

SALVATION OR SELF-TRANSCENDENCE?

A Rooted Confusion. Personal religion is usually equated with popular or parochial religion, and as a result, metaphysical religion is taken to be impersonal or anti-personal, even though that does not follow logically. This mistake is reinforced by the fact that spirituality always involves self-transcendence or, to be precise, ego-transcendence, which is a part of nearly all religions. Confusions over terminology add to the misunderstandings, as where the ego is referred to as the "self" in popular religion, while in professedly esoteric religion the whole individual being is referred to as the "ego."

Neither side recognises the fact that the full person consists of both self and ego. The self is the essential being, equivalent to the soul, while the ego is the part of the self by which one relates to the external world and engages with it, whether for good or ill. The ego is thus the form in which the self or soul is most manifest. For some kinds of esoteric religion, the higher levels of spirituality are very often equated with a development of personality into a non-personal reality. This is because personality and individuality can easily be taken to be simply modes of limitation, possibly because of experience of individual material objects and animals, whose limitations are obvious, besides that of overly-limited persons. At the same time, personality can be seen to be the source of subjective intrusions and distortions in thought where it ought to be strictly objective. That is always possible, but there is nothing necessary about it, and yet this possibility is taken as grounds for a belief

in the inferiority of personality as such. More will be said about the supposedly inherent limitations of the individual self later on. Psychologically speaking, such an attitude to oneself and others is nearly always moved by something sadistic, a trait which does not go well with claims to be on a divine level of experience. To be free from subjective limitations is certainly a merit, but for what kind of being could this be a merit, if not a personality? Typically, idealists never try to say.

The impersonal, then, is not a true alternative to personality, if only because it is a form of behaviour in which persons can and do readily engage. So clearly is this the case, that "self"-transcendence requires nothing more than the power of *selective attention*. For example, one can prove any result in arithmetic or geometry on this basis without being in any way less than a person. To be capable of only an impersonal objectivity would therefore be as much a personal limitation as an inability to be objective at all.

The Question of Vocation. The terms "self-transcendence" and "realization" instead of "salvation" are commonly used in this context, but without much depth of understanding, mainly because there is no agreed terminology for what is involved, and in what follows I shall try to reach the universal idea which underlies them. Life and growth are inseparable, and the state into which the self "grows" is to all appearances determined by our guiding principles, regardless of how aware of them we are.

The controversial part of this comes with

the question as to whether spiritual growth leads to a definitive state, like a process of addition to a certain number, or whether it goes on without end. Any yes-no answer to this question must ignore an essential limitation in our minds, corresponding to the way in which we find it equally hard to think of space or time going on for ever, or of them absolutely ending. In practical terms this means that in spiritual matters the difference between the Journey and the Destination cannot be as sharp and clear as it is for physical travel. For the same reason, the idea of "attainment" in the spiritual realm cannot be understood in the same way as in a natural context.

Traditionally, there were a number of recognized "ways" of salvation, which were derived from the different types of human being which exist universally. This accommodation to the complexity of human nature does not mean that spirituality can be reduced to one more kind of human activity, because the spiritual development of the whole person, whether consciously pursued or not, is in reality effected by God, much more than by ourselves, even though we are only directly aware of the part we ourselves are playing in it. We could not literally save ourselves without already having the Divine qualities that come with salvation. In reality, therefore, what we do is our response to grace which we have already received. We have plenty of freedom in regard to the kind of response we think it right to make, and in some cases it can, through ignorance, take the form of an approach to spirituality without regard to the conditions it requires. Spiritualization and sanctification are by no means the same thing, because the possibilities of spirit

can include the demonic just as well as the angelic, and hate as well as love. The whole person is involved, and the body shares in the advance into the life of the spirit which is being made, whether it is the Holy Spirit or not.

The spiritual path chosen will serve as the container and channel for the grace which comes through the practice of faith which is of supernatural origin. The traditions reveal the foundation, and man must build on it with the materials that he is capable of using in accordance with his vocation. The word "vocation" is still in use today, but usually only in connection with membership of a religious order, while the universal meaning of the word is ignored.

In ancient times and in the middle Ages, there were always five ways of salvation, those of the Devotee, the Ascetic, the Philosopher, the Warrior, and the Magician, whose inspiration appears in the arts and crafts. The choice has to be one of main emphasis, and not be exclusive; for example, the Philosopher needs the qualities of the Devotee, the Ascetic and the Warrior, while the Warrior will need some the virtues of the Ascetic and the Devotee. The Magician needs some virtues of the others to achieve his creative potential.

What follows here will be relevant mainly to those who are involved in the way of the Philosopher, however. In the context of this kind of vocation, the philosophical content of the individual life needs to be at least coherent with the doctrines of one's religion, and not

inconsistent with them, according as "They that are not against me are for me." For the purpose of bringing the will of God into human activities, the five traditional vocations in the realm of religion were fully recognised in the Middle Ages, and what has been said in the above can be taken as a summary of the way such things were understood in those times. Faith was objective then, so that the permanent realities of the world were accepted as a form of proto-revelation which showed the mind of God in its reflections in nature, in balance with the revelation in the Scriptures. That contrasts with the faith of today which has become mostly subjective, and so it appears out of touch with reality because its acceptance of the levelling tendency of modernity obscures its own point of view, and also therefore the position it is supposed to represent. All attempts to show involvement and commitment in a modern context are thus confined to transient things in the world, and not with the depths of what we really are.

The vocation of wisdom or intellect results from its particular nature, whereas a purely religious one, like that of the Devotee, is not so specific because it forms part of other vocations. The question as to whether one's work is "of God" or "from God" cannot therefore be identified in every case with things which are explicitly drawn from one's religion. Its logical implications in relation to religion are a more substantive issue, because any heresy can be based on ideas explicitly drawn from religion. For example, the uses made of Christian terms and doctrines by Luther and Calvin should remove all doubts on that score.

The way of the Devotee is the common centre of all

vocations, because they all require an active faith in God, and it should be noted that what has been said about particular vocations applies to some extent to nearly all other activities as well. The practice of one's faith brings something of the will of God into nearly everything one does, whether this is consciously intended or not.

Christian and Platonic. The exact form taken by the vocation cannot be simply equated with the Christian thought of the present time, because modern thought is conditioned by a reaction against religion, spirituality and tradition which has been increasing for three or four centuries. Under these conditions, a combination of Christian with Platonic thought may cause misunderstandings, while the trend of modern theology has been consistently against it. Besides, in some respects they appear to be opposed, and the implicit assumption that the Christian point of view needs to be completed by a different kind of thought can appear eclectic.

If one thinks in dichotomies, it could be said that Christianity is about the descent of God to Man, while Platonism is about the ascent of man to God, for God cannot be absolutely remote from man, who is made in the Divine image. For Catholics, this aspect of ascent to God remains an issue, however, but for Protestants, the whole issue is unilaterally focused on the Divine descent, leaving no room for the metaphysical element in salvation.

There is, moreover, an ambivalence in Platonic thought in this regard, because it can apply equally to the ascent of a disincarnate self which ceases to be personal, as well as to the ascent of the complete person. Historically, for many

Platonists, their idea of immortality may not have differed much from that of pagan mystery cults, because the personality of the individual does not appear to have any necessary place in them. The doctrine of the pagan mystery cults, according to Anselm Stolz was non-personal:

“Reduced to its logical conclusion, this teaching (of pagan spirituality) leads to the renunciation of individual personality. He who is deified consequently breaks away completely from his original existence.” (*The Doctrine of Spiritual Perfection*, Ch.V, p.76).

It will be noticed that this idea of self-transcendence and immortality has again become familiar in the West in recent times, in the form of Advaita Vedanta doctrine. It is not surprising that nearly all ideas of immortality that rest on a naturalistic basis should profess to achieve their aim by a process of reduction. Where the situation is not altered by any action by God, the only option left is to focus on some part of the self, and cut away everything else. This recalls Hegel’s remark that the pagan idea of immortality was to bring the initiate so close to death that when he finally died, he would not notice any difference.

At best, what would remain would be a universal function of cognition, out of contact with any object to which it could relate. In all such thought, there is never any idea that anything natural in mankind could possibly be redeemed and delivered from its mortality. This is what Stolz contrasts with the Christian conception:

“The essential difference between Christianity and the

Hellenistic theory characterizes also the Christian teaching on the duality of the person. Definitely in St.Paul's mind there is no complete deification demanding a surrender of individual personality. Nevertheless, association with Christ gives the believer a new existence surpassing that of nature. He remains a creature and becomes at the same time a son of God." (ibid.,p.79)

Although the Christian is taken up into God, he continues to live in the world, as the spiritual and the natural are reconciled by the redemption of the natural. This duality is an essential factor here. This, it can be shown, does not impair the rigour of what can be deduced about the way of spiritual ascent. The Platonic theory of it does not depend at all on any "real merging of man in the divine being." (ibid.p.84) The Christian doctrine on the other hand is consistent with an absolute increase in the being of the person, not the elevation of a part at the price of everything else.

In the idea of the ascent of a disincarnate self to a disincarnate God, there is an obvious incompleteness on both sides of the relation, whereas in Christian terms, salvation is a matter of union between human and Divine persons who are both complete beings on all levels of reality, which is what should be expected of the fullest truth. This would also be true to the Platonic idea of man as Microcosm, so the result of this combination is a better, more self-consistent Platonism, than one in which personality is rejected.

The role of theory, or a method of understanding reality as a whole, has an essential place in Platonism, whereas in

Christianity, it has too often been equated with mere curiosity, and as a distraction from the needs of the holy life. Here, the aim is to involve one more deeply in the moral demands of salvation, but that is to risk ignoring the fact that morality is really more a means than an end, and to grant too much to unspiritual pragmatism.

For Platonism, the ability to understand the world as a whole was always a mark of our spirituality, and it was essential for understanding the mind of God who created the world. The fact that the world is intelligible for us is, besides, a proof of the existence of God, supporting the idea that it is God's purpose that we should understand the world-order, and along with it, our dependence on God. Consequently, it would follow that to understand the objective nature of reality is part of our share in the Divine nature, without which the life of faith cannot be complete. Without this element, religion and theology could become focused only on relations between individual concretes, and reduce religion to morality, excluding the objective universals which are the life-blood of religion.

Knowledge of such things merges with wisdom, and that is more truly the goal of the good life as much as morality. Such, I believe, has always been the background to the inclusion of Platonic intellectuality in religion. The higher wisdom is a vital part of the happiness for which mankind was made, and the achievement of that means God's happiness also.

To further my argument that most Platonic ideas of spirituality are convertible into Christian ones, without any deformation of them, I would instance a Christian denial of this idea, where it is

affirmed that "the immanence of God in the world means death to the self and the world in which he dwells." This is certainly not a logical consequence, but it is said to lead at once to St. Paul's "I die daily," and "not I, but Christ," to which the author adds "The self dies in order to rise with Christ, whereas in Greek philosophy it becomes conscious of its own divinity." (Michael B. Foster, *Mystery and Philosophy*, p.91)

This is to push the opposition between Christian and Platonic thought to the limit. However, the self does not literally die, since it is still here, so there is at least the possibility that "having risen with Christ" could mean the same thing as the soul's consciousness of its own "divinity" occurring in a Christian context. Can this be proved not to be so? If "divinity" is going too far, "essential spirituality" would make the point more clearly.

If this is the case, it could be accounted for as follows: the self which must die is one in which the higher faculties (reason, intellect, memory, will) are wholly subservient to pride, egotism, and the appetites. Such would be the self which "dies" when intellect and reason begin to have a life of their own and can ignore most of the urgings of the ego. Given this hierarchical idea of the self, the liberation of the intellect from the lower faculties would make the "death" of the self the same thing as its consciousness of its own divinity or spirituality. The alleged opposition would then amount to nothing more than a matter of terminology.

Subtlety of the True Esoteric. Whenever there is a question of adopting monistic or non-dualist ideas of esoteric self-transcendence, one should bear in mind the fact that such ideas do not really transcend the perspective of ordinary common sense, despite their claims to a truth which is beyond what is offered to the majority. That may sound a strange thing to say about a form of spirituality which makes a point of being on a high level of intellect. Nevertheless, it can be seen that ordinary common sense is by no means set aside here, where the model for one's idea of the relation of man to God can be seen to be nothing more spiritual than the relation of the physical individual to the universe, as given by sense-perception. This always takes the form of the relation of a tiny object to a huge container, which is quite true on the physical level, but in no way adequate for relations between spiritual beings. This basic experience of common sense realism is never really transcended in monistic or non-dualistic spiritualities.

The real esoteric begins with the realization that the physical relation of tiny self to vast universe has its exact inverse on the inward and intellectual level, where the universe is *something in the self*, with neither able to negate the other. Most modern neo-esotericists (and scientists as well), evidently know nothing about this or, if they do, the meaning of it fails to register. This difference between the outward and inward forms of the self is jarring to common sense, of course, in much the same way as is the primary reality of the Platonic Forms in regard to sense objects, but this is precisely the kind of truth which

exponents of the esoteric should understand better than anyone else. As things are, the ideas one is commonly offered as esoteric are not much more than an aggrandized exoteric.

Ideas of salvation involve this life as much as the next, since they include a destiny which brings with it a profound spiritual change in the person in the course of life. Sometimes it is referred to as "self-transcendence", sometimes as "self-realization" or "spiritual realization." Typically, however, one can hardly ever get any idea as to the meaning of terms involving "realization" from the writings of those who most use them; it is as though their meaning was believed to be self-evident, while in practice people give them meanings of their own. Consequently, they are often used to refer to fulfilments of a purely natural kind, even allowing for the fact that natural and spiritual fulfilment do not have to be a choice.

The problem here is made worse by the fact that such teachings appear to use an idea of the self which offers little or no challenge to that of ordinary common sense. For this reason, there is a need to examine the ideas in question so as to discover what, exactly, is the principle

involved in this work of the spirit. To do so, I will try to illustrate it from a number of relevant sources.

The terms mentioned above seem to be intended to convey an idea of an attainment by the soul or person of a final state which may be the effective identification of the individual with either the Absolute or with his archetype in Heaven, but usually implying a final state which is no longer personal, and which is ultimately the same for all. Before proceeding, it is worth remembering that speculative thought in this realm can easily end by ignoring the Biblical teaching that the Kingdom of Heaven is for those who will receive it "as a little child," which is a disposition which no amount of reasoning can replace, and without which reasoning would be pointless. But given that it exists in the first place, some kinds of explanation can be helpful as a support for faith, in accounting for the varieties of destiny assigned to the soul.

For this purpose I shall explore the idea that the soul is capable of an endless process analogous to physical expansion, which continually alters its identity in the additive way of making it more comprehensive, and which can be sufficient to account for the ideas of self-transcendence or spiritual realization. The orthodox idea of Heaven is always liable to raise the question in some minds as to how, in that case, God can be, "all in all," if individual persons remain themselves and retain their selfhood?

A common answer to this question is to say that although the same self remains, there is a loss of any *sense* of self, so that the soul becomes so absorbed in the vision of God,

and in being as it were a reflector of God, to be aware of anything else. Some such belief was that of Christians such as C.S.Lewis, and non-dualists go further and say that there is not even an un-selfaware self left, but only God. Such answers to the above problem have the weakness that, if true, they really assert nothing, since the salvation in question would not be the salvation of anyone. There would be no net change, and nothing would be gained by either God or man.

I shall try to explain how the issue involved in this problem of the self rests on an ignorance as to what the self is, and that this ignorance affects the thinking of the religiously orthodox almost as much as that of non-dualists. What has already been said about the self (see: "The Primal Certainty") should be borne in mind here, in relation to terms relating to it: the terms "soul," "mind," and "self" should not be used interchangeably, because they denote three aspects of the conscious person. "Soul" refers to the full conscious being, with self-aware intelligence, imagination, feelings, sense and will. "Mind" refers to the person as an agent of intelligence first and foremost. "Self" denotes the person with first place given to the will, such that "self" denotes the centre for all action and choice, whether it is morally right or not.

In the light of the above, one should be aware of the possibility that denials of the very sense of self, taken literally, could unwittingly be a choice of a vegetative condition. This is because any kind of action by a conscious being is only possible by means of a reflection on one's present condition

before, during and after the action. Every action is essentially the conscious resolution of an experienced tension between two different states of the self. This obviously would have to mean that the soul in Heaven must still be involved in change, despite being in eternity, which is *prima facie* contradictory. Should denial of the self be enough to rule out action, however, there could be no point in prayers addressed either to God or to the saints.

The self-reflective power of the person has been discussed elsewhere, where it was shown to be in the very essence of the soul, which is why the self-aware self cannot be eliminated without absurdity if the self is believed to be immortal. The transcendence of the self, if real, must therefore be something much more subtle than the eradication of any sector of its consciousness, let alone the essential one.

An Ancient View of the Soul. In the present treatment, I use the word "soul" freely, and relate various things to it without trying to justify it. Simply taking it as the subject of the discussion has inevitably the effect of steering one's thinking towards conclusions of a Theistic kind. But then it appears that the only significant alternative to it is the terminology of non-dualists, for whom the person is merely "the ego" in association with the Absolute. That, of course, just as inevitably steers the discussion in another way, leading to another set of conclusions, this time of a Non-dualistic kind.

Nevertheless, I proceed with the idea of "soul," not

least because it is a universally-acknowledged principle of the personality which there is no reason for doubting in any context which concerns spiritual issues. It is also necessary as an order of being intermediate between material existence and that of pure spirit. Only if one were arguing either for materialism or some kind of monism would it therefore be necessary to exclude the word "soul." If it has the effect of setting a spiritual agenda it is at least one with a good claim to universality. This is unavoidable if one is discussing the self according to its metaphysical property.

Beginning with one of the earliest sources, we have the saying of Heraclitus that:

"The limits of the soul you would not find out by going about, though you travelled every road; so deep a *logos* does it have." (Fragment 45, Diels-Kranz).

This *logos* of the soul is characterized in a related text as follows: "To the soul belongs a *logos* that increases itself." (Fragment 115, D-K).

In this case, not only are the limits of the soul very hard to find, but that is made even harder by the power of self-enlargement it is said to have. According to E.Hussey, this implies that: "No investigation will produce a complete account of the soul, which must therefore be of unlimited complexity. The same conclusion is suggested by Fr.115, D-K; if the *logos* of the soul "increases itself," it presumably grows greater without limit." (*The Presocratics*, p.57)

No explanation of this self-enlargement is offered, and we

are left with the intriguing idea that at least one kind of self-transcendence is one of the soul's intrinsic functions, like its power of self-motion. If the idea of increase is taken literally however, it could only refer to an impossibility, because the soul is in no way an assembly of parts external to one another, so that it could not be extended by the addition of any more parts. Its self-increase, if real, can only mean a qualitative change, like an increase in the range of possibilities for which it is adequate, not just on the natural level, but primarily on the spiritual.

In the above, this form of growth is said to be intrinsic to it, coming from its logos, and in that case it would have to take place regardless of the quality and meaning of the possibilities which are realized. The simplest distinction among them would be between the possibilities of one's natural life and those of the metaphysical kind which underlie nature. The soul would therefore be driven by an omnivorous knowledge-seeking function which cannot choose its priorities unless its free will is developed, such as I have discussed in *Keys of Gnosis*, Ch.3. Thus the endless extent and complexity referred to by Heraclitus would increase endlessly as well, for one purpose or another.

A Platonic View of Development. One kind of qualitative growth or self-expansion of a spiritually positive kind is to be found in Plotinus, which has been observed by A.H.Armstrong, who describes it as follows:

" . . . we sometimes encounter a most important feature of the thought of Plotinus about man which is disconcerting to

tidy-minded expositors. . . . This is the extraordinary capacity which Plotinian man possesses for getting out of himself, travelling beyond his own horizons" (*Plotinian and Christian Studies*, XX, p.57-58), and: "This self who can 'snatch himself up into the higher world' has presumably become identical with his individual Form or Intellect." (*ibid.*, p.58) Thus we are introduced to the idea that the self is by nature a *self-transcending self*.

This follows from Plotinus' idea of personal identity, in which the individual is a microcosm of the material, psychical and spiritual levels of being. Consequently, his rational will can operate on the different levels which are also those of his own self. As an epitome of all the objective modes of being, individual identity can pour itself into any one of a wide range of levels of reality and value, or rather it must do so, as it does not appear that this action can be withheld. This action is one of necessary self-giving, regardless of what controls the kinds of choices it makes.

However, the interior act considered here is not only continuous, but can go by leaps from one outlet to another, and the entry into "the higher world" is said by Armstrong to be possible when the self is identified with its own Form. In this case, the element of growth would be achieved because the Forms or universals are far more comprehensive realities than the contents of the sense world, since they are the causes of the latter.

The idea of man as a microcosm is an essential assumption here, and Plotinus makes this explicit as follows:

"We must understand that, while our souls contain an Intellectual Cosmos, they also contain a subordination of various forms like that of the Cosmic Soul." (Enn.III,4,6).

Just as the Cosmic Soul also has powers which correspond to the structures of the natural world, so the powers of the soul too are "parallel to those of the Cosmic Soul: each must give out its own special act . . . "(ibid.)

There is thus a complete correspondence between the inner and the outer worlds, which could explain how the soul can exert a power out of all proportion to that of its place in the realm of appearances. The different levels of being are thus open to the soul because they are rooted in its constitution, and this is a subject explored by St. Augustine, whose ideas will be considered later. The Plotinian idea of man is one in which states of consciousness higher than the sense level are accessible for anyone who has a concern for them, but for some minds this development is obstructed by a "dark night of the soul," which has sometimes been experienced by those to whom God has given mystical experience. The Plotinian idea just mentioned may sound like an appeal to a belief in self-salvation, but this objection has already been considered in the above, in connection with vocations. Besides, the reception of grace and its assimilation to Divinity means an assimilation to the Divine independence, which could support the attempt at self-salvation rather than obstruct it.

There is therefore no reason to believe that the problem of a dependence on grace and a spiritual autonomy is

insuoerable, therefore, and where a conflict is seen to arise, the normal possibilities of soul-development can form an adequate answer. As indicated in the above, the soul is conceived as the mediator between nature and the universal Forms. From this two-fold direction of its powers alone, then, the soul has two possibilities of self-identification, one with manifest material nature or *natura naturata*, the other with the Formal causes of nature, or *natura naturans*.

Either of these interior conversions (*epistrophai*), or better, "states of conversion," can be strengthened and developed in the course of a lifetime by a way of self-conversion which is willed, and not simply part of our inborn nature, as with the soul's two basic fields of action. Besides this, it is possible to be born with one state of "conversion" or the other already in the ascendant, since there is no law that they must always be of equal force at the beginning of life. In such cases, one must therefore have the choice of either reinforcing or negating the dominant orientation during one's life.

In themselves, these two "conversions" are ethically neutral, being inborn, where they are simply ontological factors, even though one of them is adapted to sin, while the other is not. They are therefore two sources of potential, either to the spirit or to nature. In this case, someone with an inborn dominant "conversion" to the natural life, though not as yet controlling the will, could take to the religious life under a Rule. Eventually, this formal commitment to a denial of the world and of sin will

hit home when what is affirmed with the mind reaches the deeper levels of self-conversion.

This is not just a simple dichotomy of spirit-good and nature-bad, because what makes negation here is not nature as such, but a will to give natural life a totality which it was never created to have. The possibility of "anti-spirit" also arises where the good is chosen for the wrong reasons.

In the subconscious minds of some individuals, therefore, the denial of the world would be felt as though it were a denial of life itself, given the inborn state of "conversion" to the natural alone. There must then follow a time of struggle until a new identification with the true good begins to develop. The converse of this is the case of an inborn soul-conversion to the spirit, but here again, it is simply a question of potential which must be either realized or denied. Such a conclusion is not specifically Plotinian, but it does follow from the idea that every soul is born with a specific nature, even though in an undeveloped state.

Such is the speculative answer which can be found to apply, and even if it falls short of proof, the possibility it establishes is enough to exclude the idea of necessity from the alternative to it, the idea of the soul born as a blank tablet and subject to chance events. There are besides other reasons for spiritual crises which are more likely to be simply one's own fault, of course, where there is a lack of self-knowledge.

Realization and Expansion. The Plotinian idea that the individual is composed of all realities has consequences for relations between the inner being and the external world,

and involves philosophy and mysticism equally. The key to such relations exists first of all in oneself, and what is involved in this inner development is the realization of the self's possibilities. A good account of this expansive process is given by W.R.Inge (Dean Inge) as follows:

"He (C.E.M.Joad) is very suspicious of the mystical claim that at the summit of knowledge the knower and the known are united. But surely the mind expands *pari passu* with the things it perceives and knows. The 'Soul,' to use the language of the Platonists, is no stable register of events like a photographic plate: it is in a sense (not in the mentalists' sense), the creator of the world. 'Degrees of reality' mean mainly degrees in the apprehension of reality as a kingdom of values; and these values are not merely exhibited to the soul as something outside and alien to itself; they are, and increasingly become, *the life of the soul*, which, as it ascends to the spiritual world, finds the absolute values less and less external to itself. A complete correspondence of the subject and object of knowledge is eternal life." (*God and the Astronomers*, 1933, pp.47-48).

This follows from the premise that knowledge of the Forms and the ability to identify them in the objects of the outside world depends on the presence of all of them in the soul. That means that the Forms must first be instantiated in a psychic substance in a sense "before" their instantiation in the world of external matter. This is why the idea of the microcosm is essentially Platonic. The whole problem of matter in Platonism is not owing to materiality as such, but to its being an inferior kind of matter, one clearly inferior to that of the "spiritual body" of the Resurrection.

Positive development is not automatic, however, because the self-expansive power of the soul, if left to itself, will go anywhere. To give it a spiritually meaningful direction, experience must be subject to judgement and selection, so that experience is made to correspond to the archetypal values in proportion to one's awareness of them.

M.Nicoll and Living Time. The idea of a progressive augmentation of soul or self with the passage of time may appear to be in conflict with what I have said elsewhere, when I applied an argument of Plotinus to the question whether pains and pleasures can increase with the repetition of them. (*Keys of Gnosis* Ch.6). It also appears to be in conflict with nearly all orthodox religious ideals, which look to a steady *reduction* of the ego, even though they represent this reduction as the way to becoming more fully oneself in union with Christ.

In the first place, there is a distinction here, between the greatest instance of pleasure or pain and the total amount of instances of such experiences. One can readily admit an ever-increasing total of experiences of all kinds without that implying that this mode of increase can add anything to the greatest amount contained in any one instance. The extrinsic increase of experiences is quite separate from the possibility of any intrinsic increases in their content. Consequently it is still true to say that the greatest degree of any experience is that contained in just one instance.

This idea of inherent expansion in the self contrasts sharply with the common sense idea of reality which takes the self to be a mere object in the outside world. The idea that the self must be eliminated, regardless of its qualities, assumes that it must be irredeemable, and that it is in fact simply a product of the Fall. Such a conclusion belongs to an exoteric religious perspective, where the true complexities of the issue would only cause confusion. This is why it is rather strange that the same conclusion should be present in the esoteric thought of the Perennialists (who follow Guénon and Schuon), where “the ego” appears as wholly negative. In either case, the self is confused with the ego, and both are identified with sinful behaviour like selfishness, or indeed any kind of negative behaviour. In reality, the choices of being unselfish, and of condemning the ego, are just as much acts of the self as the worst sins are, given that the self is the only basis of choice and action.

The function of inherent self-growth has a considerable impact on individual identity. It is natural to think of one’s identity in terms of the way in which it exists at the present moment, but that is to ignore the fact that there have been countless other moments in one’s life which could also have been a basis of identity, and with as much right. The present moment is the one in which the previous ones culminate, though the same was true of them in their own times. I have elsewhere (*Self and Spirit*, Ch.9) quoted the Hermetica in support of the idea that all one’s states of

existence cannot be rightly understood unless they are all conceived as simultaneous.

If the present moment is accepted as a reality, the same must apply to all others, no matter how inaccessible they may appear to be at the present time. Conversely, if all one's previous psycho-physical states were not real, the reality of the present one could only be illusory. If this were the case, such unreality could be known only in relation to some other state of being which was known to be real; otherwise the supposed unreality would be just an empty hypothesis. The issue here is expressed by M.Nicoll in *Living Time* (p.102):

"Now if we are to grasp that we live at all points in our life, no longer can the distinction between yesterday, today, and tomorrow be made. But something must yield in us before we cease to make this distinction. We come here against some very strong point of denial."

The cause of this denial is the materialistic assumption that only what is experienced in sense perception can be real, and that mind as such has no right to establish realities on its own account. This is believed by those who never realise that the dominant value they place on sense-perception results precisely from an act of the mind, just as much as with any other idea of reality. In other words, sense-centred thinking depends on a false direction of the mind, in effect a form of stupidity.

From these considerations, it can be seen that there are grounds for a much extended conception of personal identity, consisting of the integral sum of all the psycho-physical

states in all the moments of the life, in which the Individual Form is instantiated. This identity goes far beyond the range of the senses, and it alters the meaning of the self of the present moment, making it in one way more and in another way less important. On the one hand, it becomes just a tiny fragment of the real person, who is extended in the fourth dimension, while on the other it is the *telos* or realized end of all the previous ones, at least provisionally.

This extended being is in no way static, for all its permanence, but grows continuously with the addition of ever more temporal states. The law is only that of growth in this way, and not of any one kind of growth, since that depends on the individual judgement or the lack of it. Nor only is there growth with the addition of new psycho-physical states in time, it can also grow by one's increasingly making choices which agree with the true nature of things, and of oneself. A qualitative change of this kind affects all the states of the person which came before it, because they are now made different in that they are thus made into so many stages of preparation, giving them a change of function which was not much in evidence before.

This increasingly identifies all the previous states with their most positive content, while downgrading the meaning of their negative content, which is made increasingly accidental and peripheral and ever less relevant to the real person. Such positive change is by no means automatic, since it requires a cooperation of free will with grace. Consequently, the opposite of this kind of change is equally possible, and these two possibilities of qualitative change are quite distinct from the other form of growth, which is much more similar to physical expansion. The latter is

automatic as long as life lasts, regardless of which tendency rises to dominance.

However, the life's transcendence of time in the fourth dimension can be purely natural, in which case it will in the end be involved with the fate of the material cosmos at the end of its cycle of manifestation. Though it cannot perish absolutely, it will not cease to be attached to a level of being which excludes all its most important possibilities.

Growth in the Inner dimension. The above conception of soul and self goes well beyond that of science or physical observation, because the latter perspective regards only the self of the present moment, and that as an object-entity among other object-entities, that is, simply an object in the outside world. The limited truth in that, if taken for the whole truth, becomes an illusion which blocks the perception of the greater truth that the outside world is also something in the mind or soul. The successive temporal states of the world as experienced are also successive psycho-physical states within the soul, which they are by no means enough to fill. Relative to the outside world, the capacity of the soul is infinite.

The external realities thus represented in and by the mind are obviously not the same as their objects, but they are not essentially different, either. If they were wholly different, they would be a different and unrelated class of objects, with no causal relation to the things we perceive, which would thus be made causeless. The objective world

would in that case systematically generate false information about itself, and the discovery of truth would be impossible. It would not be possible to explain how even that could be known. In reality, the external world, consisting of instantiations of Forms, is represented in the mind, and this takes the world a further stage away from the Forms. *Qua* representation, they must be as it were instantiations of instantiations, therefore. That entails a resemblance between the inner and external realities which is no less real on account of being incomplete.

The position and function of the soul in this regard is expressed by M.Nicoll:

"The world is also in man, so man can know from 'within' as well as from 'without'. . . The soul stands between the sensible world and the world of Ideas - between two orders of 'reality'; . . . she takes from the world of sensible objects all those impressions which remind her of a higher order of reality." (*Living Time*, pp.36-37) and:

"Everything is real, (in the material world), but relatively less real than what is above it (i.e. its archetypal Form). In so far as man is a little universe in himself this scale of relative reality exists in him up to a point, so that he is capable of becoming more real, of reaching fuller existence by ascending this scale in himself." (ibid. p.61)

This may be enough to put some flesh on the bare bones of the "realization" which is fashionable today, and to make clear the form of consciousness which transcends passing-time and links it to the supra-temporal. The constant addition of temporal states from one moment in life to the next includes developments which are not wholly temporal, therefore.

The Adept or Master. This enigmatic being is sometimes referred to in spiritual writings, and the kind of personal development discussed in the foregoing might be expected to lead to some such kind of person. But what would define the adept? There is an obvious dearth of answers in the literature, let alone agreement among them. Usually it is sidelined by the term "realization," which is also never defined, and which can mean all things to all men. And yet a general definition is not hard to understand: it is a degree of sainthood with which a corresponding knowledge and power are combined, which suggests a person who has gone beyond the purely moral criteria that are taught by orthodox religion, though without any denial of them.

[insert re Orthodoxy on the higher orders of free will]

The role of knowledge in relation to the ideal is the least problematical, as knowledge would follow from a long-term commitment to the pursuit of truth (see *Keys of Gnosis*, Ch.4). This would turn faith into understanding wherever possible, especially where it is based on the traditional forms of intellectuality. That is in any case implicitly a religious obligation. But how could a holy life lead to power, when power, along with material wealth, is no part of the spiritual ideal? The fact remains however, that heroic virtue is itself a form of power, if only over oneself. Besides, a life lived as closely as possible to God and the eternal in-forming realities of the world leads to a state of freedom, and that has the counterpart of power, or it would soon be lost among the pressures of mortal existence. True freedom does not just maintain itself, but includes a power to act without hindrance or negative reactions, the more so as the negative reactions owing to past misdeed or negligence have been gradually exhausted.

exhausted. Living in union with Providence means having no more than a minimum owing to Fate in one's life, and in this case one becomes effectively stronger than Fate; to be subject to Fate, on the other hand, deepens one's involvement with natural forces which have no place for freedom.

Where a union with providence exists, freedom, happiness and power combine, as happiness is above all the state in which one's most positive activity is unhindered as much as possible. (see *Keys of Gnosis* p.135) This activity has a positive effect on what is most essential to the world, even if not on its outward and peripheral parts. It includes an impassivity to counter-actions from the world, or forces of negative change. Such impassivity is an outward sign of power, as defined by Aristotle as ability to resist change. One is receptive or "Yin" in relation to the formative process of the world and "Yang" in relation to the manifest world. These relations are the exact opposite of the relations the typical modern person has to the Yin and Yang principles. This kind of power is not dissipated among the disturbances on the surface of reality, but is instead joined to the work of the cosmos for which it was created. Because the Microcosm is by definition in relation to all cosmic levels at once, "the great world" is said to "decay in the little," but it can also be regenerated to some extent on the same basis, even though to a lesser extent, because of the relatively smaller number of those who realize this possibility.

That mankind has a power peculiar to itself is specially evident in this cosmic role. The concept of the Microcosm

excludes the materialistic idea that the relations between man and the world and between man and God as being between a tiny object and an enormous one, as if between a microbe and a planet. All such views result from a world conditioned by sense-perception or common-sense materialism, together with ignorance of the soul, rather than from any profound insight. It is replete with the absurdity of a supposed relationship between the Infinite and the wholly finite, and the usual resolution of that mismatch is by making the individual person effectively nothing, just as though the soul did not have a real degree of infinity of its own, among the innumerable degrees of infinity which exist. This is disregarded by exponents of impersonalist forms of spirituality which are meant to transcend the world of common sense when in fact they remain attached to the sense-bound point of view.

Nevertheless, the subject of personal power on a spiritual plane is still an awkward one, owing to the legacy of late-Augustinian Christian attitudes to it, which were based on a need to instil obedience, and to suppress tendencies to individualism. So ingrained is this attitude that references to strength or power in individuals or societies in the Bible are typically translated in ways that obfuscate it, if they translate it at all. (1)

(1)For example, modern Bibles translate Psalm 75, v.10 as "All the horns of the wicked he will cut off, but the horns of the righteous shall be exalted." Only *The Grail Psalms* renders it: "He shall break the power of the wicked, while strength of the just shall be exalted." The latter is obviously the correct meaning, but in nearly all other versions the reality of strength and power in mankind is hidden behind talk about doing things with horns, as in the other Psalms. Also, Ps.148, 14: "He has

raised up a horn for his people," meaning "He has exalted the strength of his people."

The need to counter Pelagianism caused Augustine to limit free will to an ability to choose between options which are imposed on one externally, a "passive response."(2)

(2) This kind of minimal freedom is possible even for animals, as where laboratory rats can choose between binary options. Doctrine which reduces man's nature to this level is bound to be false, clearly conflicting with man's being made in the image of God.

Such a will has no creative power or capacity for initiative. In reality, man can always take the initiative, to which God can respond with an increase of grace, and without that there could be no real freedom:

"But only when man acts in freedom to perform the good, does he become truly man. Acting in conformity with the good, in freedom. If he were to do good in a merely passive response to a sovereign grace, then man could only be good in the way that a flower or a river is good." (*Cosmic Man: The Divine Presence*, Paulos Mar Gregorius, p.205).

Accordingly, Greek Orthodox theology speaks of the transcendent one or *hyperkeimenes*, the self-regulating one or *autokrates*, and an assimilation to that which has no master, *adespoton*. (Paulos Mar Gregorios, pp.131 and 144). Such terminology shows a clear understanding of the role of the Adept or Master.

Nobody ever believed that weakness was next to Godliness, and yet a corresponding attitude, opposed to both Jewish and

Greek traditions, still persists. This ingrained attitude might prevent confusions with worldly power, but only at the price of a necessary self-understanding. Despite neuroses about it, the reality of power affects nearly everyone in countless everyday matters, for example in the extent of our abilities and those of others, and in the powers or virtues of inanimate things, like medicinal drugs, all of which have specific powers of their own, without that giving rise to any moral problems. If that is true of inanimate materials, there should be no problem with the idea that human beings are endowed with intrinsic powers as well.

The moral embarrassment which attaches to power is also needless inasmuch as many devout persons have lived their faith to the point of adepthood in every age up to the Twentieth Century, without needing to give any thought to the idea. Individuals who become powerful in a spiritual way are a barrier against the spread of all kinds of evil through society, and without needing to take any direct action, and that alone should be enough to prove the irrationality of equating power with sin. The attribute of power on the spiritual level should follow automatically from moral virtue and knowledge, because the intrinsic power of the self would be freed its negative potentialities. This provides another distinction between the exoteric and the esoteric: exoterically, the ideal is simply holiness, while esoterically it takes the form of holiness with knowledge and power.

However, the esoteric ideal is just as dependent on grace as the exoteric, and the truth about holiness and power does not mean that there is a state in which one can be beyond the possibility of delusion in this life, since mutability is part of our essence.

