

By the same Author
THE MIND AND THE EYE
GOETHE'S BOTANY
THE NATURAL PHILOSOPHY OF PLANT FORM
HERBALS

*The Manifold
& the One*



by
Agnes Arber

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FIFTY ALBEMARLE STREET
LONDON

To all those
who have seen in the Manifold
THE ROCK UNHEWN & THE SILK UNWROUGHT

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❧ Introduction ❧

I still remember vividly the glow of emotion aroused in me as a child by the idea—which I discovered inside myself and treasured as my very own—that all such qualities as justice, love, and truth, are in reality *one*. At that remote period, I had no conception that I was digging my sand-castles on the edge of a tumultuous sea of great and ancient problems, and that a lifetime later I should be echoing Coleridge's heart-felt cry: 'I would make a pilgrimage to the deserts of Arabia to find the man who could make me understand how the *one can be many*.' Year after year the mystery of Unity and the Manifold has held its place in the background of my mind, gradually becoming so insistent that I was impelled irresistibly to try to approach it on various lines. I soon found that in trying to think about the nature and the relations of the One and the Many the simple linear type of thought and argument, which is used in dealing with scientific problems, does not suffice. We can no longer depend exclusively upon straightforward sequences from premisses to conclusions by means of orthodox logical thinking. We shall find ourselves obliged to feel our way towards a maturer kind of thought by first carrying the discursive process to its utmost limit, and then outdistancing it and entering a region which lies beyond logic. This means that we can scarcely look for help in our quest to any modern discipline which, though retaining for itself the ancient and comprehensive title of Philosophy, excludes Metaphysics and seems reluctant to admit the existence of any Reality which defies logical formulation. As such a discipline tends to limit its own functions primarily to the critical analysis of linguistic usage, it can have no great concern with types of thought which are communicable only in forms not suited to rigidly scientific treatment and exact verbal definition. For our special purpose linguistic analysis has thus little relevance. We may begin to understand why this is so, if we call to mind the suggestion

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arising out of Murti's studies that Logical Positivism and its developments fall into the category of those essentially negative but often salutary reactions, which have been observed to intervene rhythmically in the history of thought between the great periods of constructive philosophy. As man's mind has its home in the borderland between the universal and the particular, it is inevitable that each of his attempts at a system of productive thought should have its universality limited by some degree of finiteness and that such limitation should become more obvious in late stages when the system has been carried by disciples to an extreme point. It is then necessary and valuable that the efforts of thinkers should be concentrated upon the negative task of exposing the inadequacies of the system; but when this happens there is a danger that with the failures the positive achievements will be discarded. Reforming fervour may all too easily throw away the baby with the bath water, and after all it is the baby and not the bath water on which the future depends. It is then in the work of those who have won some degree of creative understanding, rather than in the useful but static negativity of destructive criticism, that we may search most hopefully for clues to the inner meaning of the problem of the One and the Manifold. We may find such clues not only in the writings of professed philosophers but also of those poets, seers, and visionaries, who have employed to the full their intellectual as well as their emotional powers.

In attempting any approach towards a goal that is located beyond formal logic, we must be content to take our own way, even if blunderingly, by means of routes which are complex and reticulate rather than simple and linear. So irregular a procedure is bound to result in a degree of indirectness which would be out of place if our scheme were scientific in the narrower sense; but the topics which we have in view cannot be understood unless they are viewed from several standpoints, diverging perhaps only slightly from one another but sufficiently to reveal varying aspects. After being seen in isolation these may

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then be brought together and comprehended more fully in an explanatory synthesis. This type of thought cannot be tied down to a clear-cut prearranged programme; we have to leave it free to grow untrammelled, under our hands. Such an ostensibly methodless method may sometimes result in what Dryden called 'a confus'd Mass of Thoughts, tumbling over one another in the dark'. On the other hand there is the possibility that in the end indications of a pattern may emerge spontaneously and may prove more valid for our purpose than the results of any preconceived scheme could have been.

I am painfully aware how much in those high matters considered in the following pages my reach exceeds my grasp; but my hope is that the small-scale reflections which I now offer may incline some readers to turn—or turn again—to the writings of the great contemplative thinkers of the past, wherein they cannot but find a wealth of material for their own individual syntheses. The *List of Books and Memoirs Cited* (pp. 119–135), and the footnotes referring to it, afford a key to the literature that has been drawn upon in writing this book. These indications are intended for those who wish to pursue such subjects further; the general reader will find it unnecessary to consult the notes and bibliography at all.

*The Conviction of Oneness
and the Idea
of a Graded Manifold*

Bearing in mind the limitations of the mode of thought to which we are committed, it may be helpful first to survey in the barest outline the place which Unity, or the One, has held in the minds of various thinkers, and the problem of how we are to regard the manifold parts, called in ancient Chinese writings the 'ten thousand things',¹ which seem to constitute such a unity.

That one Whole underlies the obvious multiplicity of the universe is a postulate deep-seated in man's mind; in the words of Festugière, 'Le besoin de vérité totale, pour certaines âmes du moins, est enraciné avec la vie'.² A recent interpreter, Robinson, has claimed that throughout the long series of the dialogues Plato's sustained demand was for the 'one' in lieu of the 'many'.³ Most metaphysical systems are indeed based, implicitly if not explicitly, on the notion enshrined in Diderot's aphorism—'sans l'idée de tout, plus de philosophie'.⁴ The craving to see the universe *sub specie unitatis* finds expression after expression in both East and West. The idea of a Unity resembling if not exactly paralleling the Absolute of Western metaphysics is a salient feature of Chinese thought⁵ and it seems to be even more characteristic of Indian philosophy. Brahman, the one eternal principle realised in the universe as

¹ E.g. in the *Tao Tê Ching* (240 B.C. circa); see translation of Chapters XLII, p. 195, XVI, p. 162, etc., in Waley, A. (1934).

² Festugière, A. J. (1936), p. 235. ³ Robinson, R. (1953), p. 52.

⁴ Diderot, D. (1875-7), *Pensées sur l'interprétation de la nature*, 1754, vol. II, p. 15.

⁵ Fung Yu-lan (1947), p. 213; see also the translation of the *Tao Tê Ching* in Waley, A. (1934).

I. The Conviction of Oneness

a whole, is regarded as alone having genuine existence.¹ It has been said that the conception of the One so permeates the Indian mind that the question as to how each separate individual can achieve integration with the total Unity becomes the pressing problem of life.² Islamic as well as Hindu thought is deeply imbued with the notion of Absolute Unity. For instance in one of the quatrains which go by the name of Omar Khayyām, the hoary sinner cries:

Yet I despair not to attain
The threshold of Thy Throne of Grace,
Since at no time, and in no place
I ever said that One was twain.³

At a later date the Persian mystic, Jīlī, expresses the idea of Oneness in a vivid metaphor, when he says that a wall when seen at close range is observed to consist of a multiplicity of various components (bricks, mortar, etc.), but when viewed from a distance it reveals only its essential 'wallness', so that its multiplicity is fused into unity.⁴

The broad tendency among Eastern thinkers seems to be to stress the One, whereas in the West the bias is more towards the Manifold. To this generalisation it may be objected that an authority on Zen Buddhism says that according to Zen, 'the idea of oneness or allness is a stumbling-block and a strangling snare'. But the conception of the One, even if it is explicitly

¹ Bernard, T. (1948), pp. 14, 133; Nikhilananda (*Swami*) (1949, 1952), vol. I, p. 25, etc.; for a detailed study of the relation of the One and the Many in Indian thought, see also Raju, P. T. (1953).

² Burt, E. A., in Radhakrishnan, Sir S. (1951), p. 40.

³ Arberry, A. J. (1952), Quatrain 159, p. 101; translation from the Cambridge Codex, 1207 A.D.

⁴ Nicholson, R. A. (1921), p. 95.

⁵ Suzuki, D. T. (n.d. [1949]), cf. pp. 41, 54.

⁶ Patrick, G. T. W. (1889 [reprinted from 1888]), p. 59, quoting and endorsing G. Teichmüller.

⁷ Nicholson, R. A. (1921), p. 251.

⁸ Aquinas, St Thomas (1852-73), vol. XV, 1864, Comment. on Dionysius, Opusc. VII, cap. 2, lect. VI, p. 289, 'Non enim est sicut unum quod est

Unity in the Manifold

rejected, is apt to creep back in an implicit form; when the same writer tells us that one spirit works not only through the moving of the whole universe, but also through the flying of a mosquito, or the waving of a fan, it appears that he is in reality not far from accepting a principle of ultimate unity.⁵

Heraclitus⁶ was perhaps the first in the European tradition to recognise the Unity in the Manifold, as distinct from the Unity of Xenophanes, which stood *over against* the Manifold. Without detailing the intervening links, we may recall that more than 2,000 years after Heraclitus, Descartes—following Dionysius, Ibn al-Fārīd,⁷ Aquinas,⁸ and Nicholas of Cusa⁹—carried over into modern thought the idea of a unity inclusive of the full complexity of manyness, a unity which is 'not a one in many, but a oneness of the many'.¹⁰

In the history of religious thought, both in the East and in the West, there have been periods in which the conception of Oneness played an essential part. In the *Bhagavad-Gītā*, Brahman speaks of 'the countless gods that are only My million faces',¹¹ while, in the Christian West, the cosmopolitan syncretism of the third century recognised all separate national gods as merely varied expressions of the One,¹² an idea which was reiterated at a much later date by Nicholas of Cusa.¹³ In the medieval period a strong sense of ultimate unity pervaded the writings of the great German contemplatives. This is reflected,

pars multitudinis, . . . neque etiam est unum sicut aliquod totum ex partibus constitutum: . . . est super unum quod invenitur in existentibus creatis; et hoc est unum quod producit multitudinem rerum in esse'; cf. also Gardner E. G. (1913), pp. 96, 97.

⁹ Nicolaus Cusanus (1932), vol. I, part I, *De docta ignorantia*, lib. I, cap. xxiv, p. 49, 'unitas, cui non opponitur aut alteritas aut pluralitas aut multitudo'.

¹⁰ Smith, N. Kemp (1952²), p. 8, n. 1, p. 166, etc.; for a further discussion of this aspect of Unity see Chapter VI, p. 87, of the present book.

¹¹ Prabhavananda (*Swami*) and Isherwood, C. (1953), p. 104.

¹² Hastings, J. (1921), vol. XII, p. 157, *Syncretism*.

¹³ Nicolaus Cusanus (1932), vol. I, part I, *De docta ignorantia*, lib. I, cap. xxv, pp. 52-3; translation (1954), pp. 57-9.

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for example, in the late fourteenth-century *Theologia Germanica*, where we read that 'unity-with-singleness is better than manifoldness. For blessedness lieth not in much and many, but in One and oneness'.¹

A consciousness of the close relationship of the One and the Manifold finds expression in more recent German philosophy. Hegel has been interpreted as regarding the Absolute as the ultimate form of Unity, in which the parts have no meaning but their unity, while that unity, again, has no meaning but its differentiations.² Such a view brings us up against the bewildering problem of the actual *relation* which the parts bear to the Unitary Whole. One way of regarding this question is that of Nicholas of Cusa, who quotes (as from Anaxagoras or earlier sources) the suggestion that all things are in all—'*quodlibet esse in quolibet*'.³ Plotinus had also recognised 'the whole in all, and in every part the whole'.⁴ Eckhart applied the conception to human personality in his memorable saying: 'man must always do one thing, he cannot do them all. He must always be one thing and in that one find all'.⁵ Moreover, carrying this idea to another level, he wrote: 'The nature of the soul is such that where she is at all there she is altogether. . . . So is the Godhead in all places and in all existences and in each wholly'.⁶ Another thinker who fully accepted the dictum of Plotinus was Giordano Bruno,⁷ when he wrote, '*Primum est quod in toto et in omni parte totum*'. Among modern writers Hallett disclaims Bruno's 'too magnificent phrase', and proposes the more modest alternative, 'wholly in the whole and

¹ Pfeiffer, F. (1855), cap. IX, pp. 32, 33; translation modified from Winkworth, S. (1854), p. 27.

² McTaggart, J. McT. E. (1901), p. 58, paragraph 63.

³ Nicolaus Cusanus (1932), vol. I, part I, *De docta ignorantia*, lib. III, cap. v, p. 76; Whittaker, T. (1925), pp. 450-1; Bett, H. (1932), pp. 139, 167-8.

⁴ Bréhier, É. (1924-38), 1927 vol., *Enn.* IV.II.1, p. 9: ὅλη ἐν παντί καὶ ἐν ὅτῳ αὐτῶν ὅλη.

⁵ Pfeiffer, F. (1949, 1952), vol. II, *In collationibus*, p. 34. In considering this and other quotations from Eckhart, it has to be borne in mind that many of the writings that pass under his name are now held to be of doubtful authenticity; see Clark, J. M. (1949).

Degrees of Reality

partly in every part of the whole'.⁸ To some it may seem that Hallett's amendment cancels what is essential in the aphorism handed on through Plotinus, and expressed metaphorically by Dionysius the Areopagite, who compares the relation which the Whole bears to the finite individual with the relation of the seal to its impression.⁹ Each stamping gives an imprint of the seal which is *potentially* entire, but the quality of the wax may exclude completeness in the actual result. Extending this metaphor we might hold that an imperfect impress of a seal may yet have a subtler character and greater power of suggestion than one which registers every detail with machine-like meticulousness.

Modifying the thesis of Anaxagoras with Hallett's criticism in mind we may say that, though every finite part of Reality is a manifestation of the Whole, it is obvious that this can be true only so far as the limitations of its *partialitas* allow. These limitations are not to be despised, for in man they not only make their special contribution to individuality, but also help us to something within our comprehension, pointing to that perfect reality which lies beyond. It will be recalled that the notion of degrees of reality is implicit in Plato's *method of limits*.¹⁰ Straight lines and perfect circles, for instance, are not encountered in sense-experience; we find only approximations, which fail in different degrees to reach these ideal forms. Long after Plato, conceptions of this kind were specially emphasised by Nicholas of Cusa. He pointed out that a polygon inscribed in a circle comes nearer and nearer to the circular outline as the

⁸ Pfeiffer, F. (1949, 1952), vol. I, Tract. XV, p. 385.

⁷ Bruno, G. (1879-91), vol. I, part I, *De Immenso et Innumerabilibus*, lib. II, cap. XIII, p. 312.

⁸ Hallett, H. F. (1930), pp. 155-6.

⁹ Rolt, C. E. (1920), Dionysius, *Divine Names*, ii.5, pp. 72-3. In the present book the assumed name, *Dionysius the Areopagite*, will be used for the writer (the Pseudo-Dionysius) whose work belongs to the late fifth or early sixth century, and who borrowed from Proclus (d. 485); see Gardner, E. G. (1913), p. 84, n. 3; Bett, H. (1925), pp. 5, 6; de Wulf, M. (1952), pp. 68, etc.

¹⁰ Boodin, J. E. (1929), p. 491.

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number of angles is increased, but however far this process goes the polygon never achieves full circularity; it may come indefinitely close to this limit but it cannot reach it actually.¹ As Plato realised, it is in thought alone that the ideal circle and the ideal straight line can be grasped.

It may be recalled that Aristotle also hints at a grading of reality, since in his eyes there is 'an order of fineness in the elements'.² Such an order was recognised when Shakespeare's Dauphin, in his lyrical praise of his horse, cries, 'he is pure air and fire', and contrasts these with 'the dull elements of earth and water'. The same idea, moreover, is winged with human significance when Cleopatra is able to say at the last:

I am fire, and air; my other elements
I give to baser life.

Helpful as is the notion of degrees of truth, it is essential to realise the fallacy lurking in the metaphor of grades, which oversimplifies the issue. It is fatally easy to visualise Hegel's thesis, antithesis, and synthesis, as successive degrees, gradients, or levels, of truth or reality. If such a picture were justified, the antithesis would reabsorb the thesis, out of which it grew, and the synthesis would sum up both terms completely; thesis and antithesis would then have no standing, except as parts of the synthesis. In actual fact, however, the limited finite character of each of the three terms of the triad³ has itself a value, as being the necessary condition apart from which the special individuality of each could not exist. Every thing, indeed, represents Reality or Truth in its own manner, and (in a sense) in its degree, but the word 'degree' is unfortunate, since it

¹ Whittaker, T. (1925), p. 440; Nicolaus Cusanus (1932), vol. I, part I, *De docta ignorantia*, lib. I, cap. iii, p. 9, 'Intellectus . . . habens se ad veritatem sicut polygonia ad circulum, quae quanto inscripta plurimum angulorum fuerit, tanto similior circulo, numquam tamen efficitur aequalis, etiam si angulos in infinitum multiplicaverit, nisi in identitatem cum circulo se resolvat.'

² Mure, G. R. G. (1948), p. 12; see also Jowett, B. (1871), vol. II, Plato, *Timaeus*, *passim*.

The Whole and Individuality

brings to mind a simple linear sequence and suggests that the amount of Reality present in different things can be compared and graded like lengths marked off on a ruler, or temperatures measured by a thermometer. Each thing represents one aspect of Reality, but Reality is itself wholly outside measurement; and thus these aspects even though expressed in finiteness are not susceptible of direct comparison. The quality, for example, of any animal or plant may approximate to perfection *in its own kind*; but these perfections do not lead on to one another and they cannot be ranged along a scale. Each is ultimate in the sense of being an expression of the Absolute conditioned by the characteristics and limitations of a finite individuality. 'Tyger, Tyger, burning bright'⁴ in unmitigated ferocity is no less a symbol of certain aspects of the Absolute than is in its own kind the peaceful exquisiteness of the lily-of-the-valley. Man's craving after neatly graded degrees of truth seems to take its rise in the linear development of human life—strung out, as it is, along successional time—which is reflected in the linear character of speech and writing and which encourages a belief in one continuous chain-like sequence of thought. This comparison with a chain is even more imperfect than most analogies; it has led in the past to the conception of the *Scala Naturae*, 'the Great Chain of Being',⁵ rising in a direct line from the lowest class of organisms up to man. All modern biologists, widely as they may differ among themselves in other respects, agree in rejecting this picture of a single ladder-like sequence of living things; the oak tree, for instance, has an individualised 'oak-tree-ness' which is the consummation of its self-expression. Its 'thisness' exists in its own right; it is far from being a

³ For a reference to Hegel's system from a different standpoint, see Chapter V, p. 77, of the present book. The convenient term, 'triad', was apparently not used by Hegel for his thesis, antithesis, and synthesis; it was suggested in McTaggart, J. McT. E. (1910), p. 4.

⁴ Blake, W., in Keynes, G. (1935), p. 18 (p. 108 *rev.* of the Rossetti notebook).

⁵ On this subject see Lovejoy, A. O. (1936).

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stage in a continuous step-by-step advance in organic life visualised as culminating in man. The simple metaphor of a ladder with its rungs must be rejected also for man's individual history. It is true that the infant and the child represent phases in the development of the mature human being, but they are in addition something more; infancy and childhood have their own unique perfection, and are not merely the grown-up man in miniature. But the recognition of the self-containedness of these stages is in no way incompatible with the existence right through them of a continuous linear development towards that conscious relationship with the infinite Whole which comprehends 'the Good' in Plato's sense.

When we turn from the individual to the race we find, again, that progress rarely follows a direct course.¹ When we get far enough in any discipline the inadequacy of linear schemes becomes apparent. The primitive notion that there is a steady sequence of upward movement in all intellectual fields, though it may to some extent hold for the more impersonal aspects of science, breaks down when applied to art, poetry, or even philosophy. History shows that those works which mankind will not willingly let die are far from being successive steps in a continuous progress; each is idiosyncratic and represents the personal wholeness of an individual man. Literature does not pass from Dante's creative writing to something of the same sort though nearer to ultimate perfection; the next stage must differ *in kind* from Dante. Every line of advance comes to an actual end and is replaced, not by lineal successors, but by some development which is often remote even if collateral. The same is true of philosophy,² and its past is thus invested with a significance which goes far beyond its value when it is considered merely as ancestral to the thought of today. Facets of

¹ The following considerations are based in part on Bosanquet, B. (1921), pp. 206, etc.

² Cf. Jaspers, K. (1951), pp. 140-1.

³ Nicolaus Cusanus (1932), vol. I, part I, *De docta ignorantia*, lib. II, cap. ii, fin., p. 68, 'quiescit omne esse creatum in sua perfectione, quam habet ab esse divino liberaliter, nullum aliud creatum esse appetens tamquam

Finitude and Fulfilment

the Absolute are revealed among finite creatures in wholly different directions at different periods—there is a time for everything, and a season for every purpose under heaven. Every step in advance along a given line involves a corresponding loss of some potentiality. Many excellencies are incompatible and no man can escape the defects of his qualities; these lacks though themselves negative have a positive value in conditioning individuality. It is not too much to say that completeness and perfection, if they could exist among humanity, would exclude personal uniqueness, without which everything that matters in man's finite world would perish of inanition.

Nicholas of Cusa laid special stress upon the notion that the limitation of all created things, if understood, becomes their source of contentment. He writes that each 'acquiesces in its own perfection, . . . not desiring to be any other thing supposed more perfect, but loving by preference, as a divine gift, the reality which it has from the Absolute, and choosing to perfect and preserve this in its pure and genuine state'.³ Such conceptions did not originate with Nicholas; they have recurred continually in the stream of thought throughout the ages both in East and West. The Chinese philosopher Kuo Hsiang (in his third-century commentary on the *Chuang-Tzū*⁴) instances the Roc, the huge bird which takes a flight of half a year and thus reaches the Celestial Lake, and contrasts it with the feat of the small bird which can fly only for half a morning, and achieves no more than getting to the trees. He declares that as each has done what is proper to its nature and to its capacity the happiness of both is identical, and the tiny bird is free from any craving to reach the great waters towards which the mighty Roc has an inborn urge.

perfectius, sed ipsum, quod habet a maximo, praediligens quasi quoddam divinum munus, hoc incorruptibiliter perfici et conservari optans'. For other translations see Whittaker, T. (1925), p. 449, and Nicolaus Cusanus (1954), p. 75.

⁴ Fung Yu-lan (1953), pp. 104, 228.

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Plato's Socrates hints at one of the corollaries of the idea that the degree of possible bliss depends on the individual nature of which it is the fulfilment when in speaking of the blessed gods he says that 'jealousy has no place in the choir divine'.¹ Philo regarded the benefit of God as corresponding to the capacities of the recipients,² while St Augustine declares that in the City of God there shall be grades and that 'no inferior shall envy his superior, even as now the other angels do not envy the archangels'; and he adds that if one has a lesser gift than another this limitation carries with it the further boon that he does not desire more.³ Dionysius tells us that the Good sends the rays of His Whole Goodness into all existing things according to their receptive powers,⁴ and the same idea is expressed by 'Attār, a Persian mystic born before the middle of the twelfth century, who says, 'When the Sun of Gnosis shines forth from the heaven above, . . . each one is enlightened according to his capacity, and finds his own place in the knowledge of the Truth'.⁵ Eriugena, again, saw that the Theophanies or Divine Manifestations are proportionate to the powers and qualities of each mind⁶ and a related notion is voiced by Ibn al-'Arabī,⁷ who died a few years later than 'Attār. St Bonaventura was another who realised that 'No one partakes of God in the supreme degree *absolutely*, but in the supreme degree with respect to himself; . . . each one . . . is utterly content with

¹ Hackforth, R. (1952), *Phaedrus* 247, p. 70.

² Wolfson, H. A. (1947), vol. I, p. 315.

³ Healey, J., and Tasker, R. V. G. (1945), *De civitate Dei*, vol. II, bk. xxii, chap. xxx, p. 405.

⁴ Johannes Scotus Eriugena (1853), on Dionysius, *De div. nom.*, IV, in Migne, J. P., *Patrol. cursus completus*, ser. II, vol. 122, col. 1128-9; for translations see Gardner, E. G. (1913), p. 93, and Rolt, C. E. (1920), p. 87.

⁵ Smith, Margaret (1932), quotation from the *Mantiq Al-Tayr*, p. 50: for a literal French translation, see Garcin de Tassy, M. (1863), p. 194.

⁶ Johannes Scotus Eriugena (1853), in Migne, J. P., *Patrologiae cursus completus*, ser. II, vol. 122, *De div. nat.*, lib. I, cap. 8, col. 448, 'quanta fuerit sanctorum animarum multiplicatio, tanta erit divinarum theophaniarum possessio'. Cf. also Gardner, A. (1900), pp. 34, 35, 123.

⁷ Asin, M. (1926), p. 159.

⁸ St Bonaventura (1889), T. IV, *Comment. in quatuor libros sent. Mag.*

Individuality and Bliss

that state which he hath'.⁸ St Bonaventura's younger contemporary, Eckhart, echoing Dionysius, writes that 'because all souls have not the same aptitude for God, the vision of Deity is not enjoyed to the same degree by all, just as the sun does not affect all eyes alike'.⁹ It is in the *Divina Commedia*, however, that this belief comes to the most memorable expression. In the *Paradiso*, St Bonaventura's prose flowers into poetry when Piccarda though in the lowest sphere is inspired to say to Dante:

Frate, la nostra volontà quieta
Virtù di carità, che fa volerne
Sol quel ch'avemo, e d'altro ci asseta.¹⁰

A parallel idea is embodied perfectly, if indirectly, when—even in limbo, their bliss bounded by eternal exclusion from Paradise, and their unappeased desire haunting them for ever—the pagan poets and philosophers¹¹ in quiet converse reach a fellowship of serene self-realisation, which may bring such men nearer to the Absolute than if they shared in the continuous rapture of the blest; for as Socrates asked at the end, 'What would not a man give to talk with Orpheus and Musaeus and Hesiod and Homer?'¹² It may well be held that the seeker's need is for something more fundamental than the ecstasies of Paradise. There is a tale¹³ that at the passing of a certain Ṣūfī

Petri Lomb., Lib. IV, Pars I, Dist. xlix, Qu. VI.3, *Conclusio*, p. 1011, 'Nullus participat in summo simpliciter, sed in summo sibi; . . . et contentus est omnino eo statu, quem habet'. Translation, Gardner, E. G. (1913), p. 249.

⁹ Modified from Pfeiffer, F. (1949, 1952), vol. I, Tract. III, p. 301.

¹⁰ *Paradiso*, iii, 70-73. 'Brother, the power of love stilleth our will, making us long only for what we have, and giving us no other thirst'. See also Giuliani, G. (1874), *Convito*, Tract. III, Chap. XV, pp. 290-1, and Jackson, W. W. (1909), pp. 179-80.

¹¹ *Inferno*, iv, and *Purgatorio*, iii, 41-3; cf. also Gardner, E. G. (1913), pp. 169-70. For the Islamic sources of Dante's *Limbo*, see Asin, M. (1926), pp. 83-4.

¹² Cf. Jowett, B. (1871), vol. I, p. 355, *Apology*, 41; and Woodhead, W. D. (1953), p. 65.

¹³ Fitzgerald, E. (1889), vol. II, pp. 460-1; cf. also Garcin de Tassy, M. (1863), pp. 168-9.

I · The Conviction of Oneness

saint the heavens opened to invite him into the glorious company of singing angels; but he rejected this boon, since the angelic host meant to him the Manifold *in excelsis*, while it was the One Alone which was the goal of his quest.

❧ 2 ❧

Unity and the Contemplative Experience

In the preceding pages the conviction that there is a Unitary Whole revealing itself to us as a Manifold has been treated simply as something deep-seated in the human mind, which has come to the surface recurrently among people of the most various races and schools of thought. This conviction has often in the past been accepted without rigorous analysis, but we may see it in a more critical light if we consider the form which it assumes in modern scientific thought. Here it is translated, as it were, into the postulate of the Unity and Uniformity of Nature, which lies at the foundation of most research. There is, however, more justification for regarding this principle not as a *postulate* but as an *hypothesis* which the scientist subjects to continual experimental testing.¹ Although observational evidence consistently confirms the *probability* of this hypothesis, no final proof of it can be offered either by inductive or deductive methods. As this is so, it may be worth while to ask whether we can see our way better when we approach the instinctive belief in the unity of the manifold from another direction by adopting the metaphysical standpoint, which does not commit us to the limitations of scientific thought. As has been indicated in the Introduction (pp. xi-xiii), mental effort of the rational-discursive order cannot, unaided, account for the passage from the Many to the One, so we must make some attempt to understand that other mode of thinking, which eventuates in the contemplative

¹ Cf. Arber, A. (1954), pp. 82 et seq., 103 et seq. The suggestion that the Uniformity of Nature should be classed as an hypothesis was made by the writer in ignorance of the fact that this idea had been anticipated, though in a different terminology, in Pringle-Pattison, A. S. (1917), p. 239. On postulates and hypotheses, see also Chap. VII, p. 96, of the present book.

explains another
mode of
thinking
he could not
or might not

II · Unity and the Contemplative Experience

or mystical attitude.¹ It is a serious misfortune that the word *mysticism* has been so much degraded in general usage that to many people it at once suggests charlatanism or diseased mentality; but the term is irreplaceable since there is no satisfactory alternative in our language. We lack the convenient German distinction between the genuine *Mystik* and the dubious *Mysticismus*.² It would be a great advantage if the English word 'mysticity', now out of currency, could be revived for use when spuriousness has to be indicated.

In the context of the present book, the mystical experience may be defined as that direct and unmediated contemplation which is characterised by a peculiarly intense awareness of a Whole as the Unity of all things.³

Men and women of many different periods, races, and religions have felt themselves to have entered in varying degrees into a *Unio mystica*, in which they knew the Manifold as the One; and they have attempted to recount what they then realised, or believed themselves to have realised. To assess the validity of such records demands the most rigorous and searching scrutiny. We have in the first place to discount those innumerable descriptions of the state which are undoubtedly (though often unconsciously) derivative. Many of those who crave for the vision, and who have not the power clearly to distinguish their own experiences from those about which they have heard or read, appropriate secondhand material, enabling them to produce in themselves a pseudo-mystical phase, which they take delightedly at its face value since it satisfies their wishful thinking. Moreover, basic alterations in consciousness, induced by certain drugs⁴ or by abnormal states of health,⁵ may result in enhanced perception of colours and lights, similar to

¹ For a general historical account of Western mysticism, from classical times to the seventeenth century, see Jones, Rufus M. (1909) and (1914). This author, who writes from the Quaker point of view, is more authoritative on later than on earlier mystics; his books are best treated as a background for the study of works of more modern and critical scholarship.

² Rauwenhoff, L. W. E. (1889), p. 116.

Mysticism, Genuine and Spurious

that which is often described as a side-issue of visionary experiences.⁶ This feature in the true mystic is akin to that seemingly miraculous intensification of ordinary vision which the born artist enjoys and which may coexist with perfect health and sanity; in the pseudo-mystic, on the other hand, apparently similar phenomena may be a mere hallucination. The fact must be accepted that it is often exceedingly difficult to distinguish between the manifestations of genuine and spurious mysticism. Criteria for this discrimination cannot be formulated in words, since the power to recognise distinctions of this kind depends upon a certain incommunicable flair. This flair needs, however, to be controlled by a critical but open mind, which is prepared to admit that narratives of experiences claiming to be mystical must not be disregarded solely on the evidence of association with pathological states, or with excitation from some outside influence; for such anomalous conditions may in fact open channels normally closed, through which the individual life is enabled to realise its continuity with the Whole. It was held in the twelfth century by the Persian mystic, Suhrawerdī,⁷ that, when the thoughts are fixed upon the Divine mystery, it may be an external stimulus—such as is felt in the tumult of battle or on horseback in the rush of a headlong gallop—which opens the prepared mind to the flash. We may take this to signify, not that the enlightenment is *due* to the stimulus, but that, when the self is ripe for the experience, the particular moment of enlightenment may be determined by any factor which increases the intensity with which the whole man lives. The sudden flash is, in itself, of minor importance only; it is merely a signal showing that the point has been reached at which the fusion of reasoned thought and emotional con-

³ Cf. definitions in Spurgeon, C. F. E. (1913), p. 3; Smith, Margaret (1932), p. 19.

⁴ Cf. Huxley, A. (1954).

⁵ Cf. Singer, C. (1917).

⁶ Cf., for example, citations from Ruysbroeck in Maeterlinck, M. (1894).

⁷ Spies, O., and Khatak, S. K. (1935), p. 34.

II · Unity and the Contemplative Experience

sciousness comes to fulfilment in that gnosis which both out-distances and includes them. Such fusion, achieved by long effort, can give far more powerful help, in the passage from the perception of the Many to the conception of Unity, than can be gained from any fleeting ecstasy verging on delirium. Dante's ultimate vision is a supreme example; it was not something seen in a brief precarious moment of rapture, such as might find its parallel in mental or nervous disease. It was, on the contrary, the end-result, wrought out with sternly controlled passion, of the mind- and heart-searching pilgrimage lived through in the *Inferno* and the *Purgatorio*.

So far we have touched upon the *Unio mystica* only in the most general terms; we must now consider this experience at closer range. Attempts to understand the subject are fraught with difficulty, partly because many of those who profess to be acquainted with the state at first hand, are—as we have already indicated—the victims of self-deception. Those who have really entered into the highest experience of the contemplative tend, on the contrary, to refrain from any claim to the insight which they possess. Socrates, for instance, seems to have had personal knowledge of the mystic union, but he is represented as himself speaking only of something supernatural or divine—a voice or sign—which from his childhood onwards had deterred him from certain actions.¹ That he experienced trance-like phases is suggested in the *Symposium*, where Alcibiades describes how he had been observed to stand unmoving for a day and a night immersed in thought and then at dawn—after offering up a prayer to the sun—to go upon his way.² It has been claimed that the fact that Plato was not only a savant and an artist but also a contemplative, should be attributed to the influence of Socrates.³

¹ Woodhead, W. D. (1953), *Euthyphro*, 3 B, p. 4; *Apology*, 31 C, D, p. 52; the view that Socrates had mystic experiences is rejected by Cornford, F. M. (1939), pp. 132–3n., and Hackforth, R. (1952), pp. 14–16.

² Jowett, B. (1871), vol. I, p. 536, *Symposium*, 220.

³ Festugière, A. J. (1936), p. 15.

Return to Earth from Mystic Union

Where there is definitely a culminating vision, unique or recurrent, this is merely one phase of the mystic's progress and it is essentially temporary. Bergson,⁴ for instance, recognised to the full that the philosopher must pass to and fro between prolonged intellectual effort and illumination which can be sustained for moments only. The spirit of man needs the homely support of discursive thinking; it is as impossible for it to survive continuously at the high altitudes of intuition as to remain keyed for ever to the emotional pitch of the Fourth Act of *Antony and Cleopatra*. The more pedestrian levels of existence are necessary as the soil out of which the ultimate mystical state can flower and to which its seed-harvest must return.

The life of Jacob Boehme, the Silesian mystic (1576–1624), reveals this characteristic of return to earth.⁵ Once for seven days together he felt himself inwardly bathed in a Divine light, but his outward life continued undisturbed. He never slackened his grasp upon finite reality, and when on another occasion he fell into an inward ecstasy, he tested it by going out into the green fields, where he became conscious that he was looking into the very being of herbs and of grasses, and that his revealing insights were harmonious with external nature. Turning from Silesia to the Islamic world, we find that it was a tenet of Sūfism that when the mystic reaches a state of enraptured ecstasy he loses consciousness of outward phenomena and visualises inwardness, or God, alone; but when he passes to a still more advanced stage he becomes equally aware of inwardness (God) and outwardness (the world).⁶ This return to finite existence after complete absorption in the Infinite, is expressed by Farīd al-Dīn 'Aṭṭār, the Persian poet (d. 1229), as being the recovery of human individuality, in the form of 'A conscious Ray of that eternal *All*',⁷ after the mystic experience of entire

⁴ Bergson, H. (1907), pp. 218, 258–9.

⁵ Martensen, H. L. (1949), p. 5.

⁶ Nicholson, R. A. (1921), footnote, p. 221.

⁷ Fitzgerald, E. (1889), vol. II, p. 455.

II · Unity and the Contemplative Experience

annihilation in the Ultimate One.¹ 'Aṭṭār's contemporary, the Arab Ibn al-Fāriḍ, voiced the same idea when he said that he used to think that total self-effacement was the uttermost goal he could attain, but that after he had won through this condition and had then been restored to consciousness, he found that he had risen yet another step, by which he reached the retrieval of his individual self.² Such conceptions find a parallel in Zen Buddhism. It was said long ago that the sage steeped in this cult, when he passes into Enlightenment leaves his mortal humanity behind and rises to 'the top of the hundred-foot bamboo' (a symbol for the acme of achievement); but this is not the end. He finds himself with yet another stage of ascent before him, 'over the top', and this, paradoxically, carries him back into the day-to-day world. He then lives again an ordinary life, but everything for him has an enhanced meaning, since he now bears within him a light from beyond the boundary.³ The influence of this aspect of Zen Buddhism may be recognised in the Japanese tea ceremony; by means of its restrained and exquisite symbolism, it reveals the central significance which the contemplative finds in the common things of daily existence.⁴

In attempting to evaluate the mystic vision, we may get a little help by comparing it with an experience far more familiar in the modern world—that of the process of scientific discovery.⁵ This process is often marked by the occurrence after long preparation of a flash of intuition, which bears some remote affinity to the mystic's illuminated moment; but between the two there is one obvious difference. The scientist deals with impersonal problems and his results are 'public', and adapted

¹ Garcin de Tassy, M. (1863), *Mantiq Ṭṭāir*, pp. 236–7, V. 4241; the poem is cited by more modern writers under some variant of the form, *Mantiq Al-Tayr*.

² Nicholson, R. A. (1921), p. 221, text and footnotes to verses 233–5.

³ Fung Yu-lan (1953), p. 264.

⁴ Okakura-Kakuzo (1906); Watts, A. W. (1936), pp. 117 et seq.

⁵ Cf. Arber, A. (1954), Chap. II, pp. 17–21.

⁶ Cornford, F. M. (1937), p. 22. *Timaeus*, 28 C.

⁷ *Enn.* VI. IX. 10, 11, in Dodds, E. R. (1923), p. 123.

Incommunicability of the Vision

for being expounded verbally (or by technical symbols) in their completeness; the contemplative, on the other hand, finds in the *Unio mystica* a fusion of his own individuality with the Absolute, the significance of which outdistances any conceivable expression in words. The ultimate vision is, indeed, incommunicable except to fellow initiates, who have attained the same goal, and to whom the faintest hint thus brings fullness of understanding. The conviction that the truth discovered to the contemplative can rarely be imparted to other men has been recorded again and again by thinkers of different races and periods. Plato recognised that knowledge of the Maker and Father of the universe could not be declared to all mankind.⁶ Plotinus—who is surpassed in insight by no other philosopher-mystic—was developing the same idea when he wrote: 'how should a man bring back report of the Divine, as of a thing distinct, when in seeing it he knew it not distinct but one with his own consciousness?'; and he added that 'we must not seek to reveal it to any not blest with the vision'.⁷ The view that mystical knowledge should be kept for initiates only recurs in the writings of Dionysius the Areopagite,⁸ which had so wide and deep an influence in the Middle Ages and later. Aquinas, too, must have despaired of communicating his vision, for, at the end of his life, after his culminating ecstasy, he is said to have laid down his pen and written no more.⁹ Dante, who owed much to Aquinas,¹⁰ accepted the idea that it was impossible to put into words the experience of passing beyond the limits of humanity,¹¹ though he himself achieved this impossibility more nearly, perhaps, than any other writer of Christendom.

⁶ Johannes Scotus Eriugena (1853), on Dionysius, *De div. nom.*, cap. I, in Migne, J. P., *Patrol. cursus completus*, Ser. II, vol. 122, col. 1119, 'neque dicta, neque prolata divina facere in indoctos'. For translation see Rolt, C. E. (1920), p. 64. The view of Dionysius is reiterated and confirmed by St Bonaventura (1891), vol. V, *Hexaëmeron coll.*, II, 29, 30, p. 341.

⁷ See Gardner, E. G. (1913), pp. 4, 5, for an account with references.

¹⁰ Gardner, E. G. (1913), p. 248, n.

¹¹ *Paradiso*, I, 70, 71, 'Trasumanar significar per verba, Non si poria'. Cf. also, i, 4–9.

II · Unity and the Contemplative Experience

Nicholas of Cusa also knew that in the *Unio mystica* there are 'things seen which cannot be revealed, because they are above all that mortal ever heard and above all the speech of man'.¹ In this matter the experience of Christian mystics is in agreement with the tenets of the founder of Taoism—Lao Tzū, who preceded Confucius by some fifty years—for he said, 'The Tao which can be expressed in words is not the eternal Tao'.² The essentials of Zen Buddhism, again, cannot be conveyed 'in words, or written in letters',³ and it is recorded that a priest of another Buddhist sect declared that Truth has two faces, the *expressed* for the ignorant and the *inexpressible* towards which the man of wisdom aspires.⁴

In trying to penetrate to the core of mystical literature, the reader, however fully aware he is of the difficulties of the visionary, cannot but feel that the obstacles to communication sometimes arise in part from a certain verbal ineffectualness rather than from the inadequacy of language itself. Letters and words are like the notes and chords of a piano; the tyro's use of these elements corresponds to that of an infant banging on the keyboard, while a writer of genius is like the *maestro*, who can invoke the illimitable by his touch upon the same instrument. The function of words is not merely to record a chain of reasoned argument; that they can like musical notes suggest a whole orchestra of overtones and symbolise horizons of supra-logical significance is revealed in the poetry of mysticism.

Despite the problem which verbal expression presents, the experience of the contemplative often carries with it an extreme desire to share the boon which he has gained rather than to leave it as an esoteric matter, to be understood by other initiates only. In one of his poems, the fifteenth-century Persian, Jāmī,

¹ Nicolaus Cusanus (1932), vol. I, part I, *De docta ignorantia*, lib. III, cap. xi, p. 153, 'ubi ea videntur, quae revelari non possunt, quoniam supra omnium auditum sunt et vocis doctrinam'. Translation (1954), p. 162.

² Giles, L. (1904), p. 19.

³ Takakusu, J. (1947), p. 163.

⁴ Steinilber-Oberlin, E. (1938), p. 242.

⁵ Browne, E. G. (1950), p. 137.

⁶ Boehme, J. (1914), *The Aurora*, Chap. XIX, 12 and 13, p. 488.

Attempts to Verbalise 'Unknowing'

speaks of the visionary, who has had a flashing glimpse of some deep mystery and who cannot then endure to let it pass, but must hold it in the hope of communicating it to others by tongue or pen.⁵ Among Western mystics who have known this compulsion we may recall Jacob Boehme. He tells us that his enlightenment, which occurred in the year 1600, left him with 'a mighty *impulse*, to describe *the being of God*', though at the same time he knew that he had to fight against the impossibility of transmitting it, either in speech or writing.⁶ In the preceding century, Nicholas of Cusa had felt and submitted to the same urge. He relates that once when returning by sea from Greece, he received what he believed to be a divine illumination, which led him 'in instructed ignorance to grasp the incomprehensible'; and he goes on to say that his books represent attempts to commit to writing the *docta ignorantia* to which he had attained.⁷ This mental state corresponds to the 'Unknowing' of Dionysius the Areopagite⁸—whose views an English mystic of the fourteenth century interpreted in *The Cloud of Unknowing*⁹—and to the 'knowledge which is ignorance', recognised by Ruysbroeck¹⁰ in the same century. It is also equivalent to the 'knowledge which is not knowledge' of the Chinese Taoists, a state which is described as not being the ignorance of those who *have-no* knowledge, but the condition of those who have achieved *no-knowledge*.¹¹

The strange, symbolic language, much of which is incomprehensible to the uninitiated reader, in which Boehme strove to disclose his vision, brings home to us the baffling nature of the obstacles which the mystic has to face in trying to find words for the content which he yearns to share; no instruments more direct than the remotest similitudes will serve the purpose.

⁷ Nicolaus Cusanus (1932), vol. I, part I, *De docta ignorantia*. Letter to Lord Cardinal Julian, p. 163; for another translation see (1954), p. 173.

⁸ Rolt, C. E. (1920), *Divine Names*, vii. 1, p. 147, n. 2.

⁹ Anon. (1936); for a scholarly text of this treatise, and for a study of its theme, authorship, and sources, see Hodgson, P. (1944).

¹⁰ Ruysbroeck, J. van (1951), *The Sparkling Stone*, Chap. III, p. 184.

¹¹ Fung Yu-lan (1953), p. 117.

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In the *Tao Tê Ching*, which is said to date from about 240 B.C., the inexpressible potentialities of the Supreme Tao (for which the Absolute is perhaps the least inadequate Western equivalent) and Its freedom from the limitations of human finitude were symbolised by the Uncarved Block, while the metaphor of the unhandled Raw Silk served to indicate Its complete simplicity.¹ It has been claimed that Chinese is peculiarly adapted for verbalising mystic thought since its monosyllables are capable of a surprising range of multiple significance.² Even to those who know this literature only in translation, the poetry of Arthur Waley's renderings suggests the paradoxical richness of the individual words in the originals—a quality to which he gives subtly evocative expression.

Persian poets, like those of China, have the freedom of a language in which words, without losing their literal meaning, have yet acquired also a purely symbolic reference. Among the metaphors which, in the thirteenth century, Jalālu'l-Dīn Rūmī used as indicative of the Absolute, are Sea, Light, Love, Wine, Beauty, and Truth.³ Through this shifting opalescent veil of varying comparisons, a less inadequate glimpse of Reality may be gained than from any attempt at direct description. There is an astonishing similarity in the modes of indirect expression by means of which contemplatives of all ages have sought to transmit their illumination. Nicholson has recorded that the poems of Rūmī constantly come into mind in reading the lyrics of St John of the Cross, and the writings of Law, Emerson, and Shelley.⁴ The far-reaching influence of the Islamic-Šūfī tradition has undoubtedly much to do with this consensus of

¹ Waley, A. (1934), pp. 166–7; the Dedication of the present book is suggested by this similitude.

² Cf. Suzuki, D. T., in Steinilber-Oberlin, E. (1938), pp. 146–7.

³ Nicholson, R. A. (1898), p. xxxii, n. 2.

⁴ Nicholson, R. A. (1898), p. xxxix.

⁵ Cf. the aphorism concerning general philosophy in Jaspers, K. (1951), p. 132.

⁶ Suhrawardī (translating Avicenna) in Spies, O. and Khatak, S. K. (1935), p. 45.

Stages in the Road to Union

symbolism, but it is not the whole story. When the experiences of the contemplative are in question, it may almost be said that profound differences of religion and of cultural background seem of no importance whatever. This unanimity ceases to be surprising if we accept the conclusion that mysticism, whether embodied in words or in visual or other symbols, is perhaps the ultimate human expression of the nexus formed from age to age and from race to race by the minds of those who are capable of penetrating beneath the surface of life⁵—the 'Brethren of Reality'.⁶

Detailed instructions as to the preliminary tasks and trials which have to be faced by the aspirant before he can hope to reach the vision have been lavished on him in all periods. An extreme case is that of Zen Buddhism, in which the Master uses frankly irrational devices, and sometimes even physical violence, in order to carry his disciples towards the initiation stage.⁷ Such methods are so completely alien to the Western mind that it is impossible to form a fair estimate of them; it is claimed that in Japan they do in fact serve their purpose. In other non-Christian systems, a planned technique has been carried to a startling point; in Šūfism as many as 45 'stations' and 'states' have been discriminated as marking levels in the path to ultimate Union.⁸ Christian mysticism, though not going to such extremes, has, to some extent advocated conformity to a regularised ascent by a series of agreed steps,⁹ offering the support needed by those whose instincts and training dispose them to find help in ritual. It is possible, however, to doubt whether in general the following of an authoritative scheme,

⁷ See, for example, Humphreys, C. (1949).

⁸ For an analytic enumeration of these stages, see Arberry, A. J. (1950), pp. 75 et seq.

⁹ For a brief account, from the Catholic standpoint, of some of the detailed schemes by means of which mystics of the medieval and renaissance periods mapped out the road to the *Unio mystica*, see Anon. (1953), and for the techniques adopted by the Spanish mystics, see Peers, E. Allison (1930, 1951).

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minutely organised, is the best method of approach to that *Unio mystica*, which transcends every individual theological and devotional system. Indeed, the last word as to preparation for the supreme vision is simple even if difficult; it still rests with the non-Christian philosopher of mysticism, Plotinus, who said long ago that he who hopes for the mystic experience must divest himself of everything which deforms his true and authentic nature—a cryptic dictum but one which goes to the root of the matter. He added that the seeker must not run after the vision, but must 'wait tranquilly for its appearance, as the eye waits on the rising of the sun, which in its own time ascends above the horizon—out of the ocean, as the poets say—and gives itself to our sight'.¹ Such counsel as Plotinus offers thus points primarily to the removal of those obstructions which prevent the mind from entering into full realisation of its own inborn relationship with the Whole. This is consistent with Ramon Lull's sound, if pedestrian, advice to the would-be mystic, to avoid places wherein is 'bustle and noise or excess of heat or cold'. He himself chose hours of solitude and starlight as most favouring his contemplation.² Inspiration from a less obvious aspect of nature was found by an early Buddhist poet, who chose to meditate under lowering storm clouds—against which the terrified cranes showed white—beside streamlets in spate under darkling trees.³

If intellectual mysticism is the goal, retirement and austerity may provide the best background, but austerity carried to the point of asceticism defeats its own ends. Full activation of the brain is necessary, and the path to the *Unio mystica* can be blazed in no other way than by the concentrated effort of the totality of man's powers, bodily as well as mental.⁴ This effort

¹ Cf. Mackenna, S., and Page, B. S. (1917–1930), vol. I, p. 88, *Enn.* I. vi. 9; and vol. IV, p. 56, *Enn.* V. v. 8 (translation modified).

² Peers, E. Allison, in Lull, R. (1925), pp. 5, 6.

³ From *Theragāthā*, 307, translated in Saunders, K. J. (1915), p. 33.

⁴ Cf. Gilson, É. (1938), pp. 82–3, 85.

⁵ Quoted (from a privately printed translation by R. A. Nicholson of a poem by Sanā'i) in Smith, Margaret (1954), p. 64.

Wordless Mysticism and the Golden Lotus

must be the man's very own even though he may gain something from the veiled hints and suggestions which are all that the initiates can impart in words, and still more from a certain type of wordless communication, possible only between attuned minds, whose to and fro commerce becomes close enough to be called 'intersubjectivity'. Chinese records reveal intimate friendships in early centuries between certain Taoist scholars and Buddhist monks. When they came together and their converse led them towards the ultimate Unnamable Reality, it is said that talk ceased and was replaced by a happy understanding, fraught in the phrase of a Persian poet with 'many a silent word unsyllabled'.⁵ Another Persian mystic held that 'Gnosis is nearer to silence than to speech',⁶ while Abū Sa'īd believed that all his spiritual possessions were the outcome of a single glance bestowed upon him by a Šūfī Shaykh when they happened to pass one another on the bank of a stream.⁷ Between two Taoist sages, again, words were not needed, because when their eyes met *Tao* (the Way, the Truth) was there.⁸ Moreover, wordless communication lies at the very root of Zen Buddhism. The story of its origin is that the Buddha once preached to a congregation of his followers, holding a golden-coloured lotus, which had just been offered to him. Why he kept the flower in his hand was incomprehensible to all his hearers, except the disciple Kāshyapa; he alone saw the inner significance of the act and smiled, and at that moment transcendental truth passed in a flash from Master to pupil and was thereafter handed on in the Zen tradition as Buddha's unspoken 'flower-thought'.⁹ This tale recalls Plato's dictum in the Seventh Epistle that 'after much converse about the matter itself and a life lived together, suddenly a light, as it were, is kindled in one soul by a flame that

⁵ Nicholson, R. A. (1906), p. 308, translating Abū Salaymān al-Dārānī.

⁶ Nicholson, R. A. (1921), p. 7, n. c.

⁷ Fung Yu-lan (1953), pp. 13, 212. On the meaning of *Tao* see Waley, A. (1934), p. 30.

⁸ Cf. Waley, A. (1921), pp. 21, 58, and Suzuki, D. T. (1955), p. 12.

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leaps to it from another, and thereafter sustains itself'. Plato goes on to say that it is not good that this illumination should be described to all, but that it should be restricted to those few who with the aid of a little teaching can discover it for themselves.¹

The experience which St Augustine, the Christian Neoplatonist, shared with St Monica by the window looking over the garden at Ostia on the Tiber, shows how barriers may fall before two who are spiritually akin, and who reach their full accord in a harmony in which words though used are transcended. As St Augustine wrote in the *Confessions*: 'while we were thus talking of His Wisdom and panting for it . . . we did for one instant attain to touch it'. Then they awoke to the realisation that this attainment might be reached if 'to any man the tumult of the flesh grew silent, silent the images of earth and sea and air; and if the heavens grew silent, and the very soul grew silent to herself'.²

Even when full value is ascribed to such help as communication may afford, the fact remains that the gleam must come fresh and direct from that spark which deep in the inmost essence of each man forms the concentrated focus of the mind-body unity—the point at which the individual merges with the Whole. Is it possible, then, that those who do not dare to lay claim to the experience of this gleam may yet gain an inkling of the nature of the contemplative's vision? The answer to this question seems to be that some fragmentary ideas about it are within our reach. We can say, at least, that in the mystic phase intuition passes beyond, but in no way rejects, what we

¹ Harward, J. (1932), Letter VII, 341 c, p. 135.

² For the relation that Christianity and Neoplatonism bore to one another in St Augustine's mind, see Boyer, C. (1920¹) and (1920²); Radhakrishnan, Sir S. (1940), p. 238; de Wulf, M. (1952), pp. 80 et seq. The latter part of the passage from the *Confessions* quoted here (St Augustine (1943) Bk. IX, 10, pp. 188–90) derives directly from Plotinus; see Dodds, E. R. (1923), p. 23, n. 1, and p. 31.

³ Aquinas, St Thomas (1852–1873), vol. I, p. 227, *Summa Theol.*, Part I, Qu. 58, Art. 3, 'Animae vero humanae, quae veritatis notitiam per quemdam

Intuition and Simultaneity

ordinarily call knowledge. A sense of the meaning of such intuition is perhaps conveyed, if St Thomas's exposition of what he regarded as the difference in power of apprehension between men and the angels is used as a parallel.³ He considered that the human dependence upon the rational-discursive method for the acquirement of knowledge of truth was due to the dimness of our intellectual light. He contrasts this with the capacity, which he attributes to the angels, for comprehending *at once*, from the first glimpse of principles, the whole range of whatever could be reasoned out of them. This recalls Bergson's conception of rare moments of intuition in which by a violent effort the successional past is drawn into a single present, and seen in one view.⁴ While discursive reasoning is apprehension strung out in time—so that the conclusion is reached step by step—in Bergson's 'intuition', and in the *Unio mystica*, the attained phase is that ascribed by Aquinas to the divine intelligences; at this higher level the ultimate understanding embraces the whole process in complete simultaneity. Logical 'truth' thus becomes transfigured, *sub specie aeternitatis*, in a way that wings it to pass into the region of 'unknowing'—Nicholas of Cusa's *docta ignorantia*—in which the simple linear thought sequence gives place to a 'seeing all at once', which can accept even the coincidence of contraries.⁵

The question remains whether we must take the change from logical discursive thought to illumined *docta ignorantia* as a sudden, inexplicable leap from the everyday consciousness to one of a wholly different order, or whether these forms of thinking are in reality continuous, so that it should be possible

discursum acquirunt, rationales vocantur. Quod quidem contingit ex debilitate intellectualis luminis in eis. Si enim haberent plenitudinem intellectualis luminis, sicut Angeli, statim in primo aspectu principiorum totam virtutem eorum comprehenderent, intuendo quidquid ex eis syllogizari posset'. For translation see Aquinas, St Thomas (1911, etc.), Part I, No. 2, p. 269.

⁴ Bergson, H. (1907), p. 218.

⁵ See Chapter V, pp. 67–78, of the present book.

logical truth
transfigured
sub specie aeternitatis

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to trace transition phases connecting them.¹ Turning as we so often must to the Greeks for help, we find what we need in their study of that mental activity which they named *θεωρία*. This word—which is only secondarily equivalent to 'theory' in the modern scientific sense—means primarily 'beholding', and may be translated in some contexts as 'contemplative seeing'. It thus refers to a type of thought synthesising the intellectual and visual powers.² It has been pointed out that both Descartes and Spinoza regarded *scientia intuitiva* as inclusive of reason, since to 'see' with the mind is to reason.³ Plato recognised *θεωρία* under two aspects—on the one hand *consideration*, scientific in its quality, and on the other hand a *contemplation*, belonging to a different plane, which might be described as religious.⁴ This means that he distinguished the *discursive meditation* of later writers from pure *intuitive contemplation*.⁵

Meditation consists in a comprehensive and critical review and assimilation of the successional process of logical reasoning, and of the results which it has reached. Such conscious rational labour only occasionally attains the goal—the elimination of successional time; the rare minds capable of this happy transcendence pass from meditation to that direct, unmediated awareness which characterises contemplation in the strict sense.

Since contemplation is of such central significance in our theme, we must try to visualise it in relation to life as a whole. It is natural to compare it with action—the other major expression of human energy. Both Aristotle and Plotinus made this comparison, and they agree in ranking contemplation, un-

¹ For further considerations about this transition, see pp. 81, 82 of the present book.

² On seeing with the mind, cf. Arber (1954), Chap. X, pp. 115–26.

³ Beck, L. J. (1952), pp. 109–10.

⁴ For a study of Plato's conception of *θεωρία*, see Festugière, A. J. (1936).

⁵ Cf. Gardner, E. G. (1913), p. 158, with references to Hugh of St Victor; Rolt, C. E. (1920), p. 183, n. 3.

⁶ Rackham, H. (1926), *Nich. Ethics*, X. vii. 2, pp. 612–13.

⁷ Dodds, E. R. (1923), pp. 35–6, note on Plotinus, *Enn.* III. viii. 4.

Intellection and Feeling

hesitatingly, above action; Aristotle says that contemplation is itself the highest form of activity,⁶ while Plotinus goes so far as to regard action as no more than an enfeebled form of contemplation.⁷ Dante, with his broad and liberal outlook gave both types of life their due, recognising that activity leads to felicity of a *good* kind but that the *best* happiness and blessedness are reached only by the contemplative.⁸ Ancient Chinese thought, again, allowed for both aspects of existence; the essence of Chinese philosophy may be described as the attempt to synthesise the contemplative and the active life.⁹ This synthesis can be valid only if we realise that contemplation at its highest merges into the *Unio mystica*, which involves the concrete emotional as well as the more abstract intellectual elements. To Plato contemplative knowledge, *θεωρία*, came in itself to mean beatitude¹⁰; this conclusion may be equated with Eckhart's dictum, 'Vision is the whole reward'.¹¹ Feeling and intellection cannot, indeed, be set asunder. *Feeling* (using this term in the widest sense, to include everything in consciousness which is considered to lie outside abstract rational knowledge¹²) and *intellection* are two *attributes* of the human being, each of which expresses the whole of his individuality within the limits of its own special symbolism. For Plotinus the soul attains to vision by means of the 'Intellectual-principle', but it has then to pass from the stage of 'Intellect-knowing' to the stage of 'Intellect-loving'¹³—Dante's '*Luce intellettuale piena d'amore*'.¹⁴ This mystic love that is the fulfilment of knowledge may be identified, conversely, with the one source in the soul from which Eckhart believed both knowledge and love to flow.¹⁵ It has something in

⁶ Giuliani, G. (1874), *Convivio*, Tract. IV, Chap. XVII, p. 470; translation, Jackson, W. W. (1909), p. 255.

⁷ Fung Yu-lan (1947), pp. 2 et seq.

⁸ Festugière, A. J. (1936), p. 282.

⁹ Pfeiffer, F. (1949, 1952), vol. I, title of Serm. XXX, p. 81.

¹⁰ Cf. Schopenhauer, A. (1883–6), vol. I. 1883, p. 66.

¹¹ Mackenna, S., and Page, B. S. (1917–1930), vol. V, *Enn.* VI. vii. 35, p. 203.

¹² *Paradiso*, xxx, 40.

¹³ Pfeiffer, F. (1949, 1952), vol. I, Serm. LXXXVII, p. 219.

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common with Spinoza's *felicitas*,¹ which he defines in a way that equates it with the achievement of the *conatus*—the urge that *is* life itself; or it may be visualised as the Eternal Blessedness, at which, as Lord Herbert of Cherbury said, the rhythms of nature all aim with one accord.² In this state the ecstasy of mere happiness is left behind; in the self-forgetfulness of the ultimate union the mystic becomes one with universal life, and in this experience bliss and distress both inevitably play their parts.³ Neither joy nor sorrow is complete in itself; the final mystical phase includes and surpasses them both. Strangely enough, the endless rapture of the souls in Dante's *Paradiso* was apparently unaffected by the thought that their fellows were enduring sempiternally the torments of the *Inferno*. In the East philosophic insight had penetrated to a level beyond that for which Dante finds expression. The highest aim set before themselves by the Mahāyāna Buddhists was that each man should by working upwards through many preparatory stages become a Bodhisattva, who has earned his Nirvana, but who refuses to accept the final liberation which his merit has won until every suffering creature in the world has achieved the same happy state.⁴ That comprehensive Unity which is the final goal is thus inextricably involved with the Many, instead of being the merely selective pseudo-unity implied in Dante's creed. It is indeed open to us to suppose that he might have shown the souls of the blest fired by a universal compassion, blent with but far outdistancing their own joy, if it had not been for his loyalty to those mighty Christian and Islamic⁵ traditions which inspired his genius at the cost of shackling it.

Dante's evocation of thrilling ecstasy, as the *Paradiso* works to its climax, reveals perhaps as nearly as any verbal symbolism ever could the emotional aspect of the mystic union; but it is dangerous to overstress this facet. When we turn to the actual records of individual experiences we find that the element of rapture does not invariably supervene, and that, when it does occur, it is generally not more than a transient phase in a larger context. It seems to be particularly conspicuous in connexion

Mystic Beatitude

with Christian mysticism of an emotional type, since it harmonises with a definite faith in the possibility of intimate contact with a personal Deity. The attitude of certain Islamic and Oriental thinkers reveals a more qualified joyousness but a deeper insight. They confess that they strive constantly after a goal which though interior remains for ever remote,⁶ since before the Attributes of the Absolute 'the mind is distraught and the reason totters', as Ibn al-'Arabī said.⁷ The true mystic beatitude is indeed less comparable with pure ecstasy than with the strange blending of felicity and grief which the friends of Socrates felt during their last talk with him⁸; for the *Unio mystica* is illumined not merely by the flash of unalloyed joy—so intense that, at the moment, it seems to be all in all—but also by that quiet after-glow, called in Sūfism 'the Sobriety of Union',⁹ which once experienced suffuses for ever even the darkest horizons of the mind.

¹ [Spinoza, B. de] 'B.D.S.' (1677), *Ethices*, pars IV, prop. xviii, schol., p. 178; translation, White, W. Hale, and Stirling, A. H. (1930), p. 194.

² Herbert, E. (Lord Herbert of Cherbury) (1937), p. 143.

³ Cf. Delacroix, H. (1908), p. 392.

⁴ Dasgupta, S. B. (1950), pp. 7–11; see also the moving description of *The Bodhisattva's infinite Compassion*, which is one of the *Mahāyāna* extracts translated by E. Conze in Conze, E., Horner, I. B., Snellgrove, D., and Waley, A. (1954), pp. 131–2.

⁵ On Dante's Islamic sources, see Asin, M. (1926).

⁶ Cf. Gatenby, E. V. (1929), pp. 48–9.

⁷ Nicholson, R. A. (1922), p. 149.

⁸ Woodhead, W. D. (1953), *Phaedo*, 59 A, pp. 90–1.

⁹ This 'Sobriety' is discussed fully in Nicholson, R. A. (1921), p. 200, n. 10, and other references; see also (1950), p. 104, n.

Contemplative Thought in Relation to Transcendence and Immanence

As a brief and crude expression of Plato's view, we might say that his 'forms' or 'ideas' have—broadly speaking—an existence of their own in a world transcending the material universe; all the 'things' that we know are modelled upon these 'forms'. A relatively recent, but quite literal acceptance of this scheme is implied in William Blake's belief that in his drawings he was merely transmitting to earth versions of certain eternal 'forms'. In one of his poems he speaks of his designs as remaining everlastingly unchanged on high, far above the reach of Time's rage.¹ In contrast to Plato, Aristotle leaned to the conception of the 'ideas' as immanent; in an organism the 'form' was the essential nature of the creature itself, not something external, existing independently, of which the organism was a mere reflection or copy.

In varying aspects, these two contrasting attitudes are met with again and again throughout the history of thought. The transcendence recognised by Plato is harmonious with that conception of theism which involves a break in continuity between man and God, while Aristotle's immanence is more compatible with the view that the Deity is to be found everywhere. Monism of this latter type is accepted in many forms of Eastern religion. For instance, one of the interpreters of the *Bhagavad-Gītā*, which crystallises so much of Hindu tradition, writes that the Godhead (Brahman or Atman) 'is present in man, in the mouse, in the stone, in the flash of lightning'.²

¹ Blake, W., in Keynes, G. (1935), p. 91 (p. 87 of the Rossetti notebook).

² Prabhavananda (*Swami*), and Isherwood, C. (1953), p. 177.

³ Steinilber-Oberlin, E. (1938), p. 67.

⁴ Watson, W. (1898), *The Unknown God*, p. 19; a version of the second half of *Saying X*, *Logion V*; see White, H. G. Evelyn (1920), pp. 35-6.

Light Indwelling or Inflowing

Similarly, according to the Keron sect of Japanese Buddhism, 'The Buddha manifests His presence in each speck of dust'.³ The same idea finds expression in one of the Sayings of Jesus from Oxyrhynchus:

Raise thou the stone and find me there,
Cleave thou the wood and there am I.⁴

An immanence theory of a somewhat different character is implied in Zen Buddhism, which aims at realising the essential nature of each thing in and for itself by means of direct intuitive vision, instead of thinking of it as something conceptual; it may be taken to represent the artist's rather than the philosopher's mysticism. An English exponent of the Buddhism of this school⁵ disclaims William Blake's sign of the innocent eye—'To see a World in a grain of sand'⁶—as inconsistent with the Zen attitude,⁷ which stresses the individual 'thinginess' of each thing rather than its microcosmic quality. This point of view leads to an intensity of concentration on the deed in hand; the artist, who draws a bamboo, himself *becomes* that bamboo to a degree which the Westerner rarely achieves. Like the Persian mystic Rūmī, he recognises that 'becoming is the necessary condition for beholding the reality of anything'.⁸

The opposite view, in which transcendence rather than immanence is the key-note and the individuality of person or thing fades into insignificance, was voiced by St Mechthild of Hackeborn, when—adopting an ancient metaphor—she spoke of the soul as rapt into God, as a drop of water poured into wine, into which it becomes wholly transformed.⁹ Taking an example at random from a much later period, we may recall that Nathanael Culverwel—one of the Cambridge Platonists of the seventeenth century—declared that 'the Spirit of man *is the Candle of the*

⁵ Humphreys, C. (1949), p. 87.

⁶ Blake, W. (1913), p. 171.

⁷ Humphreys, C. (1949), p. 185.

⁸ Nicholson, R. A. (1950), LXXX, p. 132.

⁹ St Mechthild (1877), vol. II, p. 152; for a study of Mechthild of Hackeborn, see Gardner, E. G. (1913), pp. 283-96.

III · Transcendence and Immanence

Lord', but he qualified this statement, which suggests immanence, by adding, 'Surely there's none can think that light is primitively and originally in the Candle.' The light, on his interpretation, is not 'a particle of the divine nature'; it is a lamp lighted by God, into which He drops 'the golden oil'.¹

Such views as those of St Mechthild and of Culverwel, involve the belief that the mystic is completely emptied of self and thus prepared passively to receive the Divine as something external but inflowing. The various symbolic expressions of this belief necessarily imply the transcendence of the Deity—a conception which, in the main, has been that of the Christian Churches.² The antithetic view—that of immanence of the Divine in each individual—has been distrusted in general by the orthodox, on account of its possible consequences. The Immanence doctrine in its extreme forms is held to nullify the distinction between God and man, and to lead in the direction of pantheism, which is disposed to obliterate the antagonism of good and evil. It is also significant that attachment to the idea of immanence of the Absolute harmonises with a personal and non-institutional form of religion, in which there is little place for an ecclesiastical framework or a priesthood. Visionaries of an essentially emotional type seem to have felt little difficulty in remaining within the fold of the Church but those whose approach was more intellectual, such as Meister Eckhart, have often found themselves in conflict with orthodox authority and their opinions have been branded as heretical. A parallel situation occurs among those of the Muslim faith. The One God of Muhammad, Who is completely transcendent, is replaced in Sūfism³—the mystical development from Islām—by the Real Being who dwells and works everywhere, in the heart of man as well as in the uttermost heaven.⁴ Indeed, when we consider

¹ Culverwel, N. (1652), Chap. XI, pp. 87, 96, etc.

² For a mysticism which is primarily Catholic and transcendent, cf. Sharpe, A. B. (1910), pp. 14-17, 21, 25.

³ Sūfism, though basically Islamic, is indebted also to Eastern thought, Neoplatonism, and Christianity; see, for instance, Nicholson, R. A. (1898), and Smith, Margaret (1931).

Awareness of the Indwelling Whole

the variety of levels which man's thought has reached in different races and at different periods, we find indications that the belief that all knowledge of an exalted kind comes from an external source (as the word 'inspiration' implies) is associated with less developed cultural stages than the belief that it is by fostering the inner light, which is integral to the mind, that the contemplative reaches the vision. Man cannot grow to his full stature in a world in which the Absolute seems to him wholly transcendent, where he feels himself to be at the mercy of an external domination that leaves him no direct access to the springs of life. But for release from this delusion of powerlessness he has only to look inwards and thus to discern the truth voiced long ago by St Bernard, that each man has his own fountain from which he can draw. 'Do you yourself', he says, 'drink of the water of your own well.'⁵

Many inhibitions have to be overcome before man can pass, fully and finally, from the childlike belief in exclusive transcendence to the more mature conception which includes immanence. Conscious awareness of the presence of the Whole is often peculiarly difficult to achieve; Ḥāfiẓ understood this, when in the fourteenth century he wrote:

There was a man that loved God well;
In every motion of his mind
God dwelt; and yet he could not tell
That God was in him, being blind:
Wherefore as if afar he stood
And cried, 'Have mercy, O my God!'⁶

Consciousness of the All, attainable with difficulty even by man, can scarcely be supposed to exist in other living creatures, which from our point of view stand lower in the scale. An oak

⁴ Nicholson, R. A. (1914), p. 8; on the relation between transcendence and immanence in Islām, see Smith, Margaret (1931).

⁵ Lewis, G. (1908), Book I, Chapter V, p. 22.

⁶ *A Mad Heart*, Arberry, A. J. (1947), No. 15, pp. 97-9.

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tree, for instance, seems to *be* and possibly (in a sense) to *know* itself alone. Man, on the other hand, is privileged, not only to *be* and to *know* himself but also, in varying degrees according to his individual power of sympathetic understanding, to *know*, and even (in a sense) to *be* the oak tree which he contemplates. His mind thus enjoys a potentially limitless enrichment through its thought-relation to the innumerable other parts-of-a-whole¹ that make up the universe. This gift of imaginative extension of his personal self enables him to be a microcosm of the Whole—the Macrocosm—and conversely it means that the Whole is immanent in his mind; as Mencius (?371–?289 B.C.) said, 'The ten thousand things are there complete, inside us.'²

Within thought itself, the resolution of a deep-seated antithesis—that of subject and object—is assisted by the conception of the microcosm. Man can either regard himself as an element in the Whole, so that he is in objective relation to everything but himself, or—by a mere change of focus—he may realise himself as a microcosm of the Whole, to which he hence stands in a subjective relation. There is something parallel to this idea in the claim that language—the primary tool of thinking—is a synthesis of the mind's subjective and objective facets. The spoken word has both an inward existence for the speaker and an outward existence for the hearer; in speech, subjective impressions and conceptions are thus translated into an objective form.³

The concept of man's individuality as a representation of the Infinite Whole, is illuminated by an analogy which Hallett⁴ puts forward. He compares the relation of man (the microcosm) to the universe (the macrocosm) with the relation of a single instrument in an orchestra to the whole orchestra. Each instrument plays its individual part, but at the same time in an under-

¹ On the sense in which such a term can be used, see Arber, A. (1950), pp. 157–8.

² Waley, A. (1934), p. 33, 'the ten thousand things' is a term for the whole universe in its multiplicity; see p. 1, n. 1, of the present book.

³ For a discussion of W. von Humboldt's theory, see Cassirer, E. (1953), Vol. I, p. 91.

Macrocosm and Microcosm

tone only to be detected by the acute ear it produces its own responsive version of the whole. Thus the contribution of each instrument reveals both its own limited individuality, and also—in its miniature fashion—the whole orchestra. In the same way, man expresses both his own limited self, and the vast universe in which that self has its unique if infinitesimal rôle.

The conception of the microcosm and macrocosm is peculiarly congenial to Chinese thinkers, in its correlation with their innate feeling of man's unity with nature. In the second century before Christ, Tung Chung-shu said that man is a shadow in brief of the universe, while the universe may be described as man on a vast scale⁵; and, in the twelfth century, Lu Chiu-yüan declared, 'The universe is my mind; my mind is the universe'.⁶ The same idea finds expression in our modern world, when Pierre, in *War and Peace*,⁷ glancing up from his prison encampment into the night sky, says to himself, 'And all that is me, all that is within me, and it is all I!'

The meaning implicit in man's oneness with the Whole, is crystallised in the Stoic doctrine that human reason is part of the Divine Logos, or Universal Nature.⁸ Plato's Socrates had voiced a corresponding belief when, speaking of those who frequented his company, he said: 'it is clear that they have never learnt anything from me; the many admirable truths they bring to birth have been discovered by themselves from within'.⁹ That the spirit of man, Atman, is identical with the spirit of the Whole, Brahman, is a tenet of the mystical idealism of the Upanishads. The Atman is described as 'a little flame in the heart' of man, who is urged to 'Learn to know this immortal light'.¹⁰ Plotinus took the same path as the Indian seers, for he realised the inner light as the birth-right of all, though few discover how to use it.¹¹ Many centuries later, when Spinoza

⁴ Hallett, H. F. (1930), p. 92.

⁵ Fung Yu-lan (1947), p. 122.

⁶ Fung Yu-lan (1953), p. 307.

⁷ Tolstoy, L. (1943), p. 1124.

⁸ Festugière, A. J. (1946), p. xi, and (1955) (translation), pp. ix, x.

⁹ Cornford, F. M. (1935), *Thaetetus*, 150 D, p. 26.

¹⁰ Mascaró, J. (1938), *Katha Upanishad*, p. 43.

¹¹ Mackenna, S. and Page, B. S. (1917–30), vol. I, p. 88, *Enn.* I. vi. 8.

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asserted that God was the immanent but not the external cause of all things,¹ he was by implication accepting the notion of the Whole as innate in man's mind, so far as finitude allows. His contemporary, George Fox, had a conception of the Inner Light which the Society of Friends has adopted and developed, but it was less comprehensive than that of Plotinus, since Fox seems to have thought of it in an exclusively Christian context.²

One of the difficulties with which we are beset in trying to penetrate towards the indwelling Whole, and thus to approach the *Unio mystica*, is that we find ourselves attempting to formulate ideas about a region in which we have passed beyond the familiar technique of logical discourse and reached experiences for which verbal expressions cannot be more than symbols and suggestions. Chu Hsi, in the twelfth century, said that the Supreme Absolute is within us like a pearl in turbid water and that it is for us to bring this pearl to light.³ In different terms his contemporary Lu Chiu-yüan declared that 'The Universe has never fenced man apart from itself. It is men who themselves fence off the Universe'.⁴ The sense of these two similitudes may be combined in a further metaphor if we think of the inner light in man's mind—the *visio*, or *lumen naturale* of Descartes⁵—as a spark which can either be fanned into flame or extinguished. This spark may be visualised as equivalent to a beam of the 'First Absolute Light',⁶ which is the All, brought to a focus by the unique finitude of an individual human being. When Abū Sa'īd,⁷ the Persian mystic, spoke of the spark (*sirr*) as present in the body merely as 'a loan', he was voicing the

¹ [Spinoza, B. de] 'B.D.S.' (1677), Letter xxi, p. 449, 'Deum enim rerum omnium causam immanentem, . . . non verò transeuntem statuo'. Translation, Wolf, A. (1928), p. 343 [Letter numbered LXXIII] Spinoza's 'transeuntem' is untranslatable; 'external' is used here because Wolf's term, 'transeunt' is scarcely an English word.

² Fox, G. (1952), p. 274 *et passim*. ³ Fung Yu-lan (1953), p. 305.

⁴ Fung Yu-lan (1947), p. 197. Lu Chiu-yüan is sometimes called Lu Hsiang-Shan.

⁵ Cf. Beck, L. J. (1952), pp. 49–50.

⁶ Suhrawardī uses this expression; see Smith, Margaret (1950), No. 84, p. 79.

Self-identification with the Whole

transcendence theory; the fuller vision that the concept as immanence gives, and which he sometimes enjoyed, reveals the spark as belonging truly to the mind-body unit and yet as being, in a microcosmic form, the light of the Whole.

We may regard both Plato's Doctrine of Reminiscence⁸ and Hegel's approach to the Absolute through his dialectic⁹ as attempts at the explicit disclosure of that microcosm of the Whole which has been implicit in man's mind from the beginning. Such a consciousness of the immanence of the Whole in the self has, from time to time in all mystical movements, led the more enthusiastic votaries to claim to be actually one with the Deity. This tendency has been resisted by organised religions but it springs up again and again. It may be recalled that Aristotle's 'active intellect' (*intellectus agens*) is, at least on the Arabian interpretation, identical with God.¹⁰ From early days the Persians realised the possibilities of deification which were offered by the conception of immanence; Abu Sa'īd once declared, 'There is nothing inside this coat except Allah!',¹¹ thus reiterating the much earlier Indian statement in the *Mundaka Upanishad*—'In truth who knows God becomes God'.¹² When we turn to the medieval thought of Europe, we find that John Scotus Eriugena held God and the creature to be not two things set at a distance from each other but one and the same.¹³ Meister Eckhart expressed himself in the same sense but even more explicitly. In one of his sermons he said that, if a man 'loves a stone, he is that stone, if he loves a man, he is that man, if he loves God—nay, I durst not say more; if I were

⁷ Nicholson, R. A. (1921), p. 51.

⁸ Jowett, B. (1871), vol. I, *Meno*, p. 269 *et seq.*

⁹ McTaggart, J. McT. E. (1922), p. 64.

¹⁰ Mure, G. R. G. (1948), p. 45, notes but does not accept this view; cf. Carré, M. H. (1949), p. 125.

¹¹ Nicholson, R. A. (1921), p. 57.

¹² Mascaró, J. (1938), p. 64.

¹³ Johannes Scotus Eriugena (1853), in Migne, J. P., *Patrol. cursus completus*, ser. II, vol. 122, *De div. nat.*, lib. III, col. 678, 'Proinde non duo a seipsis distantia debemus intelligere Deum et creaturam, sed unum et id ipsum'.

nothing inside
this coat
except Allah!

nothing inside
this coat
except Allah!

III · Transcendence and Immanence

to say, he is God, ye might stone me'.¹ For utterances such as this, he was indicted by the Church; one of the *errores* of which he was accused was having maintained that '*Nos transformamur totaliter in Deum et convertimur in eum*'.² Eckhart's audacity recalls that of the Persians; al-Ghazālī who was born in the eleventh century quotes as a saying of a mystic who had reached the ultimate state, the words, 'I am the One Reality',³ while Jalālu'l-Dīn Rūmī wrote in the twelfth century, 'Call me not infidel, O my Soul, if I say that thou thyself art He'.⁴

A belief in the identification of the self with the Deity may take either of two alternative forms; the mystic may see God not only in himself but in every creature, or he may, on the other hand, regard the Presence as confined to himself or to a favoured few. On the first view he accepts, in the terminology of the Upanishads, the identity of *Brahman* (the Absolute) and *Atman* (the individual soul), or, in the language of another philosophy, the existence of a germ of Buddhahood in *all* animate beings.⁵ This belief finds subtle expression in Japanese literature. It is related in one of the Nō plays that prayers to the Lord Amida led him to admit a bird's soul into paradise, where it played with the Phoenix and lodged in the tree-tops of heaven; while in another earlier play it is recognised that the souls of flowers can attain to Buddhahood.⁶ That this conviction is not merely a bygone tradition is witnessed by a modern account of a visit to an old priest of the Tendai sect, who was found watering his irises with delicate and scrupulous reverence as if performing a ceremonial ritual. He said in explanation, 'Even the flowers also become Buddhas!'⁷ This belief in the universal presence of the Deity saves man from the danger of self-exaltation; on the other hand, a mystic who, on the lines

¹ Pfeiffer, F. (1949, 1952), vol. I, Serm. LXIII, p. 157.

² Denzinger, H., and Bannwart, C. (1922), *Errores Eckardi*, p. 214.

³ Smith, Margaret (1944), p. 191.

⁴ Nicholson, R. A. (1914), pp. 118-19.

⁵ See a passage from the Mahāyāna writings (translated by E. Conze) in Conze, E., Horner, I. B., Snellgrove, D. and Waley, A. (1955), p. 181.

⁶ Waley, A. (1921), *Hatsuyuki*, pp. 244-7; *Kakitsubata*, p. 262.

The Outcome of Illumination

of the second view which we have indicated, identifies himself with the Deity but rejects pantheism, is apt to adopt the egoistic notion that he is distinguished from his fellows by being individually an Incarnation of God. Sri Ramakrishna, to take a nineteenth-century example, believed himself to be such an Incarnation, and to be comparable with Christ, Buddha, and Krishna. To the occidental mind, a claim of this magnitude inevitably suggests derangement, and indeed various contemporaries associated with Ramakrishna thought him insane, and even he himself at times doubted his own mental stability.⁸

If the mystic's sense of illumination reaches the utmost intensity, so that he has a full conviction of identification with the Absolute, and if he also has the gift of handing on to his disciples the insight he has gained, he may become the founder of a 'revealed' religion. Those who follow his tradition do so on the strength of the mystic experience, but only at second-hand. All they can obtain is such fragmentary initiation as can be derived from the Master's attempt to convey the incommunicable; and even what they might receive in this way is liable to be put out of focus by personal devotion, or smothered under elaborate later supplementations alien to the divine simplicity of the original vision.

A drawback that sometimes accompanies the mystic's supreme sense of illumination is the belittlement or even negation of human personality,⁹ and the assumption that in the ultimate experience man's finite individuality is simply lost in the Infinite. Schopenhauer¹⁰ regarded the mystic state as reached through the complete abnegation of the 'will', in which he, like Jacob Boehme,¹¹ included the principle of man's personality. In Schopenhauer's view the self-surrender is so complete that only

⁷ Steinilber-Oberlin, E. (1938), pp. 82-3.

⁸ Nikhilananda (*Swami*) (1951), pp. 50, 56; on the question of insanity, see pp. 27-31.

⁹ For a further treatment of personality, see Chapter VI of the present book.

¹⁰ Schopenhauer, A. (1883-6), vol. I, p. 153.

¹¹ Martensen, H. L. (1949), p. 44.

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nothingness is left. This attitude, which diverges widely from that of most of his European contemporaries, may be associated with his pioneer study of the Hindu sacred writings¹; he found in them authority for that discounting of individuality, to which he was by temperament disposed. Not only in certain aspects of Hindu thought but also in some forms of the Buddhism which has grown out of it, reality is refused to the ego or separatist self.² We find a different attitude in the Neoplatonism of Plotinus, where the denial of personality was regarded as a pitfall in the path of mysticism and disciples were warned against it. Plotinus held that the identification of the self with the Whole should be qualified by the fear of losing the self in the desire of a too wide awareness.³ As a corrective to the slight value which Hindu thought in general seems to set upon individuality, a modern Indian writer has followed Plotinus in issuing a *caveat* against the one-sidedness of rejecting God in his manifested forms, and attempting to become wholly merged in the formless Absolute.⁴ When Jan van Ruysbroeck—the Flemish mystic—wrote in the fourteenth century, ‘we should feel ourselves living wholly in God and wholly in ourselves’,⁵ he was re-expressing the conviction that human personality should be retained to the full in the mystic experience. This thought runs also, as a continuous thread, through Dante’s vision; even in those who have reached ultimate ecstasy in the *Paradiso*, individuality remains entirely unimpaired.

Though the opposition between transcendence and immanence must be a significant factor in any analytical study of mysticism, the relativity of these terms has to be borne in mind. As a parallel it may be recalled that in living organisms the

¹ Schopenhauer, A. (1883–6), vol. II, p. 5.

² For a study of Hinduism and Buddhism which stresses their tendency to negate human personality and consciousness, see Coomaraswamy, A. K. (n.d. [1943]).

³ Mackenna, S., and Page, B. S. (1917–1930), vol. IV, p. 87, *Enn.* V. viii. 11.

⁴ Turiyananda (*Swami*), in Isherwood, C. (n.d. [1951]), p. 65.

⁵ Ruysbroeck, J. van (1951), *The Sparkling Stone*, Chapter IX, p. 205.

Synthesis of Externality and Internality

final cause of development is an immanent, internal directiveness towards a goal.⁶ On the other hand a work of art such as a painting has a final cause which is external to itself, and comes from the artist. The cause is thus (if the picture itself may be credited with a point of view) transcendent. If, however, we choose to treat *the artist + his work* as a unit, the final cause of the picture is—as it is in the living organism—immanent. Considering this relativity of meaning, it is not surprising that the most enlightened of the mystics have succeeded in seeing internality and externality in a synthesised form. Long ago, in the Rg-Veda, we find the idea of Puruṣa (the one great person), the Supreme Reality, which is both transcendent and immanent. This conception is described as panentheism, which passes beyond pantheism, but includes it.⁷

The same fusion of transcendence and immanence was glimpsed in the system of Chu Hsi. He held the Supreme Ultimate to be the principle of the Universe as a whole, but to be at the same time inherent in its entirety in each individual thing. He illustrates this by comparison with the moon shining in the heavens, which is mirrored in the waters everywhere, though itself remaining undivided.⁸ This twelfth-century Chinese writer was thus reiterating, unconsciously, what St Augustine had enunciated when he wrote that the Almighty ‘is both interior to everything because all things are in Him, and exterior to everything because He is above all things’.⁹

The Upanishad conception of the highest truth is committed (according to different schools of interpretation), either to the *identity* of the Whole (Brahman) with the individual (Atman), or else to a deep-seated *communion* between the two,

⁶ Cf. Russell, E. S. (1945).

⁷ Chatterjee, S. C., and Datta, D. M. (1939), pp. 394–5.

⁸ Fung Yu-lan (1953), p. 298.

⁹ St Augustine (1936), pp. 106–7; Migne, J. P. (1845), ser. I, vol. 34, *De Gen. ad Litt.*, lib. VIII, cap. XXVI, 48, col. 391, ‘Deus est . . . interior omni re, quia in ipso sunt omnia, et exterior omni re, quia ipse est super omnia’.

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which still retain their distinctness.¹ The latter alternative, if we suppose the communion carried to the ultimate point, signifies both perfect interrelation and perfect interfusion of the individual spirit with the Absolute, whose nature it shares; this conception may be held to include and overpass not only the one-sided idea of the self discarding its entire human content in order to receive the Absolute, but also the equally one-sided idea of the content of the self in isolation, actually *being* the Absolute. In this communion the individual does not sacrifice his finite identity, but on the contrary he gives as well as receives. The finite self thus enters into the untold happiness of offering an element without which the Whole would be the poorer. That this element is, from the earthbound standpoint, infinitesimal, is of no moment; in the region to which the *Unio mystica* gives access, quantitative distinctions have no longer any meaning. In Nicholas of Cusa's profound study of the *docta ignorantia* which reaches beyond knowledge, he identifies the maximum with the minimum, and writes that 'in the infinite essence every essence is the infinite essence itself'.²

¹ Cf. Wadia, A. R., in Radhakrishnan, Sir S. (1951), p. 97.

² Nicolaus Cusanus (1932), vol. I, part I, *De docta ignorantia*, lib. I, cap. xvi, p. 32; translation (1954), p. 36.

❧ 4 ❧

Approaches to the Contemplative State The Way of Emotion and the Way of Reason

Though the Christian churches in general seem to have treated the ultimate truth as accessible to all intellectual grades—the simple-minded as well as the thinkers—another view has appeared again and again in the philosophies and religions of widely different races and epochs. This view may be summarised, though inadequately, in the statement that within truth itself higher and lower levels may be distinguished; and that only the ranges forming the lower levels are within the reach of the majority of mankind, who possess little inherent power of thought and in whom even that little has remained undeveloped. These lower levels can be reached by means of imagery, pictorial thinking, and ritual, which depend primarily upon the bodily senses and emotions, and do not demand abstract intellection. On such planes the desire is for a Deity with the attributes of personality—the Saguna Brahman of the Upanishads¹; at the higher levels, on the other hand, the conception of Deity is equated with the idea of the Absolute, or Supra-personal Whole, concerning which nothing can be predicated²—the Nirguna Brahman. 'Revealed' religions generally represent attempts to make such a Supreme Absolute accessible and comprehensible to mankind in general. This can be done only by reducing the ultimate conception from the level of Godhead down to that of God, and confining the latter term to a significance which in varying degrees is personal and anthropomorphic. Ibn al-'Arabī (b. 1165) realised this, for he

¹ Sastri, K. (1924), pp. 4, 5, etc.; Nikhilananda (*Swami*) (1949, 1952), vol. I, pp. 147, etc.

² Sparrow-Simpson, W. J., in Rolt, C. E. (1920), p. 210.

IV · Approaches to the Contemplative State

often contrasts the finite God of religion with the Infinite and Absolute Godhead of mysticism.¹ Revealed religions thus appear to be concerned mainly with the lower planes of the comprehension of Reality. A two-storey conception of truth is found in the Upanishads²; in the Islamic and Šūfī traditions³; and also in the writings of Nicholas of Cusa⁴ and Bruno⁵—to cite merely a few typical instances. It must be recognised, however, that to speak of the levels of truth as though they were sharply separated and discrete does not give a fair impression. The levels grade insensibly into one another, and the lower phases—in which symbols are taken literally at their face value—when fully developed point beyond themselves to the higher; it was a saying of Tao-Sheng (d. 434) that a symbol serves to convey an idea but should be given up as soon as the idea has been comprehended, for it 'is only those who can grasp the fish and discard the fishing net that are qualified to seek the truth.'⁶

The career of Ramakrishna⁷ (1836–1886) offers—even to those who are far from accepting his claims—an illustration in one individual life of the upward passage observable in the general history of human thought from the lower, purely personal and emotional levels of truth to the higher and more abstract levels. In his earlier years Ramakrishna passed through a series of phases of relationship to the different forms of personal god recognised in Hindu tradition, and he adopted in succession, and carried out conscientiously the rituals and modes of existence appropriate to the worshipper of each. Finally he believed that he had achieved self-identification with Krishna, thus scaling the greatest possible heights of that type of religion; but this was not the end of his pilgrimage. Leaving the Krishna-

¹ Nicholson, R. A. (1921), p. 159; (1922), p. 148.

² Sastri, K. (1924), pp. 173–4; Radhakrishnan, Sir S. (1940), p. 133; Nikhilananda (*Swami*) (1949, 1952), vol. I, p. 208. On the different positions taken up on this point by the two great commentators, Sankara and Rāmāṇiya, see Urquhart, W. S. (1928).

³ Nicholson, R. A. (1914), pp. 92, 94; (1921), p. 139, n. 4; and in Arnold, Sir T., and Guillaume, A. (1931), p. 233.

Emotional Mysticism

stage behind, he became absorbed in the non-dualistic Vedānta, which aims at the negation of everything relative. Then (after having immersed himself also in Islām and in Christianity) he reached the final conclusion that the gods of the different religions are so many manifestations on the *relative* plane, and that these partial manifestations are lost to view in the non-relational Absolute.

Discrimination of concepts, which though covering the same field arise at different levels, is of special significance in connexion with the analysis of contemplation, and concerns us closely in the present book; for much depends upon the depth of the strata in the human mind and spirit from which the mystic current springs—strata which may be primarily either intellectual or else emotional. Plotinus, rooted in Plato, can be regarded as the Western founder of intellectual mysticism. Among later writers, we may recall Eckhart, who—influenced by Neoplatonism⁸ and by the intellectualist trend of Eriugena⁹ and St Thomas Aquinas—made a strikingly bold attempt to develop this aspect in the context of Christianity.

When we turn to emotional mysticism there is no need to make a special search for individual instances, since in a Christian framework the idea of the *Unio mystica* is more often than not associated with feeling rather than with thought. European mystics seem to be predominantly of the class practising ecstatic withdrawal, and they are perhaps comparable with those who are distinguished in the Yogacara school of Buddhism as 'men of trance', in contrast to those who pursue the path of thought and are called 'men of wisdom'.¹⁰ A typical case of the emotional trend is Jan van Ruysbroeck (1293–1381), who writes that 'we must go forth into God with our feeling,

⁴ Nicolaus Cusanus (1932), vol. I, part I, *De docta ignorantia*, lib. I, cap. xxv, pp. 52–3; translation (1954), pp. 57–9.

⁵ Singer, D. W. (1950), pp. 263–5.

⁶ Fung Yu-lan (1953), p. 253.

⁷ Nikhilananda (*Swami*) (1951).

⁸ Dodds, E. R. (1933), p. xxxii. ⁹ Bett, H. (1925), pp. 141–2, 190–1.

¹⁰ Conze, E. (1951), p. 161, etc. It should be recalled that 'trance', in the Buddhist sense, does not imply coma; cf. Thomas, E. J. (1933), p. 47, n.

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above reason¹; and the same attitude appears in the anonymous author of *The Cloud of Unknowing*, who says of the Deity that he may be 'gotten and holden' by love but never by thought.² The doctrine of the Incarnation may be understood to suggest the possibility of an almost human relationship between man and God, with the result that the mystic is liable to assume the emotional tone of a lover to his beloved. There is an element of this in the works of Heinrich Suso (c. 1295–1366). He was a native of Swabia, a region famed for music and poetry, and for the cult of romantic devotion towards women³; so not unnaturally it was the emotional aspect of mysticism to which his temperament responded. The tale that we owe the celestial lyric, '*In dulce júbilo*', to a vision in which dancing angels sang this carol before Suso, is not inconsistent with his rapturous and colourful description of the abode of the blest in the Empyrean. We read of this as a fair city, shining with inlaid gold, glowing with noble pearls, set in precious stones which are clear as crystal and reflect red roses and white lilies; where may be seen happy lovers, and the gladness of those who sing and dance and play at joyful games.⁴ Suso's use of this traditional imagery is winged with genuine feeling, but so sensuous an approach is too closely akin to an effort to neutralise human frustration by means of imaginary wish-fulfilment. Lady Julian of Norwich, again, offers the account of her vision to 'alle thaye that desyres to be crystes looverse',⁵ while Richard Rolle of Hampole, who also is revered as a mystic, in his *Incendium Amoris*, describes his ecstasy in terms far more appropriate to love as a thing physical than to his great theme.⁶ In Spain, where there was a remarkable flowering of mysticism⁷ after the completion of the reconquest of the country from the Moors towards the end of the fifteenth century, we find that the

¹ Ruysbroeck, J. van (1951), *The Sparkling Stone*, Chap. IX, p. 203. For a study of Ruysbroeck and other emotional mystics of the Low Countries, see Axters, S. (1948) and (1954).

² Anon. (1936), p. 23.

³ Clark, J. M. (1949), p. 55.

⁴ Suso, H. (1953), *Little Book of Eternal Wisdom*, Chap. 12, p. 90.

The Literal and the Symbolic

visionaries were often unreservedly 'in love' with God as Christ. On Peers's interpretation, the intensely individualistic and active character of the Spaniards resulted in a form of religious experience which might be called 'a sort of divine knight errantry', rather than an impersonal, speculative mental adventure; any abstract and intellectual approach to the Whole was thus alien to their outlook. This limitation to a purely personal attitude, and the lack of a more spacious atmosphere, is indicative of a difference between Western and Islamic mystics. Persian writers evidently had a faculty for thinking about any subject *in more than one way at once*—in a literal sense, and also according to various symbolic and abstract interpretations. The average Western mind is inclined, on the contrary, to work on the strict lines of 'either . . . or . . .' so that we see, for instance, *either* the hues of the rainbow *or* white light. The Persians, on the other hand, thought in terms of 'both . . . and . . .', so that, when they focussed upon the iridescent scale of colours, they were yet aware, simultaneously, of the white radiance which includes them all. Their poetry not only suggests more than it says, but also means all that it may suggest.⁸ The part played in Persia by speech of double meaning—literal and symbolical—is explicitly outlined in a pamphlet written in the seventeenth century by a Šūfī.⁹ In this he explains, for example, that *Abrū* (eyebrow) may be taken to mean God's attributes, which veil his essence; that *Sāqī* (wine-bearer) stands for Reality revealing itself; and that *Kharābāt* (the tavern) is equivalent to pure Unity. Such instances bring home to us how foreign this idiom is to Western thought and how many opportunities of communicating abstract ideas we miss through our relative incapacity for symbolism. Even the Persian mystics did not always keep to the high symbolic level,

⁵ Julian of Norwich (1952), p. v.

⁶ Rolle, R. (1935), p. 188, etc.

⁷ Peers, E. Allison (1951), and other works by this author.

⁸ On this subject see Nicholson, R. A. (1921), pp. 168, 169, *et passim*.

⁹ For a fuller account of the following and other examples, see Arberry, A. J. (1950), pp. 113–14.

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for though they were so much more fully versed than those of the West in the technique of metaphorical approach, they were still sometimes dominated unconsciously by non-transmuted human emotion. Jalālu'l-Dīn Rūmī¹ may be taken as an example. He was scarcely an original philosopher in his own right, but derived his metaphysical conceptions from those gathered and formulated by Ibn al-'Arabī (1165-1240), who has been called the greatest mystical genius of the Arabs and to whom Dante² as well as Rūmī owed much. Between the two Islamic thinkers there is the difference that 'Arabī's mysticism was elaborately reasoned and intellectual, whereas in Rūmī's poetry as in that of the Christian mystics feeling generally plays the primary part. Although Muhammadanism is essentially monistic and non-incarnational, Rūmī found the object which his white-hot passion demanded in certain individuals; these he regarded as manifestations of the 'Perfect Man',³ in whom the Divine Mind or Logos reveals itself completely. In the course of Rūmī's career as a mystic he was associated with three men in succession, each of whom fulfilled his aspirations by offering in his eyes a mirror of the Divine Attributes. Under the spell of the first of these devotions, Rūmī immortalised his love in the great series of mystical odes called by the name of Shamsi Tabriz⁴; they corresponded in some ways to the *Sonnets*, through which Shakespeare gave endless life to his unknown friend. The literary relation of Shamsi to Rūmī has also been compared with that of Socrates to Plato.⁵ No doubt there is certain value in this comparison, but it cannot be accepted in any full sense when we recall the intensity of the purely human element in the passion crystallised for us in Rūmī's poems.

¹ This account of Rūmī is based upon Nicholson, R. A. (1950); see also (1898) and Arberry, A. J. (1950). ² Asin, M. (1926).

³ On the 'Perfect Man' see Nicholson, R. A. (1921), Chapter II, pp. 77-142.

⁴ Nicholson, R. A. (1898), includes originals and translations of 48 of these poems.

⁵ Nicholson, R. A. (1898), p. xv.

⁶ Nicolaus Cusanus (1932), vol. I, part I, *De docta ignorantia*, lib. I, cap.

The Control of Love

It is clear that, for some temperaments, human love may point a way to mystic experience, provided that it is never forgotten that this indication is metaphorical; terms drawn from human experience can offer no more than a remote analogy, since such expressions can be applicable only within the limits of finiteness and are 'based upon the creaturely'.⁶ An assumption which at the present day seems seldom to be criticised is that love (understood in terms of human feeling) is in itself the highest good, and that in a magnified form it is the principal attribute of the Absolute; but some men of genius in the past have thought otherwise. St Augustine, for instance, was convinced that love was a universal urge that needed to be curbed and guided into fit channels. Created things, he says, are all good, and may be loved rightly or ill—rightly when there is guarded control (*ordine custodito*), but ill when the controlling order is disturbed (*perturbato*). He defines virtue as the ordering of love (*virtutis ordo est amoris*).⁷ This principle was adopted by Dante, who interpreted 'love' in St Augustine's broad sense. In the *Purgatorio*,⁸ Virgil tells Dante that from love springs not only every virtue but every deed that deserves punishment. Both to St Augustine and to Dante the *ordering* of love was no merely academic necessity. Neither of them was such a man as Socrates, whose life forces seem always to have flowed without let or hindrance into his vocation. Both saint and poet knew in themselves the full human experience of anguished struggle before they learned to compel the energy of the personal-emotional urge into the service of the whole man, instead of into his subjugation; hence they both realised the need for impersonal intellect as a factor in the approach to the *Unio*

xxiv, p. 51: 'Quare quidquid per theologiam affirmationis de Deo dicitur, in respectu creaturam fundatur'. Cf. also Carré, M. H. (1949), pp. 109-10.

⁷ St Augustine (1924), vol. II, lib. xv, cap. 22, pp. 171-2; for a translation other than that given above, see Healey, J., and Tasker, R. V. G. (1945), vol. II, pp. 88-9; on the nature of love cf. p. 73 of the present book.

⁸ *Purgatorio*, xvii, 103-5. It has been pointed out that the whole process described by Dante in the *Purgatorio* consists in freeing the soul from the vices of disordered love; see Gardner, E. G. (1913), pp. 21, 54-7, etc.

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mystica. Rūmī's poetry also reveals awareness of this need. We have spoken of him as primarily emotional, but his writing is far from being limited to the individualistic, finite note. Sometimes with the aid of the intellect he reaches beyond, towards the actual mystic experience of unity with the suprapersonal Whole—an experience which flows round and absorbs all the personal emotions, and in the end outdistances them completely. In one of his odes he writes¹:

The Empyrean and the Earth and the Tablet and the
Throne, from the Pleiads to the mould—
All that you see therein, with union and with severance—I
am they.

In more homely vein, Rūmī illustrates the oneness of all things by a fable,² in which he first admonishes and then offers consolation to a chickpea, who complains of its agonies in the boiling pan:

Continue, O chickpea, to boil in tribulation until neither
existence nor self remain to thee.

If thou hast been severed from the garden of earth, yet thou
wilt be food in the mouth, and enter into the living.

Be nutriment, energy, thought!

Rūmī was much influenced by another great Ṣūfī poet, who preceded him—Farīd al-Dīn 'Aṭṭār. The enormous output of this writer includes an allegorical poem, *Mantiq Al-Tayr* (Speech of Birds), which has been translated in epitomised form by Edward Fitzgerald.³ The conclusion of the poem conveys as

¹ From an unpublished translation (direct from the Persian) by D. S. Robertson of an ode mentioned by R. A. Nicholson (1898), p. 281; it was then known to Nicholson only through former translations, but he later (1922) published a free translation of parts of it, not however including this couplet.

² Nicholson, R. A. (1950), XLII, p. 82.

³ Fitzgerald, E. (1889), vol. II, pp. 480 et seq.; part of this version is reprinted in Arberry, A. J. (1950), pp. 107-9. For a complete translation into French prose, see Garcin de Tassy, M. (1863); this French version is translated into English in Nott, S. C. (1954).

'Aṭṭār's Mysticism

deep an insight as words can invoke into the nature of the *Unio mystica*, conceived not from the standpoint of human love but from the higher level which has to be attained before the relation of man to the Suprapersonal Absolute can be experienced. As a mere indication of the luminous authenticity of 'Aṭṭār's mysticism, interpreted and distilled by Fitzgerald's genius,⁴ a few disconnected lines may be cited here. We are told that when the exhausted remnant of the questing bird-flock, which had survived the ghastly rigours of a seemingly interminable pilgrimage, in utter prostration faltered to their goal—the inmost heaven—they

ventured from the Dust to raise
Their Eyes—up to the Throne—into the Blaze,
And in the Centre of the Glory there
Beheld the Figure of—*Themselves*—as 'twere
Transfigured— . . .
They That, That They: Another, yet the Same;
Dividual, yet One . . .
. . . no Selves, but of The All
Fractions, from which they split and whither fall.
As Water lifted from the Deep, again
Falls back in individual Drops of Rain
Then melts into the Universal Main.

In considering Western contemplatives we have spoken of Spanish mystics as in general pursuing the emotional way, but the handful of supreme poems by St John of the Cross (1542-1591) express not merely sheer human ecstasy, but also the transcendency of the mystic vision.⁵ In the achievement of this

⁴ The insight into Ṣūfism that Fitzgerald's version shows is the more remarkable when we realise that, according to his own statement, he disclaimed 'Aṭṭār's standpoint (see Fitzgerald, E. [1889], vol. I, letters to E. B. Cowell, pp. 243-4, 250-1); it is possible, however, that in the depths of his mind he had an underlying sympathy with Ṣūfī mysticism, which he would not admit consciously, even to himself.

⁵ Their quality reveals itself in Roy Campbell's translations; see St John of the Cross (1952).

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synthesis his work recalls that of the Persian poets, and it seems natural to suppose that he was influenced, even if not consciously, by the mystics of Islām. The 'Moorish' conquerors of Spain left their indelible mark on her intellectual life.¹ We know specifically that the missionary-philosopher, Ramon Lull, who preceded St John by three centuries, learned after great effort to write good literary Arabic²; he speaks of Šūfism with warm admiration.³

The German Dominican, Heinrich Suso, whom we have already cited as primarily emotional in his outlook, in his more inspired moments realised like the Persians and St John of the Cross the supremacy of that vision which is reached through the intellect. He voices this explicitly when he says, 'To gaze without any mediation upon unveiled Godhead is undoubtedly absolute and unmingled truth; and the more intelligible and unimaginary [i.e. abstract and unpictured] a vision is, . . . the more noble is its character.'⁴ We are reminded of Eckhart's dictum: 'Love takes God as being sweet, but intellect goes deeper, and conceives God as being.'⁵ This again recalls Omar Khayyām, who though he was an opponent of Šūfī mysticism yet often rose far above the level at which wine and human love are obsessions rather than symbols, and reached the plane of the *amor intellectualis Dei*. This is apparent in the lines:

Lord, I am weary unto death
Of this mean being that is mine;
The fetters that my heart confine,
My empty hands, my narrow breath,

Yet Thou hast power to transmute
The naughted unto entity:
O raise me to the sanctuary
Of Thine own Being Absolute.⁶

¹ On this subject, and on Lull, see Nicholson, R. A. (1922), p. 146; Asin, M. (1926); Arnold, Sir T. and Guillaume, A. (1931); Peers, E. Allison (n.d. [1946³]), (1946⁴).

² Peers, E. Allison (1946⁴), pp. 18-19.

³ Ramon Lull, *Blanquerna*, Chapter 99, in Peers, E. Allison (n.d. [1946³]), p. 18.

⁴ Suso, H. (1913), p. 238.

Enlightenment and Intellection

Such unveiled contemplation, in which the mystic knows himself to be in the presence of the Source of Being,⁷ bears the same relation to the ecstasies of emotional mysticism that Plato's ultimate vision of the Supreme Good bears to human and personal loves, which he treats as representing the rungs of the ladder by which the contemplative ascends but which are finally outdistanced.

The surprisingly persistent notion that the reasoned approach to the mystic experience is not adequate for its purpose often arises out of a limited and artificial interpretation of the word reason, which would confine it to the type of thought that employs a hard-and-fast orthodox system of logical regulations, many of which resemble the rules of a complicated game and have little concern with the attainment of truth. It is this mutilation of thought by paring it down to fit into a pre-arranged framework to which one of the Chinese Masters of Zen Buddhism was referring when he said:

Supreme Enlightenment goes beyond the narrow range of intellection;

Cease from measuring heaven with a tiny piece of reed.⁸

Proceeding by rule is applicable to conceptual thought only in its more primitive phases; at maturity reason commands the logical situation instead of being dominated by it. This change may be compared with that in the poet's use of words. He must in childhood learn his native language, and accommodate himself thoroughly to its fixed scheme of grammar and vocabulary; but this is only the preliminary. At later stages he outgrows such restrictions, and becomes able to mould speech to his own purposes, not allowing his employment of words to be enmeshed in conventional rules; yet his writing is still conditioned

⁵ Pfeiffer, F. (1949, 1952), vol. I, Serm. xxx, p. 83; see also Serm. xliii, pp. 116-17.

⁶ Arberry, A. J. (1952), p. 119, Quatrain 213. Translation from the Cambridge Codex, 1207 A.D.

⁷ Cf. Festugière, A. J. (1936), pp. 260-61, 343, etc.

⁸ Suzuki, D. T. (1935), p. 121.

IV · Approaches to the Contemplative State

by his underlying knowledge of words in their established relations. His position is thus akin to that of the philosopher who, as Karl Jaspers has said, can only cast off the fetters of discursive thought by carrying it to the extreme rather than by relinquishing it.¹ In the language of St Bernard the stage of *consideration*—‘thought earnestly directed to research’—leads on to *contemplation* in which truth is grasped unhesitatingly.² St Bernard’s dictum is borne out by the way in which Spinoza reached his ultimate vision. Through the most stringent inferential thinking he attained the phase in which he experienced the union which the mind has with the Whole of Nature—*Deus, seu Natura*—and realised in himself the *amor intellectualis Dei*.³

Some aspects of Indian thought harmonise with Spinoza’s mysticism. One exponent of Hindu religion who studies the passage to that truth which lies beyond logical thought, holds that we must not reject reason but must on the contrary think so hard that thinking is transformed into a knowing or viewing which has a creative quality.⁴ This recalls the insight of the Šūfī, al-Nūrī, who saw that reason itself becomes transfigured in the light of the ‘Unicity’ of the Absolute.⁵ In the West Nicholas of Cusa declared that intuitive vision results from the exercise of the *lumen rationale* at its fullest,⁶ while Delacroix has insisted on the sheer necessity of an ‘*infrastructure intellectuelle*’ for the mystical experience.⁷ We even find that a convinced exponent of Zen Buddhism, who holds that Zen can never be dragged ‘down to the intellectual plane’, still believes that the student who aspires to this discipline must develop his intellect before he can rise beyond it.⁸ From yet another standpoint, that of an English neo-idealist, Joachim maintains that the religious mystic’s ‘vision’, the artist’s ‘inspiration’, and the

¹ Jaspers, K. (1951), p. 37.

² Lewis, G. (1908), Bk. II, Chap. II, p. 41.

³ [Spinoza, B. de] ‘B.D.S.’ (1677), *Tractatus de Intellectus Emendatione*, p. 360, ‘cognitionem unionis, quam mens cum totâ Naturâ habet’, *Ethics*, IV, Pref., p. 162; and V, Prop. XXXII, Coroll., p. 256.

⁴ Radhakrishnan, Sir S. (1940), p. 25.

Mysticism and ‘No-knowledge’

scientist’s capacity for ‘intuitive’ discovery are all in reality the ultimate outcome of normal intellection on rational lines.⁹

It is true that those who attain to any form of the mystic experience must have travelled to a point which is, in a sense, beyond knowledge. In the terminology of Taoist philosophy,¹⁰ they began with the ‘no-knowledge’ of original ignorance. They then worked their way through a period of acquiring knowledge, but finally discarded this acquisition and passed beyond it to ‘post-gained no-knowledge’, which is totally different from contentless ignorance.

We meet with similar ideas in Buddhism. Before this philosophy arose, systems based on various theories of Reality had been developed in India. It is claimed that the Buddha subjected these theories to a metaphysical analysis which convinced him that there is an interminable conflict within Reason itself; and he saw that the antagonisms of existing systems could be resolved only on a plane above Reason, in an Absolute or Unconditioned Reality devoid of all describable nature, which could not be known rationally and to which he could point only by maintaining silence when enquirers demanded an account of it. The ‘no-knowledge’ (or non-conceptual knowledge) of Buddhist mysticism was thus achieved through rational comparative criticism.¹¹

It would be unnecessary to catalogue all the philosophers of East and West who have found that the most strenuous attempts to carry logical thought to its utmost limit eventuate inevitably in mysticism. Merely as typical instances we may mention that Bradley believed that for some people the effort to understand the universe intellectually is a principal way of entering into communion with that which is beyond the visible world,¹² while McTaggart held that the final conclusion of all philosophy must

⁵ Smith, Margaret (1950), No. 28, p. 32.

⁶ Patronnier de Gandillac, M. (n.d. [1941]), p. 105, n.

⁷ Delacroix, H. (1908), p. 380. ⁸ Humphreys, C. (1949), pp. 4, 118.

⁹ Joachim, H. H. (1939), p. 58.

¹⁰ Fung Yu-lan (1947), p. 78.

¹¹ Murti, T. R. V. (1955), pp. 45–9, etc.

¹² Bradley, F. H. (1946), p. 5.

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be mystical.¹ Festugière, in his study of Plato's conception of the contemplative life, was even more explicit. He maintained that philosophic mysticism was possible only if every grade of knowledge had been worked through before the intellectual mode of thought made way for its affiliated extension, contemplation, which is in his words '*l'acte suprême de connaissance*'.² Hallett goes still further on the same lines when he says that 'Reason blossoms into *scientia intuitiva*', which in its turn 'enlarges and reconstructs itself by means of reason'.³

In contrast to such considered opinions as those just cited there is still a certain tendency to regard the mystic experience as most likely to come 'out of the blue' through sheer inspiration, to a man whose mind is intellectually blank and who is unaware of the great stream of mystical tradition which in the West has its primary source in Neoplatonism. The belief in the association of mysticism with ignorance may be traced back to Coleridge, who unfortunately adopted the idea that the intellectuals in any given period tend to form a sort of tacit compact not to pass beyond a certain limit in speculation, and that as a result it has been left to the simple and unlettered—who are not subjected to such stringent mental inhibitions—to seek out the indwelling and living ground of all things.⁴ As one example of this thesis he cites Jacob Boehme, the seventeenth-century shoemaker-mystic. The expression, 'the poor illiterate *Behmen*', actually occurs in a volume of his translated works⁵ that appeared in Coleridge's boyhood, and which he may have known, but this phrase does scant justice to Boehme's acquirements. A writer, later than Coleridge by a century, has shown that the Silesian did not arrive at his intuitions in solitude and isolation but that he was organically part of an historical move-

¹ McTaggart, J. McT. E. (1922), p. 255; see also (1901), p. 292.

² Cf. Festugière, A. J. (1936), pp. 164, 220, n.

³ Hallett, H. F. (1930), p. 50.

⁴ Coleridge, S. T. (1817), vol. I, pp. 139-41.

⁵ Boehme, J. (1764-81), vol. I, *A Dialogue*, p. vi; this edition generally goes under William Law's name, but this attribution is unwarranted.

Mysticism and the Learned Tradition

ment.⁶ It is true he had no Greek or Latin but his first book, the *Aurora*, brought him friendships with men of education from whom he learnt much. He was undoubtedly influenced by Paracelsus, and also, it appears, by such writers as his fellow Silesian, the spiritual reformer Caspar Schwenckfeld.

Another mystic whom Coleridge mentions as unlearned is George Fox, to whom the Society of Friends owes its foundation. It is broadly true that as William Penn wrote, Fox 'was not taught of man, nor had learned what he said by study',⁷ but his apprehension of the Inner Light in each individual was by no means original to him. It was the natural expression of the spiritual atmosphere which had been created gradually by the Seekers and others who came before him. There are clear indications that he was indebted to his predecessor, Boehme,⁸ though he does not refer to him. Possibly—like so many people whose intellects are undisciplined—he was not capable of discriminating between his own spontaneous ideas and those that he derived from others. It seems not unreasonable to suppose that the limitation of his outlook—rather than what was of value in his mysticism—was attributable to his ignorance of the world of thought.

Many years later Maeterlinck⁹ adopted a view recalling that of Coleridge, when in an appreciation of the Flemish mystic Ruysbroeck he described him as an ignorant monk whose mysticism was quite independent of that of his precursors; but Evelyn Underhill¹⁰ has reversed this conclusion by showing on good internal evidence that Ruysbroeck possessed a knowledge of earlier scholastic and contemplative writers. The great Dominican mystics of Germany—Eckhart, Tauler and Suso—also belonged to the learned tradition. Eckhart neglected no

⁶ Jones, Rufus M. (1914), pp. v, 154; see also Martensen, H. L. (1949), pp. 7, 21, n., 23.

⁷ Fox, G. (1952), p. xliii, quoted from William Penn's preface to the original edition, 1694.

⁸ Jones, Rufus M. (1914), Chap. XII, pp. 220, 227, etc. and Chap. XVIII, p. 343, etc.

⁹ Maeterlinck, M. (1894), pp. 13, 42-3.

¹⁰ Underhill, E., in Ruysbroeck, J. van (1951), pp. xiii, xx.

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aspect of the knowledge of his time,¹ while Tauler, though not his equal, was acquainted with scholastic philosophy, and Suso was versed in theology and speculative mysticism.² In fourteenth-century England we can point to Richard Rolle, who was a student at Oxford, and Walter Hilton, who shows the influence of many earlier thinkers in his account of the way to the *Unio mystica*.³

As a possible support for the contrary conception of mysticism as a wholly spontaneous growth it should be noticed that the 'devout anchoress by name Julian of Norwich' in speaking of her vision of 1373 calls herself in the language of her period 'a simple creature that could no letter'⁴; but it is not improbable that such a remark would have been taken by contemporary readers as an expected and conventional expression of humility. At any rate it is difficult to reconcile her words in any literal sense with the knowledge of Catholic theology which she is said to show. Be that as it may, St Teresa's plea against the demand that she should commit to paper her account of the 'Interior Castle' is open to a different interpretation. She says, 'Let learned men, who have studied, do the writing; I am a stupid creature. . . . For the love of God, let me get on with my spinning. . . .'⁵ It is arguable that this may indicate genuine insight into the limitations of her own temperament and into the fact that she was by nature a Martha rather than a Mary; for it was through her human and administrative gifts that she came to play so prominent a part in the renaissance of Spanish mysticism. Her younger and greater contemporary St John of the Cross, on the other hand, was undeniably a lettered man. He had attended a three years' course in Arts at Salamanca, then

¹ Delacroix, H. (1900), pp. 2-3.

² Clark, J. M. (1949), pp. 48, 49, 61.

³ Jones, Rufus M. (1939), pp. 212, 226.

⁴ Julian of Norwich (1952), p. ix.

⁵ Peers, E. Allison (1946¹), vol. II, p. 189.

⁶ Peers, E. Allison (1946²), pp. 15, 40.

⁷ Wade, G. I. (1946), pp. 140-4.

⁸ For Law's sources, see Hobhouse, S. (1948), p. xiv, and *Study* 23, pp. 355-67.

Mysticism and Intellectual Discipline

one of the leading universities of Europe, and had afterwards been a student of theology for a further year; his writings show acquaintance with the medieval mystical tradition.⁶

Among later contemplatives in England it may be recalled that Traherne, though his approach to mysticism is that of a poet, was fully versed in the scholastic intricacies of Aquinas's monumental *Summa Theologica*, and he also shows critical knowledge in intellectual fields outside theology.⁷ Passing to the eighteenth century we find that William Law was a thorough student of the mystic writers from Dionysius the Areopagite onwards, and that he was indebted to Ruysbroeck, St John of the Cross, and other great Catholics.⁸ As a modern example of the tragic results of the opposite, anti-intellectual trend, we may point to W. B. Yeats, who wasted much of himself on a welter of 'magic' and occultism.⁹ Owing to his native distaste and incapacity for strenuous thinking on a rational basis, he failed to distinguish this spurious '*mysticismus*', with its (often unconscious) charlatanry, from the genuine mystic experience.

Even such scattered instances as those cited seem to indicate that there is evidence for the view that a disciplined intellect and a knowledge of the mystical tradition in its most authentic phases, generally play an essential part in opening the road to the *Unio mystica*. A belief in this view involves the conviction that it is of the very nature of the intellect to be capable of feeling its way towards Reality, though this approach is necessarily conditioned by finitude. Such a belief is outside the realm of proof. We can only point to the fact that Plotinus,¹⁰ St Thomas Aquinas¹¹ and Spinoza¹² agree (broadly) in upholding it, despite the fact that they deal with the subject from widely

⁹ For an account of this aspect of Yeats's personality, see Ellmann, R. (1949).

¹⁰ See translation of *Enn.* V, v, 1, 2, in Dodds, E. R. (1923), and especially p. 50.

¹¹ D'Arcy, M. C. (1930), p. 83.

¹² See *De Intellectus Emendatione* in [Spinoza, B. de] 'B.D.S.' (1677), pp. 355-92; the most relevant passages are translated in White, W. Hale, and Stirling, A. H. (1899), pp. 47 et seq.; see also Pollock, Sir F. (1899), pp. 152-3.

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divergent standpoints. In speaking of the part played by the intellect in opening the way to mysticism we are using the word intellect to cover not only logical reasoning but also intuition, thus combining Plato's intuitive thought (*νοῦς, νόησις*) and his discursive reason (*διάνοια*).¹ The alliance of these two is so close that they may even be called inseparable; Milton discriminated accurately when he spoke of discursive and intuitive reason as 'Differing but in degree, of kind the same'.² This intimate connexion has been stressed by a recent writer in the course of a study of Descartes.³ He considers that deduction, although it is usually deemed to be a purely logical process, depends doubly upon intuition—firstly for the apprehension of the data themselves—and secondly for the apprehension of the linkage between the data. By intuition we achieve the direct grasp of data which we thus feel to be self-evident, and then in deduction we intuitively place these data in a self-evident sequence which carries us to a conclusion. The recognition of sequence implies time. We may hence regard reasoning as intuitive understanding made finite and patterned into discursive thought by the introduction of the time element.

Acceptance of the intellectual road to mysticism does not imply blindness to the limitations of discursive thought. The basis of thinking of this kind, which is rational in the narrow sense, is the Law or Principle of Contradiction,⁴ which may be crudely summarised as the statement that *A is not both A and not-A*. This law, according to Hegel,⁵ presupposes the so-called Principle of Sufficient Reason, *Nihil est sine ratione cur potius sit, quam non sit* (nothing is without a reason why it should be rather than not be).⁶ These principles may be taken as expressions of belief in the Uniformity of Nature, or of the causal

¹ Whittaker, T. (1934), pp. 15-16.

² *Paradise Lost*, V, 486-90.

³ Beck, L. J. (1952), *passim*.

⁴ This Law is considered further in the succeeding Chapter.

⁵ For references to Hegel on this point, see Latta, R. (1925), p. 187.

⁶ For a study of this principle as formulated by Leibniz, see Latta, R. (1925), especially Introduction, pp. 62 et seq. It is also stressed in Schopenhauer, A. (1883-6); see Appendix to Vol. III.

Suprarational Reality

rationality of the Universe; but we have to bear in mind that they are applicable only to phenomena and not to the thing-in-itself, since purely discursive thought cannot pass the limits of the phenomenal world. It is this which gives such thought its clear daytime character; twilight and the mysterious dark are, to it, utterly alien. Goethe once said⁷ that if he read a page of Kant (whose thought is primarily rational-discursive) he felt as if he entered a brightly lighted room. May we guess that Goethe—who never saw anything from one side only and in whom a thesis immediately aroused the thought of its anti-thesis—perhaps reflected within himself that a brightly lighted room is not the best place from which to see the stars.

It is obviously impossible to think in rational terms about all that is, since discursive thought is controlled by the opposition of subject and object. When a man tries to 'think' the Whole, such totality as he can hold in mind is incomplete, because being the object of his thought it fails to include that thought itself.⁸ This impasse in our thinking seems to suggest that an 'All' is a necessary postulate, but that it lies beyond the relational and logical categories of the discursive intellect.⁹ The 'All' must thus be a suprarational Reality, such as is insisted upon in the Upanishads and in the tradition of Buddhist philosophy.¹⁰ This Reality so dazzles the intellect that we can speak of it only in negative terms. Any affirmation concerning it must consist merely of remote analogical symbols based upon the 'creaturely'.¹¹

When discursive reason has struggled to the boundaries of our well-lit world of experience, it expands and comes to include the ultimate forms of emotional as well as inferential activity, thus developing into that type of intuitive apprehension

⁷ Schopenhauer, A. (1883-6), vol. II, p. 340.

⁸ Fung Yu-lan (1953), p. 337.

⁹ Cf. Campbell, C. A. (n.d. [1931]), p. 3; and Raju, P. T. (1937), pp. 82, 234.

¹⁰ Raju, P. T. (1953), pp. 400-1, 405.

¹¹ Nicolaus Cusanus (1932), vol. I, part I, *De docta ignorantia*, lib. I, cap. xxiv, p. 51.

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involving both knowledge and love, for which we lack an inclusive name. In other words, when phenomena, with their accent on manifoldness, are left behind and the unity of the Absolute is glimpsed, the mystic experience supervenes. This experience in no way negates or rejects discursive thought, or the type of thinking which *is* feeling; it represents the moment in which both are at flood tide, and the barriers between them break down, so that the two flowing into one are transformed into that intensive current of the whole being towards the Absolute, which—for want of a more adequate term—we call mystical contemplation.

The ultimate vision owes its essence, so far as this can be expressed in words, to the seriation of logical and emotional thought through which it has been reached. It is not merely the end-result of this chain of intellection, but it is the summation of that result with all those preceding it. Here we come upon one of the differences between philosophy and science. The aim of science is to find answers to questions which it sets itself; it has specific ends which it hopes gradually to achieve, and in this process it is inclined to shake itself free from each stage when it has arrived at the next. Metaphysics, on the other hand, does not expect such clear-cut specific results; its aim is the absorption and synthesis of all the phases experienced in the attempted passage towards an unattainable goal. The whole body of intellection when thus integrated is at last able to enter into an incandescent fusion with 'feeling' (this term being used in the widest possible connotation). The entire process may be seen in epitome in Spinoza's metaphysic. He rigorously pursues the rational path as far as it will carry him towards the Absolute; but when logical reasoning confesses that it can no more he calls the heart to the aid of the head, and—reason being thus illumined and reinforced by emotion—he reaches the *amor intellectualis Dei*. Dante's guardians led him on a parallel course, for after Beatrice had guided him through the successive spheres of blessedness in Paradise, using every resource of scholastic theology to interpret all that was problematic on the

Mysticism as Suprapersonal

way, she finally resigned her charge to St Bernard.¹ It was he who typified the life contemplative; this, for Dante as afterwards for Spinoza, had its foundations in a synthesis of the intellect with the urge of the whole personality towards that which transcends the personal. For the nature of this urge human love is sometimes held to afford an analogy, but it is a dangerously imperfect one. The touchstone by which the pure gold of the *Unio mystica* can be distinguished is that, in the full experience, awareness reaches inwards to the central spark which connects the individual with the Suprapersonal Whole, and it also reaches outwards to the manifestation of the Whole under the form of Manyness. The contemplative who has attained this level has won the realisation of his own nature as partaking internally of the One, as well as externally of the Many.

The idea that a suprapersonal quality is essential to genuine mysticism conflicts directly with the definition of a mystic as 'a person who has fallen in love with God'²; the absence of the suprapersonal element at once discredits all those claims to the experience—and they form the majority—in which the *Unio mystica* is understood in terms not going beyond the anthropomorphism of passionate love for a God imaged as Incarnate. In true mysticism human and bodily personality is not given this exaggerated status, but it is by no means lost; for entry into the suprapersonal realm opens up the possibility of an endless growth and expansion, carrying intrinsic individuality far beyond the ephemeral aspects of man's nature. To take a small-scale parallel—there is sometimes a hint of a corresponding process in the life history of a man whose existence has long been passed in surroundings starving his spirit, but who at last finds himself in a world in which all his potentialities are offered scope. Such a process was once described to me, by an artist who had been brought up in a philistine environment,

¹ *Paradiso*, xxxi.

² Peers, E. Allison (1943), p. 5; (1946²), p. 29; (1930, 1951), 2nd ed., vol. I, p. xv.

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as 'tearing a veil away and for the first time stepping out into your own atmosphere'.

The ultimate mystical phase in which individuality and suprapersonality reach a harmonious synthesis may be identified with that contemplative thought in which the experient does not *become* one with the Absolute but suddenly or gradually attains to a full grasp of the fact—hitherto veiled from him—that this oneness *is* and always has been; it is 'not a vision compassed but a unity apprehended'.¹

¹ Mackenna, S., and Page, B. S. (1917-30), vol. V, p. 251, *Enn.* VI. ix. 11.

❧ 5 ❧

The Coincidence of Contraries

The apprehension of Unity reached in the *Unio mystica* implies a recognition of Oneness in the Many and of Manyness in the One; it thus involves a belief in two concepts, each inwardly self-contradictory. What this means cannot be understood if the problem is treated in isolation; it will be a help towards dealing with it if we can get some insight into the nature of antitheses and contraries in general.

At first glance the world of thought seems to be riddled through and through with unqualified oppositions. It is possible that this impression is an exaggerated one; there are indications that the mind carries within itself the means of dealing with the crux of the unity of opposites. As one of these indications it may be noticed that certain students of linguistics believe that in the most ancient languages the same word sometimes expresses such opposed meaning-pairs as strong/weak, light/dark and large/small.¹ Apart from difficult questions like this about the way men think, one reason why undue importance is attached to contradictions is that the constant use of discussion and argument, which plays a much greater part in philosophy than in any other discipline, raises antitheses to a more prominent place than that to which they are in justice entitled. Reciprocal argument in its simplest and crudest form implies two interlocutors, of set purpose opposed to one another, each of whom underlines the opinion which he advocates in a way that differentiates it with unwarranted sharpness from that of his opponent. This controversial technique was carried to an extreme pitch by the Sophists of the fifth century before Christ, who rationalised the childish instinct for 'taking sides', and taught their pupils to organise '*une joute de raisons contre*

¹ Waismann, F., in Flew, A. G. N. (1953), p. 11.

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raisons'.¹ That such a procedure cannot but result in alienation from reality, was indicated vividly by Descartes, in the Preface to the 1681 edition of the *Principes*, where we read: '*C'est un défaut qu'on peut remarquer en la plupart des disputes, que, la vérité étant moyenne entre les deux opinions qu'on soutient, chacun s'en éloigne d'autant plus qu'il a plus d'affection à contredire*'.² To the present day, the Quakers—whose principles are, to a large extent, rooted in the century of Descartes—give practical expression to an attitude cognate with his, for they try to arrive at 'the sense of the meeting', without adopting the 'either . . . or' of two antagonistic views.³ There is a hint of this conciliatory method in an ancient doctrinal poem of Zen Buddhism,⁴ in which we read:

If you want the truth to stand clear before you, never be for or against.

The struggle between 'for' and 'against' is the mind's worst disease.

Following the implications of such lines of thought we realise that certain so-called contradictions owe their apparent opposition merely to the standpoint from which they are regarded; but this is not the whole story, and there are many antitheses which cannot be dismissed so summarily. One way of evading these obstinate incompatibilities is simply to accept them and thus to postulate a fundamental dualism, which deals with opposed pairs of views by assigning them to two isolated compartments in the mind. Those thinkers, however, who feel that monism (or, to put it more cautiously, 'non-dualism') is the only satisfactory basis for philosophy⁵ must needs turn to a study of the nature of contradictions, in order to discover whether these antitheses when traced to their roots disclose a

¹ Robin, L. (1923), pp. 168, etc.

² Descartes, R. (1897-1913), vol. IX, 1904, Part II, *Les principes de la philosophie, Lettre de l'auteur à celui qui a traduit le livre, laquelle peut icy servir de Preface*, pp. 6-7 (16).

³ Cf. Jones, Rufus M. (1927), pp. 169, etc.

⁴ Conze, E., Horner, I. B., Snellgrove, D., and Waley, A. (1954), p. 295.

Synthesis of Contrasts

possibility of synthesis and thus support a monistic metaphysic. One indication of a direction in which, by analogy, a clue may perhaps be sought, lies in the fact that the beauty of the world is, as St Augustine said, 'composed of contrarieties'.⁶ An illustration, from the mental pictures common to us all, is the happy synthesis of the parallel verticality of the serried ranks of catkins borne by a birch tree in April, with the delicately contrasted springing curves of the slender, whip-like branches from which they depend. The same principle extends to human handiwork. As a homely example, we may recall cross-stitch embroidery, since it embodies the combination of elements which in themselves seem incompatible. Every unit of the work consists of a cross formed of two straight lines at right angles to one another; groups and successions of these components can, nevertheless, be used to produce a design in which the broadly expressed curvature, and the detailed rectangularity of the constituent stitches, are fused into a harmony agreeable to the eye but achieved through discord. Hearing like sight may rejoice in a synthesis of this kind; the ear is satisfied when the conflict in a song between the music with its continuous stream of tone, and the words with their individual meaning and articulation, is resolved in a unified impression. The notion of such paradoxically compatible contrasts has been carried boldly into metaphysical thought, especially in the East. The Chinese conception of *Tao*, for instance, represents 'the essence of unchangeability and yet exhausts the possibilities of change'.⁷ In India, again, a related idea is a cornerstone of the non-dualist *Vedanta*. The Ultimate Reality (Brahman) behind the phenomenal universe is *not* conscious, and it *is* consciousness; it *does not* exist, and it *is* existence.⁸ This recalls phrases used by Seami (1363-1444), who says that those Japanese *Nō* plays

Translation by A. Waley from *Takakusu*, xlviii, 376; this poem dates probably from the sixth or seventh century A.D.

⁵ For a survey of monism by a writer who takes this view, see Wightman, W. P. D. (1934), p. 68 *et passim*.

⁶ Healey, J., and Tasker, R. V. G. (1945), vol. I, bk. xi, chap. xviii, p. 327.

⁷ Fung Yu-lan (1947), p. 82.

⁸ Isherwood, C. (n.d. [1951]), p. ix.

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which reach the greatest heights are known as 'Nō that speaks to the mind', but also as 'mindless Nō'.¹ Buddhist thinkers, indeed, delight in paradox and contradiction; instead of looking upon truth and falsehood as in sharp opposition—as philosophers who have been educated in the occidental tradition often do—they treat the opposite of a truth not as a falsehood but as another form of the same truth, in which it demands inclusion.² We may perhaps regard these aspects of Western and Eastern mentality as being based respectively on *linear* thought in one dimension (which accepts 'is' and 'is not' as mutually exclusive alternatives), and *reticulate* thought in three or more dimensions (which recognises the possibility that it is neither in 'is' nor in 'is not' that the truth is to be found). In order to determine what if any justification there is for the latter 'non-dualistic' attitude, it is necessary to analyse the question from a more technical standpoint.

The expression, 'coincidence of contraries', is open, obviously, to various interpretations, and it is difficult to define this phrase with any precision. Perhaps it is best explained by saying that in general it involves getting beyond the Law of Contradiction, which is the basis of all ordinary discursive-logical reasoning. This Law as we have already noticed may be epitomised roughly as *A is not both A and not-A*; its corollary the Law of Excluded Middle (*A is either B or not-B*) implies that between contradictories there can be no mediating term. That this idea of unmediated opposites is a crude one may be illustrated from the study of the classification of living beings. Bergson long ago recognised that groups should not be defined by the presence or absence of characters but by their stressing or minimisation.³ This is exemplified in the distinctions drawn between the two sections of flowering plants—the monocotyledons and dicotyledons. A student at the text-book stage might say glibly that the monocotyledons can be distinguished from the dicotyledons by having the parts of their flowers in threes;

¹ Waley, A. (1921), p. 44.

² Bergson, H. (1907), p. 116.

³ Conze, E. (1951), pp. 17, 61, 129.

Contradiction as Difference of Stress

but in actual fact this trimery is by no means universal in monocotyledons, while it is sometimes to be found in dicotyledons. On this point there is no unqualified contradiction between the characters of the two groups; all we can say is that the tendency to trimery exists in both, but that it is *emphasised* in monocotyledons and *subordinated* in dicotyledons. We are here dealing with a feature of organic form, but the same sort of conclusion emerges also from chemical studies. It has been observed that, though leaf-starch is found in both dicotyledons and monocotyledons, a grading based on a comparative study of the amount present shows that monocotyledons fall predominantly into the lower grades and dicotyledons into the higher grades.⁴ There is no sharp contradiction, but there is a *shift* as it were in the centre of gravity as regards the character in question, in passing from one group to the other.

We may detect something analogous to the shifts of emphasis in the characters of groups of living organisms, when we turn to the consideration of certain philosophic views which are generally treated as completely opposed; for their contradiction when analysed sometimes reveals itself merely as a difference of stress. There are theories of the nature of the self, for example, which have accentuated its permanence and disregarded its changes, while others have stressed its continual flux and neglected its stability. The truth cannot lie at either of these poles; a further interpretation must be found which does justice to both the undoubted permanence of the self and to its equally obvious mutability. Such a solution has been attempted in Frondizi's functional theory of the self.⁵ Again, in the controversy among idealists as to the nature of individuality, the 'personalist' stresses the uniqueness of the finite individual, whereas the 'absolutist' regards the essential character of the individual as residing in its quality of universality; but this dilemma is apparent rather than real. These views are not incompatible; their difference lies in relative emphasis. The

⁴ For references, see Arber, A. (1925), p. 220.

⁵ For a study of the self on these lines, see Frondizi, R. (1953).

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'personalist' believes, up to a point, in universality, while the 'absolutist' cannot altogether disregard uniqueness.¹

When we consider the attitudes towards contraries and oppositions that may be observed in the history of Western thought, we find that before Aristotle explicitly recognised the Principle of Contradiction² Plato went, as usual, to the root of the matter. When he made Socrates deny 'that under any circumstances any one and the same thing could at one and the same time, in the same part of it, and in the same relation, be acted upon in two opposite ways, or be two opposite things, or produce two opposite effects',³ he was coming near the formulation of the Law of Contradiction as we understand it. What view is taken of the coincidence of contraries must depend on whether this logical-rational approach (Hegel's *Verstand*) crystallised in the Laws of Thought is held to represent the philosophic process functioning at its fullest, or whether, on the other hand, philosophy is regarded as a whole of which logical thinking, important as it is, is merely a partial phase. If we accept the latter alternative the way is open to a belief in the synthesis of opposites, and we see the significance of Nicholson's saying⁴ that the paradoxes of logic are the truths of mysticism. The Buddha long ago declared that 'is' and 'is not' are for the world which is habituated to duality, but that for the man of wisdom there is no 'is' or 'is not'.⁵ Plato himself did not treat the Law of Contradiction as ultimate, but recognised the possibility of passing beyond it. It was under the influence of Heraclitus, who had coined the word *ἀμυνία* to stand for the unity of opposites,⁶ that Plato discarded some-

¹ On this question see Cunningham, G. W. (1933), pp. 523 et seq.

² For references to Aristotle on this subject see Krook, D. (1956), p. 10, n. 1.

³ Lindsay, A. D. (1907), *Republic*, Bk. IV, 436, pp. 141-2; attention is drawn to Plato's anticipation of Aristotle in Whittaker, T. (1931), p. 12.

⁴ Nicholson, R. A., in Arnold, Sir T., and Guillaume, A. (1931), p. 219.

⁵ For references see Murti, T. R. V., p. 51, and further discussion, pp. 146, etc.

⁶ Jaeger, W. (1947), p. 119.

⁷ Caird, E. (1923), vol. I, pp. 221-2.

⁸ Muirhead, J. H. (1925), pp. 176-7.

Dialectic Tension of Opposites

thing of the rigid framework of discursive thought, and thus disclosed the possibility of synthesising certain contraries often treated as irreconcilable. His conception of the Absolute Being or Divine Reason has been interpreted as transcending the opposition between being and becoming; between the one and the many; and between subject and object.⁷ Bradley's idea of an Absolute in which the elements jarring upon one another in ordinary experience fall into one harmonious whole,⁸ is essentially Platonic. We may take Plato's theory of love as a cogent instance of his synthesis of apparent contraries, for by means of it he finds a way of bridging the gulf between the intelligible and the sensible spheres—that is to say between the partial truth of Socratic intellectualism and the no less partial truth of the Heraclitean philosophy of becoming.⁹ We can enter into Plato's view only if we realise that in place of the word 'love' we need some other English term with a less limited connotation. The required expression should include in its significance the whole urge of vital energy, emotional and intellectual; it would thus be equivalent to *conatus*,¹⁰ taken in Spinoza's comprehensive sense.

More explicitly than Plato, Plotinus recognised the coincidence of contraries; it has even been said that the dialectical tension of opposites is the nerve of his system.¹¹ The same idea recurs in the writings of Dionysius the Areopagite. He speaks of the One as containing all things 'in Its all-embracing Unity . . . combining even opposites under the form of oneness'.¹² Both Eriugena¹³ in the ninth century, and Richard of St Victor (d. 1173), adopted this conception. Richard regarded

⁹ Robin, L. (1933), p. 208, paragraph 160.

¹⁰ On *conatus*, with references, see Arber, A. (1950), p. 77; (1954), p. 101.

¹¹ Dodds, E. R. (1933), p. xix.

¹² Rolt, C. E. (1920), *Divine Names*, xiii, 2, p. 186; see also i, 7, p. 138, and Gardner, E. G. (1913), p. 109.

¹³ Johannes Scotus Eriugena (1853), in Migne J. P., *Patrol. cursus completus*, ser. II, vol. 122, *De div. nat.*, col. 510, 66 D, 'Non autem irrationabiliter, ut saepe diximus, omnia, quae a summo usque deorsum sunt, de eo dici possunt quadam similitudine, aut dissimilitudine, aut contrarietate, aut oppositione, quoniam ab ipso omnia sunt, quae de eo praedicari possunt'.

the highest grade of contemplation as that in which the mind by divine illumination knows those things in which human reason sees only contraries.¹ It is, however, in the writings of Nicholas of Cusa that the profound and far-reaching significance of the identity of opposites first reveals itself fully, though Eckhart and Tauler are credited with having recognised as a sign of the Absolute the harmony of human and divine in the soul of man²; while Heinrich Suso, also, anticipated the Cusan in accepting the coincidence of contraries.³ To Nicholas, such coincidence is the key to ultimate truth. He holds that, in the study of divine things, the aim must be to embrace 'contradictories' in a simple conception which transcends them.⁴ In the figurative language that he sometimes uses as evocative of the inexpressible, he speaks of the dwelling-place of the Absolute as 'girt around by the coincidence of contradictories', and describes this 'wall' as 'that coincidence where later is one with earlier, where the end is one with the beginning, where Alpha and Omega are the same'.⁵ He believes that it is because rational thought fears and flees from the obscurity which the admission of contradictories involves, that it fails to attain the vision of the invisible. If it refused to allow itself to be deterred by rayless night, it would discover—not through logical intellection but at a higher level—that impossibility is necessity and darkness is light.⁶

In Zen Buddhism we meet with a close parallel to the thought of Nicholas. It has been said that the basic idea of

¹ Richard of St Victor (1855), in Migne, J. P., *Patrol. cursus completus*, ser. II, vol. 196, *Benjamin major*, lib. I, cap. VI, col. 72, 'illa ex divinis luminis irradiatione cognoscit atque considerat quibus omnis humana ratio reclamatur. Talia sunt pene omnia quae de personarum Trinitate credere jubemur. De quibus cum humana ratio consulitur, nihil aliud quam contrarie videtur'.

² Patronnier de Gandillac, M. (n.d. [1941]), pp. 101-2.

³ Bizet, J. A. (1946), p. 319.

⁴ Nicolaus Cusanus (1932), vol. I, part I, *De docta ignorantia*, lib. I, cap. xix, p. 38, 'Oportet enim in divinis simpliciter conceptu, quantum hoc possibile est, complecti contradictoria, ipsa antecederent praeveniendo'.

⁵ Nicolaus Cusanus (1928), pp. 44, 49.

Zen is the identity of such oppositions as black and white, or evil and good.⁷ The strange dialogue-technique which the Masters use in order to initiate their disciples into the mysteries of Zen,⁸ baffling as it is to the Western mind, seems at least to represent a genuine attempt to open the way to that realm in which contraries exist coincidentally.

In studying Nicholas of Cusa, we have to remember that he distinguishes *oppositiones* (that is, those antagonisms or contrasts which the discursive reason can eliminate or synthesise in the course of its normal functioning) from *contradictiones* (between which from the finite standpoint there is no mediating term, and which can be fused only at the level of the Absolute).⁹ Since the expression 'contradictories' is used, in more recent philosophical writing, with various conflicting meanings,¹⁰ it seems less confusing to employ the term 'contraries' in the generalised sense in which it embraces both the Cusan 'contradictories' and 'opposites'; such 'contraries' may be regarded as equivalent to the thesis and antithesis of Hegel's dialectic.

In the sixteenth century, Giordano Bruno laid hold enthusiastically upon the coincidence of contraries as expounded by Nicholas of Cusa, and applied it in his own speculations. Bruno was a seer, with the imagination of a poet, rather than a philosopher in the strictest sense; it is to such men that the idea of the coincidence of contraries has always made the most forcible appeal. Thirty-five years after Bruno's death, Donne had the same notion in mind in his reflection that 'West and

⁶ Vansteenberghe, E. (1920), p. 416, quoting a marginal note in *Cod. Cusan.* 95, fol. 105; Nicholas acknowledges his indebtedness to Dionysius for this idea.

⁷ Takakusu, J. (1947), pp. 163-4.

⁸ On this subject see Suzuki, D. T. (1955), etc.; also Watts, A. W. (1936) and Humphreys, C. (1949), which are both intended as introductions, for English readers, to Suzuki's more technical studies.

⁹ Nicolaus Cusanus (1932), vol. I, part I, *De docta ignorantia*, lib. II, cap. iv, p. 73, 'Deus . . . absolute differentia atque distantia praeveniens atque uniens, uti sunt contradictoria, quorum non est medium'.

¹⁰ Cf. Bradley, F. H. (1922), vol. I, pp. 123-4; and McTaggart, J. McT. E. (1922), pp. 190-2.

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East In all flatt Maps . . . are one',¹ while, probably in the same year, Sir Thomas Browne summed up its significance when he spoke of 'the world, whose divided Antipathies and contrary faces doe yet carry a charitable regard unto the whole, by their particular discords preserving the common harmony'.²

Milton, recognising coincidence of contraries rather from the standpoint of the special senses than from that of the intellect, applied it to a particular case when he wrote:

the parching air
Burns froze, and cold performs the effect of fire.³

Coleridge, in a manuscript note,⁴ enumerated instances of the meeting of extremes, including this quotation from *Paradise Lost*; he also refers to so abstract a coincidence as that of 'Nothing and intensest absolute being', which had been realised in the ninth century by Eriugena.⁵ In Coleridge such reflections were a side issue, but they belonged to the very core of personality in Goethe,⁶ his older contemporary. Goethe saw coincidence of contraries everywhere, and his essentially dramatic mode of thought offers illustration after illustration of this principle. A pregnant instance is his assertion that truth and error are from *one* source, and that the destruction of error may often involve the destruction of truth.⁷

While Coleridge and Goethe, approaching metaphysics as poets, discovered instinctively that the coincidence of contraries 'spoke to their condition', this conception could not but appear ludicrously unthinkable to those philosophers whose thought was regulated by a rigid logical formulæ. John Stuart Mill, for instance, stigmatised the assertion that the Law of

¹ [Donne, J.] 'J.D.' (1635), 'Hymne to God my God, in my sickness', p. 387.

² Denonain, J.-J. (1953), *Religio Medici*, Part II, Sect. 7, p. 103.

³ *Paradise Lost*, ii, 594, 595.

⁴ Coleridge, S. T. (1895), *Anima Poetae*, pp. 52-3, Dec. 11, 1803.

⁵ Bett, H. (1925), p. 195.

⁶ An illuminating analysis of Goethe's thinking, from this standpoint, showing how far he transcended the simple 'either . . . or . . .' attitude, will be found in Wilkinson, E. M. (1951), pp. 175-97.

Triadic System

Contradiction does not apply to the Absolute, as one of a series of *reductiones ad absurdissimum*.⁸ It is true that according to Nicholas of Cusa's philosophy—closely reasoned as it is in his own peculiar fashion—the coincidence of contradictories which characterises the Absolute is held to lie beyond the reach of discursive thought, and to be revealed to intuitive insight alone.⁹ It was reserved for Hegel, centuries later, to use the rigorous play of his dialectic to knit the Cusan principle into the very texture of his thought from the beginning. He saw that as soon as thesis and antithesis are superseded by their synthesis, this very synthesis reveals symptoms of provisionality, hence in its turn descending to the level of a thesis which contains in itself the seeds of a further antithesis, and so on *ad infinitum*.¹⁰ By this employment of the triadic system, Hegel felt his way towards the Absolute along a chain of reasoned argument. At the end he believed that the upshot of this scheme of thought justified the conclusion recognised long before by Eriugena, that 'the Absolute Idea is the final truth of which all lower forms of thought and of being are partial expressions'.¹¹

It may be suggested that the entire triadic treatment, when considered as broadly as possible, indicates that discursive (logical-rational) thought occupies the position of thesis, while supralogical thought, based upon the coincidence of contraries, is the antithesis. These two types of thinking, despite their apparent antagonism, are synthesised in the conception of the Absolute, in which both are completed and harmonised without any sacrifice of either. Logical thought is at home with the positive, daylight aspect of the Whole, while contradiction finds

⁷ Wilkinson, E. M. (1951), p. 177, quoting *Maximen und Reflexionen*, Günther Müller, 1943, No. 888.

⁸ Mill, J. S. (1865), p. 44.

⁹ Nicolaus Cusanus (1932), vol. I, part I, *De docta ignorantia*, lib. I, cap. iv, p. 11, 'Hoc autem omnem nostrum intellectum transcendit, qui nequit contradictoria in suo principio combinare via rationis . . .'; for translation (1954), p. 13.

¹⁰ For a consideration of Hegel's dialectic from a different standpoint, see Chapter I, p. 7, of the present book.

¹¹ Bett, H. (1925), p. 195; and cf. Macran, H. S. (1912), p. 60.

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its fulfilment in that darkling negativity which has been claimed as fundamental to Reality.¹

The triadic scheme, though for the first time fully emphasised and systematised by Hegel, represents a very ancient type of constructive thought basically native to the mind. Like most of the essentials of later philosophy it is present germinally in Plato; he puts into the mouth of Socrates the metaphor of the tripartition according to which the soul of man resembles a pair of disparate winged steeds, dominated by a winged charioteer who struggles to compel them into unison. The current interpretation recognises the fine and tractable horse as representing the higher emotions, while the unruly and lawless horse stands for the bodily demands and cravings. The power and individuality of both are required, but they can be effective only when their mutual opposition is overcome and they are held on one course—synthesised as it were—by the vital power of the charioteer.² If we may identify the charioteer with Shakespeare's 'Reason', the position is illustrated by certain lines in *The Phoenix and Turtle*, the steeds being 'Two distincts, division none', and the union being such that

Reason, in itself confounded,
Saw division grow together;
To themselves yet either neither
Simple were so well compounded;

That it cry'd how true a twain
Seemeth this concordant one!

Shakespeare recognised that the synthesis was something different from either component, and different, also, from the juxtaposition of the two; hence it is that

Single nature's double name
Neither two nor one was call'd.

¹ Bosanquet, B. (1912), vol. I, p. 230, etc.

² Hackforth, R. (1952), *Phaedrus*, 246 A, B, p. 69; Armstrong, A. H. (1947), p. 42; see also p. 108, n. 4 of the present book.

The Finite and the Infinite

The idea of finiteness (with its implication of multiplicity) and of infinity (with its implication of oneness) seem at first sight to be opposed to each other in unresolvable contradiction. Whether this first impression is valid can be determined only by a critical study of the significance of these two concepts.

When we try to think about finiteness in relation to infinity, especially if we have in mind the example of time in relation to eternity, we find that the first step is to reject the notion that the infinite can be reached by endless *summation* of the finite. It may seem platitudinous to insist on anything so obvious as the need for this rejection, but the "false infinite" of endless aggregation¹ has an insidious way of creeping back into metaphysical thought, even when the thinker has discarded it from his conscious awareness. We may fancy that we can picture time² as showing an infinite regress, moment preceding moment as we think back into the past, but this is the 'spurious' or 'dimensional' infinite, and relates only to the phenomenal world, of which we can form a mental image. This so-called infinite involves the postulation of a succession of discrete time-intervals, each of which is finite in Spinoza's sense³ since it is limited by another of its own kind. A recurring decimal offers an illustration of the same point, for though endless it cannot be infinite since there is a certain boundary which it can never attain. In elementary mathematics, and other simplifications of existence, we reduce the universe to managableness by omitting all those factors which cannot be fitted into a

¹ McTaggart, J. McT. E. (1922), p. 158.

² There is a stimulating discussion of time in d'Andrade, J. C. P. (1952), pp. 77 et seq.

³ [Spinoza, B. de] 'B.D.S.' (1677), *Ethics*, pars I, def. 2, p. 1, 'Ea res dicitur in suo genere finita, quae aliâ ejusdem naturae terminari potest'.

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measurable framework; but in so doing we sacrifice truth, for Reality is, as Hāfiz wrote in the fourteenth century,

a pearl by far too rare
To be contained within the shell
Of time and space.¹

A corollary of the principle that infinity cannot be reached by summation of finite elements is that no finite and measurable segments can bear any ratio or proportion to the infinite Whole; it is, in fact, misleading to describe them as 'parts' of the Whole. Bruno stressed this point long ago, when he wrote that 'a thousand years are not parts of eternity, because they bear no ratio to the whole; but they are truly parts of some measure of time, as for example, of ten thousand years or of a hundred thousand centuries'.² Shakespeare was possibly thinking of Bruno³ when Troilus says of Priam,

'will you with counters sum
The past-proportion of his infinite?'⁴

William Blake went straight to the heart of the matter—as he so often did—when he wrote: 'He who sees the Infinite in all things sees God. He who sees the Ratio only, sees himself only.'⁵ Measure (*ratio*), proportionality, and comparison, play an essential part in rational discursive thought, the very nature of which limits its scope to the finite. It is finiteness in which our notions of time and space are rooted, and on which our conception of causality thus depends. Nicholas of Cusa⁶ realised this, and saw that discursive thought operates by stringing things out in time, thus creating a distinction between a beginning and an ending. By means of this stringing-out process the mind feels able to tackle the universe—fragmenting

¹ *A Mad Heart*, Arberry, A. J. (1947), No. 15, pp. 97-9.

² *De l'Infinito, Universo e Mondi* (1584), in Bruno, G. (1923-7), vol. I, 1925, Dial. II, pp. 329-30, 'Cossi mille anni non sono parte dell'eternità, perchè non hanno proporzione al tutto; ma si bene son parti de qualche misura di tempo, come di diece mille anni, di cento mila secoli'. Translation, Singer, D. W. (1950), p. 294.

Discursive Thought and Intuition

it in such a way as to make it amenable to ideas of cause and effect, but leaving the path open to subsequent reintegration. The manner in which the mind resolves continuity into succession and then re-forms it into continuity may be expressed figuratively by an illustration from metal working. A uniform gold cirque is completely continuous; it has no beginning or end, and no individual parts; but if it is cut into segments laid out in a series, pure *continuity* is replaced by pure *succession*. If, however, each fragment is then made into a bead, and these beads are strung on a thread, we still have succession, but an artificial continuity has been introduced. If we take the beads to represent our individual items of perceptual knowledge, the thread on which they are strung is that filament of universality which the mind supplies, and which enables it to follow analysis by synthesis. If we carry this metaphor further, and imagine the beads worked into the form of links united into a chain, we have transformed them so that they are fixed permanently in continuity and succession. These serial links may be held to symbolise the crude, arbitrary notion of a successional chain of finite causes, distinguishable from their finite effects, which in turn take up the rôle of causation; each cause and each effect is on this view inseparably attached, on the one hand to its immediate successor, and on the other hand to its immediate predecessor.

When we pass beyond discursive thought, and thus beyond succession, so that causality in the ordinary sense is left behind, we reach intuition, which sees all simultaneously, and is able to recognise the true Infinity, Cause of Itself (*Causa sui*). Intuition, paring to the core, as Eckhart⁷ said, seizes what is neither 'here' nor 'now'; it has thus that quality of eternity in which 'every *when* and every *where* is brought to a focus'.⁸ As soon as our

³ For references to studies on reminiscences of Bruno in Shakespeare, see Singer, D. W. (1950), p. 30, n. 9. ⁴ *Troilus and Cressida*, II, 2.

⁵ Blake, W. (1913), *There is no Natural Religion*. Appendix to the Prophetic Books, p. 426. ⁶ Cf. Vansteenberghe, E. (1920), pp. 284-5.

⁷ Pfeiffer, F. (1949, 1952), vol. I, Sermon C, p. 249.

⁸ *Paradiso*, xxix, 12, 'Dove s'appunta ogni *ubi* ed ogni *quando*'.

thought attempts to enter this region we meet with verbal difficulties, since terms relating to duration have been used in a variety of inconsistent senses. It seems that it is best to accept a distinction between *sempiternity* or *aevum*¹ which is endless time, and *eternity* which is raised above all time and to which measurement cannot be applied. When Dante said 'Io, che al divino dall' umano, All' eterno dal tempo era venuto',² he had passed from the temporal to the eternal through the *aevum* to which Suso was referring when he described himself in the language of an ecstatic, as 'swimming between time and eternity in the deep sea of God's unfathomable marvellousness'.³

Such sayings suggest the possibility of imagining the existence of a transition between the finite and the infinite, but they do not enlighten us as to *how* the relation between the finite many and the Infinite One can be grasped by our minds. Some philosophers have leaned to the belief that the recognition of Manyness is itself conditioned by an underlying consciousness of the One. Thus it has been held by certain Hindu seers that in order to know objects we must presuppose Brahman, the One, as the substratum of all experience⁴; while Nicholas of Cusa reached an identical position from which he could visualise '*unitas, quam multitudo praesupponit*'.⁵ It was also Hegel's thought⁶ that to describe a thing as limited proves by implication the existence of the unlimited, and from this standpoint he made his heroic attempt to trace a passage step by step from the finite to the Infinite. His dialectic, beginning with Being, moves from category to category, and at the end he considers himself to have reached the Absolute. This claim

¹ On the meaning of *aevum* see Sharp, D. E. (1930), pp. 167, 261, 400.

² *Paradiso*, xxxi, 37, 'I who had passed to the divine from the human, to eternity from time'.

³ Suso, H. (1913), p. 226.

⁴ Sastri, K. (1924), p. 37; Nikhilananda (*Svami*) (1949, 1952), vol. I, p. 33.

⁵ Nicolaus Cusanus (1565), T. II, *De Cribr. Alch.*, II, 7, p. 901.

⁶ Hegel, G. W. F. (1874), p. 99.

⁷ On this point see pp. 27, 28, 62 et seq., 102 et seq. of the present book.

⁸ On the *Timaeus* see Cornford, F. M. (1937).

can be accepted only if we believe it possible to make an unbroken transition in the final phase of the dialectic from discursive-logical thought to intuition.⁷

In general, more attention has been paid by philosophers to the converse problem—the derivation of finite manifoldness from infinite unity. Plato must have always borne in mind the thinkable modes of transition from the One to the Many, but in the *Timaeus*,⁸ where he turns ostensibly to the subject he confines himself to veiled and mythical utterance. We have to remember that in the *Seventh Epistle*⁹ he declares that there is not and never will be any treatise by him revealing his innermost thoughts, and he also says that no writer past or future can be in a position to claim a knowledge of those thoughts. Despite this statement there is at least a possibility, as Coleridge suggested, that though Plato's inner doctrines are not recorded in his Dialogues, something of his esoteric tenets may survive in the work of Plotinus and perhaps Proclus.¹⁰ These Neoplatonists offered an elaborate and internally consistent scheme, growing out of certain Platonic conceptions and bridging the gulf between the One (the Absolute or Godhead) and the universe as we know it; they considered that they were able to trace a continuous downward passage from the Infinite to inert matter. According to Plotinus,¹¹ Absolute Unity (*τὸ ἓν*) is inconceivable by man and can be expressed only by negation. The One remains for ever undivided; its substance never suffers change, but its redundant energy, streaming out, originates a series of emanations.¹² The direct offspring of the One is the Universal Mind¹³ or Intelligence (*νοῦς*); to some extent this parallels the Cosmic Life (*Hiranyagarbha*) of the

⁹ Harward, J. (1932), p. 135, Letter VII, 341 b et seq.

¹⁰ Coleridge, S. T. (1949), p. 165.

¹¹ The following brief summary is derived chiefly from Nicholson, R. A. (1898), p. xxxi et seq. See also Gardner, A. (1886) and other references under Plotinus in *List*, p. 129.

¹² The Neoplatonic theory of the world in some respects recalls the cosmic ideas of the Upanishads; see, for instance, Dasgupta, S. (1933).

¹³ It will be noticed that the significance attached to the terms 'mind' and 'soul' in Neoplatonism differs from our present usage.

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Upanishads—the first result of the contemplation in which Brahman (or the Absolute) thinks Itself.¹ In Neoplatonism the Universal Mind is considered as inferior to the One in having become dualistic, since all discursive thought involves antithesis of subject and object. As *νοῦς* represents the overflowing of the One, so the Universal Soul (*ψυχή*) is the outpouring of *νοῦς*; it is *ψυχή* which connects *νοῦς* with the material world. Here Matter (*ὑλη*), understood as mere defect and privation, unites with Form (*εἶδος*), which is the outflowing of Soul.

In the system of Eriugena,² in which the Neoplatonic scheme (known to him only at secondhand) is somewhat modified, the immaterial ideas or prototypes are regarded as an intelligible system of causal reasons having the power to give rise to the visible world in all its multiplicity. These conceptions are suggested by such 'creative' work as that of the sculptor; the statue which he carves is the external expression of his internal intent. His originaive thought is outside space and time, but the tangible result which he produces is necessarily conditioned by these two factors, which rule our perceptions of the phenomenal world. It seems ridiculous to compare the powers of man's limited mind with the creative activity arising out of the Unknowable, but this comparison may yet have a value for the imagination if it is recognised that its status is mythical. Attempts to derive the Many from the One, whether made by Neoplatonists or by thinkers of other schools, are inevitably no more than 'likely stories'. They depend upon the introduction of the factor of *finiteness*, because emanations from the One can be conceived by us only under conditions of succession which are inapplicable to timelessness. Schopenhauer³

¹ Nikhilananda (*Swami*) (1949, 1952), vol. I, pp. 162–3; see also Deussen, P. (1906), p. 198, etc.

² Cf. Whittaker, T. (1906), pp. 127, 133, etc.; Jones, Rufus M. (1909), pp. 124–6. ³ Schopenhauer, A. (1883–6), vol. I, pp. 166, 168, 201.

⁴ Schopenhauer probably had in mind the Upanishadic idea that time is the spontaneous thought-movement of the Absolute; cf. Dasgupta, S. (1933), p. 66.

Neoplatonism

showed that he was aware of this necessity, when he pointed out that the thing-in-itself (which in his terminology is called *will*, but which it is better to identify with the Absolute), though essentially One, is disrupted into multiplicity by space and time.⁴ In other words, the Infinite Unity is revealed as the Manifold when its Oneness discloses (as part of itself) that principle of limitation which measures the immeasurable and creates forms in the formless. This principle is Sankara's *Māyā*⁵; its acceptance does not negate reality, but enables us to picture it in symbolic fashion, since, as Nicholas of Cusa said, 'Truth limited by temporality is a sign and image of supratemporal truth'.⁶

So far we have considered only the transition, as traced in Neoplatonism, from the One to the Many, but this system is concerned also with the reverse process. Being embodied, the Soul is contaminated and fallen—partially negated, as it were—through union with Matter, but the possibility of return to the Absolute remains open; in this process there is an upward passage through the same stages by which the descent was made. According to Vedanta, also, the Universe projected from Brahman ultimately merges again in Brahman.⁷ In Neoplatonic philosophy, different grades of apprehension are associated with the series of levels of which Matter and the Absolute are the extremes. The material body of man has knowledge only through the senses, while the incorporated soul finds its instrument in ratiocination or discursive thought. This stage is not final; when it is passed, logical reasoning is replaced by that intuition which knows the Forms. This, again, is not the end, but the path to the Absolute eventually carries the aspirant beyond even intuitive intellection, since the Ultimate One can be realised only in the still higher phase—the *Unio mystica*.⁸

⁵ Bernard, T. (n.d. [1948]), pp. 14, 102.

⁶ Nicolaus Cusanus (1932), vol. I, part I, *De docta ignorantia*, lib. III, cap. vii, p. 141, 'Veritas autem, ut est temporaliter contracta, est quasi signum et imago veritatis supertemporalis'.

⁷ Deussen, P. (1906), p. 223, etc.; Nikhilananda (*Swami*) (1949, 1952), vol. I, p. 265.

⁸ Cf. Dodds, E. R. (1923), p. 63 n.

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The general Neoplatonic scheme—of which merely the slightest sketch has been attempted here—does at least give some sort of metaphorical and symbolic picture of the transition from the One to the Many. For certain thinkers, notably Goethe,¹ the value of this myth is diminished or even nullified because it is dependent upon the presupposition that a cause is always greater than its effect, so that a chain of successive causes starting from the Absolute produces a series of results successively more and more inferior to their Primal source. In this respect Upanishadic doctrine might have satisfied Goethe better, for in Vedanta the cause is not exalted above the effect, and it is held that between the two there is ultimately no difference.² The weakness which Goethe detected in the Neoplatonic theory of emanations resides essentially in the failure to grasp the positive value of finitude,³ and the consequent denial to the Absolute of that vital activity which is in its very nature bound up with limitations. Plato committed himself to no such mistake, for he makes Theaetetus⁴ reject explicitly, as 'a terrible admission', the idea that the Real has no share in movement or life; he thus recognised that the Absolute, in the widest sense, comprehends not only Infinity but also the complete significance of finiteness. Eckhart took up the same position, for his whole system, as Delacroix has argued,⁵ is an impassioned attempt to infuse life and movement into the conception of the One Being, and to relate this Being more closely than the Neoplatonists did to the multiplicity of its manifestations. In Eckhart's own words, '*nihil tam unum et indistinctum quam deus et omne creatum*'. Though it was Spinoza who elaborated this conception most fully and consistently, it can also be traced in the work of other thinkers who preceded him,

¹ Wilkinson, E. M. (1951), pp. 185-6.

² Nikhilananda (*Swami*) (1949, 1952), vol. I, pp. 165, 286.

³ In the case of human personality, Plotinus himself did not disregard the value of finitude; see p. 42 of the present book.

⁴ Jowett, B. (1871), vol. III, p. 514, *Sophist*, 249.

⁵ Delacroix, H. (1900), pp. 172, 189-90, 258, etc. The Latin cited here is given by Delacroix from a manuscript source: see p. 190. n. 1.

The Universe and the One

such as Nicholas of Cusa and the Persian poets. The terms '*complicatio*' and '*explicatio*' that Nicholas uses are broadly synonymous with the One and the Many. According to his views, God as Unity is the *complicatio* (folding together in one embrace) of all the multiplicity of the universe, since all is in Him; while as Manyness He is the *explicatio* (unfolding and differentiation) of the Oneness of the universe, since He is in all. Nicholas realised, however, that if these terms are regarded as opposed, man's mind cannot resolve the antithesis.⁶ These Cusan views are closely parallel to those of Ibn al-'Arabī (1165-1240), who regarded the world as the outward aspect of that which in its inward aspect is God⁷; the Persian mystic, Jīlī (b. 1365 *circa*) followed Ibn al-'Arabī in believing that the phenomenal world is the self-realisation of the Absolute.⁸ In the fifteenth century, Jāmī's mind took the same course; he maintained that the unique Substance considered from the standpoint of unity is the Real, while, from the standpoint of multiplicity, it is the Universe—the outward and visible expression of the Real.⁹ Nicholas of Cusa is known to have been greatly interested in Islām,¹⁰ so he may have had some contact with this Persian mystical tradition. Spinoza's account of the two 'Attributes' of God—'thought' and 'extension'—is closely akin to Jāmī's conception; the idea of the Attributes offers us a bipolar view of reality. Human nature seen from one pole is 'material', and from the other pole is 'mental'—using, as we must, terms which are obviously inadequate for the purpose. These poles are in no way disjunct, and when we speak of the aspect of the universe corresponding to man's 'material' pole as 'extension', and that corresponding to man's 'mental' pole as 'thought', we are referring merely to two ways of looking at

⁶ Nicolaus Cusanus (1932), vol. I, part I, pp. 69-72, *De docta ignorantia*, lib. II, cap. iii, Heading, p. 69, 'Quomodo maximum complicit et explicet omnia', and p. 70, 'Excedit . . . mentem nostram modus complicationis et explicationis'. Cf. also Vansteenberghe, E. (1920), pp. 311-12.

⁷ Nicholson, R. A., in Arnold, Sir T., and Guillaume, A. (1931), p. 224.

⁸ Nicholson, R. A. (1921), p. 83.

⁹ Nicholson, R. A. (1914), pp. 81-2.

¹⁰ Bett, H. (1932), pp. 96-8.

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one thing. The Attributes differ only as a mountain seen by a man in the foothills differs from the same mountain seen by a man who has reached the highest peak; or as the impressions gained by gazing along a road in the two opposite directions differ from one another. The question of how to 'bridge the gulf' between these paired but opposed perceptual concepts (if we may venture to call them so) belongs to the class of problems which are insoluble because they are, in fact, non-existent. It is the bipolar finiteness of our average human nature which restricts us to visualising reality only under the two sharply distinguished aspects of 'extension' (plurality) and 'thought' (unity); but all attempts to obtain any full conception of the Real are frustrated unless we can get beyond so limited a notion of Unity.¹ Returning to Nicholas of Cusa, we find that when he speaks of the Unity of God he is not using the word 'unity' in the restricted sense which our discursive thought gives to this term, when it opposes unity to plurality, but in a larger meaning which includes both unity (as it appears when narrowed down to fit our logical reasoning) and also plurality.² That the Ultimate Unity is beyond both unity (as usually understood) and plurality is recognised by Indian thought. According to Sankara, Brahman (the eternal principle) is itself devoid of unity as well as diversity. These are features of the empirical world, and Brahman transcends such distinctions.³ The same idea recurs in Bradley's idealism, since he regards the One and the Many as correlated aspects of the universe; his Absolute is a kind of Unity higher than that which can be set over against plurality.⁴

It is thus clear that thinkers of many schools have held it possible that in intuitive thought we may slip the shackles of our own finiteness and attain some fleeting glimpse of Reality 'in the round'. In such mystical apprehension the two Attributes

¹ On this subject see Chapter I of the present book, p. 3.

² Nicolaus Cusanus (1932), vol. I, part I, p. 49, *De docta ignorantia*, lib. I, cap. xxiv, 'quare unitati pluralitas aut multitudo secundum rationis motum opponitur. Hinc unitas Deo non convenit, sed unitas, cui non opponitur aut alteritas aut pluralitas aut multitudo'.

Individuality

fuse so that Unity and Plurality are seen as One—a Oneness which is Unity interwoven with all Multiplicity. The idea that the Ultimate Unity needs finitude for its completion, can be sustained only on the ground that finiteness has itself a positive value, and is not a mere negation of infinity; it follows that we must now turn to the problem of individuality—the *haecceitas*, or 'thisness', for which, in the thirteenth century, Duns Scotus secured the recognition of thinkers.⁵

The individual man is not merely the perceived human being, with his bodily and mental characteristics; he is all this *plus* his work and his influence, emotional and intellectual, direct and indirect. So considered, his bodily frame, on the one hand, and, on the other hand, the relation with the Whole established by his mind, form the two poles of his existence, which has a range extending from the finite to the infinite. That the finite cannot be disentangled from the infinite becomes obvious when we consider man in relation to time; he has the power of recalling the past and anticipating the future, as well as recognising the present, and this means that he is not merely the passive victim of time-succession. Its dominion fails, when, as Rūmī⁶ wrote 700 years ago, he beholds the minted gold before the mine exists, or strings the pearl before the creation of the sea.

The view taken of the nature of individuality must depend largely on the relative stress laid on the polar aspects of finiteness and infinity. Bosanquet⁷ who pursued this subject with peculiar tenacity, regarded its essence as consisting in the striving of the self after the unity and completeness of the Infinite Whole. The general impression left by his discussion, is that it shows a certain failure of the sense of proportion; he tends to belittle the value of the finite, and—though doing lip-service to the idea that finiteness is a necessary element in true

³ Hiriyanna, M. (1949), p. 162.

⁴ Haldar, H. (1927), p. 244.

⁵ Carré, M. H. (1949), p. 148.

⁶ Nicholson, R. A. (1950), XLVI, p. 86.

⁷ Bosanquet, B. (1912), vol. I.

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infinity—does not actually recognise the *degree* to which finitude in its own right contributes to the Whole.

This belittlement and rejection of finite individuality is carried to extreme by certain exponents of Śūfism. The famous Persian mystic al-Junayd, who lived into the tenth century, declared that the Śūfī must 'say farewell to all the natural inclinations', and that it is his duty to 'subdue the qualities belonging to human nature'.¹ The ancient wisdom of the Upanishads, again, tends to underestimate finiteness. In these writings, despite insistence on knowledge of the manifest universe as prerequisite to knowledge of Ultimate Reality,² the phenomenal world of multiplicity and finiteness is treated as phantasmal, and as being the mere outcome of cosmic illusion (Māyā), which obscures the vision and makes the Absolute appear as manifold and relative. Upanishad philosophy, however, takes cognizance of the fact that there must be concessions to the finite phenomenal world, even though it is regarded as unreal; the problem of adjusting human existence to both finiteness and infinity receives a practical solution by the device of dividing man's grown-up life into four stages.³ In the first stage he should be a celibate pupil, studying certain aspects of the sacred writings with an accredited teacher. The second stage is that in which he marries, becomes a householder, and carries out the ritual duties of religion. In the third stage, which begins with the onset of grey hair, he leaves his home and the human duties which it involves to his children, and with his wife retreats into forest life, where meditation and symbolic worship replace the ritual sacrifices and enable him to reach a higher spiritual level than is possible for the householder. In the fourth and final stage he renounces the world totally, frees himself from all personal attachments, and be-

¹ Smith, Margaret (1950), No. 30, p. 34.

² Nikhilananda (*Swami*) (1949, 1952), vol. I, p. 163.

³ Deussen, P. (1906), pp. 4-5; Coomaraswamy, A. K. (n.d. [1943]), p. 29; Nikhilananda (*Swami*) (1949, 1952), vol. I, p. 4.

⁴ Cf. Price, A. F. (1955), Sect. VI, pp. 30-1, and Sect. XXXI, p. 73.

The Bhagavad-Gītā

comes a solitary wandering monk, who contemplates Brahman continuously and directly and no longer stands in need even of symbolic modes of worship. A corresponding ideal in accordance with which man's individuality is in the last resort immolated, is implied in the Buddhist tenet—expressed with intense conviction in the *Diamond Sutra*⁴—that the notions of selfhood, separate personality, and ego-entity, must be rejected by those who aspire to enlightenment.

Another example of what the Western mind cannot but interpret as a grievous undervaluing of human individuality and relationships, seems to me to be implicit in one aspect of the magnificent Hindu epic, the *Bhagavad-Gītā*.⁵ In this poem the God Krishna is described as acting as charioteer to Arjuna on the field of Kurukshetra. Before the battle Arjuna requests Krishna to drive him to a spot between the armies whence he can survey them both. Krishna complies, but when Arjuna gazes on the array, he realises that the enemy forces include men of his kith and kin, and others of his friends. Deeply distressed he declares that he cannot fight against such an assemblage. He makes a long and reasoned protest to Krishna, in the course of which he says:

'Knower of all things,
Though they should slay me
How could I harm them?
I cannot wish it:
Never, never,
Not though it won me
The throne of the three worlds.'

Arjuna then throws aside his arrows and bow, and sinks down on the seat of his war chariot, saying, 'I will not fight'.

⁵ The account here given of the *Bhagavad-Gītā*, and the quotations, are based upon Prabhavananda (*Swami*) and Isherwood, C. (1953). Other translations, which may be studied for comparison, are Arnold, Sir E. (1886); Telang, K. T. (1898); Barnett, L. D. (1905); Hill, W. D. P. (1928); Thomas, E. J. (1931); Mukerji, D. G. (n.d. [1932]); Otto, R. (1939); Edgerton, F. (1944); Paramananda (*Swami*), in Lin Yutang (1949).

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Krishna reproves him for taking such an attitude, and bids him forgo all these scruples, and stand up, and resolve to give battle. Since Brahman (as the Atman) is present within all existences and objects, and since the Atman is birthless, deathless, and endless, Arjuna is to regard the idea of killing as an illusion, and to understand that gain and loss, victory and defeat, are all one and the same. Then in a marvellous series of discourses Krishna reveals to Arjuna how to pass beyond finitude and advance to oneness with Brahman, of whom he (Krishna) is an incarnation.

Like the Upanishads the *Gītā* holds inexhaustible meanings and is open to innumerable interpretations at different levels.¹ It is only those who have studied it and entered into it deeply who have the right to express any opinion about it; I wish here only to draw attention to one feature in which the *Gītā* seems to me to show fallibility—but this may be merely my individual reaction. It is that Krishna, having taught his disciple to despise the senses, and to disregard all the claims of the finite and human, concludes by telling him that he is his dearly beloved, and in return demanding his whole heart in love and adoration. It is difficult to avoid the conclusion that Krishna first commends to Arjuna the rejection of all the inborn desires and affections of man, and then bestows upon him a relation to himself which appears to fall into the same category as a passionate devotion between two human beings. Krishna's offer thus suggests an attempted compensation for the narrowness and inadequacy of that conception of the Infinite which fails to include the finite. It may be recalled that *Sri Ramakrishna*² in the nineteenth century recognised this type of inadequacy; he believed himself to have had a vision in which he was warned not to become lost in the unconditioned Brahman, but to remain at the boundary between the Absolute and Relative so that he could hold to the realisation both of the Impersonal and Personal facets of Reality.

¹ For a modern symbolic approach to the *Gītā* see Prem (*Sri Krishna*) (1938).

² Nikhilananda (*Swami*) (1951), p. 46.

³ Giles, L. (1906), p. 34.

The Value of Finitude

Chinese Taoism was careful not to reject the finite. In the book, *Chuang-Tzū*, probably compiled in the third century A.D., we are told that the limits of the finite can be transcended even when the aspirant does not withdraw from earthly life.³ Buddhism—at least in its Zen aspect—sponsored a similar view. In a poem attributed to a Patriarch of the Dhyana (Zen) sect, who died early in the seventh century, it is said:

If you want to follow the doctrine of the One, do not rage against the World of the Senses.

Only by accepting the World of the Senses can you share in the True Perception.⁴

The contrary belief, that the individual selfhood ought to be altogether outgrown and discarded, may still be found as a living conviction among those born into the Hindu or Buddhist tradition; it is recorded, for instance, that Ananda K. Coomaraswamy—who did so much to interpret the East to the West—in the twentieth century couched a refusal to write his autobiography in the words: 'I myself am not interested in my personal history'.⁵

Something of the special value of finiteness is revealed when we consider the part played in human life by restraints and boundaries—features which are meaningless in relation to infinity, when this term is used in the narrow sense in which it is treated as in simple opposition to finiteness. Traherne long ago gave due weight to the value of limitations, for he said that 'Power is more infinite when bounded, than Power in its utmost liberty'. He did not throw out such ideas casually; they were deeply ingrained in his mind and he applied them widely. He realised, for instance, that finitude is a necessary ingredient in the 'Govern'd Measures', which he felt to be fundamental in music, dancing, and the humane crafts.⁶ It is a commonplace, indeed, that the arts are indissolubly linked to the visual, auditory,

⁴ Conze, E., Horner, I. B., Snellgrove, D., and Waley, A. (1954), p. 297; translation by A. Waley from *Takakusu* XLVIII, 376.

⁵ Iyer, K. B. (1947), p. xiii.

⁶ Traherne, T. (1675), pp. 326, 343.

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tactile, and rhythmical responses of the sense organs, which are essentially finite and bodily. It is thus obvious that any philosophy disavowing finiteness cuts itself off from many aspects of the arts, hence rejecting one of the main sources whence it could draw material through which it might learn to apprehend Reality.

Another factor which has played its part in awakening thinkers to the importance of finitude is the present-day recognition of the significance of *scale*. In this connexion we may recall Henry Moore's thought-provoking dictum: 'There is a right physical size for every idea'.¹ When we ponder on the difference which physics reveals between structure and behaviour on the sub-microscopic and macroscopic planes, we realise that, just as the sub-microscopic is not merely the macroscopic in miniature, so finitude has special qualities of its own which are lacking in the infinite, if this term is understood in the narrower sense in which it is diametrically opposed to the finite. It is useless to try to drag the Ultimate Infinite down to our human level, so as to pigeon-hole it as the antithesis of the finite and thus to degrade it into something which we feel we can understand. It is true that it *is* this, but it is also ineffably more; it does not exist over against finitude, but it *comprehends* all finitude while transcending it. The Absolute, in Traherne's words, 'Eternal is, yet Time includes'.² That finitude has something to offer to the Infinite is suggested metaphorically if we think of the 'white radiance of eternity', which does not reveal all its potentialities until the limiting planes of the prism of finiteness disclose the series of rainbow colours latent in it. A symbolic expression of the converse truth may be found in the synthesis, achieved in Marlowe's deathless lines, between the individual finitude of a mortal woman's aspect and the towering infinity of flame:

Was this the face that Launcht a thousand ships,
And burnt the toplesse Towers of *Ilium*?³

The contribution which the finite makes to the Absolute Infinite involves the experiences of change, frustration, grief,

The Finite Element in Infinity

and loss, which are of the very texture of humanity; and, if the Absolute was not inclusive of personal individuality, there would be no incongruity and irony—no comedy, laughter, and nonsense—no fruitful diversities arising out of differences of race, sex, and age. The infinite, in the narrow sense in which it must be classed as antithetic to finitude, is aloof from all such aspects of life; it is only when we conceive it as vitalised by the finite that we know it as it actually *is*, in its full stature as the Infinite Whole, which comprehends impartially the depths as well as the heights of man's nature.

¹ Moore, H., p. 24, in Evans, M. (1937).

² Traherne, T. (1932), *Felicity*, p. 115.

³ Greg, W. W. (1950), *Doctor Faustus*, V, lines 1874-5, p. 279, cited from the 1616 version.

Synthesis

To anyone who compares on general lines the great philosophical systems of the world, or the smaller attempts at schemes formulated by individual minds, it becomes apparent that each of these systems is an attempt to unfold the implications of the first principles or postulates which the philosophy in question takes as 'given' and from which it makes its start. This means that the difference between systems is due primarily to their differing postulates, and it is thus of the first importance to assess such postulates. It is easy to deceive oneself about their status, and to allow them a dictatorship to which they are not entitled. For instance in a recent authoritative study of Buddhism¹ they are called 'basic intuitions' due to 'original inspiration', and are thus set beyond discussion; but as we have already suggested for the particular case of the Uniformity of Nature,² the only sound method is the contrary one of treating such postulates as *hypotheses*—which is what they are in fact—and subjecting them to a rigorous and testing scrutiny. The present book has made essential use of the postulate-hypothesis that there is a Unitary Whole. As in the case of hypotheses in general, actual proof is excluded, and evidence of probability alone can be offered. We have tried to indicate the degree of this probability indirectly, through showing that ideas developed from our basic postulate, or correlated with it, fall naturally into place in a scheme of things which takes both body and mind into consideration. On the view that there is a Unitary Whole, it may be assumed that if any subsidiary postulate is valid it is because it is one manifestation of the hypothetical

¹ Murti, T. R. V. (1955), p. 55.

² See Chapter II, p. 13, f.n. 1 of the present book.

³ Chatterjee, S. C., and Datta, D. M. (1939), pp. 90 et seq.

⁴ Spinoza, B. de ['B.D.S.'] (1677), *Ethics*, pars I, def. 4, p. 1, 'Per

Synthesis of Partial Truths

Whole. Such a subsidiary postulate can never be more than a partial truth, since it is bounded by the limitations of man's mind. The partialness of these manifestations was acknowledged long ago in the Jaina system of Indian philosophy,³ which accords the fullest possible recognition to the relativity of human knowledge. Every object has characteristics which are innumerable, when we take into account its negative as well as its positive features; all these could not be appreciated simultaneously by any Being except the Omniscient. Man in his finiteness can look at anything only from one limited standpoint at a time; what his perception embraces is thus infinitesimal in comparison with what is offered. We begin to feel our way towards the grasp of a wider truth when two of our partial conceptions are first set in opposition in the Hegelian fashion as thesis and antithesis, and then an attempt is made to bring them together as a synthesis. Even when this has been done the goal is still inexpressibly remote, for absolute truth cannot arise out of the fusion of a mere pair of partial truths, which, in the nature of the case, do not include between them all possible aspects of the subject. The Jainas recognise difficulties of this kind and entertain all the varying views of other thinkers with respect, as presentations of the universe from a *series* of different standpoints. They are thus saved from the inhibiting conviction that their own opinions are sacrosanct.

A feature of partial truths which complicates the issue is that they are by no means all equally significant. As instances we may cite Spinoza's Attributes of 'thought' and 'extension', which—though each represents 'what the intellect perceives as constituting the essence of Substance'⁴—are not equal in content; for it is clear that thought comprehends extension, whereas extension cannot comprehend thought.⁵ This does not prevent their falling into place with other partial truths as

attributum intelligo id, quod intellectus de substantiâ percipit, tanquam ejusdem essentiam constituens'.

⁵ On the difficult problem of the Attributes, see Pollock, Sir F. (1899), pp. 152 et seq. Though this discussion is of such early date, the clarity of Pollock's mind makes it more illuminating than many modern criticisms.

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examples of the Hegelian thesis and antithesis, for the higher stages of Hegel's dialectic offer instances in which thesis and antithesis by no means belong to the same level.¹

A vital factor in Spinoza's conception of the Attributes is the recognition of the existence of innumerable aspects of truth in addition to those which come within the ken of humanity. The Attributes are infinite and therefore insusceptible of numbering, although two only—thought and extension—are accessible to man. It is true that Hegel² and others have held the view that when Spinoza speaks of 'infinite' Attributes he is thinking only of thought and extension, but regarding these as each infinite *in itself*. There is, however, conclusive evidence, both in the *Ethics* and in the Correspondence,³ that Spinoza had no doubts as to there being other Attributes besides those two which fill man's normal awareness. For the mystery of the Infinite Attributes we may find, perhaps, a crude analogy in our perception of the sky. Bound to earth as man formerly was, he knew the skyscape, broadly speaking, under two main aspects only, which he distinguished as the day sky and the night sky, each of which presented innumerable variations. This gives us suggestions for an image of Spinoza's two man-apprehended Attributes, each infinite in its own kind. Yet we know that an indefinite number of totally different aspects of the same sky might have been revealed if it could have been seen from positions and under conditions which had never been accessible to human eyes. There are thus two aspects of the same sky which man has always known, each of which is indefinitely variable, and it may be assumed that there are also an infinity of other comparable aspects of the same sky which he has not yet perceived because of his limitations, but in the existence of which he may without irrationality believe, especially now that the freedom of the air offers him clues. In the same way man

¹ McTaggart, J. McT. E. (1922), pp. 122-40, paragraphs 109-23.

² Hegel, G. W. F. (1892-6), vol. III, pp. 259-60, 263.

³ See, for instance, [Spinoza, B. de] 'B.D.S.' (1677), *Ethics*, pars I, prop. IX, p. 7, 'Quò plus realitatis, aut esse unaquaeque res habet, eò plura

The Infinite Attributes

is able to gain cognizance with his whole nature of the two infinite Attributes of thought and extension, and he has also a dim perception that there may be an infinity of other Attributes, which cannot be visualised by picture-thinking, or comprehended by discursive and logical thought. He is left wondering whether there is any means whereby he might hope to gain a faint glimpse of these other Attributes. The tentative suggestion may perhaps be hazarded that contemplation carried to its utmost intensity may so illuminate reality as to reveal thought and extension in their true proportion, as no more than two among the innumerable elements forming together the Absolute Whole. We get a hint of a parallel for this increase of vision if we consider the artist's capacity for thinking in form and colour, and the musician's power of thinking in sound, which enable them to reach a plane beyond the sensible and conceptual worlds of the common man. If the point is attained at which something not comprehended in the two familiar Attributes rises above the horizon, the experience would inevitably transcend verbal expression, and could be conveyed only by those subtle tones and overtones of meaning, which poetry and the other arts have the power to evoke. Such insights fall to the lot of none but those rare spirits who are capable of realising a Unity arising out of the synthesis of the Infinite Attributes. We others with our plodding, workaday minds, must needs turn to more pedestrian considerations about the possibilities of fusing systems which deal merely with the two recognised Attributes, but are based on different postulates. Such synthesis, clearly, is no facile task. Simple juxtaposition, or the interweaving of strands remaining obstinately discrete, may be mistaken all too readily for genuine fusion; two incongruous views may be forced into an uneasy union which is only a nightmare mirage of oneness and recalls the old-fashioned nursery method of

attributa ipsi competunt'; and Epistola LX, p. 580 (numbered LVI in Wolf, A. (1928)), 'non dico, me Deum omnino cognoscere; sed me quaedam ejus attributa; non autem omnia, neque maximam intelligere partem, ...'

compelling two combatants, still quivering with wrath, to 'kiss and be friends'. If any integrated synthesis is to be reached it must be by leaving the postulates free to develop, and through spontaneous growth to form organic connexions linking them into a third conception more advanced and inclusive than either of them singly. An opposed thesis and antithesis—if each has grown to maturity independently so that all its implications are disclosed—may if fused form a blend richer in content than any amalgamation attempted before either had arrived at its full stature. This idea is applicable widely. The synthesis of philosophic modes of thought is far more hopeful when each has reached an advanced stage. All roads lead to Rome, but this only becomes self-evident at the end when Rome is in sight; in their beginnings the routes often seem to be pursuing incompatible directions.

In general the more liberal-minded among thinkers have accepted the idea that no one system can possess anything but partial truth, and they have understood the urgent need of synthesising their own views with those reached by others on different paths. In the fifteenth century Nicholas of Cusa, who was deeply imbued with Neoplatonism as interpreted by Eckhart, Eriugena, and Dionysius the Areopagite, sought earnestly for a way to connect this approach to the truth with that of Islām.¹ Again, in India, the mystic Kabir² (d. 1518), whose sect survives to the present day, was associated closely both with Hinduism and Muhammadanism. He is said to have had no preference for either religion, but to have given teaching acceptable to the followers of both. The belief in synthesis which characterised him is reflected in the legend that after his death there was a difference of opinion as to whether his body should be treated according to the funerary customs of Hinduism or Islām. The matter was settled by a vision in which the spirit of Kabir instructed the disputants to lift the cloth covering the

¹ Bett, H. (1932), p. 102.

² On Kabir see Westcott, G. H. (1907); Keay, F. E. (1931); Sen, K. (n.d. [1936]), pp. 87 et seq.

³ Sen, K. (n.d. [1936]), p. 26.

⁴ Nikhilananda (*Swami*) (1949, 1952), vol. I, p. 11.

corpse. When this was done, nothing was revealed except a mass of flowers. Since these were easily separable into two heaps, half could be dedicated to the rites of each religion.

Kabir was a man of the people and had little use for the written word, but a corresponding urge to synthesis, though on another mental plane, inspired the learned at the court of Delhi. In the seventeenth century Prince Dārā, son of Sājāhān (Shah Jahan), wrote a book called *The Meeting of the Two Seas*, in which he brought together the tenets of the Islamic Šūfis and the spiritual doctrines of the Hindus.³ His influence in relating the philosophies of the world to one another still bears fruit even in Western thought; for under his patronage fifty Upanishads were translated (in part by himself) into Persian in 1650,⁴ and then at the beginning of the nineteenth century a Latin version of this Persian book made by a French scholar was printed at Strasburg.⁵ This Latin translation came into Schopenhauer's hands, and through him certain aspects of the teaching of the seers of ancient India penetrated into the intellectual atmosphere of Europe.

Apart from the synthesis of systems, a *rapprochement* between philosophy and non-philosophic modes of thought is earnestly to be desired. This need was recognised by Berkeley, and even those to whom his *esse est percipi* is not convincing, may sympathise with his effort to draw together common-sense thought and the abstract conceptions of metaphysics. He wrote (as Philonous): 'My endeavours tend only to unite and place in a clearer light that truth which was before shared between the vulgar and the philosophers: the former being of the opinion that *those things they immediately perceive are real things*; and the latter, that *the things immediately perceived are ideas which exist only in the mind*. Which two notions put together, do, in effect, constitute the substance of what I advance.'⁶ Not only common-sense but scientific thinking has often in the past

⁵ Duperron, A. (1801, 1802); for mentions of the authorship of the Persian version see vol. I, p. vi, n. 2, and pp. 1-2, n. 3.

⁶ Berkeley, G., Dialogue III of *Three Dialogues between Hylas and Philonous* (1713), in Jessop, T. E. (1949), p. 262.

VII · Synthesis

been sundered sharply from philosophy. Though the latter demarcation may have had some advantages in encouraging the unrestricted development of both disciplines, the time seems now ripe for a renewed coalescence in which the distinctive individuality attained by each is accepted and given full play. The necessity for a synthesis of philosophy with other aspects of vital thinking is recognised with special emphasis in France where—since some acquaintance with philosophy is part of the equipment of most men of education—the atmosphere is favourable to intimate contact between this subject and the rest of the humanities. Bréhier¹ in a study of recent developments in French thought, interprets existentialism as essentially an attempt to construct a synthesis to which emotion as well as intellect makes its full contribution. It is possible that this movement owes as much to dramatists and novelists as to professional philosophers. Its aim seems to have something in common with that of Kant when he was attempting to synthesise sensuous-intuitive and intellectual concepts by means of his notion of the *schema*.²

In the preceding chapters we have taken a slight glance at some of the protean aspects which the question of the One and the Many has presented at different times, and we have sought to find means of reconciling certain forms of these two antagonistic concepts.³ It may now be worth while to see whether by trying to weave together the various threads which we have dissected out in the previous pages we can trace any underlying pattern of coherence in this fundamentally baffling antithesis of Unity and Plurality. Such an attempt needs the joint use of inferential and of contemplative thought. We can visualise the possibility of this if we bear in mind that logical discursive reason and the intuitive vision of the mystic are far from being,

¹ Bréhier, É. (1950), pp. 201–4.

² Cf. Hendel, C. W., in Cassirer, E. (1953), p. 30; Smith, N. Kemp (1933), p. 181, etc.

³ A preliminary discussion of antitheses with special reference to biology will be found in Arber, A. (1954), pp. 92–114.

⁴ On this point see pp. 27, 28, 62 of the present book.

Contemplation and Mystical Insight

as is sometimes assumed, disconnected functions. Their rigid separation is an artefact due to man's craving for well-defined verbal classifications; actually these two forms of mental life are intergrading stages in the development of the inner light from a mere feeble spark to a full blaze. Ordinary happenings which we deal with by means of logical thought are characterised by being strung out in time—a fact which we recognise when we speak of our 'day-to-day' existence. The contemplative phase at its best represents, on the other hand, the drawing together of these temporal experiences into one whole,⁴ '*sub specie aeternitatis*'; Eternity is here understood according to the definition of Boethius, as 'the possession—all at once, and in its completeness—of unending life'.⁵ It seems likely then that what we need in our present effort after synthesis is the approach through contemplation which—after having achieved the realisation of the successional as the simultaneous—is transformed into mystical insight by fusion with the ultimate phase of the emotional life. To most people the multiplicity and dissociation due to successional time are obvious, while Infinite Oneness is a remote and difficult abstraction; but the mystic visualises the universe from the opposite standpoint. Traherne, for instance, with his basically contemplative temperament describes the Infinite as 'the first thing which is naturally known', whereas 'Bounds and limits are discovered only in a secondary manner'.⁶ For us of ordinary minds it will be safer to take the opposite course, and try to proceed by degrees from the Many towards Unity; we may begin by considering, from among the Manifold, certain paired concepts which generally pass as antagonistic. When we look more closely into the nature of such pairs, we find that philosophers have long recognised that various reputed antitheses are in fact correlatives, and imply one another.

⁵ 'Aeternitas igitur est interminabilis vitae tota simul et perfecta.' Boethius, *De Consolatione Philosophiae*, V, vi, in Stewart, H. F., and Rand, E. K. (1918), pp. 400–1.

⁶ Traherne, T. (1950), *Centuries of Meditations*, II, 81, p. 132. It is a matter for regret that, in the case of this work, only Bertram Dobell's modernised version is available; see Wade, G. I. (1946), p. 181.

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Positive and negative, for instance, are 'intrinsically conditioned by one another, and have a being only when they are connectively referred to each other'.¹ This was understood in China long ago; an early Patriarch of Zen Buddhism said that 'Being is an aspect of Non-being; Non-being is an aspect of Being'.² The human self and the not-self, again, come into the category of correlatives,³ for there is an underlying principle of unity that is capable of reconciling them. All experience presupposes this unity, but because we are not in general consciously alive to it, we create an artificial separation between the self and the not-self—a separation conditioned by our narrow and blinkered view. A corresponding principle extends widely. T. H. Green,⁴ for instance, held that a fact consists in relationships, and that the reality of everything lies in its pointing beyond itself to something else; the real is thus a synthesis of two things—*itself*, and *not itself*. Green carried this view to its logical conclusion, that the universe is 'a system in which every element, being correlative to every other, at once presupposes, and is presupposed by, every other'.

As we saw in discussing Spinoza's 'Attributes' of thought and extension,⁵ many apparent antitheses are regarded more justly as poles of a single unity. We can find a physical parallel to this conception among theories of states of matter. For instance, the complete disorder of a gas such as water vapour may be contrasted with the perfect order of a snow crystal at the lowest temperature. These two limiting cases are mutually exclusive, but as they are connected by a series of intermediaries, they may be treated as showing complementary polarity rather than contradiction.⁶

A dynamic version of the polarity concept, in which there is regular oscillation between the poles, is suggested by the cycle

¹ Wallace, W., in Hegel, G. W. F. (1874), p. 191.

² Conze, E., Horner, I. B., Snellgrove, D., and Waley, A. (1955); translation by Arthur Waley, p. 298. For a Persian view of Being and Non-being, differing somewhat from this Zen description, see p. 115 of the present book.

³ Caird, E. (1903-4), p. 106.

⁴ Nettleship, R. L. (1906), pp. 110, 111.

⁵ Cf. pp. 87, 88 of the present book.

Alternating Sequences in Living Things

which recurs rhythmically in the development of animals and plants. The whole urge of the organism drives it towards its own maturity—that is, towards the reproductive phase. In other words, its inherent endeavour (*conatus*?) is directed to the attainment of its individual structure in the completest form, in which multiplicity is dominant and wholeness is in abeyance,⁸ followed by a harking back to the lost unity, which starts the process again. The race passes in this way to and fro between the singleness and oneness of the egg and the complexity of the multicellular and multifunctional mature organism, which itself repeats the formation of the integrated, *multum in parvo* egg. Using Nicholas of Cusa's terms,⁹ though in a different context, we may regard the egg as the *complicatio* (folding together, or synthesis) of all the characters of the living being, while the mature creature is their *explicatio* (unfolding and separation). The processes of transition from the One to the Many, and from the Many to the One, are thus seen in the organism as alternating sequences, strung out in time. Can it be that it is in this to and fro relation between the One and the Many that the very essence of livingness is revealed? Life would then be neither Unity alone, nor the Manifold alone, but would be visualised as their joint expression, in which predominance is accorded to each in turn, in a constant rhythm.

For us human beings the type example of the relation of the One and the Many is the relation of mind and body.¹⁰ As soon as we begin to think of the infinitely complex body-manifold, we realise how insistently it calls for the analysis that to a great extent it defeats. An organic system has often been regarded as a regulative whole in the sense that the parts *all* influence one another; Nicholas of Cusa said long ago that 'in the members of the body everything contributes to everything, and all are

⁶ For a more exact and technical statement, cf. Rosenfeld, L. (1954).

⁷ On Spinoza's '*conatus*', see p. 73, n. 10.

⁸ Hallett, H. F. (1930), p. 203.

⁹ See p. 87 of the present book.

¹⁰ The mind-body relation is discussed also in Arber, A. (1954), pp. 98 et seq.

contained in all'.¹ It cannot be maintained that this is literally true of an organism *at maturity*, which, in some respects, rather suggests a mosaic system. There are certain skeletal parts, for instance, on which the other parts cannot at the fully developed stage be said to exert any appreciable influence²; but if we think away the time factor and try to see the entire life-history in one (*sub specie aeternitatis*), these skeletal parts are recognised as played upon during development by other elements in a process of mutual interaction.

If we may use the expression 'nervous system' in a broad sense to include brain, spinal cord, and afferent and efferent nerves, it becomes apparent that it is this system which interlocks the multiplicity of the body into a regulative whole. That this system cannot be treated as if it were discontinuous from the rest of the organic mechanism is stressed in the humoral theory of nervous action,³ according to which the nerve cells are in fact endocrine glands.⁴ In general, the unification of the whole body is witnessed by homeostasis⁵—that co-ordination of physiological processes in the body which maintains the steady state of the organism.

Such considerations seem to point to a way of visualising the bodily mechanism as primarily a nervous system, together with the tools which make it possible for such a system to wrest a living from the environment as well as to perform its own unique functions of sense perception, emotional activity, and thought *sensu stricto*. This approach replaces the two separate entities, 'body' and 'mind', by the single concept of a 'mind-body unit'. Although Spinoza, in the seventeenth century, had to interpret man's nature without the knowledge of the nervous system which has since accrued, he succeeded in anticipating the twentieth-century conception of the mind-body individual;

¹ Nicolaus Cusanus (1932), volume I, part I, *De docta ignorantia*, lib. II. cap. v, page 78, 'non posset unus gradus esse sine alio, sicut in membris corporis quodlibet confert cuilibet et omnia in omnibus contentantur'.

² Cf. Lorenz, K. Z., pp. 158, etc., in Whyte, L. L. (1951).

³ Evans, Sir C. Lovatt (1952), p. 365 et seq.

he did this by developing the doctrine of Attributes and its sequels. His findings—if it is allowable to express them in paraphrase—are that mind and body are identical, the body being the mind-body unit as seen darkly under the Attribute of Extension through the glass of space and time, while the mind is the same unit, seen face to face under the Attribute of Thought, which frees vision partially from these finite limitations. It is bodily sense-experience in space and time which is responsible for the conception of manyness, since it disarticulates and disintegrates the One into the Manifold; on the other hand, mental work of an abstract order (implemented, presumably, by the roof-brain) rearticulates and reintegrates the Manifold into the One. The Attribute of Extension thus leads direct to the idea of manifoldness, while the Attribute of Thought, on the other hand, carries with it the realisation of Oneness. In this connexion we may recall Bosanquet's dictum that thought is the 'nisus towards a whole'⁶—a saying which realises the essentially synthetic character of mental activity.

At different periods in the history of ideas, the relation of body and mind has been estimated most variously. To the Athenian of the fifth century B.C., the 'soul' was not a 'reluctant prisoner of the body'; it was the life or spirit of the body'. This position was altered by the introduction, possibly from some northern culture, of the 'puritanical' notion that the soul was of separate divine origin and might be detached from the body. As a sequel this idea involved that antagonism between soul and body which is to be found in Orphic literature and Pythagorean teaching.⁷ Plato seems in general to have leaned to the dissociation of body and soul (mind), which is the view that accords best with the theory of Forms. His Socrates stresses the need to escape from the turmoil for the mind of the body if it is to

⁴ Holmes, S. J. (1948), p. 19; the present writer is indebted to Professor Holmes for references to work on the subject.

⁵ Cannon, W. B. (1932), p. 24. ⁶ Bosanquet, B. (1912), vol. I, p. xx.

⁷ This account of the change to 'puritanism' is derived from Dodds, E. R. (1951), p. 139 et seq.; for a brief outline of Orphic and Pythagorean teaching, see Armstrong, A. H. (1947), Chapter I.

arrive at pure knowledge¹ and he speaks of the self as being imprisoned in the body as an oyster in its shell.² In the Islamic tradition this point of view was reiterated long afterwards by Avicenna (Ibn Sīnā) when he said that the soul—the 'heavenly Dove'—may yearn to leave the body, but 'Thick nets detain it, and strong is the cage'.³ Rigid dualism of this kind could not fully satisfy the many-sidedness of Plato's thought and in the charioteer metaphor⁴ he indicates that all bodily passions and cravings have their part in the soul as visualised in the tripartite psychology. It thus seems safest to regard Plato as tending towards a synthesis of the dualistic and monistic solutions of the mind-body problem—a synthesis in which dualism is to some degree in the ascendant. To Aristotle, on the other hand, the soul is the 'form' of the body,⁵ and his view of the mind-body relation thus inclines to the monistic; but it is impossible without injustice to put into a nut-shell the opinions of either thinker on so complex a subject.

During the whole course of Western thought, most philosophers have leaned decidedly either to the dualistic or the monistic aspect of mind-body association. St Augustine held to a belief in the separateness of mind and body, while St Thomas Aquinas and the scholastics who followed him recognised the extreme intimacy of the body-mind relation.⁶ The Augustinian and Thomist standpoints are combined to a remarkable extent in the *Divina Commedia*⁷; it was easier for a poet than for a philosopher to achieve such a synthesis. A succession of medieval thinkers continued to adhere to the dualistic view,⁸ which was carried over into modern scientific thought by Descartes, who gave it the most unqualified and convinced

¹ Jowett, B. (1871), *Phaedo*, 65 et seq., vol. I, p. 409.

² Jowett, B. (1871), *Phaedrus*, 250, vol. I, p. 584.

³ Browne, E. G. (1902, 1906), vol. II, pp. 110–11. The same metaphor is used by Sultān Owais; see Ouseley, Sir G. (1846), p. 122.

⁴ See p. 78 of the present book; agreement has never been reached among scholars as to the exact interpretation of the chariot metaphor, and the question of the tripartite soul remains 'amongst the thorniest of all Platonic problems'; see Hackforth, R. (1952), p. 75, etc.

expression. 'It is certain,' he wrote, 'that I am truly distinct from my body.'⁹

It is a help towards realising the significance of the mind-body relation, if we try to see its connexion with the ideas about extension and thought current in the seventeenth century. While Descartes separated thought entirely from extension (and hence mind from body), Spinoza brought them together, as far as he could, by regarding them as co-Attributes (Aspects) of the One Substance, which in his terminology is God. Spinoza, however, despite his deep-seated, inborn monism, was never able quite to eradicate from the Attributes the lingering traces of Cartesian duality. We have now to see whether modern thought, with its slightly different accent, offers any cure for these symptoms of dualism. Probably the most effective present-day contribution is the replacement, by the idea of organic polarity, of the notion of such artefact independence as that characterising the two sides of a man-made shield. To separate extension and thought is to disjoin the Whole as perceived by body, from the Whole as conceived by mind. This separation involves, on the one hand, the confinement of bodily perceptions to the sense organs, together with the parts of the nervous system which directly supply them, and on the other hand the exclusion from conceptual thought of everything except the purely abstract contributions of the higher centres of the brain. There is little warrant for any such rigid cleavage between sensation and intellection. Plato¹⁰ followed by Kant¹¹ recognises that the evidences from the different senses converge and meet within the mind, which integrates and uses them in the formation of its perceptions. This view is not unrelated to the experience of

⁵ Cf. Festugière, A. J. (1936), p. 112.

⁶ Cf. Sharp, D. E. (1930), pp. 185 et seq.

⁷ Gardner, E. G. (1913), p. 248, etc.

⁸ Carré, M. H. (1946), p. 31.

⁹ Descartes, R. (1641), p. 98, 'certum est me à corpore meo revera esse distinctum, et absque illo posse existere'. For translation see Smith, N. Kemp (1952¹), p. 254.

¹⁰ Cornford, F. M. (1935), p. 103, *Theaetetus*, 184 D.

¹¹ Smith, N. Kemp (1933), p. 144, n.

contemplatives in whom the functions of the senses are said to have fused. In China an early writer¹ referred to such integration, while Ibn al-Fārīd² of Cairo (1181-1295 A.D.) set it forth in explicit detail when he said that in the *Unio mystica* the eye converses and hears, the tongue looks, the ear beholds and speaks, and the tactile sense listens. This brings to mind, though on another plane, the scholastic concept of the *sensus communis*.³ The notions just cited are partly symbolic rather than literal, but even so they renew one's consciousness of the indissoluble linkage between senses and thought.

Looking at the matter more broadly, it may be claimed that physiology and philosophy form in the last resort a unity; for the extreme of mechanistic physiology, on the one hand, and the extreme of abstract metaphysics, on the other, are merely two polar aspects of the study of the body-mind individual. Borrowing a metaphor suggested by Hallett⁴ for another purpose, we might take a coloured drawing of a landscape as a symbol of this body-mind unit. Considered in its physical aspect the picture may be regarded as a piece of paper of a certain size and form, covered irregularly with lines, layers, and patches of pigments each with its special physical characters. On the other hand, considered in its mental aspect the sketch may be treated as an expression of the artist's intellectual and emotional reactions and interpretations, through which he consciously 'enjoys' his own feelings and thoughts and also communicates them to others. Relating the picture metaphor to the mind-body problem, we might say that the mind is an expression of the body, from which, however, it naturally disengages itself, just as the emotional and intellectual aspect of the picture achieves a life independent of the paper and pigment which

¹ Giles, L. (1912), Book II, p. 42.

² Nicholson, R. A., *Mysticism*, p. 210, in Arnold, Sir T., and Guillaume, A. (1931).

³ Cf., for instance, Carré, M. H. (1946), p. 82.

⁴ Hallett, H. F. (1930), p. 240.

⁵ [Spinoza, B. de] 'B.D.S.' (1677), *Ethics*, pars II, prop. xix, p. 64, 'Mens enim humana est ipsa idea, sive cognitio Corporis humani'.

⁶ Bosanquet, B. (1912), vol. I, p. xxvii.

form its essential material basis. This would be consistent with Spinoza's dictum that mind is the 'idea' of the body,⁵ and Bosanquet's more eloquent version that it is the body's 'significance and interpretation'.⁶ We may recall that Bosanquet also suggested that inwardness is diversity without dissociation.⁷ We have been treating the 'body and mind' problem as an instance of the larger problem of 'the Many and the One', and Bosanquet's suggestion enables us to see the manifold dissociation of the body (outwardness) and the unified diversity of the mind (inwardness) in terms of polarity instead of sterile dualism.

The question of the relation of body and mind cannot be separated from the problem of man as an individual person.⁸ It has been pointed out⁹ that the very existence of human personality depends on its paradoxical quality—merging as it does on the one hand into the Suprapersonal Essence, and yet on the other hand retaining on the relative plane its own particular being. As a Chinese philosopher once said, in another connexion, 'It is not divorced from daily ordinary activities, yet it goes straight to what antedated Heaven',¹⁰ thus partaking both of the finitude of time, and of the infinitude of eternity. The human consciousness, indeed, despite the limitations of its finiteness, can—at least faintly—reach some apprehension of the infinite. Proclus,¹¹ in the fifth century, recognised the difference between the everlastingness which is eternal and the everlastingness which is strung out along the endlessness of time; and he added that there is yet another everlastingness belonging to the soul which is both eternal and temporal. The soul may thus be pictured as moving to and fro between eternity and time; its eternal being is diversified by the opalescent magic

⁷ Bosanquet, B. (1912), vol. I, pp. 72-3.

⁸ On human personality, see also pp. 89 et seq, Chap. VI, of this book.

⁹ Rolt, C. E. (1920), pp. 29, 131, n. 2.

¹⁰ This is a description of the Neo-Confucianism of the Sung dynasty; see Fung Yu-lan (1953), p. 8.

¹¹ Modified from the translation in Cornford, F. M. (1937), p. 63, where references to the original will be found.

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of temporality, while its temporal thought is unified by the eternal matrix. This conception of the oneness of time and eternity, sometimes, especially in old age, becomes an intensely felt experience; the following lines¹ may be cited as an attempt to find words for an apprehension, which is, however, essentially incommunicable:

Time's fortress falls; the battlements are down;
The bastions crumble into futile dust.
Time's captive, man, released by ruin, stands
Freed from the shackling bonds of Here and Now.
Vision, no longer pent and loophole-barred,
Achieves the far horizon in its sweep,
While vanquished Time relives a phoenix life,
To enrich Infinity with finitude,
Fusing in one Eternal-Temporal flame
Unending stillness and the flowing hour.
Bathed in that light, illumined at the last,
Enringing Time, ringed by *Aeternitas*,
Man sees, embraces, knows, and is, the All.

If we keep a firm hold on the idea of the interweaving of the eternal and the temporal in humanity, we are saved from one of the worst outcomes of the rigid separation of mind and body, namely the conviction of an antagonism between reason—regarded as mental and eternal—and emotion—regarded as bodily and temporal. This unresolved conflict is painfully evident, for instance, in the poetry of Yeats. He believes that the only men whose singing can last are those who think 'in a marrow-bone', and he prays to be guarded from the thoughts men think 'in the mind alone'.² Writers with a firmer grasp upon life's essentials have refused thus to vivisection and destroy reality. Plato would not accept the exclusion of emotion from

¹ Arber, A. (1956).

² Yeats, W. B. (1950). *A Prayer for Old Age*, p. 326; see also *The Gift of Harun al-Rashid*, pp. 513–19, in which the effort after synthesis is a failure, though a magnificent one.

³ Hackforth, R. (1952), p. 10.

Reason, Emotion, and the Irrational

the mental sphere. His *voûs* is reason or thought, not divorced from passion or desire but moved by them so that ratiocination and emotion collaborate.³ In Plotinus, also, logic and feeling are closely linked.⁴ By some philosophers, on the other hand, reason has been dissociated not only from emotion but also from all the (so-called) irrational elements in human nature. Dodds,⁵ for example, uses the metaphor of horse and rider to illustrate his idea of the relation of the irrational to the rational; but this comparison is gravely misleading in overstressing the discreteness of the two. The rational and the irrational are not sundered entities. Just as there are clear connexions between intellection and intuition,⁶ so there is, at a lower level, a continuous passage from irrational impulse to rational intellection. Intuition not only surpasses but also includes both the emotional non-rational elements, and also the discursive reason; it represents a third phase in the upward path, in which the two phases which precede it find their fulfilment.

The distinction which is assumed to exist between the rational and the irrational, corresponds in the artificiality of its sharpness and definiteness to the division into the 'conscious' and 'unconscious', which plays so large a part in modern 'depth' psychology. This applies, for instance, to Jung's discussion of certain ancient Chinese conceptions.⁷ His interpretation of the mystic experience, though in some ways illuminating, fails in the last resort, because he treats the 'conscious' and the 'unconscious' as existing in isolation and hostility, whereas they are, in reality, merely polar aspects of a single entity.

There is another antithesis, that of good and evil, the synthesis of which is attempted but seldom, because the maintenance of a rigid distinction between them has often been held to be essential to the conduct of life; but certain men of

⁴ Dodds, E. R. (1923), p. 14.

⁵ Dodds, E. R. (1951), p. 254.

⁶ Cf. p. 62 of the present book.

⁷ Jung, C. G., *Commentary*, pp. 75–137, in Wilhelm, R. and Jung, C. G. (1931).

special insight have seen that the two are discrete only to the finite human outlook, and that on a higher plane they reveal themselves as one. Heraclitus in the far past realised that to God all things are beautiful and good and right, though men suppose that some are right and others wrong.¹ Eckhart, long afterwards, was moved by the same reflection when he wrote: 'no sinner would ever revel in sin were not God's likeness somehow present there'.² Jacob Boehme had the cognate thought that 'The Being of all Beings is but one only Being, but in its Generation it separates itself into two Principles, viz. . . . into Evil and Good. . . .'³ Ramakrishna in the nineteenth century was dwelling with conviction upon the same aspect when he said, 'to see Brahman everywhere, in good and evil, . . . as well as in the depths of meditation, is . . . a supremely rich knowledge'.⁴

The primary difficulty of the antithesis which we are considering is that 'good' is a word with so wide a connotation that its significance in any particular context may be quite ambiguous. Plato's idea of the ultimate 'Good',⁵ which lies at the root of all existence, is not 'good', in the sense of that human 'good' which stands in opposition to human 'evil'; but it may be interpreted as incorporating and transcending both these ideas. As Plotinus realised, the man who has experienced the Divine 'has overpassed the very concert of the virtues'.⁶ 'Evil', also, is a most enigmatic term, but the view that has tended to prevail among serious thinkers throughout the ages is that it represents a negative quality, 'a lack, a deficiency, . . . unreal, . . . never itself possessed of any existence whatever'.⁷ This Neoplatonic doctrine, which Dionysius enunciated, was adopted by St Augustine, who wrote in the *Confessions* that

¹ Fragment LXI in Bywater, I. (1877), p. 25; translation, Patrick, G. T. W. (1889), p. 99. ² Pfeiffer, F. (1949, 1952), vol. II, Serm. xxxi, p. 162.

³ Boehme, J. (1764-81), vol. IV, p. 133, *Signatura rerum*, Chap. xvi, §. 8.

⁴ Nikhilananda (*Swami*) (1949, 1952), vol. I, p. 81.

⁵ Hardie, W. F. R. (1936), p. 118.

⁶ *Enn.* VI. ix. 11. Translation combined from Dodds, E. R. (1923), §. 123, and Mackenna, S. and Page, B. S. (1917-30), vol. v, p. 252.

'evil has no being of its own, but is only an absence of good, so that it simply is not'.⁸ St Thomas Aquinas followed St Augustine with the dictum, *Malum enim est defectus boni*,⁹ and he accepted the opinion of Dionysius that the Good is present as a remote echo even in those creatures which are called evil.¹⁰ Among the moderns, Bradley has maintained the similar idea that error is partial truth, false only because incomplete.¹¹ Jalālu'l-Dīn Rūmī, long before, had given particularly clear expression to the conviction that evil is inseparably connected with finitude and limitation. He saw that God was real Being, and that in Him there is no not-Being; but man is finite through his incompleteness of Being, and it is this negative element (not-Being) to which we give the name 'evil'.¹² Adopting an attitude similar to that of the writers just cited, William Law, the eighteenth-century mystic, ascribed the conception of evil to the limits which circumscribe man's nature.¹³ If this opinion be accepted, it seems not unreasonable to attribute to the same source the human 'good' that is the opposite of 'evil', especially when we remember that in Greek thought 'good' was essentially determinate, and was associated with definiteness and proportion.¹⁴ In other words, 'good' and 'evil' are polar aspects of the Whole, as seen through the diminishing glass of man's limitations. The Infinite, which neither begins nor ends, is debarred from showing dualism; it is finitude, which—having a beginning and an ending—introduces this quality, and thus renders polarity possible. This polarity, as a finite matter which calls for transcendence, was recognised in Islamic mysticism. For instance, Bāyazīd al-Bisṭāmī (d. 875), 'the king of gnostics', in answer to an enquiry concerning the commandment to do good and eschew evil, replied, 'Be in a

⁷ Rolt, C. E. (1920), *Divine Names*, iv, 32, p. 127.

⁸ St Augustine (1943), Bk. III, vii, p. 47.

⁹ Aquinas, St Thomas (1852-73), *Summa Theol.*, Pars I, Qu. xlix, art. 1, vol. I, 1852, p. 200.

¹⁰ Gardner, E. G. (1913), pp. 98 et seq.

¹¹ Bradley, F. H. (1946), p. 169.

¹² Nicholson, R. A. (1914), p. 97.

¹³ Hobhouse, S. (1948), p. 40.

¹⁴ Mure, G. R. G. (1932), pp. 23-4, 183, 220; Robin, L. (1938), pp. 166-7.

domain where neither of these things exists: both of them belong to the world of created beings; in the presence of Unity there is neither command nor prohibition'.¹ Another Ṣūfī, Rābī'a, who lived in the eighth century, prayed that God would give to her enemies fulfilment of their earthly desires; to her friends, eternal life; to her, individually, neither of these, but simply the experience of Himself. 'Aṭṭār, to whom we owe this record, adds that he who possesses God, possesses all,² thus amending the prayer at the point where it fails, since Rābī'a *rejects* both the mundane life and the life of Paradise, without fully realising that the Deity, Whom she sought, must be inclusive of *all* levels of existence from the lowest to the highest. The levels which Rābī'a failed to face cannot be discarded but should be seen in their place, interfused with and interfusing the Infinite Whole, thus making it less inaccessible to man's apprehension; for there is more possibility of gaining some fleeting glimpse of the Absolute when the effulgence is dimmed by a cloud of human limitations, just as the sun is revealed more plainly to the eyes when it is lightly veiled than when it dazzles in unbearable brilliance.³ Looking at the matter in terms of the One and the Manifold, we realise that in the phenomenal world the One in its completeness becomes, in the form of Manyness, dissociated into innumerable beings, each branded with the imperfection of the finite which carries with it the compensation of individuality. Despite their finitude the Many still bear the stamp of their derivation from Unity, as each of the broken and distorted images of the moon in the myriad waters of the world is a reflection of the one Moon.⁴ It is this inevitable appearance of the awry and the fragmentary which we isolate in our minds and describe as 'evil'.

It seems then that 'good' and 'evil', partners in finitude, are relative and essentially human concepts. It has, indeed, to

¹ Nicholson, R. A. (1922), p. 141.

² Garcin de Tassy, M. (1863), p. 171, V. 3081.

³ Cf. Avicenna, in Smith, Margaret (1950), No. 48, pp. 46-7.

⁴ Cf. Suzuki, D. T. (1955), p. 95.

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be conceded that the ultimate tenets of any entirely honest and fully thought-out philosophy are necessarily too true to be 'good'; to be valid they must reach a plane where the Manifold is re-synthesised into Unity. Here the distinctions of 'good' and 'evil' have lost their concern, though their import on the strictly human level remains undiminished. As Rūmī⁵ wrote concerning the mystic who has reached the experience of Union:

The man of God is beyond infidelity and faith,
To the man of God right and wrong are alike.

We must now, at the last, return to the enquiry with which we started—the question as to how if at all the One can be the Many, and the Many, One—and take stock of the upshot of our attempt. At the beginning of this book we considered the conviction of Oneness in the Manifold which has found recurrent expression in the history of thought, and which may even in the individual be an element in the approach to life from childhood onwards. From an attempt to study and estimate this conviction from various different standpoints, the conclusion seems to emerge that the meaning of this basic belief cannot be deciphered if we regard it as a 'problem' (in the sense of something which will yield its secret to rational-discursive thought) but that it comes into the category of a 'mystery'⁶ which cannot be 'solved' because logical thought cannot, in its own right, penetrate into it. It is an obvious criticism that if this be so our discussion must be valueless, since it simply carries us back to the point whence we started. In a sense this is true, yet there may be a difference between our position at the beginning and at the end. We made our start with the primitive and undeveloped conviction of Oneness, but we have come to recognise that the *content* of this conviction is open to indefinite enrichment by the type of meditative thought through which at

⁵ Nicholson, R. A. (1914), p. 95; cf. also Smith, Margaret (1932), p. 42, for an earlier quotation from 'Aṭṭār's *Mantiq Al-Tayr*.

⁶ On the relation of these two terms see Marcel, G. (1948).

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the last the darkness of the mystery is seen, in the ancient words of Dionysius,¹ to outshine all brilliance. The heights of the *Unio mystica* may not be for us. We cannot dare to hope that we shall ever see with our own eyes, as Dante did,² a single eternal flame in the heart of which Unity and Multiplicity are fused by the *Amor intellectualis* that moves the sun and the other stars. Yet even we, despite the limitations of our insight, may find that long and intensive pondering will have so far fostered our fitful inward spark that we return to the starting point with at least a glimmering torch, able to irradiate, though dimly, the fringes of the mystery. If the light is sufficient to disclose to us the way of contemplation that lies within ourselves, we may by pursuing it to the end come to know—not as a mere static dictum but as a winged intuition, carrying an infinitude of significance both for mind and heart—that the One *is* the Manifold, and the Manifold *is* the One.

¹ Rolt, C. E. (1920), *Myst. Theol.*, i, p. 191.

² *Paradiso*, xxxiii, 88–90, 145.

Sustanzia ed accidenti, e lor costume,
Quasi conflati insieme per tal modo,
Che cio ch' io dico è un semplice lume.

L'Amor che move il sole e l'altre stelle.

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