

Traces of Being, Proofs of God

by

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According to the theologies, created things furnish a proof of God: starting from creatures, one infers the existence of a Creator. On this point, as on others, the theologians readily admit that reason can support dogma, and one need not blame them on this account for the generalized intellectual atrophy that justifies splitting the mind into two realms, belief and reasoning.¹

For the metaphysician properly so called, who can be defined as having on the whole retained a primordial intelligence—and it is not disobliging to anyone to maintain that such men can still be found—for this metaphysician then, when faced with the divine mystery, it is not a matter of drawing “conclusions” from given “proofs,” but on the contrary, of “perceiving” the transcendent Real through its “signs” or “traces”; it is to see the Cause in the effects, the Principle in its manifestations, the Archetypes or the Ideas in their projections, the Necessary in the possible.

Phenomena “prove,” or rather “manifest” divine Reality through several aspects: firstly through their existence pure and simple, secondly through the existential categories, such as space and time, and thirdly through qualities, which differentiate and arrange hierarchically such things as the elements, substances, forms; next, in the fourth place, come the faculties: vital, sensorial, mental, moral and intellectual or spiritual. Fifthly we could even mention privative phenomena, in the sense that the absence of a good proves, or indicates, the possibility of the presence of that good, *a contrario* and *ad maiorem Dei gloriam*; an absence that cannot but be relative, since absolute evil does not exist.

¹ It is to this infirmity become “natural” that these words of Christ refer a priori: “Blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed.” A posteriori, it refers to the integration of the will into knowledge: “to see” is to know directly, and “to believe” is to behave as if one had this knowledge already; it is consequentiality and perfect sincerity. The unicity of the divine Object demands the totality of the human subject; this totality is “faith.”

But there are not only objective phenomena, there is also, and in a certain sense above all, the perceiving subjectivity, it too a “proof of God.” The plurality of the conscious and knowing subject proves, by its very contradiction, the real unicity of an absolute underlying Subject; since logically there can be but a single subject—the consciousness of “I” being empirically unique—it is in the final analysis only the one Subject that is conceivable without absurdity, whatever be the mystery of its projections. In a word, the plurality of perceiving subjects can be explained only by the unicity of a unique immanent Subject.

It is not out of place to note in this context that the great contradiction of materialism is that it is the result of a thought process; materialism does not itself belong to matter, it is a concept, and therefore it is something immaterial by definition. The phenomenon of subjectivity—as we tirelessly repeat—concretely proves the absurdity of the materialist thesis, by the fact that the very nature of the thinker belies what he thinks; one might as well declare “objectively” that the human mind is unable to be objective, or that it is true that there is no truth, and so on and so forth.²

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But let us return to the objective “signs” of God: the boundlessness of space, time, number, of formal differentiation, in short of the cosmic illimitation, indicates, by its apparent absurdity a transcendent dimension wherein the contradiction can and must be resolved; the empirical and extrinsic limitlessness must in a certain sense open onto a principial and intrinsic limitlessness, which is none other than the metaphysical or metacosmic Infinite. Analogous to what holds true for subjectivity, the boundlessness of the spatial and temporal conditions can only be explained by the immanence of a Principle-Infinity, of which these conditions are the contingent projections, apparently contradictory since they depict the Infinite by the finite.

Be that as it may, we could imagine space as a spherical container: if one could traverse it, one would go in a circle, returning, doubtless not to the starting-point, but to a location as it were parallel to it, as regards the imaginary trajectory; this at least is one way of expressing the necessary limitation of manifested Illimitation.³ Besides, it is appropriate not to forget that space

² The materialists, or some of them, would have us believe that the brain produces thoughts as an organ secretes fluids; this is to overlook what constitutes the very essence of thought, namely the materially unexplainable miracle of subjectivity: as if the cause of consciousness—immaterial and non-spatial by definition—could be a material object.

³ Someone has said that “two parallel lines never meet, except in infinity, and since the latter does not exist, they remain separate”; this is a very curious combination of the obvious and the absurd. We would say that the reason for being of parallelism is separativity, and therefore that the lines need not meet any more than a circle is supposed to have angles; if both lines end in Infinity, it is not so that they might fuse, but on the contrary so that they might rejoin their archetype, that of ontological parallelism: *Purusha* and

coincides in fact with the ether, and time, with energy, the limits of which are perfectly conceivable; the possibility or impossibility of experiencing these limits is an altogether different question. In the same order of ideas, we would say that there is something mysterious and sacred in the point, the moment, unity, the sphere: they are so many openings towards divine prototypes, namely the Center, the Present, the One, the Perfect; whence their so to speak sacramental import. The divine signs—the “proofs of God”—are in the very structure of the world and of things.

Thus, our spirit perceives intellectually, and therefore intuitively, the Infinite in space and time, the Absolute or necessary Being in the existence of things, Perfection or the Good in qualities and faculties, and the supreme Self in the prodigy of the perceiving subjectivity;⁴ moreover—the importance of this argument authorizes us to repeat it—the phenomenon of an “I” that is unique, yet multiple in fact, is so contradictory—why is it that “I” am “I,” why is the “other” an other?⁵—that, for whoever is sensitive to the essence of things, it necessarily opens onto the dazzling intuition of the absolute Subject, whose unicity, at once transcendent and immanent, is unambiguous.

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Strictly speaking, the world is a fabric of theophanies; it could be nothing else, on pain of inexistence, for to exist is to express Being, in itself or in its potentialities. These theophanies—these divine traces—are more or less indirect, since they are not supernatural; it could be objected that in this case the term “theophany” is an abuse, but we employ it in order to indicate the deepest nature of existence and its modalities.⁶ Thus, all natural theophanies are indirect, but this reservation does not preclude their being so to a greater or lesser degree as is proven, for example, by the distinction between the sacred and the profane in the human order. Outside this order, this distinction subsists in appropriate modes, which is to say that in nature there are phenomena that pertain analogically to the sacred and others that remain foreign to this excellence, as there are things or creatures that are noble and others that are not; but even the

Prakriti, the creative Essence that contains the potentialities, and the universal Substance that projects them into Existence.

⁴ The Cartesian *cogito ergo sum* stops halfway; it would be necessary to add: “I am, therefore I am That which is,” or even: “Being is, therefore I am”; the word “therefore” indicating here, not a conclusion, but a relationship of intellectually “visible” causality.

⁵ A contradiction that led Schopenhauer to think that solipsism cannot be refuted, but that solipsists ought to be put in an asylum. Solipsism is the demented antipode of the Vedantic doctrine of the Self; it shows in any case that there is an existentially paradoxical element in the empirical consciousness of the ego, which, far from granting the right to a senseless conclusion, in reality opens the way to the liberating truth. *Credo quia absurdum*.

⁶ In an analogous fashion, the expression “relatively absolute,” which we sometimes employ, is paradoxical while being metaphysically useful or even necessary.

latter—as we have suggested above—have a theophanic character with respect to the prodigy of existence or with respect to some general qualities. Thus, very contemplative peoples, such as the Hindus and certain American Indians, have a tendency to universal adoration: to render homage to the divine traces even in modest things; this being an aspect of that pneumatic and primordial virtue that is the sense of the sacred.

When perceiving a sign-proof of the divine Principle, the contemplative mentality has two spontaneous reactions, namely essentialization and interiorization, the first being objective, and the second subjective: through the first, man sees in the sign or quality that which is essential—the divine intention if one will—whereas through the second, he finds the sign or quality in his own soul; on the one hand “unto the pure all things are pure”⁷; on the other, “the kingdom of God is within you.” The first reaction refers to transcendence, and the second to immanence, although transcendence too relates to what we bear within ourselves, and although immanence also exists outside ourselves.

Thus, we live in a fabric of theophanies of which we are a part; to exist is to be a symbol; wisdom is to perceive the symbolism of things. And perhaps we ought to recall here the distinction between a symbolism that is direct, concrete, and evident, and another that—while being traditional—is indirect and more or less arbitrary with respect to formal adequacy, which precisely it does not have in view; direct symbolism “manifests” the reality symbolized, whereas indirect symbolism merely “indicates” a fragmentary, contingent or accidental aspect of the image chosen.⁸ From another vantage point, we would say that the worship of symbols must obey sacramental rules: to worship the sun in place of God is one thing; to be aware of its spiritual emanation, and to know how to impregnate oneself with it ritually, is another.

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The contemplativity that allows of perceiving a trace of God in something created presupposes essentially the sense of forms and properties, which means that man ought to be able to see spontaneously, not only that something is beautiful and meaningful, but also why it is so; and

⁷ This formula first of all means that the Christian, inasmuch as he is an interiorized man who is free from the formalism of the Law, is supposed to have in view the nature of things and not human conventions; but it can also mean that the spiritual man everywhere sees substances and not accidents, the primordial divine intentions and not the earthly imperfections.

⁸ However, it is necessary that the image be in conformity with the principles of sacred art; Plato—who knew Egypt—disavowed Greek statues, and Plotinus said that the gods render themselves present in images that resemble them. Let it be noted that the idols of the Arabs were seats of magical powers; with the Jews, the golden calf and other idols materialized the nostalgia for a terrestrial god. Let us note at this point that, obviously, there are also negative symbols—that is, expressing privative realities—but it is of positive symbols and not of symbolism as such that we speak here.

this “why” coincides with the concrete vision of the celestial archetype or the divine aspect. In an altogether general way, a fundamental sensible phenomenon—the five elements offer examples of this—is not only a symbol, but also and thereby a trace of what it symbolizes; water is not merely an image of universal Substance, it is above all that Substance itself inasmuch as it appears on the material plane, or inasmuch as it is perceived by the gaze of relativity. Upon this vision of fundamental qualities or functions is superimposed the vision of multiple, more particular aspects, in short that of the innumerable beauties or powers of the celestial Realm and of the Divine Nature.

What is true for the phenomena of the world is also true for those of the soul; the virtues are the traces of Heaven, or theophanies, just as are the beauties of nature or art; every fundamental virtue is a way of “seeing God” and ipso facto comprises a proof, or a sign, of the Sovereign Good. Moreover, to live a virtue, is not to appropriate it for oneself, it is to be penetrated by it; it does not mean to become puffed-up, but on the contrary to be extinguished, and in becoming extinguished to find a new life which in reality is our essence and our primordial nature.

And the following is fundamental: to say that the world is the manifestation of the Principle is to say that the world is the Principle manifested. This is the *distinguo* between transcendence and immanence: under the first aspect, there is strict discontinuity; under the second, there is a kind of continuity, though it cannot abolish discontinuity. Immanence cannot compromise transcendence anymore than transcendence can prevent immanence; from the point of view of their coincidence, there is no longer any problem since, intrinsically, the Principle is neither transcendent nor immanent.

We will nonetheless repeat: on the one hand, manifestation is nothing with respect to the Principle; on the other hand, were not the world God in any way at all, it could not exist.⁹ We perceive the world through an indefinite multitude of veils; to see the veils as such is not to see God, which is the lot of most human beings, those who do not have any other choice than the choice between unbelief and faith.

⁹ It is in virtue of the first aspect that, in Islamic terms, God is “the Outward” (*Zâhir*), and it is in virtue of the second that he is “the Inward” (*Bâtin*).