

## THE CRISIS OF HIGH AND LOW

It seems to me that not enough consideration has been given to the fundamental importance of the conditioning to which our physical as well as our mental being have been submitted due to the fact that they develop within a certain gravitational field. All the long evolution of the species seems to proceed from our desire for the impossible abolition of our own gravity, or at least for its partial alleviation. Many centuries before the appearance of man compensatory means were tried and adopted, ranging from the aquatic bladder to the wing and including the simple hopping of the marsupials.

When our species came on the scene it found already established the high-low axis that it would perfect into the vertical position its predecessors had aspired to in a more or less evident fashion.

The joy implicit in the concept of high is present in children's games of today and yesterday. We see it in the soaring of fragile kites; the joyous upward surge of sky-rockets; the bouncing up and down of a ball; the rhythmic alternation of rise and fall in swings. It is also present in tobogganing, where we feel liberated from the heaviness we are more than ever subjected to during our ascent. From the effort needed to lift a weight, even that of our own hand, to the ultimate offering up of his soul by the mystic, we cannot as earthly creatures ignore the demand imposed on us by the preordained inevitability of the high and the low.

Translated by Jeanne Ferguson.

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We have a happy and direct visual experience of the high: we need only lift our heads to discover the splendor of the Heavens in all their changing magnificence. We envy the bird and the flying insect. There has never been a mythology in which our desire to fly was not reflected nor a mysticism that did not adopt the word "elevation" to describe ecstasy.

Our experience of the Low, on the contrary, is prosaically tactile; we stumble and fall down, or our fatigued body bends and threatens the upright position we have so laboriously achieved.

We say that life springs forth and flows upward. To be born is to "see the light of day" that comes to us from above. Death calls us toward the depths of the tomb. The line going from mineral to vegetable, to animal and man is conceived as an *ascending* parabola, and within its limited possibility it slowly attempts to extract us from the inevitability of gravity.

In nothing else is this seen with such clarity as it is in religion and the language that expresses its concepts. The idea that God is everywhere is a recent one; God has always been the Most High, our Father *which art in Heaven*, and formulas of praise are lavishly directed toward the Most High. It is not by accident that His messengers the angels are represented with wings and that in romanesque art archangels are provided with a profusion of wings so that they may rise to even greater heights.

One sole word, Heaven, has always been employed as both the celestial appearance of the curve of the firmament and the dwelling place of God and His just. Today the Ascension has taken on a symbolic meaning, but originally it had a strictly physical sense whose expression still appears in the Apostles' Creed: "He *descended* into Hell and He *ascended* into Heaven," and we may add that it is from *There*, a *There* which is at the highest of the high (that referred to in "Gloria in Excelsis") that He will descend on his apocalyptic mission.

Nor is all this exclusive to Judaeo-Christian beliefs. The Nordic Walhalla as well as the Greek Olympus are proof of the preference of the gods for the heights of the mountains, a preference confirmed by Jehovah when he chose Sinai as the place where the Ten Commandments should be revealed. It is also confirmed by the Sermon on the Mount.

From the heights also descended divine anger and punishment,

the thunderbolts of Zeus and the fire over Sodom.

Etymologically, the word *inferno* means “that which is located in the depths,” the lowest, the destination of the fallen angels precipitated into the abyss. Today Medieval scatology and its topography may appear meaningless to us, or symbolic, but we must remember that it is not so long ago that simple souls were not alone in taking the allegories literally. The greatest philosophers believed Hell to be a topographically locatable place, as the Moluccas would be today for those who do not live there: it would make no sense for us to deny their existence even though we are sure we shall never go there. But what is interesting is that Hell has always been thought of as a place of suffering hidden in the entrails of the Earth, that is, in the Lowest of the Low places.

The philosophers, with a certain unavowed desire to secularize, preferred to refer to God as the Supreme Being, which did not significantly change things, since supremacy was nothing other than the recognition of what was felt to be the Highest. They admitted that His superiority came from the fact of “Being that which He is,” while in the infernal depths Satan, the inevitable symmetrical image on the high-low axis, fought to resist, the Anti-Being, who had tried to usurp the Being Which is Not.

It is worthwhile to point out that no mythology, however fantastic it may be, exists that has located the place of joy where the Just are rewarded in the depths of the Earth and the place of eternal punishment in the heights.

Such a universal consensus corresponds to an inevitability common to all these mythologies: that of having been conceived within the same gravitational field.

This differentiation of values is also found in the animal kingdom. A positive symbol is assigned to the lark’s joyous flight, which enhances its song; the instinctive movement of the great carnivores is to lift their heads when they catch the scent of their prey.

Before man had acquired full consciousness of himself, he inhabited a world in which everything obeyed the principle of High and Low. The vegetable world submitted to the rules of its phototropism, lifting a profusion of foliage made gay by the colors of flowers and fruit, while hiding below ground the sordid, nourishing roots.

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If we go a little further, we realize that all these examples are only the final phase of the sedimentation of mineral elements that had been going on since the beginning. Human thought later found it appropriate to situate everything to which it attached great importance in its own most elevated position, that is, the spirit, to make lightness a virtue and heaviness a fault. It was not by chance that the dove was chosen as a symbol of the Holy Spirit while to the serpent was relegated the symbol of sin.

Even before there was a full consciousness of the concept of opposing High and Low, they were still identified with positive-negative, good-bad, light-dark, life-death. An absolute value was assigned to these oppositions and projected onto all sorts of things because of the imposition of gravity, of which no one was aware. We reflect the concept in everyday language with complete ingenuity and persistence when we speak of “high ideals” and “low passions.” Today the world press uses expressions such as “high level” and “summit conferences.” We have always called those of higher rank “superior” and those below us “subordinate.” Those in the “upper classes” do not fail to express their disdain for the “lower classes.” A good position, it goes without saying, is an “elevated” position, and if someone is “brought down,” it is because he has not been successful. There is only one example in which a derivation of the word “high,” in its Spanish equivalent “arriba,” is used pejoratively—by “high” persons, it is true—and it is the word *arriviste*. Those already established in the higher spheres use it to stigmatize the audacity of those who would like to accede to their Olympus. The *arriviste* is no more than a disappointed revolutionary who is working in his own cause; to the generalized subversion that would mean the overthrow of the order of High and Low, he prefers the maintaining of the “status quo” that permits him to inhabit the most comfortable levels of society. In architecture as well as in sociology, but especially in the latter, we are told about superstructures and infrastructures, with the former invariably given the most importance. For their part, psychoanalysts strive, as compassionately for us as profitably for themselves, to liberate us from that Hell on the instalment plan rightly called “inferiority complex.”

It may not be entirely idle to recall the curious relationship between the gravitational axis of High and Low and that of the

points of the compass indicating North and South. This may derive from the fact that the first mapmakers were of Northern origin. Out of a simple desire that their hemisphere have a good situation, they put it in the upper part of the map. The polar star around which apparently turned the starry vault was for them on High, a High that drew closer and closer to the zenith as the direction of north was followed. It is therefore not astonishing that the North became identified with High in their projections and as an inevitable consequence, the South with Low.

It is no less curious that in every European country people of northern origin attribute certain values to themselves. They consider themselves as harder-working and more serious minded than their compatriots of the South. This is true to such a point that the word "meridional" has become the vehicle of an affectionately pejorative innuendo. It would not be overly rash to think that such an attitude may come from the lower part of the map. This would reduce the presumed superiority of the Nordic peoples to a simple cartographic error.

But there is something still more curious in such maps: the configuration of the represented lands seems to have adopted this identification of North-South with High-Low. The continents, with surprising unanimity, stretch to the South as though something were pulling them downward. Even a quick glance at the maps verifies that the two Americas, Africa, Australia itself, stretch toward the South. As for the immense mass of Eurasia, numerous peninsulas point in the same direction: Spain, Italy, the Balkans, Arabia, India, Indochina. We also cannot help but remark the the tendency toward a drop-like configuration of Sicily from Italy; the Greek archipelago from the Peloponessus; Ceylon from India; all of Indonesia from Indochina; Tasmania from Australia. Madagascar seems to have dropped off Africa, as Tierra del Fuego seems to have fallen from South America. The same is true of California and Florida, both separated from North America, with Florida scattered throughout the Caribbean archipelago. Everything seems to corroborate the identification of the South with the Low, but of course this cartographical configuration can be nothing other than a curious coincidence with authentic reasons of geological structure. It obviously cannot be attributed to a non-existent downward pull to the South. Much more easily verifiable

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and interesting than that of our planet is the structure of our body, which is not subject to improvisation and much less to chance. At its highest point we find its noblest part, the head. Here are located the organs of conduct and thought as well as those of the senses that are indispensable for orientation: sight, hearing and smell. Our face is necessarily located at a high point on the body so that it may exercise its functions of radar to send its data by the shortest route to the command post, the central nervous system. Immediately below the head, the thorax and abdomen divide the respective functions of breathing and purification. All these functions are controlled by the sympathetic nervous system, itself in control of the vegetative system that makes us kin to the animal world. Lowest down are the legs, our ambulatory equipment and support, ending in the feet almost identified with the mineral world on which they rest, comparable to the roots of the vegetable world. Our "roots," however, have been wrenched from the subjugating earth by imperative orders from above.

This could all be considered as the result of a long and wise sedimentation that relegated to the lowest part of the body our less noble parts, upon which were successively stratified those of more delicate structure, ending in the lightness of what is already almost the spirit. Because of its great biological maturity, our body unequivocally responds to the demands of the High-Low concept. Of all living creatures, of all that have ever lived on our globe, it is man who has best succeeded in adapting to the gravitational environment, by accepting the demands of High-Low that have finally permitted him to act with the maximum of liberty.

What is immediately perceptible on the physiological level in our body may be perceived in our psychic being, it also organized according to a hierarchy of importances, sedimentary in their turn, also located within systems as fluctuating as can be imagined, but always answering to a High-Low ideal. Without such a system the accumulation of our perceptions would lead us into chaos; we would not be able to furnish the appropriate responses, and our great cerebral capacity would serve only to augment inhibiting perplexities, fatal to the future of the species. The systematic organization of our thought is what has made us viable as human

beings. It cannot disobey gravity, not only the physical but also the psychical, the preserver of an ideal and rigorous order of the High and the Low.

The concept of "values" does not appear until very late in the axiologies of the most opposed philosophical systems, but even though not formulated it has had influence since anything that deserves the name of human thought has existed.

Values: they must always be presented in the plural, since nothing exists that may be considered a value *per se* to the exclusion of its relationship with another value. This is why the concept of value is inseparable from that of a scale. A scale of values begins to have a meaning through the place assigned on it to each value in the order of High and Low, without which no scale could exist. Since it cannot be otherwise, we come to recognize *supreme* values, the highest, for example, those forming the sort of lay trinity of Truth, Good and Beauty, so universally accepted. There are also relative values, whose importance is determined by their distance from the highest; in other words, according to whether they are high or low on the scale under consideration.

Our abstract thinking seems unable to function without relying on physical images; this is what obliges us to project upon it the references to our gravitational environment.

Without leaving the physical world gravitational images appear in areas that have very little to do with them. We have mentioned scales. Using the term in its musical sense, we refer to *soprano* and *bass* voices. However, nothing can explain why the highest frequencies of vibration are associated with the High on a value scale, and are the most esteemed.

What is certain is that everything, whether in the physical or in the intellectual world, incites us to adopt the Ptolemaic criteria with regard to the absolute power of the High and the Low.

That is where we were until not so long ago the fall of an apple (again, an apple and a fall) alerted us to a danger by revealing to human thought that beyond the vicinity of our provincial planet, which shortly before had been dislodged from the center of the universe, the absolute value of High and Low had to be abandoned and its power reduced to the limited reach of earth's gravity. Outside it, in the practically infinite immensities

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of space, our body and our thought were deprived of their habitual anchorage. There was no longer North-High and South-Low. It seems that Newton himself did not immediately realize the implications of what he had formulated.

He, so devoted to theology—to which he attached even greater importance than he did to astronomy—was not aware that in depriving the High of its absoluteness he removed the “Father which art in Heaven” from his traditional abode. Fortunately, Newton’s theory of gravity did not provoke the violent reactions that Copernicus had caused. Nevertheless, his conclusions implied no small danger to traditional thought. They were taken as a theoretical supposition that could at the most move a few extravagant and imaginative graduate students, a supposition that was part of what was called “the lie of the stars,” and according to the Spanish proverb, “It is a very convenient lie, since no one will ever get close enough to see.” However, the time came when this “no one” became several “people” who risked their lives to go close enough to see. They did not need to venture as far as the stars; our close neighbor the Moon sufficed to administer the proof in person—not a very pleasant truth—of what the theory advanced.

It was inside the space capsule that the experimental abolition of the High-Low occurred. The phenomenon ceased to be the foreseeable result of some well-solved equations—later incarnated in the quasi-surrealist illustrations of Jules Verne’s works—and became the experience of the human body. The astronauts quickly found themselves floating with neither a high nor a low, and the proud head ceased to proclaim its millenary sovereignty, seeing it shared by the eyeless, near-to-the-mineral-world feet.

The sudden abolition of the system of axes that conditioned our organism as well as our psychic and moral being also occurred. All the laborious evolution of the species that in our presumptuous view led to the upright position of which we are so proud became obsolescent, and we regressed to the undifferentiated movements of our ancestors the protozoa.

It was not a revolution, which in the final analysis always is an accommodation of new structures raised, like it or not, on the foundation of previous elements. It was something much more serious.



Faced with such an adventure, the “God is Dead” of Nietzsche resembles the misbehavior of schoolboys when the teacher leaves the room, since Nietzsche himself at practically the same time announced the advent of the *superman*, whose *superhumanity* was to replace the Most High. It was an involuntary or at least inadvertent attempt to preserve the normative power of High-Low, which had disappeared with no possible replacement. Its disappearance as an absolute value was not the consequence of a theory whose earlier pronouncement had not disturbed timid minds, since they could not foresee its implications, nor of the fact that what was already known was suddenly understood. Its disappearance took place in our body and our mind which began to comprehend that they had been abandoned by the concept under whose influence they had developed, and their bewilderment on being faced with the impossibility of adapting to the conditions that govern the immensities of the universe. Our upright position, so laboriously acquired, and which implicitly contained our angelic vocation, as proved by its recurrence in all the dreams of the myths dealing with flight; our verticalism that we were so legitimately proud of here at home, primarily because it gave us superiority over all other inhabitants of our domestic planet: that verticalism was revealed to us as the greatest obstacle to our hypothetical vocation as conquerors of the cosmos.

In space, we do not know what to do with our body, made to measure—its own measure and that of its environment—all of whose functions were little by little fashioned to cope with gravity which, when it is lacking, suddenly reveals itself as irreplaceable. Lassitude and fatigue, which draw us downward, soon appeared as agreeable sensations compared with the frustrating and hallucinating feeling of being lifted to a resting position. Changed were the most established habits of eating and elimination, oriented downward for physiological economy, during which food abandons its higher nature as it leaves the place where taste is satisfied to descend to the place of its elimination as waste. We still do not know the disturbances which may arise from this transgression of the norms to which our organism has adjusted its normal functioning. The dramatic aspect of the matter is that the High-Low principle was lacking in the environment while it persisted in our being.

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What is most curious in these events is the coincidence (the historical lag is minimal) between the physical experience of a small number of astronauts and what is happening all around us in other areas. What the astronauts were experiencing physically in space our species was experiencing daily in the social, intellectual and esthetic fields without needing to leave the planet. Everything happened as though our species had suddenly escaped from the field of gravity and as though in everything except the physical—temporarily—we were rid of the hereditary High-Low axis.

At present there a general tendency to do away with all hierarchy, or, what is worse, to tolerate it only so we may invert the meaning of its values.

The first phenomenon that meets our eyes, and in the most varied countries of the world, is the so-called rebellion of the young, tolerated although it is not encouraged. Nothing is more appealing, nothing more necessary, than the natural revolt of young people when faced with injustice in all its forms, if their enthusiasm leads them to demand reform. Today, however, such a goal is considered to be bourgeois naïveté. "If I knew what I wanted, I would be lost," declared a young girl, while another proclaimed, "Power to the imagination!" Power unequivocally represents the High, while the imagination, in its untried euphoria, can only belong to the Low. If words still have some value, such a slogan should thus be translated, "Long live the Low!", a translation which the author of the slogan would no doubt accept.

Language seems subjugated to the demands of gravity like all human phenomena and reveals that in the traditional hierarchy of the family "ancestors" are referred to those on high, or above, such as parents or grandparents, while "descendants" are located on successive downward degrees: sons, grandsons and all those who are yet to be born. We know what respect has been shown for those structures in the traditional family, in China and in all patriarchal or matriarchal societies. Greater experience was considered a merit, never something shameful. Today in all parts of the world where youth is not restrained by force we see it proclaim its impatience as a norm, its imagination as wisdom. We also see it rushing to schools and universities with the pretext of learning what is being taught there but in fact to put themselves

above the teachers, telling them what and how they, the students, should learn. This is why traditional respect for the professor, who because of simple physical comfort has always been placed on a more elevated level than the students, has been consigned to a lower level.

On the whole, things are little better in the social sphere. It is symptomatic that the word "revolution" has taken on such a prestige that it is used in the most counter-revolutionary situations, being attenuated only by the qualification "national." It is quite easy to verify that in almost all cases, a so-called "national revolution" is counter-revolutionary. But what does it matter? All revolution, as well as all counter-revolution, occurs around an axis that traditionally turned from Low to High. This is why movements that exalt revolution are correctly called "subversive," since they aim at reversing the ruling order. In the case of the French Revolution, the bourgeoisie was elevated above the aristocracy; in that of Russia, the proletariat elevated above the bourgeoisie. The cries of the revolutionaries are not "Viva!" (toward the High) but "Down with...!" (toward the Low.)

In our time, however, we are seeing a revolution very ingeniously called "revolution without a cause," since it proclaims—or pretends to proclaim, which is worse—that it has no cause that would justify its uncontrolled violence. There is no lack of theoretical apologists in this revolution, whose goal is to have no goal and to turn everything upside down, not to replace it with a new order but to bring about change through uncontrolled violence. In classic Marxism itself the final elimination of the State, a Utopia to which it aspires and of which we see so little evidence, would be equivalent to the elimination of the field of gravity that, so long as it lasts, ceaselessly imposes a natural hierarchical sedimentation.

The blind worship of psychoanalysis, the consequences of which are to be feared if it is conducted by unqualified people (as most of those who practice it are) has contributed to this movement. Until its appearance we were subjected to a certain kind of psychic sedimentation in which a super consciousness of transcendental mystical revelation was followed by our consciousness, itself resting on the diffuse subconscious. A change in terminology occurred, and the Superego appeared, the Ego

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and the Id. In this puerile mania for changing terms, it was easy to discover the survival of High-Low. In truth, something serious happened at the moment when the patient was asked to lie down on a couch, which meant that he had to abdicate his vertical position in order to talk about his dreams and even to prolong them into the trance-like state of the questioning. Thus are brought into the conscious (from the Low to the High) matters that a prudent censor had relegated to the subconscious. It seems that surprising "cures" were obtained in this manner, not so much as "eradications" of the neuroses but as "liberating comprehensions." This meant that many aberrations, or what had therefore been considered as such, could be verbalized and exhibited by the "cured" patient. At least, the unconscious obtained its passport to enter the conscious. No one has taken the pains to inquire if this merging of the High and the Low, so patiently and minutely sedimented by centuries of evolution, was not foolhardy. One proceeded with the ardor of an enthusiastic and inexperienced farmer who by digging too deep mixed the fertile upper soil with the infertile subsoil, making his field unproductive because he dug too deeply.

The predominance of the subconscious is certainly not a novelty in human relationships. What is new is to see it situated at a positive level in the scale of values.

Viewed from the outside, the disorder seems no less great in the physical sciences. Since the beginning of this century the two most important theories have been called (at times more significantly than precisely) "relativity" and "indetermination." Before the middle of the century, however, was derived from these terms which are so evanescent and which disguise their content so well the horrible certainty of the atomic bomb, which today threatens to bring Low all that is High.

Physics began to put into doubt our certainties having to do with matter, on which the field of gravity is dependent, and of which the tangible verification was the delight of the materialists, providing them with irrefutable arguments. Now, the "material" has fallen from those hands that supported and caressed it. Today we know, and it may be the only thing we do know, that this tranquilizing certitude was nothing more than an unexpected mystification by our grosser senses. After the laborious attempts

made by physicists to present us with very approximate atomic models, today we are notified, with a prudence that contains some commiseration, that all the intuitive images we try to make for ourselves of what matter is, must be thrown overboard, because the matter in question or, to express ourselves with all due caution, what is manifested to us in the form of matter, is totally incompatible with the limitations of our intuition. There is nothing left for us but to refer to symbols of symbols, connected by abstruse and approximate equations that can never coincide with the ingenuous realism of our daily certainties. The boundary separating the metaphysics of the High and the physics of the Low has vanished. Moreover, as if that were not enough, one fine day we perceived the ephemeral positron and not long after that, the phantasmagorical negative proton. Then an appeal was made to the hardly reassuring concept of anti-matter, and the entire universe, with all its galaxies, collided with the diaphanous image of a possible anti-universe whose respective positions we would have to elucidate. Faced with such a fundamental subversion of concepts, pre-Copernican dialectic materialism, so firmly anchored in the High-Low axis which governed all its postulates, had to improvise an anti-materialism that would also be anti-dialectic.

Metaphysics, the manipulator of "Being" itself, had no better luck. Its values, inseparable from the concept of a scale, as we said above, and its eloquent categories attempted an about-face when they had existence come before essence and were forced to center Being in Nothing. They made all ontological security illusory and threatened a conversion into anti-metaphysics that would be contemporary with the concept of anti-matter.

What can we say about what happened in art? Let us recall that before taking this name it bore the more modest one of *artisanat*, under which it accomplished its masterpieces, obeying the norms of efficiency and skill aimed toward a High that was true for all cultural groups—Beauty—and avoiding the Low of repudiated ugliness.

The impatience of youth has always judged it indispensable, and especially since the last century, to put such norms into question. Not, however, with the view of causing their suicidal extinction but rather to rejuvenate them in an eagerness for

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authenticity without losing the idea of the attainment of beauty by other means. In general, everything was reduced to a return to what, according to them, their immediate predecessors had not been able to see, or rather, in their enthusiasm, to a change in nomenclature—like a man making a dangerous pump might amuse himself, while his head was down and he felt for a moment his own antipode, by calling the law of falling bodies the “law of rising bodies.” But suddenly the proposal to consider beauty as the end of art became an inadmissible puerility, while no one was able to replace this concept with another one. Ugliness began to be used for its own sake in an aggressive expressionism, but this was only the beginning of the reversal. Dadaism, fully aware of its disorienting content, recommended the abandon of any field of gravity in esthetics. Outrageousness and the desire to shock the respectable public were imposed on this same public with its enthusiastic consent. From then on, we have seen the multiplying of plagiarists of this initial absurdity, with a constant decrease in talent and ingenuity; and the disconcerting phenomenon continues to spread.

We wake up every day without knowing what we will be told to abjure, what our viewpoint should be, with what abstruseness we should identify before it is replaced by the next one.

The inevitable consequence is that today’s most renowned critics, no doubt imitating the attitude of scientists, have not hesitated to recommend that we “suspend judgment” and not try to understand, much less “feel” a work of art, since it would be useless and indeed harmful, it being no longer a question of art. But they have not told us what this non-gravitational art, with no up or down to it, is.

However, the lack of understanding of the aims of art may have much more serious consequences than the inaccessibility of scientific concepts. The common man, and no man escapes entirely from that condition, has always accepted the benefits of scientific discoveries without claiming to penetrate very far into its governing theories. He is content with a small amount of information while he uses the practical results deriving from it.

In art, on the contrary, not to understand means not to profit, since in esthetics personal participation is indispensable. It is for this reason that before we judge art to be aggressive we react

against it, with great good sense, and although we hypocritically take its side, we cannot help considering it as yet another of the innumerable forms of violence threatening us from all sides. Our natural appetite for beauty is frustrated by the vertiginous irresolution of the weather vane that has replaced the compass in today's art.

We could endlessly extend and deepen this analysis of the present crisis in the High and the Low. With infantile pride, each generation supposes that its historical situation is exceptionally tragic and that destiny has marked it with the apocalyptic sign of an irremediable fatality. To feel oneself condemned with no hope of pardon has always been a way of feeling oneself elect. Later, those who see the situation from a different perspective, itself distorted by their identical suspicion, discover they all are variations of the one law of which they are more examples than exceptions. This means that a Present has never existed, however charged with dire forebodings for contemporaries, that has not later been viewed by its successors as calm and tranquil. I say this, after all that I have written above, because I am fully conscious of running the same risk. The crisis of the validity of the High-Low principle has been coming on for a long time, but it was not sharply defined until the turn of this century, beginning with the simultaneous blossoming of scientific, esthetic and philosophical concepts. It reached its culmination later in the corporeal experience of the astronauts, an experience that was not lacking, however, in historical precedents.

Nonetheless, and considering our capacity to adapt to the most unusual situations, we must ask ourselves if we will finish by accommodating ourselves to conditions that appear to us today as unfortunate for our descendants. My personal experience, which goes from candle light to the laser beam, from the pinfeathers of aviation to the Mars modules, obliges me not to pronounce the word "impossible" too quickly. I shall try as much as possible to avoid it. It would be risky, however, to forget all that I have pointed out on the limitations implicit in the conformation of our bodies and our minds, limitations not due to chance, deriving from the unavoidable influence of the High-Low principle inseparable from the field of gravity of our planet, the planet that is beginning to appear prematurely uninhabitable to us while

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by our misconduct we do all that we can to make it so.

Before our one-celled ancestor, before the simple molecules of dioxyribonucleic acids, before anything that can be called "organic" life, whose presence is indispensable to a minimal spark of consciousness, simple inorganic elements were already subject to the law of the attraction of masses that stratified them from the greater density of the central nucleus to the lighter one of the atmosphere. It is not since yesterday but since what may legitimately be called "forever" that we have been subject to this imperious law. We can be sure that a hypothetical being, somehow born outside any field of gravity and suddenly transported to ours, would experience the unbearable sensation of being chained to the earth. Like the forced laborer, he would feel attached by his feet to the immense heavy ball of our planet. All the evolution of the species seems directed toward the abolition of gravity by the instinctive desire for the High of which we have been writing.

The hominids, our immediate predecessors, in detaching their arms from the ground, converting them into "superior" members and thus being able to lift their heads higher, created the conditions for the later development of intelligence that would culminate, paradoxically, in the present misunderstanding of that High that was so hard to achieve.

It took thousands of years of imperceptible mutations, of success and failure, of new attempts, to end in the indispensable internal skeleton, in the flexibility of the spinal column, in a cranial capacity able to shelter a complex brain that would make possible the consciousness of self in perpetual struggle against the negative pole of the Low. Today, when in our proud rapaciousness we think about the conquest of the cosmos, we forget the imprudent pride of our ancestors and begin to "burn our boats" of the High-Low concept, useless in themselves, but we realize that if we had not respected that law we would never have been able to develop our body or our thought to the point of being able to conceive and realize the space capsules, precisely within which vanished the High-Low principle that made them possible. There we encounter a basic fact of little satisfaction to our vanity: the inadaptability of our body and our mind to such enterprises. We will have to modify their structures, so useful to us on our old planet, the old planet that with a minimum of good sense



we could make comfortable enough to live with the restraints it imposes on us.

As soon as we try to free ourselves from these restraints, like Kant's dove who was hindered in its flight by the resistance of the air that alone made it possible, we notice that irresolution, coming from the polyvalence of all the Highs and Lows we invent when we disregard the traditional High-Low, annuls the liberty it seemed to offer us. What remains for us to do? Adjust to living in a world deprived of all Highs and Lows? The word "impossible" persists in making its appearance and must be substituted by cautiously limiting ourselves to pointing out that such a world would be just as uncomfortable for us as it would be for a dove to fly in a vacuum. The High-Low axis has formed the spinal column of our being, physical as well as psychical. It is not an accident that the astronauts within their bathyscaphes resemble cephalopods or slow-moving octopi and that the capsules themselves resemble lamelliferous mussels. I am certain that no one will see in these words the least attempt to belittle the astonishing exploits of these men, but it must be pointed out that their clothing and their equipment were designed to preserve at least a minimum of their absolutely necessary hereditary environment, to which they are attached as a snail is to its shell.

Experts are seriously concerned with both the physical and the psychical problems affecting the astronauts when they remain outside our field of gravity for an extended period. They even study, with all the perseverance associated with our technology, the possibility of creating artificial fields of gravity within the space ships. That is, the gravitational field is considered as indispensable as the artificial maintenance of a mini-atmosphere by means of pressurized oxygen: there we may foresee the re-creation of a mini-High-Low axis that would restore our condition as earth creatures.

It is no less urgent to extend this effort made in favor of our body to our disturbed intellectual, moral and religious atmosphere.

To the multiple causes of growing anxiety overwhelming contemporary man must be added that which is perhaps the principal one, one which leaves him helpless and disoriented by the annulment of the concept of High and Low. We must

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ask ourselves if the moment has not come to establish in each order of things the equivalent of these gravitational fields which, artificial as they may be, would permit us to return to our human condition, inseparable, as we have seen, from our adaptation to gravity. Let us be permitted to think, feel, imagine in accord with our structure, that is in no way conventional or, if you prefer, as conventional as we are ourselves.

Like the Romans who took the statues of their Lares with them when they emigrated from their native land, making it possible for them to extend the idea of fatherland to their new home, it is imperative for us when we venture far from the habitual to carry some equivalent of the High-Low principle that conditions our being, so as to preserve in "Yes" its nature of Yes and in "No" its nature of No, hoping that the rest will be given us in full. The greatest danger comes from the fact that intelligence has overflowed its banks, the intelligence of those who believe the convolutions of our brain to be limited: it is out of its normal course and seems disposed to abandon its original support and conditioning.

In the super-sonic space capsules the slowness of human thought in its upward movement may prove to be an obstacle, easily overcome thanks to the deaf, dumb and blind instantaneous orders of the computers, and they will make the decisions.