WORLD PERSPECTIVES

II

MAN'S WESTERN QUEST

DENIS DE ROUGEMONT

GEORGE ALLEN AND UNWIN

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DENIS de ROUGEMONT

Man's Western Quest

The Principles of Civilization

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Introduction

THE PURPOSE of this book is to describe man's Western Quest, to seek the principles of its coherence, and to compare it with other quests in a world perspective.

I am careful to say "describe" it, not appraise it; for I live in and by it, and any appraisal I might make of its present results would still be a part of it and within its frame of reference.

And I say Western *Quest,* because I do not in the least intend to describe Western civilization as a whole, but only the human attitude which it presupposes and that has made its most typical creations possible. This attitude is to be distinguished from the attitudes that have produced other civilizations, past and present, by a fundamental anxiety and by the creation of ever greater risks, risks which constantly call back into question the certainties and securities previously gained.

Finally, I am careful to say *man,* in general, because I believe in the ultimate unity of the human race, whatever may be the truth concerning its origins, about which we know so far next to nothing.

As to the method that I intend to adopt, I shall illustrate it by an example. Western civilization has produced, among others, two thoroughly specific realities—the person and the machine. Those two realities are heterogeneous, of an order and nature not to be compared; but they are characteristic of our culture, not because they can provide a summary of it, but because the West, alone and first, produced them. I try therefore to imagine what one and coherent human attitude will serve to explain both those two apparently unrelated products. This leads

me to study the genesis of the Western Quest, and at the same time to inquire whither it is tending and to meditate upon the ambiguous future which it is laying up for mankind.

Hence the question, *Where are we?* leads necessarily to two other questions, *Where have we come from?* and *Where are we going?* It is impossible to answer one without implying an answer to the other two.

If I name the person and the machine among our specific products, many people may be content to quote Pascal, either aloud or under their breath, "The self is hateful," or else they may say, "The machine is useful, but it can enslave us." To think in this way is implicitly to adopt a position (rudimentary, and in this instance negative as well) regarding the probable results of the Western Quest. In answering the question, *Where are we?* such people prejudge therefore the question, *Where are we going?* and yet leave unanswered the *Where have we come from?*—that is to say, the problem of the organic genesis of the realities which they are appraising, and of their necessity once certain fundamental options are granted. Yet how could we determine the general direction of our advance without some notion of the place we have come from?

But, inversely, inquiry into the origins of our civilization can never lead to our discovering an indisputable starting point. It will rather lead us to isolate in the past as many different starting points as there are schools of thought in our human society today. One will speak of the invention of the plowshare, or of the wheel, or of the harnessing of the saddlehorse; another, of some Nordic invasion, or of the appearance of a new religion; a third will choose to seize on some clearly dated event, which he considers symbolic or big with consequences. And the one thing remaining certain is that the various starting points cannot be right separately, and that the problem of the precise beginning, of its date, and even of its nature, remains insoluble so long as

we confine ourselves to the past. In reality, the problem cannot meet with a significant answer unless the development of a given civilization is considered as a whole, with what has turned out to be permanent and with the constant aim which it seems to have pursued. Its end alone, slowly given shape, makes it possible to determine the truly fruitful elements in its genesis.

All that amounts to saying that for the classroom question, How did this or that civilization originate? it is necessary to substitute a question about *fundamental options,* both initial and final, such as determine the type of venture or Quest upon which a given human group has engaged. All that suggests too that there is a profound and possibly illuminating analogy, term for term, between a work of art and a civilization. When and where did the work have its birth? The day on which the first page was written, the first dab of color laid on, the first bars noted down, or was it on the day that we sketched a plan? Or again, ought we to go back as far as the note written on one's knee in the train, long ago, and that one comes across while sorting papers, or to some adolescent surge of feeling? Or simply to a commission one was given? Who can decide? What remains certain is that once there has been the first vision of a work *already completed in imagination,* every chance, every accident, and every encounter comes along to serve in its composition, and is both selected and transmuted—let us go further, created—by it. The question, "Is it good or bad?" recurs after every stroke of the brush, every sentence, and every bar, locally, in virtue of the particular technique adopted; but it occurs also in a more diffused fashion in respect of the idea of the whole or of the directing vision. But that whole, that glimpsed goal, that grasp of the work, is predetermined in the indiscernible act—*per naturam* not to be located—whereby the work itself was conceived. The whole and the grasp of it will perhaps be modified on the way. Perhaps they will appear to the reader or spectator, or again to

the opinion of remote ages, very different from what the author himself imagined. No matter: without them nothing would have been done. "In my end is my beginning," says a poet, translating the mystics. This holds for artists and scientists. It holds also for the collective work which a civilization stands for.

The hypothesis by which the present work is guided may now be put into the terms of those analogies. It consists in postulating that *the original attitude, the fundamental option of any human pursuit, conditions not only future discoveries, but also the nature of that which later on will be accepted as the reality.* The factual, ethical, or cognitive results that a civilization yields do not so much disclose as a whole some reality in itself as illustrate the general direction in which the creative men and agents of that civilization have decided to seek and persist in seeking. Tell me what thou findest, and I shall tell thee what thou wast seeking. "Thou wouldst not be seeking me hadst thou not already found me," says Pascal's God to man. But, on the other hand, thou wouldst not be finding me if thou hadst not already accepted me.

It is the *simple questions,* those that are thought to be settled once and for all, that alone enable us to discover the essence, the characteristic genius, or, better, the initial finality of a given civilization. Does that civilization look on matter as good or bad? Does it consider individuality real or illusory? Does it strive to transcend the self, or else to escape out of it as out of a prison, or again does the civilization seek to deprive the self of autonomy by integrating it in a collective body, either administrative or mythic? From the various answers that have been effectively given to those questions ensue the respective forms of Western and Eastern civilizations, their vanished antecedents, and their totalitarian substitutes.

Part One
THE WAY AND THE QUEST

I.

The Parting of the Ways

Whatever are opposites co-operate,
and from the divergent proceeds
the most beautiful harmony.
HERACLITUS

Recognizing Our Differences

SPEAKING of the Absolute, which some call God, others the Self, or the Whole, or Being, Ramakrishna said: "There is no difference, whether you call him 'Thee' or whether you think, 'I am He.' " If there were "no difference," there would be no basic antinomy between the Christian faith of the West and the religious teaching of Asia.[1] On other levels, however, differences are obvious. It would be wronging man to deny their connection with certain fundamental *options* which he has exercised at a religious level.

In the name of the very wish for the union of mankind which inspires the best minds on either side, it appears to me vital to admit quite frankly the historical and spiritual existence of two different experiences, of two ways that diverged long ago, of two types of human venture that may be indicated by terms which are symbolical rather than geographical—the terms, East and

[1] The West is represented in this particular case by the orthodox theology of European Catholics and Protestants, according to which God is the *Thee* of man; and Asia, by the philosophical and religious systems such as the Advaita and the Brahmo Samaj, both Hindu, in which the Whole is conceived as being no other than the *I* carried to full reality.

West. To contrast the content of those terms is the purpose of my first chapter.

Some readers may think it dangerous to emphasize what distinguishes us instead of making the most of what we have in common; and feel that there is the risk of fostering prejudice and, from a sense of symmetry, of exaggerating antitheses for which a higher wisdom would find the synthesis. I see the danger. But it must also be understood that a final union of minds will never be achieved at the price of sacrificing our vital diversities. Union presupposes rather that we should know the why and wherefore of these. To want to remain unaware of them for the sake of peace, to ignore them in silence or to minimize them, is to throw away in advance the two major virtues of a true union—fruitfulness and lastingness. A higher and truly unitive wisdom does not issue from ill-informed aspirations, nor from a refusal to see the present state of things clearly, nor by recourse to some universal "Tradition" reaching back into the darkness of times past and submerging the concrete problems of our present century in an inclusive condemnation of the West.[2] "In the dark every cat is gray," says the French proverb. It is a poor recipe for union that cannot survive the dawn! If East and West are one day to converge instead of to remain unaware of, or fighting, one another, they will owe this far less to a "return to the beginnings" than to a conscious and ever more lucid advance upon the respective goals of their double venture. Better grasped, fulfilled more nearly, those goals will prove one day to be complementary in a fashion which is still indescribable to us, but the presentiment of which bears us company.

External Realities of the Division

Let us grant the hypothesis of a common origin, and of a

[2] I refer to the general attitude of the *modern* authors who in the *West* claim to preserve "traditional thought." They are inverted Utopians projecting into a past which can bear everything but verification a negative of that present which they reject.

family of Indo-European idioms, of which Sanskrit is the oldest witness. Let us grant the existence between India and Europe of a relationship of race older than the Aryans. (This seems to be attested by the fact that Dravidians and Cretans shared symbols—a caduceus, a tree, a stone, a snake, a bull, and a mother-goddess.) Let us grant that the caste system, which the conquering Aryans foisted upon the peoples of India, originated in Europe, where Plato idealized it and Caesar was destined to see traces of it among the Gauls. This primitive identity as perhaps it was, this unmistakable relationship at the outset, only makes more striking the divergence of subsequent developments.

In the East, India codified castes, and even added one more,[3] made numerous sub-castes, and kept the system going for nearly thirty centuries, notwithstanding all the efforts exerted by religious reformers, by Buddha, by Islam, and by the English. In the West, on the other hand, the rise of Europe coincided with the successes of a permanent struggle against caste. Hellenic democracy, the expansion of Christian ethics, the Renaissance, and the French Revolution mark stages in the dissolution of the tripartite social system bequeathed by our Aryan ancestors.

Against the common background the differences stand out. They can be seen incessantly asserting themselves in the ensemble or whole consistency of our history, in spite of the extended parenthesis of the Middle Ages. In many respects, indeed, the Middle Ages represented the "Eastern" period of the West. Symbolism predominated in every sphere, the three great castes were tending to form again; rites and ever more numerous traditions obstructed every effort at innovation or individual variation; the next world was regarded as more real than this one here below, whence accordingly it was a duty to escape rather than to try to make it over to suit the tastes of a vile body, and an

[3] The caste of Sudras or subjugated natives; pariahs or persons of no caste are resisters to the process of social integration.

ill-informed mind; everywhere the sacral-collective repressed the individual-rational. In this "Eastern" situation the tendency to individualism could only be exerted in mystical adventure. The true *individual* of the Middle Ages is Meister Eckart, even as in India it was first Buddha, then this or that guru down to our own day—that is, the holy man who cuts himself off from clan, customs, rites, and magic, and finally from dogma itself—the social dogma first and then the religious—growing heterodox less by negation of an orthodoxy which he fancies he is still serving than by having actually passed beyond it. But the East had no Renaissance. The very length of its middle ages, which were brought still flourishing face to face with our technical age, betrays the absence of the dialectical tensions which provoked the end of ours.

After the Renaissance the angle of divergence widened rapidly —to reach about 180° at the beginning of our technical century. Thereupon the reality of the almost diametrical opposition in which the two worlds stand became obvious to the least enlightened traveler. Attenuated in Europe by all the monumental and religious survivals of the Middle Ages, it strikes the eye in the United States, where the living past does not go back beyond an imported post-Renaissance.

All over India there is nothing but pilgrimages, sanctuaries, holy places, and holy quarters of towns; sacred trees, rivers, and animals; men and women crouching in prayer on their thresholds, at the side of the street or road, or else solitary and erect before an idol.[4] And a universal poverty.

In Europe, in a landscape where church steeples are still generally the principal feature of the silhouette of village and town, a few pilgrimages and holy places, a few hundred old castles (in

[4] Perhaps in India there are almost as many idols as inhabitants, if it is remembered that the number of known gods in the Hindu pantheon is estimated at 33 crores, i.e., 330 million.

mysticism, symbols of the soul) are evidence of a sense of the holy the antiquity of which causes it to be prized, but are cut off from life, and are being impatiently hemmed in by the great industrial suburbs and the scenic appurtenances of technics.

America is without a single holy place apart from the churches in rich fake-Gothic, upon which the skyscrapers look down from a great eminence; without a single pilgrimage or a single real castle. Plains and cities equally immense, devoid of mystery, cleansed of all trace of primitive religion and of any veneration for things, plants, animals, or the supernatural. But there are a moral well-being and a material comfort in much of which all classes share.

The Western traveler back from the East exclaims: "I saw only crowds, never a person!" And the Eastern visitor who has been to and fro in our Western cities feels that he has seen only disorderly agitation, an absence of meaning and harmony, never a true spiritual being.

Internal Realities of the Division

a. Symbolism in East and West.[5] East and West are thus not only geographical entities easily definable if not easily delimited; nor are they merely historical complexes, the mixtures and superimpositions of which would be, incidentally, objects of

[5] I want to make it clear that in this chapter, apart from exceptions, I select India to represent the East, and Christian Europe the West. That is to some extent arbitrary, but how do otherwise if I am not to confuse the intention of this book? Here now are some reasons to justify this proceeding. India has played in Asia a part that may well be compared with that of Europe in the West. It is out of Hinduism that Buddhism came, and from India it spread over Tibet and China, Malaya and Burma, a great part of Indonesia, and finally over Japan. It is out of Catholicism that the Reformation came, and from Europe it emigrated to North America. The juxtaposition of Europe and India has a central significance, and might be made to correspond with the juxtaposition of Far West and Far East represented by two "heretical" forms of the initial religion—American moralism and Zen Buddhism, both anti-mystical. Historically, the possibility of the first juxtaposition was long delayed by the barrier of Islam, and could only begin in the nineteenth century; the second is occurring before our eyes, provoked by the shock of war between Japan and the United States.

a study no less fruitful than that of their progressive differentiation. They are those things beyond all doubt, but they are much more—two *ways* for man, two main directions of his tireless Quest of the Real. To pass from the geographical and historical meaning of our two terms to their symbolical and spiritual meaning, let us resort to the visionary accounts which two great religious philosophers of Persia and Arabia, Avicenna and Sohrawardi, have left on this fundamental subject.[6]

Avicenna's account is an initiation to the East: a world of forms of light, contrasting with the West and its terrestrial world and with the Far West of pure matter. An angel appearing to an adept describes to him a cosmos of which the ostensibly physical data are transmuted into symbols, and the angel ends by inviting his collocutor to undertake the mystical journey to the East. What is the symbolical cosmos here? On the right, the East of Forms and of the Rising Sun, beyond which is the angelic universe; on the left, the West of Matter and of the Setting Sun, along the farther shore of which lies "a sea warm and muddy" (non-being). The Dark One reigns permanently over this country. "Those who cultivate its soil come from elsewhere. . . . [The theme of Exile.] And this climate is a place of devastation, a desert of salt, filled with disturbances, wars, disputations, and tumults; joy and beauty are but a loan obtained from some distant spot." Between East and West—that is to say, at the meeting place of matter and form—is a place intermediately circumscribed: "It is the place we know best." (Here is meant our terrestrial life.)

In the *Account of the Western Exile of the Soul* Sohrawardi

[6] Cf. Henry Corbin, *Avicenne et le Récit visionnaire*, 2 vols. (Teheran, 1954); and by the same author, *Œuvres philosophiques et mystiques de Sohrawardi*, vol. I (Teheran, 1952). These contain the text of the two accounts which I mention. Avicenna's is entitled *Récit d'Hayy ibn Yaqzân* (The Account of Hayy ibn Yaqzan); that of Sohrawardi, *Récit de l'exil occidental de l'âme* (Account of the Western Exile of the Soul). The first belongs to the tenth century, the second to the twelfth.

describes the soul's pilgrimage, its "exile" in the bonds of matter and body which hold it captive in their black fortresses, its departure to the East of illumination, of origins and of deliverance. And there are the same symbolical meanings of East and West as in Avicenna's account, to which, for that matter, the author connects his tale, which is a vision.[7]

Let us now try to draw up a list of the symbolical characters which the two writers attribute to East and West. Let us add the qualifying adjectives which, from the time of the pre-Socratics down to our own day, every Western mind that has been nourished on the mystic teaching of the Near East [8] has coupled with the two terms. We shall have the following scheme, formed of fourteen antitheses:

EAST. Dawn, morning, the high, the right side, extreme refinement, light, the Angel of Revelation, the final goal, the soul, initiation, wisdom, regeneration, knowledge freed by illumination, the original homeland.

WEST. Sunset, evening, the low, the left side, opaque thickness, twilight, the demon of utilitarianism and blind power, obliviousness to the aims of the spirit, body, and matter, disorderly activity, passion, degradation, knowledge gone astray and obscured by material and passionate bonds, the place of exile.

The unanimity of interpretation—entirely favorable to the East—of our two symbolical terms cannot fail to be impressive. It cannot be passed off as anything accidental, physical or anecdotal. For if the sun rises in the East for the Greeks, so it does

[7] Note that Avicenna and the Sufi mystic both wrote in that "place intermediately circumscribed between East and West" which is formed, physically on this occasion, by Arabia and Persia. Their West was the Greece of Aristotle, and the East was not India or China, but that of the "illuminated" mysticism of some Koranic traditions.

[8] I have in mind Parmenides and Plato, the gnostics, the *Pistis Sophia*, St. Augustine and his famous contrast between *cognitio matutina* and *cognitio vespertina*, the Manichaeans and the Sufi mystics, and their remote Catharist and "courtly" disciples, Pico della Mirandola, Jakob Boehme, and the German romantic philosophers and poets, and of course all European occultists from the Middle Ages down to our day.

for the Hindus, and these do not stand for the West in the sight of China or Malaya, nor is Japan the West for America! The unanimity thus discloses a form of spirit, a tendency of the soul—it might even be said, an "orientation" of the Western psyche. But from the prestige of that East, which is not the East of atlases, the real East—which stretches from Persia to Japan via India and China—benefits very considerably in our minds.

We shall see later on in the present book how the historical West, in taking up a challenge which seemed overwhelming and which it had thrown down to itself, by accepting "to sink into matter," and by accepting passions and bodies at whatever risk to soul and spirit, gained the means to potential greatness and to difficult truth—means that are the stakes of its venture.

b. Incarnation and Excarnation. If we pass to the plane of experienced realities, metaphysical and religious, the division of East and West takes on a different *value,* even though it seems by its *form* to correspond to the scheme which has just been drawn up. A German traveler [9] asked a yogi: "Haven't you too in India tried to square the circle?" The yogi replied: "We are trying on the contrary to equate the square to a circle." The European's comment on that brief exchange is as follows:

> In those two ways of self-realization, one going from the circle to the square and the other inversely, are expressed the different missions—both of them legitimate—of West and East . . . [for] the square—or better, the cube—is everywhere the symbol of matter, and the circle—or sphere—that of spirit. So that the squaring of the circle is the transformation of spirit into matter, or again the materialization of spirit, whereas the passage of the square into the circle figures the return of matter to spirit. The first operation means in human terms Incarnation (birth), the second Excarnation (death).

[9] Cf. Hans Hasso von Veltheim, *Tagebücher aus Asien* (Hamburg, 1955).

I should like to illustrate this idea in my turn by expounding it in three various aspects.

CHRIST AND BUDDHA. The Son of God, uncreated, transcendent, enters into immanence and History, makes Himself into a material body, flesh of a poor child, takes upon Himself the most dire suffering, and finally dies of pain—all in order to speak to men in their own language, in terms of their existence, and to save them there where they are, by sole faith in the act of forgiveness, and the love and grace of God.

The son of a king of this world leaves his princely palace to enter upon the most destitute solitude, and there discovers that the way of salvation is to reject the world, the body, and suffering, in order to rise to transcendent Nothingness.

The two movements—descent and reascent—are only in appearance open to being superimposed upon one another; for in the first case what occurs really is the creative descent of God into man, and in the second case there is an attempt by man to ascend toward that which denies the creature.

FAITH AND KNOWLEDGE. The Oriental, turning his back on the "world," decides to attain salvation with his whole self, but with his self alone, detached and progressively illumined: the way of *direct knowledge* of Spirit. The man of the West, turning his back to the sun, in which he continues to believe while not seeing it, decides to imitate God the Creator by working inside the divine creation: the way of *active obedience* in the shadow of faith.

The danger which the Oriental runs is that excarnation will be too easy. (In the process the created world is lost, with its purpose and justification, and the knowledge and control of its structure.) The danger for the man of the West is a too thorough incarnation. (The individual is lost in matter and material structure, and the exigencies and control of spiritual realities get overlooked.)

VERIFYING THE WAY: TWO FORMS OF EXPERIENCE. For a Hindu, it is not a matter of reaching knowledge of the divine through "the leap of faith," which does not bring enough knowledge, and does not open up a verifiable way which can be freely traversed; but a matter of reaching knowledge of the divine through an *askesis* which subjects body and mind to spirit, and hence delivers the latter from the bonds of Prakriti (the manifested world, which is illusion), so that it may go to the Spirit, knowing what it is doing. "O Beloved! However impregnated with Knowledge, however unattached, however versed in the Law, and however master of self he may be, a god even cannot, without *Yoga,* reach deliverance." (*Yoga-anka.*)

For a man of the West, on the contrary, it is not a matter of knowing God by putting the manifested world on one side, or by resting content with direct intuitions about that world (on the nature of the atom, for example), which do not allow the road to be gone over again at will by the intellect and by physical action, nor subsequently to be verified; but a matter of knowing God by the patient study of particular things, a discipline ordering the intellect according to the laws of created reality, and the body to effective action, so as the better to penetrate Creation and master its principle. "The more we know particular things, the more we know God." (Spinoza.)

Thus doubts meet and cross, and so too at times does distrust. For each thinks about the other: Is it true? Does he really find the object of his seeking? And that object itself, is it truly real? To identify the self with the One, with divinity—may that not be, the man of the West thinks, a psychological illusion of the very rare beings who say that they have been able to do it, and for others an exhausting solipsism? To master the secrets of the cosmos, and perhaps tomorrow those of life, the Oriental thinks: is that not to reign over Maya? And each will be tempted to regard as illusory the "proofs" which the other invokes, since

they apply to a reality which is itself held to be illusion. And it seems to each that the most sincere "explanations" given by the other are in truth but "implications" of his fundamental option. All mere tautology!

c. Individual and Tradition. That the West is individualist and the East traditional is something that it seems difficult to doubt.[10] All writers who have dealt with my subject agree at least on that point, in spite of divergences in their vocabulary, in their angle of vision, or else in their judgments of value. Nevertheless, the matter does not seem to me quite so simple, and I discern in it a complexity the nature of which I shall try to indicate by quoting the following remarks, made in India:

Too many people everywhere! Three servants for my simple hotel room. Seven or eight men, one of whom is working, in every tiny shop. The roadway invaded by a crowd moving in all directions, so that the passage of wheeled traffic is always obstructed. The pavements thick with sleepers at night. And I saw five people on one bicycle! Are these people ever alone? Can the individual really matter amid this everlasting swarm? But now I go to an old part of the town that stands round a great holy rectangular pond. Here are sinuous little streets lined with narrow houses—birdcages clumsily piled on top of one another; eyes gleam in the semi-darkness; bodies at prayer are packed together in recesses; silence prevails, and a profound dignity. A group of attentive men in a courtyard is listening to the reader of poems—poems of holy legends. Never has life seemed to me more serious or more simply adorable. The irregular tinkling of bells is the only sound. And what are those little garages with latticed gates over which rise baroque bell-turrets? They are temples, my guide tells me. In front of an idol decked in

[10] The adjective "traditional" is used here with its strict initiatory and religious meaning, and must not be confused with "conservative," "routineer," "reactionary," etc. "Traditional" is what any man is who thinks that religious tradition must nullify individual innovation, and that the goal of human inquiry cannot be either progress or invention, but must be God, the identification of the inquirer with an Object which is situated beyond the domain of any possible change.

precious silk and necklaces of glassware stands a solitary woman or man, erect and motionless. In a little yard a priest rekindles black candles before a trickling fountain.

I think of the holy men wandering over the countryside or squatting tailor-fashion for long hours in their hollows. . . . There is no public worship in India, no liturgy, no organized church. The gregarious Hindus are alone only when face to face with the divine. Westerners, jealously guarding their private lives, gather in churches to hear choirs sing. Mozart's masses, Bach's passions—I know nothing more European, nothing that more truly awakens the sense of community. We have invented *ecclesia.* And while they are purified by *isolation,* as magic demands, we pray and sing together.

Here I must quote Rudolf Kassner, Austrian essayist of genius. Nobody has better conveyed the impression which submerges a European delivered up to India, immersed in the Indian crowd. I spoke above of the "gregarious" Hindus: the term is inexact if it suggests a "collective," or anything organized and embodied. I intended something else. Kassner supplies me with a phrase, "the *magical body,*" and his commentary upon it is as follows: [11]

> Incorporate spirit, or spiritualized body, without Self, or with a Self which is but a mere centre. The magical man, the magical body, has neither irony nor paradox, because it has no contrary and no contradiction.
>
> Destitute of "sensibility" in the eighteenth-century sense of the word, of moralizing concern, or revolutionary spirit, unaware of curiosity, the he of "the magical body" can care nothing about distinct rights or about prospects or about a mirror, and hence nothing about a personality or a face.
>
> One may go so far as to contend that contradictions represent so little in his existence that nothing in the world seems to endanger or betray him less than a mystifier or plagiarist. The habitual fakir

[11] Rudolf Kassner, *Buch der Erinnerung.*

of streets and squares, the man of tricks, appertains to him: he forms the edge, the border, of the saint's world, as idols form the edge or border of the divine Realities.

All magic goes beyond the person, or, rather, dissolves the person in metamorphosis. Animal, man, demon, symbol, the god or saint—everything communicates in magic, everything is transmuted without obstacle, measure, limit, or distance—in an inexpressible identity within which our conceptions of liberty, action, person, and history no longer have either point or purpose. The magical world is in the form of a hard ball, infinite and all-embracing. In the West, the self and the not-self, yes and no, good and evil, liberty and destiny, the very person and its individual are in contradiction, tension, or dissension, and incessantly repeat the sign of the Cross.

I was saying that the way of the individual in India, like that of the medieval mystic, has to be flight into the Absolute. Thus the self grows conscious and *detaches* itself, escapes from the magical body—in short, isolates itself—but this is the better to lose itself in fulfillment, since the self is way, and the way consists in progressively liberating a spirit from the illusion of being distinct. It all comes down to the two opposites: pantheism and personal God. For there is no person unless there is also a God that beckons. And the East knows nothing of the sort. Whether it is supposed that there is no God—as in the Sankhya system and in Buddhism—or whether it is supposed, according to the Advaita, that God does not "exist" but that he is All, and that the All or Real is but the Self fully realized and accomplished (*That Thwam Asi*)—there is in either case as little person in Hindu gnosis as distinct Self in Buddhism. Whether there is no God or whether the I is the All—in either case the Other vanishes; no dialogue is possible, no call, and hence no vocation,[12]

[12] Vocation, from *vocare*, to call.

and accordingly no *person*. From this ensues a world of precise consequences—a world literally, as I hope to show.

Let us return to Ramakrishna's declaration which I quoted at the beginning of this chapter. "There is no difference, whether you call him 'Thee' or whether you think, 'I am He.'" We are now able to read into this a true definition of the Eastern religious attitude. For it is quite certain that the identity which is reflected in that attitude evacuates personal existence, and that, in return, the negation of the person assumes that the difference between the divine Thee and the self of man is suppressed. On the other hand, the West affirms itself and is actualized at the point where the difference is held to be essential; for upon it alone is grounded the true *person,* which assumes the individual and also transcends him, connecting him with Spirit as with his neighbor. And simultaneously there appears society in the stead and place of the magical body.

Yin and Yang

In the central symbol of Chinese teaching (a circle divided by a capital S which represents the Way or the Tao) a black spot strikes the white part and a white spot the black part. It is thus shown that the masculine element is not absent from the region of the *Yin,* and that the feminine element remains present in the region of the *Yang.* Having been verified by sexologists, this relation of the inter-presence of opposites is no less evident in the respective zones of East and West. Who would deny, for example, that there are in the West great spiritual beings and great physicists in the East? But it occurs to nobody to speak of the scientific East or of the mystical West.

Sankara at times prefigures Thomism, and Meister Eckhart happens now and then to express himself like a Buddhist. The Bhagavad Gita eulogizes action, Quietism gives praise to passivity. The greatest mystics of Europe found that they were being

charged with atheism on the strength of their ultimate conclusions (condemned and often destroyed), while there are plenty of Hindu schools to affirm the reality of the Self, of the action of Grace, and even of a personal God. The idea of the "way" of "individual law" (*Svadharma*) seems akin to the idea of personal vocation, while we are the inventors of collectivism.

And nothing is easier than to point to writings which apparently wreck my theory of the two Ways. To what mystical school of Hinduism belongs the author of the command: "Put aside things, O Lover, thy way is flight"? To what Buddhist *yana* should we attach him who said: "You must love God like not-God, not-Spirit, not-Person, not-image. . . . A One pure and absolute, devoid of the least duality, into which we have to sink eternally from nothingness to nothingness"? And inversely who is the Christian mystic who reminds us that "after avoiding all attachment" and having taken the way of divine knowledge, "it is necessary to remain in action, maintaining an equable spirit, whether the action bears its fruit or not"? I have been quoting in order St. John of the Cross, Eckhart, and the Bhagavad Gita. And yet it would be even more inaccurate than commonplace to repeat here, "All is in all." The white part contains a black circle, but it is white all the same, not gray.

What Is a Man Worth?

And finally we need to notice the *major resultants* of the doctrinal complexes within which, as I have been showing, there is a wealth of contradiction. Our mystics do not form our morals, in the West. They ground themselves upon the negation of our common beliefs, and of our institutions. They represent the Eastern spot upon our sphere. Counterbalancing this, the East is a stranger to churches. The Bible and the Vedas have really nothing in common, and the use to which each is put is not at all the same. The crowd at Benares is not the crowd at Lourdes,

even if it is believed that God will know his own, whether they bathe fully clad or naked. Belief in metempsychosis is more natural to the mind of the West than is supposed, but it is without effect in Western religious life, and still less in Western social life.

But it is in reply to the question, *What is a man worth?* (an individual man, a human sample taken at random), that the most revealing statements about East and West are elicited, and nothing better illustrates the actual divergence of the *"major resultants"* I am speaking of. I shall give two concrete examples. I find the first in Kassner, in the chapter where he describes the magical body: [13]

Herodotus tells the story of one of the great men of the kingdom who, in exchange for all he had done for Xerxes and his army, in preparing for the campaign against the Greeks, asked the king as a favour to exempt from war service one of his five sons. Whereupon Xerxes, being irritated, had this one son put to death and his body cleaved in two lengthwise. And between the two cloven halves from head to crutch, like a carcase of beef on the stone slab of a butcher's, right in the middle, marched the armies that were off to fight the Greeks, and in the armies were the four sons and the father of the boy slit in two. What is wanting here is the Greek idea of the mean, and, bound up with it, the idea of liberty. Alone the mean for man contains the idea of human individuality.

My second example is taken from an essay by Ernest Jünger: [14]

The relations which a man sustains with free will reach back to his origins. So very often they remain hidden from him; and have to be deciphered in his actions and opinions. What he believes about the person, about destiny, what he proclaims to be moral or immoral, his attitude in the presence of death—all that depends on the place which he assigns to free will. Even if no philosopher, he

[13] Rudolf Kassner, *op. cit.*
[14] Ernest Jünger, "Der gordische Knoten."

shows himself in this respect attuned to the finest distinctions, although the results are manifested not by his mind but in what he does and in how he moves.

This is particularly true for the value which he sets upon life itself. When in 1194 the Count of Champagne, during his journey through Armenia, reached the border of the Assassins' territory, the Grand Master conducted him and on the way showed his palaces and castles. They came to a stronghold with two lofty towers on either side; two watchmen in white were posted on top of each. The grand master wished to show the count that his men obeyed him better than subjects obeyed their Christian masters: he raised his arm, and the two watchmen threw themselves off the towers and crashed on to the rocky ground below.

Then he asked the count if by another sign he should order to death all the sentries at the loop-holes along the walls. The latter begged him to do nothing of the kind, admitting, however, that he could not expect from his vassals the same docility.

. . . And every European will have at this point the same feeling as the Count of Champagne: he will find himself brought to a point at which there will burst out of him the most sincere and most violent refusal. The fundamental forms about which he fancied he was certain, such as courage and loyalty, obedience, sacrifice, order and discipline, are now wrenched out of place; the horror of an alien world rises in him like nausea.

That horror will always overcome anybody who respects in man the kernel of liberty that it will not do to attack. What goes on within it, what comes out of it, can only be due to free will, under penalty of being vain, and even vile, as are favours obtained under duress. If the kernel is damaged, it emits clouds of nothingness.

The reaction of our two Western authors is no less significant for our present purpose than the stories they tell. Both set up the same connection between the little worth put on human life and the negation of the person, or, simply, of individuality. For both, human liberty has for its condition the person.

It will be said that the West invented gas chambers whereas

the East has professed a respect of life that goes so far as to involve refusing to destroy vermin.[15] Nevertheless, the adoration of life in general does not mean respect of human life. The Bhagavad Gita, which has nothing Buddhist about it, teaches that, death being the common lot, to kill is not really serious except in the eyes of ignorance. Whether a victim is sliced up or spared, he will not escape the necessity of rebirth into a thousand or a hundred thousand successive lives. Metempsychosis evacuates the dreadful sanctions of resurrection: those summed up in the picture of the martyr who comes back, his head under his arm.

What of our West? True, Europe, which believes in the absolute value of the person in every individual, has none the less experienced tortures, bonfires, the stake, the guillotine, and massacres (either patriotic or religious). It has even invented total war! Whence, then, arises that "horror" and that "most violent refusal" which the European, according to Jünger, experiences on meeting with Oriental cruelty? We are no less cruel, but differently. For we are cruel in the thick of drama, and they act cruelly according to magic. No "wisdom" clears us; on the contrary, we stand condemned by our faith. An Oriental's cruelty is as though fated, and hence without restraint, without sin, without contradiction or remorse. It is divine, and we are criminals. If the *self* is but a temporal illusion, whoever kills is destroying nothing that matters; but, on the contrary, if the free and unique self is a reality believed to be inviolable, then nothing can justify our belligerent delirium.

I am not passing judgment. I am being objective. There are differences. And my purpose is not to set them in relief in order to incite the reader to make comparisons to the advantage of one or the other camp; for there is no camp, and no struggle going

[15] While rendering it harmless, however, by gorging it with the impure blood of a no-caste servant, who precedes his master in the latter's bed and lets himself be bitten abundantly by lice and fleas and so dispenses his master from killing them. (Quoted from Kassner, *op. cit.*)

on—let that be said once for all. There are only two all-inclusive experiences which need to be interpreted. But the infinite complexity of the data compels us to examine only partial and typical examples. It will have been noticed that I have taken mine for preference from the religious domain. That is where—is it not?—that the irritating question of which of this or that is "superior" yields the smallest amount of meaning, and, in fact, loses all point, since there are no mensurable elements available, as there would be on the plane of economics or of the social situation, for example. I have been trying to outline the primordial options which gave rise to two divergent ways. It seemed to me that in mysticism, in religion, and in the explanation of both are where we might come upon them unawares, for there they are in the nascent state. Whether they are first causes or whether they are effects, whether they sum up a series of antecedent factors or, on the contrary, launch history—those are questions which matter less than it matters to have had a good view of the options, and, setting out from a fairly simple contrast between two conceptions of man and his ends, to pursue that one of the two the consequences of which formed the West.

II.

How the Drama Began

DELIVERED to the small Hebrew nation, the Christian revelation spread over a world in which there was no thinking except in the terms and concepts that had been elaborated by Hellenism. The Christian faith was thus led to speak in Greek too. But its discourse gathered together a people and raised up a community. The latter called for embodiment and institutions. And it happened that on the political and social plane there was only the Roman world. The Church was accordingly organized within the framework of the Empire, even as its doctrine was informed within the categories of Dialectic.

Incarnation, dialectic, ecclesia—Jerusalem, Athens, Rome—those three words unknown to the East, those three *names* charged with a historical meaning, open the Western drama. In the relations and tensions which they instituted, in the latent conflicts and the improbable but necessary compromises in which they shared, and in the variations of their respective portions of power, the history of the West is begotten and begun. It may sometimes seem that this history is all implied in the *occurrence* of the triple encounter, in so many respects unlikely and dissonant, and that at the outset of the successive vicissitudes in the drama there may be imagined the kind of ardent desire of a chord in quest of its resolution. . . . Nevertheless, the West did

not arise as though in response to a *challenge:* it lacked that principle of original coherence. The East—so remote in space and so near in the collective spirit—was no longer a menace, or had not yet become one.[1] It could not disturb the *Pax Romana.* The West did not arise as we are told that the great cultures and civilizations arose, animated by a dream which worked out their destiny and which at first made up for an unaccepted lot. It arose like a venture out of a most unwonted and hardly credible event which supervened at the hazardous crossroads of diverse traditions, some of them incompatible. And that initial event seems to us accidental; I mean that it would be no good trying to deduce it from a certain general situation or from some call that arose in the ancient world. Nobody can show that it came about at an appointed hour. It bore at the beginning the stigmata of reality, and not the signs of myth. It has no verisimilitude; it is true. It was not expected; there it is. Thus arose the West: like a drama about which it is possible after the event to dispute its unity of action, but not its shock.

For there was an initial shock, a sudden beginning, a great liberation of spiritual and moral energy that had been provoked by the instantaneous integration of two radically different realities—the divine Word and the flesh.

> In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. . . . And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us . . . full of grace and truth.

This scandal for the Greeks, this foolishness for the Jews, this disorder in the eyes of the Romans, this additional *avatar* in the eyes of Orientals was nevertheless going to preserve the legacy of Socrates, fulfill the expectation of the Prophets, and create the Church that was going to take over the edifice of the faltering imperial order. As for the East . . . The East of Myth ceases

[1] Alexander had been dead for three centuries; Attila was not going to leap into view on the Rhine till the year 450.

where History begins, and so too the East of that Silence in which God speaks. And the Incarnation is the Word that has entered through the flesh into History.

The Hindu avatar—which is the descent of the god into the body of an animal or man—recurs in dark and catastrophic times. Thus the ten incarnations of Vishnu—nine of them having already occurred—have for their successive causes the deluge, a holy mountain threatened with being engulfed, a pressing need of eliminating a too powerful devil, a quarrel between a king and gods, the rivalry of two castes, etc. Buddha was the ninth incarnation; and the tenth, Kalki, will be the destroyer of our radically degenerate world. The Bhagavad Gita teaches that God is incarnated each time evil exceeds good and begins to tip the scales. Thus the age of the Hindu avatar is that of Myth, not of History. The avatar is repeated, it occurs "every time that . . ."; it is cyclical, archetypal, and thus a-historical, whereas the Incarnation, as is affirmed forcibly by St. Paul and in the Epistle to the Hebrews, has occurred "once for all." The heart of the Creed is thus expressly situated in profane duration, in the duration of History, and the history is definitely dated—"under Pontius Pilate."

Here, then, is the Logos, the Word—and not the Silence of the mystics or of Hindu-Buddhist Asia [2]—became through a single movement of the Spirit both Word of God and human form, indissolubly, in the Person of the Son. Here is the start of the Christian "way." And that way is not a method, an *askesis*, a system; it is not the course of a star laid out by other stars, nor a way to be taken, but indeed a way that has to be *lived* and

[2] Theologians might have much to say about the use of the Word in the magico-mythic East on the one hand, and, on the other, in the West of Christians. The *mantra* is not the *logos*. It gives power over man, but also over gods. The *logos* is a director of action, whereas the *mantra*—a sacred formula—serves to liberate man from Maya and the latter's ephemeral powers. Far from being self-incarnating, it dissolves; it dissipates the illusion that there are links connecting forms to individual.

that one has oneself to become, for it is a person! *"I am the way, the truth, and the life."*

At the end of the way will be found *Grace,* which is the gift of the personal God "who first loved us." And Grace is simultaneously prevenient help, final forgiveness, beatitude; both the condition of being saved and salvation. It is a term alien alike to Antiquity and to the East. For the Greeks were familiar only with Fortune and its throws; and the East was familiar only with an infinitely patient *askesis.*[3] It is curious, but not on the whole contradictory, that the rationalist Greeks should have believed in chance, whereas the mystical, pantheistic, and astrological Hindus have awaited salvation only from the effort which a man is to exert upon his own mind. For the Christian, the paradox is not merely apparent, it is constitutive and radical: salvation comes from God to man, it is initiated by God alone, and given by a pure grace; and yet any man who has received it must act as though he were gaining it! That is what St. Paul says in the difficult words: *"Work* out your own salvation . . . *For* it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do, of his good pleasure." [4]

Between the Word and Grace, between vocation and forgiveness, how find and live the way? For the East, the way is knowledge, progressive illumination (or even instantaneous illumination, according to the Zen). For the Christian, experience of the way is involved with experience of *faith,* which is not only belief, or "the substance of things hoped for," or "the evidence of things not seen," but the anticipation of grace—final grace—and the sole guide. "By faith Abraham, when he was called to go out into a place which he should after receive for

[3] Notwithstanding claims that there is a divine Grace in the Vishishta Advaita system; that is due to Christian influences.

[4] Philippians, II, 12–13. The doctrine of predestination emphasizes the paradox still more through its double insistence that man is fully responsible and yet that the salvation of each is due to the eternal prescience and decision of God.

an inheritance, obeyed; and he went out, not knowing whither he went." [5] A man of faith is bound to be a man on his way, a *viator*, the eternal "sojourner on earth," who has here below "no abiding city." He knows not; he believes. He has not; he hopes. He sees not; he obeys. And his road is not defined like the unvarying orbit of a star, but is permanently venture: it is created under the feet of those who take it. Thus faith, which is active confidence, is also essential anxiety.

But what happens to ethics in all this? Ethics are replaced by Love.

In order to measure the extent of the revolution here, it is necessary to understand what was the sacred, what the sacred still is, in the East. The morality of the Ancients was based on rite, and in the magical world morality is but rite. Only the modern belief in "scientific laws" and in "technical necessities" in general gives us some idea of what magico-religious manifestations then meant, and what indisputably followed upon their transgression. The offense once committed could be dealt with neither by opinion nor by a jury. It was rather like some gross error in calculating the assembly of the parts of a machine or in setting railway points; that is to say, there was no putting it right; it suspended the normal course of life, it excluded the offender from reality, and it clamored not for his repentance but for the punishment that would restore order.

Such was the ancient framework—"traditional" in the Eastern sense of the word—which the Christian message was going to upset and overturn. With St. Paul, we pass all at once from the rule of Law to the rule of Faith; that is to say, from Rite to Love. "All things are lawful, but not all things are expedient." "There is nothing unclean of itself," but "to the pure all things are pure." Similarly, St. Augustine: "Love God and do what you will." Now these statements invalidate from a spiritual stand-

[5] Hebrews, XI, 1 and 8.

point every kind of codified, ritualistic, or rational morality. They imply indeed that the worth of an action cannot be judged by the extent to which it is *consonant* with the rules of the sacred or of the social, but that what it means must depend upon a private attitude, upon a free appreciation of the person, so far as determining if the action has expressed love and if it edifies. "For why is my liberty judged of another man's conscience?" exclaims St. Paul.[6] The freedom in question is, for that matter, not license, because it is directed by the very love which has first made it possible: it is responsibility. "Ye have been called unto liberty; only use not liberty for an occasion to the flesh, but by love serve one another." [7]

Hence, it is in the liberty of each individual that the solidarity of the human race is rooted. Only the man who is an autonomous being can love, i.e., can act in virtue of faith; and it is indeed in the love of one's neighbor, not in the collective and impersonal Rule, that St. Paul found the secret of the *harmony* of human liberties, an age-long yearning after the ancient wisdom. Where the Apostle shows his genius is where he sums up the effects of the Incarnation in one flashing phrase: Faith succeeding to the Law. For the Law which he declares outdated is not only the Jewish Torah—whatever he himself believed—but the whole system of the ancient world, Eastern as well as Roman. And the Faith which he proclaims instituted a new relation in men's dealings with one another and within each man singly. But that is not all. The Law was visible, it was the measure of the world, it outlined man and defined him by means of the coordinates of an Enclosed City. Liberated by faith from the ritual setting, man found that he was being connected simultaneously with transcendent Love and with his neighbor. His measure was

[6] I Cor., X, 29. Similar statements are not lacking in the writing of anti-ritualist thinkers of modern India.
[7] Galatians, V, 13.

no longer outside himself, but inside—in his divided heart; it was no longer order, but tension. Delivered, but only in order to be again related; freed in respect of the Law, but responsible in respect of Love; distinct and separate from all others in virtue of his "gifts," but solitary in sin as in salvation; in the world but not of the world; weak when he was strong, and strong when he was weak; lost by his own efforts to save himself, saved by giving himself up to his Judge; a sinner according to the Law and one of the saved by Faith. Hence the sign of contradiction which is written across History by the Cross was henceforth to mark his existence.

If the man of a clan, of a tribe or caste, had only one real dimension—the line of his relation with the sacred body; if the second dimension, invented by the Greeks, is that which grounded upon self both the individual and his mode of relations—the City-State; St. Paul defined the third dimension, which relates dialectic to the transcendent, and connects the individual in the sense of divine vocation with the community as love of one's neighbor. The new man—more fully set free than the Greek individual, more fully committed than the Roman citizen, but set free by the very faith that has committed him—is the archetype of the nascent West: he is the person.

What have we established so far? Even if only by enumerating the principal keywords of Christianity, the earliest dialectic of Western man?

Word and not silence; *made flesh* and not concept; *Grace* instead of merit or spiritual techniques. *Faith* and not direct knowledge of the divine; *History* instead of Myth. Recognition of the flesh and hence of matter as realities of our present life. *Paradox, tension, dialectic* . . . And love of one's neighbor as oneself, corresponding with the love of God, replacing the sacred, and founding the *person*.

The terms define the Christian's way only, but is there another way in the West? Many men, it is true, are without a way, particularly in the world of today. But those who seek a way, and reject the Christian, go either to the East or else to Moscow. In either case they forsake the West in spirit.

Yet the Christian way is not the whole of the West. It has its start in the decisive shock from which we date our history. But it was opened up in a world unmistakably real, which already possessed a powerful armature combined from Greek teaching, the religious traditions of the Near East, and the imperial Roman order. Making use of one of those elements, setting aside another, snatching up a third while on the move—and frequently damaged by this latter feat—it set everything in motion again. And the motion, taken as a whole down to our own day, is Man's Western Quest. No doubt the Christian way is not the only active element in it, but it was decisive and it remains axial: by reference to the Christian way, we shall be able to measure our swings of the pendulum, alien contributions, progressions, and the derivation of our culture.

Setting out from the central and initial fact which the Incarnation involved—the Word made flesh—let us now survey the Western Quest in respect of its two master-ambitions—to discover the secret of man and that of the cosmos.

Faith in a personal God whose sole commandment is the one to love—"Thou shalt love the Lord thy God and thy neighbour as thyself"—is a faith that releases the individual from the bonds of magic, reforms the Ancient World in the act of taking it over, creates the idea of person thanks to which the Greek idea of the individual and the Roman idea of the citizen can be unified, and preserves right through our revolutions—whether anarchist or collectivist—the directing ideal of man as both free and responsible.

The Incarnation of God in space and time, in a human body

at a particular date, witnesses for the eyes of the mind to the significance and reality of flesh and matter, and thereby of all Creation, such as we expect "in an earnest expectation" to be loved and known, and finally redeemed by the manifestation of the children of God.[8] And that is why Western man pursues science even while he forgets his primitive impulsion and its sublime connection with his final ends.

[8] Romans, VIII, 19–23.

Part Two
THE WESTERN QUEST

III.

The Spire and the Axis

GALILEO very rightly decided that, whatever he might say to the Inquisition, the earth nevertheless goes round. But there are realities which suffer in being unsaid or ill said. If they are denied—or it is enough if they are incorrectly and vaguely referred to—they will stop "going round" and being active. They are those which matter to man, because they are bound up with his faith, his actions, or his emotions. Thus love: it is not really there till it has "declared" itself. To name certain tendencies, beliefs, or passions is to give rein to virtual energy which is thus being *called,* in the double sense of the word.

That is why it worries me to observe the constant confusion there is over the words "individual," "individuality," "personality," and "person." The fault for this today lies in an altogether universal inattentiveness, but there may be serious consequences. The slightest shift in meaning where a definition of man is concerned and of the part he plays among other men can bring about wars and revolutions, from the mere fact that the shift favors or justifies systems of government violently irreconcilable. It is true that history is not identical with semantics, and is not made by piling up definitions. But it plays upon our confusion: Is it not in the name of liberty, or of peace (as though dissembling with those powerful names), that the most evil

tyrannies have come into our time? And it is true, also, that the Western world started off without knowing where it was going, even as Abraham left his own country. Otherwise, would it really be the Quest which I am describing? Some of our Western countries having the finest systems of government display the greatest repugnance to any clear enunciation of the principles they follow. England takes pride in having no written constitution, and no Declaration of the Rights of Man; and the Swiss have scrupulously refrained—till the present day—from putting into words the federalist doctrine according to which they have all the same been living for centuries. But if it may be of advantage to remain unaware what one is living, and not to announce where one is going, it is as well to know whence one has come.

As I look around for the origins of the notion of *person*—of which I have said that it was properly constitutive of the West—I come upon the great ecumenical councils—Nicea, Constantinople, Ephesus, and Chalcedon—whose decisions represent so many declarations of principle or communiqués on the state of affairs at the time Europe was about to drop away from the Ancient World.

Theological Genesis of the Person

The memoirs of Gregory of Nazianzus, the chronicles of the period, and the resolutions adopted combine to give us a vivid picture of those foundations of Greek Christianity—the great councils. What we are to compare them with are not so much learned meetings of professors and scholars as the stormy sittings of modern parliaments, or, better, with American national party conventions. Upon the summons of the Byzantine emperor, the bishops gathered together from all the Near East, Africa, Macedonia, Egypt, and Iberia. The leaders of the great parties, surrounded by their clients, and the legates of emperor and pope

made a solemn entry into the appointed city. Proceedings opened with such displays of power and prestige by either side. Troops of fanatical monks paraded the streets. Now and then—as at Ephesus and Chalcedon—a whole crowd of ambitious laymen, soldiers, Egyptian seamen, and creatures of the great hung about outside the church where the council met and waited for an occasion to intervene with force. Within disturbance frequently interrupted discussion. "It is like a swarm of hornets," Gregory notes down. Shouting and heckling swirled from left to right of the nave in which some hundreds of bishops and scholars would be massed, while the papal legates (the pope himself never attended) and the imperial officials sat at the altar rails. Disorder broke out, and the fathers cried: "It's the true faith! It's the faith of the apostles!" "If anyone does not believe this, let him be anathema! Drive out Eusebius, let him be chopped up! He has divided the Saviour, let him himself be divided!" Improvised drafts were put to the vote. The vote took place, but lobbying brought the same question up again next day. One group of bishops threatened to withdraw. There would be an exchange of deputations. Lists of attendance were signed, and then later disputed. "Are they complete? Are they correct? Have not the names of absentees been added?" It was then necessary to subscribe to the formulas that had been agreed upon, and put down the heretical opponent,[1] excommunicate or restore to a see, take into account the contrary pressures of emperor and pope, depose or not depose the Byzantine patriarch—and suddenly a rabble of monks and *nervi* would break into the church; Hilary owed his safety only to having fled, while Flavian died under the blows of cudgels. The same evening the dogma was proclaimed, the Nestorian error condemned, and the inhabitants of the city

[1] Hecatombs of bishops were put down after some councils. How not compare this with the liquidations that were carried out 1,500 years later in Russia, where a "Byzantine" spirit goes to explain much further than is realized both political conduct and the way affairs are viewed?

burst into transports of joy, acclaimed the fathers, lit up the squares, escorted the bishops in procession by torchlight and with the incense of perfuming censers.

Such, then, was the spectacle afforded by the early assizes of Christianity, on the morrow of its temporal triumph. (Nicea was held only twelve years after the Edict of Milan, and many of the bishops who took a leading part in that council showed physical traces of the persecution and tortures which they had suffered.) It is indeed a spectacle to leave us confounded. Everything is seething, orating or demonstrating, protesting, exiling, accusing of blasphemy or being accused, plotting ambushes or falling into them, mixing up indistinguishably ecclesiastical and even imperial politics with the most subtle metaphysics, in order finally to conclude with definitions that *hardly* differ from the old or from those which have been rejected—both those proclaimed and those rejected being, for that matter, not very intelligible in themselves, and often completely obscure to the Christian masses. It would all be absurd if it were not sublime, and if it were not in the end far more intelligent, far wiser, and far more realistic than Athanasius himself could have imagined, for want of having been able to judge it through the eyes of History.

There, then, was the atmosphere in which was born the notion from which our ideas of man are descended.

Superficially, the question at issue at Nicea was only about an *iota;*[2] in reality, it concerned the definition of the person, beginning with the divine Persons, and particularly the Person of Christ, both true God and true man. Here was the problem: How name the inter-divine relations and the relations of God to man revealed by Christ's coming—God Who is the Father insofar as Creator, the Son insofar as Redeemer, the Holy Ghost

[2] The subject of discussion at the Council of Nicea was indeed two Greek terms, *homoousios* (of the same substance), defended by Athanasius, and *homoiousios* (of like substance), defended by Eusebius and the supporters of Arius.

insofar as Liberator? How preserve both the distinction and the connection of those aspects? How avoid both an undifferentiated monotheism, which would evacuate the central fact of the Incarnation, and a mythological or rationalized tritheism? To solve this age-long dispute doctrinally,[3] under the growing pressure of heresies and of the Gnostics at the height of their effervescence, the Greek and Latin Fathers had available only notions and words that were inadequate, and, in addition, hard to harmonize.

Hellenism had brought out the two notions of the distinct and separate being—i.e., the individual—and of the permanence of this being behind his modalities—essence, substance, and hypostasis. In turn, the Romans had defined the term: *persona,* meaning by it first the actor's mask, then the actor himself, then his part, so that in the end it came to mean a man himself insofar as endowed with rights in the city—i.e., a citizen. Every man is an individual from the mere fact that he has a separate body; but he becomes "a person" only in virtue of the civic and juridical relations which he bears in the state, whence the adage in Roman law: *persona est sui juris, servus non est persona* (A person being defined by his juridical worth, a slave is not a person). Thus the individual was but an atom, and the *persona* but valency; one existed in himself, the other in his relations.

The creative act of the great councils consisted accordingly in accomplishing the perilous transmutation of a Latin word with a Hellenic content into a dogma that expresses the triple and single nature of the Divinity revealed in Jesus. Hence was born the

[3] The Council of Nicea was held in 325. The great Christological disputations had begun as early as the age of the apostles. They sprang up in the middle of the second century A. D., between philosophical Greeks and fanatically monotheistic Jews, and were then pursued between Greeks and Latins on the one side, and, on the other, Gnostics, Montanists, Arians, Donatists, Sabellians, Docetists, Subordinationists, etc. Later, in the fifth century, there again broke out the Monophysite quarrel, and it was then that the East and West of Christianity took shape. Catholic orthodoxy was not definitely established till the year 681, at the third Council of Constantinople.

idea of Person, a term purely theological in the eyes of the Nicean Fathers, but one destined to become, in retrospect, the specific and capital acquisition of Western anthropology.

Genesis of the Human Person

How explain the transfer of a dogmatic term concerned with *God Himself onto a level of reality* where the same word means both a man's social role and his metaphysical dignity? That the transfer occurred is evident: we all speak of "the human person," and nobody could have done so before Nicea. But if we confined ourselves to noting the fact we should be losing the best of occasions to situate Western man at the *hazardous crossroads* I spoke of above [4]—the crossroads of societies no less than doctrines.

Greek dialectic and Roman jurisprudence, on being catalyzed by the Christian need, proffered the decisive word. But the political and social realities elaborated by the three worlds also underwent symbiosis, and the process is manifest from the age of the first ecumenical councils.

THE GREEK CONTRIBUTION. Man had removed himself from the magical body in which were mingled without clear end or form both the living and the dead, both gods and devils. The *individual* began to take his measure—frail and in danger, mortal and ignorant, he was aware of not being a god, did not meditate becoming one, but felt therefore all the more determined to make the best of his situation. Enterprising, curious to the point of defiance, a navigator, a speculator in every sphere and domain, he was in all respects he who defines—man of the Word and of the epithet—"the measure of all things," Protagoras said; "of those that are by supposing they are, of those that are not by supposing they are not." The judge of all, obviously, even of gods. Whence his sense of dignity, which was due to nothing

[4] Chapter II.

other than himself, to the bare fact that he was existing—distinct. Whence too his pride, his selfish guile, and lastly his skeptical disregard of orderliness, which, once awe of the gods and of the laws had been lost, was going to deliver over his "atomized" society to the brutal regimentation of the Roman.

THE ROMAN CONTRIBUTION. This is summed up in the virile word "citizen." Man no longer drew his unique dignity from some indestructible essence, but from the personage which he had become in the city now that the city was supported by the edifice of the law and of institutions duly set in a hierarchy. Social puritanism, a morality of service of the state, is what made the grandeur of the Empire and its subjects' poverty of spirit. If dissociation permanently hung over the Greek city-state, it was collectivist sclerosis that brought about the fall of Rome.

There, in the heart of a society with a rigid framework which finally enclosed no more than a latent anarchy, because its disciplines were not of the spirit, Christianity was born, and there it spread.

THE CHRISTIAN CONTRIBUTION. Conversion—i.e., individual revolution—released any man, noble or slave, from the sacred ties of caste or clan; at the same time, it enlisted him in the service of his neighbor. Upon entry into the Christian community, a slave encountered moral dignity—that of the individual, according to the Greeks—and the honor of service—that of the Roman citizen. He thus became a living paradox, alike free and responsible, truly distinct and truly related, and made distinct by the same vocation that led him to discover that any man might be his neighbor. The paradox experienced in virtue of faith reproduces, on the plane of concrete existence, the very form of the great antithetical definitions of Nicea. Thus it is that the *person* of a Christian imitates on the human level the Person of Christ. (This sociological analysis corresponds—let me insist—with the philological analysis of "Person.") But if the

person of a Christian, in being poised in a balanced tension, combined the best of Rome and Greece, that person was also exposed in the world of sin to a double and simultaneous peril—that of flight in the direction of individual salvation and that of surrender to the collectively sacred—the Greek sickness and the Roman sickness of the person.

The Spire

If in the person of the Man-God the two natures were fully united without conflict, it is not so as regards the flesh and spirit of sinful man; nor even as regards liberty and service in converted man. Those antinomies cannot, indeed, be resolved except thanks to faith, in love, and by absolute obedience to a transcendent vocation; failing which, the person remains a pure possibility, or the ideal resultant of a tension ever exposed either to setback or to rupture, whenever one of its poles weakens or suddenly suffers itself to be absorbed by the other.

Having arisen out of the complex of paradoxes and tensions that we have seen coalescing at the "hazardous crossroads" of the lower Empire, the West seemed destined to a truly dialectical history, which as a whole calls up the picture of a discussion growing more and more substantial and excited between the alternate excesses of individualism and the social. And since it had issued out of contradictions perhaps insurmountable at the level on which history deciphers the evidence of them, it was doomed to Progress—that is, to engage in the unending pursuit of a balance and equilibrium, the secret of which is not of this world. For if it is true that faith has to act in this world, it remains "a gift of God" and man does not command it.

Let us now assume that the Goal of the whole of human history, as viewed in the Christian perspective, is this: *the community of persons,* set free and set in relation by virtue of faith.

That ideal was formed as such during the first centuries of our era, in a history which it did not bring to a stop, but in respect of which it acted doubly as a relief. It intervened in a dialectical sequence, not as conclusion, but as an accident. And to the extent that it could fit into that sequence it did not interrupt its motion; instead, by creating a vertical axis of attraction, it raised into a spire a natural movement that was tending to grow circular: the cycle of perpetual return was transformed into a Quest.

The cycle was—or seemed to be—determined by a kind of "logic" that can be deduced empirically from history. Here is the scheme of it.

The clan—the primitive tribe—binds the beings born in its domain with the ties of blood and of the earth where lie the dreadful dead. Everything participates in everything, in magic; nothing ever gets really detached from anything, neither a name from the thing, nor a son from the father, nor what is dead from what is alive. This is the gregarious stage, in which the sacred alone ensures the differentiation of a few functions.

He who leaves his clan is estranged from its tombs and loses the protection of the fearful dead. Nothing distinguishes him from a criminal, save the idea which he acquires of himself, now distinct. He takes his chance as an *individual,* and in this aspect joins forces with other "homeless" beings—adventurers, expatriates, the outcasts and the half-breeds. In order to take alien gods to himself, he has to suppose these universal and guaranteeing the lot of every man who renders them civic worship. Thereafter the "liturgies" of the City prescribe rights and duties, according to laws and contracts, and no longer according to magic. Each for himself, the gods for all.

But once the pressures of all the energies thus *unleashed* combine and become conquest, when distant cities fall, and with them their gods and the veneration of gods in general, only

"each for himself" is left. We are in the cosmopolitan age of individuals without faith or law, the strongest or the most daring becoming tyrant. But such a general flight from duty—civic, private, and religious alike—the dissolution of moral ties and the contempt for limitations as much as for fealties, combine to leave man derelict, a stranger to himself in too vast a city. Out of the *social void* which individualism has created there arises a call for order at any price.

And order is established—by military decree. Order frees individuals from the anguish of being free without purpose. They are fallen in, lined up, reassured, terrorized, and flattered—as one process. It is with their dust that the state makes its cement. The state prescribes a state morality, and makes up for its want of internal principle by a vigilant repressiveness. It "restores" the sacred—the sacred is now the state, with no magic, but not without dramatic prestige, and the state god now personally commands the army, the police, and the priests. Castes come back and complete the enclosure of man in his social function.[5] What is now going to be required by the schism of the soul which makes itself apparent—the fatal disease of all order that has been unable to do more than discipline anarchy?

Bread? The state assures that to its docile clients—the idle *Clarissimi* on their estates, the officials of every kind, the militiamen, and the plebes of the towns all live at the expense of the Providence-State in a sloth that is hardly believable.[6] Games? The state organizes them to satiety. Religions? Of course. But it is there that Rome betrayed its essential failing. It insisted with too great a rigor upon rites and symbols that were too obviously

[5] Let me recall that in the Lower Empire, the magistracy, the army, colonists, artisans, workmen in mines, and peasants all became so many genuine castes. The only way in was by birth, and there was no getting out except by death. Workmen and peasants were branded with a red-hot iron and shackled to their place of work.

[6] Beginning with the reign of Marcus Aurelius, there were 175 holidays a year—spent at the circus.

indigent and frigid. Eastern sects arose in swarms. They served but to precipitate the internal dissolution of a society that had forsaken magic, put the individual into ranks, and exhausted the virtues of order. Isis, Mithra, Mani, the Great Goddess—none of them could serve for the reconstruction of a human society, for they could promise no salvation except in mystic flight or in the archaic unconscious.

The excited barbarians, jostling one another at the frontier, made the sole response to the summons exerted by the void: they fell into it as a man topples over with giddiness. It was they who fell into the Empire, rather than that the Empire fell under their blows. They closed the circle, and everything began over again—magical gregariousness, ties of blood, reinvention of the individual, then his excesses, a social void, reaction from the state, dictatorship, restoration of the holy, lassitude, return of the barbarians. . . . And here Christianity intervened. The Incarnation is, as I have said, "due" to nothing. Isaiah had foreseen it, but the Jews denied it, and not a single historian has rendered it plausible: historians work out their dates from it and not the other way about. The success of the Church, on the contrary, does seem explicable in retrospect. It supplied a faith that could take up the best elements of the Greek inheritance, and save that inheritance from dissociation far better than the imperial order had been able to. Nevertheless, the Church did not suspend the foreseeable verdict nor the fall. It did not halt the barbarians. It only converted them. Here the new cycle turns into an ascending spire and becomes our History.

Return of the Phases, but Modified

The Middle Ages were a reversion to gregariousness. But the Christian holy made war on magic, and the Church put up a resistance to the Empire. The three estates were imitated from

castes, but at least the first of them was now kept open to all—the clergy and the religious orders were the denial of estates.

The Renaissance was the return of rational and profaning Hellenism, and almost of the Alexandrian venture: its discovery of the world was a consequence of that notion of the infinite which had just gained acceptance, and which delivered the dazzled European mind from the tightly partitioned world of the Middle Ages. But by then the Reformation had already created anew the morality of social service in the name of a well-tempered liberty, and this was in due course to save the countries in which it was adopted from coming under totalitarian regimentation.

The true Hellenistic period—with tyrannies and the pulverizing dissociation of social groups and responsible classes—was not reflected till the French eighteenth century. A *bourgeois* who got his portrait painted, cheated in the game of business, speculated in colonial undertakings, reduced to a matter of interest every spiritual motive, and believed in nothing except his rights—that *bourgeois* was the kind of individualist who, far more than any king, called down upon the country the Roman reaction known as Jacobinism. He thereupon imagined that he wanted an end made of the "privileges" and "abuses" of the monarchical system, but all he expected to succeed it was a more rational tyranny, and that is what he got. For while America grounded democracy upon a quasi-personalistic morality—the Founding Fathers wanted real liberty, not its emblems—middle-class France gave herself a goddess and games, tribunes, consuls, and finally Caesar.

We had reached our own Lower Empire period—anxious, divided in its spirit, and confronted with its own invading "barbarians."

The second coil of the spire brought back the same phases in the same order of procession, at least generally speaking. But

each phase was now more complex. And first of all owing to the complexity of the different past ages incorporated in it; for it was formed at the expense of the most recent past age, and yet its novelty was each time accomplished in the name of the most recent age but one, even though apparently repeating that age. The Thomist Middle Ages went back to Aristotle, the Renaissance imitated what it was much aware of in the art of antiquity, the Reformation was intended to be a pure recovery of the springs of faith, the French Revolution was thought by its agents to be Roman whereas it inaugurated Romanticism, and Romanticism in its turn thought it was medieval. Thus the successive phases bear the name of their innovation, when they would have preferred to call themselves after their model. That is the sign of the permanent struggle subtending them and perpetually warping them. That is how the motion of a moving spire is what results to our gaze of distant observers.

Then further: every one of the past ages enters into each new phase: one past age repressed in some collective unconscious wnich still finds expression by means of legends; a second simply subordinated to the novel values; and a third, finally, which is confined within a class or indeterminate geographical areas. The primitive gregariousness with its magic still survives among the peasantry of every country in Europe—islets to the West, vast continuous colorings of the map at the confines of East and South—even as it peoples our dreams and sometimes inspires a poet. C. G. Jung finds traces of the Indian in the unconscious of rich American women. Nearly every intellectual today is a Hellene or an Alexandrian. Many ritual features of Mithraism have entered into our liturgies, even as the supreme title of Pagan Rome—Pontifex—is borne by the popes. And so on. Stratification of past ages? Yes, if it were a mere matter of inert *reliquiae* or of simple reflexes conditioned by gestures of execration that perhaps go back to the paleolithic age, like stifling a yawn with

one's hand. But it is also a matter of evidences that have remained present and active, such as statues, paintings, monuments, rites, and dreams. And, above all, it is a matter of dynamic complexes, *forms* of existing that pursue within the lives of each of us—in the atom of duration which each of our lives is—the same dialectic which has just been shown illustrated in great panels of the history of Europe.

True, we are past the stage at which maps were drawn with Europe at the center of the world—as was still being done in the fifteenth century—but I firmly think that Europe remains the place where the strongest density of human history is to be observed. I mean: the simultaneous presence of the greatest number of at least different experiences, and some of them experiences with opposed meanings. Asia and Russia did not have a Renaissance: they are in the course of passing without transition out of their Middle Ages straight into the era of technics. The United States had no Middle Ages [7] and issued out of the rationalist-moralist era which gave rise, without any major conflict, to our technics. Europe has behind her and bears within herself Greco-Latin Antiquity, the Middle Ages, the Renaissance and the Enlightenment, Romanticism, Nationalism, and Socialism, and she has entered upon the technical era while retaining the vital marks and the conflicts of all those successive phases. Such historical density is a powerful impulse in the Western Quest.

The Two Communities

I shall be told that the Quest is on the point of coming to a sticky end, as totalitarian systems plainly threaten to arrest it. And it is true that these have sprung up in a phase of our development corresponding—one coil of the spire higher—to that

[7] The Protestants of New York build their churches in Gothic, whereas Europeans employ in their temples contemporary architecture—glass and concrete, and *avant-garde* frescoes. There is too much to be said on that head; this is not the place.

of the Christian expansion. In the same way that the preaching of the "latter days" and of an imminent end to the world strongly appealed to the Roman slaves, so in our day the Communist message is observed bringing with it the promise of an "end of history"—that is to say, an end to the sufferings of the classes which have been the victims of Progress, and an end to our political and moral conflicts. Is it to be supposed that Communism is tantamount "historically" to a new hope and a new principle of human communion, even while our modern societies disintegrate within ossified frameworks?

The general data of the problem of human community in the West can be summed up in analogous terms whether we consider the beginnings of our era or the present century. For Christianity appeared at the heart of a society in which the cohesive principle seemed exhausted, but within which institutional forms were still substantial and respected enough to preclude any deep reform, if not enough to ensure that the barbarians at the gate would be thrown back and the Christians within subjugated. So today we see Europe being driven out of Asia, invested by the Russians and sapped by the Communists, and yet nevertheless hanging on to semi-sacred institutions—like national sovereignty—which prevent the Continent from uniting in its defense and also from rallying all its social forces round some great principle or common hope. But the parallel goes no further.

Let us notice first two factual differences. There has been an attempt to compare the Christians of the catacombs with our more or less clandestine Communists, but the Christians never made common cause with the enemy barbarians, and in no way represented the "fifth column" of some Germanic or Hunnish empire. The first difference brings out the notable advantage which the Soviets have over Attila. Then, too, Christianity had to contend with no more than a civic religion which frustrated the hunger of the soul. But the opposite is happening before our

eyes. Face to face with the militant forces of Fascism or Communism the same sign of the Cross springs up in the West. The reasons for its triumph under Constantine have not altered. And the crashing uproar of the aircraft flying low over the holy parades in the Red Square will never silence the haunting murmur which slipped nearly sixteen centuries ago from between the lips of the dying Emperor Julian: *"You have won, Galilean!"* (*"Vicisti, Galilaee!"*)

But whatever may be the issue of the struggle that is being fought, the antinomy of aims and answers is plain. At this point of the ascending spiral the anguish of the isolated man, subjected beyond his strength to the contradiction of ideals in which he dares not believe and of practices of which he suffers the humiliation, requires either a brutal or a soothing answer, and one voice exclaims: "I release you from the torment of choosing: obey!" Another says merely: "Seek and thou shalt find." (For the goal is in the seeking. And no seeking is really without a goal, since it is aroused by the summons of such a goal. And the goal is present in the summons, as the person in the person's voice.)

In other words: to a man on the point of asking for no more than a principle of community—that is to say, some means or other of giving a meaning to his life, bound up as that is with the world of men—Communism says "Party" and Christianity says "Church."

The Party is a dictatorship. It dictates to each what he should do, and hence the figure he is to cut and his morals. It liquidates, centralizes, and tyrannizes. It fights personal taste, which might be the origin of unproductive struggles, and even possibly of sabotage. It can be seen restoring castes [8] and creating over again

[8] The Hitler castes are familiar, and as to those of the Soviets: ministers, heads of trusts, generals, engineers, writers, and scientists are their brahmins; party members, stakhanovists, soldiers, policemen and lower-grade officials, their *kshatrias* (natchalnikis); workmen, shopkeepers, artisans, their *vaishas;* the peasants might be their *sudras;* and the crowd of "social

a synthetic idea of the holy which, for want of tradition, is inflicted upon the people by terror: Diocletian's Invincible Sun was the forerunner of Hitler's Swastika, even as Robespierre's Goddess Reason heralded that Dialectical Necessity which "the Father of Peoples" invoked the better to decimate his children.

But the Church is, on the contrary, a community of personal vocations, which, because personal, are imprescriptible. It summons to liberty in the obedience of faith. And that faith has never ceased to be a man's real recourse against the law, be that law sanctioned by the pope. That is why Christianity, wherever it acts in the spirit of its eternal Leader, destroys castes and the barriers of class, nation, race, and rank. True, the Church, in all the historical forms which it has assumed, non-Roman as much as Roman, has often compromised with the law of the "world." But wherever the Church conducts itself as though it were a Party, it is plainly *betraying its faith;* whereas a Party is true *to its own law* when it turns totalitarian—that is, as soon as it arrogates to itself powers appropriate to a Church.[9]

To the spiritual void and the anguish of the isolated, the Church began by proffering a completely new kind of communal life, both open and progressive. The Party too offers a community, but closed and hence regressive.

The twin communal possibility has existed in the West for nearly twenty centuries. If the West should one day, by a radical

waste," oppositioners, former noblemen, *bourgeois,* deviationists and saboteurs of every kind who are recruits for the forced labor camps—they form the mass of untouchables. To have known any of them, to have spoken with one, is enough to render one oneself "impure"—a word which is translated into the language of political religions by "suspect."

[9] Let us take the instance of the liquidation of excommunicated heretics; when the Church has entrusted this to the state and to the state police (Crusade against the Albigenses, St. Bartholomew Massacre, the stake for Servet, the execution of Thomas More and Cranmer, the *dragonnades,* etc.), it was an inexcusable scandal in the eyes of faith, which appeals to the spirit of the Gospel; but when the Party does likewise, it is acting in full strictness according to its genius, and according to the writings of its Fathers—Marx, Lenin, and Stalin—against which the ordinary active party member has no appeal.

choice, adopt one and reject the other finally and forever, the spire would join the axis, or else would turn into a cycle. In one or the other case it would be the end of History.

The Axis

Magic, individual, city, dissociation, state reaction, internal anarchy, totalitarian system (*da capo al fine*)[10]—each of those dialectical moments in our Western history might be illustrated by a superabundance of "documents" and of "historical facts." And each of the categories may be seen with the naked eye in the plastic evidence: medieval gregariousness in the pile of stone of some ancient city inside its circular walls; tempered individualism in the regular dispersion of Dutch or American cottages, akin in style, carefully spaced apart, but without hedges or fences to divide them one from another; insistent individualism in the suburban bungalows of France, heteroclite and fenced about ("Beware of the Dog!"); totalitarian collectivism in its processions and their austere and flat scenic effects.

But amid it all where is the person? A fundamental and specific category of the West, is the person the only one unable to produce its symbols, its illustrations, the evidence of its existence? Indeed it is, and it is easy to see that it could not be otherwise. The person is call and answer, it is action and neither fact nor object, and the complete analysis of facts and objects will never yield an indisputable proof of it. Hence a careful and conscientious historian is found writing: [11] "The Christian Church brought to society no new juridical or social concept. Hence it accepted without resistance, with no real repugnance, the institutions of the Roman state." Yet in fact the Church, as we saw above, introduced into a caste society the principle of human brotherhood; it preserved what was best in Greece and Rome by achieving the

[10] Repeat from beginning to end.
[11] Ferdinand Lot, *La Fin du Monde antique* (1927).

unprecedented integration of the free individual and the pledged citizen; it thus introduced the concept of person, on account of which all other "juridical and social concepts" of antiquity were to be progressively revised and to be subjected to a series of revolutions. No doubt, it is possible not to see the invisible person, but to refuse to believe in it without "documented" evidence (and, after all, there are the acts of the ecumenical councils) is to condemn oneself and at the same time to judge without understanding the visible facts and objects of our history.

While tracing the manifested coils of our spire, we have not once come upon the person, for the perfectly simple reason that it is the axis of the curve. It remains equidistant from every point of the curve, and its action is exerted upon each, although it is never objectivized, introduced, or assumed as a "fact."

It acted upon the Middle Ages, which would otherwise have been still more "oriental" and might not have experienced the passage from slave to serf, and on to freeman, the communal movement, and the Cortes, the Order of St. Francis, chivalry—and that model of unity in diversity which is music, the purest of European creations. It acted upon the Renaissance, which would otherwise have missed that great moderation—a Western form of "wisdom"—which is to be admired in the writings of Vittoria, who subordinated the cause of the state to Christian morality and set forth, in his *De Indis,* the principium of the duties of colonizer. It acted through and in Calvin's Reformation, whereby vocation was given precedence over civic duty. It acted in the eighteenth century like a nameless ideal upon the American legislators, the authors of *The Federalist,* and possibly upon Rousseau,[12] certainly upon Goethe. It acted pseudonymously [13] in the

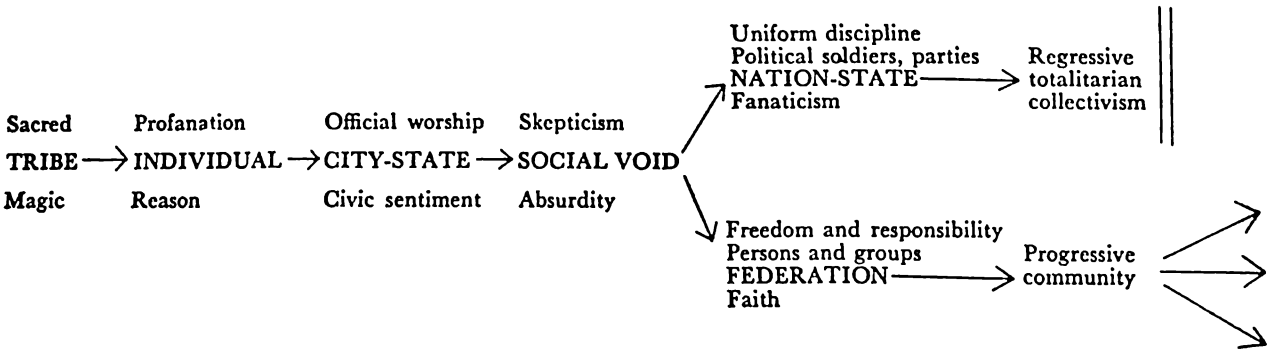
[12] But it might be contended that in Rousseau there is rather the juxtaposition of an enclosed individualism and a sentimental totalitarianism. So in Machiavelli the individual only ceases to be subject in order to reign, and is ever taking back his stake in the game the better to play in his own way.

[13] Kierkegaard calls *der Enkelte,* the Alone, the Isolated, with whom he builds his fundamental categories.

SYNOPTIC DIAGRAMS OF THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE WEST

The Dialectic of the West I

The Basic Categories



The Dialectic of the West II

The Phases and Their Return

	I	Primitives	Greek city-states	Hellenistic period	Rome State, citizen	Christianity Church, person
		Magic, gregariousness	Individuals, contracts	Individualism, social void		
	II	Middle Ages	Renaissance	Eighteenth century	Revolution, Napoleon, nation	Democracy, totalitarianism, federalism

Period	*Places*	*Religion*	*Kind of Man*	*Political Organization*
Up to 1500 B.C.	Crete	Great Goddess		
From 1500 B.C.	Greece	Male and female divinities	Individual	City-states
From 1500 B.C.	Palestine	Jealous God	Worshiper	Sacerdotal theocracy
From 1500 B.C.	Rome	State gods	Citizen	Centralized empire
I–VI Centuries	Byzantium, Asia Minor, Near East	Formation of Christian dogmas, heresies, gnosis	Person	Assemblies, church
Middle Ages	North-Center-West, Western Mediterranean	Scholasticism, mysticism, hallowing of human society	Priest, knight, umpire (*prud'homme*)	Feudality, communes, empire, church
Renaissance	Venice-Bruges axis, Bohemia, Paris, Portugal	Neo-Platonism, Reformation	Venturous individual	State
XVII Century	France, Spain, Austria, England, Holland	Unified dogma, rational morality	"Decent" man, or re-enrolled individual	Centralizing monarchy
XVIII Century	France, England, Prussia, Austria	Rationalism, occultism	Cosmopolitan, or unattached individual	Absolutism (Cath.) parliamentarianism (Prot.)
French Revolution	France	Reason and nation	Jacobin, king-citizen	State control
XIX Century	All Europe	Romanticism	Bourgeois, proletarian	Nations and parties
XX Century	Europe, U.S.S.R., U.S.A.	Scientism	Active party member, voter	Totalitarian collectivism, federalism

intellectual passion of Kierkegaard (despite Hegel and against him) before being named and defined as such by the finest minds of the twentieth century (despite Marxism and against totalitarian doctrines). And again in the twentieth century it has inspired the first of political theories deserving to be called axial—I refer to federalism, which is directed simultaneously against the tyranny of compulsory unity and the anarchy of private interests.

It will of course be realized that I am not trying to draw up a catalogue: I am pointing to a few landmarks as though at random. And it is necessary that these should remain open to discussion, and that there should be claimed for them no more than approximation, the necessity being involved by the definition of the *human* person, as we saw above. The person is never here or there, but in an action, in a tension, in an impetuous rush—more seldom as the source of a happy balance, such as a work of Bach's gives us the feeling of. Nowhere fully actualized in our history and yet active everywhere.

One Form of Personalist Thought

However, the age-long practice of this two-term dialectic, which, as I showed above, arose from meditation upon the Man-God, did not fail to form in our minds a particular way of thinking. This may be called "personalist" in the sense that it is the homologue in intellectual operations of the living paradox of the person. And it is remarkable that it should have taken form in the twentieth century, in the very period when totalitarianism was in full expansion, and indeed be sometimes brought to the surface of consciousness by the totalitarian challenge—and then it is called "personalist"—and sometimes, too, for purely "technical" reasons, and in a context of pure science such as seems wholly independent of political and social circumstances. . . . I shall confine myself here to the common *form* taken by the argu-

ments of my contemporaries in the wildly varied domains of their inquiries and behavior.

The problem of contradictory (or incompatible) maxima presented itself to the scholars of Nicea in the following form: How reconcile the *unity* of the divine essence with the *diversity* of "aspects" of the revealed God (Father, Son, and Holy Ghost)? Next, how reconcile in a single historical and divine being, Jesus Christ, the two terms "very man" and "very God"? The settlement of this fundamental issue brought with it the notion of the divine Person, later transferred by analogy to the human person—that is to say, to the natural individual who receives a vocation from God; then to every human being considered in his dignity.

The particular dialectic that took shape during the examination and discussion of the problem was later to inform all theological thinking during the periods in which philosophy was still only the handmaid of theology. But philosophy is at the origin of political and juridical doctrines on the one hand, of scientific thought on the other.

Let us jump to the twentieth century: here too we find, in the most widely varied domains, but now also in the most express fashion, the problem of contradictory maxima. I give five examples.

Every man is at one and the same time separate and unique, and bound to the social body—to his fellows. He is free but responsible. The maximum freedom should thus correspond in his view with the minimum responsibility. In fact, Robinson Crusoe's freedom is the more empty the more it is unrestricted, whereas the maximum responsibility of a king ideally conscientious (or of any man who is entirely absorbed by his civic side, and thus socialized) can leave no room for the separate life of the individual. How in those conditions reconcile *liberty* and *obligation?*

The problem of upbringing is analogous: what needs to be done is in sum to transmit to a child the maximum of acquired forms of conduct and items of knowledge—that is to say, to train him to live *like others*—but at the same time to lead him into exercising the maximum of individual independence—that is to say, to train him to live *in his own way.*

In political life the antinomy is this: the maximum *independence* for any given nation excludes the maximum *prosperity* for the people. How reconcile the absolute sovereignty of nations with peace, or, inversely, the interdependence of nations with their autonomy?

A buyer's advantage and a seller's advantage are the contradictory maxima in the economy of every people; in practice, they are reconciled in price. But today Western economy has to cope with contradictions of another kind—that between private enterprise and planned economy, for example, or the contradiction of economic democracy: to give *the most* to the *greatest number.*

But the most celebrated and the clearest example of maximum incompatibles is furnished by physics. It is expressed in Heisenberg's principle of uncertainty, according to which it is not possible to determine with the utmost precision the velocity of a particle unless its position is left uncertain, and reciprocally. The wave and corpuscle duality furnishes another instance.

In all this—and not only in the last instance—is it not simply once more a question of the old fundamental antinomies formulated by the Pre-Socratics, and which twenty-five centuries of mental effort have not yet resolved? That of automism and holism, or that of the one and the many, which passionately opposed Eleatics v. Pythagoreans? Are we to suppose that the Greek thinkers transmitted to the Fathers of the Primitive Church that antinomial *form of the understanding,* a sense of which had steadily haunted them? The formal relationship is undeniable, and the language was the same. Nevertheless, between the mys-

tical philosophers and the missionary bishops there stands the historical fact of the Incarnation.

The Incarnation raises no problem of logic (unless a dogma has to be formulated), because it is the *event* of Mediation. It is in no respect the conclusion of a dialectical process, but the starting point of faith. The realized Mediation, unthinkable and yet accomplished, was also the one perfect completeness of the person. Outside *faith* in it, in the world where it appeared, the Cross that saves becomes also a "Sign of contradiction." For in fact we discover that we are incapable of living constantly in faith. "None are good, no, not one," says the same Gospel which commands us: "Be ye perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect." And that is why the Western world, which should never be called "the Christian world," but which was the first to be marked by the indelible sign of the Cross, was doomed from the beginning of its era to the contradictions and conflicts that arise out of the permanent duality of the individual and his vocation, and that have been propagated thence into every order. In that principle of imperfection, I see the secret of the dynamism without respite which is at work within us. Without respite we pursue syntheses, methods of excluding the contradiction, practical ways of behaving, guarantees for the repose of a spirit and intellect that are at last reconciled. We do not find rest, but fresh problems that arise from the ambiguous success of our inquiries. We do not discover the El Dorado of the spirit, but American gold and American limitless space. We do not discover how to square the circle, but methods of reaching down ever further into the secrets of matter and the cosmos. We go after formulations of unity at any price, and we find either the totalitarian society or the nations that divide us. We must thus go further. . . . And for every Hegel who proclaims that he has a key and a system of universal mediation by means of the Idea, there is always a Kier-

kegaard to remind us that between the Idea and existence drama springs up: "So long as I live, I live in contradiction. . . ."

This description of Western existence may tend to represent it as "impossible" and more and more unlivable. And in a certain sense that is what it is—outside faith. But actually it is sustained by the continual invention of relative solutions and of useful compromises—that is to say, of provisional *orders* which are soon themselves subject to new revolutions, as is to be seen notably in the progress of the sciences.

The fundamental, original antinomy of the divine Person is not one to be either resolved or transcended. It must be taken over by faith, at the price of the change in a man himself which Christianity calls conversion.

Likewise the antinomy which constitutes the human person cannot be evacuated by means of any theoretical mediation. The person cannot be conceived, for example, as a harmonious synthesis of individualism and collectivism, any more than health could ensue from a happy compromise between plague and cholera.

But the existential conflict of the person is reflected, or rather projected, in everything that Western man thinks and does. Our passion for diversity and our passion for unity increase the antinomial pairs but also add to the means of rendering their tensions productive, or, on the contrary, of eliminating these, should they prove factitious. That is the principle of all Western inquiry, and it is the principle which presides today over the undertakings that promise most for the future in the different domains I have glanced at. In politics, for example, the federalist principle is developing in response to the double challenge thrown down by individualist (or nationalist) anarchy and by the totalitarian reaction. The problem there is to find an *optimum* between two conflicting maxima. In science, on the contrary, a new logic is being applied to the effort of overcoming the antinomies to which physics has been brought: it is a matter of changing our

understanding, so as to resolve contradictions which have been due solely to our inadequate categories.[14]

In that sense, and within the limits which have been indicated, personalist teaching may be termed mediative even as it instigates conflict. It represents the "wisdom"of the West, a venturous and dynamic wisdom—not at all serene—and one for which the symbol ought to be Ulysses seeking his way between a Charybdis and a Scylla both ever rising up again.

Note on Robinson Crusoe

One limiting case may enable us better to understand, by contrast, the reality of the person. It is the case of Robinson Crusoe, the myth of an individual in complete purity. I referred in the above chapter to his empty freedom, empty because unrestricted. But empty of what? What renders freedom "empty" is the absence of any possible point of application to desire and to will. For want of at least a potential field of action, from which he is *cut off* by the empty ocean, Crusoe cannot really enjoy the freedom which he is enjoying. As soon as freedom is actualized in action, it obliges the individual by responsibility. A tension is simultaneously set up between freedom and responsibility. Far from excluding one another, these actualize one another reciprocally. If the tension relaxes because a break occurs between the two poles, or because one pole absorbs the other, there is no longer any real freedom or any real responsibility.

Let us now suppose the counterpart of Crusoe: a responsibility empty because unrestricted.

[14] As to that, cf. Vol. II of World Perspectives: Lancelot L. Whyte, *Accent on Form*. Let me repeat: The real antinomies demand a transformation of the whole being, who takes them up by faith instead of trying to deny them, or, what amounts to the same thing, to transcend them ideally. Whereas the antinomies which have arisen simply owing to our contradictory desires call for a training by disciplinary reason; and those which arise merely from rational thinking, a transformation of our understanding, whereby they will be eliminated.

What renders it empty is the absence of any will and of any desire distinct from their immediate application. The perfect totalitarian militant party member is in this situation. He cannot really take on the responsibility with which he is vested, for want of at least a potential freedom, from which he is *cut off* by the bare fact that the idea of freedom is bound up in his mind with the idea of social error and implies the immediate penalties of Terror.

Hence flight from all obligation and complete absorption in social obligation both bring about a relaxing of the tension, and consequently the simultaneous loss of all real freedom and all real responsibility. Or again: individualism being man's insular tendency and collectivism his totalitarian tendency, the first seems to enhance the self and the second to sacrifice it. But in reality the two tendencies diverge less than they form a circle. At the limit, indeed, the two ways of flight from the person fuse and are canceled out in the motionless impersonal. For at the limit the totalitarian state becomes an island, whereas Crusoe's island represents the one ideally totalitarian state. It is evident from this that an equal mixture of the two tendencies will never recreate personal tension, but end on the contrary in depressing it completely. The person cannot be compounded: it is *initial* or it is not. It is evident too that whoever will not involve himself in the social matter and whoever yields to tyranny are accomplices, the egoist and the man who has fallen in and is under orders, whoever murmurs, "Every man for himself," and whoever exclaims, "The state for all." Those two absconders from the person, those two fugitives from vocation, are *for the same reason* saboteurs of the West. They alone, by increasing in number, are capable of getting History stuck in the mud and of putting an ignominious end to the Western Odyssey of the spirit.

IV.

The Castle Perilous

Passion, Revolution, Nation

IF THE West were to be defined by its specific diseases, I think that the above three words would do. Equally unknown to Antiquity and (till our influence reached there) the East, inconceivable apart from Christianity although they name three attempts to tear away from it, they are all charged with prestige in the eyes of a European and have an unmistakable pathos: they represent in our Quest of the Grail the episode of the Castle Perilous (Circe's Cave in the *Odyssey*). And to anyone who may be tempted to doubt their religious and sacred value I would suggest that he should measure that by his own reaction to these pages.

To speak of passion in any other way than by rewriting *Wuthering Heights* or by adding a sixth letter to the apocryphal ones of the Portuguese Nun, to try on the contrary to describe it in its clinical symptoms, as the obsession which it is; or to speak of Revolution without preaching and cursing it, but by establishing the balance sheet of its effects, which will show that it puts liberty in debt; finally, to speak of the Nation not as an idol bloody and dull, but simply as a formula which has had its day—that is what will be resented as *sacrilege* by the Western intel-

ligentsia, and resented the more strongly the less that intelligentsia is Christian.

Hence there is a modern sacred. And the three words disclose the secret of its sorcery. The modern sacred is the enemy of the person and of the person's freedom, if I go by its real effects, and yet it remains none the less inconceivable outside a world which has been invested and given its structure by the reality of the person and of its most assured "notes"—vocation, conversion, and the sentiment of unprecedented uniquity.

Passion, or Conversion to Nothingness

"Love? An invention of the twelfth century," wrote a historian by no means frivolous. In support of this famous remark, let me recall a series of indisputable facts—the connection of which I have sought to interpret elsewhere.[1] It was at the beginning of the twelfth century and in the South of France that courtly poetry and courtly morals took form, and the one theme for both was love. Soon afterward (at Lyons, in 1143) the canons instituted the worship of the Virgin. And Our Lady responds to the Lady of Thoughts, as the *cortezia* of the troubadours to the mystical nature of the divine love according to St. Bernard, or as the exemplary story lived through by Héloïse and Abélard to the myth of fatal passion put into verse and prose at the end of the same century—the Romance of Tristan and Iseult.

From the South of the troubadours—the inventors of our lyrical poesy—to the North of the *trouvères*—the inventors of the novel—and thereupon to the whole of literary Europe, the transmission of themes, subjects, and manners of composition can be traced step by step—our erudite scholars have described it. But the Romance of Tristan was not only imitated by writers during nearly eight centuries; the whole experience of passionate

[1] Cf. my *Passion and Society* (revised edition; New York; Pantheon Books, and also Doubleday, 1956).

love drew from it, down to our own day, its language and its types of behavior—that is to say, the steps to avowal, to encourage one another to the point of exaltation, to defy morality, and finally how to despoil morality of its most effective piece of prestige—divinizing heroism.

Such was the progress of passion from the southern twelfth century down to the days of Romanticism, and we are still living in the warmth of the ashes of an interminable conflagration. And I am quite aware that from the fatal passion to the more or less exciting romance, and from mystical Love down to the love interest of Hollywood films, there is only a long decadence, vulgarization in the literal sense; and yet all the time it has remained the same myth. By means of culture, and thanks to the models which it lends to sentiment, the myth has penetrated into our lives, and even where our actions escape from its thrall it goes on reigning over our dreams and stirs our nostalgia. And that is how it has conditioned for centuries the relations of the sexes in the West, even though an average young European no more resembles Tristan than some churchgoer in his Sunday best the martyrs whose blood was the seed of the Church.

The content of the myth cannot be described except by contrasting terms which are themselves ambivalent: it is the enhancement of life in the direction of death (but life and death change their signs in the language of the passionate and mystical), it is imperialism and abandonment of the self (with equal sincerity, with the same gesture); it is intensity but depressing, *askesis* but luxurious, challenge but masochistic (Wagner's *Tristan* brings all that out).

But it is the *form of the myth* that provokes its content and brings it to light in existence, even as the rules of a game are enough to produce an insensate excitement over bits of wood. The form, the structure, still operates upon us, even when we

are unaware of the origins of the myth and have no suspicion of its finality.

In respect of society, the myth of passion is but revolt and flight. It could only foment the selfish and profaning individual in the very center of the feudal world, which was the world of "fealties." Tristan, seized by passion, violates every moral, social, and religious taboo; Iseult betrays every one of her sacred vows, and in the episode of the ordeal by the red-hot iron she succeeds in deceiving God Himself. Actually, the twelfth century, in which passion arose with the passion of the troubadours, witnessed a first return of individualism in the Christianized West. It heralded the Renaissance with the melancholy strains of the lute which Manes is said to have invented. And this music of gnosis has gone on disturbing the wild heart of man shut up in a sensible marriage with orthodoxy. As for marriage itself, civil and religious alike—a personalist form of the relations of the sexes, since it assumes union in the heart of distinction—it was natural for *every* heresy in the twelfth century to condemn it. The heresies alleged abuses, but in reality it was the use of it that they were against. They substituted for it the oath made *against* married life and in the sole name of passion.

Here appears the religious form of the phenomenon and of its myth. A man and woman are observed to have entered upon passion as they might have entered into religion. The first look and the first avowal corresponded to the "touches" of the Spirit, the bodily embrace opened the mystic Way, and the complete yielding up to passion is described as a *conversion:*

> Thereupon the true Minne, the impetuous goddess, filled him with her ardours. And his blazing heart revealed to him the source of the pains he was suffering. Then began for him another life. He entered into this new life and his whole being was changed. He became another man. . . .[2]

[2] Gottfried of Strasbourg, *Tristan.*

The "new life"—in the world as though not of the world—was not vouchsafed to a man for his pleasure: it seized him like a commanding *grace,* and fitted him with a *vocation.* Anybody who was snatched out of the common run by a sovereign caprice of the *Minne* at once lost all power over himself. He was no sooner released than consecrated. *Minne* had distinguished him, but it was in order that he might serve her. Let us hear her sing with the wild and delirious voice of her priestess and magician, Isolde: *"Chosen by me, lost by me!"* It is a vocation of suffering and fidelity all the way to divinizing death, but one being has taken the place of everybody; and of the world, and of God Himself.

Everything here recalls the person, imitates its form, and reproduces its paradox, although in a reversed reflection. Deified love is not the God Who is Love. It does not elect a man in order to save him, but in order to exalt him in the direction of his ruin. It does not endow him with a neighbor, but with an object of fatal fascination. Nevertheless, the man is *elected,* isolated and related, transported beyond all profane morality and told in his turn what Augustine said to him whose faith had delivered him from the law: *"Ama et fac quod vis."* Tristan's passion could never be avowed in its tragic and obsessive grandeur except in the heart of a world which had been taught to believe in the irreplaceable value of each single being. "I was thinking of thee in my death throes. I shed these drops of blood for thee," says to the believer the Jesus of Pascal. Passion accordingly could only have appeared in a world where this belief in a *unique* being was part and parcel of everybody's religion. The wild rush of passion, which mimics the leap of faith, did not cast a man into his living salvation nor into a salutary martyrdom, but into the catastrophe of the death of the two lovers. "Come, sweet death!" sings the appeased spirit in the purest of Bach's chorals. The dying Isolde's

"supreme Joy" is but a last cry of defiance hurled at the Sun that has sunk below the yellow horizon of the western sea. It is the cry of an "exiled" spirit, which snatches itself away from matter and the flesh only to founder.

But does not that make passion the frustration of the Western Quest, a fatal frustration once the spirit has refused to accept complete incarnation or abasement into the finite world—the place of our salutary experience? Certainly. But it must be understood that frustration of this order remains specifically Western, even though it is caused by the rejection of the principal options of the West. It does not carry the spirit off to the symbolical East, as by a double negation; for the East is a stranger to the tragic absolute which follows upon an irreversible act and which pledges the person beyond return. And yet passion invented afresh one of the profound secrets of spiritual escape devised in India and by Buddhism. In the rejection of the fragile and provisional flesh, and at the decisive moment of the carnal life, passion, in its essential angelism, could not dream of a horizon of hope unless it was that of metempsychosis. "Our engagement was not for this life," says Novalis, referring to his lost betrothed. On the tomb of Tristan and Iseult two plants shot up in a night and they embraced. And that discreet symbol of transmigration has its roots in the depths of passion. It flowers on the edge of the abyss which separates the magical East from the tragic West, and the abyss in question is but the dizziness of the spirit once it has fallen a prey to the Manichaean rejection of the Incarnation.

Revolution, or Socialized Passion

Whenever passionate catastrophism flows over into the social body, it takes the name of Revolution.

The idea and the reality of this happening have, as I said above, never been known in the East, neither to the Aryan or Dravidian empires nor to the Khmer or Mongolian, Chinese or

Japanese empires. The *idea* can appear to an Asiatic untouched by Western influences only in the aspect of a profound indecency, or of a wound to the cosmic order, of an absurd crime. As for *reality,* Orientals are not strangers to great upheavals of empire and to revolts. Nevertheless, when the Great Khan swept the Sung dynasty out of China, and then the Mings chased away the Mongols, when Chandragupta usurped the throne, and Mahmud invaded the kingdoms of the Rajputs and these rose against him, there was no revolution at any juncture; for subversion comes from without, or aims at a foreign dominion. The very notion of revolution, connoting a sudden change, a renewal *from within* of all things and of Order itself, is a notion that has the same extension in space and time as the "Christianized world." If there is no socialism in Asia, wrote Henri de Man in 1930, it is owing to the absence of Christianity. At the very same moment a Japanese began introducing trade unionism to his country, but he was a Christian—named Kagawa. Since then we have witnessed the spread of Communism in Asia. But let us take India: the first to be affected there by Marxist ideology were intellectuals educated in England and the inhabitants of the Malabar coast, who had been Christianized very long ago. Take China: the father of the revolution there was the convert, Sun-Yat-Sen, who to begin with had been a fanatical Protestant.

Everything inclines us to link the phenomenon of revolution to some specific quality or defect of the West or of its religion.

Actually, Christianity provides us with the very type of sudden and radical change, but coming from within—conversion, the dazzling light of the Road to Damascus, where Saul of Tarsus became the Apostle Paul. Revolution and conversion have the same meaning: to turn round completely. In both cases, there is a sudden, swift crisis, a process of dying and rebirth, which partakes of the violence of a *catharsis:* "Old things are passed away," St. Paul says; "behold, all things are become new." And the

leaders of our revolutions promise "new things" in a sudden accession. In both cases the subversion of the old order is achieved with a double movement: the violent rejection of "old things," the institution of a new order. A convert rejects the Law, which has become dead for him—that is the anarchical moment—but then instantly Faith pledges him to obey the Church—and that is the instituting moment putting him in community. The irruption of faith into a particular human life thus figures the spiritual model of every Western revolution.

But there is more to it than that. Christianity brought into the world values which were to inspire the revolutionary ideal (an ideal that was going to change them into things due): the demand for universal justice in place of one relative to caste or to class; the claim to freedom for every man of whatever rank. The conflict between those two demands, which is at the root both of the instability of our political and social systems and of our pursuit of true good citizenship, has remained unknown to enclosed or sacred societies. Finally, the idea of a received mission or vocation, transcendent in respect of the common morality and the "interests of the state." Thus, the type of a European revolutionary took form out of a background of faith in which liberty and prophetic action are regarded as *more real* than the Order of the World and obedience to sacred laws.

Finally, the appearance of Christ and the triumph of the Church in the West meant that in Western development there was a discontinuity, an outstanding traumatism: we say "B.C." and we mean antiquity; "A.D.," and we refer to a new era, numbered afresh. Every subsequent revolution was animated by the memory of that. The East has experienced no similar division of time—no cutting of history into two, thanks to which History came to exist. Southern Asia has lasted down to the present in the living continuity of its pasts, not one of which has been abolished

or deprived of its temples. It is comparable with a Continent of Europe in which we should still see alive around us, in town and countryside, with their rites and their idols and their worshipers, Zeus, Aphrodite, and Diana, the Eleusinian mysteries, the Great Goddess, the initiatory cults, Scandinavian Odin and Celtic Dispater, currents of Judaic and Arab, Persian and Manichaean ideas, and twenty simultaneous schools of metaphysics, with none supreme, with no succession and no exclusion. On the other hand, the sharp division which was operated by Christianity once it had been officially established in the Roman Empire created for Europe a *precedent* which goes on unceasingly haunting its history.

Conversions, "subversive" values, historical discontinuity—those are three facts which seem decisive. But to note them is not to explain matters completely. For example, the transition from conversion to revolution—that is to say, from a spiritual model to a political and social event—does not seem to go without saying. It seems even doubtful if the early Christians behaved like "revolutionaries" in the modern sense of the term. Of course, the Church, in organizing groups of the converted, did create a new type of human relations. It instituted a new order which was soon going to take over as the Empire faltered. But the early Christians remained supporters of the established order. There is no sign of their trying to subvert the imperial system or of attacking the institution of slavery, for example,[3] neither of which was going to be abolished on theological grounds, but the first for military reasons and the second for technical. Finally, there where Christianity did display its subversive power, there is a flagrant contradiction between "the Christian revolution" of the first centuries A.D. and the other revolutions which have in its shadow shed unhallowed blood. The Church was indeed grounded upon

[3] Although they did empty both these of a *sacred* element by refusing to worship Caesar and by marrying slaves.

the *reality* of men's being transformed by faith. Its purpose was not to convert society, but to unite the converted in one body. And it is accessorily that it happened to contribute to modifying certain structures which were decidedly incompatible with its notion of man.[4] Our revolutions attempt the reverse: setting out from the *utopia* of a theoretic order, which has to be imposed by force, it is imagined that this will necessarily result in "a new man," freer and happier.

In order to account for these coincidences and contradictions both, it is necessary to go back to our dialectic of the person.

It is not the person which gets away from the magical body of the tribe; it is the profaning individual. The latter founds a city-state for which he decrees laws and contracts. But once civic and political cheating comes to prevail over the city-state, and an individual can no longer feel supported and related in it, the social void calls for an authoritarian order. Here *may* arise revolution.

Two kinds of order are indeed thereupon conceivable. There is the Church with its fundamental brotherhood in love of one's neighbor and of one Father. There is the Party (movement, political club, or faction) and its conditional comradeship[5] in the struggle against the established order. The Church is obedience to the eternal Liberator, who died for us but is present in faith, that "full assurance of things not seen." The Party is instead subordinate to a leader whose visible and material presence is

[4] It might even be contended that Christianity had been subversive only *in spite* of the pretension of the Church to set up a permanent order, a holy immobility in the Eastern manner. Karl Jaspers insists rightly: "The Byzantine Empire was a more or less theocratic state. In the West, it was quite otherwise. The Church had advanced the same pretension. *But as this was not accepted, it became the Church militant,* and while developing on the spiritual plane, was a factor in favour of liberty and against abuses by the temporal power. Thus Christianity went so far as to encourage the liberal aspirations of opponents of the Church." (*Origins and Meaning of History,* French translation, p. 79.)

[5] Every man is my brother, whatever he may do or believe, when I am a Christian. Every comrade may at any moment cease to be mine, when I am a Communist.

confirmed on every hoarding; he too claims from active party members faith in an ideal and future world, but the only pledges for this faith are the sacrifice and death of his adversaries. A man enters the Church because he has been *converted,* hence changed; but a man joins the Party so as to change the world first and not first himself. In the case of a revolutionary, accordingly, the conversion is one not of being but of doing; and, furthermore, *delegated* to collective action. A party recruit imitates the leap of conversion, but instead of discovering that he is now a pledged person, he finds that he is now an enrolled political soldier.

That the revolutionary Party is an exact parody (conscious or unconscious) of the Christian Church is something which our time can no longer question. Nazism and Stalinism have each had a pope and infallibility; hierarchies, orders, forms of worship and dogmas, an Inquisition more effective than the other in the eradication of heresy from the utmost recesses of the cerebellum. Saint-Just was a little Lord Fauntleroy compared to their Philanthropists, if not in intention at least in success. He could not avail himself of telecommands and his *missi dominici* only went on horseback. But his Terror was as good as Communist purges, and his "clericalism" without stain.

However, the political churches only copy from the Church what has been least Christian about her. Not one of the features enumerated above is truly evangelical. It is theocratic ambition, not Agape, that broods inside a doctrinaire of revolution, and lands him in Caesaro-Papism. That kind of ambition is bridled in the Church by its transcendental vocation and by the direct recourse of a soul to God. But who can appeal from the decrees of a Party which incarnates the Revolution? There is nothing above it.[6] There is no Judge of its crimes. And as soon as the Party is aware that it is unjustified in its pretension to rule in the

[6] The Soviet leaders have had Marx himself rewritten, fearing to leave in existence some superior authority, even one merely human.

name of all against a portion of the people, it lives obsessed by "the enemies of freedom," so naming those who differ from it and might accordingly turn into its judges. Hence the *inevitable* Terror which it sets up, being itself terrorized. Hence the necessary and not accidental fact—despite the hypocrisy of partisan historiographers—that the Revolution, while a libertarian myth, is in reality closed and lugubrious, a persecution psychosis, the paranoia of the West.

Whoever were to condemn the aspiration to community which generated our revolutions would be dwelling in the unreal; I have said why. But those who still think that those revolutions have "objectively" served freedom simply betray a wonderful ignorance of history. The great European revolutions did not once overthrow a tyrant. On the contrary, they set up some very great and bloody ones—Napoleon, Hitler, Mussolini, Stalin. Those tyrants were only felled by war or by death. And most were the gainers by our "libertarian" revolutions, not victims. Revolutions have never triumphed except over senile political systems, the "tyranny" of which, if compared with the kind of state rule that followed them, was many times dubbed "happy days," not only by its survivors but by the sons of its executioners.

Here the intellectual snobs of the West, the youth of yesterday, will protest loudly out of a sense of injured virtue. I am in fact attacking their religion. Not as an opposition party, but as a pathetic mistake. They dreamed of community without daring really to want it, making into gods those who dictated the recipe for it in the sadistic and haughty language that has invariably excited masochists. The tense eloquence of Saint-Just [7] has been

[7] This figure is worshiped by them on a level with the greatest men—and this now that psychoanalysis flourishes among us! The authors whom they admire are aware of this, and are careful not to lay a finger on the idol, even if they themselves no longer believe in it. "Do not let us mix up, even for a single second, the grandiose character of Saint-Just with the melancholy Marat," one of them writes. Unbelief, however serene, needs the prestige that goes with the word "saint."

confirmed on every hoarding; he too claims from active party members faith in an ideal and future world, but the only pledges for this faith are the sacrifice and death of his adversaries. A man enters the Church because he has been *converted,* hence changed; but a man joins the Party so as to change the world first and not first himself. In the case of a revolutionary, accordingly, the conversion is one not of being but of doing; and, furthermore, *delegated* to collective action. A party recruit imitates the leap of conversion, but instead of discovering that he is now a pledged person, he finds that he is now an enrolled political soldier.

That the revolutionary Party is an exact parody (conscious or unconscious) of the Christian Church is something which our time can no longer question. Nazism and Stalinism have each had a pope and infallibility; hierarchies, orders, forms of worship and dogmas, an Inquisition more effective than the other in the eradication of heresy from the utmost recesses of the cerebellum. Saint-Just was a little Lord Fauntleroy compared to their Philanthropists, if not in intention at least in success. He could not avail himself of telecommands and his *missi dominici* only went on horseback. But his Terror was as good as Communist purges, and his "clericalism" without stain.

However, the political churches only copy from the Church what has been least Christian about her. Not one of the features enumerated above is truly evangelical. It is theocratic ambition, not Agape, that broods inside a doctrinaire of revolution, and lands him in Caesaro-Papism. That kind of ambition is bridled in the Church by its transcendental vocation and by the direct recourse of a soul to God. But who can appeal from the decrees of a Party which incarnates the Revolution? There is nothing above it.[6] There is no Judge of its crimes. And as soon as the Party is aware that it is unjustified in its pretension to rule in the

[6] The Soviet leaders have had Marx himself rewritten, fearing to leave in existence some superior authority, even one merely human.

name of all against a portion of the people, it lives obsessed by "the enemies of freedom," so naming those who differ from it and might accordingly turn into its judges. Hence the *inevitable* Terror which it sets up, being itself terrorized. Hence the necessary and not accidental fact—despite the hypocrisy of partisan historiographers—that the Revolution, while a libertarian myth, is in reality closed and lugubrious, a persecution psychosis, the paranoia of the West.

Whoever were to condemn the aspiration to community which generated our revolutions would be dwelling in the unreal; I have said why. But those who still think that those revolutions have "objectively" served freedom simply betray a wonderful ignorance of history. The great European revolutions did not once overthrow a tyrant. On the contrary, they set up some very great and bloody ones—Napoleon, Hitler, Mussolini, Stalin. Those tyrants were only felled by war or by death. And most were the gainers by our "libertarian" revolutions, not victims. Revolutions have never triumphed except over senile political systems, the "tyranny" of which, if compared with the kind of state rule that followed them, was many times dubbed "happy days," not only by its survivors but by the sons of its executioners.

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their idea of "purity," the brutal sentences pronounced by Lenin their idea of effective rigor. A kind of literary extremism long passed with them for spirituality, and its prestige is far from being outworn. The guillotine and the Russian labor camps help to reassure the consciences of our votaries of the Revolution Myth. "We must not count the cost," they say with an air of hardened wisdom. They have to feel that, no doubt. But have they any purpose that they dare avow? Let us recall that it was once thought to be a necessary outlay to slit open with the obsidian knife the bosoms of young Aztecs and tear out their still beating hearts and offer these to the god—so that it might rain. Really, the sacred cares nothing for results; it finds its evidence in bloodshed.

But if we, defying the myth and its taboos, coldly estimate the results, we are compelled to admit that the European revolutions have, without notable exception, all ended in reinforcing tyranny, either that of a man or that of a class, and invariably that of the state. Adopting the values of Passion—"Give us liberty or give us death!" cried the Jacobins, and they got death, but first it was the death of others, and Liberty hid her face—and later consigning to neglect in official files the early generous aspiration to community, European revolutions have fomented nationalism, the third and perhaps fatal religious frenzy of the West.

The Nation, or Socialized Vocation

Goethe, while watching the Battle of Valmy, exclaimed: "From this spot and this day will begin the new era." It was indeed to the cry of "Long live the Nation!" shouted all along the front that the French owed their victory. Let us notice that the cry did not then mean "Long live France!" any more than "Soviets everywhere!" meant under Lenin "Long live Russia!" The cry proclaimed a new myth. It was like the invocation of a

new god, a kind of *Gott mit uns* immediately answered, since by means of that single cry the battle was won.

A nation in process of being born, such as we come upon at Valmy, is therefore an ideal, an ideology, the essence of a new community not already made at birth, but destined to be the product of the future and of will. Nevertheless, the ideology is not the concern of the whole people, but of a party; and the party acts by means of the state.

Within the country the first task of the state was going to be to crush opposition; for the nation is a religion, and religions, in the West, have been uncompromising—at least since the advent of Christianity. The state thus found that it was compelled to reinforce the police, to centralize all the elements of power, and to transform justice into an instrument of ideology—the whole in the name of the Nation.

But if, at home, the idea of nation became in the hands of the state an instrument of oppression and of latent civil war, abroad it became the instrument of open war. Why should a nation *have* to make war? First of all, because the "nations divided within themselves conquered by war abroad stability at home," as Hegel was to put it. Next, because the collusion of the centralized state and the missionary nation is bound to produce imperialism: thus the France of Napoleon took the place of Revolutionary France. The ideology of the nation was essentially one of conquest: it was impelled to carry Liberty to other peoples under the constraint of the bayonet.

But what happened was that national war, as fought by the "liberating" soldiery of the Revolution and Empire, far from ensuring the triumph all over Europe of the unitary ideology of the Jacobins, aroused nationalist rivalries. And it was in a country which had suffered most severely from Napoleonic aggression—in Prussia—that the nationalist philosophy came to be elaborated. Hegel was the reflective counterpart of Napoleon.

Hegel pictured the nation as a crusade for *the idea.* "It is not the natural determinations of a nation which give it its character; it is the national spirit." (It is to be noted that nation and fatherland differ for him as spirit and nature.) The national spirit is "an individual in the march of History." The spirit takes form thanks to its own activity, reaches maturity, and then enters into its full vigor by opposition (hence through war), and inevitably declines and dies. "Every people ripens like a fruit; its activity consists of accomplishing its principle, not of enjoying it. . . . Each has its principle to which it tends as to its end. That end once attained, it has nothing more to do in the world." And again: "At every epoch the people that becomes supreme is the people that incarnates the most lofty concept of Spirit."

Here then were the peoples being raised to the dignity of particular intentions of the world Spirit, but at the same time they were being denied, under penalty of being of "public nullity," any leave to live in peace, "to vegetate," Hegel makes plain, in happiness and without history. We have reached the point of the decisive transfer of the idea of *vocation;* it passes from persons to nations.

But how is the Nation-State, once endowed with all the personality of which it tends to deprive actual human beings, going to behave in the world? The primitive ideal of the nation, confiscated by the French state, led to wars of aggression. *These caused other nationalisms to rise up,* and they in their turn were to claim the right to dominate the epoch. To that end, each professed to incarnate "the highest concept of the Spirit." For France, this was its "immortal principles." For Prussia, the idea of the state. For England, rule Britannia! For Russia, despotic messianism. The small countries were content to invoke their traditions, their folklore, or even their language: so that in our present century Norway, Ireland, and Israel artificially revived a

"national language" which had long been completely forgotten, in order the better each to establish its *raison d'être*. They were exhibiting a reflected or imitation nationalism, at times nearer to true patriotism, but quite as jealous and as churlish as that of their great neighbors. None of such "concepts of the Spirit" being really assented to, no one nation kept the lead for long, but not one came to the conclusion, once defeated, that "it had nothing more to do in the world." Each went on calling itself "sovereign" in the wake of the absolutist kings who had been accountable to God alone—but God was no longer above the nations. Divine right was therefore translated to mean the right of the strongest state. This state recognized no obligations other than those undertaken in the contracts which it had signed with its competitors, trade alliances and treaties which were abrogated the moment they no longer paid. It thus was made possible for half a dozen gangster states, excessively touchy, devoid of any respect for community, quick on the draw, hand already in pocket, to try to bend Europe to their will. There was much talk of "concert of nations" and of "international law," but it is plain that these Individual-Nation-States rendered any international order out of the question, in theory and by definition, as they would accept no superior judge of their "rights" and no restriction of their "absolute sovereignty." For a hundred years Europe, while supposing itself rational, was to live upon this fundamental absurdity. In 1914 it proved fatal.

But how did the absurdity succeed for a century and more? By aping religion and its teaching, and in becoming itself a spring out of which flowed the sacred. The Eagle, the Three Colors, and the Little Hat played to begin with the part of labarum, crucifix, and miter. Ceremonies were introduced later, with the Cenotaphs to the Dead and the worship of the Unknown Soldier. To provide for piety and the new morality, popular poets and the authorities responsible for compulsory schooling saw to it that

appropriate hymns and a catechism were made available. This national religion, which has justly been compared to Shintoism, was not going to bother to attack Christianity; it was content to annex it on decisive occasions. Admittedly, the national spirit is a very real god and is really believed in, since he successfully calls upon the citizens to sacrifice their actual lives. But what are we offered in exchange for our lives? A nebulous but potent sense of communion, which enables an individual to rise above his narrow horizon, to throw off his private worries (in wartime), to feel as though transported in a kind of transcendence. In truth, we have here again egoism, but so broadened as to become a virtue. It is taught in schools under the name of "patriotism." It is accepted that every form of pride, every form of vanity, and even the most stupid boastings are legitimate and honorable so long as they are attributed to the nation in which one has taken the trouble to get born. What nobody would dare to say of his *me,* he has the sacred duty of saying for his *us.*

Nevertheless, this religion remains obviously incapable of giving vitality to the whole existence of man. "National pride is remote from daily life," remarked Simone Weil. The nation is a far-off god, who demands much more than he gives, infinitely more, absurdly more. A source of hatred rather than of love, the nation lays claim to absolutes of which obviously it is spiritually unworthy and materially incapable: that of unlimited sovereignty, for example, which is an attribute of God; or that of eternity, to the contempt of all likelihood. "Eternal France," "immortal Germany" are frequent expressions in time of war. Millions of men are moved by the rhetoric, and instantly forget their smattering of history.

I said above that the pseudo-religious frenzy of nationalism may be fatal to the West, and I see two considerable reasons for fearing that it will be.

The first is that there are essential contradictions between abso-

lute sovereignty and peace, between the nation-state and liberty, between the sacredness of the nation and the Christian faith, etc., contradictions which broke out as far back as 1914, and they weaken not only Europe—demoralized by wars—but indeed the whole of the West. For the absence of European unity throws the Atlantic grouping off balance and threatens to deliver half the world to the hegemony of the United States. That country has not sought such a responsibility, and is not equipped to shoulder it. There is where America differs profoundly from Rome—in face of the magnified Greece which Europe may well be said to figure. If Europe were Americanized, it would gain in stability, but it would lose the profound significance of its Quest. Everyone feels this and fears it obscurely. If I were asked why, I should reply with the sentence which is a biological parable of fundamental spiritual truth: "Every plant which suffers tends to produce flower and fruit." [8] (A little more pain, and it would be desiccated; none at all, and its leaves and stems would grow in beauty, but at the expense of the taste of its fruit.) With this fear is bound up another—that of seeing vanish with Europe the strongest prospect of a truly illuminating dialogue between West and East.

And that brings me to my second reason. The whole of Asia is in danger of "catching" our nationalist fever. Some countries have already been attacked by it, though lightly, as counterpart of the white man's withdrawal. Others are infected by a virus which has been methodically spread by Moscow. So we see China delivered over to westernization in the worst sense of the word, on the morrow of a revolution which was indubitably genuine, but nevertheless an imported article.

The Western nationalism "caught" by the peoples of the East is rather like our common cold, which is often fatal to South Sea islanders. Nationalism in Europe was partially neutralized by the

[8] *Bulletin de la Société d'horticulture de France,* January, 1955.

enduring resistance of local groups and of the various politic and professional international bodies. Such defensive reflexes the body social are not put forth in the East, and the nationali disease may have an extraordinary virulence there. All that wi turn against our West, at the very moment the West begins t have a glimpse of the extent of its own folly and to seek the cur *which it alone can invent.*

The Revolt Against Freedom

Passion, Revolution, Nation—those three specific diseases are the "special marks" of Europe listed on its card in the card index of History. But they are not only feverish ills; they are also heresies: truths gone astray, cut off from the whole in which they were reconciled in a common tension in the direction of an ever receding resolution. All three are the result of an *abusive transposition* of spiritual realities, either onto the individual or onto society. All three are fatal, and bound up with death from the beginning. We know this, or at least we guess it. But we recoil from imagining a sudden recovery from them at the wave of a magic wand. To arrest these fevers would be devastating: should we not be emptied of an affectivity which has grown to be the savor and even the very meaning of life for millions of our fellow-beings, and among them excellent people?

They threaten our peace, and more than that: the very existence of the West. And yet the West without them would appear almost unthinkable. For they are connected with the deepest motives of our situation in History; with the genesis of our whole Quest. They are persistent errors inseparable from the perilous Odyssey upon which we had already launched at birth.

A final trait common to all three of them should make completely plain their congenital relation to Christianity. They resurrect among us the sense of the holy—that is, the religious instinct which true Faith transcends. They measure how far Western

man goes *adrift* once he is no longer guided by the stars. They illustrate three forms of one and the same revolt against the final Goal of the Venture, which can never be grasped except by faith.

Christianity is to be distinguished from most other religions by the fact that it seems impossible for believers to satisfy its demands fully. That is what impelled the West forward, and roused its unslakable thirst. But when a man comes to feel that he will never be able to attain the final goal unless he at the same time lets Grace make up for his debility and hence grants that salvation will be a gift and not wrested from God, he throws himself at more immediate and more tangible goals. It is essentially an *untimely* movement—a denial of time, of waiting, and of the given conditions, and substituting impatiently for the object of hope that of an immediate enjoyment. The same ardor moves him, the same leap of faith; but he thinks he sees suddenly that the goal is at hand: he touches it, he embraces it, and he fancies he is embracing the Absolute, *because* his thirst expected no less. But, akin to the tragic lovers of the legend, with their god-inebriating philter that cancels Time, he has "drunk his destruction and death."

To treat as holy the goals which are not the Goal is the recipe of Western rebellion. It is rebellion against the Church, which had proffered the type of a society of love and brotherhood, but had not been able to actualize it—it is the Stone of offense. There remains that thirst after true community which let loose the revolutions and maintains the worship of the national idol. It is rebellion against the Love of God and of one's neighbor, which was the commandment that replaced all the Law, and which one would like to follow but cannot; yet the need survives to give oneself without reserve, to love with all the fullness of one's being, to the point of desperate sacrifice. Then I shall make of Iseult the absolute of desire, and she will be that absolute so long as an obstacle, real or not, shall come between her

and me, even when embraced, and hold back the Absolute from being wrecked by breaking into time.

In face of the impossible challenge, man says: This is too much for me, but I could not go on living and feeling my life without that intimate summons. He then thinks: It is God Who must be too weak to compel me to obey and to love. Rebels never rise against force at its zenith. But from a power which is thought to have grown weak, every demand is resented as though it were an "abuse." Thus it is that every one of our rebellions imitates, even unawares, the vexation of love which turns against the Father those children whom He has not constrained to virtue. The God of Christianity has left man *free* to sin or to believe in forgiveness. Man thereupon rebels against this radical and heady liberty, in the name of a freedom which he dreams of as being to his measure; and this incarnated dream becomes a tyranny.

Passion, Revolution, Nation—some people have thought that the hold which these have on our minds indicates the extent of what is quite wrongly called the "dechristianization of the West." It is now plain that this is not so. The West *qua* historical whole was never converted, and indeed never could be, from the mere fact that it is not a person. But the original ferment of Christianity, its demand that the *absolute* should be *realized* in this restricted life, within the limits of a time that is ever slipping from us, within this imperious and weak flesh, has never ceased working in the human spirit over twenty centuries. Our "errors" are part of the Quest, in the sense that they arise from its eagerness and propagate this into new regions of the spirit, even when the errors overlook both the true purpose and what is at stake. Thus it is that heresies spurt out of the true faith and move away from it, but disseminate in millions of minds which have not been touched by orthodoxy certain mental forms, certain modes of expression, certain types of spiritual experience which faith alone could have created and which will thenceforth await faith

with the whole strength of an unconscious nostalgia. And that is why our Western psyche, having suffered over centuries the ever more penetrating stabs of individual and collective passion, might well turn out on close analysis to be more and better "Christianized" in its whole fabric than it was before the twelfth century. Whence we cannot infer by resort to the absurd that the modern unbeliever is more "Christian" than could have been a naïve parishioner of the Middle Ages, but only that the formal dialectic of the person is more deeply active than was recently supposed in the spirit of our contemporaries, even the nonbelieving, and goes on reaching out to new regions of our secular existence.

V.

The Experience of Historical Time

The West Discovers Time

FROM Mosaic Genesis to the beginning of last century, we in the West hardly disagreed over the date of the birth of mankind. A Cambridge professor in the seventeenth century thought he could put his finger on the precise moment. Man, he averred, had been created in 4004 B.C., on October 23 at 9 A.M. At Oxford the faculty preferred March 23, but the same hour and the same year. Buffon writes a little later: "Since the end of God's works—that is to say, since the creation of Man—only six to eight thousand years have elapsed." Cuvier shared his view, which Schelling assented to fully in the middle of the nineteenth century; it is a view which was taught in Sunday school to generations whose last representatives were to be met with in our own childhood. Nevertheless, by about 1950, it had become impossible for anybody to doubt that man has existed for nearly 100,000 years. According to the very latest tidings—and who can improve on them?—it is at least 600,000 that ought to be conceded.

The sudden extension of the age of mankind a hundred times may seem a considerable revolution. But it is no more than a detail without interest for anybody who considers the dimensions of time described in the old Eastern cosmologies. In India, the

unit of time—the Kalpa, or day in the life of Brahma—is 4,320,000,000 solar years. The life of Brahma lasts 108 "years," each day and each night of which is equivalent to a Kalpa. When Brahma dies the universe is to return into the Great Chaos for an equivalent period, and then another Brahma will start a new era, and so on *ad infinitum*. The smallest unit of measure of cyclical time is the yuga, or "age." A complete cycle is the Mahayuga, composed of four shorter ages of unequal duration. We today are living in the last of the four, Kaliyuga, which is a mere 1,200 "years" of 360 solar years each. Kaliyuga began at exactly midnight on February 18, 3102 B.C., and is expected accordingly to end 426,943 solar years from the present year, 1955 A.D., by the destruction of the world. This will be followed by a reconstruction, which will be the task of Kalki, the latest avatar of Vishnu.

Opposite such prodigiously different orders of magnitude attributed by the great religions of East and West to cosmic time and to historic time, let me set this double fact: a sense of history is characteristic of the West, and may even turn into an obsession (to judge by the present century), whereas it was completely wanting in Orientals till they came under Western influences.[1]

Any reflection upon the Western Quest should take this contrast into account, and seek to interpret it. And, in particular, a theory of History which either neglected to deal with it or betrayed that it was unfitted to do so would appear inadequate. Why will grow more plain as this chapter proceeds.

Simultaneous Birth of History and of the Person

Any particular fact is historical in the strict sense of the word

[1] The first historical society in the East was founded at the beginning of the nineteenth century by an Englishman, Sir William Jones: the Asiatic Society of Bengal. And it is only since the end of the nineteenth century that a science of history has been practiced in India.

thanks only to being unique. If it could recur, return like the seasons, it would belong not to history but to myth. Likewise, an individual is made a person thanks only to the uniqueness which his vocation confers upon him; otherwise, he must appear as a repetition, a speck of dust, alone in an absurd universe, a matter of pure statistics, or as a transitory cell of the enduring magical body. How many individuals should we thus say have been born and have died since men appeared on the planet? If a demographer of genius could convince us tomorrow that the answer was "on the order of three hundred thousand millions" we should be not so much astounded as embarrassed. And what would be the cause of our embarrassment? How fail to see that it would be closely bound up—in those who experienced it—with our sense of the person?

Nearly all the cultures and civilizations which we have dug up out of the Earth's past, or which survive in our own century, have had a theory of time, and most of them abided by a cyclical time. They also put their trust in metempsychosis, in astrology, and in caste. All that holds together and is interconnected; it is all *religion,* in the original sense of the word [2]—and leaves no room for history or (for that matter) for the person. Alone the Jewish religion was an exception in the Ancient World. Its prophets thought that Yahveh intervened with free actions in the terrestrial existence of the chosen people: that being so, this people was no longer dependent upon the stars or upon a calculable lapse of time, but upon a personal intention, inscrutable and yet manifested in a sequence of revealing events. The Incarnation of Christ came to fulfill that unique vocation of the people of Israel. And indeed the Gospel is absolutely oblivious to any kind of doctrine of history: it preaches the Resurrection, which is going to be victory over time even as it is going to be victory over death. Nevertheless, only from the moment that men who

[2] *Religio,* from *religare,* to bind together.

had been moved by the evangelical message understood that the time of history is irreversible did they *dare to treat it as valid.* Paulinian homiletics, with their extraordinary insistence upon the absolute unicity of the redeeming Incarnation, and the "Once for all" that serves as leitmotiv to the Epistle to the Hebrews precisely—they together destroy the unanimous belief in the eternal returns of cyclical time. Thereupon, in a prolongation of the dramatic time of the prophets, the time of salvation opens: a time of active waiting, of patient hope, and of faith in the one return of Christ in glory. And in this new time, the part of each person grows unique and decisive, as was under the Ancient Alliance the collective part played by Israel. The dialogue of Person to person between the God who summons and the spirit that gives answer liberates the latter from the uniform decrees of morality and of sacred tradition, as also from the caprice of insensate chance, as finally from the wheel of karma and the swoon of metempsychosis, which reduced all life in time and in the flesh to the anonymous insignificance of an ephemeral passage through illusion.

Thus history, as the new consciousness of the time of human beings, issued from the same *break* in the great cosmic rhythms and astrological fatalities, and from the same victory over the stars and over death, that liberated and set up the person. It is not by chance that the first author of a philosophy of history—the *Civitas Dei*—was also the first to write a biography of the person—the *Confessions.*

From Myth to History

But it remains to see more clearly how man, once delivered from "religions" by faith, had the exceptional courage to shoulder both time and history.

If every traditional religion developed myths of cyclical time and of the eternal return, *it is because man went in fear of time.*

For time is bound up with death as it is with the loss of paradise—Eden, Golden Age, childhood, all of them either experienced or imagined. And it is bound up too with the ever insistent danger of unpredictable and arbitrary catastrophe, of private and public disasters and of their injustice—an injustice the more scandalous because it appears to be "without precedent," truly novel, and thus devoid of meaning. Against misfortune and its absurdity, man has no remedy except *to attribute a meaning* to whatever he suffers without having "deserved" it. To the offense of suffering and death, he will not retort with a vain rebellion—pure folly in the eyes of Greek or Oriental—but by the tremendous dream of religions, which transforms the insensate reality into a poem of deaths and resurrections dominated by the rhythms and archetypes that harmonize with those of the spirit. Thus it is that the universal dream of cyclical time, and of the everlasting return of every situation, devalues the experienced time of suffering and pain.

It is not suffering that is made vain, provided it assumes an exemplary meaning in myth; it is time itself that loses its reality, since it brings no more absolute novelty, and hence no more offense. (The man of today who thinks he no longer believes anything still mimics that movement of mythic wisdom when he says, *in order to cheer himself up,* that "history repeats itself," or, more familiarly, *"Plus ça change, plus c'est la même chose."*)

When into this world of ancient religions there irrupted the message of the Incarnation, it was bound to figure the absolute offense, complete novelty, the truly unthinkable. And it is indeed in those terms that St. Paul presents it. Let God have manifested Himself as a Person; by an act without precedent; in His own good time; "once for all"—and forthwith collapse must overtake the whole mythical edifice which has hitherto protected the human spirit against the time of history. What has occurred is a real *fact,* not some avatar and not the epiphany of an archetype.

The break in the cosmic cycle delivers man over to the unforeseeable—that is to say, to the Grace of God, but also to freedom: he becomes responsible for his time on earth.

That would be intolerable if Revelation did not simultaneously bring with it the certainty that time was vanquished on Easter morning, that man is in bondage to it only through the flesh (being in the world but not of the world) and that an end to history is promised, although none knows "either the day or the hour." Only therefore thanks to the realized negation of time is is possible to shoulder time in its reality. Without the Resurrection, man would have no evidence of an existence which escapes both time and death. "And if Christ be not raised, your faith is vain; ye are yet in your sins."

But the evidence is valid only for perfect faith; and recourse to the Transcendent—and no longer to Myth—against the dictatorship of time, is effective only for whosoever believes that—as Kierkegaard writes—"God can do anything at any moment."

Now faith is never perfect, and in every convert "the old Adam" persists. His natural movement was accordingly bound to be to seek and to invent *other* defenses against time. First he tried to *mythologize* Christ by denying His perfect humanity: that intention is common to every gnostic, Manichaean, and Docetist heresy. Later on, in the Middle Ages, the theory of cosmic cycles and rhythms in history was taken up again—against the spirit of the Fathers—by the greatest Western scholars, Albertus Magnus, Thomas Aquinas, Dante, Roger Bacon, and all astrologers, even though they, with the advent of Kepler, turned into astronomers. Only one thinker still advanced the linear conception of time and of the continuous progress of history; he was Joachim of Floris, and his writings were either condemned or distorted. In the medieval popular consciousness, even as today among the peasant masses, the idea of an unforeseeable and progressive development is generally discarded in

favor of archetypal and mythical representations of the course of human affairs, felt to be akin to that of the seasons, of vegetation, and of the stars. And it is perhaps as well to connect that same natural tendency with the growing propensity in the Middle Ages to substitute tradition, mystical allegory, and legend for the *facts* which only Scripture,[3] very little read at that time, showed to be historical. All this strengthens my view that the Middle Ages, far from standing for some vague "golden age of Christianity"—as the Romantics were the first to allege and has been repeated *ad nauseam* ever since—were much rather, generally speaking, a long defensive reaction against the revolutionary ferment introduced into the world by the Gospel. (I said above that the Middle Ages were the "Eastern" period of Europe.)

As the first to whom the Christian message came, mankind in the West were compelled to find a means of accepting it gradually and of adapting their preconceptions to it. For the early Christians, the idea of time emptied of rhythms and myths was made bearable by belief in the imminent End: "And again, a little while," and Christ will return. But Rome collapsed, the Church became established, and the barbarians were converted. Means had to be found to render this unforeseen continuation intelligible now that it was undeniable. St. Augustine resolved the paradox by means of a barely veiled dualism: there is the history of God and the history of men, and if the former intervenes in the latter with free actions, no law of development is thereby determined. The Middle Ages were to go much further, not in the direction of hazards, but in that of norms. They were enabled to restore rhythm to the passage of time thanks to a

[3] The novelty—the fact without archetypal precedent—is the terror of all Middle Ages. When this terror appears, when people are driven to innovate in order to save their skins or in order to overcome, there is an immediate appeal to custom, and it is pretended that "tradition is being renewed." A charter, a custom, a usage needed only to be twenty-five or thirty years old in the Middle Ages and it would be invoked in the name of "tradition."

vision of history reduced and restricted. The appearance of Christ no longer meant the beginning of the time of the End, but "the middle of the times"—an archetypal symbol. The times had been contracted to a few millenaries with a chronology destined to remain symbolical till the eve of the Renaissance. Thereafter chronology grew more exact but within the same undisputed framework (hence the excesses mentioned above). It was not really upset till the end of the nineteenth century.

Let us note at this point that the dizzy chronology of the Hindus did not apply to anything but cosmic cycles: the events of history were so thoroughly submerged that nobody bothered to date them. A completely opposite movement occurred in the modern West; there, contrary to what happened in the medieval interval, births, marriages, and deaths and human actions have been more and more accurately recorded, while the End and the Beginning of time both receded steadily into the vagueness of Infinity. Now the Creed was carefully made to specify the date of the one and only Passion—"under Pontius Pilate"; but it is silent about the date of the Last Judgment, "for ye know neither the day nor the hour." And that is why the historical vision, in the course of its advance, far from secularizing Christianity as many feared it would, agreed with it more and more in proportion as it drew away from myth.

It remains nevertheless that a *sudden* expansion of the dimensions of history, such as has occurred in the twentieth century, is bound to provoke a profound disturbance of the intimate and really congenital relation between history and the human person. We are confronted with a problem that is still fresh.

To Be or Not to Be in History

All of a sudden—within a space of about 40 years—it turns out that mankind has not had a past of 6,000 years, but one of probably 600,000. And the Earth, with its age of three or four

thousand million years, has very nearly endured through one whole "day of Brahma" in the present cosmos. I say "present cosmos," because many scientists now speak of a movement of diastole and systole in the universe which may be recurring ad infinitum, and that would place us who are alive now in an expansive phase. Hindu cosmology thereupon seems less remote from the truth than that of the "Christian" Middle Ages. The consequences of this work *de facto*—but not, I believe, *de jure*—against the Western idea of man.

The apparent importance of the human *aggregate,* of civilizations, of periods and of ages, increases on this time scale because, then, they alone remain visible and intelligible. The individual, on the other hand, vanishes and is canceled. It is for the same reason that "the laws of history," necessarily to be deduced from extended wholes, must neglect the action of the person and incline us to doubt its reality. The "historical real," in this configuration, recedes as far away from a concrete human being as Brahma from a pariah without a way. And history, in the minds of our contemporaries, takes the place of Providence, although without either providential justice or goodness.

Bossuet, in his *Abrégé de l'Histoire de France,* already speaks of a "history" that shall be "master of human life and of politics." He was concerned to train the Dauphin, his pupil, for the boy's future task of kingship. A history thus intended to provide examples and lessons has merely a tutor's authority. Its "laws" are but those of morality, and its reality that of a world of discourse. But history today is no longer a story, and has to be distinguished absolutely from its narrative. History is no longer concerned with the past, or with the "lessons" of the past, which might as well remain unknown. It is something quite different: the immediate becoming. It has a greater truth than we possess ourselves, dwelling in it as we each do for an insignificant atom of time. It has become *the flow of reality,* in which what is most

real is the flow itself. And as this pure motion "has to be" devoid of both knowable origin and knowable end, its direction cannot be discovered and must simply be followed, and we can only think of it by abandoning ourselves to it. Whatever fits into the flow of history thereby receives the attribute of existence. Whatever resists that flow is "mystification" in the eyes of theorists and writers, "sabotage" in the eyes of the powers. Confronted with a political or social doctrine, or with the conduct of a country's affairs or with a man's option, we can no longer think of asking if it is "true." Either it is "according to the flow of history," or it is no good at all.

Am I in history? Are you in history? Are they in history? That is how a considerable portion of the Western intelligentsia of the twentieth century conjugate.[4] As clearly one cannot "be" in the history written by historians, some other kind of history must be meant—not of memory but of immediate attitude, and not of an intellectual discipline but, plainly, of a notion of existence.

Is this history made absolute—this history which is not acquaintance with the actions of the past, but the irresistible flux

[4] A highly typical quarrel in that respect involved two well-known French writers a few years ago. One accused the other of "not being in history," while the other tried to show that he indisputably was, except for some reservations. And there was much talk of Hegel and Marx, of human dignity and of human effectiveness. Meanwhile, Jean Monnet was creating in Luxembourg the High Authority of the Schuman Plan, and Europe was in the throes of an effort to unite. But our two writers, firmly convinced that one had "to be in history," allowed history in the making to go past them, and did not as much as refer to the one real option in which the age was "existing" politically—a United Europe or a Soviet triumph. Should one join the Communists or not? That was the real issue. Meanwhile, the Soviets, as regards Europe, had a policy—they did not wish to see Europe united—and a policy as regards Asia, of which Lenin is alleged to have said that it is the shortest way to Europe.

The abstract but peremptory moralism which inspires that kind of discussion in France often lays claim to be in the tradition of Saint-Just, who is then complacently called the "archangel of the Terror." The instance of Saint-Just tragically illustrates the otherwise comic situation I call attention to. "Saint-Just said amidst unanimous applause that the world had been empty since the Romans. Washington was alive, however, and Clive had overthrown in India the empire of Aureng-Zebe and Baber."—Emmanuel Berl, *Histoire de l'Europe.*

that bears along both those who surrender to it and those who resist—to be distinguished from *time* itself? Is it not simply a way of conceiving time which cuts it off from all transcendence, and also shuts us in and forbids any breaking out? "In the world as though not of the world," St. Paul was wont to say. But this history made absolute requires that the whole of man should be solely of the world; it cuts him off from spirit. In doing so it denies the person; for the person is grounded in what is the judge of time, and destroys and renews time. And if we dream of a world cut off from the transcendent, we evacuate with the same desperate motion any justification for personal action.

It is not in the least surprising that man, once he has *accepted* this history, should discover that he is powerless before it and inside it. No awareness is more widespread in the intelligentsia as in the modern masses than this anxious feeling, and it is upon it that the totalitarian dictatorships base their power. The right of opposition was apt to be supported by the mere conviction that a man's *vocation* might be nearer the truth than is the rule—whence the martyrs of the early days of Christianity. If, on the contrary, "meaning" belongs to history, and history to the Caesar of the moment, that Caesar's political police alone control the meaning of our lives. No scruple of conscience and no spasms of optimism will dispose of that consequence, which, though painful, is normal.

The Modern Rejection of Time

As a diagnosis, this summary description of a new attitude and of a new state of consciousness—both profoundly typical of the West in the twentieth century—seems to me incontrovertible. But how situate it within the whole Western Quest? Is it the premonitory sign of a dismal end or merely a sign of growing pains?

I have suggested above that belief in an absolute history—as a substitute product for Providence—normally tends to eliminate

any belief in personal action. The person is the agent of freedom. This kind of history delivers us over to fatalism. How did history and person become mutually exclusive, since they arose together from one single liberating act?

But, first of all, are we sure that the modern faith in history as Omnipotent, Becoming is a normal development and an inevitable concomitant of the Christian attitude to time? Is it simply that our age is more "historically minded" than all earlier ages? Yes, if we mean by the expression a taste for getting to know about the past; for that is more widespread than ever among the general public: Toynbee is a best seller, reviews and newspapers refer to Sumer, to the paleolithic age, to the Mayas, and to the Vix vase; memoirs are the rage, biographies are fought for, and many men and women do not wait till they are fifty before putting themselves in the past tense in a book. But the answer is No, if we mean by history that in the "direction" of which we have necessarily "to be" under pain of not being at all. Acceptance of that kind of history marks a *retreat* from the hazards of time.

The consciousness of history has followed upon acceptance of a time radically unforeseeable. And its end alone was going to be certain and to be good. Even so it was necessary to believe in the Apocalypse. Till that happens, there is no support but faith. To this temporal hazard, the Middle Ages resisted by going back to cyclical conceptions and by a sharp limitation upon the size of past and future: the effect of the kind of congelation of time which this entailed was *the elimination of all becoming.* But the Renaissance and subsequent centuries discovered infinity and reintroduced it into imagination and speculation, and then into mathematical calculation. It is no longer possible to limit either space or time, and after these have been suddenly dilated in the twentieth century far beyond anything that our minds can conceive, the idea of evolution sweeps away our former landmarks

and bears us away without hope at random. As the hazards suddenly gape open, throwing everything into jeopardy, a man without faith is bound to yield to dizziness. His ultimate resistance to the anxiety of time is then displayed according to the way in which he decides *to identify with becoming* both being and truth itself. For a man of the West, it is a masochistic solution. An individual finds the challenge too heavy a burden. In a cosmos which is measured in hundreds of millions of light-years, in this duration that moves toward infinity, and in a society where technics, economic "laws," the power of the state, the movements of the masses, etc., elude his grasp and close round him, "he can make neither head nor tail of it," and throws up the sponge. Let history decide for me; anyhow I can do nothing. Let the dictator or the party decree what direction my life should properly take; anyhow I shall not be able to make out what it is. I am no longer responsible; Evolution is, and I have no alternative but to declare myself its agent.

This complete surrender to Maya with no further expectation of deliverance into Nirvana, this getting bogged in the form of the world without hope of individual salvation,[5] betrays, I feel, a kind of love disappointment as much as a real lapse from awareness of one's person and one's freedom. It is not that people no longer like being their very selves freely, nor indeed that the person is repudiated, but that they no longer believe, they no longer dare to believe, that the person can respond—that is, be responsible.

Behind this masochism, there is, as usual, sadism. From abject self-humiliation, wild pride derives an alibi. The unescapable evolution is really what it is wanted *to force* upon the world. The Communists assert that they are the instruments of the in-

[5] It is then positively necessary that *temporal success* should take the place of salvation and that it should pass for the supreme aim. Individual success or collective success, for that matter; but the former smacks of cheating.

evitable direction of history, claiming that this renders legitimate the deaths of millions of kulaks who happened to be in the way. But the "laws" revealed by Karl Marx provide for nothing of the kind; they merely enable a dictator to get *his* utopia accredited. If the blood of its own martyrs was the seed of the Church, the edifice of the Soviet Factory is cemented with the blood of "pagans," the blood of others, and that blood is invoked as demented proof of the reality of the utopias in the name of which it has been shed. But whence comes the frenzy to anticipate the future to the extent of mortgaging it on millions of crimes? It comes from our anxiety about time. To anticipate the future is to try to convince oneself that time is not going to produce the negation of what I am, or what I expect, or of my belief and unbelief, or even of those reasons for despair to which I cling against the world and against God—the negation of myself and of the meaning of my life. To anticipate the future is the final rejection of the time venture; it is flight into utopia.

Utopias are pessimistic in the democracies: Orwell predicts the early setting up of a censorship of thinking by the government. Utopias are optimistic in totalitarian countries: they are the same as the democratic ones, but the totalitarian countries are delighted with them. And both, whether dreaded or wished for, are not only similar in their detailed vision of a future assumed to be inevitable, but similar also in one and the same relinquishment of the person, who despairs of his innovating powers and of every kind of recourse to a transcendent liberator.

To engender utopia is a motion of the spirit, inseparable, no doubt, from the historicity initiated by Christianity: faith need only have faltered or the challenge of time have appeared insurmountable. Utopia is retreat from undetermined time, a refusal to meet that gaping situation in which the first Christians were placed, and yet utopia is subject to that situation; and that is why there are no utopias in the East. To conceive a utopia and

to act in accordance with it in actual life, to massacre in order to hasten its beneficent advent, are to project our anxiety ahead of us in an attempt to paralyze the unforeseeable. Very often historical inquiry projects our wishes backward, but "the lessons of the past" have seldom justified other offenses than those of routine. History as Becoming is *an incantation against time* and exacts bloody sacrifices on a far greater scale than was ever imagined by the feathered priests of the great god Huizilipochtli.

Dilemma

The breakdown of our sense of time confronts us with a dilemma. If the West succumbs to deified Becoming, will it thereby grow incapable of making history? Or else, overcoming the cosmic and temporal intoxication produced by the very suddenness of its scientific advance, will it extract from the experience a new freedom? I should be succumbing to the temptation which I have described above if I tried to anticipate on our morrows, and these will not be shaped by our hypotheses however accurate, but by our fundamental choices. For it is not a question of knowing "what's going to happen," but of knowing forthwith what we are ready to allow to occur or to cause to occur; it is not a matter of guessing the probable direction of a fatalistic becoming, in order "to adjust" ourselves to its "laws," but, on the contrary, of facing time in the name of a meaning which can only originate in the person. In short, it is not a matter of guessing history, but of making it. Alone our present options set up a meaning, ensure ahead that the surprises of the time to come shall be significant. And those options will not operate with the violence of adopted positions abstractly calculated [6] but

[6] Procrustean beds of utopias which are invariably indigent, or of those plans which foresee everything except the essentially human, because they have been thought out not as directives, but as reassuring frameworks, the more reassuring in that they are rigid, and it is from that precisely that their evil-doing issues.

thanks to the kind of fascination which is exercised upon the still intact future, filled with a rich variety of attainable unforeseeables, by the actualizing expectation of a firm vocation.

In a book by Mircea Eliade to which the foregoing pages are much indebted,[7] the central option of the Western spirit is described in such clear terms, as I feel, that I should like to quote them as a summary and conclusion of this chapter: [8]

The horizon of archetypes and repetition cannot be transcended with impunity unless we accept a philosophy of freedom that does not exclude God. . . . Christianity is the "religion" of *modern* man and *historical* man, of the man who simultaneously discovered personal *freedom* and *continuous time* (in place of cyclical time). It is even interesting to note that the existence of God forced itself far more urgently upon modern man, for whom history exists as such, as history and not as repetition, than upon the man of the archaic and traditional cultures, who, to defend himself from the terror of history, had at his disposition all the myths, rites, and customs. . . .

Since the "invention" of faith, in the Judaeo-Christian sense of the word (=for God all is possible), the man who has left the horizon of archetypes and repetition can no longer defend himself against the terror except through the idea of God. In fact, it is only by presupposing the existence of God that he conquers, on the one hand, *freedom* (which grants his autonomy in a universe governed by laws, or, in other words, the "inauguration" of a mode of being that is new and unique in the universe), and, on the other hand, the *certainty* that historical tragedies have a transhistorical meaning, even if that meaning is not always visible for humanity in its present condition. Any other situation of modern man leads, in the end, to despair.

[7] *The Myth of the Eternal Return* (London, 1955).
[8] *Op. cit.*, pp. 160–61.

VI.

The Experience of Space

A Cosmos No Longer with a Center

AMONG the oldest maps of the world drawn in Europe and still in existence, that of Ebstorf (end of the thirteenth century) and that of Richard of Haldingham (about 1300) place its exact center in *Jerusalem*. The Mediterranean and its surroundings—Europe on the left, Africa on the right—occupy a little more than the lower half of the map. Asia, reduced almost to the Near East, occupies the rest of the upper half. There are no oceans.

In 1450, the "Catelan Mappemonde" of Modena put in the middle a *Mediterranean* encumbered with islands but of the correct shape and swelled the three continents to about half their true dimensions.

A hundred years later, the Tramerzini Mappemonde showed the five continents and the oceans. At last, in 1597, the map figuring in the *Universale Descrizione di Tutto il Mondo,* by Giuseppe Rosaccio, gave the correct proportions and outlines of land and sea as we know them.

Two considerable revolutions thus occurred in three centuries in the picture of the earth which we in the West had been led to form by our metaphysics and our notion of reality, corrected by a few observations. The first revolution substituted Mediterranean Europe for the symbol of Jerusalem as the center of the

world; and the second suppressed all appearance of any center either religious or geographical.

A little later the earliest astronomers were going to remove the earth itself from its central position, just after Magellan had circumnavigated it. It needed four hundred years for Europe to assimilate those discoveries. And nobody can say when China and India learned of them through us: those civilizations had other preoccupations without doubt, more essential perhaps, but certainly different.

The whole of the earth being now discovered (except for a very few regions, all carefully outlined), man feels confined and hastens to calculate the possible exploration of other planets, first cousins x light-years away. This in a cosmos where our galaxy occupies but an odd corner, *as does each of the others;* for the center is everywhere and nowhere in the unimaginable space defined by astrophysics.

The discovery and relative acceptance of the linear (and no longer cyclical) time of history is bound up in the West with the discovery and acceptance of space, and that by steep gradations in a few minds, slowly and progressively in the collective spirit. The first discovery preceded the second by several centuries, but it benefited in return, for the exploration of terrestrial space has recently disclosed to us civilizations of undreamed of antiquity, and the exploration of cosmic space has familiarized us with measurements of time of a novel kind. And finally, the notion of space-time has come along in the twentieth century to mingle the two movements in a single mode of apprehension of the universe by our minds.

The Earth a European Discovery

It is easy to see that the systematic exploration of terrestrial and cosmic space was undertaken by Europeans, and by them alone, and that it had become, by the beginning of the sixteenth

century, one of the most striking aspects of the Western Quest. But it seems harder to explain that great fact, and to connect it convincingly with this or that original feature of the European psyche. Let me try to outline the problem.

Why did it not occur to the Indians, the Africans, and the Aztecs to go and see what existed beyond their world? If I am told that they lacked the means, how is it that Europeans alone were able to obtain means? If it is observed, on the contrary, that peoples other than the European had possessed such means for a long time, why did they make only regional use of them? The Dravidians reached the Sea of Bengal and they conquered and went beyond Indo-China. The Hindus were in touch with Africa thanks to Arab seafarers, and with China thanks to Javanese seafarers. Enormous Chinese junks, equal to carrying 1,300 sailors, soldiers, and passengers, ensured communication in the fourteenth century between Calicut and China; they even went as far as the Persian Gulf. But in the sixteenth century the Portuguese, who had not only come from a much greater distance but were going much farther also, seized on the way all this maritime traffic. The Arab fleet was far superior to the Iberian in the fifteenth century, but it was nevertheless the latter that achieved the first circumnavigation of the world. It would be idle to seek a common denominator for all non-European civilizations in an effort to explain their relative want of curiosity. It is quicker to examine the reasons for the *unique* avidity displayed by the West.

The "material" reasons dear to the last century—reasons geographical, demographical, or technical—are the least convincing. Some of them would be equally valid for Japan and others for Islam or Insulind.

The reasons drawn from the characters of the different peoples whose traditions have nourished the West seem more attractive. Curious and foolhardy, the Greeks bequeathed to us the myth of the Argonauts and the *Odyssey*. In their search for the golden

fleece and in the explorations of Ulysses, the motives of salvation and of the will to power, of mystical gold and commercial gold, of conquest and of knowledge, were already mingled as they were to be again later in the genesis of the drive westward. It is also possible that the Hebrews—Palestinians and Phoenicians—transmitted to us their vagrant anxiety and something of that spirit of exodus of which it is hard to say if it proceeds more from their tribulations than from their faith. As for the Romans, from them we get without doubt that desire to extend our laws to the whole world and to occupy the places which we discover, far from conducting ourselves as passing guests who respect customs differing from their own. This colonizing passion has very likely sustained the "Greek" or "Judaic" passion of a quest for Quest's sake.

The historical reasons, finally, are well known. The chief of them was the heavy barrier put up by Islam between Asia and ourselves, compelling us to turn our energies elsewhere, to South Africa first of all, and then suddenly in the direction of the unknown West, in order to catch up at any price with the object of a nostalgia which was, for that matter, very vague, and was then called "the Indies." But the same challenge which Islam threw down did not drive the peoples of Asia to seek contact with Europe. . . . The historical reasons are therefore not enough. There remain the religious.

There is first of all faith and its first model: Abraham "went out, not knowing whither he went," obedient to a vocation as obscure as it was imperious. But from this faith ensued a missionary vocation: "Go and preach the Gospel to all nations." Now Christians very quickly grasped that the phrase "all [the] nations" applied to something else and to more than the *totus orbis terrarum* formerly civilized by Hellenism. Christian missionaries reached the Malabar coast of India as early as the third century. The travels of Thomas Apostle (in A.D. 52) and later of

Mar Thomas are perhaps a legend, but the Jacobite Church was a reality and has been perpetuated down to our own day. In the sixth century it was monks who brought back to Byzantium the first silkworms from the fabulous country of "Serinda," somewhere in the Far East. Early in the first half of the seventh century China, under the Tang dynasty, was evangelized by Nestorian pilgrims, churches and episcopal sees sprang up all over the place, remote forerunners of those whereby the papal envoy to the Grand Khan of Karakorum, the monk Joannes de Plano Carpino, sought to set up relations in 1245. As for pre-Columbus America, there are strong presumptions in favor of the belief that northern and Irish Christians carried their faith, their symbols, and their rites to the native inhabitants of Canada, Michigan, Mexico, and Peru, and did so perhaps as long ago as the tenth century, if the old Icelandic chronicles are to be credited. How otherwise account for the welome given to the conquistadores? The Aztec emperor received Cortes as though he were the avatar of the god Quetzalcoatl; for this god, according to holy legend, had a white skin and a fair beard, and he was to come from the East, bearing good tidings, the symbol of which was to be a cross, and to predict "that white men like himself would come one day from the East by sea" and would then reign over Mexico.[1] For quite analogous reasons, the Inca of Peru submitted to Pizarro, thinking that he was the god Viracocha, whose legend also was that he would come bearing a cross and baptize by aspersion. . . . The first mission must have occurred there too several centuries before the military and commercial conquests that were undertaken by the kings of Europe "in Christ's name." . . .

All these elements shed a varying light upon the background of an irrefutable fact. It is Europe alone that discovered the rest

[1] Chronicle of John of Torquemada, one of the companions of Cortes.

of the earth, and no other people within historical times turned to "discover" Europe.

Now how account for this unique fact on the basis of such various "causes"? An actual instance will enable us to observe the beginnings of the process whereby man's *fundamental options* turn into his concrete action in history. The instance is afforded by the absurd and magnificent fortunes of the paragon of "discoverers"—Christopher Columbus.

The Western Dream

The religious and civilizing factors which in combination built up the West—Greece, Judaism, Rome, and the Christian faith—were now once again operating together in one man—in a Ulysses who had a Christian heart although he was of Jewish origin, a future empire builder. And his real name was Cristóbal Colón [2]—his real name according to the records, not of Genoa where he was born, but of Castile, the country for which he was to become Viceroy of the Indies and Grand Admiral of the Ocean Sea; and also his real name according to his vocation. For, as his first biographer, Bartolomé de las Casas, writes: [3]

> This illustrious man . . . wished to call himself Colón . . . moved by that divine will which had elected him to work out that which his Christian name and surname implied. Divine Providence usually ordains that persons It designates to serve be given names and surnames in accordance with the task they are meant to perform. . . . He was therefore named Cristóbal, i.e. *Christum ferens,* which means bringer or bearer of Christ, and so he often signed his name; for in truth he was the first to open the gates of this Ocean sea by

[2] Colón's Jewish origin, assumed and then admitted by several writers, seems to me strongly attested by the admirable book of Salvador de Madariaga, *Christopher Columbus* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1940). In this the variations in the name—Colombo, Colomo, Colom, Colón—are examined and their connotations carefully set forth. It is from this book that I take my quotations.

[3] *Op. cit.*

which he brought our Saviour, Jesus Christ, to these remote lands and realms, until then unknown. . . . His surname was Colón, which means *repopulator,* a name befitting one thanks to whose labour so many souls, through the preaching of the Gospel . . . , have gone and are going to repopulate the glorious city of Heaven. It also befits him inasmuch as he was the first to bring over people from Spain (albeit not as they should have been) to found *colonies* or new populations which, settling among the original inhabitants . . . , should constitute a new . . . Christian and happy republic.

Has it not by now been repeated far too often that the evangelization of the newly discovered nations was used by the West merely as a "pretext" for the conquest of the Americas? The life of the discoverer proves the contrary: even as in his name Cristóbal comes before Colón, so a passion for crusade and a passion for the Christian mission preceded, and were the causes of, the expedition which was to result in conquest. Wild and insensate dreams, built up out of errors and extravagant hypotheses, were all Colón could communicate to the princes of Europe, and the Catholic kings of Castile and Aragon were ultimately persuaded by his mystical ravings, not by the prospect of founding an overseas empire.

Indeed, Colón's objective was not the conquest of an America he never supposed to exist, but to find a way to India and Cathay which on the west side were, he imagined, fairly near; to convert their prince—whom he fancied to be the Grand Khan —and to bring back enough gold to pay for a second crusade, and so in the end to free Jerusalem. The religious motives were not the only ingredient of his megalomaniacal scheme, nor everything that swayed the minds of Ferdinand and Isabella; but, being the only motives common to both sides, they were also, and therefore, the only decisive ones. "For it was the end and the beginning of the enterprise, that it should lead to the development and glory of the Christian religion," as he wrote in his

diary on November 27, 1492, having reached the Bahamas and fancying he was close to China.

All the springs of the Western Quest can be seen coiled taut in this exemplary life through the sixteen years of bitter humiliations which separated the wreck off Lisbon from the setting sail of the tiny caravels early in the morning from Palos de Moguer. Every ambiguity of our deepest motives and of our human ends is reflected in it.

There is indeed the faith of Abraham. Colón extolled that faith in a sublime passage of his letter to the Highnesses, dated from "the Indies, Island of Jamaica, 7 July 1503." Seeing that he was in dire peril, alone on deck, in a worm-eaten ship threatened by Red Indians, he called back his companions who had stayed on the island:

I, very lonely outside, on so wild a coast, with high fever, in such a plight; all hope to escape was dead; . . . with a frightened voice, weeping and in great haste, I called out to the war-masters of Your Highnesses, to all the four winds, for help; but they never answered me. Tired out, I went to sleep moaning: I heard a very compassionate voice which said:

Oh fool, man slow to believe and to serve thy God, God of all! What more did He do for Moses or for David his servant? From thy birth, He always took great care of thee. When He saw thee of an age that satisfied Him, marvellously did He make thy name resound in the Earth. The Indies, which are part of the world, so rich, He gave them to thee as thine; thou gavest them to whomsoever thou didst please and He gave thee power to do so. Of the shackles of the Ocean Sea, which were bound with such strong chains, He gave thee the keys; and thou wast obeyed in so many lands and didst win such honoured renown among Christians! What more did He do for the people of Israel when He led them out of Egypt? Nor for David, whom from a shepherd He raised to be King of Judea? Turn thy face to Him and know thy error at last: His mercy is boundless: thy age shall not hinder great things:

He has many very great mansions. Abraham was over a hundred when he begat Isaac, and Sarah, was she a girl? Thou callest out for uncertain help: answer, who has afflicted thee so much and so often, God or the world? The privileges and promises which God gives, He breaks them not, nor does He say, after He has received the service, that His intention was different and that it must be understood in another way, nor does He give martyrdom to anyone in order to lend some colour to sheer force: He sticks to the letter; all He promises, He fulfils and more: is this customary? I have said what thy Creator has done for thee and does for all. Now He will show some of the reward of this anxiety and danger which thou hast undergone serving others. I heard all half asleep, but I had no answer for such truthful words, save to weep for my errors. He ended speaking, whoever he was, saying: "Fear not. Be trustful. All these tribulations were written on marble and not without cause." [4]

So Colón was a man of faith. But was his faith pure? Without it he would not have been what he became; but did he also not respond to other, obscure calls? His personal ambition was almost insane, and nearly ruined the whole undertaking; he desired an unheard of fame which would atone for the humiliation of his fellow-Jews.[5] He thirsted after the Unknown, which he filled with absurd marvels, some of them perhaps hardly Catholic. A passionate connivance could be excited by the thought of gold even in the heart of a crusader. . . .

It is good to set off not knowing where one is going, bad to think of ways which one declares divine; the irrepressible masquerade of the heart may lead a man to mistake for the voice of faith the injunctions of a nameless desire. Who can judge? Every human venture is *also* a mistake; Colón's was no less prodigious than the success which crowned it.

[4] S. de Madariaga, *op. cit.*

[5] The exodus of the Jews driven out of Spain occurred on August 2, and Colón set sail from Palos *the next day!*

His cosmographic lore was a complex of errors—like the beginning of every one of our sciences without exception. In his estimate of the distance which must separate Asia from Europe by sea, he missed out by merely one whole ocean—the Pacific. Finding Jamaica, he thought it was Cathay. He likewise was one quarter out over the length of a degree, and allowed only seventy-eight degrees between Lisbon and India. He drew his "evidence" from Pierre d'Ailly's *Ymago Mundi,* in which Jerusalem, the scene of the Redemption, was still "in the middle of the earth"; from the apocryphal Book of Esdras, in which the sea is said to cover only one-seventh of the surface of the earth; and from a secret memoir by the Florentine, Toscanelli, in which he found his own wishful thinking already put into words. All this "evidence" was valid in his view only to the extent that it agreed with his dream and made fulfillment of the dream seem likely. The accumulation of errors of different kinds, which made him put India where America actually is, enabled him to discover a land where indeed he expected to find one! From dreams and faith—the two often indiscernible—through error on to truth, but a truth different from that which he expected—such was Colón's navigation, a living, equivocal, and grandiose parable of the whole of Western inquiry and exploration.

The belated supporters of a particular view of history and of the superstition of "concrete facts," those who still sincerely imagine that the true motive of any action is always the lowest,[6] invariably equate the expedition to the Indies and an obsession with gold and conquest. But such motives are too universal to serve to explain European Discovery. No doubt the Admiral of

[6] Suppose that interplanetary navigation, which is as yet in the dream stage for the present generation, were to be actually carried out in the twenty-first century, what distinct motives, "basely utilitarian," will our descendants saddle us with? It will all depend on what is ultimately found on the planets. Whatever it may be, it will be said that we set out *in order to go* after it.

the Ocean Sea was obsessed by gold. Nevertheless, gold was far from meaning to him what it is likely to mean to his detractors. Gold was first of all a symbol, as it was for medieval alchemy. "It is most excellent," Colón says, and "he who has it does all he wants in the world, and can even lift souls up to Paradise." Gold was furthermore a means of delivering Jerusalem. Finally, Colón supposed that by promising to bring back from the Indies heaps of precious metal he would obtain the support of the Spanish king and queen. There he was mistaken, for the backing he did receive was granted for quite different reasons. And as for the conquering spirit, it is true that Colón set sail soon after the completion of the *Reconquista* and seems to have prolonged that victorious thrust forward; and yet till Colón came along Castilian energy had been mostly directed to Africa. The forward pressure of faith in the delirium of a dream could alone have forced the gates of Ocean, and so have opened to us the New World.

The Center of the World Is in Man

Colón never realized what he had discovered, and that it was a new world which would not even bear his name. All he experienced was his own *impulse* in the direction of the unknown. But the lucky find matters little beside the impulse which is still there within us and which incessantly endows with novelty the world we are incessantly discovering. Are we really aware in our turn of the nature and significance of our discoveries? What is the meaning of the *American myth* in the indefinite inquiry and questing that *transform* us?

The gross product of the Spanish expeditions was gold, and the gold was at once connected with slavery. And for people today who dislike America, "U.S.A." stands for "dollar" and portioned-out sliding-belt work. It is one aspect of the Quest;

and here is the other, the other sequence of unforeseeable consequences unloosed by the Discovery.

An era had to begin in which man was first to seek the surface of the planet, then to fathom its depths, then the depths of infinite space and of that other infinite which is in the microcosm. Man had to discover man, the better to know himself. The cannibals had to create Caliban in the genius of Shakespeare; the new world had to bring forth the *Novum Organum* in the genius of Bacon; the naked Arcadians of Guanahani had to arouse Rousseau's imagination into chanting the beauties of natural man and to usher in the French Revolution, the rights of man, and the gospel of Karl Marx.[7]

Astounding counterpoint of nature and of human or mechanical coercion—of the discovery of Others and of the invention of a new man! All this admittedly remains ambiguous, like the very idea of Progress. If Caliban does not make a good slave, will he be an active party member when it comes to Stakhanovist production? Has liberty expanded in going from Rousseau to Marx? Had it actually diminished from the beginnings down to Rousseau? In opening up "India" Colón made known to us the *past* of savages and perhaps a Golden Age, but he also opened up the *future* of liberties and perhaps their utopia. And likewise America remains, for us, the symbol both of capitalism and of progress, as pictured in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries: the irresistible advance to science and to the myths of democracy.

Thus the opening up of space has added to the ages of man, as the measurement of time by means of the stars made it possible to sail across the ocean.[8] The experience of space and that of time have converged. The astronomer guided the explorer of the globe, the new lands disclosed great panels of the buried his-

[7] S. de Madariaga, *op. cit.*

[8] The junta of mathematicians arranged at Sagres by Prince Henry the Navigator and the Ephemeridae of Nuremberg together played a decisive role in the preliminaries of the Portuguese expeditions.

tory of every race, and that brings us back in the end to the discovery of man. These remote sequences attach ethnography and anthropology—sciences that took their rise in this century—to the very origins of the West.

It can now be seen why Europe and America have become the world's museum. Their collections, their libraries, their microfilms slowly piece together again, and illustrate and record, the memory of mankind. And the aggregate of digging which Europe and America now carry out in every part of the earth suggests the persevering effort of an immense creature trying to recall the course of its existence. Yet nothing would be more misleading than to impute any kind of growing old to the West. To restore the neolithic age is not to "turn back to the past," *but one more case of exploration.* It is not escaping from the present, but making the present once again a matter for evaluation, and the valiance thus displayed is juvenile. For it is the same mental impulse that drives us to dig in the deserts or in the jungle of Yucatan, to construct the Palomar telescope, and to catch a meson in process of behaving inside the nucleus of an atom. One and the same impulse to explorative learning actualizes all these realities. Whether it applies to the past, to the cosmos, or to the atom, we feel it to be an identical form of *progress.*

But if we were asked the goal of the Quest, should we be able to reply anything better than: "India and Cathay"?

Every man of little faith cheers himself up by means of a system, or else he draws up a plan. But to project ahead a calculated utopia is to shut up the future and sterilize it; it is trying to forbid whatever possibilities are not *already* in the plan which we have in mind, and so it is to condemn the future to be no more than the past into which today will fall this evening. He who thinks that "the Indies and Cathay" are the real goal of his inquiries and explorations has his chances restricted to error

and failure. As for the man of faith, we behold him going forward like Abraham, who set out not knowing whither he would go. If such a man tells us of an India of cities paved with gold, let us realize that he wants to deliver Jerusalem, for him the center of the world, and the Ithaca of his Odyssey: the home of salvation, and outside time.

VII.

The Exploration of Matter

From Nicea to the Atom Bomb

THAT the fundamental options exercised by the Council of Nicea should also have settled the kind of science which Christianized Europe would produce seems indisputable; the contrary is what would be surprising. How could we account for the unmistakable fact that science is bound up with the West, if the starting point were made once more the old conflict between science and religion, in the guise it assumed as the predominant conflict of the nineteenth century? Would they have been opposed to one another anywhere else than in a civilization which had deliberately pushed up the value of matter and body—together the subject matter of science—at the same time as liberty, the subject of conflict? Is our civilization not held together by that which it would deny? The only serious question then is: How has science, which reacts upon our lives, been due to the options of Nicea? Is the connection positive, dialectical, or purely negative?

The negative aspects of the religion-science connection have been emphasized *ad nauseam* by two centuries of discussion, now all of it out of date and sterile. It is time to give the problem fresh vitality and recall its positive aspects. These are "newer" (and even more upsetting) for minds still haunted by

the routine of the recent past, and also more helpful for a discussion of the dialectical aspects.

The doctrine of the Incarnation, expounded in extreme detail by the Greek Fathers, and maintained at the highest point of paradox by a jealous scruple, gave rise to a type of thinking in tension, or, better, *by tensions,* which, right down to our time, have been the mark and motive power of the inquiring Western mind, in contrast with the monism of an ultimate wisdom of the East. The same doctrine implicitly invests the phenomenal world of matter and flesh—that is to say, what was going to be the subject matter of our natural and physical sciences—with a *dignity* and a *reality* denied to them on principle in the East. Finally, we saw that *faith* put an end to the magic, myths, and natural religion which served ancient human societies in lieu of science.

These specific dispositions and attitudes of Christian thought could not fail to condition a particular approach to the real. Formed and formulated by the theology which begot our philosophies, they have largely determined the nature of the problems which our sciences were to take up.

a. Thinking by Tensions. The dogma of the Man-God was the crucial problem of speculation for the Fathers and their councils. It was also the supreme model of *an unthinkable but true* polarity, which requires, once it is accepted, a profound reform of our intellectual categories.

If Jesus Christ is both "true God" and "true man" in one and the same Person, and if that Person in turn is both really distinct and really related to the heart of the Trinity, there ensues for the believing mind an obligation to take terms actually opposite but at the same time really valid and think them together. It is therefore no good seeking a solution by reducing one term to the other, or in an alternation of the diastole-systole type, which would dissociate the person. The tension between the two terms has unmistakably to be lived.

And that is how it is that, step by step, on every plane of our Western thinking, the "offense" of contradictory realities was propagated or transposed. Once assented to at the summit, it was difficult to exclude it in subordinate domains. But the transposition was not invariably legitimate: far from it.

To the pair of opposites, "true God" and "true man," there corresponds in an immediate manner, term for term, *transcendence* and *immanence* in the language of the philosophers, *vocation* and *individual* in Christian anthropology, and, lastly, *faith* and *natural religion*. But what about other pairs of opposites which have grown in number in the course of our history? Most of them involve merely human realities, realities of the same nature, which are not related either closely or remotely to the two original terms. If it is true that the opposition between *Church* and *Empire* (Guelphs and Ghibellines) also reflects that of the divine and human (at the price of what equivocations and abuses is well known), that will not hold for the pairs, *left* and *right, freedom* and *authority, order* and *movement, revolution* and *stability, individual* and *society,* etc., in the political and social sphere. And yet these polarities reproduce the same type of necessary tension (the two terms are true, contradictory, and essential) that theology had elaborated with Revelation for its starting point. They have a common origin, the great historical model of which was held up as the object of faith by the Fathers of the Council of Nicea, but became in due course "a way of thinking," a mental archetype of the West. I do not say that the transition from Christology to psychology was *legitimate*—neither theologians nor scientists should accept it as such—but I observe (first) that it occurred, and (secondly) that it is actually part and parcel of the definition of the West.

And this manner of thinking is displayed at the decisive stages of Western science. No doubt it cannot be said that the theological model preceded the discovery of the antinomies of reality.

The conflict which opposed Eleatics and Pythagoreans goes back to the fifth century B.C. But between Parmenides and Pythagoras—that is to say, between the one and the many—or between Democritus and Aristotle—atomism and the continuous or holism—no tension really "exists." It is simply a matter of antagonism between two isolated and hostile schools, mutually altogether exclusive. Only in Europe—and more and more as we draw near to the twentieth century—has the human mind dared to act in the way that *assumes incompatibles.* The passion of synthesis, which has been the mainspring of our inquiries and of all scientific effort, arose, and constantly arises again, out of that tension. If it is true that the secret of synthesis is "to comprehend" incompatibles, that can happen only in *one* mind. So long as the contradictory aspects are viewed separately by different minds, there are, in a culture as a whole, only oscillations and alternations without progress, sequestrated monisms, sterile scepticism. It was what happened in antiquity. Or else it is assumed, as in the wisdoms of the East, that apparent contraries are identical: all is in all, of course, but science does not occur. Now present-day physics is characterized by a recognition of incompatibles. The problem of wave and particle is the purest example of this.[1] Admittedly, the phenomena here have one and the same nature, and their opposition is perhaps due merely to the methods of analysis adopted. But the *form* of the problem is typical; it calls up an analogy of which scientists, most probably, have ceased to be aware, but that theologians cannot fail to notice.

[1] I am concerned here only with real incompatibles. Some incompatibles regarded as such today are perhaps only apparent: the fact that the combined mass of the neutrons and protons making up the nucleus of an atom is always *less* than the total mass of the nucleus (the deficiency of mass being represented, it is thought, by the energy expended by the particles in keeping together). Other incompatibles are perhaps only due to the provisional inadequacy of our measuring rods; for instance, the fact that the age of the earth and of the sun (three to four thousand million years) appears to be *higher* than the age of the universe, which the most careful calculations, carried out with reference to distant galaxies, put at two thousand million years at most.

Has not the light which consists both of "real waves" and of "real particles" already given rise to interminable discussions which suggest—and the suggestion will not be vain—an equivalent of the most renowned heresies, dualist or monophysite, Arian or Docetist, an equivalent in which orthodoxy comes to be represented by Messrs. Einstein and de Broglie, men as persistent as Athanasius in wanting to achieve a "Catholic" synthesis?

An analogous demonstration to the one I have just sketched by starting from Christology can be performed with the help of the doctrine of the Trinity. From Nicea to St. Augustine, and then on to Anselm of Canterbury, to Thomas Aquinas and Joachim of Floris, in order to reach finally Hegel, out of whom came Marx and his disciples, down to ourselves, the doctrine of the Trinity has incessantly propagated into domains ever more and more "human" a kind of dialectic in three terms, which, in finally being detached from its primitive and original object, has come to be one form of our mind.[2]

b. The Enhanced Value of the Manifested World. Thanks to the essential paradox, the Christology of Nicea not only conditioned new forms of thought, but also predetermined, circumscribed, and put a higher value upon the range of future inquiry.

How deny the reality of matter and of our flesh, when God Himself chose to manifest Himself in them? It is certainly true that the final end of man is to know God, but God Himself made Himself knowable in the flesh. And if it is also true that "it is

[2] See the decisive criticism of Karl Barth in his *Dogmatik,* Vol. I, Chap. 2, *Vestigium Trinitatis,* from which I shall quote a few lines: "Let it suffice to mention here Schelling's triad: Subject, Object, Subject-object, and that of Hegel's: the *An-sich* of the subjective mind (thesis), the *Für-sich* of the objective mind (antithesis), and the *An-und-für-sich* of the absolute mind (synthesis). It may be affirmed without fear that these extreme products of idealist philosophy would have remained unthinkable by the mind but for the background of Christian dogmatics, for they represent in reality only variants of Augustine's argument for the Trinity." Let me conclude summarily: The doctrine of the Trinity furnishes our minds with a means of thinking the synthesis for which Christology awakens expectation and demand in natural man.

the spirit that quickeneth; the flesh profiteth nothing," there is still the fact that it is in this present life, in this altogether carnal existence,[3] that a man has to be converted; it is "here below," with no possible evasion, that is the place of his obedience. Finally, it is true that "flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God," and that these are now under the dominion of the Law, hence of sin and death, but the Creed nevertheless affirms their final deliverance and resurrection.

That violent and tormented dialectic, that insistence of the Gospels and Epistles upon the doomed reality of the flesh, and upon all its contradictions, the very term "In-carnation" and the descending motion which it suggests—all that contributes to concentrate the vital attention of a believer upon the *reality,* fallen but consistent, of "here below."

There is more. In the Epistle to the Romans St. Paul makes known that "the whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain" and that "the earnest expectation of the creature waiteth for the manifestation of the sons of God . . . in hope, because the creature itself also shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God." Here, then, is man entrusted with a cosmic mission, armed by it to confront a world the reality of which is attested by God, and who awaits his salvation from the saved man. It is very important that Kepler should have written: "The works of God are worthy to behold." To see in his words no more than an "edifying" remark would exclude understanding of the primordial motive of our Western science, and the reason why Descartes considered that an atheist is unfitted to do physics. Admittedly, many atheists have been physicists, but the *creative movement of science*—as is

[3] It is certain that "the flesh," according to St. Paul, is not the physical body, but the whole natural man, the indissociable complex of body-mind-soul both volitional and affective. The modern error on the subject is general: it is sometimes carried to the excess of an identification of the flesh with sexuality exclusively!

averred by the biographies of the men of genius—proceeds from an intuitive confidence in the agreement of man and the world—an agreement *once* realized by Jesus Christ and assured to all who believe by the Resurrection. Thereupon the testimony of our senses is not vain. That testimony is admittedly infected with error through sin, but it can be corrected by experience, correcting in its turn the reverie of our reason. The relationship between our eye and light, although mysterious, is no longer illusion; and the cosmos is not a phantasmagoria devoid of coherence, order, and meaning, but it expects from us, in a profound participation of hope, to be in its turn interpreted and revealed. . . . Whoever really thinks that the world is absurd may be able to turn his opinion into literary form; he will hardly engage in science. Einstein has confirmed the intuition of Descartes, which was also Newton's and Kepler's.

c. The Scientific Virtues. The nonabsurdity and reality of the manifested world would not have been enough to allow of science. The Greeks believed that the world has order, but of its order they regarded as real only beauty. The subject matter of science cannot really become the whole of reality except in a world created by God. Thereupon, every single thing, beautiful or ugly to our minds, implies an intention, betrays a meaning, is interesting and valid. "God is also present in the belly of a louse," Luther declared—thus inaugurating modern poetry, sister of the sciences.

The "adversaries" of Christ have often shown that they understood better than His official "defenders" what is really implied in Christianity. Thus Nietzsche was the first to succeed in describing the fundamental difference which separates Greek science from our modern science, and, according to him, the latter could not have arisen except in a Christianized world.

Let me draw here on the masterly exegesis by Karl Jaspers of Nietzsche's mind on the subject: [4]

[4] Karl Jaspers, *Nietzsche und das Christentum,* Munich: R. Piper, 1947.

If the Greeks, who founded science, were unaware of universal science properly so called, it was because they lacked the necessary spiritual motives and moral impulses. On the contrary, Christians were able to cause the advance of this science thanks to their Christianity and then against their Christianity—at least, against each of the objective forms which Christianity assumed. . . . In face of the immensity of possible experience, the Greeks were content with closed cosmic ideas, with the beauty of the cosmos as they conceived it, with the logical transparency of the whole which the mind assumes. . . . And this holds not only for Aristotle and Democritus; Thomas too, and even Descartes, yielded to the Greek impulse to establish at all costs a closed form, and thus paralyze science. Entirely different is the modern impulse, which is to remain unreservedly open to the whole of created reality. The aim of knowledge is thereupon whatever in reality does not square with previously established rules and laws. Logical thinking even experiences the need of keeping constantly in check, not with any intention of giving up, but, on the contrary, in order to be presently enlarged and enriched, and to be able to pursue this process *ad infinitum* without ever being overburdened. Modern science arose out of a *rationality* which, far from being self-enclosed, *remains open to the irrational,* and even succeeds in penetrating into the irrational by subordination.

Whence comes this really insatiable demand, "both anxious and self-confident," and whence the courage which the demand implies? From faith, which is confidence in God. For "if God is the Creator of the world, He is therefore *responsible* for what the world is and for what goes on in it." There must accordingly be a meaning, and it is worth while trying to find what that meaning is—come what may! So much for confidence. And as for the demand: "This problem of *theodicy,* of the justification of God . . . provokes thereupon a passionate effort to reach the true divine reality, with a full consciousness of the reality of the world. The God that insists upon absolute truth does not want it to be

grasped with the aid of illusions. He rejects the theologians who seek to console and comfort Job with specious theories. He exacts from man an understanding which nevertheless seems constantly to turn into a self-indictment. The scientific passion, both universal and incorruptible, arises out of that tension, of that struggle with the idea of God, a struggle that seems to be carried on right into the knowledge of reality, which nevertheless comes from God. . . . God is not the object of a true faith unless He can stand being brought up into question by the facts; and all quest of God renders its task more arduous at the same time by refusing illusory approaches. Likewise, all authentic scientific inquiry requires that the inquirer shall struggle against his own hopes, his own forecasts. It is a peculiar trait of the scientist that he looks with suspicion upon every thought which convinces and satisfies him in advance."

Hence, it is to the extent Christianity has meant the end of the religions and magic that had been begotten of fear that it made possible the development of science, that "relentless" pursuit of truth. For truth, to the eye of faith, can only be the truth of God, even when it may seem harmful to the group, the tribe, and to the religious laws and customs which the group or tribe has treated as being order and good. Galileo's *eppur* seems to me more "Christian" than the indignation of his judges.

The Materialist Heresy

Compared with the religions of the East, Christianity might be called materialism, to the extent that its central dogma assumes the reality of the body and of matter. It has just been shown, moreover, how science is bound up with the fundamental attitude and dialectic of Christianity. Nevertheless, it was materialism, as a metaphysical doctrine, which was going to cause the outbreak in Europe of the conflict between science and religion. Marked by sporadic outbreaks, the struggle remained for a long

time latent; with the Encyclopedists it became open, and down to the early years of our own century the majority of scientists were for the materialistic attitude *against* the mass of those who believed. In the end, materialism having been made into a general system of thought, it was decreed state doctrine by the U.S.S.R. But while in that country heresy was organized as a church, its decline in prestige in the West was, as it happens, started by the defection of the scientists.

It is remarkable that Christianity was at first threatened by an altogether contrary heresy; I mean Docetism, according to which the body of Christ was a mere appearance or phenomenon, and Spirit the one true reality. Most of the great heresies of the first centuries of the Church were distinctly idealist—in the philosophical sense of the term—and that indicates plainly enough that Christian orthodoxy was found to be too materialistic, in a world still imbued with notions of an oriental type. It is thanks to a break with that kind of "East"—the break that followed on the Renaissance, and was complete by the dawn of the technical era—that *Western extremism*—materialism in its various forms of mechanism, monism, and "dialectic"—was given its head.

That it was in fact a heresy in the strict sense of the word [5] is what, indeed, I have tried to bring out above by recalling with insistence the character of Christology, which is the first form of the living paradox out of which idealism, and then materialism, have been two means of escape, one of escape above, the other of escape below.

In spite of pretensions to objectivity, materialism has remained—at least among its exponents—a point of view typically controversial; it consists of a denial of that Spirit thanks to which it was possible to put on flesh and matter a higher value. Its

[5] "Heresy" means the exclusive choice of an opinion cut off from its complementaries and carried to the absolute. A doctrine cannot be termed heretical unless it originated in the complex of orthodoxy and then developed *against* orthodoxy.

tendency was to monism, but, arising after the West had been deeply marked with the sign of the Cross, it could only be experienced in the form of an *inverted Manichaeism,* as may be seen from the instance of Marx. Nevertheless, it would seem that the scientists who assented to its tenets were swayed less by its controversial element than by a kind of *fascination* which the accelerated advances of the exploration of matter were having upon them. Spiritually analphabetic for the most part,[6] scientific workers in the nineteenth century must have felt all the more free *to engulf* themselves in matter and its study, so that they seldom paused to survey the motives and effects of their inquiries and research. Perhaps at that moment in the history of the Western Quest, there was need of something like that great blind pressing on, that mole-like tunneling into a region beyond reach of the sun—where sunshine is in the end forgotten and denied; perhaps there was need of that last sacrifice, of that long intermission from spiritual things, so that the bottom of matter could be pierced and a new and still diffused light break through on the hither side, as at the end of an arid ascent Balboa saw extending before his eyes the further ocean. *Oportet haereses esse!*

The break-through began about 1900. Half a century later Schrödinger writes:

> The present-day physicist, within his field of inquiry, is no longer able to establish a sensible distinction between matter and some other thing.

And it is not only between matter and that "other thing," or between energy and some "wave-motion" on the part of an unknown entity, that the intelligible boundary has vanished, but it

[6] The average scientific worker of the nineteenth century was not so much hostile as indifferent to Christianity, being a long way from any inkling that his own work was indebted to the existence of the Church. Was this entirely his fault? And did the theology of the period—at least in Protestant countries, the most productive from the scientific standpoint—have much to offer him? Theology was never at any time more remote from the great affirmations of Nicea. It was at work on history and running after science.

is also between the living and the inert, between soma and psyche, even possibly between the myths of the spirit and the cosmogonies which we fancy we "observe" or calculate. We shall see presently that the transcendence-immanence dialectic is in no way affected, and brings along no argument "in favor" of the Nicean Creed. But it is important to see immediately that this forever discredits the "certitudes" of materialistic thinking. That thinking was grounded upon the *idée fixe* that *the proof of reality* in every instance and in every sphere is supplied by experiments of the kind that can be repeated at will, everything remaining materially the same.[7]

The phrase "material proof" became current. It meant making absolutely evident and ending all argument. Science was supposed to guarantee this point of view, in the name of which any "mystical hypothesis" was disposed of. But while the "sound common sense of materialism" was being popularized downward as far as the most widespread layers of people in the West, thanks to a quasi-religious respect for science, actual science was elsewhere. It withdrew from matter, one after the other, the classical qualities of real matter—consistency, immutability, and impenetrability. Prime foundation and ultimate refuge of the idea of materiality, the atom was resolved into a kind of void animated by something or other, about which it was known only that "it" was calculable. "A passenger figure inside a field which is undulatory but of which the form and structural complexity are so clearly defined by the wave laws that many things happen *as if* they were substantial and enduring beings." [8] There we have all that is left of matter in the eyes of science today.

If the basis of materialism was not so much old-fashioned mat-

[7] Which amounts to saying that the spiritual state, the subjective purpose, the personal motive, the final end, etc., were considered *at best* as zero factors.

[8] Erwin Schrödinger, "Unsere Vorstellung von der Materie," in *Merkur*, No. 60, 1953. It will be noticed that within his own sphere Schrödinger adopts a *Docetist* attitude.

ter as the negation of Spirit, it is now nevertheless true that its scientific arguments have disappeared with the familiar attributes of matter; for matter has actually assumed the attributes which materialists believed to be those claimed for Spirit—ubiquity, invisibility, a certain indetermination, and, finally, immateriality! It follows that the popular conception of materialism, having survived what had served as its basis, is now no more than a superstition. It religiously keeps up attitudes of which the guarantee is an obsolete science, even as the rites of "primitive" peoples perpetuate sacred movements after the secret of those movements seems to have been lost, or as some of our own customs go back, unknown to us, to the age of animism. In return, idealists are in no position to put out flags; for, *on account of the same reasons,* their notion of spirit appears to be badly damaged. If materialism has been rightly embarrassed to find science volatilizing matter, what is the idealist to say when the same science invades his sphere? Some philosophers argue from Heisenberg's principle of uncertainty that there must be freedom even in matter. But is that not to allow simultaneously that even the spiritual may be determined? Let the boundary between matter and energy be wiped out, then the boundary between energy and something that can only be expressed in mathematical formulas—and which therefore would seem to belong to thought and its laws—and we are led to suppose the presence of a *continuity* between undifferentiated matter and the most abstract thought. It would then be necessary to dissociate mind from Spirit far more radically than is usual. And that would bring mind back under the dominion of the law—that is to say, into the "flesh," as flesh is defined by St. Paul and the Gospels.

From Science to Theology

The question boils down to *"Who decides?"* and *"Who has the evidence of reality?"* The average man in the West imagines

that in the Middle Ages the general direction of life was dependent upon theology, of which, since the Renaissance, science and reason have once for all taken the place. The change stands in his eyes for an unmistakable advance. If he is asked why, he says that science delivers the individual from the tyranny formerly exerted by priests. He has been told that anybody now can base his judgment on facts which are "proved by science," whereas medieval man was in the position of being obliged to believe "unquestioningly" whatever usurped authorities, who were grounded in error, might insist upon. But as the average man in the West is utterly incapable of verifying the facts which are affirmed by science, this amounts to saying that he has chosen "to believe"—no less unquestioningly than medieval man [9]—the science of matter instead of the science of Spirit. The choice is therefore not scientific, but really theological: it is the heresy I have described.

What have the scientists elected for? Many of them, by no means the least distinguished, have been carried by their work to a point far beyond the materialistic superstition, and they notice that the boundaries between the "basis" of matter and thought grow less distinct. They argue from this to a whole world system which they call pantheistic. Because, if the cosmos is actually infinite both in time and in space—as was thought by the Greek atomists, and then by Nicholas of Cusa and Giordano Bruno, and as several renowned astronomers maintain today—or if the cosmos is practically finite and yet unbounded, as Einstein oddly believed, then it follows that the cosmos takes on certain attributes of God. The divine then receives the strangest of names. It may be the archetypal form organizing the creative waves of matter, or again the "superdispersive field" or "sub-

[9] In one way scientific superstition is *more unquestioning* than that with which the Middle Ages are reproached. For theological truths were then nearer the grasp of the average believer than theories of wave mechanics or quantum physics can be to the modern man who believes only in science.

ether" in which the news from all points of the universe is transmitted "at the velocity of thought"—that is, with no loss of time.[10] But there again the theological choice remains as obvious as it is inevitable. And it operates in general with fairly coarse confusions—that of infinite time and eternity, that also of immanence and transcendence, once the former is conceived as the complete system of laws of a universe otherwise *unimaginable* (whence the natural temptation to assimilate it to the divine).

In the present stage of the Western Quest, of which science is the extreme spearhead in our century, our picture of the world dissolves. It is too much for our reason, as it had already proved too much for our senses. Once we have gone beyond matter, although matter had been made the principal subject matter of science, we are brought up sharp by that mystery which science had expected to dispose of.

The whole cosmos is turned into a veil woven with waves that animate the void.[11] The phenomenal world is but an appearance floating on the shoreless and fathomless ocean of immaterial energy. We are back at the Hindu Maya, at the end of a journey which started from an impulse originating in the firmest belief in the reality of matter. *But what is behind the veil?* The question is meaningless, we are told. In Einstein's universe (unbounded but finite), you may go as far and as long as you please, straight ahead, in order to return to your starting point. Try to think that out, and you will soon see that the question of a beyond no longer arises. In the expanding universe of the Abbé Lemaître and of Gamow, which came into existence out of a primal explosion, and which will perhaps return to its *initial point,* you will

[10] Cf. O. L. Reiser, "The Field Theory of Matter in a Pantheistic Cosmology," *Scientia,* 7–8, 1954.

[11] Ninety-nine per cent of cosmic matter consists of hydrogen and of helium, the latter produced from hydrogen. The nucleus of hydrogen has one proton. This ultimate substratum of the physical universe is "a node of energy" which occurs in a "field" at the heart of which indefinable formative archetypes are operating.

not go any farther or any longer than the most remote galaxy. But in what does it all move? It is true that the question is meaningless. Nothing in "the world" can answer it. But then, too, it exceeds the world. Nothing in this, nor I myself, can prevent me from raising it with myself. That is how, without intermission, our minds go on being brought up short by transcendence.

If the immaterialized materialism of our Einsteinian period amounts to an admission that Maya is *everything,* and that it is folly to think of no matter what *else,* then it is mistaken to think "God," and also to think "freedom." The refusal that greets my last question conceals a refusal to be brought into question by anything except "the world" and mathematics.

Everything is explained and implied in the cosmos of the sciences, and invisibility itself is constantly being converted into matter composed of energy, which returns constantly to the nonphenomenal.[12] To this infinite cycle, man opposes his Question. No reply, no refusal to reply, and no forbidding him to ask will ever get the better of the Question; it judges us and sets out our limits, which are those of human knowledge, but simultaneously it also calls up the idea of an absolute Other Place, of a *totaliter aliter.* And nothing can make such an idea come from a world self-sufficient and enclosed.

The "negative way" of science leads us to the Unknowable. That is man's name for the absence of God.

The infinite and omnipresence, order and its steadfast principle, prescience and totality—those major attributes which the great religions had conceived as those of the supreme God, physics and mathematics are able to transfer to the cosmos. But the God to whom Christians pray is He who made Himself known by that which, precisely, science knows not, and never

[12] I deliberately anticipate the *complete* success of present-day science in the direction it is taking. That direction can change. Therefore one day it will change.

will be able either to integrate or to refute as illusory. And it is the only definition of God given by His Revelation in Jesus Christ: "God is Love." (In the stiff context which we have been exploring, the word takes on an unwonted meaning. Let me hope that it will thereby be purified of its pious and sentimental associations.)

VIII.

The Technical Venture

THE FIRST flight across the Atlantic, by Lindbergh, thrilled the West. It gave us a hero, in a flimsy machine. Whence his fame. The first flight across the Atlantic by a *pilotless* bomber, achieved twenty-five years later, afforded a spectacular demonstration of pure mechanism operating far away from men thanks to a sovereign extension of their powers over matter and nature. It passed almost unnoticed. What did it change in the living habits of peoples or individuals? So little as to be nothing. It is easy to see that the introduction of the plow among the Mayas would have altered their civilization, perhaps prevented their exodus to Yucatan, and revolutionized their whole social system. But it does not appear that our technical conquests have so radically upset our habitat, our manners, and the continuity of our national characters.

The question which then arises is whether the thinking West has not formed the habit for the last fifty years of exaggerating without measurement or verification the importance and danger of technics, and of their effects on the human person. The diatribes repeated a hundredfold against "the enslavement of man by the machine" seem to betray greater alarm over man's intoxicating freedom than over the limitations which the machine

may be inflicting upon him. Are the diatribes really due to exact observations on the human repercussions of technics?

There has been a prolonged cry of anguish at the modern world delivered over to the inexorable laws of machines. All the thinkers of the century, with a dark ardor, have one after another, following Tolstoy, made the most of it, and every review and the press of the whole world have amplified and rediffused it, thanks to the machines they were able to use. There has been a demand for a supplement of spirit, according to the unjustifiable (but easy to quote) metaphor of Bergson. Man's depersonalization is alleged, and mass production blamed for it. The reign of the robot is predicted. It is now even general to go to the extreme of opposing the H-bomb to progress and even to scientific research as a whole. It is like cursing electricity on account of the electric chair, but no matter: the cause is noble and the anxiety betrayed is genuine and popular.

Behind this unanimous campaign, let me distinguish two kinds of alleged motives.

Protests are put out in the name of Spirit, or simply in the name of mind, and are voiced against the impersonal forces which repudiate man and his dignity, and that threaten to sterilize his most human faculties—judgment, choice, taste to differ, fantasy, need of the unexpected, serenity, leisure, self-control, individuality, and freedom. . . .

Protests are put out in the name of *Nature* and of the majestic movement of the seasons, and of contact with the earth, against a world which grows artificial and ugly, uniform and abstract, breathless and timetabled, cut off from the natural cycles and the poetry of the *Georgics*.

Or again the two sources are drawn from together, and spiritual doctrine is joined with naturalism in an unexpected but lyrical alliance.

Before analyzing the two groups of motives, one general re-

mark is called for. Although unanimous among our pundits and their public, this reaction remains powerless. It has sometimes deprived scientists of subsidies, but it has not seriously hindered the march of technical inquiry and research. "The invasion of our lives by machines" has the brake put upon it by the price of apparatus, not by the complaints of literary men. Workmen have long since given up smashing machines, and the middle classes were always careful not to. As for those who have decided to walk out of the world and weave their clothes, etc., nothing lasting has emerged from their small communities living in retreat. Nevertheless, the attitude of impotent revolt against the way of the modern world, if it fails to change the world, does modify those who condemn the world. It increases the sense of insecurity and the pessimism of the masses; and in that way contributes to keeping up that "crisis" which is the favorite topic of our best minds.

And yet, even though it remains powerless and even though it is content on the whole with pathetic but fallacious arguments, this anxiety about the machine age, the age of the Bomb, is none the less indicative of our Western situation. What has to be ascertained is, once again, whether it marks a dead end or growing pains, the failure of the Quest or a new hazard.

Prehistory

The prehistory of technics goes from the beginnings of mankind down to the end of the eighteenth century. The history of technics as a separate entity begins only with the machine century, the century of chemistry and electricity, in order to expand in the century of electronics and of nuclear and solar energy.

Till then, and in this respect, East and West hardly differ. Chinese junks were better than the caravels of Columbus. Hindu architecture was never inferior to ours. The craft industries—textiles, paper, and printing—which to begin with lagged behind in

Europe till the Renaissance, did not forge ahead of those of Asia to any extent till machines were invented. About 1800 they underwent a sudden transformation.

But let us go back to the paleolithic age. Why did men fashion tools? There are as many answers to the question as views of man. One is that *homo faber* took up the challenge to nature: he held his own with the help of harder articles which prolonged the actions of his hand and the decisions of his mind. Another is that man was only impelled by the desire to improve his lot or to amass more food and wealth: this "economic" or utilitarian theory assumes a type of man little met with, or not met with at all, till the nineteenth century, the type of man who happens to have written our school textbooks and to have never invented anything.[1] Finally, from Nietzsche to Spengler, passing through Scheler and Schubert, we have been shown a kind of man of prey who hurled himself at nature in order to subjugate her to his "will to power." Prometheus has been appealed to, the sole figure that could serve to illustrate this tragical theory, which reflected the taste of the age rather than the reality. Did primitive man—who still survives inside each of us—ever think of mastering nature? As we look back at him, he appears rather to be submerged in her and to be a part of her. How could she have threatened "the free development of his personality"? No doubt she compelled him to toil very hard in our Western climate, in order to get food and protect himself from cold, floods, and drought. Nature might kill him, but from her he drew his life. All that is granted, as something that goes without saying, as, in fact, "natural." At the point man's mind was involved, it was not in order to attack a nature whose intentions were far from

[1] An examination of the circumstances in which great inventions occurred down to our day shows that the attraction of wealth and well-being has hardly ever operated. Cf. D. Brinkmann, *Mensch und Technik* (1936), pp. 85–92 and passim. This changed in the twentieth century with the setting-up of research laboratories in the service of the large industries.

all being malevolent; it was in order to bargain with her so as to cope with demons. The way to come to terms with the fire god—who appeared at two points on the planet, in the Caucasus and in China, it seems—was first to commune with him in order to appease and propitiate him: he was given a lump of the same meat that the suppliants ate (whence the invention of cooked food?). With that, the god was committed, having shared the same ritual meal with men. We should feel in this, not so much a "will to power"—which would be a one-way relation of strength, unimaginable at that stage—but a need *to play,* in the strong sense of the verb, which is a religious sense. Civilization appeared simultaneously with tools, weapons and pots, clothing and houses, all things a little stronger or more solid than man, and which enabled him to play his hand by making up for the weaknesses which are his mark. But the usefulness of these articles in no way exhausted the intention which created them, and even, most frequently, did not take account of it. Everything was magic to begin with, everything was dialogue with the natural forces which had to be won over even while they were being obeyed. Whence the lack of adaptation which our rational mind thinks it discovers in what it erroneously mistakes for "technics" among ancient peoples. The history of inventions is not that of the needs which may have existed before them. Its logic is not that of utility, but of play.[2] Now to speak of "play" is to mean "set rules." What had to be kept up with jealous care was the system of sacred conventions between man and natural forces. What men feared was not the laws of nature, but, on the contrary, the *unexpectedness* of phenomena. Far from there having been any effort to escape from those laws, the hope was that sun and rain,

[2] The eighteenth-century automata were toys—pure play. They were nevertheless the ancestors of our factory robots, which are indispensable for manipulating radioactive substances, for example. In turn, the discovery of radioactivity corresponded with no utilitarian need, but has created many needs that have become "vital."

the powers which made the earth fruitful, were going "to go on playing the game," according to the rules. Thus mankind, in its religious rites, "played" with the natural order, so that this could be perpetuated. Notions of magic, myth, and liturgy, the alchemical ideal and the active pantheism of the Renaissance, and religious motives in general seem to have been far more fruitful than motives of utility and power in explaining the whyfore and the real aim of the enormous majority of inventions down to our own period. Man created tools because he played a game with the demons lurking in fire or stone, in running water, or in an animal, and later on peopling his dreams or waking fancies. The dream of flying is what produced the airplane; and the dream of setting out at haphazard along the open road, the motorcar. See Henry Ford's autobiography. Ford was an incurable dreamer, as his readers know, a jack-of-all-trades without either culture or genius, who wanted to build a "road engine" which would not have to obey the rigid rules of the railway track and its time-tables, but could go off at random—a typical adolescent dream. It met with fulfillment in 1893, a few years after the German, Otto, had invented the internal-combustion engine. We all know, for that matter, that dozens of inventors—especially in France—had made motorcars long before Ford. His invention, or re-invention, nevertheless remains an instructive instance.

A history of the inventions which did not come off, or were not "made use of," as we suppose, would lead to the same conclusion. Why did the Mayas not plow their soil? Why did the Aztecs use a wheel only to make toys? And why was gold purely ornamental among so many peoples? Owing to their magic, to their differing dreams, to the particular rules of the game they played with nature.

Up to now nature was man's Object, his opposite and mirror. Man was not yet aware that all he could see in nature was his dreams, and that the spirit of things is a reflection of his spirit.

Submerged in nature, he felt that nature was the stronger; and because he projected into it the anxieties of his own breast he ended by seeing in it Evil itself. Let us trace the process.

Once the nexus of rites, codified beliefs, and instruments of a dawning civilization enabled man to put a kind of distance between nature and his life—the distance being the environment and atmosphere in which he existed—the human mind conceived of a Good separate from nature, and that nature alone seemed to put out of reach. The human mind came to conceive perfect virtue and perfect health, power, assured abundance, freedom to go far, or, on the contrary, freedom to stay put in spite of natural changes, the ability to fulfill one's dreams, to fly, to escape the seasons (Paradise pictured as eternal spring), to bring the body into subjection, not to die. . . . Whatever thereupon opposed and resisted this Good were the servitudes of nature, the animal necessity to kill in order to survive, disease, tyrannical instincts, death. Soon the more spiritually minded among men were to think of God as akin to their Good: He was good, just, perfect, and immortal; His omnipotence was only thwarted by the demoniacal principle, which had now become assimilated to nature. The God of Good could not be the author of Evil. Nature must therefore be the work of Another. This will be recognized as the Manichaean attitude which has invariably accompanied the ascent of *Good God* religions, and which has set up against them on the quiet a "purified idealism," which is, in fact, a dualism. For man was henceforth pictured as a soul inside a body. He would never be free and never be really good unless he could *escape* from the flesh, from matter, and from natural life, the dominion and creation of the Demiurge. Whence asceticism, monachism, and angelism, in which matter, flesh, and nature are despised, and which could but lead to the condemnation and renunciation of every kind of inventive effort.

Upon this same nature—henceforth the subject of hostility by

the "pure"—less spiritually minded men were able freely to exercise their arts and guile. They made use of nature as a soulless thing, a thing which they had to find how to use. This latter attitude, a repercussion of the former, was to be of service to modern technics by removing many of the scruples felt by its agents and users.

History

Let us now come down to the present of our century. Nature, now that every kind of magic has been expelled from it, is being domesticated by technics and domesticated for the first time in history. Already man commands the means of subduing several aspects of nature's "inhumanity." He can virtually ward off *famine* (agricultural machines, manures, synthetic foods, chlorella, photosynthesis); control *temperature* (heating, refrigeration, climatization, rational clothing), *drought* (desert irrigation and artificial rain), *epidemics* and a great number of *diseases* (antibiotics, vaccinations, asepsis, preventive hygiene, psychotherapy), *distance* and *temporal intervals* (rapid transportation, telecommunications). Man is still far from having completed this subjection, but he is already entitled to consider completing it as something attainable. (Floods, typhoons, and earthquakes remain free; but the largest of wild animals, vermin, and many kinds of insect have been overcome.)

On the other hand, we discover that we are the very first contemporaries of the machine. Invented in the last century, the machine did not affect notably the daily life of the greatest number till the First World War. An infinitely small portion of human beings had up to then traveled by train, for example, and all trains from 1830 to 1900 doubtless carried fewer passengers than aircraft now do in a single year. The motorcar, the tank, the airplane, the subway, agricultural and household machines,

domestic electricity, the telephone, and the wireless made their entry into our lives only during the first third of this century.

Such are certainly the facts—speaking generally. But it would be wrong to believe that the peoples of the West ever sought or wanted what they are now getting as their due. What in general do men in the West want? Health, higher pay, better protection against the unforeseen, to travel a little, to be unhampered in enjoying their own little hobby or eccentricity (and not "to subdue nature"!). To meet such modest desires, here are the incredible gifts of technics. Some of these fulfill our secret desires, but many of them correspond to nothing. Technics, having proffered them, has to get them taken up and to create a mass need of them. On the basis of these toys for grown-ups,[3] serious and scientific economics has gone on to erect the system of its "laws." It claims to "satisfy" needs which nobody has in the least experienced. The motorcar was not invented because men needed it; but the other way about: men have needed it because it was invented. Yet the existence of innumerable factories, brands, annual shows, dividends, and records lends so much consistency to the industry that *its origin as a phantasm* (in the strict psychoanalytic sense) *is forgotten.*

Whence, then, have we got technics, if not in response to our material and utilitarian needs, which came into account only afterward? The problem amounts to ascertaining how and why technics suddenly took on impetus at a particular moment of the Western Quest.

It would be vain to try to find that why and wherefore of the inventive passion, which is of a poetic order (in the Greek sense of the term), and characteristic of men in general. But something unique occurred in Europe at the beginning of our technical age; *science,* at last set up on an autonomous and exact basis,

[3] In 1833 Thiers declared that a railway locomotive was "simply a scientifically constructed plaything."

encountered *the alchemist's dream,* which, having been driven by chemistry out of the domain of pure research, was turning to practical applications. And that in a *social and political climate* which had turned very favorable to the brutal undertakings of those who were dubbed "captains of industry" and were inspired by—and found their sanction in—the precedents of the French Revolution and Empire. There were thus three forces, two of them creative, and the last instrumental.

For science, it goes without saying: mathematics, physics, and chemistry were at the immediate base of the major inventions of technics. But they did not lead to these organically. To pass from the desire for disinterested knowledge to the idea of applying some of its results, men other than the best scientists were needed, and also there had to be some *aim* other than what directed the work of the scientists. We now know that what the alchemists wanted to do was not to make gold in order to enrich themselves, but indeed so as to effect a great work of transfiguration of matter by man—man in his role of demiurge delegated by God.[4]

The connection between alchemists and chemists seems less important, from the standpoint of technics, than the relation of alchemists to the German pietists, and of the latter to the founders of numerous modern industries. Leonhard Euler, a pietist of Basle, was not only the greatest mathematician of his century, but also the inventor of the turbine.

The desire for contemplative knowledge and the desire for

[4] As regards what alchemy set itself to do spiritually, I can only refer my readers to the works of C. G. Jung, *Psychologie und Religion, Psychologie und Alchemie,* etc. In *Mensch und Technik* by Donald Brinkmann will be found numerous examples showing the influence of "alchemical dreams" on inventions of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Their genealogy goes back to Paracelsus, via Hieronymus Cardanus, Leibniz, Denis Papin, across the pietists of the eighteenth century, and issues in a pleiad of inquirers more or less "raving," whose *mysticism* was decisive for the greater part of the technical advance. Let us note on the other side that two of the great mystics of the period were mining engineers—Swedenborg and Novalis.

transformative knowledge (by the transmutation of matter and of souls) are the two sources of the technical advance and they coalesce in the great myth of the modern age. The hero of Goethe's *Faust* is first of all an alchemist, but he ends his human venture (conditioned by the three dominant notes of pure knowing, power, and salvation) in the part of an engineer creating a new country.[5]

It would have been most surprising if natural avidity, the thirst for winnings in its modern form which came to be called capitalism, had not seized upon these elements. But capitalism created nothing: it financed "Progress" without paying royalties to its authors and to the detriment of its workmen. Thus it was that the application of science to social life, fostered by a mystical doctrine which tended to the joint salvation of cosmos and human spirit, suddenly changed its sign and turned into a scourge by creating the proletariat, once the unrestrained ambitions of the Napoleons of industry had seized upon it without further scruple.

The profound paradox of the technical age arises from the fact that its gifts were not expected. Western society of the nineteenth century—caught unprepared by an event which astonished it marvelously, and of which it could not measure the coming amplitude—fell into a double mistake: it mistook the end of technics and it misunderstood how technics could be made use of. It was unable to foresee the appalling price it was bound to have to pay for the anarchical development of machinery. The bait of enormous and swift profits and the temptation to power (not over nature but over men) blinded this society to the means being employed. And as to the ends: technics were to contribute *to delivering man from toil*—that is to say, from the labor exacted

[5] The model who served Goethe for writing the last part of his *Second Faust* was the English engineer, W. A. Madocks, who built a sea wall along the coast of North Wales.

by the needs of his subsistence; it tended to release him for *other* tasks, not to increase his toil merely in order to increase his natural needs and to add artificial ones to them.

That lack of foresight, this false start, had to be dearly paid for—and are being paid for still—by the industrial proletariat, which has had to defray the "human costs" of the operation from the beginning.[6] As for those who derived a material profit from it, they paid a price less visible and tangible, for there is no measuring spiritual values, nor what a man loses by slaying them inside himself.

Historically, the paradox is brought home to us if we compare the *realities* with the corresponding *states of mind* in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

In the nineteenth century, the technical advance created among the common people an inhuman poverty, but in the great majority of middle-class elites an overflowing optimism. In the twentieth century, it has been the other way about. The masses have accepted technical progress and have made it an article of faith, whereas the elites view it with growing pessimism. The shift is eloquent.

In 1836, Andrew Ure, in the *Philosophy of Manufactures,* extolled the factories "which exceeded in number, in value, in utility, and in architectural nobility, the celebrated monuments of Asiatic, Egyptian, and Roman despotism." But as soon as 1846 Michelet heralded the pessimistic reaction:

What a humiliation to behold, beside the machine, man fallen so low! It is heart-rending to go over those marvellous houses in which iron and brass, dazzling and polished, seem to go of their own accord, seem to think and will, while man, weak and pale, is the

[6] The Roman term of "proletarians," as applied to industrial workers, was introduced by Sismondi as early as 1819. Thirty years later Marx was able to say rightly that the modern forces of production made of the proletarians "the living counterpart of a dead mechanism."

humble servant of the steel giants. . . . I admired sadly; it was impossible to avoid noticing at the same time the men's pitiful faces, the withered girls, the children twisted and puffy.

The European middle classes were unaware of all this in the nineteenth century, as under Hitler they did not know about the concentration camps. Yet the number of proletarians who died of poverty around their factories during the whole of the last century no doubt exceeds the number of persons killed in Nazi concentration camps, if not the number of dead in Kolyma and other places of re-education.

In the twentieth century, the situation has been reversed. American and Scandinavian workers have the product of their work delivered to their door: motorcars, wireless, refrigerators, and tinned food; and the cinema is at the corner of the street. They renew acquaintance with nature at the week end, or else in the paid holidays. They imagine, further, that the "irresistible movement of history" is more and more on their side. Meanwhile, the cultivated middle class, its conscience pricked a hundred years late by the social crimes of its grandfathers, influenced by reading the best thinkers and a thousand columnists, terrified, moreover, by the H-bomb, takes of "technical progress" a very sorry view. We have witnessed in the last fifty years the development of an attitude which recalls Manichaeism, even though the values are reversed: it is no longer nature that stands for evil, it is man's handiwork, inexorable technics, personified and mythologized, which now rules over us and empties us of our humanity.

The projection of Evil on to the machine betrays a relaxation of our vitality of spirit. It is beating the table because you have collided with it. But it is also to conceal your secret doubts under an opportune "fate." Machines are stronger than we are, granted (a hammer is harder than my hand, the walls of a house stand

up better than our bodies). But if you no longer say your prayers, it is not their fault.

Back to the Axis

Unlike Buddhism and Manichaeism, Christian orthodoxy does not condemn the tangible world of nature. The doctrine of the Incarnation, which is its ever active basis, is enough to forbid that. Nature has to be redeemed by means of redeemed man, having been subjected to corruption, not of its own will, but on account of sin.[7] It follows that man's efforts to subject nature to human wills and wants will be good if they proceed from the divine effort at work in man, very bad if they proceed from human pride. *Evil is not in things, but in man.* It is bound up with our freedom. It belongs to our human situation, as the obverse belongs to the reverse. It is in our mind, exists nowhere else, and it is in ourselves that we have to fight it.

How then imagine that technics, having been created by man, could acquire an independent existence? Its evil comes from our fault, and its good is part of the effort to attain salvation. Let us therefore cease to project the evil which is within us upon things, whether machines or nature, and to endow them with autonomous intentions. The magical proceeding should no longer delude us.

Those writers today who, as regards the technical advance, nevertheless adopt a Neo-Manichaean position, are actuated by two motivations which need to be distinguished.

1. The Christian idea that evil is in man, and that nature is innocent, makes them fear that technics will increase the human capacity to do evil rather than good, and at the same time throw man out of harmony with the pulse of nature considered only in its regulating aspect. Human pessimism is conjoined with naturalist optimism, both unilateral.

[7] Romans, VIII, 18–24.

2. The idea of Evil is projected afresh not upon nature but unmistakably upon personified Technics and its products, like the Bomb, which are thus endowed with a kind of intrinsic capacity to harm man. A return to magic.

The twin confusion appears to me to account for the most obvious mistakes perpetrated by the "anti-moderns" I referred to.

The Mistake about the Bomb. I wrote on the morrow of Hiroshima: [8]

> The Bomb is not at all dangerous. It is a thing. What is horribly dangerous is man. He it was who made the Bomb and who gets ready to use it. To control the Bomb is absurd. Committees are appointed to restrain it! It is as if I were to hurl myself at a chair to stop it from going to break Chinese vases. If the Bomb is left alone, it will do nothing, plainly. It will stay quiet in its crate. So please let us hear no more tales. What we need to control is man.

The Mistake about the Telephone. Enslavement to the telephone is one of the clichés of our time. But the telephone, a mere piece of apparatus, never did anything of its own accord, and it is invariably *somebody* who calls you by means of this speaking trumpet. If you run to answer, irritated by the noise, it is you who expected something which you wanted not to miss. So you are only your own slave.

The Mistake about the Fine Car. That man, they say, is the slave of his car. See what trouble he takes with it! He ravels on its account, he is ruining himself for it, and some day, on its account, he will kill himself! Yet somebody else is doing the same for the woman he desires, or for a work of art, or for his drug. The tyranny is exerted by our passions, not by technics on their own.

The Mistake about Standardization of Work. We are told over and over again from both left and right that sliding-belt

[8] *The Last Trump* (New York, 1946).

work dehumanizes men, and that we are living in a soulless world of uniformity and mass production. It must be realized that this refers to "Taylorized" workers (fewer today than are the prisoners in the labor camps of the nations under Communism). Here is the serious feature of the matter: not the feeling of being part of "a soulless world" but the fact that men are now no more than the "living counterparts of a dead mechanism." Now, for this the dead mechanism cannot be to blame. It is not the machine that turns a man into a slave. It is a certain behavior which other men impose on a workman, not so much to facilitate his handling of his machine as to ensure that he shall keep up with it for the sake of a standard output. It is the output that man is then the slave of, whatever economic system demands it, capitalist or Communist. Taylor thought of a workman as a human machine that could be completely timed. His system, not the machine, is what enslaves man. But Taylor created his system according to materialistic notions of man which were the product of the century of enlightenment. Blame those notions, not technics.

The Mistake about Inventions. Leonardo's "Flying Man" was going to drop snow on sweltering cities in summer; the airplane bombs our cities. Einstein's discoveries of genius have culminated in the atom bomb. A curse on invention! But what are people trying to say? Is it imagined that some invention could be employed only *for good?* I say that such an invention would be the work of the Devil: it would deprive man of his freedom, which God has willed for him.

The Real Problem

The great complaint of the twentieth century against technics would have been justified a hundred years earlier: against the vile and unhealthy factory, workmen might well have said through the mouth of a poet of the time:

The air of our workshops is rotting our lungs,
And we die with our gaze fixed on woodland and dale.[9]

Today the progress of technics restores the country to townspeople, manual and office and professional workers mixed. Technics have done more to draw men near to nature than have the back-to-nature theories which condemn technics. The boys and girls who go camping lead lives as naked as Gauguin's Polynesians. It was the Middle Ages which were remote from nature; they were afraid of it.[10] The classical age thought it improper. Romanticism looked upon it with stirred feelings, but did not bathe in it physically. Fondness for sun-bathing on the beach has been contemporary with the motorcar.

Technics in their infancy created the industrial proletariat, but it is technics alone that *can* rescue the proletariat from its situation and from the hideous setting of its present existence. What abolished slavery in Europe was not scholasticism, but the improvement of agricultural technology—in particular, the harnessing of horses by means of a rigid headstall. The proletariat will not be emancipated thanks to our protests against sliding-belt work, but thanks to the replacement of servile workers by robots. The factory without workers, shortly to be achieved, will solve the problem of "the workman slave of the machine."

But once the pseudo-problems are set aside—and the working class emancipated not by Communists but unambiguously by technics—two great and very real problems will confront mankind in the West. One, a danger: technocracy. The other, a bewildering promise: leisure.

Technocracy. A man who loses his sense of the final ends for

[9] *L'air de nos ateliers nous ronge les poumons,*
Et nous mourons les yeux tournés vers les campagnes.
—Auguste Barbier, *Iambes,* quoted by P. M. Schuhl, *Machinisme et Philosophie* (1938).

[10] The only "pleasant" descriptions of nature in medieval poetry and painting are of orchards. The rest is terror.

which he is alive and ceases to desire them is bound to begin talking about "the exactions of technics." It is only then that technics become a genuine danger; not indeed technics themselves but the man who talks in that way. Ernest Jünger has clearly seen that technics incline us to a nihilist morality, their motto being that of an action "without why or wherefore," without cause and without purpose. Here we again meet the obsession by movement for movement's sake, which sums up the policy of Jacobins and totalitarians of every hue. The practical objective is to retain power, or to control the market, without submitting to any guidance from the uncertain and suspect finality of human wishes. This intoxication by action is due to mental fatigue; and the obliviousness of final ends is but a huge and revealing lapse: it betrays anxiety over the intoxicating prospects of leisure, which would confront us in an immediate and concrete fashion with the great question of the ends for which we are here below.

Repudiating the great alchemist dream, technics are often reduced to the sole and immediate motives of profit, well-being, and military force. Deprived of long-term objectives, they can only come within the compass of *current morals,* and of the abstract or customary rules of those morals. But individual morality remains without hold upon a feature that is modified at the level of collective myths: profit depends more and more on the national economy; well-being, on statistics (average standard of living of a nation); and "the needs of national defense" determine science itself, the source of inventions. The only morality henceforth powerful enough to regulate the technical element would therefore be social morality, which it falls to the great states to define.

To overlook the final ends of the human venture must then land us in technocracy, which is the government of means over ends. (The "exactions of technics," constantly appealed to, are decisive in the last resort.) And morality, when determined by states, leads to totalitarian dictatorships. (God is replaced by

Society, and, the state being the sole representative of Society, there is no recourse or appeal from its decisions.)

Evolution in the direction of closed societies seems to us all the more inevitable that it is going on under our very eyes—has been going on for nearly half a century. It has been seen above how technics contribute not of themselves, but, indeed, by a certain use which man makes of technics. Whence the idea, current among the elites, that a little more technics can only produce a little more state socialism and an equally little less liberty. And, in fact, state socialism is not to be arrested, but it is possible to foster technics till decisive successes produce a new situation. If tomorrow technics can pay the masses in leisure on a more generous scale than it has ever paid shareholders in dividends, the technocrat will still be in command of the means, but his prestige will vanish to the precise extent that leisure and its content become a vital and exciting problem. Thereupon the "serious" will change sides. He whose job is to run a colossal factory without workmen will reign sovereign over absence. But the famous technical needs will no longer concern anybody but him. What will he be able to suggest to human beings made free for other dreams and other games; that is to say, made free for new forms of work and of creativeness?

The present task appears to me to be far less the applying of a moral brake to technics than accelerating technics strongly, to the point at which nothing to which we dare confess will any longer obstruct us from at last reaping the human benefits.

Leisure. Is this cure of the technical disease by technics themselves a utopia? Let us first see to what extent it has *already* been carried out.

The average standard of living in Europe rose, we are told, from 1 to 15 between 1800 and 1950. (More closely, it is stated to be ten times higher in 1954 than in 1880.) These figures, I confess, do not much persuade me. The very notion of an "average standard of living" is not very clear, and grows even less

clear when multiplied. (What does the word "living" mean if we are told that we live ten or fifteen times better than our ancestors did?) But here is something perfectly sensible. From 1890 to 1954 the working week in the cotton and wool trades dropped from 65 to 40 hours, the working year for railwaymen from 3,900 hours to 2,000 hours; and production steadily increased.

Leisure thus assumes the guise of a subproduct of technics, and the chief aim of technics remains to supply more articles and more profits. And yet was this "subproduct" not to begin with one of the underlying intents of technical invention? And becoming ever more abundant, will it not one day soon look like the real aim of the undertaking? This supposes, of course, that a certain saturation point of natural needs will be reached. Technics have added to the number of men whose needs they have increased. It may seem as though the more they are developed the more the prospect recedes of satisfying the human needs which they are pushing forward. Will the donkey ever catch up with the carrot it has been running after for a century and a half?

It has been seen above that in fact the distance between the means of technics and one of their possible aims—leisure—has diminished by a third during that time. A second aim is to ensure the subsistence of mankind, with mankind growing by seventy thousand souls a day; and this second aim has seemed to recede as the West grew more clearly conscious of the lot of the great Asiatic masses, both undernourished and uncontrollably prolific. But the fact that there has been this new piece of awareness fixes finally for technics one properly human objective. It is now the means which remain to be found that will have to be adapted to the *recognized* purpose, not the other way round, as previously.

These means still waiting to be found we already possess in principle—nuclear energy, chlorella, photosynthesis, plans on a world-wide scale. Twenty to thirty years hence, according to our

best experts, a third of the population of the planet—then much greater in number—will be enough, working four hours a week, for satisfying (far better than today) all our "material" needs —food and transportation, housing, hygiene, and pleasures. I readily see the theoretical aspect of these figures, and that they assume a socialized distribution of mass-produced goods in great abundance at a very low price; and that the development of Africa, Asia, and the polar regions will provide fresh "occasions for work"; and finally that atomic warfare may ruin everything before the egg is hatched. But the egg is there, bearing its germ and our future—that future which we must be ready to look squarely in the face.

The Serious Thing in Life

It is said: What will the masses do if, thanks to technics, they are indeed suddenly set free to that extent? I have no idea. Was anybody more clear in about 1830 concerning what technics were going to produce? Our duty this time is to see the problems squarely instead of repressing them because they make us dizzy.

We are on the threshold of an era *in which culture will be the serious thing in life.* (It always was, but now we shall *see* it.) Hitherto, it was work which filled the essence of our days, and upon which our fate depended: pay, food, and lodging. If technics tomorrow—as they can—allow society to meet these elementary requirements at a very low price, "the empty time" of leisure [11] will become the real time of our daily lives. The ques-

[11] The *Encyclopaedia of 1765* defines leisure as "the empty time" (*le temps vide*). It assumes accordingly that work is real time, full time. It is this hierarchy of values that has held sway down to our day. It partly explains why trade unions are opposed to the creation of leisure by technics, e.g., by automation; for they picture leisure as the "empty time" known as unemployment. That leisure should be the actual goal of the machine age is a suggestion they will not entertain. Yet that is what it might be, as soon as the profits of industry were shared out among the workers, notably in the form of a lowering of the cost of living, to make up at least for paid working hours lost.

tion: "What shall I make of my life?" will no longer be repressed by the reply—several thousand years old—"Earn it!" It will suddenly be laid bare.

I have no intention of now depicting some utopia which might amuse our descendants. Everything may change radically, and very soon, not so much owing to material factors which I may have overlooked, or cannot foresee, as on account of *our free decisions.* (The invention of the wheel is not what counts in itself; it is indeed the use to which a people decided to put the wheel: chariots and wagons in the West, toys and ornaments among the Aztecs.) One certain thing is that technical progress is going to take an unprecedented leap, producing a situation in which our real wishes, our real orientations, and our real options will be manifest transparently, and will be followed by almost immediate effects. Such wishes and orientations I may try to forecast on the basis of our present disposition.

Released from material work, a man of the West at once turns to travel, sport, games, and eroticism.

The French experiment with paid holidays has shown this on a small scale, but over too short a time for the sequel to be distinguishable. A rather longer trial is furnished by the inhabitants of the Arctic circle—Sweden and Norway—who are condemned to leisure during the six months of their winter. They take up culture. Now it happens that the West has increased tenfold or a hundredfold during this century the instruments and means of culture. More books than ever are published, and dirt cheap. Libraries and local cultural centers are becoming general. The whole of the world's painting can now come on to our walls in the form of reproductions that "take you in"; the whole of music is delivered to the home by means of wireless and records; public lectures, talks, and discussions take place by tens of thousands in our democratic countries; and state schooling is happily duplicated by hundreds of works of popularization which enable the

people of the West for the first time in history to take a general view of their own Quest: a sense of history, a feeling of discovering the world, the sciences and technics, politics, religions. This is to say that we are already increasing—as though in prospect of morrows in which there will be time for song—the occasions for understanding our lives better and for misunderstanding the masterpieces better also. . . . As for the quality, creativeness, or relative noxiousness of this invasion of culture, nobody can foretell anything. I am content to say that everything is leading to it for both better and worse. In other words, everything is leading to a religious age.

For culture, when all is said and done, is but a diffracting prism of the religious sense upon those activities of ours called creative, from pure mathematics to pottery, and from metaphysics to carving furniture. That is how it is that technics tomorrow will bring us back, practically, like science, to the religious options. And I cannot imagine any drug strong enough to divert the human race away from them.[12]

I know well that the most intense religious life has long meant *askesis* and renunciation—in the West as in the East. (In fact, it is—and should be—especially accession to truth, and the means do not matter.) It is therefore not at all easy to see at first glance how a technical age can lead to religions. *Askesis* was actually an effort to resist technics in their primitive form, as mysticism was

[12] The boasted contempt of religious matters will have been no more than a transient feature of our Western civilization. The intelligentsia of Berlin, then of New York, and then part of the intelligentsia of Paris supposed in the twentieth century that they were anti-religious or a-religious, and indeed to a great extent they were. French surrealism was a signal for the first rebellion against a "rationalist" view of the world. Hence its world-wide success up till the beginning of the second war. André Breton, the surrealist leader, never gave up seeking a religious vision of the world and of life, thereby proving that he was much more of a "pagan" than J. P. Sartre, who places himself on the plane of morals in a prolongation of the existential demands of a Protestant-liberal ethics—no matter what otherwise his atheism may be. A return to religious problems in Western literature was first attempted as early as 1919, and has been growing ever since.

a movement to go beyond (or to withdraw ahead of) the formulated dogma; but both leaned on the object of their renunciation and depended closely on it. The *askesis* of tomorrow may have difficulty in taking the form of a return to nature—to Gandhi's hand loom, for example—since technics are what will make this return possible by producing leisure. And as for mysticism, it presupposes above all an exact knowledge of dogma. "Mysticism in the savage state"—to use the expression Claudel coined to describe the case of Rimbaud—flourishes thanks simply to the scattered reflections of the dogma and liturgy over the culture with which it is impregnated. That is why knowledge of the dogmas and of the fundamental options of our religions will be tomorrow the first precondition of the heresies and gnosis that are destined to appear. Otherwise these would but repeat the old, which did not vanish without reason, or else resurrect doctrines the creative style of which has had its day.[13] I do not say that they will forego these mistakes. But I notice that over a public hitherto utterly ignorant of that order of realities, culture is diffusing a certain curiosity which will not be stopped short. Television and wireless deliver the world to your home, and the solemn spectacles organized by art or by sport are preparing both masses and individual for unexpected liturgies. The religions of "distraction"—in Pascal's sense of the word, which include, in this context, the great totalitarian march-pasts—will certainly gain from this. And it is also well known, on the other hand, that the passion for the occult is steadily growing in towns, rapidly filling the void of spirit left by materialism. Hence the unprecedented success of books offering *recipes* for happiness, about telepathy, eroticism, peace of mind, or enthusiasm of soul. Tomorrow there will be available "scientific" rules of yoga in the Western manner.

[13] Our orientalist sects sometimes suggest somebody who might invent a machine for climbing stairs instead of taking the lift.

Many shallow minds imagine man as a kind of balloon who asks only to be "lifted" as soon as he is set free from daily cares. The proof that he is nothing of the kind is that our greatest mystics lived in the worst possible physical conditions. Technics can do nothing for the Spirit, any more than lack of well-being has brought about anything against Spirit. I say only that we may be cast into an era where religious questions will be *more serious* than are today material questions, economic "laws," the backwash of politics, the cinema, or art itself.

As for whether it will mean an advance or a fresh hazard—that is a point which leads me to reconsider the meaning and final nature of Progress. Is it not simply an increase in the risk taken by man as a person, which is the risk of freedom?

IX.

The Ambivalence of Progress

A Situation of "Crisis"

NOTWITHSTANDING the illusion of us provincials of time, the twentieth century has no more reason than any other known century to be regarded as a decisive epoch, an epoch of all or nothing, of final triumph or irremediable disaster. If there is this feeling, however, it is not only owing to the H-bomb and the anxiety which that keeps up. It is rather and especially that we today have grown aware of the ambivalent character of all progress.

The West is continuing, in general, the democratic experiment. It witnesses the rise of science applied to sociological phenomena. It expects it may soon be possible to overcome, by means of technics, endemic famine and a hostile nature, and to ensure the material well-being of the human race. But nothing warrants any advance estimate of the result of its undertakings, which may just as well be happiness as a collective stupidity, as likely as not a new venture of the person or an unprecedented tyranny. The swings of the pendulum grow longer—that at least is certain.

The wars of this century killed more men than all the other wars of our history, but mankind has multiplied at an unprecedented rate. The disunity of European nations has reached the

height of absurdity, and their move toward union grows perceptible at the same time. Christianity was never more powerfully attacked, either by the Totalitarian State or with views of the world drawn from science; never before, likewise, has Christianity been better purified of its thousand-year-old confusions with the state, with a social class, with a certain area of the planet, or with some particular explanation of the cosmos.

As for the ambivalences of science, they are bound up, as we saw above, with the essence of that discipline, at once systematic and never completed, purveyor of new superstitions for the masses, but nourishing itself with the critical spirit and radical doubt, destructive of accustomed truths but creative of certitudes constantly being brought back into question, typically Western in its style and deportment, but nevertheless sure of its universal value and validity.

Finally, we may observe acceleration in the rate at which inventions are applied to social ends. It required at least two centuries for the consciousness of Europe to digest the discoveries of the Renaissance astronomers, still longer for printing to be used for the mass sale of books and newspapers, and for state schooling to make the printed word fully effective; whereas nowadays we see the "incomprehensible" theories of Einstein lead in a quarter of a century to the explosion of the atom bomb, the discovery of antibiotics instantly made available commercially, the invention of TV transform within a single year the conditions of an election campaign, and, generally speaking, the most abstract and theoretical work going on in laboratories of nuclear research become at once a center of attraction for capital, industry, banking speculation, and the diplomacy of states. All this, moreover, without anybody being able yet to settle the question, *so confusedly raised,* in which direction—beneficial or noxious, toward setting free the individual or toward incurring mass death—the social consequences of these researches will develop. Yet it is

precisely our growing awareness of the essential ambiguity of the results of science and technics that has fomented the "crisis" of the idea of Progress.

Evolution No Longer a Synonym of Progress

The idea of evolution is a kind of thinking which shot up vigorously in the West at the beginning of the technical and scientific age. Darwin applied it to living species; others, a little later, to civilizations, to moral doctrines, to concepts, to history, and to every cultural discipline. "The evolution of painting from Giotto to Manet," "The evolution of science from Sumer to our day" have become phrases as familiar as "the evolution of animal species" or as the evolution of a disease, of an individuality, or of a political system.

The word was to begin with the archetype of the kind of thinking which conditioned our idea of Progress, in the sense which Condorcet gave to the word in 1793. The two words, "evolution" and "progress," were synonyms during the nineteenth century, and this sums up the fundamental optimism of the middle classes then in full prosperity. But from the beginnings of the twentieth century—George Sorel's *Les Illusions du Progrès* appeared in 1905—the two notions can be seen parting company. Linear progress, continuous, setting out from primitive chaos and moving without remission in the direction of order and complete justice, became an object of belief unverifiable rigorously. On the contrary, in every sphere, collective or individual, Evolution became a scientific object both mensurable and open to being formulated in laws. Now, whereas Progress has necessarily *to ascend,* the greater number of evolutions that we have sought to measure show an ascending curve, a summit, then a descending curve that implies a return to 0. It grows ever more difficult to argue from these cycles of "rise and fall' to the idea of a general and continuous ascent, such as is implied in the

belief in Progress.[1] Linear progress was necessarily an optimistic doctrine. Evolution leaves room for pessimistic views, invites them, and perhaps is the result of them.

Thus there comes into our mental field the entirely novel notion of an evolution which was being "too swift" and, on that account, one likely to hinder the continuous ascent of Progress. We may be in danger, for instance, of finding ourselves outdistanced by technics, which in that case will enslave us instead of setting us free. Hence the proposal of a truce in invention, put forward by anxious pundits. But that pessimistic attitude is no less utopian than the one prevalent in the day of the enthusiasts of a mechanical and inevitable progress. For to try to plan invention would be equivalent to sterilizing it. Who can foresee the consequences of a mathematical theory? The atom bomb issued from $E=mc^2$. Was Einstein to be prevented from making his work known or from going on with it? But in the name of what power of foresight, superior to that of this great and notoriously humanitarian brain? Once his work was done and published, who could prevent the imperiled West from getting out of it, on the one hand, the H-bomb, on the other—not so fast, it is true—the means of meeting mankind's needs in energy with mankind likely to double quantitatively in a period which our grandchildren will see completed?

"There is no stopping the march of Progress," the man in the street concludes, and he is wrong. For there is no progress in the simple fact that one is on the march, if it is toward atomic death. Only one thing appears to me irrepressible in the West, and that is the passion for inquiry and research. Now this passion works psychologically in favor of the idea of Progress, and against that of Evolution, which is an unconscious return (through anxiety) to forms of cyclical thinking.

[1] I need hardly recall the works of Spengler and Toynbee, which have done so much to get people to accept the idea of an inevitable decadence following upon expansion.

Why Inquiry and Research?

The civilization which arose in Europe has led the world for centuries. It is still, in our time, the one imitated everywhere, even when it is being fought against. It is therefore still *the strongest*. Nevertheless, if it is compared with others, past, present, or in course of formation, it is seen to differ from them by two great features which are generally held to be sources of weakness: I mean, *a fundamental anxiety* and *a permanent disorder*.

The Chinese and Egyptians, the Sumerians and Romans, the Aztecs and Mayas set up stable orders. Their priests and princes had the answer to everything. And likewise today Soviet Russia provides for a man of the masses, or forces upon him, more security and far fewer problems than do our free democracies. (That is the whole secret of the temporary success of the political systems called totalitarian: they provide and inflict massive certainties.) We, on the contrary, in the West, and in Europe far more than in America, suffer from a kind of essential anxiety. We never stop referring to "the confusion of the time." We have the impression of living in an ever increasing chaos, in a swamp of moral, intellectual, and practical contradictions. What is the source of this fundamental anxiety and permanent disorder, which the best minds have deplored for centuries?

They cannot be accidental. I even believe that they go back to the living springs of our civilization, and *that they are inseparable from it.* I connect them with our greatest traditions: Christianity and the scientific spirit. Our anxiety is due to our faith, and our uncertainties are produced by the very nature of our certainties. The paradox is explained fairly simply.

Let us take a Christian man as our example. He may read in Scripture that "there is none righteous, no, not one," and that all the same he ought to be a saint. He knows that sin consists of being separated from the living Truth, and that all men are sin-

ners. So he seeks. He seeks to draw near to Truth and holiness. In this effort without end and without pause, he is nevertheless sustained by his faith in grace. He is therefore perpetually anxious, but also one knowing why he is anxious; he knows that his anxiety is normal, not desperate, since it is due to faith—that is to say, to his certainty.

Let us next take the example of a man of science. He reads the history of the sciences. It shows him that all the "truths" set up by successive schools have been relative and provisional, have been surpassed one after the other, and that yet the *raison d'être* of science is to grasp unshakable truths. In this effort without end and without pause—here also—to draw nearer to an ever receding goal, he is sustained by his confidence in reason and verifying experiment. The same insistence on rigor which, on the one hand, causes the certitudes which were supposed unshakable to be brought back into question without relaxation, is, on the other hand, the assurance of progress in the direction of the real. So it is, therefore, from disorder to a certain order, then on to a fresh disorder, then to a new and broader way of interpreting it, that Science advances.

The Oriental raises at this point the question, does Western man not prefer inquiry and research to full possession of the truth? It is tempting to reply that this must be so when the liberal intellectuals of today are overheard reproaching the orthodox of every denomination with doing what they consider redhibitory, namely, of refraining from further inquiry and of thinking that they are the receptacles of absolute truth. It would perhaps be mistaken to argue from this that Western man denies the existence of unconditional truth. It is simply that he refuses to admit that anybody can really attain to such truth. (A Hindu thinks a man can.) If a Western man is sometimes tempted to think unconditional truth attainable, it is in the presence of a few great figures (or, rather, outside their presence, and when they are

viewed afar off in time or space) whom he calls saints. But let us take care to note that if he calls them so, it is less on account of the intrinsic validity of "their truth" than because they seem indeed to have fulfilled it, lived and incarnated it, perfectly. The saints are more reassuring therefore concerning the possibility of becoming a person than about the existence of complete truth, which would be equally valid for all, and which would not be open to discovery in the active and creative sense of the word, but waiting only to be identified in certain states of awareness.

The objectives of Western inquiry thus appear to be more modest than those of Eastern religions or of totalitarian political systems, providing or imposing their indisputable and all-embracing Truth. But the very principle of insufficiency, anxiety, and even at times disorder, which a never ending inquiry assumes, is what has made possible—along with the idea of Progress—some forms of progress which are not illusory. I shall give two telling instances.

Eastern religions have provided from the beginning recipes of immortality,[2] not one of which is known to have ever been successful. The West, instead, has been content to put into practice the moderate recipes of scientific hygiene which have, within a hundred years, more than doubled the average age of people in the West. And it is the first application of the same absolutely profane hygiene that accounts for the sudden increase in the population of the East.

My second instance includes a simplified definition of Western democracy: the legal abolition of castes and organized slavery. Condemned as a sacred institution by St. Paul and the early Christians, rendered practically superfluous by some technical inventions, but again defended by St. Thomas Aquinas, slavery was not re-established till 1456 by a bull of Pope Calixtus III,

[2] The Hindu and Buddhist *Tantras* and the sacred books of China are particularly rich in examples of this kind. The idea that repressed sexuality (still more than chastity) renders immortal is one that recurs insistently.

which authorized Henry the Navigator to sell the African blacks "discovered" by his Portuguese. Columbus, half a century later, tried to sell the natives of Haiti, but found that he was strongly opposed by the Catholic kings and by the great theologians of the day. Finally, in 1537, Paul III forbade on pain of excommunication that any American Indians should be made slaves. Whence we jump to the history of North America down to the Civil War. But who will dare say that the problem has been completely solved, when liberals and Christians in the United States still find the customs of the South a matter of complaint, customs which are also attacked, for that matter, and with suspicious vehemence, in Europe and Asia by all who admire Soviet Russia? The latter country has already set up again the use of slaves on a "scientific" and "Marxist" basis. Twenty million slave-comrades are employed in the erection of the "progressive" equivalent of the Pyramids! It remains that in the heart of the Western world slavery is no more than a memory, since the proletarian status, which has been, to our shame, the modern image of it, could be abolished in a short while thanks to the development of technics. One conclusion is called for by this summary. A system of castes and slavery is normal for societies which believe that they have, and represent, Truth. The West, consistently or skeptically Christian, is not in that case.

Western Objectives of Progress

The interest of history for the West is Progress. But what is the interest of Progress? It is that there should be more *meaning* in our personal lives: more delight in having what one has, in being what one is, in doing what one wants, in liking what one likes, hence more freedom. Freedom for all, it goes without saying, but the term has no concrete meaning except for each individually, the unit of measurement or, better, the organ of sensibility for real liberty remaining the separate self, or person.

No doubt other ends may be assigned to Progress, and our European elites do not hesitate to do so. But they betray the most astonishing inconsistency in the political opinions which they thereupon express in the name of altogether subjective preferences, and ones generally unavowed.

If the objective is the constant expansion of personal autonomy—with each human being able more and more to achieve his vocation, and so be free—an objective in nowise that of the U.S.S.R., which is expressly collectivist, and the *praxis* no more than the *theoria* of the Soviets heading that way, then the U.S.S.R. appears, objectively speaking, to be the supreme home of anti-progressiveness and reaction. (Its "dialectical" reasons do not alter the fact; Marx would have called them "mystification.") If, on the contrary, the objective is a greater quantity of consumer goods and of individual purchasing power, then the most progressive country is without question the U.S.A., one of the most laggardly being the U.S.S.R. after more than thirty years of forced labor. If, finally, the objective is the piling up of state regulations, of the power of a state doctrine over people's minds—hence practically, social entropy—then the U.S.S.R. is in the front rank, blazing the trail. What has taken the name of "progressiveness" since 1945 is, therefore, in face of the facts, an antiphrasis.

When laws forbidding judges to pronounce any but the death sentence upon persons accused of Calvinism (as happened in France in the sixteenth century) are compared with laws allowing accused persons not to answer incriminating questions (as is the case in the United States today), no conscientious person can deny that from the first to the second set of laws there has been progress. Now, the intellectuals who style themselves "progressive" are violently hostile to the nation which made and which respects the latter law, proclaiming not only their "dialectical," but also their moral, admiration of the government which re-

instates and practices laws like the former. Our "progress crisis" subsists on such confusions, even if it began much earlier, as has been seen. Other questions need, however, to be raised.

From the materialistic standpoint, the United States ought to stand for real progress, indisputably. From the spiritual standpoint, both the U.S.S.R. and the U.S.A. are regressive, even though the latter puts up with many follies on the ethical and religious plane which the former, having had greater experience of them, condemns the more severely. From the standpoint of the person, however, Europe, having stood back hitherto from the two great empires that have issued from its complex, alone possesses, in my view, the recipe for balance. We have come close to the heart of the problem.

The Definition of Progress

All concrete definitions of Progress have a common character. They result in flagrant antinomies as soon as they are applied.

The definition given by *technics:* produce ever more machines. But among the machines is one which may cause in a few moments the certain death of our civilization.

The definition given by *culture:* increase and popularize the means of creating and assimilating it. But as the greatest quantitative successes fall regularly to the worst quality, cultural progress tends to apply its own brake, if not indeed to change its sign suddenly and move toward anti-culture.

The definition given by *religion:* restore a common standard valid for the whole of civilization, and one that guarantees that our present means and our final ends shall be harmonized. But all attempts nowadays to institute a harmony principle have led to maximum disorder and bloodshed, and have aggravated world chaos. Nevertheless, both the various fascisms and Stalinian Communism tried to meet the most urgent and general demand of the century: the communal nostalgia, the call to something that

should give a common sense and direction to our deeds and our dreams, our lives, our death. . . . This ever frustrated hunger is bound to devise other means of being duped. But the great heresies and variants of gnosis of tomorrow, political and spiritual, seem to stand no better chance of avoiding the peril of totalitarian tyranny and illusory escape.

The idea of Progress seems contradictory as soon as it is attempted to measure its historic effects. It would be none the less vain to suppose that it can be eliminated or forgotten. Let it be admitted that Europe, in forming it, "infected" the whole world; the world will never recover. Assuming the world could repress it one day, it would reappear irresistibly out of the sentiment of history which can no longer be effaced, out of the movement of science which is not completed, and finally out of technics, the ambiguous gifts of which neither Asia nor Africa appears disposed to refuse. But Europe, being responsible for the idea of Progress, is also responsible for correcting it aright.

All the "heresies of Progress" undoubtedly originated in Europe, even if they have displayed their full effects only in the great human spaces of the Americas and of the U.S.S.R., there where, as though extracted from their original context, they are no longer checked by too many ancient customs or limitations set up by contrary excesses. If Europe today is alarmed to see what America has made of some technics (Taylorism or psychoanalysis), what the Soviets have made with belief in history, and what the peoples of the East—the Near as much as the Far East—seem in danger of doing with nationalism—in all that I see the sign that Europe still retains the *meaning* of intimate balance: if that meaning were not damaged, nothing would react; if it is damaged, and does react, this shows that it exists. I shall accordingly try to describe its nature and consequent demands.

The at least diverse origins of European culture, and still more the doctrine of the Man-God, have made of *paradox* an essential

and normative form of thought for the West. A form of thinking and of love, for all love is both of the same and of the other, from one's neighbor and oneself, from man and from something or from Someone who transcends man: all love is paradoxical. And where there is any attempt to escape from this essential paradox, love is turned into merely taking or yielding, imperialism or less of the ego, exerted tyranny or suffered passion—the opposite of freedom. Unless the profound genius of Europe is that paradoxical form of active love, Europe does not deserve to be defended against the forces that oppose its survival and that Europe created. But so long as Europe is still suffering from the alternating excesses of its own mistakes now magnified abroad, then Europe can draw up out of that secret genius the means to a fresh and living harmony.

The paradoxes which have been seen to grow in number along the Western Quest [3] all present one great common trait: they cannot be overcome by the reduction of one of their terms and they do not bear theoretical mediation; they have therefore to be lived *in tension*. Whence the permanent dialectic of Western existence, whence the pursuit, never completed but creative, of forms of balance wider and more vital, and yet never made stable, whence the idea of Progress and also of the illusions which it fosters inside us.

At the head of those illusions, I see our perfectly natural desire to reach *solutions* that shall be final, and "mark progress," as the saying is. It is a possibility at the level of practical life, in some circumscribed domain such as that of technics, for instance. But technics do not cease on that account to be in tension with other

[3] The Man-God, the Incarnation, the concept of person. To love God and one's neighbor—as oneself. To be in the world—as though not of it. To be free—and yet responsible. To be in history—and yet to be making it. To be an autonomous individual—but in an organized society. To find certainties—and to bring them back into question. . . . And all the paradoxes of science and Technics which have been noticed as we went along.

aspects of our existence. The illusion must then be to imagine a stable state, a stoppage of the Quest. That stable state could only be won at the price of a repression, either of technical advance (a ban on nuclear research, for example), or of the "overwhelming" benefits which may come from that advance (material abundance and leisure). In both cases, it is the elimination of the *hazards* inherent in the Quest that would be attempted. And the same holds for attempts once for all to resolve our tensions—social or political, cultural or religious. We should never do so except either by sacrificing one of the two opposite terms involved—that is how every tyranny and anarchy proceeds—or else by obtaining the neutralization of both terms—the equivalent of "thermic death" for human societies.

A second type of illusion is due to our habit of applying the idea of progress to spheres in which it is not development but the moment and the action that count. I take the example of the arts. If it is true that Einstein's relativity represents a progression over Newtonian physics, and if the electronic brain is an advance on Vaucanson's automata, it does not follow that the latest in time of our atonal or sound-effects modes marks any progress on Mozart. For there is no going "beyond" Mozart: he is sufficient unto himself. He is not a transitory stage in some collective pursuit or inquiry, never ended; he is a completed work, a creative act. A most curious Western superstition is disclosed here! Prisoners of history or of chronology, we have come to the point of imagining that the extreme vanguard is equivalent to progress. To differ seems to us superior in itself to resembling no matter what, especially to resembling masterpieces. This is to place ourselves excessively under tribute to whatever is declared to have been "left behind." It is to prevent ourselves from being really up to date, really modern, as were, without aiming to be, every century and every artist before us. This artistic vanguardism, based upon an abusive belief in history, is in course of diminish-

ing or paralyzing thousands of young painters, poets, and musicians. "What is there left to do *after* Schönberg or Picasso?" they ask anxiously. Certainly, the taste for being different is one of the permanent marks of the West. But that taste is only truly creative when it spontaneously expresses a person and his vocation; it is sterile and a caricature when it is made systematic, and we pretend to proceed by exclusion of the models provided by history. The arts do not progress, for they are not made up of "currents" but of significant works. The East has always understood this, and should be now teaching it to us afresh, instead of losing its virtue by copying us. The measure of great art is love, not the manner of expression; sublimity, not difference; an achievement valid for all, not some small variation momentarily odd. . . . But this is only a parenthesis.

Purified of the illusions most widely popular at the moment, the idea of Progress is now seen to combine with that of *an accretion of meaning* and *an enlargement of the human hazard.*

But it is important to be perfectly clear about the meaning of the word "hazard" in this context.

I mean a dialectical hazard. It consists of a twin possibility, which it creates. It opens up two divergent ways, one leading to a possibly fatal danger, the other to new hazards and fresh challenges. The danger which appears from one direction is no longer a true hazard, if it puts a full stop to human development and bars choice to a person. In that sense, the real risk suffered by Ulysses is not from the final sinking of his ship, but in his continuing at sea through repeated trials and tests, which call forth ever more varied and profound resource. Let us take a blazingly hot instance. The cobalt bomb is a "hazard," and a greater one than that of the H-bomb. It is not on that account the sign of progression, and for it to be forbidden by both sides could not be considered a reactionary step. Progress implies, on the contrary, that such "hazards" should be got rid of, because they

would end the Quest. On the other hand, it requires the continuation of purely scientific research of the kind that may easily result in the bomb and its effects as in abundance and leisure—which latter will not fail in turn to set up fresh hazards both vaster and more significant.

As one draws nearer to a summit, the horizon expands, but dizziness also grows more fascinating; joy exceeds fatigue, but any false step will be fatal.

There is progress when the challenge widens, and compels man to raise questions and to take decisions ever more extensive in range, ever more embracing in aim, and ever more decisive in meaning.

A hazard—in the sense I mean—occurs whenever a man is confronted by options steadily more significant, so that they exact from him a more profound awareness of his final ends. Every creative act, by resolving the contradictions which subtend it, opens up a virgin field to fresh conflicts, and these in turn will call for new acts of invention, and so on.

I believe I have said enough in the course of the preceding chapters for the reader to have recognized that the signs of Progress in the definition which I offer are akin to the signs of the person. In truth, the former issue from the latter. The paradoxes and tensions, the perpetual ambivalences, which will have been noticed in the march of Progress, arose with our notion of the person, itself the issue of the trinitarian discussions that gave shape to the great options whereby the West was engendered.

That is why the person is the sole judge, and also the measure, of Progress. That Progress deserves the name and actually advances is something we are able to tell from the status of the person in our society.

Will our heightened awareness of space and of historical time, our deeper acquaintance with matter and the cosmos, and the opening out by the technical venture of possibilities of general-

ized culture serve our prospects of becoming more nearly the persons we might be? The answer will not be vouchsafed by inquiry. The person is not mensurable; it measures. It is therefore not a statistical object; and, by definition, it will always elude the calculations of electronic brains. The person alone knows the person in others, even as only active love discovers our neighbor. How determine in our present world that the person feature grows more frequent and larger—that would be the sole evidence of Progress—and that liberty is gaining upon its enemies? Strictly speaking, the matter is one of faith, and of spiritual sensibility in a man; and, more generally, of human sympathy. We need greatly to love the people we see leading their lives to discern in them traces of their true vocation, and to feel what really wounds their dignity.

If, then, I now affirm my faith in Progress, it is not at the logical end of a more or less competent appraisal of our world as it wags (I have everywhere found but ambivalence), but in virtue of an act of hope, from which I have done my best to eliminate the motives due to current illusions.

The ideal of personal progress, the *ambiguous* enlargement of a man's powers over himself and over the cosmos in which he exists, although properly Western through its historical origins, seems to me none the less universal in its purest requirements. On that account, it can be accepted by the East. And I know of no other that offers us better chances of one day seeing joined together the Way and the Quest.

Part Three
WHERE ARE WE GOING?

X.

The Western Drama

THIS book is no doubt but one sign among thousands of the awakening of the West to self-awareness that will mark the twentieth century.

As always happens, such self-awareness is brought about by some stoppage of normal action, such as a brutal failure, a sudden calling in question, imprisonment, or the prospect of death. This is indeed our present situation. (And I speak especially for Europe, but the Americans are not oblivious to the fact that their health partly depends on ours.) Here is Europe in crisis and disjoined, turned out of the other continents where it had long lorded it, shut up in its "Asiatic cape" by the Communist iron curtain and the revolt of its colonies, suddenly brought face to face with the possibility of definitive decadence, and compelled to ask what it is still worth to the world. Europe then grows aware of what it has stood for, and of what it might be yet. It discovers its vocation (which it had so often betrayed) now that it is challenged either to unite in order to live again or else to go down into the catacombs of history.

Let us try to estimate the scope of the success of the West in the modern era. Toynbee warns us—and with what abundant justice!—against those illusions that might be called cultural narcissism. But how agree with him when he draws from the in-

stance of the Greco-Roman world reasons for refuting the belief that "we, in the course of the last few centuries, did something in the world which has had no precedent"? Alexander conquered only a quarter of what was the known land area of the world in his day. If he imagined that it was the whole world, he was mistaken. But his mistake is not one that we can repeat. What has Europe done since the fifteenth century down to the present day? It has not only shed its radiance over the *whole*—at last known, and known thanks to Europe alone—of the planet; it has not only influenced, colonized, or turned into vassals according to circumstances, the whole of Africa, the two Americas and Australasia, and the southern part of Asia (in different degrees, but degrees at least equal to those attained in their empires by the Diadochi and the Mongolian khans); but, further, Europe has never ceased exerting over all differing civilizations an intellectual and technical superiority which was never contested. If today peoples affected by European methods of thinking, material production, and state organization are making themselves politically independent, I see it far less as a sign of revolt against European imported methods than as a decisive proof of their success. The Greeks and Romans did not enjoy a margin of indisputable superiority over the Hindus and Chinese. But where may we look in the twentieth-century world for another civilization fitted to surpass that spread by the West? Do not the U.S.S.R. and China represent samples of the (overswift) Westernization of a large portion of mankind at least as much as a political setback for the West? And if we confine ourselves to the plane of religions, Christianity has not conquered the whole world, and is even in retreat in the Communist empire, but it has shed its radiance—alone in known history till the appearance of the Soviet gospel—on all the peoples of the earth, and it still nourishes as vigorously as ever the ambition to convert them. There again, no precedent is afforded by the religion of the Roman

Empire, which, so far as I know, never called forth a single missionary vocation.

It is thus less the revolt of the world than the internal vicissitudes of the Western Quest that have brought about the dramatic crisis in which we have been living since 1914, and the focus of which is the very place the Quest set out from—Europe.

Selecting three symptoms of the crisis—the disunion of Europe, the proletarian status, and the crisis in democracy—I shall attempt their rapid diagnosis and especially their prognosis.

Disunion of Europe

This is due to nationalism, which, on being propagated among other peoples, has had the effect of uniting them—against Europe. Facing twenty small nations which persist in styling themselves "sovereign," but not one of which can defend itself alone, we have the compact Soviet bloc, a hostile Islam, and Asia which is expelling us.

Although Europe discovered all the continents, it had to feel endangered in order to discover that it was itself a unit superior and anterior to its nations. But this awareness—the indispensable prelude to any attempt at union on the political plane—does not yet extend beyond restricted elites, which are, for that matter, curiously heterogeneous. Whatever success, and early or delayed, may await the movement to unite Europe—it is far too soon to appraise it, after a few years of ill-co-ordinated efforts—what matters to me here is the fact itself, that such a movement should have appeared at such a moment in the development of the West.

In a world perspective, two very different attitudes can be adopted to present-day Europe—disjoined and beating a retreat.

It is possible to consider that Europe has had its day and has contributed what it could for the benefit of the human race. (This is perhaps a little more than has been contributed in the same length of time by all the other areas of the planet added

together, but anyhow it has been given, once for all.) It is possible to consider that the whole world has had the secrets of its sciences, adopted its political frameworks, its principal values, and its technics, and will be able henceforth to cultivate these without Europe. And as for Christianity, that is not European property. Europe can accordingly disappear without fuss from the play of historical forces without causing much loss to the world; on the contrary, it is Europe which, in the course of this century, has caused the most frightful turmoil. Let the Americas, and Asia, and tomorrow Africa, take over "the torch of civilization."

But it is possible to consider, instead, that Europe is in the best position to seek and find remedies for the diseases bred on its soil. It certainly invented total war, but it also devised pacifism —the Christian idea of condemning war. It certainly created nationalism, but also the federal idea; anarchical individualism, but also the spirit of the communes, of trade unions and cooperative societies. Everything accordingly singles Europe out to foment *the antibodies* that will render mankind immune to some of the viruses Europe was alone in propagating. In saving itself by federation (an arrangement far older than its nationalism), it can offer the world the recipe and the model of a fruitful transcendence of the national framework.

That is why the supporters of a united Europe are convinced that they serve all things human when they take up arms—first of all in their native homestead—against an inveterate nationalism, the fomenter of wars, in favor of a world open to creative exchanges of fruitful hazards. They feel that they are the real heirs of the Western Quest. They are well aware that a federated Europe, resuming its proper place in history, will be neither the supreme solution nor the completion of the Quest. But their very effort witnesses that they are already conscious of a Western vocation. And their struggle to obtain the Europe they want,

against the Europe which they do not want and which is falling apart, guarantees the human validity of their activity. Such a battle cannot be lost—whatever its collective result—except by him who gives up.

Secession of the Proletariat

This is due to the anarchical development of industry in a civilized atmosphere which increases resistance and opposition to the full expansion of technics and its liberating results. Several million workers, in each of our largest countries, lead an existence comparable (from the standpoint of social status) with that of pariahs and coolies; no doubt, less arduous physically, but more cruel morally, owing to the mere fact that the ideals and beliefs in force—equality, progress, democracy—make their status an offense, far from justifying it by any dialectic or any fatalistic doctrines. They live in hideousness, remote from culture, most frequently outside any kind of religion, as though on the margin of their nation, whose political system, however liberal it may be, they look upon as responsible for their condition.

Every civilized people has known what it is for classes to be condemned to hereditary poverty. Never before, however, had a proletariat been *created* so directly from the operation of the very principle of progress, nor in such flagrant contradiction with the ideals of a society. The offense having appeared with the same suddenness as technics, at the beginning of the nineteenth century, the result has been that Europe was the first to grow alive to it, in an awareness doubtless not unanimous but particularly sharp among the best. Its religion fitted it less than any other to put up with or ignore the injustice, and even those who no longer subscribed to that religion still preserved the moral exigencies of the Decalogue and the Gospel; first Proudhon and then Marx prove that. Whence the immense movement, as quickly as the

middle of the century, in the direction of everything that is embraced by the term socialism—from Marxism to trade unionism, and from the splendid reveries of Fourier to the co-operative societies. Whence the set of laws tending to protect workers from the alternating excesses of inhuman working conditions and unemployment. Whence lastly the radical idea—radical and yet agreeable to the genius of the technical era—of holding in prospect the abolition of the proletarian status.

It is typical of the West that an ambition of the kind should have arisen there, and then have been considered by many as both right and feasible, and neither completely absurd nor sacrilegious. But there is no agreement on how it is to be done. Some put their faith in revolution: the Soviet example tends to show that this solution, far from raising the standard of living for proletarians, lowers that of the whole people, and that such a regressive progress is obtained only at the price of the enslavement of everybody to a few leaders, nine out of ten of whom soon confess to being either traitors or incompetent. Another school backs technics. It has on its side the only possible but not certain future. For success with technics depends on a number of conditions, to fulfill which Europe still has a long way to go. Europe would indeed have to give up the sly resistance of its popular medieval layers to the full use of mechanization; the nations of Europe would have to give up their dreams of self-sufficiency, open their stifling frontiers, and build together a great common market; and finally, and especially, it would have to be decided to set up a system (the name does not matter) which would *share out the benefits of technics* as much in kind as in leisure, instead of re-investing men's toil in the pursuit of insensate profits. But that throws us back to the general problem of culture and education—charism and hazard for Europe.

It is plain that the United States has solved the first two prob-

lems—but at less cost than Europe, hence with less value as an example. The third problem has met with the beginning of a solution in the Scandinavian countries only. It remains the gravest and most urgent question confronting the whole of the West.

The proletarian status is one there is no reason to perpetuate beyond the century of electronics and nuclear energy, provided we dare to run the risks of leisure, meet the challenge of boredom, and further the real ambitions of that democracy we claim to defend.

The Crisis in Democracy

This is due to the fact that the parliamentary system and universal suffrage are being accepted everywhere, even in Asia, at the moment that the great problems of the state and of economics elude the understanding of the electoral masses and of the elites, while technicians more and more fail to take comprehensive views. Once the art of government has become a science, to vote on a party basis for or against a bill for social reform, or for some financial or technical arrangement, is to make Boyle's law or the law of the excluded middle depend on a majority.

This profound and constitutional folly can only grow worse in those political regimes which try to play the game. (Dictatorships flatly cheat.) There is only one thing to say in its favor: public common sense can sometimes make up—let us say, once in every two occasions, which is not so bad—for the absence of directing ideals in rulers and technocrats, where it is a question of measures the mechanics of which the masses do not understand very well, but the final intentions of which, even when hidden or unconscious, they guess at. However, that can hold only on two conditions. The first is that the voter should only have to decide upon questions within his reach—local dispositions, of which he may quickly check the success or failure, and altogether questions

which are to be judged on general conditions or on those of morality, like disarmament, federation, regulation of morals, modification of the political system. This is the federalist line, contrary to Jacobin state socialism, totalitarian and centralizing. The second condition is that common sense should be allowed to correct the lack of technical knowledge, and it is a condition harder to set out. It is a matter of *confidence*—a confidence freely given (not by some party decision) either to a man or to a political regime. For the man or the regime in whom confidence is shown thereupon feels responsible and becomes responsible. This public sentiment and this reality are to be found especially, it would seem, in the countries on which the Reformation made its mark—Northern Europe, Switzerland, the United States—which turn out to be at the same time, let us notice, the countries which have suffered the fewest revolutions, and which have the fewest Communists.[1] In Latin nations, the contrary is to be observed, and the voter decides less on the facts and men than on the basis of traditional *a priori* beliefs, and with a radical suspicion of the opposite parties and the powers. (The great majority of French and Italian voters who regularly cast their votes for the Communist party are simply discontented: they show that they are *against* the regime in office generally, as a man is anticlerical forever. A convinced minority votes, on the contrary, for "the Party" as others for the Church.) So long as the spirit of personal decision, the hazard and health of democracy, is not openly cultivated, Communism (or its Fascist substitutes) will continue to stand a chance in Europe.

[1] They are also the countries in which the sense of *the private group,* formed spontaneously by citizens who feel responsible for public affairs, has more authority than the central state, and influences the latter in a thousand ways. The nonconformity of Protestant denominations paradoxically favors the formation of a common opinion, whereas the Roman centralist tradition produces between right and left, clericals and anticlericals, *inexpliable* warfare, and cuts the nations in twain.

Comparative Hazards

Parodying Lenin, we may say that Stalinism equals Marxism plus electricity, plus Byzantine despotism; that is to say, a synthesis of tyranny *à l'orientale,* of technics *à l'occidentale,* and of an allegation of moral principles (such as justice, civic sense, puritanism, progressivism, etc.), which derive from the Christian tradition. All that makes up a fairly complex religion to seduce both Eastern peoples in the very midst of material poverty and us in the West in the very midst of moral anarchy. Has this world religion any prospect of replacing its great and only rival—Christianity?

From the standpoint of tactics, the Soviets stand to win. For at the very moment in which Christianity has abandoned forcing itself upon souls by political and military conquest, Bolshevism has borrowed that ancient method (as shown in China and the European satellites). Russia thus steps into the shoes of Islam, of Catholic authoritarianism, of orthodox collectivism, and the doctrine of the Lutheran princes, *Cujus regio ejus religio.* But simultaneously we see Christianity—and the Roman Church itself—relinquishing temporal power in order the better to comply with its spiritual mission. To the Caesaro-Papism of Moscow, the political West opposes only profane and completely secularized powers: its statesmen, apart from possible exceptions, do not claim to behave as Christians, whereas the Russian and satellite hierarchs all act strictly in the role of Bolsheviks. Whence the enormous tactical advantage of the Muscovite universal Church.

Strategically, the prognosis is different. The message of Stalinism is not more liberating, more demanding and pacifying than that of Christianity for man and the individual spirit. It does not adapt itself to opposition—the life of civics—nor to the spirit of criticism and free inquiry—the life of science—which in its turn is indispensable for the progress of technics, failing which no power will be able to predominate. Finally, by denying all

transcendence, Stalinism relaxes the springs of creative anxiety, and is bound to bring about a static condition of culture and of society.

But Christianity, on the contrary, however poorly practiced it goes on being, has nevertheless established in the course of twenty centuries its ability either to produce or absorb the greatest novelties of every category—art, science, and philosophy—without being false to its evangelical principles, and to endure without profound change through the most varied political systems. It has never given up being missionary, and witnessing to every people its unvarying truth and universal ambition. It has never ceased to offer to all men of whatever race or class, or at whatever stage of development, the possibility of conversion to it and of becoming "new men." It ought therefore to win in the long run—although such a prognosis is dependent upon our very short human views. (In fact, it has "won" as soon as a man believes it, for two thousand years past and on forever, for each and for all, against nobody.)

The History of the World Begins in the Twentieth Century

To say that Huang-Ti's empire in his legend was "the greatest power in the world" is to say nothing, because there then existed no mensurable and finite world. Of many other empires it has been imagined that they were the greatest, in their district of the planet. But Europe first rendered the history of the world *simultaneous*. To begin with, thanks to the Great Discoveries, enumerating civilizations, and then by the export of its technics. America and Communism have finished the task before our eyes. Henceforth the times and pulse of civilizations and their nations are destined to agree; by war very often, since man is not good, but in the direction of peace whenever agreement is reached by the exchange of virtues and vices in the struggle.

The pulse of history is dictated today by two antagonistic powers which already resemble one another—Euramerica and Eurasia. The Communist pulse and the Western pulse seem destined indeed to force themselves of necessity upon Mother Asia. They already divide her into two halves. How shall they be harmonized? That would be to make a synthesis of faith and utopia. It can be expected that utopia, after not coming off for a long time, will be defeated. Or else the West, wearying of its freedom, will one day give way to utopia almost at the end of its tether. . . . But this is to judge according to our present passions. It may be that a more general logic, regulated by technics and demography, will soon alter the world game.

I cast my mind forward to the end of this century, and I then see that the problem will no longer be in the least capitalism or Communism, U.S.A. or U.S.S.R. On one side will be the still underdeveloped countries which will have doubled their population, and on the other side the countries that will more or less balance their production effort. The great anxieties of the years of the cold war will either have dropped into the background, or else have been forgotten. The situation of the U.S.S.R. (helped by the West?) will have improved so much that the Russians will now belong to the side of the haves, and be faced by China, the leading country on the side of the have nots. Everything will then be ostensibly reduced to the thousand-year-old dialogue between the poor, populous, but religious East and the profane, rich, and less populated West. But already the two terms will be in course of changing. The West, having discovered leisure, will turn to religion and the diversions of culture. The East, having discovered technics and the means of overcoming its poverty, will put a commensurate brake on its prolificness, and begin to think in European categories. Will the relative unification of the two halves of mankind thereupon be achieved under the sign—albeit an ambiguous sign—of technical and social progress?

XI.

Where the Quest and the Way Come Together

A Dialogue Is Necessary and Possible

BETWEEN East and West up till this century any dialogue has invariably been broken off, either because the participants were nonplused having hardly begun, or else because it quickly degenerated into alternating military pressures,[1] so that as many lasting misunderstandings were produced as irregular exchanges were fostered.

Alexander did not reach Chandragupta, the great emperor of the Ganges. Plano Carpino's mission failed. Joannes de Montecorvino arrived too late at the meeting place with the aged Kubla Khan, a Christian woman's son. The few embassies that succeeded in traveling between China and the popes of Rome or Avignon, thanks to the good offices of the Nestorian princes of Asia and the Franciscan friars, brought about no more than primitive exchanges of grandiose pretensions in the void. Before Christianity, Europe had undergone repeated one-way invasions from the religions of the Near East—the Great Goddess, Isis and

[1] From the wars of the Medes to Port Arthur, including the conquests of Alexander, Attila's incursion, the Crusades, the Mongolian onrush, Nicopolis and Lepanto, then the *short* period—spectacular and heavy with consequences—of European colonial rule.

Serapis, Mithra, and the Invincible Sun. Then the Christianized West reversed the flow. It turned missionary in Asia, set up bishoprics all over Mongolian China, in Turkestan, and on the coast of India, during those Middle Ages in which people in Europe did not even know the name of Hinduism, Buddhism, or Tao.[2] At last, in modern times, Jesuits and Protestants undertook the evangelization of non-Mahometan Asia, but colonialism and technics, then Bolshevism and nationalism, obtained much vaster and more spectacular results, to the detriment of Asiatic peace and Western moral prestige. So, during thousands of years of commercial and warlike exchanges, of blind exploitation of the one by the other, no dialogue of minds took place.

However, the nineteenth century was going to throw down the groundwork of such a dialogue, and the twentieth century, to remove the chief obstacle to its start. Oriental studies in the West did not become systematic till the rise of German Romanticism. A little later, "the Father of Modern India," Ram Mohan Roy, founder of the Bramo Samaj, came under liberal Protestant influences, and, in return, his disciples have supplied the West with the most widespread, if not the most exact, interpretation of Hindu thought.[3] Lastly, the voluntary or compulsory relinquishment of European colonies in Asia has just abolished the most irritating cause of the sense of inequality that obstructed any fruitful dialogue.

At the same time as a dialogue becomes possible, it is seen to be necessary. And I mean a real dialogue, at the level of religions and philosophies; that is to say, at the level on which civiliza-

[2] Buddhist infiltrations (for that matter, spreading Manichaeism) probably occurred in the twelfth century in the south of France, but were not known as such at the time.

[3] Ramakrishna is the most well known of them in Europe (cf. his biography by Romain Rolland). On the other hand, the Brahma Samaj opened the way to Mrs. Annie Besant's theosophy, the theories of which, although open to much criticism from the standpoint of Hindu orthodoxies, have nevertheless drawn many Western minds to India.

tions and cultures are created. Now that exchanges are actually increasing, that Asia is being industrialized, and that the age of travel has put an end to our separation (we now do in a day by air the journey which took two years in the time of Plano Carpino and Marco Polo), it becomes urgent to correct the aberrations which have been due to anarchical contacts in every sphere.

Every exchange is ambivalent. It can destroy as much as it can fructify. The adoption of our machinery, and of certain beliefs grounded upon our science of matter, can arrest in other civilizations the normal development of their spiritual or physio-psychological sciences. And this at the very moment that the West begins to suspect that these other sciences may be "true" also, and even prove vital. As the Quest draws near the Way, one ought to integrate the other (but at the price of sacrifices which might be in no way rewarding) or else some transcendental principle should be sought. The nature of such a principle C. G. Jung in Europe, Aurobindo in India, have striven to catch a glimpse of.

On behalf of a sort of pragmatism now in vogue, it will be objected here that it is dangerous to want to contrast and compare doctrines and principles, and both safer and easier to take as the ground of understanding what are called "practical convergences"—that is to say concretely, the material needs of the East, overpopulated and underfed. "One does not talk philosophy or religion to those who are asking, above all, for bread. A famished stomach has no ears." It may seem, however, that the opposite is true; that the replete do not listen, and that anxiety is the mother of thinking. Had the Ancient Hindus, the Sumerians, the Egyptians, and the Romans said in their day, "No culture so long as men and women are hungry," there would be no civilization now. We should be without the technical means of fighting famine. And there is a further point. To adopt technical needs as the ground of understanding between the two

cultures is to compel a dialogue to begin with a Western bias, when actually a footing of equality is desirable; and the dice would, so to speak, be loaded for the sole benefit of the West (and not the best West at that). The East, suddenly brought face to face with those *partial results* of our values represented by technics and machinery, may certainly find in them the means of feeding its myriad mouths, but it will also risk suffering more seriously from them in other respects. It is far less fitted to cope with the evils of a system of technics which is alien to all its system of thought than the West was to meet the same challenge. We were on the defensive against many abuses, and this thanks to the very notions—religious notions—that had made a normal use of technics possible. But the Hindu and Buddhist East is being subjected, by the presence and temptation of the same technics, to a genuine blackmail. Either its peoples must die because they multiply too fast, or else they will be constrained to adopt our methods, and with them—without either knowing it or accepting it—a set of options which are not oriental. To transcend that alternative—ruinous to the spirit or to bodies, as you please—is not a matter for commercial experts, nor for politicians, nor even for sociologists. A *real* dialogue cannot be set up accordingly except at the level of the basic options, which are of the metaphysical order.

The Difficulty of a Dialogue

Let us take a concrete instance. That of the technical help which the West is called upon to give to Asia. "It is necessary to analyze the intimate relations that exist between economic conditions and cultural values," wrote the swami, Siddeswaramanda. And I endorse his words the more fully, that he thereby justifies one ambition of this book. But he continues without transition: "When millions of men in the East have nothing to eat, to talk of humanism and of the development of man's ideal is but a

caricature: effective measures must be taken to get rid of ignorance, hunger, and disease." [4] The words deserve serious examination.

We were being told yesterday (either in the East, or in those Western circles that like to talk about our decadence): "You have neglected Mind and Spirit, your values are materialistic, and you only believe in technics." We are being told today: "Don't come and talk to us of your humanistic or spiritual values, when by millions we are dying of hunger. Save our bodies with your technics." And of course we shall not refuse to do this: it would be against our values and our Christian absolutes. But our technics too arose out of those values, which you have long rejected. You have preferred the Impersonal Spirit, contemptuous of matter and body. That fundamental preference is not unconnected with the physical ills from which you suffer. And now you want the consequences of our values, which you think false, to save you from the consequences of your beliefs, which you go on thinking superior. Is there not here something deeply unfair? Is it not time to admit that our values have not after all been so bad, since the results that follow logically from them are alone capable of curing the ills either permitted or put up with by your spirituality, which was after all not so good?

To which other swamis, more orthodox (and certainly also many men in the West), would not fail to reply that indeed Spirit cannot be affected by what attacks the body, the needs of which cannot be considered primordial. The truths of the East thus retain their full right to condemn the mistakes of the West. At the same time, the West is obliged, on account of its beliefs and its scheme, to come to the help of Orientals.

I am not deciding the matter, but there it is. It must be met frankly, if a worth-while dialogue is desired.

[4] Quoted from p. 228 of *Humanism and Education in West and East*, a volume produced by UNESCO in 1953.

Another instance may make perceptible the difficulties inherent in a meeting of the great doctrines of East and West. I call it the paradox of unity. The Western view of unity is essentially exclusive, whereas the Eastern is inclusive. The unity invoked by the Pauline Epistles is synonymous with Love, with the absence of hostile parties and fanatical opposition; but in the Church, as early as the great councils, and without any doubt by contamination with imperial ambition (Byzantine as much as Roman), it became the synonym of uniformity authoritatively established. Whence the passionate hostility to those who differed on points of doctrine or dogma, the rigid opposition to other forms of religion, and the relentless exclusion of heresies. Actually, the dogmas of the Church were put together with ejaculations of anathema. On looking closely at Father Danzinger's *Enchiridion,* a collection of articles of faith and conciliar and papal decisions, we see very quickly that the dogmatic tradition prospered and was enriched thanks chiefly to heresies, their successive condemnations forming the stratifications (and not the development) of orthodoxy. This has tended to become more and more like the negative of doctrines (or individual opinions) which it has declared anathema. On the contrary, the *Upanishads* adopt and foster a reverse attitude; the acceptance of every form of adoration that man can imagine in the presence of God. All roads lead to God, says in effect the Bhagavad Gita (chapters IV, VII, and IX especially). All roads should lead to Rome first, says the Catholic Church. And the Reformers were not less exclusive, even though they simplified the system of references and excluded the criteria of exclusion reputed to be nonevangelical, but that was in order to make still more absolute those which they maintained or restored. Nevertheless, Vedantic toleration brought India to resignation, whereas the authoritarian unitarianism of the West incited creative tendencies, reinforced diversities, and favored in practice the free choices of the person. We are called

upon to compare two systems of basic conventions, the one tolerant and inclusive, the other unitary but creative of dynamic diversities.

Opposite the difficulties, of which I have given but two examples, certain convergences take form. Proof of "reality" by means of matter is something which the West is in course of passing beyond, whereas the traditional Hindu cosmogony gains in "scientific" verisimilitude from the Western standpoint. And the psychology of the unconscious, as inaugurated by Freud and developed by Jung, links up with the experience of the Yogis, which is derived from a physiology not materialistic but "mystical."

We Ought to Compare Our Dreams

At the present stage of the Western Quest it seems as though there is only one of mankind's constant dreams which is not open theoretically to being fulfilled: the dream of knowing the thither side of death. But nearly all the others: to fly in the air, to go down to the bottom of the sea, to make gold, to grow young again, to journey over the moon, to read other people's thoughts, to kill or cure without contact—all that has arrived or will be there soon. Already we fly, transmute metals, exceed the velocity of sound, prolong twice or thrice the average span of life, see what is going on in the antipodes, speak with the invisible, slay at a great distance, and hold communication with the moon. Already we know the theoretical principles for fulfilling plenty of other possibilities we dream of. It would be surprising if one among them should turn out to be forever utopian, and to show that it was would mean a discovery as interesting as the discoveries which would lead to its being carried out. . . .

In the lump and taking all together, *everything happens as though our dreams were pledges of our future realities, and thus stood for a kind of memory anticipating things to come;* as

though man were potentially all that he can imagine, as though truth were destined to become one day what we now dream it is, and that alone. Man is defined by his dreams, which, far more than action, shape his reality.

But what is the oriental dream? We wanted to master *physis,* they, *psyche.* We have largely succeeded. But our success raises other and vaster questions. What is to be done with the world thus domesticated, with space, time, and leisure once these have been won? We have wanted also to show the impossibility of certain phenomena, or of certain beliefs which Asia holds to be true—magic, control of the springs of thought, the ideality of the real, and the reality of transcendent forces. At the moment all that is being brought back into question in the Western consciousness—of this science fiction is the indubitable sign—at the moment that the danger which hangs over us is no longer that of failing in our persistent effort, but on the contrary of succeeding—and then what? We anxiously question the different wisdom of the East. Has it succeeded in its own domain—the domain which we have neglected? Can it protect us from the consequences of *intoxicating* successes? And give us the secret of a harmony which would enable us little by little to turn toward other goals, without lapsing into either *hubris* or insanity?

I wish that an Oriental, in answer to this book, would describe in his turn the Way as I have striven to describe the Quest, and show us the coherence (or, in places, the contradictions) between the great options or animating dreams of one half of mankind, and the experienced realities which have arisen from them.

Two dreams of this nature are not to be compared, but we can compare their effects in life. The dream of Columbus produced America; that of the alchemists and scholars, technics. Does the dream of the Eastern sages lead to salvation, to the true peace of the spirit? The question of proof is what arises here.

In the presence of the East, the West looks like a world in

which proof is by material effect. First, the miracles (the changing of water into wine, or the cure of a paralytic), then conclusive experiments (the airplane flies, the bomb bursts at the hundredth of a second expected)—in both cases the probative effect is of a tangible or mensurable nature. But proof by spiritual effect, which alone convinces an Oriental as such, seems to us univerifiable, arbitrary, and nonprobative. In return, our proofs appear tautological. The bomb bursts, granted; but everything has been arranged so that it shall burst. What does this show that can really matter to us?

Let us examine the misunderstanding a little more strictly, and the necessity of going beyond it. I recalled above that Orientals have produced numerous recipes (psychosomatic, we should call them) for immortality on earth, even while they were teaching that life is but illusion. But not one of them became immortal. We seek rather the means of gaining time, and find them thanks to technics. Whereupon a Chinese of the old school, while going round our factories, will ask: "When you have gained all time, what will you do with it?" (But what about him, supposing he became immortal—what would he do?) The problem of what to do with free time will accordingly confront us tomorrow, as a result of our efforts, in serious and everyday reality. But here is the concrete paradox: the technical qualities, the utilitarian attitude, and, in a word, the efficiency which have brought the problem up are precisely those qualities and attitudes which least predispose one to a fruitful use of leisure. Inversely, Eastern values prepare one for leisure and presuppose it, but have not been able to obtain it for the crowd. At the very moment that the West may be in a position to set up the needful conditions of leisure for all, it is suffering spiritual impoverishment, while the East throws itself upon our technics and forgets its own values, which are those of which we stand in greatest need. . . .

I see plainly enough what still conceals from us the full reality of such problems. It is proletarian poverty, still real and scandalous; it is the economic contradictions that are still acute, the political and ideological struggles that go on noisily in the heart of the Western world. But a conflict is never resolved on its own plane. It is necessary to go beyond, either in space or in time, or else in a spiritual dimension. I see the beyond of our present Western crises in a bringing together of our Quest—thereby given self-awareness—with the traditional Way, and both subjected to the question of our living present, in a world perspective.

XII.

Unending Quest

THE QUEST goes on. Anybody who asks where it is going should look first at where it comes from, and how, hitherto, it has fared. It will then be evident that the very question is specific of the West. A decisive answer would therefore announce the end of our civilization, its intimate exhaustion, and be always preliminary to its annihilation by a foreign force. I have had no other intention than better to express the question, and in that I am faithful to the West where I was bred. He who would have an answer at all costs and refused to find it for himself—after he had once understood that there is none that is really general and transposable—would be forsaking in spirit this human experience which for two thousand years has forged destinies, and also fomented the free vocations of the white race, the venturesome half of the world. The Quest is our form of existing.

And yet, thinking of the East, I shall invoke the fabulous precedent of the conclusion of another quest. Ulysses has returned to Ithaca. He has won his peace. But he has to wage a final struggle against the many who have believed him dead and condemned. And suddenly the Eternal Wisdom appears. Minerva addresses him:

"Son of Laertes, nurtured in heaven, Ulysses of the many artifices,

be calm! Don't pursue this civil strife to a finish! Fear you may offend the ever-vigilant God!"

Thus spoke Minerva, daughter of thunder-striking Zeus. The hero obeyed her with a happy heart. And the goddess, with the features and voice of Mentor for disguise, caused the two parties to conclude for ever a sincere alliance.

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