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Ananda K. Coomaraswamy
Scholar of the Spirit[1]

Brian Keeble

So as not to present Coomaraswamy in a sort of existential vacuum a very brief outline of his life and work is necessary. But a word of caution must be sounded immediately. We are not dealing here with a writer who saw it as his life's task to present his own beliefs and thoughts. He once said that perhaps the most important thing he had learned was not to think for himself. And he regarded any interest on the part of others in his personal life with the highest degree of disdain. He wrote:

> I consider the modern practice of publishing details about the lives and personalities of well known men as nothing but a vulgar catering to illegitimate curiosity. . . . This is not a matter of "modesty" but one of principle.

We shall see rather more of what is meant by this word principle in a moment.

Ananda Kentish Coomaraswamy was born on August 22, 1877 in Ceylon. His father, Sir Mutu Coomaraswamy, was descended from a distinguished Ceylonese family. He was the first Asian to be knighted by the English monarchy and the first Hindu to be called to the bar in England. Sir Mutu married the English woman Elizabeth Clay Beeby in 1876. Ananda was their only child. Sir Mutu died in 1879 shortly before he was due to leave for England to join his wife and son who had left for England the previous year.

Ananda was raised by his mother in England. At the age of twelve he went to Wycliffe College at Stonehouse in Gloucester where he remained for more than six years. He went on to attend the University of London from which he received the degree of Bachelor of Science with first class honors in Geology and Botany. He spent the years

[1] This essay was originally delivered as an introductory lecture on the work of Coomaraswamy at the Temenos Academy, London, May 1994.

1903 and 1906 in Ceylon directing the first mineralogical survey of the country. During this survey he discovered a new mineral which he named Thorianite. It was during this trip, as a result of witnessing firsthand the effects of Western industrialism on the native arts and crafts—and therefore the life of the people—that an interest in the interrelation between religion, philosophy, work, the arts and the crafts was awakened.

So far as is known the years 1906 to 1916 were spent largely in India and England. His activities in India were partly political and in the cause of nationalism. In 1910 he undertook an extended tour of Northern India collecting a large quantity of paintings and drawings which later became the basis of the collection of Asian art at the Boston Museum. During these years—1906 to 1916—in England, he had among his friends and acquaintances many of the leading figures of the day—among them W. B. Yeats, Eric Gill, William Rothenstein, A. J. Penty, and C. R. Ashbee from whom he bought the press on which William Morris had printed his Kelmscott Press books. On this press Coomaraswamy personally supervised the design and printing of his first major work, *Medieval Sinhalese Art,* in 1908.

In 1917 Coomaraswamy went to America to take up the appointment of Keeper of Indian Art at the Boston Museum of Fine Arts. He remained for the final thirty years of his life at Boston leading the life of a scholar and lecturer almost exclusively. His most mature work was done during this period. He died at his house in Needham, Massachusetts on the 7th of September 1947—shortly after his seventieth birthday.

Of these thirty years devoted entirely to study and writing, the last twenty years of tireless work were his most productive. No definitive bibliography of his work exists despite several attempts. Durai Raja Singam's *Bibliographic Record,* in two volumes with a total of nearly one thousand pages, lists around one thousand items.

Any appreciation of Coomaraswamy's achievement cannot help but be linked with that of René Guénon. Coomaraswamy disavowed any suggestion that his was a prophetic role, but it was certainly providential that both he and Guénon were to remind the West of first principles, in his own words—which could equally apply to Guénon—"in a way that may be ignored but cannot be refuted." Indeed, Coomaraswamy has been described as one of the greatest intellectuals of the modern era—using the word intellect in the sense, its proper sense, of having the habit of first principles.

Coomaraswamy and Guénon were born into a world that had all but erased a principial grasp of the sacred. By the end of the 19th century, and as a result of a complex variety of cumulative developments—including the nominalism of the late Middle Ages, the humanism of the Renaissance, the advent of rationalism, of pragmatic, materialist science and such notions as evolution and progress, the West had indeed evolved beyond its traditional Christian structure. Though there had been voices raised in opposition to this trend towards total secularization—such voices as Nicholas de Cusa, Ficino, Boehme, William Blake, Thomas Taylor and their like—none the less by the turn of the century the West was by and large locked into a self-referring and self-complacent materialism in which the sacred, the true and the beautiful—as first principles—were no longer part and parcel of Western man's intellectual, psychological and practical life.

The result of four centuries of such development was a situation in which religion—by now not much more than the sentimental subscription to a set of moral precepts—was faced with an incompatible and irreconcilable opposite attitude, a science of phenomena that owes its entire allegiance to the material domain. In this situation relativism held complete sway, in the absence of any spiritual or intellectual hold upon the Absolute or supreme principle. And, since no mere sequence of worldly causality can account for it, what we must be obliged to think of as a law of cosmic compensation, this situation was found, in due course, to give rise to a recall to order—a reassessment of all values in terms of first principles.

The contribution of René Guénon to this call to order I will leave to Dr. Martin Lings.[2] But in the case of Coomaraswamy, initially it was the fact of witnessing at first hand in the early years of this century, in India and Ceylon, the Asian apathy towards the erosion of three thousand years of its cultural heritage in the face of secular imperialism that spurred him on to make his contribution.

As a young man in England Coomaraswamy had imbibed a good deal of the arts and crafts milieu. He admired above others William Morris' example, both his craft works and his writings with their anti-industrial bias. So it was more or less natural that Coomaraswamy should have begun with the arts and crafts rather than with religion or philosophy. And, moreover, to look at the arts not as the expression of

[2] See "René Guénon" by Martin Lings, *Sophia*, Volume 1, No. 1, Summer 1995, pp. 21-37 [Editors' Note: Chapter 18 of this anthology.]

a rarefied attitude to life—as a special aesthetic compartment of life—but as part of the expression of reality and of the nature of human life as a whole. It was in the arts and crafts of India that Coomaraswamy began his study of the symbolical and mythical patterns that underlie traditional works of art. Here he was able to begin his demonstration of how, in the normal context of human life and work, the arts are like variegated reflections of immutable principles. They are like so many modes of spiritual knowing and being and where art is a knowledge of *how* things are made, and works of art are sensible supports for the contemplation of those inner realities that enable man to realize those truths that pertain to his proper nature and last end.

In this early tracing of mythical patterns and symbolic forms Coomaraswamy began a process that he went on to demonstrate with blinding clarity in the rest of his life's work. That is, that the outer vocabulary of forms in works of art are the outward expression of a veiled or hidden wisdom and that, in essence, this wisdom is shared by all the great religions. These early studies in iconography took place against the background of two interrelated attitudes, current then as now, that he detested. One was the method of studying art from a standpoint that more or less ignored the deeper religious and philosophical implications of its content. The other was the art for art's sake attitude in which art was studied as if it were merely a sophisticated diversion played on exclusively aesthetic terms. What he wanted to oppose was the idea that one can read arbitrary, subjective meanings into art rather than strive to understand their true meanings as they relate to man both spiritually and practically at one and the same time.

He wrote:

> Let us admit that the greater part of what is taught in the Fine Arts departments of our universities, all of the psychologies of art, all the obscurities of modern aesthetics, are only so much verbiage, only a kind of defense that stands in the way of our understanding of the wholeness of art, at the same time iconographically true and practically useful, that was once to be had in the market place or from any good artist, and that whereas the rhetoric that cares for nothing but the truth is the rule and method of the intellectual arts, our aesthetic is nothing but a false rhetoric, and a flattering of human weakness by which we can only account for the arts that have no other purpose than to please.

It was this "rhetoric that cares for nothing but the truth" and the "intellectual arts" that henceforth were to totally absorb Coomaras-

wamy until the end of his life, a life spent in demonstrating how they were the expression of *tradition*. It is to this idea of tradition that we must now turn.

It was the providential task of Guénon and Coomaraswamy to restore the authentic notion of tradition. Guénon did so mainly by way of expounding, on the basis of the Vedanta, its metaphysical doctrines, and Coomaraswamy mostly by way of showing how such doctrines are embodied in the themes and images of works of art. Strictly speaking, Coomaraswamy came late to the idea of tradition and as a result of having studied the works of Guénon around 1930. His studies up to then of the symbolic and mythical content of art were in effect a study of the means by which tradition is operative in a given religious context.

For our present purposes we can best understand what tradition is by thinking of religion as being the revelation of the sacred to man, and tradition as being the continuity of the *transmission* of this sacred vision in the spiritual, psychological, and practical life of man. When Coomaraswamy speaks, as he so often does, of a traditional society or of the *normal* view of art, he has in mind a society which is founded upon and orientated towards those first principles of knowing and being that are ultimately rooted in the sacred. That is to say the transcendent principle of the One is the ultimate measure of truth in all human thought and action. About this there could be no argument or disproof. As he wrote:

> All tradition proposes means dispositive to absolute experience. Whoever does not care to employ these means is in no position to deny that the proposed procedure can lead, as asserted, to a principle that is precisely . . . no thing and no where, at the same time that it is the source of all things everywhere. What is most repugnant to the nominalist is the fact that granted a possibility of absolute experience, no rational demonstration could be offered in the classroom, no "experimental control" is possible.

Coomaraswamy is not arguing here, and in similar passages, that tradition surpasses religion in any way. All his work demonstrates otherwise; that tradition is concerned with the *maintenance* of what is at the core of a religion and so in this measure is dependent upon religion. So, in the widest sense tradition is the language of the Spirit and in so far as each religion addresses portions of the human race at different times, places, and according to circumstances, so tradition is made up of many dialects that form a universal language. This

universal language of the Spirit, unanimous in its acknowledgment of the one supreme and absolute principle came to be called by the traditionalist writers who followed Guénon and Coomaraswamy, the perennial philosophy. It was Coomaraswamy's great gift to articulate this philosophy by means of works of the most exacting scholarship, a scholarship that challenges the modern intelligentsia with its own weapons. As Martin Lings has written:

> It is as if he (Coomaraswamy) had said, you have asked for scholarship and nothing but that, so let us have it, but let it be the real thing, in fullness and in depth, not merely a surface smattering.

Coomaraswamy's scholarship, in other words, is not meant to demonstrate tradition to be the mere history of what men have believed, one after the other, at various times and places. It is much more than this. It is the presentation of an "all embracing metaphysics or science of first principles and of the true nature of reality." As such it represents a sufficient demonstration or *vision* of reality whereas the religion to which it is attached forms the *way* to the verification of this vision in actual experience. Plato, faced with the inexplicable wonder of existence, thought that the best we could do to explain it was to come up with the most likely story. Coomaraswamy, in answer to Aldous Huxley's question as to why he thought tradition was *the truth,* replied, because its "self-authenticating intelligibility explains more things than are explained elsewhere."

The underlying eternal truth of the body of principles and doctrines that are called the perennial philosophy or *sophia perennis* is, as Coomaraswamy says, "always and everywhere the same whatever form it may take." In the words of Augustine, so often quoted by Coomaraswamy, these doctrines are the philosophy of a "wisdom that was not made, the same now that it was and ever shall be." Now in so far as anything is created it is intelligible. That is to say it is informed by this divine wisdom or *Logos.* And this *Logos* (in the terminology of Christianity, Christ, the Son, is the *Logos*) is the intelligible exemplar of all creation.[3] The doctrines of the *sophia perennis* are, then, the first principles of a philosophy of the supreme Godhead, the creation and man. Put another way, these doctrines are an account of the One and its passage to or reflections in the Many and then the return of the

[3] This is why Eckhart, for instance, lays such stress on the birth of Christ in the soul, and almost no emphasis on the historical Christ.

multiple to a transcendent unity. The supreme principle is the identity of both non-being and all orders of being in the Godhead. This deity has one essence and two natures which together comprise the whole of reality[4]—the One and the All—Creator and creation, from which proceed the two contraries that determine the nature of our existence. As transcendent essence the supreme principle is also the ultimate subject in the experience of being. To unite this ultimate object and ultimate subject in the realization of a state of non-differentiated awareness in which knower and known are one is the final end and perfection of man. This is to know and to see God in so far as humans are able to make such a claim at all.

From the doctrine of the supreme principle as the divine ground of all things, we must move to its natural correlative, the doctrine of the creation, God *in* the many. This is the doctrine of the *Logos* as the divine intelligence at the heart of all created things—for by definition nothing can be outside and beyond the One else it would not be the One. In the final analysis, at the root of all things, there is nothing "different from" or "outside of" the divine Reality. It is the *Logos* that makes possible the analogical correspondence between the spiritual and sensible orders of being. Without this correspondence these two orders of being would, as it were, inhabit disjunct worlds, forever apart from one another. Moreover, the doctrine of the *Logos* entails our seeing the world as a theophany—in Blake's famous words, often quoted by Coomaraswamy:

> To see a World in a Grain of Sand
> And a Heaven in a Wild Flower
> Hold Infinity in the palm of your hand
> And Eternity in an hour.

These axiomatic principles are always assumed by Coomaraswamy—as by all the authorities he quotes—to be incontrovertibly true. They are beyond rational dispute and empirical proof both by what they *confirm* intrinsically and by what they *affirm* extrinsically. They underwrite, both as starting point and as continual orientation, all of Coomaraswamy's expository analysis. As they are true so they require of us, in the words of the Christian definition of faith, "assent to a credible proposition." For as Coomaraswamy says:

[4] "God is both One and All does not mean that the One is two, but that the two are One" (Hermes, Lib. xvi:3)

> one must believe in order to understand, and understand in order to believe. These are not successive, however, but simultaneous acts of the mind. In other words, there can be no knowledge of anything to which the will refuses its consent, or love of anything that has not been known.

It is not often enough appreciated that in the modern world religion has a bad name because it is all too often little more than a sentimental subscription to a set of beliefs that have been isolated from any real knowledge worthy of the name—that is, based on the eternal verities—as if belief should function in the absence of a discerning intellectual scrutiny. Coomaraswamy, echoing his sources, always stressed the importance of the need to *know* in order to *believe,* and to *believe* in order to *know,* in order to avoid that condition Heraclitus spoke of: "Most of what is divine escapes recognition through unbelief" (Frag. 86). To which might be added these words by Coomaraswamy:

> If Christianity should fail, it is just because its intellectual aspects have been submerged, and it has become a code of ethics rather than a doctrine from which all other applications can and should be derived; hardly two consecutive sentences of some of Meister Eckhart's sermons would be intelligible to an average modern congregation, which does not expect doctrine, and only expects to be told how to behave.

So, by way of summary so far, one might outline the following archetypal pattern as underlying all human existence and endeavor however it might appear otherwise because of our entanglement with contingent circumstances.

The world of becoming—that is, the world of created things—is the outward expression or manifestation of God who, in proceeding to be many, sacrifices his essential oneness in order to be known. In so far as he is of the created world man is "other" than God. But in so far as he shares in the One he is created in God's image. As God's image he is called upon to know God by acting as the "reflector" of God's consciousness (such terms are obviously analogical). That is, he imitates God, in virtue of his deiformity, by reflecting inversely the original sacrifice. He must, in other words, sacrifice multiplicity in order to realize and return to the primordial unity. In Coomaraswamy's words:

> The sacrifice undertaken here below is a ritual mimesis of what was done by the Gods in the beginning. . . , (it) reflects the myth, but like all

> reflections inverts it. What has been a process of generation and division becomes now one of regeneration and composition.

In this passage "in the beginning" (*in principio*, or *in divinis*) means in the first principle. The sacrifice, which is a dismembering of God, is made in order to liberate the possibilities dormant in the divine substance. By means of this generation and division of the One so the many worlds are created, otherwise there would be no worlds—spiritual or sensible.

But what is dismembered must be remembered: that is remembering in the Platonic sense of *recollection*. In order to restore our humanity to its divine prototype a "slaying" or "self-naughting" of that part of us that is "other" than God, the psycho-physical self, is required as a sacrifice. Remember Christ's words at the Feast of the Eucharist: "This do in remembrance of Me."

So, as Coomaraswamy concludes:

> This conception of the Sacrifice as an incessant operation and the sum of man's duty finds its completion in a series of texts in which each and every function of the active life, down to our very breathing, eating, drinking and dalliance are sacramentally interpreted and death is nothing but the final catharsis. And that is finally the famous "Way of Works" of the Bhagavad Gita, where to fulfill one's own vocation, determined by one's own nature, without self referent motives, is the way of perfection.

In this passage the "texts" Coomaraswamy refers to are Hindu and Buddhist. But one of the recurrent demonstrations of his work is to show that this interpretation is essentially applicable to Platonic, Hermetic and Christian texts also. For instance, referring to those who, by the exercise of their vocation, traverse the field of becoming which is mortal life, in order to achieve their portion of perfection, the Biblical *Book of Wisdom* says, "They will maintain the fabric of the world; and in the handiwork of their craft is their prayer."

Since it is impossible here to deal with the whole range of Coomaraswamy's work, we might best use the remaining space to deal with two themes that follow on connaturally from the doctrines we have dealt with so far. These are the doctrine of the two selves and the traditional or "normal" doctrine of art.

As Coomaraswamy's scholarly writings demonstrate, the doctrine of the two selves is fundamental to all religions. Without it there could hardly be a religion since there would be no "platform" or "arena" for

the dynamic of spiritual action to be played out. The whole notion of sacrifice as a spiritual attainment implies the conquering of our outer self by a superior inner self—an outer empirical self to be guided according to the illumination of an inner, spiritual Self. Without the *reality* that this doctrine expounds such phrases as "self-control" and "know oneself," let alone the injunction, "the Kingdom of Heaven is within you," would be utterly meaningless—as indeed they are to a world that will not distinguish noumenal from phenomenal reality.

There are, then, two in man—the individual self (psyche or soul) and the divine Self (pneuma or spirit), the Self of all selves. To quote Coomaraswamy again:

> Of these two "selves," the outer and inner man, psycho-physical "personality" and very Person, the human composite of body, soul and spirit is built up. Of these two, on the one hand, body and soul (or mind), and on the other, spirit, one is mutable and mortal, the other constant and immortal; the one "becomes" the other "is," and the existence of the one that is *not* [italics ours], but becomes, is precisely a "personification" or "postulation" since we cannot say of anything that never remains the same that "it is." And however necessary it is to say "I" and "mine" for the practical purposes of everyday life, our Ego in fact is nothing but a name for what is really only a sequence of observed behavior.

In this characteristic passage that situates the psychophysical personality on a level of relative unimportance you will begin to see why Coomaraswamy, as a matter of *principle,* showed little or no interest in biographical matters. He never tired of drawing attention to the impermanence of this outer self or ego. In this he was no doubt fueled by a world accustomed to view man as more or less a congeries of energies and appetites and little else. It is this self, the self of "wants" but not "needs," that is the great burden of modern society.

It can come as something of a shock to discover Coomaraswamy's vehemence in denouncing the personal ego. But in all he did he could quote a multitude of traditional sources to confirm the orthodoxy and authenticity of his conclusion. To quote him again:

> In the words of Eckhart, "Holy scripture cries aloud for freedom from self." In this unanimous and universal teaching, which affirms an absolute liberty and autonomy, spatial and temporal, attainable as well here and now as anywhere else, this treasured "personality" of ours is at once a prison and a fallacy, from which the Truth shall set you free: a prison because all definition limits that which is defined, and a fallacy because in this ever-changing composite and corruptible psycho-physical "per-

> sonality" it is impossible to grasp a constant, and impossible therefore to recognize any authentic or "real" substance. . . . In so far as man is merely a "reasoning and mortal animal," tradition is in agreement with the modern determinist in affirming that "this man," so-and-so, has neither free will nor any element of immortality. . . . Tradition, however, departs from science by replying to the man who confesses himself to be only the reasoning and mortal animal, that he has "forgotten who he is" . . . requires of him to "know thyself," and warns him, "If thou knowest not thyself, begone."

But when Coomaraswamy states quite categorically "there is no one that acts or inherits," we must move to a cosmic frame of reference to understand the "absoluteness" of the denial. We are back at the level of the One and the Many. Hence, as Coomaraswamy explains:

> There is no death of anyone save in appearances only, even as there is no birth of anyone, but in appearance only. For when anything turns away from its Essence to assume a nature there is the notion of "birth," and in the same way when it turns away from the nature, to the Essence, there is the notion of a "death," but in truth there is neither a coming into being nor a destruction of any essence, but it is only manifest at one time and invisible at another.
>
> The manifestation and invisibility are due respectively to the density of the material assumed on the one hand, and to the tenuity of the essence on the other.

It is clear from this passage that the impermanent, outer self or ego must be seen as a "created accident" of the divine essence that alone is permanent. Coomaraswamy drew upon the whole range of scriptural texts and traditional teachings to underpin his demonstration of the universality of the doctrine of man's perfectibility by way of attaining to his inner, divine self—spirit, not *psyche* (soul). For in the traditional philosophy "the soul is as much as the body a thing that becomes, according to the food it assimilates."

For instance, a text such as Augustine's "things that are not immutable are not at all," among many others, might be used by Coomaraswamy to authorize his claim that "what we call our consciousness is nothing but a process." And Eckhart's "the kingdom of heaven is for none but the thoroughly dead," as Coomaraswamy points out, is yet another elliptical way of saying that no soul, as a thing that is still becoming, can subsist in the purity and permanence of Heaven. For had not St. John said, "no man hath ascended up to heaven, but he that came down from heaven." No nature returns to essence as a

nature, but must first put on the ungenerated perfection of essence. Such purity is made necessary by the transcendent perfection of the divine essence that is beyond Being itself. As Coomaraswamy puts it—making use again of Eckhart—"man's last end is to be 'as free as the Godhead in its non-existence'."

Now this spiritual drama that is the sacrifice of the ego for the sake of attaining the divine self is not fought out in some specially set aside department of life. It is the living of life itself. It is nothing less than our proper vocation as human beings. If it is not fought out at the very heart of all our thinking and doing it will not be accomplished at all. And here we must deal with our final theme, that of art or right livelihood.

Coomaraswamy's scholarship is nothing if not an overwhelming demonstration that the traditional view of art is in almost every respect the opposite of the modern. It is in this area that Coomaraswamy makes his most radical challenge to the modern mentality.

In its traditional conception art does not refer to that select category of aesthetic creations set apart from the customary activities of daily life. Here, art is not the thing made, it is the innate principle that stays in the artist. It is the habit of the practical intellect that determines how a thing or action should be brought to its own perfection. In this sense art is not a sort of superior delectation—but is concerned with integrating outward activities with internally realizable states of being and truth. Art therefore serves as a support for contemplation. Again we come back to the notion of man imitating God. Here it is a case of the human artist imitating the divine artificer. As God, the supreme artist, creates the world by outwardly manifesting His inner divine substance, so the artist conceives inwardly, as an image, what it is he must make. Then by the operative habit of his art he fashions that image outwardly in some material substance. To the extent that the artist is able to reduce to a minimum the difference between inwardly conceiving and outwardly executing, so he draws closer to the perfect instantaneity by which God makes the world—and which He saw was Good! Such perfect integration as the human artist is capable of entails mastery over the idiosyncrasies and defects of his outer personality. In other words art (or work)—there is no real distinction in this context—are a form of prayer, as Coomaraswamy never tired of pointing out.

It would be almost impossible to overemphasize the contrast between the modern conception of the artist as a special sort of person, and the traditional conception in which *every* person is an artist and

all work is sacrificial—a "making sacred"—a type of ritual action or performance. The classic statement of the traditional conception of art and work as precisely human vocation comes in the Bhagavad Gita—though Coomaraswamy did confirm the universal application of the same thesis from Platonic, Christian, Hindu, Buddhist and other sources. He translates the passage in the Gita as follows:

> Man reaches perfection (or success) by his loving devotion to his own work. . . . And now hear how it is that he who is thus devoted to his own task finds this perfection. It is inasmuch as by this work that is his own he is praising Him from whom all beings (or, all his powers) are projected, and by whom all this (Universe) is extended. More resplendent is one's own law, however imperfectly fulfilled, than that of another, however well carried out. Whoever does not abandon the task that his own nature imposes upon him incurs no sin. . . . One's hereditary . . . task should never be forsaken, whatever its defects may be; for every business is clouded with defects, as fire is clouded by smoke.

In order to show the universality of this doctrine we might quote from the Christian tradition, this fragment from Epicharmus of Syracuse:

> The divine Logos accompanies all the acts, itself teaching men what they must do for their advantage; for no man has discovered any art but it is always God.

Since the passage from the Gita emphasizes the function of the artist in the wider social context, we might end by quoting a passage that is not only a summary of a good deal of scholarly research by Coomaraswamy, but also refers intimately to the theme of the two selves in the actual operation of art.

> In the production of anything made by art, or the exercise of any art, two faculties, respectively imaginative and operative, free and servile, are simultaneously involved; the former consisting in the conception of some idea in an imitable form, the latter in the imitation . . . of this invisible model . . . in some material, which is thus in-formed. Imitation, the distinctive character of all the arts, is accordingly two-fold, on the one hand the work of intellect . . . and on the other of the hands. . . . These two aspects of the creative activity correspond to the "two in us," viz. our spiritual or intellectual Self and sensitive psycho-physical Ego, working together. . . . The integration of the work of art will depend upon the extent to which the Ego is able and willing to serve

> the Self, or if the patron and the workman are two different persons, upon the measure of their mutual understanding.

Obviously nothing could be further from the way in which art is understood and practiced in the modern world. Today the artist works as if it were more or less impossible to serve spiritual needs in and through the material and practical life of everyday. The modern artist, set aside from the mass of society, thinks of art as the expression of his personality—a private invention or fabrication which demonstrates his originality and uniqueness. In such circumstances he must always feel the lash of that tyrant innovation—be "different" or be ignored. All this Coomaraswamy called abnormal for the very reason that it does not, ultimately, correspond to the nature of reality, and so does not correspond immediately to the needs of man himself in the wholeness and integrity of his material and spiritual nature. As Coomaraswamy never tired of demonstrating by the sheer cognitive power of his scholarship, as well as the rhetorical strength of his argument, normal art belongs to a type of culture where the practice of art is the treading of a path towards freedom from that very self or ego that is the almost sole preoccupation of modern culture. All the force of traditional philosophy, as he said, "is directed against the delusion 'I am the doer'." "I" am not in fact the doer but the instrument; human individuality is not an end but only a means.

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