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ORIENTAL METAPHYSICS*

René Guénon

For the subject of this essay I have taken Oriental metaphysics. Perhaps it would have been better to have said simply metaphysics unqualified, for in truth, pure metaphysics being essentially above and beyond all form and all contingency is neither Eastern nor Western but universal. The exterior forms with which it is covered only serve the necessities of exposition, to express whatever is expressible. These forms may be Eastern or Western; but under the appearance of diversity there is always a basis of unity, at least, wherever true metaphysics exists, for the simple reason that truth is one.

If this be so, what need is there to deal specifically with Oriental metaphysics? The reason is that in the present intellectual state of the Western world metaphysics is a thing forgotten, generally ignored, and almost entirely lost, while in the East it still remains the object of effective knowledge. Thus it is to the East that one must look if one wishes to discover the true meaning of metaphysics; or even if one's wish is to recover some of the metaphysical traditions formerly existing in a West which was in many respects much closer to the East than it is today, it is above all with the help of Oriental doctrines and by comparison with them that one may succeed, since these are the only doctrines in the domain of metaphysics which can still be studied directly. As for these, however, it is quite clear that they must be studied as the Orientals themselves study them and one must certainly not indulge in more or less hypothetical interpretations which may sometimes be quite imaginary; it is too often forgotten that Eastern civilizations still exist and still have qualified representatives from whom it is possible to enquire in order to discover the exact truth about the subject in question.

I have said "Eastern metaphysics" and not merely Hindu metaphysics, for doctrines of this order, with all they imply, are not only to be found in India, as some people believe who, moreover, barely

* Editor's Note: The text of a lecture given at the Sorbonne in Paris on 12 December, 1925.

grasp their true nature. The case of India is by no means exceptional in this respect; it is precisely that of all civilizations which possess what might be termed a traditional basis. On the contrary, what are exceptional and abnormal are civilizations without such a basis, and to tell the truth, the only one known to us is that of the modern West. To take only the principal Eastern civilizations: the equivalent of Hindu metaphysics is found in China (in Taoism) and is also to be found elsewhere in certain esoteric schools of Islam; it should be understood, however, that this Islamic esotericism has nothing in common with the overt philosophy of the Arabs, which is for the most part Greek-inspired. The only difference is that except in India these doctrines are reserved for a relatively restricted and closed elite. This was also the case in the West in the Middle Ages, in an esotericism comparable in many respects to that of Islam and as purely metaphysical as the Islamic one; of this the moderns, for the most part, do not even suspect the existence. In India it is not possible to speak of esotericism in the true sense of the word, because there is no doctrinal dualism of exoteric and esoteric; it can only be a matter of natural esotericism, in the sense that each goes more or less deeply into the doctrine and more or less far according to the measure of his abilities, since there are, for certain individualities, limitations which are inherent in their own nature, and which it is impossible to overcome.

Naturally, forms differ from one civilization to another; but though more accustomed myself to the Hindu forms, I have no scruple in employing others when necessary, if they can contribute to the understanding of certain points; there are no objections to this since they are only different expressions of the same thing. Once again, truth is one, and it is the same for all those who, by whatever way, have attained to its understanding.

This said, it should be made clear in what sense the word "metaphysics" is used, all the more so since I have frequently had occasion to state that everyone does not understand it in the same way. I think the best course to take with words that can give rise to ambiguity is to reduce them, as far as possible, to their primary and etymological meaning. Now, according to its composition, this word "metaphysics" means literally "beyond physics," taking the word "physics" in the accepted meaning it always had for the ancients, that is as the "science of nature" in its widest sense. Physics is the study of all which appertains to the domain of nature; metaphysics, on the other hand, is the study of what lies beyond nature. How then can

some claim that metaphysical knowledge is natural knowledge, either in respect of its object, or with regard to the faculties by which it is obtained? There we have a complete misconception, a contradiction in terms; and, what is more amazing, this confusion affects even those who should preserve some idea of the true metaphysics and know how to distinguish it clearly from the pseudo-metaphysics of modern philosophers.

But, one might say, if this word "metaphysics" gives rise to such confusion, would it not be better to abandon it and substitute something more suitable? Plainly, this would not be advisable, since, by its formation, this word meets the exact requirements; also it is hardly possible, since Western languages have no other word equally adapted to this usage. Simply to use the word "knowledge," as is done in India, because this is indeed knowledge *par excellence* and that which alone can be dignified by that name, is out of the question, for it would only make things more confusing for Occidentals who habitually associate knowledge with nothing beyond the scientific and rational. Also is it necessary to concern ourselves with the abuse to which a word is put? If we rejected all such, what would be left? Is it not sufficient to take precautions to avoid misunderstandings and misrepresentations? We are not any more enamored of the word "metaphysics" than of any other, but since a better term cannot be suggested to replace it we will continue to use it as before.

Unfortunately one comes across people who claim to "judge" that which they do not know, and who, because they apply the name "metaphysics" to a purely human and rational knowledge (which for us is only science or philosophy), imagine that Oriental metaphysics is no more and no other than that; from which they arrive logically at the conclusion that this metaphysics cannot in reality lead to any particular results. They fail to see that it is an effective guide just because it is something quite other than they suppose. What they envisage has really nothing to do with metaphysics since it is only knowledge of a natural order, an outward and profane scholarship; it is not of this that we wish to speak. Can one then make "metaphysical" synonymous with "supernatural"? We are prepared to accept such an analogy, since if one does not go beyond nature, that is to say the manifest world in its entirety (and not only the world of the senses, which is only an infinitesimal part of it), one is still in the realm of the physical. Metaphysics is, as we have already said, that which lies beyond and above nature; hence it can properly be described as "supernatural."

But an objection will undoubtedly be raised here: Is it possible to go beyond nature? We do not hesitate to answer plainly: Not only is it possible, but it is a fact. Again it might be said, is this not merely an assertion; what proofs thereof can be adduced? It is truly strange that proof is demanded concerning the possibility of a kind of knowledge instead of searching for it and verifying it for one's self by undertaking the work necessary for its acquisition. For those who possess this knowledge, what interest can there be in all this discussion? Substituting a "theory of knowledge" for knowledge itself is perhaps the greatest admission of impotence in modern philosophy.

Moreover, all certitude contains something incommunicable. Nobody can truly attain to any knowledge other than by a strictly personal effort; all that one can do for another is to offer him the opportunity and indicate the means by which to attain the same knowledge. That is why it would be vain to attempt to impose any belief in the purely intellectual realm; the best argument in the world could not in this respect replace direct and effective knowledge.

Now, is it possible to define metaphysics as we understand it? No, for to define is always to limit, and that with which we are concerned is, in itself, truly and absolutely unlimited and cannot be confined to any formula or any system. Metaphysics might be partly described, for example, by saying that it is the knowledge of universal principles, but that is not a definition in the proper sense, and only conveys a rough idea. Something can be added by saying that the scope of these principles is far greater than was thought by some Occidentals who, although really studying metaphysics, did so in a partial and incomplete way. Thus when Aristotle envisages metaphysics as a knowledge of being *qua* being, he identifies it with ontology, that is to say he takes the part for the whole. For Oriental metaphysics, pure being is neither the first nor the most universal principle, for it is already a determination. It is thus necessary to go beyond being, and it is this which is of the greatest significance. That is why, in all true metaphysical conceptions it is necessary to take into account the inexpressible: just as everything that can be expressed is literally nothing in comparison with that which surpasses expression, so the finite, whatever its magnitude, is nothing when faced with the Infinite. One can hint at much more than can be expressed, and this is the part played by exterior forms. All forms, whether it is a matter of words or symbols, only act as a support, a fulcrum for rising to possibilities of conception which far outstrip them; we will return to this later.

We speak of metaphysical conceptions for lack of any other term whereby to make ourselves understood, but it is not to be concluded from this that there is here something comparable to scientific or philosophic conceptions; it is not a question of any "abstractions," but of attaining an intuitive and immediate supra-rational knowledge. This pure intellectual intuition, without which there is no true metaphysics, has, moreover, no connection with the intuition spoken of by certain contemporary philosophers, which is, on the contrary, infra-rational. There is an intellectual intuition and a sensible intuition; one lies beyond reason, but the other is situated on its hither side; the latter can only know the world of changing and becoming, that is to say nature, or rather, an inferior part of nature. The domain of intuition, on the contrary, is the province of eternal and immutable principles; it is the realm of metaphysics.

To comprehend universal principles directly the transcendent intellect must itself be of the universal order; it is no longer an individual faculty, and to consider it as such would be contradictory, as it is not within the power of the individual to go beyond his own limits and leave the conditions which limit him *qua* individual. Reason is a specifically human faculty, but that which lies beyond reason is truly "non-human"; it is this which makes metaphysical knowledge possible, and that knowledge, one must again emphasize, is not a human knowledge. In other words, it is not as man that man can attain it, but because this being which is human in one of its aspects is at the same time something other and more than a human being. It is the attainment of effective consciousness of supra-individual states which is the real object of metaphysics, or better still, of metaphysical knowledge itself. We come here to one of the most vital points, and it is necessary to repeat that if the individual were a complete being, if he made up a closed system like the monad of Leibnitz, metaphysics would not be possible; irremediably confined in himself, this being would have no means of knowing anything outside his own mode of existence. But such is not the case; in reality the individuality represents nothing more than a transitory and contingent manifestation of the real being. It is only one particular state amongst an indefinite multitude of other states of the same being; and this being is, in itself, absolutely independent of all its manifestations, just as, to use an illustration which occurs frequently in Hindu texts, the sun is absolutely independent of the manifold images in which it is reflected. Such is the fundamental distinction between "Self" and "I," the personality and the individuality; as the images are

connected by the luminous rays with their solar source, without which they would have neither existence nor reality, so the individuality, either of the human individual or of any other similar state of manifestation, is bound by the personality to the principial center of being by this transcendent intellect of which we are speaking. It is impossible, within the limits of this exposition, to develop these lines of thought more completely, or to give a more exact idea of the theory of multiple states of being;* but I think I have said enough to show the extreme importance of all truly metaphysical doctrine.

I said "theory," but here it is not a question of theory alone; this is a point which needs further explanation. Theoretical knowledge, which is only indirect and in some sense symbolic, is merely a preparation, though indispensable, for true knowledge. It is, moreover, the only knowledge which is communicable, even then only in a partial sense. That is why all statements are no more than a means of approaching knowledge, and this knowledge, which is in the first place only virtual, must later be effectively realized. Here we find another discrepancy in the more limited metaphysics to which we referred earlier, for example that of Aristotle. This remains theoretically inadequate in that it limits itself to being, and its theory seems to be presented as self-sufficient instead of being expressly bound up with a corresponding realization, as is the case in all Oriental doctrines. However, even in this imperfect metaphysics (we might be tempted to say this demi-metaphysics), sometimes statements are encountered which, if properly understood, would lead to totally different conclusions; thus, did not Aristotle specifically state that a being is all that it knows? This affirmation of identification through knowledge is the same in principle as metaphysical realization. But here the principle remains isolated; it has no value other than that of a merely theoretical statement, it carries no weight, and it seems that, having propounded it, one thinks no more about it. How was it that Aristotle himself and his followers failed to see all that here was implied? It is the same in many other cases, where apparently other equally essential things are forgotten, such as the distinction between pure intellect and reason, even after having defined them quite explicitly; these are strange omissions. Should one see in this the effect of certain limitations inherent in the Occidental mind, apart from some rare but always possible exceptions? This might

* Editor's Note: See Guénon's later work dedicated to this subject, *The Multiple States of Being* (New York: Larson, 1984).

be true in a certain measure; nevertheless it is not necessary to believe that Western intellectuality has always been as narrowly limited as it is in the present age. But after all, we have been speaking only of outward doctrines, though these are certainly superior to many others since, in spite of all, they comprise a part of the true metaphysics. For our part we are certain that there has been something other than this in the West during the Middle Ages and in olden times; there certainly have existed amongst an elite purely metaphysical doctrines which could be called complete, including their realization, a thing which, for most moderns, is barely conceivable. If the West has lost the memory of this completely it is because it has broken with its proper tradition, which explains why modern civilization is abnormal and deviationist.

If purely theoretical knowledge were an end in itself and if metaphysics went no further, it would still assuredly be worth something, but yet it would be altogether insufficient. In spite of conferring the genuine certainty, even greater than mathematical certainty, which belongs to such knowledge, it would yet remain, though in an incomparably superior order, analogous to that which, at an inferior level, constitutes terrestrial and human, scientific and philosophical, speculation. That is not what metaphysics is meant for; if others choose to interest themselves in a "mental sport," or suchlike, that is their affair; these things leave us cold, and moreover we think that the curiosities of psychology should be completely indifferent to the metaphysician. What he is concerned with is to know what is, and to know it in such fashion as to be oneself, truly and effectively, what one knows.

As for the means of metaphysical realization, we are well aware of such objections as can be made by those who find it necessary to challenge its possibility. These means, indeed, must be within man's reach; they must, in the first stages at least, be adapted to the human state, since it is in this state that the being now exists which subsequently will assume the higher states. Thus it is in these formal means, appropriate to this world as presently manifested, that the being finds a fulcrum for raising itself beyond this world. Words, symbolism, signs, rites, or preparatory methods of any sort have no other reason for existence and no other function; as we have already said, they are supports and nothing else. But some will ask, how is it possible that merely contingent means can produce an effect which immeasurably surpasses them and which is of a totally different order from that to which the instruments themselves belong? We should first point out

that these means are, in reality, only fortuitous. The results they help to attain are by no means consequential; they place the being in the position requisite for attainment and that is all. If the above-mentioned objections were valid in this case they would be equally so for religious rites, for the sacraments, for example, where the disproportion between the means and the end is no less; some of those who have raised the above objections might have thought of this too. As for us, we do not confuse a simple means with a cause in the true sense of the word and we do not regard metaphysical realization as an effect, since it is not the production of something which does not yet exist, but the knowing of that which is, in an abiding and immutable manner, beyond all temporal succession, for all states of the being, considered under their primary aspect, abide in perfect simultaneousness in the eternal now.

Thus we see no difficulty in recognizing that there is nothing in common between metaphysical realization and the means leading to it, or, if preferred, which prepare for it. This is why, moreover, no means are strictly or absolutely necessary; or at least there is only one indispensable preparation, and that is theoretical knowledge. This, on the other hand, cannot go far without a means which will play the most important and constant part: This means is concentration. This is something completely foreign to the mental habits of the modern West, where everything tends towards dispersion and incessant change. All other means are only secondary in comparison; they serve above all to promote concentration and to harmonize the diverse elements of human individuality in order to facilitate effective communication between this individuality and the higher states of being.

Moreover, at the start, these means can be varied almost indefinitely, for they have to be adapted to the temperament of each individual and to his particular aptitudes and disposition. Later on the differences diminish, for it is a case of many ways which all lead to the same end; after reaching a certain stage all multiplicity vanishes, but by that time the contingent and individual means will have played their part. This part, which it is unnecessary to enlarge upon, is compared, in certain Hindu writings, to a horse which helps a man to reach the end of his journey more quickly and easily, but without which he would still have been able to arrive. Rites and various methods point the way to metaphysical realization, but one could nevertheless ignore them and by unswervingly setting the mind and all powers of the being to the

aim of this realization could finally attain the supreme goal; but if there are means which make the effort less laborious, why choose to neglect them? Is it confusing the contingent with the absolute to take into account the limitations of our human state, since it is from this state, itself contingent, that we are at present compelled to start in order to attain higher states, and finally the supreme and unconditioned state?

After considering the teachings common to all traditional doctrines we must now turn to the principal stages of metaphysical realization. The first is only preliminary and operates in the human domain and does not go beyond the limits of the individuality. It consists of an indefinite extension of this individuality of which the corporeal modality, which is all that is developed in the ordinary man, represents the smallest portion; it is from this corporeal modality that it is necessary to start by means borrowed from the sensible order, but which, however, must have repercussions in the other modalities of the human being. The phase in question is, in short, the realization or development of all the potentialities which are contained in the human individuality, and which, comprising, as they do, manifold extensions, reach out in diverse directions beyond the realm of the corporeal and sensible; and it is by these extensions that it is possible to establish communication with the other states.

This realization of the integral individuality is described by all traditions as the restoration of what is called the "primordial state" which is regarded as man's true estate and which moreover escapes some of the limitations characteristic of the ordinary state, notably that of the temporal condition. The person who attains this "primordial state" is still only a human individual and is without effective possession of any supra-individual states; he is nevertheless freed from time and the apparent succession of things is transformed for him into simultaneity; he consciously possesses a faculty which is unknown to the ordinary man and which one might call the "sense of eternity." This is of extreme importance, for he who is unable to leave the viewpoint of temporal succession and see everything in simultaneity is incapable of the least conception of the metaphysical order. The first thing to be done by those who wish to achieve true metaphysical understanding is to take up a position outside time, we say deliberately in "non-time," if such an expression does not seem too peculiar and unusual. This knowledge of the intemporal can, moreover, be achieved in some real measure, if incompletely, before having fully attained this "primordial state" which we are considering.

It might be asked perhaps: Why this appellation of "primordial state"? It is because all traditions, including that of the West (for the Bible says nothing different) are in agreement in teaching that this state was originally normal for humanity, whereas the present state is merely the result of a fall, the effect of a progressive materialization which has occurred in the course of the ages, and throughout the duration of a particular cycle. We do not believe in "evolution" in the sense that the moderns give the word. The so-called scientific hypotheses just mentioned in no way correspond to reality. It is not possible here to make more than bare allusion to the theory of cosmic cycles, which is particularly expounded in the Hindu doctrines; this would be going beyond our subject, for cosmology is not metaphysics even though the two things are closely related. It is no more than an application of metaphysics to the physical order, while the true natural laws are only the consequences, in a relative and contingent domain, of universal and necessary principles.

To revert to metaphysical realization: Its second phase corresponds to supra-individual but still conditioned states, though their conditions are quite different from those of the human state. Here, the world of man, previously mentioned, is completely and definitely exceeded. It must also be said that that which is exceeded is the world of forms in its widest meaning, comprising all possible individual states, for form is the common denominator of all these states; it is that which determines individuality as such. The being, which can no longer be called human, has henceforth left the "flow of forms," to use a Far-Eastern expression. There are, moreover, further distinctions to be made, for this phase can be subdivided. In reality it includes several stages, from the achievement of states which though informal still appertain to manifested existence, up to that degree of universality which is pure being.

Nevertheless, however exalted these states may be when compared with the human state, however remote they are from it, they are still only relative, and that is just as true of the highest of them, which corresponds to the principle of all manifestation. Their possession is only a transitory result, which should not be confused with the final goal of metaphysical realization; this end remains outside being and by comparison with it everything else is only a preparatory step. The highest objective is the absolutely unconditioned state, free from all limitation; for this reason it is completely inexpressible, and all that one can say of it must be conveyed in negative terms by divestment of

the limits which determine and define all existence in its relativity. The attainment of this state is what the Hindu doctrine calls "Deliverance" when considered in connection with the Supreme Principle.

In this unconditioned state all other states of being find their place, but they are transformed and released from the special conditions which determined them as particular states. What remains is that which has a positive reality, since herein it is that all things have their own principle; the "delivered" being is truly in possession of the fullness of its own potentialities. The only things which have disappeared are the limiting conditions, which are negative, since they represent no more than a "privation" in the Aristotelian sense. Also, far from being a kind of annihilation, as some Westerners believe, this final state is, on the contrary, absolute plenitude, the supreme reality in the face of which all else remains illusion.

Let us add once more that every result, even partial, obtained by the being in the course of metaphysical realization are truly its own. This result constitutes a permanent acquisition for the being, of which nothing can deprive it; the work accomplished in this way, even if interrupted before it is completed, is achieved once and for all since it is beyond time. This is true even of merely theoretical knowledge, for all knowledge carries its benefit in itself, contrary to action, which is only a momentary modification of a being and is always separated from its various effects. These effects belong to the same domain and order of existence as that which has produced them. Action cannot have the effect of liberating from action, and its consequences cannot reach beyond the limits of individuality considered in its fullest possible extension. Action, whatever it may be, is not opposed to, and cannot banish, ignorance which is the root of all limitation; only knowledge can dispel ignorance as the light of the sun disperses darkness, and it is thus that the "Self," the immutable and eternal principle of all manifest and unmanifest states, appears in its supreme reality.

After this brief and very imperfect outline, which can only give the merest idea of metaphysical realization, it is absolutely essential to stress one point in order to avoid grave errors of interpretation; it is that all with which we are here concerned has no connection whatever with phenomena of any sort, however extraordinary. All phenomena are of the physical order; metaphysics is beyond the phenomenal, even if we use the word in its widest sense. It follows from this, amongst other inferences, that the states to which we are referring are in no way "psychological"; this must be specifically stated since strange confusions

sometimes arise in this connection. By definition psychology can only be concerned with human states, and further, what it stands for today is only a very limited part of the potentialities of the individual, who includes far more than specialists in this science are able to imagine. The human individual is, at one and the same time, much more and much less than is ordinarily supposed in the West; he is greater by reason of his possibilities of indefinite extension beyond the corporeal modality, in short, of all that refers to what we have been studying; but he is also much less since, far from constituting a complete and sufficient being in himself, he is only an exterior manifestation, a fleeting appearance clothing the true being, which in no way affects the essence of the latter in its immutability.

It is necessary to insist on this point that the metaphysical domain lies entirely outside the phenomenal world, for the moderns hardly ever know or investigate anything other than phenomena; it is with these that they are almost exclusively concerned, as is demonstrated by the attention they have given to the experimental sciences. Their metaphysical ineptitude arises from the same tendency. Undoubtedly some phenomena may occur during the work for metaphysical realization, but in a quite accidental manner. They can also have unfortunate consequences, as things of this nature are only an obstacle for those who are tempted to attach importance to them. Those who are halted or turned aside by phenomena, and above all those who indulge in search for extraordinary "powers," have very little chance of pressing on to a realization beyond the point already arrived at before this deviation occurred.

This observation leads naturally to the rectification of some erroneous interpretations on the subject of the term "yoga." Has it not been claimed that what the Hindus mean by this word is the development of certain powers latent in the human being? What we are about to say will suffice to show that such a definition should be rejected. In reality the word "yoga" is the same as that which we have translated as literally as possible by the word "union" and which, correctly defined, thus means the supreme goal of metaphysical realization; the "yogi," in the strictest sense of the term, is solely the man who attains this end. However, it is true that in a wider sense the same terms, in some cases, may be applied to stages preparatory to "union" or even to simple preliminary means, as well as to the being who has reached states corresponding to those stages which these means are employed in order to attain. But how can it be supposed that a word

primarily meaning "union" applies correctly and originally to breathing exercises or other things of that sort? These and other exercises, usually based on what we might call the science of rhythm, admittedly figure amongst the most usual means for the promoting of realization; but one must not mistake for the end that which amounts to no more than contingent and accidental aids, nor must one confuse the original meaning of a word with a secondary acceptation which is more or less distorted.

Referring to the original "yoga," and while declaring that it has always meant essentially the same thing, one must not forget to put a question of which we have as yet made no mention. What is the origin of these traditional metaphysical doctrines from which we have borrowed all our fundamental ideas? The answer is very simple, although it risks raising objections from those who would look at everything from an historical viewpoint: It is that there is no origin; by which we mean no human origin subjected to determination in time. In other words, the origin of tradition, if indeed the word origin has any applicability in such a case, is "non-human," as is metaphysics itself. Doctrines of this order have not appeared at any particular moment in the history of humanity; the allusion we have made to the "primordial state," and also what we have said of the intemporal nature of all that is metaphysical, enables one to grasp this point without too much difficulty, on condition that it be admitted, contrary to certain prejudices, that there are some things to which the historical point of view is not applicable. Metaphysical truth is eternal; even so, there have always existed beings who could truly and completely know. All that changes is only exterior forms and contingent means; and the change has nothing to do with what people today call "evolution," It is only a simple adaptation of such and such particular circumstances to special conditions of some given race or epoch. From this results the multiplicity of forms; but the basis of the doctrine is no more modified and affected than the essential unity and identity of the being is altered by the multiplicity of its states of manifestation.

Metaphysical knowledge, as well as the realization that will turn it into all that it truly ought to be, is thus possible everywhere and always, at least in principle and when regarded in a quasi-absolute sense; but in fact and in a relative sense, can it be said that this is equally possible in any sphere and without making the least allowance for contingencies? On this score we shall be much less positive, at least as far as realization is concerned; which is explained by the fact that in its beginning such

a realization must take its support from the realm of contingencies. Conditions in the modern West are particularly unfavorable, so much so that such a work is almost impossible and can even be dangerous in the absence of any help from the environment and in conditions which can only impede or destroy the efforts of one who undertakes such a task. On the other hand, those civilizations which we call traditional are organized in such a way that one can find effectual aid, though this is not absolutely necessary, any more than anything else of an external kind; nevertheless without such help it is difficult to obtain effective results. Here is something which exceeds the strength of an isolated human individual, even if that individual possesses the requisite qualifications in other respects; also we do not want to encourage anyone, in present conditions, to embark thoughtlessly upon such an enterprise, and this brings us to our conclusion.

For us, the outstanding difference between the East and West (which means in this case the modern West), the only difference which is really essential (for all others are derivative), is on the one side the preservation of tradition with all that this implies, and on the other side the forgetting and loss of this same tradition; on one side the maintaining of metaphysical knowledge, on the other complete ignorance of all connected with this realm. Between civilizations which open to their elite the possibilities of which we have caught a glimpse and offer the most appropriate means for their effective realization (thus allowing of their full realization by some at least)—between those traditional civilizations and a civilization which has developed along purely material lines, what common measure can be found? And how, without being blinded by I know not what prejudices, dare one claim that material superiority compensates for intellectual inferiority? When we say intellectual, we mean by that the true intellectuality, that which is restricted by neither limitations of the human nor the natural order and which makes pure metaphysical knowledge possible in its absolute transcendence. It seems to me that only a moment's reflection on these questions leaves no doubt or hesitation as to the answer that should be given.

The material prosperity of the West is incontrovertible; nobody denies it, but it is hardly a cause for envy. Indeed one can go further; sooner or later this excessive material development threatens to destroy the West if it does not recover itself in time, and if it does not consider seriously a "return to the source," using an expression which is employed in certain Islamic esoteric schools. Today one hears from

many quarters of the "defense of the West," but unfortunately it does not seem to be understood that it is against itself that the West needs to be defended, and that it is its own present tendencies which are the chief and most formidable of all the dangers which really threaten it. It would be as well to meditate deeply on this; one cannot urge this too strongly on all who are still capable of reflection. So it is with this that I will end my account; I have done my best to make it, if not fully comprehensible, at least suggestive of that Oriental intellectuality which no longer has any equivalent in the West. This has been a sketch, even if imperfect, of the true metaphysics, of that knowledge, which, according to the sacred works of India, is alone completely true, absolute, infinite, and supreme.

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