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Orthodoxy and Intellectuality

by

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At first sight there seems to be no connection between intellectuality and orthodoxy, for the term orthodoxy is too often taken as a synonym of "conformity," even of "prejudice" or "mental laziness," while intellectuality, on the contrary, appears to most of our contemporaries as "unfettered exploration" or even "creative thinking," hence as something at the antipodes of intellectual intuition and contemplation. From our standpoint, orthodoxy is the principle of formal homogeneity proper to any authentically spiritual perspective; it is therefore an indispensable aspect of all genuine intellectuality, which is to say that the essence of every orthodoxy is the truth and not mere fidelity to a system that eventually turns out to be false. To be orthodox means to participate by way of a doctrine which can properly be called "traditional" in the immutability of the principles which govern the Universe and which constitute our intelligence.

What perhaps renders somewhat difficult the definition of orthodoxy is that in fact it presents two principal modes, one being essential or intrinsic and the other formal or extrinsic: the latter is its accordance with truth in some particular revealed form, the former its accordance with essential and universal truth, whether or not this agrees with a given particular form, so that these two modes may sometimes oppose one another outwardly. For example, Buddhism is on the one hand extrinsically heterodox in relation to Hinduism, because it is separated from the basic forms of the latter, and on the other hand it is intrinsically orthodox because it accords with the universal truth from which it derives. By contrast, the Brahmo-samaj, like every other form of "progressive" neo-Hinduism, is heterodox twice over, firstly in relation to Hinduism and secondly in relation to truth itself, heterodox therefore both from the particular point of view of form and from the universal point of view of essence. A *sannyāsi* may disregard caste without thereby departing from brahmanical orthodoxy, since this orthodoxy recognizes all spiritual possibilities; but if he preaches the abolition of the Hindu social system he is a heretic, for then

he is setting himself up against the Revelation, the form "willed by God," or rather one of the forms, for none of them is exclusive. True, the exception proves the rule, that is to say the limitlessness of All-Possibility requires exceptions, and these therefore will occur also in the field of orthodoxy, as is shown by Kabir for example; but here, precisely, the apparent heresy is only on the level of form, without the intrusion of any intrinsically false idea or attitude.[1]

Objections will no doubt be made that Hindu spirituality does not know orthodoxy, since "opinions" and "systems" contradict one another in Hinduism even more than in any other traditional wisdom; rightly or wrongly, according to the individual, it will be claimed that the "great thinkers" of India are beyond forms and so are free from all "narrow dogmatism."[2] It is true that Hindu orthodoxy is sometimes more difficult to grasp from outside than that of a monotheist tradition; this is because Hinduism is founded more directly on the metaphysical essence, so that the form can be treated more freely; also, dogma—or what corresponds to it—assumes forms more varied than in Western religions, which amounts to saying, not that Hinduism is not quite orthodox, but that its orthodoxy has a wider scope in respect of form, which is all that is in question here.[3]

The wide range of forms belonging to Hinduism may be bewildering to some minds, but could never mean that Hinduism sanctions error, as is in fact done by modern philosophy, where "genius" and "culture" count as much as or more than truth, and where the very idea of truth is even called into question by some people. The formal "fluidity" proper to Hinduism in no way prevents error from being always recognizable, as is the case everywhere, whether by the aid of scriptural criteria, or in the light of metaphysical truth, which immediately unmasks absurdity,

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[1] Kabir incarnates not a form or a theory, but an essence or a realization; he is the exceptional, but necessary, manifestation of the non-formal link between Hindu *bhakti* and Islamic *mahabbah*; a case such as his could not fail to occur in a place like India which was Brahmanical and Moslem at the same time. In other words, Kabir's *bhakti* is exceptional because it has no formal framework, and it is necessary because dictated by the spiritual circumstances and, above all, by the limitlessness of divine Possibility. Readers familiar with our writings will not be surprised that we like to draw examples from the Hindu world; this world, besides the contemplative character of its peoples and the metaphysical quality of its wisdom, affords a sort of recapitulation or synthesis of all spiritual possibilities, so that we might readily speak of the "miracle of Hinduism."

[2] Westernized heretics—pseudo-intellectual mollusks if ever there were any—are placed on the same level as the most venerable authorities of the Vedic tradition; the "breadth of mind" boasted by the moderns profits nothing except error and unintelligence.

[3] Hinduism, despite its extreme conceptual "elasticity," does not swallow everything, for otherwise Jainism and Buddhism would have become additional *darshanas* [orthodox perspectives] instead of being excluded from specifically Hindu orthodoxy; on the other hand, the very breadth of this orthodoxy allows it to recognize a posteriori—but "on the margin" and without any innovation—the celestial character both of the Buddha and of his message.

even when heterodoxy is founded on a sacred text, this of course through falsifying its meaning. The doctrines of *jnāna* and *bhakti* contradict one another outwardly because of the difference of levels and modes, but neither is absurd in itself: to say that the world is unreal, or that it is real, or that it is both at once, or again that it is neither one nor the other, is true according to the perspective adopted, and these perspectives result from objective reality and not from human arbitrariness. Intrinsic heterodoxy is, we repeat, contrary not only to a particular perspective or a particular formulation, but to the very nature of things, for it results, not from a perspective legitimate by nature and therefore "providential," but from the arbitrary judgment of a mind left to its own resources and obliged to "create" what the intellect when paralyzed—fundamentally or accidentally—cannot transmit to it. When a man seeks to escape from "dogmatic narrowness," it is essential that it be "upwards" and not "downwards": dogmatic form is transcended by fathoming its depths and contemplating its universal content, and not by denying it in the name of a pretentious and iconoclastic ideal of "pure truth."[4]

It is also necessary to take account of the differentiated manifestation of the "total doctrine": if "the divergences of theologians are a blessing," as Moslems say, this means that the total doctrine, contained more or less synthetically in the Revelation, is rendered explicit only by "fragments" which are outwardly divergent, although fundamentally concordant. The "totality" in question here does not relate to the intrinsic truth but to the human possibilities of understanding and realization; it is obvious that in respect of quality the perspective of Shankara, for example, is "total," and that therefore it contains eminently the perspective of Ramanuja, since it goes beyond it: but its formulation could not take account of all possible levels of truth, so that the perspective of Ramanuja becomes necessary. This leads us to point out that an intellectual authority is infallible within the framework assigned to him by the tradition, and on this plane alone; he can assuredly be infallible beyond this framework and on all planes, but is not necessarily so, firstly because no man can a priori have knowledge of all the elements of truth, and secondly because intellectual intuition may on occasion operate more easily in one given "dimension" than in some other, according to the nature of the human receptacle.

When we say that a doctrine is "providential", we mean by this that it is contained in its own way in the Revelation itself and that it cannot fail to be "crystallized" at the cyclic moment assigned to it by its nature; thus, *bhakti* has always existed as a spiritual possibility, but its flowering required particular conditions, belonging to a given phase of the Hindu cycle. Every cycle has qualitative aspects: what is possible at a certain moment is not possible at another, so that the birth of a particular perspective cannot occur at some arbitrary moment; and this provides us with yet another criterion of orthodoxy— or of heterodoxy—for it is certain that in "our times", that is for the last few centuries, the cyclic moment for the manifestation of the great perspectives (*darshanas*) is past; readaptations—in the sense of a legimate and therefore

[4] Within the monotheist religions, sapiential esoterism inevitably presents aspects of extrinsic heterodoxy, for a qualitative difference necessarily presents aspects of opposition.

adequate and efficacious synthesis—are always possible, but not the manifestations of perspectives that are fundamental, and "new" as to their form.

The least that can be said is that no present formulation could "surpass" the ancient formulations; commentaries can be made on the traditional perspectives, they can be summed up from a particular point of view or expressed according to a particular inspiration, but they cannot be contradicted or replaced. It was possible, for example, for Ramanuja to contradict Shankara on the basis of a perspective which, though doubtless more limited, was legitimate on its own level and "willed by God"; but no man of our times is a Ramanuja, that is to say there is no one who can reject Shankara except by doing so in the footsteps of Ramanuja and within his doctrinal limits, on the level, that is, of traditional *bhakti*; he could not surpass both Shankara's *jnāna* and Ramanuja's *bhakti* at the same time, claiming to "classify" them and to add to them a new and better element. The spuriousness of such attempts always shows itself—apart from its intrinsic error—in the belittling and falsifying spirit which is so characteristic of the modern world; in fact it requires a prodigious lack of spiritual sensibility and of a sense of proportion to take any contemporary thinking, even the best possible, for one of the great providential "crystallizations" of the *philosophia perennis*.

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This question of the limitations of Ramanuja's outlook—or of *bhakti* in general—obliges us to point out that in order to avoid those confusions which are the most illegitimate, a distinction must be made between two degrees of doctrinal limitation which are eminently unequal: in the first case the doctrine comprises certain restrictions in view of particular mental conditions or a particular spiritual method; in the second case it is intrinsically false; there lies the whole difference between "lesser truth" and error. The first limitation is dictated more or less by the needs of a particular mentality, and is thus "willed by God"—whether it is a question of Ramanuja or of Aristotle, to cite two very different cases—whereas the second arises from human weakness and also from the devil, who exploits this weakness, and who cannot but exploit it. In other words, two doctrines may be opposed to one another either because of a legitimate difference of perspective,[5] or because one of them is erroneous, or because both are so but in different ways; care must therefore be taken to avoid putting oppositions of form on the same level with fundamental contradictions.

[5] When Averroes asserts the unity of the intellect and appears to deny the immortality of the individual soul, he is right in the sense that the one, universal Intellect exists—particular intelligences being luminous thanks to it alone—and that the purely sentient part of the soul is in fact perishable; but his opponents also are right in the sense that the diversification of the intelligence and the immortality of the human person are incontestable realities. The specifically philosophical or logical point of view—apart from all question of spiritual opportuneness—is characterized by its incapacity to reconcile antinomic truths, an incapacity deriving from the very nature of reason.

It is not possible to emphasize too strongly that philosophy, in its humanistic and rationalizing and therefore current sense, consists primarily of logic; this definition of Guénon's correctly situates philosophical thought in making clear its distinction from "intellectual intuition," which is a direct perception of truth. But another distinction must also be established on the rational plane itself: logic can either operate in accordance with an intellection or on the contrary put itself at the disposal of an error, so that philosophy can become the vehicle of just about anything; it may be an aristotelianism conveying ontological knowledge, just as it may degenerate into an existentialism in which logic is no more than a blind, unreal activity, and which can rightly be described as an "esoterism of stupidity."[6] When unintelligence—and what we mean by this is in no way incompatible with "worldly" intelligence—joins with passion to prostitute logic, it is impossible to escape a mental satanism which destroys the very bases of intelligence and truth.

The validity of a logical demonstration depends then on the prior knowledge which this demonstration aims at communicating, and it is clearly false to take as the point of departure, not a direct cognition, but logic pure and simple; when man has no "visionary"—as opposed to discursive—knowledge of Being, and when he thinks only with his brain instead of "seeing" with the "heart," all his logic will be useless to him, since he starts from an initial blindness. Moreover, a distinction must be made between the validity of a demonstration and its dialectical efficacy; the latter evidently depends on an intuitive disposition for recognizing the truth demonstrated, namely on intellectual capacity, which amounts to saying that a demonstration is effective for those to whom it applies. Logic is nothing other than the science of mental coordination, of rational conclusion; hence it cannot attain to the universal and the transcendent by its own resources; a supra-logical—but not "illogical"—dialectic based on symbolism and on analogy, and therefore descriptive rather than ratiocinative, may be harder for some people to assimilate, but it conforms more closely to transcendent realities. "Avant-garde" philosophy is properly an acephalous logic: it labels what is intellectually evident as "prejudice"; seeking to free itself from the servitudes of the mind, it falls into infra-logic; closing itself, above, to the light of the intellect, it opens itself, below, to the darkness of the subconscious.[7] Philosophical

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[6] What is to be said of a system of "metaphysics" which places human experience ponderously at the center of reality—as if our intelligence did not allow us to go further—and which operates with concepts as grossly subjective and conjectural as "anxiety" and "anguish"?

[7] This is what Kant with his rationalistic ingenuousness did not foresee. According to him, every cognition which is not rational in the narrowest sense, is mere pretentiousness and fanciful enthusiasm (*Schwärmerei*); now, if there is anything pretentious it is this very opinion. Fantasy, arbitrariness, and irrationality are not features of the Scholastics, but they certainly are of the rationalists who persist in violently contesting, with ridiculous and often pathetic arguments, everything which eludes their grasp. With Voltaire, Rousseau, and Kant, "bourgeois" (or *vaishya*, as the Hindus would say) unintelligence is put forward as a "doctrine" and definitively installed in European "thought," giving birth—by way of the French Revolution—to scientism, industry and to quantitative "culture." Mental hypertrophy in the

skepticism takes itself for an absence of "prejudices" and a healthy attitude, whereas it is something quite artificial: it is a result not of knowledge but of ignorance, and that is why it is as contrary to intelligence as it is to reality.

The fact that the philosophic mode of thought is centered on logic and not directly on intuition implies that intuition is left at the mercy of logic's needs: in Scholastic disputations it was a question of avoiding certain truths which, given the general level of mentality, might have given rise to certain dangerous conclusions. Scholasticism, it should be remembered, is above all a defense against error: its aim is to be an apologetic and not, as in the case of "metaphysically operative" doctrines —gnosis or *jnāna*—a support for meditation and contemplation. Before Scholasticism, Greek philosophy had also aimed to satisfy a certain need for causal explanations rather than to furnish the intelligence with a means of realization; moreover, the disinterested character of truth easily becomes, on the level of speculative logic, a tendency towards "art for art's sake," whence the *ventosa loquacitas philosophorum* stigmatized by Saint Bernard. Some will certainly raise the objection that traditional metaphysics, whether of the East or the West, makes use of rational argumentations like any philosophy; but an argumentation a man uses to describe to his fellow men what he knows is one thing, and one that he uses on himself because he knows nothing is quite another. This is a crucial distinction, for it marks the full extent of the distance separating the intellectual "visionary" from the mere "thinker" who "gropes alone through the darkness" (Descartes) and whose pride it is to deny that there could be any knowledge which does not proceed in the same fashion.

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The intellect is a receptive faculty and not a productive power: it does not "create," it receives and transmits; it is a mirror reflecting reality in a manner that is adequate and therefore effective. In most men of the "iron age" the intellect is atrophied to the point of being reduced to a mere virtuality, although doubtless there is no watertight partition between it and the reason, for a sound process of reasoning indirectly transmits something of the intellect; be that as it may, the respective operations of the reason—or the mind—and of the intellect are fundamentally different from the point of view that interests us here, despite certain appearances due to the fact that every man is a thinking being, whether he be wise or ignorant. There is at the same time analogy and opposition: the mind is analogous to the intellect insofar as it is a kind of intelligence, but is opposed to it by its limited, indirect and discursive character; as for the apparent limitations of the intellect, they are merely accidental and extrinsic, while the limits of the mental faculty are inherent in it. Even if the intellect cannot exteriorize the "total truth"—or

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"cultured" man henceforth compensates the absence of intellectual penetration; the sense of the absolute and the principial is drowned in a mediocre empiricism, coupled with a pseudo-mysticism posing as "positive" or "human." Some people may reproach us with a lack of due consideration, but we would ask what due consideration is shown by philosophers who shamelessly slash down the wisdom of countless centuries.

rather reality—because that is in itself impossible, it can perfectly well establish points of reference which are adequate and sufficient, rather as it is possible to represent space by a circle, a cross, a square, a spiral, or a point, and so on. “Truth” and “reality” must not be confused: the latter relates to “being” and signifies the aseity of things, and the former relates to “knowing”—to the image of reality reflected in the mirror of the intellect—and signifies the adequation of “being” and “knowing”; it is true that reality is often designated by the word “truth,” but this is a dialectical synthesis which aims at defining truth in relation to its virtuality of “being,” of “reality.” If truth is thus made to embrace ontological reality, aseity, the inexpressible, and so also the “personal” realization of the Divine, there is clearly no “total truth” on the plane of thought; but if by “truth” is understood thought insofar as it is an adequate reflection, on the intellectual plane, of “being,” there is a “total truth” on this plane, but on condition firstly that nothing quantitative is envisaged in this totality, and secondly that it is made clear that this totality can have a relative sense, according to the order of thought to which it belongs. There is a total truth which is such because it embraces, in principle, all possible truths: this is metaphysical doctrine, whether its enunciation be simple or complex, symbolical or dialectical; but there is also a truth which is total on the plane of spiritual realization, and in this case “truth” becomes synonymous with “reality.” Since on the plane of facts there is never anything absolute—or more precisely, nothing “absolutely absolute”—the “totality,” while being perfect and sufficient in practice, is always relative in theory; it is indefinitely extensible, but also indefinitely reducible: it can assume the form of an extended doctrine, but also that of a simple sentence, just as the totality of space can be expressed by a system of intertwining patterns too complex for the eye to unravel, but also by an elementary geometrical figure.

We have compared pure intelligence to a mirror; now it must be recalled that there is always a certain element of inversion in the relationship between subject and object, that is, the subject which reflects inverts the object reflected. A tree reflected in water is inverted, and so is “false” in relation to the real tree, but it is still a tree—even “this tree”—and never anything else: consequently the reflected tree is perfectly “true,” despite its illusory character, so that it is a mistake to conclude that intellection is illusory because of its subjective framework. The powers of the cosmic illusion are not unlimited, for the Absolute is reflected in the contingent, otherwise the latter would not exist; everything is in God—“all is *Ātmā*”—and the Absolute surges forth everywhere, it is “infinitely close”; barriers are illusory, they are at the same time immeasurably great and infinitesimally small. The world is antinomic by definition, which is a way of saying it is not God; every image is at the same time true and false, and it suffices to discern the various relationships. Christ is “true God and true man,” which is the very formula of the antinomy and parallelism governing the cosmos: antinomy because the creature is not the Creator, and parallelism because nothing can be “outside God,” Reality being one.

In a certain sense, doctrine is identical with truth, for account must always be taken of the “relatively absolute”; doctrine should have more than a relative value for us, seeing that its content transcends relativities to the extent that it is essential. There is no difficulty in the fact

that pure intelligence—the intellect—immensely surpasses thought, and that there is no continuity—despite the identity of essence —between a concept as such and reality, the aseity of the real; to lament over the shortcomings of thought is to ask it to be something that it is not; this is the classical error of philosophers who seek to enclose everything in the *cogito* alone. From the point of view of "concrete"—not "abstract"— knowledge of the transcendent, the problem of thought is resolved in the very nature of the intellect.

There are objects which exceed the possibilities of reason; there are none which exceed those of intelligence as such. If there were not something absolute in man—he is "made in the image of God"—he would be only an animal like other animals; but man knows the animals, while they do not know man. Man alone can step out of the cosmos, and this possibility proves—and presupposes—that in a certain way he incarnates the Absolute.[8]

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Intellectual intuition implies, among other things, the comprehension of Being, both in itself and in connection with things; this intuition therefore allows of understanding on the one hand that Being does not have to be defined at every turn to satisfy an artificial need for causality, and on the other that Being is in no way difficult to define, precisely because the sense of Being is inherent in the intellect; to say "intellect" is to say "sense of Being."

In connection with this question of intellectual intuition, it would be useful to reply here to a difficulty raised by Pascal: "One cannot undertake to define being without falling into absurdity: for a word cannot be defined without beginning with the words *it is*, whether they are expressed or implied. Therefore in order to define being it would be necessary to say *it is*, and so to use the word to be defined in formulating its own definition" (*Pensées et Opuscules*). It is in fact impossible, in European languages, to give a definition without using the word "is"; if in other languages, in Arabic for example, a definition can be made without the help of this word or of some other copulative, that is exactly for the same reason, namely that all is immersed in Being and that Being therefore has an a priori evidentness; if Being cannot be defined outside itself, any more than can Knowledge, it is because this "outside" does not exist; the separation necessary for every definition thus actually lies within the thing to be defined, and in fact although we are "within Being" we are not Being. The copulative "it is" indicates a "determination" or an "attribute" according to the circumstances, and this shows the meaning of the word: we will define Being in itself as the universal determination, that is to say as the supreme Principle "insofar as it determines itself," to use Guénon's expression; if we start from the ternary Beyond-Being, Being, [9] and Manifestation, we see that Being is "Principle" in

[8] Without this quality of absoluteness there could be no question either of his salvation or of his damnation.

[9] Beyond-Being—or Non-Being—is Reality absolutely unconditioned, while Being is Reality insofar as It determines Itself in the direction of its manifestation and in so doing becomes personal God.

relation to the world but "determination" in relation to Beyond-Being.[10] Now, given that Being is determination in relation to Beyond-Being and the source of every attribute in relation to the world, every determination and every attribute can be expressed by means of the verb "to be," hence by "it is," so that Pascal's difficulty can be resolved thus: "*being*" manifests (or "is" the manifestation of) an aspect of its own inner limitlessness, thus a possibility, an attribute. When we say: "The tree is green," this is, by analogy, like saying: "Being comprises such and such an aspect," or again in the deepest sense: "Beyond-Being determines itself as Being"; the thing to be defined—or determined—serves analogically as "Being," and the definition—the determination—serves as "divine attribute." Instead of speaking of "Being" and of "attribute of Being," we could refer to the first distinction: Beyond-Being and Being. When the verb "to be" designates an existence, it has no complement; on the other hand, when it has a complement it does not designate an existence as such, but an attribute; to say that a certain thing "is," signifies that it is not non-existent; to say that the tree "is green" signifies that it has this attribute and not some other. In consequence, the verb "to be" always expresses either an "existence" or a "character of existence," in the same way as God on the one hand "is" and on the other "is thus," that is to say Light, Love, Power, and so forth. Saint Thomas expresses this well by saying that if Being and the first principles which flow from it are incapable of proof, it is because they have no need of proof; to prove them is at once useless and impossible, "not through a lack, but through a superabundance of light."[11]

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[10] The French *Sur-Etre* has generally been translated throughout by the phrase "Beyond-Being" rather than by "Supra-Being," since the latter might convey the idea of a superior level of Being instead of that of the Reality which transcends Being altogether.—Trans.

[11] In the *Cogito ergo sum* all is lost, since consciousness of being is subordinated to the experience of thought; when being is thus blurred it carries thought downwards with it, for if it is necessary to prove being, it is necessary also to prove the efficacy of the intelligence, hence the validity of its conclusions, the soundness of the *ergo*. Guénon, who had the great merit of restoring to the conceptions of intellectuality and of orthodoxy their true and universal meaning, once wrote to us on the subject of the *Cogito*: "In order to see all that is involved in Descartes' saying 'I think, therefore I am,' it is necessary to consider the twofold reduction which this effects: firstly, the 'I' is reduced to the soul alone (the body being excluded); and secondly, the soul itself is reduced to thought, ('a substance the whole nature of which consists solely of thinking'; the distinction which he maintains between substances and their respective principal attributes seems to be primarily verbal since for him the principal attribute expresses completely the essence or the nature of the substance). There has been much discussion on the question of knowing whether the Cartesian formula ought really to be considered as an argument or line of reasoning; the *therefore* however does not seem open to any interpretation other than as signifying a deduction. The same objection can also be applied to the famous 'ontological argument': "everything that it contains which is true and metaphysically valid comes down to the affirmation 'Being is,' where there is no trace of argument. In this connection one could recall the absurd philosophical question of the 'criterion of truth,' that is to say the search for an external sign by which truth would infallibly be recognized; this question is among those that cannot be solved because they do not really arise."

When intellectual intuition is operative, there is no problem of Being, and enunciations considered to be “summary” and “dogmatic” are in fact sufficient; but when the intellect is paralyzed, every effort to define Being is vain, for it is obvious that one cannot define what one does not know. If for some people today the idea of “being” is “the most obscure there is,” this is certainly nothing to cause surprise; but what is disturbing is when blindness poses as light, or as “leading” to light, which amounts to the same thing. Intellectual intuition cannot be created where it is absent from the essence of the individual, but it can be actualized where its absence is only accidental, otherwise it would be senseless to speak of it; knowledge, as Saint Augustine maintains with Plato and many others, is not something that is added from outside; teaching is only the occasional cause of the grasping of a truth already latent within us. Teaching is a recalling; understanding is a recollection. In the intellect, the subject is the object, “being,” and the object is the subject, “knowing”: whence comes absolute certitude.

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Metaphysical truth cannot be regarded as having, by definition, solely a character of complexity, even of “difficulty”; everything depends on our “visual capacity” and the angle from which we approach the transcendent realities. Things apparently most complex and difficult are from a certain point of view simple and easy, because the Essence is simple, provided one’s intelligence goes beyond the resources of the discursive mind and has the ability to grasp the real “in depth”. If truth is accessible, it has an aspect of facility; if it is inaccessible, it is useless to speak of it; truth would not then be a human notion. To be so over-prudent as to believe only in the complex is a failure to see that the Absolute simplifies: in fact, wherever the Absolute is “incarnate” it manifests an aspect of simplicity, which one must beware of wanting to water down in human relativities—of a psychological or historical kind for example—as if intelligence were bound to complicate the simple while at the same time debasing the sublime. There cannot be an “absolutely relative,” but there is a “relatively absolute” by virtue of which essential determinations maintain all their rigor on the relative plane, at least in respect of their qualitative content, which is all that matters in the cases being considered. All relativism applied to the intelligence as such—or to the truth—is radically false, and this falsity already results from the inner contradiction which all “intellectual” relativism implies; for on what grounds would it be possible to judge when one denies, implicitly or explicitly, the possibility of “objective” judgment, thus of judgment as such? If the intelligence possesses the faculty of transcending the human level, of getting outside the vicious circle of thinking, of defining its own mechanism from a “neutral” starting-point, then it has always possessed this faculty; if it does not possess it, then it is not possible for philosophers—any more than for others—to throw any light on this subject, on pain of contradiction, and all their subtleties prove empty.

The principle of simplicity just mentioned—which is not other than a certain reflection of the Absolute—nullifies every objection that philosophical speculation, which is “mental” and not “intellective”, is able to advance against the imperative character of the truth. All expression is of

necessity relative, but language is nonetheless capable of conveying the "quality of absoluteness" which has to be conveyed; expression contains all, like a seed; it opens all, like a master-key; what remains to be seen is to which capacity of understanding it is addressed. Doctrine offers the whole truth, first by virtue of its form, and then in regard to the capacity of the properly qualified intelligence to receive and actualize it; it lays open its content in a way that is doubtless elliptical, since it is a form, but in a way that is also total since this form is a symbol and is therefore something of what it has to communicate. The "accidental"—but not "essential"—discontinuity between content and expression will make no difference; we observe it, since it exists in the respect envisaged, but practically speaking it does not concern us. The discernment between the accidental and the essential is a basic function of the intelligence; the latter is a direct "consciousness," a non-formal essence, against which it is of no avail for the discursive mind to try to lay down the law, should the occasion arise. If our knowledge cannot be certain, it is idle to think; if it can be certain, that proves we can have all the certainty there is.

If there were no points at which the incommensurable complexity of the real—or of the unreal—became quite simple, quite tangible, we would have no possibility of contact with truth. Relative, indirect knowledge of the Absolute is "essentially"—that is to say insofar as it is knowledge, not insofar as it is relative—absolute, direct knowledge; everything lies in grasping the mental symbol in its center or in its essence. This precisely is a characteristic aspect of Taoism and of Zen: what is infinitely far off is also infinitely close. One man can spend his whole life in searching and looking, and still know nothing, "see" nothing; another may arrive without trouble at intellectual certainties, and this proves that his ignorance was only accidental and not fundamental. Likewise with sanctity: there is no common measure between efforts and results; enlightenment means to awaken into the infinite Consciousness which is certitude, totality, reality; a degree of enlightenment is always in a way total Consciousness, for there are no hard and fast barriers here; intellectual intuition lies along the axis centered on the Absolute. Between a doctrinal concept and infinite Consciousness there is no continuity, despite the analogy which indicates an essential identity; this is what the scrutinizers of "human thought" are incapable of conceiving, and that is why they expect to obtain everything on the level of words. A symbol is relative and absolute at the same time, like the intellect; it is necessary to understand and realize absoluteness and thus burn up accidentality. Criticism by discursive thought is an endless task since the contingent is inexhaustible, and it is erroneous since the contingent cannot be discerned and defined in its total nature except by reference to the Absolute; this Absolute we rejoin in pure Consciousness. Intellectual intuition is a participation in this state; if there were no microcosmic anticipation of infinite Consciousness no knowledge would be possible, still less any realization, any gnosis, that is to say effective, "existential" knowledge.[12]

[12] This word, which we use here in a quite provisional way, is inaccurate inasmuch as transcendent knowledge goes beyond Existence and can even go beyond Being. In the letter from which we have already quoted, Guénon emphasizes that "for metaphysics, the use of rational argument never represents

The discontinuity between concept and Reality is compensated and as it were abolished by the identity existing between them: in this second relationship, which metaphysically is crucial, the idea "is" the Truth. In order to see here a kind of continuity it would in any case be necessary to specify that it is a purely essential, not "material" or "physical" continuity, and therefore not subject to any possible individual experience; this reservation means, not that the experience cannot occur in the domain of the intellect, but that it cannot occur on the mental plane, which is that of the individual as such.

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If it is useless to seek to establish a "system" embracing every possible aspect of Truth or Reality, it is nonetheless legitimate to develop a traditional perspective to the point of drawing from it all the consequences that human experience can require, and such development will in principle be unlimited. If there can be no exhaustive system of the real, for example of the intelligible nature of the world, it is because there can be no total coincidence between reality and its reflection in the logical order, otherwise the two would be indistinguishable; however, when there is knowledge of the metaphysical basis from which a given "system" proceeds, this system can furnish all the keys needed to the reality concerned.

Insofar as the quality of systematization is a perfection, God is systematic —he is a "Geometer"—and so is the truth; but insofar as a system is a limitation, the truth escapes all systematization. Concretely, this means that every traditional doctrine has an aspect of system and an aspect of indeterminacy; this latter appears in the variety of orthodox perspectives, hence also in the plurality of systems, such as may appear in the writings of one and the same author, above all in the esoteric field.

In any case it is absurd to want to exploit for the benefit of heterodoxy—and so of freedom for error—scriptural passages like the following, taken from the *Mahabhârata*, it would appear: "The Vedas are divided.… There is no sage whose thought is not divided.…" Such texts, far from evincing a more or less agnostic relativism, do no more than state the principle of limitation, of exclusion, of contradiction, and division implied in every affirmation. "Why callest thou me good? There is none good but one, that is, God," said Christ; which signifies that every manifestation, even if divine, implies imperfection; it implies it because it is manifestation, and not on account of its content, since the latter may be divine, and therefore "absolute." If a Taoist master could say that "only error is transmitted," it is because there is an inverse relationship between "idea" and "reality," the "thought" and the "lived," the "conceived" and the "realized"; this is the application of the principle which Sufis call "isthmus" (*barzakh*): seen from "above"

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more than a mode of outward expression (necessarily imperfect and inadequate as such) and in no way affects metaphysical knowledge itself, for the latter must always be kept essentially distinct from its formulation; and formulation, whatever form it may assume, can never be taken as anything but a symbol of that which in itself is incommunicable."

the symbol is darkness, but seen from “below”, it is light. This inversion, however, is not everything, for there is also direct analogy, essential identity, otherwise there would be no symbolism to provide a framework for the wisdom of the sages; to show the “earthly” or “human” side—an inevitable side—of tradition is by no means to abolish tradition.

It was pointed out above that the intellect, which is a mirror, must not be confused with spiritual realization, thanks to which our “being”—and not merely our “thought”—participates in the “objects” which the mirror reflects. The mirror is “horizontal”, while realization is “vertical”; the vertical ascent certainly purifies the mirror, but the mirror must adequately reflect the essential outlines of the archetypes, otherwise the ascent is impossible. The goal of spiritual realization cannot go beyond the span of the field of vision, just as in an equilateral triangle the height of the apex depends on the length of the base; a bhaktic doctrine cannot lead as if by chance to the goal envisaged by *jnāna*; an anthropomorphic and individualist “mythology” or a “passional” mysticism excludes a final objective lying beyond the cosmic realm. But the distinction between the intellect and spiritual realization should make us understand above all that, if intellectual intuition implies absolute certainty, it does not however exclude the possibility of error on a plane of insufficiently known facts, unless these facts fall directly within the “jurisdiction” of the intellectual mode in question; this question has already been referred to in connection with authority. Every manifestation of absoluteness—and the authority flowing from intellectual intuition is one such—presupposes an appropriate framework: “the perfect man”—said a Buddhist master—“may be uninformed on secondary matters of which he has no experience, but he can never be wrong on what his power of discernment has already revealed to him.… He knows clay, but he has not acquired knowledge of every form that clay can be given.” On the other hand it must not be forgotten that, as was mentioned above, intellectual intuition may operate only within certain “dimensions” of the spirit, according to given modes or within given domains; the intelligence may be centered on some particular aspect of the real. The drawbacks which may result from such differences are however neutralized, in the broadest sense, by the traditional framework, which offers to each predisposition its appropriate field.

In short, there are three essential causes of error; lack of intelligence, lack of information, and lack of virtue, that is to say of beauty, in the receptacle. In the first case, the defect is in the subject: the intelligence is neutralized by an internal impediment, either essential or accidental or acquired; in the second case, the defect lies with the object: the intelligence has no possibility of operating adequately because the necessary data are missing; in the third case, the defect is on the periphery of the intellective subject: the intelligence is then reduced, not in its actual essence, but in its modes of operation, which are burdened or falsified by the intervention of passional elements, whether of a hardening or of a dissipating nature. Unintelligence and vice may be merely superficial, that is, to some extent accidental and so curable, just as they may be relatively “essential” and in practice incurable; an essential lack of virtue however is

incompatible with transcendent intelligence, just as a very high degree of virtue is scarcely to be found in a fundamentally unintelligent being.[13]

When error is attributed to a "lack of intelligence", it means that this lack may by nature be either "vertical" or "horizontal": leaving aside mere stupidity, we would say that intelligence may be extremely acute on the rational level alone, while being quite inoperative beyond that level; or again, it may be penetrating even in the sphere of pure metaphysics, but lacking "breadth" in the sense that it is incapable—in practice though not in principle—of grasping certain aspects of things or certain "dimensions" of reality; in other words, intelligence may be limited not only as to degree, but also as to mode, though this does not compromise it on the plane of its particular competence.

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We cannot insist too strongly on the following: if the relative did not comprise something "of the absolute", relativities could not be distinguished qualitatively from one another. It is clearly not as a relativity that orthodoxy bestows salvation, but by virtue of its quality of absoluteness; Revelation is infallible light insofar as it is the divine Subject objectivized, but not insofar as it is objectification pure and simple. Revelation, tradition, orthodoxy, and intellectual intuition would be inconceivable but for the qualitative and quasi-absolute element which is present at the center and in the arteries of the cosmos, and which flashes forth to produce the phenomenon of the sacred.

In philosophical relativism, there is obviously no place for the concept of the relatively absolute, nor consequently for that of qualitative differences; if relativism were right, the world would be a mere amorphous substance. The relativist position could be compared with the following reasonings: the color white is not light, hence there is only a quantitative difference between black and white; the expression of truth is not truth itself, hence there is only a quantitative—or let us say relative—difference between expressed truth and error.[14] Under these

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[13] Lack of mental cleverness does not exclude sharpness of understanding; the Curé d'Ars, contrary to widespread opinion, was very far from being dull-witted; conversely, experience proves only too cruelly that mental cleverness may not go hand in hand with intelligence, which amounts to saying that it has not in itself any relationship with true intellectuality.

[14] To see things in this way means that there would be no difference between the discussions of the Hindu schools for example and those of modern philosophers; in reality the difference is radical owing to the fact that the Hindus were subject in a direct manner to a tradition, to an orthodoxy which they sought to affirm in the best possible way, a fact which serves as a guarantee of inspiration, whereas the moderns on the contrary engage in discussions based on their concern to escape every "preconceived idea," whence their rejection of all orthodoxy, all "dogmatism," all scriptural criteria. Similarly, people fail to see any essential difference between traditional civilizations and modern civilization, on the pretext that the former involved evils like the latter, whereas there is no common measure between a civilization which "is" an evil by its very principle, and another which, while being good, "includes" in fact some inevitable

conditions, all qualitative determinations disappear in a shadow-land of relativism; when the truth becomes thus diluted in a sort of universal error, every spiritual value quits the scene, and there remains nothing but a satanic game—satanic because illusory and leading nowhere—a game played with half-truths of an ever more arbitrary ingenuity. It is as if discernment, having turned away from qualitative determinations—by which we mean everything that reflects the Absolute in whatever manner—had now relentlessly set upon intelligence itself to introduce scissions. Thus relativism mixes together things that are in reality different and differentiates what is simple; objectively, it abolishes the qualitative hierarchies—it eliminates the absolute element from the relative—and subjectively, by a compensatory movement, it dissects the adequation which knowledge constitutes, and this amounts to denying the latter's efficacy. Relativism, even when it makes a show of admitting the interventions of an absolute in the relative, gives them such a quantitative air as to take away precisely their absoluteness; it seeks to ruin either the idea of truth, or that of intelligence, or both at once. To lend a relative character to what functionally stands for the absolute is to attribute absoluteness to the relative; to claim that knowledge as such can only be relative amounts to saying that human ignorance is absolute; to to doubt of certitude is, logically, to avow that one knows "absolutely" nothing."[15]

Wearied by the artifices and the lack of imagination of academic rationalism, most of our contemporaries in rejecting it reject true metaphysics as well, because they think it "abstract"—which in their minds is synonymous with "artificial" —and seek the "concrete," not beyond the rational and in the order of ontological prototypes, but in crude fact, in the sensory, the "actual"; man becomes the arbitrary measure of everything, and thereby abdicates his dignity as man, namely his possibility of objective and universal knowledge. He is then the measure of things not in a truly human but in an animal way: his dull empiricism is that of an animal which registers facts and notices a pasture or a path; but since he is despite all a "human animal," he disguises his dullness in mental arabesques. The existentialists are human as it were by chance; what distinguishes them from animals is not human intelligence but the human style of an infra-human intelligence.

The protagonists of "concrete" thought, of whatever shade, readily label as "speculations in the abstract" whatever goes beyond their understanding, but they forget to tell us why these "speculations" are possible, that is to say what confers this strange possibility on human intelligence. Thus what does it mean that for thousands of years men deemed to be wise have practiced such "speculations", and by what right does one call "intellectual progress" the replacement of these speculations by a crude empiricism which excludes on principle any operation characteristic of intelligence? If these "positivists" are right, none but they are

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evils. Christianity as such is in the same situation as other traditions, but modernism precisely is not Christianity, it is not an "ailing religion" but an "anti-religion."

[15] In every field, it is "absoluteness" which creates "quality": thus a work of art is not concerned with registering accidents; it must touch upon essences.

intelligent; all the founders of religions, all the saints, all the sages have been wrong on essentials whereas Mr. So-and-So at long last sees things clearly; one might just as well say that human intelligence does not exist. There are those who claim that the idea of God is to be explained only by social opportunism, without taking account of the infinite disproportion and the contradiction involved in such a hypothesis; if such men as Plato, Aristotle, or Thomas Aquinas—not to mention the Prophets, or Christ or the sages of Asia—were not capable of noticing that God is merely a social prejudice or some other dupery of the kind, and if hundreds and thousands of years have been based intellectually on their incapacity, then there is no human intelligence, and still less any possibility of progress, for a being absurd by nature does not contain the possibility of ceasing to be absurd.

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In order to get a firm grasp of the dominant tendencies of contemporary philosophy it is important to note the following: everything which does not derive either from intellectual intuition or from revelation is of necessity a form of "rationalism," because man disposes of no other resource outside the intellect. One criterion of rationalism, even when disguised, is thinking in alternatives, which results from the fact that spanning antinomical realities is beyond the scope of reason; reason has no consciousness of analogies which exceed its sphere of action, even though it is aware of them through their reflections on the physical plane; beyond a certain level, the discursive mind sees only "segments" and not the "circle." Let us say at once that a consciously rationalizing thought, the content of which is true, is worth infinitely more than an anti-rationalist reaction which only ends in ruining the ideas of intelligence and truth: rationalism properly so called is false not because it seeks to express reality in rational mode, so far as this is possible, but because it seeks to embrace the whole of reality in the reason, as if the latter coincided with the very principle of things. In other words, rationalism does not present itself as a possible—and necessarily relative—development of a traditional and sapiential point of view, but it usurps the function of pure intellectuality. But there are degrees to be observed here, as for example with Aristotle: his fundamental ideas—like those of "form" and "matter" (hylomorphism)—really flow from a metaphysical knowledge, and so from supra-mental intuition; they carry in themselves all the universal significance of symbols and become rational—and therefore "abstract"—only to the extent that they become encrusted in a more or less artificial system.

There is a close relationship between rationalism and modern science: the latter is at fault not in concerning itself solely with the finite, but in seeking to reduce the Infinite to the finite, and consequently in taking no account of Revelation, an attitude which is, strictly speaking, inhuman; what we reproach modern science for is that it is inhuman—or infra-human—and not that it has no knowledge of the facts which it studies, even though it deliberately ignores certain of their modalities. It believes that it is possible to approach total knowledge of the world—which after all is indefinite—by what can only be a finite series of discoveries, as if it were

possible to exhaust the inexhaustible. And what is to be said of the pretentiousness which sets out to "discover" the ultimate causes of existence, or of the intellectual bankruptcy of those who seek to subject their philosophy to the results of scientific research? A science of the finite cannot legitimately occur outside a spiritual tradition, for intelligence is prior to its objects, and God is prior to man; an experiment which ignores the spiritual link characterizing man no longer has anything human about it; it is thus in the final analysis as contrary to our interests as it is to our nature; and "ye shall know them by their fruits." A science of the finite has need of a wisdom which goes beyond it and controls it, just as the body needs a soul to animate it, and the reason an intellect to illumine it. The "Greek miracle" with its so-called "liberation of the human spirit" is in reality nothing but the beginning of a purely external knowledge, cut off from genuine Sophia.[16]

A striking feature of modern science is the disproportion between the scientific, mathematical, practical intelligence and intelligence as such: a scientist may be capable of the most extraordinary calculations and achievements but may at the same time be incapable of understanding the ultimate causality of things; this amounts to an illegitimate and monstrous disproportion, for the man who is intelligent enough to grasp nature in its deepest physical aspects, ought also to know that nature has a metaphysical Cause which transcends it, and that this Cause does not confine itself to determining the laws of sensory existence, as Spinoza claimed. What we have called the "inhuman" character of modern science also appears in the

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[16] It is said that Einstein, for example, revolutionized the vision of the world as Galileo or Newton had done before him, and that the usual conceptions which he overturned—those of space, time, light, and matter—are "as naive as those of the Middle Ages"; but then there is nothing to guarantee that his theory of relativity will not be judged "naïve" in its turn, so that, in profane science, it is never possible to escape the vicious circle of "naivety." Moreover, what could be more naive than to seek to enclose the Universe in a few mathematical formulae, and then to be surprised to find that there always remains an elusive and apparently "irrational" element which evades all attempts to "bring it to heel"? We shall no doubt be told that not all scientists are atheists, but this is not the question, since atheism is inherent in science itself, in its postulates and its methods. The Einsteinian theories on mass, space, and time are of a nature to demonstrate the fissures in the physical universe, but only a metaphysician can profit from them; science unconsciously provides keys, but is incapable of making use of them, because intellectuality cannot be replaced by something outside itself. The theory of relativity illustrates of necessity certain aspects of metaphysics, but does not of itself open up any higher perspective; the way in which Euclidean geometry is abusively relativized goes to prove this. On the one hand the philosophical point of view trespasses on science, and on the other the scientific point of view trespasses on metaphysics. As for the Einsteinian postulate of a transmathematical absolute, this absolute is not supra-conscious: it is not therefore more than ourselves and could not be the Cause of our intelligence; Einstein's "God" remains blind just as his relativized universe remains physical: one might as well say that it is nothing. Modern science has nothing it can tell us—and this not by accident but by principle—about the miracle of consciousness and all that is connected with it, from the most minute particles of consciousness to be found in creation up to the pure and trans-personal Intellect.

monstrous fruits it produces, such as the overpopulation of the globe, the degeneration of humankind, and, by compensation, the means of mass destruction.

Rationalism properly so called had, despite all, the merit of not being purely and simply subject to the investigations of science, hence to material facts; it still kept a certain awareness of the dignity of the intelligence in front of the vicissitudes of experience. But thought in its most specifically modern form destroys intelligence itself, so that nothing remains but the establishing of facts, often arbitrarily selected and isolated from their indispensable "context", and then interpreted in such manner as to destroy what constitutes the very value of the human state; the human spirit is denied the faculty of objectivity and universality, as if, in these conditions, there still remained something to be thought.

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A few words must be said here on the antinomy between dogmatism and empiricism: the empiricist error consists not in the belief that experiment has a certain utility, which is obvious, but in thinking that there is a common measure between principial knowledge and experience, and in attributing to the latter an absolute value, whereas in fact it can only have a bearing on modes, never on the very principles of Intellect and of Reality; this amounts to purely and simply denying the possibility of a knowledge other than the experimental and sensory. On the "dogmatist" side, on the contrary, it is necessary to guard against the danger of underestimating the role of experience within the limits where it is valid, for even thought based on an awareness of principles can go astray on the level of applications, and that precisely through ignorance of certain possible modes, without such misapprehension however being able to affect knowledge in a global sense. It is self-evident that "dogmatism"—whether rightly or wrongly so called—has value only insofar as the immutability of its axioms derives from that of principles, hence of truth.[17]

It is here—let us say in passing—that the hiatus between youth and mature age is situated: what youth has difficulty in understanding a priori—and even if it understands it in theory, the relevant reflexes generally are missing—is that the value of things can in practice change according to unforeseen modes, and that it is the modalities which introduce the paradoxes and enigmas into existence, along with the legitimate disappointments and exaggerated resentments following in their wake.

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[17] According to Kant, dogmatism is the "dogmatic process of pure reason, without prior critique of its capacity," or "a manner of philosophizing (*vernünfteln*) conveniently about things of which one understands nothing and of which no one in the world will ever understand anything." This brings us back, on the one hand, to the picture of the non-swimmer trying to get himself unaided out of the water and, on the other, to a confession of ignorance, to stupidity erected into universal law and mystique; in fact, what can be more irrational than this denial of intelligence in others—which is itself a perfect example of "dogmatism" and which is, in any case, convenient?

But to return to empiricism: there is no worse confession of intellectual impotence than to praise a thought for its love of experience and its disdain for principles and speculations.

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One of the most characteristic forms of denial of the Intellect is the prejudice which seeks to reduce intelligence to the element of passion: without passion, it is said, there is no will to know, no effort, no knowledge. Now, intelligence is intelligence and passion is passion; the difference exists, or the two terms would not exist. There is no question but that every manifestation, be it macrocosmic or microcosmic, physical or mental, requires the cooperation of a dynamic element, but this has nothing whatever to do with the nature of intelligence; this latter remains virgin in relation to desire as long as desire does not impinge on the intellectual domain, that is to say, does not determine thought. The fact that the enunciation of a truth is necessarily accompanied by an act of will is entirely indifferent, since this act of will does not modify the truth but on the contrary arises by virtue of it; it simply forms a part of existence.

Essentially, man knows not by an act of will but as a result of perception: when an object imposes itself on our vision, it is not because we have had a desire to see it, but because our eye is sensitive to light rays. Instead of asserting that everything starts from passion, it could just as well be said that everything starts from knowledge, for there can be no passion for an object which is totally unknown. To claim that man has knowledge thanks only to love or hatred, as some have done, is to confuse an occasional cause—love or hatred—with an essential cause, which proves the absurdity of such theories.

Following the same line of thought, we would point out an abuse of language which feeds the confusion between intelligence and sentiment: it is currently called “pessimism” to observe that black is black—we speak figuratively—and “optimism” to observe that white is white, as if a perception, whether intellectual or physical, depended on our good pleasure; in reality, pessimism consists in taking white for black, while optimism makes the opposite mistake, which means that both alike belong to the sentimental order; it is quite illogical, therefore, to apply these terms to operations of the intelligence.

“Objectivity” is often discussed in our times, but it is readily reduced to a purely volitional or moral attitude, a kind of softness in the face of error or injustice, as if indignation could not be a criterion of “consciousness of the object,” and so of “objectivity”. Serenity can, it is true, result from a higher point of view where disequilibriums are reabsorbed into the universal Equilibrium, and there is then nothing to refute, since phenomena appear in their ontological interdependence, and therefore in their necessity; but there is a false serenity which becomes the accomplice of evil, and proves only one thing, namely that the person concerned does not see that a disequilibrium is a disequilibrium: the man who mistakes a scorpion for a dragonfly remains calm, but it does not follow that his vision is “objective”. Christ’s wrath proved, not a lack of objectivity of course, but the ignominy of its object.

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The universality and immutability of the intellect and of truth imply that there can be no "metaphysical problems specific to our times"; the problems of our times are either the results of abnormal situations, or the fruits of accumulated errors, and it is these latter which must first be corrected before even raising the question of whether objectively possible solutions exist. When "our times" are spoken of, it is most often with a sort of fatalism which accepts them, even eagerly—and this quite conforms to the prejudice according to which an actual "state of affairs" takes precedence over the truth, or rather is identified with it—as if the present quagmire were some blind force of nature for which man was in no way responsible, and as if this something inevitable—or this character of fatality—implied a quasi-normative value or a "categorical imperative"; man poses as a victim when faced with the fruit of his sin, but without giving the latter its name, indeed quite the contrary. A thinking which espouses temporal contingencies—or those of "life," which comes to the same thing—thereby loses all its validity; for validity lies in the quality of objectivity or the sense of the absolute, without which thought is only a monologue or an agitation in the void; if mathematical truths have not visibly changed since antiquity, there seems still less reason why metaphysical truths should change. Scarcely have we been asked to take a certain philosopher seriously when we are already being told not only that some other has "gone past" him, but also that the first has himself meanwhile "evolved"; and if there is a shortage of arguments for excusing the falsity of an opinion, consolation is sought in declaring that it constitutes a sample of "human effort" or a "contribution to culture," and so on, as if the aim of intelligence were not the discernment of truth.[18]

In reality, the *philosophia perennis*, actualized in the West, on different levels, by Plato, Aristotle, Plotinus, the Fathers, and the Scholastics, constitutes a "definitive" intellectual heritage, and the great problem of our times is not to replace them with something better—for this something could not exist according to the point of view in question here[19]— but to return to the sources, both around us and within us, and to examine all the data of contemporary life in the light of the one, timeless truth.

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[18] In this line of ideas mention should be made of the mania for mixing painters and novelists with metaphysics, for seeking imaginary depths or all kinds of bizarre qualities in people like Cézanne or Dostoyevsky; in spirituality, to be "an artist" is an entirely different thing, insofar as such an expression is admissible on this plane; it is to have an immediate vision of universal qualities in phenomena, and of "proportions" and "rhythms" in the transcendent order.

[19] It is evident that some doctrines are more profound than others, but that is not the question here, for a difference of level has nothing to do with "progress," all the less so since such a difference is independent of temporal sequence. Aristotelianism is a kind of "exteriorization" of Platonism, that is to say of the doctrine represented by the line Pythagoras- Socrates-Plato-Plotinus. The Middle Ages showed at times an awareness of the superiority of Plato over Aristotle; it is thus that Saint Bonaventure attributes "wisdom" to the former and "science" to the latter.

One of the things that men of today seem to fear most is to appear naive, whereas there is really nothing more naive than to attribute naivety to the ancient sages of the East and the West, whose teachings embrace implicitly, and broadly, everything of value to be found among the precautions and subtleties of modern thought; a man has to have very little imagination to believe, with the satisfaction of a schoolboy who is promoted, that he has at last discovered what hundreds and thousands of years of wisdom did not know, and that on the level of pure intelligence.[20] Before seeking to "surpass" any "scholasticism," one should at least understand it! And if one understood it, one would hardly any longer try to surpass it in the quite exterior and provisional field of words.

When a philosophy is put forward as the answer to unresolved "problems", by virtue of what principle are we to admit that this answer, hitherto never given, could suddenly arise in the brain of some thinker? If some philosophy, with a completely ineffective prudence which only pushes back the bounds of the difficulty, claims to be making at least some advance towards the truth, by virtue of what are we to believe, firstly, that the thesis in question is really an advance, and secondly, that the truth placed ideally at the end of the road will ever be attained? For one of two things is true: either such a philosopher is the first to give a definitive answer, and then one would like to know by virtue of what quality a man can be the first to discover not a continent or gunpowder, but a fundamental truth of the principial order, which would imply that this man was in fact the first to be intelligent; or else it is the case that no philosopher can give a definitive answer, nor consequently know whether such an answer is possible or not, and then the philosophy which "is moving towards a goal" is itself reduced to nothing. This can also be expressed as follows: if a certain thesis is capable of serving as an— approximate and provisional—"indication" of absolute truth, then this means that the latter exists and one is aware of it, so that there is no need to resort to gropings; a thesis is true or it is not true, and if the said "indication" is true, it is because it is itself truth; error could not "indicate" anything whatsoever.

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[20] For Heidegger, for instance, the question of Being "held the investigations of Plato and Aristotle in suspense" and: "what was formerly wrenched out of phenomena in a supreme effort of thought, although in a fragmentary and groping (*in ersten Anläufen*) manner, has long since been rendered trivial" (*Sein und Zeit*). Now, it is a priori excluded that Plato and Aristotle should have "discovered" their ontology by dint of "thinking"; they were, at most, the first in the Greek world to consider it useful to formulate an ontology in writing. Like all modern philosophers, Heidegger is far from being aware of the quite "indicative" and "provisional" role of "thinking" in metaphysics; and it is not surprising that this writer should, typical for a "thinker," misunderstand the normal function of all thought and conclude: "It is a matter of finding and following a way which allows one to arrive at the clarification of the fundamental question of ontology. As for knowing whether this way is the sole way, or the right way, this can only be decided subsequently" (*ibid*.). It is difficult to conceive a more anti-metaphysical attitude; it is always this same prejudice of subjecting the intellect, which is qualitative in essence, to the vicissitudes of quantity, or in other words of reducing every quality proper to the absolute into something relative. It is the classical contradiction of philosophers: knowledge is decreed to be relative, but in the name of what is this decree issued?

A thesis which is regarded as remaining prudently "aloof" from the truth is not only no preparation for anything, but is obviously false in itself. If we must be content with "indications"—by way of "working tools" we are told—because the truth is inaccessible, then our conjectures are false by definition; it is absurd to present the inaccessibility of truth as being a truth, or to think that truth can be sought outside itself. Or again: if truth is inaccessible in principle, there is no explaining the existence of the concept or the word truth; if it has hitherto been inaccessible in fact, there is no reason to admit that it will ever be attained, and above all there is no possible explanation for this temporary inaccessibility. We could compare philosophical "research" to the vain efforts of an eye to see itself, as if the mystery of visibility were not revealed on the one hand by the nature of outward light and on the other by the intelligence; another image which comes to mind is that of a kitten chasing its own tail, which is not a joke, but a rigorously adequate comparison. We do not deny that such and such a new thesis may represent, in relation to a preceding theory, a corrective movement in the direction of a partial truth, whence the illusion of a real progress; but such a tendency will in practice have merely the function of the positive phase in a pendular movement resulting from the initial contradiction inherent in the rationalist point of view. In other words, profane thinkers cannot fail to sterilize their acquired truths by new errors,[21] and this proves precisely that an apprehension of the truth is possible only on the foundations, and within the framework, willed by God.

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To sum up our exposition and at the risk of repeating ourselves, we say that all anti-intellectual philosophy falls into this trap: it is claimed, for example, that there is only the subjective and the relative, without taking account of the fact that this is an assertion which, as such, is valid only on condition that it is itself neither subjective nor relative, for otherwise there would no longer be any difference between correct perception and illusion, or between truth and error. If "everything is true that is subjective," then Lapland is in France, provided we imagine it so; and if everything

[21] What good, for example, is Schelling's correct view of intellectual contemplation and of the transcending of the subject-object relationship in the Absolute, since it is accompanied by the promise of a flat philosophical pseudo-religion mingled with a "classical" or "academic" aestheticism of the most banal style? The replacing of the Cartesian *Cogito ergo sum* by the formula of Maine de Biran: "I act, I will, I exist," or the *Sum cogitans* of Heidegger, and so on, is strictly a matter of taste, or of mental illusion; the starting point in all cases of this kind is at bottom merely an ignorance ignorant of itself. It may well be asked why thought or action are any better proof of our existence than some sensation or other; it is precisely the intelligence which shows us that many things exist without thinking, acting or willing, for once we see that stones exist, we have no need to invoke thought or action as proofs of our own existence, provided, of course, we admit that we are certain of the objective value of our vision. Now we are certain of it by virtue of the infallibility of the intellect, and that is a subject which admits of no discussion, any more than does the question of knowing whether we are sane or mad. Philosophers readily found their systems on the absence of this certitude, which is however the *conditio sine qua non* of all knowledge, and even of all thought and all action.

is relative—in a sense which excludes all reflection of absoluteness in the world—then the definition of relativity is equally relative, absolutely relative, and our definition has no meaning. Relativists of all kinds—the "existentialist" and "vitalist" defenders of the infra-rational—have then no excuse for their bad habits of thought.

Those who would dig a grave for the intelligence[22] do not escape this fatal contradiction: they reject intellectual discrimination as being "rationalism" and in favor of "existence" or of "life," without realizing that this rejection is not "existence" or "life" but a "rationalist" operation in its turn, hence something considered to be opposed to the idol "life" or "existence"; for if "rationalism"—or let us say intelligence—is opposed, as these philosophers believe, to fair and innocent "existence"—that of vipers and bombs among other things—then there is no means of either defending or accusing this existence, nor even of defining it in any way at all, since all thinking is supposed to "go outside" existence in order to place itself on the side of "rationalism", as if one could cease to exist in order to think.

In reality, man—insofar as he is distinct from other creatures on earth—is intelligence; and intelligence—in its principle and its plenitude—is knowledge of the Absolute; the Absolute is the fundamental content of the intelligence and determines its nature and functions. What distinguishes man from animals is not knowledge of a tree, but the concept— whether explicit or implicit—of the Absolute; it is from this that the whole hierarchy of values is derived, and hence all notion of a homogeneous world. God is the "motionless mover" of every operation of the mind, even when man—reason—makes himself out to be the measure of God.

To say that man is the measure of all things is meaningless unless one starts from the idea that God is the measure of man, or that the Absolute is the measure of the relative, or again, that the universal Intellect is the measure of individual existence; nothing is fully human that is not determined by the divine, and therefore centered on it. Once man makes of himself a measure, while refusing to be measured in turn, or once he makes definitions while refusing to be defined by what transcends him and gives him all his meaning, all human reference points disappear; cut off from the divine, the human collapses.

In our day, it is the machine which tends to become the measure of man, and thereby it becomes something like the measure of God, though of course in a diabolically illusory manner; for the most "advanced" minds it is in fact the machine, technologies, experimental science, which will henceforth dictate to man his nature, and it is these which create the truth—as is shamelessly admitted—or rather what usurps its place in man's consciousness. It is difficult for man to fall lower, to realize a greater mental perversion, a more complete abandonment of himself, a more perfect betrayal of his intelligent and free personality: in the name of "science" and of "human genius" man consents to become the creation of what he has created and to forget what he is, to the point of expecting the answer to this from machines and from the blind forces

[22] Kierkegaard, Nietzsche, Klages and others like them.

of nature; he has waited until he is no longer anything and now claims to be his own creator. Swept away by a torrent, he glories in his incapacity to resist it.

And just as matter and machines are quantitative, so man too becomes quantitative: the human is henceforth the social. It is forgotten that man, by isolating himself, can cease to be social, whereas society, whatever it may do—and it is in fact incapable of acting of itself—can never cease to be human.

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The problem of intellectuality presents yet another aspect, this time in the religious field: there are those who criticize intellectual contemplation—always confused with ratiocination —for "willing" to penetrate the divine mysteries, as if it were not a contradiction in terms to attribute a "will" to pure intelligence, which is contemplation and nothing else. Those who formulate such objections admit a "metaphysical knowledge" only in mystical experience, in the grace which may arise gratuitously from the self-annihilation of the ascetic; but this amounts in practice and in the last analysis to reducing the distinction between truth and error to a question of will and grace.[23] If knowledge is nothing and if illuminating grace alone—conditioned by asceticism—has the power to give ontological certitudes together with the right to express them, of what use is this expression, since, if the intellect be inoperative, there is no faculty to understand it? There are those who would subordinate the intellectual element to the "existential," the "lived," doubtless in order to avoid mere "facility" and to maintain the supremacy of moral will and divine mystery over what are believed to be purely human "speculations", but they forget that an affirmation is true, not because it has been formulated by someone who is considered to have experienced the highest degree of asceticism, but simply because it corresponds to reality; acceptance of an intelligible and communicable truth could not depend on more or less conjectural extrinsic criteria. An urge to debase and humanize the intellect always betrays a certain "instinct of self-preservation", a desire to safeguard something of the human in face of what is "inhuman" in truth. This explains the frequent paradox of a humility which makes itself the spokesman of a collective pride; a man will say for example that whoever has not received such and such sacramental and mystical graces could not spontaneously have an opinion on the divine Truths, and, while recognizing his own individual incompetence, he will disparage all wisdom falling outside a particular religious framework; this is excusable when it is done in the name of a dogma and without preoccupation with the content of the wisdom in question, but it is no longer excusable when taking part in discussions which, in this case, can only be question-begging. There is here an initial contradiction arising from the fact that the intelligence, which is reproached for not being an ascetico-mystical grace, is rejected, not by means of such a grace but by means of the intelligence itself; and what is to be said of unintelligence basing itself

[23] To affirm that grace is a "free gift" is to say that we do not know its causes, unless we are to attribute arbitrariness to God. The same remark is valid for the "gratuitousness" of Creation.

on sanctity in order to pretend that intelligence is valueless? In the same way, it is only too convenient and rather uncharitable to accuse of "pride" those who are more intelligent than oneself or to avenge oneself for failing to understand a superior intelligence by calling it "childish", as is sometimes—with scant humility—done in respect to Hindu thought; it is true, however, that all this is characteristic of human nature. It is not a question of denying the existence of an intellectualist pride, that is to say of a will usurping the rights of pure intelligence and having the ambition to see what reason cannot attain, but the fact that such a defect exists does not authorize the banning of the vision of certain realities, in principle comprehensible, on the grounds that most men do not comprehend them.

Certainly, transcendent knowledge—provided it is real, that is to say "visionary" and not simply "dialectical"—is deepened by asceticism, for asceticism contributes in its own way to the transition from "knowing" to "being," from theory to realization, just as ascesis is in turn deepened by knowledge, where this latter is within the possibilities of the man; but when it is not so, ascesis has no power to produce gnosis—or rather to be the condition of its blossoming—for no discipline can modify the scope of the human receptacle, although, in the course of spiritual development, transmutations that seem miraculous can take place. It is obviously absurd to evaluate some ascetic practice in terms of its possible fruits in respect of sacred knowledge, for that would oblige one to question the heroic qualities of many saints; and conversely, it is just as illogical to make this knowledge depend on conditions of will or morality which are relatively external, for knowledge alone implies intrinsic certainty, that is to say it imposes itself by its very nature of intelligibility and self-evidence, and not by contingent conditions. This could also be expressed as follows: if knowledge is a grace, it is a free gift, and if it is freely given, it could not depend essentially on attitudes of will, otherwise it would be necessary to conclude that grace is their product; or again, if knowledge cannot depend, subjectively, on an extrinsic condition such as ascetic effort, truth in its turn cannot depend, objectively, on an extrinsic condition such as its attachment to a subjective phenomenon, namely the ascetic perfection of a particular individual. Moreover, if on the one hand it be admitted that ascesis is a preparation for grace—in the sense of a logical condition and not of an efficient cause—it must on the other hand be understood that metaphysical intellection, which is direct and therefore "concrete," implies a certain detachment with regard to the world and the "I," and demands a posteriori an ascesis conforming to its nature. And let us repeat here that intellection has absolutely nothing to do with mental "crutches" such as the "law of non-contradiction" or the "law of sufficient reason" and so on, although on the mental plane logic has its part to play, and although from another angle these laws translate aspects of the divine Wisdom. Man can, in a certain sense,[24] will what God does not will; but he cannot in any sense know what God does not know. Vice always comes from the will, but error as such never comes from knowledge; hence there is in the intellect an element of

[24] "In a certain sense" for, if it be true that God does not desire sin, there is, in the last analysis, nothing that takes place outside the divine Will. God "wills evil" insofar as the latter is a necessary element in the cosmic equilibrium; to cut off evil from the world would mean to abolish the world.

participation or union with God, a “supernatural” and not simply human element, and this marks in an eminently qualitative way a clear distinction between knowledge and will. To say that the intellect can “penetrate” the divine mysteries—and it can do so for the simple reason that it bears traces of them in its very substance—does not mean that it can “exhaust” them, for God is infinite, and the mirror is not the object it reflects, any more than the “Son” is the “Father.” In reality, it is not the intellect which penetrates God, but God who penetrates the intellect; no one can choose God who has not been chosen by Him.