The Perennial Philosophy
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YOGeBooks: Hollister, MO 65672
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Introduction

Philosophia Perennis—the phrase was coined by Leibniz; but the thing—the metaphysic that recognizes a divine Reality substantial to the world of things and lives and minds; the psychology that finds in the soul something similar to, or even identical with, divine Reality; the ethic that places man’s final end in the knowledge of the immanent and transcendent Ground of all being—the thing is immemorial and universal. Rudiments of the Perennial Philosophy may be found among the traditionary lore of primitive peoples in every region of the world, and in its fully developed forms it has a place in every one of the higher religions. A version of this Highest Common
Factor in all preceding and subsequent theologies was first committed to writing more than twenty-five centuries ago, and since that time the inexhaustible theme has been treated again and again, from the standpoint of every religious tradition and in all the principal languages of Asia and Europe. In the pages that follow I have brought together a number of selections from these writings, chosen mainly for their significance—because they effectively illustrated some particular point in the general system of the Perennial Philosophy—but also for their intrinsic beauty and memorableness. These selections are arranged under various heads and embedded, so to speak, in a commentary of my own, designed to illustrate and connect, to develop and, where necessary, to elucidate.

Knowledge is a function of being. When there is a change in the being of the knower, there is a corresponding change in the nature and amount of knowing. For example, the being of
a child is transformed by growth and education into that of a man; among the results of this transformation is a revolutionary change in the way of knowing and the amount and character of the things known. As the individual grows up, his knowledge becomes more conceptual and systematic in form, and its factual, utilitarian content is enormously increased. But these gains are offset by a certain deterioration in the quality of immediate apprehension, a blunting and a loss of intuitive power. Or consider the change in his being which the scientist is able to induce mechanically by means of his instruments. Equipped with a spectroroscope and a sixty-inch reflector an astronomer becomes, so far as eyesight is concerned, a superhuman creature; and, as we should naturally expect, the knowledge possessed by this superhuman creature is very different, both in quantity and quality, from that which can be acquired by a stargazer with unmodified, merely human eyes.
Nor are changes in the knower’s physiological or intellectual being the only ones to affect his knowledge. What we know depends also on what, as moral beings, we choose to make ourselves. ‘Practice,’ in the words of William James, ‘may change our theoretical horizon, and this in a twofold way: it may lead into new worlds and secure new powers. Knowledge we could never attain, remaining what we are, may be attainable in consequence of higher powers and a higher life, which we may morally achieve.’ To put the matter more succinctly, ‘Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.’ And the same idea has been expressed by the Sufi poet, Jalal-uddin Rumi, in terms of a scientific metaphor: ‘The astrolabe of the mysteries of God is love.’

This book, I repeat, is an anthology of the Perennial Philosophy; but, though an anthology, it contains but few extracts from the writings of professional men of letters and, though illustrating a philosophy, hardly
anything from the professional philosophers. The reason for this is very simple. The Perennial Philosophy is primarily concerned with the one, divine Reality substantial to the manifold world of things and lives and minds. But the nature of this one Reality is such that it cannot be directly and immediately apprehended except by those who have chosen to fulfil certain conditions, making themselves loving, pure in heart, and poor in spirit. Why should this be so? We do not know. It is just one of those facts which we have to accept, whether we like them or not and however implausible and unlikely they may seem. Nothing in our everyday experience gives us any reason for supposing that water is made up of hydrogen and oxygen; and yet when we subject water to certain rather drastic treatments, the nature of its constituent elements becomes manifest. Similarly, nothing in our everyday experience gives us much reason for supposing that the mind of the average sensual man has, as one
of its constituents, something resembling, or identical with, the Reality substantial to the manifold world; and yet, when that mind is subjected to certain rather drastic treatments, the divine element, of which it is in part at least composed, becomes manifest, not only to the mind itself, but also, by its reflection in external behaviour, to other minds. It is only by making physical experiments that we can discover the intimate nature of matter and its potentialities. And it is only by making psychological and moral experiments that we can discover the intimate nature of mind and its potentialities. In the ordinary circumstances of average sensual life these potentialities of the mind remain latent and unmanifested. If we would realize them, we must fulfil certain conditions and obey certain rules, which experience has shown empirically to be valid.

In regard to few professional philosophers and men of letters is there any evidence that they did very much in the way of fulfilling
the necessary conditions of direct spiritual knowledge. When poets or metaphysicians talk about the subject matter of the Perennial Philosophy, it is generally at second hand. But in every age there have been some men and women who chose to fulfil the conditions upon which alone, as a matter of brute empirical fact, such immediate knowledge can be had; and of these a few have left accounts of the Reality they were thus enabled to apprehend and have tried to relate, in one comprehensive system of thought, the given facts of this experience with the given facts of their other experiences. To such first-hand exponents of the Perennial Philosophy those who knew them have generally given the name of ‘saint’ or ‘prophet,’ ‘sage’ or ‘enlightened one.’ And it is mainly to these, because there is good reason for supposing that they knew what they were talking about, and not to the professional philosophers or men of letters, that I have gone for my selections.
In India two classes of scripture are recognized: the Shruti, or inspired writings which are their own authority, since they are the product of immediate insight into ultimate Reality; and the Smriti, which are based upon the Shruti and from them derive such authority as they have. ‘The Shruti,’ in Shankara’s words, ‘depends upon direct perception. The Smriti plays a part analogous to induction, since, like induction, it derives its authority from an authority other than itself.’ This book, then, is an anthology, with explanatory comments, of passages drawn from the Shruti and Smriti of many times and places. Unfortunately, familiarity with traditionally hallowed writings tends to breed, not indeed contempt, but something which, for practical purposes, is almost as bad—namely a kind of reverential insensibility, a stupor of the spirit, an inward deafness to the meaning of the sacred words. For this reason, when selecting material to illustrate the doctrines of the Perennial Philosophy, as
they were formulated in the West, I have gone almost always to sources other than the Bible. This Christian Smriti, from which I have drawn, is based upon the Shruti of the canonical books, but has the great advantage of being less well known and therefore more vivid and, so to say, more audible than they are. Moreover, much of this Smriti is the work of genuinely saintly men and women, who have qualified themselves to know at first hand what they are talking about. Consequently it may be regarded as being itself a form of inspired and self-validating Shruti—and this in a much higher degree than many of the writings now included in the Biblical canon.

In recent years a number of attempts have been made to work out a system of empirical theology. But in spite of the subtlety and intellectual power of such writers as Sorley, Oman and Tennant, the effort has met with only a partial success. Even in the hands of its ablest exponents empirical theology is not particularly convincing. The reason, it
seems to me, must be sought in the fact that the empirical theologians have confined their attention more or less exclusively to the experience of those whom the theologians of an older school called ‘the unregenerate’—that is to say, the experience of people who have not gone very far in fulfilling the necessary conditions of spiritual knowledge. But it is a fact, confirmed and re-confirmed during two or three thousand years of religious history, that the ultimate Reality is not clearly and immediately apprehended, except by those who have made themselves loving, pure in heart and poor in spirit. This being so, it is hardly surprising that a theology based upon the experience of nice, ordinary, unregenerate people should carry so little conviction. This kind of empirical theology is on precisely the same footing as an empirical astronomy, based upon the experience of naked-eye observers. With the unaided eye a small, faint smudge can be detected in the constellation of Orion, and
doubtless an imposing cosmological theory could be based upon the observation of this smudge. But no amount of such theorizing, however ingenious, could ever tell us as much about the galactic and extra-galactic nebulae as can direct acquaintance by means of a good telescope, camera and spectroscope. Analogously, no amount of theorizing about such hints as may be darkly glimpsed within the ordinary, unregenerate experience of the manifold world can tell us as much about divine Reality as can be directly apprehended by a mind in a state of detachment, charity and humility. Natural science is empirical; but it does not confine itself to the experience of human beings in their merely human and unmodified condition. Why empirical theologians should feel themselves obliged to submit to this handicap, goodness only knows. And of course, so long as they confine empirical experience within these all too human limits, they are doomed to the perpetual stultification of their
best efforts. From the material they have chosen to consider, no mind, however brilliantly gifted, can infer more than a set of possibilities or, at the very best, specious probabilities. The self-validating certainty of direct awareness cannot in the very nature of things be achieved except by those equipped with the moral ‘astrolabe of God’s mysteries.’ If one is not oneself a sage or saint, the best thing one can do, in the field of metaphysics, is to study the works of those who were, and who, because they had modified their merely human mode of being, were capable of a more than merely human kind and amount of knowledge.
Chapter 1. That Art Thou

In studying the Perennial Philosophy we can begin either at the bottom, with practice and morality; or at the top, with a consideration of metaphysical truths; or, finally, in the middle, at the focal point where mind and matter, action and thought have their meeting place in human psychology.

The lower gate is that preferred by strictly practical teachers—men who, like Gautama Buddha, have no use for speculation and whose primary concern is to put out in men’s hearts the hideous fires of greed, resentment and infatuation. Through the upper gate go those whose vocation it is to think and speculate the born philosophers and theologians. The middle
gate gives entrance to the exponents of what has been called ‘spiritual religion’—the devout contemplatives of India, the Sufis of Islam, the Catholic mystics of the later Middle Ages, and, in the Protestant tradition, such men as Denk and Franck and Castellio, as Everard and John Smith and the first Quakers and William Law.

It is through this central door, and just because it is central, that we shall make our entry into the subject matter of this book. The psychology of the Perennial Philosophy has its source in metaphysics and issues logically in a characteristic way of life and system of ethics. Starting from this mid-point of doctrine, it is easy for the mind to move in either direction.

In the present section we shall confine our attention to but a single feature of this traditional psychology—the most important, the most emphatically insisted upon by all exponents of the Perennial Philosophy and, we may add, the least psychological. For the doctrine that is to be illustrated in this section
belongs to autology rather than psychology—to the science, not of the personal ego, but of that eternal Self in the depth of particular, individualized selves, and identical with, or at least akin to, the divine Ground. Based upon the direct experience of those who have fulfilled the necessary conditions of such knowledge, this teaching is expressed most succinctly in the Sanskrit formula, \textit{tat tvam asi} (‘That art thou’); the Atman, or immanent eternal Self, is one with Brahman, the Absolute Principle of all existence; and the last end of every human being is to discover the fact for himself, to find out Who he really is.

The more God is in all things, the more He is outside them. The more He is within, the more without.

\textit{Eckhart}

Only the transcendent, the completely other, can be immanent without being modified by the becoming of that in which it dwells. The
Perennial Philosophy teaches that it is desirable and indeed necessary to know the spiritual Ground of things, not only within the soul, but also outside in the world and, beyond world and soul, in its transcendent otherness—‘in heaven.’

Though GOD is everywhere present, yet He is only present to thee in the deepest and most central part of thy soul. The natural senses cannot possess God or unite thee to Him; nay, thy inward faculties of understanding, will and memory can only reach after God, but cannot be the place of His habitation in thee. But there is a root or depth of thee from whence all these faculties come forth, as lines from a centre, or as branches from the body of the tree. This depth is called the centre, the fund or bottom of the soul. This depth is the unity, the eternity—I had almost said the infinity of thy soul; for it is so infinite that nothing can satisfy it or give it rest but the infinity of God.

William Law
This extract seems to contradict what was said above; but the contradiction is not a real one. God within and God without—these are two abstract notions, which can be entertained by the understanding and expressed in words. But the facts to which these notions refer cannot be realized and experienced except in ‘the deepest and most central part of the soul.’ And this is true no less of God without than of God within. But though the two abstract notions have to be realized (to use a spatial metaphor) in the same place, the intrinsic nature of the realization of God within is qualitatively different from that of the realization of God without, and each in turn is different from that of the realization of the Ground as simultaneously within and without—as the Self of the perceiver and at the same time (in the words of the Bhagavad-Gita) as ‘That by which all this world is pervaded.’

When Svetaketu was twelve years old he was sent to a teacher, with whom he studied until he was twenty-four.
After learning all the Vedas, he returned home full of conceit in the belief that he was consummately well educated, and very censorious.

His father said to him, ‘Svetaketu, my child, you who are so full of your learning and so censorious, have you asked for that knowledge by which we hear the unhearable, by which we perceive what cannot be perceived and know what cannot be known?’

‘What is that knowledge, sir?’ asked Svetaketu.

His father replied, ‘As by knowing one lump of clay all that is made of clay is known, the difference being only in name, but the truth being that all is clay—so, my child, is that knowledge, knowing which we know all.’

‘But surely these venerable teachers of mine are ignorant of this knowledge; for if they possessed it they would have imparted it to me. Do you, sir, therefore give me that knowledge.’

‘So be it,’ said the father…. And he said, ‘Bring me a fruit of the nyagrodha tree.’

‘Here is one, sir.’

‘Break it.’

‘It is broken, sir.’
'What do you see there?'
'Some seeds, sir, exceedingly small.'
'Break one of these.'
'It is broken, sir.'
'What do you see there?'
'Nothing at all.'

The father said, 'My son, that subtle essence which you do not perceive there—in that very essence stands the being of the huge nyagrodha tree. In that which is the subtle essence all that exists has its self. That is the True, that is the Self, and thou, Svetaketu, art That.'

'Pray, sir,' said the son, 'tell me more.'

'Be it so, my child,' the father replied; and he said, 'Place this salt in water, and come to me tomorrow morning.'

The son did as he was told.

Next morning the father said, 'Bring me the salt which you put in the water.'

The son looked for it, but could not find it; for the salt, of course, had dissolved.

The father said, 'Taste some of the water from the surface of the vessel. How is it?'

'Salty.'
'Taste some from the middle. How is it?'
'Salty.'
'Taste some from the bottom. How is it?'
'Salty.'
The father said, ‘Throw the water away and then come back to me again.’
The son did so; but the salt was not lost, for salt exists for ever.

Then the father said, ‘Here likewise in this body of yours, my son, you do not perceive the True; but there in fact it is. In that which is the subtle essence, all that exists has its self. That is the True, that is the Self, and thou, Svetaketu, art That.’ 

From the Chandogya Upanishad

The man who wishes to know the ‘That’ which is ‘thou’ may set to work in any one of three ways. He may begin by looking inwards into his own particular thou and, by a process of ‘dying to self’—self in reasoning, self in willing, self in feeling—come at last to a knowledge of the Self, the Kingdom of God that is within. Or else he may begin with the thous existing outside
himself, and may try to realize their essential unity with God and, through God, with one another and with his own being. Or, finally (and this is doubtless the best way), he may seek to approach the ultimate That both from within and from without, so that he comes to realize God experimentally as at once the principle of his own thou and of all other thous, animate and inanimate. The completely illuminated human being knows, with Law, that God ‘is present in the deepest and most central part of his own soul’; but he is also and at the same time one of those who, in the words of Plotinus,

see all things, not in process of becoming, but in Being, and see themselves in the other. Each being contains in itself the whole intelligible world. Therefore All is everywhere. Each is there All, and All is each. Man as he now is has ceased to be the All. But when he ceases to be an individual, he raises himself again and penetrates the whole world.
It is from the more or less obscure intuition of the oneness that is the ground and principle of all multiplicity that philosophy takes its source. And not alone philosophy, but natural science as well. All science, in Meyerson’s phrase, is the reduction of multiplicities to identities. Divining the One within and beyond the many, we find an intrinsic plausibility in any explanation of the diverse in terms of a single principle.

The philosophy of the Upanishads reappears, developed and enriched, in the Bhagavad-Gita and was finally systematized, in the ninth century of our era, by Shankara. Shankara’s teaching (simultaneously theoretical and practical, as is that of all true exponents of the Perennial Philosophy) is summarized in his versified treatise, *Viveka-Chudamani* (‘The Crest-Jewel of Wisdom’). All the following passages are taken from this conveniently brief and untechnical work.
The Atman is that by which the universe is pervaded, but which nothing pervades; which causes all things to shine, but which all things cannot make to shine….

The nature of the one Reality must be known by one's own clear spiritual perception; it cannot be known through a pandit (learned man). Similarly the form of the moon can only be known through one's own eyes. How can it be known through others?

Who but the Atman is capable of removing the bonds of ignorance, passion and self-interested action?...

Liberation cannot be achieved except by the perception of the identity of the individual spirit with the universal Spirit. It can be achieved neither by Yoga (physical training), nor by Sankhya (speculative philosophy), nor by the practice of religious ceremonies, nor by mere learning….

Disease is not cured by pronouncing the name of medicine, but by taking medicine. Deliverance is not achieved by
repeating the word ‘Brahman,’ but by directly experiencing Brahman….

The Atman is the Witness of the individual mind and its operations. It is absolute knowledge….

The wise man is one who understands that the essence of Brahman and of Atman is Pure Consciousness, and who realizes their absolute identity. The identity of Brahman and Atman is affirmed in hundreds of sacred texts….

Caste, creed, family and lineage do not exist in Brahman. Brahman has neither name nor form, transcends merit and demerit, is beyond time, space and the objects of sense-experience. Such is Brahman, and ‘thou art That.’ Meditate upon this truth within your consciousness.

Supreme, beyond the power of speech to express, Brahman may yet be apprehended by the eye of pure illumination. Pure, absolute and eternal Reality—such is Brahman, and ‘thou art That.’ Meditate upon this truth within your consciousness….
Though One, Brahman is the cause of the many. There is no other cause. And yet Brahman is independent of the law of causation. Such is Brahman, and ‘thou art That.’ Meditate upon this truth within your consciousness.…

The truth of Brahman may be understood intellectually. But (even in those who so understand) the desire for personal separateness is deep-rooted and powerful, for it exists from beginningless time. It creates the notion, ‘I am the actor, I am he who experiences.’ This notion is the cause of bondage to conditional existence, birth and death. It can be removed only by the earnest effort to live constantly in union with Brahman. By the sages, the eradication of this notion and the craving for personal separateness is called Liberation.

It is ignorance that causes us to identify ourselves with the body, the ego, the senses, or anything that is not the Atman. He is a wise man who overcomes this ignorance by devotion to the Atman.…

When a man follows the way of the world, or the way of the flesh, or the way of tradition (i.e. when he believes in
religious rites and the letter of the scriptures, as though they were intrinsically sacred), knowledge of Reality cannot arise in him.

The wise say that this threefold way is like an iron chain, binding the feet of him who aspires to escape from the prison-house of this world. He who frees himself from the chain achieves Deliverance.

*Shankara*

In the Taoist formulations of the Perennial Philosophy there is an insistence, no less forcible than in the Upanishads, the Gita and the writings of Shankara, upon the universal immanence of the transcendent spiritual Ground of all existence. What follows is an extract from one of the great classics of Taoist literature, the Book of Chuang Tzu, most of which seems to have been written around the turn of the fourth and third centuries B.C.
Do not ask whether the Principle is in this or in that; it is in all beings. It is on this account that we apply to it the epithets of supreme, universal, total. It has ordained that all things should be limited, but is itself unlimited, infinite. As to what pertains to manifestation, the Principle causes the succession of its phases, but is not this succession. It is the author of causes and effects, but is not the causes and effects. It is the author of condensations and dissipations (birth and death, changes of state), but is not itself condensations and dissipations. All proceeds from It and is under its influence. It is in all things, but is not identical with beings, for it is neither differentiated nor limited.

Chuang Tzu

From Taoism we pass to that Mahayana Buddhism which, in the Far East, came to be so closely associated with Taoism, borrowing and bestowing until the two came at last to be fused in what is known as Zen. The Lankavatara Sutra, from which the following extract is taken, was the scripture which the founder of Zen
Buddhism expressly recommended to his first disciples.

Those who vainly reason without understanding the truth are lost in the jungle of the Vijnanas (the various forms of relative knowledge), running about here and there and trying to justify their view of ego-substance.

The self realized in your inmost consciousness appears in its purity; this is the Tathagata-garbha (literally, Buddha-womb), which is not the realm of those given over to mere reasoning.…. 

Pure in its own nature and free from the category of finite and infinite, Universal Mind is the undefiled Buddha-womb, which is wrongly apprehended by sentient beings.

*Lankavatara Sutra*

One Nature, perfect and pervading, circulates in all natures, One Reality, all-comprehensive, contains within itself all realities.

The one Moon reflects itself wherever there is a sheet of water,
And all the moons in the waters are embraced within the one Moon.
The Dharma-body ‘(the Absolute) of all the Buddhas enters into my own being.
And my own being is found in union with theirs....
The Inner Light is beyond praise and blame;
Like space it knows no boundaries,
Yet it is even here, within us, ever retaining its serenity and fullness.
It is only when you hunt for it that you lose it;
You cannot take hold of it, but equally you cannot get rid of it,
And while you can do neither, it goes on its own way.
You remain silent and it speaks; you speak, and it is dumb;
The great gate of charity is wide open, with no obstacles before it.

_Yung-chia Ta-shih_

I am not competent, nor is this the place to discuss the doctrinal differences between Buddhism and Hinduism. Let it suffice to point out that, when he insisted that human
beings are by nature ‘non-Atman,’ the Buddha was evidently speaking about the personal self and not the universal Self. The Brahman controversialists, who appear in certain of the Pali scriptures, never so much as mention the Vedanta doctrine of the identity of Atman and Godhead and the non-identity of ego and Atman. What they maintain and Gautama denies is the substantial nature and eternal persistence of the individual psyche. ‘As an unintelligent man seeks for the abode of music in the body of the lute, so does he look for a soul within the skandhas (the material and psychic aggregates, of which the individual mind-body is composed).’ About the existence of the Atman that is Brahman, as about most other metaphysical matters, the Buddha declines to speak, on the ground that such discussions do not tend to edification or spiritual progress among the members of a monastic order, such as he had founded. But though it has its dangers, though it may become
the most absorbing, because the most serious and noblest, of distractions, metaphysical thinking is unavoidable and finally necessary. Even the Hinayanists found this, and the later Mahayanists were to develop, in connection with the practice of their religion, a splendid and imposing system of cosmological, ethical and psychological thought. This system was based upon the postulates of a strict idealism and professed to dispense with the idea of God. But moral and spiritual experience was too strong for philosophical theory, and under the inspiration of direct experience, the writers of the Mahayana sutras found themselves using all their ingenuity to explain why the Tathagata and the Bodhisattvas display an infinite charity towards beings that do not really exist. At the same time they stretched the framework of subjective idealism so as to make room for Universal Mind; qualified the idea of soullessness with the doctrine that, if purified, the individual mind can identify itself
with the Universal Mind or Buddha-womb; and, while maintaining godlessness, asserted that this realizable Universal Mind is the inner consciousness of the eternal Buddha and that the Buddha-mind is associated with ‘a great compassionate heart’ which desires the liberation of every sentient being and bestows divine grace on all who make a serious effort to achieve man’s final end. In a word, despite their inauspicious vocabulary, the best of the Mahayana sutras contain an authentic formulation of the Perennial Philosophy—a formulation which in some respects (as we shall see when we come to the section, ‘God in the World’) is more complete than any other.

In India, as in Persia, Mohammedan thought came to be enriched by the doctrine that God is immanent as well as transcendent, while to Mohammedan practice were added the moral disciplines and ‘spiritual exercises,’ by means of which the soul is prepared for contemplation or the unitive knowledge of the Godhead. It
is a significant historical fact that the poet-saint Kabir is claimed as a co-religionist both by Moslems and Hindus. The politics of those whose goal is beyond time are always pacific; it is the idolaters of past and future, of reactionary memory and Utopian dream, who do the persecuting and make the wars.

Behold but One in all things; it is the second that leads you astray.

*Kabir*

That this insight into the nature of things and the origin of good and evil is not confined exclusively to the saint, but is recognized obscurely by every human being, is proved by the very structure of our language. For language, as Richard Trench pointed out long ago, is often ‘wiser, not merely than the vulgar, but even than the wisest of those who speak it. Sometimes it locks up truths which were once well known, but have been forgotten. In
other cases it holds the germs of truths which, though they were never plainly discerned, the genius of its framers caught a glimpse of in a happy moment of divination.’ For example, how significant it is that in the Indo-European languages, as Darmsteter has pointed out, the root meaning ‘two’ should connote badness. The Greek prefix dys- (as in dyspepsia) and the Latin dis- (as in dishonourable) are both derived from ‘duo.’ The cognate bis- gives a pejorative sense to such modern French words as bévue (‘blunder,’ literally ‘two-sight’). Traces of that ‘second which leads you astray’ can be found in ‘dubious,’ ‘doubt’ and Zweifel—for to doubt is to be double-minded. Bunyan has his Mr. Facing-both-ways, and modern American slang its ‘two-timers.’ Obscurely and unconsciously wise, our language confirms the findings of the mystics and proclaims the essential badness of division—a word, incidentally, in which our old enemy ‘two’ makes another decisive appearance.
Here it may be remarked that the cult of unity on the political level is only an idolatrous ersatz for the genuine religion of unity on the personal and spiritual levels. Totalitarian regimes justify their existence by means of a philosophy of political monism, according to which the state is God on earth, unification under the heel of the divine state is salvation, and all means to such unification, however intrinsically wicked, are right and may be used without scruple. This political monism leads in practice to excessive privilege and power for the few and oppression for the many, to discontent at home and war abroad. But excessive privilege and power are standing temptations to pride, greed, vanity and cruelty; oppression results in fear and envy; war breeds hatred, misery and despair. All such negative emotions are fatal to the spiritual life. Only the pure in heart and poor in spirit can come to the unitive knowledge of God. Hence, the attempt to impose more unity upon societies
than their individual members are ready for makes it psychologically almost impossible for those individuals to realize their unity with the divine Ground and with one another.

Among the Christians and the Sufis, to whose writings we now return, the concern is primarily with the human mind and its divine essence.

My Me is God, nor do I recognize any other Me except my God Himself.

_St. Catherine of Genoa_

In those respects in which the soul is unlike God, it is also unlike itself.

_St. Bernard_

I went from God to God, until they cried from me in me, 'O thou I!'

_Bayazid of Bistun_

Two of the recorded anecdotes about this Sufi saint deserve to be quoted here. 'When
Bayazid was asked how old he was, he replied, “Four years.” They said, “How can that be?” He answered, “I have been veiled from God by the world for seventy years, but I have seen Him during the last four years. The period during which one is veiled does not belong to one’s life.” On another occasion someone knocked at the saint’s door and cried, ‘Is Bayazid here?’ Bayazid answered, ‘Is anybody here except God?’

To gauge the soul we must gauge it with God, for the Ground of God and the Ground of the Soul are one and the same.

*Eckhart*

The spirit possesses God essentially in naked nature, and God the spirit.

*Ruysbroeck*

For though she sink all sinking in the oneness of divinity, she never touches bottom. For it is of the very essence of the soul that she is powerless to plumb the depths of her creator.
And here one cannot speak of the soul any more, for she has lost her nature yonder in the oneness of divine essence. There she is no more called soul, but is called immeasurable being.

Eckhart

The knower and the known are one. Simple people imagine that they should see God, as if He stood there and they here. This is not so. God and I, we are one in knowledge.

Eckhart

‘I live, yet not I, but Christ in me.’ Or perhaps it might be more accurate to use the verb transitively and say, ‘I live, yet not I; for it is the Logos who lives me’—lives me as an actor lives his part. In such a case, of course, the actor is always infinitely superior to the rôle. Where real life is concerned, there are no Shakespearean characters, there are only Addisonian Catos or, more often, grotesque Monsieur Perrichons and Charley’s Aunts mistaking themselves for Julius Caesar or the Prince of Denmark. But
by a merciful dispensation it is always in the power of every *dramatis persona* to get his low, stupid lines pronounced and supernaturally transfigured by the divine equivalent of a Garrick.

O my God, how does it happen in this poor old world that Thou art so great and yet nobody finds Thee, that Thou callest so loudly and nobody hears Thee, that Thou art so near and nobody feels Thee, that Thou givest Thyself to everybody and nobody knows Thy name? Men flee from Thee and say they cannot find Thee; they turn their backs and say they cannot see Thee; they stop their ears and say they cannot hear Thee.

*Hans Denk*

Between the Catholic mystics of the fourteenth and fifteenth, centuries and the Quakers of the seventeenth there yawns a wide gap of time made hideous, so far as religion is concerned, with interdenominational wars and persecutions. But the gulf was bridged
by a succession of men, whom Rufus Jones, in the only accessible English work devoted to their lives and teachings, has called the ‘Spiritual Reformers.’ Denk, Franck, Castellio, Weigel, Everard, the Cambridge Platonists—in spite of the murdering and the madness, the apostolic succession remains unbroken. The truths that had been spoken in the *Theologia Germanica*—that book which Luther professed to love so much and from which, if we may judge from his career, he learned so singularly little—were being uttered once again by Englishmen during the Civil War and under the Cromwellian dictatorship. The mystical tradition, perpetuated by the Protestant Spiritual Reformers, had become diffused, as it were, in the religious atmosphere of the time when George Fox had his first great ‘opening’ and knew by direct experience:

that Every Man was enlightened by the Divine Light of Christ, and I saw it shine through all; And that they that believed in
it came out of Condemnation and came to the Light of Life, and became the Children of it; And that they that hated it and did not believe in it, were condemned by it, though they made a profession of Christ. This I saw in the pure Openings of Light, without the help of any Man, neither did I then know where to find it in the Scriptures, though afterwards, searching the Scriptures, I found it.

*From Fox’s Journal*

The doctrine of the Inner Light achieved a clearer formulation in the writings of the second generation of Quakers. ‘There is,’ wrote William Penn, ‘something nearer to us than Scriptures, to wit, the Word in the heart from which all Scriptures come.’ And a little later Robert Barclay sought to explain the direct experience of *tat tvam asi* in terms of an Augustinian theology that had, of course, to be considerably stretched and trimmed before it could fit the facts. Man, he declared in his famous theses, is a fallen being, incapable of good, unless united to the Divine Light. This
Divine Light is Christ within the human soul, and is as universal as the seed of sin. All men, heathen as well as Christian, are endowed with the Inward Light, even though they may know nothing of the outward history of Christ’s life. Justification is for those who do not resist the Inner Light and so permit of a new birth of holiness within them.

Goodness needeth not to enter into the soul, for it is there already, only it is unperceived.

_Theologia Germanica_

When the Ten Thousand things are viewed in their oneness, we return to the Origin and remain where we have always been.

_Sen T’sen_

It is because we don’t know Who we are, because we are unaware that the Kingdom of Heaven is within us, that we behave in the generally silly, the often insane, the sometimes criminal
ways that are so characteristically human. We are saved, we are liberated and enlightened, by perceiving the hitherto unperceived good that is already within us, by returning to our eternal Ground and remaining where, without knowing it, we have always been. Plato speaks in the same sense when he says, in the *Republic*, that ‘the virtue of wisdom more than anything else contains a divine element which always remains.’ And in the *Theaetetus* he makes the point, so frequently insisted upon by those who have practised spiritual religion, that it is only by becoming Godlike that we can know God—and to become Godlike is to identify ourselves with the divine element which in fact constitutes our essential nature, but of which, in our mainly voluntary ignorance, we choose to remain unaware.

They are on the way to truth who apprehend God by means of the divine, Light by the light.

*Philo*
Philo was the exponent of the Hellenistic Mystery Religion which grew up, as Professor Goodenough has shown, among the Jews of the Dispersion, between about 200 B.C. and 100 A.D. Reinterpreting the Pentateuch in terms of a metaphysical system derived from Platonism, Neo-Pythagoreanism and Stoicism, Philo transformed the wholly transcendental and almost anthropomorphically personal God of the Old Testament into the immanent-transcendent Absolute Mind of the Perennial Philosophy. But even from the orthodox scribes and Pharisees of that momentous century which witnessed, along with the dissemination of Philo’s doctrines, the first beginnings of Christianity and the destruction of the Temple at Jerusalem, even from the guardians of the Law we hear significantly mystical utterances. Hillel, the great rabbi whose teachings on humility and the love of God and man read like an earlier, cruder version of some of the Gospel sermons, is reported to have spoken
these words to an assemblage in the courts of the Temple. ‘If I am here’ (it is Jehovah who is speaking through the mouth of his prophet). ‘everyone is here. If I am not here, no one is here.’

The Beloved is all in all; the lover merely veils Him;
The Beloved is all that lives, the lover a dead thing.

*Jalal-uddin Rumi*

There is a spirit in the soul, untouched by time and flesh, flowing from the Spirit, remaining in the Spirit, itself wholly spiritual. In this principle is God, ever verdant, ever flowering in all the joy and glory of His actual Self. Sometimes I have called this principle the Tabernacle of the soul, sometimes a spiritual Light, anon I say it is a Spark. But now I say that it is more exalted over this and that than the heavens are exalted above the earth. So now I name it in a nobler fashion…. It is free of all names and void of all forms. It is one and simple, as God is one and simple, and no man can in any wise behold it.

*Eckhart*
Crude formulations of some of the doctrines of the Perennial Philosophy are to be found in the thought-systems of the uncivilized and so-called primitive peoples of the world. Among the Maoris, for example, every human being is regarded as a compound of four elements—a divine eternal principle, known as the *toiora*; an ego, which disappears at death; a ghost-shadow, or psyche, which survives death; and finally a body. Among the Oglala Indians the divine element is called the *sican*, and this is regarded as identical with the *ton*, or divine essence of the world. Other elements of the self are the *nagi*, or personality, and *niya*, or vital soul. After death the *sican* is reunited with the divine Ground of all things, the *nagi* survives in the ghost world of psychic phenomena and the *niya* disappears into the material universe.

In regard to no twentieth-century ‘primitive’ society can we rule out the possibility of influence by, or borrowing from, some higher culture. Consequently, we have no
right to argue from the present to the past. Because many contemporary savages have an esoteric philosophy that is monotheistic with a monotheism that is sometimes of the ‘That art thou’ variety, we are not entitled to infer offhand that neolithic or palaeolithic men held similar views.

More legitimate and more intrinsically plausible are the inferences that may be drawn from what we know about our own physiology and psychology. We know that human minds have proved themselves capable of everything from imbecility to Quantum Theory, from Mein Kampf and sadism to the sanctity of Philip Neri, from metaphysics to crossword puzzles, power politics and the Missa Solemnis. We also know that human minds are in some way associated with human brains, and we have fairly good reasons for supposing that there have been no considerable changes in the size and conformation of human brains for a good many thousands of years. Consequently it
seems justifiable to infer that human minds in
the remote past were capable of as many and
as various kinds and degrees of activity as are
minds at the present time.

It is, however, certain that many activities
undertaken by some minds at the present time
were not, in the remote past, undertaken by any
minds at all. For this there are several obvious
reasons. Certain thoughts are practically
unthinkable except in terms of an appropriate
language and within the framework of an
appropriate system of classification. Where
these necessary instruments do not exist, the
thoughts in question are not expressed and not
even conceived. Nor is this all: the incentive to
develop the instruments of certain kinds of
thinking is not always present. For long periods
of history and prehistory it would seem that men
and women, though perfectly capable of doing
so, did not wish to pay attention to problems
which their descendants found absorbingly
interesting. For example, there is no reason to
suppose that, between the thirteenth century and the twentieth, the human mind underwent any kind of evolutionary change, comparable to the change, let us say, in the physical structure of the horse’s foot during an incomparably longer span of geological time. What happened was that men turned their attention from certain aspects of reality to certain other aspects. The result, among other things, was the development of the natural sciences. Our perceptions and our understanding are directed, in large measure, by our will. We are aware of, and we think about, the things which, for one reason or another, we want to see and understand. Where there’s a will there is always an intellectual way. The capacities of the human mind are almost indefinitely great. Whatever we will to do, whether it be to come to the unitive knowledge of the Godhead, or to manufacture self-propelled flame-throwers—that we are able to do, provided always that the willing be sufficiently intense and sustained. It is clear that
many of the things to which modern men have chosen to pay attention were ignored by their predecessors. Consequently the very means for thinking clearly and fruitfully about those things remained uninvented, not merely during prehistoric times, but even to the opening of the modern era.

The lack of a suitable vocabulary and an adequate frame of reference, and the absence of any strong and sustained desire to invent these necessary instruments of thought—here are two sufficient reasons why so many of the almost endless potentialities of the human mind remained for so long unactualized. Another and, on its own level, equally cogent reason is this: much of the world’s most original and fruitful thinking is done by people of poor physique and of a thoroughly unpractical turn of mind. Because this is so, and because the value of pure thought, whether analytical or integral, has everywhere been more or less clearly recognized, provision was and still
is made by every civilized society for giving thinkers a measure of protection from the ordinary strains and stresses of social life. The hermitage, the monastery, the college, the academy and the research laboratory; the begging bowl, the endowment, patronage and the grant of taxpayers’ money—such are the principal devices that have been used by actives to conserve that rare bird, the religious, philosophical, artistic or scientific contemplative. In many primitive societies conditions are hard and there is no surplus wealth. The born contemplative has to face the struggle for existence and social predominance without protection. The result, in most cases, is that he either dies young or is too desperately busy merely keeping alive to be able to devote his attention to anything else. When this happens the prevailing philosophy will be that of the hardy, extraverted man of action.

All this sheds some light—dim, it is true, and merely inferential—on the problem of
the perennialness of the Perennial Philosophy. In India the scriptures were regarded, not as revelations made at some given moment of history, but as eternal gospels, existent from everlasting to everlasting, inasmuch as coeval with man, or for that matter with any other kind of corporeal or incorporeal being possessed of reason. A similar point of view is expressed by Aristotle, who regards the fundamental truths of religion as everlasting and indestructible. There have been ascents and falls, periods (literally ‘roads around’ or cycles) of progress and regress; but the great fact of God as the First Mover of a universe which partakes of his divinity has always been recognized. In the light of what we know about prehistoric man (and what we know amounts to nothing more than a few chipped stones, some paintings, drawings and sculptures) and of what we may legitimately infer from other, better documented fields of knowledge, what are we to think of these traditional doctrines?
My own view is that they may be true. We know that born contemplatives in the realm both of analytic and of integral thought have turned up in fair numbers and at frequent intervals during recorded history. There is therefore every reason to suppose that they turned up before history was recorded. That many of these people died young or were unable to exercise their talents is certain. But a few of them must have survived. In this context it is highly significant that, among many contemporary primitives, two thought-patterns are found—an exoteric pattern for the unphilosophic many and an esoteric pattern (often monotheistic, with a belief in a God not merely of power, but of goodness and wisdom) for the initiated few. There is no reason to suppose that circumstances were any harder for prehistoric men than they are for many contemporary savages. But if an esoteric monotheism of the kind that seems to come natural to the born thinker is possible in modern savage societies,
the majority of whose members accept the sort of polytheistic philosophy that seems to come natural to men of action, a similar esoteric doctrine might have been current in prehistoric societies. True, the modern esoteric doctrines may have been derived from higher cultures. But the significant fact remains that, if so derived, they yet had a meaning for certain members of the primitive society and were considered valuable enough to be carefully preserved. We have seen that many thoughts are unthinkable apart from an appropriate vocabulary and frame of reference. But the fundamental ideas of the Perennial Philosophy can be formulated in a very simple vocabulary, and the experiences to which the ideas refer can and indeed must be had immediately and apart from any vocabulary whatsoever. Strange openings and theophanies are granted to quite small children, who are often profoundly and permanently affected by these experiences. We have no reason to suppose that what happens
now to persons with small vocabularies did not happen in remote antiquity. In the modern world (as Vaughan and Traherne and Wordsworth, among others, have told us) the child tends to grow out of his direct awareness of the one Ground of things; for the habit of analytical thought is fatal to the intuitions of integral thinking, whether on the ‘psychic’ or the spiritual level. Psychic preoccupations may be and often are a major obstacle in the way of genuine spirituality. In primitive societies now (and, presumably, in the remote past) there is much preoccupation with, and a widespread talent for, psychic thinking. But a few people may have worked their way through psychic into genuinely spiritual experience—just as, even in modern industrialized societies, a few people work their way out of the prevailing preoccupation with matter and through the prevailing habits of analytical thought into the direct experience of the spiritual Ground of things.
Such, then, very briefly are the reasons for supposing that the historical traditions of oriental and our own classical antiquity may be true. It is interesting to find that at least one distinguished contemporary ethnologist is in agreement with Aristotle and the Vedantists. ‘Orthodox ethnology,’ writes Dr. Paul Radin in his *Primitive Man as Philosopher,* ‘has been nothing but an enthusiastic and quite uncritical attempt to apply the Darwinian theory of evolution to the facts of social experience.’ And he adds that ‘no progress in ethnology will be achieved until scholars rid themselves once and for all of the curious notion that everything possesses a history; until they realize that certain ideas and certain concepts are as ultimate for man, as a social being, as specific physiological reactions are ultimate for him, as a biological being.’ Among these ultimate concepts, in Dr. Radin’s view, is that of monotheism. Such monotheism is often no more than the recognition of a single dark and numinous Power ruling the world. But
it may sometimes be genuinely ethical and spiritual.

The nineteenth century’s mania for history and prophetic Utopianism tended to blind the eyes of even its acutest thinkers to the timeless facts of eternity. Thus we find T. H. Green writing of mystical union as though it were an evolutionary process and not, as all the evidence seems to show, a state which man, as man, has always had it in his power to realize. ‘An animal organism, which has its history in time, gradually becomes the vehicle of an eternally complete consciousness, which in itself can have no history, but a history of the process by which the animal organism becomes its vehicle.’ But in actual fact it is only in regard to peripheral knowledge that there has been a genuine historical development. Without much lapse of time and much accumulation of skills and information, there can be but an imperfect knowledge of the material world. But direct awareness of the ‘eternally complete
consciousness, which is the ground of the material world, is a possibility occasionally actualized by some human beings at almost any stage of their own personal development, from childhood to old age, and at any period of the race's history.
Chapter 2. The Nature of the Ground

Our starting point has been the psychological doctrine, ‘That art thou.’ The question that now quite naturally presents itself is a metaphysical one: What is the That to which the thou can discover itself to be akin?

To this the fully developed Perennial Philosophy has at all times and in all places given fundamentally the same answer. The divine Ground of all existence is a spiritual Absolute, ineffable in terms of discursive thought, but (in certain circumstances) susceptible of being directly experienced and realized by the human being. This Absolute is the God-without-form of Hindu and Christian mystical phraseology. The last end of man, the ultimate reason for
human existence, is unitive knowledge of the divine Ground—the knowledge that can come only to those who are prepared to ‘die to self’ and so make room, as it were, for God. Out of any given generation of men and women very few will achieve the final end of human existence; but the opportunity for coming to unitive knowledge will, in one way or another, continually be offered until all sentient beings realize Who in fact they are.

The Absolute Ground of all existence has a personal aspect. The activity of Brahman is Isvara, and Isvara is further manifested in the Hindu Trinity and, at a more distant remove, in the other deities or angels of the Indian pantheon. Analogously, for Christian mystics, the ineffable, attributeless Godhead is manifested in a Trinity of Persons, of whom it is possible to predicate such human attributes as goodness, wisdom, mercy and love, but in a supereminent degree.
Finally there is an incarnation of God in a human being, who possesses the same qualities of character as the personal God, but who exhibits them under the limitations necessarily imposed by confinement within a material body born into the world at a given moment of time. For Christians there has been and, *ex hypothesi*, can be but one such divine incarnation; for Indians there can be and have been many. In Christendom as well as in the East, contemplatives who follow the path of devotion conceive of, and indeed directly perceive, the incarnation as a constantly renewed fact of experience. Christ is for ever being begotten within the soul by the Father, and the play of Krishna is the pseudo-historical symbol of an everlasting truth of psychology and metaphysics—the fact that, in relation to God, the personal soul is always feminine and passive.

Mahayana Buddhism teaches these same metaphysical doctrines in terms of the ‘Three
Bodies’ of Buddha—the absolute Dharmakaya, known also as the Primordial Buddha, or Mind, or the Clear Light of the Void; the Sambhogakaya, corresponding to Isvara or the personal God of Judaism, Christianity and Islam; and finally the Nirmanakaya, the material body, in which the Logos is incarnated upon earth as a living, historical Buddha.

Among the Sufis, Al Haqq, the Real, seems to be thought of as the abyss of Godhead underlying the personal Allah, while the Prophet is taken out of history and regarded as the incarnation of the Logos.

Some idea of the inexhaustible richness of the divine nature can be obtained by analysing, word by word, the invocation with which the Lord’s Prayer begins—‘Our Father who art in heaven.’ God is ours—ours in the same intimate sense that our consciousness and life are ours. But as well as immanently ours, God is also transcendentally the personal Father, who loves his creatures and to whom love and
allegiance are owed by them in return. ‘Our Father who art’: when we come to consider the verb in isolation, we perceive that the immanent-transcendent personal God is also the immanent-transcendent One, the essence and principle of all existence. And finally God’s being is ‘in heaven’; the divine nature is other than, and incommensurable with, the nature of the creatures in whom God is immanent. That is why we can attain to the unitive knowledge of God only when we become in some measure Godlike, only when we permit God’s kingdom to come by making our own creaturely kingdom go.

God may be worshipped and contemplated in any of his aspects. But to persist in worshipping only one aspect to the exclusion of all the rest is to run into grave spiritual peril. Thus, if we approach God with the preconceived idea that He is exclusively the personal, transcendental, all-powerful ruler of the world, we run the risk of becoming entangled in a religion of rites,
propitiatory sacrifices (sometimes of the most horrible nature) and legalistic observances. Inevitably so; for if God is an unapproachable potentate out there, giving mysterious orders, this kind of religion is entirely appropriate to the cosmic situation. The best that can be said for ritualistic legalism is that it improves conduct. It does little, however, to alter character and nothing of itself to modify consciousness.

Things are a great deal better when the transcendent, omnipotent personal God is regarded as also a loving Father. The sincere worship of such a God changes character as well as conduct, and does something to modify consciousness. But the complete transformation of consciousness, which is ‘enlightenment,’ ‘deliverance,’ ‘salvation,’ comes only when God is thought of as the Perennial Philosophy affirms Him to be—immanent as well as transcendent, supra-personal as well as personal—and when religious practices are adapted to this conception.
When God is regarded as exclusively immanent, legalism and external practices are abandoned and there is a concentration on the Inner Light. The dangers now are quietism and antinomianism, a partial modification of consciousness that is useless or even harmful, because it is not accompanied by the transformation of character which is the necessary prerequisite of a total, complete and spiritually fruitful transformation of consciousness.

Finally it is possible to think of God as an exclusively supra-personal being. For many persons this conception is too ‘philosophical’ to provide an adequate motive for doing anything practical about their beliefs. Hence, for them, it is of no value.

It would be a mistake, of course, to suppose that people who worship one aspect of God to the exclusion of all the rest must inevitably run into the different kinds of trouble described above. If they are not too stubborn in their
ready-made beliefs, if they submit with docility to what happens to them in the process of worshipping, the God who is both immanent and transcendent, personal and more than personal, may reveal Himself to them in his fullness. Nevertheless, the fact remains that it is easier for us to reach our goal if we are not handicapped by a set of erroneous or inadequate beliefs about the right way to get there and the nature of what we are looking for.

Who is God? I can think of no better answer than. He who is. Nothing is more appropriate to the eternity which God is. If you call God good, or great, or blessed, or wise, or anything else of this sort, it is included in these words, namely, He is.

*St. Bernard*

The purpose of all words is to illustrate the meaning of an object. When they are heard, they should enable the hearer to understand this meaning, and this according to the four categories of substance, of activity, of quality and
of relationship. For example, *cow* and *horse* belong to the category of substance. *He cooks* or *he prays* belongs to the category of activity. *White* and *black* belong to the category of quality. *Having money* or *possessing cows* belongs to the category of relationship. Now there is no class of substance to which the Brahman belongs, no common genus. It cannot therefore be denoted by words which, like ‘being’ in the ordinary sense, signify a category of things. Nor can it be denoted by quality, for it is without qualities; nor yet by activity, because it is without activity—‘at rest, without parts or activity,’ according to the Scriptures. Neither can it be denoted by relationship, for it is ‘without a second’ and is not the object of anything but its own self. Therefore it cannot be defined by word or idea; as the Scripture says, it is the One ‘before whom words recoil.’

*Shankara*

It was from the Nameless that Heaven and Earth sprang; The named is but the mother that rears the ten thousand creatures, each after its kind. Truly, ‘Only he that rids himself forever of desire can see the Secret Essences.’
He that has never rid himself of desire can see only the Outcomes.

*Lao Tzu*

One of the greatest favours bestowed on the soul transiently in this life is to enable it to see so distinctly and to feel so profoundly that it cannot comprehend God at all. These souls are herein somewhat like the saints in heaven, where they who know Him most perfectly perceive most clearly that He is infinitely incomprehensible; for those who have the less clear vision do not perceive so clearly as do these others how greatly He transcends their vision.

*St. John of the Cross*

When I came out of the Godhead into multiplicity, then all things proclaimed, ‘There is a God’ (the personal Creator). Now this cannot make me blessed, for hereby I realize myself as creature. But in the breaking through I am more than all creatures; I am neither God nor creature; I am that which I was and shall remain, now and for ever more. There I receive a thrust which carries me above all angels. By this thrust I become so rich that God is not sufficient for me, in so
far as He is only God in his divine works. For in thus breaking through, I perceive what God and I are in common. There I am what I was. There I neither increase nor decrease. For there I am the immovable which moves all things. Here man has won again what he is eternally and ever shall be. Here God is received into the soul.

Eckhart

The Godhead gave all things up to God. The Godhead is poor, naked and empty as though it were not; it has not, wills not, wants not, works not, gets not. It is God who has the treasure and the bride in him, the Godhead is as void as though it were not.

Eckhart

We can understand something of what lies beyond our experience by considering analogous cases lying within our experience. Thus, the relations subsisting between the world and God and between God and the Godhead seem to be analogous, in some measure at least, to those that hold between the body
(with its environment) and the psyche, and between the psyche and the spirit. In the light of what we know about the second—and what we know is not, unfortunately, very much—we may be able to form some not too hopelessly inadequate notions about the first.

Mind affects its body in four ways—subconsciously, through that unbelievably subtle physiological intelligence, which Driesch hypostatized under the name of the entelechy; consciously, by deliberate acts of will; subconsciously again, by the reaction upon the physical organism of emotional states having nothing to do with the organs or processes reacted upon; and, either consciously or subconsciously, in certain ‘supernormal’ manifestations. Outside the body matter can be influenced by the mind in two ways—first, by means of the body, and second, by a ‘supernormal’ process, recently studied under laboratory conditions and described as ‘the PK effect.’ Similarly, the mind can establish relations
with other minds either indirectly, by willing its body to undertake symbolic activities, such as speech or writing; or ‘supernormally,’ by the direct approach of mind-reading, telepathy, extra-sensory perception.

Let us now consider these relationships a little more closely. In some fields the physiological intelligence works on its own initiative, as when it directs the never-ceasing processes of breathing, say, or assimilation. In others it acts at the behest of the conscious mind, as when we will to accomplish some action, but do not and cannot will the muscular, glandular, nervous and vascular means to the desired end. The apparently simple act of mimicry well illustrates the extraordinary nature of the feats performed by the physiological intelligence. When a parrot (making use, let us remember, of the beak, tongue and throat of a bird) imitates the sounds produced by the lips, teeth, palate and vocal cords of a man articulating words, what precisely happens? Responding
in some as yet entirely uncomprehended way to the conscious mind’s desire to imitate some remembered or immediately perceived event, the physiological intelligence sets in motion large numbers of muscles, co-ordinating their efforts with such exquisite skill that the result is a more or less perfect copy of the original. Working on its own level, the conscious mind not merely of a parrot, but of the most highly gifted of human beings, would find itself completely baffled by a problem of comparable complexity.

As an example of the third way in which our minds affect matter, we may cite the all-too-familiar phenomenon of ‘nervous indigestion.’ In certain persons symptoms of dyspepsia make their appearance when the conscious mind is troubled by such negative emotions as fear, envy, anger or hatred. These emotions are directed towards events or persons in the outer environment; but in some way or other they adversely affect the physiological
intelligence and this derangement results, among other things, in ‘nervous indigestion.’ From tuberculosis and gastric ulcer to heart disease and even dental caries, numerous physical ailments have been found to be closely correlated with certain undesirable states of the conscious mind. Conversely, every physician knows that a calm and cheerful patient is much more likely to recover than one who is agitated and depressed.

Finally we come to such occurrences as faith healing and levitation—occurrences ‘supernormally’ strange, but nevertheless attested by masses of evidence which it is hard to discount completely. Precisely how faith cures diseases (whether at Lourdes or in the hypnotist’s consulting room), or how St. Joseph of Cupertino was able to ignore the laws of gravitation, we do not know. (But let us remember that we are no less ignorant of the way in which minds and bodies are related in the most ordinary of everyday activities.) In
the same way we are unable to form any idea of the *modus operandi* of what Professor Rhine has called the PK effect. Nevertheless the fact that the fall of dice can be influenced by the mental states of certain individuals seems now to have been established beyond the possibility of doubt. And if the PK effect can be demonstrated in the laboratory and measured by statistical methods, then, obviously, the intrinsic credibility of the scattered anecdotal evidence for the direct influence of mind upon matter, not merely within the body, but outside in the external world, is thereby notably increased. The same is true of extrasensory perception. Apparent examples of it are constantly turning up in ordinary life. But science is almost impotent to cope with the particular case, the isolated instance. Promoting their methodological ineptitude to the rank of a criterion of truth, dogmatic scientists have often branded everything beyond the pale of their limited competence as unreal and even
impossible. But when tests for ESP can be repeated under standardized conditions, the subject comes under the jurisdiction of the law of probabilities and achieves (in the teeth of what passionate opposition!) a measure of scientific respectability.

Such, very baldly and briefly, are the most important things we know about mind in regard to its capacity to influence matter. From this modest knowledge about ourselves, what are we entitled to conclude in regard to the divine object of our nearly total ignorance?

First, as to creation: if a human mind can directly influence matter not merely within, but even outside its body, then a divine mind, immanent in the universe or transcendent to it, may be presumed to be capable of imposing forms upon a pre-existing chaos of formless matter, or even, perhaps, of thinking substance as well as forms into existence.

Once created or divinely informed, the universe has to be sustained. The necessity for
a continuous re-creation of the world becomes manifest, according to Descartes, ‘when we consider the nature of time, or the duration of things; for this is of such a kind that its parts are not mutually dependent and never co-existent; and, accordingly, from the fact that we are now it does not necessarily follow that we shall be a moment afterwards, unless some cause, viz. that which first produced us, shall, as it were, continually reproduce us, that is, conserve us.’ Here we seem to have something analogous, on the cosmic level, to that physiological intelligence which, in men and the lower animals, unsleepingly performs the task of seeing that bodies behave as they should. Indeed, the physiological intelligence may plausibly be regarded as, a special aspect of the general re-creating Logos. In Chinese phraseology it is the Tao as it manifests itself on the level of living bodies.

The bodies of human beings are affected by the good or bad states of their minds.
Analogously, the existence at the heart of things of a divine serenity and goodwill may be regarded as one of the reasons why the world's sickness, though chronic, has not proved fatal. And if, in the psychic universe, there should be other and more than human consciousnesses obsessed by thoughts of evil and egotism and rebellion, this would account, perhaps, for some of the quite extravagant and improbable wickedness of human behaviour.

The acts willed by our minds are accomplished either through the instrumentality of the physiological intelligence and the body, or, very exceptionally, and to a limited extent, by direct supernormal means of the PK variety. Analogously the physical situations willed by a divine Providence may be arranged by the perpetually creating Mind that sustains the universe—in which case Providence will appear to do its work by wholly natural means; or else, very exceptionally, the divine Mind may act directly on the universe from the
outside, as it were—in which case the workings of Providence and the gifts of grace will appear to be miraculous. Similarly, the divine Mind may choose to communicate with finite minds either by manipulating the world of men and things in ways which the particular mind to be reached at that moment will find meaningful; or else there may be direct communication by something resembling thought transference.

In Eckhart’s phrase, God, the creator and perpetual re-creator of the world, ‘becomes and disbecomes.’ In other words He is, to some extent at least, in time. A temporal God might have the nature of the traditional Hebrew God of the Old Testament; or He might be a limited deity of the kind described by certain philosophical theologians of the present century; or alternatively He might be an emergent God, starting unspiritually at Alpha and becoming gradually more divine as the aeons rolled on towards some hypothetical Omega. (Why the movement should be
towards more and better rather than less and worse, upwards rather than downwards or in undulations, onwards rather than round and round, one really doesn’t know. There seems to be no reason why a God who is exclusively temporal—a God who merely becomes and is ungrounded in eternity—should not be as completely at the mercy of time as is the individual mind apart from the spirit. A God who becomes is a God who also disbecomes, and it is the disbecoming which may ultimately prevail, so that the last state of emergent deity may be worse than the first.)

The ground in which the multifarious and time-bound psyche is rooted is a simple, timeless awareness. By making ourselves pure in heart and poor in spirit we can discover and be identified with this awareness. In the spirit we not only have, but are, the unitive knowledge of the divine Ground.

Analogously, God in time is grounded in the eternal now of the modeless Godhead. It
is in the Godhead that things, lives and minds have their being; it is through God that they have their becoming—a becoming whose goal and purpose is to return to the eternity of the Ground.

Meanwhile, I beseech you by the eternal and imperishable truth, and by my soul, consider; grasp the unheard-of. God and Godhead are as distinct as heaven and earth. Heaven stands a thousand miles above the earth, and even so the Godhead is above God. God becomes and disbecomes. Whoever understands this preaching, I wish him well. But even if nobody had been here, I must still have preached this to the poor-box.

_Eckhart_

Like St. Augustine, Eckhart was to some extent the victim of his own literary talents. _Le style c’est l’homme_. No doubt. But the converse is also partly true. _L’homme c’est le style_. Because we have a gift for writing in a certain way, we find ourselves, in some sort, becoming
our way of writing. We mould ourselves in the likeness of our particular brand of eloquence. Eckhart was one of the inventors of German prose, and he was tempted by his new-found mastery of forceful expression to commit himself to extreme positions—to be doctrinally the image of his powerful and over-emphatic sentences. A statement like the foregoing would lead one to believe that he despised what the Vedantists call the ‘lower knowledge’ of Brahman, not as the Absolute Ground of all things, but as the personal God. In reality he, like the Vedantists, accepts the lower knowledge as genuine knowledge and regards devotion to the personal God as the best preparation for the unitive knowledge of the Godhead. Another point to remember is that the attributeless Godhead of Vedanta, of Mahayana Buddhism, of Christian and Sufi mysticism is the Ground of all the qualities possessed by the personal God and the Incarnation. ‘God is not good, I am good,’ says
Eckhart in his violent and excessive way. What he really meant was, ‘I am just humanly good; God is supereminently good; the Godhead is, and his “isness” (istigkeit, in Eckhart’s German) contains goodness, love, wisdom and all the rest in their essence and principle.’ In consequence, the Godhead is never, for the exponent of the Perennial Philosophy, the mere Absolute of academic metaphysics, but something more purely perfect, more reverently to be adored than even the personal God or his human incarnation—a Being towards whom it is possible to feel the most intense devotion and in relation to whom it is necessary (if one is to come to that unitive knowledge which is man’s final end) to practise a discipline more arduous and unremitting than any imposed by ecclesiastical authority.

There is a distinction and differentiation, according to our reason, between God and the Godhead, between action and rest. The fruitful nature of the Persons ever worketh in a
living differentiation. But the simple Being of God, according to the nature thereof, is an eternal Rest of God and of all created things.

_Ruysbroeck_

(In the Reality unitively known by the mystic), we can speak no more of Father, Son and Holy Spirit, nor of any creature, but only one Being, which is the very substance of the Divine Persons. There were we all one before our creation, for this is our super-essence. There the Godhead is in simple essence without activity.

_Ruysbroeck_

The holy light of faith is so pure that, compared with it, particular lights are but impurities; and even ideas of the saints, of the Blessed Virgin, and the sight of Jesus Christ in his humanity are impediments in the way of the sight of God in His purity.

_J. J. Olier_

Coming as it does from a devout Catholic of the Counter-Reformation, this statement may seem
somewhat startling. But we must remember that Olier (who was a man of saintly life and one of the most influential religious teachers of the seventeenth century) is speaking here about a state of consciousness, to which few people ever come. To those on the ordinary levels of being he recommends other modes of knowledge. One of his penitents, for example, was advised to read, as a corrective to St. John of the Cross and other exponents of pure mystical theology, St. Gertrude’s revelations of the incarnate and even physiological aspects of the deity. In Olier’s opinion, as in that of most directors of souls, whether Catholic or Indian, it was mere folly to recommend the worship of God-without-form to persons who are in a condition to understand only the personal and the incarnate aspects of the divine Ground. This is a perfectly sensible attitude, and we are justified in adopting a policy in accordance with it—provided always that we clearly remember that its adoption may be attended
by certain spiritual dangers and disadvantages. The nature of these dangers and disadvantages will be illustrated and discussed in another section. For the present it will suffice to quote the warning words of Philo: ‘He who thinks that God has any quality and is not the One, injures not God, but himself.’

Thou must love God as not-God, not-Spirit, not-person, not-image, but as He is, a sheer, pure absolute One, sundered from all two-ness, and in whom we must eternally sink from nothingness to nothingness.

_Eckhart_

What Eckhart describes as the pure One, the absolute not-God in whom we must sink from nothingness to nothingness is called in Mahayana Buddhism the Clear Light of the Void. What follows is part of a formula addressed by the Tibetan priest to a person in the act of death.
O nobly born, the time has now come for thee to seek the Path. Thy breathing is about to cease. In the past thy teacher hath set thee face to face with the Clear Light; and now thou art about to experience it in its Reality in the *Bardo* state (the ‘intermediate state’ immediately following death, in which the soul is judged—or rather judges itself by choosing, in accord with the character formed during its life on earth, what sort of an after-life it shall have). In this *Bardo* state all things are like the cloudless sky, and the naked, immaculate Intellect is like unto a translucent void without circumference or centre. At this moment know thou thyself and abide in that state. I, too, at this time, am setting thee face to face.

*The Tibetan Book of the Dead*

Going back further into the past, we find in one of the earliest Upanishads the classical description of the Absolute One as a Super-Essential No-Thing.

The significance of Brahman is expressed by *neti neti* (not so, not so); for beyond this, that you say it is not so, there is nothing further. Its name, however, is ‘the Reality of reality.'
That is to say, the senses are real, and the Brahman is their Reality.

*Brihad Aranyaka Upanishad*

In other words, there is a hierarchy of the real. The manifold world of our everyday experience is real with a relative reality that is, on its own level, unquestionable; but this relative reality has its being within and because of the absolute Reality, which, on account of the incommensurable otherness of its eternal nature, we can never hope to describe, even though it is possible for us directly to apprehend it.

The extract which follows next is of great historical significance, since it was mainly through the ‘Mystical Theology’ and the ‘Divine Names’ of the fifth-century author who wrote under the name of Dionysius the Areopagite that mediaeval Christendom established contact with Neoplatonism and thus, at several removes, with the metaphysical thought
and discipline of India. In the ninth century Scotus Erigena translated the two books into Latin, and from that time forth their influence upon the philosophical speculations and the religious life of the West was wide, deep and beneficent. It was to the authority of the Areopagite that the Christian exponents of the Perennial Philosophy appealed, whenever they were menaced (and they were always being menaced) by those whose primary interest was in ritual, legalism and ecclesiastical organization. And because Dionysius was mistakenly identified with St. Paul’s first Athenian convert, his authority was regarded as all but apostolic; therefore, according to the rules of the Catholic game, the appeal to it could not lightly be dismissed, even by those to whom the books meant less than nothing. In spite of their maddening eccentricity, the men and women who followed the Dionysian path had to be tolerated. And once left free to produce the fruits of the spirit, a number of
them arrived at such a conspicuous degree of sanctity that it became impossible even for the heads of the Spanish Inquisition to condemn the tree from which such fruits had sprung.

The simple, absolute and immutable mysteries of divine Truth are hidden in the super-luminous darkness of that silence which revealeth in secret. For this darkness, though of deepest obscurity, is yet radiantly clear; and, though beyond touch and sight, it more than fills our unseeing minds with splendours of transcendent beauty…. We long exceedingly to dwell in this translucent darkness and, through not seeing and not knowing, to see Him who is beyond both vision and knowledge—by the very fact of neither seeing Him nor knowing Him. For this is truly to see and to know and, through the abandonment of all things, to praise Him who is beyond and above all things. For this is not unlike the art of those who carve a life-like image from stone: removing from around it all that impedes clear vision of the latent form, revealing its hidden beauty solely by taking away. For it is, as I believe, more fitting to praise Him by taking away than by ascription; for we ascribe attributes to Him, when we start
from universals and come down through the intermediate
to the particulars. But here we take away all things from Him
going up from particulars to universals, that we may know
openly the unknowable, which is hidden in and under all
things that may be known. And we behold that darkness
beyond being, concealed under all natural light.

*Dionysius the Areopagite*

The world as it appears to common sense consists of an indefinite number of successive
and presumably causally connected events, involving an indefinite number of separate,
individual things, lives and thoughts, the whole constituting a presumably orderly cosmos. It is
in order to describe, discuss and manage this common-sense universe that human languages
have been developed.

Whenever, for any reason, we wish to think of the world, not as it appears to common sense,
but as a continuum, we find that our traditional syntax and vocabulary are quite inadequate.
Mathematicians have therefore been compelled
to invent radically new symbol-systems for this express purpose. But the divine Ground of all existence is not merely a continuum, it is also out of time, and different, not merely in degree, but in kind from the worlds to which traditional language and the languages of mathematics are adequate. Hence, in all expositions of the Perennial Philosophy, the frequency of paradox, of verbal extravagance, sometimes even of seeming blasphemy. Nobody has yet invented a Spiritual Calculus, in terms of which we may talk coherently about the divine Ground and of the world conceived as its manifestation. For the present, therefore, we must be patient with the linguistic eccentricities of those who are compelled to describe one order of experience in terms of a symbol-system, whose relevance is to the facts of another and quite different order.

So far, then, as a fully adequate expression of the Perennial Philosophy is concerned, there exists a problem in semantics that is
finally insoluble. The fact is one which must be steadily borne in mind by all who read its formulations. Only in this way shall we be able to understand even remotely what is being talked about. Consider, for example, those negative definitions of the transcendent and immanent Ground of being. In statements such as Eckhart's, God is equated with nothing. And in a certain sense the equation is exact; for God is certainly no thing. In the phrase used by Scotus Erigena God is not a what; He is a That. In other words, the Ground can be denoted as being there, but not defined as having qualities. This means that discursive knowledge about the Ground is not merely, like all inferential knowledge, a thing at one remove, or even at several removes, from the reality of immediate acquaintance; it is and, because of the very nature of our language and our standard patterns of thought, it must be, paradoxical knowledge. Direct knowledge of the Ground cannot be had except by union, and union can
be achieved only by the annihilation of the self-regarding ego, which is the barrier separating the ‘thou’ from the ‘That.’
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