have already mentioned, that from the perspective of manifestation the Principle appears as the ‘pinnacle of Heaven’ (*T’ien Ch’*).

It is interesting to note that when Christian missionaries wanted to translate the word ‘God’ into Chinese they always used either the word *T’ien* or the expression *Chang Ti*, ‘the Ruler on high’, which is just another way of describing Heaven. This would seem to indicate that for them the ‘theological’ perspective itself (using this word in its proper and fullest sense) did not really reach as far as the Principle, although of course they would probably not have been aware of the fact. Doubtless this was a major error on their part; but whether this is so or not, they demonstrated the limitations of their own mentality and their inability to distinguish between the different meanings that the word ‘God’ can have in Western languages in the absence of more precise terms such as we encounter in the Eastern traditions.

As to *Chang Ti*, the following quotation from the commentary on the *Chou Li* may be found helpful: ‘Heaven and Sovereign: both are one. The word Heaven is used to describe what it is; the word Sovereign to describe how it rules. Because it is so immense, it is called Splendid Heaven. Because it rules from its position on high, it is called Sublime Sovereign’.

4. Chuang Tzu, chapter 11.

As for Nature, it is tempting simply to understand it in its primary sense of primordial, undifferentiated Nature: the root of all things, *Mulaprakriti* in the Hindu tradition. Then, of course, it will be exactly equivalent to Earth in the Far-Eastern tradition. But a complication arises here, because when someone speaks of Nature as an object of knowledge, he usually means something broader and less specific. According to this more usual sense, the knowledge of nature includes the study of everything that could be classified under the heading of 'manifested nature'—in other words everything that goes to make up the totality of our cosmic environment.⁵ This extension in meaning could up to a certain point be justified by stating that in this case nature is being viewed in its 'substantial' rather than its 'essential' aspect. According to this interpretation all things would be viewed—just as in the Hindu *Sankhya* system—as simple productions of *Prakriti*, independent so to speak of any influence of *Purusha*.⁶ It could perhaps be said that this way of looking at things is at the root of the perspective obtaining in 'physics' or 'natural philosophy'.⁷ However, there is another, more satisfactory and more complete way of accounting for this extension in meaning of the word Nature. This is due to the fact that, where man is concerned, the totality of the cosmic environment is regarded as forming his outer world. It is therefore, so to speak, purely a question of a change of perspective. At the level corresponding to the strictly human point of view, everything which is external can, at least in a relative sense, be described as 'terrestrial', while everything internal can be described as 'celestial'. It is worth recalling here

5. The use in Western languages of the one word 'nature' in both of these senses is unavoidable, but unfortunately only too prone to give rise to confusion. In Arabic, primordial Nature is *al-Fitrah*, whereas manifested nature is *al-ṭabiʿah*.

6. In fact, of course, nothing whatever can be effectively produced independently of *Purusha*, for the simple and obvious reason that another factor besides pure potentiality is needed if something is to pass from the state of potentiality to the state of actuality.

7. The word 'physics' is here meant to be taken in its original and etymological sense of 'science of nature' in general. The English expression 'natural philosophy' originally had this same meaning, but in recent times (at least up to the time of Newton) has been used to denote 'physics' in the limited and specialised sense usually attributed to the word today.

our earlier comments on Sulphur, Mercury and Salt. Whatever is 'divine' is necessarily 'internal';⁸ in the case of man it acts upon him like a 'sulphurous' principle.⁹ Whatever is 'natural' is what goes to make up a man's environment or surroundings; and this means (as we explained earlier) that it plays the role of a 'mercurial' principle. Man, the simultaneous product of the 'divine' and of 'nature', finds himself situated, like Salt, at the common boundary between the internal and the external, which is also the point where celestial and terrestrial influences converge and reach a state of equilibrium.¹⁰

We can now make some general statements about the inter-relationship between God and Nature—provided, that is, that we bear in mind our initial remarks on the limited sense in which the term 'God' must here be understood; otherwise we are likely to fall into the error either of pantheism on the one hand or, on the other, of 'association' in the sense of the Arabic word *shirk*. On this basis it can be said that God and Nature, when viewed as correlatives or complementaries,¹¹ assume the respective roles of active principle and passive principle of manifestation, or of 'act' and 'potency' in the Aristotelian meaning of these terms: pure act and pure potency in relation to universal manifestation as a whole,¹² and relative act and relative potency when viewed in a more specific and restricted context. In short, they will always correspond to 'essence' and 'substance' as we have so often defined them.

Another way of indicating these active and passive roles is by

8. Compare the Gospels' *Regnum Dei intra vos est*, 'The Kingdom of God is within you'.

9. Here again we encounter the two meanings ('sulphur' and 'divine') of the Greek word *theion*.

10. Needless to say, this way of looking at things (which is strictly Hermetic) goes far beyond exoteric philosophy. On the other hand, exoteric philosophy needs to be justified by something else beyond it precisely because it is only exoteric.

11. This way of understanding the terms 'God' and 'Nature' accounts for the symmetrical fashion in which they are inscribed on the symbols belonging to the 14th degree of Scottish Freemasonry.

12. We see from this that the well-known definition of God as 'pure act' really refers not to Being itself (as some people believe) but simply to the active role of manifestation. In Far-Eastern terminology we could say it refers to *T'ien*, not *T'ai Chi*.

the use of the expressions *Natura naturans* and *Natura naturata*.¹³ Here the word *Natura* denotes not just the passive principle but, simultaneously and symmetrically, both of the two principles associated directly with 'becoming'.¹⁴ Here again we meet up with the Far-Eastern tradition, which says that everything in existence is modified by *yang* and *yin* or Heaven and Earth. To quote Lieh Tzu, in the world of manifestation 'everything is governed by the revolution of the two principles of *yin* and *yang*' [i.e. the reciprocal actions and reactions of the celestial and terrestrial influences].

In the fuller account of Chuang Tzu:

Once the two modalities of being (*yin-yang*) had become differentiated within primordial Being (T'ai Chi), their revolution began and the Cosmos was modified accordingly. The peak of *yin* (condensed into Earth) is passivity and tranquillity; the peak of *yang* (condensed into Heaven) is activity and fertility. Earth offers itself passively to Heaven, Heaven exerts its influence on Earth, and from the two all things come to birth. The binomial Heaven-Earth is an invisible force; its action-and-reaction produces every modification. Starting and stopping, fullness and emptiness,¹⁵ astronomical revolutions [time cycles], phases of the Sun [the seasons] and Moon: all these are brought about by that single cause that nobody perceives but which functions perpetually. Life moves towards a goal; death is the return to

13. Historians of philosophy generally attribute these terms to Spinoza. In fact this is wrong, because although he certainly used the terms himself (not without adapting them to fit his own personal ideas), their history extends back much further in time and they were in no way his own invention.

When the word *Natura* is used on its own without further specification, it is almost always a question of *Natura naturata*, although very occasionally the term can also be understood as referring simultaneously to *Natura naturans* as well. In the first case *Natura* corresponds to the use of the term in the ternary that we have been considering; in this second case, however, it strictly speaking has no correlative because there is nothing else apart from it besides the Principle on the one hand, and manifestation on the other.

14. The essential idea of the Latin word *natura*, just as of its Greek equivalent *physis*, is of 'becoming'. Manifested nature is 'what comes into existence'; the principles involved are 'what brings into existence'.

15. The chief allusion here is to 'emptiness of form'—i.e. the supra-formal state.

a final point. Births and dissolutions [i.e. condensations and dissipations] follow upon each other without a break, without anyone knowing their origin, without anyone perceiving their end [because both origin and end are concealed in the Principle]. The action and reaction of Heaven and Earth are the one and only motive power behind this movement¹⁶—a movement that guides all beings through an indefinite series of modifications to the final transformation which returns them to the one Principle from which they originally issued.¹⁷

16. *Chuang Tzu*, chapter 21.

17. This is the 'departure from the Cosmos' that we referred to earlier in connection with the top of the pole protruding above the chariot canopy.

20 | Distortions in Modern Philosophy

AT the start of modern philosophy, Bacon still considered the three terms God, Man and Nature as representing three distinct objects of knowledge, and so divided 'philosophy' into three major sections corresponding to these terms. But already, in agreement with the 'experimental' tendency of modern thought of which at that time he was the representative—just as Descartes was the supreme representative of the 'rationalistic' trend¹—it was to 'natural philosophy' or the knowledge of nature that he attached the greatest significance. But by and large it was still only a question of 'proportion'.²

It was left for the nineteenth century to produce a distortion of this particular ternary that was both extraordinary and unexpected. We are referring here to the so-called 'law of the three states' as propounded by Auguste Comte. But as the connection between this law and the ternary in question may not be immediately apparent, a few words of explanation will not be out of place—especially as we have here a strange and instructive example of the way in which the modern mind is capable of distorting a traditional datum beyond all recognition once it decides to take it over rather than simply reject it out of hand.

Comte's fundamental error in this case was to suppose that, regardless of the specific kinds of speculation to which man has applied himself, he has always had only one aim in mind: the explanation of natural phenomena. Starting from this narrow point of view he is inevitably led to assume that every possible kind of knowledge is simply a more or less imperfect attempt to arrive

1. Descartes of course also devoted himself primarily to 'physics'. However, his intention was to establish it on the basis of deductive reasoning, using mathematics as a model; Bacon, on the other hand, wished to found it on an entirely experimental basis.

2. Leaving aside, that is, the fact that the sciences were already conceived of in an entirely exoteric sense. But that is another question, and our concern here is simply with what it is that is recognised as an object of knowledge independently of the question of the particular perspective from which it is being viewed.

at an explanation of the phenomena of nature. Combining this preconceived idea with a totally fantastic notion of history, he thought he was able to discover three different types of explanation which he considered succeeded each other in historical order—although in fact all three explanations relate to specific kinds of knowledge that have always coexisted. His mistake was to apply each of them to one and the same object, because by doing so he naturally found them incompatible with each other.

Comte linked his three ‘explanations’ with three distinct stages that, according to him, humanity passed through during the course of the centuries: the first one he called the ‘theological state’, the second the ‘metaphysical state’ and the third the ‘positive state’. During the first stage the occurrence of phenomena is ascribed to the intervention of supernatural agencies. During the second these phenomena are associated with natural forces which are no longer transcendent in relation to things but inherent in them. Finally, the third stage is marked by abandonment of the search for ‘causes’ and the beginning of the search for ‘laws’—in other words for consistent and constant relationships between phenomena. This final ‘state’—regarded by Comte as the only definitely valid one—sums up pretty accurately the limited and purely relative standpoint of the modern sciences. But as for his description of the two other ‘states’, it is such a hopeless mass of confusion that we will not undertake the pointless task of analysing it in detail. Instead, we will simply extract the specific points that relate directly to the question in hand.

Comte’s thesis is that each stage followed the same line of development: the various component elements of each type of explanation in turn gradually became co-ordinated and culminated in the final conception of one single principle containing all the different elements. So, in the ‘theological state’, the various supernatural agencies were first of all conceived of as independent of each other, then they became grouped in a hierarchical structure, and finally they were all synthesised in the idea of God.³

3. These three subordinate phases are described by Comte as fetishism, polytheism and monotheism. It should hardly need stating that monotheism (i.e. the affirmation of a single Principle) must in fact be the original stage, not the last one.

Similarly, in the so-called 'metaphysical state', the notions of different natural forces were viewed by him as tending increasingly to merge into the one 'entity' called 'Nature'.⁴ We see here Comte's total ignorance of what metaphysics actually is. 'Nature' and natural forces obviously have to do with 'physics', not 'metaphysics': he could easily have avoided such a blatant error by simply referring to the etymology of the words he used. But be that as it may, what we have here so far is God and Nature, understood however not as two objects of knowledge, but only as two concepts which the first two of the three kinds of explanation posited according to the theory⁵ happen to lead up to. This leaves us with Man; and although it is perhaps slightly more difficult to see how this term in the triad plays the same role in relation to Comte's third 'explanation', this is in fact the case as we will now see.

This is the case because of the particular way in which Comte understands the various sciences. According to him they have successively attained to the 'positive state' in a definite sequence; each more recent one has been prepared for by those that preceded it and without which it could not have come into being. Now the final science of all according to this sequence—the science which all the preceding ones were only leading up to, and which accordingly is the goal and crown of so-called 'positive' knowledge—is the one he christened with the barbaric name 'sociology' (a word that since then has passed into common usage). This 'sociology', which Comte saw it as his 'mission' to establish, is in fact the science of Man. Alternatively it can be called the science of Humanity—understood of course only from a 'social' point of view. Indeed, for Comte no other science of man

Actually Comte's 'monotheism' is the only one of his phases that has existed always and everywhere, exception being made for the lack of understanding of the masses and for those cases of extreme degeneracy in certain traditional forms.

4. Comte is assuming here that wherever the expression 'Nature' is used it is to some degree being personified—as indeed it commonly was in the philosophical and literary rhetoric of the eighteenth century.

5. It is perfectly clear that it is just a hypothesis and nothing more. Also, as a hypothesis it has virtually no foundation whatever, in spite of Comte's dogmatic assertion to the contrary by wrongly giving it the name of 'law'.

is possible: in his eyes everything that is unique in a human being when compared with other living beings is attributable entirely to his social life. In spite of what certain people have said, it was therefore completely logical that he ended up where he did. Pushed on by the more or less conscious need to discover a kind of parallelism between the ‘positive state’ and his two other ‘states’, he saw its culmination and final achievement in what he called the ‘religion of Humanity’.⁶

So it is that we find God, Nature and Humanity presented as the ‘ideal’ goals of each of these three ‘states’. What we have said should be enough to demonstrate that the all too famous ‘law of the three states’ derives simply from a false application and distortion of the ancient ternary *Deus, Homo, Natura*, God, Man, Nature. What is even more extraordinary than this fact in itself is that apparently nobody has ever perceived it.

6. ‘Humanity’—conceived of as the collectivity of all men who ever have lived, do live or will live in the future—is for him very much of a personification, because in the pseudo-religious section of his work he calls it the ‘Great Being’. To all intents and purposes this is a kind of profane caricature of ‘Universal Man’.

21 | Providence, Will and Destiny

To help round off and complete our comments on the ternary God, Man, Nature, we will add some brief remarks on another ternary which corresponds to it very closely: Providence, Will, Destiny. In this case the three different terms are each being viewed as powers that govern the manifested universe.

The most complete study of this ternary in modern times has been made by Fabre d'Olivet.¹ He based himself primarily on data deriving from Pythagoreanism; however, he also supplemented this material by referring on several occasions to the Chinese tradition,² and in a way which suggests that he recognised the close correspondence between this ternary and the Great Triad. 'Man,' he writes, 'is neither animal nor pure intelligence. He is an intermediate being, situated half-way between matter and spirit, or Heaven and Earth, and forming the link between them.' It should hardly need stating that this is a highly accurate description of the position and role of the middle term in the Far-Eastern Triad.

1. Primarily in his *Hermeneutic Interpretation on the Origin of the Social State of Man* (English translation by Nayán Louise Redfield, N.Y. and London, 1915, of the original *Histoire philosophique du Genre humain*.) Unless indicated to the contrary, we have taken all the following quotations from the introductory dissertation to this work, first published under the title *De l'État social de l'Homme*.

Fabre d'Olivet's earlier *The Golden Verses of Pythagoras* also contains views on the same subject, but not so clearly expressed. Sometimes in this book he seems to regard Destiny and Will simply as correlatives, both of them subordinate to Providence; but this way of approaching the matter is incompatible with the relationship between the terms that we ourselves are here concerned with.

We will take this opportunity of mentioning incidentally that it was by applying the notion of these three universal powers to the social domain that Saint-Yves d'Alveydre arrived at his theory of 'synarchy'.

2. As it happens, it would seem that his knowledge of this tradition was more or less confined to its Confucian aspect, although once in the *The Golden Verses of Pythagoras* he does give a quotation from Lao Tzu.

To quote further from Fabre d'Olivet:

That universal Man³ is a power in his own right is a fact acknowledged by the sacred codes of every nation, realised by every man of wisdom, and admitted by every true man of learning. . . . The two other powers that he stands between are *Destiny* and *Providence*. Beneath him is *Destiny*: 'natured nature', nature bound by necessity. Above him is *Providence*: 'naturing nature', nature in its freedom. He himself—as the human kingdom—is the mediating, efficient Will, situated between the two natures so as to serve as the link and means of communication between them and combine two actions, two motions, which otherwise would be incompatible.

It is interesting to note that the two end terms of the ternary are explicitly referred to as *Natura naturans* and *Natura naturata*, which agrees exactly with our earlier comments. As to the two actions or motions, basically they are identical to the action and reaction of Heaven and Earth, or the alternating movements of *yang* and *yin*.

These three powers—*Providence*; Man, or more precisely the human kingdom; and *Destiny*—together make up the universal ternary. Nothing escapes their action. Everything in the universe is subordinate to them—everything, that is, except for God Himself, who embraces all three in his unfathomable unity so as to form the tetrad of the ancients, that immense quaternary which is all in all and apart from which there is nothing.

The allusion here is to the basic quaternary of the Pythagoreans, symbolised by the *Tetraktys*; our earlier comments on the ternary *Spiritus, Anima, Corpus* apply here as well, so any further explana-

3. This term must here be understood in a restricted sense, because it would not seem that it is being given any application beyond the purely human domain. In fact when this idea of 'universal man' is transposed to include the totality of the states of existence, clearly there can no longer be a question of any 'human kingdom'—a concept that only has meaning in relation to our own world.

tion should be unnecessary. However, one additional observation does need to be made because of its considerable importance from the point of view of concordances. This is the fact that 'God' is envisaged here as the Principle itself, in contradistinction to the way in which the word is used as the first term in the ternary God-Man-Nature. This means that the same word does not have the same meaning in both cases; in the present case Providence is merely the instrument used by God in governing the universe, in exactly the same way that Heaven is the instrument of the Principle according to the Far-Eastern tradition.

Now if we are to understand why the middle term here is not only man but specifically the human Will, we need to appreciate that for Fabre d'Olivet the will in the human being represents the inward and central element which unites and embraces⁴ the intellectual, psychic and instinctive spheres. These three spheres of course correspond respectively to spirit, soul and body; and as in the microcosm we must always look for correspondences with the macrocosm, we will find that at the microcosmic level these three spheres are analogous to the three universal powers of Providence, Will and Destiny.⁵ At this microcosmic level the will plays a role that makes it the image or reflection of the Principle itself.

This way of envisaging the will—which, it must be said, Fabre d'Olivet insufficiently justifies by appealing to considerations which are psychological rather than truly metaphysical—should be compared with our earlier remarks on the subject of alchemical Sulphur, for that is precisely what we are concerned with here. It is also worth noting that a kind of parallelism exists between the three powers themselves. The appropriateness of describing Providence as an expression of the divine Will should, on the one hand, be self-evident; and on the other hand it is also appropriate to view Destiny as a kind of obscure will of Nature.

4. Here again we have to bear in mind that in reality it is the centre that contains everything.

5. We refer to what we said earlier about the 'three worlds' in general and, specifically, about the correspondence between Man and the animic or psychic world.

Destiny is the lower or instinctive part of universal Nature,⁶ which I have termed 'natured nature'. Its action is called fate; it manifests itself to us as what we call necessity. . . . Providence is the higher and intelligent aspect of universal Nature, which I have termed 'naturing nature'. It is a living law that emanates from the Divinity; through it all things are determined in their potentiality of being.⁷ . . . The median power—corresponding to the animic aspect of universal Nature—is the Will of man. It is this that unites Destiny and Providence. Without it, these two polar powers would not only never unite: they would never even know each other.⁸

There is another point that deserves special mention. In uniting itself to Providence and consciously collaborating with it,⁹ the human Will can become a counter-balance to destiny and finally neutralise it.¹⁰ In the words of Fabre d'Olivet, 'the harmony between Will and Providence is what constitutes the Good. Evil is what is born from their opposition.¹¹ . . . Man either perfects himself or becomes depraved according to whether his tendency is to merge into the universal Unity or to distinguish himself from it'.¹² In other words he approaches either perfection

6. By 'universal Nature' here is meant Nature in the broadest sense possible. As 'three natures in one Nature' it comprises all three terms of the 'universal ternary'; in other words it includes everything apart from the Principle itself.

7. This expression is inaccurate, because in fact potentiality belongs to the opposite pole of manifestation. Fabre d'Olivet should rather have said 'principally', or 'in essence'.

8. Elsewhere Fabre d'Olivet names as agents of the three universal powers those beings that the Pythagoreans called the 'immortal Gods', the 'glorified Heroes' and the 'terrestrial Daemons'—'relative to the height of their rank and to the harmonic position of the three worlds they inhabit': *The Golden Verses of Pythagoras*, translated by Nayán Louise Redfield (N.Y. and London, 1917), Third Examination.

9. To collaborate in this way with providence is referred to in Masonic terminology as working towards the realisation of the 'plan of the Great Architect of the Universe'. See *Aperçus sur l'Initiation*, chapter 31.

10. This was expressed by the Rosicrucians in the formula *Sapiens dominabitur astris*, 'the wise man will rule the stars'. As we said earlier, 'astral influences' refers to the sum total of all those influences that emanate from the cosmic environment and act upon the individual in such a way as to determine him from outside.

11. Basically this proposition equates good and evil with the two opposing tendencies we are about to mention—together with their inevitable consequences.

12. *The Golden Verses of Pythagoras*, Twelfth Examination.

or depravity depending on which of the two poles of manifestation¹³ he gravitates towards: the pole of unity or the pole of multiplicity. Either he allies his will with Providence and follows the path of 'freedom', or he allies his will with destiny and follows the path of 'necessity'.

Fabre d'Olivet also writes that 'providential law is the law of the divine man. He lives a life primarily of the intellect, which is governed by that law'. We are not told explicitly what he means here by 'divine man'; presumably it could be either 'transcendent man' or just 'true man', as the case may be. According to Pythagorean teaching, followed on this as on so many other points by Plato, 'the Will hard won by faith [this shows that it is related to Providence] is capable of enslaving Necessity itself, controlling Nature and producing miracles'.

The equilibrium between Will and Providence on the one hand and Destiny on the other was symbolised geometrically by a right-angled triangle with sides proportionally equivalent to the numbers 3, 4 and 5. This triangle played a major role in Pythagoreanism;¹⁴ remarkably, it had no less important a role in the Far-Eastern tradition. If the number 3 stands for Providence,¹⁵ 4 for the human Will and 5 for Destiny, we end up with $3^2 + 4^2 = 5^2$ ($9 + 16 = 25$). The raising of the numbers to the power of two shows that it is a question here of the domain of universal forces,

13. These are the opposing tendencies (one ascending, the other descending) which in the Hindu tradition are termed *sattva* and *tamas*.

14. This triangle occurs also in Masonic symbolism, as can be noted from our earlier reference to it in connection with the Worshipful Master's square; the complete triangle also features in the insignia of the Past Master. We may mention at this point that a considerable portion of Masonic symbolism derives directly from Pythagoreanism via an unbroken 'chain' including the Roman *Collegia fabrorum* and the medieval builders' guilds. The triangle we are discussing here is one example of this direct transmission; the Blazing Star—identical to the *Pentalpha* which was used by the Pythagoreans as a means of mutual recognition—is another. See *Aperçus sur l'Initiation*, chapter 16.

15. Here again we find 3 as a 'celestial' number and 5 as a 'terrestrial' number, just as in the Far-Eastern tradition. However there is one difference: in that tradition the two numbers are not regarded as correlatives, because 3 is coupled with 2 and 5 with 6 as we explained earlier. As for the number 4, it corresponds to the cross as symbol of 'Universal Man'.

specifically the animic domain.¹⁶ In the macrocosm, this domain corresponds to Man. In the microcosm, its centre is the will—the median term.¹⁷

16. This is actually the second of the ‘three worlds’—regardless of whether they are viewed in an ascending or a descending order. The successive raising of the powers represents increasing degrees of universalisation, and corresponds to the ascending direction. See *The Symbolism of the Cross*, chapter 12; *Les Principes du Calcul infinitésimal*, chapter 20.

17. According to Fabre d’Olivet’s schematisation, this animic centre is also the tangential point of the two other spheres—the intellectual and instinctive—while the centres of these two spheres are located at diametrically opposite points on the circumference of the middle sphere. ‘By projecting its circumference, this centre reaches the other centres and joins to itself the opposite points of the two circumferences projected by those centres [i.e. the lowest point of the one circumference and the highest point of the other]. In this way the three vital spheres move within each other and so mutually transmit their own special nature and qualities, transferring their reciprocal influences from one sphere to another.’ We see from this that the circumferences representing two consecutive spheres (i.e. intellectual and animic or animic and instinctive) have the same relative configuration—each passing through the centre of the other—which we commented on in connection with figure 3.

22 | Triple Time

IN spite of everything we have said so far, one question still remains: do the three terms of the Great Triad—or for that matter any other ternary of the same kind—have any spatial or temporalequivalents?

As far as space is concerned, finding such a correspondence presents no difficulty. The key lies in the notions of ‘above’ and ‘below’, determined according to normal geometrical convention in relation to a horizontal plane taken as the level of reference. For us, this horizontal plane will naturally be the human state itself. The median character of this plane can be appreciated firstly from the fact that this is precisely how it appears to us from our own particular perspective (to the extent, that is, that this is the state which we find ourselves in at present); and secondly from the fact that, at least virtually, it is possible to locate in it the centre of all the states of manifestation. For these two reasons, this horizontal plane clearly corresponds to Man as the middle term of the Triad as well as to man in the ordinary sense of an individual human being.

In relation to this horizontal plane, everything above represents the ‘celestial’ aspects of the Cosmos, and everything below its ‘terrestrial’ aspects. The extreme limits of the two regions into which space is accordingly divided—limits which are situated at an indefinite remove in both directions—are the two poles of manifestation. These two poles are Heaven and Earth themselves, perceived from the median plane through those relatively ‘celestial’ and ‘terrestrial’ aspects. The corresponding influences manifest as two contrasting tendencies, each of which relates to one half of the vertical axis: the upper half acting in an ascending direction, the lower in a descending direction, starting from the median plane. As this plane naturally corresponds to expansion in a horizontal direction, and is intermediate between the two

opposing tendencies, we find here an exact analogy between the three terms of the Triad and the three *gunas* of the Hindu tradition:¹ *sattva* corresponding to Heaven, *rajas* to Man and *tamas* to Earth.²

Finally, if we view the median plane as the diametral plane of a sphere of indefinite radius (indefinite because it contains the totality of space), the upper and lower hemispheres are identical to the two halves of the ‘World Egg’ which we spoke of earlier. These two halves, after separating as a result of the determination of the median plane, become Heaven and Earth respectively (understanding these terms in their broadest sense).³ At the very centre of the median plane itself is *Hiranyagarba*, which thereby appears in the Cosmos as the ‘eternal *Avatar*’—in other words, as ‘Universal Man’.⁴

When we turn to the question of time, things would seem to be less straightforward. But in fact here also the ternary structure applies, as can be seen from the expression ‘triple time’, or *trikala* in Sanscrit. ‘Triple time’ is time viewed according to its three distinct modalities: past, present and future. However, is it possible to relate these three modalities to the three terms of the kind of ternaries we have been studying so far?

The first step towards answering this question is to observe that the present can be depicted as a point dividing into two the line representing the unfolding of time. At each instant this point determines the separation (and also the juncture) between the past and the future, of which it is the common boundary—just as the median plane that we were speaking about above is the common boundary between the upper and lower hemispheres of space.

1. See *The Symbolism of the Cross*, chapter 5.

2. The reader will recall our earlier comments on the way in which the human Will—neutral or ‘rajasic’ in itself—takes on either a ‘sattvic’ or a ‘tamasic’ quality depending on whether it allies itself with Providence or with Destiny.

3. This should be related to our previous remarks on the two hemispheres and the double spiral, as well as on the division of the *yin-yang* symbol into its two halves.

4. See *Aperçus sur l’Initiation*, chapter 48.

As we have explained elsewhere,⁵ a ‘rectilinear’ representation of time is both inadequate and inaccurate. In reality time is cyclical—a fact which applies even to its smallest subdivisions. Here however there is no need to specify the form of the line in question. Regardless of whether it is straight or circular, for a person situated at one particular point on the line the two sections into which it is divided will always be either ‘in front of’ or ‘behind’ that point—in just the same way as the two halves of space will appear to be either ‘above’ or ‘below’ the plane taken as the level of reference.

To complete the analogy between spatial and temporal determinates, we can add that the point representing the present can always be taken as being in a certain sense the ‘middle of time’, because when viewed from this point time is bound to appear equally indefinite in the two opposite directions corresponding to past and future. Also relevant here is the fact that ‘true man’ occupies the centre of the human state, which means he occupies a point that is truly central in relation to all the conditions of the state—the temporal condition included.⁶ He can therefore be said to be situated at the ‘middle of time’, from where he actually determines time itself through his dominance of individual conditions,⁷ just as in the Chinese tradition the Emperor determines the midpoint of the annual cycle by situating himself at the centre of the *Ming T'ang*. As a result the ‘middle of time’ is—if one may so put it—‘true man’s’ temporal location. For him, this point is always the present.

So a close correspondence exists between Man and the present. In fact even in the case of an ordinary human being it is clearly only in the present that he can exert his action, at least in a direct and immediate sense.⁸ The question remains: does a

5. *The Reign of Quantity and the Signs of the Times*, chapter 5.

6. There is no need to say anything here on the subject of ‘transcendent man’, for he is beyond all temporal—as well as all other—conditions. However, should he situate himself in the human state in the way we described earlier, he will *a fortiori* occupy the central position in every possible respect.

7. See *Aperçus sur l'Initiation*, chapter 42 and also *L'Ésotérisme de Dante*, chapter 8.

8. If it is the case that ‘true man’ can exert an influence at any chosen moment in time, this is because from the central position which he occupies he is capable at will of making that moment present for himself.

certain correspondence also exist between the past and the future on the one hand, and the two remaining terms of the Triad on the other?

Here again it is a comparison between spatial and temporal determinates which provides the clue. Compared with the human state, those states of manifestation that are relatively speaking lower are depicted in spatial symbolism as being beneath it, while those states that are relatively speaking higher are conceived of as being above it. Now in terms of temporal symbolism these same states are described as constituting cycles that are respectively earlier and later than the present cycle. All of these states together therefore form two distinct domains. The action of these domains is expressed in the human state (to the extent that it is felt there at all) by influences that can be called ‘terrestrial’ on the one hand and ‘celestial’ on the other—understanding these terms in the sense we have consistently given them throughout this study. What is more, these ‘terrestrial’ and ‘celestial’ influences will, for the human state, appear as the respective manifestations of Destiny and Providence: a fact very accurately indicated by the Hindu tradition in allocating the first of these two domains to the *Asuras* and the second to the *Devas*.

Perhaps, then the clearest way of appreciating the temporal correspondence of the Great Triad is by viewing the two end terms as Destiny and Providence. From this we see why it is that the past is associated with ‘necessity’ and the future with ‘freedom’, which in fact is precisely the characteristic of those two powers. It is quite true that really this is still just a question of perspective, and that for a being who exists outside the condition of time there is no longer any past or future: no distinction between past and future can possibly exist, because everything appears to him in perfect simultaneity.⁹ It should be understood

9. This is even more strictly true for the Principle itself. It is worth noting in this connection that the Hebrew Tetragrammaton is supposed to be formed grammatically by the contraction of the three tenses of the verb ‘to be’. This makes it a designation of the Principle, that is to say of pure Being which contains within itself all three terms of the ‘universal ternary’ (as Fabre d’Olivet calls it), just as Eternity—which is inherent in it—contains within itself ‘triple time’.

therefore that we are speaking purely in terms of a being who exists within time and, by virtue of this very fact, finds himself placed midway between past and future.

Here it is worth quoting some words on the same subject by Fabre d'Olivet.

Destiny does not provide the principle of anything; but once the principle has been provided it takes it over and dictates its consequences. Only through the necessity of those consequences does it exert its influence on the future and make itself felt in the present, because in itself it strictly speaking belongs entirely to the past. In other words, we can understand Destiny as being the power which determines our belief that things which have been done have in fact been done; that things are as they are and not otherwise; and that, given their nature, they have inevitable results which manifest successively and necessarily.

Unfortunately, it must be said that Fabre d'Olivet is much less clear and accurate in his discussion of the temporal correlatives of the other two powers.¹⁰

By engaging in activity, the Will of man modifies things that are co-existent [and therefore present], creates new things which immediately fall under the sway of Destiny, and prepares for the future mutations in what has already been done and necessary consequences for what has only just been done.¹¹ . . . The aim of Providence is to bring all

10. In fact in a work written earlier than the one we have just quoted from, he even inverts the correct correspondences for reasons that are not at all easy to discern: 'The power of the will is exerted over things yet to be done, or over the future. The necessity of destiny is exerted over things done, or over the past. . . . Freedom reigns over the future, necessity over the past, and providence over the present' (*The Golden Verses of Pythagoras*, Twelfth Examination). This is equivalent to making Providence the median term and, by ascribing 'freedom' to Will, making Will rather than Providence the opposite of Destiny. However, this does not harmonise at all with the true relationship between the three terms as Fabre d'Olivet himself was to describe it a little later.

11. Certainly it can be said that the Will works with an eye to the future inasmuch as the future is a continuation of the present, but this of course is totally different from saying that it acts directly upon the future itself as such.

beings to perfection—a perfection which it has received in irrefragable form from God himself. The means used by Providence to achieve this end is what we call time. However, time as we conceive it does not exist for Providence,¹² which perceives it instead as a movement in eternity.¹³

This quotation is not as clear as one might hope, but what is missing can easily be supplied. As far as Man—and therefore the Will—is concerned, this has already been done above. As for Providence, it is a traditionally accepted notion that (to use an expression from the Quran) ‘God holds the keys of hidden things’.¹⁴ In other words, God holds the keys primarily of things that in our world have not yet manifested.¹⁵ The future is in fact hidden from men—at least under normal conditions. Now it is obvious that no being can have any hold over something it does not know, and consequently that man cannot act directly upon the future, which in his temporal ‘perspective’ is simply whatever does not yet exist. This idea has indeed persisted even in the popular mentality, which expresses it (without necessarily having a very accurate understanding of what it is saying) in the proverbial form of statements such as ‘man proposes, God disposes’. This particular expression means that although man may strive as far as is possible for him to prepare for the future, that future will in fact only be what God wills it to be, or what God makes it through the action of His Providence. From this we see that the closer that Will is united to Providence, the more effectively it will act in relation to the future. Another proverbial saying is even

12. This fact should be self-evident, because Providence corresponds to what is beyond the human state, of which time is simply one of the specific conditions. It is however worth adding for the sake of precision that Providence does make use of time to the extent that time for us moves ‘forwards’—i.e. towards the future. This is naturally implied by the fact that the past belongs to Destiny.

13. Fabre d’Olivet seems to be referring here to what the Scholastics called *aevum* or *aeviternitas*—terms used to designate modes of duration other than time which condition the ‘angelic’ or supra-individual states. Viewed in terms of the human state, these higher states are of course ‘celestial’.

14. Quran VI:59.

15. We say ‘primarily’ because of course the things that we are referring to represent only a tiny fraction of all the ‘hidden things’ (*al-ghayb*) that together make up the non-manifest.

more explicit: 'the present belongs to man but the future belongs to God'. Of this there can be no doubt; and of the three modalities of 'triple time' it is clearly the future that is the true domain of Providence. This correspondence is, indeed, presupposed by the symmetry between Providence and Destiny, whose true domain is the past. This symmetry in turn is a necessary result of the fact that these two powers represent the two end terms of the 'universal ternary'.

23 | The Cosmic Wheel

IN several works allied to the Hermetic tradition¹ we find references to a ternary *Deus, Homo, Rota*: God, Man, Wheel. Here the third term of the ternary *Deus, Homo, Natura*, which we examined in an earlier chapter, has been replaced by *Rota*, the ‘Wheel’. This is the ‘cosmic wheel’—a symbol of the manifested world, as we have pointed out on other occasions. We find it referred to by the Rosicrucians as *Rota Mundi*, the ‘wheel of the world’.² Generally speaking, then, this symbol stands for Nature in its widest sense. However, it is also capable of being interpreted in various other, more specific, senses. In this chapter we will examine several of these other senses that have a direct bearing on the subject of the present study.

The symbol of the wheel derives from the geometrical figure of a circle plus its centre. Interpreted at a universal level, the centre stands for the Principle, which is symbolised geometrically by the point and arithmetically by the number ‘one’. The circumference will then stand for manifestation, which is ‘measured’ by the radius extending outwards from the Principle.³ This overall schema appears very simple and straightforward, but in fact it has a multiplicity of applications each of which corresponds to a different and more or less particularised point of view.⁴ To take just one example, which in fact is especially relevant to this point

1. Especially Postel’s *Absconditorum Clavis*. It is worth noting the exact equivalence between the title of this work (literally ‘The Key of Hidden Things’) and the passage from the Quran which was quoted in the previous chapter.

2. Compare the figure of the *Rota Mundi* presented by Leibnitz in his treatise *De arte combinatoria* (cf. the preface to *Les Principes du Calcul infinitésimal*). Like the *Dharma-chakra* which we will come to shortly, this is a diagram of a wheel with eight spokes.

3. See *The Reign of Quantity and the Signs of the Times*, chapter 3.

4. In astrology it is the sign for the Sun, which for us is in fact the centre of the sensible world and, for this very reason, used traditionally as a symbol for the ‘Heart of the World’ (*Aperçus sur l’Initiation*, chapter 47).

in our discussion: because the Principle acts in the Cosmos through the medium of Heaven, this means that Heaven itself can also be represented by the centre. In this case the circumference—against which the radii emanating from the centre come to a halt—will represent the other pole of manifestation, Earth; and the surface of the circle will correspond to the entire cosmic domain. Furthermore, the centre represents unity and the circumference multiplicity, which actually expresses the characteristics of universal Essence and Substance respectively. One could also limit oneself to considering one particular world or state of existence alone. In that case the centre will naturally represent the point at which the ‘Activity of Heaven’ manifests itself in the state in question, while the circumference will represent the *materia secunda* or secondary matter of the world which—relative to that particular world—plays the same role which the *materia prima* or primal matter plays in relation to universal manifestation as a whole.⁵

The figure of the wheel is identical to the geometrical figure we have just been considering, with the one exception that it also includes a number of radii which mark in a more explicit manner the relationship between the circumference (where they end) and the centre (where they originate). It goes without saying that whereas the circumference cannot exist without its centre, the centre is absolutely independent of the circumference and contains principally all possible concentric circumferences, which are determined simply by the length of the radii. These radii can be depicted by any number of lines, because really they are as indefinite in their multitude as the points on the circumference which mark their limit. In fact, however, the traditional schemas

In alchemy, the same sign stands for gold, which as the ‘mineral of light’ is the metal that corresponds to the Sun among the planets. In the science of numbers it stands for the denary *qua* complete numerical cycle. From this perspective the centre is 1 and the circumference 9, which together make up 10. The reason for this attribution is that ‘one’ is the principle of all numbers and therefore belongs at the centre, not the circumference. In fact the circumference is normally measured not in decimals or tens but, as explained earlier, by division based on multiples of 3, 9 and 12.

5. For further elaboration of this subject the reader is referred to *The Reign of Quantity and the Signs of the Times*.

always contain set numbers which have their own particular symbolic value; when these are added to the basic symbolism of the wheel they indicate the specific application to which the symbol is being put in each particular case.⁶ The simplest form of all presents just four radii dividing the circumference into four equal sections—i.e. two diameters at right angles to each other forming a cross inside the circumference.⁷ From a spatial point of view this figure of course corresponds to the determination of the four cardinal points.⁸ From a temporal point of view on the other hand, if the circumference is regarded as being traversed in one direction it is the image of a cycle of manifestation, while the four sections of the circumference marked off by the four extremities of the cross will correspond to the different periods or phases into which the cycle is divided. A division of this kind can be envisaged on any number of different scales, so to speak, depending on how large or small the cycle in question happens to be.⁹ One may add that the idea of a wheel evokes immediately the idea of rotation, and this rotation symbolizes the continuous change to which every single thing in manifestation is subject: hence the expression ‘wheel of becoming’.¹⁰ In this perpetual movement there is only one single point which remains fixed and unmoving, and that is the centre.¹¹

All these notions should need no further explanation. However, we will add one further comment, which is that if the centre to begin with is a starting point, it is also a point of termination.

6. The forms most usually encountered are wheels with six spokes or eight spokes, as well as twelve and sixteen—i.e. double the first two numbers.

7. In *The Symbolism of the Cross*, chapter 10, we discussed the similarities between this symbol and the *svastika*.

8. See above, figures 13 and 14.

9. Hence purely at the level of terrestrial existence we have the four main times of the day, the four phases of the moon, the four seasons of the year, as well as the four traditional ages of humanity and also of an individual human being: in short, all those quaternary correspondences of the kind already alluded to earlier.

10. Compare the ‘Wheel of Fortune’ in Western antiquity, and the symbolism of the 10th Tarot trump.

11. The centre should also be regarded as containing in a principal sense the entire wheel. This is the reason why Postel described the centre of *Eden*—which itself is both the ‘centre of the world’ and an image of it—as ‘the Wheel in the middle of the Wheel’. This is precisely in line with our earlier comments on the symbolism of the *Ming T’ang*.

Everything issues from it, and everything must finally return to it. All things exist only through the Principle (or whatever represents the Principle in relation to manifestation or to a specific state of manifestation); and this means that a permanent link must exist between them and it, symbolised by the radii joining each point of the circumference to the centre. But these radii can be traversed in two opposite directions: proceeding first from the centre to the circumference, and then returning from the circumference to the centre.¹² In short, we have two complementary phases: the first represented by a centrifugal movement, the second by a centripetal one.¹³ These two phases, as mentioned earlier, are traditionally compared to the two phases of respiration as well as to the double movement of the heart. What we actually have here is a ternary consisting of centre, radius and circumference, with the radius performing precisely the median function that we defined above. Here lies the reason why, in the Far-Eastern Great Triad, Man is sometimes equated with the spoke of the 'cosmic wheel' whose centre is Heaven and whose circumference is Earth. Just as the radius emanating from the centre 'measures' the cosmos, or the realm of manifestation, so 'true man' is precisely the 'measure of all things' in our world, as 'Universal Man' is the measure of all things for manifestation as a whole.¹⁴ In this connection it is worth noting that while the shape of a cross produced by two diameters at right angles to each other, which we just mentioned, is in a sense equivalent to all the radii of the circumference (because all the moments of a cycle are summed up as it were in its principal phases), so this same schema provides in its complete form the symbol of 'Universal Man'.¹⁵

Needless to say, this symbolism is different, at least in ap-

12. One could therefore regard the reaction of the passive principle as a 'resistance' which halts the influences emanating from the active principle and limits their field of action. The same idea is also implicit in the symbolism of the 'plane of reflection'.

13. It is important to appreciate that the two movements are being described here in relation to the Principle and not in relation to manifestation. This point needs underlining so as to avoid the kind of mistakes that can so easily be made by failing to apply the 'law of inverse analogy'.

14. See *The Symbolism of the Cross*, chapter 16.

15. For an interpretation of this figure based on the numerical values of its components, see chapter 18 of L.-Cl. de Saint-Martin's *Tableau naturel des rapports qui*

pearance, from the symbolism that shows man at the centre of a state of existence and 'Universal Man' as identified with the 'World Axis': this is because it corresponds to a point of view which equally is to a certain extent different. However, fundamentally they are in perfect agreement so far as their essential meaning is concerned, and it is simply a case (as in any similar situation) of having to be careful to avoid confusing the various meanings which can become attached to their constituent elements.¹⁶ In this connection it is worth observing that, at each point on the circumference and relative to that point, the tangent can be regarded as the horizontal. This means that the direction of the radius, which is perpendicular to it, can be regarded as being vertical, so that every radius is in a sense a virtual axis. 'Above' and 'below' can accordingly be regarded as always corresponding to this direction of the radius, envisaged in both an ascending and a descending sense. But whereas in the realm of sensible appearances 'below' is towards the centre (in this case the centre of the earth¹⁷), here it is necessary to apply the 'law of inverse analogy' and view the centre as actually the highest point of all.¹⁸ Accordingly whichever point on the circumference one starts from, the highest point will always remain the same. This gives us a picture therefore of Man—identified with the spoke of

existent entre Dieu, l'Homme et l'Univers (Natural chart of the interrelationships between God, Man and the Universe). Although it is normal to refer to this work by its abbreviated title *Tableau naturel*, we have here given its full title so as to draw attention to the fact that (because the word 'Universe' is being used in the sense of 'Nature' in general) it contains an explicit allusion to the ternary God, Man, Nature.

16. To give another example of this which also has a bearing on the same subject: in the Hindu tradition, and sometimes in the Far-Eastern tradition as well, Heaven and Earth are portrayed as the two wheels of the 'cosmic chariot'. In this case the World Axis is symbolised by the axle joining the two wheels at their centres, which means that it should be thought of as vertical, like the 'bridge' we spoke of earlier. Obviously the significance of the different parts of the chariot will not be the same in this case as in the case we mentioned above, where the canopy represents Heaven, the floor Earth, and the chariot-pole is an image of the World Axis (which corresponds to an ordinary chariot's normal position); also, the wheels here are not given any specific meaning.

17. See *L'Ésotérisme de Dante*, chapter 8.

18. This 'reversal' is also a consequence of the fact that according to the first perspective man is situated outside the circumference (which in this case represents the surface of the earth), whereas in the second case he is placed inside it.

the wheel—with his feet on the circumference and his head touching the centre. In fact in the microcosm one can say that from every point of view the feet correspond to the Earth and the head to Heaven.¹⁹

19. It was specifically with a view to emphasising even further this correspondence—already evident from the shape of the feet and head as well as from their respective positions—that the early Confucians wore round caps and square-shaped shoes. This should be compared with our earlier comments on the shapes of the ritual clothing worn by princes.

24 | The *Triratna*

As a final contribution to our study of the correspondences between traditional ternaries, we will say a few words about the ternary *Buddha, Dharma, Sangha*.

Together, these three terms make up the *Triratna* or 'triple jewel', which several Western writers have very misleadingly referred to as a 'Buddhist Trinity'. It is important to state at the outset that it is impossible to make these terms correspond exactly and completely to the terms of the Great Triad. However, this is not to say that a correspondence between these two ternaries does not exist, at least in certain respects. In fact we have only to start from what is the most obvious point of similarity to see immediately that the *Sangha* or 'Assembly'¹—that is, the Buddhist community—clearly represents the human element. From a purely Buddhist point of view the *Sangha* effectively stands for Humanity itself,² because for Buddhism it represents the 'central' part of Humanity and therefore the term of reference for Humanity as a whole.³ Another reason is that, generally speaking, every particular traditional form is bound to be concerned directly only with its actual adherents; everyone else is, so to speak, outside of its jurisdiction. And there is one further consideration as well: the 'central' position ascribed to the *Sangha* in the human realm is justified in real terms by the presence inside it of the

1. We have deliberately avoided using the term 'Church', even though it has approximately the same meaning etymologically, because of the special meaning the word has acquired in Christianity. It is the same with the word 'Synagogue', which originally was even closer in sense to the word *Sangha* but has since acquired a specifically Judaic connotation.

2. We refer to our discussion in the first chapter of this book of the similar role played by the term *hwei* (or by what it represents) in the case of the *T'ien Ti Hwei*.

3. We have already explained this point of view in our discussion of the 'central' position ascribed to the Chinese Empire.

Arhats—those who have attained to the rank of ‘true man’⁴ and consequently stand at the very centre of the human state. The same would of course apply to the equivalent of the *Sangha* in any other tradition.

As for the *Buddha*, he can be considered as representing the transcendent element through which the influence of Heaven is manifested. This means that the *Buddha* as it were ‘incarnates’ this celestial influence for the benefit of his immediate and indirect disciples, who then transmit a participation in this influence from one to another along an unbroken ‘chain’ by means of the rites of admission into the *Sangha*.

In speaking of the *Buddha* in this way we are not primarily concerned with him as a historical personality; actually his historical reality as such is of only incidental significance for our particular line of inquiry. Our main concern is instead with what he represents⁵ as a result of the symbolic characteristics ascribed to him.⁶ In fact these characteristics endow him primarily with the features of an *Avatar*.⁷ The manifestation of the *Buddha* is therefore the ‘redescent from Heaven to Earth’, as the *Emerald Tablet* describes it; and the being who in this way ‘incorporates’ the celestial influences in his own nature and brings them into this

4. The *Bodhisattvas* can be considered as being at the same level as ‘transcendent man’, which means that strictly speaking they reside in the ‘Heavens’ beyond the sphere of the terrestrial community. The only time they will leave these ‘Heavens’ will be when they ‘return’ along the ‘path of descent’ in order to manifest themselves as *Buddhas*.

5. It is only by virtue of what he represents that the name of *Buddha* is given to him or truly belongs to him: it is not the proper name of an individual, which anyway would no longer be appropriate in such a case. See *Aperçus sur l’Initiation*, chapter 27.

6. Of course to state that these characteristics are symbolic is by no means to deny that they were in fact possessed by a real historical person. (In fact we will even go so far as to say that such a person is real to precisely the extent that his individuality is effaced by these characteristics.) We have already discussed the symbolic value of historical facts themselves frequently enough for any further elaboration here to be redundant: see especially the foreword to *The Symbolism of the Cross*. We will simply take this opportunity to repeat once again that ‘historical truth only possesses substance when it derives from the Principle’ (*Chuang Tzu*, chapter 25).

7. For a more detailed treatment of this subject we can do no better than refer to the various works in which Ananda K. Coomaraswamy has discussed it. See primarily his *Elements of Buddhist Iconography* (Cambridge, Mass., 1935), and ‘The Nature of Buddhist Art’ (rpt. in *Selected Papers* Vol. I, Bollingen Series LXXXIX, Princeton N.J., 1977).

world can justifiably be termed the representative of Heaven as far as the human realm is concerned. Certainly this is a concept far removed from the rationalised form of Buddhism with which Westerners have become familiarised through the work of Orientalists. It might well be that it corresponds to a 'Mahayanist' point of view, but that for us is not a valid objection because it seems clear that the 'Hinayanist' point of view which is commonly presented as 'original' (no doubt because it fits in all too well with certain preconceived ideas), is in reality simply the result of a process of degeneration.

Be that as it may, the reader is warned against interpreting the correlation we just mentioned as a straightforward identification. Although in a sense the *Buddha* represents the 'celestial' principle, he only does so in a strictly relative sense determined by his role as 'mediator'—that is, insofar as he plays what is properly the role of 'Universal Man'.⁸ Similarly, so far as the *Sangha* is concerned we were able to equate it with Humanity, but only at the cost of understanding the term 'Humanity' in a purely individual sense. (This includes the state of 'true man', which is still the perfection of individuality.) In fact we need to add one further qualification, which is that (because the *Sangha* is an 'Assembly') Humanity here is to be conceived of 'collectively' rather than 'specifically'. We could therefore say that while we have been able to find here a relationship comparable to the one between Heaven and Man, strictly speaking both of the terms in this relationship form part of what the Far-Eastern tradition designates by the one term 'Man'—understood in the fullest and most comprehensive meaning of this word as containing in himself an image of the Great Triad in its entirety.

When we turn to the *Dharma*, or 'Law', it is not so easy to find a precise equivalent—even with the kind of reservations we made regarding the two other terms of the ternary. The matter is made even more complex by the fact that the word *dharma* possesses several different meanings in Sanscrit, which vary according to

8. Compare our earlier discussion of the relationship between 'transcendent man' and 'true man', and between the different grades of the Taoist and Confucian hierarchies.

the context in which the word is used and make an overall definition virtually impossible. However, we can be guided to a considerable extent by the root meaning of the word, which is 'to support'.⁹ This suggests an analogy with the Earth which (as explained in an earlier chapter) is what 'supports'. *Dharma* must therefore refer to a principle of conservation and hence of 'stability'—at least to the extent that stability is compatible with the conditions of manifestation, because the word *dharma* in all its applications is always concerned with the manifested world. As was said earlier in connection with the role ascribed to Niu Kua, the function of maintaining the stability of the world is associated with the 'substantial' side of manifestation. Admittedly it is quite true that the notion of stability refers to something which in the sphere of change is itself free from change, and therefore ought to occupy the 'Invariable Middle'; but it is none the less something which comes from the 'substantial' pole—that is, from the side of 'terrestrial' influences, by way of the lower part of the vertical axis.¹⁰

Understood in this sense, the notion of *dharma* is not confined in its application to man: it extends to all beings and all states of manifestation. In other words it can be said that in itself it has a cosmic scope. Nevertheless, in the Buddhist conception of the 'Law' it refers specifically to the human domain; and this means that although it presents a certain analogy to the lowest term of the Great Triad, here again the term is to be viewed in relation to Humanity (understood here as well in an individual sense).

One other point worth considering is that the idea of 'law' always includes an implication of 'necessity'¹¹ or 'constraint'

9. The root *dhri* means to carry, support, sustain, maintain.

10. The root *dhri* is related both in form and in meaning to another root *dhru*, which includes among its derivatives the word *dhruva*—the term for 'pole'; it can also be said that the idea of a 'pole' or 'axis' of the manifested world plays a significant role in the concept of *dharma* itself.

Regarding stability or immobility as an inverted reflection—at the very lowest point of manifestation—of the principial immutability, see *The Reign of Quantity and the Signs of the Times*, chapter 20.

11. This 'necessity' can be either logical or mathematical, or 'physical', or of the kind which is commonly (although inaccurately) called 'moral'. The Buddhist *Dharma* falls naturally into this last category.

—regardless of how it is interpreted or applied—which situates it on the side of Destiny. To this we can add the fact that, for every manifested being, *dharma* is an expression of conformity to the conditions imposed upon it from outside by the environment, which is equivalent to ‘Nature’ in the broadest sense of the term. This—together with our comments in the previous chapter—enables us to understand why the principal symbol used for denoting the Buddhist *Dharma* is the wheel.¹² Also, this symbol makes it clear that the *Dharma* is to be understood as a passive principle in relation to the *Buddha*, who is described as ‘turning the wheel of the Law’.¹³ Of course it could not be otherwise, considering that the *Buddha* and the *Dharma* belong to the realms of celestial and terrestrial influences respectively. Finally, we note that the fact of the *Buddha*’s being beyond the conditions of the manifested world means he would have nothing in common with the *Dharma*¹⁴ if he did not have to apply it to Humanity. This exactly parallels the situation described earlier, where Providence would have nothing in common with Destiny if it were not for Man and his role as the link between these two end terms of the ‘universal ternary’.

12. Generally speaking the *Dharmachakra*, or ‘wheel of the Law’, has eight spokes. Besides their obvious correspondence in spatial symbolism to the four cardinal and four intermediary points of the compass, these eight spokes also correspond in Buddhism itself to the eightpaths of the ‘Excellent Way’, as well as to the eight petals of the ‘Lotus of the True Law’ (which, incidentally, have a further analogy in the eight ‘beatitudes’ of the Gospels). We also find a similar arrangement in Fu Hsi’s eight *kua* or trigrams, and in this connection it is worth noting that the title *I Ching* is itself interpreted as meaning the ‘Book of mutations’, or ‘Book of changes in the turning of the circle’. The relevance of this to the symbolism of the wheel hardly needs pointing out.

13. He accordingly plays a similar role to *Chakravarti*, the ‘universal monarch’, in another application of the wheel symbol. In fact Shakyamuni is said to have had to choose between the functions of *Buddha* or *Chakravarti*.

14. This lack of any connection with the *Dharma* corresponds to the state of the *Pratyeka-Buddha*, who after attaining the goal of complete realisation does not ‘re-descend’ into manifestation.

25 | The City of Willows

AT the beginning of this book we stated that we had no intention of analysing the symbolism found in the rituals of the *T'ien Ti Hwei*. However, there is one particular point which we wish to draw attention to, because it concerns a 'polar' symbolism not unconnected with some of the subjects we have been considering.

The 'primordial' nature of such a polar symbolism, regardless of the particular forms which it happens to assume, should be apparent from our remarks earlier in this book on the subject of orientation. It can also be easily appreciated if we consider that while the centre is the 'place' corresponding to the 'primordial state', fundamentally centre and pole are one and the same thing: both are representations of the one and only point that remains fixed and unchanging throughout the turning of the 'wheel of becoming'.¹

The centre of the human state can therefore be conceived of as the terrestrial pole and the centre of the universe as the celestial pole. The first can accordingly be described as the 'place' belonging to 'true man'; the second as the 'place' of 'transcendent man'. Furthermore, the terrestrial pole is as it were a reflection of the celestial pole. This is because the terrestrial pole, as representative of the centre, is the point at which the 'Activity of Heaven' manifests itself directly, and these two poles are linked to each other by the World Axis, along which the 'Activity of Heaven' exerts itself.² This is why certain stellar symbols which strictly speaking refer to the celestial pole can also be applied to the terrestrial pole, which is the point from which they are as it were

1. For a more detailed treatment of polar symbolism we refer the reader to our study *The Lord of the World*.

2. These two poles are the two extremities of the 'cosmic chariot's' axle when its two wheels are interpreted as symbols of Heaven and Earth according to the meaning of these two terms in the *Tribhuvana*.

reflected by ‘projection’ into the corresponding domain. Putting to one side those cases where the two poles are expressly designated by different symbols, there are no real grounds for distinguishing between them. The same symbolism can with equal correctness be applied at two different degrees of universality. This means that the centre of the human state and the centre of the state of the total being are virtually identical;³ and so we are brought back to our earlier conclusion that from the human point of view ‘true man’ is indistinguishable from the ‘trace’ of ‘transcendent man’.

On initiation into the *T'ien Ti Huei*, the neophyte first of all passes through a number of preliminary stages, culminating in the stage called the ‘Circle of Heaven and Earth’ (*T'ien Ti Ch'üan*). After this he arrives finally at the ‘City of Willows’ (*Mu Yang Ch'eng*), which also has another name: ‘House of the Great Peace’ (*Tai P'ing Chuang*).⁴ The first of these two names has a simple explanation: in China the willow is a symbol of immortality. It is therefore equivalent to the acacia in Freemasonry, or to the ‘golden bough’ in the ancient mysteries.⁵ As a consequence of this meaning the ‘City of Willows’ is identical to the ‘Abode of the Immortals’.⁶

As to the second of these two names, nothing could be more obvious than that it refers to a place considered as ‘central’.⁷ The ‘Great Peace’ (*Es Sakīnah* in Arabic⁸) is identical to the *Shekhinah* of the Hebrew Kabbalah: that is to say, the ‘divine presence’ which is the manifestation of the ‘Activity of Heaven’ and as such can, as was said earlier, only possibly reside in a place of this

3. Compare the treatment of this idea in *The Symbolism of the Cross*.

4. See B. Favre, *Les Sociétés secrètes en Chine*, chapter 8. Favre’s analysis of the dipper symbol (which we will come to shortly) is basically sound, but he failed to extract its most crucial implications.

5. See *L'Ésotérisme de Dante*, chapter 5.

6. For the ‘abode of immortality’, compare *The Lord of the World*, chapter 7 and *The Reign of Quantity and the Signs of the Times*, chapter 23.

7. The acacia in Masonic symbolism is similarly located in the ‘Middle Chamber’.

8. See *The Lord of the World*, chapter 3 and *The Symbolism of the Cross*, chapters 7 and 8. Compare also the *Pax profunda* of the Rosicrucians. Equally relevant is the fact that in the nineteenth century the title ‘Great Peace’ (*T'ai Ping*) was adopted by an offshoot organisation of the *Pai Lien Huei* (see the Foreword to this volume).

kind—or in a traditional sanctuary assimilated to it. In accordance with what we said above, this centre can be the centre either of the human world or of the entire Universe as a whole. The fact that it is beyond the ‘Circle of Heaven and Earth’ indicates that, in terms of the human world, whoever reaches it has escaped from the movement of the ‘cosmic wheel’ and the endless alternations of *yin* and *yang*. In other words he has escaped from the cycle of lives and deaths and can therefore truly be termed ‘immortal’.⁹ In terms of the entire Universe, the fact that it is beyond the ‘Circle of Heaven and Earth’ is a clear and explicit allusion to the fact that the ‘pinnacle of Heaven’ is situated ‘outside’ the Cosmos.

One additional point which is particularly striking is that the ‘City of Willows’ is represented in ritual by a dipping bowl filled with rice and planted with a number of symbolic emblems or standards.¹⁰ This may seem rather strange, but it is easily understood by the fact that the ‘Dipper’ (*Tou*) is the name given in Chinese to the constellation of the Great Bear.¹¹ The importance traditionally attached to this constellation is well known; for example in the Hindu tradition the Great Bear (*saptariksha*) is

9. For ‘true man’ this is still only a state of virtual immortality, but it will become fully effective once the direct transition has been accomplished from the human state to the supreme and unconditioned state. See *Man and his Becoming according to the Vedanta*, chapter 18.

10. It is worth comparing this symbolism with the standards in the ‘Camp of the Princes’, as described in the ‘chart’ used in the 32nd grade of Scottish Freemasonry. There, by a still more extraordinary coincidence, we also find included among several strange terms which are particularly hard to interpret, the word *Salix*—which is none other than the Latin word for ‘willow’. We refrain from drawing any conclusions from this strange coincidence, but mention it simply as a curiosity.

The fact that the dipper is filled with rice is reminiscent of the ‘vessels of abundance’ common to various traditions, and which also have a ‘central’ connotation. No doubt the example best known in the West is the case of the *Grail*. See further *The Lord of the World*, chapter 5. As to the rice itself, it here represents the ‘food of immortality’, which symbolically speaking is equivalent to the ‘drink of immortality’.

11. This is certainly no mere ‘pun’, as B. Favre thought. The dipper here is very specifically a symbol of the Great Bear, just as in an earlier age the constellation was symbolised by a pair of scales. Before the title ‘Scales’ was transferred to the zodiacal constellation Libra, the Great Bear was known in the Far-Eastern tradition as the Scales (or Balance) of Jade—which according to the symbolic meaning of jade is equivalent to the Perfect Balance. In fact the Great Bear and the Little Bear were even identified with the two pans of the balance. On this whole question see *The Lord of the World*, chapter 10.

considered the abode of the seven *Rishis*, which identifies it clearly with the 'Abode of the Immortals'. Also, since the seven *Rishis* represent the 'supra-human' wisdom of the cycles prior to our own, the Great Bear is a kind of 'ark' in which the store of traditional knowledge is contained with a view to preserving and transmitting it from age to age.¹² This also makes it a symbol of the spiritual centres which actually perform this function and, beyond them, of the supreme centre which is the depository of the primordial Tradition.

While on this subject we will briefly mention one other instance of 'polar' symbolism which is equally interesting. In certain of the ancient rituals of Operative Masonry the letter G is depicted at the centre of the vault, at the very point which corresponds to the Polestar.¹³ Suspended from this letter G is a plumbline which falls directly to the centre of a swastika traced out on the floor, which therefore represents the terrestrial pole. As to the plumbline, it is the 'plumbline of the Great Architect of the Universe', suspended from the geometrical point of the 'Great Unity'¹⁴ and

12. Rice (which is equivalent to wheat in other traditions) also has a meaning which is related to this point of view, for food symbolises knowledge: it is assimilated corporeally just as knowledge is assimilated intellectually (see *Man and his Becoming according to the Vedanta*, chapter 9). This connotation of rice is directly connected with the idea of 'food of immortality' mentioned in note 10 above, for the true 'food of immortality' is the knowledge imparted by tradition—that is, effective as opposed to merely theoretical knowledge. It is also the meaning of the Gospel expression 'bread from Heaven' (John, vi), for 'Man shall not live by [terrestrial] bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God' (Matt. iv:4; Luke iv:4)—or, in general terms, which emanates from a 'supra-human' source.

While on this subject we will mention that the expression *ton arton ton epiouision* in the Greek text of the Lord's Prayer does not mean 'daily bread', as it is usually translated. Its precise and literal meaning is 'supra-essential bread' (and not 'supra-substantial bread', as has been claimed by some due to the confusion as to the meaning of the word *ousia* which we drew attention to in the first chapter of *The Reign of Quantity and the Signs of the Times*). Alternatively the term 'supra-celestial' could also be used, provided that 'celestial' or Heaven is understood in its Far-Eastern sense as referring to what proceeds from the Principle itself and consequently provides man with the means of communicating with that Principle.

13. The Great Bear is still depicted on the ceiling of many Masonic Lodges, even of the 'speculative' branch.

14. In the Hebrew Kabbalah this is also the point from which the scales that feature in the *Sifra de Zeniuta* are suspended, because it is on the pole that the equilibrium of the world rests. It is referred to as 'a place that does not exist' (i.e. the 'non-manifest'), which corresponds exactly to the identification in the Far-Eastern tradition of the

descending—as an image of the World Axis—from the celestial pole to the terrestrial pole.

As we have referred to the letter G, it is appropriate to add that this letter should really be the Hebrew *yod*, for which it was substituted in England as a result of phonetic assimilation of *yod* to 'God'. In fact this substitution does not fundamentally change the meaning of the symbol.¹⁵ The various interpretations usually given to this letter (the most important being the one that relates it to 'Geometry') are for the most part only possible in the context of modern Western languages and—whatever certain people may claim¹⁶—they represent purely secondary explanations that have incidentally gathered around the essential meaning just mentioned.¹⁷

As for the letter *yod*, it is the first letter of the Tetragrammaton and it represents the Principle, which means that it is considered a divine name in its own right. Also, its form makes it the principal element from which all the other letters of the Hebrew alphabet are derived.¹⁸ It should be added that the equivalent letter I in the

Polestar, *qua* 'pinnacle of Heaven', with the 'locus' of the Principle itself. This of course also fits in with our remarks in note 11 above about the Scales and their connection with the Great Bear. The two pans of the balance, with their alternating upward and downward movements, naturally refer to the alternating predominance of *yin* and *yang*. The correspondence of one side with *yin* and the other side with *yang* generally speaking holds good for all double symbols presenting an axial symmetry.

15. The substitution of the G for the *yod* is mentioned for example (although not explained) in the *Récapitulation de toute la Maçonnerie ou description et explication de l'Hiéroglyphe universel du Maître des Maîtres*, an anonymous work ascribed to Delaunay.

16. There are even those who are apparently of the opinion that the G was only subsequently interpreted as the initial letter of God. These people are clearly unaware of the fact that it was substituted for the letter *yod*, and it is this substitution that gives the letter G its real significance and meaning from the esoteric and initiatic point of view.

17. In order to arrive at five different interpretations of the letter G, the recently instituted rites of the grade of Companion often resort to giving it meanings that are very far-fetched and devoid of any real significance. Generally speaking this particular grade has received more than its fair share of maltreatment as a direct result of the efforts made to 'modernise' it.

In its position at the centre of the Blazing Star, the letter G represents the divine principle that resides in the 'heart' of the man who has been 'twice born': see *Aperçus sur l'Initiation*, chapter 48.

18. As is well known, the numerical value of this letter is 10, and we refer the reader to our remarks in chapter 23 on the symbolism of the point at the centre of a circle.

Latin alphabet is also a symbol of Unity, both on account of its form and because of its value in Roman numerals. It is, to say the least, curious that the sound of this letter is identical to the sound of the Chinese letter *i* which—as we have noted already—is also symbolic of unity in both its arithmetical and its metaphysical sense.¹⁹ But, if anything, even more remarkable is the fact that in his *Divine Comedy* Dante makes Adam say that the first name of God was I²⁰ and that he was later called *El*. Here we find yet another confirmation of the primordiality of the ‘polar’ symbolism mentioned above. And there is also the fact that, in his *Tractatus Amoris*, Francesco da Barberino had himself portrayed in an attitude of adoration in front of the letter I.²¹ What this all means should by now be clear. Whether it is a case of the Hebrew *yod* or the Chinese *i*, this ‘first name of God’—which in all probability was also the secret name of God for the *Fedeli d’Amore*—is none other than the very expression of the principal Oneness.

19. The character *i* also consists of a single straight line: its only difference from the Latin letter I is that it is drawn horizontally rather than vertically. In the Arabic alphabet it is *alef*, the first letter of all, that has the form of a single straight vertical line; numerically, it also has the value of one.

20. *Paradiso* xxvi:133–4. In an epigram ascribed to Dante the letter I is referred to as the ‘ninth figure’ in accordance with its position in the Latin alphabet, although the *yod* to which it corresponds is the tenth letter of the Hebrew alphabet. As a matter of fact we know from other sources that the number 9 had a very special symbolic significance for Dante: see especially his *Vita Nuova*, and our *L’Ésotérisme de Dante*, chapters 2 and 6.

21. See Luigi Valli, *Il Linguaggio segreto di Dante e dei ‘Fedeli d’Amore’*, vol.2, pp.120–1, where this picture is reproduced.

26 | The Middle Way

WE will conclude this study with a few final comments on the 'Middle Way'. Earlier on we explained that this is the same as the 'Way of Heaven', and so is depicted in the form of a vertical axis envisaged in an ascending direction. However, we must now add that this only applies in the case of a being who has reached the centre of the human state and strives to raise himself from there to the higher states, but has not yet achieved complete realisation. On the other hand, once this being has identified himself with the axis by following its direction and 'ascending' to the 'pinnacle of Heaven', what he has effectively done as far as he himself is concerned is to make the centre of the human state from which he started coincide with the centre of the whole being. In other words, for such a being the terrestrial pole and the celestial pole are one. This, after all, is only logical, because he has finally arrived at the principal state which is prior to the separation of Heaven and Earth (if in such a case it is still permitted to use a word which evokes temporal symbolism). Once this has been achieved there is strictly speaking no axis left. It is as if this being 're-absorbed' the axis to the extent that he identified himself with it, until it was reduced to a single point; but needless to say, this single point contains in itself all the possibilities not just of one particular state but of the totality of all the states, both manifest and non-manifest. Only for other beings does the axis remain as it was: nothing has changed in their state, and they have stayed in the realm of human possibilities. The idea of a 're-descent' that we spoke of earlier is therefore only really valid for them; it should not be difficult to appreciate that this apparent 're-descent', while admittedly a reality at its own level, will not have the slightest effect on 'transcendent man' himself.

The centre of the total being is the 'Holy Palace' which is spoken of in the Hebrew Kabbalah, and which we have discussed

elsewhere.¹ Continuing with our use of spatial symbolism, we could say it is the 'seventh direction', which is not itself a specific direction but contains all directions principally. In terms of another symbolism it is also the 'seventh ray' of the Sun, which passes through the centre of the Sun itself. Truly speaking it *is* that centre, and can only really be depicted in the form of a single point. And also, it is the true 'Middle Way' when understood in an absolute sense, because this centre and this centre alone is the 'Middle' in every possible way. When we talk here of 'every possible way' we are referring not just to all the different meanings that a word is capable of conveying, but—once again—to the symbolism of space and spatial directions. In fact the centres of the different states of existence are only the 'Middle' by participation and, as it were, by reflection, and consequently only incompletely. If we turn again to the geometrical schema of the three axes of coordinates which determine space, we can say that such a centre is indeed the 'Middle' in relation to two of these axes, but not in relation to the third. It is the 'Middle' in relation to the two horizontal axes that define the plane of which it is the centre; but not in relation to the vertical axis through which it receives this participation in the total centre.

In the 'Middle Way' as we have just defined it, there is 'neither right nor left, neither forward nor backward, neither above nor below'. It should not be hard to appreciate why, for a being that has not yet reached the universal centre, only the first two of these three pairs of complementary terms can cease to exist. Once a being has arrived at the centre of its own state of manifestation, it is beyond all the contingent oppositions that derive from the alternation of *yin* and *yang*;² from then on there is no longer any

1. *The Lord of the World*, chapter 7; *The Symbolism of the Cross*, chapter 4.

2. See *The Symbolism of the Cross*, chapter 7. If one were so inclined one could take as representative of these oppositions the contrast between 'good' and 'bad'—but only on condition that these terms are understood in their widest possible sense and not restricted to the exclusively 'moral' meaning they are normally invested with. Even then this contrast would still only represent one particular kind of opposition, because there are many other kinds which are of a fundamentally different type: for example oppositions between the elements (fire-water, air-earth) or between sensible qualities (dry-wet, hot-cold).

'right or left'. Also, temporal succession will have disappeared, transmuted into simultaneity at the central and 'primordial' point of the human state of humanity;³ and the same will naturally apply to any other mode of succession if it is a question of conditions in another state of existence. This—as we explained when discussing 'triple time'—means there is no longer any 'forward or backward'. However, 'above and below' will always continue to exist in relation to such a point, and even along the entire course of the vertical axis; and this is why that axis itself is only the 'Middle Way' in a purely relative sense.

For there to be 'neither above nor below' any longer, what is required is that the point where the being is located must effectively be identified with the centre of all the states. From this point the 'universal spherical vortex' which we have described elsewhere⁴ extends indefinitely in every direction. This is the 'Way' along which the modifications of all things flow outwards. But as to the vortex itself, in reality it is only the unfolding of the possibilities of the central point; and this means that principally it must be regarded as being contained in its entirety in that central point,⁵ because from the principal point of view (which is not a specific or a 'distinctive' point of view) it is the centre which is everything.

This is what Lao Tzu meant when he said that 'the way which is a way (which can be travelled) is not the (absolute) Way',⁶ because for the being who has become effectively established at the total, universal centre, it is this unique point and this point alone that is the true 'Way'—apart from which there is nothing.

3. See *The Reign of Quantity and the Signs of the Times*, chapter 23.

4. *The Symbolism of the Cross*, chapter 20.

5. This is another example of the symbolic 'reversal' produced by passing from the 'outward' to the 'inward'. This central point is obviously 'inward' as far as everything else is concerned, but for whoever has reached it there is no longer any question of 'outward' or 'inward', but only of an absolute and indivisible totality.

6. *Tao Te Ching*, first chapter.