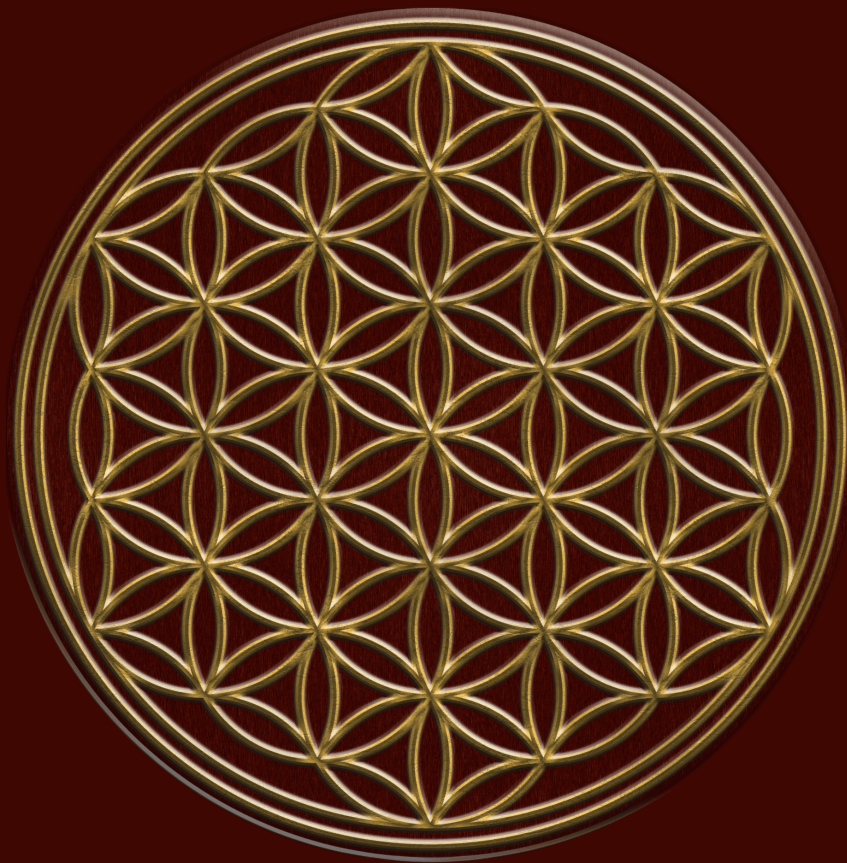


RENÉ GUÉNON



TRADITIONAL STUDIES

VOLUME II

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TRADITION

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EAST AND WEST

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1

CIVILIZATION & PROGRESS

THE civilization of the modern West appears in history as a veritable anomaly: among all those which are known to us more or less completely, this civilization is the only one that has developed along purely material lines, and this monstrous development, whose beginning coincides with the so-called Renaissance, has been accompanied, as indeed it was fated to be, by a corresponding intellectual regress; we say corresponding and not equivalent, because here are two orders of things between which there can be no common measure. This regress has reached such a point that the Westerners of today no longer know what pure intellect is; in fact they do not even suspect that anything of the kind can exist; hence their disdain, not only for Eastern civilization, but also for the Middle Ages of Europe, whose spirit escapes them scarcely less completely. How is the interest of a purely speculative knowledge to be brought home to people for whom intelligence is nothing but a means of acting on matter and turning it to practical ends, and for whom science, in their limited understanding of it, is above all important insofar as it may be applied to industrial purposes? We exaggerate nothing; it only needs a glance at one's surroundings to realize that this is indeed the mentality of the vast majority of our contemporaries; and another glance, this time at philosophy from Francis Bacon and Descartes onward, could only confirm this impression still further. We will mention, by way of reminder, that Descartes limited intelligence to reason, that he granted to what he thought might be called 'metaphysics' the mere function of serving as a basis for physics, and that this physics itself was by its very

nature destined, in his eyes, to pave the way for the applied sciences, mechanical, medicinal, and moral—the final limit of human knowledge as he conceived it. Are not the tendencies which he so affirmed just those that at the first glance may be seen to characterize the whole development of the modern world? To deny or to ignore all pure and supra-rational knowledge was to open up the path which logically could only lead on the one hand to positivism and agnosticism, which resign themselves to the narrowest limitations of intelligence and of its object, and on the other hand to all those sentimental and ‘voluntarist’ theories that feverishly seek in the infra-rational for what reason cannot give them. Indeed, those of our contemporaries who wish to react against rationalism accept nonetheless the complete identification of intelligence with mere reason, and they believe that it is nothing more than a purely practical faculty, incapable of going beyond the realm of matter. Bergson has written as follows: ‘Intelligence, considered in what seems to be its original feature, is the faculty of manufacturing artificial objects, in particular tools to make tools [sic], and of indefinitely varying the manufacture.’¹ And again: ‘Intelligence, even when it no longer operates upon its own object (i.e., brute matter), follows habits it has contracted in that operation: it applies forms that are indeed those of unorganized matter. It is made for this kind of work. With this kind of work alone is it fully satisfied. And that is what intelligence expresses by saying that thus only it arrives at distinctness and clearness.’² From these last features it becomes obvious that there is no question here of intelligence itself, but quite simply of the Cartesian conception of intelligence, which is very different: and the ‘new philosophy’, as its adherents call it, substitutes for the superstition of reason another that is in some respects still grosser, namely, the superstition of life. Rationalism, though powerless to attain to absolute truth, at least allowed relative truth to subsist; the intuitionism of today lowers that truth to be nothing more than a representation of sensible reality, in all its inconsistency and ceaseless change; finally, pragmatism succeeds in blotting out altogether the very

1. *Creative Evolution*, p 146, in the English translation of Arthur Mitchell.

2. *Ibid.*, P169.

notion of truth by identifying it with that of utility, which amounts to suppressing it purely and simply. We may have schematized things a little here, but we have not falsified them in the least, and whatever may have been the intermediate stages, the fundamental tendencies are indeed those we have just stated; the pragmatists, in going to the limit, show themselves to be the most authentic representatives of modern Western thought: what does the truth matter in a world whose aspirations, being solely material and sentimental and not intellectual, find complete satisfaction in industry and morality, two spheres where indeed one can very well do without conceiving the truth? To be sure, this extremity was not reached at a single stride, and many Europeans will protest that they have not reached it yet; but we are thinking particularly of the Americans, who are at a more 'advanced' stage of the same civilization. Mentally as well as geographically, modern America is indeed the 'Far West'; and Europe will follow, without any doubt, if nothing comes to stop the development of the consequences implied in the present state of things.

But most extraordinary of all is perhaps the claim to set up this abnormal civilization as the very type of all civilization, to regard it as 'the civilization' par excellence, and even as the only one that deserves the name. Extraordinary too, and also complementary to this illusion is the belief in 'progress', considered no less absolutely, and naturally identified, at heart, with this material development that absorbs the entire activity of the modern West. It is curious to note how promptly and successfully certain ideas come to spread and impose themselves, provided of course that they correspond to the general tendencies of the particular environment and epoch; it is so with these ideas of 'civilization' and 'progress', which so many people willingly believe universal and necessary, whereas in reality they have been quite recently invented and, even today, at least three-quarters of mankind persist either in being ignorant of them or in considering them quite negligible. Jacques Bainville has remarked that:

If the verb *civilize* is already found to have been used by the good authors of the eighteenth century in the sense which we give it,

the noun *civilization* is only to be met with in the economists of the years which immediately preceded the French Revolution. Littri quotes an example taken from Turgot. Littri, who had ransacked all French literature, could not trace it any further back. Thus the word civilization has no more than a century and a half of existence. It was only in 1835, less than a hundred years ago, that it finally found its way into the dictionary of the Academy.... The ancients, from whom we still consciously trace our descent, were equally without a term for what we mean by civilization. If this word were given to be translated in Latin prose, the schoolboy would indeed find himself in difficulties.... The life of words is not independent of the life of ideas. The word civilization, which our ancestors did very well without, perhaps because they had the thing itself, spread during the nineteenth century under the influence of new ideas. The scientific discoveries, the development of industry, of commerce, of prosperity and of material welfare, had created a kind of enthusiasm and even a kind of 'prophetics'. The conception of indefinite progress, dating from the second half of the eighteenth century, helped to convince mankind that it had entered upon a new era, that of absolute civilization. It is the now quite forgotten Fourier, an utter utopian, who was responsible for first calling the present age the age of civilization, and for identifying civilization with modern times.... So civilization was the degree of development and perfection which the nations of Europe had reached in the nineteenth century. This term, understood by everyone, although no one had defined it, included material and moral progress side by side, the one bringing with it the other, the one united to the other, both inseparable. In a word, civilization was Europe itself, it was a patent which the European world granted itself.³

That is exactly what we think ourselves; and we were intent on making this quotation, although it is rather long, to show that we are not alone in thinking so.

3. 'L'Avenir de la Civilization', *Revue Universelle*, March 1, 1922, PP586-587.

These two ideas, then, of 'civilization' and 'progress', which are very closely connected, both date only from the second half of the eighteenth century, that is to say from the epoch which saw, among other things, the birth of materialism;⁴ and they were propagated and popularized especially by the socialist dreamers of the beginning of the nineteenth century. It cannot be denied that the history of ideas leads sometimes to rather surprising observations, and helps to reduce certain fantastic ideas to their proper value; it would do so more than ever if it were not, as is moreover the case with ordinary history, falsified by biased interpretations, or limited to efforts of mere scholarship and to pointless research into questions of detail. True history might endanger certain political interests; and it may be wondered if this is not the reason, where education is concerned, why certain methods are officially imposed to the exclusion of all others: consciously or not, they begin by removing everything that might make it possible to see certain things clearly, and that is how 'public opinion' is formed. But to go back to the two ideas that we have just been speaking of, let us make it quite clear that in giving them so close an origin we have in mind simply this absolute and, as we think, illusory interpretation, which is the one most usually given them today. As for the relative meaning in which the same words may be used, that is quite another question, and as this meaning is very legitimate, there can be no question here of ideas that originated at some definite moment; it matters little that they may have been expressed in one way or another and, if a term is convenient, it is not because of its recent creation that we see disadvantages in using it. Thus we do not hesitate to say that there have been and still are many different 'civilizations'; it would be rather hard to define exactly this complex assemblage of elements of different orders which make up what is called a civilization, but even so

4. The word 'materialism' was invented by Berkeley, who only used it to designate belief in the reality of matter; materialism in its modern sense, that is to say the theory that nothing exists but matter, originates only with I.a Mettrie and Holbach; it should not be confused with mechanism, several examples of which are to be found even among the ancients.

everyone knows fairly well what is to be understood by it. We do not even think it necessary to try to enclose in a rigid formula either the general characteristics of civilization as a whole, or the special characteristics of some particular civilization; that is a somewhat artificial process, and we greatly distrust these narrow 'pigeon-holes' that the systematic turn of mind delights in. Just as there are 'civilizations', there are also, during the development of each of them, or for certain more or less limited periods of this development, 'progresses' which, far from influencing everything indiscriminately, affect only this or that particular domain; in fact this is only another way of saying that a civilization develops along certain lines and in a certain direction; but just as there are progresses, there are also regresses, and sometimes the two are brought about at one and the same time in different domains. We insist, then, that all this is eminently relative; if the same words are accepted in an absolute sense they no longer correspond to any reality, and it is then that they come to represent these new ideas which have existed for barely a century and a half, and then only in the West. Certainly 'Progress' and 'Civilization', with capital letters, may be very effective in certain sentences, as hollow as they are rhetorical, most suitable for imposing on a mob, for which words are rather a substitute for thought than a means of expressing it, thus it is that these two words play one of the most important parts in the battery of formulas which those 'in control' today use to accomplish their strange task of collective suggestion without which the mentality that is characteristic of modern times would indeed be short-lived. In this respect we doubt whether enough notice has ever been given to the analogy, which is nonetheless striking, between, for example, the actions of the orator and the hypnotist (and that of the animal-tamer belongs equally to the same class); here is another subject for the psychologists to study, and we call their attention to it in passing. No doubt the power of words has been more or less made use of in other times than ours; but what has no parallel is this gigantic collective hallucination by which a whole section of humanity has come to take the vainest fantasies for incontestable realities; and, among these idols of modern worship, the two which we are at the moment denouncing are perhaps the most pernicious of all.

We must revert again to the birth of the idea of progress, or rather of indefinite progress, to exclude these particular and limited progresses whose existence we have not the least desire to dispute. It is probably in the writings of Pascal that the first trace of this idea is to be found, applied moreover to a single point of view: the passage⁵ is the well-known one where he compares humanity to 'one and the same man who always exists and who learns continually during the course of the centuries,' and where he shows evidence of that anti-traditional spirit that is one of the peculiarities of the modern West, declaring that 'those whom we call ancient were actually new in everything,' and that consequently their opinions have very little weight; and in this respect Pascal had at least one predecessor, since Bacon had already said with the same implication: *Antiquitas saeculi, juvenus mundi*. The unconscious sophism that such a conception is based on is easy to see: it consists in supposing that humanity as a whole develops continuously along the same lines: the false simplicity in this outlook is quite blatant, since it is in contradiction with all the known facts. Indeed, history shows us, at every epoch, civilizations independent of one another, often divergent, some of which are born and develop while others grow decadent and die, or are annihilated at one blow in some cataclysm; and the new civilizations by no means always gather in the inheritance of the old ones. Who would venture to maintain seriously, for example, that the West of today has benefited, however indirectly, by the knowledge which the Chaldeans or the Egyptians had accumulated, let alone some civilizations that have not even come down to us in name? But there is no need to go back so far into the past, as there are sciences that were studied in Europe during the Middle Ages, and of which there remains no longer the least notion. If Pascal's idea of 'collective' man (whom he very improperly calls 'universal man') is to be kept, it must then be said that, if there are periods in which he learns, there are others in which he forgets, or rather, that while he learns certain things he forgets others; but the reality is even more complex, since there are simultaneously, as there have always been, civilizations which do not penetrate one another, but remain

5. Fragment of *Train! du Ville*.

unknown to each other: that is indeed, today more than ever, the situation of the Western civilization with regard to the Eastern ones. All told, the origin of the illusion expressed by Pascal is simply this: the people of the West, starting from the Renaissance, took to considering themselves exclusively as the heirs and carriers-on of Greco-Roman antiquity, and to misunderstanding or ignoring all the rest; that is what we call the 'classical prejudice'. The humanity that Pascal speaks of begins with the Greeks, continues with the Romans, and then there is a discontinuity in its existence corresponding to the Middle Ages, in which he can only see, like all the people of the seventeenth century, a period of sleep; then at last comes the Renaissance, that is, the awakening of this humanity, which, from then on, is to be composed of all the European peoples together. It is a grotesque error, and one that indicates a strangely limited mental horizon, consisting, as it does, in taking the part for the whole. Its influence may be found in more than one sphere: the psychologists, for example, usually confine their observations to a single type of humanity, the modern Westerner, and stretch inadmissibly the results so obtained even to the pretension of drawing from them, without exception, the characteristics of man in general.

It is essential to remember that Pascal only visualized an intellectual progress, within the limits of his and his time's conception of intellectuality; it was toward the very end of the eighteenth century that there appeared, with Turgot and Condorcet, the idea of progress extended to all branches of activity; and this idea was then so far from being generally accepted that Voltaire eagerly set about ridiculing it. We cannot think of giving here the complete history of the different modifications which this same idea underwent during the nineteenth century, and of the pseudo-scientific complications in which it was involved when, under the name of 'evolution', people sought to apply it, not only to humanity, but to the whole animal world. Evolutionism, despite many more or less important divergencies, has become a real official dogma: it is taught like a law which it is forbidden to discuss, when actually it is nothing more than the most idle and ill-founded of all hypotheses; this applies *a fortiori* to the conception of human progress, which is now taken for granted as being no more than a particular case of 'evolution'. But

before reaching this position there were many ups and downs, and, even among the champions of progress, there were some who could not help making one or two rather serious reservations: Auguste Comte, who had started by being a disciple of Saint-Simon, admitted a progress that was indefinite in duration but not in extent; for him the march of humanity might be represented by a curve with an asymptote which it approaches indefinitely without ever reaching, so that the extent of progress possible, that is to say the distance from the present state to the ideal state, represented by the distance from the curve to the asymptote, grows perpetually less. Nothing is easier than to show the confusions that underlie the fantastic theory which Comte named the 'law of the three states', and of which the chief consists in supposing that the sole object of all possible knowledge is the explanation of natural phenomena. Like Bacon and Pascal he compared the ancients to children, and others, more recently, have thought to improve on this by likening them to the savages, whom they call 'primitives', but whom we on the contrary consider degenerates.⁶ Apart from these there are some who, unable to help noticing the ups and downs in what they know of the history of mankind, have come to talk of a 'rhythm of progress'; it would be perhaps simpler and more logical in these circumstances to stop talking about progress altogether, but, since the modern dogma must be safe-guarded at all costs, progress is supposed to exist nonetheless as the final result of all the partial progresses and all the regresses. These reservations and disagreements ought to serve as food for reflection, but very few seem to have realized this. The different schools can come to no mutual agreement, but it remains understood that progress and evolution must be admitted; without these it seems that one would lose all right to the title of 'civilized man'.

6. Despite the influence of the 'sociological school', there are, even in 'official circles', some authorities who agree with us on this point, notably Georges Foucart, who, in the introduction of his work entitled *Histoire des religions et Methode comparative*, upholds the theory of 'degeneration', and mentions several of its supporters. In connection with this, Foucart criticizes admirably the 'sociological school' and its methods, and he very properly declares that 'totemism or sociology should not be confused with serious ethnology.'

There is still another point that is worth noticing: if one examines which branches of the pretended progress most often come up for consideration today, which ones are imagined by our contemporaries to be the starting-point of all the rest, it will be seen that they only amount to two: 'material progress' and 'moral progress'. These are the only ones mentioned by Jacques Bainville as included in the current idea of 'civilization', and we think he was right. To be sure, there are some who still talk about 'intellectual progress', but for them this phrase is essentially a synonym of 'scientific progress', and it applies above all to the development of the experimental sciences and of their applications. Here again there comes to light this degradation of intelligence which ends in identifying it with the most limited and inferior of all its uses—experimenting upon matter for solely practical purposes. To be accurate, the so-called 'intellectual progress' is thus no more than 'material progress' itself, and, if intelligence was only that, Bergson's definition of it would have to be accepted. Actually it never enters the heads of most Westerners of today that intelligence is anything else; for them it no longer amounts even to reason in its Cartesian sense, but to the lowest part of this reason, to its most elementary functions, to what always remains closely connected with this world of the senses which they have made the one exclusive field of their activity. For those who know that there is something else and who persist in giving words their true meaning, there can be no question in our time of 'intellectual progress', but on the contrary of decadence, or to be still more accurate, of intellectual ruin; and, because there are some lines of development which are incompatible, it is precisely this which is the forfeit paid for 'material progress', the only progress whose existence during the last centuries is a real fact: it may be called scientific progress if one insists, but only in an extremely limited meaning of the word, and a progress that is very much more industrial than scientific. Material development and pure intellectuality go in opposite directions; he who sinks himself in the one becomes necessarily further removed from the other. It should be carefully noted that we say here intellectuality and not rationality, for the domain of reason is only intermediate, as it were, between that of the senses and that of the higher intellect: though reason

receives a reflection of intellect, even while denying it and believing itself to be the human being's highest faculty, it is always from the evidence of the senses that the notions which it works on are drawn. In other words, what is general, the proper object of reason and consequently of the science which is reason's work, though it is not of the sensible order of things, proceeds nonetheless from what is individual, which is perceived by the senses; it may be said to be beyond the sensible, but not above it; it is only the universal, the object of pure intellect, that is transcendent, and in the light of the universal even the general itself becomes one with the individual. That is the fundamental distinction between metaphysical knowledge and scientific knowledge, such as we have shown it to be more fully elsewhere;⁷ and, if we call attention to it again here, it is because the total absence of the former and the disordered development of the latter are the most striking characteristics of the Western civilization in its present state.

As for the conception of 'moral progress', it represents the other predominant factor in the modern mentality, that is, sentimentality. The presence of this element does not serve in the least to make us modify the judgment which we formulated in saying that the Western civilization is altogether material. We are well aware that some people seek to oppose the domain of sentiment to that of matter, to make the development of the one a sort of counterbalance against the spread of the other, and to take for their ideal an equilibrium as settled as possible between these two complementary elements. Such is perhaps, when all is said and done, the thought of the intuitionists who, associating intelligence inseparably with matter, hope to deliver themselves from it with the help of a rather vaguely defined instinct. Such is still more certainly the thought of the pragmatists, who make utility a substitute for truth and consider it at one and the same time under its material and moral aspects; and we see here too how fully pragmatism expresses the particular tendencies of the modern world, and above all of the Anglo-Saxon world, which is one of its most typical portions. Indeed, materialism and sentimentality, far from being in opposition, can scarcely exist one

7. *Introduction to the Study of the Hindu Doctrines*, pt 2, chap. 5.

without the other, and they both attain side by side to their maximum development; the proof of this lies in America, where, as we have had occasion to remark in our books on Theosophism and Spiritualism, the worst pseudo-mystical extravagances come to birth and spread with incredible ease at the very time when industrialism and the passion for 'business' are being carried to a pitch that borders on madness; when things have reached this state it is no longer an equilibrium which is set up between the two tendencies, but two disequilibriums side by side which aggravate each other, instead of counterbalancing. It is easy to see the cause of this phenomenon: where intellectuality is reduced to a minimum, it is quite natural that sentiment should assume the mastery; and sentiment, in itself, is very close to the material order of things: there is nothing, in all that concerns psychology, more narrowly dependent on organism, and, in spite of Bergson, it is obviously sentiment and not intellect that is bound up with matter. The intuitionists may reply, as we are well aware, that intelligence, such as they conceive it, is bound up with inorganic matter (it is always Cartesian mechanics and its derivations that they have in mind) and sentiment with living matter, which seems to them to rank higher in the scale of existences. But whether inorganic or living, it is always matter, and in its domain there can never be any but sensible things; it is indeed impossible for the modern mentality, and for the philosophers who represent it, to escape from this limitation. Strictly speaking, if it be insisted that there are two different tendencies here, then one must be assigned to matter and one to life, and this distinction may serve as a fairly satisfactory way of classing the great superstitions of our epoch; but we repeat, they both belong to the same order of things and cannot really be dissociated from each other; they are on one same plane, and not superposed in hierarchy. It follows then that the 'moralism'⁸ of our contemporaries is really nothing but the necessary complement of their practical materialism; and it would be an utter illusion to seek to exalt one to the detriment of the other

8. We say practical materialism to denote a tendency and to distinguish it from philosophic materialism, which is a theory, and on which this tendency is not necessarily dependent.

because, going necessarily together, they both develop simultaneously along the same lines, which are those of what is termed, by common accord, 'civilization'.

We have just seen why the conceptions of 'material progress' and 'moral progress' are inseparable, and why our contemporaries are almost as indefatigably engrossed with the latter as they are with the former. We have in no way contested the existence of 'material progress', but only its importance: we maintain that it is not worth the intellectual loss which it causes, and it is impossible to think differently without being altogether ignorant of true intellectuality. Now, what is to be thought of the reality of 'moral progress'? That is a question which it is scarcely possible to discuss seriously, because, in this realm of sentiment, everything depends on individual appreciation and preferences; everyone gives the name 'progress' to what is in conformity with his own inclinations, and, in a word, it is impossible to say that one is right any more than another. Those whose tendencies are in harmony with those of their time cannot be other than satisfied with the present state of things, and this is what they express after their fashion when they say that this epoch marks a progress over those that preceded it; but often this satisfaction of their sentimental aspirations is only relative, because the sequence of events is not always what they would have wished, and that is why they suppose that the progress will be continued during future epochs. The facts come sometimes to belie those who are convinced of the present reality of 'moral progress', according to the most usual conception of it; but all they do is modify their ideas a little in this respect, or refer the realization of their ideal to a more or less remote future, and they, too, might crawl out of their difficulties by talking about a 'rhythm of progress'. Besides this, by a much simpler solution, they usually strive to forget the lesson of experience: such are the incorrigible dreamers who, at each new war, do not fail to prophesy that it will be the last. The belief in indefinite progress is, all told, nothing more than the most ingenuous and the grossest of all kinds of 'optimism'; whatever forms this belief may take, it is always sentimental in essence, even when it is concerned with 'material progress'. If it be objected that we ourselves have recognized the existence of this progress, we reply that we have only done

so as far as the facts warrant, which does not in the least imply an admission that it should, or even that it can, continue its course indefinitely; furthermore, as we are far from thinking it the best thing in the world, instead of calling it progress we would rather call it quite simply development; it is not in itself that the word progress offends us, but because of the idea of 'value' that has come almost invariably to be attached to it. This brings us to another point: there is indeed also a reality which cloaks itself under the so-called 'moral progress', or which, in other words, keeps up the illusion of it; this reality is the development of sentimentalism, which, whether one likes it or not, does actually exist in the modern world, just as incontestably as does the development of industry and commerce (and we have said why one does not go without the other). This development, in our eyes excessive and abnormal, cannot fail to seem a progress to those who put feelings above everything; and it may perhaps be said that in speaking of mere preferences, as we did not long ago, we have robbed ourselves in advance of the right to confute them. But we have done nothing of the kind: what we said then applies to sentiment, and to sentiment taken alone, in its variations from one individual to another: if sentiment, considered in general, is to be put into its proper place in relation to intelligence, the case is quite different, because then there is a hierarchy to be observed. The modern world has precisely reversed the natural relations between the different orders of things: once again, it is depreciation of the intellectual order (and even absence of pure intellectuality), and exaggeration of the material and the sentimental orders, which all go together to make the Western civilization of today an anomaly, not to say a monstrosity.

That is how things look when considered without any prejudice; and that is how they are seen by the most qualified representatives of the Eastern civilizations who view them quite without bias, for bias is always something sentimental, not intellectual, and their point of view is purely intellectual. If the people of the West have some difficulty in understanding this attitude, it is because they are incorrigibly prone to judge others according to themselves, and to attribute to them their own concerns, as well as their own ways of thinking, and their mental horizon is so narrow that they do not

even take into account the possibility of other ones existing; hence their utter failure to understand all the Eastern conceptions. This failure is not reciprocated: the Easterners, when they are faced with Western science, and when they are willing to give themselves the trouble, have scarcely any difficulty in penetrating and understanding its special branches, because they are used to far wider and deeper speculations, and he who can do the greater can do the less; but in general they feel scarcely any temptation to devote themselves to this work, which, for the sake of things that in their eyes are insignificant, might make them lose sight of, or at least neglect, what is for them the essential. Western science means analysis and dispersion; Eastern knowledge means synthesis and concentration; but we shall have occasion to come back to this point. In any case, what the Westerners call civilization, the others would call barbarity, because it is precisely lacking in the essential, that is to say a principle of a higher order. By what right do Westerners claim to impose on everyone their own likes and dislikes? Besides, they should not forget that among earthly mankind taken as a whole they form only a minority; of course, this consideration of number proves nothing in our eyes, but it ought to make some impression on people who have invented 'universal suffrage', and who believe in its efficacy. If they merely took pleasure in affirming their imagined superiority, the illusion would only do harm to themselves; but their most terrible offence is their proselytizing fury: in them the spirit of conquest goes under the disguise of 'moralist' pretexts, and it is in the name of 'liberty' that they would force the whole world to imitate them! Most astonishing of all, they genuinely imagine in their infatuation that they enjoy prestige among all other peoples; because they are dreaded as a brutal force is dreaded, they believe themselves to be admired; when a man is in danger of being crushed by an avalanche, does it follow that he is smitten with respect and admiration for it? The only impression that, for example, mechanical inventions make on most Easterners is one of deep repulsion; certainly it all seems to them far more harmful than beneficial, and if they find themselves obliged to accept certain things which the present epoch has made necessary, they do so in the hope of future riddance; these things do not interest them, and they will never really interest them. What

Westerners call progress is for nothing but change and instability; and the need for change, so characteristic of modern times, is in their eyes a mark of manifest inferiority: he who has reached a state of equilibrium no longer feels this need, just as he who has found no longer seeks. In these circumstances it is indeed difficult to understand one another, since the same facts give rise, on this side and on that, to interpretations that are diametrically opposed. What if the Easterners also sought, after the manner of the West, and by its methods, to impose their own outlook? But one may rest assured that nothing is more contrary to their nature than propaganda, and that such considerations are quite foreign to them. Without preaching 'liberty', they let others think what they will, and are even indifferent as to what is thought of them. All they ask, in fact, is to be left in peace, but that is just what the people of the West refuse to allow them, and it must be remembered that they went to seek them out in their own home, and have behaved there in a way that might well exasperate the most peaceful of men. We are thus faced with a state of affairs that cannot last indefinitely; there is only one way for the West to make itself bearable: this is, to use the customary language of colonial politics, that it should give up 'assimilation' and practice instead 'association' in every domain; but that alone would already mean some modification of their mentality, and the understanding of at least one or two of the ideas which form part of our present exposition.

2

THE SUPERSTITION OF SCIENCE

THE civilization of the modern West has, among other pretensions, that of being eminently 'scientific'; it would be as well to make it a little clearer how this term is to be understood, but that is not what is usually done, for it is one of those words to which our contemporaries seem to attach a sort of mysterious power, independent of their meaning. 'Science', with a capital letter, like 'Progress' and 'Civilization', like 'Right', 'Justice', and 'Liberty', is another of those entities that are better left undefined, and that run the risk of losing all their prestige as soon as they are inspected a little too closely. In this way all the so-called 'conquests' which the modern world is so proud of amount to high-sounding words behind which there is nothing, or else something insignificant: we have called it collective suggestion, and the illusion which it leads to, kept up as it is and shared by so many people, cannot possibly be spontaneous. Perhaps one day we will try to throw a little light on this side of the question. But for the moment that is not what we are directly concerned with. We simply note that the modern West believes in the ideas which we have just mentioned, if indeed they may be called ideas, however this belief may have come to it. They are not really ideas, because many of those who pronounce these words with the greatest conviction have in mind nothing very clear that corresponds to them; actually there is nothing there in most cases but the expression—one might even say the personification—of more or less vague sentimental aspirations. These are veritable idols, the divinities of a sort of 'lay religion', which is not clearly defined, no doubt, and which cannot be, but which has nonetheless a very real

existence: it is not religion in the proper sense of the word, but it is what pretends to take its place, and what better deserves to be called 'counter-religion'. The origin of this state of things can be traced back to the very beginning of the modern epoch, where the anti-traditional spirit showed itself at once by the proclaiming of 'free inquiry', or in other words, the absence in the doctrinal order of any principle higher than individual opinions. The inevitable result was intellectual anarchy; hence the indefinite multiplicity of religious and pseudo-religious sects, philosophic systems aiming above all at originality, and scientific theories as pretentious as they are ephemeral, in short, unbelievable chaos which is, however, dominated by a certain unity, there being beyond doubt a specifically modern outlook which is the source of it all, though this unity is altogether negative since it is nothing more or less than an absence of principle, expressed by that indifference with regard to truth and error which ever since the eighteenth century has been called 'tolerance'. Let our meaning be quite clear: we have no intention of blaming practical tolerance as applied to individuals, but only theoretic tolerance, which claims to be applied to ideas as well and to recognize the same rights for them all, which if taken logically can only imply a rooted skepticism. Moreover we cannot help noticing that, like all propagandists, the apostles of tolerance, truth to tell, are very often the most intolerant of men. This is what has in fact happened, and it is strangely ironical: those who wished to overthrow all dogma have created for their own use, we will not say a new dogma, but a caricature of dogma, which they have succeeded in imposing on the Western world in general; in this way there have been established, under the pretext of 'freedom of thought', the most chimerical beliefs that have ever been seen at any time, under the form of these different idols, of which we have just singled out some of the more important.

Of all the superstitions preached by those very people who profess that they never stop inveighing against 'superstition', that of 'science' and 'reason' is the only one which does not seem, at first sight, to be based on sentiment; but there is a kind of rationalism that is nothing more than sentimentalism disguised, as is shown only too well by the passion with which its champions uphold it, and by the

hatred they evince for whatever goes against their inclinations or passes their comprehension. Besides, since rationalism in any case corresponds to a lessening of intellectuality, it is natural that its development should go hand in hand with that of sentimentalism, as we explained in the last chapter; but either one of these two tendencies may be more particularly represented by certain individualities or by certain currents of thought, and, by reason of the more or less exclusive and systematic terms in which they have come to be clothed, there may even be apparent conflicts between them, which hide their fundamental fellowship from the eyes of superficial onlookers. Modern rationalism begins, in short, with Descartes (it had even had some forerunners in the sixteenth century) and its tracks can be followed throughout all modern philosophy, no less than in the domain which is properly speaking scientific. The present reaction of intuitionism and pragmatism against this rationalism gives us an example of one of these conflicts, and we have seen meanwhile that Bergson entirely accepts the Cartesian definition of intelligence; it is not the nature of intelligence that is questioned, but only its supremacy. In the eighteenth century there was also antagonism between the rationalism of the encyclopedists and the sentimentalism of Rousseau; both these, however, served equally to further the revolutionary movement, which shows that each of them has its place in the negative unity of the anti-traditional outlook. If we cite this example in connection with the preceding one, it is not that we attribute any hidden political motive to Bergson; but we cannot help thinking of the use made of his ideas in certain syndicalist circles, especially in England, while in other circles of the same kind the 'scientific' spirit is held more in honor than ever. Indeed, one of the great tricks of those who 'control' the modern mentality seems to consist, as it were, in brewing a potion for the public, now of rationalism, now of sentimentalism, and now of both together, as occasion demands, and their knack for holding a balance between the two shows that they are much more concerned with their own political interests than with the intellectuality of their patient. It is true that this cleverness may not always be calculated, and we have no desire to question the sincerity of any scientist, historian, or philosopher; but they are often only the apparent

'controllers', and they may be themselves controlled or influenced without in the least realizing it. Besides, the use made of their ideas does not always correspond with their own intentions, and it would be wrong to make them directly responsible, or to blame them for not having foreseen certain more or less remote consequences. But provided that these ideas conform to one or the other of these two tendencies, they may be used in the way which we have just described; and, given the state of intellectual anarchy in which the West is plunged, each event would seem to suggest that every possible advantage is being taken of the disorder itself and of all that contributes to the chaotic agitation for the realizing of a rigidly determined plan. We do not want to insist on this too much, but we find it difficult not to revert to it from time to time, for we cannot admit that a whole race may be purely and simply smitten with a sort of madness which has lasted for several centuries, and there must be something after all which gives a meaning to modern civilization: we do not believe in chance, and we are sure that every existing thing must have a cause; those who think differently are at liberty to set aside such considerations.

Now, taking the two chief tendencies of the modern mentality in turn to examine them better, and leaving for the moment sentimentalism to return to it later, we may ask ourselves this question: what exactly is this 'science' that the West is so infatuated with? A Hindu, summing up most concisely the opinion of all the Easterners who have come across it, has said most justly: 'Western science is ignorant knowledge.'¹ This expression is in no way a contradiction in terms and this is what it means: it is, if one insists, a knowledge that has some reality, since it is valid and effective in one relative domain; but it is a hopelessly limited knowledge, ignorant of the essential, a knowledge which, like everything else that belongs in particular to Western civilization, lacks a principle. Science, as conceived by our contemporaries, is nothing more than the study of sensible phenomena, and this study is undertaken and followed out

1. 'The Miscarriage of Life in the West', by P. Ramanathan, Solicitor-General of Ceylon: *Hibbert Journal*, vn, i; quoted by Benjamin Kidd, *The Science of Power*, P95.

in such a way that it cannot, we insist, be attached to any principle of a higher order; it is true that by resolutely ignoring everything that lies beyond its scope, it makes itself fully independent in its own domain, but this vaunted independence is only made possible by the limitations of science itself. Not content with that, it goes even to the length of denying what it is ignorant of, because only in this way can it avoid admitting this ignorance: or, if it does not venture in so many words to deny the possible existence of what does not come within its range, it at least denies all possibility of knowing such things, which amounts to the same thing, and it has the pretension of comprising in itself everything that can be known. Starting often unconsciously from a false assumption, the 'scientists' imagine, as did Auguste Comte, that man has never aimed at knowing anything other than an explanation of natural phenomena; we say unconsciously, because they are evidently incapable of understanding that it is possible to go further, and it is not for this that we blame them, but only for their pretension of refusing to allow others the possession or the use of faculties which they themselves lack. They are like blind men who deny, if not light itself, at least the existence of sight, for the sole reason that they are without it. To declare that there is not only an unknown but also an 'unknowable' (to use Spencer's word), and to turn an intellectual infirmity into a barrier which no one may pass—that is something whose like was never seen or heard before; and it is equally unheard of for men to turn a declaration of ignorance into a program of thought and a profession of faith, and quite openly to label a so-called doctrine with it under the name of 'agnosticism'. And these men, be it noted, are not skeptics, and do not wish to be skeptics: if they were, there would be a certain logic in their attitude, which might make it excusable; but they are, on the contrary, the most enthusiastic believers in 'science', the most fervent admirers of 'reason'. It might well be considered rather strange to put reason above everything, to profess a veritable worship for it, and to proclaim at the same time that it is essentially limited; that is, in fact, somewhat contradictory, and though we note it, we do not undertake to explain it; this attitude points to a mentality which is not in the least our own, and it is not for us to justify the contradictions that seem inherent in 'relativism' in all its forms. We, too, say

that reason is limited and relative: but, far from making it the whole of intelligence, we look on it only as one of its inferior parts, and we see in intelligence other possibilities that go far beyond those of reason. It seems then that modern Europeans, or at least some of them, are very willing to acknowledge their ignorance, and the rationalists of today do so perhaps more readily than their predecessors, but it is only on condition that no one has the right to know what they themselves do not; the pretension of limiting what is, or just of limiting knowledge fundamentally, shows in either case the spirit of negation which is so characteristic of the modern world. This spirit of negation is nothing other than the systematic spirit, for a system is essentially a closed conception; and it has come to be identified with the spirit of philosophy itself, especially since Kant, who, wishing to shut up all knowledge within the bounds of relativity, ventured to declare in so many words that 'philosophy is not a means of extending knowledge but a discipline for limiting it,'² which amounts to saying that the chief function of philosophers is to impose on all the narrow limits of their own understanding. That is why modern philosophy ends by almost entirely substituting 'criticism' or the 'theory of knowledge' for knowledge itself; that is also why many of its representatives no longer claim for it a higher title than 'scientific philosophy', or, in other words, mere coordination of the most general results of science, whose domain is the only one it recognizes as being accessible to intelligence. In these circumstances philosophy and science are not to be distinguished, and in actual fact, since the birth of rationalism, they can only have had one and the same object, they have only represented a single order of knowledge, they have been animated by the self-same spirit: it is this that we call, not the scientific spirit, but the 'scientistic' spirit.

We must insist a little on this last distinction: what we wish to indicate by it is that we see no essential harm in the development of certain sciences, even if we find that far too much importance is given them; it is only a very relative knowledge, but it is nonetheless a knowledge, and it is right that everyone should turn his intellectual activity to what suits his natural talents and the means at his

2. Kant, *Kritik der reinen Vernunft*, ed. Hartenstein, P256.

disposal. What we object to is the exclusiveness, we might say the sectarianism, of those who are so intoxicated by the lengths to which these sciences have been stretched that they refuse to admit the existence of anything apart from them, and maintain that, to be valid, every speculation must be submitted to the methods that are peculiar to these same sciences, as if these methods, created for the study of certain fixed objects, were universally applicable, it is true that their conception of universality is something very limited, which certainly does not pass beyond the domain of contingency, but these 'scientists' would be most astonished if told that, without even leaving this domain, there is a host of things which cannot be attained by their methods and which notwithstanding may be made the object of sciences quite different from the ones they know, but no less real and often more interesting in many respects. It seems that people today have arbitrarily accepted, in the domain of scientific knowledge, a certain number of fields, which they have frenziedly set about studying to the exclusion of all the rest and on the assumption that the rest is non-existent; and it is quite natural, and not in the least surprising or admirable, that they should have given these particular sciences which they have so cultivated a much larger development than could men who did not attach anything like the same importance to them, who often scarcely even bothered about them, and who were in any case concerned with many other things which seemed to them more important. We are thinking above all of the considerable development of the experimental sciences, a domain where the modern West clearly excels and where no one would dream of contesting its superiority which, moreover, as the Easterners see it, is a scarcely enviable one for the very reason that it could only be purchased at the expense of forgetting all that they hold truly worthy of interest. However, we have no hesitation in stating that there are sciences, even experimental ones, of which the modern West has not the least idea. Such sciences exist in the East, among those which we call 'traditional sciences'. Even in the West there were also, during the Middle Ages, such sciences, altogether equivalent in some respects; and these sciences, some of which even give rise to undeniably efficient practical applications, are carried out by means of investigations altogether unknown to

the 'authorities' of modern Europe. This is certainly not the place for us to enlarge on the subject, but we should at least explain why we say that certain branches of scientific knowledge have a traditional basis, and what we mean by this; and by doing so we shall in fact be showing, still more clearly than we have done so far, what Western science lacks.

We have said that one of the special features of this Western science is its claim to be entirely independent and autonomous; and this claim can only be upheld by systematically ignoring all knowledge of a higher order than scientific knowledge, or better still by formally denying it. What is above science in the necessary hierarchy of knowledge is metaphysics, which is pure and transcendent intellectual knowledge, while by its very definition science is only rational knowledge. Metaphysics is essentially supra-rational; it must be that, or else not be at all. Now rationalism consists, not in simply stating that reason has some value—which only the skeptics contest—but in maintaining that there is nothing above it, or, in other words, that there is no knowledge possible beyond scientific knowledge; thus rationalism necessarily implies the negation of metaphysics. Almost all modern philosophers are rationalists, more or less narrowly and more or less outspokenly. And, among those who are not, there is only sentimentalism and voluntarism, which is no less anti-metaphysical, because having reached this state, if they admit anything other than reason, it is below instead of above reason that they look. True intellectualism is at least as remote from rationalism as modern intuitionism can be, but it is so in exactly the inverse direction. In these circumstances, if a modern philosopher claims to be concerned with metaphysics, one may be sure that what he so names has absolutely nothing in common with true metaphysics, and such is indeed the case. We can only allow these preoccupations the title of 'pseudo-metaphysics', and if nonetheless some valid considerations are occasionally to be found among them, they belong really to the scientific order pure and simple. The general features, then, of characteristically modern thought are these: complete absence of metaphysical knowledge, negation of all knowledge that is not scientific, and arbitrary limitation of scientific knowledge itself to certain particular domains, excluding the rest. Such is the

depth of intellectual degradation to which the West has sunk since it left those paths that the rest of mankind follows as a matter of course.

Metaphysics is the knowledge of the universal principles on which all things necessarily depend, directly or indirectly; in the absence of metaphysics, any other knowledge, of whatever order it may be, is literally lacking in principle, and if by that it gains a little in independence (not as a right, but as a matter of fact), it loses much more in scope and depth. That is why Western science is, as it were, all on the surface. While scattering its energies among countless fragments of knowledge, and losing its way among the innumerable details of fact, it learns nothing about the true nature of things, which it declares to be inaccessible in order to justify its powerlessness in this respect; thus its interest is much more practical than speculative. If there are sometimes attempts to unify this eminently analytical learning, they are purely artificial and are never based on anything but more or less wild suppositions; and they all collapse one after the other, until it seems that no scientific theory of any general bearing can last more than half a century at the most. Besides, the Western idea which would make synthesis a sort of result and conclusion of analysis is radically false. The truth is that a synthesis worthy of the name can never be reached by analysis, because one belongs to one order of things and the other to another. By its very nature, analysis may be carried out indefinitely, if its field of action is expansive enough, without one's having got any nearer to a general view over the whole field; it is still less surprising that it should be utterly ineffectual in establishing a connection with principles of a higher order. The analytical character of modern science is shown by the ceaseless growth in the number of 'specialities' the dangers of which August Comte himself could not help pointing out. This 'specialization', so gloried in by certain sociologists under the name of 'division of labor', is the best and surest way of acquiring this 'intellectual shortsightedness' which seems to be among the qualifications demanded of the perfect 'scientist' and without which, moreover, 'scientism' itself would have scarcely any hold. And the 'specialists', once brought outside their own domain, generally show themselves to be unbelievably ingenuous; nothing is easier

than to impose on them, and this is what contributes in good part to the success of the most idiotic theories, provided that care is taken to call them 'scientific'. The most idle suppositions, like that of evolution for example, take the rank of 'laws' and are held for proven; and though this success is only temporary, their riddance means that their place has been taken by something else which is always accepted with equal readiness. False syntheses, which are bent on extracting the superior from the inferior (a strange transposition of the conception of democracy), can never be anything more than hypothetical: true synthesis, on the contrary, starting from principles, partakes of their certainty; but it is of course true principles which must be the starting-point, and not mere philosophic assumptions in the manner of Descartes. In short it may be said that science, in disavowing the principles and in refusing to re-attach itself to them, robs itself both of the highest guarantee and of the surest direction that it could have; there is no longer anything valid in it except knowledge of details, and as soon as it seeks to rise one degree higher, it becomes dubious and vacillating. Another consequence of what we have just said about the relations between analysis and synthesis is that the development of science, as the moderns understand it, does not really extend its domain; the amount of fragmentary knowledge may increase indefinitely within this domain, not through deeper penetration, but through division and subdivision carried out always more and more minutely; it is indeed the science of matter and multitude. Besides, even if there should be a real extension, as may happen exceptionally, it would always be within the same order and would not enable this science to rise any higher; in its present state it is separated from its principles by an abyss which, far from being bridgeable, cannot even be made the least little fraction less of an abyss.

When we say that the sciences, even experimental sciences, have in the East a traditional basis, we mean that, unlike Western ones, they are always attached to certain principles; these are never lost sight of, and what is contingent seems only worth studying in that it is a consequence and outward manifestation of something that belongs to a higher order. True, there remains nonetheless a profound distinction between metaphysical knowledge and scientific

knowledge, but there is not an absolute discontinuity between them such as is to be noticed in the present state of scientific knowledge in the West. We can take an example even within the Western world, if we consider all the distance that separates the standpoint of ancient and medieval cosmology from that of physics as understood by the moderns; never, until the present epoch, had the study of the sensible world been regarded as self-sufficient; never would the science of this changing and ephemeral multiplicity have been judged truly worthy of the name of knowledge, unless the means had been found of connecting it, in some degree or other, with something stable and permanent. According to the ancient conception, which Easterners have always adhered to, a science was less esteemed for itself than for the degree in which it expressed after its own fashion and represented within a certain order of things a reflection of the higher immutable truth which everything of any reality necessarily partakes of; and, as the features of this truth were incarnated, as it were, in the idea of tradition, all science appeared as an extension of the traditional doctrine itself, as one of its applications, secondary and contingent no doubt, accessory and not essential, constituting an inferior knowledge, but still a true knowledge nonetheless, since it kept a link with that supreme knowledge which belongs to the order of pure intellect. It is clear that this conception is absolutely irreconcilable with the gross practical naturalism which shuts up our contemporaries within the sole domain of contingency—one may even say, to be more exact, within a narrow portion of this domain;³ and as the Easterners, we repeat, have not varied in this conception and cannot do so without denying the principles on which their civilization is based, the two mentalities appear to be decidedly incompatible. But since it is the West that has changed, and never ceases to change, perhaps a moment will come when its mentality will be modified for the better and become open to a wider understanding, and then this incompatibility will vanish of itself.

3. We say practical naturalism, because this limitation is accepted by people who do not profess naturalism in its more particularly philosophical sense. In just the same way there is a positivist mentality which does not in the least presuppose adherence to positivism as a system.

We think we have shown clearly enough how far the Easterners' appraisal of Western science is justified; and, under these conditions, there is only one thing that can explain the unbounded admiration and superstitious respect that is lavished on this science: this is its perfect harmony with the needs of a purely material civilization. There is, in fact, no question here of disinterested speculation; those minds which are altogether engrossed by outward things are struck by the applications that science gives rise to, and by its above all practical and utilitarian character, and it is especially thanks to the mechanical inventions that the 'scientistic' spirit has had its development. These are the inventions that have aroused, since the beginning of the nineteenth century, a positively delirious enthusiasm, because their objective seems to be the increase of bodily comfort, which is clearly the chief aspiration of the modern world. Moreover, there were thus created unawares in addition more new needs than could be satisfied, so that even from this very relative point of view, progress is most illusory; and, once launched upon this course, it seems no longer possible to stop, as there is always some new want to be supplied. But however that may be, it is these applications, confused with science itself, which more than anything else have made for its credit and prestige. This confusion, which could only arise among people ignorant of what pure speculation is, even in the scientific order, has become so usual that today, on opening no matter what publication, one finds constantly under the name of 'science' what ought properly to be called 'industry'. The typical 'authority' is, in most minds, the engineer, inventor, or constructor of machines. As for scientific theories, they must be considered much more as profiting from this state of mind than as causing it; if those very people who are least capable of understanding them accept them with confidence and receive them as veritable dogma (and the less they understand the more easily they are deluded) it is because they look on them, rightly or wrongly, as closely bound up with these practical inventions which they deem so marvelous. Actually this closeness is much more apparent than real. The more or less inconsistent 'scientistic' hypotheses play no part in these discoveries and these applications, on the interest of which opinions may differ, but which have in any case the merit of

being something effective; and, inversely, all that can be realized in the practical order will never prove the truth of any hypothesis. Besides, in a more general way, there could not, properly speaking, be a verification of an hypothesis by experiment, for it is always possible to find several theories which explain equally well the same facts. Certain hypotheses may be eliminated when they are seen to be in contradiction with the facts, but those that are left remain always mere hypotheses and nothing more; this is not the way that certainties could ever be arrived at. However, for men who accept nothing but hard facts, and who have no other criterion of truth than 'experience', by which they simply mean the noticing of sensible phenomena, there can be no question of going further or of proceeding otherwise, and, for such as these, there are only two attitudes possible: either to take one's tone from the realization that scientific theories are hypothetical and to renounce all certainty higher than mere sensible evidence, or, refusing to admit that they are hypothetical, to believe blindly everything that is taught in the name of 'science'. The former attitude, assuredly more intelligent than the latter (always remembering the limitations of 'scientific' intelligence), is that of certain 'authorities' who, being less ingenuous than the others, refuse to be the dupes of their own or their fellows' hypotheses. Thus, except for what is immediately practical, they arrive at a state of more or less complete skepticism, or at least at a sort of probabilism: it is 'agnosticism' no longer applied simply to what goes beyond the domain of science, but extended even to the scientific order itself. They only emerge from this negative attitude by a more or less conscious pragmatism, having regard, like Henri Poincaré, no longer to the truth of a hypothesis but instead to its convenience. Is that not an admission of incurable ignorance? Meanwhile, the second attitude, which may be called dogmatic, is maintained with more or less sincerity by other 'authorities', but especially by those who believe themselves bound for the needs of education to be affirmative: to appear always sure of oneself and of what one says, to cover up difficulties and uncertainties, and never to express anything in a doubtful manner is indeed the easiest way to make sure of being taken seriously and to acquire authority in one's dealings with a public, that is for the most part incompetent

and incapable of discernment, whether it is pupils that are being addressed, or whether the task in hand is one of popularization. This same attitude is naturally taken up, and this time with incontestable sincerity, by those who receive such an education. It is also commonly the attitude of what is called 'the man in the street', and the 'scientistic' outlook can be seen in all its fullness, with this characteristic blind belief, among men who have only been semi-educated, in circles reigned over by that mentality which is often qualified as 'primary', although this mentality is not confined to those who have had a 'primary' education.

We spoke just now of 'popularization'. This is another thing altogether peculiar to modern civilization, and in it may be seen one of the chief factors of this state of mind that we are trying to describe. It is one of the forms taken by this strange need for propaganda which animates the Western mind, and which can only be explained by the predominant influence of sentiment. No intellectual consideration justifies proselytism, in which the Easterners see nothing but a proof of ignorance and incomprehension; there is a complete difference between simply expounding the truth as one has understood it, with the one care not to disfigure it, and wishing at any price to make others share one's own conviction. Propaganda and popularization are not even possible except to the detriment of the truth: the pretension of putting it 'within everyone's grasp', of making it accessible to all without distinction, necessarily involves diminishing and deforming it, for it is impossible to admit that all men are equally capable of understanding anything. It is not a question of the greater or lesser extent of education, it is a question of 'intellectual horizon', and that is something which cannot be modified, which is inherent in the very nature of each human individual. The chimerical prejudice of 'equality' goes against all the best established facts, in the intellectual order as well as in the physical order; it is the negation of all natural hierarchy, and it is the debasement of all knowledge to the level of the limited understanding of the masses. People will no longer admit anything that passes common comprehension, and, in fact, the scientific and philosophic conceptions of our epoch are, all told, most lamentably mediocre: modern 'authorities' have succeeded only too well in wiping out all that

might have been incompatible with the concern for popularization. Whatever anyone may say, the constitution of any elite cannot be reconciled with the democratic ideal, which demands that one and the same education shall be given to individuals who are most unequally gifted, and who differ widely both in talents and temperament; inevitably the results still continue to vary, in spite of this education, but that is contrary to the intentions of those who instituted it. In any case such a system of teaching is assuredly the most imperfect of all, and the indiscriminate diffusion of scraps of knowledge is always more harmful than beneficial, for it can only bring about a general state of disorder and anarchy. It is such a diffusion that is guarded against by the methods of traditional teaching, as it exists throughout the East, where the very real inconveniences of 'compulsory education' are seen to outweigh by far its imagined benefits. As if it were not already enough that the knowledge available to Westerners contains precious little of the transcendent, even this little is still further diminished in the works of popularization, which only treat of its most inferior aspects, and that too with distortions in order to make them simpler; and these works insist complacently on the most fantastic hypotheses, having the effrontery to give them out as proven truths, and accompanying them with those inept declamations which so please the mob. A half knowledge acquired by such reading, or by an education whose elements are all drawn from hand-books of a like value, is far more injurious than pure and simple ignorance; better for a man to know nothing at all than to have his mind encumbered with false ideas, often ineradicable, especially when they have been inculcated from his earliest years. The ignorant man retains at least the possibility of learning if he is given the opportunity: he may possess a certain natural 'common sense' which, together with the consciousness that he ordinarily has of his own incompetence, is enough to save him from much folly. On the contrary, the man who has been half taught has nearly always a deformed mentality, and what he thinks he knows makes him so self-satisfied that he imagines himself capable of talking about everything, no matter what; he does so at random, and the greater his incompetence the greater his glibness: so simple do all things appear to one who knows nothing!

Besides, even setting aside the evils of popularization itself and considering Western science as a whole and under its most authentic aspects, there remains, in the claim of its promoters to be able to teach it to all without any reserve, a clear sign of mediocrity. In the eyes of the Easterners there can be no great value and no true depth of content in something whose study calls for no particular qualification; and, in fact, Western science is altogether outward and superficial. To characterize it, instead of saying 'ignorant knowledge' we would be willing to say, with very much the same meaning, 'profane knowledge'. There is no real distinction, from this point of view any more than from the others, to be made between philosophy and science. People have sought to define philosophy as 'human wisdom'; indeed it is, but with the strong reserve that it is nothing more than that, a wisdom purely human, in the most limited sense of this word, derived from no element of a higher order than reason; to avoid all uncertainty we would call it also 'profane wisdom', but that amounts to saying that it is not really a wisdom at all, but only the illusory appearance of one. We will not insist here on the consequences of this 'profane' character of all modern Western knowledge; but to show further how superficial and sham this knowledge is, we will call to notice that the methods of teaching in use have the effect of replacing intelligence almost entirely with memory. What is demanded of the pupils, from the time they first go to a primary school to the time they leave the university, is that they should hoard up as much as possible of what is taught them, not that they should assimilate it; those things are especially worked at whose study requires no comprehension; facts are substituted for ideas, and scholarship is commonly mistaken for real knowledge. To promote or to discredit this or that branch of knowledge, this or that method, no more is needed than to declare that it is or is not 'scientific'. What are accounted officially as 'scientific methods' are the most unintelligent methods of learning, methods which exclude everything that is not research after facts for facts' sake down to their most insignificant details; and it is worth noting that the worst abusers under this heading are the 'men of letters'. The prestige of this label 'scientific', even when it is really nothing more than a label, is indeed the triumph of triumphs for the 'scientistic' mind; and as for the respect which is extorted from the masses (including

the so-called 'intellectuals') by the use of a simple word, are we not right in calling it 'the superstition of science'?

Of course 'scientistic' propaganda is not carried on only within the West, under the double form of 'compulsory education' and popularization; it is also rife elsewhere, like all the other varieties of Western proselytism. Everywhere that the Europeans have installed themselves, they have wanted to spread these so-called 'benefits of education', always following the same methods, without the least attempt to adapt them and without it entering their heads that there may be already some other kind of education there. Everything that does not come from them is to be considered as null and void, and 'equality' does not allow different peoples and different races to have their own mentality; moreover, the chief 'advantage' that the imposers of this education expect from it is probably, always and everywhere, the blotting out of the traditional outlook. Likewise, once they are away from home, this 'equality' so dear to Westerners amounts to mere uniformity; the rest of what it implies does not come under the category of 'exportable goods' and only concerns the relations between one Westerner and another, for they believe themselves incomparably superior to all other men, among whom they scarcely make any distinctions: the most barbarous black men and the most cultured Easterners are treated in almost the same way, because they are equally outside the one 'civilization' that has the right to exist. Also, the Europeans usually confine themselves to teaching the most rudimentary fragments of all their knowledge. It is not hard to imagine how these fragments must be appreciated by the Easterners, to whom even what is highest in this knowledge would seem chiefly remarkable for its narrowness, and stamped with a rather gross ingenuousness. As the peoples who have a civilization of their own prove themselves on the whole refractory to this so much boasted education, while the peoples without culture submit to it much more docilely, Westerners are perhaps not far from judging the latter superior to the former; they are prepared to show at least a relative esteem for those whom they look on as susceptible of 'rising' to their level, even though this elevation be considered only possible after some centuries of the regime of compulsory elementary education have passed. Unfortunately, however, what the people of the West call 'rising' would be called by some, as far as they

are concerned, 'sinking'; that is what all true Easterners think, even if they do not say so, and if they prefer, as most often happens, to hedge themselves round with the most disdainful silence, leaving, so little does it matter to them, Western vanity free to interpret their attitude as it pleases.

The Europeans have so high an opinion of their science that they believe its prestige to be irresistible, and they imagine that the other peoples must fall down in admiration before their most insignificant discoveries; this state of mind, which leads them sometimes into strange misunderstandings, is not altogether new, and we have found a rather amusing example of it in Leibnitz. This philosopher, as is known, had planned to establish what he called a 'universal characteristic', that is a sort of generalized algebra, made applicable to the notions of every order, instead of being limited to quantitative notions alone; moreover, this idea had been inspired in him by certain authors of the Middle Ages, especially Raymond Lull and Trithemius. In the course of the studies which he made toward realizing this project, Leibnitz came to be engrossed with the meaning of the ideographic characters that constitute Chinese writing, and more particularly with the symbolical figures which form the basis of the *I Ching*. It will be seen how he understood these last: 'Leibnitz,' says Couturat,

believed he had found by his binary numeration (a numeration which only employs the signs 0 and 1 and in which he saw the image of creation *ex nihilo*) the interpretation of the characters of Fu Hsi, mysterious and most ancient Chinese symbols, whose meaning was unknown to the European missionaries and to the Chinese themselves.... He proposed to use this interpretation for the propaganda of the Faith in China, seeing that it was fit to give the Chinese a high idea of European science, and to show the accord of this science with the venerable and sacred traditions of Chinese wisdom. He added this interpretation to the exposition of his binary arithmetic which he sent to the Paris Academy of Sciences.⁴

4. Leibnitz, *La Logique*, pp 474—475.

Here, in fact, is the text of the thesis in question:

What is surprising in this calculus (of binary arithmetic) is that this arithmetic by 0 and 1 happens to contain the mystery of the lines of an ancient king and philosopher named Fohy, who is believed to have lived more than four thousand years ago⁵ and whom the Chinese regard as the founder of their Empire and of their sciences. There are several linear figures which are attributed to him, and they are all the outcome of this arithmetic; but it is enough to give here the Figure of eight Cova,⁶ as it is called, which passes for fundamental, and to add the explanation, which is clear so long as it be noticed first of all that a whole line signifies unity or 1, and secondly, that a broken line signifies zero or 0. It is perhaps more than a thousand years since the Chinese lost the meaning of the Cova or Lineations of Fohy, and they have made commentaries about it, in which they have sought to give I know not what far-fetched interpretations, so that they have now had to receive the true one from the Europeans. This is how: it is scarcely more than two years since I sent to the Rev. Father Bouvet, a celebrated French Jesuit living at Peking, my way of counting by 0 and 1, and it needed no more to make him realize that it is the key to the figures of Fohy. So, writing to me on November 17, 1701, he sent me this philosopher-prince's great figure, which goes up to 64,⁷ and leaves no longer any room for doubting the truth of our interpretation, so that one may say that this Father has deciphered the enigma of Fohy with the aid of what I had communicated to him. And as these figures are perhaps the most

5. The exact date is 3468 BC, according to a chronology based on the precise description of the state of the heavens at that epoch; it should be added that actually the name Fu Hsi serves to designate a whole period of Chinese history.

6. *K'ita* is the Chinese name for 'trigrams', that is figures obtained by assembling in threes, with every possible combination, whole and broken straight lines. Actually the number of figures so obtainable is eight.

7. This reference is to the sixty-four 'hexagrams' of Wen-Wang, that is figures of six lines formed by combining the eight 'trigrams' two by two. Incidentally, Leibnitz's interpretation is quite incapable of explaining, among other things, why these 'hexagrams', as well as the 'trigrams' that they are derived from, are always tabulated in *circular* form.

ancient monument of science in the world, this restitution of their meaning, after so great an interval of time, will seem all the more curious.... And this accord gives me a high opinion of the depth of Fohy's meditations. For what we now find easy was not all so in those remote times.... And as it is believed in China that Fohy is as well the author of the Chinese characters, although they have been much changed by the lapse of time, his essay in Arithmetic leads one to judge that there might well be something else of import there in relation to numbers and to ideas, if the foundation of Chinese writing could be laid bare, the more so as it is believed in China that he had regard to numbers in establishing it. The Rev. Father Bouvet is much inclined to press this point, and very capable of succeeding in many respects. However, I know not if there has ever been in Chinese writing an advantage approaching that which should necessarily be in a Characteristic that I am planning. This is that all reasoning which may be deduced from notions, might be deduced from their characters by a manner of calculation, which would be one of the chief means of aiding the human mind.⁸

We were anxious to reproduce at length this curious document, by means of which one may measure the limits in understanding of the man whom we nonetheless regard as the most 'intelligent' of all the modern philosophers. Leibnitz was convinced in advance that his 'Characteristic', which moreover he never succeeded in constituting (and the 'logicians' of today are scarcely more advanced), could not fail to be very superior to the Chinese ideography; and the best of all is that he thinks to do Fu Hsi great honor in attributing to him an

8. 'Explication de l'Arithmétique binaire, qui se sert des seuls caractères 0 et 1, avec des remarques sur son utility, et sur ce qu'elle donne le sens des anciennes figures chinoises de Fohy', *Memoires de l'Académie des Sciences*, 1707 (*Oeuvres mathématiques de Leibnitz*, ed. Gerhardt, t.vii, PP226-227. See also *De Dyadicis*: ibid., t. vii, PP223-234. This text ends as follows: *Ita mirum accidit, ut res ante ter et amplius (millia?) annos nota in extreme nostri continentis oriente, nunc in extrema ejus occidentis, sed melioribus ut spero auspiciis resuscitaretur. Nam non apparet, ante usum hujus characterismi ad augendam numerorum scientiam innotuisse. Sinenis vero ipsi ne Arithmetica quidem rationem intelligentes nescio quos mysticos significatus in characteribus mere numeralibus sibi fingeant.*

'essay in arithmetic' and the first idea of his own little play on numbers. We seem to see here the smile of the Chinese, if they had been presented with this rather puerile interpretation, which would have been very far from giving them 'a high idea of European science,' but which would have been fit to make them realize very exactly its actual range. The truth is that the Chinese have never 'lost the meaning,' or rather the meanings, of the symbols in question; only they do not feel themselves in the least obliged to explain them to the first-comer, especially if they judge that it would be a waste of breath; and Leibnitz, in speaking of 'I know not what far-fetched interpretations' admits in so many words that he understands nothing about it. It is just these interpretations, carefully preserved by the tradition (which the commentaries never cease to follow faithfully), that constitute 'the true one', and moreover there is here no 'mystery'; but what better proof of incomprehension could be given than the taking of metaphysical symbols for 'purely numerical characters'? They are, in fact, essentially metaphysical symbols, these 'trigrams' and 'hexagrams', a synthetic representation of theories that are susceptible of unlimited developments, susceptible also of multiple adaptations, if, instead of keeping to the domain of the principles, one wishes to apply them to one or another determined order of things. Leibnitz would have been most surprised if he had been told that his arithmetical interpretation was also included among these meanings which he rejected without knowing, but only on an altogether accessory and subordinate level; for this interpretation is not false in itself, and it is perfectly compatible with all the others, but it is quite incomplete and insufficient, even insignificant when considered by itself, and may only be deemed interesting in virtue of the analogical correspondence which connects the lower meanings with the higher one, in accordance with what we have said about the nature of the 'traditional sciences'. The higher meaning is the pure metaphysical meaning; as for the rest, they are only different applications, more or less important, but always contingent. It is in this way that there may be an arithmetical application, just as there are an indefinite number of others, just as there is for example a logical application, which might have better served Leibnitz's project had he had been aware of it, just as there is a social application, which is

the basis of Confucianism, just as there is an astronomical application, the only one that the Japanese have ever been able to grasp,⁹ and just as there is even a divinatory application, which the Chinese moreover look on as one of the lowest of all, and the practice of which they leave to the wandering jugglers. If Leibnitz had been in direct contact with the Chinese, they might have explained to him (but would he have understood?) that even the numbers which he used might symbolize ideas of an order much more profound than the order of mathematics, and that it is by reason of such a symbolism that numbers played a part in the formation of the ideograms, no less than in the expression of the Pythagorean doctrines (which shows that these things were not unknown to the ancients of the West). The Chinese might even have accepted the notation by *o* and *i*, and have taken these 'purely numerical characters' to represent symbolically the metaphysical ideas of *yin* and of *yang* (which have moreover nothing to do with the conception of the creation *ex nihilo*), there being nonetheless many reasons for them to prefer, as more adequate, the representation furnished by Fu Hsi's 'lineations', of which the essential and direct object is in the domain of metaphysics. We have treated this example at length because it illustrates clearly the difference that exists between philosophical systematization and traditional synthesis, between Western science and Eastern wisdom; it is not hard to see, judging from this example—which also serves as a symbol—on which side lie the incomprehension and the narrowness of outlook.¹⁰ Leibnitz, in his pretension to understand the Chinese symbols better than the Chinese themselves, is a veritable forerunner of the orientalists, who—the Germans above all—have the same pretension with regard to all the conceptions and

9. The French translation of the *I Ching* by Philastre (*Annates du Muste Cuiniet*; vols. VIII and XXIII), which is moreover an extremely remarkable work, has the fault of considering rather too exclusively the astronomical meaning.

10. We will recall here what we said of the plurality of meanings of all traditional texts, and especially of the Chinese ideograms in *Introduction to the Study of the Hindu Doctrines*, pt 2, chap. 9. We will add also this quotation borrowed from Philastre: 'In Chinese, a word (or a character) scarcely ever has an absolutely defined and limited meaning; the meaning results very generally from the position in the sentence, but above all from its use in some older book or other, and from its accepted interpretation in this case... A word has no value except through its traditional acceptations.' (*I Ching*, pt 1, p8.)

all the doctrines of the East, and who refuse to take into the least consideration the opinion of the authorized representatives of these doctrines: we have mentioned elsewhere the case of Deussen thinking to explain Shankaracharya to the Hindus, and interpreting him through the ideas of Schopenhauer; these are indeed manifestations of one and the same mentality.

There is still a last remark that we should make with regard to this: it is that Westerners, who advertise so insolently on every occasion belief in their own superiority and in that of their science, are really very much beside the mark when they call Eastern wisdom 'arrogant', as some of them do at times, on the grounds that it does not submit to the limitations that they are used to, and because they cannot make allowance for what goes beyond these limitations. This is one of the habitual faults of mediocrity, and it is mediocrity which forms the basis of the democratic spirit. Arrogance, in reality, is something very Western; so also, moreover, is humility, and, however much of a paradox that may seem, these two opposites go rather closely together: it is an example of the duality which dominates the whole order of sentiment and which is proved most obviously by the innate character of moral conceptions, for the notions of good and evil could not exist but by their very opposition. In actual fact, arrogance and humility are equally strange to Eastern wisdom (we might as well say to wisdom without epithet) and leave it equally unaffected, because in essence it is purely intellectual, and entirely detached from all sentimentality; it knows that the human being is at the same time much less and much more than it is believed to be by the people of the West, at least by those of the present day, and it also knows that it is just what it should be to occupy the place assigned to it in the order of the universe. Man, that is, human individuality, by no means holds a privileged or exceptional place, either one way or the other; he is neither at the top nor at the bottom of the scale of beings: he represents simply, in the hierarchy of existence, a state like the others, among an indefinitude of others, many of which are above him, and many of which also are below him. It is not hard to show, even in this respect, that humility goes very readily hand in hand with a certain kind of arrogance: it is just in seeking to abase man, as they often do in the West, that they find the means of attributing to him at the same time a

really quite undue importance, at least insofar as his individuality is concerned; perhaps it is an example of that kind of unconscious hypocrisy, which is, in one degree or another, inseparable from all 'moralism', and in which the Easterners see fairly generally one of the specific marks of the Westerner. Besides, this counterbalancing humility by no means always exists. There is also, among a good number of other Westerners, a veritable deification of human reason, worshipping itself either directly or through the science which is its work; it is the most extreme form of rationalism and of 'scientism', but it is their most natural outcome and altogether the most logical one. Indeed, anyone who knows nothing beyond this science and this reason may well have the illusion of their absolute supremacy; anyone who knows nothing superior to humanity, and more particularly to this type of humanity which is represented by the modern West, may be tempted to deify it, especially if sentimentalism intrudes (and we have shown that it is far from being incompatible with rationalism). All this is only the inevitable consequence of ignorance of the principles, an ignorance which we have denounced as the capital vice of Western science; and, despite Littré's protestations, we do not think that Auguste Comte caused the slightest deviation in positivism by wishing to set up a 'religion of humanity'; this particular 'mysticism' was nothing more than an attempt to fuse the two characteristic tendencies of the modern civilization. Worse still, there exists even a materialist pseudo-mysticism: we have known people who went so far as to declare that even if they should have no rational motive for being materialists, they would nonetheless continue to be so, solely because it is 'finer' to 'do good' without any hope of possible recompense. These people, whose minds are so powerfully influenced by 'moralism' (and their morality, in spite of calling itself 'scientific', is at bottom nonetheless purely sentimental), are naturally among those who profess the 'religion of science'. As this, in all truth, can only be a 'pseudo-religion', we deem it far juster to call it a 'superstition of science': a belief which is only based on ignorance (even if it is that of 'authority') and on vain prejudice does not deserve to be looked at in any other way than as a common superstition.

3

THE SUPERSTITION OF LIFE

AMONG the many things that Westerners often blame the Eastern civilizations for are their fixity and stability; these characteristics amount in their eyes to a denial of progress, which indeed they are, as we readily admit; but to see a fault in this, one must believe in progress. For us, these characteristics show that these civilizations partake of the immutability of the principles upon which they are based, and that is one of the essential aspects of the idea of tradition. It is because the modern civilization is lacking in principle that it is eminently unstable. Besides, one should not imagine that the stability we speak of goes to the length of excluding all change; what it does is to reduce the change to being never more than an adaptation to circumstances, by which the principles are not in the least affected, and which may on the contrary be strictly deduced from them, if they are resorted to, not for themselves, but in view of a definite application; and that is the point of all the 'traditional sciences', apart from metaphysics which, as knowledge of the principles, is self-sufficing, for these sciences cover the range of all that may happen to proceed from the principles, including social institutions. It would also be wrong to confuse immutability with immobility; such misunderstandings are common among Westerners because they are generally incapable of separating conception from imagination, and because their minds are inextricably bound up with representations dictated by the senses; this is very obvious in such philosophers as Kant, who cannot however be ranked among the 'sensualists'. The immutable is not what is contrary to change, but what is above it; just as the 'supra-rational' is not the

'irrational'. There is every reason for distrusting the tendency to arrange things in artificial oppositions and antitheses, by an interpretation which is both systematic and falsely simple, arising chiefly from the inability to go further and resolve the apparent contrasts in the harmonious unity of a true synthesis. It is nonetheless true that there is very real opposition, from the point of view that we have in mind here as well as from many others, between East and West, at least as things are at present: there is divergence, but it should not be forgotten that this divergence is one-sided and not symmetrical, being like that of a branch which grows away from the trunk; it is the civilization of the West alone which, by going in the direction that it has followed throughout the last centuries, has become so remote from the civilizations of the East that between it and them there seems to be, as it were, no longer any common element, any term of comparison, or any meeting-ground for agreement and reconciliation.

The Westerner, or rather the modern Westerner (it is always the latter that we mean), shows himself to be essentially changeable and inconstant, as if vowed to ceaseless movement and agitation, and, what is more, to have no ambition to emerge from it; in a word, his plight is that of a being who is unable to find his balance, but who, in his inability to do so, will not admit that the thing is possible in itself or even desirable, going so far as to make his own impotence something to boast of. These changes which he is subject to and which he takes delight in without requiring that they should lead him to any end, because he has come to like them for their own sake, constitute in fact what he calls 'progress', as if it were enough simply to walk, quite regardless of direction, to be sure of advancing. As for the goal of his advance, he does not even dream of asking himself what it is; and the scattering of his forces amid the multiplicity which is the inevitable consequence of these changes without principle and without aim, and indeed the only consequence whose reality cannot be contested, he calls 'being enriched': that is yet another word which, in the gross materialism of the image that it calls up, is altogether typical and representative of the modern mentality. The need for outward activity carried to such a pitch, together with the love of effort for effort's sake, independent of the results

that can be got by it, is not at all natural to man, at least not to the normal man, according to the idea which has always and everywhere been accepted of him; but it has become in a sense natural to the Westerner, perhaps as a result of habit, which Aristotle says is like a second nature, but above all through the atrophy of the being's higher faculties, which goes necessarily with the intensive development of the lower elements. A man without means of extricating himself from agitation has nothing left but to be satisfied with it, just as a man whose intelligence stops short at rational activity finds such activity admirable and sublime; to be fully at ease in a limited sphere, whatever it may be, one must be blind to the possibility of there being anything beyond. The aspirations of the Westerner, alone of all mankind (we are not considering the savages, about whom it is, moreover, very difficult to know what to think), are as a rule strictly confined to the sensible world and to its dependencies, among which we include the whole order of feeling and a good part of the order of reason; no doubt there are praiseworthy exceptions, but we can only consider here the general and common mentality, such as is truly characteristic of the place and the period.

Another strange phenomenon may be noted in the intellectual domain itself, or rather in what is left of it, and this, which is only a particular case of the state of mind that we have just described, is the passion for research taken as an end in itself, quite regardless of seeing it terminate in any solution. While the rest of mankind seeks for the sake of finding and of knowing, the Westerner of today seeks for the sake of seeking; the Gospel saying, 'Seek and ye shall find,' is a dead letter for him, in the full force of this phrase, since he calls 'death' anything and everything that constitutes a definite finality, just as he gives the name 'life' to what is no more than fruitless agitation. This unhealthy taste for research, real 'mental restlessness' without end and without issue, shows itself at its very plainest in modern philosophy, the greater part of which represents no more than a series of quite artificial problems, which only exist because they are badly propounded, owing their origin and survival to nothing but carefully kept up verbal confusions; they are problems which, considering how they are formulated, are truly insoluble, but, on the other hand, no one is in the least anxious to solve them,

and they were created simply that they might go on indefinitely feeding controversies and discussions which lead nowhere, and which are not meant to lead anywhere. This substituting research for knowledge (and closely bound up with it is the remarkable abuse which consists in 'theories of knowledge' to which we have already called attention) is simply giving up the proper object of intelligence, and it is scarcely strange that in these conditions some people have come ultimately to suppress the very idea of truth, for the truth can only be conceived of as the end to be reached, and these people want no end to their research. It follows that there can be nothing intellectual in their efforts, even taking intelligence in its widest, not in its highest and purest sense; and if we have been able to speak of a 'passion for research', it is in fact because sentiment has intruded into domains where it ought never to have set foot. Of course we are not protesting against the actual existence of sentiment, which is a natural fact, but only against its abnormal and illegitimate extension; one must know how to put each thing in its place and leave it there, but this calls for an understanding of the universal order, which is beyond the reach of the modern world, where disorder is law. To denounce sentimentalism is not to deny sentiment any more than to denounce rationalism amounts to denying reason; sentimentalism and rationalism are both nothing more than the results of abuses, although the modern West sees them as the two extremes of an alternative from which it cannot escape.

We have already said that sentiment is quite close to the material world; it is not for nothing that the sensible and the sentimental are so closely linked by language, and, although they are not to be altogether confused with one another, they are only two modes of one and the same order of things. The modern mind faces almost exclusively outward, toward the world of the senses; sentiment seems inward to it, and it often seeks, in virtue of this, to oppose sentiment to sensation; but that is all very relative; and the truth is that the psychologist's 'introspection' itself grasps nothing but phenomena, or, in other words, outward and superficial modifications of the being; there is nothing truly inward and deep except the higher part of the intelligence. This will seem surprising to those who, like the

intuitionists of today, only know intelligence in its lower part, represented by the sensible faculties and by reason insofar as it turns its attention to the objects of sense, and believe it to be more outward than sentiment; but, in relation to the transcendent intellectuality of the Easterners, rationalism and intuitionism go closely together upon one and the same plane, and both stop short at the being's 'exterior', despite the illusions by which either conception believes that it grasps something of the being's interior nature. But when all is said and done, in neither of them is there ever any question of going beyond sensible things; they disagree simply on the methods to be put into practice for reaching these things, on how they are to be considered, and on which of their diverse aspects should come most to the fore: we might say that the ones prefer to insist on the 'matter' side, the others on the 'life' side. These are, in fact, the limitations which Western thought cannot throw off: the Greeks were unable to free themselves from form; modern Westerners seem above all powerless to extricate themselves from matter, and, when they try to do so, they cannot in any case get away from the domain of life. All these, life just as much as matter and even more so than form, are merely conditions of existence particular to the sensible world, so that they are all on one same plane, as we have just been saying. The modern West, save for exceptional cases, takes the sensible world as the sole object of knowledge; whether it prefers to attach itself to one or to the other of this world's conditions, or whether it studies it from this or that point of view, scouring it in no matter what direction, the domain in which its mind works continues nonetheless to be always the same. If this domain appears to become at all enlarged, it never does so to any real extent, even supposing that the appearance is not altogether illusory. There are moreover, bordering on the sensible world, various prolongations which also belong to the same degree of universal existence. According to whether a man has in mind this or that condition, among those which define this world, he may at times reach one or another of these prolongations, but he will remain nonetheless shut up in a special and determined domain. When Bergson says that the natural object of intelligence is matter, he is wrong in giving the name intelligence to what he means, and he does so through his ignorance

of what is truly intellectual; but he is substantially right if, by this faulty designation, he means no more than the lowest part of the intelligence, or, to be more precise, the use that is commonly made of it in the West of today. As for him, it is clearly and essentially to life that he attaches himself: the part played by 'Élan vital' in his theories is well known, as is also the meaning he gives to what he calls 'pure duration'; but life, whatever 'value' be attributed to it, is nonetheless inextricably bound up with matter, and it is always the same world that is being considered here, whether it is looked at with the eyes of an 'organicist' or 'vitalist' or, on the other hand, with those of a 'mechanist'. Only, when, of the elements which make up this world, the vital element is held to be more important than the material one, it is natural that sentiment should take precedence over so-called intelligence; the intuitionists with their 'mental contortions', the pragmatists with their 'inner experience', simply address themselves to the dark powers of instinct and sentiment, which they take for the being's very depth, and, when they follow their thought or rather their tendency to its conclusion, they end, like William James, in proclaiming the supremacy of the 'subconscious', by the most incredible subversion of the natural order ever chronicled in the history of ideas.

Life, considered in itself, is always full of change and ceaseless modification; it is, then, understandable that it should hold such fascinating sway over the outlook of the modern civilization, whose changefulness is also its most striking characteristic, obvious at first sight, even if one stops short at an altogether superficial examination. When a man is imprisoned like this in life and in the conceptions directly connected with it, he can know nothing about what escapes change, about the transcendent and immutable order, which is that of the universal principles; in this case there can no longer be any possibility of metaphysical knowledge, and we are always brought round again to this same conclusive statement of fact, which is the inevitable consequence of each of the modern West's characteristics. We say here change rather than movement, because the former word is wider in scope than the latter: movement is only the physical or rather the mechanical modality of

change, and there are conceptions which have in view other modalities that cannot be brought under the heading of movement, and which even hold these modalities to be more strictly 'vital' in character to the exclusion of movement in its ordinary sense, that is, as meaning just a change of position. There again, it would be wrong to exaggerate certain oppositions, since they only appear as such from a more or less limited point of view: for example, a mechanistic theory is, by definition, a theory that claims to explain everything by matter and movement; but if the idea of life were given its widest possible extension, movement itself could be made to fit into it, and it would be seen that the so-called opposed or antagonistic theories are, at bottom, much more equivalent than their respective partisans will admit;¹ there is scarcely any difference between the two except for a little more or a little less narrowness of outlook. In any case, a conception that gives itself out as a 'philosophy of life' is necessarily, then and there, a 'philosophy of becoming'; we mean that it is confined to this state, and cannot escape from it (to become and to change being synonymous), which leads it to situate all reality therein and to deny anything whatever outside or beyond it, since the systematic mind is so framed as to imagine that it comprises within its formulas the whole of the Universe; that is yet another formal negation of metaphysics. One such, among others, is evolutionism in all its forms, from the most mechanistic conceptions, including gross 'transformism', to theories like Bergson's; there is no room to be found there for anything except the state of becoming, and even then, strictly speaking, it is only a more or less limited part of this state that is kept in view. Evolution, all told, is nothing but change, backed up by an illusion with regard to the direction and quality of this change; evolution and progress are one and the same thing, to all intents and purposes, but the former term is often preferred today because it seems to give the impression of being more 'scientific'. Evolutionism is, as it were, a product of those two great modern superstitions, that of science and that of life, and its success

1. This corresponds to what we once said about the two conflicting varieties of 'monism', the one spiritualistic and the other materialistic.

is made for the very reason that both rationalism and sentimentalism find full satisfaction in it; the variable proportions in which these two tendencies are combined account very largely for the diversity of forms in which this theory is clothed. The evolutionists see change everywhere, even in God himself when they admit him: Bergson is no exception when he imagines God as 'a center from which worlds shoot out, and which is not a *thing* but a continuity of shooting out'; and he added expressly: 'God thus defined has nothing of the already made; he is unceasing life, action, freedom.'² It is, then, nothing more nor less than these ideas of life and of action which our contemporaries are literally obsessed with, and which, as in the above case, intrude themselves into a domain that seeks to be speculative; in other words they suppress speculation in the interests of action, which encroaches everywhere and absorbs everything. This conception of a God in a state of becoming, who is only immanent and not transcendent, together with that (which amounts to the same) of a truth in the making, which is nothing more than a sort of ideal limit, devoid of all present reality, is by no means exceptional in modern thought; the pragmatists, who have adopted the idea of a limited God for chiefly 'moralist' motives, are not its original inventors, since what is held to develop must necessarily be conceived of as limited. Pragmatism, by its very name, poses above all as a 'philosophy of action'; its more or less avowed assumption is that man only has needs of a practical order, material ones and, together with these, sentimental ones. It means, then, the doing away with intellectuality; but, if this is so, why go on wanting to evolve theories? That is rather hard to understand; and if pragmatism, like skepticism, which it only differs from with regard to action, wished to conform to its own standards, it would have to limit itself to a mere mental attitude, which it cannot even seek to justify logically without giving itself the lie; but there is no doubt that it is very difficult to keep strictly within such bounds. However degraded a man may be intellectually, he cannot at least help reasoning, if only in order to deny reason; moreover the pragmatists do not deny it as the skeptics do, but they seek to reduce it to serving purely practical

2. *Creative Evolution*, p262.

ends; as the followers of those who sought to reduce the whole of intelligence to reason, though without denying it a theoretic function, they have gone one degree lower in the scale of degradation. There is even one point where the pragmatists carry their denying further than the pure skeptics: the latter do not contest the existence of truth outside us, but only our ability to reach it; the pragmatists, in imitation of one or two Greek sophists (who very probably did not take themselves seriously), go to the lengths of suppressing truth itself.

Life and action go closely together; the one's domain is also the other's, and it is to this limited domain that the whole Western civilization keeps, today more than ever. Elsewhere we have told what view the Easterners take of the limitations of action and its consequences, and how for them, in this respect, knowledge is the opposite of action: the Far-Eastern theory of 'non-action' and the Hindu theory of 'deliverance' are inaccessible to the ordinary Western mind, which cannot conceive that a man may dream of freeing himself from action, still less that he may actually come to do so. Besides, action is not generally considered except in its most outward forms, in those that strictly correspond to physical movement: hence this growing desire for speed and this feverish restlessness so peculiar to modern life; it is all action for the pleasure of action, and this can only be called agitation, for even in action there are certain degrees to observe and certain distinctions to make. Nothing would be easier than to show how incompatible this is with all that concerns reflection and concentration, or in other words with the essential means of all true knowledge; it is indeed the triumph of dispersion, in the most complete turning of all things inside out that can be conceived; it means the definite ruin of whatever may still be left of intellectuality, if nothing comes to react in time against these fatal tendencies. Fortunately, such an excess of evil may bring on a reaction, and even the physical dangers inherent in so abnormal a development may end by inspiring a salutary dread. Besides, the very fact that the domain of action only admits of very limited possibilities, even if it may seem to do otherwise, makes it impossible that this development should go on indefinitely, and sooner or later the nature of things will forcibly impose a change of

direction. But for the moment we do not intend to consider the possibilities of a future that is perhaps remote. What we have in view is the present state of the West, and all that we see of it is clear confirming evidence that material progress and intellectual decadence are knit closely together; we have no wish to decide which of the two is the cause or effect of the other, especially as we are dealing, in the main, with a complex whole in which the relations of the different elements are sometimes reciprocal and alternating. Without trying to trace the modern world back to its beginnings and to study the way in which its special mentality may have been formed, as we should have to do if the question were to be fully disposed of, we can say this much: there must have been already a depreciation and a dwindling of intellectuality for material progress to become important enough to overstep certain bounds; but once this movement had started, with the concerns of material progress absorbing little by little all man's faculties, intellectuality went on growing gradually weaker and weaker, until it reached the plight that we see it in today, with perhaps a still worse one in store for it, although that certainly seems difficult. On the other hand, the expansion of sentimentality is by no means incompatible with material progress, because the two are, fundamentally, things of almost the same order; we shall be excused for coming back to this point so often, since, unless it is understood, we cannot grasp what is going on around us. This expansion of sentimentality, corresponding to the regress of intellectuality, will be all the more excessive and disordered for not meeting anything that might effectively check it or direct it, since this part could certainly not be played by 'scientism', which, as we have seen, is far from being immune to sentimental contagion, and which offers no more than a false semblance of intellectuality.

One of the most noticeable symptoms of the preponderance acquired by sentimentality is what we call 'moralism', which is the clearly marked tendency to refer everything to concerns of a moral order, or at least to subordinate everything else to them, especially what is considered as coming within the domain of intelligence. Morality in itself is something essentially sentimental; it represents as relative and contingent a point of view as possible, and one,

moreover, that has never been held except by the West; but 'moralism', in the already defined sense of the word, is an exaggeration of this point of view, and only came into being quite recently. A moral code, whatever foundation is given it, and whatever importance is attributed to it, is not and cannot be anything more than a rule of action. For men who are no longer interested in anything but action it is clear that morality must figure very largely indeed, and they attach themselves to it all the more because considerations of this order may be made to pass for thought in a period of intellectual decadence. It is this that explains the birth of 'moralism'. Something of the kind had already come to light toward the end of the Greek civilization, but without growing, as far as one can tell, to the proportions which it has taken on in our time; in fact, from Kant onward, almost all modern philosophy has been saturated with 'moralism', which amounts to saying that it gives precedence to the practical over the speculative, the former being moreover considered from a special angle; this tendency reached its full development with the philosophies of life and of action that we have spoken of. On the other hand we have mentioned the obsession, which haunts even the most avowed materialists, of what are called 'scientific morals', which represent exactly the same tendency; it may be called scientific or philosophical according to individual tastes, but it is never any more than an expression of sentimentality, and this expression does not even vary to any appreciable extent. Indeed, a curious thing about it all is that the moral conceptions within any given sphere of society are all extraordinarily alike, in spite of their claim to be based on considerations that are different and sometimes even conflicting. This is what shows up the artificiality of the theories by which each man strives to justify certain practical rules, which are always the ones commonly observed about him. All told, these theories simply represent the particular preferences of those who formulate or adopt them. Often a party interest plays no small role as well. As proof of this no more is needed than the way in which 'lay morals' (it matters little whether they are called scientific or philosophical) are put in opposition to religious morals. Besides, as the moral point of view only exists for social reasons and no other, the intrusion of politics into the same domain is not to be

unduly wondered at; it is perhaps less shocking than the utilization, for similar ends, of theories that are made out to be purely scientific; but, after all, has not the 'scientistic' mentality itself been created to serve certain political interests? We doubt very much whether most champions of evolutionism are altogether innocent of any such hidden motive, and, to take another example, the so-called 'science of religions' is much more like a weapon of controversy than a serious science; these are among the cases that we have already alluded to, cases where rationalism is chiefly a mask for sentimentality.

It is not only among the 'scientists' and among the philosophers that the encroachment of 'moralism' may be noticed; notice must also be taken, in this respect, of the degeneration of the religious idea, such as it is found to be in the innumerable sects that have sprung from Protestantism. These are the only forms of religion which are specifically modern, and they are characterized by a progressive reduction of the doctrinal element in the interests of the moral or sentimental element; this phenomenon is a particular instance of the general diminishing of intellectuality, and it is no mere chance that the epoch of the Reformation coincides with that of the Renaissance, that is, precisely with the beginning of the modern period. In certain branches of contemporary Protestantism the doctrine has dwindled into nothing at all, and, as the worship, in a parallel way, has also been reduced to practically nothing, the moral element is ultimately all that is left: 'Liberal Protestantism' is no more than a 'moralism' with a religious label; it cannot be said that it is still a religion in the strict sense of the word, because, of the three elements that enter into the definition of religion, there remains no more than one alone. Having reached this stage, it should rather be classed as a sort of special philosophical way of thinking; besides, its representatives are by and large in sympathy with the champions of 'lay morals', which are also styled independent, and they have even been known on occasion to associate themselves openly with them, which shows that they are conscious of their real affinities. As a name for things of this kind, we willingly use the word 'pseudo-religion'; and we apply also this same word to all the 'neo-spiritualist' sects, which are born and prosper above all in the Protestant countries, because 'Neo-Spiritualism' and 'Liberal

Protestantism' spring from the same tendencies and from the same state of mind. The place of religion, owing to the suppression of the intellectual element (or its absence in the case of new creations), is taken by religiosity, or, in other words, by a mere sentimental aspiration, more or less vague and inconsistent; and this religiosity is to religion just about what the shadow is to the body. Here can be seen traces of the 'religious experience' of William James (which is further complicated by its appeal to the 'subconscious'), and also the 'inner life' in the sense which the modernists give it, for modernism was nothing but an attempt to introduce the mentality in question into Catholicism itself, an attempt that was broken against the force of the traditional outlook, whose sole refuge, in the modern West, appears to be Catholicism, save for individual exceptions which may always exist apart from all organization.

It is among the Anglo-Saxon peoples that 'moralisin' rages with its greatest intensity, and it is there too that the love of action may be seen in its most extreme forms, which shows that these two things are indeed closely knit together, as we have said. There is a strange irony in the current conception of the English as being a people essentially attached to tradition, and those who think so are quite simply confusing tradition with custom. The ease with which certain words come to be misused is truly extraordinary: there are some who have gone so far as to give the name 'traditions' to popular habits, or even to conventions of quite recent origin, without importance or real significance. As for ourselves, we refuse to give this name to what is only a more or less automatic respect for certain outward forms, which are sometimes nothing more than 'superstitions' in the etymological sense of the word. True tradition dwells in the outlook of a people or race or civilization, and it springs from causes that lie far deeper. The Anglo-Saxon outlook is in reality quite as anti-traditional as the French and Germanic outlooks, but in what seems to be rather a different way, for in Germany it is more the tendency of 'scientism' that predominates and the French tend more toward scholarship. Little matter, however, whether it is 'moralisin' or the 'scientistic' attitude that prevails, for it would, we repeat once again, be artificial to seek to separate entirely these two tendencies, which represent the two sides of the

modern outlook, and which are to be found in varying proportions among all the peoples of the West. It seems that today the 'moralist' tendency has fairly generally the upper hand, though it is only a few years since the domination of 'scientism' was the more marked; but the one's gain is not necessarily the other's loss, since the two can be very well reconciled, and, in spite of all fluctuations, the common mind links them fairly closely together: it has room, at one and the same time, for all those idols that we spoke of earlier. However, a sort of crystallization of the different anti-traditional elements of the modern outlook is now taking place rather with the idea of 'life', and what goes with it, as center, just as a similar crystallization took place in the nineteenth century round about the idea of 'science', and in the eighteenth about that of 'reason'. We speak of ideas, but we should do better simply to speak of words, since all this is a triumph of the hypnotic power of mere words. What is sometimes called 'ideology', with an unfavorable implication by those who are not its dupes (for in spite of everything there are still one or two to be met with who remain undeluded), is really nothing more than verbalism, and in this connection we can take up again the word 'superstition' in the etymological sense, which we have last alluded to and which designates a thing that survives in itself, when it has lost its real point. Actually, the sole point of words is the expression of ideas; attributing a value to the words by themselves, independently of the ideas, failing even to base these words on any idea at all, and letting oneself be influenced by their mere sonority, is indeed superstition. 'Nominalism', in its different degrees, is the philosophical expression of this negation of the idea, for which it professes to substitute the word or the image; and in confusing conception and sensible representation, it really leaves nothing but the latter. In one form or another 'nominalism' is extremely rife in modern philosophy, while formerly it was no more than an exception. This is very significant; and it must be added that nominalism almost always goes hand in hand with empiricism, that is to say with the tendency to make experience, and especially experience of the senses, the origin and end of all knowledge. This negation of everything truly intellectual is what we always come back to, as common element, at the bottom of all these tendencies and all these opinions,

because it is, in fact, the root of all mental deformation, and because this negation is implied, as the necessary starting-point, in all that contributes to pervert modern Western conceptions.

So far we have been mainly concerned with giving a general view of the present state of the Western world considered with regard to its mentality; this must come first, for it is on this that all the rest depends, and there can be no important and lasting change that does not start by influencing the general mentality. Those who maintain the contrary are still the victims of a very modern illusion. Seeing only the outward manifestations, they take the effects for the causes, and they readily believe that what they do not see does not exist. What is called 'historical materialism', or the tendency to trace everything to economic facts, is a remarkable example of this illusion. Things have reached such a state that the facts of this order have actually acquired, in the history of today, an importance which they never had in the past; but nonetheless the part they play is not and never can be exclusive. Besides, let there be no mistake about it: those 'in control', known or unknown, are well aware that, to act effectively, they must first of all create and keep up currents of ideas or of pseudo-ideas, and they do not fail to do so; even when these currents are purely negative, they are nonetheless of a mental nature, and it is in the minds of men that first the germs must be spawned that will later attain to outward realization; even for intellectuality to be done away with, minds must first be persuaded of its non-existence and their activity turned in another direction. This does not mean that we are among those who hold that the world is led by ideas directly; this again is a formula that has been much misused, and most of its users scarcely know what an idea is, even supposing that they do not confuse it altogether with the mere word. In other words, they are very often nothing more than 'ideologists', and the worst 'moralist' dreamers belong precisely to this category: in the name of the chimeras which they call 'right' and 'justice', and which have nothing to do with true ideas, they have had too fatal and lamentable an influence on recent events, an influence whose consequences are making themselves too keenly felt for it to be necessary to insist on what we mean. But the simpletons are not the only ones concerned: there are also, as always, those who lead them

without their knowing it, who exploit them and make use of them in view of much more positive interests. In any case, as we are continually tempted to repeat, what matters above all is to know how to put everything in its proper place; the pure idea has no immediate relation with the domain of action, and it cannot have the direct influence on outward things that sentiment has; but the idea is, nonetheless, the principle, the necessary starting-point of all things, without which they would be robbed of any sound basis. Sentiment, if it is not guided and controlled by the idea, brings forth nothing but error, disorder, and obscurity; there is no question of doing away with sentiment but of keeping it within its legitimate bounds, and the same applies to all the other contingencies. The restoration of a real intellectuality, even if at first it was only within a limited elite, appears to be the sole means of putting an end to the mental confusion that reigns in the West. It is only this which could disperse the mob of empty illusions that encumber modern minds, and of superstitions far more ridiculous and unfounded than all those which are made a butt for random mockery by people who seek to be thought 'enlightened'; and it is only that which will make it possible to find a common ground for understanding with the peoples of the East. In fact, all we have said represents faithfully, not merely our own view—which in itself hardly matters—but also, what is far more worth considering, the judgment that is passed by the East upon the West, when Easterners deign to extend their interest in the West beyond merely counteracting its invasive action by that altogether passive resistance of theirs which the West cannot understand, because it implies an inner power of which it has no equivalent, and against which no brutal force can prevail. This power is beyond life, it is superior to action and to all that takes place, it has nothing to do with time, and partakes of supreme immutability; if the Easterner can patiently undergo the material domination of the West, it is because he knows how relative transitory things are, and because he carries, in the very depth of his being, the consciousness of eternity.

4

IMAGINARY TERRORS & REAL DANGERS

DESPITE the high opinion which Westerners have of themselves and of their civilization, they are well aware that their control over the rest of the world is far from being definitely assured, and that it may be at the mercy of events that it is not within their power to foresee, still less to prevent. What they do refuse to see, however, is that the chief cause of the dangers that threaten them lies in the very character of the European civilization. Nothing that relies merely, as their civilization does, on the material order of things can hope for more than transitory success. Change, which is the law in this essentially unstable domain, may have the worst consequences in every respect, and these consequences will come with all the more lightning rapidity as the speed of change grows greater and greater, the very excess of material progress bringing with it the grave risk of ending in some cataclysm. One has only to think of the ceaseless perfecting of the means of destruction, of the increasingly important part that they play in modern warfare, of the scarcely reassuring prospects that certain inventions open up for the future, and one will hardly be disposed to deny such a possibility. Furthermore, the machines that are expressly intended for killing are not the only dangerous ones. Starting from the point that things have now reached, it does not need much imagination to picture the West ending by self-destruction, either in a gigantic war compared with which the last one will seem negligible, or through the unforeseen effects of some product which, when unskillfully manipulated, would be capable of blowing up, not merely a factory or a town as hitherto, but a whole continent. Certainly, it may still be hoped that

Europe and even America will pull themselves together and regain their self-control before reaching such extremities; lesser catastrophes may serve as useful warnings for them and, by the fear which they inspire, do something to arrest this dizzy course which can only lead to an abyss. All this is possible, especially if the fear is coupled with some overly strong sentimental disappointments such as may work upon the mass of the people to wipe out the illusion of 'moral progress'. Thus the excessive development of sentimentality might also contribute to this salutary result, and indeed it will have to, if the West, left to itself, is to look no further than in her own mentality for the means of a reaction which will become necessary sooner or later. Such means, however, would be far from sufficient to force upon Western civilization a change of trend, even if this reaction were to take place at once; and, as equilibrium is scarcely to be realized in such conditions, there would still be good reason to dread a return to barbarism pure and simple, as a quite natural consequence of the negation of intellectuality.

Setting aside for the moment these indications of a future which may be far off, it is clear that the Westerners of today are still apt to believe that progress, or what they call progress, can and must be unbroken and indefinite. While deluding themselves more than ever about their own importance, they have become the self-appointed missionaries for the world-wide propagation of this progress, imposing it, if need be, by force on those peoples who commit the offence—which is unpardonable in their eyes—of not eagerly accepting it. This rage for propaganda, which we have already alluded to, is very dangerous for everyone, but above all for the Westerners themselves, who make themselves dreaded and loathed as a result; the mania for conquest has never been developed so far, and until now there was never any question of hiding behind masks of hypocrisy such as belong to modern 'moralism'. The West forgets, moreover, that it had no historical existence at a time when the Eastern civilizations had already reached their full development;¹

1. It is possible that there were earlier Western civilizations, but the present one is not their heir, and even the memory of them is lost, so that we need not concern ourselves with them here.

with its pretensions, the West seems to Easterners as a child might seem if, proud at having hurriedly acquired some scraps of rudimentary information, it should believe itself to possess the sum of all knowledge and should wish to teach it to old men full of wisdom and experience. This mistake would be harmless enough, and no more than amusing, if Westerners had not brutal force at their disposal; but the use that they make of it entirely alters the situation, since it is there, and not in an 'assimilation', that the true danger lies for those who, quite without wanting to, come into contact with them. Indeed, Westerners are quite incapable of assimilating others to themselves, being qualified neither intellectually nor even physically; European peoples, no doubt because they are made up of heterogeneous elements and do not strictly speaking constitute one race, are those whose racial characteristics are the least firmly fixed and the first to disappear when there is a mingling with other races; wherever such mixtures occur, it is always the Westerner who, far from being able to absorb the others, is absorbed himself. As for the intellectual point of view, the considerations that we have just been putting forward make it needless for us to insist on it; a civilization that never ceases to move, that has neither tradition nor deep-rooted principle, obviously cannot have a real influence on those which possess those very things that it lacks itself; and if the inverse influence is in fact no longer exerted, it is simply because Westerners are incapable of understanding what is strange to them: they are impervious, in this respect, merely through mental inferiority, whereas the Easterners are so out of pure intellectuality.

There are truths which it is necessary to emphasize again and again, however unpalatable many people may find them. All the superiorities on which Westerners preen themselves are purely imaginary, with the sole exception of material superiority. This one is only too real; and no one denies it them, while, at heart, no one envies them for it either; but the trouble is that they abuse it. For anyone who has the courage to see things as they are, colonial conquest cannot, any more than any other armed conquest, base itself on any other right than that of brute force. By all means let it be said that a people that feels itself too cramped at home must enlarge its field of activity, and that it can only do so at the expense of those

who are too weak to resist it. We do not even see how things of this kind could be prevented from happening, but at least let there be no pretence of acting in the interests of 'civilization', which are quite beside the point. That is what we call 'moralist' hypocrisy: it is unconscious in the masses of the people, who never fail to accept with docility whatever ideas are inculcated, but it ought not to be equally so with everyone, and we cannot admit that statesmen, in particular, are the dupes of the phraseology which they use. When a European nation seizes some country, even if it should be only inhabited by truly barbarian tribes, no one will convince us that it is for the pleasure or the honor of 'civilizing' these poor people, who have shown not the least desire for it, that a costly expedition is undertaken, followed by all sorts of public works. A man must be very ingenuous indeed if he can help realizing that the true motive is quite different, and that it lies in the hope of more tangible profits. The chief object, whatever pretexts are put forward, is to exploit the country, and very often, if possible, its inhabitants at the same time, for they could not possibly be suffered to go on living there in their own way, even if they are untroublesome. But since the word 'exploit' sounds bad, one speaks, in the modern idiom, of 'developing the resources' of a country: it is the same thing, but a change of word is all that is needed to save the sensibility of the public from being shocked. Naturally, when the conquest has been carried out, the Europeans give free rein to their proselytism, because for them it is a real need. Each people brings to the task its own particular temperament, some performing it more brutally, others with more moderation, and the latter attitude, even when it is not calculated, is without doubt the more clever of the two. As for the results obtained, it is always forgotten that the civilization of certain peoples was not made for others of different mentalities. In the case of savages, the harm is perhaps not very great, and yet, in adopting the outward features of the European civilization (for their assimilation of it remains very superficial), they are generally more prone to imitate its evils than to take what good it may have. We have no desire to insist on this aspect of the question, which we are only considering incidentally; what is more serious is that the Europeans, when they find themselves face to face with civilized peoples, treat them

like savages, and it is then that they make themselves really intolerable; and we are not speaking only of the rather dubious people from among whom colonists and officials are too often drawn, but of the Europeans almost without exception. The minds of men, especially of those who never cease to talk about 'right' and 'liberty', must be in a strange state when they are so prone to deny civilizations other than theirs the right to an independent existence; that is all that is asked of them in many cases, and it is not asking too much. There are some Easterners who, on this sole condition, would even agree to a foreign administration, so little do they care about material contingencies; it is only when it attacks their traditional institutions that they begin to find European domination intolerable. But it is just this traditional outlook that Westerners are more hostile to than to anything else, because they are all the more afraid of it the less they understand it, being themselves without it; such men are instinctively afraid of everything that goes beyond them; all their attempts in this respect will always go on being in vain, for there is a force there whose immensity they do not suspect; but if their indiscretion brings certain mishaps upon them, they have only themselves to blame. Furthermore, in the name of what, it may be asked, do they seek to force everyone to interest themselves exclusively in what interests them, to put economic concerns above all, or to adopt the political regime which they happen to prefer, and which, even admitting it to be the best for certain peoples, is not necessarily so for all? And the most extraordinary thing is that they have similar pretensions not only with regard to the peoples that they have conquered, but also with regard to those among whom they have succeeded in introducing and installing themselves while seeming to respect their independence; in fact, they extend these pretensions to the whole of mankind.

If this were not so, there would not be, in general, prejudices or systematic hostility against Westerners; their relations with other men would be what the relations between different peoples normally are; they would be taken for what they are, with the qualities and faults that belong to them, and, in spite of a possible regret that no truly interesting intellectual relations could be kept up with them, there would be scarcely any attempt to change them, for the

Easterners are not in the least given to proselytizing. Even those of the Easterners who seem to be most closed to everything foreign, the Chinese for example, would not be repelled by the sight of Europeans coming individually to set up house among them for business purposes, if they did not know only too well, from sad experience, what they are exposing themselves to by letting them have their way, and what encroachments quickly follow on what seemed, in the beginning, to be so inoffensive. The Chinese are the most deeply pacific people that exists; we say pacific and not 'pacifist', for they feel not the least need to build up grandiloquent humanitarian theories on that score: their temperament makes war repellent to them, and that is all. If this is a weakness in a certain relative sense, there is, in the very nature of the Chinese race, a force of another order which makes up for it, and the consciousness of which undoubtedly goes toward making this peaceful frame of mind possible. This race is gifted with such a power of absorption that it has assimilated all its successive conquerors, and done so with incredible rapidity, as history shows. Nothing, therefore, could be more ridiculous than the imaginary terror of the 'yellow peril' invented one day by William II, who even symbolized it in one of those so-called 'mystical' pictures which he liked to fill up his spare time by painting. No one, without all the ignorance that most Westerners suffer from, and their incapacity to see how much the rest of mankind differs from themselves, could possibly imagine the Chinese rising up in arms and marching forth to conquer Europe;² a Chinese invasion, if it should ever take place, could only be a peaceful penetration, and that is not, in any case, a very imminent danger. It is true that if the Chinese had the Western mentality, the hateful imbecilities that they are publicly credited with on every occasion would have been quite enough incitement for them to send out expeditions into Europe; much less would serve the West as a pretext for armed intervention, but these things leave the Easterners altogether indifferent. No one

2. Whereas the march of events in China since the first publication of this book might seem to contradict this assertion, it should be recalled that it was 'revolutionary' China, and hence precisely a 'China' that had turned against its own tradition, that became aggressive. Eo.

has ever, to our knowledge, dared to tell the truth about the origin of the events which took place in 1900. Here it is in a few words: the precincts of the European legations in Peking were not subject to the jurisdiction of the Chinese authorities, and a veritable den of robbers had been formed in the out-buildings of the German legation by people who were under the patronage of the Lutheran mission; these people used to spread themselves through the town, pillage as much as they could, and then, with their spoils, retreat into their refuge where, as no one had the right to pursue them, they were sure of impunity; in the end the townspeople were exasperated and threatened to invade the legation precincts so as to take hold of the malefactors who were there; the German minister wished to stop this and set himself to harangue the mob, but he only succeeded in getting killed in the turmoil; to avenge this outrage, an expedition was organized at once, and the strangest thing is that all the European states, even England, let themselves be drawn in the wake of Germany; the spectre of the 'yellow peril' had at least served some purpose in this case. It goes without saying that the belligerents got considerable benefits out of their intervention, especially from an economic point of view; and the profits made out of the mishap were not even confined to states as a whole: we know individuals who were placed in most fortunate circumstances in recognition of their military service... in the cellars of the legations; there would be no need to go and tell these people that the 'yellow peril' is not a reality!

It may, however, be objected that not only are there the Chinese, but also the Japanese, and that these latter are certainly a warlike people; that is true, but in the first place the Japanese, who come from a mixture in which Malayan elements predominate, do not really belong to the yellow race, and consequently their tradition is bound to be of a different character. If Japan is today ambitious to have the hegemony of the whole of Asia and to 'organize' it after its own fashion, it is precisely because Shintoism, a tradition in many ways very unlike Chinese Taoism, and one which gives much prominence to ritual warfare, came into contact with nationalism, learnt of course from the West—for the Japanese have always been only too clever at imitation—and has been changed into an imperialism

very like what is to be found in certain other countries. However, if the Japanese attempt such an undertaking, they will meet with at least as much resistance as the Europeans do, and perhaps even more. In fact, the Chinese evince for no one such hatred as for the Japanese, no doubt because the Japanese, as their neighbors, seem to them particularly dangerous; they dread them as a man who loves his quiet dreads everything that shows signs of disturbing it, and above all they despise them. It is only in Japan that the so-called 'progress' of the West is eagerly received, and this eagerness is all the greater because they think they can make 'progress' serve toward their realizing this ambition that we have just spoken of; and yet superiority in armaments, even combined with the most remarkable fighting qualities, does not always prevail against certain forces of another order: this was brought home to the Japanese in Formosa, and they do not find Korea an altogether untroublesome possession either. In fact, if the Japanese very easily won a war that a large part of the Chinese knew nothing of until it was over, it is because they were for the moment favored, for special reasons, by certain elements that were hostile to the Manchu dynasty, and that knew very well that other influences would intervene in time to prevent things from going too far. In a country like China, many events, such as wars or revolutions, take on quite a different aspect according to whether they are looked at from far or near, and, however surprising it may seem, it is distance that enlarges them: seen from Europe, they look considerable; in China herself, they dwindle down to mere local incidents.

It is by an optical illusion of the same kind that Westerners give undue importance to the movements of turbulent small minorities, formed of people who are often quite unheard of by their own compatriots, and who, in any case, are totally ignored by them. We are referring to a few individuals, such as are to be found more or less in all Eastern countries today, who have been brought up and educated in Europe or America, and who, having lost through this education the sense of tradition and knowing nothing of their own civilization, think it as well to affect the most extreme 'modernism'. These 'young' Easterners, as they call themselves to make their tendencies more marked, could never acquire a real influence in the East;

sometimes, like puppets, unknown to themselves, they are used for playing a part that they have no idea of, being manipulated with all the greater ease because they take themselves very seriously; but it also happens sometimes that after renewing contact with their race they are gradually disabused, realize that their presumption was chiefly the result of ignorance, and end by becoming true Easterners once more. These elements are merely exceptions of the very lowest order, but, as they make a certain amount of noise which carries into other countries, they attract the attention of Westerners, who naturally look on them with sympathy, and who, in doing so, lose sight of the silent multitudes compared with which these few are quite inexistent. The true Easterners scarcely trouble about making themselves known to foreigners, and this accounts for some rather strange errors: we have often been struck by the ease with which people come to accept, as authentic representatives of Eastern thought, one or two incompetent and unauthorized writers, sometimes even in the pay of a European power, and almost exclusively putting forward ideas that are entirely Western. Because they have oriental names, they are taken eagerly at their word, and henceforth, since there are no means of judging them by comparison, all their fellow countrymen are credited with conceptions or opinions which only belong to these few, and which are often poles apart from the Eastern outlook; of course, their output is strictly reserved for the European or American public, and in the East no one has ever heard of them.

Apart from the individual exceptions just spoken of, and also the collective exception of Japan, material progress really interests no one in these Eastern countries, where it is held to have brought few advantages and many disadvantages; but there are, with regard to it, two different attitudes, which outwardly may even seem conflicting, though they proceed nonetheless from one and the same standpoint. There are some who will not hear this so-called progress spoken of at any price and, retiring into a shell of purely passive resistance, go on behaving as if it did not exist; the others, looking on this progress as an unpleasant necessity, imposed by circumstances that will not last, prefer to accept it for the time being, simply and solely because they see, in the instruments which it puts at

their disposal, a means of resisting Western domination more effectively and of hastening its end. These two currents run throughout the East, in China, in India, and in the Islamic countries. If the present tendency may seem to be for the latter to prevail over the former, it would be very rash to draw the conclusion that there has been any deep change in the East's way of existence; the whole difference amounts to no more than a mere question of timeliness, and it is not on such a basis that there could be a real renewal of relations with the West, but quite the contrary. Though some Easterners seek to promote in their country an industrial development which would enable them, for the future, to struggle without being at a disadvantage against the peoples of Europe—meeting them on the very ground over which these peoples extend their whole activity—they nonetheless, we maintain, give up nothing of what is the essence of their civilization. Besides, economic rivalry can only be a new source of conflicts, unless an understanding is reached in another domain and from a higher point of view. There are, however, some Easterners, very few, who have come to the following conclusion: since Westerners are definitely unamenable to intellectuality, let there be no longer any question of it; but, even so, friendly relations might perhaps be established in a purely economic way with some peoples of the West. That also is an illusion: either there must be agreement in the domain of the principles to start with, and then all the secondary difficulties will be smoothed away automatically, or else no real agreement of any sort will ever be reached; and it is for the West to take, if it can, the first steps toward an effective renewal of intellectual relations, since it is the misunderstanding hitherto shown by it that has actually given rise to all the obstacles.

It would be as well if Westerners would become resigned to seeing the cause of the most dangerous misunderstandings where it really lies, that is, in themselves, and rid themselves of these ridiculous terrors of which the all too familiar 'yellow peril' is certainly the extreme example. The spectre, too, of 'Pan-Islamism' has a way of being conjured up, regardless of facts: in this case there is no doubt that the fear is less absolutely devoid of foundation, for the Islamic peoples, occupying the place of intermediaries between the East and

the West, combine certain characteristics of both, and they are, for example, much more warlike than the pure Easterners; but when all is said and done there is no need to exaggerate. True Pan-Islamism is primarily a statement of principle, essentially doctrinal in character; for it to take the form of political vindication, the Europeans would have to have compromised themselves considerably; in any case, it has nothing in common with any sort of 'nationalism', which is quite incompatible with the fundamental conceptions of Islam. The fact is that in most cases (and here we are thinking chiefly of North Africa) a clearly understood policy of 'association', respecting Islamic legislation in its entirety and implying a definite renunciation of all attempt at 'assimilation', would probably be enough to do away with the danger, if danger there be. Considering, for example, that the conditions imposed for obtaining French naturalization amount quite simply to an abjuration of the Islamic faith (and there are many other facts that might be mentioned in the same connection), it is small wonder that there are frequent jars and difficulties that might easily be avoided by a truer understanding of the situation. But, once again, it is precisely this understanding which the Europeans lack altogether. What must not be forgotten is that the Islamic civilization, in all its essential elements, is strictly traditional, as are all the Eastern civilizations; this is quite a sufficient reason to prevent Pan-Islamism, whatever form it may take, from ever identifying itself with Bolshevism or other such movements, as one or two misinformed people seem to fear. We have not the least desire to give here an account of Russian Bolshevism, for it is very difficult, as far as this is concerned, to know exactly what to go on; no doubt the reality is rather different from what it is generally reputed to be, and more complex than its opponents and champions think; but it is at least certain that the movement is clearly anti-traditional and therefore altogether modern and Western in outlook. It is utterly absurd to claim that the German or even the Russian mentality is in opposition to the outlook of the West, and we do not know what sense words can have for those who maintain such an opinion, any more than for those who describe Bolshevism as 'Asiatic'; in fact, Germany is on the contrary one of the countries where the Western outlook is carried to its extreme pitch; and, as for

the Russians, even if they have derived some outward characteristics from the Easterners, they are also as far removed from them intellectually as it is possible to be. We should add that when we speak of the West, we also include Judaism, which has never exerted any influence except in a Westerly direction, and which may even have helped somewhat toward forming the modern mentality in general. In point of fact, the large part played in Bolshevism by Israelite elements is a serious reason for the Easterners, and for the Muslims above all, to be distrustful and to keep their distance; we are not speaking of certain agitators of the 'Young Turk' type, who are profoundly anti-Muslim, being not seldom also of Jewish origin, and not having the least authority. Bolshevism cannot penetrate into India either, because it is opposed to all the traditional institutions, and especially to that of the castes; from this point of view, the Hindus would see no difference between its destructive action and the destructive action that the English have long tried to carry out by every sort of means, and where the one has failed, the other would be no more successful. As for China, she is generally very much out of sympathy with everything Russian, and moreover the traditional outlook is no less firmly established there than in all the rest of the East; if certain things can be tolerated more easily there for the moment, it is because of this power of absorption that is inherent in the Chinese race, and that enables it to turn in the end to its own advantage even a momentary disorder. In fact it would be quite irrelevant, for the sake of bringing credit to the legend of non-existent and impossible agreements, to mention the presence in Russia of a few bands of mercenaries who are no more than common brigands, and whom the Chinese are very glad to be rid of at their neighbors' expense. When the Bolsheviks tell of champions gained for their ideas among the Easterners, it is either mere boasting or self-deception. The truth is that some Easterners see in Russia, Bolshevik or no, a possible means of help against the domination of certain other Western powers, but they have not the slightest interest in Bolshevik ideas, and furthermore, if they consider a temporary agreement or alliance as acceptable in certain circumstances, it is because they know perfectly well that these ideas can never take

root in their country; otherwise they would beware of showing them the least semblance of favor. It is quite possible for a state to accept as auxiliaries, in view of a certain definite course of action, people with whom it has no common thought, and for whom it feels neither respect nor sympathy; for the true Easterners, Bolshevism, like everything else which comes from the West, will never be anything but a brutal force. If this force can do them some passing service, they will undoubtedly be glad of it, but one may rest assured that, as soon as there is nothing more to be got from it, they will take all the necessary steps to prevent it from becoming harmful to them. Besides, the Easterners, whose ambition it is to escape from the domination of one Western power, would certainly never consent to place themselves, for the sake of realizing this ambition, in a situation that might involve their falling again immediately under the domination of another Western power; they would gain nothing by the change, and, as their temperament is opposed to all feverish haste, they will always prefer to wait for more favorable circumstances, however remote they may seem, rather than to expose themselves to such a risk.

This last remark may explain why those Easterners who seem most impatient to shake off England's yoke did not dream of taking advantage of the war in 1914 for this purpose: it was because they knew well that Germany, in case of victory, would not fail to impose on them at least a more or less disguised protectorate, and this further state of subjection was to be avoided at any price. No Easterner who has had a reasonably close view of the Germans thinks it possible to arrive at mutual understanding with them any more than with the English; the same applies to the Russians, but Germany, with her formidable organization, generally inspires, and with good reason, more fears than Russia. Easterners will never be for any European power, but they will always be against those, whichever they may be, that seek to oppress them, and against those only; as for the rest, their attitude can only be neutral. We are speaking, of course, from the political point of view alone and as far as states or collectivities are concerned; there may always be individual sympathies or antipathies which remain outside these considerations, just

as, when we speak of Western lack of understanding, we have in mind only the general mentality, and not the possible exceptions. These exceptions, moreover, are very rare; nonetheless, if one is convinced, as we are, of the desirability of restoring proper relations between East and West, a beginning must certainly be made now to encourage this by all available means, however inadequate they may be; and the foremost of these means is to bring home, to those who are capable of understanding, what are the indispensable conditions of this restoration.

These conditions, as we have already said, are above all intellectual, and they are at the same time both negative and positive: firstly, all the prejudices, each of which is an obstacle, must be destroyed, and it is this end that is aimed at essentially by all the considerations which we have put forward so far; then there must be a restoration of true intellectuality, which the West has lost, and which the study of Eastern thought, if undertaken as it ought to be, can greatly help it to recover. In short, the Western outlook must be completely reformed; that is, at least, the ultimate goal to be reached; but this reform, at the beginning, could evidently not be realized except within a limited elite, though no more would be needed for it to bear fruit sooner or later, owing to the influence that this elite would not fail to exert, even without expressly seeking to do so, upon the whole Western world. This would be, in all probability, the sole means of rescuing the West from very real dangers which, though they are not those that it believes in, will become more and more imminent if it continues to go along its present path; and it would also be the sole means of saving, when the time came, all that might be worth keeping of Western civilization, that is, everything in it that may be in some ways advantageous and compatible with a normal state of intelligence, instead of letting the whole of it disappear in one of those cataclysms whose possibility we indicated at the beginning of the present chapter, without however wishing to venture upon the least prediction. Furthermore, in such an eventuality, an elite, if it was already intellectual in the true sense of the word, would alone be able to prevent a return to barbarism; and also, if this elite had had time to act deeply enough upon the general mentality, it would save the West from having to

be absorbed or assimilated by other civilizations, a possibility which is much less terrible than the last, but which would give rise to some disadvantages, for a time at least, by reason of the ethnic revolutions which would have to lead up to this assimilation. At this point, before going any further, we are anxious to make our attitude quite clear: we are not attacking the West in itself, but only, which is quite different, the modern outlook, in which we see the cause of the West's intellectual ruin; nothing would be more desirable, in our opinion, than the reconstitution of a truly Western civilization on normal foundations, for the diversity of the civilizations, which has always existed, is the natural outcome of the mental differences that characterize the races. But diversity in the forms does not in the least exclude agreement on the principles; concord and harmony do not mean uniformity, and to think that they do would be to defer to those theories of utopian equality which are one of the very things we denounce. A normal civilization, in the sense in which we understand it, will always be able to develop itself without being a danger to other civilizations; being conscious of the exact place that it ought to occupy among mankind as a whole, it will know how to keep to it and will not create any antagonism, because it will not have any pretension toward taking the lead, and because it will abstain from all proselytizing. We would not venture to maintain, however, that a purely Western civilization would be quite the equal intellectually of the Eastern civilizations; the West of old, going back as far as history will let us, does not show itself to be fully their equal (except perhaps in certain very secret schools, which, for this reason, it is difficult to speak of with certainty); but there are nonetheless, in this respect, some things which are far from negligible, and which our contemporaries are quite wrong in systematically ignoring. Besides, if the West comes one day to hold intellectual relations with the East, we see no reason why it should not take advantage of them for supplying itself with what it may still lack; lessons or inspirations may be taken from others without giving up one's independence, especially if, instead of resting content with borrowings pure and simple, one knows how to adapt what has been acquired so that it may conform as well as possible with one's own mentality. But, once again, these are remote possibilities; and, while waiting for the

West to return to its own traditions, there is perhaps no other means of preparing for this return and recovering what is essential to it than to go by analogy with the traditional forms that still exist today, and that, as such, can be studied directly. In this way the West, through understanding the Eastern civilizations, would come nearer to being brought back into the traditional paths which it so rashly and foolishly broke away from, while, on the other hand, the return to this tradition would bring about of itself an effective re-establishment of relations with the East. These are two things which are intimately bound up with one another, from whatever angle they are looked at, and in our eyes they seem equally desirable, not to say necessary. All this will be made clearer by what we have yet to say; but it should already be clear that we are not criticizing the West for the empty pleasure of criticism, nor even for the sake of showing up her intellectual inferiority when compared with the East. If the work which is to be done first seems chiefly negative, it is because, as we said at the beginning, the ground must necessarily be cleared before it can be built on. In fact, if the West were to give up its prejudices, the task would be already half done, and perhaps even more than half, for nothing would stand any longer in the way of constituting an intellectual elite, and those with the faculties required for taking part in it, no longer seeing almost insuperable barriers set up before them by present conditions, would easily find from then on the means of using and developing these faculties, instead of having them cramped and stifled by the mental formation or rather deformation which is at present imposed on whoever has not the courage to place himself resolutely outside the ranks of convention. Besides, to take in the full inanity of the prejudices in question, there must already be a certain degree of positive understanding, and, for some at least, it is perhaps harder to reach this degree than to go further once it has been reached. For a well constituted intelligence, the truth, however high, should be more easily assimilated than all the idle subtleties that the 'profane wisdom' of the Western world delights in.

HOW THE DIFFERENCES MIGHT BE BRIDGED

1

FRUITLESS ATTEMPTS

IN considering the idea of a renewal of intellectual relations between the East and the West, we have not the slightest pretension of putting forward an idea that is new, which, moreover, is in no way necessary to make it interesting; the love of novelty, which is nothing else but the need for change, and the cultivation of originality, resulting from an intellectual individualism that borders on anarchy, are characteristics that belong exclusively to the modern mentality, being the outward signs of its anti-traditional tendencies. In fact, this idea of renewal may already have occurred to many people in the West, which does not rob it of any of its value or importance. But we must face the fact that so far it has had no result, and that the opposition has even grown more and more marked, which was the inevitable consequence of the West's going along her divergent course. It is, indeed, the West alone that must be held responsible for this widening distance, since the East, in her essence, has never varied; and all the attempts which did not take this fact into consideration were bound to fail. The great fault of these attempts is that they were always carried out along lines that were the inverse of those that alone could have made for success: it is for the West to approach the East, since it is the West that has gone astray, and her efforts to persuade the East to do the approaching will be in vain, for the East does not feel that it has any better reasons for changing today than it had during the last centuries. Of course, there has never been any question, for the Easterners, of excluding those adaptations which are compatible with the traditional outlook, but if someone comes and suggests a change that

amounts to a subversion of the whole established order, they can only meet this suggestion with a flat refusal; and the spectacle offered them by the West is very far from being an eloquent reason why they should let themselves be persuaded. Even if the Easterners feel bound to accept material progress to a certain extent, their doing so will never amount to a radical change, because, as we have already said, they will not be interested in it; they will undergo it simply as a necessity, and they will find nothing in it except an additional motive for resentment against those who have obliged them to submit to it. Far from giving up what is for them the whole point of their existence, they will keep it more rigidly locked within themselves than ever, and they will make themselves more remote and more inaccessible.

Besides, as the Western civilization is by far the youngest of all, the rules of the most elementary politeness, if accepted as valid in relations between peoples or races as they are between individuals, should be enough to show the West that it is for her, and not for the others who are her elders, to take the first steps. True, it is indeed the West that went to seek out the Easterners, but with quite contrary intentions: it was not to learn from them, as behoves youths in the presence of old men, but to strive, by brutal or insidious means, to convert them to their own way of thinking, and to preach to them all sorts of things which are pointless so far as they are concerned, or which they have no desire to hear about. The Easterners, who have all a great regard for politeness, are shocked at this unseasonable proselytism as at something grossly vulgar; coming, as it does, to make itself felt in their own country, it amounts even to what is still more serious in their eyes, a breach of the laws of hospitality; and Eastern politeness, let it be well understood, is no vain formalism such as the keeping of the entirely outward customs to which Westerners give the same name: it has, underlying it, far deeper reasons, since it reflects the whole of a traditional civilization, whereas, in the West, these reasons having disappeared with the tradition, what remains is strictly speaking no more than superstition, quite apart from the innovations simply due to 'fashion' and to its unjustifiable whims, which amount to mere parody. But, to revert to proselytism, it is nothing for the Easterners, apart from all question of politeness,

but a proof of ignorance and incomprehension, a token of the absence of intellectuality, because it essentially implies and presupposes sentimentality: propaganda can only be made for an idea if there is attached to it some sentimental interest, to the detriment of its purity, as for pure ideas, all that can be done is to expound them for those who are capable of understanding them, without the least anxiety to carry the convictions of anyone whatever. This unfavorable judgment, which proselytism calls down upon itself, is confirmed by everything that Westerners say and do; all those facts which they believe to be proofs of their superiority are for the Easterners just so many marks of inferiority.

Anyone who takes up an attitude outside all prejudice must indeed resign himself to admitting that the West has nothing to teach the East, except in the purely material domain, in which the East, we repeat, can find no interest, having at her disposal things besides which material considerations scarcely count, things which she is not disposed to sacrifice in return for vain and futile contingencies. Besides, industrial and economic development, as we have already said, can only provoke rivalry and strife between peoples; thus it could not possibly provide a ground upon which close relations might be re-established, unless it be maintained that at least one way of bringing them together is to make them fight against each other; but that is not how we understand it, and indeed it would be nothing but a very poor play on words. For us, when we speak of a re-establishment of close relations, it means agreement and not rivalry; besides, the sole purpose for which certain Easterners will tolerate economic development in their country, as we have explained, admits of no hope on this score. It is not the conveniences added by mechanical inventions to the outward relations between peoples which will ever give them the means of better mutual understanding; such conveniences can only bring about, in every field of activity, more frequent jars and wider conflicts; as for the agreements based on purely commercial interests, one should know only too well how high they are to be rated. Matter is, by its nature, a principle of division and separation; nothing that comes from it could possibly serve as a basis for a real and lasting union, and moreover, in the realm of matter, it is ceaseless change which is

law. We do not mean that there should be no attention paid at all to economic interests; but, as we repeat again and again, one must know how to put each thing in its place, and the place that normally belongs to such interests is rather the last than the first. This is not to say, either, that they should make way for sentimental utopias in the form of a 'League of Nations'; such concerns are still less stable if that be possible, not even being founded on that gross and brutish reality which at least cannot be denied to things of the purely sensible order; and sentiment, in itself, is no less variable and inconstant than what belongs to the strictly material domain. Moreover, humanitarianism, with all its dreams, is very often nothing but a mask to cloak material interests, a mask that is imposed by 'moralist' hypocrisy. We are not inclined to believe in the disinterestedness of the apostles of civilization', and furthermore, if the truth be told, disinterestedness is not a political virtue. In fact, it is neither in economics nor in politics that the means of an agreement could ever be found, and it is only after the event and as a minor consideration that economic and political activity will be invited to share the benefits of this agreement; these means, if they exist, do not spring from the realm of matter nor from that of sentiment, but from a far deeper and firmer realm, which can only be that of intelligence. Only, we mean here intelligence in its true and complete sense; we are not referring to those counterfeits of intellectuality which the West unfortunately persists in presenting to the East, and which are, moreover, all that she can present, knowing no other and, even for her own use, having nothing else at her disposal; what is enough to satisfy the West in this respect is entirely unfitted to give the East the slightest intellectual satisfaction since it lacks everything that is essential.

Western science, even when not purely and simply confused with industry, even when considered apart from all practical applications, is still, in the eyes of the Easterners, nothing but this 'ignorant knowledge' that we have spoken of, because it is not attached to any principle of a higher order. Since it is limited to the sensible world, which it takes for its sole object, it has not, properly speaking, a speculative value of itself; even so, if it were a preparatory means for attaining to a knowledge of a higher order, the Easterners would be

much inclined to respect it, though they would think this means a very roundabout one, noticing especially how little it was adapted to their own mentality; but it is not such a means. This science, on the contrary, is fated, by its very constitution, to produce a state of mind that culminates in the denial of all other knowledge, and that we have named 'scientism'. Either it is taken for an end in itself, or else its only results are in the realm of practical applications, that is, in the lowest order of all, where the very word 'knowledge', with the fullness of meaning which the Easterners attach to it, can no longer be used except by the most illegitimate of extensions. The theoretic results of analytical science, however considerable they may seem to Westerners, loom only very small in the eyes of the Easterners, on whom it all makes the impression of childish pastimes, unworthy to retain for long the attention of those who are capable of applying their intelligence to other objects, or, in other words, of those who possess true intelligence, for everything else is only a more or less dim reflection of it. So much for the 'high idea' which the Easterners, according to Westerners (Leibnitz, for example, whom we have already mentioned in this connection), may come to have of European science. The same applies even if they are presented with its most authentic and complete products, and not merely with the rudiments of 'popularization'; it is not that they are incapable of understanding and appreciating it, but on the contrary because they rate it at its true value, with the help of a term of comparison which Westerners lack. European science, in fact, because there is no depth to it, and because it is really nothing more than it seems, is easily accessible to anyone who will take the trouble to study it. Every science, no doubt, is specially fitted to the mentality of the people that produced it, but in this particular case there is not the least equivalent of the difficulties encountered by those Westerners who wish to penetrate the 'traditional sciences' of the East, difficulties which arise from the fact that these sciences spring from principles that these would-be students have no idea of, and that they use means of investigation which are wholly foreign to the West, because they go beyond the narrow bounds that limit its outlook. The lack of adaptation, if it exists on both sides, takes very different forms: for the Westerners who study Eastern science, it shows itself as an almost

irremediable failure to understand, however much they apply themselves to the task, and though individual exceptions are always possible, in this case they are very rare; for the Easterners who study Western science, it is simply a question of lack of interest, which is no bar to understanding, but which naturally makes them little inclined to devote to this study energies that might be better employed. Thus there must be no counting on scientific propaganda, nor on any other kind of propaganda either, for the bringing together of East and West; the very importance that Westerners attach to these methods and sciences gives the Easterners a poor enough opinion of their mentality, and, if they consider such things intellectual, it is because intellectuality has not the same meaning for them as for the Easterners.

All that we say about Western science can be said also about philosophy, and the plight of the latter is still more serious in that, while its speculative value is neither greater nor more real, it has not even that practical value which, however relative and secondary it may be, is still nonetheless something; and from this point of view we can couple with philosophy everything which, in science itself, has only a purely hypothetical character. Besides, in modern thought there can be no deep gulf between scientific and philosophic knowledge; the former has come to embrace everything which this thought has access to, and the latter, so far as it remains valid, is no more than a portion or mode of it, which is only given a place apart as a result of habit, and for reasons that are on the whole more historical than logical. If philosophy has the greater pretensions, so much the worse for it, since these pretensions can be founded on nothing; within the limits of the present state of the Western mentality, the only legitimate conception is the positivist one, which is the normal culmination of 'scientific' rationalism, or else the pragmatist one, which definitely sets aside all speculation so as to keep to a utilitarian sentimentality: here we are face to face once again with these two tendencies between which the whole of modern civilization oscillates. For the Easterners, on the contrary, the alternative thus expressed has no meaning, because what really and essentially interests them is far beyond these two terms, just as their conceptions are beyond all the artificial problems of philosophy, and as

their traditional doctrines are beyond all systems, those purely human inventions in the narrowest sense of the word human, invented, that is, by an individual reason, which, failing to understand its limitations, believes itself capable of embracing all the Universe or of reconstructing it at its fancy's whim, and which on 'principle'—to crown all—absolutely denies everything that goes beyond it. This amounts to denying metaphysical knowledge, which is supra-rational, and which is pure intellectual knowledge, knowledge at its highest. Modern philosophy cannot admit the existence of true metaphysics without destroying itself, and as for 'pseudo-metaphysics' which it incorporates, it is merely a more or less clever assemblage of exclusively rational hypotheses, which are therefore scientific in reality, and which are generally not based on anything very serious. In any case, the range of these hypotheses is always extremely limited; the few valid elements that may help to make up the mixture never go much further than the domain of ordinary science, and their close association with the most deplorable fantasies, no less than the systematic form given to the whole, can only invalidate them altogether in the eyes of the East. Easterners have not that special manner of thought which is generally known as philosophy: it is not among them that the systematic spirit and intellectual individualism are to be met with; but, if they have not the disadvantages of philosophy, they have, unadulterated by any alloy, the equivalent of all that may be interesting in it, which, in their 'traditional sciences', even takes on a much higher significance; and they have, besides this, immeasurably more, since they have, as principle of all the rest, metaphysical knowledge, whose domain is absolutely unlimited. That is why philosophy, with its attempts at explanation, its arbitrary demarcations, its useless subtleties, its ceaseless confusions, its aimless discussions, and its inconsistent verbiage, seems to them like a particularly puerile game; we have mentioned elsewhere the appreciation of the Hindu who, on hearing expounded for the first time the conceptions of certain European philosophers, declared that the ideas in them would only do credit, at the most, to a child of eight. Thus philosophy is still less to be counted on than ordinary science for inspiring the Easterners with admiration, or even for impressing them favorably, and it should not be imagined

that they will ever adopt these ways of thinking, whose absence in a civilization is nothing to be sorry for, and whose characteristic narrowness is one of intelligence's greatest dangers; for the Easterners, as we were saying, it is all no more than a mere counterfeit of intellectuality, for the exclusive use of those who, through incapacity to see higher and further, are condemned, by their own mental constitution or by the effects of their education, to be forever ignorant of what true intellectuality is.

We have still a little more to say as regards in particular the 'philosophies of action': these theories really do nothing but sanction the complete overthrow of intelligence. Perhaps it is better in one sense to give up frankly all appearance of intellectuality than to go on deluding oneself indefinitely with mock speculations, but then why persist in wanting to evolve theories any longer? To claim that action must be put above all, through the incapacity to reach pure speculation, is an attitude which is really a little too like that of the fox in the fable... However that may be, there can be no self-delusion about converting Easterners to such doctrines, for whom speculation is incomparably superior to action; moreover, the taste for outward action and research after material progress go closely together, and there would be no need to revert to the question if our contemporaries did not feel that they must 'philosophize' on this subject, which shows clearly that philosophy, as they understand it, may in reality be anything but true wisdom and pure intellectual knowledge. Since this opportunity presents itself, we will take advantage of it to dispel at once a possible misunderstanding: to say that speculation is superior to action is not the same as saying that everyone ought equally to cease all interest in the latter; in a human society organized hierarchically each one must have assigned to him the function that suits his own individual nature, and that is the principle which essentially underlies, in India, the institution of the castes. If, then, the West ever comes again to have a hierarchic and traditional constitution, that is, a constitution founded on true principles, we do not in the least maintain that the Western masses will become as a result exclusively contemplative, nor even that they will have any obligation to be so to the degree that the Eastern masses are. Such a state might in fact be reached in the East, but

there are, in the West, special conditions of climate and temperament which go against it and which always will. Intellectual aptitude will no doubt be much more widespread than it is today, but—what is still more important—speculation will be the normal occupation of the elite, and it will even be inconceivable that a true elite can be anything but intellectual. This alone, moreover, is enough to ensure a state of affairs that would be the entire opposite of what we see today, when material wealth almost totally replaces all genuine superiority, chiefly because it corresponds directly to the concerns and ambitions of the modern Westerner, with his outlook wholly confined to this earth, and secondly because it is the only kind of superiority (if indeed it can be called one at all) that the mediocrity of the democratic mind can adapt itself to. Such a reversal makes it possible to gauge the full extent of the transformation that must take place in the Western civilization for it to become normal again and comparable to other civilizations, and for it to cease being a cause of trouble and disorder in the world.

It is not unintentionally that we have so far refrained from mentioning religion among the different things which the West has to offer the East; it is because, though religion is also something Western, it is by no means modern, and, furthermore, it is a target for all the concentrated animosity of the modern mind, being the sole element in the West that has kept a traditional character. We are, of course, only speaking of religion in the proper sense of the word, and not of the deformations or imitations which, on the contrary, come to birth under the influence of the modern outlook, and which bear its mark so plainly that there is practically no difference between them and philosophical 'moralisin'. As for religion proper, the Easterners can have nothing but respect for it, precisely because of its traditional character; furthermore, if Westerners were more attached to their religion than they usually are, they would certainly be much better thought of in the East. But an important point to remember is that tradition does not take on the specifically religious form among the Easterners, with the exception of the Muslims, and the Muslims, it must be remembered, have something of the West about them. Now the difference of outward forms is only a question of adaptation to the different mentalities, and where the tradition

has not spontaneously taken the religious form, it is because it had definitely no need to do so. The error consists here in wanting to make the Easterners adopt forms that were not made for them, and that do not correspond to the requirements of their mentality, although they acknowledge how excellent such forms are for Westerners: that is why Hindus may be sometimes seen encouraging Europeans to return to Catholicism, and even helping them to understand it, without being in the least drawn to it on their own account. The traditional forms are no doubt not entirely equivalent, because they correspond to points of view which really differ; but, insofar as they are equivalent, the substitution of one for the other would be clearly useless; and, insofar as they are different otherwise than in expression (which does not in the least mean that they may be opposed or contradictory), this substitution could only be harmful, because it could only lead to faulty adaptation. If the Easterners have no religion in the Western sense of the word, they have as much of it as is fitted for them; at the same time, they have more from the intellectual point of view, since they have pure metaphysics, of which theology, all told, is merely a partial translation, tinged with the sentiment that is inherent in religious thought as such; if they have less on another side, it is only from the standpoint of sentiment, and because they can well do without it. What we have just said shows also why, in our eyes, the most satisfactory solution for the West is the return to its own tradition, with any gaps in the domain of pure intellectuality to be filled in as the occasion arises (which, moreover, only concerns the elite); religion cannot fill the place of metaphysics, but the two are not in the least incompatible, and the proof of this lies in the Islamic world, with the two complementary aspects of its traditional doctrine. Let us add that even if the West repudiates sentimentalism (and we mean by that the predominance of feeling over intelligence), the Western masses will retain nonetheless a need for satisfactions derived from sentiment, which the religious form alone can give them, just as they will retain a need for outward activity which the Easterners do not feel at all. Each race has its own temperament, and, though it is true that these are mere contingencies, it is, notwithstanding, only a fairly limited elite that can afford to disregard them. But, as for the satisfactions in

question, it is in religion proper that Westerners in the normal course can and should find them, and not in those more or less extravagant makeshifts where men are preyed upon by the 'pseudomysticism' of some of our contemporaries, which is nothing more nor less than troubled and perverted religiosity, being yet another symptom of the mental anarchy which the modern world is suffering from, and which it may even die of, if effective remedies are not applied before it is too late.

Thus, among the manifestations of Western thought, some are simply ridiculous in the eyes of the Easterners, and these are all the ones that are specifically modern; the others are respectable, but they are exclusively suited to the West alone, although modern Westerners have a tendency to depreciate or reject them, no doubt because they are the surviving representatives of something too high for them. It is, then, quite out of the question, from whatever side one likes to look at it, that true relations should be re-established to the detriment of the Eastern mentality; as we have already said, it is for the West to approach the East; but for the approach to be effective, even good will would not be enough, and what is needed above all is understanding. So far those Westerners who have striven to understand the East, with more or less seriousness and sincerity, have only arrived in general at the most lamentable results, because they have brought into their studies all the prejudices that their minds were encumbered with, the more so because they were 'specialists', having inevitably acquired beforehand certain mental habits which they could not get rid of. To be sure, among the Europeans who have lived in direct contact with the Easterners, there are one or two who have been able to understand and assimilate certain things, just because, not being 'specialists', they were freer from preconceived ideas; but, as a rule, these people have not written; what they have learnt they have kept to themselves, and besides, the lack of understanding shown by any other Westerners whom they may have spoken to about it was well calculated to discourage them and lead them to be as reserved as the Easterners. The West, as a whole, has never been able to benefit from certain individual exceptions; and, as for the works that have been produced about the East and its doctrines, it would in most cases be better not

to know of their existence, for ignorance pure and simple is far preferable to false ideas. We do not want to repeat all that we have already said elsewhere about the productions of the orientalists: their chief effect is, on the one hand, to mislead the Westerners who have recourse to them without having from other sources the means of correcting their mistakes, and, on the other hand, to give the Easterners, by the misunderstanding there displayed, the most unfavorable idea of Western intellectuality. In this latter respect, these productions merely confirm the opinion which everything else that the Easterners know of the West has already inclined them to hold, and accentuate their attitude of reserve that we were speaking of just now; but the former inconvenience is even more serious, especially if it is the West that must take the initiative in re-establishing intellectual relations. Actually, anyone who has a direct knowledge of the East can, when reading the worst translation or the most fantastic commentary, quite well extract the particles of truth that remain after all, unknown to the author who has merely transcribed without understanding, and who has only lighted on the correct word by a sort of fluke (this happens chiefly in the English translations, which are done conscientiously and without too much systematic bias, but also without any concern for true understanding); he can often even restore the meaning where it has been disfigured, and in any case he can consult works of this kind with impunity, even if he gains nothing from them; but for other people it is quite different. The ordinary reader, who has no means of checking their accuracy, can only take up one of two attitudes: either he honestly believes that the Eastern conceptions are in fact what they are made out to be, and feels a very understandable distaste for them—which serves meanwhile to strengthen all his Western prejudices—or else he realizes that these conceptions cannot, in actual fact, be so absurd or so devoid of sense, and feels more or less confusedly that there must be something else in them, but does not know what that something can be, and, in despair of ever knowing it, loses all interest in the matter, and will not even give it another thought. In this way, the final result is always a widening, and not a narrowing, of the gulf. We are only referring, of course, to people who are interested in

ideas, for it is only among such that there is a possibility of finding those who might understand if given the means; as for the others, who merely look at it from the standpoint of curiosity and scholarship, we need not bother about them. Moreover, most orientalists are not and do not wish to be anything but scholars; so long as they confine themselves to historical or philological works it does not matter very much; it is clear that such works cannot serve in the least toward the end that we have in view, but their only real danger is the one which is common to all the abuses of scholarship, and which consists in the spread of the 'intellectual short-sightedness' that limits all knowledge to research after details, and the frittering away of efforts that might in many cases be better employed. But much more serious in our eyes is the influence exerted by those of the orientalists who profess to understand and to interpret the doctrines, and who make the most incredible travesty of them, while asserting sometimes that they understand them better than the Easterners themselves do (just as Leibnitz imagined that he had recovered the true meaning of the characters of Fu Hsi), and without ever dreaming of accepting the opinion of the authorized representatives of the civilizations that they seek to study. This should be the first thing for them to do; instead they act as if called upon to reconstruct vanished civilizations.

This incredible pretension merely betrays the Westerners' belief in their own superiority: even when they consent to take the ideas of others into consideration, they deem themselves so intelligent that they must needs understand these ideas much better than do the people who elaborated them: just a glance from the outside, and they know fully what to make of them; a man who has such confidence in himself generally lets slip all the opportunities that he might have of obtaining real instruction. Among the prejudices that go toward keeping up such a state of mind there is one that we have called the 'classical prejudice', and that we alluded to in connection with the belief in a single and absolute 'civilization', the prejudice being, in fact, nothing more than a particular form of this belief. Because the modern Western civilization considers itself the heir to the Greco-Roman civilization (which is only true up to a certain

point), it is not thought desirable to know anything that lies beyond,¹ on the conviction that the remainder is not interesting or that it can only be the object of a sort of archaeological interest. The law is laid down that elsewhere there can be no valid ideas, or that at least, if one or two happen to occur, they must have existed also among the ancient Greeks and Romans. It is however something to be truly thankful for if this is all, and if they are not made out to be borrowings from classical sources. Even those who do not think expressly along these lines submit nonetheless to the influence of this prejudice: there are some who, while displaying a certain sympathy for Eastern conceptions, wish at all costs to make them fit into the frames of Western thought, which amounts to disfiguring them altogether, and which proves that in point of fact they understand nothing about them. Some, for example, will not see in the East anything but religion and philosophy, that is, just exactly what is not there, and as for what really is there they see nothing of it at all. No one has ever pushed these false assimilations further than have the German orientalists; it is precisely they whose pretensions are the greatest, and who have come to monopolize almost entirely the interpretation of the Eastern doctrines. With their narrowly systematic cast of mind, they have not merely made philosophy out of them, but something altogether like their own philosophy, whereas the things in question have nothing whatever to do with such conceptions. Evidently, they cannot resign themselves to not understanding, nor help reducing all things to the level of their own mentality, thinking the while to do great honor to those whom they are crediting with these ideas that would be 'good for children of eight.'

Besides, in Germany, the philosophers themselves have had a direct hand in this work, and Schopenhauer in particular must certainly take a large share of responsibility for the way in which the

1. In a speech delivered in the French Chamber of Deputies by M. Bracke, during a debate on educational reform, we noticed this very characteristic passage: 'We are living in the civilization of Greece and Rome. For us there is no other. The civilization of Greece and Rome is, for us, Civilization with a capital letter.' These words, and above all the unanimous applause that greeted them, fully justify all that we have said elsewhere about the 'classical prejudice'.

East is interpreted. And how many people, even outside Germany, go about repeating, after him and his disciple Hartmann, trite sentences on 'Buddhist pessimism', which they readily suppose to be the basis of the Hindu doctrines! There are also a good number of Europeans who are so ignorant as to imagine moreover that India is Buddhist, and, as always happens in such cases, they do not fail to talk at random. Furthermore, if the public attributes an undue importance to the deviated form of Buddhism that developed in India, the mistake is owing to the incredible number of orientalists who have specialized in it, and who have, moreover, found the means of deforming even this deviation of the Eastern outlook. The truth is that no Eastern conception is 'pessimistic', and that even Buddhism is not. It is true that there is no 'optimism' there either, but that proves simply that these labels and classifications do not apply, any more than do all those others which are likewise made for European philosophy, and that things do not appear in this light to the Easterners. To look at things in terms of 'optimism' or 'pessimism' requires Western sentimentality (this same mentality which led Schopenhauer to look for 'consolations' in the Upanishads), and the deep serenity that the Hindus find in pure intellectual contemplation lies far beyond those contingencies. We should never finish if we wished to bring to light all the mistakes of this kind, a single one of which is enough to prove total lack of understanding; our intention is not to give here a catalogue of the setbacks, German or otherwise, which the study of the East, undertaken on faulty foundations and apart from any true principle, has culminated in. We have only mentioned Schopenhauer because he is a very 'representative' example. Among the orientalists proper we have already referred above to Deussen interpreting India by means of this same Schopenhauer's conceptions; we will call attention also to Max Muller's endeavoring to discover 'the germs of Buddhism', that is, of heterodoxy, even in the Vedic texts themselves, which are the essential foundations of traditional Hindu orthodoxy. We could go on like this almost indefinitely, even while only noting one or two features in the work of each; but we will confine ourselves to adding one last example, because it shows up clearly an altogether characteristic bias; it is that of Oldenberg sweeping aside *a priori* all the

texts that speak of doings which seem miraculous and asserting that they must merely be considered as later additions, not only in the name of 'historical criticism', but under the pretext that the 'Indo-Germans' (*sic*) do not admit miracles. Let him speak, if he will, in the name of the modern Germans, who are not for nothing the inventors of the so-called 'science of religions'; but that he should have the effrontery to associate the Hindus with his negations, which are those of the anti-traditional outlook, is something that passes all bounds. We have already said elsewhere what is to be thought of the hypothesis of 'Indo-Germanism', which scarcely exists but for political reasons: the Germans' orientalisms, like their philosophy, has become an instrument in the service of their national ambition, which, however, does not mean that its representatives are necessarily dishonest; it is not easy to see what limits there are to the blindness that is caused by the intrusion of sentiment into domains that should be reserved for the intelligence. As for the anti-traditional outlook, which is at the bottom of 'historical criticism' and of all that is connected with it more or less directly, it is purely Western and, in the West itself, purely modern. No amount of insistence here can be too much, since it is this anti-traditionalism that is particularly repellent to the Easterners, who are essentially traditionalists and who, if they were not, would no longer be anything at all, since everything that makes up their civilizations is rigidly traditional. It is, then, this outlook which must be got rid of before anything else if there is to be any hope of an understanding with them.²

Apart from the more or less 'official' orientalists, who have at least in their favor, for want of other more intellectual qualities, an honesty that is generally indisputable, there is nothing, in the way of

2. For want of an opportunity to examine it closely enough, we cannot say much about the most recent of the pseudo-oriental attempts that have cropped up in Germany, that of Count Keyserling, who has founded a 'School of Wisdom' at Darmstadt; but it seems that its underlying conception is chiefly a 'philosophy of life', that is, yet another purely Western thing. Moreover, we have reasons for thinking that Count Keyserling has not been altogether unconnected with the Theosophist movement or its derivations; in any case the information that we have been able to get from Hindu sources with regard to him is altogether unfavorable.

Western presentations of the Eastern doctrines, but the daydreams and vagaries of the Theosophists, which are nothing but a tissue of gross errors, made still worse by methods of the lowest charlatan-ism. To this subject in particular we have already devoted an entire work, ' where, in order to give all the pretensions of these people their full deserts and to show that they have no right to claim any credentials from the East, but quite the contrary, we have simply had to appeal to the most rigorously established historical facts; so we do not wish to go into the question again, but we could not help calling to notice here their existence at least, since one of their claims is precisely the establishment, after their fashion, of relations between East and West. There again, even apart from the political undercurrents that play a considerable part in these organizations, it is the anti-traditional outlook which, under cover of a pseudo-tradition born of pure fancy, gives itself free rein in these inconsistent theories whose woof is spun from an evolutionist conception; beneath the bits and pieces borrowed from the most varied traditions, and behind the Sanskrit terminology, which is used almost always in diametrically the wrong sense, there is nothing but purely Western ideas. If these could contain the elements of a mutual approach, then it would have to be brought about, all things considered, entirely at the expense of the East: concessions as far as mere words go would be made, but the East would be asked to give up all of its essential ideas, and also all the institutions that it is attached to. However, the Easterners, above all the Hindus who are aimed at more particularly, are far from being duped and know perfectly well what to make of the real tendencies of such a movement; one cannot expect to seduce them by offering them a gross caricature of their doctrines, even supposing that they had no other motives for being distrustful and keeping their distance. As for those Westerners who, even without being truly intelligent, have a certain amount of common sense, they pay little heed to these extravagances, but the unfortunate part of it is that they let themselves be too easily persuaded that such things are Eastern, when they are nothing of the

3· 1 *heosophy. History of n Pseudo-Religion.* See also the final chapter of *Introduction to the Study of the Hindu Doctrines.*

sort. Besides, even common sense is becoming strangely rare today in the West, and minds are becoming more and more unbalanced, which accounts for the present success of Theosophism and of all the other more or less analogous undertakings that we bring together under the general heading of 'Neo-Spiritualism'. While there is no trace of 'Eastern tradition' among the Theosophists, the occultists are equally lacking in authentic 'Western tradition'. Once again, there is nothing serious in any of it, but merely a confused and, on the whole, incoherent 'syncretism', in which the ancient conceptions are interpreted most falsely and quite arbitrarily, and which seems to be made simply to serve as a disguise for the most extreme modernism. If there are any 'archaisms' in it, they are merely in the outward forms, and both ancient and medieval Western conceptions meet with almost as total a lack of understanding there as the Eastern ones do in Theosophism. Certainly, it is not through occultism that the West will ever be able to recover its own tradition, any more than it will be able to rejoin Eastern intellectuality, and for the same reasons; here again, these two things are closely bound up one with another, whatever may be thought by certain people, who see oppositions and antagonisms where there cannot possibly be any. It is precisely the occultists who, some of them at any rate, believe themselves bound not to speak of the East, which they know absolutely nothing about, except with injurious epithets that betray a real hatred, and probably also spite caused by the feeling that the Easterners have knowledge which they will never succeed in penetrating. We are not reproaching either Theosophists or occultists with a lack of understanding which, after all, they are not responsible for; but let anyone who is Western (from the intellectual point of view, we mean) acknowledge it openly, and not put on an Eastern mask; let anyone who has the modern outlook at least have the courage to admit it (there are so many who glory in it), and not claim support from a tradition that is not his. In denouncing such pieces of hypocrisy we are of course only thinking of the leaders of the movements in question, not of their dupes; but it must be said that unconsciousness often goes with dishonesty, and that it may be difficult to determine exactly the part played by either—is not 'moralist' hypocrisy also as a rule unconscious? Moreover, it makes little

difference to the results, which are all that we seek to guard against, and which this unconsciousness does not make any the less deplorable: the Western mentality becomes more and more warped in every way; it wanders and is scattered in all directions, a prey to a most obscure disquiet, haunted by the darkest nightmares of a delirious imagination. Is this really 'the beginning of the end' for modern civilization? We do not want to make any rash supposition, but at least there are many signs that should give food for reflection to those who are still capable of it. Will the West be able to regain control over herself in time?

Keeping to what can be stated as actual facts, and not anticipating the future, we will say this much: all the attempts that have been made so far to bring East and West together again have been undertaken in the interests of the Western outlook, and that is why they have failed. This is true, not only of all propaganda openly Western (and that is the form which these attempts usually take), but also just as much of the ventures that claim to be based on a study of the East: there is far less effort to understand the Eastern doctrines in themselves than there is to reduce them to the level of Western conceptions, which amounts to mutilating them altogether. Even where there is no conscious and avowed bias toward depreciating the East, it is nonetheless implicitly assumed that whatever the East possesses is possessed also by the West as a matter of course; now that is utterly untrue, especially with regard to the West of today. Thus, through an incapacity for understanding which is largely due to their prejudices (for, while there are some who are born with this incapacity, there are others who acquire it only under the influence of preconceived ideas), Westerners do not attain in the slightest degree to Eastern intellectuality. Even when they imagine that they grasp it and that they are translating the writ that expresses it, they are simply making a caricature, and, in the texts or in the symbols they believe themselves to be explaining, they merely fish out again what they have put there themselves, that is, Western ideas: the fact^{is} that the letter is nothing by itself, and that the spirit escapes them. In these conditions, the West cannot get outside the limits that hedge her round, and since, within these limits beyond which nothing really exists for her any longer, she goes on and on ceaselessly

and simultaneously exploring material and sentimental paths that lead her always further and further away from intellectuality, it is clear that she can only grow more and more markedly divergent from the East. We have just seen why even the orientalist and pseudo-oriental attempts contribute to this themselves. Once again, it is the West that must take the initiative, but she must really be prepared to go toward the East, not merely seeking to draw the East toward herself, as she has tried to do so far. There is no reason why the East should take this initiative, and there would still be none, even if the Western world were not in such a state as to make any effort in this direction useless; but on the other hand, if a serious and fully conscious attempt were made starting from the West, the authorized representatives of all the Eastern civilizations could not fail to receive it very favorably. This chapter has taken into consideration what we had already said in the first part of the book, and it now remains for us to show how the West might attempt to approach the East. We have shown that it is specifically Western mental tendencies that make impossible all intellectual relations between the two; and without first reaching some mutual understanding on this intellectual ground, all else will be quite in vain.

2

AGREEMENT ON PRINCIPLES

WH EN wishing to talk about principles to our contemporaries, it does not do to hope that they will be made to understand easily, for most of them have not the slightest idea what these things can possibly be, and in fact do not even suspect that they may exist; to be sure, they also talk about principles, and they even talk too much about them, but not once without applying this word to whatever least fits its meaning. Thus, in our epoch, the name 'principles' is given to scientific laws a little more general than the rest, whereas they are really just the opposite, being conclusions and the results of induction, even when they are not mere hypotheses. Thus—and this is still commoner—the same name is given to moral conceptions, which are not even ideas, but the expression of one or two sentimental aspirations, or to political theories, often equally based on sentiment, such as the all too familiar 'principle of nationalities', which has contributed to the disorder of Europe more than one can possibly imagine. Do not some people even go so far as to speak unhesitatingly of 'revolutionary principles', as if it were not a contradiction in terms? The misuse of a word to such an extent means that its true significance has been completely forgotten; this case is altogether like that of the word 'tradition', applied, as we were saying just now, to no matter what purely outward custom, however banal and insignificant it may be; and, to take yet another example, if Westerners had kept the religious sense of their ancestors, would they not avoid using on every occasion such phrases as 'religion of patriotism', 'religion of science', 'religion of duty', and others of the same kind? These are not pieces of linguistic slovenliness without

greater import, but symptoms of the confusion that infests every part of the world: people can no longer distinguish between the most different standpoints and domains; they put one thing in the place of another that it has nothing to do with; and men's language, all things considered, merely gives a faithful representation of the state of their minds. As there is, moreover, a correspondence between mentality and institutions, the reasons for this confusion are also the reasons why it is thought that anyone, no matter who, can equally well fulfill any function, no matter what, the democratic slogan of equality being merely the consequence and the manifestation, in the social order, of intellectual anarchy. The Westerners of today are truly, in every respect, 'without caste', to use the Hindu expression, and even 'without family', in the sense that the Chinese give to the phrase; they have no longer anything of what constitutes the foundation and the essence of the other civilizations.

These considerations bring us precisely to our starting-point: modern civilization suffers from a lack of principles, and it suffers from it in every domain. By a monstrous anomaly, it is, alone among all the others, a civilization without principles, or with only negative ones, which amounts to the same thing. It is as if an organism with its head cut off went on living a life that was at the same time intense and disordered. The sociologists, who are so fond of likening collectivities to organisms (often quite unjustifiably) ought to reflect a little on this comparison. With the suppression of pure intellectuality, each special and contingent domain is looked on as independent; one infringes on the other, and everything is mingled and confused in an inextricable chaos. Natural relations are turned upside down and what should be subordinate proclaims itself autonomous mentally as well as socially, all hierarchy is done away with in the name of that hallucination, equality; and as equality is after all impossible in actual fact, false hierarchies are created, in which anything, no matter what, is given the highest rank, whether it be science, industry, morals, politics, or finance, for want of the one thing that can and must normally assume the supremacy, that is, once again, for want of true principles. Let people pause a little in the face of such a picture before crying out that it is an exaggeration; let them rather take the trouble to examine sincerely the state of

things, and if they are not blinded by prejudice, they will realize that it is indeed as we described it to be. We do not in the least deny that there are degrees and stages in the disorder; it was not reached all in one stride, but it was inevitably fated that it should be reached, once given the absence of principles which, as it were, dominates the modern world and makes it what it is; and, at the point where we stand today, the results are already clear enough for some people to begin to be alarmed and to feel the threat of a final dissolution. There are some things that really cannot be defined except by negation: anarchy, in whatever realm it may be, is simply the negation of hierarchy, and it is nothing positive; all told, modern Western civilization is anarchic and unprincipled, and this is exactly the same thing that we express in other terms when we say that, unlike the Eastern civilizations, it is not a traditional civilization.

What we call a traditional civilization is one that is based on principles in the true sense of the word, that is, one where the intellectual realm dominates all the others, and where all things, science and social institutions alike, proceed from it directly or indirectly, being no more than contingent, secondary, and subordinate applications of purely intellectual truths. Thus a return to tradition and a return to principles are in reality just one and the same thing; but clearly the knowledge of the principles, where it is lost, must first be restored before there can be even a remote thought of applying them; it is quite out of the question to build up again a traditional civilization in all its fullness without first having the supreme and fundamental knowledge that must preside over the work. To seek to go about it otherwise would mean introducing still more confusion just where one hoped to abolish it, and it would also mean that one had failed to understand what tradition is in its essence; this is the case of all the inventors of pseudo-traditions of the kind we mentioned above; and if we insist on things that are so obvious, it is because the state of the modern mind compels us to do so, for we know only too well how hard it is to stop it from reversing the normal order of things.

I he best intentioned people, if they are at all tainted with this mentality, even despite themselves and while declaring themselves >ts enemies, might be strongly tempted to begin at the end, but this

would only be to give way, in their impatience to reach at once those visible and tangible results which are everything in people's eyes today, to that strange giddiness and love of speed that has overcome the whole West; indeed, modern minds have been turned so consistently toward outward things that they have become incapable of grasping anything else. That is why we repeat so often, at the risk of seeming tedious, that the necessary starting-point is the domain of pure intellectuality, and that nothing worthwhile will ever be done by starting from anywhere else. And everything connected with this domain, though not coming within the range of the senses, has consequences which are far more to be reckoned with than what depends on a contingent order of things. This is perhaps not easily taken in by those who are not used to the idea, but such is the case nonetheless. However, good care must be taken not to confuse the purely intellectual with the rational, the universal with the general, metaphysical knowledge with scientific knowledge; on this subject we will refer our readers to the explanations we have given elsewhere,⁴ and we do not think that we need excuse ourselves for doing so, as there can be no question of reproducing indefinitely and unnecessarily the same considerations. When we speak absolutely of principles, without any specification, or of purely intellectual truths, it is always the universal order, and no other, that is in question; here lies the domain of metaphysical knowledge, that is, supra-individual and supra-rational knowledge itself, knowledge that is intuitive, beyond all analysis, and independent of what is relative. It should, moreover, be added that the intellectual intuition through which such knowledge is arrived at has absolutely nothing in common with these infra-rational intuitions, be they of a sentimental, instinctive, or purely sensible order, which are the only ones that come within the scope of present-day philosophy. Of course, the conception of metaphysical truths must be distinguished from their formulation, where discursive reason may intervene secondarily (on condition that it receives directly a reflection of pure and transcendent intellect) in order to express, as far as possible, these truths which lie far beyond its domain and its range,

4. *Introduction to the Study of the Hindu Doctrines.*

and of which, in view of their universality, no symbolic or verbal form can ever give anything but an incomplete, imperfect, and inadequate translation, such as is rather fitted to act as a support for the conception than to express effectively what is in itself, for the most part, inexpressible and incommunicable, and what cannot be 'experienced' except in a direct and personal way. Finally, let us mention once more that if we cling to this term 'metaphysics', it is solely because it is the most suitable of all those that the Western languages offer.

If philosophers have come to apply it to something quite different, the confusion is of their making, not of ours, since the sense in which we understand it is the only one that conforms to its etymological derivation, and this confusion, due to their total ignorance of true metaphysics, is quite analogous to those that we mentioned just now. We do not feel in the least bound to take these misuses of language into consideration, and it is enough simply to put people on their guard against the mistakes that might so arise. Since we take all due precautions in this respect, we see no serious disadvantage in using such a word, and we dislike having recourse to neologisms except where strictly necessary; moreover, such neologisms are a nuisance and might very often be avoided by taking care to fix, as clearly as need be, the meaning of the terms used, which would most certainly be better than inventing a wilfully complicated and involved terminology, after the fashion of the philosophers, who, it is true, get themselves in this way the cheap luxury of being thought original. If there are some people who dislike this term 'metaphysics', it may be added that the knowledge in question is knowledge in the highest sense of the word, knowledge unqualified, and the Hindus have, in point of fact, no other word to express it; but in the European languages we do not think that the use of this word would be likely to avoid all misunderstanding, since people have grown used to applying it, without qualifying it in the least, to science and philosophy. We shall, then, simply go on speaking of metaphysics as we have always done; but we hope that the explanations made necessary by our desire to be always as clear as possible will not be looked on as profitless digressions: they only seem to take us away from our intended subject, without actually doing so.

By reason of the very universality of the principles, it is there that the agreement should be most easily reached, and, furthermore, reached in an altogether immediate way: either a man succeeds in grasping them or he does not, but, having once done so, he cannot help but be in agreement. The truth is one and imposes itself alike on all those who know it, provided, of course, that they actually do know it with certainty; but an intuitive knowledge cannot be anything else but certain. In this domain one is outside and above all the particular points of view; the differences never lie in anything but the more or less outward forms, which are merely a secondary adaptation, and not in the principles themselves; it is the domain of what is essentially 'formless'. The knowledge of the principles is strictly the same for all those who possess it, for mental differences can only affect what belongs to the individual order and what is therefore contingent, and the domain of pure metaphysics does not come within their range; undoubtedly, each one will express in his own way what he has understood, as far as he can express it, but he who has truly understood will always be able, behind the diversity of the expressions, to recognize the one truth, and so this inevitable diversity will never be a cause of disagreement. However, this power to see through the many forms that serve more as a veil than as an expression of the truth implies that true intellectuality which has become so utterly foreign to the Western world; and in the light of this it is scarcely to be believed how futile and miserable all the philosophical discussions appear, bearing, as they do, on words far more than on ideas, even if the ideas are not wholly lacking. As for truths of a contingent order, the multiplicity of the individual points of view concerning them may give rise to real differences, which, moreover, are by no means necessarily contradictions; the fault of systematic minds lies in not acknowledging as legitimate any point of view but their own, and in condemning all that does not comply with it as wrong; but in any case, once given that the differences are real, even though they are reconcilable, agreement cannot be reached at once, especially as each one feels a natural difficulty in taking the others' standpoints, because his mental make-up does not lend itself to them without some revulsion. In the domain of principles there is nothing of the kind, and this explains

the seeming paradox that what is highest in any tradition may be at the same time what is easiest to grasp and assimilate, apart from all considerations of race or epoch, and on the sole condition of having enough capacity for understanding; it is, in fact, what is freed from all contingencies. For all else in a tradition, on the contrary, and especially for everything that may be classed as 'traditional sciences', a special preparation is necessary, and as a rule it is rather a painful process for anyone not born in the civilization that has evolved these sciences; this is because mental differences intervene here, for (the sole reason that the things in question are contingent, and the way that men of one race have of looking at these things, which is for them the most suitable way, is by no means equally suitable for men of other races. Within a given civilization, there may even be, in this order, adaptations that vary according to the different epochs, though they consist nonetheless in nothing but the strict development of the principles contained in the fundamental doctrine, which are thus made explicit to answer the needs of a particular moment, without its ever being possible to say that any new element has come to be added from outside. There cannot possibly be any real addition or change where an essentially traditional civilization is concerned, as is always the case in the East.

In the modern Western civilization, on the contrary, it is only the contingent things which people consider, and their way of doing so is truly chaotic because they lack the guidance that a purely intellectual doctrine alone can give, and that has no possible substitute. Obviously there is no question of contesting the results which are nonetheless arrived at in this way, nor of denying them any relative value; and it seems even natural that, within a given domain, the more narrowly a man limits his activity, the more results he will get from it. If the sciences which so interest Westerners had never previously reached anything like the development that these people have given them, it is because they used not to be thought important enough for such efforts to be devoted to them. But if the results are valid when each one is taken separately (which goes well with the entirely analytical character of modern science), the whole merely gives an impression of disorder and anarchy; no one bothers about the quality of the knowledge accumulated, but only about its

quantity; the result is the scattering of energies amid an indefinite number of details. Furthermore, there is nothing above these analytical sciences: they depend on nothing and, intellectually, lead to nothing; the modern mind becomes more and more shrunkly petty, and in this domain, which is really so minute though believed to be so immense, it confuses everything, drawing analogies between things that are quite unconnected, seeking to apply to one the methods that are exclusively suited to the other, transferring into one science the conditions which define a different one, and finally losing its way there, unable to find it again, for want of guiding principles. Thence springs the chaos of innumerable theories, of jarring, colliding, and conflicting hypotheses that overthrow and replace one another, until, with all hope of knowledge gone, it is even maintained that there is no point in searching except for searching's sake, that the truth is beyond man's reach, that perhaps it does not even exist, that there is no reason to worry about anything except what is useful or profitable, and that if, after all, one sees fit to call it true, there is no harm done. The intelligence that so denies the truth denies its own purpose, or, in other words, it denies itself. The ultimate outcome of Western science and philosophy is the suicide of intelligence; and perhaps this is, for some people, merely the prelude to that monstrous cosmic suicide dreamed of by certain pessimists who, failing to understand anything from their faint glimpses of the East, have mistaken for nothingness the supreme reality of metaphysical 'non-being', and for inertia the supreme immutability of the eternal 'non-action'!

The sole cause of all this disorder is ignorance of the principles; only let pure intellectual knowledge be restored, and all the rest will be able to grow normal again: it will then be possible to put all the domains in order once more, to set up what is definite and final in place of what is provisional, to wipe out all vain hypotheses, to throw the light of synthesis on the fragmentary results of analysis, and, by putting these results back into their place as part of a knowledge that is truly worthy of the name, to give them, although they must only rank as subordinates, an incomparably higher import than that which they can lay claim to at present. To do this, true metaphysics must first be sought out where it still exists, namely, in

the East; and then, but only then, while retaining Western sciences insofar as they are valid and legitimate, it will be possible to think of giving them a traditional basis by linking them up once more with the principles in the way most suited to the objects of their research, and by giving them their rightful place in the hierarchy of knowledge. Wanting to start by establishing in the West something comparable to the 'traditional sciences' of the East amounts really to wanting the impossible; though it is true that the West also had once her 'traditional sciences', notably in the Middle Ages, it must be admitted that they are for the most part almost entirely lost, that even for what is left of them the key is missing, and that modern Westerners would find them just as impossible to assimilate as those used by the Easterners; ample proof lies in the painfully labored works of the occultists who have sought to take a hand in the reconstruction of such sciences. This does not mean that, after fulfilling the conditions indispensable for understanding, namely, after acquiring knowledge of the principles, there can be no inspiration taken from these ancient sciences at all, or from the Eastern ones either: both may no doubt be drawn on for certain elements that can be put to use, and above all they may serve as an example of what is to be done so as to build up other sciences analogous to them; but it will always be a question of adapting, and not of copying purely and simply. As we have already said, it is the principles alone that are strictly invariable; knowledge of them is the only knowledge that cannot be modified in any way, and moreover it contains in itself all that is necessary for bringing to birth, in all the relative orders, all the possible adaptations. That is why the secondary elaboration in question will be able to take place as it were of its own accord, as soon as this knowledge is there to preside; and if this knowledge is held by an elite that is powerful enough to put the community at large into the right frame of mind, all the rest will be brought about with seeming spontaneity, just as the fruits of the present frame of mind seem to be spontaneous; it is never more than mere seeming, for the masses are always influenced and guided unknown to themselves, but it is just as possible to guide them in a normal direction as it is to pervert them mentally and to keep them s« perverted. The purely intellectual task, which must first of all be

fulfilled, is then really the first in every respect, being at the same time the most necessary and the most important, since on it everything depends and from it everything is derived; but when we use this phrase 'metaphysical knowledge', there are very few indeed, among the Westerners of today, who have even the vaguest suspicion of all that it implies.

The Easterners (we are only speaking of those who really matter) will never take into account any civilization, unless, like theirs, it is traditional; but there can be no question of giving this traditional character overnight, without any preparation at all, to a civilization that is totally lacking in it; such dreams and utopias are not of our making, and it is better to leave to the unreflecting enthusiasts that incurable 'optimism' which makes them incapable of seeing what can or cannot be accomplished in given conditions such as these. The Easterners, who moreover attribute only a relative importance to time, know very well what it means, and they would never make any of the blunders that Westerners are liable to be drawn into by the unhealthy haste that brings all their undertakings to a fever pitch, whose stability is thus fatally undermined. No sooner do they think their purpose achieved than everything collapses; it is as if someone were to try building on a piece of shifting ground, without first taking the trouble to establish solid foundations, under the pretext that foundations cannot be seen. Certainly, those who might undertake a task like the one we are speaking of should not expect to obtain visible results immediately; but their work, far from being any the less real and effective, would on the contrary be the more so, and while having no hope of ever seeing it come outwardly to flower, they would reap many other satisfactions from it, gaining for themselves inestimable benefits. In fact, there is no common measure between the results of an altogether inward work of the highest order and all that can be obtained in the domain of contingency. If Westerners think otherwise, here too reversing the natural order of things, it is because they do not know how to rise above the world of the senses. It is always easy for a man to belittle what he has no knowledge of, and when he is incapable of reaching it, an assumed contempt is actually his best means of consoling himself for his impotence, and it is moreover a means that is at everyone's

disposal. But it may be asked, if this is so, and if this inward work which must mark the beginning is in point of fact the sole truly essential one, why should one bother about anything else? The reason is that, although the contingencies are indeed no more than secondary, they nonetheless exist; seeing that we are in the world of manifestation, we cannot ignore them entirely; and besides, since everything is necessarily dependent on the principles, all the rest may be had, as it were, for the asking, and it would be a great mistake to shut one's eyes to this possibility. There is also another reason, more particularly concerned with the modern Western outlook: this outlook being what it is, there would be little chance of interesting even the possible elite (we mean those who have the necessary intellectual gifts, albeit undeveloped) in a realization that would have to remain purely inward, or that at any rate was only presented to it under this one aspect; it is far easier to arouse its interest by showing it that this realization must in fact lead, if only in the far future, to outward results; and this is, moreover, the strict truth. Though the end is always the same, there are many different ways of attaining it, or rather of approaching it, for as soon as the transcendent domain of metaphysics is reached all diversity vanishes.

Among all these ways, that particular one must be chosen which suits best the outlook of the people in question. Anything, or almost anything—especially at the beginning—may serve as a support and an opportunity; where there is no organized traditional teaching, it would sometimes be very hard, in the exceptional case of an intellectual development being brought about, to say what had been the moving factor, and the most different and most unexpected things may have served as its starting-point, according to the individual natures of those concerned, as well as to outward circumstances. In any case, being essentially devoted to pure intellectuality is no reason for losing sight of the influence that it can and must exert in every domain, no matter how indirectly, even if this influence does not proceed from an express intention. We will go on to add, although no doubt this may be rather more difficult to understand, that no tradition has ever forbidden those who, by its guidance, have reached certain heights to radiate downward to lower domains

the spiritual influences which they have concentrated in themselves, nor, by so doing, are they liable to lose anything that they have acquired; indeed, such things cannot be taken away from them, and the influences will gradually distribute themselves throughout the different domains in hierarchy, and will spread there as a reflection of supreme intelligence and as a participation in it.⁵

Between knowledge of the principles and the reconstitution of the 'traditional sciences', there is another task, or another part of the same task, which could be fulfilled, one whose action would make itself more directly felt in the social order; it is moreover the only one for which the West might still, to a fairly large extent, find the means in herself, but this calls for some explanations. In the Middle Ages, Western civilization was undeniably traditional; the difficulty is to decide whether it was as completely traditional as the Eastern ones are, especially when it comes to bringing formal proofs one way or the other. To keep to what is generally known, the Western tradition, such as it was at that epoch, was a tradition which took the form of a religion; but that does not necessarily mean that there was nothing else there, or that a certain elite may not have attained to pure intellectuality, which is above all forms. We have already said that there is no incompatibility between the two, and we have quoted Islam as an example in this respect; if we mention it again here, it is because the Islamic civilization is just the one that comes in many ways nearest in type to the European civilization of the Middle Ages; there is an analogy there which it might be good to take into account.

Furthermore, it must not be forgotten that religious or theological truths, not being, as such, looked at from a purely intellectual point of view, and not having the universality that belongs exclusively to metaphysics alone, are only principles in a relative sense; if the principles proper, of which these are an application, had not been known by at least one or two persons fully conscious of their knowledge, no matter how few, we can hardly see how the tradition, outwardly religious, could have had all the influence which it did

5. This sentence contains a precise allusion to the Tibetan symbolism of *Avalokiteshvara*.

actually exert for so long a period, and have produced, in different domains which do not seem to concern it directly, all the results that history has chronicled and that its modern falsifiers cannot cover up entirely, try as they will. It must be admitted moreover that in the doctrine of the Scholastics there is at least a certain degree of real metaphysics, perhaps not free enough from philosophical contingencies, and not clearly enough distinguished from theology; to be sure, it is not metaphysics in the full sense, but, when all is said and done, it is metaphysics, while in modern philosophy there is no trace of it;⁶ and the fact that there was metaphysics there means that this doctrine, as far as it goes, must necessarily be in agreement with every other metaphysical doctrine. The Eastern doctrines go much further, in many different ways, but there may have been in the Middle Ages of the West something to complement the outward teaching, and these complements, being exclusively at the disposal of very inaccessible bodies of men, may never have been formulated in any written text, so that there can only be found at the most, in this respect, symbolic allusions, clear enough for anyone who knows from other sources what is behind it all, but quite unintelligible to anyone else. We are well aware that there is at the moment, in many religious circles, a very definite tendency to deny all 'esoterism', for the past as well as for the present; but we believe that this tendency, besides possibly implying one or two concessions made involuntarily to the modern outlook, is largely due to people being a little too ready, whenever the word is mentioned, to think of the false esoterism of certain people today, which has absolutely nothing in common with the true esoterism that we have in mind, which has left many traces that can still be discovered by anyone who is free from all bias. But however that may be, there is one fact that is incontestable: medieval Europe had from time to time, if not continuously, relations with the Easterners, and these relations had considerable effect in the realm of ideas. It is known, but perhaps

6. Leibnitz alone tried to take up again certain elements borrowed from the Scholastics, but he mixed them with considerations of quite a different order, which rob them of almost all their significance, showing that he only understood them very imperfectly.

not fully as yet, how much medieval Europe owed to the Arabs, who are the natural intermediaries between the West and the more distant parts of the East; and there was also direct contact with central Asia and even with China. It would not be amiss to study, among other periods, that of Charlemagne and also that of the Crusades, for though they were times of outward strife, there were understandings too on a more inward plane, so to speak; and we must call attention to the fact that strife, roused in this case by the equally religious form of the two traditions in question, is quite pointless and cannot arise where a tradition not clothed in this form is in question, as is the case with the more Eastern civilizations; among these there can be neither antagonism nor even mere rivalry. But we shall have occasion later on to come back to this point; what we want to bring out for the moment is that the Western medieval civilization, with its truly speculative branches of knowledge (even without considering how far they went), and with its social constitution organized in hierarchy, had enough in common with the Eastern civilizations to admit (with the same reserve) of certain interchanges in the order of intellect, which the character of modern civilization, on the contrary, now makes impossible.

If some people, while admitting the absolute necessity for a regeneration of the West, are inclined to prefer a solution by which none other than purely Western means need be resorted to (and, in all conscience, nothing but sentimentality could so incline them), they will no doubt make this objection: why not return purely and simply, though with all the necessary social modifications, to the religious tradition of the Middle Ages? In other words, why not rest content, instead of looking further afield, with giving back to Catholicism once more the pre-eminence which it held at that time, with reconstituting, under an appropriate form, ancient 'Christendom', whose unity was broken by the Reformation and by the events that followed? To be sure, if that could be realized here and now, it would indeed be something achieved, and it would even go far toward clearing up the frightful disorder of the modern world, but unfortunately this is far from being so easy a task as it may seem to certain theorists, and all sorts of obstacles would soon be raised against those who were bent on any definite action along these

lines. We need not enumerate all these difficulties, but we will point out that the mentality of the present day, taken as a whole, hardly seems liable to lend itself to a transformation of this kind, so that here too everything would have to be got ready from the very beginning, and this task, even if those willing to undertake it really had the means of doing so at their disposal, might be no less long and no less arduous than the one that we have in mind ourselves, and its results would be far more superficial. Besides, there is no proof that the traditional civilization of the Middle Ages had only an outward and properly speaking religious side; it is even certain that there was something else, if only scholastic philosophy, and we have just said why we think that there must have been still more, for this philosophy, despite its undeniable interest, remains always merely on the outside. Lastly, if the West were to hedge herself round like this with a special form, the understanding with the other civilizations could only be realized in quite a limited way, instead of first basing itself on what is most fundamental; and so, among the problems which concern it, many would still be left unsolved, not to mention that there would always be a cause for anxiety and a perpetual risk of ruining everything in the excess of Western proselytism, which cannot be definitely checked except by full understanding of the principles, and by the essential agreement which, without even having to be expressly formulated, would be the immediate result. However, it goes without saying that, if the work to be done in the two domains of metaphysics and religion could be carried out side by side, we should see no reason to be anything but thankful, as we are convinced that even if they both went on quite independently of one another, harmony would be the end-result. Besides, if the possibilities we have in mind are to come to anything, a strictly religious revival would be needed sooner or later in any case, religion being a form of tradition especially suited to the West: this revival may be a part of the work that awaits the intellectual elite, once it has been constituted, or else, if this work is already done beforehand, the elite will find there a fitting support for its own activity. The religious form contains everything that is needed by the vast majority of Westerners, who cannot really find in anything else the satisfactions that their temperament calls for; this majority will

never need anything else, and it is with this form as vehicle that it will have to receive the influence of the highest principles, an influence which, although so indirect, will be nonetheless a real participation.⁷ In this way there may be, in a full tradition, two complementary and superposed aspects, which cannot possibly contradict one another or come into conflict because they refer to two domains that are essentially distinct; the purely intellectual one, moreover, concerns directly none but the elite, which alone need necessarily be aware of the communication kept up between the two domains to ensure the perfect unity of the traditional doctrine.

In short, we should not like to be in the least exclusive, and we do not think that any work is useless, provided that it be directed along the right lines; efforts that merely concern the most secondary domains may also yield something that is not altogether negligible, with consequences which, though not to be put to an immediate application, may come into their own later and, fitting in with all the rest, play their part, however modest it may be, in the constitution of this whole which we have in mind for a future that is no doubt very far off. This is why there would be, from our point of view, nothing against a study of 'traditional sciences', whatever tradition they may belong to, in the case of someone wanting to undertake it without delay (not in their entirety, which for the moment is impossible, but at least in certain elements), provided firstly that the student has already enough information to keep him from losing his way, which in itself presupposes much more than one might think, and secondly that the study never causes him to lose sight of the essential. These two conditions, moreover, go closely together: he whose intellectuality is developed enough for him to devote himself with unerring confidence to such a study is no longer in danger of being tempted to sacrifice the superior to the inferior: in whatever domain he has to exert his activity, he will never see there anything but a piece of work that is auxiliary to what is achieved in the sphere of the principles. Under the same conditions, if in some of its conclusions 'scientific philosophy' happens

7. An analogy might well be drawn here with the caste system and its way of ensuring that everyone participates in the tradition.

accidentally to agree at times with the ancient 'traditional sciences', there may be some interest in calling attention to the fact, though at the same time care should be taken to avoid the slightest implication that the latter are on a level with any particular scientific or philosophic theory whatsoever, for all such theories change and pass away, whereas everything that has a traditional basis receives from that alone a permanent value which does not depend on the results of any subsequent research. Lastly, as regards points of contact or analogies, it is important never to let oneself be drawn into making false assimilations, seeing that one is dealing with modes of thought that are essentially different. It is impossible to be too cautious of saying anything that might be interpreted in this way, for most of our contemporaries, owing to the very narrowness of their mental horizon, are only too prone to see likenesses where there are none. Within these limits, we can say that everything done in a truly traditional spirit has a purpose, and a deep-seated purpose at that; but there is nonetheless a certain order to be observed, at least in a general way, according to the necessary hierarchy of the different domains. Furthermore, before anyone can have the full traditional outlook (instead of merely a 'traditionalist' one, which only implies a tendency or an aspiration), he must have already penetrated into the domain of the principles, at least enough to have received the inward guidance which, once found, can never be lost sight of.

CONSTITUTION OF THE ELITE & THE PART TO BE PLAYED BY IT

WE have already referred several times in the foregoing chapters to what we call the intellectual elite. Our readers will no doubt have easily understood that what we mean by this has nothing in common with what, in the West of today, sometimes goes under the same name. Those scholars and philosophers who are held to be the greatest 'authorities' in their own special domains may be absolutely unqualified to belong to this elite; indeed, they very likely are so, owing to acquired mental habits and to the many prejudices that always go with them, and above all to that 'intellectual short-sightedness' which these habits most usually lead to. There may always be honorable exceptions, of course, but it would not do to count too much on them. Generally speaking, there is more good to be got out of an ignorant man than out of one who has specialized in an essentially limited branch of studies, and who has undergone the deformation which a certain kind of education brings with it. The ignorant man may have within him possibilities of understanding which he has merely not developed for want of an opportunity, and the more futile the method of administering education in the West, the more common such cases may be. The qualifications we have in mind when we speak of the elite cannot be gauged by any outward criterion, since they are purely intellectual, and the qualities that go to make them up have nothing to do with 'profane' teaching. There are people in some countries of the East who do not know how to read or write, yet attain to a very high rank

among the intellectual elite. On the other hand it would be just as wrong to exaggerate one way as the other: because two things are independent, it does not follow that they are incompatible; and if, especially in the conditions of the modern Western world, 'profane' or outward teaching can provide one or two additional aids to action, it would assuredly be wrong to despise it unduly. But there are things which it is only safe to study after having already got that unerring inward guidance which we alluded to, and which ensures immunity against all mental deformation. Once this point has been reached, there is no longer any danger to fear, for the road always lies open ahead; any domain, no matter what, may be entered into without risk of losing the way or even of staying there overlong, for its exact importance is known in advance; it is no longer possible to be led astray by error in any shape or form, or to take it for truth, or to confuse the contingent with the absolute. To use the language of symbolism, we might say that one has both an infallible compass and an impenetrable suit of armor. But before getting so far, there is often a long period of striving to be gone through (we do not say always, as time is not an essential factor in this respect) and it is then that the very greatest precautions are necessary if all confusion is to be avoided, at least under present conditions, for clearly the same dangers cannot exist in a traditional civilization, where, moreover, those who are truly gifted in an intellectual way find everything made as easy as possible for them to develop their natural abilities: in the West, on the contrary, they cannot meet anything at the moment but obstacles, often insuperable ones, and it is only thanks to rather exceptional circumstances that it is possible to get out of the ruts of mental and social convention.

At present, then, the intellectual elite, according to our idea of it, simply does not exist in the West: the exceptions are too rare and too isolated to be looked on as constituting anything that might be so called, and, besides, they are on the whole really quite un-Western, since they consist of individuals who intellectually owe everything to the East, and who are thus almost in the same situation as the Easterners in Europe, knowing only too well what abyss separates them mentally from the men who surround them. Under these conditions one is certainly tempted to take refuge in silence rather

than run the risk of being bruised against the wall of general indifference in an attempt to express certain ideas, or even of provoking hostile reactions; however, the conviction that certain changes are necessary brings with it the obligation to begin doing something toward them, and at least to give those who are capable of developing their latent faculties (for, after all, there must be some who are) the opportunity of doing so. The primary difficulty is to reach those who are so qualified and who may not have the least suspicion of their own possibilities; a subsequent difficulty would be to bring about a selection and to turn away those who might think themselves qualified without really being so, but it must be admitted that very likely this elimination would take place almost of itself. None of these questions arise where there is organized traditional teaching, which everyone may partake of according to his capacity and up to the very point that it is within his powers to reach; there are, in fact, means of deciding exactly the full extent of a given individual's intellectual possibilities; but that is a subject which is above all 'practical', if this word may be used in such a case, or, if it be thought better, 'technical', and there would be no point in treating of it with the Western world in its present state. Besides, we only want at the moment to make people aware in advance, rather remotely, of some of the difficulties that would have to be overcome for there to be the beginnings of organization, and for there to be the constitution, even in embryo, of an elite; it would be far too premature to try here and now to define the means of this constitution, as the means—assuming that it becomes one day possible to consider them—will necessarily depend to a great extent on circumstances, like everything which is properly speaking a question of adaptation. The only thing that can be accomplished for the moment is to give the possible elements of the future elite the consciousness, as it were, of themselves, and that can only be done by putting forward certain conceptions which, when they reach those who are capable of understanding them, will show them the existence of what they knew nothing about, and will at the same time make them see the possibility of going further. Everything related to the order of metaphysics has, in itself, the power of opening up boundless horizons to anyone who has a true conception of it. This

is not a hyperbole or a figure of speech, but it must be understood quite literally, as an immediate outcome of the very universality of the principles. Those who simply hear talk of metaphysical studies, and of things that keep exclusively to the domain of pure intellectuality, can scarcely have any suspicion, at their first encounter, of all that this implies: the things in question are the most tremendous that exist, and compared with them everything else is mere child's play. Moreover, that is why those who seek to set foot in this domain without having the qualifications required for reaching at least the first stages of true understanding, withdraw of their own accord as soon as they find that they have incurred the liability of undertaking serious and real work; true mysteries defend themselves unaided against all profane curiosity, and their very nature protects them against all assaults of human folly, no less than against the powers of illusion that may be described as 'diabolical' (everyone being free to read into this word all the meanings that he pleases, literal, or figurative). For this reason it would be utterly childish to have recourse to interdictions which, applied in such an order of things, would be meaningless; such bans may be legitimate in other cases, which we do not intend to discuss, but they cannot concern pure intellectuality; and as to what goes beyond mere theory and calls for a certain reticence, those who have the right attitude need not be constrained in any way to ensure their always being as careful and discreet as is necessary; all this is far beyond the range of any outward formulas whatever, and has nothing to do with the more or less fantastic 'secrets' which are above all the plea of those who have nothing to say.

Since we have been led into speaking of the organization of the elite, we must go on to point out a mistake that we have often had occasion to notice: many people no sooner hear the word 'organization' than they imagine that there is something afoot which may be compared with the formation of a group or an association. That is utterly wrong, and those who conceive such ideas prove by so doing that they understand neither the sense nor the import of the question; the reasons for this should be already clear from what we have just been saying. True metaphysics cannot be enclosed in the formulas of a particular system or theory, and no more can the

intellectual elite possibly put up with the forms of a 'society' founded with statutes, regulations, reunions, and all the other outward manifestations that this word necessarily implies—these things have nothing to do with true metaphysics. Even to begin with, so as to form as it were a first nucleus, such an organization could not help; it would be an extremely bad starting-point, and one that could scarcely lead to anything but a setback. In fact, not only is this form of 'society' useless in such a case, but it would be most dangerous, by reason of the deviations that could not fail to take place: however strict the selection was, it would be very difficult to prevent, especially at the beginning and among so ill-prepared a portion of mankind, the introduction of one or two individuals whose lack of understanding would be enough to compromise everything; and it is more than likely that such groups would run a very severe risk of letting themselves be led astray by the prospect of some immediate social action, perhaps even political in the narrowest sense of the word, which would be the most disastrous thing that could happen, and the one which would tell most against the end in view. There are only too many examples of such deviations: how many associations, which might have fulfilled a very high function (if not a purely intellectual one, at least bordering on intellectuality) by continuing along the lines that had been laid down for them at the outset, began almost at once to degenerate in this way! Some of them even went not only astray, but changed their course completely, though they still bear the marks of their original objective, and these remain very clear to the eye of anyone with knowledge to understand them. That is how there came about a total loss, after the sixteenth century, of what might have been saved of the heritage left by the Middle Ages; and we say nothing of the accompanying drawbacks, such as petty ambitions, personal rivalries, and other causes of dissensions which inevitably arise in groups that are so constituted, especially if account be taken, as it certainly must be, of Western individualism. All this shows clearly enough what should not be done; what should be done is perhaps less clear, and that is natural, since, at the point where we now are, no one can say exactly how the elite will be constituted, supposing that it ever should be; that is probably something that belongs to a

distant future, and one should have no illusions in this respect. However that may be, we will say that in the East the most powerful organizations, those whose work is the most far-reaching, have absolutely nothing in common with 'societies' in the European sense of the word; sometimes, under their influence, more or less external societies are formed in view of some definite end, but these societies, being always temporary, disappear as soon as they have fulfilled the function allotted to them. The outer society, then, is in this case no more than an accidental manifestation of the already existing inner organization, and the latter, in all its essence, is always absolutely independent of the former; the elite does not have to take part in struggles which, whatever their importance, are necessarily outside its own domain; only indirectly can it play a social part, but this makes that part all the more effective, because, to be the true director of what is in motion, one must not be involved oneself in the movement.¹ Here, then, is just the inverse of the plan that would be followed by those who would want to begin by forming outward societies; these societies must merely be the effect, and not the cause; they could only be of use and there could only be a real point in them if the elite had already been brought into existence (in accordance with the saying of the Scholastics: 'to act, one must be'), and if it was strongly enough organized to be sure of preventing any deviation. It is only in the East that examples can now be found which would be suitable for drawing inspiration from: we have many reasons for thinking that the West also had, in the Middle Ages, some organizations of the same type, but it is at least doubtful whether sufficient traces have been left to make it possible to form an exact idea of them in any other way than by analogy with what exists in the East, this analogy being moreover founded, not on idle suppositions, but on signs which do not deceive if one already has a knowledge of certain things; furthermore, to know these things, search must be made where they are still to be found as part of a living present, for we are speaking, not of archaeological curiosities, but of knowledge that cannot be anything but direct if it is to be of

1. Aristotle's 'unmoved mover' may be recalled here; naturally, this is susceptible of many applications.

any use. This idea of organizations which do not take the form of 'societies' in any respect, which have none of the outward features that characterize such groups, and which for that reason are all the more sound because they are really based on what is immutable without allowing themselves to be adulterated with anything transitory, is an idea which is quite strange to the modern mentality, and we have had various opportunities of appreciating the difficulties that are to be met with by anyone who tries to make people understand it. Perhaps we shall find the means of coming back to it some day, as lengthy explanations on this subject would not come within the scope of the present work, where we merely allude to it incidentally so as to cut short any misunderstanding.

However, we do not mean to shut out any possibility, in this sphere any more than in any other, or to discourage any initiative, provided that it is capable of producing valid results without culminating in a mere waste of energy; we simply want to put people on their guard against false opinions and over-hasty conclusions. It goes without saying that if one or two individuals, instead of working by themselves, would rather meet together and form what one might call 'working groups', we should not see any danger in that by itself, nor even any inconvenience, provided that those who take part are fully aware that they have not the slightest need to resort to this outward formalism which looms so large in the eyes of most of our contemporaries, for the very reason that outward things are everything for them. Moreover, great care would have to be taken even in forming these groups, if any serious work was to be done in them and followed out to any lengths, and many precautions would be necessary, since everything accomplished in this domain brings into play powers that the ordinary man has no inkling of, and those who are indiscreet may find themselves at the mercy of strange reactions, at least so long as a certain level of understanding has not been reached. Besides, the questions of method, in this connection, are closely dependent on the principles themselves; it follows that they are much more important than in any other domain, and that they have consequences much more serious here than in the field of science, though even there they are far from being negligible. This, however, is not the place to dwell on all these

considerations; we exaggerate nothing, but, as we have said right from the beginning, we do not want to cloak the difficulties either; adaptation to certain definite conditions is always extremely delicate, and without unshakable and very extensive theoretic information there can be no question of trying to realize effectively the least thing. Even to acquire this information is not such a light task for Westerners; in any case, and we can never be too insistent on it, this task is the necessary starting-point, and the one indispensable preparation, without which nothing can be done, and which all the ultimate realizations in any order of things essentially depend on.

There is still another point that calls for our explanation: we have said elsewhere that the Easterners would not fail to help the intellectual elite in the fulfilment of its task, as, actually, they will always be well disposed toward a re-establishment of relations which ought normally to exist: but that presupposes an already constituted Western elite, and for its actual constitution it is the West that must take the initiative. As things are now, the authorized representatives of the Eastern traditions cannot have any intellectual interest in the West: at least, they can only be interested in the rare individuals who approach them, directly or indirectly, and who are simply too much of an exception for there to be any possibility of considering general action. We can state the following definitely: never, so long as the conditions are not altogether changed, will any Eastern organization be able to have relations with any Western organization whatsoever, since it could only do so with an elite constituted in accordance with the true principles. Until that day, then, the Easterners can be asked for nothing more than inspiration, which is already a great deal, and this inspiration can only be transmitted by individual influences acting as intermediaries, not by any direct action on the part of organizations which, except in case of unforeseen upheavals, will never do anything to incur responsibility in the affairs of the Western world, and that is understandable, for these affairs, after all, do not concern them; Westerners are alone in being over-ready to meddle with other peoples' business. If no one in the West gives proof of both the will and the capacity to understand all that is necessary for entering into relations with the East, the Easterners will take good care not to intervene, knowing moreover that it would be useless;

and, even if the West should be heading straight for a cataclysm, they can do no more than leave it to fend for itself. Indeed, how could anyone exert an influence on the West, even supposing that they wanted to, without finding there the slightest foothold?

In any case, as we repeat once again, it is for the Westerners to take the first steps; naturally, the Western masses do not enter into the question, and there cannot even be any question of a large number of individuals, which might in many ways do more harm than good; to begin with, only a few are needed, on condition that they are capable of understanding truly and deeply everything concerned. There is also another point to remember: those who have assimilated, by direct contact, the intellectuality of the East must needs confine themselves to playing the part of intermediaries that we mentioned just now; they are, owing to this assimilation, too near the East to do more; they can suggest ideas, put forward conceptions, point out what ought to be done, but not form on their own initiative an organization, which, coming from them, would not be truly Western. If there were still some individuals in the West, even isolated ones, who had kept intact the legacy of the purely intellectual tradition that must have existed in the Middle Ages, everything would be greatly simplified; but it is for these individuals to make known their existence and to put forward their claims, and so long as they have not done so it is not for us to settle that question. Failing this, which is unfortunately rather improbable, it is only what we might call an indirect assimilation of the Eastern doctrines that could bring to birth the first elements of the future elite; we mean that the initiative would have to come from individuals who had developed themselves through their understanding of these doctrines, but without being too directly connected with the East, and on the contrary keeping in touch with everything valid that may still exist in the Western civilization, and especially with the traces of the traditional outlook that have managed to survive there despite the modern outlook, chiefly under the form of religion. This does not mean that those who, intellectually, have become altogether Eastern must necessarily lose touch with these things, the less so for the simple reason that they are essentially representatives of the traditional outlook; but their situation is too unusual not to impose a very great reserve on them, especially so

long as they are not expressly appealed to for collaboration. They must hold themselves in wait, like the Easterners by birth, and all that they can do more than these Easterners is to expound their doctrines in a form more suited to the West, and to bring out the possibilities of agreement which their understanding of these doctrines will have revealed to them; once again, they must rest content with being intermediaries whose presence shows that all hope of mutual understanding is not irremediably lost.

We trust that these reflections will not be taken for anything other than what they are, and that conclusions will not be drawn from them which might well be most out of keeping with our thoughts; if too many points remain indefinite, it is because it is unavoidable, and because future circumstances alone will make it possible for light to be thrown on them little by little. In all that is not purely and strictly doctrinal, contingencies come necessarily to play a part, and from them may be drawn the secondary means of realizing all plans of adaptation; we say the secondary means, for the sole essential means, as must not be forgotten, belongs to the order of pure knowledge (that is, knowledge so far as it is simply theoretical, leading up to fully effective knowledge, for this last is not a means, but an end in itself, with regard to which any application is merely like an 'accident' which cannot possibly affect it or be a determining factor of it). If we take care, in such questions as these, to say neither too much nor too little, it is because, on (he one hand, our intention is to make ourselves understood as clearly as possible, and because, on the other hand, we must nonetheless leave room for the possibilities, now unforeseen, which circumstances may bring to light later; the elements that might come into play are exceedingly complex, and, with things as unstable as they are in the Western world, it would be impossible to overestimate the importance of the part thus to be played by the unforeseen, which we do not say is absolutely unforeseeable, but which we do not admit the right to anticipate. That is why all that can be said with precision is mostly negative, in the sense that it is in answer to objections, some being actually formulated while others are only considered as possible, or in the sense that it clears away mistakes and misunderstandings and different forms of incomprehension, so far as they happen to meet the eye; but by such a process of elimination the question

comes to be set in a much clearer light, which, all told, is already an appreciable result and, however things may seem, a truly positive one. We are well aware that Western impatience does not take at all easily to such methods, and that it would be more inclined to sacrifice certainty in the interests of speed; but it is not for us to make any concession to the demands of this impatience, which allow nothing firm to be set up, and which are altogether opposed to the end that we have in view. Those who are not even capable of restraining their impatience would be still less able to carry out the least work of a metaphysical order: let them simply try, as a preliminary exercise that does not commit them to anything, to concentrate their attention on one single idea, no matter what, for half a minute (it does not seem too much to ask), and they will see whether we are wrong to question their capabilities.²

And so we will add nothing further about the means by which an intellectual elite may come to be constituted in the West; even assuming that all goes in its favor, it does not look as if this constitution were anything like immediately possible, which does not mean that now is not the time to begin thinking about how things may be made ready for it. As for the part that will devolve on this elite, it follows clearly enough from all that has so far been said: it is essentially the return of the West to a traditional civilization, in its principles and in the whole mass of its institutions. This return will have to be

2. Let us recall here Max Muller's very explicit admission: 'This concentration of thought, *ekagrata* (or *ekagrya*) or one-pointedness, as the Hindus called it, is something to us almost unknown. Our minds are like kaleidoscopes of thoughts in constant motion; and to shut our mental eyes to everything else, while dwelling on one thought only, has become to most of us almost as impossible as to appreciate one musical note without harmonics. With the life we are leading now... it has become impossible, or almost impossible, ever to arrive at that intensity of thought which the Hindus meant by *ekagrata* and the attainment of which was to them the indispensable condition of all philosophical and religious speculation.' (Preface to the *Sacred Books of the East*, pp. xxiii-xxiv.) It would be impossible to give a better description of the scattered nature of the Western outlook, and we have only two corrections to make to this text: what concerns the Hindus should be put into the present as well as the past, since for them it remains always so, and there can be no question here of 'philosophical and religious speculation', but of 'metaphysical speculation' exclusively.

brought about in the proper order, going from the principles to the consequences, and descending by degrees down to the most contingent applications; and it can only be done by using both what the East has to offer and also whatever traditional elements remain in the West herself, the former completing the latter and being superposed on them —not modifying them in themselves but giving them, by revealing their deepest meaning, their own original point and purpose in all its fullness. As we have said, a firm stand must first of all be taken at the intellectual point of view, and by a perfectly natural repercussion the consequences will then spread in due course, more or less quickly, to all the other domains, including that of social applications. If some useful work should have already been accomplished by other means in these other domains, there will obviously be no cause to be anything but thankful, but it is not to this end that efforts should be directed at first, for that would mean putting the accessory above the essential. Until the right moment comes, the considerations that have to do with secondary points of view ought scarcely to enter in except as examples, or rather as 'illustrations'; as such, if presented relevantly and under a suitable form, they can have the advantage of making the most essential truths more easily understood by supplying a kind of foothold, and also of arousing the attention of people who, through a faulty appreciation of their own faculties, might believe themselves incapable of reaching pure intellectuality without moreover knowing what it is; let everyone remember what we said above about the unexpected means which may on occasion be the deciding factor at the outset of an intellectual development. It is necessary to mark out an absolute distinction between the essential and the accidental; but once this distinction has been made we have no wish to set any restrictive bounds to the part played by the elite, in which each one will always be able to find means of using his own special talents as it were in addition and without any detriment whatsoever to the essential. In short, the elite will work first for itself, since its members will naturally reap from their own development an immediate and altogether unflinching benefit, one moreover that amounts to a permanent and inalienable acquisition; but at the same time, and by that very development, it will necessarily be working, though less

immediately, for the West in general as well, since it is impossible that work such as this should be brought to fruit in any surroundings without producing there sooner or later considerable modifications. Besides, mental currents are subject to perfectly definite laws, and the knowledge of these laws makes for action that is incomparably more effective than the use of means simply derived from experience; but here, to succeed in making the application and in giving it its full realization, there must be a strongly constituted organization to rely on, which does not mean to say that partial results, already appreciable, may not be obtained before this point be reached. However defective and incomplete the means at one's disposal may be, the first thing to be done is to bring them into action as they are, for otherwise there will be no possibility of ever acquiring more perfect ones. We will add that the least thing accomplished according to the principles carries virtually in itself possibilities whose expansion may serve to bring about the most tremendous consequences; and this affects not merely one particular realm but all, insofar as the repercussions spread themselves throughout the full hierarchy in indefinite progression.³

Naturally, in speaking of the part to be played by the elite, we are supposing that there will be no sharp and sudden event to interrupt its action; in other words, we are considering the most favorable possibility. It is also possible—for there are discontinuities in history—that the Western civilization might be blotted out in some cataclysm before this action had been carried out. If such a thing were to happen before the elite had been fully constituted, the results of the previous work would evidently be limited to the intellectual benefits reaped by those who had taken part in it; but these benefits are, by themselves, something inestimable, and so, even if

3. We allude to an extremely important metaphysical theory which we name 'theory of gesture', and which we will perhaps expound one day in a special treatise. The word 'progression' is taken here in a sense analogous to its mathematical one, but transposed so as to make it applicable in the universal order, no longer confining it to the single domain of quantity. See also, in connection with this, what we have already said elsewhere about *apfirva* and 'concordant actions and reactions': *Introduction to the Study of the Hindu Doctrines*, pt. 3, chap. 13.

there were nothing else forthcoming, this work would still be worthwhile; the fruits would then be withheld from all save a few, but these few, as far as they themselves were concerned, would have got the essential.

If the elite were already constituted, even though it had not time to act generally enough upon the West so as to bring about a deep alteration in her whole mentality, there would be something more: during the period of trouble and upheaval this elite would be the symbolic ark floating on the waters of the flood, and, afterward, it could serve as a point of support for an action by which the West, though probably losing her autonomous existence, would nonetheless receive, from the other remaining civilizations, the principles of a new development, this time regular and normal. But in the second case there would still be, at least for a time, lamentable prospects to consider: the ethnic revolutions that we have already alluded to would certainly be very serious; besides, it would be far better for the West, instead of being absorbed purely and simply, to be able to transform herself so as to acquire a civilization comparable to those of the East, but adapted to her own conditions, and absolving her, as far as the bulk of the people was concerned, from having to assimilate, more or less painfully, traditional forms which were not made for her. This transformation, taking place smoothly and spontaneously, in order to give the West once more an appropriate traditional civilization, is what we have just called the most favorable possibility. Such would be the work of the elite, with the aid no doubt of those who are in charge of the Eastern traditions, but with a Western initiative as starting point; and it should be understood now that this last condition, even if it were not as rigorously indispensable as it actually is, would make nonetheless for a considerable advantage, since this initiative would be the means of the West's preserving her autonomy and even keeping, for her future development, those not worthless elements which she may after all have acquired in her present civilization. In short, if there were time for this possibility to be realized, the catastrophe that we began by considering would be avoided, since the Western civilization, normal mice more, would have its legitimate place among the others and

would no longer be, as it is today, a menace to the rest of humanity, a factor of disequilibrium, and oppression in the world. In any case, action should be taken as if the said goal must inevitably be reached, because, even if circumstances make it impossible, nothing of what has been achieved toward it will be lost; and to have this goal in view may supply those who are capable of belonging to the elite with a motive for striving to understand pure intellectuality, this motive being by no means negligible while they are still not fully conscious of something less contingent, that is, of what intellectuality is worth in itself, apart from the results that it may produce additionally in the more or less outward orders. The prospect of these results then, however secondary, may be at least a help, and it cannot moreover be an obstacle so long as care is taken to put it exactly in its place and to observe in everything the necessary hierarchies, so as never to lose sight of the essential or sacrifice it to the accidental. We have already given enough explanation on this score to justify, in the eyes of those who understand these things, the standpoint which we adopt here, and which, if it does not correspond to our whole thought (and it could not, seeing that purely doctrinal and speculative considerations rank for us above all others), represents nonetheless a very real part of it.

We make no claim to consider here anything more than possibilities that are in all likelihood very remote, but that are nonetheless possibilities, and that, for this alone, deserve to be taken into account; moreover the very fact of considering them may perhaps be already a step, in some measure, toward bringing their realization closer. Besides, in an essentially restless atmosphere such as that of the modern West, events may take place under the action of certain circumstances, with a speed far surpassing all expectations; it cannot therefore be too soon to set about getting ready to face them, and it is better to look too far ahead than to let oneself be taken unawares by an irremediable calamity. Certainly, we have no illusions as to the chances that such warnings have of being listened to by most of our contemporaries; but, as we have said, the intellectual elite would not need to be very large, especially at the beginning, to enable its influence to have a very effective action,

even upon those who had not the slightest idea of its existence or who did not in the very least suspect the range of its work. Here comes to light the uselessness of those 'secrets' that we alluded to earlier: there are actions which, by their very nature, remain totally unknown to the ordinary man, not because they are concealed from him, but because he is incapable of understanding them. There would be no question of the elite making public the means of its action, chiefly because it would be pointless, and because, even if it wanted to, it would not be able to explain them in language that could be understood by the vast majority; it would know in advance that it would be a waste of time, and that the efforts so spent might be put to a better use. We do not contest, moreover, the danger and untimeliness of certain things being divulged: many people might be tempted, if the means were shown them, to set certain forces in motion for the sake of results that they were in no way ready for, simply and solely out of curiosity, without understanding the true point of them, and without knowing where they might lead. This would only be a supplementary cause of disequilibrium, a most deplorable addition to all those that are making for turmoil in the Western mind today and that will no doubt go on doing so for some time yet, and one that would be all the more to be dreaded owing to the deeper nature of the things brought into play: but all who have certain kinds of knowledge are, by virtue of that alone, fully qualified to appreciate such dangers, and they will always know how to behave in consequence without being bound by other obligations than those which are quite naturally implied in the degree of intellectual development that they have reached. Besides, the first step to be taken is necessarily that of theoretic preparation, which is the one essential and truly indispensable preparation, and theory can always be put forward without reserve, or at least with the sole reserve of what is strictly inexpressible and incommunicable. It is for each one to understand insofar as he is capable, and, as for those who do not understand, if they reap no advantage from it, they suffer no harm from it either, remaining simply as they were before. Perhaps some will be surprised that we should lay so much stress on things that are on the whole extremely simple and ought not to raise the least

difficulty; but experience has shown us that too many precautions cannot be taken in this respect, and we would rather over-explain certain points than risk seeing our thought wrongly interpreted. The remarks we have still to make are prompted largely by the same anxiety, and as they come in answer to a lack of understanding that we have actually met with face to face on several occasions, they will prove well enough that there is nothing exaggerated in our fear of being misunderstood.

4

NOT FUSION BUT MUTUAL UNDERSTANDING

ALL the Eastern civilizations, despite the very great difference of the forms that they are dressed in, may be compared with each other, because they are all essentially traditional in character; each tradition has its own ways of expression, and its own modalities, but, wherever there is tradition, in the true and deep sense of the word, there is necessarily agreement on the principles. The differences lie solely in the outward form, in the contingent applications, which are naturally conditioned by circumstances, above all by racial characteristics, and which, for a given civilization, may even vary within certain limits, since that is the domain which is left open to adaptation. But where there is no longer anything but outward forms, which reflect nothing of any deeper order, there can hardly be any longer anything but differences with regard to the other civilizations. There is no longer any agreement possible as soon as there are no longer any principles, and that is why the lack of actual attachment to a tradition seems to us the very root of the Western deviation. That is also why we declare in so many words that, if the intellectual elite comes one day to be constituted, the essential end which it will have to work for is the return of the West to a traditional civilization; and we will add that if there has ever been a properly Western development in this sense, we have the example of it in the Middle Ages, so that it would be on the whole a question, not of copying or reconstituting purely and simply what existed then (a task that would obviously be impossible, for, whatever certain people may maintain, history does not repeat itself, and

there are merely analogous things in the world, not identical things), but of drawing inspiration from it for the adaptation made necessary by the circumstances. That is, word for word, what we have always said, and it is not without express intention that we reproduce it here in the same terms that we have already used;¹ this seems to us clear enough to leave no room for any doubt. However, there are some who have shown the strangest misunderstanding on this score, and who have thought fit to attribute to us the most fantastic intentions, for example that of wanting to restore something comparable to the Alexandrian 'syncretism'. We will come back to that directly, but let us make it quite clear to begin with that when we speak of the Middle Ages, we have particularly in mind the period beginning with Charlemagne's reign and going down to the end of the thirteenth century—which is rather remote from Alexandria! It is indeed curious that when we maintain the fundamental unity of all the traditional doctrines, we can be taken as meaning that the task in question is a 'fusion' between the different traditions, and that people should fail to see that agreement about the principles in no way presupposes uniformity. Does not this seem to be yet another outcome of that very Western fault of not being able to go further than outward appearances? In any case, we do not think it a waste of words to revert to this question and to lay further stress on it, so as to save our intentions from being any longer misrepresented in this way; and, besides, apart from this consideration, the question is not without interest.

In virtue of the principles being universal, as we have said, all the traditional doctrines are identical in essence; there is and can only be one metaphysics, however differently it may be expressed, insofar as it actually is expressible, according to the language at one's disposal, which moreover merely serves as a symbol and never as anything more; and this is so quite simply because the truth is one, and because, being in itself absolutely independent of our conceptions, it imposes itself alike on all those who understand it. Two veritable traditions, then, can never in any instance be in contradiction with each other. If there are doctrines that are incomplete (whether they have always been so or whether part of them has been

1. *Introduction to the Study of the Hindu Doctrines.*

lost), and that may be more or less far-reaching, it is nonetheless true that up to the point where they stop they remain in agreement with the others, even though their living representatives should be unaware of it. For all that lies beyond, there can be no question either of agreement or of disagreement; but only the systematic mind could call in question the existence of this 'beyond', and apart from this biased negation, which is a little too like those that are second nature to the modern mind, all that the incomplete doctrine can do is to admit itself incompetent with regard to what goes beyond it. In any case, if two traditions were found to be in apparent contradiction with one another, the right conclusion would be, not that one was true and that the other was false, but that at least one of them was not fully understood; and on a closer examination it would be seen that there was in fact one of those mistakes of interpretation which the differences in expression, for anyone not sufficiently used to them, may very easily give rise to. As for us, moreover, we must say that in point of fact we do not find such contradictions, while on the contrary we see in a very clear light, beneath the most diverse forms, the essential unity of doctrine. What amazes us is that those who assume on principle the existence of one 'primordial tradition', originally common to all mankind, do not see the consequences implied in this affirmation or do not know how to draw them from it, and that they are sometimes just as rabidly anxious as others to discover oppositions which are purely imaginary. We are only speaking, of course, of the doctrines that are truly traditional, or, if it be preferred, 'orthodox'; there are means of recognizing these doctrines among all the others without any possible mistake, just as there are also means of determining the exact degree of understanding that any one doctrine corresponds to; but that does not concern us at the moment. To sum up what we think in a few words, we can say this: every truth is exclusive of error, not of another truth (or, to express ourselves better, of another aspect of the truth); and, we repeat, all exclusivism other than that is nothing more than the mark of a systematic outlook, which is incompatible with the understanding of the universal principles.

Since the agreement is essentially on principles, it can only be truly conscious for those doctrines that have in them at least a part of metaphysics or of pure intellectuality; it is not conscious for

those strictly limited to a special form, for example that of religion. However, this agreement exists nonetheless really in such a case, in that the theological truths may be considered as an adaptation of certain metaphysical truths to a special point of view; but to show this, the transposition must be made which gives back to these truths their deepest meaning, and only the metaphysician can make it, because he places himself beyond all the particular forms and all the special points of view. Metaphysics and religion are not, and never will be, on the same plane; it follows, furthermore, that a purely metaphysical doctrine and a religious doctrine cannot enter into rivalry or conflict, since their domains are clearly different. But, on the other hand, it follows also that the existence of a solely religious doctrine is not enough to allow the establishment of a deep mutual understanding like the one we have in view when we speak of intellectual relations being renewed between East and West. That is why we have insisted on the necessity of carrying out in the first place work of a metaphysical order, and it is only then that the religious tradition of the West, revived and restored in its fullness, could come to be of use for this end, thanks to the addition of the inner element which it now lacks, but which might very well succeed in superposing itself without there being any outward change. If a mutual understanding is possible among the representatives of the different traditions—and we know that there is nothing against it in principle—this understanding can only be brought about from above, in such a way that each tradition will always keep its full independence, with the forms that belong to it; and the masses, while sharing in the advantages of this understanding, will not be directly conscious of it, for that is something which only concerns the elite, and even ‘the elite of the elite’, according to the expression used by certain Islamic schools.

It is obvious how remote all this is from all those schemes of ‘fusion’ which we consider to be utterly impracticable. A tradition is not a thing that can be invented or artificially created. However well or badly elements borrowed from different traditions be put together, the result will never be more than a pseudo-tradition without value and without bearing, and such fantastic ideas should be left to the occultists and the Theosophists. To act as they do means

ignorance of what a tradition truly is and failure to understand the real and deep meaning of these elements that they strive to fit together into a more or less incoherent assemblage. In fact, it is all no more than a sort of 'eclecticism', and there is nothing that we are more resolutely against, precisely because we see the deep agreement beneath the diversity of the forms, and because we see also, at the same time, the reason for these many forms in the variety of the conditions that they must be adapted to. The very great importance of studying the different traditional doctrines lies in the scope that it gives for verifying this agreement and harmony which we affirm here; but there can be no question of making this study the source of a new doctrine: such an idea, far from conforming to the traditional outlook, would be absolutely against it. No doubt, when the elements of a certain order are lacking, as is the case in the modern West for all that is purely metaphysical, they must be looked for elsewhere, wherever they actually exist; but it must not be forgotten that metaphysics is essentially universal, so that it is not the same thing as it would be in the case of elements that have reference to a particular domain. Besides, the Eastern forms of expression would never have to be assimilated by any but the elite, which would then have to set about the task of adaptation; and the knowledge of the doctrines of the East would make it possible, by a judicious use of analogy, to restore the Western tradition itself in its entirety, just as it may make it possible to understand the vanished civilizations; these two cases are altogether comparable, since it must be admitted that, for the most part, the Western tradition is now lost.

Where we have in view a synthesis of a transcendent order as the only possible starting-point for all the further realizations, some people imagine that there can only be question of a more or less confused 'syncretism'; however, those are things that have nothing in common, and there is not even the least connection between • hem. In the same way, there are some who cannot hear the word 'esoterism' (which we do not abuse, as will be admitted) without thinking immediately of occultism or of other things of the same kind, in which there is not a trace of true esoterism. It is incredible that the most unjustified claims should be so easily admitted by those very people who would have most interest in refuting them.

The only effective means of fighting occultism is to show that there is nothing serious in it, that it is only an altogether modern invention, and that esoterism, in the true sense of the word, is in reality something quite different from it. There are also some who, by another confusion, think that 'esoterism' may be glossed by 'gnosticism'; here the conceptions in question are genuinely older, but for all that the interpretation is neither more exact nor more justified. It is rather hard to know now the precise nature of the somewhat varied doctrines which are classed together under the term 'gnosticism', and among which there would no doubt be many distinctions to make; but, on the whole, they seem to have contained more or less disfigured Eastern ideas, probably misunderstood by the Greeks, and clothed in imaginative forms which are scarcely compatible with pure intellectuality; it would assuredly cost little effort to find things more worthy of interest, less mixed with heteroclitic elements, of a much less dubious value, and much more surely significant. This leads us up to a few remarks about the Alexandrian period in general: that the Greeks were then in fairly direct contact with the East, and that their outlook was thus opened to conceptions against which it had until then been shut, seems to us beyond all question; but the result seems unfortunately to have remained much nearer to 'syncretism' than to true synthesis. We have no wish to depreciate unduly such doctrines as those of the Neoplatonic school, which are in any case incomparably superior to all the productions of modern philosophy, but when all is said and done it is better to go back directly to the Eastern source than to take any intermediate steps, and, besides, that has the advantage of being much easier, since the Eastern civilizations still exist, whereas the Greek civilization has not really had any direct successors. The Eastern doctrines, once known, may serve as a means for better understanding the Neoplatonic ones, and even ideas more purely Greek than those, for despite some considerable differences the West was then much closer to the East than it is today; but the inverse would not be possible, and anyone who sought to approach the East through Greece would lay himself open to many mistakes. Besides, the wants of the West can only be supplied by addressing oneself to what actually still exists. There can be no question here of archeology, and the things we have

in mind have nothing to do with the pastimes of scholars. If the knowledge of antiquity can play a part, it is only insofar as it will help to understand certain ideas properly, and confirm still further that doctrinal unity which is the meeting ground of all civilizations, with the exception of the modern one alone, which, having neither doctrine nor principles, is outside the normal ways of humanity.

If no attempt at fusion between the different doctrines is admissible, still less can there be any question of substituting one doctrine for another; not only is there no disadvantage in there being many traditional forms, but on the contrary there are very definite advantages in it; even though these forms are, at bottom, fully equivalent, each one of them has its point, if only because it is better fitted than any other to the conditions of some particular setting. The tendency to make everything uniform comes, as we have said, from prejudices instilled by those who preach 'equality'; to seek to apply it here would therefore amount to making a concession to the modern outlook, and this concession, even if involuntary, would be nonetheless real, and could only have most deplorable consequences. Only if the West showed herself definitely powerless to go back to a normal civilization could an alien tradition be imposed upon her; but then there would be no fusion, because there would no longer be left anything that was specifically Western; and there would be no substitution either, for, to reach such an extremity, the West would have to have lost even the last vestiges of the traditional outlook—all except for a small elite without which, unable even to receive this alien tradition, she would sink inevitably into the worst barbarism. But, we repeat, it is not too late to hope that things will not go so far and that the elite will be able to establish itself and carry out its task fully, so that the West may not only be saved from chaos and dissolution, but find once more the principles and means of a development that is natural to her, while being at the same time in harmony with that of the other civilizations.

As for the part to be played by the East in all this, let us, to make things clearer, sum it up once more as precisely as possible; we can also make clear, in this connection, the difference between the period of the elite's constitution and that of its effective action. In the first period it is by the study of the Eastern doctrines, more than

by any other means, that those who are destined to belong to this elite will be able to acquire and develop in themselves pure intellectuality, since they cannot possibly find it in the West. It is also only by this study that they will be able to learn what a traditional civilization is in its various elements, for it is only a knowledge as direct as possible that has any value in such a case, and there is no place for mere book-learning, which is of no use by itself for the end that we have in view. For the study of the Eastern doctrines to be what it ought to be, certain individuals will have to serve as intermediaries, in the way that we have explained, between the possessors of these doctrines and the Western elite in formation; that is why, for the latter, we speak only of a knowledge as direct as possible, and not absolutely direct, at least to begin with. But subsequently, with the way prepared by this work of assimilation, nothing need stop the elite itself (since it is from it that the initiative must come) from appealing in a more direct way to the representatives of the Eastern traditions; and the latter would be brought to take an interest in the lot of the West by the very presence of this elite and would not fail to answer this appeal, for the one condition that they insist on is understanding (and this one condition is moreover imposed by the very nature of things). We can state definitely that we have never seen any Easterner keep up his habitual reserve when he finds himself face to face with someone whom he thinks capable of understanding him. It is in the second period that actual and visible help of this kind could be given by the Easterners. We have said why that presupposes an elite already constituted, that is, in fact, a Western organization capable of entering into relations with the Eastern organizations which work in the order of pure intellect, and of receiving from them, for its action, the help that is to be had from forces which have accumulated from time immemorial. In such an event the Easterners will always be, for the people of the West, guides and 'elder brothers'; but the West, without claiming to be on a footing of absolute equality with them, will nonetheless have the right to be considered as an independent power as soon as she possesses such an organization; and the Easterners' deep distaste for anything that smacks of proselytism will be sufficient guarantee of her independence. The Easterners are not in the least bent on

absorbing the West, and they will always much prefer to help on a Western development in conformity with the principles, however little possibility they see of this; it is precisely for those who are to belong to the elite to show them this possibility, proving by their own example that the intellectual degradation of the West is not past all cure. The thing to be done, then, is not to impose on the West an Eastern tradition whose forms would not correspond to the people's mentality, but to restore a Western tradition with the help of the East, first with indirect help, then direct, or, in other words, inspiration in the first period and actual support in the second. But what is not possible for Westerners in general will have to be so for the elite: before it can hope to carry out the necessary adaptations, it must first have penetrated and understood the traditional forms that exist elsewhere; it must also go beyond all forms, whatever they may be, to grasp what constitutes the essence of all tradition. It is in virtue of this that, when the West is once more in possession of a regular and traditional civilization, the elite will be bound to play its part still further: it will then be the means by which the Western civilization will communicate permanently with the other civilizations, for such a communication can only be established and kept up by what is highest in each of them. In order that it may not be simply at the mercy of events, there must be men present who are, for their own part, detached from all particular forms, fully conscious of what is behind the forms, and who, placing themselves in the domain of the most transcendent principles, may take part in all the traditions without distinction. In other words, the West would finally have to reach the stage of having representatives in what is symbolically termed the 'center of the world' or its equivalent (which should not be taken literally as indicating any fixed place whatsoever); but this question is concerned with things too remote and, for the moment and no doubt for some time to come, too inaccessible for there to be any advantage in insisting on it.²

Since the first step toward rousing Western intellectuality from its slumber must be the study of the doctrines of the East (we mean a real and deep study, with everything that it includes concerning the

2. See *the King of the World*. RD.

personal development of those who undertake it, and not an outward and superficial study after the manner of the orientalists), we must now explain why one of these doctrines is, in general, to be approached rather than the others. It might in fact be asked why we take India as our mainstay rather than China, or why we do not think more is to be gained from basing our work on what is closest to the West, that is, on the esoteric side of the Islamic doctrine. We will confine ourselves, moreover, to considering these three big divisions of the East; all the rest is, either of lesser importance, or, like the Tibetan doctrines, so unknown to the Europeans that it would be very difficult to speak to them intelligibly about them before they had understood things less completely foreign to their usual way of thinking. As for China, there are similar reasons for not fixing on her to begin with; the forms in which her doctrines are expressed are really too far removed from the Western mentality, and the methods of teaching in use there are such as might immediately discourage the most gifted Europeans; very few indeed are those who could bear up under work directed along such lines, and, if the prospect of a very rigorous selection should in any case be kept in mind, one should nonetheless avoid as much as possible difficulties that would merely depend on contingencies, and which would arise rather from the temperament inherent in the race than from a real lack of intellectual faculties. The forms of expression of the Hindu doctrines, while being also extremely unlike all those that Western thought is used to, are to be assimilated with relatively greater ease, and they have in them greater possibilities of adaptation. We might say, taking the East as a whole, that India, being in the middle, is neither too far from the West nor too near her for our present purpose. In fact, there would also be disadvantages in taking what is nearest as a basis, and though these would be of a different kind from the ones that we have just been pointing out, they would nonetheless be quite serious enough; and perhaps there would not be many real advantages to make up for them, as Westerners are almost as ill-informed about the Islamic civilization as they are about the more Eastern ones, and the metaphysical part of it in particular, which is what interests us here, escapes them altogether. It is true that this Islamic civilization, with its two aspects, esoteric and

exoteric, and with the religious form which the latter is clothed in, comes nearest to being like what a traditional Western civilization would be; but the very presence of this religious form, by which Islam takes as it were after the West, might arouse certain susceptibilities which, however little justified they were, would not be without danger. Those who are incapable of distinguishing between the different domains would wrongly imagine there to be a rivalry between the religions; and there is certainly, among the Western masses (in which we include most of the pseudo-intellectuals), much more hatred against all that is Islamic than against what concerns the rest of the East. Fear enters a good deal into the motives of this hatred, and this state of mind is only due to lack of understanding, but, so long as it exists, the most elementary forethought demands that it shall not be altogether ignored. The elite on its way to being formed will have quite enough to do in the way of overcoming the hostility which it will run up against on different sides, without pointlessly adding to this hostility by making room for false suppositions which stupidity and malignity combined would not fail to give credit to; there will probably be some in any case, but, when they can be foreseen, it is better to take steps against their materializing, if at least it is possible to do so without incurring other consequences that would be still worse. That is why we do not think it advisable to take as our mainstay Islamic esoterism; but, naturally, that does not mean that this esoterism, being truly metaphysical in its essence, has not the equivalent to offer of what is to be found in the other doctrines; all this, then, we repeat, is merely a question of opportuneness, which only arises because it is as well to select the most favorable conditions for work, and does not involve the principles themselves.

Moreover, if we take the Hindu doctrine as the center of the study in question, that does not mean that we intend to refer to it exclusively; it is important on the contrary to bring out, at every favorable opportunity, the agreement and equivalence of all the metaphysical doctrines. It must be shown that beneath expressions that vary there are conceptions that are identical because they correspond to the same truth; sometimes even there are analogies that strike one all the more because they have bearing on very particular

points, and also there is a certain community of symbols among the different traditions. These are things that it would be impossible to overemphasize, and there is no question of 'syncretism' or 'fusion' in establishing these real likenesses and this sort of parallelism which exists among all the civilizations that are traditional, and which can only be surprising to men who believe in no transcendent truth both beyond and above human conceptions. For our part, we do not think that civilizations like those of India and China need necessarily have been in direct communication with one another in the course of their development; that does not prevent them from having, side by side with very marked differences that are to be explained by ethnic and other conditions, features in which they are noticeably alike; and here we are not speaking of the metaphysical order, where the equivalence is always perfect and absolute, but of the applications made to the order of contingent things. Of course, one must always keep in mind the possibility of something belonging to the 'primordial tradition'; but since this is by definition previous to the special development of the civilizations in question, its existence does not take away any of their independence. Besides, the 'primordial tradition' must be considered as having essentially to do with the principles, and in this domain there has always been a certain lasting communication, established from within and from above, as we have just been saying; but that also does not affect the independence of the different civilizations. However, in the face of certain symbols which are the same everywhere, there is clearly nothing for it but to acknowledge them to be a manifestation of this fundamental traditional unity which is so generally unrecognized today, and which the 'scientists' are at great pains to discount as something particularly annoying; the existence of such points in common cannot be mere chance, especially as the ways of expression are, in themselves, apt to vary indefinitely. In short, unity, for whoever has eyes to see it, is everywhere, underlying all diversity; it is there in consequence of the universality of the principles. That the truth should impress itself in the same way on men who have no direct connection with one another, or that real intellectual relations should be kept up between the representatives of different civilizations, is only made possible by this universality;

and, if it were not consciously admitted by one or two at least, there could be no question of any truly stable and deep agreement. What all normal civilizations have in common are the principles; if these were lost sight of, each civilization would have scarcely anything left but the special characteristics by which it differs from the others, and even the likenesses would become purely superficial since the true reason for them would not be known. We do not mean that it is absolutely wrong to cite, in explanation of certain general likenesses, the unity of human nature; but it is usually done in a very vague and altogether inadequate way, and moreover the mental differences are much greater and go much further than those who only know one type of humanity can imagine. This unity itself cannot be clearly understood and given its full significance without a true knowledge of the principles, apart from which it is somewhat illusory; the true nature of the species and its deep reality are things that no mere empiricism could account for.

But let us revert to what led us up to these considerations: there cannot be the slightest question of 'specializing' in the study of the Hindu doctrine, since the order of pure intellect is just what eludes all specialization. All the doctrines that are metaphysically complete are fully equivalent, and we can even say that they are necessarily identical at bottom; it only remains, then, to decide which is the one that would lend itself most to the sort of exposition required, and we think that, in a general way, it is the Hindu doctrine; that is the reason, and that alone, why we take it as a basis. But if it should happen that certain points are treated of by other doctrines under a form that seems easier to assimilate, there can clearly be no harm in having recourse to those doctrines; in fact it would be yet another way of bringing to light that agreement which we have just been speaking of. We will go further: tradition, instead of standing in the way of the adaptations called for by circumstances, has on the contrary always provided the principle which all necessary adaptations could be based on, and these are absolutely legitimate through their keeping to the strictly traditional line, or, in other words, to what we have also termed 'orthodoxy'. So, if new adaptations are called for, >s all the more natural on account of the difference in the setting, there is no harm in formulating them by drawing inspiration from

those that exist already, while taking also the mental conditions of this setting into account, provided that it is done with the required forethought and competence, and that the traditional outlook has already been grasped in all its depth with all that it includes; this is what the intellectual elite will have to do sooner or later, in everything for which no earlier Western form of expression can be found. It is clear how remote this is from the standpoint of scholarship: the origin of a particular idea does not interest us in itself, for this idea, in being true, is independent of all the men who have expressed it under this form or that; historical contingencies are irrelevant. But since we do not claim to have reached by ourselves and without any help the ideas which we know to be true, we think that it will be as well for us to say who passed them on to us, especially since by so doing we shall be pointing out to others which way they can turn so as to find them for themselves; and, in fact, it is to the Easterners alone that we owe these ideas. As to the question of age, if only considered in a historical way, it is not of very great interest either; only when connected with the idea of tradition does it take on quite another aspect, but then, if it be understood what tradition really is, this question loses its point at once through the knowledge that from the beginning everything was implied principally in what is the very essence of the doctrines, so that it merely had to be deduced from the principles later by a development which, in its foundation if not in its form, could not admit of any innovation. There is no doubt that a certainty of this kind is scarcely communicable; but, if some people possess it, why should not others attain to it as well, especially if the means are given them insofar as they can be given? The 'chain of the tradition' is sometimes renewed in a very unexpected way; and men have thought that they had conceived certain ideas spontaneously whereas they had in fact received help that was effective in spite of not being consciously felt by them; still less should such help fail those who put themselves expressly in the required disposition for obtaining it. Of course, we are not denying here the possibility of direct intellectual intuition, since we maintain on the contrary that it is absolutely indispensable and that without it there is no real metaphysical conception; but it must be led up to, and whatever latent faculties an individual may have, we doubt if he

can develop them by himself; at the very least a certain event is necessary to make way for this development. This event, which may vary indefinitely according to the particular cases is never accidental except in appearance; in reality, it is brought about by an action whose ways of working, although they inevitably escape all outside observation, may be grasped by those who understand that 'spiritual posterity' is no empty phrase. However, it should be said that cases of this sort are always exceptional, and that if they occur in the absence of all unbroken and regular transmission carried out by organized traditional teaching (one or two examples of such cases might be found in Europe, as also in Japan), they can never entirely make up for this absence, firstly because they are few and far between, and secondly because they lead to the acquisition of knowledge which, whatever its value, is never more than fragmentary. It should also be added that the means of coordinating and expressing what is conceived in this way cannot be given at the same time, so that the benefit remains almost exclusively a personal one.³ True, that is already something, but it must not be forgotten that even from the point of view of this personal profit, a partial and incomplete realization, like that which may be had in such a case, is a poor result compared with the veritable metaphysical realization that all the Eastern doctrines assign to man as his supreme goal (and which, let us say in passing, has absolutely nothing to do with 'quietist sleep' as is imagined by some people that we have come across, through a grotesque interpretation that is certainly not justified by anything we have said of it). Besides, where realization has not been preceded by a sufficient theoretic preparation, many confusions may arise, and there is always the possibility of losing one's way in one of those intermediate domains where there is no security against illusions; it is only in the domain of pure metaphysics that such security is to be had, and, since it is then acquired once and for all, there can no longer be the least danger in entering any other domain whatsoever, as we have already pointed out.

3. The connection might be noted between this and what we have said elsewhere with regard to 'mystical states'; the two states are, if not identical, at least comparable; we shall no doubt have to revert to this question on other occasions.

The truth of facts may seem almost negligible compared with the truth of ideas; however, even in the contingent order, there are degrees to be observed, and there is a way of looking at things, by linking them up with their principles, which gives them an importance such as they altogether lack by themselves; what we have said about the 'traditional sciences' should be enough to make this clear. There is no need to become involved in questions of chronology, which are often insoluble, at least by the ordinary historical methods; but there is some point in knowing that such and such ideas belong to a traditional doctrine, and even that such and such a way of presenting them is equally traditional in character; we think it unnecessary to insist on this any more, after all the considerations that we have already put forward. In any case, although the truth of facts, which is merely supplementary, must not make one lose sight of the truth of ideas, which is the essential, it would be wrong to refuse to take into account the additional advantages to be had from knowing a fact, since, despite their being, like it, contingent, they are not always to be disdained. To know that certain ideas have been given us by the Easterners is to know a true fact; this is less important than to understand these ideas and to acknowledge inwardly that they are true, and if they had come to us from elsewhere, we would see not the slightest reason for waving them aside *a priori*, but since we have found nowhere in the West the equivalent of these Eastern ideas, we think it as well to say so. Of course, it would be possible to have an easy success by putting forward certain conceptions as if one had, as it were, invented them from start to finish, and by keeping their real origin secret; but we cannot admit such behavior, and besides, it would amount in our eyes to robbing the conceptions of their true bearing and their authority, since in this way they would be reduced to seeming no more than a 'philosophy', when really they are something quite different; here once more we are touching on the question of the individual and the universal, which is at the bottom of all such distinctions.

But let us keep, for the moment, to what is contingent: to maintain boldly that it is in the East that pure intellectual knowledge may be acquired, while striving at the same time to reawaken the intellectuality of the West, is to help promote, in the only effective way,

the renewal of relations between East and West; and we hope that it will now be understood why this possibility is not to be neglected, since that is the chief object of all that we have said so far. The restoration of a normal civilization in the West may be only a contingency; but, we repeat, is that a reason for losing all interest in it, even if one is above all a metaphysician? And besides, apart from the importance that such things have in their own relative order, they may be the means of realizations that are not limited to the domain of contingency, and that, for all those who take part in them directly or even indirectly, will have consequences before which all transitory things efface themselves and vanish. The reasons for all this are many, and the deepest of them are perhaps not those that we have laid most stress on, since we could not think of expounding here the metaphysical theories (and even cosmological ones in certain cases, as, for example, where the 'cyclic laws' are concerned) without which they could not be fully understood; we intend to do so in other works which will follow in due course. As we said at the beginning, we cannot possibly explain everything at once; but we state nothing gratuitously, and we are conscious of having, for want of many other merits, at least that of only talking about what we know. If then there are some who are surprised at certain considerations that they are not used to, we hope that they will take the trouble to give them their more attentive reflection, and perhaps they will then see that these considerations, far from being useless or superfluous, are precisely some of the most important, or that what seemed to them at first sight to take us away from our subject is on the contrary what concerns it most directly. There are indeed things that are connected in a way quite different from what is usually thought, and the truth has many aspects that most Westerners scarcely suspect; that is why we should always be more afraid of seeming to limit things too much by the expression that we give them than of implying possibilities that are too great.

CONCLUSION

AFTER what has already been said, we might almost do without a conclusion that seems fairly obvious and that would scarcely give us scope for anything more than a repetition, in a more or less summary form, of one or two considerations which we have already treated at length with enough stress to bring out all their importance. We think in fact that we have shown as clearly and explicitly as possible what are the chief prejudices that keep the West of today so remote from the East; and if they do so, it is because they are opposed to true intellectuality, which the East has kept in its fullness, while the West has gone so far as to lose all notion of it, having no longer even the vaguest and most muddled glimmering of it. Those who have understood this will have inevitably grasped as well how 'accidental', in all the various senses of this word, is the divergence that separates the West from the East; the bringing of these two portions of mankind together and the return of the West to a normal civilization are really just one and the same thing, and that is indeed the chief point of their being brought together, as perhaps in the more or less remote future they may be according to the considerations we have put forward. What we call a normal civilization is one that is based on principles, in the true sense of this word, one where everything is arranged in hierarchy to conform to these principles, so that everything in it is seen as the application and extension of a doctrine whose essence is purely intellectual and metaphysical: this is what we mean also when we speak of a traditional civilization. It must not be believed, moreover, that tradition can cramp thought in the slightest, unless it be maintained that to stop it from going astray amounts to limiting it, which we cannot admit; is it permissible to say that the shutting out of error is a limitation of the truth? To reject impossibilities, which are a mere nothing, is not to place restrictions on the total and universal possibility, which is necessarily infinite; it follows that error is a mere negation,

a 'privation' in the Aristotelian sense of the word; it has, insofar as it is error (for it may contain fragments of truth that have not been understood), nothing positive, and that is why it may be excluded without laying oneself in the least open to the charge of having a systematic mind. Tradition, on the other hand, admits all the aspects of the truth; it does not set itself against any legitimate adaptation; it allows those who understand it conceptions not only of an immensity that none of the dreams of the most 'daring' philosophers can approach, but also conceptions of a most undreamlike solidity and validity; in short, it opens up possibilities to the intelligence, which, like truth itself, are unlimited.

All this results immediately from the characteristics of metaphysical knowledge, which is indeed the only altogether unlimited knowledge, being of the universal order; and we think it would be as well to revert here to the question, which we have already treated elsewhere, of the relations between metaphysics and logic.¹ Logic, which refers to the conditions that specially belong to human understanding, is something contingent; it is of the individual and rational order, and what are called its principles are only principles in a relative sense; we mean that they can only be, like those of mathematics or of any other particular science, the application and specification, in a fixed domain, of the veritable principles. Thus metaphysics necessarily dominates logic as it dominates all the rest; not to recognize this is to turn upside down the hierarchic relations that are inherent in the nature of things; but, however evident this may appear to us, we have been unable to help noticing that most of our contemporaries find cause for astonishment at it. They are totally ignorant about what is of the metaphysical and 'supra-individual' order; they only know things that belong to the rational order, including the 'pseudo-metaphysics' of the modern philosophers and, in this rational order, logic does actually hold the highest rank, all the rest being subordinate to it. But true metaphysics cannot be dependent on logic any more than on any other science whatsoever; the mistake of those who think that it can comes from their failure to conceive of knowledge apart from the domain of

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reason, and from their not having the least suspicion of what pure intellectual knowledge is. This we have already said; and we have also taken care to point out that there is a distinction to be made between the conception of metaphysical truths, which, in itself, is beyond the reach of all individual limitation, and the formulated exposition of them, which, insofar as it is possible, can only be a sort of transposition down to the plane of discourse and reason. If, then, this exposition takes the form of reasoning, and appears logical and even dialectic, it is because, given the way in which human language is constituted, it would be impossible to say anything without such a form; but that is only an outward thing, which does not in the least affect the truths in question, since they are essentially higher than reason. On the other hand, there are two very different ways of considering logic: there is the Western way, which consists in treating it philosophically, and in striving to tie it down to some systematic conception; and there is the Eastern way, that is, logic constituted as a 'traditional science' and bound up with the metaphysical principles, which moreover give it, like every other science, an incomparably greater bearing. It may be, of course, that the results seem practically the same in many cases, but the difference between the two points of view remains quite undiminished; it is no more possible to contest this than it would be to conclude, owing to outward likenesses between the actions of various individuals, that they were carried out with the same intentions. And here is what we have been leading up to: logic is not, in itself, anything especially 'philosophical', since it exists also where there is none of that very particular mode of thought which may be termed philosophy; if metaphysical truths can, up to a certain point—and always excepting what is inexpressible in them—be clothed in logical form, it is traditional logic, and not philosophical logic, that may serve this purpose; and how could it be otherwise, when philosophy has reached the point of being unable to subsist if it does not deny true metaphysics?

It should be seen from this explanation how we regard logic: if we use a certain dialectic, without which it would be impossible for us to speak of anything at all, it cannot be brought up against us as a contradiction, since there is certainly no philosophizing in it so far as we are concerned. Moreover, even when we are especially

engaged in refuting the conceptions of the philosophers, one may be sure that we always know how to keep the distances required by the difference in the points of view: we do not place ourselves on the same footing, as do those who criticize or fight one philosophy in the name of another philosophy; we say what we say because the traditional doctrines have enabled us to understand the absurdity or inanity of certain theories, and, whatever the imperfections that we inevitably bring with us to the task (and that should only be imputed to ourselves), the character of these doctrines is such that it forbids us all compromise. What we have in common with the philosophers can only be dialectic; but that is nothing more, as we use it, than an instrument at the service of principles which they have no knowledge of, so that even this likeness is quite outward and superficial, as is the one that may sometimes be noted between the results of modern science and those of the traditional sciences. Also, we cannot be said to be borrowing the methods of the philosophers, for these methods, as far as they are valid, are not their own, but represent simply something that is the common possession of all men, even of those men who are most far removed from the philosophical point of view; philosophical logic is merely a dwindling of traditional logic, and the latter has precedence over the former. If we insist here on this distinction which seems to us essential, it is not for our personal satisfaction, but because it is important to maintain the transcendent character of pure metaphysics, and because all that proceeds from it, even secondarily and in a contingent order, partakes of this character in a sense, thereby becoming something quite different from the merely profane knowledge of the Western world. What characterizes one kind of knowledge and sets it apart from the others is not only its object, but also the way this object is looked at; and that is why some questions which, by their nature, might have a certain metaphysical bearing, lose it altogether when they are incorporated into a philosophical system. But the distinction between metaphysics and philosophy, which is nonetheless fundamental, and which should never be forgotten by anyone who wishes to understand something about the doctrines of the East (since without it there can be no escape from the danger of false assimilations), is so unfamiliar to Westerners that most of them

never succeed in grasping it: thus it is that we were surprised to see it stated here and there that we had spoken of 'Hindu philosophy', when we had precisely set ourselves to show that what exists in India is quite different from philosophy! Perhaps what we have just said about logic will suffer the same fate, and we should be no more surprised than before to be credited, in certain circles, with 'philosophizing' against philosophy, whereas what we are really doing is nonetheless something quite different. If we were expounding, for instance, a mathematical theory, and if someone cared to call it 'physics', we should certainly have no means of stopping him, but all those who understand the meaning of words would know just what to think of it; although the notions in question here are less current, the mistakes that we are trying to prevent can quite well be compared with the above example. If some people are tempted to express certain criticisms based on similar confusions, we warn them that these criticisms would fall wide of their mark, and if we can thus spare them some errors we shall be very glad; but we can do no more, for it is not in our power, nor in anyone's, to give understanding to those who have not the means of it in themselves. If then these ill-founded criticisms are nonetheless forthcoming, we have the right to take no account of them at all: but on the contrary, if we see that we have not yet drawn certain distinctions clearly enough, we will revert to them until the uncertainty be no longer possible, or at least until it can no longer be attributed to anything but incurable blindness or evident bad faith.

The same applies to the means by which the West could approach the East by returning to true intellectuality: we believe that the reflections we have put forward here may dispel many confusions about this as also about our view of the eventual state of the Western world, in case the possibilities that we have in mind should come one day to be realized. However, we obviously cannot claim to foresee all possible misunderstandings; if any really important ones come to light, we shall always do our utmost to dispel them also, and we shall do so all the more gladly because it may give us an excellent opportunity of expressing our thoughts more precisely on certain points. In any case, we shall never let ourselves be turned aside from the course that is mapped out for us by all that we have

understood thanks to the traditional doctrines of the East. We address ourselves to those who are able and willing to understand in their turn, wherever they may be and wherever they may come from, but not to those who are liable to be stopped by the most insignificant or illusory obstacle, who have a rooted fear of certain things or of certain words, or who would believe themselves lost if they happened to overstep certain conventional and arbitrary limitations. We do not see, in point of fact, what advantage the intellectual elite could draw from the collaboration of these timorous and fretful creatures; he that is not capable of looking every truth in the face, he that does not feel the force of penetrating into the 'great solitude', according to the expression sanctioned by the Far-Eastern tradition (and which has its equivalent in India), could not go very far in the metaphysical work that we have spoken of, and that all the rest strictly depends on. There seems to be, among certain people, a sort of preconceived determination not to understand; but we do not believe that those whose intellectual possibilities are truly far-reaching will be subject to these idle terrors, for they are well enough balanced to have, almost instinctively, the assurance that they will never run the risk of giving way to any mental dizziness. It is true that this assurance is not fully justified so long as they have not attained to a certain degree of actual development, but the mere fact of possessing it, without even being very clearly aware of it, gives them already a considerable advantage. We are not referring here to those who have a more or less excessive confidence in themselves; those we are speaking of, even if they are not yet aware of it, really put their trust in something much higher than their individuality, since they have a kind of presentiment of these higher states which are to be totally and definitely won by pure metaphysical knowledge. As to the others, who dare go neither too high nor too low, the fact is that they cannot see further than certain barriers, beyond which they can no longer even distinguish the higher from the lower, the true from the false, the possible from the impossible; imagining that the truth must be of the same dimensions as themselves and that it is tied down to an average level, they are at their ease in the 'pigeon-holes' of the philosophic outlook, and, even when they have assimilated certain partial truths, they can never use

them to enlarge indefinitely their own understanding. Whether it be due to their own nature, or only to the education that they have received, the limitation of their 'intellectual horizon' has become incurable, so that their bias, if that is their trouble, is truly involuntary, even if they are not altogether unaware of it. Among such people, some are certainly the victims of environment, and their case is indeed the most regrettable; their faculties, which might have had the opportunity of being developed in a normal civilization, have on the contrary been atrophied and repressed to the point of annihilation; and, modern education being what it is, one comes to the conclusion that those who know nothing are the ones who are more likely to have kept intact their intellectual possibilities. Compared with the mental deformations that are the ordinary effect of false learning, ignorance pure and simple really seems to us a lesser evil; and although we put knowledge above everything, this is by no means a paradox on our part nor a piece of inconsequence, for the only knowledge truly worthy of the name in our eyes is utterly different from that which is cultivated by the modern Westerners. And let no one reproach us, on this point or on any others, for having an attitude that is too uncompromising; this attitude is forced on us by the purity of the doctrine, by what we have called 'orthodoxy' in the intellectual sense; and, being moreover exempt from all prejudice, it can never lead us into injustice with regard to anything at all. We admit the whole truth, whatever aspect it shows itself under; but, being neither a skeptic nor an eclectic, we cannot admit anything apart from the truth.

We are well aware that our point of view is not one that is usually taken up in the West, and that, in consequence, it may be rather difficult to understand all at once; but it goes without saying that we ask no one to adopt it without examination. Our object is merely to urge to reflection those who are still capable of it; each of them will understand what he can, and, however little this may be, it will always be something; besides, we are very inclined to think that there will be some who will go further. There are no reasons, when all is said and done, why what we have done ourselves should not be done by others also; with the Western mentality as it is, these others will doubtless be no more than exceptions, but it only needs such

exceptions to be found, even a few, to justify what we have foreseen and to give the possibilities that we are pointing out a chance of being realized sooner or later. Besides, all that we shall do or say will amount to giving those who come afterward advantages that we ourselves were not given; here, as everywhere else, it is the beginning of the work that is the most painful, and the more unfavorable the conditions, the greater must be the effort toward achievement. The fact that belief in 'civilization' should be more or less shaken in people who until lately would not have dared to dispute it, and that 'scientism' should be undergoing a decline in certain circles, may possibly help us a little, since there is, in consequence, a kind of uncertainty that lets minds embark upon different channels without so much resistance; but that is all we can say about it, and the new tendencies that we have so far noticed are in no way more encouraging than those that they are trying to supplant. From our point of view there is not the slightest difference in value between rationalism and intuitionism, positivism and pragmatism, materialism and spiritualism, 'scientism' and 'moralism'; nothing is gained in passing from one to the other, and no one who is not completely detached from all of them can be said to have taken even the first step in the domain of true intellectuality. We are bent on stating this expressly, just as we are on repeating once again that no study of the Eastern doctrines undertaken 'from the outside' will help in the least toward the end we have in view; what actually will help has quite a different bearing and belongs to a far deeper order of things.

Finally, we will call to the notice of those who eventually gainsay us that if we are fully at our ease in judging quite independently the sciences and philosophies of the West, it is because we are conscious of owing nothing to them; what we are intellectually we owe to the East alone, so that we have behind us nothing that might cramp us in the least. If we have studied philosophy, we did so at a time when our ideas had been completely and definitely fixed on all that is essential, which is probably the only means of not incurring any bad influence from this study; and what we saw then merely confirmed very exactly all that we had been used to thinking with regard to philosophy. We knew that there was no intellectual benefit to be expected from it; and in fact the only help

that we did get from it was to be made more aware of the precautions necessary for avoiding confusions, and of the inconveniences that arise from the use of certain terms that are liable to produce uncertainties. These are things that the Easterners are sometimes not enough on their guard against, and there are, in this order, many difficulties of expression which we should not have suspected without having had occasion to examine closely the special language of modern philosophy, with all its incoherences and all its useless subtleties. But this help is merely of service in the work of exposition, because it allows us to anticipate many mistakes of interpretation that are too easily made by those who are used to Western thought and to none other, although at the same time we are forced to introduce complications that have nothing essential in them; for us personally there is not the least advantage in it, since we get no real knowledge from it. If we say this, it is not in order to cite ourselves as an example, but to bring evidence which those who do not in any way share our way of thinking must at least admit as sincere; and if we insist more particularly on our absolute independence with regard to all that is Western, it is because that may help also toward a better understanding of our real intentions. We hold that we have the right to denounce error wherever it is, if we think it timely to do so; but there are disputes that we will not be mixed up in at any price, and we feel that it is not for us to take the side of this or that Western conception; as for what may happen to be of interest in some of these conceptions, we are quite ready to admit it with full impartiality, but we have never found anything in them of any value except a very small fragment of what we already knew from other sources, and wherever the same things were looked at in different ways, it was always the Western points of view that suffered by comparison. It is only after long reflection that we decided to write such a book as this, and we have said why we thought it necessary to do so before dwelling on the doctrine itself, the interest of which may then be brought home to people who for want of preparation would otherwise not have paid enough attention to it, and who nonetheless may be perfectly capable of understanding it.

In being brought nearer to the East, the West has everything to gain; if the East has also some interest in this, it is not an interest of the same order, nor even of an importance that is comparable, and it would not be enough to justify the least concession with regard to what is essential; besides, nothing can be set above the rights which belong to truth. To show the West its faults, its errors, and its shortcomings, is not to evince hostility toward it, but quite the contrary, since it is the only means of curing the evil that it suffers from, and that it may perish of if it does not pull itself together in time. The task is an arduous one certainly, and not without unpleasantness; but that matters little to anyone convinced that it is necessary; we ask no more than that one or two should understand that it is really so. Moreover, no one who has understood this can remain at a standstill, just as no one who has assimilated certain truths can lose sight of them or refuse to accept all the consequences of them; there are obligations which are inherent in all true knowledge, and compared with them all outward ties seem vain and laughable; these obligations, for the very reason that they are purely inward, are the only ones that can never be shaken off. No one can yield to discouragement who has the power of truth on his side, even if he has no other weapon for overcoming the most dreadful obstacles, for this power is such that in the end nothing can prevail against it. The only ones to doubt this are those who do not know that all the partial and transitory disequilibriums go necessarily to make up the great total equilibrium of the Universe.

ADDENDUM

IT must be clear to everyone that since this book was written [1924], the situation has grown worse than ever, not merely in the West but in the whole world; this was only to be expected, failing some restoration of order of the kind that we have mentioned, and it goes without saying moreover that we never thought that such a restoration could possibly take place as soon as this. But as a matter of fact the disorder has gone on increasing even more

quickly than could have been foreseen, and this should be taken into account, although on the whole it makes no difference to the conclusions which we drew.

In the West the disorder in every sphere has grown so obvious that more and more people are aware of it and begin to doubt the value of modern 'civilization'; but though this is in one sense a favorable sign, the result has so far been purely negative: some people make excellent criticisms of the present state of affairs, but they do not know what remedies to apply, and nothing that they suggest goes beyond the realm of mere contingency, so that it will all be clearly quite ineffective. We can only repeat that the one true remedy lies in the restoration of pure intellectuality; but unfortunately, from this point of view, the chances of a reaction on the part of the West herself seem to grow smaller and smaller, since what is left of tradition in the West is becoming more and more affected by the modern outlook and consequently all the less capable of serving as a sound basis for this restoration, so that without setting altogether aside any possibility that may still exist, it seems likelier than it did before that the East will have to intervene more or less directly, in the way that we explained, if the restoration is eventually to take place.

On the other hand, as far as the East is concerned, it must be admitted that the ravages of 'modernization' have considerably spread, at least outwardly; in those countries that resisted them longest the change seems now to be all the quicker, and India herself is a striking example of this. However, none of it really goes to the heart of the tradition, which is what counts from our point of view, and perhaps it would be wrong to lay too much stress on appearances that may only be transitory; in any case it is enough that the traditional outlook, with all that it implies, should be wholly preserved in some Eastern retreats that are inaccessible to the outward agitation of our age. Besides, it must be remembered that everything modern, even in the East, is really nothing more than a sign that the Western outlook has trespassed there; the real East, the only one that really deserves the name, is and always will be the traditional East, even though its representatives should be reduced to

being no more than a minority, as even today is far from the case; it is this East only that we mean, just as, in speaking of the West, we mean the Western outlook, that is, the modern or anti-traditional outlook, wherever it is to be found, since we are above all concerned with the opposition of these two outlooks, and not simply the opposition of two geographical terms. Also, in addition to this, let us say here and now that we are more than ever inclined to think of the traditional outlook, insofar as it is really alive, as remaining intact only in its Eastern forms; however, if the West has still in itself the means of going back to and fully restoring its own tradition, it is for the West to prove it; we can only say that so far we have seen not the slightest sign which would justify us in supposing that it is really capable of carrying out such a task all by itself, even if it should become overwhelmed by the sense of its necessity.

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EDITORIAL NOTE

THE past century has witnessed an erosion of earlier cultural values as well as a blurring of the distinctive characteristics of the world's traditional civilizations, giving rise to philosophic and moral relativism, multiculturalism, and dangerous fundamentalist reactions. As early as the 1920s, the French metaphysician Rene Guenon (1886-1951) had diagnosed these tendencies and presented what he believed to be the only possible reconciliation of the legitimate, although apparently conflicting, demands of outward religious forms, 'exoterisms', with their essential core, 'esoterism'. His works are characterized by a foundational critique of the modern world coupled with a call for intellectual reform; a renewed examination of metaphysics, the traditional sciences, and symbolism, with special reference to the ultimate unanimity of all spiritual traditions; and finally, a call to the work of spiritual realization. Despite their wide influence, translation of Guenon's works into English has so far been piecemeal. The *Sophia Peremiis* edition is intended to fill the urgent need to present them in a more authoritative and systematic form. A complete list of Guenon's works, given in the order of their original publication in French, follows this note.

Guenon frequently uses words or expressions set off in 'scare quotes'. To avoid clutter, single quotation marks have been used throughout. As for transliterations, Guenon was more concerned with phonetic fidelity than academic usage. The system adopted here reflects the views of scholars familiar both with the languages and Guenon's writings. Brackets indicate editorial insertions, or, within citations, Guenon's additions. Wherever possible, references have been updated, and English editions substituted.

The present translation is based on the work of Henry Fohr, Cecil Bethell, Hubert Schiff, and Patrick Moore. The entire text was

1

THE DEMIURGE

THERE are a certain number of problems which have constantly preoccupied men, but perhaps none has ever seemed so insoluble as that of the origin of evil, a problem which most philosophers, and especially theologians, encounter as an insurmountable obstacle: *Si Deus est, unde Malum? Si non est, unde Bonum?* | If God is, whence Evil? If He is not, whence the Good?] In fact, this dilemma is insoluble for those who consider Creation as the direct work of God, and who, consequently, have to make him equally responsible for good and evil. One may well say that this responsibility is to a certain extent attenuated by the creatures' freedom; but if the creatures can choose between good and evil, this means that both already exist, at least in principle; and if they are prone to sometimes deciding in favor of evil rather than being always inclined toward good, this is because they are imperfect. How then can God, if he is perfect, create imperfect beings?

Obviously the perfect cannot engender the imperfect, for, if that were possible, the perfect would have to contain within itself the imperfect in the principial state, and then it would no longer be the perfect. Therefore the imperfect cannot proceed from the perfect by way of emanation, and can only result from creation *ex nihilo*. But how can one accept that something can come from nothing, or, in other words, that anything can exist without having a principle? Moreover, to admit creation *ex nihilo* would be to acknowledge *ipso facto* the final annihilation of created beings, for what has a beginning must also have an end; and nothing is more illogical than to speak of immortality under such an hypothesis. But creation thus understood is an absurdity, for it is contrary to the principle of causality, which it is impossible for any reasonable man to deny

sincerely; and we can say with Lucretius: *Ex nihilo nihil, ad nihilni nil posse revcrti* [Nothing comes from nothing; nothing can revert to nothing].

There can be nothing that does not have a principle; but what is this principle? and is there in actual fact only one Principle of all things? If the entire universe is considered, it is certainly obvious that it contains all things, for all parts are contained within the whole. On the other hand, the whole is necessarily unlimited, for if it had a limit, whatever exceeded that limit would not be included within the whole, and this supposition is absurd. That which has no limit can be called the Infinite, and since it contains everything, this Infinite is the principle of all things. Moreover, the Infinite is necessarily one, for two Infinities that are not identical would exclude one another. Hence there is only one unique Principle of all things—and this Principle is the Perfect, for the Infinite can only be such if it is the Perfect.

Thus, the Perfect is the supreme Principle, the primal Cause; it contains all things potentially and it has produced all things. But then, since there is only one unique Principle, what becomes of all the opposites that are usually considered in the universe: Being and Non-Being, spirit and matter, good and evil? Hence we find ourselves again in the presence of the same question we posed at the outset; and we can now formulate the question in a more general way: how has unity been able to produce duality?

Certain people have found it necessary to admit two distinct principles opposed to each other; but this hypothesis is ruled out by what we said previously. In fact, these two principles cannot both be infinite, for they would then exclude each other, or else they would be identical. If only one was infinite, it would be the principle of the other. Finally, if both were finite they would not be true principles, because to say that what is finite can exist by itself amounts to saying that something can come from nothing—since whatever is finite has a beginning, logically, if not chronologically. Consequently, in the latter case, since both are finite they must proceed from a common principle, which is infinite, and so we are brought back to the consideration of one unique Principle. Furthermore, many doctrines usually considered dualistic are so only in appearance. In

Manicheism as well as in the Zoroastrian religion, dualism was only a purely exoteric doctrine, concealing the true esoteric doctrine of Unity: Ormuzd and Ahriman are both engendered by Zervane-Akerene, and must merge in him at the end of time.

Hence duality is necessarily produced by unity, since it cannot exist by itself, but how can it be produced? In order to understand this, we must first of all consider duality under its least particularized aspect, which is the opposition between Being and Non-Being. Moreover, since both are necessarily contained within the total Perfection, it is obvious in the first place that this opposition can only be apparent. It would thus be better to speak only of distinction; but of what does this distinction consist? Does it exist as a reality independent from us, or is it merely the result of our way of viewing things?

If by Non-Being one understands only pure nothingness, it is useless to speak about it, for what can be said about that which is nothing? But if Non-Being is considered as the possibility of being, then this is completely different. In this sense, Being is the manifestation of Non-Being and is contained in a potential state within Non-Being. The relationship of Non-Being to Being is then that of the non-manifested to the manifested, and it can be said that the non-manifested is superior to the manifested (of which it is the principle) since it contains potentially the whole of the manifested, plus that which is not, has never been, and never will be manifested. At the same time it can be seen that here it is impossible to speak of a real distinction, since the manifested is contained principally within the non-manifested. However, we cannot conceive the non-manifested directly, but only through the manifested; this distinction therefore exists for us, but only for us.

If such is the case for duality under the aspect of the distinction between Being and Non-Being, the same holds true with greater reason for all other aspects of duality. From this it is already easy to see how illusory is the distinction between spirit and matter, a distinction on which, nevertheless, so many philosophical systems are built, especially in modern times, as if on an unshakable basis; if this distinction disappears, nothing is left of all these systems. Furthermore, we can point out in passing that duality cannot exist without

the ternary, for if in differentiating itself the Supreme Principle gives rise to two elements (which moreover are only distinct insofar as we view them as such), these two elements, together with their common Principle, form a ternary, so that in reality it is the ternary, and not the binary, which is directly produced by the first differentiation of the primordial unity.

Let us now come back to the distinction of good and evil, which too is only a particular aspect of duality. When good and evil are opposed to each other, the good is usually seen to lie in Perfection, or, at a lower degree at least, as a tendency toward Perfection, so that evil is then nothing other than the imperfect. But how could the imperfect oppose the Perfect? We have seen that the Perfect is the Principle of all things and that, on the other hand, it cannot produce the imperfect, from which it follows that in reality the imperfect does not exist, or at least that it only exists as a constituent element of total Perfection; but then it cannot really be imperfect, and what we call imperfection is only relativity. Thus, what we call error is only relative truth, for all errors must be included within total Truth, or else the latter, being limited by something external to itself, would not be perfect, which amounts to saying that it would not be the Truth. Errors, or rather relative truths, are only fragments of the total Truth, so that it is fragmentation that produces relativity, and consequently could be said to be the cause of evil—if relativity is really synonymous with imperfection. But evil is such only if it is distinguished from the good?

If the perfect is called good, the relative is not really distinct from it, since it is contained within it principally. Therefore evil does not exist from the universal point of view. It will exist only if all things are considered in a fragmentary and analytical light, separating them from their common Principle, instead of viewing them as contained synthetically within this Principle, which is Perfection. Thus is the imperfect created; in distinguishing evil from good, both are created by this very distinction, for good and evil are such only when they are opposed to each other. If there is no evil, there is no longer any reason to speak of good in the ordinary sense of this word, but only of Perfection. It is thus the fatal delusion of dualism that realizes good and evil, and which, considering things from a

particular point of view, substitutes multiplicity for unity, and thus encloses the beings who are under its spell within the sphere of confusion and division. This sphere is the Empire of the Demiurge.

II

What we have just said concerning the distinction of good and evil makes it possible to understand the symbol of the original Fall, at least insofar as such things can be expressed. The fragmentation of total Truth, or of the Word—for fundamentally they are the same thing—a fragmentation that produces relativity, is identical to the dismemberment of Adam Kadmon, whose separated fragments constitute protoplasmic Adam, namely the first creator of forms. The cause of this segmentation is Nahash—egoism, or the desire for individual existence. Nahash is not a cause external to man but is within him, potentially at first, and becomes external to him only insofar as man himself exteriorizes it. This instinct of separativity, which by its very nature provokes division, induces man to taste the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil, that is, to create the very distinction of good and evil. Thus man's eyes open, for what was internal to him has become external as a result of the separation that has arisen between beings; from now on beings assume forms which limit and define their individual existence, and so man was the first maker of forms. But henceforth he too is subject to the conditions of this individual existence and he also assumes a form, or, according to the biblical expressions tunic of skin. He is enclosed within the sphere of good and evil, within the Empire of the Demiurge.

This essay, very abridged and incomplete though it is, makes it evident that the Demiurge is not a power external to man. In principle he is merely man's will, inasmuch as this will realizes the distinction between good and evil. But then man, limited as an individual being by this will which is his very own, regards it as something external to himself, and thus it becomes distinct from him. Furthermore, as it opposes the efforts he makes to escape from the sphere in which he has enclosed himself, he views it as a hostile power and calls it Satan or the Adversary. Let us note, moreover, that this

Adversary, whom we ourselves created and whom we create moment by moment—for this should not be considered as having taken place at a given time—is not evil in itself, but is merely the whole of everything that is adverse to us.

From a more general point of view, once the Demiurge has become a separate power and is considered as such, he is the Prince of this World mentioned in Saint John's Gospel. Here again, strictly speaking, he is neither good nor bad, or rather he is both, since he contains within himself both good and evil. His sphere is regarded as the lower world, as opposed to the upper world or principal Universe from which it has been separated, but it should be carefully noted that this separation is never absolutely real. It is real only insofar as we realize it, for this lower world is contained potentially within the principal Universe, and it is obvious that no part can really depart from the Whole. This is what keeps the fall from going on indefinitely, however, this is only a purely symbolic expression and the depth of the fall simply measures the degree to which the separation is realized. With this reservation in mind, the Demiurge is opposed to Adam Kadmon or principal Mankind, manifestation of the Word, but only as a reflection, for he is not an emanation and does not exist by himself. This is what is represented by the two old men of the Zohar, and also by the two opposed triangles of the Seal of Solomon.

We are thus led to consider the Demiurge as a dark and inverted reflection of Being, for in reality he cannot be anything else. So he is not a being; but according to what we said earlier, he can be considered as the community of the beings to the extent that they are distinct, or if one prefer, insofar as they are endowed with individual existence. We are separate beings insofar as we ourselves create the distinction, which only exists insofar as we create it. As creators of this distinction, we are elements of the Demiurge; and to the extent that we are distinct beings, we belong to the sphere of this same Demiurge, which is what we call Creation.

All elements of Creation, namely the creatures, are therefore contained within the Demiurge himself, and he cannot in fact draw them out of anything but himself, since creation *ex nihilo* is impossible. As Creator, the Demiurge first produces division, from which

he is not really distinct, since he exists only inasmuch as division itself exists. And then, as division is the source of individual existence, which in turn is defined by form, the Demiurge should be considered as the form-maker, and as such he is identical to protoplasmic Adam, as we have seen. One can also say that the Demiurge creates matter, understood in the sense of the primordial chaos that is the common reservoir of all forms. Then he organizes this chaotic and dark matter, in which confusion reigns, bringing forth from it the multiple forms the totality of which constitutes Creation.

Now, must one say that this Creation is imperfect? Certainly, it cannot be regarded as perfect; however, from a universal point of view, it is merely one of the constituent elements of total Perfection. It is imperfect only when considered analytically as separated from its Principle, and it is moreover in the same extent that it is the sphere of the Demiurge. But if the imperfect is merely an element of the Perfect, then it is not really imperfect, and consequently the Demiurge and his sphere do not really exist from the universal point of view, any more than does the distinction between good and evil. From the same point of view it also follows that matter does not exist: material appearance is only an illusion. However, one should not conclude from this that beings with a material appearance do not exist, for this would amount to succumbing to another illusion, that of an exaggerated and poorly understood idealism.

If matter does not exist, the distinction between spirit and matter thereby disappears. Everything must in reality be spirit, but spirit understood in a completely different sense from that attributed to it by most modern philosophers. In fact, while opposing spirit to matter, they still do not consider spirit as independent of all form, and one may then wonder in what way it is differentiated from matter. If it is said that spirit is unextended whereas matter is extended, how then can that which is unextended assume a form? Moreover, why should one want to define spirit? Whether by thought or otherwise, one always attempts to define it by means of a form, and then it is no longer spirit. In reality, the universal spirit is Being, and not such or such a being in particular, but the Principle of all beings, and thus it contains them all. This is why everything is spirit.

When man reaches real knowledge of this truth, he identifies himself and all things with the universal Spirit. Then all distinctions vanish for him, so that he contemplates everything as being within himself, and no longer as external, for illusion vanishes before Truth like a shadow before the sun. By this very knowledge, then, man is freed from the bonds of matter and individual existence; he is no longer subject to the domination of the Prince of this World, he no longer belongs to the Empire of the Demiurge.

III

From the preceding it follows that beginning with his earthly existence man can free himself from the sphere of the Demiurge, or the hylic world, and that this emancipation is achieved through gnosis, that is, through full knowledge. Let us further point out that this knowledge has nothing to do with analytical science, and does not imply it in any way. It is too widespread an illusion nowadays to believe that total synthesis can only be attained through analysis. On the contrary, ordinary science is quite relative, and, limited to the hylic world as it is, does not exist any more than this world, from the universal point of view.

Moreover, we must also point out that the different worlds—or, according to a generally accepted expression, the various planes of the universe—are not places or regions, but modalities of existence or states of being. This enables one to understand how a man living on the earth might in reality no longer belong to the hylic world, but to the psychic or even to the pneumatic world. It is this that constitutes the second birth; however, strictly speaking, this birth is only a birth into the psychic world, through which man becomes conscious on two planes but without yet reaching the pneumatic world, that is, without identifying himself with the universal Spirit. This last result is only obtained by the one who fully possesses the triple knowledge, by which he is forever liberated from mortal births; this is what is being expressed when it is said that only pneumatics are saved. The state of the psychics is, in short, only a transient state; it is that of the being that is already prepared to receive

the Light, but that does not yet perceive it, that is not yet aware of the one and immutable Truth.

When we speak of mortal births, we mean the modifications of a being, its passage through multiple and changing forms. There is nothing here which resembles the doctrine of reincarnation, such as it is accepted by the spiritists and Theosophists, a doctrine which we might some day have the opportunity to explain.¹ The pneumatic is freed from mortal births, that is to say he is liberated from form, hence from the demiurgic world. He is no longer subject to change, and, consequently, is actionless; we shall come back to this point later. The psychic, on the contrary, does not pass beyond the World of Formation, which is symbolically designated as the first heaven or the Sphere of the Moon. From there he comes back to the terrestrial world, which does not in fact mean that he will actually take a new body on earth, but simply that he will need to assume new forms, whatever they may be, before obtaining Liberation.

What we have just said illustrates the agreement—we could even say the real identity, despite certain differences of expression—of the gnostic doctrine with the Eastern doctrines, particularly with the *Vedanta*, the most orthodox of all the metaphysical systems based on Brahmanism. This is why we can complete what we have said about the various states of the being by borrowing a few quotations from *Self-Knowledge \Atma-Bodha* by Shankaracharya:

There is no other way of obtaining full and final Liberation than through Knowledge; it is the sole means which loosens the bonds of passion; without Knowledge, Beatitude cannot be obtained. Action, not being opposed to ignorance, cannot cast it away; but Knowledge dispels ignorance, as light dispels darkness.

Ignorance here means the state of a being shrouded in the darkness of the hylic world, attached to the illusory appearance of matter and to individual distinctions. Through knowledge, which is not within the sphere of action but superior to it, all these illusions vanish, as we said above.

1. Guenon came back to the question of reincarnation in *The Spiritist Fallacy and Theosophy: History of 11 Pseudo-Religion*. F.t>.

When ignorance born of earthly affections is cast away, Spirit shines from the distance by Its own splendor in an undivided state, just as the Sun sheds its light when the cloud is dispersed.

But before reaching this state, the being goes through an intermediate stage corresponding to the psychic world. Then it no longer believes itself to be the material body but the individual soul, for all distinction has not vanished for it, since it has not yet departed the sphere of the Demiurge.

Imagining that he is the individual soul, man becomes frightened like a person mistaking a piece of rope for a snake. But his fear is dispelled by the perception that he is not the soul, but the universal Spirit.

The one who has become aware of the two manifested worlds, namely the hylic (the totality of gross or material manifestations) and the psychic (the totality of subtle manifestations), is twice born, *dvija*. But the one who is aware of the unmanifested universe or the formless world—that is, the pneumatic world—and who has achieved the identification of himself with the universal Spirit, *Atma*, he alone can be called *yogi*, that is to say united with the universal Spirit.

The Yogi, whose intellect is perfect, contemplates all things as abiding in himself and thus, through the eye of Knowledge, he perceives that everything is Spirit.

Let us note in passing that the hylic world is likened to the waking state, the psychic world to the dream state, and the pneumatic world to deep sleep. In this connection, we should recall that the unmanifested is superior to the manifested, since it is its principle. According to the gnostic doctrine there is nothing beyond the pneumatic Universe but the Pleroma, which can be viewed as constituted by the totality of attributes of the Divinity. This is not a fourth world, but is the universal Spirit itself, the Supreme Principle of the three worlds, neither manifested nor unmanifested, indefinable, inconceivable, and incomprehensible.

The *yogi* or pneumatic, for they are fundamentally the same thing, perceives himself no longer as a gross or subtle form, but as a

formless being. Hence he identifies himself with the universal Spirit, a state which Shankaracharya describes as follows:

He is Brahma beyond whose possession there is nothing to be possessed; beyond whose happiness once enjoyed there is no happiness which could be desired; and beyond whose knowledge once obtained there is no knowledge that could be obtained.

He is Brahma who having once seen, no other object is contemplated; with whom once identified, no birth is experienced; whom once perceived, there is nothing more to be perceived.

He is Brahma who is spread everywhere, all-pervading; in mid-space, in what is above and what is below; the true, the living, the happy, non-dual, indivisible, eternal and one.

He is Brahma without size, unextended, uncreated, incorruptible, figureless, without qualities or character.

He is Brahma by whom all things are illuminated, whose light makes the Sun and all luminous bodies shine, but who is not made manifest by their light.

He himself permeates his own eternal essence and he contemplates the whole World appearing as being Brahma.

Brahma does not resemble the World, and apart from Brahma there is nothing; whatever seems to exist apart from him is an illusion.

Of all that is seen, of all that is heard, nothing exists other than Brahma; and through knowledge of the principle, Brahma is contemplated as the real Being, living, happy, non-dual.

The eye of Knowledge contemplates the true, living, happy, all-pervading Being; but the eye of ignorance does not discover It, does not catch sight of It, just as a blind man does not see the light.

When the Sun of spiritual Knowledge arises in the sky of the heart, It casts away darkness, pervades everything, embraces everything and illuminates everything.

Let us point out that the Brahma here in question is the superior Brahma. It should be carefully distinguished from the inferior *Brahma*, for the latter is none other than the Demiurge, regarded as a reflection of the Being. For the Yogi there is only the superior Brahma, who contains all things and apart from whom there is

nothing; for him, the Demiurge and his work of division no longer exist.

The one who has accomplished the pilgrimage of his own spirit, a pilgrimage in which there is nothing connected to the situation, the place, or the time, which is everywhere, in which neither heat nor cold are experienced, which bestows eternal happiness and freedom from all sorrow, that one is actionless; he knows everything and obtains eternal Beatitude.

IV

After having characterized the three worlds and the corresponding states of the being, and having indicated as far as possible what being is liberated from the demiurgic domination, we must once again return to the question of the distinction between good and evil, in order to draw a few consequences from the preceding exposition.

First of all, one might be tempted to say that if the distinction between good and evil is sheer illusion, if it does not exist in reality, the same should hold true for morality, for moral standards are obviously based on this distinction, since they essentially imply it. But this would be going too far; morality does exist, but only to the same extent as the distinction between good and evil, that is, for anything that belongs to the sphere of the Demiurge; from the universal point of view, it no longer has any *raison d'être*. Morality, in fact, can apply only to action; now action implies change, which is only possible in the formal or manifested order. The formless world is immutable, superior to change, and therefore also to action; and this is why the being no longer belonging to the Empire of the Demiurge is actionless.

All this shows that one should take great care never to confound the various planes of the universe, for what is said about one could be untrue for another. So, morality necessarily exists on the social plane, which is essentially the field of action, but it can no longer be in question when the metaphysical or universal plane is considered, since thenceforth there is no more action.

Having established this point, we should mention that the being that is superior to action nevertheless possesses the fullness of activity, but it is a potential activity, hence an activity that does not act. This being is not motionless, as might be wrongly said, but immutable, that is to say superior to change; indeed, it is identified with Being which is ever identical to itself, according to the biblical formula 'Being is Being'. This must be compared with the Taoist doctrine, according to which the Activity of Heaven is non-acting. The sage, in whom the Activity of Heaven is reflected, observes non-action; nevertheless, the sage, whom we designated as the pneumatic or the *yogi*, can give the appearance of action, just as the moon appears to move when clouds pass over it; but the wind that blows away the clouds has no influence on the moon. Similarly, the agitation of the demiurgic world has no effect on the pneumatic; in this connection, we can again quote what Shankaracharya says;

The Yogi, having crossed the sea of passions, is united with Tranquility and rejoices in the Spirit.

Having renounced these pleasures that are born of external and perishable objects, and enjoying spiritual delights, he is calm and serene like the lamp placed inside a jar, and rejoices in his own essence.

During his residence in the body, he is not affected by its properties, just as the firmament is not affected by what is floating within its bosom; knowing all, he remains unaffected by contingencies.

By this we can understand the real meaning of the word *Nirvana*, to which so many wrong interpretations have been given. This word literally signifies extinction of the breath or of agitation, therefore the state of a being no longer subject to any agitation, ever free from form. At least in the West, it is a very widespread error to believe that when there is no more form, there is nothing, whereas in reality it is form that is nothing and the formless that is everything. Thus, far from being annihilation, as certain philosophers have contended, *Nirvana* is on the contrary the plenitude of Being.

Prom all that has been said till now, one could draw the conclusion that one should not act; but this would again be inaccurate, if

not in principle, at least in the application that one would like to draw from it. In fact, action is the condition of individual beings belonging to the Empire of the Demiurge. The pneumatic or the sage is really actionless, but as long as he resides in a body he gives the appearance of action. Externally, he is in all respects like other men, but he knows this is only an illusory appearance, and this is enough to set him truly free from action, since it is through knowledge that Deliverance is obtained. By the very fact that he is free from action, he is no longer subject to suffering, for suffering is merely the result of effort, hence of action, and it is this that constitutes what we call imperfection, although there is nothing imperfect in reality.

Obviously action cannot exist for the one who contemplates within himself all things as existing within the universal Spirit, without any distinction of individual objects, as is expressed in these words from the Vedas: 'Objects differ merely in designation, accident and name just as earthly utensils receive various names, although they are only different forms of earth.' The earth, principle of all these forms, is itself formless, but contains them all potentially; such also is the universal Spirit.

Action implies change, namely the unceasing destruction of forms which disappear in order to be replaced by others. These are the modifications that we call birth and death, the multiple changes of state which any being that has not yet attained liberation or the final transformation (transformation taken here in its etymological sense, that of passing beyond form) must traverse. Attachment to individual things, or to essentially transient and perishable forms, is characteristic of ignorance. Forms are nothing for the being liberated from form, and this is why it is not affected by the properties of the latter, even during its residence in the body.

Thus he moves about free as the wind, for his movements are not impeded by the passions.

When forms are destroyed, the Yogi and all beings enter the all-pervading essence.

He is devoid of qualities and actionless; imperishable and without volition; happy, immutable, faceless; eternally free and pure.

He is like ether which is spread everywhere and pervades simultaneously both the inside and the outside of things; he is incorruptible, imperishable; he is the same in all things, pure, undisturbed, formless, immutable.

He is the great Brahma who is eternal, pure, free, one, unceasingly happy, non-dual, existing, perceiving and endless.

Such is the state attained by a being through spiritual knowledge; thus is it forever free from all the conditions of individual existence, and thus liberated from the Empire of the Demiurge.

2

MONOTHEISM & ANGELOLOGY

WHAT we said earlier makes it possible to understand the nature of the error that tends to give rise to polytheism: this latter, which in short is but the most extreme case of 'association',¹ consists of admitting a plurality of totally independent principles, whereas in reality these are and can be only more or less secondary aspects of the supreme Principle. It is obvious that this can only be the result of a failure to understand precisely those traditional truths that refer to the divine aspects or attributes. Such a lack of understanding is always possible among isolated individuals, whatever their number, but its generalization, which corresponds to the state of extreme degeneration of a traditional form about to disappear, has no doubt been far more uncommon in fact than is usually believed. In any case, no tradition whatsoever could ever be polytheist in itself; it is a reversal of all normal order to suppose, as do the evolutionist' views of most moderns, a polytheism at the origin rather than to see therein only the simple deviation that it is in reality. All genuine tradition is essentially monotheistic; more specifically, it affirms above all the oneness of the supreme Principle,² from which

t. There is 'association' as soon as it is admitted that anything whatsoever outside of the Principle possesses its own proper existence; naturally there are many degrees from this to polytheism properly so called.

2. When it is truly a question of the supreme Principle, one should in all strictness speak of 'non-duality', since unity, which is an immediate consequence thereof, is merely situated on the level of Being. Although this distinction is of the greatest metaphysical importance, it has no effect on what we have just said here: just as we can generalize the sense of the term 'monotheism', we can also and correlatively just speak of the unity of the Principle.

everything is derived and on which it entirely depends, and it is this affirmation that, especially in the guise in which it is clothed in the traditions having a religious form, constitutes monotheism in the strict sense of the word; but, having given this explanation in order to avoid any possible confusion of points of view, we can ultimately extend the meaning of the term monotheism so as to apply it to every affirmation of principial unity. On the other hand, when we say that monotheism is therefore necessarily at the origin, it goes without saying that this is in no way related to the hypothesis of a so-called 'primitive simplicity', which probably never existed.³ Furthermore, to avoid any misunderstanding in this respect, it is enough to note that monotheism can include all the possible developments connected with the multiplicity of divine attributes, and also that angelology, which is closely related to the consideration of these attributes as we have already explained, plays an important role in the traditional forms where monotheism is affirmed most explicitly and rigorously. Thus no incompatibility exists here, and even the invocation of the angels is perfectly legitimate and normal from the strictest monotheistic point of view, provided they are considered solely as 'celestial intermediaries', that is to say, finally, as representing or expressing certain divine aspects within the order of supra-formal manifestation, according to what we have already explained.

In this connection we should also mention certain misuses of the so-called 'historical' point of view dear to many of our contemporaries, and particularly as regards the theory of 'borrowings' which we have already mentioned on various other occasions. Indeed, to give an example, we have quite often seen authors claim that the Hebrews did not know anything about angelology before the captivity in Babylon and that they simply borrowed it from the Chaldeans, while others maintain that all angelology, wherever encountered, invariably proceeds from Mazdaism. It is clear enough that similar assertions implicitly suppose that angelology belongs to the sphere

3. Cf. *The Reign of Quantity and the Signs of the Times*, chap. 11. — Moreover, it is very difficult to understand how some people can at the same time believe both in 'primitive simplicity' and in original polytheism, yet so it is. This is again a curious example of the innumerable contradictions of the modern mentality.

of mere 'ideas' in the modern and psychological sense of this word, or of baseless concepts, whereas for us—as for all those who share the traditional point of view—on the contrary it concerns knowledge of a certain order of reality. It is hard to imagine why such knowledge should have been 'borrowed' by one doctrine from another, whereas it is very easy to understand that it is inherent to one as well as the other, since both are expressions of one and the same truth. The same knowledge can and must be found everywhere; and when we speak here of equivalent knowledge, we mean knowledge that is basically the same, but presented and expressed in different ways in order to adapt to the special constitution of this or that traditional form.⁴ In this sense, it could be said that angelology or its equivalent—whatever its particular designation—exists in all the traditions; it is hardly necessary to recall for instance that in the Hindu tradition, the *Devas* are the exact equivalent of the angels of the Judaic, Christian, and Islamic traditions. In all cases, what is in question can be defined as the part of a traditional doctrine that refers to supra-formal or supra-individual states of manifestation, either purely theoretically or in view of an actual realization of these states.⁵ It is obvious that in itself this is something that does not have the slightest connection with any kind of polytheism, even if, as we have said, polytheism can only be the result of a lack of understanding of such matters, but when those who believe in the existence of polytheistic traditions speak of 'borrowings' such as those mentioned above, they seem to want to suggest thereby that angelology represents nothing but a 'contamination' of monotheism by polytheism! This would amount to saying that because idolatry can arise from the misunderstanding of certain symbols, symbolism itself is only a derivation of idolatry; the above case would be completely similar, and we think the comparison is more than enough to point out how absurd such a view is.

4. Previously we alluded to the links between angelology and the sacred languages of the different traditions. This is a characteristic example of what is here in question.

5. As an example of the first one could cite that part of Christian theology related to angels (and in a general way, moreover, exoterism can only take a theoretical point of view here), and as an example of the second, the 'practical *Kabbalah*' in the Hebrew tradition.

To conclude these remarks, which are meant to complete our preceding study, let us quote this passage from Jacob Boehme, who, with his characteristic terminology and somewhat obscure form, seems to us to express correctly the relationship of the angels to the divine aspects:

The creation of the angels has a beginning, but the forces from which they were created never knew a beginning, but were present at the birth of the eternal beginning.... They are born of the revealed Word, out of the eternal, dark, fiery, and luminous nature, from desire for divine revelation, and have been turned into 'creatured' images [that is, fragmented into isolated creatures].⁶

And Boehme says elsewhere: 'Each angelic prince is a property come out of the voice of God, and he bears God's great name.'⁷ A. K. Coomaraswamy, quoting this last sentence and comparing it with various texts about 'Gods' in the Greek as well as the Hindu tradition, adds these words, which fully accord with what we have written above:

We hardly need say that such a multiplicity of Gods is not polytheism, for all are the angelic subjects of the Supreme Deity from whom they originate and in whom, as is so often recalled, they again become one.⁸

6. *Mysterium Magnum*, viii, 1.

7. *De Signature Rerum*, xvi, 5. — On the subject of the first creation 'going out from the mouth of God,' cf. *Perspectives on Initiation*, chap. 47.

8. 'What is Civilization?', in Albert Schweitzer Festschrift [republished in *What is Civilisation?* (Great Barrington, MA: Lindisfarne Press, 1989)]. — In this connection, Coomaraswamy also mentions Philo's identification of the angels with the Platonic 'Ideas', that is, in short, the 'Eternal Reasons', contained in the divine understanding, or, according to the language of Christian theology, in the Word considered as the 'place of possibles'.

SPIRIT & INTELLECT

It has been pointed out that, while it is often affirmed that the spirit is not other than *Atma*, there are nevertheless instances in which this same spirit seems to be identified only with *Buddhi*, is there not something contradictory here? It would not suffice to see in this a simple question of terminology, for if such were the case one could just as well go further and accept indiscriminately the many more or less vague and incorrect meanings commonly given to the word 'spirit', instead of carefully avoiding them, as we have always tried to do; and the only too evident inadequacy of Western languages regarding the expression of ideas of a metaphysical order is, to say the least, certainly no reason for not taking all the precautions necessary to avoid confusion. What justifies these two uses of the same word, let us state it at the outset, is the correspondence that exists between different 'levels' of reality, and that makes possible the transposition of certain terms from one of these levels to another.

The case in question is in short comparable to that of the word 'essence', which can also be applied in several different ways. Insofar as it is correlative to 'substance', it designates, from the point of view of universal manifestation, *Purusha* envisaged in relation to *Prakriti*, but it can be transposed beyond this duality,¹ and such is necessarily the case when one speaks of the 'Divine Essence', even if,

I. The use of the term *Purushottauia* in the Hindu tradition implies precisely the same transposition in relation to that which *Purusha* designates in its most common sense.

as usually happens in (the West, those who use this expression do not go beyond pure Being in their conception of the Divinity. Similarly, one can speak of the essence of a being as complementary to its substance, but one can also designate as essence that which constitutes the ultimate, immutable, and unconditioned reality of that being; and the reason for this is that the first is after all nothing other than the expression of the second in regard to manifestation. Now, if one says that the spirit of a being is the same as its essence, this can also be understood in both of these two senses, and from the point of view of absolute reality, spirit or essence obviously is not and cannot be anything other than *Atmii*. Only, it must be noted that *Atma*, comprising all reality within itself principally, for that very reason cannot enter into correlation with anything whatsoever. Thus, as long as it is a question of the constitutive principles of a being in its conditioned states, what is considered spirit (as for example in the ternary 'spirit, soul, and body') can no longer be the unconditioned *Atmu*, but only that which so to speak most directly represents it in manifestation. We would add that this is no longer even the essence correlative to substance, for although it is true that this latter must be considered in relation to manifestation, it is nevertheless not within manifestation itself; therefore, properly speaking it will only be the first and highest of all manifested principles, that is, *Buddhi*.

From the point of view of a state of manifestation such as the individual human state, it is therefore necessary to introduce what could be called a question of 'perspective'; thus, when we speak of the universal, distinguishing it from the individual, we must thereby understand not only the unmanifested, but also that which in manifestation itself is non-individual, that is, supra-formal manifestation, to which *Buddhi* essentially belongs. Similarly, with regard to the individuality as such, including as it does the entirety of the psychic and corporeal elements, we can only designate as spiritual the principles that are transcendent in relation to this individuality, which again is precisely the case with *Buddhi*, or the intellect. This is why we can say, as we often have, that for us pure intellectuality and spirituality are fundamentally synonymous; and furthermore the intellect itself can also be transposed as in the cases above, since it is

generally considered quite acceptable to speak of the 'Divine Intellect'. In this connection, we will again note that although the *gunnas* are inherent in *Prakriti*, only *saliva* can be considered as a spiritual tendency (or 'spiritualizing' tendency, if one prefers) because it is the tendency that orients the being toward the higher states. This, in short, is a consequence of the same 'perspective' that presents the supra-individual states as intermediary degrees between the human state and the unconditioned state, although between the latter and any conditioned state whatsoever, even the most elevated of all, there is really no common measure.

What must be emphasized most particularly is the essentially supra-individual nature of the pure intellect; moreover, only that which belongs to this order can truly be called 'transcendent', as this term normally can be applied only to what lies beyond the individual domain. The intellect is thus never individualized; this again corresponds to what, from the more particular point of view of the corporeal world, is expressed when it is said that whatever the appearances may be, the spirit is never really 'incarnated', which moreover is equally true of all the legitimate senses of the word 'spirit'.² It follows that the distinction existing between the spirit and elements of the individual order is much more profound than all those distinctions which can be established among these elements themselves, and notably between the psychic and corporeal elements, that is, between those which belong respectively to subtle and gross manifestation, both of which are after all only modalities of formal manifestation.³

But this is still not all: not only does *Buddhi* constitute the link between all the states of manifestation insofar as it is the first production of *Prakriti*, but from another perspective and considered

2. It could even be said that generally this marks the clearest and the most important distinction between these senses and the illegitimate meanings which are too often attributed to this same word.

3. This is also why in all strictness a man cannot speak of 'his spirit' as he speaks of 'his soul' or 'his body', the possessive implying that it is a question of an element belonging properly to the individual order. In the ternary division of the elements of the being, the individual as such is composed of soul and body, while the spirit (without which it could not exist in any manner) is transcendent in relation to it.

from the principal point of view, it appears as the luminous ray emanating directly from the spiritual Sun, which is *Atnui* itself. It can therefore be said that *Buddhi* is also the first manifestation of *Atma*,⁴ even though it must be clearly understood that *Atnui* itself always remains unmanifest, not being affected or modified by any contingency.⁵ Now, light is essentially one, and is not of a different nature in the sun and in the sun's rays, which latter, from the point of view of the sun itself, are distinguishable from the former only in an illusory mode (although this distinction is nonetheless real for the eye which perceives these rays, and which here represents the being situated within manifestation).⁶ By reason of this essential 'connaturality', *Buddhi* is ultimately none other than the very expression of *Atma* in the manifested order. This luminous ray which links all the states together is also represented symbolically as the 'breath' by which they subsist—which, let us note, is in strict conformity with the etymological sense of the words designating spirit, whether this be the Latin *spiritus* or the Greek *pneunur*, and as we have already explained on other occasions, it is properly the *suatmci*, which amounts to saying that in reality it is *Atnui* itself, or, more precisely, the appearance which *Atnui* takes from the moment that, instead of considering only the supreme Principle (which would then be represented as the sun containing in itself all the rays in an 'indistinguished' state), we also consider the manifested states. Moreover, this appearance, which seems to give to the ray an existence distinct from its source, is such only from the point of view of the beings within these manifested states, for it is evident that the 'exteriority' of the manifested states in relation to the Principle can only be altogether illusory.

The immediate conclusion to be drawn from these considerations is that as long as the being is not only in the human state, but

4. (Icf. *The Great Triad*, chap. 8, n 13.

5. According to the Upanishadic formula, it is "t hat by which everything is manifested, which is not itself manifested by anything."

6. Light is the traditional symbol of the very nature of the spirit; we have remarked elsewhere that one also encounters, in this regard, the expressions 'spiritual light' and 'intelligible light', as if they were in some way synonymous, which, again, obviously implies an assimilation between the spirit and intellect.

in any manifested state whatsoever, either individual or supra-individual, there can be for it no effective difference between the spirit and the intellect, nor, consequently, between spirituality and true intellectuality. In other words, in order to arrive at the supreme and final goal, there is no other path for this being but the very ray by which it is linked to the spiritual Sun; whatever the apparent diversity of paths at the point of departure, sooner or later they must all be united in this one 'axial' path; and when the being has followed this path to the end, it 'will enter into its own Self', which it has been outside of only illusorily, because this 'Self'—called analogically spirit, essence, or whatever name one wishes—is identical to absolute reality in which everything is contained, that is, supreme and unconditioned *Atma*.

4

THE ETERNAL IDEAS

WITH regard to the identification of spirit with intellect, we noted in the preceding chapter that no one hesitates to speak of the 'Divine Intellect', which obviously implies a transposition of this term beyond the domain of manifestation; but this point deserves further attention, for ultimately it is here that the very basis for this identification is to be found. Let us immediately note that here again one can place oneself at different levels, according to whether one stops at the consideration of Being alone, or whether one goes beyond Being; but in any case it is obvious that when theologians consider the Divine Intellect or the Word as the 'place of possibles', they have in view only possibilities of manifestation, which as such are included in Being. The transposition that allows the shift from Being to the Supreme Principle no longer pertains to the domain of theology, but solely to that of pure metaphysics.

One might wonder whether this conception of the Divine Intellect is identical to Plato's 'intelligible world', or, in other words, whether the 'ideas' understood in the Platonic sense are the same as those contained eternally in the Word. In both cases, it is clearly a question of the 'archetypes' of manifested beings; however, at least at first glance, the 'intelligible world' might seem to correspond to the supra-formal order of manifestation rather than to that of pure Being, or, according to Hindu terminology, it would be identical to *Biuldhi* envisaged in the Universal sense rather than to *Atind*, even were *Atma* taken in a sense restricted to the consideration of Being alone. Both points of view are of course perfectly legitimate,¹ but, if

1. It might be of some interest to mention that the 'idea' or 'archetype', envisaged within the order of the supra-formal manifestation, and with reference to

such is the case, then the Platonic 'ideas' cannot properly be called 'eternal', for this word cannot be applied to anything that belongs to manifestation, even manifestation at its highest degree and closest to the Principle, whereas the 'ideas' contained in the Word are necessarily eternal, as is the Word, since whatever is of the principial order is absolutely permanent and immutable and admits of no kind of succession.² Notwithstanding this, it appears to us quite probable that the passage from one of these points of view to the other must have remained possible for Plato himself, as in reality it still remains. We will not dwell further on this, however, preferring to leave to others the task of examining this question more closely, its interest being after all more historical than doctrinal.

What is rather strange is that some people seem to consider the eternal ideas as mere 'virtualities' in relation to the manifested beings of which they are the principial 'archetypes'. Here is a delusion that is doubtless due to the common distinction between the 'possible' and the 'real', a distinction which, as we explained elsewhere, could not have the least value from the metaphysical point of view.³ This delusion is all the more grave in that it leads to a real contradiction, and it is difficult to understand how it can go unnoticed. In fact, there can be nothing virtual within the Principle but, on the contrary, only the permanent actuality of all things in an 'eternal present', and it is this very actuality that constitutes the sole foundation of all existence. Still, there are those who push the misunderstanding so far that they seem to regard eternal ideas merely as kinds of images (which, let us note in passing, implies a further contradiction in wanting to introduce something of a formal nature even into the Principle), images that have no more real a connection

each being, basically corresponds, despite the different mode of expression, to the Catholic concept of the 'guardian angel'.

2. We do not differentiate here between the domain of Being and that which is beyond, for it is obvious that the possibilities of manifestation, whether considered especially as contained within Being or as contained along with all others within Total Possibility, do not really differ. The sole difference lies simply in the point of view or the 'level' from which things are viewed, according to whether or not one considers the relation of these possibilities with manifestation itself.

3. See *The Multiple Stilles of the living*, chap. 2.

with the beings themselves than would their reflected image in a mirror. This is strictly speaking a complete reversal of the relationship of the Principle with manifestation, which is too obvious to require further explanation. The truth is indeed very far from all such erroneous conceptions: the idea in question here is the very principle of the being; it is that which gives it all its reality and without which it would be only nothingness pure and simple. To maintain the contrary amounts to severing all links between the manifested being and the Principle, and if at the same time a real existence is attributed to the being, this existence cannot but be independent of the Principle, whether or not one wishes it, so that, as we said on another occasion,⁴ one inevitably ends up in the error of 'association'. From the moment one recognizes that the existence of manifested beings in all their positive reality can only be a 'participation' in principial Being, there cannot be the slightest doubt about this matter. If one were to admit this 'participation' simultaneously with the so-called 'virtuality' of the eternal ideas, one would face yet another contradiction. What is in fact virtual is not our reality within the Principle, but only the awareness we may have of it as manifested beings, which is obviously something quite different; and it is only through metaphysical realization that this awareness of our true being, which is beyond and above all 'becoming', can become effective, that is, actualized into the awareness, not of something that might pass as it were from 'potency' to 'act', but rather an awareness of that which we really are principially and eternally, and this in the most absolutely real sense possible.

Now, to relate what we have just said about eternal ideas to the manifested intellect, one must naturally turn once again to the doctrine of the *siitratnuT* regardless of the form under which it is expressed, for the various symbolisms traditionally used in this respect are basically perfectly equivalent. Thus, to return to the representation we used earlier, it can be said that the Divine Intellect is the spiritual Sun, while the manifested intellect is one of its rays;⁵

4. See 'The Roots of Plants', in *Symbols of Sacred Science*, chap. 62. (See also chapter two of the present hook. En.)

5. Moreover, this ray will be single insofar as *Buddhi* is envisaged at the Universal level (it is then the 'one foot of the sun' of which the Hindu tradition also

and there can be no more discontinuity between the Principle and manifestation than there is between the sun and its rays.⁶ It is thus by the intellect that every being in all its states of manifestation is directly attached to the Principle, and this is because the Principle, insofar as it eternally contains the ‘truth’ of all beings, is itself none other than the Divine Intellect.⁷

speaks), but it will seemingly be multiplied indefinitely in relation to particular beings (as the *sufhumna* ray by which each being, in whatever state it is situated, is permanently linked to the spiritual Sun).

ular beings (as the *fushumna* ray by which each being, in whatever state it is situated, is permanently linked to the spiritual Sun).

6. These are the rays which, according to the symbolism that we explained elsewhere, realize manifestation through ‘measuring’ it by their actual extension from the sun (see *The Reign of Quantity and the Sigfts of the Tinies*, chap. 3).

7. In the terms of the Islamic tradition, *αΤΙταφηαλι*, or the ‘truth’ of every being whatsoever, lies in the Divine Principle inasmuch as this Principle is itself *al-Haψ*/ or the “Truth’ in the absolute sense.

5

SILENCE & SOLITUDE

IN every tribe without exception among the North American Indians, there exists, in addition to various kinds of collective rites, the practice of a solitary and silent worship, which is regarded as what is most profound and of the highest order.¹ To some degree, collective rites always have, in fact, something relatively external about them; we say 'to some degree' because in this as in every other tradition it is of course necessary to differentiate between rites that may be called exoteric, that is, those in which any and all may participate, and the initiatic rites. Moreover, it is quite clear that, far from excluding these rites or opposing them in any way, the worship here in question is merely superimposed on them as something of another order as it were; and there is even every reason to think that to be truly effective and to produce actual results, initiation is implied as a necessary prerequisite.²

1. This information is taken mainly from Paul Coze's work *The Thunderbird*, from which we also draw our quotations. The author shows a remarkable sympathy for the Indians and their tradition, and the only necessary reservation is that he seems rather strongly influenced by 'metapsychist' conceptions, which obviously affect some of his interpretations and in particular sometimes lead him to a certain confusion between the psychic and the spiritual. However, there is no room for such considerations in the matter that we are dealing with here.

2. It goes without saying that here, as always, we mean initiation in its true sense, not in that of the ethnologists, who use this word incorrectly to designate rites of admission to the tribe. One should take great care in making a clear distinction between these two things, both of which in fact exist among the Indians.

This worship is sometimes spoken of as ‘prayer’, but this is obviously inaccurate, for there is no petition of any kind; besides, prayers such as are generally expressed in ritual chants can only be addressed to the various divine manifestations,³ and we will see that in reality what is here under consideration is something completely different. It would certainly be much more appropriate to speak of ‘incantation’, in the sense in which we have defined it elsewhere,⁴ and it could also be spoken of as an ‘invocation’, in a sense exactly comparable to that of *dhikr* in the Islamic tradition, as long as it is made clear that it is essentially a silent and wholly interior ‘invocation’.⁵ Here is what Charles Eastman⁶ writes in this connection: ‘The worship of the Great Mystery was silent, solitary, without inner complication; it was silent because all speech is necessarily weak and imperfect, also the souls of our ancestors reached God through silent worship. It was solitary because they thought that God is closer to us in solitude, and there was no priest to serve as mediator between man and the Creator.’⁷ In truth, there can be no intermediaries in such a case, since this worship tends to establish a direct communication with the Supreme Principle, which is designated here as the ‘Great Mystery’.

Not only is it solely in and through silence that this communication can be obtained—for the ‘Great Mystery’ is beyond any form or expression—but silence itself is the Great Mystery’. How can this

3. In the Indian tradition, these divine manifestations seem usually to be distributed according to a quaternary division, in accordance with a cosmological symbolism which applies simultaneously to both the macrocosmic and the microcosmic points of view.

4. See *Perspectives on Initiation*, chap. 24.

5. In this connection, it is not without interest that certain Islamic *turnip* notably the *Naqshbandt*, also practice silent *dhikr*.

6. Charles Eastman, quoted by Paul Coze, was born a Sioux and seems to have retained a clear awareness of his own tradition despite a ‘white’ education. We have moreover good reason to believe that in reality such a case is far from being as exceptional as one might think if one stops at certain wholly external appearances.

7. The last word, only employed here as a result of habitual usage in European languages, is certainly not exact if one wants to get to the heart of the matter, for in reality ‘Cod the Creator’ can only be placed among the manifested aspects of the Divine.

assertion be properly understood? First of all, one may recall in this connection that the true 'mystery' is essentially and exclusively the inexpressible, which can obviously be represented only by silence.⁸ Furthermore, since the 'Great Mystery' is the unmanifested, silence itself, which is precisely a state of non-manifestation, is thus like a participation in or conformity to the nature of the Supreme Principle. Moreover, silence, correlated to the Principle, is so to speak the unuttered Word; this is why 'sacred silence is the voice of the Great Spirit', insofar as the latter is identified with the Principle itself.⁹ This voice, which corresponds to the principial modality of sound which the Hindu tradition calls *para* or unmanifested,¹⁰ is the response to the call of a being at worship: call and response, alike silent, are an aspiration and an illumination (hat are both purely interior).

For this to be true, silence must in reality be something more than the mere absence of word or speech, even if they are in a purely mental form. In fact, for the Indians, silence is essentially 'the perfect balance of the three parts of the being,' that is, of what is known in Western terminology as spirit, soul, and body, for the whole being, in all its constituent elements, has to participate in the worship in order to obtain a fully valid result. The necessity for this condition of equilibrium is easy to understand, for within manifestation itself equilibrium is like the image or reflection of the principial indistinction of the unmanifested, an indistinction also well represented by silence, so that there is no cause to wonder at the assimilation that has thus been established between silence and balance.¹¹

As for solitude, let us first of all point out that its association with silence is in a way normal and even necessary, and that whoever

8. See *Perspectives on Initiation*, chap. 17.

9. '(he reason for this reservation is that in certain cases the expression 'Great Spirit', or what one translates as such, seems also to be the particular designation of one of the divine manifestations.

10. See *Perspectives on Initiation*, chap. 47

11. There is hardly need to recall that the principial non-distinction in question here has nothing in common with what can also be designated by the same word in a lower sense, that is, the pure undifferentiated potentiality of the *materia prima*.

establishes perfect silence within himself is thereby, even in the presence of other beings, necessarily isolated from them. Moreover, silence and solitude are both implied in the meaning of the Sanskrit term *manṇa*, which, in the Hindu tradition, is no doubt what applies most exactly to the state currently under consideration.¹² Multiplicity, being inherent to manifestation, and increasing as one descends to its lower degrees, necessarily removes one from the unmanifested. Also, the being that wishes to communicate with the Principle must first of all establish unity within itself to the degree possible by harmonizing and balancing all its elements; and at the same time it must isolate itself from all external multiplicity. The unification thus realized, even if still only relative in most cases, is nonetheless a certain conformity to the 'non-duality' of the Principle, in accordance with the present possibilities of the being. In the highest sense, isolation has the meaning of the Sanskrit term *kaivalya*, which simultaneously expresses the notions of perfection and of totality, and in its full significance even designates the absolute and unconditioned state, that of the being that has reached final Deliverance.

At a much lower degree than this, one still belonging only to the preliminary phases of realization, one notes the following: wherever dispersion necessarily exists, solitude, inasmuch as it opposes multiplicity and coincides with a certain unity, is essentially concentration; and indeed one is well aware of the importance accorded concentration by all the traditional doctrines without exception, as means and indispensable condition for any realization. It seems of little use to emphasize this point further, but there is yet another consequence to which we wish to draw attention in closing: the method in question, by opposing every dispersion of the being's powers, excludes the separate and more or less disorderly development of one or another of its elements, particularly that of the psychic elements cultivated for their own sake as it were, a development that is always contrary to the harmony and equilibrium of the whole. According to Paul Coze, for the Indians 'it seems that in

12. (*X Man and His becoming according to Vedanta*, chap. 23.

order to develop *orenda*¹³ the intermediary between the material and the spiritual, one must first of all dominate matter and tend toward the divine.' This amounts to saying that they consider it legitimate to approach the psychic domain only 'from above', since results of the psychic order are obtained only in a very secondary way and 'by way of addition' so to speak, which is in fact the sole means of avoiding the dangers; and let us add that this is assuredly as far removed from common 'magic' as can be, contrary to what has all too often been attributed to such results by profane and superficial observers, no doubt because they themselves do not have the least notion of what true spirituality can be.

13. This word belongs specifically to the Iroquoian language, but it has become customary in European works to use it generally in place of all other terms bearing the same meaning that can be found among the various Indian peoples. It designates the different modes of the psychic and vital force. It is therefore almost the exact equivalent *ofpriina* in the Hindu tradition and *k'i* in the Far-Eastern tradition.

6

‘KNOW THYSELF’

THE saying ‘Know Thyself’ is frequently cited, but its exact meaning is very often lost sight of. As for the prevailing confusion over this saying, two questions may be posed: the first concerns its origin, and the second its real meaning and *raison d’être*. Certain readers would like to believe that these two questions are entirely distinct and unrelated, but on reflection and after careful examination it becomes quite clear that they are in fact very closely connected.

If we ask students of Greek philosophy who is the man who first uttered these words of wisdom, most of them will not hesitate to reply that it was Socrates, although some of them attempt to link them to Plato and others to Pythagoras. From these contradictory views and divergences of opinion we may rightfully conclude that none of these philosophers is the author of this phrase and that one should not seek its origin with them.

This opinion seems permissible to us, as it will to the reader once he knows that two of these philosophers, Pythagoras and Socrates, left no writings. As for Plato, whatever his philosophical competence might be, we are even unable to distinguish his own words from those of his master Socrates. Most of Socrates’ doctrine is known to us only through Plato, who, as is well known, garnered some of the knowledge displayed in his *Dialogues* from the teachings of Pythagoras. It is thus extremely difficult to determine what comes from each of the three philosophers: what is attributed to Plato is often attributed to Socrates as well, and, among the theories brought forward, some predate both of them and come from the school of Pythagoras, or from Pythagoras himself.

In truth, the origin of the saying in question goes back much further than the three philosophers here mentioned; better yet, it is older than the history of philosophy, even passing beyond the domain of philosophy. It is said that this saying was inscribed over the door of the Temple of Apollo at Delphi. It was adopted by Socrates, and likewise by other philosophers, as one of the principles of their teaching, despite the difference existing between these various teachings and the ends pursued by their authors. It is probable moreover that Pythagoras had employed this expression long before Socrates. By this saying these philosophers intended to show that their teaching was not strictly personal, that it came from an older starting-point, from a more elevated point of view rejoining the very source of its original inspiration, which was spontaneous and divine. We note that in this these philosophers differed greatly from modern philosophers, who expend all their efforts in expressing things anew so as to present them as the expression of their own thought, and to pose as the sole authors of their opinions, as if truth could be the property of one man.

We shall now see why the ancient philosophers wished to attach their teaching to this saying, or to a similar one, and why it can be said that this maxim is of an order superior to all philosophy. To reply to the second part of this question, then, let us say that the answer is contained in the original and etymological meaning of the word 'philosophy', which is said to have been used for the first time by Pythagoras. The word 'philosophy' properly expresses the fact of loving *Sophia*, or wisdom, the aspiration toward it or the disposition required for acquiring it. This word has always been used to signify a preparation for this acquisition of wisdom, and especially such studies as could help the *philosophos*, or the man who felt some inclination toward wisdom, to become a *sop/ios*—that is, a sage. So, just as the means cannot be taken as an end, the love of wisdom cannot constitute wisdom itself. And since wisdom in itself is identical with true inner knowledge, it can be said that philosophical knowledge is only a superficial and outward knowledge. Hence it does not have an independent value in itself or by itself; it constitutes only a first degree on the path of the superior and veritable knowledge which is wisdom.

Those who have studied the ancient philosophers know well that these latter had two kinds of teaching, one exoteric and the other esoteric. What had been written down belonged only to the first. As for the second, it is impossible for us to know its precise nature, for on the one hand it was reserved for a few, and on the other hand it had a secret character. There would have been no reason for these two characteristics had there not existed something higher than mere philosophy. One may at least surmise that this esoteric teaching had a close and direct connection with wisdom, and that it did not only appeal to reason or to logic, as is the case with philosophy, which for this reason has been called rational knowledge—the philosophers of antiquity maintained that rational knowledge, that is, philosophy, is not the highest degree of knowledge, is not wisdom.

Is it possible that wisdom could be taught in the same way that exterior knowledge is taught, through speech or through books? This is in fact impossible, as we shall shortly see. But what we can already affirm now is that philosophical preparation was not enough, even as preparation, for it concerns only the limited faculty of reason, whereas wisdom concerns the reality of the whole being. Hence there exists a preparation for wisdom which is higher than philosophy, which no longer addresses itself to reason, but to the soul and to the spirit, and which we may call inner preparation; and it appears to have been the characteristic of the highest levels of the school of Pythagoras. Its influence extended through the school of Plato right up to the Neoplatonism of the Alexandrian school, where it clearly appears anew, as well as among the Neo-Pythagoreans of the same period.

If words were still made use of in this inner preparation, they could now only be taken as symbols for the purpose of focusing inner contemplation. Through this preparation, man was led to certain states which enabled him to go beyond the rational knowledge that he had attained earlier, and since all of this lay beyond the level of reason, it was also beyond philosophy, for the name 'philosophy' is in fact always used to designate something pertaining to reason alone. It is nonetheless surprising that the moderns should have come to consider philosophy, thus defined, as if it were complete in itself, thus forgetting what is higher and superior.

Esoteric teaching had been known in the lands of the East before spreading to Greece, where it received the name of 'mysteries'. The first philosophers, Pythagoras in particular, had linked their teaching to it, considering it as no more than a new expression of ancient ideas. There were several kinds of mysteries, of diverse origin. Those which inspired Pythagoras and Plato were connected with the cult of Apollo. The 'mysteries' always had a reserved and secret character—the word 'mystery' itself has the etymological meaning of 'total silence'—since they were in connection with things that could not be expressed in words, but could only be taught by a way of silence. But the moderns, knowing of no method other than one implying the use of words, and which we may call the method of exoteric teaching, for this reason falsely believed that these 'mysteries' conveyed no teaching at all. We can affirm that this silent teaching made use of figures, symbols, and other means the purpose of which was to lead man to certain interior states that would allow him gradually to attain real knowledge or wisdom. This was the essential and final purpose of all the 'mysteries' and of similar things found elsewhere.

As for the 'mysteries' specially connected with the cult of Apollo and with Apollo himself, it must be remembered that this latter was the god of the sun and of light—light in its spiritual sense being the source whence all knowledge springs forth and all the sciences and the arts derive. It is said that the rites of Apollo came from the north, and this refers to a very ancient tradition also found in sacred books like the Hindu *Veda* and the Persian *Avesta*. This northern origin was affirmed even more specially for Delphi, which was known as a universal spiritual center; and in its temple was a stone called *omphalos*, which symbolized the center of the world.

It is thought that the story of Pythagoras and even the name of Pythagoras have a certain link with the rites of Apollo. The latter was called *Pythios*, and it is said that Pytho was the original name of Delphi. The woman who received inspiration from the gods in the temple was called Pythia; the name of Pythagoras therefore signified 'the guide of Pythia', which was applied to Apollo himself. It is also said that it was the Pythia who had declared Socrates to be the wisest of men. From this it appears that Socrates had a link with the spiritual center of Delphi, as did Pythagoras himself.

Let us add that although all the sciences were attributed to Apollo, this was more particularly so for geometry and medicine. In the Pythagorean school, geometry and all the branches of mathematics were foremost in the preparation for higher knowledge. With regard to this knowledge itself, these sciences were not then set aside, but on the contrary remained in use as symbols of spiritual truth. Plato also considered geometry an indispensable preparation for every other teaching and had these words inscribed over the entrance of his school: 'Let no one enter who is not a geometrician.' The meaning of these words can be understood when they are linked to another of Plato's expressions, 'God always geometrizes', if we add that in speaking of a geometer God Plato was again alluding to Apollo. One should thus not be astonished that the philosophers of antiquity made use of the saying inscribed over the entrance to the temple of Delphi, for we now know what links bound them to the rites and to the symbolism of Apollo.

From all of this we can easily understand the real meaning of the saying under consideration, as well as the error of the moderns on this subject. This error arises from the fact that they have viewed the phrase as a simple saying of a philosopher, whose thought they always assume to be comparable to their own. But in reality ancient thought differed profoundly from modern thought. Thus many people impute a psychological meaning to this phrase, but what they call psychology consists only in the study of mental phenomena, which are no more than external modifications—and not the essence—of the being.

Others, particularly among those who attribute the phrase to Socrates, see in it a moral goal, the search for a law applicable to practical life. All these external interpretations, though not entirely false, do not justify the sacred character it had originally, and which implies a much more profound meaning than the one they would thus like to attribute to it. The saying signifies first and foremost that no exoteric teaching is capable of providing true knowledge, which man must find only within himself, for in fact no knowledge can be acquired except through a personal comprehension. Without this comprehension, no teaching can lead to an effective result, and the teaching that awakens no personal resonance in the one who

receives it cannot give any kind of knowledge. This is why Plato says that 'everything that a man learns is already within him.' All the experiences, all the external things that surround him, are only an occasion to help him become aware of what is within himself. This awakening he calls *anamnesis*, which signifies 'recollection'.

If this is true for any kind of knowledge, it is all the more so for a more exalted and profound knowledge, and, when man advances toward this knowledge, all external and perceptible means become increasingly insufficient, until they finally become useless. Although they can assist to some degree in the approach to wisdom, they are powerless in actually attaining it. In India it is commonly said that the true guru or master is found within man himself and not in the external world, although in the beginning an external aid can be useful to prepare man to find within himself and by himself that which cannot be found elsewhere, and especially what is above the level of rational knowledge. In order to attain this, it is necessary to realize certain states which go ever deeper within the being, toward the center symbolized by the heart, and whither man's consciousness must be transferred in order to make him capable of attaining real knowledge. These states, which were realized in the ancient mysteries, are degrees on the path of this transposition from the mind to the heart.

As we said, in the temple of Delphi there was a stone called *omphalos*, which represented the center of the human being as well as the center of the world, in accordance with the correspondence existing between the macrocosm and the microcosm—that is to say, man—so that everything that is in the one is directly related to what is in the other. Avicenna said: 'You believe yourself to be nothingness, yet the world abides within you.' It is curious to note the widespread belief in antiquity that the *omphalos* had fallen from the sky, and an accurate idea of the sentiment of the Greeks regarding this stone can be had by saying it was somewhat similar to the sentiment Muslims feel with regard to the sacred black stone of the *Kaaba*.

The similarity which exists between the macrocosm and the microcosm is such that each is the image of the other, and the correspondence of the constitutive elements shows that man must first of all know himself so that he may then know all things, for in truth,

he can find all things within himself. It is for this reason that certain sciences, especially those which were a part of ancient knowledge and are now almost unknown to our contemporaries, possess a double meaning. In their outward appearance, these sciences are related to the macrocosm, and can justly be considered from this point of view. But at the same time they have also a deeper meaning, which is related to man himself and to the inner path through which he can realize knowledge within himself, a realization which is none other than the realization of his own being. Aristotle has said: 'the being is all that it knows,' so much so that, where there is real knowledge, and not its appearance or its shadow, knowledge and being are one and the same thing.

The shadow, according to Plato, is knowledge through the senses and even rational knowledge which, although higher, has its source in the senses. As for real knowledge, it is above the level of reason, and its realization, or the realization of the being itself, is similar to the formation of the world, according to the correspondence which we have mentioned above. That is why certain sciences can describe it under the appearance of this formation; this double meaning was included in the ancient mysteries, as it is also to be met with in all kinds of teachings having the same goal among the peoples of the East. It seems that in the West, too, this teaching existed throughout the Middle Ages, even though today it may have completely disappeared to the point that most Westerners have no idea of its nature or even of its existence.

From all that has been said, we see that real knowledge is not based on the path of reason, but on the spirit and the whole being, for it is none other than the realization of this being in all its states, which is the culmination of knowledge and the attainment of supreme wisdom. In reality, what belongs to the soul, and even to the spirit, represents only degrees on the path toward the intimate essence that is the true self; this self can be found only when the being has reached its own center, all its powers being united and concentrated as in a single point in which all things appear to it, since they are contained in this point as in their first and unique principle; thus the being is able to know everything as in itself and of itself, as the totality of existence in the oneness of its own essence.

It is easy to see how far this is from psychology in the modern sense of the word, and that it goes even further than a truer and more profound knowledge of the soul, which can only be the first step on this path. It is important to note that the meaning of the Arabic word *nafs* should not be limited here to the soul, for this word is found in the Arabic translation of the saying in question, while its Greek equivalent *psyche* does not appear in the original. *Nafs* should therefore not be taken in its usual sense, for it is certain that it has another much higher significance, which makes it similar to the word essence, and which refers to the *Self* or to the *real being*, as proof of this, we can cite what has been said in a *hadith* that is like a complement of the Greek saying: 'He who knows himself, knows his Lord.'

When man knows himself in his deepest essence, that is, in the center of his being, then at the same time he knows his Lord. And knowing his Lord, he at the same time knows all things, which come from Him and return to Him. He knows all things in the supreme oneness of the Divine Principle, outside of which, according to the words of Muhyi 'd-Din Ibn al-'Arabi, 'there is absolutely nothing which exists,' for nothing can be outside of the Infinite.

7

ON THE PRODUCTION OF NUMBERS

'IN the beginning, before the origin of all things, was Unity,' say the loftiest of Western theogonies, which strive to reach Being beyond its ternary manifestation, not halting at the universal appearance of the Binary. But the theogonies of the East and Far East say: 'Before the beginning, before even the primordial Unity, was the Zero,' for they know that beyond Being there is Non-Being; that beyond the manifest there is the non-manifest, which is its principle; and that Non-Being is not nothingness, but on the contrary infinite Possibility, identical to the universal All, which is at the same time absolute Perfection and integral Truth.

According to the Kabbalah, the Absolute, in order to manifest itself, concentrates itself in an infinitely luminous point, leaving darkness around it. This light within the darkness, this point within limitless metaphysical extension, this nothing that is all in an all that is nothing, if one may so express it, is Being in the midst of Non-Being, active Perfection within passive Perfection. This luminous point is Unity, the affirmation of metaphysical Zero, here represented by unlimited extension; it is the image of infinite, universal Possibility. In order to serve as the center from which, like so many rays, the indefinite manifestations of Being will emanate, Unity once affirmed is united to Zero, which contains it in principle, that is, to the state of non-manifestation. Here the Decad already appears in potentiality, and it will be the perfect number, the complete development of the primordial Unity.

Total Possibility is at the same time universal Passivity, for it contains all particular possibilities, certain of which will be manifested, passing from potentiality to actuality under the action of Unity-Being. Each manifestation is a radius of the circumference that represents total manifestation; and this circumference, the points of which are indefinite in number, is again Zero in relation to its center, which is Unity. But the circle was not laid out in the Abyss of Non-Being, and it only marks the limit of manifestation, of the domain of Being within the heart of Non-Being; it is therefore Zero realized, and, through the totality of its manifestation following the indefinite circumference, Unity perfects its development into the Decad.

Moreover, with the affirmation of Unity even before all manifestation, if this Unity were opposed to Zero, which contains it in principle, the Binary would then appear within the Absolute itself, in the primary differentiation that leads to the distinction between Non-Being and Being. But in our study on the Demiurge we saw what this distinction is, and showed that Being, or active Perfection — *Khien*—is not really distinct from Non-Being, or passive Perfection—*Khoun*—that this distinction, which is the point of departure for all manifestation, exists only insofar as we create it ourselves, since we can only conceive of Non-Being through Being, the non-manifest through the manifest; thus the differentiation between the Absolute within Being and the Absolute within Non-Being only expresses the manner in which we represent things to ourselves, and nothing more.

Viewing things in this light, one might be tempted to speak of the Absolute as the common principle of Being and Non-Being, of the manifest and the non-manifest, although in reality it should be identified with Non-Being, since the latter is the principle of Being, which in turn is itself the first principle of all manifestation. Thus if one should wish to consider the Binary here, one would immediately find oneself in the presence of the Ternary; but in order for such to be a true Ternary, that is, already a manifestation, the Absolute would have to be primordial Unity, and we have seen that Unity represents only Being, the affirmation of the Absolute. It is this

Unity-Being that will be manifested in the indefinite multiplicity of numbers, the entirety of which it contains in potentiality, and which emanate from it like sub-multiples of itself; and all of these numbers are included within the Decad, realized through the course of the cycle of the total manifestation of Being. It is therefore the production of this Decad, starting from the primordial Unity, that we must now consider.

In a previous study, we saw that all the numbers can be considered to emanate from Unity in pairs; these pairs of inverse or complementary numbers, which may be regarded as symbolizing the syzygies of the Eons of the Pleroma, exist within Unity in the undifferentiated or non-manifest state:

$$1 = \sqrt{2} \times 2 = \sqrt{3} \times 3 = \sqrt{4} \times 4 = \sqrt{5} \times 5 = \dots = 0 \times 0$$

None of these groups, $\sqrt{n} \times n$, is distinct from Unity, or from the other groups within Unity; they become so only when their constituent elements are considered separately; it is then that Duality is born, distinguishing one principle from the other, not in opposition, as is ordinarily—and wrongly—said, but as complementary principles; active and passive, positive and negative, masculine and feminine. But the two principles coexist within Unity, and their indivisible duality itself constitutes a secondary unity, a reflection of primordial Unity; thus, together with the Unity that contains them, the two complementary elements compose the Ternary, which is the first manifestation of Unity, for two, being the issue of one, cannot exist without three thereby existing as well:

$$1 + 2 = 3$$

And just as we can only conceive of Non-Being through Being, we can only conceive of Unity-Being through its ternary manifestation, the necessary and immediate consequence of the differentiation or polarization that our intellect creates within Unity. Whatever the aspect according to which this ternary manifestation is viewed, it is always an indissoluble Trinity, that is, a Tri-Unity, since the three terms are not really distinct, but are only the same Unity conceived as containing within itself the two poles through which it will produce all of manifestation.

This polarization is again found immediately within the Ternary itself, for if one considers its three terms to have an independent existence, one will thereby obtain the Senary number, implying a new ternary, which is the reflection of the first.

$$1 + 2 + 3 = 6$$

This second ternary has no real existence by itself; it is to the first what the Demiurge is to the emanative Logos, a tenebrous and inverted image, and in what follows we shall indeed see that the Senary is the number of Creation. For the moment let us content ourselves with saying that it is we who realize this number, as we distinguish the three terms of Tri-Unity, instead of envisaging principal Unity synthetically, independent of all distinction, that is, of all manifestation.

If the ternary is regarded as a manifestation of Unity, it will at the same time be necessary to consider Unity insofar as it is not manifested, and then Unity, joined to the Ternary, will produce the Quaternary, which can be represented here by the three vertices of a triangle, together with its center. One could also say that the Ternary, symbolized by a triangle of which the three vertices correspond to the first three numbers, necessarily presupposes the Quaternary, the first term of which, being unexpressed, would then be Zero, which indeed cannot be represented. Thus one could consider the first term within the Quaternary to be either Zero or primordial Unity. In the first instance, the second term will be Unity insofar as it is manifested, and the two others its double manifestation; in the second instance, on the contrary, these last two, the two complementary elements mentioned above, will logically have precedence over the fourth term (which is nothing other than their union), realizing between them an equilibrium in which principal Unity is reflected. Finally, if one considers the Ternary according to its lowest aspect, taking it to be formed from the two complementary elements and the equilibrating term, then the latter, as the union of the other two, will participate in both, such that one will be able to regard it as double; here again, the Ternary will immediately imply a Quaternary, which is its development.

Whatever manner in which one considers the Quaternary, one can say that it contains all numbers, for if its four terms are regarded as distinct, one will see that it contains the Decad:

$$1 + 2 + 3 + 4 = 10$$

This is why all the traditions say that one produced two, two produced three, three produced all numbers. The expansion of Unity in the Quaternary immediately realizes its total manifestation, which is the Decad.

The Quaternary is represented geometrically by the square, if the static state is considered, and by the cross, if the dynamic state is considered. When the cross turns about its center, it engenders the circle, which, together with its center, represents the Decad. This is what is called circling the square, and it is the geometric representation of the arithmetical fact set forth above; conversely, the Hermetic problem of squaring the circle will be represented by the division of the circle into four equal parts by means of two rectilinear diameters, and it will be expressed numerically by the preceding equation written in the opposite direction:

$$10 = 1 + 2 + 3 + 4$$

The Decad as formed by the set of the first four numbers, is what Pythagoras called the Tetraktys. In its entirety the symbol representing it had a ternary form, each of its exterior sides embracing four elements, and composed of ten elements in all. The figure is given, in a note, in the translation of the chapter on Pythagoras in the *Philosophumena*.

If the Ternary is the number that represents the first manifestation of principal Unity, then the Quaternary stands for its total expansion. This latter is symbolized by a cross of which the four branches are formed by two indefinite straight lines extending fully in each direction, and oriented along the four cardinal points of the indefinite, pleromatic circumference of Being, points the Kabbalah represents by the four letters of the Tetragrammaton, ITTT. The Quaternary is the number of the manifested Word, of Adam Kadmon, and one can say it is essentially the number of Emanation, for Emanation is the manifestation of the Word. From it, the other

degrees of manifestation of Being are derived in logical succession, by the development of the numbers it contains within itself, the totality of which constitutes the Decad.

If the quaternary expansion of Unity is considered to be distinct from Unity itself, when it is added to Unity it produces the number five, and this again is symbolized by the cross with its four branches and center. Moreover, it will be the same for all new numbers whenever they are regarded as distinct from Unity, even if they cannot really be so, since they are only manifestations thereof; each of these numbers when added to primordial Unity, gives birth to the following number. Having pointed out this successive mode of production for numbers once and for all, we shall not return to it in what follows.

If the center of the cross is taken to be the starting-point for the four branches, it will represent the primordial Unity; if on the contrary it is only considered as their point of intersection, it will merely represent equilibrium, a reflection of Unity. This second point of view is marked Kabbalistically by the letter □ ['shin'], which, placed at the center of the Tetragrammaton, "IT—the four letters of which represent the four branches of the cross—forms the pentagrammatic name Π12Π',¹ the significance of which we shall not stress here, as we only wish to point it out in passing. The five letters of the Pentagram are placed at the five points of the Blazing Star, a figure of the Quinary, which symbolizes more particularly the Microcosm, or individual man. The reason for this is as follows: if the Quaternary is taken to be Emanation, or the total manifestation of the Word, then each emanated being, a sub-multiple of this Emanation, will be characterized by the number four; it will be an individual being to the measure in which it is distinguished from Unity, or from the emanating center, and we have just seen that this distinction between the Quaternary and Unity is precisely the genesis of the Quinary.

In our study on the Demiurge we said that the distinction that gives birth to individual existence is the point of departure for Creation; indeed, the latter exists to the measure in which the totality of

1. *Yeshua*, the Hebrew form of 'Jesus'. Eo.

individual beings, characterized by the number five, is considered to be distinct from Unity, which gives birth to the number six. As we have seen earlier, this number can be considered as formed from two ternaries, the one the inverted reflection of the other; this is represented by the two triangles in the Seal of Solomon, symbol of the Macrocosm, or the created World.

Things are distinct from us to the degree that we distinguish between them; and it is precisely to this degree that they become external to us, as well as distinct from one another; from this point they appear clothed in forms, and this process of Formation, which is the immediate consequence of Creation, is characterized by the number that follows the Senary, namely the Septenary. We only need indicate the concordance of the preceding with the first chapter of Genesis: the six letters of the word $\Pi\ddot{u}^{\wedge}\text{I}\Pi$, the six phases of Creation, and the formative role of the seven Elohim, representing the totality of natural forces, and symbolized by the seven planetary spheres, which latter could also be made to correspond to the first seven numbers, the lowest sphere, that of the Moon, being designated as the World of Formation.

The Septenary, such as we have just considered it, can be represented either by the double triangle and its center, or by a seven-pointed star, around which are inscribed the signs of the seven planets; this is the symbol of the forces of nature, that is, of the Septenary in the dynamic state. If it were considered in the static state, it could be seen as formed by the reunion of a Ternary and a Quaternary, and it would then be represented by a square surmounted by a triangle. Much could be said on the meaning of all these geometric forms, but such considerations would take us too far afield from the subject of our present study.

The process of Formation leads to what one can call material realization, which for us marks the limit of the manifestation of Being, which will then be characterized by the number eight. This number corresponds to the terrestrial World contained within the seven planetary spheres, and which should be taken here as symbolizing the whole of the material World (each World is of course not to be understood as a place, but rather as a state or modality of being). The number eight also corresponds to an idea of equilibrium, because material realization is, as we have just said, a limitation, a

halting point as it were with respect to the distinctions we create in things, the degree of these distinctions being a measure of what is symbolically designated as the depth of the fall. We have already said that the fall is nothing other than a means of expressing precisely this distinction that created individual existence, separating us from principal Unity.

In its static state, the number eight is represented by two squares, one inscribed within the other in such a way that the vertices of the inner square intersect the sides of the outer. In its dynamic state it is symbolized by two crosses with the same center, oriented in such a way that the branches of one bisect the right angles formed by the branches of the other.

If the number eight is added to Unity, it forms the number nine. For us this new number serves to limit the manifestation of Being, since it corresponds to material realization distinguished from Unity; it will therefore be represented by the circle, and will designate Multiplicity. We have said elsewhere that this circle, the points of which, indefinite in number, represent the formal manifestations of Being—we do not go further and say all manifestations, only the formal manifestations—can be regarded as Zero realized. Indeed, added to Unity the number nine forms the number ten, which also results from the union of Zero with the Unit, and which is represented by the circumference of the circle taken together with its center.

On the other hand, the Novenary could also be envisaged as a triple Ternary; from this, the static point of view, it will be represented by three superimposed triangles, each the reflection of the one immediately above, such that the intermediate triangle is inverted. This figure is the symbol of the three Worlds and their relationships; this is why the Novenary is often considered the number of hierarchy.

Finally, the Decad, corresponding to the circumference of the circle together with its center, is the total manifestation of Being, the complete development of Unity. It can therefore be regarded as nothing other than Unity realized within Multiplicity. Starting from it, the sequence of numbers begins again, forming a new cycle:

$$11 = 10 + 1; 12 = 10 + 2; \dots 20 = 10 + 10$$

Then comes a third cycle, and so on indefinitely. Each of these cycles can be regarded as reproducing the first, but at another level, or, if one wishes, in another modality; they will therefore be symbolized by as many circles placed parallel one above another, in different planes; but since in reality there is no point of discontinuity between them, it is necessary that they be open circles, so that the end of each will at the same time be the beginning of the next. They will then not be circles, but the successive spirals of a helix traced on a cylinder, and these spirals will be indefinite in number, the cylinder itself being indefinite; and each spiral is projected as a circle onto a plane perpendicular to the axis of the cylinder, although in reality its point of departure and its point of arrival are not in the same plane. But we shall return to this subject in another study, when we come to the geometric representation of evolution.²

We must now consider another mode of production for numbers, production by multiplication, and more particularly the multiplication of a number by itself, giving birth successively to various powers of the number. But here the geometric representation would lead us to considerations concerning the dimensions of space, which it is preferable to study separately; we would then have to consider in particular the successive powers of the Decad, which would lead us to consider the question of the limits of the indefinite in a new light, as well as the question of passage from the indefinite to the Infinite.

In the preceding remarks, we have simply wished to indicate how the production of numbers starting from Unity symbolizes the different phases of the manifestation of Being in logical succession starting from the principle, Being itself, taken as identical to Unity; and if Zero—preceding primordial Unity—is introduced, one can thus even ascend beyond Being to Non-Being, that is, even to the Absolute.

2. See *The Symbolism of the Cross* and *The Multiple States of the Reiki*. Ei>.

TRADITIONAL SCIENCES & ARTS

1

INITIATION & THE CRAFTS

WE have often said that the 'profane' conception of the sciences and the arts, such as is now current in the West, is a very modern one and implies a degeneration with respect to a previous state where both presented an altogether different character. The same can also be said of the crafts; moreover, the distinction between arts and crafts, or between 'artist' and 'artisan', is also specifically modern, as if it were born of this profane deviation and had no meaning outside of it. For the ancients, the *artifex* is indifferently a man who practices either an art or a craft; but in truth he is neither artist nor craftsman in the current sense of these words, but something more than either, for, at least originally, his activity is related to principles of a far more profound order.

In every traditional civilization all activity of man, whatever it might be, is always considered as essentially deriving from principles; by this it is as if 'transformed', and instead of being reduced to what it is as a simple outer manifestation (which, in short, is the profane point of view) it is integrated in the tradition; and for the one who accomplishes it, it constitutes a means of participating effectively in this tradition. Even from a simple exoteric point of view this is the case: if, for example, one looks at a civilization like that of Islam or the Christian civilization of the Middle Ages, it is easy to see the 'religious' character which the most ordinary acts of existence assume. There religion is not something that holds a place apart, unconnected with everything else, as it is for modern Westerners (those at least who still consent to acknowledge a religion); on the contrary, it pervades the entire existence of the human being,

or, better yet, all that constitutes this existence; and social life in particular is included in its domain, so much so that in such conditions there cannot really be anything 'profane', except for those who for one reason or another are outside of the tradition and whose case is then a simple anomaly. Elsewhere, when there is nothing to which the name of religion can properly be applied, there is nonetheless a traditional and 'sacred' legislation which, while having different characteristics, exactly fulfills the same role; these considerations can therefore be applied to all traditional civilizations without exception. But there is something more: if we pass from exoterism to esoterism (we use these words here for the sake of greater convenience, although they do not equally suit every case), we notice very generally the existence of an initiation bound up with and based on the crafts. These crafts are therefore still susceptible of a higher and more profound meaning; and we would like to point out how they can effectively furnish a way of approach to the initiatic domain.

What allows the above to be better understood is the notion of what the Hindu doctrine calls *svadharma*, that is to say the performance by each being of an activity in conformity with its own nature, and it is this notion, or rather its absence, that most clearly marks the shortcomings of the profane conception. According to the latter a man can adopt any profession, and he can even change it at will, as if this profession were something purely exterior to him, without any real connection with what he truly is, with what makes him himself and not another. In the traditional conception, on the contrary, everyone must normally fulfill the function for which he is destined by his very nature, and he cannot fulfill any other function without a resulting grave disorder, which will have its repercussion on the whole social organization to which he belongs. Even more than this, if such a disorder becomes general, it will have its effects on the cosmic realm itself, all things being linked together according to strict correspondences. Without dwelling further on this last point, which, however, could be quite easily applied to the conditions of the present time, we will note that the opposition of the two conceptions can, at least in a certain connection, be reduced to that of a 'qualitative' and a 'quantitative' point of view: in the traditional conception, it is the essential qualities of beings which determine

their activities; in the profane conception, individuals are considered as interchangeable 'units', as if in themselves they were without any quality of their own. This last conception, which is obviously closely connected to modern ideas of 'equality' and 'uniformity' (the latter being literally against true unity, for it implies the pure and 'inorganic' multiplicity of a kind of social 'atomism'), can logically lead only to the exercise of a purely 'mechanical' activity, in which nothing specifically human subsists; this is in fact what we can see today. It must therefore be well understood that the 'mechanical' crafts of the moderns, being but a product of the profane deviation, can in no way offer the possibilities of which we intend to speak here; strictly speaking, they cannot even be considered crafts if one wishes to preserve the traditional meaning of this word, which is the only meaning with which we are concerned here.

If the craft is something of the man himself, and like a manifestation or expansion of his own nature, it is easy to understand that, as we were just saying, it can serve as a basis for an initiation, and even that in most cases it is what is best adapted to this end. Indeed, if initiation essentially aims at going beyond the possibilities of the human individual, it is equally true that it can only take this individual such as he is as its starting-point. This accounts for the diversity of initiatic ways, that is to say of the means implemented by way of 'supports', in conformity with the difference of individual natures, this difference subsequently arising ever less as the being advances on its way. The means thus employed can be efficacious only if they correspond to the very nature of the beings to whom they are applied. Because one must necessarily proceed from the more accessible to the less accessible, from the exterior to the interior, it is normal to take these means as the activity by which this nature is outwardly manifested. However, it goes without saying that this activity can play such a role only inasmuch as it really expresses the inner nature; it is thus truly a question of 'qualification' in the initiatic sense of this term. In normal conditions this 'qualification' should be a necessary condition for the very exercise of the craft. At the same time this touches on the fundamental difference which separates initiatic teaching from profane teaching: what is simply 'learned' from outside is here without any value.

What is in question is the 'awakening' of the latent possibilities that the being bears in itself (and this is basically the true significance of Platonic 'reminiscence').

These last considerations can further help us understand how initiation, taking the craft as its 'support', will at the same time, and inversely, as it were, have a repercussion on the exercise of this craft. The individual, having fully realized the possibilities of which his professional activity is but an external expression, and thus possessing the effective knowledge of what is the very principle of this activity, will henceforth consciously fulfill what had hitherto been only a quite 'instinctive' consequence of his nature. Thus, if for him initiatic knowledge is born of the craft, the latter, in its turn will become the field of application of this knowledge, from which it can no longer be separated. There will henceforth be a perfect correspondence between the interior and the exterior, and the work produced will no longer be only the expression to a certain degree and in a more or less superficial way, but a truly adequate expression of the one who will have conceived and executed it, and it will constitute a 'masterpiece' in the true sense of this word.

As can be seen, this is very far from the so-called unconscious or subconscious 'inspiration' in which moderns wish to see the criterion of the true artist, while considering him superior to the artisan, according to the more than contestable distinction that normally applies. Artist or artisan, anyone who acts under such an 'inspiration' is in any case only a profane person. No doubt, he shows by his 'inspiration' that he carries within himself certain possibilities, but as long as he has not effectively become aware of them, even if he attains to what is fittingly called 'genius', this changes nothing. Unable as he is to control these possibilities, his success will be so to speak accidental, which, moreover, is commonly recognized by saying that the 'inspiration' is sometimes lacking. All that can be conceded in order to reconcile the case under discussion to that in which true knowledge operates, is that the work which, consciously or unconsciously, truly flows from the nature of the one who performs it, will never give the impression of being a more or less painful effort which, because it is something abnormal, always leads to some imperfection. On the contrary, such a work will draw its very

perfection from its conformity to nature, which implies directly and so to speak necessarily that it is exactly suited to the end for which it is destined.

If we now want a more rigorous definition of the sphere of what can be called the craft initiations, we will say that they belong to the 'lesser mysteries', referring to the development of the possibilities that belong properly to the human state, which is not the final aim of initiation, but at least constitutes the first obligatory phase. This development must first be accomplished in full, so as then to allow the surpassing of this human state; but beyond this, it is evident that individual differences which these craft initiations emphasize disappear completely and no longer play any role. As we have explained on other occasions, the 'lesser mysteries' lead to the restoration of what the traditional doctrines designate as the 'primordial state'. Once the being has reached this state, which still belongs to the sphere of human individuality, and which is the point of communication between it and the superior states, the differentiations which give rise to the various 'specialized' functions have disappeared, although all these 'specialized' functions also had their source there, or rather by this very means, and it is really a question of returning to this common source so as to possess in its plenitude all that is implied by the exercise of any function whatsoever.

If we view the history of humanity as taught by the traditional doctrines in conformity with the cyclical laws, we must say that since in the beginning man had full possession of his state of existence, he naturally had the possibilities corresponding to all the functions prior to every distinction of these latter. The division of these functions came about in a later phase, representing a state already inferior to the 'primordial state', but in which every human being, while having as yet only certain determined possibilities, still spontaneously had the effective consciousness of these possibilities. It was only in a period of the greatest obscurity that this consciousness became lost. From this point initiation became necessary to enable man to regain, along with this consciousness, the former state in which it inhered; this is the first of its aims, at which it aims most immediately. For this to be possible what is implied is a transmission going back by an unbroken 'chain' to the state to be

restored, and thus, step by step, to the 'primordial state' itself; yet initiation does not stop there, for since the 'lesser mysteries' are only the preparation for the 'greater mysteries', that is to say for the taking possession of the superior states of the being, it is necessary to go back even beyond the origins of humanity. In fact, there is no true initiation, even to the most inferior and elementary degree, without the intervention of a 'non-human' element, which, as we have already explained in other articles, is the 'spiritual influence' regularly communicated by the initiatic rite. If this is so, there is obviously no place to search 'historically' for the origin of initiation, a search which now appears as bereft of meaning, nor, moreover, for the origin of the crafts, arts, and sciences viewed according to their traditional and 'legitimate' conception, since by means of multiple but secondary differentiations and adaptations they too all derive from the 'primordial state', which contains them all in principle. In this way they link up with other orders of existence beyond humanity itself, which moreover is necessary so that each according to its rank and measure can contribute effectively to the realization of the plan of the Great Architect of the Universe.

2

ON MATHEMATICAL NOTATION

WE have often had occasion to remark that in reality most of the profane sciences—the only sciences the moderns know or even consider possible—represent only simple, distorted residues of the ancient, traditional sciences in the sense that the lowest part of these sciences, having ceased to have contact with the principles, and having thereby lost its true, original significance, ended up undergoing an independent development and came to be regarded as a branch of knowledge sufficient unto itself. In this respect, modern mathematics is no exception if one compares it to what was for the ancients the science of numbers and geometry; and when we speak here of the ancients, it is necessary to include therein even those of 'classical' antiquity, as the least study of Pythagorean and Platonic theories suffices to show, or at least should were it not necessary to take into account the extraordinary incomprehension of those who claim to interpret them today. Were this incomprehension not so complete, how for example could one maintain a belief in the empirical' origin of the sciences in question? For in reality—and to the contrary—they appear all the more removed from any empiricism' the further back one goes in time, and this is moreover equally the case for all other branches of scientific knowledge.

Modern mathematicians seem to have become ignorant of what number truly is, for they reduce their entire science to calculation, which for them means a mere collection of more or less artificial processes, and this amounts to saying, in short, that they replace number with the numeral; moreover, this confusion between the two is today so widespread that it can be found everywhere, even in

everyday language. Now a numeral is strictly speaking no more than the clothing of a number; we do not even say its body, for it is rather the geometric form that in certain respects, can legitimately be considered to constitute the true body of a number, as the theories of the ancients on polygons and polyhedrons show when seen in the light of the symbolism of numbers. We do not mean to say, however, that numerals themselves are entirely arbitrary signs, the form of which has been determined only by the fancy of one or more individuals; there must be both numerical and alphabetical characters (the two not being distinguished in some languages moreover) and the notion of a hieroglyphic, that is, an ideographic or symbolic origin, can be applied to the one as well as to the other, and this holds for all scripts without exception.

What is certain is that mathematicians employ in their notation symbols the meaning of which they no longer understand, and which are like vestiges of forgotten traditions; and what is more serious, not only do they not ask themselves what this meaning might be, they even seem not to want them to have any at all. Indeed, they tend more and more to regard all notation as mere 'convention', by which they mean something set out in an entirely arbitrary manner, which in reality is a veritable impossibility, for one never establishes a convention without having some reason for doing so, and for doing precisely that rather than anything else. A convention can appear arbitrary only to those who are ignorant of this reason, and this is exactly what happens in this instance. Likewise, it is all too easy to pass from a legitimate and valid use of a notation to an illegitimate use that no longer corresponds to anything real, and that can even sometimes be completely illogical; this may seem strange when it is a question of a science like mathematics, which should have a particularly close relationship with logic, yet it is nevertheless all too true that one can find many illogicalities in mathematical notions as they are commonly understood.

One of the most striking examples of these illogical notions is that of the so-called mathematical infinite, which, as we have amply explained on other occasions, can in reality be no more than the indefinite—and let it not be believed that this confusion of the infinite and the indefinite can be reduced to a mere question of words.

What mathematicians represent by the sign ∞ can in no way be the Infinite understood in its true sense; the sign \circ is itself a closed figure, therefore visibly finite, just like the circle, which some people have wished to make a symbol of eternity. In fact, the circle can only be a representation of a temporal cycle, indefinite merely in its order, that is to say, of what is properly called perpetuity; and it is easy to see that this confusion of eternity with perpetuity corresponds exactly to that of the infinite with the indefinite. In fact, the indefinite is only a development of the finite; but the Infinite cannot be derived from the finite. Furthermore, the Infinite is no more quantitative than it is determined, for quantity, being only a special mode of reality, is thereby essentially limited. What is more, the idea of an infinite number, that is to say a number greater than all other numbers according to the definition given by mathematicians, is an idea contradictory in itself, for however great a number *it* might be, the number $n + 1$ will always be greater in virtue of the law of formation for the indefinite sequence of numbers. This contradiction leads to many others, as various philosophers have noted, although they never saw the full import of this argument, for they believed they could apply to the metaphysical Infinite what applies only to the false mathematical infinite, and thus they fell prey to the same confusion as their adversaries, only in an opposite direction. It is obviously absurd to wish to define the Infinite, for every definition is necessarily a limitation, as the words themselves show clearly enough, and the Infinite is that which has no limits; to seek to place it within a formula, or, in short, to clothe it in a form, is to attempt to place the universal All within one of its minutest parts, which is manifestly impossible. Finally, to conceive of the Infinite as a quantity is not only to limit it, as we have just said, but in addition it is to conceive of it as subject to increase and decrease, which is no less absurd. With similar considerations one quickly finds oneself envisaging several infinities that coexist without confounding or excluding one another, as well as infinities greater or smaller than other infinities; and, the infinite no longer sufficing, one even invents the 'transfinite', that is, the domain of quantities greater than the infinite: so many words and so many absurdities, even with regard to simple, elementary logic. Here we intentionally speak of 'invention',

for if the realities of the mathematical order, like all other realities, can only be discovered and not invented, it is clear that this is no longer the case when, by a 'game' of notation, one allows oneself to be led into the domain of pure fantasy; but how could one hope for mathematicians to understand this difference when they willingly imagine that the whole of their science is and must be no more than a 'construction of the human mind', although if this were true it would of course reduce their science to a mere trifle?

What we said concerning the infinitely great, or what is so called, is equally true of what is no less improperly called the infinitely small: however small a number $1/n$ might be, the number $1/n + i$ will be smaller still; later we shall return to the question of what exactly this notation should be taken to mean. In reality, there is thus neither an infinitely great nor an infinitely small; but one can envisage the sequence of numbers as increasing and decreasing indefinitely in such a way that the so-called mathematical infinite will only be the indefinite, which, let us say again, proceeds from the finite, and is consequently always reducible to it. The indefinite is thus still finite, which is to say limited; even if we do not know its limits, or are incapable of determining them, we do know that they exist, for every indefinitude pertains only to a certain order of things, limited precisely by the existence of other things outside of it. By the same token, one can obviously envisage a multitude of indefinites; one can even add them to each other, or multiply them by each other, which naturally leads to the consideration of indefinites of unequal magnitude, and even different orders of indefinitude, in both the increasing direction and the decreasing direction. Once this is understood, we shall be able to see the real significance of the previously mentioned absurdities, which disappear as soon as the so-called mathematical infinite is replaced with the indefinite; but whatever might be obtained thus will of course have no relation to the Infinite, and will always be rigorously null with respect to it; and the same may be said of all ordinary finitude, of which the indefinite is necessarily but an extension. At the same time, these considerations also show in a precise way the impossibility of arriving at synthesis by analysis: however much one adds together an indefinite number of elements successively, one will never obtain

the All, because the All is infinite, and not indefinite; it cannot be conceived of as other than infinite, for it could only be limited by something outside of itself, and then it would not be the All. If it can be said that it is the sum of all its elements, this is only on the condition that the word 'sum' be taken in the sense of an integral, which is not calculated by taking its elements one by one; and even were one to suppose that one or more indefinite sequences could be passed through analytically, one would not for that have advanced a single step from the point of view of universality, and one would always be at exactly the same point in relation to the Infinite. Moreover, all of this can be applied analogically to other domains than quantity; and the immediate consequence is that profane science, of which the points of view and methods are exclusively analytical, is by that very fact incapable of transcending certain limitations; here the imperfection is not simply inherent in its present state, as some have wished to believe, but in its very nature, that is, ultimately, in its lack of principles.

We have said that the sequence of numbers can be considered indefinite in two directions, the increasing and the decreasing; but this demands some further explanation, for an objection can immediately be raised. True number, what one might call pure number, is essentially whole number; and the sequence of whole numbers, starting from the unit, continues ever to increase, but it progresses entirely in a single direction, and thus the other, opposite direction—that of indefinite decrease—cannot be represented by it. However, one is brought to consider various other kinds of number aside from the whole numbers; these, it is usually said, are extensions of the idea of number, and this is true after a certain fashion; but at the same time these extensions are also distortions, which is what mathematicians seem too easily to forget on account of their 'conventionalism', which causes them to misunderstand the origin and *raison d'être* of these numbers. In fact, numbers other than whole numbers always appear first and foremost as the representation of the results of operations that would be impossible were one to keep to the point of view of pure arithmetic, which, in all strictness, is the arithmetic of whole numbers alone. Indeed, one does not arbitrarily consider the results of the aforementioned operations

thus, instead of regarding them purely and simply as impossible; generally speaking, it is in consequence of the application made of number—discontinuous quantity—to the measurement of magnitudes belonging to the order of continuous quantity. Between these modes of quantity there is a difference of nature such that a correspondence between the two cannot be perfectly established; to remedy this to a certain degree, at least insofar as it is possible, one seeks to reduce, as it were, the intervals of this discontinuity constituted by the sequence of whole numbers, by introducing between its terms other numbers, such as fractional and incommensurable numbers, which would be meaningless apart from this consideration. Moreover, it must be said that in spite of this something of the essentially discontinuous nature of number will inevitably always remain, preventing one from thus obtaining a perfect equivalent to the continuous. The intervals can be reduced as much as one might like—that is, in short, they can be reduced indefinitely—but they cannot be eliminated; thus one is once again brought to consider a certain aspect of the indefinite, and this could find its application in a study of the principles of the infinitesimal calculus, although (his is not what we propose to do at present.

Under these conditions and with these reservations, one can accept certain of these extensions of the idea of number to which we have just alluded, and give them, or rather restore to them, a legitimate significance; thus, notably, we can consider the inverses of the whole numbers represented by symbols of the form V_n and forming the indefinitely decreasing sequence, symmetrical to the indefinitely increasing sequence of whole numbers. We must further note that although the symbol $1/n$ could evoke the idea of fractional numbers, the numbers in question here are not defined as such; it suffices for us to consider the two sequences as constituted by numbers respectively greater and smaller than the unit, that is, by two orders of magnitude having their common limit in the unit, while at the same time both can be regarded as having issued from this unit, which is indeed the primary source of all numbers. Since we have spoken of fractional numbers, we should add in this connection that the definition ordinarily given to them is again absurd: in no way can fractions be 'parts of a unit', as is said, for the true unit is necessarily

indivisible and without parts; arithmetically, a fractional number represents no more than the quotient of an impossible division; but this absurdity arises from a confusion of the arithmetical unit with what are called 'units of measurement', which are units only by convention, since in reality they are magnitudes of another sort than number. The unit of length, for example, is only a certain length chosen for reasons foreign to arithmetic, to which one makes the number 1 correspond in order to be able to measure all other lengths by reference to it; but by its very nature as continuous magnitude, all length, even when thus represented numerically by unity, is no less always and indefinitely divisible. Comparing it to other lengths, one might therefore have to consider parts of this unit of measurement, without it in any way being necessary that they be parts of the arithmetical unit; and it is only thus that the consideration of fractional numbers is really introduced, as a representation of the ratios of magnitudes that are not exactly divisible by one another. The measurement of a magnitude is in fact no more than the numerical expression of its ratio to another magnitude of the same species taken as the unit of measurement, or, basically, as the term of comparison; and from this one sees that all measurement is essentially founded on division, something which could give rise to further observations which are important, but beyond our present subject.

That said, we can now return to the double numerical indefinitude constituted in the increasing direction by the sequence of whole numbers, and in the decreasing direction by that of their inverses; both sequences start from the unit, which alone is its own inverse, since $1/1 = 1$. Moreover, there are as many numbers in one sequence as there are in the other, such that if one considers the two indefinite sets as forming a unique sequence, one could say that the unit occupies the exact mid-point within this sequence of numbers; indeed, for every number n in one sequence, there will correspond another number $1/n$ in the other, such that $n \times 1/n = 1$, any two inverse numbers multiplied together again producing the unit. To generalize further, if we wished to introduce fractional numbers instead of considering only the sequence of whole numbers and their inverses as we have just done, nothing would be changed in this regard: on one side there would be all the numbers greater than

the unit, and on the other all those smaller than the unit; here, again, for any number $a/b > i$, there will be a corresponding number $b/a < i$ in the other set, and reciprocally, such that $a/b \times b/a = i$, and there will thus be exactly the same number of terms in each of these two indefinite groups separated by the unit. One can say further that the unit, occupying the mid-point, corresponds to the state of perfect equilibrium, and that it contains in itself all numbers, which proceed from it in pairs of inverse or complementary numbers, each pair, by virtue of its complementarity, constituting a relative unity in its indivisible duality. In what follows we shall further examine the consequences implied by these various considerations.

If one considers the sequence of whole numbers together with that of their inverses, in accordance with what was said above, the first will be indefinitely increasing and the second indefinitely decreasing; one could say that the numbers thus tend on the one side toward the indefinitely great and on the other toward the indefinitely small, understanding by this the very limits of the domain in which one considers these numbers, for a variable quantity cannot but tend toward a limit. The domain in question is, in short, that of numerical quantity taken in every possible extension; this amounts to saying that its limits are not determined by such and such a particular number, however great or small one might suppose it to be, but solely by the nature of number as such. By the same token number, like everything else of a determined nature, excludes all that it is not, and thus there can be no question of any infinite here; moreover, we have just said that the indefinitely great must inevitably be conceived of as a limit, and in this connection one can point out that the expression 'tend toward infinity', employed by mathematicians in the sense of 'increase indefinitely', is again an absurdity, since the infinite obviously implies the absence of all limits, and since consequently there is nothing toward which it is possible to tend. It goes without saying that the same observations can be applied to modes of quantity other than number, that is, to different kinds of continuous quantity, notably the spatial and the temporal; each of these is likewise capable of indefinite extension within its order, but essentially limited by its very nature, as, moreover, is quantity itself in all its generality; the very fact that there exist things

to which quantity is not applicable suffices to demonstrate the contradiction in the idea of the so-called 'quantitative infinite'.

Furthermore, when a domain is indefinite, we cannot know its limits distinctly, and, consequently, we will not be able to fix them in a precise manner; here, in short, we have the entire difference between indefinitude and ordinary finitude. There thus remains a sort of indeterminacy, but one which is such only from our point of view and not in reality itself, since its limits are no less existent on that account; whether we see them or not in no way changes the nature of things. As far as number is concerned, one could also say that this apparent indeterminacy results from the fact that the sequence of numbers in its entirety is not 'terminated' by a certain number, as is always the case with any given portion of the sequence considered in isolation; there is thus no number, however great it might be, that can be identified with the indefinitely great in the sense in which we take it; and parallel considerations naturally apply to the indefinitely small. However, one can at least regard a number as practically indefinite, if one may so express it, when it can no longer be expressed by language or represented in writing, which indeed occurs the moment one considers numbers that go on ever increasing or decreasing; here we have simply a matter of 'perspective', if one wishes, but even this is in accordance with the character of the indefinite, which is ultimately nothing other than that of which the limits can be, not done away with—which would be impossible, since the finite can only produce the finite—but simply pushed back to the point of being entirely lost from view.

In this regard certain rather curious questions arise: thus, one could ask why the Chinese language symbolically represents the indefinite by the number ten thousand; the expression 'the ten thousand beings', for example, means all beings, which in reality are an indefinite multitude. What is most remarkable is that precisely the same thing occurs in Greek, where a single word likewise serves to express both ideas at once, with a simple difference in accentuation, which is obviously only a quite secondary detail: $\mu\acute{\upsilon}\rho\iota\omicron\iota$, 'ten thousand'; $\mu\upsilon\rho\acute{\iota}\omicron\iota$, 'an indefinitude'.¹ The true reason

1. The English cognate *myriad* has come to combine both meanings. En.

for this is as follows: the number ten thousand is the fourth power of ten; now according to the formulation of the *Tao Te Ching*, 'one produced two, two produced three, three produced all numbers,' which implies that four, produced immediately after three, is in a way equivalent to the whole set of numbers, and this because, when one has the quaternary, by adding the first four numbers one also has the decad, which represents a complete numerical cycle: $1 + 2 + 3 + 4 = 10$; this is the Pythagorean Tetraktys, the significance of which we shall perhaps return to more thoroughly on another occasion. One can further add that this representation of numerical indefinitude has its correspondence in the spatial order: raising a number from one power to the next highest power represents in this order, the addition of a dimension; now, since our space has only three dimensions, its limits are transcended when one goes beyond the third power. In other words, this amounts to saying that elevation to the fourth power marks the very term of its indefinitude, since, as soon as it is effected, one has thereby departed from this extension.

Be that as it may, it is in reality the indefinitely great that mathematicians represent by the sign ∞ , as we have said; if the sign did not have this meaning, it would have none at all; and according to the preceding, what is thus represented is not a determined number, but as it were an entire domain, which, moreover, is necessary for it to be possible to envisage inequalities and even different orders of magnitude within the indefinite, as we have already pointed out.

As for the indefinitely small, which can similarly be regarded as embracing everything in the decreasing order that is found to lie outside the limits of our means of evaluation, and which as quantity we are consequently led to consider practically non-existent with respect to us, one can represent it in its own set by the symbol 0 —although this is in fact only one of the meanings of zero—without bringing in here the notation of differential or infinitesimal quantity, which essentially finds its justification only in the study of continuous variations; and it must be understood that this symbol no longer represents a determined number for the same reasons as those given for the indefinitely great.

The sequence of numbers such as we have been considering it, extending indefinitely in the two opposite directions of increase and decrease and composed of the whole numbers and their inverses, presents itself in the following form: $0 \dots \sqrt{4}, \sqrt{1}, \sqrt{2}, \sqrt{3}, \sqrt{4} \dots$ co; two numbers equidistant from the central unit will be inverses or complementaries of one another, thus producing the unit when multiplied together, as we explained earlier: $\lambda/\eta \times \pi = i$, such that, for the two extremities of the sequence, one would be compelled to write $0 \times 00 = 1$ as well. However, since the signs 0 and 00, the two factors of this product, do not really represent determined numbers, it follows that the expression 0×00 itself constitutes what is called an indeterminate form, and must then be written: $0 \times 00 = n$, where n could be any number; but in any case one is thus brought back to ordinary finitude, the two opposed indefinites being so to speak neutralized by one another. Here, once again, one can clearly see that the symbol 00 most emphatically does not represent the Infinite, for the Infinite can have neither opposite nor complement, and it cannot enter into correlation with anything whatsoever, no more with zero than with the unit or with any number; as the absolute All, it contains Non-Being as well as Being, such that zero itself, whenever it is not regarded as purely nothing, must necessarily be considered to be contained within the Infinite.

In alluding here to Non-Being, we touch on another meaning of zero, quite different from the one we have just been considering, and moreover one that is more important from the point of view of metaphysical symbolism; but in this regard, in order to avoid all confusion between the symbol and that which it represents, it is necessary to make it quite clear that the metaphysical Zero, which is Non-Being, is no more the zero of quantity than metaphysical Unity—which is Being—is the arithmetical unit; what is designated by these terms is so only by analogical transposition, since as soon as one places oneself within the Universal, one is obviously outside of all special domains such as that of quantity. Moreover, it is not insofar as it represents the indefinitely small that zero can be taken as a symbol of Non-Being, but rather insofar as, following another of its mathematical meanings, it represents the absence of quantity,

which in its order indeed symbolizes the possibility of non-manifestation, just as the unit symbolizes the possibility of manifestation, since it is the point of departure for the indefinite multiplicity of number, as Being is the principle of all manifestation.

In whatever manner zero is envisaged, it can in no case be taken to be purely nothing, which is all too obvious when it is a question of the indefinitely small; it is true that this is only a derivative sense so to speak, owing to a sort of approximate assimilation of quantities that are negligible for us to the total absence of quantity; but insofar as it is a question of this absence of quantity itself, which is null in this connection, it is quite clear that it cannot be so in all respects, as is apparent in an example like that of the point, which is without extension, that is, spatially null, but which is as we have explained elsewhere nonetheless the very principle of all extension. It is truly strange, moreover, that mathematicians are for the most part inclined to envisage zero as purely nothing, when at the same time it is impossible for them not to regard it as endowed with an indefinite potentiality, since, placed to the right of another, 'significant' digit, it helps to form the representation of a number that, precisely by the repetition of this zero, can increase indefinitely, as for example with the number ten and its successive powers; if zero really were absolutely nothing, this could not be so, and it would even be a useless sign, entirely deprived of real value; here we have yet another inconsistency to add to the list of those we have already pointed out so far.

Returning now to zero considered as a representation of the indefinitely small, what is important is to keep in mind the fact that within the doubly indefinite sequence of numbers, the domain of the latter embraces all that eludes our means of evaluation in a certain direction, just as within the same sequence the domain of the indefinitely great embraces all that eludes our means of evaluation in the other direction. This being said, to speak of numbers less than zero is obviously no more appropriate than to speak of numbers greater than the indefinite; and it is still more unacceptable—if such is even possible—when zero simply represents the absence of quantity, for it is totally inconceivable that a quantity should be less than nothing; this, however, is what is attempted—although in a slightly

different sense than the one just discussed—when the consideration of so-called negative numbers is introduced into mathematics, forgetting that these numbers were originally no more than an indication of the result of a subtraction impossible in reality, in which a greater number is taken away from a smaller; but this subject of negative numbers, and the logically contestable consequences it entails, calls for further discussion.

Ultimately, the consideration of negative numbers arises solely from the fact that when a subtraction is arithmetically impossible, its result is nonetheless not devoid of meaning when linked to magnitudes that can be reckoned in two opposite directions, as, for example, distances or times. From this results the geometric representation habitually accorded negative numbers: on a straight line, the distances lying along it are considered to be positive or negative depending on whether they fall in one direction or the other, and a point is chosen to serve as the origin, in relation to which the distances are positive on one side and negative on the other, the origin itself being given a coefficient of zero; the coefficient of each point on the line will thus be the number representing its distance from the origin, and its sign of + or - will simply indicate on which side the point falls on in relation to the origin; with a circle one could likewise designate positive and negative directions of rotation, which would give rise to analogous remarks. Furthermore, as the line is indefinite in both directions, one is led to consider both a positive and a negative indefinite, represented by the signs +∞, and -∞ respectively, commonly designated by the absurd expressions 'greater infinity' and 'lesser infinity'. One might well ask what a negative infinity would be, or again what could remain were one to take away an infinite amount from something, or even from nothing, since mathematicians regard zero as nothing. In cases such as these one has only to put the matter in clear language in order to immediately see how devoid of meaning they are. We must further add that, particularly when studying the variation of functions, one might next be led to believe that the negative and the positive indefinite merge, such that a moving object, departing from its origin and moving further and further away in the positive direction would return toward the origin from the negative side if

the movement were carried on for an indefinite amount of time, or vice versa, whence it would result that the straight line, or what is so considered, would in reality be a closed line, albeit an indefinite one. One could show, moreover, that the properties of the straight line in a plane would be entirely analogous to those of a diameter on the surface of a sphere, and that the plane and the straight line could thus be likened respectively to a sphere and a circle of indefinitely great radius, ordinary circles in the plane then being comparable to the smaller circles on the sphere; without pushing the issue further, we shall only note that here one can grasp the precise limits of spatial indefinitude directly, as it were; if one wishes to maintain some semblance of logic, how then can one still speak of the infinite in all of this?

When considering positive and negative numbers as we have just done, the sequence of numbers takes the following form: $-\infty \dots -4, -3, -2, -1, 0, 1, 2, 3, 4 \dots +\infty$, the order of these numbers being the same as that of the corresponding points on the line, that is, the points having these numbers for their respective coefficients. Although the sequence is just as indefinite in either direction, it is completely different from the one we envisaged earlier: it is symmetric not with respect to 1, but to 0, which corresponds to the origin of the distances; and two numbers equidistant from the central term again reproduce it, but this time by 'algebraic' addition—that is, by addition performed while taking account of signs, which in this case would amount, arithmetically speaking, to a subtraction—and not by multiplication. One can immediately see a disadvantage that inevitably results from the artificial—we do not say arbitrary—character of this notation: if one takes the unit as the point of departure, the entire sequence of numbers will immediately follow from it; but, if one takes zero, it is on the contrary impossible to derive any number from it, the reason for this being that in reality the forming of the sequence would then be based on considerations of a geometric rather than an arithmetical order, and also that, in consequence of the difference in nature of the quantities treated in these two branches of mathematics, there can never be a completely rigorous correspondence between arithmetic and geometry, as we have already said. Moreover, the new sequence in no way increases

indefinitely in one direction and decreases indefinitely in the other, as was the case with the preceding series; or at least, if one claims to consider it thus, it is only in a most incorrect manner of speaking'. In reality, the sequence increases indefinitely in both directions equally since it is the same sequence of whole numbers that is contained on either side of the central zero; what is called the 'absolute value'—another rather singular expression, as the quantities in question are always of an essentially relative order—must be taken into consideration only in a purely quantitative respect, the positive or negative signs changing nothing in this regard, since they express no more than differences in 'situation', as we have just now explained. The negative indefinite is thus by no means comparable to the indefinitely small; on the contrary, just like the positive indefinite, it belongs with the indefinitely great; the only difference is that it proceeds in another direction, which is perfectly conceivable when it is a question of spatial or temporal magnitudes, but totally devoid of meaning in the case of arithmetical magnitudes, which proceed solely in one direction since they are nothing other than the magnitudes of which the sequence of numbers is composed. Negative numbers are by no means numbers 'less than zero', which essentially is but a pure and simple impossibility, and the sign by which they are designated can in no way reverse the order in which they are ranked with respect to their magnitude. Moreover, in order to realize it as clearly as possible, it suffices to note that the point of the coefficient -2, for example, is further from the origin than the point of the coefficient -1, and not less far, as would inevitably be the case were the number -2 in fact less than the number -1; in reality, it is not the distances themselves, insofar as they are capable of being measured, that can be qualified as negative, but only the direction in which they lie; here we have two entirely different things, and it is precisely the confusion of the two that is the source of a large part of the logical difficulties raised by the notation of negative numbers.

Among the other bizarre and illogical consequences of this notation, let us draw attention to the question of so-called 'imaginary' quantities, introduced in the solving of algebraic equations; these quantities are presented as the roots of negative numbers, which again could answer only to an impossibility; perhaps some other

meaning could be assigned to them, whereby they might correspond to something real, but in any case, their theory and application to analytic geometry as presented by contemporary mathematicians hardly appears as anything but a veritable mass of confusions and even absurdities, and as the outcome of a need for excessive and artificial generalizations, a need that does not draw back even at manifestly contradictory propositions; certain theorems concerning the 'asymptotes of a circle', for example, amply suffice to prove that this remark is by no means an exaggeration. One could say, it is true, that this is no longer a question of geometry strictly speaking, but only of algebra translated into geometric terms; but precisely because such translation, as well as its inverse, is possible to a certain degree, it is extended to cases in which it can no longer mean anything, for this is indeed the symptom of an extraordinary confusion of ideas, as well as the extreme result of a 'conventionalism' that goes so far as to cause a loss of the sense of all reality.

There is yet more to be said, and before ending we shall now turn to the consequences, also quite contestable, of the use of negative numbers from the point of view of mechanics; indeed, since in virtue of its object the field of mechanics is in reality a physical science, the very fact that it is treated as an integral part of mathematics has not failed to introduce certain distortions. In this regard we shall only say that the so-called 'principles' upon which modern mathematicians build this science such as they conceive of it (and among the various abuses of the word 'principles', this is not the least worthy of remark) are in fact only more or less well-grounded hypotheses, or again, in the most favorable case, only more or less simple, general laws, perhaps more general than others, but still no more than applications of true universal principles in a highly specialized domain. Without entering into excessively long explanations, let us cite, as an example of the first case, the so-called 'principle of inertia', which nothing justifies, neither experience, which on the contrary shows that inertia has no role in nature, nor the understanding, which cannot conceive of this so-called inertia consisting only in a complete absence of properties; rigorously speaking, such a word could only be applied to pure potentiality, but this latter is assuredly something altogether different from the quantified and qualified

'matter' envisaged by physicists. An example of the second instance may be seen in what is called the 'principle of the equality of action and reaction', which is so little a principle as to follow immediately from the general law of the equilibrium of natural forces: whenever this equilibrium is in any way disturbed, it immediately tends to re-establish itself, whence a reaction of which the intensity is equivalent to that of the action that provoked it; it is therefore only a simple, particular case of 'concordant actions and reactions', a principle that does not concern the corporeal world alone, but indeed the totality of manifestation in all its modes and states; and it is precisely on this question of equilibrium that we propose to dwell for a little while.

Two forces in equilibrium are usually represented by two opposed 'vectors', that is, by two line segments of equal length, but of opposite directions; if two forces applied to the same point have the same intensity and fall along the same line, but in opposite directions, they are in equilibrium. As they are then without action at their point of application, it is even said that they cancel each other out, although this ignores the fact that if one of the forces is suppressed, the other will immediately act, proving that they were never really annulled in the first place. The forces are characterized by numerical coefficients proportional to their respective intensities, and two forces of opposite direction are given coefficients with different signs, the one positive, the other negative: the one being f , the other $-f$. In the case just considered, in which the two forces are of the same intensity, the coefficients characterizing them must be equal with respect to their 'absolute values'; one then has: $f = f$, from which can be derived the condition for their equilibrium: $f - f = 0$, which is to say that the sum of the two forces, or of the two 'vectors' representing them, is null, such that equilibrium is thus defined by zero. Now zero having been incorrectly regarded by mathematicians as a sort of symbol for nothing—as if nothing could be symbolized by something—it seems to follow that equilibrium is the state of non-existence, which is a rather strange conclusion; nonetheless, it is almost certainly for this reason that instead of saying that two forces in equilibrium neutralize one another, which would be more exact, it is said that they annul one another,

which is contrary to the reality of things, as we have just made clear by a most simple observation.

The true notion of equilibrium is entirely different. In order to understand it, it suffices to point out that all natural forces—and not only mechanical forces, which, let us say again, are no more than a very particular case—are either attractive or repulsive; the first can be considered compressive forces, or forces of contraction, and the second expansive forces, or forces of dilation. Given an initially homogenous medium, it is easy to see that for every point of compression there will necessarily correspond an equivalent expansion at another point, and conversely, such that two centers of force, neither of which could exist without the other, will always have to be considered correlatively. This is what can be called the law of polarity, and it is applicable to all natural phenomena, since it is derived from the duality of the very principles that preside over all of manifestation; in the domain with which physicists occupy themselves, this law is evident above all in electrical and magnetic phenomena. Now if two forces, the one compressive, the other expansive, act upon the same point, then the condition requisite for them to be in equilibrium or to neutralize one another, that is, the condition which, when fulfilled, will produce neither contraction nor dilation, is that the intensities of the two forces be equivalent—we do not say equal, since they are of different species. The forces can be characterized by coefficients proportional to the contraction or dilation they produce, in such a way that if one considers a compressive force and an expansive force together, the first will have a coefficient $n > i$, the second a coefficient $n' < i$; each of these coefficients will be the ratio of the density of the space surrounding the point in consideration under the action of the corresponding force, to the original density of the same space, which is taken to be homogenous when not subject to any forces, in virtue of a simple application of the principle of sufficient reason. When neither compression nor dilation is produced, the ratio will inevitably equal one, since the density of the space will be unchanged; in order for two forces acting upon a point to be in equilibrium, their resultant must have a coefficient of one. It is easy to see that the coefficient of this resultant is the product—and not the sum, as in the 'classical'

conception—of the coefficients of the two forces under consideration; these two coefficients, a and it' , must therefore each be the inverse of the other: $it' = Vn$, and we will then have as the condition for equilibrium, $(\llcorner)(\gg') = 1$; thus equilibrium will no longer be defined by zero, but by the unit.

It will be seen that the definition of equilibrium with respect to the unit—which is the only real definition—corresponds to the fact that the unit occupies the mid-point in the doubly indefinite sequence of whole numbers and their inverses, while this central position is as it were usurped by zero in the artificial sequence of positive and negative numbers, far from being the state of non-existence, equilibrium is on the contrary existence considered in and of itself, independent of its secondary, multiple manifestations; moreover, it is certainly not Non-Being, in the metaphysical sense of the word, for existence, even in this primordial and undifferentiated state, is still the point of departure for all differentiated manifestations, just as the unit is the point of departure for the multiplicity of numbers. As we have just considered it, this unit, in which equilibrium resides, is what the Far-Eastern tradition calls the 'Invariable Middle'; and according to the same tradition, this equilibrium or harmony is the reflection of the 'Activity of Heaven' at the center of each state and of each modality of being.

We conclude this study, which makes no claim to be exhaustive, with a 'practical' conclusion; we have shown explicitly why the conceptions of modern mathematicians cannot inspire us with any more respect than do those of the representatives of the other profane sciences; their opinions and views thus have no weight in our eyes, and we need take no account of them in our evaluations of one or another theory, evaluations which, in this domain as well as any other, can be based for us only on the data of traditional knowledge.

3

THE ARTS & THEIR TRADITIONAL CONCEPTION

WE have frequently emphasized the fact that the profane sciences are only the product of a relatively recent degeneration brought about by a misunderstanding of the ancient traditional sciences—or rather only of some of them—the others having completely fallen into oblivion. This is true not only for the sciences, but also for the arts, and furthermore the distinction between them was once far less accentuated than it is now; the Latin word *artes* was sometimes also applied to the sciences, and in the Middle Ages, the classification of the 'liberal arts' included subjects which the modern world would assign to either one or the other group. This one remark is already enough to show that art was once something other than what is now understood by this name, and that it implied a real knowledge with which it was incorporated, as it were, and this knowledge obviously could only have been of the order of the traditional sciences.

By this alone can one understand that in certain initiatory organizations of the Middle Ages, such as the *Tedeli d'Amore*, the seven 'liberal arts' were considered to correspond to the 'heavens', that is, to states which were identified with the different degrees of initiation.¹ For this the arts as well as the sciences had to be susceptible of a transposition giving them a real esoteric value; and what makes such a transposition possible is the very nature of traditional

1. See *The Esoterism of Danle*, chap. 2.

knowledge, which, whatever its order, is always connected to transcendent principles. This knowledge is thus given a meaning which can be termed symbolic, since it is founded on the correspondence that exists between the various orders of reality; but here it must be stressed that this does not involve something superadded to them accidentally, but on the contrary something that constitutes the profound essence of all normal and legitimate knowledge, and which, as such, is inherent in the sciences and the arts from their very beginning and remains so as long as they have not undergone any deviation.

That the arts can be viewed from this point of view should cause no astonishment, once one sees that the crafts themselves, in their traditional conception, serve as a basis for an initiation, as we have explained.² In this connection we should also recall that we spoke at that time about how the distinction between the arts and the crafts seems specifically modern and, in short, appears to be only a consequence of the same degeneration which has given birth to the profane outlook, for this latter literally expresses nothing other than the very negation of the traditional spirit. After all, whether it was a question of art or craft, there was always to one degree or another the application and the implementation of various sciences of a higher order, gradually linked to initiatic knowledge itself. Furthermore, the direct implementation of initiatic knowledge also went by the name of art, as can be seen clearly by expressions such as 'sacerdotal art' and 'royal art', which refer to the respective applications of the 'greater mysteries' and the 'lesser mysteries'.

Let us now consider the arts and give to this word a more limited and at the same time more customary meaning, that is, what is more precisely called the 'fine arts'. From the preceding we can say that each of them must constitute a kind of symbolic language adapted to the expression of certain truths by means of forms which are of the visual order for some, and of the auditive or sonorous order for others, whence their customary division into two groups, the 'plastic arts' and the 'phonetic arts'. In previous studies we have explained that this distinction, like that between two kinds of corresponding

2. See pt. 2, chap i above, 'Initiation and the Crafts'.

rites founded on the same categories of symbolic forms, originally refers to the difference that exists between the traditions of a sedentary people and those of a nomadic people.³ Moreover, whether the arts are of one or another genre, it is easy to see in a general way that in a civilization they have a character all the more manifestly symbolic as the civilization itself is more strictly traditional, for their true value then lies less in what they are in themselves than in the possibilities of expression which they afford, beyond those to which ordinary language is confined. In a word, their productions are above all destined to serve as 'supports' for meditation, and as foundations for as deep and extensive an understanding as possible, which is the very *raison d'être* of all symbolism;⁴ and everything, even to the smallest details, must be determined by this consideration and subordinated to this end, without any useless addition emptied of meaning and simply meant to play a 'decorative' or 'ornamental' role.⁵

One sees that such a conception is as far removed as possible from all modern and profane theories, as for example that of 'art for art's sake', which fundamentally amounts to saying that art is what it should be only when it has no meaning, or again that of 'moralizing' art, which from the standpoint of knowledge is obviously of no greater value. Traditional art is certainly not a 'game', to use an expression dear to certain psychologists, nor is it simply a means of procuring for man a special kind of pleasure, qualified as 'superior', although no one really knows why, for as soon as it is only a question of pleasure, everything is reduced to purely individual preferences, among which no hierarchy can logically be established. Moreover, neither is it a vain and sentimental declamation, for which ordinary language is certainly more than sufficient without

3. See 'Cain and Abel' in *The Reign of Quantity and The Signs of the Times*, chap. 21, and also 'Rite and Symbol' in *Perspectives on Initiation*, chap. 16.

4. this is the Hindu notion of *prafitka*, which is no more an 'idol' than it is a work of imagination and individual fantasy. Each of these two Western interpretations, opposed to a certain extent, is as wrong as the other.

5. The degeneration of certain symbols into ornamental 'motifs' because the meaning has ceased to be understood is one of the characteristic features of the profane deviation.

there in any way being a need to resort to more or less mysterious or enigmatic forms, and in any case forms far more complicated than what they would have had to express. This gives us an opportunity to recall in passing—for one can never insist too much on these things—the perfect uselessness of 'moral' interpretations which certain people aim to give to all symbolism, including initiatic symbolism properly speaking. If it really were a question of such banalities, one does not see why or how one would ever have thought of 'veiling' them in some way, for they do very well without this when expressed by profane philosophy, and it would then be better to say quite simply that in reality there is neither symbolism nor initiation.

That said, one may ask on which of the various traditional sciences the arts most directly depend. This, of course, does not exclude their also having more or less constant relations with the others, for here everything necessarily holds together and is connected in the fundamental unity of the doctrine, which could neither be destroyed in any way, nor even affected by the multiplicity of its applications. The conception of sciences which are narrowly 'specialized' and entirely separated from each other is clearly anti-traditional insofar as it manifests a lack of principle, and is characteristic of the 'analytic' outlook that inspires and rules the profane sciences, whereas any traditional point of view can only be essentially 'synthetic'. With this reservation, it can be said that what lies at the very heart of all the arts is chiefly an application of the science of rhythm under its different forms, a science which is itself immediately connected with that of number. It must be clearly understood that when we speak of the science of number, it is not a question of profane arithmetic as understood by the moderns, but of that arithmetic to be found in the Kabbalah and in Pythagorism (the best known examples), whose equivalent also exists, under varied expressions and with greater or lesser developments, in all the traditional doctrines.

What we have just said may appear especially obvious for the phonetic arts, the productions of which are all constituted by sequences of rhythms unfolding in time. Poetry owes its rhythmical character to having originally been the ritual mode of expression of

the 'language of the gods', that is to say the 'sacred language' par excellence,⁶ a function of which it still preserved something until a relatively recent time when 'literature' had still not been invented.⁷ As for music, it will surely not be necessary to insist on this, since its numerical basis is still recognized by moderns themselves, distorted though it is through the loss of traditional data; formerly, as can be seen especially well in the Far East, modifications could only be introduced into music in consequence of certain changes occurring in the actual state of the world in accordance with cyclical periods, for musical rhythms were at once intimately linked with the human and social order and with the cosmic order, and in a certain way they even expressed the connections between the one and the other. The Pythagorean conception of the 'harmony of the spheres' belongs to exactly the same order of considerations.

For the plastic arts, the productions of which are developed through extension in space, the same thing cannot appear as immediately apparent, and yet it is no less strictly true; but rhythm is then as it were fixed in simultaneity, and not in a state of successive unfolding as in the previous case. This can be understood especially by observing that in this second group the typical and fundamental art is architecture, and in the final analysis the other arts, such as sculpture and painting—at least in regard to their original intention—are only simple dependencies thereof. Now, in architecture, rhythm is directly expressed by the proportions existing between the various parts of the whole, and also through geometric forms, which, when all is said and done are from our point of view only the spatial translation of numbers and their relations.⁸ Here

6. See 'The Language of the Birds' in *Symbols of Sacred Science*, chap. 7.

7. It is rather curious to note that modern 'scholars' have come to an indiscriminate application of the word 'literature' to everything—even to the sacred scriptures, which they have the pretension to study in the same way as the rest and by the same methods—and, when they speak of 'biblical poems' or of 'Vedic poems', while completely misunderstanding what poetry meant for the ancients, their intention is again to reduce everything to something purely human.

8. In this connection, it should be noted here that Plato's 'geometer God' is properly identified with Apollo, who presides over all the arts; this, directly derived as it is from Pythagorism, has a particular importance concerning the filiation of certain traditional Hellenic doctrines and their connection with a 'Hyperborean' primal origin.

again, of course, geometry must be considered in a very different way from that of the profane mathematicians, and its anteriority in respect to the latter most completely refutes those who would like to attribute an 'empirical' and utilitarian origin to this science. On the other hand, we have here an example of the way in which, from the traditional point of view, the sciences are linked together to such an extent that at times they could even be considered the expressions, as it were, of the same truths in different languages. Furthermore, this is only a most natural consequence of the 'law of correspondences' which is the very foundation of all symbolism.

These few notions, summary and incomplete as they are, will at least suffice for an understanding of what is most essential in the traditional conception of the arts and what differentiates this conception most profoundly from a profane one with regard to the basis of these arts as applications of certain sciences, with regard to their significance as different modalities of symbolic language, and with regard to their intended role as a means for helping man to approach true knowledge.

4

THE CONDITIONS OF CORPOREAL EXISTENCE

ACCORDING to the *Sankhya* of Kapila, there are five *tanmiUras* or elementary essences, ideally perceptible (or rather 'conceptible'), but incomprehensible and imperceptible under any mode of universal manifestation, because themselves unmanifested; for just this reason it is impossible to attribute to them particular designations, for they cannot be defined by any formal representation.¹ These *tanmatras* are potential principles, or, to use an expression recalling the doctrine of Plato, the 'ideas-archetypes' of the five elements of the physical material world, and thus, of course, of an indefinitude of other modalities of manifested existence corresponding analogically to these elements in the multiple degrees of this existence. According to the same correspondence, these principal ideas also potentially imply, respectively, the five conditions the combinations of which constitute the determinations of this particular possibility of manifestation that we call corporeal existence. Thus, the five *tanmiUras* or principal ideas are the 'essential' elements, primordial causes of the five 'substantial' elements of physical manifestation, which are only particular determinations of exterior modifications. Under this physical modality, they are expressed in the five conditions according to which the

I. They can only be designated by analogy with the different orders of sensible qualities, for it is only in this way that we can know them (indirectly, in some of their particular effects) as long as we belong, as individual and relative beings, to the world of manifestation.

laws of corporeal existence are formulated;² the law, intermediate between the principle and the consequence, expresses the relation of cause and effect (relation in which the cause can be regarded as active and the effect as passive), or of the essence to the substance, considered as the K and the Π, the two extreme points of the modality of manifestation that are envisaged (and which, in the universality of their extension, are the same for each modality). But in themselves neither essence nor substance belong to the domain of this manifestation, any more than the two extremities of *yin-yang* are contained in the plane of the cyclic curve; they are on either side of this plane, and this is why, in reality, the curve of existence is never closed.

The five elements of the physical world³ are, as we know, ether (*akasha*), air (*vayn*), fire (*tejas*), water (*apa*), and earth (*prithvī*) the order in which they are enumerated is that of their development, in accordance with the teaching of the *Veda*.⁴ The effort has often been made to assimilate the elements to the different states or degrees of condensation of physical matter, starting with primordial homogeneous ether, which fills the whole expanse, thus uniting between them all the parts of the corporeal world; from this point of view, proceeding from the densest to the most subtle, that is, in the inverse order of their differentiation, the earth is made to correspond to the solid state, water to the liquid state, air to the gaseous state, and fire to a still more rarefied state rather similar to the 'radiant state' recently discovered by the physicists and currently under investigation with the help of their special methods of observation

2. However, the five *tanmītras* cannot be considered as being manifested by these conditions, any more than they can by the elements and the perceptible qualities that correspond to them; on the contrary, it is by the five *tanmatras* (considered as principle, support, and end) that all these things are manifested, followed by everything resulting from their unlimited combinations.

3. Each of these primitive elements is called *bhīta*, from *Win* 'to be', more particularly in the sense of 'subsisting'; this term *bhīta* therefore implies a substantial lietermination, which in fact corresponds well to the notion of the corporeal element.

4. The origin of ether and air, not mentioned in the text of the *Veda*, where the genesis of the three other elements is described (*Chhiinda^ya Upanishad*), is indicated in another passage (*Hīnirlyā Upanishad*).

and experimentation. This point of view undoubtedly contains a portion of truth, but it is too systematic, that is, too strictly particularized, and the order it establishes in the elements differs from the preceding on one point, for it places fire before air and immediately after ether, as if it were the first element to differentiate itself within the original cosmic milieu. On the contrary, according to the teaching that conforms to orthodox doctrine, air is the first element, and air, a neutral element (only potentially containing the active-passive duality), differentiating itself through polarization (bringing about this duality from potency to act), produces in itself fire, an active element, and water, a passive element (one could also say 'reactive', that is, acting in reflective mode, correctively to action in spontaneous mode of the complementary element). The reciprocal action and reaction of fire and water gives birth (through a sort of crystallization or residual precipitation) to earth, the 'terminating and final element' of corporeal manifestation. More justifiably, we could consider the elements as different vibratory modalities of physical matter, modalities under which it makes itself perceptible successively (in purely logical succession, naturally)⁵ to each of the senses of our corporeal individuality; moreover, all of this will be sufficiently explained and justified through the considerations we will bring out later in this study.

Above all, we must establish that ether and air are distinct elements, contrary to what is maintained by some heterodox schools;⁶ but to make what we are going to say on this point more comprehensible, let us first recall that the five conditions taken together, to which corporeal existence is subject are space, time, matter, form, and life. Consequently, in order to set forth these five conditions in a single definition, it can be said that a body is 'a material form living

5. We cannot in any way consider such a concept as that of the ideal figure imagined by Condillac in his *Train. 1 des Sensations*.

6. Notably the *Jainas*, the *Rauddhas* and the *Charvakas*, with whom most of the (reek atomist philosophers are in accord on this point; an exception must be made however for Empedocles, who admitted the five elements but imagined them developing in the following order: ether, fire, earth, waler, and air. We will not insist on this, however, for we do not intend to examine here the opinions of the different (reek schools of physical philosophy'.

in time and space'; let us add that when we use the expression 'physical world', it is always as a synonym of 'domain of corporeal manifestation'.⁷ It is only provisionally that we have enumerated these conditions in the preceding order, without prejudgment of relations between them, until in the course of our exposition we determine their respective correspondences with the five senses and the five elements, which, moreover, are all likewise subject to this set of five conditions.

[1] *Akasha*, ether, considered as the most subtle element and the one from which all the others proceed (forming, in relation to its primordial unity, a quaternary of manifestation), occupies all physical space, as we have said;⁸ however, it is not immediately through the ether that this space is perceived, its particular quality not being extension, but sound; this requires some explanation. In fact, ether, envisaged in itself, is originally homogenous; its differentiation, which engenders the other elements (beginning with air), takes its start from an elementary movement, originating at any point whatsoever, in this indeterminate cosmic milieu. This elementary movement is the prototype of the vibratory movement of physical matter, from the spatial point of view, it is propagated around its starting-point in isotropic mode, that is to say through concentric waves, in a helicoidal vortex along all the directions of space, forming the unclosed figure of an indeterminate sphere. To mark the connections which already link together the different conditions of corporeal existence as enumerated above, we will add that this spherical form is the prototype of all forms; it contains them all potentially, and its first differentiation in polarized mode can be represented by the figuration of *yin-yang*, which is easy to see if one refers back to the symbolic conception of Plato's *Androgyne*.⁹

7. The lack of adequate expressions in Western languages is often a great difficulty for the exposition of metaphysical ideas, as we have already noted on various occasions.

8. 'Ether, which is spread everywhere, enters simultaneously both the exterior and interior of things' (citation of Shankaracharya, in *The Demiurge*, pt. 1, chap. 1 above).

9. This could even be supported by various embryological considerations, but to say more on this now would lead us too far from our present subject.

Movement, even when elementary, necessarily presupposes space, just as it does time, and one can even say that in a way it is the result of these two conditions, since it necessarily depends on them as the effect depends on the cause (in which it is implied potentially);¹⁰ but it is not the elementary movement itself that gives us the direct perception of space (or more exactly of extension). In fact, it is important to note clearly that when we speak of movement produced in the ether at the origin of all differentiation, it is exclusively a question of elementary movement, a movement that we can call undulatory, or simple vibratory movement (the wave-length and the infinitesimal period) in order to indicate its mode of propagation, which is uniform in space and time, or rather the geometric representation of the latter. Only in considering the other elements will we be able to envisage complex modifications of this vibratory movement, modifications which correspond for us to various orders of sensations. This last point is all the more important in that on it lies the entire fundamental distinction between the characteristic qualities of ether and those of air.

We must now ask which among the corporeal sensations presents the perceptible exemplar of vibratory movement, which we perceive directly without its passing through one or another of the various modifications to which it is subject. Now, elementary physics itself teaches us that these conditions are fulfilled by sonorous vibrations, of which the wavelength, just as the speed of propagation,¹¹ falls within the limits of our sensory perception; one can thus say that it is the sense of hearing which directly perceives vibratory movement. It will doubtless be objected at this juncture that it is not the etheric vibration that is thus perceived in sonorous mode, but rather the

10. However, it is clear that in the spatial and temporal conditions which make its production possible, movement can only commence under the action (exteriorized activity, in reflective mode) of a principal cause, which is independent of these conditions (see further on).

11. Velocity in any movement is the relation at any given moment between the space traversed and the time elapsed in traversing it; and, in its general formulation, this relation (constant or variable according to whether the movement is uniform or not) expresses the law governing the movement under consideration (see below).

vibration of a gaseous, liquid, or solid medium. It is no less true that it is ether that forms the original medium of propagation of vibratory movement, which, in order to enter within the limits of perceptibility corresponding to the range of our auditive faculty, must be amplified only by its propagation through a denser medium (ponderable matter), without for all that losing its characteristic of simple vibratory movement (in this case, however, its wavelength and frequency are no longer infinitesimal). In order thus to manifest the sonorous quality, it is necessary that this movement already possess it potentially (directly)¹² in its original medium, ether, of which consequently this quality, in its potential state (of primordial indifferenciation), really constitutes its characteristic nature in relation to our corporeal sensibility.¹³

On the other hand, if one investigates by which of the five senses time is more particularly manifested to us, it is easy to see that it is the sense of hearing; moreover, this is a fact that can be verified experimentally by all those who are accustomed to examining the respective origins of their various perceptions. The reason is as follows: for time to be perceived materially (that is, for it be in contact with matter, particularly as regards our corporeal organism), it must be measurable, for in the physical world this is a general characteristic of all perceptible quality (when considered as such).¹¹

12. It also potentially possesses the other sensory qualities as well, but indirectly, since it can manifest them—that is, produce them in act—only through different complex modifications (amplification being on the contrary only a simple modification, the first of all).

13. Moreover, this same sonorous quality belongs equally to the oilier four elements, no longer as their own or characteristic quality, but insofar as they all proceed from ether. Each element, proceeding immediately from the one preceding it in the order of their successive development, is perceptible to the same senses as the latter, and, in addition, to another sense which corresponds to its own particular nature.

14. This characteristic is implied by the presence of matter among the conditions of physical existence; but, in order to realize measure, it is to space that we must link all the other conditions, as we have here for time. We measure matter itself by division, and it is divisible only insofar as it is extended, that is to say situated in space (see further on for the demonstration of the absurdity of the atomist theory).

Now, for us it is not direct because it is not in itself divisible, and we only conceive the measure through division, at least in the usual and perceptible way (for one can conceive of other modes of measure, such as integration for example). Time will therefore be rendered measurable only insofar as it expresses itself according to a divisible variable, and as we shall see further on, this variable can only be space, divisibility being a quality essentially inherent to the latter. Consequently, in order to measure time it will be necessary to envisage it insofar as it enters into contact with space, as it is combined therewith, as it were, and the result of this combination is the movement by which space is traversed, which, being the sum of a series of elementary displacements envisaged in successive mode (that is, precisely under the temporal condition), is a function¹³ of the time elapsed to traverse it. The relation existing between this space and this time expresses the law of movement under consideration.¹⁶ Conversely, time will then likewise be expressed in relation to space, by reversing the previously considered relation between these two conditions in a determined movement; this amounts to considering this movement as a spatial representation of time. The most natural representation will be that which represents it numerically by the simplest function; it will therefore be a uniform oscillatory movement (rectilinear or circular), one, that is, with a constant velocity or oscillatory period, which can be regarded as no more than a sort of amplification (implying moreover a differentiation in relation to the directions of space) of the elementary vibratory movement. But since this is also the characteristic of sonorous vibration, we see immediately by this that it is hearing which, among the senses, particularly gives us the perception of time.

We must now observe that even if space and time are the necessary conditions of movement, they are not its first causes; they are themselves the effects by means of which is manifested movement, itself another effect (secondary in relation to the preceding ones,

15. In the mathematical sense of a quantity that varies according to the value of another quantity.

16. This is the formula of velocity, of which we have spoken earlier, and which, considered for each moment (that is to say, for the infinitesimal variations of time and space), represents the derivative of space in relation to time.

which can be regarded in this sense as its immediate causes since it is conditioned by them) of the same essential causes, causes which potentially contain the integrality of all their effects, and are synthesized in the total and supreme Cause conceived as the unlimited and unconditioned Universal Power.¹⁷ On the other hand, for movement to actually occur, there must be something which is moved, in other words a substance (in the etymological sense of the word)¹⁸ on which it is exercised; that which is moved is matter, which thus

17. This is clearly expressed in biblical symbolism: as regards the special cosmogonic application to the physical world, *Cain* ('the strong and powerful transformer, the one who centralizes, seizes and assimilates to himself') corresponds to time, *Abel* ('the gentle and peaceful liberator, the one who withdraws and calms, who vanishes, who flees the center'), to space, and *Seth* ('the base and the basis of things') to movement (see the works of Fabre d'Olivet [esp. *Cain* (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1923)], *Ei*>). The birth of *Cain* precedes that of *Abel*, which is to say that the perceptible manifestation of time precedes (logically) that of space, just as sound is the perceptible quality which develops first; the murder of *Abel* by *Cain* represents then the apparent destruction—in the exteriority of things—of simultaneity by succession. The birth of *Seth* is consecutive to this murder, as conditioned by what it represents, but *Seth*, or movement, does not proceed in itself from *Caïtt* and *Abel*, or from time and space, although its manifestation is a consequence of the action of one on the other (hence regarding space as passive in relation to time); but, like them, he is born from *Atlant* himself, that is, that he proceeds as directly as do they from the exteriorization of the powers of Universal Man, who has, as Fabre d'Olivet says, 'generated, in the midst of its integrating faculty, its reflective shadow.'

Time, under its three aspects of past, present, and future, unites between them all the modifications—considered as successive—of each of the beings that it leads through the Current of Forms toward the final Transformation; thus *Shiva*, under the aspect of *Mahadeva*, having three eyes and holding the *trifhida* (trident), keeps to the center of the Wheel of Filings. Space, product of the expansion of the potentialities of a principal and central point, makes the multiplicity of things coexist in its unity; now these things, considered (exteriorly and analytically) as simultaneous, are all contained in it and penetrated by ether, which entirely fills space. Likewise, *Vishnu* under the aspect of *Vasudeva*, manifests things, penetrating them in their intimate essence through multiple modifications distributed along the circumference of the Wheel of Filings, without the Unity of its supreme Essence being altered (cf. *Bhagavad Gita*, 10). Finally, movement, or better, 'mutation', is the law of all modification or diversification in the manifested order, a cyclic and evolutive law, which manifests *Prajapati* or *Brahma* considered as 'Ford of the Creatures' at the same time that it is 'the Provider of Substance |S>bst-nitenrl and organic Sustainer'.

18. But not in the sense understood by Spinoza.

does not intervene in the production of movement except as a purely passive condition. The reactions of matter are subject to movement (since passivity always implies a reaction) and develop in matter the different perceptible qualities, which, as we have already said, correspond to the elements the combinations of which constitute this modality of matter (considered as object, not of perception, but of pure conception)¹⁹ that we know as the 'substratum' of physical manifestation. In this domain, activity is therefore neither inherent nor spontaneous in matter, but belongs to it in a reflexive fashion insofar as this matter coexists with space and time; and it is this activity of matter in movement which constitutes, not life in itself, but the manifestation of life in the domain that we are considering. The first effect of this activity is to give form to this matter, for it is necessarily formless so long as it is in a homogenous and undifferentiated state, which is that of primordial ether; it is only capable of taking on all the forms potentially contained within the integral extension of its particular possibility.²⁰ It can thus be said that it is also movement that determines the manifestation of form in physical or corporeal mode; and, just as all form proceeds from the spherical primordial form by differentiation, so all movement can be reduced to a set of elements each of which is a vibratory helicoidal movement differing from the elementary spherical vortex only in that space will no longer be envisaged as isotropic.

We have already had occasion to consider the five conditions of corporeal existence taken as a whole, and we will have to return to this subject from different points of view as we consider each of the four elements the respective characteristics of which remain to be studied.

[21 *Vayu* is air, and more particularly air in movement (or considered as principle of differentiated movement²¹ since in its original meaning this word really means breath or wind); mobility is thus

19. Cf. the dogma of the 'Immaculate Conception' (see 'Pages dedicated to Sahaif Ataridiyah', by Abdul-Hadi, in *Ln (inose)*, January 1911, p3s).

20. See "I he Demiurge", pt. 1, chap. 1 (citation from the *Vcdn*).

21. As we shall see, this differentiation implies above all the idea of one or several specialized directions in space.

considered as the characteristic nature of this element,²² which is the first to be differentiated from the primordial ether (and which, like ether, is still neutral, the exterior polarization appearing by duality as the complementarity Fire and Water, and not before). In fact, this first differentiation necessitates a complex movement, constituted by a series (combination or coordination) of elementary vibratory movements, and determining a rupture of the homogeneity of the cosmic milieu by propagating itself according to certain particular and determined directions from its point of origin. Once this differentiation takes place, space must no longer be regarded as isotropic; on the contrary, it can then be related to a complex of several defined directions taken as axes of coordinates, and which, serving to measure it in any portion of its extension—and even, theoretically, in the totality of the latter—are what one calls the dimensions of space. These coordinate axes (at least according to the ordinary idea of so-called ‘Euclidean’ space, which corresponds directly to the sensible perception of corporeal extension) will be three orthogonal diameters of the indeterminate spheroid that comprise the full extension of its deployment, and their center can be any point of this extension, which latter will then be considered as the product of the development of all spatial virtualities contained in this point (principally indeterminate). It is important to note that the point in itself is not contained in space and cannot in any way be conditioned by it, because on the contrary it is the point that creates out of its own ‘ipseity’ redoubled or polarized into essence and substance,²³ which amounts to saying that it contains space

22. The word *Viiyi* derives from the verbal root *vd*, ‘to go’, ‘to move’ (which is still retained in the French *it vn*, whereas the roots *i* and *pi*, which are linked to the same idea, are found respectively in the Latin *ire* and the English *to go*). Analogically, the atmospheric air, considered as milieu surrounding our body and affecting our organism, is rendered perceptible to us by its displacement (kinetic and heterogeneous state) before we perceive its pressure (static and homogenous state). Let us recall that *Aer* (from the root *S*, which is more especially related to rectilinear movement) signifies ‘that which gives to everything the principle of movement,’ according to Fabre d’Olivet.

23. In the field of manifestation considered, essence is represented as the center (initial point), and substance as the circumference (indefinite surface of terminal expansion from this point); cf. the hieroglyphic meaning of the Hebraic particle ‘R, formed of the two extreme letters of the alphabet.

potentially. It is space that proceeds from the point, and not (the point that is determined by space; but secondarily (all manifestation or exterior modification being only contingent and accidental in relation to its 'intimate nature'), the point determines itself in space in order to realize the actual extension of its potentialities of unlimited multiplication (of itself by itself). Again, one can say that this primordial and principial point fills all of space by the deployment of its possibilities (envisaged in active mode in the point itself dynamically 'effecting' the extension, and in passive mode in this same extension realized statically). It is situated in space only when it is considered in each particular position that it is able to occupy, that is to say in each of its modifications corresponding precisely to each of its special possibilities. Thus extension already exists in the potential state in the point itself; it starts to exist in the actual state only when this point, in its first manifestation, is in a way doubled in order to stand face to face with itself, for one can then speak of the elementary distance between two points (although in principle and in essence the latter are only one and the same point), whereas, when one considers only a single point (or rather when one considers the point only under the aspect of principial unity), it could obviously not be a question of distance. However, one must point out that the elementary distance is only what corresponds to this doubling in the domain of spatial or geometric representation (which only has the character of symbol for us). Metaphysically, the point is considered to represent Being in its unity and its principial identity, that is to say *Atnia* outside of any special condition (or determination) and all differentiation; this point itself, its exteriorization (which can be considered as its image, in which it is reflected) and the distance that joins them while at the same time separating them, and that marks the relationship existing between both (a relationship that implies causality, indicated geometrically by the direction of the distance, envisaged as a 'directed' segment, and going from point-cause to point-effect), corresponds respectively to the three terms of the ternary that we have distinguished in Being considered as knowing itself (that is to say in *Buddhi*), terms which, outside this point of view, are perfectly identical among themselves, and which are designated *Sat*, *Chit*, and *Ananda*.

We say that the point is the symbol of Being in its Unity; this latter can in fact be conceived in the following way: if the extension of a dimension, or a line, is measured quantitatively by a number a , the quantitative measure of the extension in two dimensions, or of the surface, will be of the form a^2 , and that of the extension in three dimensions, or of volume, will be of the form a^3 . Thus, adding a dimension to the extension is equivalent to raising by one the exponent of the corresponding quantity (which is the measure of this extension), and, inversely, to take away a dimension from the extension is equivalent to diminishing this very exponent by one. If the last dimension, that of the line (and, consequently, the final unity of the exponent), is removed, it remains the point geometrically, and numerically it remains a , that is, from the algebraic point of view, unity itself, which identifies quantitatively the point of this unity. It is therefore an error to believe, as some do, that the point can only correspond numerically to zero, for it is already an affirmation, that of Being pure and simple (in all its universality). No doubt it has no dimension, because in itself it is not situated in space, which latter contains, as we have said, only the indefinitude of its manifestations (or of its particular determinations); since it is without dimension, it obviously no longer has any form; but to say that it is non-formal is by no means to say that it is nothing (zero is considered thus by those who assimilate the point to it), and moreover, although without form, it contains space potentially, which, realized in actuality, will in its turn be the container of all forms, at least in the physical world.²⁴

24. In a wholly elementary way one can even take account of the development of spatial potentialities contained in the point by observing that the displacement of the point engenders the line, as likewise that of the line engenders the surface, and the surface in turn engenders volume. However, this point of view presupposes the realization of extension, and even of extension in three dimensions, for clearly each of the elements considered successively can only produce the following one by moving in a dimension that is actually exterior to it, and in relation to which it was already situated. On the contrary, all these elements are realized simultaneously—time then no longer intervening—in and through the original deployment of the indefinite and unclosed spheroid we have considered, a deployment that is effected not in actual space, whatever this may be, but in a pure void deprived of all positive attribution, and which is in no way productive by itself, but which, in passive

We have said that extension exists in actuality once the point has manifested itself by its self-exteriorization, since it is by this very act that the point realizes space. It should not be thought that this assigns a temporal beginning to space, however, for it is a question of a purely logical starting-point only, of an ideal principle of space understood in the fullness of its extension, and not limited to corporeal extension alone.²⁵ Time intervenes only when the two positions of the point are envisaged as successive, while on the other hand the relation of causality that exists between them implies their simultaneity; and it is also insofar as this first differentiation is envisaged under the aspect of succession, that is, in temporal mode, that the resulting distance (as intermediary between the principal

potential, is full of all that the point contains in active potential (being thus, in a way, the negative aspect of *that* of which the point is the positive aspect). This void, thus filled in an originally homogenous and isotropic way with the virtualities of the principal point, will be the milieu—or, if you will, the 'geometric place'—of all the modifications and ulterior differentiations of the latter, thus being in relation to universal manifestation what ether is particularly for our physical world. Envisaged in this way, and in this plenitude that it holds integrally from the expansion (in exteriorizing mode) of the point's active potentialities (which are themselves all the elements of this plenitude), it *is*. Without this plenitude it would not be, since the void can only be conceived as 'non-entity', and thus it is entirely differentiated from the 'universal void' (*sat va shītitya*) of the Buddhists, who, moreover, attempting to identify it with ether, regard the latter as 'non-substantial' and consequently do not count it as one of the corporeal elements. Moreover, the true 'universal void' would not be this void just considered, which is capable of containing all the possibilities of Being (symbolized spatially by the virtualities of the point), but is, quite to the contrary, everything outside of Being, where there can no longer in any way be a question of 'essence' or of 'substance'. This would then be Non-Being or metaphysical zero, or, more exactly, an aspect of Non-Being, which, moreover, is full of everything that in total Possibility is not subject to any development in exterior or manifested mode, and which is thereby absolutely inexpressible.

25. Corporeal extension is the only one known to astronomers, and even then they can only study a certain portion of it by their methods of observation. Moreover, this is what produces for them the illusion of the so-called 'infinity of space', for by the effect of a veritable intellectual myopia that seems inherent to all analytical science, they are induced to consider as 'to infinity' [sic] everything that exceeds the range of their sensory experience, and which in relation to them and the domain that they study, is in reality no more than simple indefinity.

point and its exterior reflection, the first by implication being immediately situated in relation to the second)—'can be regarded as measuring the amplitude of elementary vibratory movement, of which we have spoken previously.

However, without the coexistence of simultaneity with succession, movement itself would not be possible, for then the mobile point (or at least considered as such in the course of its process of modification) would be there where it is not, which is absurd, or it would not be anywhere, which amounts to saying that there would not actually be any space where movement can in fact occur.²⁷ Ultimately all the arguments that have been raised against the possibility of movement, notably by certain Greek philosophers, amount to this, and it is this question, moreover, that most embarrasses academicians and modern philosophers. Its solution is very simple, however, and as we have already indicated elsewhere, lies precisely in the coexistence of succession and simultaneity, succession in the modalities of manifestation, in the actual state, but simultaneity in principle, in the potential state, making possible the logical linking of causes and effects (every effect being implied and contained potentially in its cause, which is in no way affected or modified by the actualization of this effect).²⁸ From the physical point of view, the idea of succession is tied to the temporal condition and the idea of simultaneity to the spatial condition;²⁹ movement, in its passage

26. This localization already implies, moreover, a first reflection preceding the one that we shall consider here but with which the principal point identifies itself (by determining itself) in order to make of it the effective center of extension in the process of realization, and from which it is then reflected in all the other points (purely virtual in relation to it) of this extension, which is its field of manifestation.

27. The point is in fact 'somewhere' once it is situated or determined in space (its potentiality in passive mode)—so as to realize this space, that is—and in this very realization, which all movement, even elementary movement, necessarily presupposes, to bring it from potency to act.

28. Leibnitz seems to have caught at least a glimpse of this solution when he formulated his theory of 'pre-established harmony', which has generally been very poorly understood by those who have tried to interpret it.

29. Leibnitz respectively defines time and space by means of these two notions, which are wholly ideal when envisaged outside of this specialized point of view, under which alone they are rendered perceptible.

from potency to act, results from the union or the combination of these two conditions, and reconciles (or balances) the two corresponding ideas, by making a body coexist with itself in simultaneous mode from the purely spatial point of view (which is essentially static), identity thus being conserved through all its modifications, contrary to the Buddhist theory of 'total dissolubility'. This coexistence underlies an indefinite series of positions (which are so many modifications of this same body, and are accidental and contingent in relation to what constitutes its intimate reality, in substance as in essence), positions which are successive from the temporal point of view (kinetic in its relation with the spatial point of view).³⁰

On the other hand, since actual movement supposes time and its coexistence with space, we are led to the following formulation: a body can move according to one or another of the three dimensions of physical space, or following a direction that is a combination of these three dimensions, for whatever the direction (fixed or variable) of its movement, it can always be reduced to a more or less complex series of components related to the three axes of the coordinates to which is linked the space under consideration; but in every case this body moves always and necessarily in time. As a result, time will become another dimension of space if one changes succession into simultaneity; in other words, to suppress the temporal condition amounts to adding a supplementary dimension to physical space, of which the new space thus obtained constitutes a prolongation or extension. This fourth dimension thus corresponds to 'omnipresence' in the domain considered, and it is through this transposition in 'non-time' that we can conceive the 'permanent actuality' of the manifested Universe. While noting that

30. It is quite evident, in fact, that all these positions coexist simultaneously insofar as they are places situated in one and the same extension, of which they are only different portions (quantitatively equivalent, moreover), all equally capable of being occupied by one and the same body, which on the one hand must be envisaged statically in each of these positions when considered in isolation in relation to the others, and also, on the other hand, when all of them are considered as a whole outside the temporal point of view.

all modification is not assimilable to movement, which is only an exterior modification of a special order, this also explains all the phenomena commonly regarded as miraculous or supernatural³¹—quite mistakenly, since they still belong to the domain of our present individuality in one or the other of its multiple modalities, for the corporeal individuality constitutes only a very small part (hereof, a domain in which the conception of 'fixed time' allows us to embrace fully all indefinitude.³²

31. There are facts that seem inexplicable only because in searching for an explanation one does not move outside the ordinary conditions of physical time. Hence it is said that the sudden reconstitution of injured organic tissues that is observed in certain cases regarded as 'miraculous' cannot be natural because it is contrary to the physiological laws of the regeneration of these tissues, which laws operate through multiple and *successive* generations (or bipartitions) of cells, and necessarily require the collaboration of time, first, it is not proved that a regeneration of this kind, as sudden as it may be, is truly *instantaneous*, that is, not actually requiring *any time* in order to occur, and it is possible that in certain circumstances the multiplication of the cells is simply rendered much more rapid than in normal cases, to the point of no longer requiring even the least duration detectable to our sensory perception. Next, even in admitting that it is really a question of a truly *instantaneous* phenomenon, there is still the possibility that in certain particular conditions differing from the ordinary, but nonetheless quite natural, this phenomenon is in fact accomplished *outsid of time* (implying the 'instantaneity' in question, which, in the cases considered, amounts to the *simultaneity* of the multiple cellular bipartitions, or at least as expressed in its corporeal or physiological correspondence), or, if one prefers, that it is accomplished *in 'mm-time'*, whereas in ordinary conditions it is accomplished *in time*. It would no longer be a miracle for the person who could understand its real meaning and resolve the following question, which is much more paradoxical in appearance than it is in reality: how, while living *in the present*, can we act so that any event produced *in the past* has not happened? And it is essential to note that this (which is not more impossible *a priori* than it is to *presently* prevent the realization of an event *in the future*, since the link of succession is not a causal link) does not in any way suppose a return to the past as such (such a return being a manifest impossibility since it would equally be a transport into the future as such), since there is obviously neither past nor future in relation to the 'eternal present'.

32. In this connection, we might add a remark on the numeric representation of this indefinitude (continuing to take it under its spatial symbol): the line is measured, that is to say represented quantitatively by a number a to the first power; but since its measure may also be taken using decimal division as basis, one can write $a = 10^n$. In this case, then* one will have for the surface: $a^2 = 100n^2$, and for the solid: $a^3 = 1000n^3$; for the extension to four dimensions, it will again be necessary to

Let us return to our conception of the point filling all of space through the indefinitude of its manifestations, that is to say of its multiple and contingent modifications. From the dynamic point of view³³ the latter must be considered in space (of which they are all the points) as so many centers of force (of which each is potentially the very center of space), and force is nothing other than the affirmation in manifested mode of the will of Being, symbolized by the point. In the universal sense, this will is the active power or 'productive energy' (*Shakti*)⁴ of Being indissolubly united to itself, and exerted on the actional domain of Being, that is to say, using the same symbolism, on space itself envisaged passively, that is, from the static point of view (as the field of action of any one of these centers of force).³⁵ Thus, in all its manifestations and in each of

add a factor a , giving: $a^* = 10,00011$ '. Furthermore, it can be said that all the powers of 10 are contained virtually in its fourth power, just as the denary, complete manifestation of unity, is contained in the quaternary

33. It is important to point out that 'dynamic' is in no way synonymous with 'kinetic'; the movement may be considered as the consequence of a certain action of force (thus rendering this action measurable by means of a spatial translation permitting a definition of its 'intensity'), but it cannot be identified with this force itself. Furthermore, under other modalities and in other conditions, the force (or the will) in action obviously produces something completely different from movement, since, as we have just pointed out above, the latter constitutes only a particular case among the indefinitude of possible modifications comprised in the exterior world, that is, in the whole of universal manifestation.

34. Moreover, this active power can be envisaged under different aspects: as creative power, it is more particularly called *Kriya-Shakti*, whereas *Jndna-Shakti* is the power of knowledge, *lehchha-Shakti* the power of desire, and so on, considering the unlimited multiplicity of attributes manifested by Being in the exterior world, but for all that without in any way dividing the unity of Universal Potency in itself—which is necessarily correlative with the essential unity of Being, and is implied by this very unity—into the plurality of these aspects. — In the psychological order, this active power is represented by HSR, 'volitional facility' of CK, the 'intellectual man' (see Fabre d'Olivet, *The Hebraic Tongue Restored*).

35. Universal Possibility, regarded in its integral unity (but, of course, as to the possibilities of manifestation only), as the feminine side of Being (of which the masculine side is *Parasha*, which is Being itself in its supreme and 'non-acting' identity in itself), is thus polarized here into active potency (*Shakti*) and passive potency (*Prakriti*).

them, the point can be regarded in relation to these manifestations as being polarized in active and passive mode, or, if one prefers, direct and reflected mode;³⁶ the dynamic, active, or direct point of view corresponds to essence, and the static, passive, or reflective point of view corresponds to substance;³⁷ but of course the consideration of these two complementary points of view in every modality of the manifestation in no way alters the unity of the principal point (any more than of Being, of which it is the symbol), and this allows one clearly to conceive the fundamental identity of the essence and the substance, which, as we said at the beginning of this study, are the two poles of universal manifestation.

Extension, considered from the substantial point of view, is not distinct as regards our physical world from the primordial ether (*«kasha»*), so long as it does not produce therein a complex movement determining a formal differentiation; but the indefinitude of possible combinations of movements then gives birth in this extension to the indefinitude of forms, all differentiating themselves, as we have just shown, starting from the original spherical form. From the physical point of view, movement is the necessary factor in all differentiation, and thus the condition of all formal manifestations, and also, simultaneously, of all vital manifestations, both in the domain considered, being equally subject to time and space, and presupposing, on the other hand, a material 'substratum' on which this activity is physically exercised through movement. It is important to note that every corporeal form is necessarily living, since life

36. But this polarization remains potential (therefore wholly ideal, and not perceptible) as long as we do not have to envisage the actual complementarism of fire and water (each of the latter remaining likewise potentially polarized); till then, the two aspects active and passive, can be dissociated only conceptually, since air is still a neutral element.

37. For every point in extension, the static aspect is reflected in relation to the dynamic aspect, which latter is direct as long as it participates immediately in the essence of the principal point (implying an identification), but which in its indivisible unity, however, is itself reflected in relation to this point considered in itself. One must never lose sight of the fact that the consideration of activity and passivity implies only a relation or a link between two terms envisaged as mutually complementary.

as well as form is a condition of all physical existence.³⁸ Moreover, this physical life consists of an indefinitude of degrees, its most general divisions corresponding to the three kingdoms mineral, vegetable, and animal, at least from our terrestrial point of view, but without the distinctions between these kingdoms having more than a wholly relative value.³⁹ It follows that in this domain any form is always in a state of movement or activity, manifesting the life proper to it, and that it can be envisaged statically, that is to say at rest, only through a conceptual abstraction.⁴⁰

It is through mobility that form manifests itself physically and is rendered perceptible to us, and, just as mobility is the characteristic nature of air ($ra/t/$), touch is the sense which corresponds properly to form, for it is by touch that we generally perceive form. But owing to its limited mode of perception which operates exclusively

38. (Conversely, it is clearly understood thereby that in the physical world life cannot manifest itself otherwise than in forms; hut this is no proof against the possible existence of a non-formal life outside of this physical world, without it being legitimate however to consider life itself, in all the indefinitude of its extension, as being more than a contingent possibility comparable to all the others, and in the same way as the others, arising in the determination of certain individual states of manifested beings, states which proceed from certain specialized and refracted aspects of Universal Being.

39. It is impossible to determine characteristics that permit the establishment of certain and precise distinctions between these three kingdoms, which seem closely akin, especially in their most elementary forms, which are in some way embryonic.

40. From this it is sufficiently clear what, from the physical point of view, one should think of the so-called 'principle of inertia of matter': truly inert matter, that is to say matter deprived of all attribution or actual property, and therefore indistinct and undifferentiated; a pure passive and receptive power on which is exercised an activity of which it is not the cause, is, we repeat, only conceivable when envisaged apart from this activity of which it is only the 'substratum' and from which it takes all its reality. It is this activity (to which it is not opposed, in order to furnish a support for it, except by the effect of a contingent reflection which does not give to it any independent reality) which, through reaction (by reason of this very reflection), in fact, in the special conditions of physical existence, makes of it the place of all sensory phenomena (just like other phenomena which do not reappear within the limits of our sense perception), the substantial and plastic milieu of all corporeal modifications.

through contact,⁴¹ this sense still cannot directly and immediately give us the full idea of corporeal extension in three dimensions,⁴² which belongs only to the sense of sight; but here the actual existence of this extension is already assumed through that of form, since it conditions the manifestation of this latter, at least in the physical world.⁴³

Moreover, insofar as air proceeds from ether, sound is also perceptible therein; since, as we have established above, differentiated movement implies the distinction of the directions of space, the role of air in the perception of sound, apart from its quality of medium in which the etheric vibrations are amplified, will consist principally in enabling us to recognize the direction according to which this sound is produced in relation to the actual situation of our body. In the physiological organs of hearing, the part corresponding to this perception of direction (a perception which, moreover, effectively becomes complete only with and through the notion of extension in three dimensions) constitutes what are known as the 'semi-circular canals', which are precisely oriented according to the three dimensions of physical space.⁴⁴

Finally, to a point of view other than that of (the perceptible qualities, air is the substantial medium whence the vital breath (*prāna*) proceeds. This is why the five phases of respiration and assimilation, which are modalities or aspects of *prāna*, are identified as a whole with *vāyu*. This is the particular role of air with regard to life; hence

41. In this connection it must be noted that the organs of touch are distributed over the whole surface (exterior and interior) of our organism which finds itself in contact with the atmospheric medium.

42. The contact can only be operated between surfaces by reason of the impenetrability of physical matter (a property to which we shall return later), so that the resulting perception can therefore give, in an immediate way, only the notion of surface, in which just two dimensions of extension occur.

43. We always add this restriction so as not to limit in any way the indefinite possibilities for combinations of the various contingent conditions of existence, and in particular those of corporeal existence, which are found to be united in a necessarily constant way only in the domain of this special modality.

44. This explains why it is said that the directions of space are the ears of *Vaish-
|i|nara*.

we see that, just as we had foreseen for this element as for ether, we have really had to consider the totality of the five conditions of corporeal existence and their relations. The same will hold true for each of the other three elements, which proceed from the first two, and which we shall now discuss.¹⁵

45. [The text ends here. En.]

SOME MODERN ERRORS

1

THE 'EMPIRICISM' OF THE ANCIENTS

ON numerous occasions we have already explained the fundamental difference between the sciences of the ancients and the moderns, which is that between traditional and profane sciences; but this is a question involving so many commonly held errors that it cannot be overemphasized. Thus it is often affirmed as self-evident that the science of the ancients was purely 'empirical', which basically amounts to saying that it was not really even a science strictly speaking, but only a kind of practical and utilitarian knowledge. Now it is easy to see on the contrary that preoccupations of this order have never held such sway as among the moderns, and also, even without going further back than what is called 'classical' antiquity, that everything concerned with experimentation was considered by the ancients as only constituting knowledge of a very inferior degree. It is not very clear how all of this can be reconciled with the preceding affirmation; and, by a remarkable inconsistency, those very people who express the latter almost never fail to reproach the ancients for their disdain for experimentation!

The source of the error in question, as also for a multitude of others, is the notion of 'evolution' or 'progress': by virtue of the latter, it is claimed that all knowledge began in a rudimentary state from which it was to be gradually raised and developed. A sort of crude, primitive simplicity is postulated which, of course, cannot be the object of any observation; and it is maintained that everything started from below, as if it were not contradictory to accept that the superior can originate in the inferior. Such a concept is not just any error, but quite specifically a 'counter-truth'; by this we mean that it

goes right against the grain of the truth by a strange inversion which is very characteristic of the modern spirit. The truth, on the contrary, is that since the beginning there has been a sort of degradation or continual 'descent', going from spirituality to materiality, that is, from the superior to the inferior, and manifesting itself in all the domains of human activity; and from this, in fairly recent times, sprang the profane sciences separated from any transcendent principle and justified solely by the practical applications to which they give rise, for this is in sum all that interests modern man, who cares little for pure knowledge, and who, as we have just said, only attributes his own tendencies¹ to the ancients because he cannot even conceive that theirs may have been altogether different, any more than he can imagine that there may exist sciences altogether different in objective and method from those which he himself cultivates exclusively.

This same error also implies 'empiricism' when understood to designate a philosophical theory, that is, the idea —also very modern—that all knowledge derives entirely from experience and, more precisely, from perceptible experience; in reality, this is only one form of the claim that everything comes from below. It is clear that outside of this preconceived notion there is no reason to suppose that the first state of all knowledge must have been an 'empirical' state; this comparison between the two meanings of the same word certainly has nothing fortuitous about it, and it could be said that it is the philosophical 'empiricism' of the moderns that leads them to attribute to the ancients a *de facto* 'empiricism'. Now it must be admitted that we have never been able to understand even the possibility of such a concept, so much does it seem to us to go against all evidence: that there may be knowledge that does not come from the senses, is, purely and simply, a matter of fact; but the moderns, who claim that they rely only on facts, ignore them or readily deny them when they do not agree with their theories. In short, the existence of this notion of 'empiricism' simply proves that

1. It is by an illusion of the same kind that moderns, because they are driven above all by 'economic' motives, claim to explain all historical events by linking them to causes of this order.

among those who have expressed it and among those who accept it, certain faculties of a supra-sensible order beginning, it goes without saying, with pure intellectual intuition, have entirely disappeared.²

Generally speaking, the sciences as understood by the moderns, that is to say the secular sciences, actually assume nothing more or less than a rational elaboration of perceptible data; it is therefore they who are truly 'empirical' as to their point of departure; and it could be said that moderns unduly confuse this starting-point of their sciences with the origin of all science. Yet even in their sciences there are sometimes diminished or altered vestiges of ancient knowledge, the real nature of which escapes them; and here we are thinking especially of the mathematical sciences, the essential concepts of which cannot be drawn from sensory experience. The efforts of certain philosophers to explain 'empirically' the origin of these ideas is at times irresistibly comical! And, if some are tempted to protest when we speak of diminishment or alteration for the worse, we will ask them to compare in this regard, for example, the traditional science of numbers to profane arithmetic; no doubt they will then be able to understand quite easily what is meant.

Moreover, most of the profane sciences really owe their origin only to fragments or even, one could say, to residues from misunderstood traditional sciences: elsewhere we have mentioned as particularly characteristic the example of chemistry, which arose, not from genuine alchemy, but from its denaturation by 'puffers', that is, by the profane who, ignorant of the true meaning of hermetic symbols, understood them in a crudely literal sense. We have also cited the case of astronomy, which represents only the material portion of ancient astrology, isolated from everything that constituted the 'spirit' of this science, and irremediably lost to moderns, who go off spouting foolishly that astronomy was discovered in a totally 'empirical' way by Chaldean shepherds, without suspecting that the

2. Disappearance of these faculties as to their effective exercise, of course, for in spite of everything they subsist in the latent slate in every human being; but this kind of atrophy can reach such a degree that their manifestation becomes completely impossible, and this is indeed what we notice in the great majority of our contemporaries.

name 'Chaldean' was really the designation of a priestly caste! We could multiply examples of the same kind to establish a comparison between sacred cosmogonies and the theory of the 'nebula' and other similar hypotheses, or, in another order of ideas, to show the degeneration of medicine from its ancient dignity of 'sacerdotal art', and so on. The conclusion would always be the same: secular people, having illegitimately taken over fragments of knowledge of which they can grasp neither the scope nor the significance, have formed so-called independent sciences which are worth just exactly what they themselves are worth; and thus modern science, which has sprung from them, is literally only the science of the ignorant.³

The traditional sciences, as we have so often said, are characterized essentially by their attachment to transcendent principles, upon which they depend strictly as more or less contingent applications, and this is the complete contrary of 'empiricism'; but the principles necessarily escape the profane, and that is why the latter, even our modern experts, can never really be other than 'empirical'. Since the time when, as a result of the degradation alluded to previously, men have no longer been equally qualified for all knowledge, that is to say, at least since the beginning of the *Kali-Yuga*, the profane became inevitable. However, in order that their truncated and falsified science be taken seriously and pass for what it is not, it was necessary that true knowledge together with the initiatic organizations which were charged with conserving and transmitting it disappear, and this is precisely what has happened in the Western world in the course of the last centuries.

We should add that in the way moderns envisage the knowledge of the ancients one may clearly see this negation of any 'supra-human' element which constitutes the basis of the anti-traditional spirit, and which, after all, is only a direct result of secular ignorance. Not only is everything reduced to purely human proportions, but, as a result of this reversal of all things which the 'evolutionist' conception entails, they go so far as to put the 'infra-human' at the

3. By a curious irony, the 'scientism' of our time insists above all upon proclaiming itself 'secular', without being aware that this is, quite simply, the explicit avowal of that ignorance.

origin. What is most serious is that in the eyes of our contemporaries these things seem to be self-evident; because they no longer even have any inkling that things might be otherwise, they go so far as to state them as if they could not even be disputed, and to present as 'facts' the most unfounded hypotheses. This is most serious, we say, because it is what makes us fear that, having reached such a point, the deviation of the modern spirit may be altogether irremediable.

These considerations will help us understand why it is absolutely futile to seek to establish any accord or reconciliation whatsoever between traditional and secular knowledge, and why the first does not have to ask of the second a 'confirmation' of which it has no need in and of itself. If we stress this, it is because we know how widespread this point of view is today among those who have some idea of traditional doctrines; yet an 'exterior' idea, so to speak, is insufficient to enable one to penetrate their profound nature, as well as to prevent one from being deluded by the false prestige of modern science and its practical applications. The former, by thus putting on the same plane things that are in no way comparable, not only waste their time and effort, but also risk going astray and misleading others into all kinds of false conceptions. And the many varieties of 'occultism' are there to show that this danger is only too real.

2

THE DIFFUSION OF KNOWLEDGE & THE MODERN SPIRIT

WE have already had more than one occasion to say what we think of the modern tendencies to 'propaganda' and 'popularization', and of the incomprehension of true knowledge that they imply; so we do not intend to return yet again to the many disadvantages presented generally by the unconsidered diffusion of an 'education' which is intended to be distributed equally to everyone under forms and by methods that are identical, and that can only result in a kind of levelling; here, as everywhere in our time, quality is sacrificed to quantity. Yet in a relative way this kind of activity is perhaps excusable in light of the very character of the secular education in question, which offers no knowledge in the true sense of the word, and contains absolutely nothing of a profound order. What makes it especially harmful is that it is taken for what it is not and tends to deny everything that is beyond itself, thus stilling all possibilities relating to a higher domain. But what is perhaps more serious still—and what we wish especially to call attention to here—is that some people believe they are able to expound traditional doctrines on the model as it were of this same profane education, applying considerations that take no account of the actual nature of these doctrines, and of the essential differences that exist between them and everything that is today designated by the terms 'science' and 'philosophy'. Here we see the modern spirit penetrating even into what is by very definition radically opposed, so that it is not

difficult to understand what destructive consequences, may result from it, consequences unknown even to those who often in good faith and with no precise intention make themselves the instruments of such penetration.

We have recently had an example of this which is rather surprising in more than one respect: one cannot stifle a certain astonishment in hearing it asserted first of all that 'in India it has long been believed that certain aspects of the Vedantic teaching must be kept secret,' that 'the popularization of certain truths was reputed to be dangerous,' and that one was even forbidden to speak of it outside a small circle of initiates.' There is no call to cite any names here, since this case is of value only to 'illustrate' a certain mentality; but to account for our astonishment we must at least say that these assertions do not come from an orientalist or Theosophist, but from a native Hindu. Now, if there was ever a country where it has always been held that the theoretical aspect of doctrine (for of course there is no question here, of 'realization' and its proper means) could be expounded with no other reservation than that of their ultimate inexpressibility, it is precisely India. Given the actual constitution of traditional Hindu organization, one cannot imagine who could be qualified to prohibit anyone's speaking of this or that; in fact, such a situation can only occur where there is a clear distinction between esoterism and exoterism, which is not the case for India. Neither one say that the 'popularization' of doctrines is dangerous, but rather that, were it even possible, it would simply be useless, since in reality truths of this order resist all 'popularization' by their very nature. However clearly they may be presented, they will be understood only by those qualified to understand them, while for the rest the doctrines will be as if they do not exist. Our opinion of the 'secrets' so dear to pseudo-esoterists is known well enough: a reserve in the theoretical order can only be justified by considerations of simple expediency and thus on purely contingent grounds; ultimately, any outward secret can only have the value of a symbol, or sometimes also that of a 'discipline', which would not be without benefit... But the modern mentality is such that it cannot abide any secret or even any reserve; the import and significance of such things entirely escape it, and its incomprehension in their regard

quite naturally engenders hostility; yet the truly monstrous character of a world in which everything would be made 'public' (we say 'would' for in spite of everything we have not yet come to such a pass) is such that it would merit a special study in itself. But this is not the moment to indulge in perhaps too facile 'anticipations', and we will simply say that we can only pity those who have fallen so low as to be able to live, literally as well as symbolically, in 'hives of glass'.

But to continue with our citations: 'Today, one can no longer take these restrictions into account; the average level of culture has been raised and minds have been prepared to receive the complete teaching.' Here we see as clearly as possible the confusion of traditional teaching with profane education, designated by the term 'culture', which in our time has come to be one of its standard designations. But this is something that has not the least connection to traditional teaching or to the aptitude for receiving it; and in addition, since the so-called raising of the 'average level' has its inevitable counterpart in the disappearance of the intellectual elite, one can truly say that this 'culture' represents exactly the opposite of the preparation in question here. We wonder moreover how a Hindu can completely ignore our present position in the *Kali-Yuga*, and can go so far as to say that 'the time has come when the entire system of the *Vedanta* can be publicly expounded,' whereas the least knowledge of cyclical laws obliges one to say, on the contrary, that they are less favorable than ever; and if it has never been 'within the reach of the common man,' for whom it is not made, it certainly is not so today, for this 'common man' has never been so totally lacking in understanding. Besides, the truth is that for this very reason everything representing traditional knowledge of a truly profound order, and thus corresponding to what an 'integral teaching' must imply, is made increasingly difficult of access —and this everywhere. Faced with the invasive modern and profane spirit, it is all too obvious that it could not be otherwise; how then can one so misunderstand the reality as to affirm its complete opposite, and this with as much tranquillity as if one were expressing the most incontestable of truths?

The reasons our author advances for his current interest in spreading the *Vedantic* teaching are no less extraordinary. First, he

highlights the 'development of social ideas and political institutions'; but even if there truly is a 'development' (and in any case he should specify what sense he intends), this is still something that has no more relation to the understanding of a metaphysical doctrine than has the diffusion of secular education. Moreover, it is enough to observe in any country of the East how political preoccupations hinder the knowledge of traditional truths wherever they have been introduced, for one to think it more justifiable to speak of an incompatibility (more or less of fact) than of a possible agreement between two such 'developments'. We do not really see what connection 'social life', in the purely profane sense as conceived by the moderns, could possibly have with spirituality; on the other hand, there was such a connection when social life was integrated into a traditional civilization. But it is precisely the modern spirit that has destroyed such civilizations, or aims to destroy them wherever they still exist; that being so, what can one really expect from a 'development' the most characteristic trait of which is its opposition to all spirituality?

But he invokes yet another reason: 'Furthermore, for the *Vedanta* as for the truths of science, a scientific secrecy no longer exists today; science does not hesitate to publish the most recent discoveries.' In fact, this profane science is made only for the 'general public', and this is indeed its whole *raison d'être*; it is all too evident that science is really nothing more than it appears to be, since—we cannot say 'in principle', but rather 'in the absence of principle'—it restricts itself to the surface of things. Surely there is nothing in it worth the trouble to keep secret, or, to speak more precisely, that merits being reserved for the use of an elite; and besides, only an elite need do such a thing. What assimilation, then, can one possibly want to establish between the so-called truths of profane science and the teachings of a doctrine such as the *Vedanta*? It is always the same confusion, and one may well wonder just how deeply someone who commends it so insistently can understand the doctrine that he wishes to teach; in any event, assertions of this kind can only prevent this comprehension in those to whom it is addressed. Between the traditional spirit and the modern spirit there really can be no accommodation; every concession made to the second is necessarily

at the expense of the first, and can only result in a weakening of the doctrine, even when its consequences do not go as far as their most extreme and also most logical outcome, that is, to the point of true deformation.

It will be noted that in all this we do not adopt a point of view that includes the hypothetical dangers that a general diffusion of true knowledge could present; we only affirm the pure and simple impossibility of such a diffusion, especially in present conditions, for the world has never been further from true knowledge than it is today. If, however, one insists on speaking of dangers, we will say this: formerly, in explaining doctrinal truths exactly as they are, and without any 'popularization', one sometimes risked being misunderstood, but now the risk is simply that of not being understood at all, which perhaps is in fact less serious in a certain sense, although we do not really see what the partisans of diffusion have to gain thereby.

THE SUPERSTITION OF 'VALUE'

IN certain of our works we have denounced a number of specifically modern 'superstitions', the most striking characteristic of which is that ultimately they rest only on the prestige attributed to a word, a prestige all the greater as the idea evoked by this word is, for most people, the more vague and inconsistent. The influence exercised by such words themselves, independently of what they express or should express, has in fact never been as great as in our time. It is like a caricature of the power inherent in ritual formulas, and those who are most intent on denying the latter are also, through a singular 'backlash', the first to allow themselves to adopt what is actually a kind of profane parody. It goes without saying that this power of formulas or words is not at all of the same order in the two instances: the power of ritual formulas, which is essentially based on 'sacred science', is something fully effective, and is truly operative in the most diverse domains, according to the effects one wishes to obtain; on the contrary, that of their profane counterfeit is naturally only capable—at least directly—of a purely 'psychological' and above all sentimental action, that is, it falls within the most illusory of all domains. This is not to say that such an action is harmless; far from it, for these 'subjective' illusions, however insignificant they may be in themselves, nevertheless have very real consequences in all human activity; and, above all, they contribute greatly to the destruction of all true intellectuality, which moreover is probably the chief function assigned them in the 'plan' of the modern subversion.

The superstitions of which we speak vary to some extent from moment to moment, for in all of this there is a kind of 'fashion', as with all things in our time. We do not mean that when a superstition arises, it at once entirely replaces the others, for on the contrary we can easily observe their coexistence in the contemporary mentality; but at least the most recent takes a predominant place and relegates the others more or less to the background. Thus, keeping more specifically to what we presently have in view, it can be said that there was first the superstition of 'reason', which reached its culmination near the end of the eighteenth century, then the superstitions of 'science' and 'progress', closely attached to the former, but more particularly characteristic of the nineteenth century; more recently still, we see the appearance of the superstition of 'life', which had great success in the early years of the present century. As everything changes with an ever increasing speed, these superstitions, like all the scientific and philosophical theories to which they are linked in a certain way, seem to 'wear out' more and more rapidly. Thus we must now note the emergence of yet another superstition, that of 'value', which apparently only dates from a few years back, but which is already tending to follow in the steps of those that have preceded it.

We are certainly not inclined to exaggerate the importance of philosophy, and above all of modern philosophy, for while recognizing that it may be one of the factors that act more or less on the general mentality, we think that it is far from the most important, and that, under its 'systematic' form, it even represents more of an effect than a cause. As such, however, it expresses in a more clearly defined way what already existed in a diffused state in this mentality, and consequently, in somewhat the same way as a magnifying instrument, it reveals things that could otherwise escape the attention of the observer, or that would be at least more difficult to discern. Also, in order to understand fully what is involved, it helps to recall first of all the stages of the gradual decline of modern philosophical conceptions, which we have already pointed out elsewhere: first, the reduction of all things to the 'human' and to the 'rational'; then the increasingly narrow meaning given to the 'rational' itself, which in the end is envisaged only in its most inferior functions; and finally, a

descent into the 'infra-rational' with so-called 'intuitionism' and the various theories that are more or less directly part of it. The 'rationalists' at least still spoke of 'truth', although for them it could obviously only be a question of a very relative truth; the 'intuitionists' tried to replace the 'true' with the 'real', which could be almost the same thing if one kept to the normal meaning of words, but which is very far from being the case in fact, for here one must take into account the strange deformation by which, in current usage, the word 'reality' has come to designate exclusively things of the sensible order, which is to say precisely those that have the least degree of reality. Next, the 'pragmatists' chose to ignore truth entirely, and to suppress it in a certain manner by substituting for it 'utility'; this is then really the fall into the 'subjective', for it is quite clear that the utility of a thing is by no means a quality that resides in the thing itself, but depends entirely on the one who appraises it and who makes it the object of a kind of individual appreciation, without in the least concerning himself with what the thing is outside of this appreciation, that is to say with all that it really is. Assuredly, it would be difficult to proceed any further on the path of the negation of all intellectuality.

The 'intuitionists' and the 'pragmatists', and likewise the representatives of some other related schools of lesser importance, willingly adorn their theories with the label 'philosophy of life'; but it seems that already this expression no longer enjoys as much success as it once did, and that today it is the 'philosophy of values' that is most in favor. This new philosophy appears to attack the 'real' itself, however one wishes to understand it, almost as 'pragmatism' attacks the 'true'; its affinity in certain respects with 'pragmatism' is obvious, for both 'value' and 'utility' can be no more than a simple matter of individual appreciation, and its 'subjective' character is perhaps even more accentuated, as will be made evident below. It is possible that the current success of the word 'value' is due in part to the rather grossly material sense that, although not inherent to its original meaning, is associated with it in ordinary language: when one speaks of 'value' or 'evaluation', one immediately thinks of something that can be 'counted' or 'numbered', and it must be agreed that this accords quite well with the 'quantitative' spirit

characteristic of the modern world. However, this is at most only half of the explanation; indeed, it must be remembered that 'pragmatism', which is defined by the fact that it relates everything to 'action', does not only mean 'utility' in a material sense, but also in a moral sense. 'Value' is equally subject to these two meanings, although the second clearly predominates in the conception in question, for the moral—or more exactly 'moralist'—aspect is still exaggerated. This 'philosophy of values' appears above all as a form of 'idealism', and this no doubt explains its hostility toward the 'real', since it is understood that in the special language of modern philosophers, 'idealism' is opposed to 'realism'.

It is known that for the most part modern philosophy thrives on ambiguity, and there is something noteworthy hidden in this label 'idealism'. The word can in fact be derived both from 'idea' and from 'ideal'; and in fact, the two essential characteristics that can easily be discerned in the 'philosophy of values' correspond to this twin derivation. 'Idea' is of course taken here in the purely 'psychological' sense, which is the only sense the moderns know (and it will be seen shortly that it is useful to emphasize this point in order to dispel yet another ambiguity), and this is the 'subjectivist' side of the conception in question; as to the 'ideal', it represents no less obviously its 'moralist' side. Thus, in this case the two meanings of 'idealism' are closely associated and as it were support each other, because they both correspond to rather general tendencies of the contemporary mentality: 'psychologism' indicates a state of mind that is far from being peculiar to 'professional' philosophers, and furthermore, the fascination which the empty word 'ideal' has exercised on most of our contemporaries is only too well known!

What is almost incredible is that the philosophy in question claims to have its roots in 'Platonic idealism'; and it is difficult to refrain from a certain stupefaction in seeing the assertion that 'true reality lies not in the object but in the idea, that is to say in an act of thought,' attributed to Plato. First, there is no 'Platonic idealism' in any of the meanings that the moderns give to the word 'idealism'; for Plato, 'ideas' are neither 'psychological' nor 'subjective', and have absolutely nothing in common with an 'act of thought'; on the contrary, they are the transcendent principles or 'archetypes' of all

things. That is why they constitute reality par excellence, and although Plato himself did not express it in this way (any more than he anywhere expressly formulates something that could be called a 'theory of ideas'), one could say that the 'world of ideas' is ultimately nothing other than the 'Divine Intellect'; what connection can this have with the product of an individual 'thought'? Even from the mere point of view of the 'history of philosophy', there is a truly extraordinary error here; and not only is Plato neither 'idealist' nor 'subjectivist' in any degree, but it would be impossible to be more completely 'realist' than he; it is surely more than paradoxical that the avowed enemies of the 'real' wish to make him their predecessor, furthermore, these same philosophers commit yet another error that is hardly less serious when, in trying to connect their 'moralism' to Plato, they invoke the 'central' role, as it were, that he assigns to the 'idea of the Good'; here, to use Scholastic terminology, we can say that they quite simply confuse the 'transcendental Good' with the 'moral good', so great is their ignorance of certain notions, no matter how elementary. When one sees the moderns thus 'interpret' ancient conceptions—even though no more than philosophy is involved—can one still be astonished how outrageously they deform doctrines of a more profound order?

The truth is that the 'philosophy of values' cannot claim the least connection with any ancient doctrine whatsoever, save in indulging in very poor puns on the 'ideas' and the 'good', to which must be added yet other confusions—and rather common ones—such as that of 'spirit' with 'mind'; on the contrary, it is one of the most typically modern confusions, arising from the 'subjectivist' and 'moralist' traits noted above. It is not difficult to understand at what point it is thereby opposed to the traditional spirit, as is all 'idealism' moreover, the logical outcome of which is to make truth itself (and today one would also say the 'real') dependent on the operations of individual 'thought'. At a time when intellectual disorder had not yet reached the point it has today, perhaps certain 'idealists' sometimes retreated before the enormity of such a consequence, but we do not believe that contemporary philosophers have such reservations... But after all this, one may still wonder just what exactly is served by promoting this particular idea of 'value', thrust thus into the world

like a new 'slogan' or, if one wishes, a new 'suggestion'. The answer to this question is also easy, if we simply consider that nearly the entire modern deviation could be described as a series of substitutions that amount to just so many falsifications in all orders. It is in fact easier to destroy a thing by claiming to replace it, even with a more or less crude parody, than to acknowledge openly that one wishes to leave behind only nothingness; and, even when it is a question of a thing that already no longer in fact exists, one can still have an interest in devising an imitation in order to prevent anyone from feeling the need to restore it, or in order to create an obstacle for those who might in fact have such an intention. Thus, to take only one or two examples of the first case, the idea of 'free enquiry' was invented in order to destroy spiritual authority, not by denying it purely and simply all at once, but by substituting for it a false authority, that of individual reason; or again, philosophical 'rationalism' made a point of replacing intellectuality with what is only a caricature. For us, the idea of 'value' seems to be connected rather to the second case; it is already a long time since anyone has in fact recognized any real hierarchy, that is, one founded essentially on the very nature of things. For one reason or another—a point we do not intend to investigate here—it seemed opportune (doubtless not to the philosophers, for in all likelihood they were merely the first dupes) to establish in the public mentality a false hierarchy based solely on sentimental appreciation, and hence entirely 'subjective' (and all the more innocuous, from the point of view of modern 'egalitarianism', which finds itself thus consigned to the mists of the 'ideal', or, one might say, to the fancies of the imagination). One could say, in sum, that 'values' represent a counterfeit of hierarchy used by a world that has been led to the negation of all true hierarchy.

What is even less reassuring is that some dare to qualify these 'values' as 'spiritual', and the abuse of this word is no less significant than all the rest. In fact, here we recognize another counterfeit, that of 'spirituality', the different forms of which we have already denounced; would the 'philosophy of values' also have some role to play in this connection? What in any case is not in doubt is that we are no longer at the stage where 'materialism' and 'positivism' exert a preponderant influence; henceforth it is a question of something

else, which, to fulfill its purpose, must assume a more subtle character; and, to state clearly our complete thought on this point, in the order of philosophical ideas, and by means of their reactions on the general mentality, 'idealism' and 'subjectivism' at present are and no doubt will increasingly be the principal obstacles to a full restoration of true intellectuality.

4

THE SENSE OF PROPORTIONS

IN witnessing the confusion reigning in our time in every domain, we have often emphasized that, in order to escape it, one needs to know above all how to put each thing in its place, that is, to situate it with respect to other things exactly according to its own nature and exact importance. Most of our contemporaries in fact no longer know how to do this because they no longer have an idea of any true hierarchy; this idea, which in a way is part of the foundation of every traditional civilization, is for this same reason an idea which the forces of subversion, whose action has produced what is called the modern spirit, try especially to destroy. Thus, mental disorder today exists everywhere, even among those who call themselves 'traditionalists' (and we have already shown how what this word implies is not sufficient to react effectively against this state of things); in particular, the sense of proportions is strangely lacking, to the point that one not only sees what is most contingent or even most insignificant taken for the essential, but even the normal and abnormal, the lawful and unlawful, are put on equal footing, as if both were equivalent and had the same right to exist.

A characteristic example of this mentality is furnished by a 'neo-Thomist' philosopher¹ who in a recent article stated that in 'the

1. In order to avoid any ambiguity and any dispute, let us explain that by 'neo-Thomist' we mean an attempt to 'adapt' Thomism; this implies rather serious concessions to modernist ideas which sometimes affect much more than one might think even those who readily proclaim themselves 'anti-modern'; our age is full of such contradictions.

sacred type of civilization' (we would rather say 'traditional') like the Islamic civilization or the Christian civilization of the Middle Ages, 'the idea of a holy war could have a meaning' but that it 'loses all meaning' in 'the profane type of civilization' such as ours today, 'in which the temporal is more completely distinguished from the spiritual, and, since from now on it is wholly autonomous, it no longer has an instrumental role with regard to the sacred.' Does not this way of speaking seem to indicate that fundamentally one is not far from seeing 'progress' therein, or at least that it is considered something more or less definitively established and from which there is 'from now on' no turning back? Moreover, we would like someone to cite at least one other example of a 'profane type of civilization', because for our part we know of none outside of modern civilization, which, precisely because it is such, is strictly nothing but an anomaly; the plural seems to have been put there expressly to allow a parallel or, as we will explain shortly, an equivalence between this 'profane type' and the 'sacral' or traditional type, which is the type of every normal civilization without exception.

It goes without saying that this is not a mere recognition of a state of fact, which would raise no objection; but from such a recognition to the acceptance of this state as constituting a lawful form of civilization in the same way as that form which it negates, there is a veritable abyss. That one should say that the ideal of 'holy war' is inapplicable in present circumstances is a fact that is only too obvious, and one with which everyone will necessarily agree; but let no one say because of this that the idea has no more meaning, for the intrinsic value of an idea', especially a traditional idea like this, is entirely independent of contingencies and has not the least connection with what is called 'historical reality', for it belongs to a completely different order of reality. To make the value of an idea—that is, ultimately, its very truth, for as soon as it is a question of an idea we do not see how its value could be anything else—depend on the vicissitudes of human events is the very mark of that 'historicism' which we have denounced as error on other occasions and which is nothing but one of the forms of modern 'relativism'. That a 'traditionalist' philosopher should share this way of seeing things is indeed regrettably significant! And if, instead of seeing the profane

point of view as the degeneration or deviation that it really is, he accords it the same validity as the traditional point of view, how can he then object to the too well known 'tolerance', also a specifically modern and profane attitude, that consists in giving every error the same rights as the truth?

We have dwelt at some length on this example because it is very representative of a certain mentality; but one could of course find a great many others from a more or less closely related order of ideas. The undue importance attributed to the profane sciences by the more or less authorized (but quite poorly qualified) representatives of traditional doctrines, ultimately belong to the same tendencies. Indeed, an attempt is constantly made to accommodate the doctrines to the more or less hypothetical and always provisional results of these sciences, as if between the one and the other there could be any common measure, and as if they were things situated on the same level. Among those who believe themselves obliged to adopt it, a similar attitude, its weakness particularly visible in religious 'apologetics', shows a truly singular misunderstanding of the value—we would even willingly say of the dignity—of the doctrines they think they are thus defending, while in fact they only abase and diminish them. These same people are thereby led imperceptibly and unwittingly to the worst compromises, thus offering a bowed head to the noose held out to them by those who seek only to destroy all that has a traditional character and who know very well what they are about in leading them onto this terrain of useless profane discussion. It is only by maintaining the transcendence of tradition in an absolute way that one makes (or rather keeps) it inaccessible to every attack by its enemies, whom one must never consent to treat as 'adversaries'; but in the absence of the sense of proportions and of hierarchy, who still understands this today?

We have just spoken of concessions made to the scientific point of view in the sense that this latter is understood by the modern world; but the too frequent illusions about the value and scope of the philosophical point of view also imply the same kind of error of perspective since by very definition this point of view is no less profane than the other. One should be content to smile at the pretensions of those who wish to put purely human 'systems', products of

mere individual thought, in parallel or in opposition to traditional doctrines, which are essentially supra-human, if in so many cases they did not succeed only too well in having these pretensions taken seriously. If the consequences are perhaps less serious, it is only because philosophy has a more restricted influence than profane science does on the general mentality of our time. Nevertheless, here too it would be a great mistake to conclude that the danger is non-existent or negligible just because it does not appear to be as immediate. Moreover, even when in this regard there is no other result than to 'neutralize' the efforts of many 'traditionalists' by leading them into a domain where there is no real headway to be made regarding a restoration of the traditional spirit, this is still always so much the more gain for the enemy. Our reflections on another occasion concerning various illusions of the political or social order also find an application in such cases.

From this philosophical point of view, let it be said in passing, it sometimes happens that things take a rather amusing turn; we are speaking of the 'reactions' of certain 'polemicists' of this kind when they find themselves on that rare occasion in the presence of someone who positively refuses to follow (hem onto this terrain, and of the amazement mingled with vexation, even rage, that they exhibit in realizing that their whole argument falls into the void, something to which they are as little able to resign themselves as they are obviously incapable of understanding the reasons. We have even dealt with people who claimed we were obliged to bestow on the flimsy constructions of their individual fantasies a significance that we must reserve exclusively for traditional truths alone; naturally we could only demur, hence the fit of truly indescribable anger; thus it is no longer only the sense of proportions that is lacking but also the sense of the ridiculous.

But let us return to more serious things. Since these are errors of perspective we will point out another, which is to tell the truth of a wholly different order, for it occurs in the traditional domain itself and is ultimately only a particular case of the difficulty men generally have in admitting whatever surpasses their own point of view. I hat some, even the great majority, should have their horizon limited to a single traditional form or even to a certain aspect of this

form, and that they should consequently be enclosed in a point of view that could be called more or less narrowly 'local', is something perfectly legitimate in itself and in any case wholly inevitable; but on the other hand what is in no way acceptable is that they should imagine that this same point of view with all its inherent limitations must also belong to everyone without exception, including those who are conscious of the essential unity of all traditions. Against anyone who manifests such an incomprehension we must steadfastly maintain the rights of those who have risen to a higher level from which the perspective is necessarily wholly different; that they give the benefit of the doubt to what they themselves, at least presently, are unable to understand, and that they not meddle with anything beyond their competence—this is basically all we ask of them. Moreover, we very readily recognize that for them this limited point of view is not without certain advantages, first because it permits them to cling intellectually to something rather simple and to be satisfied with it, and then, because of the 'local' situation to which they are restricted, they certainly bother no one, which avoids their provoking hostile forces against themselves which, for them, would probably be impossible to resist.

THE ORIGINS OF MORMONISM

AMONG the religious or pseudo-religious sects widespread in America, the Mormon sect is assuredly one of the oldest and most important, and we believe that it would not be without some interest to look at its origins.

At the beginning of the nineteenth century there lived in New England a Presbyterian pastor named Solomon Spalding, who had abandoned his ministry in favor of commerce, where it was not long before he went bankrupt. After this setback, he began writing a kind of novel in biblical style which he entitled *Manuscript Found*, and which, it seems, he counted on to restore his fortune; in this he was mistaken, as he died before he could find a publisher. The subject of this book concerns the history of the North American Indians, who were portrayed as the descendants of the Patriarch Joseph; it was a protracted account of their wars and their supposed migrations from the time of Sedecias, king of Judah, up to the fifth century AD. This account was supposed to have been written by various chroniclers, the last of whom, named Mormon, is said to have deposited it in an underground hiding place.

How had Spalding struck upon the idea of compiling this extremely boring, incredibly monotonous work written in a deplorable style? It is hardly possible to say, and one wonders whether this idea came to him spontaneously or was suggested to him by someone or other, for he is far from having been alone in searching for what had become of the ten lost tribes of Israel and in the attempt to resolve the problem in his own way. We know that some tried to find traces of these tribes in England, and that there are even Englishmen

who stoutly claim the honor of this origin for their nation; others sought these same tribes much further afield—as far even as Japan. What is certain is that there are very old Jewish colonies in some regions of the East, notably Cochin in southern India, and also China, which claim to have been established there since the time of the Babylonian captivity. The idea of a migration to America seems much more unlikely and moreover has occurred to others than Spalding; in fact there is a rather remarkable coincidence to be noted here. In 1825, a Jew of Portuguese origin, Mordecai Manuel Noah, former consul of the United States in Tunis, bought an island named Grand Island situated in the Niagara river, and issued a proclamation urging all his co-religionists to come and settle on this island, which he named Ararat. On September 2nd of the same year, the foundation of the new city was celebrated with great pomp; now, and this is what we wish to draw attention to, the Indians had been invited to send representatives to this ceremony in the capacity of descendants of the lost tribes of Israel, and they also were to find a refuge in the new Ararat. This project came to nothing, and the town was never built. About twenty years later, Noah wrote a book in which he advocated the re-establishment of the Jewish nation in Palestine, and, although his name may be almost forgotten today, he must be regarded as the real promoter of Zionism. The episode that we have cited took place almost five years prior to the foundation of Mormonism; Spalding was already dead, and we do not think that Noah had known of his *Manuscript Found*. In any case, at that point the extraordinary fortune that was reserved for this work could hardly have been foreseen, and Spalding himself probably never suspected that the day would come when the multitudes would consider it a new divine revelation. At this period no one had yet formed the premeditated intention of composing so-called ‘inspired’ writings such as the *Oahspe Bible* or the *Aquarian Gospel*—wild imaginings which find among the Americans of this day and age a milieu well-prepared to receive them.

IN Palmyra, Vermont there was a young man of rather bad reputation named Joseph Smith. He had first attracted the attention of his

fellow citizens during one of those periods of religious enthusiasm that the Americans call *revivals*, by spreading the account of a vision with which he claimed to have been favored; after that he became a 'treasure hunter, living on money given to him by the credulous people whom, thanks to certain divinatory processes, he promised to lead to riches buried in the ground. It was at this point, twelve years after the death of its author, that he laid his hand on Spalding's manuscript. It is believed that this manuscript was given him by one of his accomplices, Sidney Rigdon, who could have stolen it from a printery where he was serving his apprenticeship. Still, the widow, brother, and former associate of Spalding recognized and formally affirmed the identity of the *Book of Mormon* with the *Manuscript Found*. But the 'treasure seeker' claimed that, guided by an angel, he had pulled this book from the earth where Mormon had buried it, in the form of plates of gold covered with hieroglyphic characters. He added that the angel had also led him to discover two translucent stones —none other than the *Urim* and *Thumniin*—which figured on the breast-plate of the High Priest of Israel,² the possession of which, bestowing the gift of tongues and the spirit of prophecy, had allowed him to translate the mysterious plates. Ten or so witnesses said they had seen these plates; three of them even asserted that they had also seen the angel, who had then taken away the plates and kept them under his guard. Among the latter was a certain Martin Harris, who despite the opinion of Professor Anthon of New York, to whom he had submitted a sample of the alleged hieroglyphics, and who cautioned Harris against what seemed to him no more than a common hoax, sold his farm to meet the cost of publishing the manuscript. It is to be assumed that Smith had procured some brass plates upon which he inscribed characters borrowed from various alphabets; according to Professor Anthon,³ they were mainly a mixture of Greek and Hebrew characters, as well as a crude imitation of a Mexican calendar published by Humboldt. It is extremely difficult to say whether those who helped Smith in the early stages were his dupes or accomplices. In the case

2. Exod. 28:30. These two Hebrew words mean 'light' and 'truth'.

3. Letter to Mr Howe, February 17, 1834.

of Harris, whose fortune was seriously compromised by the initial lack of success of the *Book of Mormon*, he did not hesitate to renounce the new faith and to quarrel with Smith. The latter soon had a revelation which charged his followers with his upkeep; then, on the April 6, 1830, another revelation came appointing him prophet of God, with the mission of teaching men a new religion and establishing the *Church of Latter-Day Saints*, which one had to enter through a new baptism. Smith and his associate Cowdery administered this baptism to each other; at the time the Church consisted of only six members, but after a month it numbered about thirty, including Smith's father and brothers. This Church, in short, differed little from the majority of Protestant sects; in the thirty articles of faith which were then drawn up by the founder, there is reason to note only the condemnation of child baptism (article 4), the belief that a man can be called to God by prophecy and by the laying on of hands' (article 5), and that miraculous gifts such as 'prophecy, revelation, visions, healing, exorcism, and the interpretation of tongues' are perpetuated in the Church (article 7), the addition of the *Book of Mormon* to the Bible as being the 'word of God' (article 8), and finally the promise 'that God will again reveal great things concerning His Kingdom' (article 9). Let us also mention article 10, couched as follows: 'We believe in the literal gathering of Israel and the restoration of the ten tribes; we believe that Zion will be rebuilt on this continent, that Christ will reign personally on the earth, and that the earth will be renewed and will receive the heavenly glory.' The beginning of this article curiously recalls the projects of Noah; what follows is the expression of a 'millenarism' which is in no way exceptional in Protestant churches, and which, around 1840 in this same region of New England, would also give birth to the 'Seventh Day Adventists'. Finally, Smith wished to reconstitute the organization of the early Church: Apostles, Prophets, Patriarchs, Evangelists, Elders, Deacons, Pastors, and Doctors, plus two hierarchies of pontiffs, one according to the order of Aaron, the other according to the order of Melchizedek.

The first adherents of the new Church were people with very little education, for the most part small farmers or craftsmen; the least ignorant among them was Sidney Rigdon, the one who had

probably put Smith in possession of Spalding's manuscript; and who, also by a revelation, was given responsibility for the literary part of the work; and to him is attributed the first part of the book of *Doctrines and Alliances*, published in 1846, and which is as it were the Mormon New Testament. Furthermore, Rigdon did not hesitate to compel the prophet, to whom he had become indispensable, to have another revelation that shared the leadership between them. Meanwhile, the sect began to grow and to make known its existence abroad: the English *hvingitcs*,^A who also believed in the perpetuation of miraculous gifts in the Church, sent a letter to Smith signed by a council of pastors' and expressing their sympathy. But Smith's very success made for him enemies who did not hesitate to recall his less than honorable past. And so, from 1831, the prophet judged it prudent to change his residence; from Fayette, in Seneca County, New York, where he had started his Church, he established himself at Kirtland, in Ohio. Then he and Rigdon took a journey of exploration in the regions of the West, and on their return Smith issued a series of revelations ordering the 'Saints' to go to Jackson County in Missouri to build a 'Holy Zion'. Within a few months, twelve hundred faithful responded to this appeal and set about working to clear the land and to erect the 'New Jerusalem'. But the first occupants of the region underwent all sorts of vexations which finally forced them to leave Zion. During this time, Joseph Smith remained in Kirtland where he had founded a business and bank, from whose till—as we learn from his own autobiography—he and his family had an unlimited right to help themselves freely. In 1837 the bank failed, and Smith and Rigdon, threatened with prosecution for fraud, had to flee to their followers in Missouri. Four years had already passed since the latter had been driven out of Zion, but (hey had retired into neighboring regions, where they had acquired new properties; upon his arrival, Smith told them the hour had come when he was going to 'trample his enemies under his feet.' The Missourians, having learned of his attitude, were infuriated, and hostilities began almost immediately. The Mormons, defeated,

•1. A religious sect named after Edward Irving (1792-1834), a deposed Presbyterian minister. En.

had to surrender and started to leave the area immediately; the prophet, handed over to the authorities, managed to escape his guards and rejoin his disciples in Illinois. There the 'Saints' began to construct a town, the city of Nauvoo, on the bank of the Mississippi; proselytes arrived, even from Europe, for a mission sent to England in 1837 had resulted in ten thousand baptisms, and a revelation summoned the new converts to hasten to Nauvoo 'with their money, their gold, and their precious stones.' The state of Illinois accorded the city a charter of incorporation; Joseph Smith was made mayor and organized a militia of which he was named general; thenceforth he often made a show of appearing on horseback and in uniform. His military adviser was a certain General Bennett, who had served in the United States army. Bennett had offered his services to Smith in a letter in which, while professing a complete incredulity as to the latter's divine mission, and even treating the Mormon baptism he had received as a 'joyous masquerade', promised the prophet 'a dedicated assistance and the *appearance* of a sincere faith.' The growing prosperity of the faith carried Smith's vanity to such a point that he dared, in 1844, to declare his candidacy for the presidency of the United States.

It was around this time that polygamy was introduced into Mormonism. The revelation authorizing it is dated July 1843, but for a long time it was kept secret and reserved for a small number of initiates. Only after ten years was the practice admitted publicly by the Mormon leaders.⁵ Yet despite the efforts that had been made to conceal the revelation, the outcome of it had been known in spite of everything; a body of opposition formed in the very bosom of the sect made its protests known in a journal called *The Expositor*. The partisans of the prophet razed the journal's workroom; the editors fled and denounced Joseph Smith and his brother Hiram to the authorities as disruptive of the public order. A warrant for their arrest was issued, and in order to execute it, the Illinois government

5. The revelation in question was published in the official organ of the sect. *The Millennium Star*, in January 1853. The other revelations that we alluded to above have all been taken from *Doctrines and Alliances*. We have not thought it necessary to show here an exact reference for each.

appealed to the military. Joseph Smith, seeing that he could not resist, judged it prudent to give himself up and together with his brother was locked up in the county jail at Carthage. On July 27, 1844 an armed crowd invaded the jail and fired on the prisoners. Hiram Smith was killed on the spot, and Joseph, trying to escape through the window, misjudged his jump and was dashed against the foot of the wall; he was thirty-nine years old. It is unlikely that the assailants had assembled spontaneously in front of the prison; it is not known by whom they were led or at least influenced, but it is very likely that someone had an interest in causing Joseph Smith's disappearance at the precise moment when he saw all his ambitions being realized.

In any case, if he was undeniably an impostor—although some had tried to present him as a sincere fanatic—it is not certain that he himself had thought up all his impostures. There are too many other more or less similar cases, where the apparent leaders of a movement are often only the instruments of hidden instigators, whom they themselves perhaps do not always know. A man such as Rigdon, for example, could very likely have played an intermediary role between Smith and the likely instigators. The personal ambition that was part of Smith's character, joined to his lack of scruples, could make him suitable for the realization of more or less shadowy plans; but, beyond certain limits, it risked becoming dangerous, and as is usual in such cases, the instrument is broken mercilessly; this is precisely what happened to Smith. We point to these considerations only by way of hypothesis, not wishing to establish any connection; but this is sufficient to show that it is difficult to make a definitive judgment on individuals, and that the search for those truly responsible is much more complicated than those who hold to outer appearances imagine.

AFTER the prophet's death, four claimants, Rigdon, William Smith, Lyman Wight, and Brigham Young, disputed his succession. It was Brigham Young, a former carpenter and president of the 'College of Apostles', who finally prevailed and was proclaimed 'seer, revealer, and president of the Latter-Day Saints'. The sect continued to grow, but it was soon learned that the inhabitants of nine counties were

united in the intention of destroying the Mormons. The leaders then decided on a migration *en masse* of their people to a remote and deserted region in High-California belonging to Mexico. This news was announced by a 'catholic epistle' dated January 20, 1846. The Mormons' neighbors agreed to let them go quietly, on condition that they leave before the beginning of the following summer; the 'Saints' took advantage of this delay to complete the temple they were building on the summit of the Nauvoo hill, and to which a revelation had attached various mysterious blessings; the consecration took place in May. The citizens of Illinois, seeing in this a lack of sincerity and the sign of an intention on the part of the Mormons to return, brutally drove from their homes those who were still there and, on September 17, took possession of the abandoned town. The emigrants began a punishing journey; many of them were left by the wayside, and some even died of cold and privations. In spring, the president went on ahead with a body of pioneers; on July 21, 1847, they reached the valley of the Great Salt Lake and, struck by the similarity of its geographic configuration to that of the land of Canaan, resolved to found there a *stake of Zion*, while awaiting the time when they could reconquer the real Zion, that is, the city in Jackson County that Smith's prophecies assured them would be their heritage. When the colony was assembled, they numbered four thousand people. It grew rapidly, and six years later the number of its members had already reached thirty thousand. In 1848, the country had been ceded by Mexico to the United States; the inhabitants asked Congress to establish them as a sovereign state under the name 'State of Deseret', taken from the *Book of Mormon*, but Congress only established the country as a Territory under the name of Utah, which could only become a free State when its population numbered sixty thousand men. This encouraged the Mormons to intensify their propaganda in order to attain this number as quickly as possible and so legalize polygamy and their other particular institutions. In the meantime, the president Brigham Young was named governor of Utah. From this moment, the material prosperity of the Mormons as well as their numbers continued to grow, in spite of some unfortunate episodes, among which may be noted a schism which occurred in 1851. Those who had not followed the emigration

formed a 'Reorganized Church' with its center at Lamoni, in Iowa, which claimed to be the only legitimate church. They appointed as their head the prophet's own son, young Joseph Smith, who had been living in Independence, Missouri. According to an official statistic dated 1911, this 'Reorganized Church' then numbered fifty thousand members, while the branch in Utah numbered three hundred and fifty thousand.

THE success of Mormonism may seem astonishing. It is likely that it is due more to the hierarchical and theocratic organization of the sect—very cleverly conceived, it must be acknowledged—than to the value of its doctrine, although the very eccentricity of the latter enabled it to exercise an attraction on certain minds; in America especially, the most absurd things of this kind succeed in an incredible fashion. This doctrine has not remained the same as it was at the beginning, which is easily understood, since new revelations could come along and modify it at any moment. Thus in the *Book of Mormon* polygamy was called an abomination—'an abomination in the eyes of the Lord'—which did not prevent Joseph Smith from receiving another revelation by which it became 'the great blessing of the last Alliance'. The strictly doctrinal innovations seemed to have been due especially to Orson Pratt, under whose intellectual domination Smith had fallen toward the end of his life, and who had a more or less vague knowledge of the ideas of Hegel and some other German philosophers, popularized by writers such as Parker and Emerson.⁶

The religious ideas of the Mormons are the grossest anthropomorphism, as these extracts from one of their catechisms proves:

QUESTION 28. What is God?—An intelligent and material being, having a body and limbs.

QUESTION 38. Is he also susceptible to passion?—Yes, he eats, he drinks, he hates, he loves.

6. Orson Pratt edited in 1853 a journal called *The Seer*, from which we take most of the following quotations.

QUESTION 44. Can he live in several places at the same time?—
No.

This material God inhabits the Planet *Colob*; he is also materially the Father of the creatures he has *begotten*, and the prophet says in his last sermon: 'God did not have the power to create the spirit of man. This idea would diminish man in my eyes; but I know better than that.' What he knew, or claimed to know, is this: initially the Mormon God was a God who 'evolved'; his origin was 'the fusion of two particles of elementary matter,' and, by a progressive development, he attained human form;

God, *it goes without saying*, commenced by being a man, and, by a path of continual progression, he has become what he is, and he can continue to progress in the same manner eternally and indefinitely. Likewise, man can also grow in knowledge and in power as long as it pleases him. If man is thus endowed with eternal progression, there will certainly come a time when he will know as much as God now knows.

Joseph Smith says again:

The weakest child of God who now exists on the earth, will in his time have greater domination, subjects, power, and glory than Jesus Christ or his Father have today, whereas the power and elevation of the latter will grow in the same proportion.

And Parly Pratt, brother of Orson, also developed this idea:

What will man do when this world is overpopulated? He will make *other worlds* and fly off like a swarm of bees. And when a farmer will have too many children for his portion of earth, he will say to them: My sons, matter is infinite; create a world and populate it.

In addition, the representations of the future life are as crude as possible, and consist of details as ludicrous as the descriptions of *Sttnt-inerland* by Anglo-Saxon spiritualists: 'Suppose,' says the same Parly Pratt,

that of the population of our earth, one person in a hundred partakes of a happy resurrection; what portion could each of the Saints have? We reply; each of them could well have one hundred and fifty acres of land, which would be fully sufficient to gather manna, erect splendid dwellings, and also to cultivate flowers and all things liked by the fanner and botanist.

Another 'Apostle', Spencer, chancellor of the University of Deseret and author of the *Patriarchal Order*, also says:

The future residence of the Saints is not something figurative; just as in this world, they will also need houses for themselves and their families. Literally, those who have been deprived of their goods, houses, land, wife, or children, will receive a hundred times more.... Abraham and Sarah will continue to multiply not only in this world, but in all the worlds to come.... The resurrection will restore your own wife, whom you will keep for eternity, and you will raise children of your own flesh.

Some spiritualists, it is true, do not even wait for the resurrection to speak to us of 'celestial marriages' and 'astral children'! But this is not all. From the idea of a God 'in the making'—an idea not exclusively theirs, as witnessed in more than one instance of modern thought—the Mormons soon passed to that of a plurality of gods forming an indefinite hierarchy. In fact, it was revealed to Smith 'that our actual Bible was no more than a truncated and perverted text that he had the mission to restore to its original purity,' and that the first verse of Genesis should be interpreted thus: 'The Godhead engenders other gods together with the heaven and the earth.' Furthermore, 'each of these gods is the special god of the spirits of all flesh which live in the world he has formed.' Finally, something more extraordinary still, a revelation from Brigham Young in 1853 informs us that the God of our planet is Adam, who is himself only another form of the archangel Michael:

When our father Adam arrived in Eden, he took with him Eve, *one of his wives*. He helped with the organization of this world. He is Michael, the Ancient of Days. He is our father and our God, *the only God* with whom we have anything to do.

In these fantastic stories some things remind us of certain rabbinical speculations, whereas in other respects we cannot help but think of the 'pluralism' of William James. Are not the Mormons among the first to have formulated the conception, so dear to the pragmatists, of a limited God, 'the invisible king' of Wells?

The cosmology of the Mormons, as far as one can judge from the rather vague and confused expressions, is a kind of atomist monism in which consciousness or intelligence is regarded as inherent to matter. The only thing that has existed for all eternity is

an indefinite quantity of moving and *intelligent* matter, of which each particle that now exists has existed through all the depths of eternity in a state of free locomotion. Each individual of the animal or vegetable kingdom has a living and intelligent spirit. People are only tabernacles wherein resides the eternal truth of God. When we say that there is only one God and that He is eternal, we do not designate any being in particular, but this supreme Truth which inhabits a great variety of substances.

The conception of an impersonal God which appears here seems to be in absolute contradiction with the anthropomorphic and evolutionist conception noted earlier. But no doubt it is necessary to make a distinction and to admit that the corporal God who lives on the planet *Coloh* is only the chief of this hierarchy of 'particular' beings that the Mormons also call gods. We must add as well that Mormonism, the leaders of which pass through a series of 'initiations', really has an exoterism and an esoterism. But to continue: 'Each man is an aggregate of so many intelligent individuals, which he incorporates into his formation of particles of matter.' Here we find something which simultaneously recalls Leibnitzian monadism understood moreover in its most outer meaning, and the theory of 'poly-psychism' held by certain 'neo-spiritualists'. Finally, again in the same order of ideas, the president Brigham Young, in one of his sermons, proclaimed that 'the recompense of the virtuous will be an eternal progression, and the punishment of the wicked a return of their substance to the primitive elements of all things.' In several schools of occultism, those who are unable to gain immortality are similarly threatened with 'final dissolution'; and there are also some

Protestant sects, the Adventists among others, who allow for man only a 'conditional immortality'.

We think we have said enough to show the worth of the Mormon doctrines, and also to make it clear that, in spite of their singularity, their appearance does not constitute an isolated phenomenon; in short, they represent in many of their particulars, tendencies that have found multiple expressions in the contemporary world, and of which the actual development even seems a rather worrisome symptom of a mental disequilibrium that risks becoming widespread if care is not taken. In this respect, the Americans have given Europe some truly deplorable gifts.

6

GNOSIS ^THE SPIRITIST SCHOOLS

IN its widest and highest meaning gnosis is knowledge; therefore true gnosticism cannot be a particular school or system but must above all be the search for integral truth. Nonetheless, it must not be thought that gnosticism must accept every doctrine whatsoever under the pretext that all contain a particle of truth, for synthesis is never reached by an amalgamation of disparate elements, as is too readily believed by minds habituated to the analytical methods of modern Western science.

Today there is much talk of unity among the different schools called spiritist, but all the efforts undertaken up to this point have remained fruitless. We believe that this will always be the case, for it is impossible to bring together doctrines so dissimilar as are those listed under the name of spiritism; such elements can never make a stable edifice. The mistake of most of these so-called spiritist doctrines is that in reality they are only materialism transposed onto another plane, and that they aim to apply to the domain of the Spirit methods used by ordinary science to study the hylic world. These experimental methods can never make known anything but mere phenomena, on which basis it is impossible to build any metaphysical theory whatsoever, for a universal principle cannot be inferred from particular facts. Moreover, the attempt to acquire a knowledge of the spiritual world by material means is obviously absurd; it is only in ourselves that we can find the principles of this knowledge, and never in outward objects.

Certain experimental investigations indeed have a relative value in their proper domain, but outside this same domain any such

value is lost. This is why, for us, the investigation of so-called psychic forces, for example, can have neither more nor less interest than the investigation of any other natural force, and we have no more reason to show solidarity with the scholar who pursues this investigation than with the physicist or chemist who studies forces of other kinds. We speak of course only of the scientific investigation of so-called psychic forces and not of the practices of those who, starting from a preconception, wish to see in them the manifestation of the dead. These practices do not hold even the relative interest of an experimental science, and they possess the danger that the manipulation of any force by the ignorant always presents.

It is therefore impossible for those who seek to acquire spiritual knowledge to join with the experimenters, psychists or others, and this is not at all due to contempt for these latter, but simply because these latter do not work on the same level as themselves. It is no less impossible for them to accept doctrines with metaphysical claims that rely on an experiment base; these doctrines cannot seriously be granted any value at all and always lead to absurd consequences.

Gnosis must therefore avoid all these doctrines and base itself only on the orthodox Tradition contained in the sacred books of all peoples, a Tradition that in reality is everywhere the same despite the different forms it clothes itself with in order to adapt to every race and age. But here again great care must be taken to distinguish this true Tradition from all the erroneous interpretations and all the fantastic commentaries that have been bestowed on it in our day by a throng of more or less occultist schools, which unfortunately too often wish to speak about things of which they are ignorant. It is easy to attribute a doctrine to imaginary persons in order to lend it more authority and to claim a relation with lost initiatic centers in the furthest reaches of Tibet or on the most inaccessible summits of the Himalayas; but those who know the real initiatic centers know what to think of these pretensions.

This is enough to show that a union of so-called spiritist schools is impossible and that, moreover, even if it were possible, it would produce no worthwhile result and would consequently be far from as desirable as is thought by those who are well intentioned but insufficiently informed of what these different schools really are. In

reality, the only possible union is that of all orthodox initiatic centers that have preserved the true Tradition in its original purity; but this union is not merely possible, it exists now as it has existed in all times. When the moment comes, the mysterious Thebah which contains all principles will open and show the immutable edifice of the universal Synthesis to those capable of contemplating the Light without being blinded.

From the first appearance of the journal *La Gnose* we have very clearly repudiated any solidarity with the different spiritist schools, whether occultist, Theosophist, spiritist, or any other more or less similar group, for we thought it particularly important to leave no room for doubt on this score in the minds of our readers. None of these opinions, which can be combined under the common denomination 'neo-spiritualist',¹ have any more connection with metaphysics, which alone interests us, than do the different scientific or philosophical schools of the modern West; and in addition, by virtue of their unjustified and unreasonable claims, they possess the serious drawback of being able to create among the insufficiently informed extremely regrettable confusions leading to nothing less than a reflection on others, we among them, of the discredit on the part of all who are serious that ought by right to be attached to them alone.

This is why we consider that we owe no particular circumspection to the theories in question, all the more so in that, if we did so, we are certain that their more or less authorized representatives, far from doing the same for us, would in no way be grateful to us, and would show us no less hostility; it would thus be pure weakness on our part that would do us no good, quite the contrary, and those who know our true thoughts on the subject would always reproach us for it. Thus we do not hesitate to declare that we consider all these neo-spiritist theories to be no less false in their very principle

1. One must be careful to distinguish this neo-spiritism from the spiritism that is called classical or eclectic, a doctrine doubtless of very little interest and of no value from the metaphysical point of view, but which at least offers itself as no more than a philosophical system like any other; being wholly superficial, it owes its success to this very lack of depth, which makes it especially convenient for university instruction.

and harmful to the public mentality than is, in our eyes, the modernist tendency under whatever form and in whatever domain it manifests itself.²

Indeed, if there is at least one point on which the Catholic church as presently oriented has all our sympathies, it is its fight against modernism.³ The church appears to be much less preoccupied with neo-spiritism which, it is true, has perhaps not spread as far and as rapidly, and moreover is something outside of it and on another terrain, so that it can hardly do more than to point out the dangers to those of the faithful who might risk being seduced by doctrines of this kind. But if someone were to place himself outside of all confessional preoccupations, thus in a much more extended field of action, and could find a practical means of halting the spread of so many ravings and insanities presented more or less cleverly according to whether this is done by men of bad faith or mere imbeciles (and that in either case have already contributed to irremediably confusing such a large number of individuals), we think that he would thus accomplish a true work of mental health and would render an outstanding service to a considerable portion of present-day Western humanity.⁴

This cannot be our role, for on principle we forego all polemics and remain apart from all outward action and all partisan strife. Nonetheless, without leaving the strictly intellectual domain, we may as occasion arises point out the absurdities of certain doctrines or beliefs and sometimes emphasize certain statements made by the spiritists themselves in order to show how these can be used against their own doctrinal affirmations, for logic is not always their strong

2. For more on this see 'Masonic Orthodoxy' in *Studies in yrcetnasonry dint the (vniipagnonnage*.

3. A fight that now, nearly nine decades after these lines were written (by the then twenty-three year old Guenon), it appears to have lost, at least as far as Vatican II and the 'official' church are concerned, Vatican II having been the great victory, at least in appearance, of modernism over the Catholic church. Ft>.

■I. In this age rife with associations of every kind and leagues against every plague, real or imagined, one might perhaps suggest an 'Anti-occultist League' that would appeal simply to all people of common sense without any distinction of party or opinion.

point and incoherence is a widespread defect with them, visible to all who do not let themselves be taken in by pompous words and bombastic phrases which very often only hide an emptiness of thought. It is with this end in mind that we write the present chapter, reserving the right to take up the question again whenever we judge it opportune. We hope that our remarks, made in the course of reading and research that drew our attention incidentally to the incriminated theories, might, if there is still time, open the eyes of those of good faith who have gone astray among the neo-spiritualists and of whom at least some may be worthy of a better fate.

WE have already made it known on many occasions that we absolutely reject the fundamental hypotheses of spiritism, namely reincarnation,⁵ the possibility of communicating with the dead by material means, and the claim to demonstrate human immortality experimentally.⁶ Moreover, these theories are not unique to the spiritists, the belief in reincarnation in particular being shared, by the majority of them, with the Theosophists and many occultists of different kinds. We can accept nothing from these doctrines because they are formally contrary to the most elementary principles of metaphysics; in addition, and for the same reason, they are clearly anti-traditional, and besides they were invented only during the nineteenth century, although their partisans try by every method of twisting and distorting texts to have us believe that they go back to remotest antiquity. To this end they use the most extraordinary and unexpected arguments; thus in a review that we will have the charity not to name, we recently saw the Catholic dogma of the 'resurrection of the body' interpreted in a reincarnationist sense; and it was a priest, no doubt strongly suspected of heterodoxy, who dared to make such assertions! It is true that reincarnation has never been

5. See in particular 'The Demiurge', pt. 1, chap. 1 above, and also *The Symbolism of the Cross* and *The Spiritist Fallacy*.

6. See 'Regarding the Great Architect of the Universe', in *Studies on Freemasonry and the Compagnonnage*.

explicitly condemned by the Catholic church, and some occultists do not fail to note this with obvious satisfaction at every opportunity. But they do not seem to suspect that, if this is so, it is merely because it was not even possible to conceive that a day might come when such folly could be imagined. As to the 'resurrection of the body', this is really only a defective way of speaking of 'the resurrection of the dead', which esoterically can correspond to the inclusion, in the being that has realized Universal Man, of all the states that were considered as having passed away with respect to its present state but that are eternally present in the 'permanent actuality of the extra-temporal being.'⁷

In another article in the same journal we came across an unintended and even unconscious admission amusing enough to merit a note in passing. A spiritist declares that 'truth lies in the exact relationship between the contingent and the absolute'; now, this relationship, which is that between the finite and the infinite, can rigorously be equal only to zero; draw the conclusion yourself and see if after this there remains anything of that claimed 'spiritist truth' that they offer as future 'experimental evidence'! Poor 'human child' [sic],⁸ poor 'psycho-intellectual', that is to be 'nourished' with such a truth?) and who is to be made to believe that he is 'made to know, love, and serve it' in a faithful imitation of what the Catholic catechism teaches in regard to its anthropomorphic God. Since in the intention of its promoters this 'spiritist teaching' seems above all to have a sentimental and moral goal, we wonder if it is worth the trouble to substitute for these old religions—which despite all their defects at least have an incontestable validity from this relative point of view—such bizarre ideas which will never replace them to advantage in any respect and which especially will be entirely unable to fulfill the social role that they claim as their own.

7. Of course this esoteric interpretation has nothing in common with the actual (Catholic doctrine which is purely exoteric. On this subject see *The Symbolism of the Cross*.

8. The author takes care to warn us that 'this is not a pleonasm'; but then we have to ask what it might be.

But let us return to the question of reincarnation. This is not the place to demonstrate its metaphysical impossibility, that is to say its absurdity; we have already provided all the elements of this demonstration⁹ and will complete it in further studies. For the moment we must limit ourselves to what its partisans themselves say, so that we may discover what, according to their understanding, might be the basis for this belief. The spiritists want above all to demonstrate reincarnation 'experimentally' (?) by facts, and certain occultists follow them in these attempts which naturally have not yet yielded any convincing results, any more than has the 'scientific demonstration of immortality'. On the other hand, most Theosophists seem to see in the reincarnationist theory only a sort of dogma or article of faith that must be accepted for sentimental reasons, but for which it is impossible to give any rational or perceptible proof.

We beg our readers to excuse us if in what follows we are unable to give every reference precisely, for there are people whom the truth would perhaps offend. But in order to explain the reasoning by which some occultists try to prove reincarnation we must first advise the reader that those to whom we allude are supporters of the geocentric theory: they see the earth as the center of the universe, either materially in terms of physical astronomy itself, like Auguste Strindberg and others,¹⁰ or, if they do not go this far, at least by the privilege they accord the nature of its inhabitants. For them the earth is in fact the only world where there can be human beings, because the conditions of life on other planets or in other solar systems are too different from those on Earth for a man to adapt to them; from this it follows that by 'man' they mean exclusively a corporeal individual endowed with five physical senses, the corresponding faculties (without forgetting spoken language... and even written), and all the organs necessary for the different functions of

9. See *The Symbolism of the Cross* and *The Spiritist Error*.

10. There are some who go so far as to deny the real existence of the stars and to regard them as mere reflections, virtual images or exhalations of the Earth, according to the opinion attributed, doubtless falsely, to certain ancient philosophers such as Anaximander and Anaximenes (see the translation of the *Philosophumem* pages 12 and 13); we shall speak later of the astronomical ideas peculiar to some occultists.

terrestrial human life. They do not conceive that man exists in other forms of life,¹¹ or with all the more reason, that he can exist in immaterial mode, informal, extra-temporal, extra-spatial, and above all beyond and above life.¹² It follows that humans can only be reincarnated on earth since there is no other place in the universe where they can live. Let us note, moreover, that this is contrary to several other ideas according to which man is 'incarnated' on various planets, as Louis Figuier holds,¹³ or in different worlds, either simultaneously, as Blanqui imagines,¹⁴ or successively, as Nietzsche's theory of the 'eternal return' tends to imply.¹⁵ Some people have even gone so far as to claim that the human individual can have several 'material bodies'¹⁶ [s/c] living at the same time on different planets of the physical world.¹⁷

We must say further that the occultists we mentioned add, as usual accompaniment to the geocentric doctrine, a belief in the literal and popular interpretation of the Scriptures, and lose no occasion to publicly mock the triple and sevenfold meanings of the esoterists and Kabbalists.¹⁸ Thus, according to their theory, which

11. Moreover, we can note in passing that all writers, astronomers or otherwise, who have put forth hypotheses about the inhabitants of other planets have always, perhaps unconsciously, imagined them in the more or less modified image of terrestrial human beings (see in particular C. Flammarion, *La Pluralité des Mondes habités* and *Les Mondes imaginaires et les Mondes réels*).

12. The existence of individual beings in the physical world is subject to five conditions: space, time, matter, form, and life, which can be considered as corresponding to the five bodily senses as well as the five elements; we shall treat this very important question with all the developments it implies in the course of other studies.

13. *Le Incendinain de la Mort 011 la Vie future se/on la Science*, see 'Regarding the (great Architect of the Universe' in *Studies on Prcemasonry and the Compaynomiaye*.

14. *L'Eternite des Astrcs*.

15. See *The Symbolism of the Cross*.

16. Here is another occasion to wonder if this is not a pleonasm'.

17. We have even heard the following assertion: 'If you happen to dream that you have been killed, it is in most cases because you have been on another planet'!

18. This does not prevent them from sometimes wanting to remake the Kabbalah in their own fashion; thus we have seen some who count as many as 72 Sephiroth; and it is they who dare accuse others of 'fantasizing'!

conforms to an exoteric translation of the Bible, in the beginning man, 'issuing from the hands of the Creator' (we think that no one can deny that this is anthropomorphism), was placed on Earth to 'cultivate his own garden', that is, according to them, to 'evolve physical matter,' which they suppose to have been more subtle than today. By 'man' must be understood the entire human collectivity, the totality of the human species, so that 'all men' without any exception and in an unknown but certainly very large multitude were initially incarnated on Earth at the same time.¹⁹ In these conditions there obviously could be no birth since there was no man who was not incarnated, and things remained this way as long as man did not die, that is, until the 'fall' understood in its exoteric sense as a historical fact,²⁰ but which is nevertheless regarded as 'being able to represent a whole series of events that must have unfolded over the course of several centuries.' This somewhat broadens ordinary biblical chronology, which finds it easy to place the whole history not only of the Earth but of the World, from the creation to our days, into a total duration of something less than six thousand years (some, however, go to nearly ten thousand).²¹ After the 'fall' physical matter became more gross, its properties were modified, it became subject to corruption, and men, imprisoned in this matter, began to die, to 'disincarnate'; thereupon they also became subject to birth, for these 'disincarnated' men who remain 'in space' (?) in the 'invisible atmosphere' of the Earth, would then 'reincarnate', that is, once again take on earthly physical life in a new human body. Thus it is always the same human beings (it must not be forgotten that this means the restricted corporeal individuality)

19. This is not the opinion of certain other schools of occultism, which speak of 'the differences in age of human spirits' with respect to terrestrial existence and even of methods to determine them. There are also those who try to determine the number of successive incarnations.

20. On the esoteric and metaphysical interpretation of the 'original Fall' of man, see above, pt.t, chap. i, 'The Demiurge'.

21. However, we shall not contradict the opinion that assigns to the world a duration often thousand years if this number is no longer taken in its literal sense but as designating numerical indefiniteness. (See above, pt.2, chap. 2, On Mathematical Notation'.)

that must be periodically reborn from the beginning of terrestrial humanity to its end.²²

As can be seen, this reasoning is very simple and perfectly logical, but only on condition of first admitting the starting-point, that is, the impossibility of the human being existing in modalities other than the terrestrial corporeal form, which, let us repeat, can in no way be reconciled with the most elementary notions of metaphysics; and this seems to be the most solid argument that can be offered to support the hypothesis of reincarnation!

Indeed, we cannot for an instant take seriously the moral and sentimental arguments for this hypothesis, which are based on an averred injustice in the inequality of human conditions. This notion arises solely from always considering particular facts in isolation from the whole of which they form a part, while if they are again situated in this whole there can obviously be no injustice, or, to use a term that is both more exact and broader in meaning, there is no disequilibrium,²³ because these facts, like all the rest, are elements of the total harmony. We have sufficiently explained our position on

22. This implies that earthly humanity has an end, for there are schools which maintain that the goal is to regain 'physical' or 'bodily' immortality, and that each human individual will reincarnate upon Earth until he has finally attained this result. — On the other hand, according to the Theosophists, the series of each individual's incarnations in this world is limited to the duration of a single earthly human 'race', after which all men making up this 'race' will pass on to the 'sphere' determined by the 'round' they belong to. The Theosophists also maintain that as a general rule (but with exceptions) two consecutive incarnations are separated by a fixed interval of time of 15 thousand years, while according to the spiritists one can sometimes reincarnate almost immediately after death, if not while still alive(!) in certain cases which, happily, are said to be very rare. — Another question that provokes numerous and interminable controversies is to know if the same individual must always and necessarily 'reincarnate' in the same sex or whether the contrary hypothesis is possible; we may have occasion to return to this point.

23. See *L'Archeomttre*, ']' year, no.i, p 15, nj. — In the social order what is called justice can only lie in compensating injustices by other injustices, to use a Ear-Eastern formula (a conception that does not suffer the introduction of mystico-moral ideas such as merit and demerit, reward and punishment, etc., any more than it does the Western idea of moral and social progress). The sum of all these injustices, which together are in harmony and equilibrium, is the greatest justice from the viewpoint of the human individual.

this question elsewhere and we have shown that evil has no reality whatsoever, that what is so called is only a relativity considered analytically, and that beyond the special point of view of the human mentality imperfection is necessarily illusory, for it cannot exist except as an element of the Perfect which can obviously contain nothing imperfect.²⁴

It is easy to understand that the diversity of human conditions arises from nothing else than the differences in nature existing among individuals themselves, that it is inherent in the individual nature of earthly human beings, and that it is no more unjust or less necessary (being of the same order, although of a different species) than the variety of plant or animal species, against which no one has dreamed of protesting in the name of justice, which would be perfectly ridiculous.²⁵ The special conditions belonging to each individual work toward the perfection of the total being of which this individual is a modality or particular state, and in the totality of the being everything is joined and given equilibrium by the harmonious linking of cause and effect.²⁶ But once it is a matter of causality, no one w'ho possesses the least idea of metaphysics can understand this to mean anything even remotely resembling the mystico-religious idea of reward and punishment,²⁷ which, after having been applied to an extra-terrestrial 'future life' is applied by the neo-spiritualists to supposed 'successive lives' on Earth, or at least in the physical world.²⁸

24. Sec 'The Demiurge', pt. 1, chap i above.

25. On the question of the diversity of human conditions considered as the basis of castes, see *rArchcomittre*, 2nd year, no. i pp8 ff.

26. This supposes the coexistence of all the elements considered outside of time as well as outside of every other contingent condition belonging to any specialized mode of existence. Let us note once more that this coexistence obviously leaves no room for the idea of progress.

27. To this idea of religious sanctions belongs the wholly Western theory of sacrifice and expiation, the inanity of which we shall demonstrate.

28. What the Theosophists most incorrectly call *Karma* is nothing other than the law of causality, which, moreover, they understand very poorly and apply even less well. We say that they understand it badly, that is to say incompletely, for they restrict it to the individual domain instead of extending it to the indefinite multitude of states of the being, in reality, the Sanskrit word *Karma*, which derives from

The spiritists, especially, have exploited this wholly anthropomorphic idea and have drawn from it conclusions that often reach the extreme of absurdity. Such is the well known example of the victim who pursues vengeance against his murderer into another existence; the victim then becomes murderer in his turn and the murderer, now a victim, must avenge himself in a new existence, and so on indefinitely. Another example of the same sort is the coachman who runs over a pedestrian; as punishment, the coachman, who has become a pedestrian in the next life, will be run over by the pedestrian who has become a coachman; but logically this coachman must then suffer the same punishment, so that these two unhappy individuals will be obliged to run each other over alternately until the end of time, for there is obviously no reason why this should come to an end.

But to be impartial we must add that on this point certain occultists concede nothing to the spiritists, for we have heard one occultist give the following account as an example of the frightful consequences that can follow upon actions generally considered indifferent.²⁹ A student amuses himself by breaking a pen, then throws it away; the molecules of metal will retain the memory of the mischief committed against them by the child throughout all the transformations they will undergo; finally, after several centuries, these molecules will enter into the parts of some machine and, one day, there will be an accident and a worker will be killed, crushed by this machine; it will turn out that the worker is the student described earlier, who has been reincarnated to suffer the punishment for his

the verbal root Ari, 'to make' (identical to the Latin *creme*), simply means 'action' and nothing else. The Westerners who use it thus have turned it from its true meaning, of which they are ignorant, and they have done the same for a great number of other Eastern terms.

29. it goes without saying that the purely individual (and imaginary) consequences in question here have no connection with the metaphysical theory, of which we shall speak elsewhere, that the most elementary gesture can have unlimited consequences in the Universal by reverberating and amplifying throughout the indefinite series of states of the being, both horizontally and vertically (see *The Symbolism of the Cross*).

earlier act.³⁰ It would surely be difficult to imagine anything more extravagant than such fantastic tales, which suffice to give an accurate picture of the mentality of those who invent them and especially of those who believe them.

An idea closely linked to reincarnation, which also has many partisans among neo-spiritualists, is that in the course of its evolution each being must pass successively through all forms of life, terrestrial and otherwise.³¹ To this there is only one word in response: such a theory is an impossibility for the simple reason that there exist an infinity of living forms through which a being could never pass since these forms are occupied by other beings. It is therefore absurd to claim that a being must traverse all possibilities considered individually in order to reach the term of its evolution because this affirmation encloses an impossibility; and here we can see a particular case of that entirely false idea, so widespread in the West, that a synthesis can only be accomplished by analysis, whereas on the contrary it is impossible to achieve it in this fashion.³² Even if a being should have traversed an infinity of possibilities, this entire evolution could never be anything but rigorously zero with respect to Perfection, for the indefinite proceeds from the finite; and since infinity is produced by the finite (as the generation of numbers clearly shows) and is thus contained in it in potency, in the final analysis it is only the development of the potentialities of the finite and in consequence obviously cannot have any connection with the Infinite, which amounts to saying that, considered from the standpoint of the Infinite (or from Perfection, which is identical with the Infinite), it can be only zero.³³ The analytic conception of evolution

30. There are occultists who go so far as to claim that congenital infirmities are the result of accidents that occurred in 'earlier existences'.

31. We speak only of 'forms of life' because it must be clearly understood that those who hold such an opinion can conceive nothing outside of life (and of life in a form) so that for them this expression encloses all possibilities, while for us it represents on the contrary only a very special possibility of manifestation.

32. See 'The Demiurge', pt. t.chap. t above.

33. What is generally true of the indefinite considered in connection (or rather in its absence of connection) with the Infinite remains true for each particular aspect of the indefinite or, if you will, for the particular indefinite corresponding to

is thus reduced to adding zero to itself indefinitely by an indefinite number of successive and distinct additions, the final result of which will always be zero. This sterile succession of analytical operations can be transcended only by integration, and this is accomplished at one stroke by a transcendent and immediate synthesis that logically has no preceding analysis.'*

Moreover, since, as we have explained on various occasions, the entire physical world, with the deployment of all the possibilities it contains, is only the domain of manifestation of a single state of the individual being, this same state of the being contains in itself *a fortiori* the potentialities for all the modalities of terrestrial life, which represents only a very restricted portion of the physical world. Thus, if the complete development of the actual individuality, which extends indefinitely beyond the corporeal modality, includes all the potentialities whose manifestation constitutes the sum of the physical world, it includes in particular all those corresponding to the different modalities of terrestrial life. This therefore renders useless the supposition of a multiplicity of existences through which the being must progressively raise itself from the lowest modality of life, the mineral, to the human modality considered as the highest, passing successively through plant and animal modalities, with all the multiplicity of degrees contained in each of these kingdoms. In his integral extension the individual simultaneously contains the possibilities that correspond to all these degrees; this simultaneity is not expressed in temporal succession except in the development of his corporeal modality, during which, as embryology shows, he passes through all the corresponding stages from the unicellular form of the most elementary organized beings, and, going back still further, even from the crystal (which presents more than one analogy with

the development of each possibility considered in isolation. It is therefore true of immortality (indefinite extension of the possibility of life) which in consequence can be nothing but zero with regard to Eternity. On this point we shall have the opportunity to explain ourselves more fully elsewhere (see also 'Regarding the (Great Architect of the Universe' in *Studies in freemasonry and the Compagnonnage*).

34. For more details on the mathematical representation of the totalization of the being by a double integration that realizes the universal volume, see our study *The Symbolism of the Cross*.

these rudimentary beings),³⁵ to the terrestrial human form. But for us these considerations are in no way a proof of the 'transformist' theory, for we regard the so-called law that 'ontogeny recapitulates phylogeny' as a pure hypothesis; for if the development of the individual, or ontogeny, can be proved by direct observation, no one would dare to claim that the same goes for the development of the species, or phylogeny.³⁶ Moreover, even in the restricted sense just noted, the point of view of succession loses almost all its interest by the simple observation that the seed, before any development, already contains in potency the complete being; and this point of view must always remain subordinate to that of simultaneity, to which the metaphysical theory of the multiple states of the being necessarily leads us.

Thus, leaving to one side the essentially relative question of the embryonic development of the body (which we see only as indicating an analogy with the integral individuality), there can be no question of anything but a purely logical (and not temporal) succession, that is to say a hierarchization of these modalities or possibilities in the extension of the individual state of the being in which they are not realized corporeally, and this because of the simultaneous existence in the individual of an indefinitude of vital modalities, or, what amounts to the same thing, the corresponding possibilities. In this connection, and to show that these ideas are not peculiar to us, we thought it would be interesting to reproduce certain extracts from a chapter devoted to this question in the instruction manuals of one of the rare serious initiatic Fraternities that still exist today in the West:³⁷

35. Particularly in regard to growth; likewise for reproduction by bipartition or twinning; on the question of the life of crystals, see in particular the noteworthy works of J.C. Bose of Calcutta, which have in turn inspired works by various European thinkers.

36. We have already explained why the purely scientific question of 'transformism' has no interest for metaphysics (see 'Scientific (Conceptions and Masonic Ideal' in *Studies in Freemasonry and the Compagnonnage*).

37. We will not pause to point out the absurd calumnies and inept tales that ill-informed or ill-intentioned people have wantonly spread about this Fraternity, which is designated by the initials 'H B of I'. (Regarding the Hermetic Brotherhood

In the descent of life into outward conditions, the monad had to travel through each of the states of the spiritual world, then the kingdoms of the astral empire,³⁸ in order to appear at last on the outward plane, the lowest possible, that is to say the mineral plane. From that point we see it successively penetrate the waves of mineral, plant, and animal life of the planet. In virtue of the higher and most inward laws of its particular cycle, its divine attributes always seek to unfold their imprisoned potentialities. As soon as one form is provided and its capacities are exhausted³⁹ another, new form of a higher degree is requisitioned; thus each in its turn becomes more and more complex in structure, more and more diverse in function. Thus we see the living monad begin with the mineral in the *outward* world, then the great *spiral* of its evolutionary existence moves slowly forward, imperceptibly but nevertheless always progressing.⁴⁰ There is no form too simple nor organism too complex for the faculty of adaptation (a marvelous and inconceivable power) possessed by the human soul. And through the entire cycle of Necessity the character of its genius, the degree of its spiritual emanation, and the states to which it belonged at the beginning are strictly preserved with a mathematical exactitude.⁴¹

During the course of its involution the monad is not really incarnated in any form whatever. The course of its descent through the various kingdoms comes about by a gradual polarization of its divine powers due to its contact with the conditions of gradual externalization of the descending and subjective arc of the spiral cycle.

of Luxor, see *The Spiritist Fallacy*, pt.i, chap. 2, and *Theosophy: History of a Psettdo-Rcliyion*, chaps. 2 and 31; hut we believed that it is nonetheless necessary to advise that it is foreign to all occultist movements, although some of these have judged it good to appropriate some of its teachings, distorting them completely to adapt them to their own ideas.

38. That is, the various states of subtle manifestation divided according to their correspondence with the elements.

39. That is to say that it has completely developed the entire series of modifications of which it is capable.

40. This is from the *outward* point of view, of course.

41. This indeed implies the *coexistence* of all the vital modalities.

This is an absolute truth expressed by the adept author of *Ghost Land* when he says that, *as an impersonal being*, man lives in an indefinite number of worlds before arriving in this one. In all these worlds, the soul develops its rudimentary states until its cyclic progress makes it capable of attaining ' - the special state whose glorious function is to confer *consciousness* on this soul. It is only at this moment that it truly becomes a man; in every other instant of its cosmic voyage it was but an embryonic being, a passing form, an impersonal creature in which shines a part, but only a part, of the *non-individualized* human soul. Once the great stage of *consciousness* has been reached, summit of the series of material manifestations, the soul will never again enter into the matrix of matter, will never again undergo *material incarnation*; henceforth *its rebirths are all in the kingdom of the spirit*. Those who maintain the strangely illogical doctrine of the multiplicity of *human* births have surely never developed in themselves the lucid state of spiritual consciousness; otherwise the theory of reincarnation, asserted and maintained today by a great number of men and women versed in 'worldly wisdom', would not be given the least credit. An *outward* education is relatively worthless as a means of obtaining *true* Knowledge.

No analogy favoring reincarnation is found in nature, while on the other hand, many are found favoring the contrary.

The acorn becomes oak, the coconut becomes palm; but let the oak produce myriads of other acorns, it will never again become an acorn itself, nor will the palm once again become coconut. The same for man: once the soul is manifested on the human plane and has thus reached consciousness of outward life, it never again passes through any of its rudimentary states.

A recent publication asserts that 'those who have led a noble life worthy of a king (be this in the body of a beggar) in their last earthly existence will come to life again as nobles, kings, or other persons of high rank'! But we know that kings and nobles

42. By the gradual extension of this development to the point where it attains a determinate zone that corresponds to the particular state here under consideration.

in the past have been and in the present are often the worst specimens of humanity that can be conceived from the spiritual point of view. Such assertions serve only to prove that their authors only speak under the inspiration of sentimentality and that they lack Knowledge.

All the alleged 're-awakening of latent memories' by which some people try to insure the recall of their past existences can be explained and even solely explained by simple laws of *affinity* and of *form*. Each race of human beings considered *in itself* is immortal; it is the same for each cycle: the first cycle never becomes the second, but the beings of the first cycle are (spiritually) the parents or *generators* of those of the second.⁴⁵ Thus each cycle includes a great family made up of the reunion of the different groups of human souls, each condition being determined by the laws of its *activity*, those of its *form*, and those of its *affinity*—a triad of laws.

This is why man can be compared to the acorn and the oak: the embryonic soul, un-individualized, becomes a man just as the acorn becomes an oak, and just as the oak gives birth to an innumerable quantity of acorns, so man in his turn provides an indefinite number of souls with the means to be born in the spiritual world. There is a complete correspondence between the two, and it is for this reason that the ancient Druids paid such great honors to this tree, which was honored above all the others by the powerful Hierophants.

Prom this one can see how far the Druids were from admitting 'transmigration' in the ordinary and material sense of the word, and how little they dreamed of the theory—which, we repeat, is wholly modern—of reincarnation.

43. this is why the Hindu tradition gives the name of *Pitris* (fathers or ancestors) to the beings of the cycle preceding ours, which is represented with regard to ours as corresponding to the Sphere of the Moon, the *Puris* make terrestrial humanity in their image and present humanity plays in its turn the same role toward the following cycle. This causal relation of one cycle to another necessarily presupposes the coexistence of all cycles, which are successive only horn the point of view of their logical sequence; if it were otherwise, such a relation could not exist (see *Mau amt His Recoinig according to the Vedanta*).

WE have recently read in a foreign spiritist journal an article in which the author criticizes with good reason the preposterous idea of those who announce the impending 'second coming' of Christ as necessarily being a reincarnation.⁴⁴ But where things become rather amusing is when the same author declares that if this thesis cannot be admitted, it is simply because according to him the return of Christ is even now an accomplished fact... thanks to spiritism!

'It has already happened,' says he, 'because in certain centers his communications are registered.' One must truly have a very robust faith in order to thus believe that Christ and his Apostles reveal themselves in spiritist seances and speak through the mouthpiece of mediums! If there are people for whom such a belief is necessary (and this seems to be the case with the great majority of Westerners) we do not hesitate to assert how much we still prefer the belief of the least enlightened Catholic or even the faith of the sincere materialist, for this also exists.⁴⁵

As we have already said, we think that neo-spiritism in any form is absolutely incapable of replacing the ancient religions in their social and moral roles, and nevertheless this is certainly the goal it proposes in a more or less open way. Earlier we alluded in particular to the claims of its promoters for education; in fact we just read a speech on this subject by one of them. Whatever he may have said on the subjective find very little stability in the 'liberal spiritualism' of those 'aviators of the spirit'(!?) who, seeing in the atmosphere 'two colossal rain clouds full to the jaws [stc] with contrary electricities', ask 'how to avoid the series of lightning Hashes, the scales of thunder [sic], the cataracts of lighting, and who despite these threatening omens wish to brave the freedom of education' as others have 'braved the freedom of space'. They nonetheless admit that 'education in the schools must remain neutral', but on condition that this

44. This bizarre opinion, which for some years has found much credit among the theosophists, is after all hardly more absurd than the opinion that St John the Baptist was a reincarnation of the prophet Elijah; we will say a few words later on about the different Gospel texts that some people have endeavored to interpret in favor of the reincarnationist theory.

45. See 'Regarding the Great Architect of the Universe' in *Studies in freemasonry and the Compagnonnage*.

'neutrality' lead to 'spiritualist' conclusions. It seems to us that this would only be an apparent neutrality, not a real one, and whoever has the least sense of logic can hardly think otherwise. But for them, on the contrary, this is 'profound neutrality'! A systematic mentality and preconceived ideas sometimes lead to strange contradictions, and this is an example that we wished to point out.⁴⁶ As for us, who are far from aspiring to any social action, it is obvious that this question of education thus posed cannot interest us in any way. The only method that could have a real value would be 'integral instruction',⁴⁷ and unfortunately, given the present mentality, it will no doubt be a long time before the least application of this can be made in the West, particularly in France, where the Protestant mentality so dear to certain 'liberal spiritualists' reigns as the absolute master at all levels and in all branches of government.

RECENTLY the author of the speech in question (we do not wish to name him here in order not to wound his... modesty, and the circumstances do not matter) decided it was good to reproach us for having said that we have 'absolutely nothing in common with him' (no more than with the other neo-spiritualists of any sect or school), and he objected that this must lead us to 'reject comradeship, virtue, to deny God, the immortality of the soul, and Christ'—a rather disparate collection of things! Although we formally forbid ourselves any polemics in this Journal we think that it would not be useless to reproduce here our response to these objections, for a more complete enlightenment of our readers and to mark more clearly and more precisely (at the risk of repeating ourselves somewhat) certain profound differences which we cannot emphasize too much.

First of all, whatever Mr X may say..., his God is certainly not ours, for he evidently believes, as do all modern Westerners, in a

46. In this connection but in another order of ideas we can recall the attitude of certain scholars who refuse to admit facts dtdy proved simply because their theories cannot provide a satisfactory explanation of them.

47. See *I. instruction integrate* by our eminent collaborator E Ch. Barlet.

'personal' (not to say individual) and rather anthropomorphic God who has 'nothing in common' with the metaphysical Infinite.⁴⁸ We will say as much of his idea of Christ, that is to say a unique Messiah who is an 'incarnation' of the Divinity; we on the contrary recognize a plurality (and even an indefinite number) of divine 'manifestations' which are not in any way 'incarnations', for above all it is important to maintain the purity of monotheism, which cannot agree with such a theory.

As to the individualistic idea of the 'immortality of the soul', this is even simpler, and Mr X... is strangely mistaken if he believes that we hesitate to state that we reject it completely, both in the form of an extra-terrestrial 'future life', as well as in the surely much more ridiculous and all too well known theory of 'reincarnation'. Questions of 'pre-existence' and 'post-existence' obviously do not arise for anyone who envisages all things outside of time; moreover, 'immortality' can only be an indefinite extension of life, and it will never be otherwise than rigorously equivalent to *zero* in the (ace of Eternity,⁴⁹ which alone interests us, and which is above life as well as time and all the other limitative conditions of individual existence. We know very well that Westerners are attached above all to their 'I'; but what value can a purely sentimental tendency like this have? Too bad for those who prefer illusory consolations to the Truth!

Finally, 'fraternity' and 'virtue' are manifestly nothing other than mere moral concepts; and morality, which is wholly relative and concerns only the very particular and restricted domain of social action,⁵⁰ has absolutely nothing to do with Gnosis, which is *exclusively metaphysical*. And we do not think we are 'risking' too much, as Mr X says, in asserting that he is

48. Moreover the word *God [Dien]* itself is so linked to the anthropomorphic conception [of the Divine] and has become so incapable of corresponding to anything else, that we prefer to avoid using it as much as possible, be this only to better mark the abyss that separates metaphysics from the religions.

49. See above, pi58,1133.

50. On this question of morality see 'Scientific (Conceptions and Masonic Ideal', cited above.

entirely ignorant of metaphysics; this being said, moreover, without reproaching him in the least, for it is incontestably allowable to be ignorant of what one has never had the occasion to study; no one is held to the impossible!

We said earlier, but without dwelling on it, that there are people, spiritists and others, who strive to prove the reincarnationist thesis 'experimentally'.⁵¹ Such an attempt must appear so improbable to any person with the least amount of common sense that one is tempted *a priori* to suppose it to be merely a bad joke; but it seems that it is not. Indeed, an experimenter of serious repute who has acquired a certain scientific esteem for his work on 'psychism'⁵² but who, unfortunately for him, seems little by little to have been converted almost entirely to the spiritist theories (it frequently happens that scholars are not exempt from a certain... naivete),⁵³ has quite recently published a work containing a description of his researches into so called 'successive lives' by means of the phenomena of 'memory regression' which he believes he has seen in certain subjects of hypnosis or magnetism.⁵⁴

51. See *The Spiritist fallacy*, chapter on reincarnation [pt. 2, chap. 6].

52. Lacking a less imperfect term we retain 'psychism', as vague and imprecise as it is, to designate all the studies of which the object is itself hardly better defined. Someone (Dr Richet we believe) had the unfortunate idea of substituting the word 'metapsychics', which has the immense drawback of making one think of something more or less analogous or parallel to metaphysics (and in this case we do not see clearly what that could be if not metaphysics itself under another name), while on the contrary this is an experimental science with methods modeled as exactly as possible on those of the physical sciences.

53. The case we allude to is not isolated and similar ones exist of which many are well known. Elsewhere we cited the cases of Crookes, Lobroso, Dr Richet, and Camille Elammarion ('Regarding the Great Architect of the Universe') and we could have added that of William James and many others besides. All of this merely proves that an analytic scholar, whatever his value as such and whatever his special domain, is not, outside of this domain, necessarily much better off than the great mass of the ignorant and credulous public who furnish the major part of the spirito-occultist clientele.

54. We shall not investigate here how far it is possible to clearly distinguish hypnotism and magnetism; it could indeed be that this distinction is more verbal than real and, in any case, it has no importance to the question that now occupies us.

We say: 'which he believes he has seen', for while we do not in any way wish to doubt his good faith, we think that the facts that he interprets in this way by virtue of a preconceived hypothesis are really explained in another, much simpler way. These facts can be summed up as follows: The subject, being in a certain state, can be placed mentally in conditions where he finds himself in a past age, and to be thus 'situated' at some age or another about which he then speaks as if it were the present, whence it is concluded that in this case there is no 'remembrance' but 'memory regression'. This latter, by the way, is a contradiction in terms, for there can obviously be no question of memory where there is no remembering; but leaving this observation aside, it must first be asked if the possibility of remembrance pure and simple is truly excluded for the sole reason that the subject speaks of the past as if it were present to him again.

To this one can immediately respond that memories as such are always mentally present;⁵⁵ what marks them in our present consciousness as memories of past events is their comparison with our present perceptions (we mean present as perceptions), a comparison that only allows one to be distinguished from the other by the establishment of a relationship (temporal, that is, of succession) between outward events⁵⁶ of which they are for us the respective mental representations. If for some reason (either by the momentary suppression of every outward impression or in some other way), this comparison comes to be impossible, memory, no longer localized in time with respect to other psychological elements at present different, loses its characteristic quality of past and preserves only its quality of present. Now this is precisely what happens in the case we are considering. The state in which the subject is

55. It matters little whether these memories are actually in the field of clear and distinct consciousness, or in that of the 'subconscious' (taking this word in its most general sense), since normally they can always pass from one to the other, which shows that this is only a difference of degree and nothing more.

56. Outward with respect to the point of view of our individual consciousness, of course; this distinction between memory and perception belongs to the most elementary psychology and, on the other hand, it is independent of the question of the mode of perception of the objects regarded as outward, or rather of their sensible qualities.

placed corresponds to a modification of his present consciousness, implying an extension of the individual faculties in a certain direction to the momentary detriment of the development in another direction that these faculties possess in their normal state. If therefore the subject is prevented in such a state from being affected by present perceptions and if, further, all events after a certain determinate moment are kept from his consciousness (conditions that are perfectly attainable with the help of suggestion), they cannot be situated in the past or considered in this aspect because in the present field of consciousness there is no longer any element to which they can be related as temporally past.

In all of this it is a question of nothing more than a mental state implying a modification of the conception of time (or better, of its comprehension) with respect to the normal state; moreover, these two states are both only two different modifications of one and the same individuality.⁵⁷ Indeed, there can be no question of higher and extra-individual states in which the being is freed from the temporal condition, nor even of an extension of the individuality implying such freedom in part, since on the contrary the subject is placed in a determinate instant which essentially presupposes that his present state is conditioned by time. Besides, on the one hand states like those to which we have just alluded obviously cannot be reached by means that remain entirely within the domain of the present and restricted individuality, as every experimental process necessarily is; on the other hand, even if these states should in some way be reached, they could never be discerned by this individuality whose particular conditions of existence have no contact with those of the higher states, and because, as a particular individuality, it is necessarily incapable of assenting to, and *a fortiori* of expressing, all that is above the limits of its own possibilities.⁵⁸

57. The same goes for the states (spontaneous or induced) corresponding to all the alterations of individual consciousness, the most important of which are usually ranged under the improper and defective name of 'split personality'.

58. Besides, all the cases we are considering involve only physical events, and even, most often, terrestrial ones (although another well known experimenter once published a detailed description of supposed 'earlier incarnations' of his subject on

As for really returning to the past, this is something which is as we have said elsewhere manifestly just as impossible for the human individual as is travel into the future;⁵⁹ and we never would have thought that Wells' "time machine"⁶⁰ could have been considered to be anything but pure fantasy, nor that anyone would come to speak seriously about the 'reversibility of time'. Space is reversible, that is to say that after any one of its parts has been traversed in a given direction it can thereafter be traversed in the opposite direction; this is because it is a coordination of elements considered in present and permanent mode; but time, on the contrary, is a coordination of elements considered in successive and transitory mode and thus cannot be reversible, for such a supposition would be the very negation of the point of view of succession, or, in other words, it would amount precisely to the abolition of the temporal condition.⁶¹ Nonetheless there are people who have conceived this singular—to say the least—idea of the 'reversibility of time' and who have attempted to base it on a 'theorem of mechanics'!?) which we believe interesting enough to reproduce in its entirety in order to show more clearly the origin of their fantastic hypothesis.

The complex series of all the successive states of a system of bodies being known, and these states following and developing from each other in a determinate order from the past, which serves as cause, to the future, which has the rank of effect [sic], let us then

the planet Mars, without being surprised that all that happened there should be so easily described in earthly language!); there is nothing in all of this that requires the least intervention of the higher states of the being, the existence of which the 'psy-chists' do not of course even suspect.

59. For this and for what follows see our study on 'The Conditions of Corporeal Existence'.

60. H.G. Wells, 1866-1946, English novelist with a taste for science fiction and 'progress'. Er>.

61. This abolition of the temporal condition is indeed possible, but not in the cases we are considering here, since these cases always presuppose time; and when speaking elsewhere of the 'eternal present' we have been very careful to point out that this can have nothing to do with a return to the past or traveling into the future since it precisely abolishes the past and the future by freeing us from the viewpoint of succession, that is to say from what constitutes for our present being, the whole reality of the temporal condition.

consider one of these successive states, and without changing anything of the composing masses or of the forces that act between these masses,⁶² or of the laws of these forces nor of the present situations of these masses in space, let us replace each velocity by an equal and contrary velocity.⁶³ We shall call this 'reverting' all the speeds; this change itself will take the name of reversion, and we shall call its possibility reversibility of the movement of the system.

Let us pause a moment here, for it is precisely this possibility that we cannot admit even from the point of view of movement, which is necessarily effected in time; in a new series of successive states but in the opposite direction, the system under consideration will regain the positions that it had earlier occupied in space, but time will never be the same as before, and it is obviously sufficient for one condition to change in order that the new states of the system be completely unable to identify with the preceding ones. Moreover, in the reasoning that we cited, it is explicitly supposed (although in rather dubious French) that the relation of past to future is a relation of cause and effect, while on the contrary the causal relationship essentially implies simultaneity, whence the result that from this point of view the states considered to follow each other cannot develop from one another.⁶⁴ But let us continue:

Now when the reversion of velocities in a system of bodies has been effected,⁶⁵ the complete series of future and past states for

62. 'On these masses' would have been more comprehensible.

63. A velocity contrary to another or indeed in a different direction cannot be equal to it in the rigorous sense of the word, it can only be equivalent to it in quantity; on the other hand, is it possible to consider this 'reversal' as changing nothing of the laws of the movement under consideration, given that, if these laws had continued to be followed normally, it would not have been produced?

64. *Man and His Becoming according to the Vedanta*. Consequently, if the memory of some impression can be the cause of other mental phenomena, this is as a present memory, but the past impression cannot now be the cause of anything.

65. The author of the argument had the prudence to add parenthetically 'not in reality but in pure thought'; by this he completely leaves the domain of mechanics and what he speaks of no longer has any connection with 'a system of bodies'; but it

this reverted system must be found. Will this inquiry be any more difficult than the corresponding problem for the successive states of a non-reverted system? Neither more nor less,⁶⁶ and the solution to one of these problem will give the solution to the other by a very simple change, that in technical terms consists in changing the algebraic sign for time, writing $-t$ instead of $+t$, and inversely.

This is indeed very simple in theory, but leaving aside the fact that the notation of 'negative numbers' is only a wholly artificial process meant to simplify calculations and that it does not correspond to any kind of reality, the author of this argument (falls into a serious error that is shared, moreover, by almost all mathematicians, and in order to interpret the change of sign that he has just noted he immediately adds:

That is to say that the two complete series of successive states of the same system of bodies differ only in that the future becomes past and the past becomes future.⁶⁷ The same series of successive states will be traversed in the opposite direction. The reversion of velocities simply reverses time; the original series of successive states and the reverted series have at all corresponding moments the same systemic figures with the same equal and contrary velocities [sic].

Unfortunately, the reversion of velocities really only reverses the spatial situations and not time; instead of being 'the same series of successive states traversed in the opposite direction' there will be a second series inversely homologous to the first with respect only to

is to be remembered that he himself considers the so-called 'reversion unrealizable, contrary to the hypothesis of those who would like to apply his argument to 'memory regression'.

66. Evidently, since in both cases one examines a movement of which all the elements are given; but in order for this investigation to correspond to anything real or even possible one must not let oneself be fooled by mere changes in notation!

67. This is certainly a peculiar phantasmagoria, and it must be acknowledged that an operation as common as a mere change of algebraic sign is endowed with a most strange and truly marvelous power... in the eyes of mathematicians!

space. This will not make the past become the future, and the future will not become the past except in virtue of the normal and natural law of succession, as this occurs at every instant. It is truly too easy to show the unconscious and multiple sophisms hidden behind such arguments; yet this is all they can find to show us in justification, 'before science and philosophy', of a theory like that of so-called 'memory regressions'!

This being said, in order to complete the psychological explanations mentioned at the beginning, we must also point out that the claimed 'return to the past' (which is really only a recalling to clear and distinct consciousness of memories preserved in a latent state in the subconscious memory of the subject) is facilitated from the psychological point of view by the fact that every impression necessarily leaves a trace in the organism that has experienced it. Here we do not have to investigate the way in which this impression may be recorded in various nerve centers; this is an investigation that belongs to experimental science pure and simple, which, moreover, has already been able to 'localize' almost exactly the centers corresponding to the different modalities of the memory.⁶⁸ The action exerted on these centers, aided by the psychological factor of suggestion, allows the subject to be placed in the desired conditions to realize the experiences we discussed, at least as to their first part, that relating to events in which he has really played a role or has witnessed at a more or less remote period.⁶⁹

68. This 'localization' is made possible especially by observing different cases of 'paramnesia' (partial alterations of the memory); and we can add that the sort of fractionating of the memory witnessed in these cases allows one to explain a great number of the so-called 'double personalities' referred to earlier.

69. As strange as this might appear at first sight, one could also speak of a correspondence, as much physiological as psychological, with events not yet realized but the virtualities of which the individual bears within himself. These virtualities are expressed by predispositions and tendencies of various kinds that are like the present seed of future events that concern the individual. Every diathesis is ultimately an organic predisposition of this kind; an individual carries within himself, from his origin *tab ovo*, one could say) this or that illness in a latent state, but this illness might not manifest itself except in circumstances favorable to its development, for example, under the effect of some trauma or any other cause that weakens the organism. If these circumstances are not met, the illness will never develop

But of course the physiological correspondence that we just pointed out is possible only for impressions that have really affected the subject's organism; likewise from the psychological point of view the individual consciousness of some being can obviously not contain anything except elements that have some connection with the actual individuality of this being. This should suffice to show that it is useless to pursue experimental investigations beyond certain limits, that is, in the present case, before the birth of the subject, or at least before the beginning of his embryonic life; yet it is this that they claim to do on the basis of the preconceived hypothesis of reincarnation (as we said), and they think they are thus able to 'revive' the subject's 'anterior lives' while in the interval also studying 'what is taken to be the non-incarnated spirit'!

Here we are in complete fantasy. How can one speak of the 'anteriority of the living being' when it is a question of a time when this living being did not yet exist in the individualized state; and how can one wish to take him back before his origin, that is to say into conditions in which he never existed, thus conditions that for him do not correspond to any reality? This amounts to creating an artificial reality from scratch, if one may express oneself thus, that is to say a present mental reality that is not the representation of any kind of sensible reality; the suggestion given by the experimenter provides the starting-point for it, and the imagination of the subject does the rest. The same thing, minus the initial suggestion, happens in the state of ordinary dreams where the 'individual soul creates a world that comes entirely from itself and whose objects consist exclusively in mental images'⁷⁰ without it being possible to distinguish these images from perceptions originating from outside, at least as long as no comparison is established between these two kinds of psychological elements, which can only occur by a more or less clearly conscious passage from the dream state to the state of waking.⁷¹ Thus an induced dream, a state similar in every respect to

in the organism, just as a psychological tendency that does not manifest itself by an outward act is no less real despite this.

70. See *Man anil His Becoming according to the Vedanta*.

71. But this comparison is never possible in the case of a dream induced by suggestion since at his wakening the subject preserves no memory of it in his normal consciousness.

those in which partially or wholly imaginary perceptions are provoked in a subject by the appropriate suggestions, but with this one difference that here the experimenter is himself the dupe of his own suggestion and takes the mental creations of the subject for the 'awakening of memories'⁷²—behold what the would-be exploration of successive lives' is reduced to, the sole 'experimental proof' that the reincarnationists have been able to furnish in favor of their theory.

That an attempt should be made to apply suggestion to 'psychotherapy', to use it to heal drunkards or maniacs or to develop the mentality of certain idiots, is an endeavor that does not fail to be most praiseworthy, and whatever the results obtained, we shall not change our opinion on the matter. But let this be the limit and let there be an end to the use of phantasmagorias like those of which we have just spoken. Nevertheless, people will still come forth to vaunt the 'clarity and evidence of spiritism' and oppose it to the 'obscurity of metaphysics', which they confuse with the most commonplace philosophy;⁷⁵ peculiar evidence, at least if it is not evidence of absurdity! But all of this does not surprise us in the least, for we know very well that the spiritists and other 'psychists' of different ilks are all like a certain person with whom we recently had dealings; they are profoundly ignorant of what metaphysics is, and we shall certainly not undertake to explain it to them. *Sarebbe lavar la testa all' asino* [Let them wash the head of a donkey],⁷⁶ as they irreverently say in Italian.

72. Moreover, the subject could also consider them to be memories, for a dream can include memories as well as present impressions, without the two kinds of element being anything more than pure mental creations. We are not of course speaking of waking memories that often mingle with a dream, because the separation of the two states of consciousness is rarely complete, at least with regard to ordinary sleep. They seem to be much more separate in induced sleep, and this is what explains the complete forgetting that follows the awakening of the subject.

73. Some even go so far as to claim they have had 'metaphysical experiences' without realizing that the juncture of these two words constitutes a pure and simple 'non-sense'.

74. A close English equivalent would be 'let them try to make a silk purse from a sow's ear.' ED.

7

CONCERNING A MISSION TO CENTRAL ASIA

AT the moment there is much talk of the discoveries that Paul Pelliot, a former student of the French School of the Far East, appears to have made during a recent exploration of Central Asia. So many French and foreign missions have succeeded one another in this region without any appreciable results that one is permitted to be a little skeptical at first. No doubt, explorers have brought back documents that are interesting from the geographical point of view, especially photographs, as well as zoological, botanical, and mineral specimens, but nothing more. But here is what Pelliot himself relates about his expedition, first at a conference held at the Sorbonne on December 11 [1909] and then in an article that appeared in *Echo de Paris* on December 15 and 16. To learn of his archeological discoveries we can best refer to his own account.

Near the village of Tumchuk in Chinese Turkestan, he says he first found a group of ruins almost entirely buried, from which he was able to extricate some Buddhist sculptures exhibiting very clear traces of Hellenic influence. Then, at Kutchar, one of the principal oases of Chinese Turkestan, he excavated 'some artificial grottoes furnished as Buddhist sanctuaries and decorated with murals', as well as open air temples; 'in the court of one of these there one day came to light a thick pile of manuscripts all in confusion and mixed with sand and salt crystal,' in short, in rather bad shape.

To separate the pages required much time and the attention of expert hands; thus these documents have not been deciphered. All that can be said about them at the moment is that they are written in the Hindu script called Brahmi but translated for the most part into those mysterious Central Asian languages that European philology has hardly begun to understand.

Thus Pelliot himself recognizes that the philologists, of whom he is one, have only a very imperfect knowledge of certain Asian languages; this is a point we shall return to later. For the moment, let us note only that we have been assured that Pelliot 'knows the ancient Chinese, Brahmi, Uigur, and Tibetan languages perfectly' (*Echo de Paris* of December 10); it is true that it was not he himself who said this, but he is doubtless too modest to do so.

However this may be, it certainly seems that early in his exploration Pelliot, like his Russian, English, German, and Japanese predecessors, was the only one to discover

preserved by the sands of this desiccated country, the remains of an essentially Buddhist civilization that had flourished there during the first two centuries of the present era, and was abruptly destroyed around the year 1000 by Islam.

This is therefore not a relatively recent civilization 'where influences from India, Persia, Greece, and the Far East' mingled, and that simply came to be superimposed on earlier civilizations dating back many thousands of years. Now Chinese Turkestan is not far from Tibet; is Pelliot ignorant of the true age of Tibetan civilization, and does he believe it also to be 'essentially Buddhist' as many of his peers have claimed? The reality is that Buddhism never had anything but a completely superficial influence in these regions, and that in Tibet itself it would be difficult to find any traces of it, unfortunately for those who even now wish to make it the center of Buddhist religion. The ancient civilizations to which we have just alluded must thus have been buried under the sand, but to find them it would doubtless have been necessary to dig a bit deeper; it is truly regrettable that no one should have thought of this.

After spending some time at Urumachi, capital of Chinese Turkestan, Pelliot proceeded to Tuan Huang in Western Kan Su, knowing 'that about twenty kilometers from the city was a sizeable group of Buddhist caves called Ts'ien-Fo-Tong or Caves of the Thousand Buddhas.' Here again it is thus a Buddhist civilization that is involved; it would really seem that there were never any others in this country, or at least that this was the first to have left any vestiges, and nonetheless everything proves to us the contrary. One is obliged to think that there are things that, while very apparent to some, are completely invisible to others. 'We examined these Buddhist caves for a long while,' says Pelliot; 'there were almost five hundred dating from the sixth to the eleventh century, still covered with the paintings and inscriptions with which the donors decorated them.' Thus, at Tuan Huang as in Turkestan, there is nothing prior to the Christian era; all of this is almost modern, given that, on the admission of the sinologists themselves, 'a rigorously controlled chronology allows one to go as far back in Chinese history as four thousand years,' and these four thousand years are nothing when compared with the period, considered legendary, that preceded them.

But here is the most important discovery. At Urumachi, Pelliot heard that ancient manuscripts had been found a few years earlier in one of the caves at Tuan Huang.

In 1900 a monk, who was clearing out one of the bigger caves, chanced upon a walled niche that, when opened, was found to be filled with manuscripts and paintings.

It is rather strange that all this remained in the same place from 1900 until 1908 without anyone being told that these manuscripts and paintings might be of some interest; even admitting that the monk was wholly illiterate, as Pelliot believes (which would be very surprising), he would nonetheless not have gone without announcing his find to people more capable of appreciating its value. But what is even more surprising is that this monk allowed strangers to examine these documents and to take away everything that they found interesting; never has any explorer encountered such compliance among Easterners, who generally guard everything that relates to the past and to the traditions of their country and their race with

a jealous caution. We cannot cast doubt on Pelliot's account, however, but we have to think that not everyone attached the same importance to these documents as he, or they would long since have been safely stored in some monastery—let us call it Buddhist so as not to take from the sinologists all their illusions. No doubt, Pelliot was made to find these manuscripts just as curious travelers who visit Tibet are made to see many things so that they will be satisfied and not extend their investigations too far; it is both easier and more polite than to turn them away abruptly, and, as to politeness, the Chinese are known not to yield anything to any other people.

There was a bit of everything in this niche at Tuan Huang:

texts in Brahmi, Tibetan, Uigur, but also many in Chinese; Buddhist, and Taoist manuscripts on paper or silk, a Nestorian Christian text, a Manichean fragment, works of history, geography, philosophy, literature, the archetypes of the classics [sic], the oldest prints in the Far East, sales records, leases, financial records, accounts, many paintings on silk, and finally, xylographs from the tenth and even the eighth centuries, the oldest in the world.

In this enumeration Taoist manuscripts seem to be found there as if by chance, just as the Nestorian and Manichean texts, of which the presence is rather surprising. On the other hand, since the xylograph was known in China long before the Christian era, it is hardly likely that the prints in question here are really 'the oldest in the world' as Pelliot believes. Pelliot, well pleased by his discovery, which he himself proclaims 'the most extraordinary that the history of the Far East has ever recorded,' hastened to return to China proper; the letters from Peking, which are too polite to permit any doubt as to the value of the documents he describes, beg him to send them photographs of the discoveries that would serve as the basis for a large publication.

Pelliot has now returned to France with his collection of paintings, bronzes, ceramics, and sculptures collected all along his route, and especially with manuscripts found at Kutchar and Tuan Huang. While admitting that these manuscripts have all the value some wish to attribute to them, we are left to wonder how the philologists

are going to go about deciphering and translating them, and this task does not seem to be a very easy one.

Despite all the scholars' claims, the much vaunted progress of philology seems to be rather dubious judging by how oriental languages are still officially taught today. Concerning sinology in particular, people still follow the path of the first translators and little seems to have advanced in a half century. We can take the translations of Lao Tzu, for example, of which the first, by G. Pauthier, is surely the most deserving and conscientious, despite the inevitable imperfections. Even before it was published, this translation was violently criticized by Stanislaus Julien, who seems to have tried to deprecate it in favor of his own, which is nonetheless much inferior and only dates from 1842 while Pauthier's dates from 1833. In his introduction to the *Tao Tc Ching*, moreover, Stanislaus Julien shares the views of the following statement by A. Remusat in *Un Mcmoire sur Lao-tsen* which could still be repeated by modern sinologists.

The text of the *Tao* is so full of obscurities, we have so few means to acquire a perfect understanding of it, so little knowledge of the circumstances to which the author alludes; in every respect we are so far from the ideas that influenced his writing, that it would be foolhardy to claim to discover exactly the meaning he had in mind.

Despite this admitted incomprehension, the translation of Stanislaus Julien (we shall see shortly what this is worth in itself) is still held to be authoritative and is the one to which official sinologists most readily turn.

In reality, leaving aside the very remarkable translation of the *I Ching* and its traditional commentaries by M. Philastre, a translation that is unfortunately very little understood by Western intellectuals, it must be recognized that nothing truly serious was done in this regard until the work of Matgioi. Before him, Chinese metaphysics was entirely unknown in Europe; one could even say wholly unsuspected without risking the accusation of exaggeration. Since the translations of the two books of the *Tao* and the *Te* by Matgioi have been seen and approved in the Far East by sages who retain the heritage of Taoist Science, which for us guarantees their perfect

exactitude, Stanislaus Julien's translation must be compared to it. We shall be content to refer to the eloquent notes accompanying the tradition of *Tao* and *Tc* published in *La Haute Science* (2ⁿⁱ year, 1894) in which Matgioi presents a number of mistranslations such as the following: 'It is good to place a shelf of jade in front of one and to mount a chariot of four horses,' instead of 'Joined together they go faster and more forcefully than a chariot of four horses.' We could cite at random a host of similar examples where a term signifying 'the blink of an eye' becomes 'a rhinoceros horn', or where money becomes 'a commoner' and its true value 'a wagon' and so forth; but here is something even more telling, that is, the appraisal of a native scholar reported in these words by Matgioi:

Having in hand the French paraphrase by Julien, I then had the idea of re-translating it literally into common Chinese for the doctor who was teaching me. He first began to smile silently in the Eastern manner, then became indignant, and finally declared, 'The French must indeed be enemies of Asians if their scholars amuse themselves by knowingly distorting the works of Chinese philosophy and changing them into grotesque fabrications to be held up to the ridicule of the French masses.' I did not try to make my doctor believe that Julien imagined his to be a respectable translation, for he would then have questioned the worth of all our scholars. I preferred to let him doubt the sincerity of Julien alone; and thus it is that the latter has posthumously paid for the indiscretion he committed while living by tackling texts of which the meaning and import inevitably escaped him.

We think the example of Stanislaus Julien, who was a member of the Institute, gives a good idea of the value of philologists in general. Nonetheless there may be honorable exceptions and we even prefer to believe that Pelliot is one; it is now up to him to give us proof of it by accurately interpreting the texts he has brought back from his expedition. However this may be, as regards Taoist texts, today it should no longer be possible to demonstrate an ignorance of Chinese metaphysics that might have been excusable up to a point in the time of Rimusat and Stanislaus Julien, but that can no longer be so after the work of Matgioi, especially after the publication of his

two most important works from this point of view, *La Voie Metaphysique* and *La Voie Rationelle*. But official scholars, always disdainful of anything that does not come from one of their own, are hardly capable of profiting from them precisely because of their peculiar mentality. This is a great pity for them, and if we are permitted to counsel Pelliot, we urge him with all our strength not to follow the unfortunate errors of his predecessors.

If we move from Chinese manuscripts to texts written in the languages of Central Asia or even in the sacred languages of India, we find ourselves in the presence of yet graver difficulties, for as we observed above, Pelliot himself recognizes that 'European philology has hardly begun to interpret these mysterious idioms.' We can go even further and say that among these languages, each of which has a script of its own, without counting the cryptographic systems very much still in use throughout the East, which in certain cases make deciphering completely impossible (even in Europe one finds inscriptions of this kind which have never been interpreted) among these languages, we say, there are a great number of which everything, even the name, is and will long remain unknown by Western scholars. In order to translate these texts they will probably turn to methods that the Egyptologists and Assyriologists have already used in other branches of philology; the interminable arguments that arise between them at every moment, their inability to agree on the most essential points of their science, as well as the obvious absurdities met with in all their interpretations, sufficiently illustrate the minimal value of the results they achieve, of which they are nonetheless so proud. The strangest thing is that these scholars claim to understand the languages they study even better than those who spoke and wrote them in the past; we do not exaggerate, for we have seen noted in manuscripts so-called interpolations which according to them prove that the copyist was mistaken about the meaning of the text he transcribed.

We are here far from the cautious reserve of the first sinologists mentioned above; yet if the claims of the philologists are always on the increase, their science is far from making a similarly rapid progress. Thus Egyptologists still use Champollion's method, their only fault being to apply it solely to inscriptions from the Greek and

Roman periods when Egyptian writing had become purely phonetic following the degeneration of the language, whereas earlier it had been hieroglyphic, that is to say ideographic like Chinese writing. Moreover, the failing of all official philologists is to want to interpret sacred languages, nearly all of which are ideographic, as they do common languages, which are merely alphabetic or phonetic. Let us add that there are languages that combine the ideographic and alphabetic systems; biblical Hebrew is like this, as Fabre d'Olivet has shown in *The Hebraic Tongue Restored*; and we can note in passing that this is sufficient to make it clear that the true meaning of the Bible has nothing in common with the ridiculous interpretations that have been attributed to it from the commentaries of Protestant as well as Catholic theologians—which moreover are based on versions that are entirely erroneous—to the critiques of modern exegetes who are still at the point of asking how it happens that in Genesis there are passages where God is called E'H^N and others where He is called ΓΠΓΓ, without seeing that these two terms, the first of which is a plural, have a completely different meaning and that in reality neither has ever designated God.

Furthermore, what makes the translation of ideographic languages almost impossible is the multitude of meanings belonging to the hierogrammatical characters, each of which corresponds to a different if analogous idea according as it is related to one level or another of the universe; from this it follows that three principal meanings can always be distinguished, which are in turn subdivided into a great number of secondary and more particular significations. This explains why one cannot properly speaking translate the sacred books; one can only make a paraphrase or a commentary, and this is what the philologists and exegetes ought to resign themselves to, if only they could grasp the most outward meaning; unfortunately, up to now they do not seem to have attained even this modest result. Let us hope that Pelliot will be more fortunate than his colleagues, and that the manuscripts he possesses will not remain for him a dead letter, and let us wish him all courage in the arduous task he has undertaken.

8

PROFANE SCIENCE IN LIGHT OF TRADITIONAL DOCTRINES

ALTHOUGH we have often explained what ought to be the normal attitude toward profane science on the part of anyone who represents or merely expounds a traditional doctrine of any sort, it seems from certain remarks that have recently come to us from various quarters, that everyone has not yet fully understood it. We must admit that there is an excuse for this: the attitude in question is difficult to conceive for those who have been affected to some degree by the modern mentality, which is to say for the immense majority of our contemporaries, at least in the West. Rare are those who succeed in fully disencumbering themselves of the prejudices inherent in this mentality, and which have been imposed on them by their education and by the very ambiance in which they live. Now, among these prejudices one of the strongest is certainly a belief in the value of modern science, which is really the same thing as profane science, and as a result many have a more or less unconscious desire not to admit that the real or supposed results of this science are something that can be disregarded.

First of all we will recall that in every order it is the profane point of view as such that is illegitimate, and this point of view consists essentially in considering things without a link to any transcendent principle and as if they were independent of every principle, which it ignores purely and simply, even when it does not go as far as to deny them outright. This definition applies equally to the domain of action and to that of knowledge; in the latter it is evident that such

is the case of modern science in its entirety, and that as a consequence modern science has no right to be considered as true knowledge since, even if it should happen to state things that are true, its manner of presenting them is nonetheless illegitimate, and it is in any case unable to give the reason for their truth which can only lie in their dependence on principles. Of course, when we speak of knowledge this does not concern the practical applications that can result from this science, for these applications are completely independent of the value of the science as such and consequently do not interest us here. Besides, scientists themselves readily recognize that they make use of forces the nature of which is completely unknown to them. This ignorance no doubt accounts for much of the danger that these applications too often present, but this is another question which we do not have to pursue at present.

It could be asked whether, in spite of everything, such a science might not be legitimized by re-establishing, for the part of truth it can contain of a relative order, the link with principles which alone would permit this truth to be effectively understood as such. Certainly this is not impossible in some cases, but then it would not really be a question of the same science, since this would imply a complete change of point of view, and a traditional point of view would thereby be substituted for the profane point of view; and it must not be forgotten that a science is not defined solely by its object but also by the point of view from which it considers the object. If it were to happen, what could be preserved would have to be most carefully distinguished from what on the contrary would have to be eliminated, that is to say all the false ideas which ignorance of principles has only too easily allowed to be introduced; and the very formulation of truths would most often have to be corrected, for it is almost always seriously influenced by the false ideas with which the truths in question are associated in profane science. We ourselves, in one of our works, have given some evidence of this in regard to certain aspects of modern mathematics;¹ and let no one come and say that in such an instance the correction of terminology would have but little fundamental importance, or even that it

1. See *The Metaphysical Principles of the Infinitesimal Calculus*.

would not merit the effort required, under the pretext that mathematicians are not themselves dupes of the absurdities implied in the language they use. First of all, incorrect language always presupposes some confusion in thought, and it is more serious than might be thought to refuse to correct this error, and to treat it as something negligible or indifferent. Next, even if professional mathematicians finally realize the falsehood of certain ideas, nonetheless, by continuing to speak in ways that reflect these same false ideas, they contribute to spreading or maintaining them among those who in any measure receive their teaching, directly or indirectly, and who cannot examine things as closely as they. Finally, and most importantly, the fact of using terminology to which no plausible significance is attached is nothing but another manifestation of the growing tendency of modern science to become nothing more than an empty 'conventionalism', a tendency that is itself characteristic of the phase of 'dissolution' succeeding that of 'solidification' in the last periods of the cycle.² It would be truly curious and moreover very worthy of an age of intellectual disorder like ours, if, in wanting to prove that the objections we have formulated against their science were not really applicable to them, people were to advance precisely an argument that on the contrary only provided a still more ample confirmation of it!

This leads us directly to a more general consideration: we know that people sometimes reproach us for raising an argument against modern scientific theories that are hardly accepted any longer by scientists themselves, or concerning which they at least have reservations not held by their predecessors. To take an example, it is true that transformism has lost much ground in 'scientific' circles without it being possible to go so far as to say that it has no more advocates, which would be a manifest exaggeration. But it is no less true that it continues to spread as before, and with the same 'dogmatic' assurance, in textbooks and in works of popularization, that is to say in all that is in fact accessible to those who are not 'specialists', so much so that as regards the influence it exercises on the general mentality nothing has truly changed, and in this respect it still

2. See *The Reign of Quantity and the Signs of the Times*.

retains the same 'currency'. Moreover, it must be well understood that the importance we attach to this fact, which can also be noted for other 'out of date' or 'outgrown' theories (according to the fashionable expressions), is in no way due to any particular interest we bear toward the 'general public'. The true reason is that these theories affect without distinction all those who, as we just said, are not 'specialists', among whom there are surely some, however few they may be, who, if not subjected to such influences, would possess possibilities of comprehension that, on the contrary, would hardly be expected among scientists irremediably enclosed in their 'specialties'. In truth, although for their part many of these scientists have renounced the gross forms of transformism, we are not sure that it is not simply in order to replace them with ideas which, even if more subtle, are worth no more fundamentally and are perhaps even more dangerous. In any case, why do they maintain a blame-worthy equivocation, continuing to speak of 'evolution' as they always have, if what they now really mean by this term hardly has any connection with what used to be designated by it? Must one see here, as well, one of the manifestations of current scientific 'conventionalism', or simply an example of the tendency that words have today, even in everyday usage, to completely lose their normal meanings? However this may be, what is rather strange is that while certain people reproach us for not sufficiently taking into consideration what could be called scientific 'topicality', in other circles there are people who, on the contrary, certainly do not forgive us for thinking and saying that materialism is no longer the only danger there is reason to decry, nor even the principal or most formidable one. It is very difficult to satisfy everyone, and we must add, moreover, that for our part this is something that has never greatly preoccupied us.

Let us now return to the question of the legitimation of the modern sciences. If, as we said, this legitimation is possible for some, it is not so for all equally, for it is a necessary condition that a science have an object that is legitimate in itself even if, because of its profane character, its manner of considering it is not legitimate. Now this condition is not fulfilled by those sciences—we ought rather to say so-called sciences—which are really only specific products of the

modern deviation. A typical case of this sort is psychoanalysis, and there is no good reason to attempt to link to higher principles what is properly only an aberration due to the action of the lowest psychic influences; one might as well try to legitimize spiritism or 'sur-realist' divagations, which have a wholly similar origin, the only difference being that these latter are not admitted into the categories of 'official' teaching. On the other hand, as regards those modern sciences that have at least a legitimate object, it must not be forgotten that for many of them one has to take into account their 'residual' character regarding certain ancient sciences, as we have explained on other occasions, so that legitimizing them would amount to a more or less integral restoration of the traditional sciences to which they correspond and of which they are only the degenerate vestiges resulting from the forgetting of principles. But this restoration itself would not be without difficulty, for among these traditional sciences are some, like astrology, the true 'keys' to which seem to have been lost completely, and great care would have to be taken not to confuse them with more or less recent deformations that one meets with today under the same name and which themselves are very much affected by the profane point of view that more and more encroaches on everything.

The question we have just been considering has as yet only a 'theoretical' interest, as it were, for in fact the legitimation in question has not yet been undertaken in any case, so that when it is a question of modern science one is solely in the presence of profane science. With respect to traditional doctrines this can only be considered to be purely and simply non-existent; in other words, there is no need to preoccupy oneself with knowing whether it agrees or disagrees with these doctrines, with which, because of its lack of principles, it could have no effective link. If there is disagreement one can be certain that the error is necessarily on the part of the profane science, for traditional data cannot be the object of any doubt for anyone who understands their true nature. If on the contrary there is agreement, this is all the better for the science in question, but only for it, for this shows that it has managed to arrive, albeit by very roundabout and uncertain ways, at the truth about certain particular points. This concurrence, which has only a wholly

accidental character, is of no importance to traditional doctrines, for these have no need of any outward 'confirmation'. Moreover, it would be a strange kind of confirmation made by appeals to a science for which the truths in question, as all of its theories, can never be anything except mere, more or less probable, hypotheses. For the same reasons there is no additional reason to try to associate traditional data with ideas borrowed from profane science or more or less directly inspired by it; this is a perfectly vain undertaking which could only be the work of people like the occultists, for example, who are completely ignorant of the true import of the fragmentary elements they have taken from the little they know of different traditions. We have often enough explained the inanity of this sort of 'syncretistic' and hybrid construction for it to be unnecessary for us to enlarge on it again.

Furthermore, we have also had occasion to point out the weakness, not to say more, of the attitude customarily called 'apologetic', which consists in trying to defend a tradition against attacks such as those by modern science, by disputing these arguments on their own ground, something that almost always entails unfortunate concessions and that in any case implies a misunderstanding of the transcendent character of traditional doctrine. This is the usual attitude of exoterists, and it may be thought that very often they are especially driven by the fear that numerous adherents of their tradition will be led astray by scientific objections, or what are so called, raised against it; but beside the fact that this 'quantitative' consideration is itself of a rather profane order, these objections merit all the less having such importance attached to them since the science that inspires them changes continually—and this should suffice to prove what little soundness they have. When one sees theologians, for example, preoccupied with 'making the Bible agree with science', it is only too easy to see how illusory is such work, since it constantly has to be redone as scientific theories change, this without counting the drawback of appearing to link tradition to the present state of profane science, that is, to theories that in a few years will perhaps no longer be accepted by anyone, if they have not already been abandoned by scientists—for this also can happen, as the objections that are challenged are more usually the work of popularizers than

of the scientists themselves. Instead of clumsily reducing sacred scriptures to such a level, these theologians would surely do much better to penetrate their true meaning as far as possible and to expound them purely and simply for the benefit of those who are able to understand and who, if they understood them effectively, would thereby no longer be tempted to let themselves be influenced by the hypotheses of profane science, any more than by the dissolving 'critique' of a modernist and rationalist, that is, essentially anti-traditional, exegesis, the alleged results of which no longer need to be taken into consideration by those who are conscious of what tradition really is. Whoever expounds a traditional doctrine, exoteric as well as esoteric, not only has the strictest right but even the duty to refrain from the least compromise with the profane point of view, whatever the domain in question. But in the West today, where are those who still understand that this must be so? Perhaps some will say that, after all, this is the business of theologians (since we have just taken them as an example) and not our own. But we are not among those who think one can dissociate oneself from attacks upon any tradition and who are even always ready to congratulate themselves on attacks aimed at a tradition other than their own, as if these were blows against 'rivals', and as if ultimately these attacks did not always affect the traditional spirit itself. The type of 'apologetics' we have discussed shows only too well to what degree these attacks have succeeded in weakening the traditional spirit even among those who believe themselves its defenders.

Now there is still a point that we must clarify in order to avoid any misunderstanding. It certainly must not be thought that anyone who intends to keep a rigorously traditional attitude must thenceforth be forbidden to speak about the theories of profane science. On the contrary, when there is reason, he can and must denounce their errors and dangers, and this especially when he finds in them assertions clearly running counter to the data of tradition. But he must do so in a way that never constitutes a discussion 'between equals', which is only possible on the condition that one place oneself on profane ground. Indeed, what is really at issue is a judgment made in the name of a higher authority, that of traditional doctrine, for of course it is this doctrine alone that counts here, while (he

individualities who express it have not the slightest importance in themselves. Now as far as we know no one has ever dared claim that a judgment could be assimilated to a discussion or to 'polemics'. If because of a prejudice due to incomprehension, the bad faith of which is unhappily not always absent, those who misunderstand the authority of tradition claim to see 'polemics' where there is no shadow of it, there is obviously no way to prevent them from doing so, any more than one can prevent an ignorant person or a fool from taking traditional doctrines for 'philosophy', but this is not worth the least attention. At least all those who understand what tradition is and whose opinion alone counts will know perfectly well what to think; as for us, if there are profane people who would like to engage us in discussion, we shall warn them once for all that, since we will never consent to descend to their level nor to place ourselves at their point of view, their efforts will always fall into the void.

