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1. To Have a Center

To be normal is to be homogeneous, and to be homogeneous is to have a center. A normal man is one whose tendencies are, if not altogether uniform, at least concordant—that is to say, sufficiently concordant to convey that decisive center which we may call the sense of the Absolute or the love of God. The tendency towards the Absolute, for which we are made, is difficult to realize in a heterogeneous soul—a soul lacking a center, precisely, and by that fact contrary to its reason for being. Such a soul is *a priori* a "house divided against itself", thus destined to collapse, eschatologically speaking.

The anthropology of India—which is spiritual as well as social—distinguishes on the one hand between homogeneous men whose centers are situated at three different levels,[1] and on the other hand between these men taken as a totality and those who, having no center, are not homogeneous;[2] it attributes this lack either to a degeneration or to a "mixture of castes"—especially those castes that are furthest removed from each other. But it is of the natural castes, not the social ones, that we wish to speak here: the former do not always coincide with the castes representing them socially, for the institutional caste allows for exceptions, inasmuch as it becomes numerically very large and thereby includes all human possibilities. Thus, without wanting to concern ourselves with the castes of India, we shall describe as succinctly as possible the fundamental tendencies which they are meant to transmit, tendencies which are found wherever there are men, with various predominant traits according to the nature of the group.

There is first of all the intellective, speculative, contemplative, sacerdotal type, which tends towards wisdom or holiness—holiness referring more particularly to contemplation, and wisdom to discernment. Next there is the warlike and royal type, which tends towards glory and heroism; even in spirituality—since holiness is for everyone—this type will readily be active and heroic, whence the ideal of the "heroicalness of virtues". The third type is the "honorably average" man: he is essentially a hard worker, well-balanced, perse-

[1] The *brāhmana*, the *kshatriya*, the *vaishya*.

[2] The *shūdra*, the *chandāla* or *panchama*.

vering; his center is love for work that is useful and well done, and carried out with God in mind; he aspires neither to transcendence nor to glory—although he desires to be both pious and respectable—yet he nonetheless shares with the sacerdotal type a love of peace and finds little appeal in adventures; and this predisposes him to a contemplativeness in keeping with his occupations.[3] Lastly there is the type that has no ideal other than more or less gross pleasure; this is lustful man who, not knowing how to control himself, has to be controlled by others, so that his great virtue will be submission and fidelity.

No doubt, the man who finds his center only outside himself—in pleasures, without which he feels like a void—is not really "normal"; but he is nonetheless redeemable through his submission to someone better than he, and who will serve as his center. This in fact is exactly what happens—but on a higher plane which may concern any man—in the relation between disciple and spiritual master.

But there is still another human possibility, namely the man who lacks a center, not because lust deprives him of it, but because he has two or even three centers at once: this is the type known as the pariah,[4] arising from a "mixture of castes", and who bears in himself the double or triple heredity of divergent types: that of the sacerdotal type, for example, combined with the materialistic and hedonistic type of which we have just spoken. This new type—who is unhinged—is capable "of everything and nothing": he is a mimic and a born comedian, always looking for a makeshift center, hence for a psychic homogeneity which can only elude him. The pariah has neither center nor continuity; he is a void eager for sensations; his life is a disconnected series of arbitrary experiences. The danger this type represents for society is evident since one never knows whom one is dealing with; no one is willing to trust a leader who is at bottom a circus showman and one who by his nature is predisposed to crime. This is what explains the ostracism of the Hindu system towards those who, born from too heterogeneous a breeding, are "outcastes". We say that this explains the ostracism, and not that this excuses the abuses,

[3] From the standpoint of "caste" this third type is particularly complex and unequal: it contains in fact peasants, craftsmen, and merchants. Thus, apart from all social classifications, it includes tendencies which may be quite uneven.

[4] A loan word in the European languages, derived from the Tamil *paraiyan*, "tambourine man".

or that the assessment made of individuals is always fair—something which is impossible to do in practice.[5]

Generally speaking, a man's psychological type is a matter, not of the exclusive presence of a given tendency, but of its predominance; and in this sense—or with this reservation—we may say that the first of the types enumerated is "spiritual"; the second, "noble"; the third, "upright"; the fourth, "lustful"; and the fifth, "vain" and "transgressing". Spirituality, nobility, uprightness: these are the fundamental tendencies of men who, according to the Hindu doctrine, are qualified for initiation or "twice born"; lust and vanity: these are the tendencies of those who *a priori* are not concretely qualified for a spiritual path but who, being men, nevertheless have no choice; which amounts to saying that every man can save himself in principle. As Ghazzali said, men have to be driven into Paradise with whips.

Thus there is hope for the man who has no center, whatever the cause of his privation or infirmity may be; for there is a supra-human Center that is always available to us, and whose trace we bear within ourselves, given that we are made in the image of the Creator. That is why Christ could say that what is impossible for man is always possible for God; however decentralized man may be, as soon as he sincerely turns to Heaven his relationship with God bestows a center on him; we are always at the center of the world when we address the Eternal. That is the point of view of the three monotheistic religions of Semitic origin, and also that of human distress and of Divine Mercy.[6]

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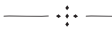
It is crucial not to confuse the absence of a center—which is abnormal—in the hylic and somatic type, with the same absence—but normal in this case and situated on an altogether different plane—in the feminine sex; for it is only too evident that if as a sexual being woman seeks her center in man, she is nonetheless in full possession

[5] The Hindu system sacrifices the exceptional cases in the interest of the collectivity, for the sake of maintaining quality, on the one hand, and the perennial renewal of this quality, on the other.

[6] A point of view which is likewise found in Buddhism and in certain sectors of Hinduism, and necessarily so since human misery is one, just as man is one.

of her center in precisely the respect in which hylics or pariahs do not possess it. In other words: if woman as such aspires to a center situated outside herself, namely, in the complementary sex—just as the latter in the same respect seeks his vital space in his sexual complement—as a human being she nonetheless benefits from an integral personality, on condition that she be humanly in conformity with the norm, which implies the capacity to think objectively, especially in cases where virtue requires it. Too often it is thought that woman is capable of objectivity and thus of disinterested logic only at the expense of her femininity,[7] which is radically false; woman has to realize, not specifically masculine traits of course, but the normatively and primordially human qualities, which are obligatory for every human being; and this is independent of feminine psychology as such.[8]

Another point to be considered is the personal center in connection with certain racial factors. If the mixture between two races too different from each other is to be avoided, it is precisely because this disparity generally has as a consequence that the individual possesses two centers, which means practically speaking that he has none; in other words, that he has no identity. But there are also cases where, on the contrary, the mixture gives rise to a harmonious result, namely when each parent represents a sort of racial supersaturation, such that the racial type is limitative rather than positive; in such cases, the combination with the foreign race appears as a liberation and re-establishes equilibrium; but this solution is as exceptional as are its conditions. Besides, every soul contains two poles, but normally they are complementary and not divergent.



[7] The feminists themselves—of both sexes—are convinced of this, at least implicitly and in practice, otherwise they would not aspire to the virilization of woman.

[8] Legitimate feminine psychology results from the principial prototype of woman—from the universal Substance—as well as from the biological, moral, and social functions which she personifies; and this implies the right to limitations, to weaknesses, if one wishes, but not to defects. A human being is one thing, and the male is another; and it is a great pity that the two things have often been confused even in languages which—like Greek, Latin, and German—make this distinction; a confusion due to the fact that the male is more central than the female, thus also more integral, but this reason has only a relative import, because man (*homo*, not *vir*) is one.

The practical interest of all these considerations lies in the fact that we live in a world which on the one hand tends to deprive men of their center, and on the other hand offers them—in place of the saint and the hero—the cult of the "genius"; now a genius is all too often a man without a center, in whom this lack is replaced by a creative hypertrophy. Certainly, there is a genius proper to normal, hence balanced and virtuous, man; but the world of "culture" and of "art for art's sake" accepts with the same enthusiasm normal and abnormal men, the latter being particularly numerous—to the extent that men of genius can be—in that world of dreams or nightmares that was the nineteenth century. That geniuses of this kind have often been unfortunate and desperate persons who have ended in disaster, does not deprive them of any prestige in public opinion; quite the contrary, people find them all the more interesting and "authentic", and allow themselves to be attracted by the seduction, indeed the fascination, which emanates from their siren songs and tragic destinies.

Let us take the example of a man who has two heredities and thus two equivalent centers, one intellectual and idealistic and another materialistic and pleasure-driven: as an intellectual, this man will forge a philosophy, but it will be determined by his materialism and his love of pleasure; as a materialist, he will enjoy life as a *bon vivant*, but his pleasures will be intellectualized, thus he will enjoy life as an epicurean and an aesthete. And he will be an elusive and inconsistent man, dominated by the pleasure of the moment which he will always justify by his hedonistic philosophy; and this is one of the most lethal possibilities there is.

Consequently it is not astonishing that a man who is at once a man of genius and lacking a true center should easily be a psychopath—and this precisely on account of his unbridled subjectivism—whether he be a schizoid artist, a paranoid politician, or some other such caricature of grandeur. It is all very well to admire the qualities of a brilliant work of art; but its creator may have, alongside his genius, a perfectly odious character; thus the values that are manifested in his creations, or in some of them, pertain only to a single compartment of his split and heteroclitic psychism, and not to a homogeneous personality.

As for profane genius as such, aside from the question of knowing whether it is normal or morbid, good or bad, it is important to know that it can be the medium for a cosmic quality, for an archetype of beauty or grandeur, and in that case it would be unfair to reject its

production; but it would likewise be unfair to despise it for the simple reason that it does not pertain to traditional art, just as, conversely, it would be sheer prejudice to admire a work for the sole reason that it is traditional or sacred, since it could be badly executed and manifest unintelligence as well as ineptitude. In short, cosmic values, or aesthetic and moral qualities, can manifest themselves incidentally in any human climate, to the extent that it does not set up an obstacle to them.[9]

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One has to insist, therefore, on this point: what is blameworthy in the exteriorized and worldly genius is not necessarily his production, but the fact that he sets his center outside himself, in a work which in a certain manner deprives him of his real core or puts itself in place of it. Such is not the case for genius not determined by humanism: in Dante, for example, or in Virgil, their work was the providential manifestation of an immensely rich and profound center; of a "genius", precisely, but in the ideal, normative, and legitimate sense of the term. The criterion of such genius is that the author is as interested in his salvation as in his work, and that his work bears the trace of this. No doubt—when speaking of literature—this criterion could not appear in each poem or in each tale, but it applies to every work that demands a lengthy reading and has to compensate for this monopolization of our attention by a fragrance that is spiritual and interiorizing. Every writer or artist ought to communicate—in addition to his literal message—if not elements of truth, of nobility, and of virtue, at least eschatological ideas; the most stupid and perverse prejudice being "art for art's sake", which cannot be founded on anything whatsoever.

Indisputably, it is humanistic narcissism with its mania for individualistic and unlimited production that is responsible for this ultimately useless profusion of talents and geniuses. The humanistic perspective

[9] It should be noted that, apart from the superior modes of talent or of genius—modes to which the great musicians and actors belong—there are also cerebral prodigies such as calculators and chess players, or prodigies of imagination and vitality such as the great adventurers; we mention such types here on account of the category of the phenomenon, even though, not producing any works of art, these people remain outside of our subject.

not only proposes the cult of man, but—by that very fact—also aims at perfecting man according to an ideal that does not transcend the human plane. Now, this moral idealism is fruitless because it depends entirely on a human ideology; such an ideal wants man to be ceaselessly productive and dynamic, whence the cult of genius, precisely. The moral ideal of humanism is inefficacious because it is subject to the tastes of the moment, or to fashion, if one wishes;[10] for human qualities, which imply by definition the will to transcend oneself, are not vitally relevant unless connected to something that transcends us. Just as man's reason for being does not lie within man as such, so too man's qualities do not represent an end in themselves; it is not for nothing that deifying gnosis requires the virtues. A quality is fully legitimate only on condition that it derive, in the last analysis, from necessary Being and not from mere contingency, that is to say, not from what is merely possible.

The initial contradiction of humanism is that, if one man can prescribe for himself an ideal that pleases him, so too can someone else, for the same reason, prescribe for himself another ideal, or indeed nothing at all; and in fact amoral humanism is almost as ancient as moralistic humanism.[11] The moralizing candor of a Kant or a Rousseau is followed by the adventurous amoralism of a Nietzsche; people no longer say "humanism is morality", they now say "I am morality"—even when this morality is the absence of all morality.

Voltaire expressed the wish that every man should be "seated under his fig tree, eating his bread without asking himself what is in it"[12] (we quote from memory). He means: sheltered from the tyranny of dogmas and priests; and, good humanist that he is, he completely forgets that the decent fellow he is dreaming of is potentially a savage

[10] The ostentatiously human perfection of classical or academic art has in reality nothing universally convincing about it; this was noticed long ago, but only in order to fall into the contrary excess, namely, the cult of ugliness and of the inhuman, despite a few intermediary oases—certain impressionists, for example. The classicism of a Canova or an Ingres no longer convinces anyone, but that is no reason for acknowledging only Melanesian fetishes.

[11] On the more or less traditionalist side one also speaks of "hominism"—with a reproving intention—no doubt because the term "humanism" still evokes "classical" associations of ideas which one still feels obliged to uphold.

[12] That is to say: without concerning himself with the supernatural, the mysteries, in short with things that are humanly unverifiable.

beast; in other words, that man is not necessarily good, and that the only thing which protects man from man—or the good from the bad— is precisely religion, tyrannical or not. And religion does so even if it unleashes in turn some bad men against some good men, which in any case is inevitable and by far the lesser evil compared to a world without religious discipline, a world delivered into the hands of man alone, precisely.

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Since our thesis on the human center has led us to mention the ambiguous possibility that is genius, we shall take the liberty of illustrating our preceding considerations by a few concrete examples, without wishing to plunge into "all too human" (*allzumenschlich*) blind alleys; this is not in keeping with our habit, but our subject more or less obliges us to do so. The reader should not be surprised if, in what follows, he enters as it were into a new world.

A Beethoven, despite being a believer, was inevitably situated on the plane of humanism, hence of "horizontality". And although there was nothing morbid about him, we note the characteristic disproportion between the artistic work and the spiritual personality; characteristic, precisely, for the type of genius arising from the cult of man, thus from the Renaissance and its consequences. There is no denying what is powerful and profound about many of Beethoven's musical motifs, but, all things considered, a music of this sort should not exist; it exteriorizes and thereby exhausts possibilities which ought to remain inward and contribute in their own way to the contemplative scope of the soul.[13] In this sense, Beethoven's art is both an indiscretion and a squandering, as is the case with most post-Renaissance artistic manifestations;[14] even so, compared to certain other geniuses,

[13] It is quite possible that if Ramakrishna had heard the Seventh Symphony and if he could have grasped its musical language, he would have fallen into *samādhi*, something which happened to him when he saw a lion for the first time, or when an Indian dancing girl was brought before him; but we doubt very much that there are many Ramakrishnas among Beethoven's listeners, so the argument has hardly any practical value as regards the spiritual and social justification of such an exteriorized and communicative music, one which is in fact a "two-edged sword".

[14] Whereas in Bach or Mozart musicality still manifests itself with faultless crystallin-

Beethoven was a homogeneous man, hence "normal", if we disregard his demiurgic passion for musical exteriorization.

Alongside motifs possessing all the pure beauty of the archetypes, there are necessarily in Beethoven and his successors—for example in Wagner—features denoting the megalomania of the Renaissance and thus of humanistic idealism. While appreciating particular musical motifs, and different polyphonic harmonies which throw them into relief, one cannot help noticing the disproportionate and "ponderous" side of the musical production in question; a melody may be celestial, but a symphony or an opera is excessive. It should be noted, however, that the great deviation of the C*inquecento* had much less of an effect on music and poetry than on painting, sculpture, and architecture; thus the megalomaniacal character of this or that modern music refers finally more directly—from the standpoint of affinity—to the plastic arts of the Renaissance rather than to its musical arts.[15]

Having spoken of music, let us pass on to another example of creations of genius, this time of a visual character but equally powerful and quasi-volcanic: namely Rodin, direct heir to the Renaissance despite the lapse of centuries; although we cannot accept this carnal and tormented by-product of ancient naturalism as a fully legitimate expression of human art, we are compelled to take note of the titanesque dimensions of this art in its most expressive productions. As in the case of the sixteenth century artists—such as Michelangelo, Donatello, Cellini—the motivating force here is the sensual cult of the human body combined with a neo-pagan perspective,[16] thus with various abuses of intelligence and also with the Greco-Roman sense of grandeur; but a grandeur of man and not that of God.

ity, in Beethoven there is something like the rupture of a dam or an explosion; and this climate of cataclysm is precisely what people appreciate.

[15] In Beethoven and other Germans, the titanism of the distant Renaissance is combined with the thunder of ancient Germany, and this aside from the presence of a quasi-angelic dimension of Christian origin.

[16] There is a curious analogy between Michelangelo's Last Judgment and Rodin's Gate of Hell: in both cases, the sensual and tormented beauty of the bodies goes hand in hand with an atmosphere of damnation, instead of communicating the serenity of the celestial shores as do the naked and on occasion amorous divinities of India and the Far East. With Bourdelle and Maillol, the ancient naturalism is attenuated. Exact observation in art certainly has its rights, but needs the regulatory and as it were musical element of stylization; art has to remain a writing, but a legible one.

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One of the determining causes of the blossoming of genius from the end of the eighteenth century onwards—but above all in the nineteenth century—was the impoverishment of the environment: whereas in earlier times, in the Middle Ages especially, the environment was at once religious and chivalrous, that is to say laden with colors and melodies, if one may so express it, the Age of Philosophy and above all the Revolution, took away from the world all supranatural poetry, all the vital space extending upwards; men were more and more condemned to a hopeless horizontality, "profanity", and pettiness. This is what explains in part, or in certain cases, the cries of protest, of suffering, and despair, and also of nostalgia and beauty. If Beethoven, or any other great creator in the realm of art, had lived in the epoch of Charlemagne or of Saint Louis, their genius might have remained more inward, they would have found satisfactions and consolations—and above all, planes of realization—more in conformity with what constitutes the reason for the existence of human life. In a word, they would have found their center; or they would have perfected the center they already possessed by rendering it supernatural. Deprived of a real world, of a world which has a meaning and allows one to engage in liberating pursuits, many geniuses create for themselves an intense inner world, but one which is exteriorized on account of the need to manifest themselves; a world composed of nostalgia and grandeur, but in the final analysis with no meaning or efficacy other than that of a confession.

Such was also the case with Nietzsche, a volcanic genius if ever there was one; here, too, there is passionate exteriorization of an inward fire, but in a manner that is both deviated and demented; we have in mind here, not the Nietzschian philosophy, which in its literal expression is without interest,[17] but his poetical work, whose most intense expression is in part his *Zarathustra.* What this book, highly uneven as it is, manifests above all is the violent reaction of an *a priori* profound soul against a mediocre and paralyzing cultural

[17] This philosophy could have been a warning cry against the peril of a flattening and bastardizing humanitarianism, thus mortal for mankind; in point of fact, it was a combat against windmills and at the same time a seduction of the most perilous kind.

environment; Nietzsche's fault was to have only a sense of grandeur in the absence of all intellectual discernment. *Zarathustra* is basically the cry of a downtrodden grandeur, whence comes the heart-rending authenticity—the grandeur precisely—of certain passages; not all of them, certainly, and above all not those which express a half-Machiavellian, half-Darwinian philosophy, or literary cleverness. Be that as it may, Nietzsche's misfortune—like that of other men of genius, such as Napoleon—was to be born after the Renaissance and not before it; which indicates evidently an aspect of their nature, for nothing occurs by chance.

This was also Goethe's misfortune, a well-balanced and, from a certain standpoint, too well-balanced a genius. By this we mean to say that he was the victim of his epoch owing to the fact that humanism in general and Kantianism in particular had impaired his tendency towards a vast and finely-shaded wisdom; he thus became, quite paradoxically, the spokesman of a perfectly bourgeois "horizontality". His *Faust*, which starts off in the Middle Ages and in mystery, comes to an end, so to speak, in the nineteenth century and in philanthropy, leaving aside the final apotheosis which springs from the poet's Christian subconscious, without being able to compensate for the Kantian and Spinozan atmosphere of the work.[18] All the same, there is unquestionably great scope in the human substance of Goethe: a scope manifested by the at once lofty and generous quality of his mind;[19] and also, in a more intimate fashion, in those poems where he makes himself the "medium" of the popular soul, of medieval Germany all told; in so doing, he extends the spring-like and delicate lyricism of Walter von der Vogelweide, as if time had come to a stop.

A particularly problematical type of talent led astray from its true vocation is the novelist. Whereas in the Middle Ages novels still drew their inspiration from myths, legends, and religious and chivalrous

[18] The poet believes in the saving grace of an omnipresent divine Love, granted to whoever "strives unceasingly towards the good" ("*Wer immer strebend sich bemüht, den können wir erlösen*"); an eschatological optimism that combines in a strange fashion with eighteenth century deism on the one hand, and with esoteric knowledge of hermetic and cabalistic origin on the other hand; the incoherence is flagrant.

[19] We find the same traits in Schiller, with a slightly different accentuation; thus it is inadmissible that people should heap sarcasms on the moving idealism of this poet—as is fashionable nowadays in Germanic countries—for there was in him a truly authentic moral elevation and sense of grandeur, as is demonstrated especially by his ballads.

ideals, they became from a certain period onwards more and more profane,[20] even chatty and insignificant: their authors, instead of living their own lives, lived the lives of their imaginary personages one after the other. A Balzac, a Dickens, a Tolstoy, a Dostoevsky lived outside of themselves, giving their blood to phantoms, while inciting their readers to do the same: to waste their lives by burying themselves in the lives of others, with the aggravating circumstance that these others were neither heroes nor saints and, what is more, never existed. These remarks can apply to that whole universe of dreams termed "culture": flooded by literary opium, siren songs, vampirizing and—to say the least—useless productions, people live on the fringe of the natural world and its demands, and consequently on the fringe—or at the antipodes—of the "one thing needful". The nineteenth century—with its garrulous and irresponsible novelists, its "*poètes maudits*", its creators of poisonous operas, its unhappy artists, in short, with all of its useless idolatries and all of its blind alleys leading to despair—was bound to crash against a wall, the fruit of its own absurdity; thus the First World War[21] was for the "*belle époque*" what the sinking of the Titanic was for the elegant and decadent society that happened to be on board, or what Reading Gaol was for Oscar Wilde, analogically speaking.

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Like other writers or artists, Wilde offers isolated values—we are thinking here of his tales[22]—which one would like to see in another

[20] Cervantes is in certain respects an exception—and certainly not the only one—in that his work serves as the vehicle for elements of philosophy and of symbolism, making one think of Shakespeare. As a literary genre, the theater is much less problematical than the novel, if only on account of its more disciplined and less time-consuming character. Calderón's plays prolong—in different degrees—the "mysteries" of the Middle Ages and exercise a didactic and spiritual function, in the manner of the tragedies of Antiquity, which were intended to provoke a catharsis.

[21] Of which the Second World War was only a belated continuation and conclusion.

[22] The best tales belong to poetry rather than to novels; they are in a way prose poems, inspired by the traditional models of popular tales containing an initiatory intention. We may note that Andersen does not have Wilde's capacity, but has the merit of having the soul of a child.

general context but of which it may be said, at least, that beauty always transmits a celestial dew-drop, if only for an instant. Divining in him a mystical dimension—his cult of beauty was only its golden shadow—one pities the author and one would like to save him from his morbid and futile side;[23] one may in any case suppose that his conversion *in extremis*—after so many cruel trials—was an encounter with Mercy. We can have the same sentiment in several analogous cases, where regret and hope prevail over a feeling of uneasiness, or even irritation.

Among the classic cases of self-destructive individualism we may mention the poet Lenau—half-German, half-Hungarian—who personifies the drama of a pessimistic narcissism sinking into melancholy and insanity. Such destinies are almost inconceivable in a religious and traditional climate; as inconceivable as the general phenomenon of a culture claiming to be an end in itself. No doubt, sadness has its beauty; it evokes a nostalgia which takes us beyond ourselves by purifying us, and consequently it evokes distant shores far from the disappointing narrowness of our earthly dreams; as the lyricism of the *Vita Nuova* testifies. Sadness has a right to be related to the song of Orpheus, but not to that of the sirens.[24]

There are also unhappy painters, such as Van Gogh and Gauguin, who are bearers of certain incontestable values—otherwise there would be no point in speaking about them; here too, the qualities are partial in the sense that the lack of discernment and spirituality makes itself felt—at least in certain figures—despite the prestige of the style.[25] But what counts here is not so much the value of this or

[23] Or save him from himself, since he personifies the tragic trajectory—or the total cycle—of quasi-divinized pleasure: of ultra-refined and intellectualized hedonism wishing to live itself out, down to its ineluctable ontological consequences. As soon as enjoyment is taken for an end in itself, and in the absence of a vertical and spiritual dimension which, by supernaturalizing it, would lend it the permanence of the archetypes, it presses on fatally towards the suicide it bears within itself. In saying in his "Ballad" that "each man kills the thing he loves", the poet expresses the intrinsic tragedy, not of love, but of pleasure become idol.

[24] Thus Saint Francis of Sales, who was certainly not lacking in sensibility, could say that "a sad saint is a sorry sort of saint"; he has in mind here a melancholy which erodes the theological virtues, precisely. Krishna's flute is the very image of ascending, not descending, nostalgia; sweetness of salvation, not of perdition.

[25] One should not forget—but the modernists will never admit it—that the choice of the subject matter is a part of art, and that the subject, far from being the "anecdote" of the work, as some people stupidly assert, is on the contrary its reason for being.

that pictorial style, as the drama—typical for the modern West—of normally intelligent men who sell their souls to a creative activity which no one asks of them and of which no one has any need, they themselves no more than others; who make a religion of their profane and individualistic art and who, so to speak, die martyrs for a cause not worth the trouble.

We meet in all arts with a type of genius which, like a display of fireworks, burns itself out in a single significant work, or in two or three works born of a single burst of inspiration. This is the case with Bizet, a medium—if one may say so—of the Hispano-Provençal soul, or more particularly of the passionate and at the same time tragic romanticism of bull fighting; with accentuations which, in the last analysis, go back to heroic chivalry and to the lyricism of the troubadours; of this, however, the great majority of his listeners are scarcely aware.

To come back to literature and to its least attractive aspects: an Ibsen and a Strindberg are the very types of talent wishing to make itself the spokesman of a thesis that is excessive, revolutionary, subversive, and in the highest degree individualistic and anarchic; in the nineteenth century, to be original at this price was like a mark of distinction—"after me the flood". This kind of talent—or of genius, as the case may be—makes one think of children who play with fire, or of Goethe's sorcerer's apprentice: these people play with everything, with religion, with the social order, with mental equilibrium, provided they can safeguard their originality; an originality which, retrospectively, reveals itself to be a perfect banality, because nothing is more banal than fashion, no matter how ostentatiously strident.

This calls for a general remark here, which has nothing to do with the considerations immediately above: our intention is not—and cannot be—to present a survey of art and literature, so there is no point in asking why we do not mention this or that particularly prominent genius. A Victor Hugo, for example; if we have not spoken of this sumptuous and long-winded spokesman of French romanticism, it is because neither his personality nor his destiny could merit a substantial commentary on our part; and the same remark applies to

As a matter of fact, the subjects of portraitists are all too often lacking in interest and consequently have nothing to communicate; the landscapists are fortunate in that they avoid this pitfall.

every other typologically equivalent celebrity. We shall not say anything very noteworthy therefore in pointing out that the author of the *Orientales*—like so many other creators of art—lives only through his productions, and that he puffs himself up and finally becomes hardened in the passionate projection of himself; and he does all this while enclosing his readers in an intense and despairing horizontality while inculcating in them a false idea of human grandeur, or of grandeur as such. As a result, humanism—in becoming humanitarianism—entails equally a false idea of human misery, the full eschatological dimension of which people take great care not to perceive; this humanism, furthermore, is quite likely to end in demagogy. And one knows from experience that, amongst the standard-bearers of integral humanism, megalomaniacal idealism gets along well with moral pettiness—on the political plane notably.

Be that as it may, this fragile and almost dreamlike world of totally profane genius and "culture" lasted barely two centuries; born more or less in the middle of the eighteenth century, it died about the middle of the twentieth century, after offering a burst of fireworks in the course of the previous century—the century that believed itself to be eternal. The protagonists die and the audience along with them; and the protagonists with the audience.

No doubt it will be objected that the flux of culture continues, since there are always new writers and new artists, whatever may be their worth or lack thereof; this is true, but it is no longer the same culture; living as it does on forgetfulness, it is no longer the culture which, on the contrary, once lived on remembrance.

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A particularly problematical sector of a culture set against a humanist background is philosophical production, where naive pretension and impious ambition intrude into the affairs of universal Truth, which is a very serious problem; the desire for originality on this plane is one of the least pardonable of sins. That said, and apart from the fact that one should not confuse cleverness with intelligence, one will note that there is intelligence everywhere, and therefore it is a truism to assert that the least of philosophers can sometimes say things which make sense. But, irrespective of this aspect of the question, it is para-

doxical to say the least that those who are readily considered as being "thinkers" are not always those who know how to think—far from it—and that there are men who feel they have a vocation to think precisely because they are unable to evaluate all that this function implies.

As for doctrines—and this is an entirely different viewpoint—one has to recognize that profane philosophy benefits sometimes, and even fairly often in certain respects, from extenuating circumstances given the fact that the inadequacies of contemporary theology and confessional discord provoke with good reason doubts and reactions; thus philosophers are more or less victims, at least inasmuch as they are sincere. For the truths of the *philosophia perennis*, largely disregarded by average theologians, require something in the human intelligence to take their place; this explains, not the whole phenomenon of modern thought of course, but its most respectable or more excusable aspects.[26] But there is also, over and above the vain fluctuations of specifically profane thought, the spiritualist renewal of a Maine de Biran—whose merits we cannot overlook—not to mention the prolongations of ancient theosophy in the case of a Saint-Martin and a Baader, and partially in a Schelling.

Coming back now to the flood of philosophical literature—and it is indeed to this flood that the Hegelian dialectic could be applied—the most serious reproach we can make concerning the general run of these "thinkers" is their lack of intuition of the real and consequently their lack of sense of proportions; or the short-sightedness and disrespectful casualness with which they handle the weightiest questions human intelligence can conceive of, and to which centuries or even millennia of spiritual consciousness have provided the answer.

And while we are in this context, perhaps it is worthwhile to mention a phenomenon as uncalled for as it is irritating, that of the philosopher, or so-called philosopher, who imagines he can support his aberrant theses by means of novels and plays, because this comes down to inventing cock-and-bull stories in order to prove that two and two make five; this phenomenon is all too typical of a mentality

[26] Leaving aside the instances of culpable negligence—such as is the case of liberal theologians for example—not everyone feels obliged to plunge into the twists and turns of Scholasticism, all the more so since it is not accepted by the Eastern Orthodox Church which is, after all, strictly traditional, nor by the Protestants intent on adhering to Scripture.

that does not see the absurdity of intelligence denying intelligence. It is as if one were to paraphrase Descartes' *cogito ergo sum* upside down, postulating in fact that "I am; therefore I do not think."

Normally, the vocation of a thinker is synonymous with the sense of responsibility. The art of thinking is not the same thing as the joy of life; he who wishes to know how to think, must know how to die.

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There is a side of "bourgeois culture" which reveals all its pettiness, and that is its aspect of conventional routine, its lack of imagination, in short its unconsciousness and its vanity: not for an instant is it asked, "What is the good of all this?"; there is not one author who asks whether it is worthwhile writing a new story after an untold number of other stories; it would seem as though they wrote them simply because others have done so, and because they do not see why one should not do so and why one should not gain the glory that others have gained.[27] It is a *perpetuum mobile* nothing can stop, except a catastrophe or, less tragically, the progressive disappearance of readers; there is no celebrity without an audience, as we have said earlier.[28] And this is what has happened to some extent: past authors whose prestige seemed assured are no longer read; the general public has other needs, other resources, and other distractions, however base they may be. More and more, culture becomes the absence of culture: the senseless habit of cutting oneself off from one's roots and of forgetting where one comes from.

One of the subjective reasons for what we may call "cultural routine" is that man does not like to face perdition alone, as a consequence he likes to find accomplices for a perdition in common; this is what profane culture does, consciously or unconsciously, but not innocently, because man bears deep within himself the instinct of his

[27] "To be famous and to be loved", as Balzac said.

[28] Much as Léon Bloy clung to the lifelines of religion, his imagination was nonetheless confined to the closed universe of literature, and it was a waste of time for him to fulminate against his colleagues and his accomplices. In too many cases, religious belief has strangely little power over the imagination, and this is still another effect of immanent humanism.

reason for being and of his vocation. The Oriental civilizations have often been reproached for their cultural sterility, that is to say for the fact that they do not comprise a continuous stream of literary, artistic, and philosophical production; we believe that we can be dispensed at this point from having to explain the reasons for this.

Even more detestable than unimaginative "conventionalism" is the obsession with change along with the repetitious infidelities it implies: it is the need to "burn what one has worshipped" and, on occasion, to "worship what one has burned".[29] Classicism, romanticism, realism, naturalism, symbolism, psychological novels, social novels, and so on and so forth; and strangest of all is that one ceases at each new stage to understand what previously one had understood perfectly; or one pretends not to understand it any longer, for fear of being left behind. One has no choice but to remember Racine and Corneille—above all Molière who, as everyone knows, is still comically entertaining—or Pascal,[30] in the context of "culture" precisely; one is also obliged to accept La Fontaine and Perrault for the sake of children. But few are those who still know and appreciate a Louise Labé, whose sonnets are in no way inferior to those either of Petrarch, Michelangelo, or Shakespeare; otherwise a poet as refined as Rilke would not have taken the trouble to translate them and in so doing turn them into new masterpieces.

No doubt, a man can grow weary of something he has busied himself with too much, or with which he has busied himself too superficially; but it does not follow from this that he has a right to despise it, especially if there is nothing in it warranting either weariness or contempt. Weariness itself can be the sign of a warped mentality, and the tendency to arbitrary mockery certainly is so; quite simply, if we have had enough of something, whether rightly or wrongly, all we have to do is to busy ourselves with something else; there is no reason why we should speak disparagingly of it; he who has studied Aristotle too much can go and play the violin. But it is a fact—as Schiller has said—that "the world likes to blacken whatever shines, and drag the sublime into the dust. . .".

[29] This is exactly what the Renaissance did in "burning" the symbolist Middle Ages and in "worshipping" naturalistic Antiquity.

[30] To also mention a philosopher, the "most valid" one that France has known since the Middle Ages.

Whereas the traditional literatures and arts manifest all their modes and all their diversity in a simultaneous manner—with, however, differences of accentuation depending on the epochs—the West, starting with the Renaissance, manifests its cultural modes in a successive manner, following a route bristling with anathematizations and glorifications. The reason for this is in the last analysis a profound ethnic heterogeneity: that is to say, a certain incompatibility, among Europeans, between the Aryan and Semitic minds on the one hand, and between the Roman and Germanic mentalities on the other; it is a situation in a certain sense equivalent to what the Hindus call a "mixture of castes", with the difference that the constituent elements are not hierarchized, but simply disparate—the West being in addition more individualistic than the East.

A characteristic trait of Western culture from the late Middle Ages onwards is, moreover, a certain feminization: indeed, the masculine costume manifests outwardly, at least in the upper classes and above all among the princes, an excessive need to please women, which is a telling sign; whereas in the culture in general, we can observe an increase in the imaginative and emotive sensibility, in short an expressivity which strictly speaking goes too far and renders souls worldly instead of interiorizing them. The distant cause of this trait could be in part the respect which, according to Tacitus, the Germans had for woman—a respect we are far from blaming—but this quite normal and praiseworthy feature would have been without any problematical consequences if there had not been another much more determinative factor, namely the Christian scission of society into clerics and laymen; because of this, lay society grew into a separate humanity which came more and more to believe that it had a right to worldliness, wherein woman—whether she liked it or not—evidently played a leading role.[31] We mention this aspect of Western culture because it explains

[31] A sign of this lay autocracy and the worldliness resulting from it is, as regards vestimentary manifestations, the low-cut neckline of women, already criticized by Dante and paradoxical not only from the standpoint of Christian asceticism, but also from the standpoint of Semitic legalism which, precisely, makes no distinction between clerics and laymen since it attributes a sacred character to society as a whole. It is not the phenomenon of uncovering the flesh which is astonishing here—for it exists

a certain exteriorized and hypersensitive style of genius; and let us not forget to add that all this pertains to the mystery of Eve, and not to that of Mary which pertains to ascending *Māyā*.

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One has to react against the prejudice that every man of genius, even the most eminent intellectual, is necessarily intelligent, and that it is enough for an Einstein to be intelligent in mathematics for him to be equally intelligent in other domains—in politics for example—which in fact was certainly not the case. There are men who are geniuses in a single domain and who are all the less gifted in other respects; examples of fragmentary, unilateral, asymmetric, disproportional genius are provided above all by those writers or artists—and they are numerous—who compensate for their creative sublimity by a trivial or even odious character. In a normal world, one could readily do without their creations and the hidden poison they contain and transmit in most cases; not in all cases though, since there is the possibility of intermittent "mediumship", as we have explained above.

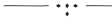
Among many men of varying genius we can see a "brilliant intelligence" having no connection either with metaphysical truth or with eschatological reality; now the definition of integral or essential, and thus efficacious, intelligence is adequation to the real, both "horizontal" and "vertical", terrestrial and celestial. A consciousness having neither the sense of priorities nor that of proportions is not really intelligence; it is at the very most a reflection of intelligence in the mirror of the mind, and we are quite willing to have it called "intelligence" in an entirely relative and provisional sense; human discernment may be exercised in a very limited field, but the mental activity involved is still discernment. Conversely, it can happen that a spiritually—thus

legitimately in Hinduism and elsewhere—but the fact that this phenomenon occurs in a Christian setting; the same remark holds good for the prominence of the male organs in certain costumes of the late Middle Ages. It could also be said that the frivolous character of lay customs—notably the balls—serves as the counterpart for the exaggerated rigorism of the convents, and that this far too ostentatious disparity points to a disequilibrium which is the fomenter of all sorts of subsequent oscillations. In India, the maharajah covered with pearls and the *yogin* covered with ashes are certainly dissimilar, but both are "divine images".

fundamentally—intelligent man lacks intelligence practically speaking on the plane of earthly things or some of them; but that is because, rightly or wrongly, he cannot bring himself to take an interest in them.[32]

To come back to the poets: it is impossible to deny that the plays of Montherlant are quite intelligent in their way, but the fact that the author—who possessed an excessively uneven and contradictory character[33]—scarcely manifested any discernment outside of dramatic art, illustrates well enough the relativity and the precariousness of what we may call "worldly intelligence". One should not forget in this context the role of passions: pride limits intelligence, which amounts to saying that in the last analysis it slays it: it destroys its essential functions, while possibly allowing the surface mechanism to remain, as if in mockery.[34]

In this order of ideas—and leaving aside the question of pride—we might also express ourselves as follows: in a certain sense it was very intelligent on the part of the Greeks and their emulators to have represented the human body in all its exactness and all its contingency; but more fundamentally, it was quite unintelligent on their part to have taken this trouble and to have neglected other modes of adequation, those precisely which were developed by the Hindus and the Buddhists. Intelligence as such is above all the sense of priorities and proportions, as we have pointed out above; it implies *a priori* a sense of the Absolute and of the hierarchy of corresponding values.



[32] It is no exaggeration on our part to say that for some people the most intelligent men are the Nobel prize winners in physics; given such blunders, it is quite excusable to say things which run the risk of being truisms.

[33] That is to say that the plebeian side of his personality was opposed to the aristocratic side, just as in Heine the cynical was opposed to the lyrical; in both cases, the trouble is not in the bipolarity but in the antagonism between the two poles.

[34] The meaning of human life is sanctification, without which man would not be man. "Life is no longer worthy of me", said—or thought he could say—an individualist who refused to accept a trial; whereas every man ought to say from the outset "I am not worthy of life", while accepting the trial in order to become worthy of it. Because, for man to be worthy of life is to be worthy of God; without forgetting that *Domine non sum dignus*, which expresses another relationship.

Thus, neither efficacy in a particular domain nor the phenomenon of genius are necessarily identified with intelligence as such. Another error of evaluation to be refuted is the odd habit of seeing genius where there is none; this is to confuse genius with extravagance, snobbery, cynicism, and brazen boldness, and it is to seek an object of worship because one no longer has God. Or again, it is to worship oneself in an artificial and illusory projection; or it is quite simply to adulate vice and darkness.

Nothing is easier than to be original using a false absolute, all the more so when this absolute is negative, for it is easier to destroy than to build. Humanism is the reign of horizontality, either naive or perfidious; and since it is also—and by that very fact—the negation of the Absolute, it is an open door to a multitude of sham absolutes, which in addition are often negative, subversive, and destructive. It is not too difficult to be original with such intentions and such means; it is enough for someone to stumble onto the idea. It should be noted that subversion includes not only philosophical and moral schemes designed to undermine the normal order of things, but also—in literature and on a seemingly harmless plane—all that can satisfy an unhealthy curiosity: namely all the stories that are bizarrely fantastic, grotesque, lugubrious, "dark", thus satanic in their way, and made to predispose men to all kinds of excesses and perversions; this is the sinister side of romanticism. Having no qualms for being "childlike", nor the slightest concern for being "adult", we are quite happy to do without these somber lunacies, and are fully satisfied with Snow White and Sleeping Beauty.

Literary "realism" is properly subversive because it aims at reducing reality to the vilest contingencies of nature or chance, instead of leading it back to its archetypes and thus to the divine intentions, in short, to the essential which any normal man should perceive without difficulty, and which any man perceives in love notably, or with respect to any phenomenon that gives rise to admiration. This is, moreover, the mission of art: to remove the shells in order to reveal the kernels; to distill the materials until the essences are extracted. Nobleness is nothing if not a natural predisposition for this alchemy, and of this on all planes.

As for subversion, on the plane of ideologies there are not only those which are frankly pernicious, thus negative despite their masks, there are also those which are formally positive—more or less—but

limitative and poisonous and ultimately destructive in their way: such as nationalism and other narcissistic fanaticisms; the majority—if not all—are as ephemeral as they are shortsighted. And the worst among these false idealisms are, in certain respects, those that annex and adulterate religion.

But let us come back to the question of originality which we broached above. In order to define true originality, we shall say this: art in the broadest sense is the crystallization of archetypal values, and not a mere copy of the phenomena of nature or of the soul *tale quale;* and this is why the terms "reality" and "realism" have another meaning in art than in the sciences; the latter record phenomena without disregarding accidental and insignificant contingencies, whereas art, on the contrary—as we have said—works to remove shells in order to extract gold from "dense matter". Positive originality could never arise from our desire; it proceeds from the combination of our traditional environment and our legitimate personality, a combination sown with the archetypes likely to manifest themselves in it, and inclined to do so. In a word, art is the quest for—and the revelation of—the center, within us as well as around us.

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At the opposite extreme of the false genius people glorify is situated the true genius which people ignore: among famous men, Lincoln is one such example, he who owes a large part of his popularity to the fact that people took him—and still take him—for the incarnation of the average American, one as average as possible. This he absolutely was not, and could not have been, precisely because he was a man of genius, a man whose intelligence, capacity—and also nobility of character—went far beyond the level of the average person.[35]

[35] It was during Lincoln's administration that the formula "In God we trust" was first introduced in coinage, and it was Lincoln who made Thanksgiving Day a national holiday. We should like to mention in this context the greatness of soul of another statesman, Chiang Kai-shek: at the end of the Second World War he made a declaration enjoining his countrymen not to hate the Japanese people, which was a gesture of exceptional lucidity and courage; not in itself, because there is no such thing as a people deserving hatred, but given human nature as well as the circumstances.

Another case—and a rather peculiar one—of a genius in full possession of his center is Gandhi; a peculiar case, we say, because he seems to be a borderline possibility from the standpoint of sanctity. Technically speaking, Gandhi can no doubt be included in the category of saints; but from a traditional viewpoint, the question remains open. Against him, there are his somewhat too liberal, even Tolstoian ideas, although—despite certain reservations—he rejected neither the Vedas nor the castes; in his favor, one can mention his practice of *japa-yoga*, which is a good argument as far as "traditionality" is concerned, but not of sanctity as such. We take note of the phenomenon here but without wishing to settle the question in a peremptory manner; what we have here is a possibility that is characteristic of the cyclical period in which we live: a period of ambiguities, paradoxes, and also of exceptions. Given the fact that Gandhi did not found anything and that he had no disciples in the strict sense of the term, the question of his degree of spirituality can, we repeat, be left unanswered. [36]

The question of normal genius, not conditioned by some cultural abuse, allows us to move on to the following considerations, which have their importance in this context. The racist argument that the whites, and among them the Europeans, have more genius than other races obviously loses much of its value—to say the least—in the light of what we have said about humanism and its consequences; because how could one fail to see that neither a hypertrophy nor a deviation can constitute an intrinsic superiority? Nonetheless, when considering genius under its natural and legitimate aspect, one has a right to ask whether this phenomenon is also encountered among non-literate peoples, given the fact that they do not seem to provide any such examples; we reply without hesitation that genius lies within human nature and that it must be possible for it to occur wherever there are men. Obviously, the manifestation of genius depends on such cultural materials as are at the disposal of a racial or ethnic group; since these materials are relatively meager among the peoples in question, the manifestations of genius must be all the more intangible and easily forgotten, except for legends and proverbial expressions.[37]

[36] But we must insist emphatically on the factor that we have just pointed out, namely that Gandhi did not exercise the function of a spiritual master; our "tolerance" thus cannot be taken as opening the door to any technical deviation from the rule.

[37] "Not every man is the son of Gaika", the Zulus say, evoking the memory of a particularly gifted and glorious chief, but who has disappeared in the mists of time.

Non-literate ethnic groups have at their disposal three ways of manifesting genius, in keeping with their way of life: firstly the martial and royal genius; secondly, the oratorical and epic genius;[38] and thirdly, the contemplative genius, but this one rarely leaves any traces, whereas the two preceding types leave them more easily, the second one especially. If these ethnic groups have no sense of history, it is for the same reason that they have no writing: their entire conception of life is so to speak rooted in an "eternal present" and in a flux of things wherein the individual counts for nothing; time being a spiroidal movement around an invisible and immutable Center.

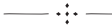
A factor which should not be overlooked when one is surprised at the lack of "culture" among non-literate peoples is that the nature surrounding them furnishes all the nourishment that the soul requires; these ethnic groups feel no need to superimpose on the riches and beauties of nature riches and beauties springing from the imagination and creativity of men; they feel no need to listen to human language rather than to the language of the Great Spirit.[39] On the one hand, the lack of urban culture can assuredly be the result of degeneration; but on the other hand, this lack can be explained by a particular perspective and a free choice; both causes can evidently be combined. It should not be overlooked that the Hindu *sannyāsin*, who lives in the forest, does not worry about "culture", any more than does a Christian hermit; this is not an absolute criterion, but it nonetheless has its importance.

[38] There have been true Demosthenes among the orators of the American Indians. Some of their speeches, either complete or in fragments thereof, have been preserved in writing; the upright, generous, and moving grandeur of their language is quite striking. We may mention here, by way of examples, three men of genius belonging to the red race: first, Hinmaton-Yalatkit ("Chief Joseph"), chief of the Sahaptin (Nez Percés), who in the opinion of American army officers was a prodigious strategist; then the Shawnee chief Tecumseh, who lived some decades earlier—at the beginning of the nineteenth century—and whose qualities as a statesman and magnanimous hero are almost proverbial in the New World; and finally Tammany or Tamanend, a sachem of the Leni-Lenape (Delawares)—in the seventeenth century—who enjoyed a reputation for wisdom and holiness not only among the Indians, but even among the whites, who went as far as venerating him as the "patron of America" and gave his name to several of their societies.

[39] The remark of a Sioux chief after a visit to a museum of fine arts: "You whites are strange men; you destroy the beauties of nature, then you daub a board with colors and call it a masterpiece."

And one has to keep clearly in mind the following: the marvels of the basilicas and the cathedrals, of the iconostases and the altar pieces, as well as the splendors of Buddhist Tibeto-Mongol and Japanese art or, prior to it, those of Hindu art, not forgetting the summits of the corresponding literatures—all this did not exist in the primitive epochs of these various traditions, epochs which were precisely the "golden ages" of these spiritual universes. Thus the marvels of traditional culture seem like the swan songs of the celestial messages: in other words, to the extent that the message runs the risk of being lost, or is effectively lost, a need is felt—and Heaven itself feels this need—to exteriorize gloriously all that men are no longer capable of perceiving within themselves. Thenceforth it was outward things that had to remind men where their center lies; it is true that this is in principle the role of virgin nature, but in fact its language is only grasped where it takes on traditionally the function of a sanctuary.[40] Moreover, the two perspectives—sacred art and virgin nature—are not mutually exclusive, as is shown notably by Zen Buddhism; this proves that neither can altogether replace the other.

All that we have said above concerning non-literate peoples does not mean that they have no culture in the fully legitimate sense. Integrally human culture is linked to participation in the sacred, and this obviously has no indispensable connection with literacy or with sedentary civilization. The immense stores of oral tradition and diverse forms of artistic expression testify to a formerly prodigious richness of soul in ancient man, and this was originally linked to sacred wisdom, of which virgin nature, precisely, is the primordial expression—an expression transparent to the integral symbolist mentality, although scarcely so to modern "culturism".



After having spoken at the beginning of this account of the hierarchical types of mankind—namely of the "intrinsic" and not simply institutional castes—we then engaged in reflections about an entirely

[40] Among the ancient Aryans, from India to Ireland—except, more or less, the Mediterraneans in historic times—and in our day still among the shamanist peoples, Asiatic and American.

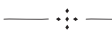
different subject, that of genius, with digressions and illustrations for which we see no reason to apologize. In both cases, that of genius as well as that of the castes, it is always a question of man and his center: either because nature has bestowed on man a given personal center and consequently a particular fundamental tendency and a particular conception of duty and happiness—this is precisely what "caste" is—or because man, whatever his basis or starting point may be, embarks on the search for his center and his reason for being.

To speak of humanism is to speak of individualism, and to speak of individualism it to speak of narcissism and, as a result, of a breaching of that protective wall which is the human norm; thus of a rupture of equilibrium between the subjective and the objective, or between wandering sensibility and pure intelligence. However, it is not easy to have completely unmixed feelings on the subject of profane "cultural" genius: if, on the one hand, one must condemn humanism and the literary and artistic principles derived from it, one cannot, on the other hand, help recognizing the value of this or that archetypal inspiration, and possibly the personal qualities of a particular author; hence one can hardly escape a certain ambiguity. And the fact that a work of art, by reason of its cosmic message, can transmit values graspable only by a few—just as wine can at the same time do good to some and harm to others—this fact makes our judgments in many cases, if not objectively less precise, at least subjectively more hesitant; although it is always possible to simplify the problem by specifying in what respect a given work has value.

Be that as it may, what we wish to suggest in most of our considerations on modern genius is that humanistic culture, insofar as it functions as an ideology and therefore as a religion, consists essentially in ignoring three things: firstly, what God is, because it does not accord primacy to Him; secondly, what man is, because it puts him in the place of God; thirdly, what the meaning of life is, because this culture limits itself to playing with evanescent things and to plunging into them with criminal unconsciousness. In a word, there is nothing more inhuman than humanism, by the fact that it, so to speak, decapitates man: in wishing to make of him an animal which is perfect, it succeeds in turning him into a perfect animal; not all at once—because it has the fragmentary merit of abolishing certain barbaric traits—but in the long run, since it inevitably ends by "re-barbarizing" society, while "dehumanizing" it *ipso facto* in depth. A fragmentary merit, we say,

because the softening of customs is good only on condition that it not corrupt man, that it not unleash criminality, nor open the door to all possible perversions. In the nineteenth century it was still possible to believe in an indefinite moral progress; in the twentieth century came the brutal awakening; people were forced to recognize that one cannot improve man by finding contentment on the surface while destroying the foundations.

Thus, there is no doubt that talent or genius does not constitute a value in itself. One thing is absolutely certain—so much so that one hesitates to mention it—and that is that the best way to have genius is to have it through wisdom and virtue, hence through holiness. Creative genius can certainly be added to this plenitude as a supplementary gift—for others even more than for the one who possesses it—with the mission of transmitting elements of interiorization and thereby of liberation. Clearly, pure spirituality suffices unto itself; but no one will reproach Dante for having known how to write, nor Fra Angelico for having known how to paint.



To return to the first subject of our account: whatever the fundamental differences may be between the hierarchized human types—from the standpoint of that central core that constitutes the substance of a person—there is what we may call, not without reservations of course, "religious egalitarianism", to which we have alluded before; man before the face of God is always man and nothing else, whether he possesses a valid center or lacks one. And man, being what he is, is always free to choose his center, his identity, and his destiny, to build his house either on sand or on a rock.

"Free to choose": but in reality, the man who is conscious of his interest and concerned with his happiness has no choice; the purpose of freedom is to enable us to choose what we are in the depths of our heart. We are intrinsically free to the extent that we have a center which frees us: a center which, far from confining us, dilates us by offering us an inward space without limits and without shadows; and this center is in the last analysis the only one there is.

The text above is from Chapter 1 of the book

To Have a Center: A New Translation with Selected Letters
by Frithjof Schuon
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