

CHAPTER II

IN THE WAKE OF THE FALL

IN antiquity and in the Middle Ages man was “objective” in the sense that his attitude was still largely determined by “objects”,¹ by objects on the plane of ideas as well as by objects of the senses; he was very far from the relativism of modern man who impairs objective reality by reducing it to accidents of nature lacking in significance and in symbolic quality; and he was equally far from a “psychologism” which calls in question the value of the subject, the knower, and thus in effect destroys the very idea of intelligence. To speak of “objects on the plane of ideas” is not a contradiction, since a concept, while it is evidently a subjective phenomenon so far as it is a mental phenomenon, is at the same time, like every sensory phenomenon, an object in relation to the subject who takes cognizance of it; truth comes in a sense from outside, it is offered to the subject who may accept it or not accept it. Held fast as it were to the objects of his knowledge or of his faith, ancient man was little disposed to grant a determining role to psychological contingencies; his inner reactions, whatever their intensity, were related to an object and thereby had in his consciousness a more or less objective cast. The object as such—the object envisaged in all its objectivity—was the real, the basic, the immutable thing, and in grasping the object, he had hold of the subject; the subject was guaranteed by the object. This is, of course, always the case with many men, and in certain respects even with every sane man; but the aim here—at the risk of seeming to propound truisms—is to indicate, despite the fact that it can only be done approximately, the outlines of points of view that are in the nature of things complex. In any case, to be too easily satisfied by attention to the subject is to betray the object; the men of old would have had the impression of denaturing or losing the object if they had paid too much attention to the subjective pole of consciousness. It was only from the time of the Renaissance that the European became “reflexive”, and so in a certain way subjective; it is true that such a reflexivity can in its turn have a perfectly objective quality, just as an idea received from without can have a subjective character owing to some bias of interest or feeling in the subject, but this aspect of the matter is not relevant here; what is relevant is that at the Renaissance man began to analyse mental reflections and psychic reactions and thus to be interested in the “subject” pole to the detriment of the “object” pole; in becoming “subjective” in this sense, he ceased to be symbolist and became rationalist, since reason is the thinking *ego*. It is this that explains the psychological and descriptive tendencies of the great Spanish mystics, tendencies which have been wrongly taken as evidence of a superiority and as a kind of norm.

This transition from objectivism to subjectivism reflects and repeats in its own way the fall of Adam and the loss of Paradise; in losing a symbolist and contemplative perspective, founded both on impersonal intelligence and on the metaphysical transparency of things, man has gained the fallacious riches of the *ego*; the world of divine images has become a world of words. In all cases of this kind, heaven—or a heaven—is shut off from above us without our noticing the fact and we discover in compensation an earth long un-

¹ In current usage, the words “objective” and “objectivity” often carry the meaning of impartiality, but it goes without saying that in the present context they are not used in that derivative and secondary sense.

appreciated, or so it seems to us, a homeland which opens its arms to welcome its children and wants to make us forget all Lost Paradises; it is the embrace of *Maya*, the sirens' song, *Maya*, instead of guiding us, imprisons us. The Renaissance thought that it had discovered man, whose pathetic convulsions it admired; from the point of view of laicism in all its forms, man as such had become to all intents and purposes good, and the earth too had become good and looked immensely rich and unexplored; instead of living only "by halves" one could at last live fully, be fully man and fully on earth; one was no longer a kind of hail-angel, fallen and exiled; one had become a whole being, but by the downward path. The Reformation, whatever certain of its tendencies may have been, had as an overall result the relegation of God to Heaven—to a Heaven henceforth distant and more and more neutralized—on the pretext that God keeps close to us "through Christ" in a sort of biblical atmosphere, and that He resembles us as we resemble Him. All this brought with it an apparently miraculous enrichment of the aspect of things as "subject" and "earth", but a prodigious impoverishment in their aspect as "object" and "Heaven". At the time of the Revolution of the late eighteenth century, the earth had become definitely and exclusively the goal of man; the "Supreme Being" was merely a "consolation" and as such a target for ridicule; the seemingly infinite multitude of things on earth called for an infinity of activities, which furnished a pretext for rejecting contemplation and with it repose in "being" and in the profound nature of things; man was at last free to busy himself, on the hither side of all transcendence, with the discovery of the terrestrial world and the exploitation of its riches; he was at last rid of symbols, rid of metaphysical transparence; there was no longer anything but the agreeable or the disagreeable, the useful or the useless, whence the anarchic and irresponsible development of the experimental sciences. The flowering of a dazzling "culture" which took place in or immediately after these epochs, thanks to the appearance of many men of genius, seems clearly to confirm the impression, deceptive though it be, of a liberation and a progress, indeed of a "great period"; whereas in reality this development represents no more than a compensation on a lower plane such as cannot fall to occur when a higher plane is abandoned.

Once Heaven was closed and man was in effect installed in God's place, the objective measurements of things were, virtually or actually, lost. They were replaced by subjective measurements, purely human and conjectural pseudo-values, and thus man became involved in a movement of a kind that cannot be halted, since, in the absence of celestial and stable values, there is no longer any reason for calling a halt, so that in the end a stage is reached at which human values are replaced by infra-human values, up to a point at which the very idea of truth is abolished. The mitigating circumstances in such cases—for they are always present, at any rate for some individuals—consist in the fact that, on the verge of every new fall, the order then existing shows a maximum of abuse and corruption, so that the temptation to prefer an apparently clean error to an outwardly soiled truth is particularly strong. In a traditional civilization, the mundane element does all it can to compromise in the eyes of the majority the principles governing that civilization; the majority itself is only too prone to be worldly, its worldliness is not however aristocratic and light-hearted, but ponderous and pedantic. It is not the people who are the victims of theocracy, it is on the contrary theocracy that is the victim, first of aristocratic worldlings and finally of the masses, who begin by being seduced and end in revolt. The European monarchs of the nineteenth century made almost desperate efforts to dam the mounting tide of a democracy of which they had already, partially and despite themselves, become representatives. But these efforts were doomed to be vain in default of the one counterweight that could have re-established stability, and that could only be religion, sole source of the legitimacy and the power of princes. They fought to maintain an order in

principle religious, but the forms in which this order was presented disavowed it themselves; the very apparel of kings, and all the other forms among which they lived, proclaimed doubt, a spiritual “neutralism”, a dimming of faith, a bourgeois and down-to-earth worldliness. This was already true, to a lesser degree, in the eighteenth century, in which the arts of dress, architecture and craftsmanship expressed, if not exactly democratic tendencies, at least a worldliness lacking in greatness and strangely insipid. In this incredible age all men looked like lackeys—the nobles all the more so for being nobles—and a rain of rice-powder seemed to have fallen on to a world of dreams; in this half-gracious and half-despicable universe of marionettes, the Revolution merely took advantage of the previous suicide of the religious outlook and of greatness, and could not but break out; the world of wigs was much too unreal. Analogous remarks, suitably attenuated to conform to eminently different conditions, apply to the Renaissance and even to the end of the Middle Ages; the causes of the descent are always the same when seen in relation to absolute values. What is sometimes called the “tendency of history” is only the law of gravity.

To state that the values of ancient man were celestial and static, amounts to saying that man then still lived “in space”; time was merely the contingency that corroded all things; in the face of that contingency values that are so to speak “spatial”, that is, permanent by virtue of their in temporal finality, had always to assert themselves anew. Space symbolizes origin and immutability; time is the decadence which carries us away from the origin while at the same time leading us towards the Messiah, the great Liberator, and towards the meeting with God. In rejecting or losing celestial values, man became the victim of time; in inventing machines which devour duration man has torn himself away from the peacefulness of space and thrown himself into a whirlpool from which there is no escape.

The mentality of today seeks in fact to reduce everything to categories connected with time; a work of art, a thought, a truth have no value in themselves and independently of any historical classification, but their value is always related to the time in which they are rightly or wrongly placed; everything is considered as the expression of a “period” and not as having a timeless and intrinsic value; and this is entirely in conformity with modern relativism, and with a psychologist or biologist that destroys essential values. In order to “situate” the doctrine of a scholastic, for example, or even of a Prophet, a “psychoanalysis” is prepared—it is needless to emphasize the monstrous impudence implicit in such an attitude—and with wholly mechanical and perfectly unreal logic the “influences” to which this doctrine has been subject are laid bare. There is no hesitation in attributing to saints, in the course of this process, all kinds of artificial and even fraudulent, conduct; but it is obviously forgotten, with satanic inconsequence, to apply the same principle to oneself, and to explain one’s own supposedly “objective” position by psychoanalytical considerations; sages are treated as being sick men and one takes oneself for a god. In the same range of ideas, it is shamelessly asserted that there are no primary ideas; that they are due only to prejudices of a grammatical order—and thus to the stupidity of the sages who were duped by them— and that their only effect has been to sterilize “thought” for thousands of years, and so on and so forth; it is a case of expressing a maximum of absurdity with a maximum of subtlety. For procuring a pleasurable sensation of important accomplishment there is nothing like the conviction of having invented gunpowder or of having stood Christopher Columbus’ egg on its point. This philosophy derives all it has in the way of originality from what, in effect, is nothing but a hatred of God; but since it is impossible to abuse directly a God in whom one

does not believe, one abuses Him indirectly through the laws of nature,² and one goes so far as to disparage the very form of man and his intelligence, the very intelligence one thinks with and abuses with. There is however no escape from the immanent Truth: “The more he blasphemes”, says Meister Elkhart, “the more he praises God”.

Mention has already been made of the passage from objectivity to reflexive subjectivity—a phenomenon pointed out by Martian—and at the same time the ambiguous character of this development has been emphasized. The fatal result of a “reflexivity” that has become hypertrophied is an exaggerated attention to verbal subtleties which makes a man less and less sensitive to the objective value of formulations of ideas; a habit has grown up of “classifying” everything without rhyme or reason in a long series of superficial and often imaginary categories, so that the most decisive—and intrinsically the most evident—truths are unrecognized because they are conventionally relegated into the category of things “seen and done with”, while ignoring the fact that “to see” is not necessarily synonymous with “to understand”; a name like that of Jacob Boehm, for example, means theosophy, so “let’s turn over”. Such propensities hide the distinction between the “lived vision” of the sage and the mental virtuosity of the profane “thinker”; everywhere we see “literature”, nothing but “literature”, and what is more, literature of such and such a “period”. But truth is not and cannot be a personal affair; trees flourish and the sun rises without anyone asking who has drawn them forth from the silence and the darkness, and the birds sing without being given names.

In the Middle Ages there were still only two or three types of greatness: the saint and the hero, and also the sage; and then on a lesser scale and as it were by reflection, the pontiff and the prince; as for the “genius” and the “artist”, those glories of the Lay universe, their like was not yet born. Saints and heroes are like the appearance of stars on earth; they rescind after their death to the firmament, to their eternal home; they are almost pure symbols, spiritual signs only provisionally detached from the celestial iconostasis in which they have been enshrined since the creation of the world.

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Modern science, as it plunges dizzily downwards, its speed increasing in geometrical progression towards an abyss into which it hurtles like a vehicle without brakes, is another example of that loss of the “spatial” equilibrium characteristic of contemplative and still stable civilizations. This criticism of modern science—and it is by no means the first ever to be made—is made not on the grounds that it studies some fragmentary field within the limits of its competence, but on the grounds that it claims to be in a position to attain to total knowledge, and that it ventures conclusions in fields accessible only to a supra-sensible and truly intellective wisdom, the existence of which it refuses on principle to admit. In other words, the foundations of modern science are false because, from the “subject” point of view, it replaces Intellect and Revelation by reason and experiment, as if it were not contradictory to lay claim to

² A contemporary writer whose name does not come to mind has written that death is something “rather stupid”, but this small impertinence is in any case a characteristic example of the mentality in question. The same outlook—or the same taste—gave rise to a remark, met with a little time ago, that a certain person had perished in an “idiotic accident”. It is always nature, fate, the will of God, objective reality, which is pilloried; it is subjectivity that sets itself up as the measure of things, and what a subjectivity!

totality on an empirical basis; and its foundations are false too because, from the “object” point of view, it replaces the universal Substance by matter alone, either denying the universal Principle or reducing it to matter or to some kind of pseudo-absolute from which all transcendence has been eliminated.

In all epochs and in all countries there have been revelations, religions, wisdoms; tradition is a part of mankind, just as man is a part of tradition. Revelation is in one sense the infallible intellection of the total collectivity, in so far as this collectivity has providentially become the receptacle of a manifestation of the universal Intellect. The source of this intellection is not of course the collectivity as such, but the universal or divine Intellect in so far as it adapts itself to the conditions prevailing in a particular intellectual or moral collectivity, whether it be a case of an ethnic group or of one determined by more or less distinctive mental conditions. To say that Revelation is “supernatural” does not mean that it is contrary to nature in so far as nature can be taken to represent, by extension, all that is possible on any given level of reality, it means that Revelation does not originate at the level to which, rightly or wrongly, the epithet “natural” is normally applied. This “natural” level is precisely that of physical causes, and hence of sensory and psychic phenomena considered in relation to those causes.

If there are no grounds for finding fault with modern science in so far as it studies a realm within the limits of its competence—the precision and effectiveness of its results leave no room for doubt on this point—one must add this important reservation, namely, that the principle, the range and the development of a science or an art is never independent of Revelation nor of the demands of spiritual life, not forgetting those of social equilibrium; it is absurd to claim unlimited rights for something in itself contingent, such as science or art. By refusing to admit any possibility of serious knowledge outside its own domain, modern science, as has already been said, claims exclusive and total knowledge, while making itself out to be empirical and non-dogmatic, and this, it must be insisted, involves a flagrant contradiction; a rejection of all “dogmatism” and of everything that must be accepted *a priori* or not at all is simply a failure to make use of the whole of one’s intelligence.

Science is supposed to inform us not only about what is in space but also about what is in time. As for the first-named category of knowledge, no one denies that Western science has accumulated an enormous quantity of observations, but as for the second category, which ought to reveal to us what the abysses of duration hold, science is more ignorant than any Siberian shaman, who can at least relate his ideas to a mythology, and thus to an adequate symbolism. There is of course a gap between the physical knowledge—necessarily restricted—of a primitive hunter and that of a modern physicist; but measured against the extent of knowable things, that gap is a mere millimeter.

Nevertheless, the very precision of modern science, or of certain of its branches, has become seriously threatened, and from a wholly unforeseen direction, by the intrusion of psychoanalysis, not to mention that of “surrealism” and other systematizations of the irrational; or again by the intrusion of existentialism, which indeed belongs strictly speaking not so much to the domain of the irrational as to that of the unintelligent.³ A rationality that claims self-sufficiency cannot fail to provoke such interferences, at any rate at its vulnerable points such as psychology or the psychological—or “psychologizing”—interpretation of phenomena which are by definition beyond its reach.

³ That is to say if one applies the intellectual norms properly applicable in this case, since it is a question of “philosophy”.

It is not surprising that a science arising out of the fall—or one of the falls—and out of an illusory rediscovery of the sensory world should also be a science of nothing but the sensory, or what is virtually sensory,⁴ and that it should deny everything which surpasses that domain, thereby denying God, the next world and the soul,⁵ and this presupposes a denial of the pure Intellect, which alone is capable of knowing everything that modern science rejects. For the same reasons it also denies Revelation, which alone rebuilds the bridge broken by the fall. According to the observations of experimental science, the blue sky which stretches above us is not a world of bliss, but an optical illusion due to the refraction of light by the atmosphere, and from this point of view, it is obviously right to maintain that the home of the blessed does not lie up there. Nevertheless it would be a great mistake to assert that the association of ideas between the visible heaven and celestial Paradise does not arise from the nature of things, but rather from ignorance and ingenuousness mixed with imagination and sentimentality; for the blue sky is a direct and therefore adequate symbol of the higher—and supra-sensory—degrees of Existence; it is indeed a distant reverberation of those degrees, and it is necessarily so since it is truly a symbol, consecrated by the sacred Scriptures and by the unanimous intuition of peoples.⁶ A symbol is intrinsically so concrete and so efficacious that celestial manifestations, when they occur in our sensory world, “descend” to earth and “reascend” to Heaven; a symbolism accessible to the senses takes on the function of the supra-sensible reality which it reflects. Light-years and the relativity of the space-time relationship have absolutely nothing to do with the perfectly “exact” and “positive” symbolism of appearances and its connection at once analogical and ontological with the celestial or angelic orders. The fact that the symbol itself may be no more than an optical illusion in no way impairs its precision or its efficacy, for all appearances, including those of space and of the galaxies, are strictly speaking only illusions created by relativity.

One of the effects of modern science has been to give religion a mortal wound, by posing in concrete terms problems which only esoterism can resolve; but these problems remain unresolved, because esoterism is not listened to, and is listened to less now than ever. Faced by these new problems, religion is disarmed, and it borrows clumsily and gropingly the arguments of the enemy; it is thus compelled to falsify by imperceptible degrees its own perspective, and more and more to disavow itself. Its doctrine, it is true, is not affected, but the false opinions borrowed from its repudiators corrode it cunningly “from within”; witness, for example, modernist exegesis, the demagogic levelling down of the liturgy, the Darwinism of Teilhard de Chardin, the “worker-priests”, and a “sacred art” obedient to surrealist and “abstract” influences. Scientific discoveries prove nothing to contradict the traditional positions of religion, of course, but there is no one at hand to point this out; too many “believers” consider, on the contrary, that it is time that religion “shook off the dust of the centuries”, which amounts to saying, that it should “liberate” itself from its very essence and from everything which manifests that essence. The absence of metaphysical or esoteric knowledge on the one hand, and the suggestive force emanating from scientific discoveries as well as from collective psychoses on the other, make religion an almost defenceless victim, a victim that even refuses more often than not to make use of the arguments at its disposal. It would nevertheless be easy, instead of slipping into the errors of others, to demonstrate that a world fabricated by scientific influences tends everywhere to turn

⁴ This distinction is necessary to meet the objection that science operates with elements inaccessible to our senses.

⁵ Not that all scientists deny these realities, but science denies them, and that is quite a different thing.

⁶ The word “symbol” implies “participation” or “aspect”, whatever difference of level may be involved.

ends into means and means into ends, and that it results either in a mystique of envy, bitterness and hatred, or in a complacent shallow materialism destructive of qualitative distinctions. It could be demonstrated too that science, although in itself neutral—for facts are facts—is none the less a seed of corruption and annihilation in the hands of man, who in general has not enough knowledge of the underlying nature of Existence to be able to integrate—and thereby to neutralize—the facts of science in a total view of the world; that the philosophical consequences of science imply fundamental contradictions; and that man has never been so ill-known and so misinterpreted as from the moment when he was subjected to the “X-rays” of a psychology founded on postulates that are radically false and contrary to his nature.

Modern science represents itself in the world as the principal, or as the only purveyor of truth; according to this style of certainty to know Charlemagne is to know his brain-weight and how tall he was. From the point of view of total truth—let it be said once more—it is a thousand times better to believe that God created this world in six days and that the world beyond lies beneath the flat surface of the earth or in the spinning heavens, than it is to know the distance from one nebula to another without knowing that phenomena merely serve to manifest a transcendent Reality which determines us in every respect and gives to our human condition its whole meaning and its whole content. The great traditions moreover, aware that a promethean knowledge must lead to the loss of the essential and saving truth, have never prescribed nor encouraged any such accumulating of wholly external items of knowledge, for it is in fact mortal to man. It is currently asserted that such and such a scientific achievement “does honour to the human race”, together with other futilities of the same kind, as if man could do honour to his nature otherwise than by surpassing himself, and as if he could surpass himself except in a consciousness of the absolute and in sanctity.

In the opinion of most men today, experimental science is justified by its results, which are in fact dazzling from a certain fragmentary point of view, but one readily loses sight not only of the decided predominance of bad results over good, but also of the spiritual devastation inherent in the scientific outlook, *a priori* and by its very nature, a devastation which its positive results—always external and partial—can never compensate. In any event, it savours of temerity in these days to dare to recall the most forgotten of Christ’s sayings: “For what shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?” (Mark viii. 36.)

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If the unbeliever recoils from the idea that all his actions will be weighed, that he will be judged and perhaps condemned by a God whom he cannot grasp, that he will have to expiate his faults or even simply his sin of indifference, it is because he has no sense of immanent equilibrium, and no sense of the majesty of Existence, and of the human state in particular. To exist is no small matter; the proof is that no man can extract from nothingness a single speck of dust; similarly, consciousness is not nothing; we cannot bestow the least spark of it on an inanimate object. The hiatus between nothingness and the least of objects is absolute, and in the last analysis this absoluteness is that of God.⁷

⁷ It should not be forgotten that God as Beyond-Being, or suprapersonal Self, is absolute in an intrinsic sense, while Being or the divine Person is absolute extrinsically, that is, in relation to His manifestation or to creatures, but not in Himself, nor with respect to the Intellect which “penetrates the depths of God”.

What is outrageous in those who assert that “God is dead” or even “buried”⁸ is that in doing so they inevitably put themselves in the place of that which they deny: whether they want to or not, they fill the vacuum left by the loss of the notion of God with psychological constructions, and this confers on them provisionally—and paradoxically—a false superiority and even a kind of pseudo-absoluteness, or a kind of false realism stamped with icy loftiness or if need be with false modesty. Thenceforth their existence—and that of the world—is terribly lonely when faced with the vacuum created by the “inexistence of God”;⁹ it is the world and it is themselves—they who are the brains of the world—who henceforth carry the whole weight of universal Being instead of having the possibility of resting in it, as is demanded by human nature and above all by truth. Their poor individual existence—as distinct from Existence as such in so far as they participate in it, which moreover appears to them “absurd”, if they have any idea of it at all¹⁰—their existence is condemned to a kind of divinity, or rather to a phantom of divinity, whence the appearance of superiority already mentioned, a posed and polished ease too often combined with a charity steeped in bitterness and in reality set against God.

The artificial isolation in question accounts moreover for the cult of “nothingness” and of “anguish”, as well as for the astonishing notion of liberation by action, and even by “dedication” to action. When man is deprived of the divine “existenciation” or when he believes himself so to be, he must find something to take its place, on pain of collapsing into his own nothingness, and he does so by substituting for “existence” precisely this kind of “dedication” to action.¹¹ In other words, his imagination and his feelings capitulate to the ideal of the machine; for the machine has no value except by virtue of what it produces, and so man exists only by virtue of what he does, and not of what he is; but a man defined by action is no longer man, he is a beaver or an ant.

In the same line of thought, attention must be drawn to the current search for false absolutes of all planes, whence the silly theatricality of modern artists; ancient man, who had a sense of the relativity of values and who put everything in its place, appears to be mediocre by comparison, easily satisfied and hypocritical. The mystical fervour that is a part of human nature is deflected from its normal objects and squandered on absurdities; it is put into a still life or a play, when it is not applied to the trivialities which characterise the reign of the machine and of the masses.

Independently of doctrinal atheism and of cultural peculiarities, modern man moves in the world as if existence were nothing, or as if he had invented it; in his eyes it is a commonplace thing like the dust beneath his feet—more especially as he has no consciousness of the Principle at once transcendent and immanent—and he makes use of it with assurance and inadvertence in a life that has been de-consecrated into meaninglessness. Everything is conceived through the haze of a tissue of contingencies, relationships, prejudices; no phenomenon is any longer considered in itself, in its being, and grasped at its root; the contingent has usurped the rank of the absolute;

⁸ There are Catholics who do not hesitate to hold such views about the Greek Fathers and the Scholastics, doubtless in order to compensate a certain “inferiority complex”.

⁹ In reality God is indeed not “existent” in the sense that He cannot be brought down to the level of the existence of things. In order to make it clear that this reservation implies no kind of privation it would be better to say that God is “non-inexistent”.

¹⁰ In any case the idea is restricted to the field of perception of the world and of things, and is therefore quite indirect.

¹¹ It is forgotten that the sages or philosophers who have determined the intellectual life of mankind for hundreds or thousands of years—the Prophets not being now under consideration—were in no way “dedicated to action”, or rather that their “dedication” was in their work, which is fully sufficient; to think otherwise is to seek to reduce intelligence or contemplation to action, and that comes well into line with existentialism.

man scarcely reasons any more except in terms of his imagination falsified by ideologies on the one hand and by his artificial surroundings on the other. But the eschatological doctrines, however exaggerated they may appear to the sensibilities of those whose only Gospel is their own materialism and dissipation and whose life is nothing but a flight before God, are in fact a true yardstick for man's cosmic situation; what the Revelations ask of us and what Heaven imposes or inflicts on us is what we are in reality, whether we think so or not; we know it in our heart of hearts, if only we can detach ourselves a little from the monstrous accumulation of false images entrenched in our minds. What we need is to become once again capable of grasping the value of existence and, amid the multitude of phenomena, the meaning of man; we must once again find the measure of the real! The degree of our understanding of man can be measured by our reactions to what religions teach, or to what our own religion teaches, about the hereafter.

There is something in man which can conceive the Absolute and even attain it and which, in consequence, is absolute. On this basis one can assess the extent of the aberration of those to whom it seems perfectly natural to have the right or the chance to be man, but who wish to be man without participating in the integral nature of man and the attitudes it implies. Needless to say, the possibility of denying itself, paradoxical though it appears, is also a part of human nature—for to be man is to be free in a “relatively absolute” sense—much in the same way as it is humanly possible to accept error or to throw oneself into an abyss.

It has already been pointed out that “unbelievers” no longer have the sense either of nothingness or of existence, that they no longer know the value of existence, and never look at it in relation to the nothingness from which it is miraculously detached. Miracles in the usual sense of the word are in effect only particular variants of this initial miracle—everywhere present—the miracle of the fact of existence; the miraculous and the divine are everywhere; it is the truly human outlook that is absent.

When all is said and done there are only three miracles: existence, life, intelligence; with intelligence, the curve springing from God closes on itself, like a ring which in reality has never been parted from the Infinite.

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When the modern world is contrasted with traditional civilizations, it is not simply a question of seeking the good things and the bad things on one side or the other; good and evil are everywhere, so that it is essentially a question of knowing on which side the more important good, and on which side the lesser evil, is to be found. If someone says that such and such a good exists outside tradition, the answer is: no doubt, but one must choose the most important good, and it is necessarily represented by tradition; and if someone says that in tradition there exists such and such an evil, the answer is: no doubt, but one must choose the lesser evil, and again it is tradition that embodies it. It is illogical to prefer an evil which involves some benefits to a good which involves some evils.

Nevertheless, to confine oneself to admiring the traditional worlds is still to stop short at a fragmentary point of view, for every civilisation is a “two-edged sword”; it is a total good only by virtue of those invisible elements that determine it positively. In certain respects, every human society is bad; if its transcendent character is wholly eliminated—which amounts to dehumanizing it since an element of transcendence is essential to man though always dependent on his free consent—then the whole justification of society's existence is removed at the same time, and there remains only an ant-heap, in no way superior to any other ant-heap, since the needs

of life and in consequence the right to life remain everywhere the same, whether the life be that of men or of insects. It is one of the most pernicious of errors to believe, firstly, that the human collectivity as such represents an unconditional or absolute value, and secondly that the well-being of this collectivity represents any such value or any such end in itself.

Religious civilisations, regarded as social phenomena and independently of their intrinsic value—though there is no sharp dividing line between the two—are, despite their inevitable imperfections, like sea-walls built to stem the rising tide of worldliness, of error, of subversion, of the fall and its perpetual renewal. The fall is more and more invasive, but it will be conquered in its turn by the final irruption of the divine fire, that very fire of which the religions are and always have been the earthly crystallizations. The rejection of the traditional religious frameworks on account of human abuses amounts to an assertion that the founders of religion did not know what they were doing, as well as that abuses are not inherent in human nature, and that they are therefore avoidable even in societies counting millions of men, and that they are avoidable through purely human means; no more flagrant contradiction than this could well be imagined.

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In a certain sense, Adam's sin was a sin arising from inquisitiveness, if such an expression be admissible. Originally, Adam saw contingencies in the aspect of their relationship to God and not as independent entities. Anything that is considered in that relationship is beyond the reach of evil; but the desire to see contingency as it is in itself is a desire to see evil; it is also a desire to see good as something contrary to evil. As a result of this sin of inquisitiveness—Adam wanted to see the other side” of contingency—Adam himself and the whole world fell into contingency as such; the link with the divine Source was broken and became invisible; the world became suddenly external to Adam, things became opaque and heavy, they became like unintelligible and hostile fragments. This drama is always repeating itself anew, in collective history as well as in the life of individuals.

A meaningless knowledge, a knowledge to which we have no right either by virtue of its nature, or of our capacities, and therefore by virtue of our vocation, is not a knowledge that enriches, but one that impoverishes. Adam had become poor after having acquired knowledge of contingency as such, or of contingency in so far as it limits.¹² We must distrust the fascination which an abyss can exert over us; it is in the nature of cosmic blind-alleys to seduce and to play the vampire; the current of forms does not want us to escape from its hold. Forms can be snares just as they can be symbols and keys; beauty can chain us to forms, just as it can also be a door opening towards the formless.

Or again, from a slightly different point of view: the sin of Adam consists in effect of having wished to superimpose something on existence, and existence was beatitude; Adam thereby lost this beatitude and was engulfed in the anxious and deceptive turmoil of

¹² A *hadith* says: “I seek refuge with God in the face of a science which is of no use to me”, and another: “One of the claims to nobility of a Moslem rests on not paying attention to what is not his concern”. Man must remain in primordial innocence, and not seek to know the universe in detail. This thirst for knowledge—as the Buddha said—holds man to the *samsara*.

superfluous things.¹³ Instead of reposing in the immutable purity of Existence, fallen man is drawn into the dance of things that exist, and they, being accidents, are delusive and perishable. In the Christian cosmos, the Blessed Virgin is the incarnation of this snow-like purity; She is inviolable and merciful like Existence or Substance; God in assuming flesh brought with Him Existence, which is as it were His Throne; He caused it to precede Him and He came into the world by its means. God can enter the world only through virgin Existence.

* * *

The problem of the fall evokes the problem of the universal theophany, the problem that the world presents. The fall is only one particular link in this process; moreover it is not everywhere presented as a “shortcoming” but in certain myths it takes the form of an event unconnected with human or angelic responsibility. If there is a cosmos, a universal manifestation, there must also be a fall or falls, for to say “manifestation” is to say “other than God” and “separation”.

On earth, the divine Sun is veiled; as a result the measures of things become relative, and man can take himself for what he is not, and things can appear to be what they are not; but once the veil is torn, at the time of that birth which we call death, the divine Sun appears; measures become absolute; beings and things become what they are and follow the ways of their true nature.

This does not mean that the divine measures do not reach this world, but they are as it were “filtered” by its existential shell; previously they were absolute but they become relative, hence the floating and indeterminate character of things on earth. The star which is our sun is none other than Being seen through this carapace; in our microcosm the Sun is represented by the heart.¹⁴ It is because we live in all respects in such a carapace that we have need—that we may know who we are and whither we are going—of that cosmic cleavage which constitutes Revelation; and it could be pointed out in this connection that the Absolute never consents to become relative in a total and uninterrupted manner.

In the fall, and in its repercussions through duration, we see the element of “absoluteness” finally devoured by the element of “contingency”; it is in the nature of the sun to be devoured by the night, just as it is in the nature of light to “shine in the darkness” and not to be “comprehended”. Numerous myths express this cosmic fatality, inscribed in the very nature of what could be called the “reign of the demiurge”.

The prototype of the fall is in fact the process of universal manifestation. The ideas of manifestation, projection, “alienation”,

¹³ Compare: “You are dominated by the desire to possess more and more”. (Koran cii. x.)

¹⁴ And the moon is the brain, which is identified macrocosmically— if the sun is Being—with the central reflection of the Principle in manifestation, a reflection susceptible to “waxing and waning” in accordance with its contingent nature and therefore also with cyclic contingencies. These correspondences are of great complexity—a single element can take on various significations—they can therefore only be mentioned in passing. It is sufficient to add that the sun itself also of necessity represents the divine Spirit manifested, and that it is on this account that it must “wane” in setting and “wax” in rising; it gives light and heat because it is the Principle, and it sets because it is but the manifestation of the Principle; the moon from this point of view is the peripheral reflection of that manifestation. Christ is the sun, and the Church is the moon; “it is expedient for you that I go away” (John xvi. 7) but the “Son of man will come again”.

gress, imply those of regression, reintegration, return, apocatastasis; the error of the materialists—whatever subtleties they may employ in seeking to dissolve the conventional and now “obsolete” idea of matter—is to take matter as their starting point as if it were a primordial and stable fact, whereas it is only a movement, a sort of transitory contraction of a substance that is in itself inaccessible to our senses. The matter we know, with all that it comprises, is derived from a suprasensory and eminently plastic protomatter; it is in this protomatter that the primordial terrestrial being is reflected and incarnated”; in Hinduism this truth is affirmed in the myth of the sacrifice of *Purusha*. Because of the tendency to segmentation inherent in this protomatter, the divine image was broken and diversified; but creatures were still, not individuals who tear one another to pieces, but contemplative states derived from angelic models and, through those models, from divine Names. It is in this sense that it could be said that in Paradise sheep lived side by side with lions; but in such a case only “hermaphrodite” prototypes—of supra-sensory spherical form—are in question, divine possibilities issuing from the qualities of “clemency” and of “rigour”, of “beauty” and of “strength”, of “wisdom” and of “joy”. In this proto-material *hyle* occurred the creation of species and of man, a creation resembling the “sudden crystallization of a supersaturated chemical solution”¹⁵ After the “creation of Eve”—the bipolarization of the primordial “androgyné”—there occurred the “fall”, namely the “exteriorization” of the human couple, which brought in its train—since in the subtle and luminous protomatter everything was bound together and as one—the exteriorization or the “materialization” of all other earthly creatures, and thus also their “crystallization” in sensible, heavy, opaque and mortal matter.

Plato in his *Symposium* recalls the tradition that the human body, or even simply any living body, is like half a sphere; all our faculties and movements look and tend towards a lost centre—which we feel as if “in front” of us—lost, but found again symbolically and indirectly, in sexual union. But the outcome is only a grievous renewal of the drama: a fresh entry of the spirit into matter. The opposite sex is only a symbol: the true centre is hidden in ourselves, in the heart-intellect. The creature recognizes something of the lost centre in his partner; the love which results from it is like a remote shadow of the love of God, and of the intrinsic beatitude of God; it is also a shadow of the knowledge which consumes forms as by fire and which unites and delivers.

The whole cosmogonic process is found again, in static mode, in man: we are made of matter, that is to say of sensible density and of “solidification”, but at the centre of our being is the suprasensible and transcendent reality, which is at once infinitely fulminating and infinitely peaceful. To believe that matter is the “alpha” which gave to everything its beginning amounts to asserting that our body is the starting point of our soul, and that therefore the origin of our *ego*, our intelligence and our thoughts is in our bones, our muscles, our organs. In reality, if God is the “omega”, He is of necessity also the “alpha”, on pain of absurdity. The cosmos is a “message from God to Himself by Himself” as the Sufis would say, and God is “the First and the Last”, and not the Last only. There is a sort of “emanation”, but it is strictly discontinuous because of the transcendence of the Principle and the essential incommensurability of the degrees of reality; emanationism, on the contrary, is based on the idea of a continuity such as would not allow the Principle to remain unaffected by manifestation. It has been said that the visible universe is an explosion and consequently a dispersion starting from a mysterious centre; what is certain is that the total Universe, the greater part of which is invisible to us in principle and not solely *de*

¹⁵ An expression used by Guénon in speaking of the realization of the supreme Identity”. It is possible to consider deification as resembling—in the inverse direction—its antipodes, creation.

facto, describes some such movement—in an abstract or symbolical sense—and arrives finally at the deadpoint of its expansion; this point is determined, first by relativity in general and secondly by the initial possibilities of the cycle in question. The living being itself resembles a crystallized explosion, if one can put it in that way; it is as if the being had been turned to crystal by fear in the face of God.

* * *

Man, having shut himself off from access to Heaven and having several times repeated, within ever narrower limits, his initial fall, has ended by Losing his intuition of everything that surpasses himself. He has thus sunk below his own true nature, for one cannot be fully man except by way of God, and the earth is beautiful only by virtue of its link with Heaven. Even when man retains belief, he forgets more and more what the ultimate demands of religion are; he is astonished at the calamities of this world, without its occurring to him that they may be acts of grace, since they rend, like death, the veil of earthly illusion, and thus allow man “to die before death”, and so to conquer death.

Many people imagine that purgatory or hell are for those who have killed, stolen, lied, committed fornication and so on, and that it suffices to have abstained from these actions to merit Heaven. In reality, the soul is consigned to the flames for not having loved God, or for not having loved Him enough; this is understandable enough in the light of the supreme Law of the Bible: to love God with all our faculties and all our being. An absence of this love¹⁶ does not necessarily involve murder or lying or some other transgression, but it does necessarily involve indifference;¹⁷ and indifference, which is the most generally widespread of faults, is the very hallmark of the fall. It is possible for the indifferent¹⁸ not to be criminals, but it is impossible for them to be saints; it is they who go in by the “wide gate” and follow the “broad way”, and it is of them that the book of Revelation says “So then because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spue thee out of my mouth” (Rev. iii. i6). Indifference towards truth and towards God borders on presumption and is not free from hypocrisy; its seeming harmlessness is full of complacency and arrogance; in this state of soul, the individual is contented with himself, even if he accuses himself of minor faults and appears modest, which in fact commits him to nothing but on the contrary reinforces his illusion of being virtuous. It is this criterion of indifference that makes it and for the most surreptitious and insidious of vices to be as it were taken by the throat, and for every man to have his poverty and distress proved to him; in short, it is indifference that is “original sin”, or its most general manifestation.

Indifference is diametrically opposed to spiritual impassibility or to contempt of vanities, as well as to humility. True humility is to know that we can add nothing to God and that, even if we possessed all possible perfections and had accomplished the most extraordinary works, our disappearance would take nothing away from the Eternal.

¹⁶ It is not exclusively a question of a *bhakti*, of an affective and sacrificial way, but simply of the fact of preferring God to the world, whatever may be the mode of this preference; “love” in the Scriptures consequently embraces also the sapiential ways.

¹⁷ Fénelon was right to see in indifference the gravest of the soul’s ills.

¹⁸ The *ghafilun* of the Koran.

Even believers themselves are for the most part too indifferent to feel concretely that God is not only “above” us, in “Heaven”, but also “ahead” of us, at the end of the world, or even simply at the end of our own lives; that we are drawn through life by an inexorable force and that at the end of the course God awaits us; that the world will be submerged and swallowed up one day by an unimaginable irruption of the purely miraculous—unimaginable because surpassing all human experience and standards of measurement. Man cannot possibly draw on his past to bear witness to anything of the kind, any more than a may-fly can expatiate on the alternation of the seasons; the rising of the sun can in no way enter into the habitual sensations of a creature born at midnight whose life will last but a day; the sudden appearance of the orb of the sun, unforeseeable by reference to any analogous phenomenon that had occurred during the long hours of darkness, would seem like an unheard of apocalyptic prodigy. And it is thus that God will come. There will be nothing but this one advent, this one presence, and by it the world of experiences will be shattered.

* * *

In man stamped with the fall, not only has action priority over contemplation, but it even abolishes contemplation. Normally, the alternative ought not to be in evidence, contemplation being in its essential nature neither allied to action nor at enmity with it; but fallen man is precisely not “normal” man in the absolute sense. One could also say that in certain contexts there is harmony between contemplation and action whereas in other contexts there is opposition; but any such opposition is extrinsic and quite accidental. There is harmony in the sense that in principle nothing can be opposed to contemplation—this is the initial thesis of the Bhagavad Gita—and there is opposition in so far as their respective planes differ; just as it is impossible to contemplate a nearby object and at the same time the distant Landscape behind it, so too it is impossible—in this connection alone—to contemplate and to act at the same time.¹⁹

Fallen man is man led on by action and imprisoned by it, and that is why he is also sinful man; the moral alternative arises less from action than from the exclusivism of action, that is to say, from individualism with its illusion of being situated in a “territory” other than the “territory” of God; action becomes in a sense autonomous and totalitarian, whereas it ought to be fitted into a divine context, in a state of innocence wherein the separation of action from contemplation could not take place.

Fallen man is simultaneously squeezed and torn assunder by two pseudo-absolutes: the ponderous “I” and the dissipating “thing”, the subject and the object, the *ego* and the world. As soon as he wakes up in the morning man remembers who he is; and straightway he thinks of one thing or another; between *ego* and object there is a link, which is usually action, so that a ternary is implicit in the phrase: “I—do—this” or, what amounts to the same thing: “I—want—this”. *Ego*, act and thing are in effect three idols, three screens

¹⁹ This is what the tragedy of Hamlet expresses: facts and actions, and the exigencies of action were inescapable, but Shakespeare’s hero saw through it all, he saw only principles or ideas; he plunged into things as into a morass; their very vanity, or their unreality, prevented him from acting, dissolved his action; he had before him, not this or that evil, but evil as such, and he broke himself against the inconsistency, the absurdity, the incomprehensibility of the world. Contemplation either removes action to a distance by causing the objects of action to disappear, or it renders action perfect by making God appear in the agent. The contemplativity of Hamlet had unmasked the world, but it was not yet fixed in God; it was as it were suspended between two planes of reality. In a certain sense, the drama of Hamlet is that of the *nox profunda*: it is also perhaps, in a more outward sense, the drama of the contemplative who is forced to action, but has no vocation for it; it is in any case a drama of profundity faced with the unintelligibility of the human comedy.

hiding the Absolute; the sage is one who puts the Absolute in the place of these three terms; it is God within him who is the transcendent and real Personality, and is hence the Principle of his “I”.²⁰ His act is then the affirmation of God, in the widest sense, and his object is again God;²¹ it is this that is realized, in the most direct way possible, by quintessential prayer²² or concentration, which embraces, virtually or effectively, the whole life and the whole world. In a more external and more general sense, every man ought to see the three elements “subject”, “act” and “object” in God, as far as he is enabled to do so through his gifts and through grace.

Fallen man is a fragmentary being, and therein lies a danger of deviation; for to be fragmentary is, strictly speaking, to lack equilibrium. In Hindu terms, one would say that primordial man, *hamsa*, was still without caste; the *brahmana* however does not correspond exactly to the *hamsa*, he is only the uppermost fragment of the *hamsa*, otherwise he would by definition possess to the full the qualification of the warrior-king, the *kshatriya*, which is not the case; but every *Avatara* is necessarily *hamsa*, and so is every “living liberated one”, every *jivan-mukta*.

A parenthesis may be permissible at this point. Mention has often been made elsewhere of the “naturally supernatural” transcendence of the Intellect; now one must not lose sight of the fact that this transcendence can act without impediment only on condition that it is framed by two supplementary elements, one human and the other divine, namely virtue and grace. “Virtue” in this sense is not equivalent to the natural qualities which of necessity accompany a high degree of intellectuality and contemplativity, it is a conscious and permanent striving after perfection, and perfection is essentially self-effacement, generosity and love of truth; “grace” in this sense is the divine aid which man must implore and without which he can do nothing, whatever his gifts; for a gift serves no purpose if it be not blessed by God.²³ The Intellect is infallible in itself, but this does not prevent the human receptacle from being subject to contingencies which, though they cannot modify the intrinsic nature of intelligence, can none the less be opposed to its full actualization and to the purity of its radiance.

With that in mind, let us return to the problem of action. The process of the fall, and even its results as well, are repeated on a reduced scale in every external or internal act which is contrary to the universal harmony, or to any reflection of that harmony, such as a sacred Law. The man who has sinned has, in the first place, allowed himself to be seduced, and in the second place has ceased to be what he was before; he is as it were branded by the sin, and he is so of necessity, since every act must bear its fruit; every sin is a fall, and that being so it is also “the fall”. Within the general conception of “sin”, distinctions must be made between a “relative” or extrinsic sin, an “absolute”²⁴ or intrinsic sin, and a sin of intention. Sin is “relative” when it contravenes only some specific system of morality—such as polygamy in the case of Christians or wine in the case of Muslims—but then, by the very fact of this contravention, it amounts in effect for those concerned to “absolute sin”, as is proved by the sanctions for the hereafter pronounced by the respective

²⁰ “The Christ in me”, as St. Paul would say.

²¹ This corresponds to the Sufi ternary “one who invokes, the invocation, the One who is invoked” (*dhakir, dhikr, Madhkur*).

²² Such as the *japa* of the Hindus, the *dhikr* of the mystics of Islam, or the Jesus prayer of the Hesychasts.

²³ In certain disciplines it is the *guru* who acts on behalf of God; the result in practice is the same, if account be taken of the conditions—and the imponderables—of the spiritual climate in question.

²⁴ Needless to say, the word “absolute” when used in connection with sin is synonymous with “mortal”, it can have no more than a purely provisional and indicative function when, as in the present case, the ground it covers falls entirely within the actual framework of contingency.

Revelations; none the less, certain “relative sins” can become legitimate— within the very framework of the Law which they contravene—under certain special circumstances; such, for example, is the case with killing in war. Sin is “absolute” or intrinsic when it is contrary to every code of morality and is excluded in all circumstances, like blasphemy, or contempt for truth. As for the sin of intention, it is externally in conformity with a particular code or with all codes of morality, but internally opposed to the divine Nature, like hypocrisy for example. “Sin” is thus defined as an act which, firstly, is opposed to the divine Nature in one or another of its forms or modes (the reference here is to the Divine Qualities and the intrinsic virtues which reflect them) and which, secondly, engenders in principle posthumous suffering; it does so “in principle”, but not always in fact, for repentance and positive acts on the one hand and the divine Mercy on the other efface sins, or can efface them. A “code of morality” in this sense is a sacred Legislation in so far as it ordains certain actions and prohibits certain others, independently of the depth or subtlety with which a particular doctrine may define its laws in other respects. This reservation is necessary because India and the Far East have conceptions of “transgression” and “Law” more finely shaded than those of the Semitic and European west, in the sense that, broadly speaking, in the East the compensatory virtue of knowledge is taken into account; it is “the lustral water without equal”, as the Hindus say; and in the sense that intention plays a much more important part than most Westerners imagine, so that it can even happen, for example, that a *guru* should ordain, provisionally and with a view to some particular operation of spiritual alchemy,²⁵ actions which, while damaging no one, are contrary to the Law;²⁶ but none the less a Legislation does comprise a code of morality, and man as such is so made that he distinguishes, rightly or wrongly, between a “good” and an “evil”, that is to say his perspective is of necessity fragmentary and analytical. Moreover, the statement that certain acts are opposed to the “divine Nature” is made with the reservation that metaphysically nothing can be opposed to that Nature; Islam expresses this when it affirms that nothing can be separated from the divine Will, not even sin;²⁷ such ideas are not unconnected with non-Semitic perspectives, which always insist strongly on the relativity of phenomena, and on the variability of definitions to accord with different aspects of truth.

It is this essential and as it were supra-formal conception of sin which explains how in a tradition remaining “archaic” and therefore to a large extent “inarticulate”, like Shinto for example, an elaborated doctrine of sin is absent; the rules of purity are the supports of a primordial synthetic virtue, superior to actions and considered as conferring on them a spiritual quality. Whereas Semitic morals start from action—outside esoterism at any rate—and seem to confine virtue to the realm of action and even to define it in terms of action, the moral code of Shinto and analogous codes²⁸ take an interior and global virtue as their starting-point and do not see acts as independent and self-contained crystallizations; it is only *a posteriori* and as a consequence of the “externalizing” influence of time, that the need for a more analytical code of morality could make itself felt.

²⁵ Islam is not ignorant of this point of view, witness the Koranic story of the mysterious sage scandalizing his disciples by actions with a secret intention, but externally illegal.

²⁶ Or more precisely to the “prescriptions”, such as exist in Hinduism and, in the West, especially in Judaism; there can be no question of infingements such as would seriously harm the collectivity.

²⁷ Christianity also admits this idea because it could not do otherwise, but puts less emphasis on it.

²⁸ One might well wonder whether “morality” is really the right word here, but that is a matter of terminology which is of little importance when the context admits of no misunderstanding.

Sin, as has been said, retraces the fall. But sin is not the only thing that retraces it in the realm of human attitudes and activities; there are also factors much more subtle and at the same time less serious, which intervene in a well-regulated life, and are connected with the kind of spiritual influences the Arabs call *barakah*; these factors become perhaps increasingly important as the spiritual aim becomes higher. They are connected, on the most diverse levels, with the choice of things or of situations; with the intuition of the spiritual quality of forms, gestures, morally neutral actions; their domain is connected with symbolism, aesthetics, with the significance of materials, proportions, movements, in short with everything which in a sacred art, a liturgy, a protocol, has meaning and importance. From a certain point of view, all this might seem negligible, but it is no longer at all so when one thinks of the “handling of spiritual influences”—if this expression be allowable—and when one takes account of the fact that there are forms which attract the presences of angels while there are others which repel them; in the same line of thought, one can say that, in addition to obligation, there is also a kind of courtesy towards Heaven. Things have their cosmic relationships and their perfumes, and all things ought to retain something of a recollection of Paradise; life must be lived according to the forms and rhythms of primordial innocence and not according to those of the fall. To act according to *barakah* is to act in conformity with a kind of “divine aesthetic”; it is an external application of the “discerning of spirits” or of the “science of humours” (*ilm el-khawatir* in Arabic) as well as also of a geometry and of a music at once sacred and universal. Everything has a meaning and everything signifies something; to feel this and to conform to it is to avoid many errors that reason could not by itself prevent. Sacred art, which depends on this science of *barakah*, enfolds and penetrates the whole of human existence in traditional civilizations, and even constitutes all that is understood in our days by “culture”, at least so far as those civilizations are concerned; but without this science of “benedictions” sacred art and all the forms of courtesy would remain unintelligible and would have no sense nor value whatever.

What matters to the man who is virtually liberated from the fall is to remain in holy infancy. In a certain sense, Adam and Eve were “children” before the fall and became “adult” only through it and after it; the adult age in fact reflects the reign of the fall; old age, in which the passions are silenced, once again draws near to infancy and to Paradise, at any rate in normal spiritual conditions. The innocence and confidence of the very young must be combined with the detachment and resignation of the old; the two ages rejoin one another in contemplativity, and then in nearness to God: infancy is “still” close to Him, old age is so “already”. The child can find his happiness in a flower, and so can the old man; the extremes meet, and life’s spiral becomes a circle as its ends are brought together once more in the divine Mercy.