

a teacher of Cupitt's calibre could have produced a much tougher book, I am sure, which would have made us wrestle with our understanding of the incarnation of God in Jesus of Nazareth. I consider, however, that orthodox belief in the incarnation has not been falsified here (it has been systematically misrepresented) and no better alternative has been suggested.

Faith And Experience

IX The Rational, The Irrational, And the Non-Rational

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Recent discussions of religion have, as we have seen, made much use of the idea of "ineffable experiences". It is suggested that there is, beyond reach of conceptual language and the discursive intellect, a primary *experience* which grounds religion. It is also suggested, at least sometimes, that this experience is common to all religions, in spite of their considerable doctrinal and philosophical differences.

In my last article I expressed some doubts about this suggestion. And it is, in fact, very difficult even to see what it is actually meant to be suggesting. Quite apart from the extreme vagueness of the word "experience", it is not at all clear what sense can be given to "ineffable" simply on the basis of experience. Presumably experiential ineffabilists, if I may so designate them, would not wish to deny that there might be all kinds of experience which make us talk in terms of ineffability or inexpressibility. "It was inexpressibly beautiful". "It was unspeakably horrible". "It was more terrifying than you can conceive of". And so on. But if it is possible to pick out in some way (as, for instance, Otto tries to do) just what kind of inexpressible experience is intended, then it is not clear in what sense it is said to be inexpressible, unless, indeed, nothing more is meant than that the experience is "too wonderful for words".

But perhaps, after all, the concern with ineffable *experiences* has been leading us on a wild goose chase. It is a fact worth noticing that a great deal of the original literature, both philosophical and religious, which is concerned with ineffability and incomprehensibility and such like, does not approach these matters from the vantage point of *experience*. And, in so far as it is this literature which constitutes the sources for the study of ineffability as a religious concept, we must ask whether the modern students of

I alone seem to be in the dark.
Common folks see difference and are clear-cut;
I alone make no distinctions.
I seem drifting as the sea;
Like the wind blowing about, seemingly without destination.
The multitude all have a purpose;
I alone seem to be stubborn and rustic.
I alone differ from others,
And value drawing sustenance from Mother Tao.⁵

There is obviously an element of what could be called irrationalism in all of this. "Abandon sageliness and discard wisdom; then the people will benefit a hundredfold".⁶ "Knowledge and wisdom" arise only "when the great Tao declined".⁷ But it would be wrong to interpret this as recommending simply an abandonment of the pursuit of intellectual clarity. What Lao Tzu objects to is *deliberate* wisdom, and the objection is the same as that brought against deliberate virtue: "When a country is in disorder, there will be praise of loyal ministers";⁸ but the ideal situation is one in which a great ruler can simply accomplish his task without appearing to do anything.⁹ Similarly it is only in a context of confusion that self-conscious learning and wisdom will appear. The ideal state is one of "enlightenment" in which the sage knows things in their hidden root, and so can see clearly in the world and act harmoniously.¹⁰ "Seeing what is small is called enlightenment. Keeping to weakness is called strength".¹¹ The philosophy of the Tao Te Ching is both a metaphysics and an ethics of unobtrusiveness and spontaneity. It resists grandiose schemes, whether intellectual or political. It therefore resists a certain kind of intellectualism. It is quite clear that the foundation for true wisdom is beyond "naming", and so beyond all normal modes of apprehension. It is "known" in the whole attitude of non-purposiveness, non-possessiveness. "Attain complete vacuity, maintain steadfast quietude".¹² It is not at all clear that it would make any sense at all to talk of "experiencing" it.

We look at it and do not see it;
Its name is The Invisible.
We listen to it and do not hear it;
Its name is The Inaudible.
We touch it and do not find it;
Its name is The Subtle (formless).
These three cannot be further inquired into,
And hence merge into one.
Going up high, it is not bright, and coming down low, it is not dark.
Infinite and boundless, it cannot be given any name;
It reverts to nothingness.

This is called shape without shape,
Form without object.
It is The Vague and Elusive.
Meet it and you will not see its head.
Follow it and you will not see its back.
Hold on to the Tao of old in order to master the things of the
present.

From this one may know the primeval beginning of the universe.
This is called the bond of Tao.¹³

The Tao Te Ching is notoriously an extraordinarily difficult work to interpret. But surely it is sufficiently clear that the author of it does not claim to have arrived at his awareness of the unnamed Tao by way of some direct experience of it. His reason for declaring the essential Tao to be unnamed is that the whole sphere of what can be named derives from the Tao; the Tao itself, therefore, cannot be part of the universe of things which can be named. It is part of the whole business of naming things that we can compare and contrast things, giving the name N to one thing *rather than* to another. The Tao is declared to have no name because it does not enter into the scheme of things in such a way that you can compare or contrast it with anything else. It is absolutely undifferentiated, underlying all possible kinds of differentiation. Being and non-being seem clearly contrasted, and on the basis of the contrast it is possible for us to talk richly about reality. But in the Tao being and non-being "are the same".¹⁴ Maybe this is a metaphysical postulate that we should find it difficult to justify to an unsympathetic critic. And this might lead us to say that it rests on some "intuition" that you either have or do not have. But it would not be correct, surely, to claim such an intuition as being, precisely and exclusively, an intuition of the Tao: it would be truer to say that it is only in terms of the Tao that we can make sense of everything else. It is an intuition of the whole pattern of things, of the essential presupposition of, or shape of, intelligibility. The "content" of it is all that can be named and identified. The Tao is the emptiness which allows for this content to be intelligible, just as it is the hole in the middle of the wheel that makes it possible for the wheel to be used as a wheel (without the hollow at the centre, you could not fit the wheel to an axle).¹⁵

A remarkably similar concept of the ineffable is found in Wittgenstein's *Tractatus*, and here it is even more clear that the matter is not being approached by way of "mystical experience": Wittgenstein attempts to indicate by strict logic the borderline between what can be said and what cannot be said. He was, at this period, very much interested in tautology; in a letter to Russell on the 15th of December, 1913, he declares that the question of the nature of tautology "is the fundamental question of *all* logic".

In the *Tractatus* he develops an interesting view of the nature and significance of tautology, which we can fill out with reference to his contemporary Notebooks. "To view the world *sub specie aeterni* is to view it as a limited whole (*Die Anschauung der Welt sub specie aeterni ist ihre Anschauung als—begrenztes—Ganzes*). The feeling of the world as a limited whole is what is mystical. (*Das Gefühl der Welt als begrenztes Ganzes ist das mystische*).¹⁶ This is where the ineffable is situated: it cannot be uttered; it shows itself (*Es gibt allerdings Unaussprechliches. Dies zeigt sich, es ist das Mystische*).¹⁷ But it is the task of logic to isolate and indicate the Unaussprechliches, because logic is concerned with *limits*, both of language and of 'the world'.¹⁸ The limits cannot strictly be articulated; they are constituted by contradiction and tautology.¹⁹ Logic is not an element within the world, it "pervades the world".²⁰ It is concerned, not with any particular propositional content, but with the general form of propositions (*die allgemeine Satzform*), and this is said to be "the essence of the world (*das Wesen der Welt*)".²¹ And this shows itself particularly in tautology which is "the common factor of all sentences which have nothing in common with one another".²² "Tautology is sentences' substanceless centre, which vanishes, as it were, inside all sentences".²³

Whether or not Wittgenstein's attempt to create a whole world-view on the basis of logic succeeds, the essential point for our present purposes is that he, like many another, is concerned to identify the "mystical" as the ineffable, and that he sets about it by logical argument, not by any appeal to experience. He does, it is true, mention the "Gefühl" of the world as a limited whole, but his project does not depend on such a Gefühl, it depends on a highly articulate and severely argued account of what is going on when we talk about the world. And the ineffable is not *something else*, that we could somehow get at by direct experience, independently of the world. The "mystical" shows itself, it becomes apparent, in the structure of language and reality; it is the inescapable precondition of all talking and thinking. It can therefore be contrasted with what can be talked about and conceptualized only because it plays a distinct role within the whole system of talking and conceptual thought. There is no separate sphere of the non-rational.

Wittgenstein later repudiated the view of language contained in the *Tractatus*; but it is far from clear that he ever really abandoned the basic vision of that work. In any case, it seems quite plausible to suppose that, on any view of language, we shall find ourselves, within language, running into some kind of "limit" of language. In my previous article, for instance, I mentioned the impossibility of our ever fully stating the context which is pre-

supposed by any particular statement. Anything that is said must always carry with it a background of what is not said, and even if we could always set about articulating that background, every move made in the process of articulating it would itself carry a similarly unspoken background. It is always "out of silence" that the word comes. But this does not mean that we have to invoke some mystical non-rational faculty of intuition. It is just that this is how talking works. Reason can only be reason on these terms.

Conversely, it is only within the system of words and concepts that the "ineffable" can be indicated. No experience, by itself, could do more than confront the experiencer with 'something' that he, as a matter of fact, cannot make conceptual sense of or articulate in words. It cannot reveal the 'something' or the 'experience' of the 'something' to be, strictly, beyond reach of conceptual thought and language, except in a relatively commonplace sense which would not allow for the particular experience to be regarded as ineffable in any uniquely mystical or portentous way.

So long as the alleged access to "ineffability" is by way of some particular kind of experience, I think that Bambrough must be allowed to be right to protest that there is a confusion between what cannot as a matter of contingent fact be uttered, and what cannot as a matter of absolute principle ever conceivably be uttered.

But as we have seen, at least some of those who make use of the idea of the ineffable, and such related ideas as inconceivability, unknowability, approach it in a very different way. They reckon that language and discursive thought themselves indicate that there must be "something" there, and that they also indicate why and in what sense that "something" must be beyond reach of discursive, descriptive thought and articulation. This enables them at least to claim to be able to identify what is being referred to as ineffable without destroying the alleged ineffability.²⁴

If there is, then, a need to "go beyond reason" it is a need both indicated by reason and actually satisfied, in so far as it can be, by reason. The "non-rational" is not simply to be contrasted with the "rational" as if they were two separate affairs altogether. It is within the "rational" that it sometimes may become appropriate to speak of the "non-rational". The major religious and philosophical traditions of the world do not really provide much support for any facile resorting to "paradox"; they are, in general, very seriously concerned to regulate paradox by constant reference to very rational considerations.

Thus, for instance, Shankara, in his commentary on the Brihadaranyaka Upanisad, appears to be wantonly paradoxical when he says, on the text "One knows something": "This is the state of ignorance". But in fact he indicates very precisely why he says this. As the text of the Upanisad on which he is commenting

says:

When there is duality, as it were, then one smells something, one sees something, one hears something, one speaks something, one thinks something, one knows something. But when to the knower of Brahman everything has become the Self, then what should one smell and through what, what should one see and through what, what should one hear and through what, what should one speak and through what, what should one think and through what, what should one know and through what? Through what should one know That owing to which all this is known – through what, O Maitreyi, should one know the Knower?

As Shankara explains, all kinds of perception and (ordinary) knowledge involve a distinct subject and object and a process leading to the perception, or at least a distinct activity of the appropriate faculty. But all this diversity is, ultimately, unreal. "It is ignorance that conjures up the idea of the non-Self". Thus the "knower of Brahman", who "truly realizes the unity of the Self" cannot possibly be conscious "of actions and their factors and results". Thinking and knowing belong only in the state of ignorance.

But even in the state of ignorance, within the "knowledge" that goes with ignorance, there must be an element of unknowability.

Even in the state of ignorance, when one sees something, through what instrument should one know That owing to which all this is known? For that instrument of knowledge itself falls under the category of objects. The knower may desire to know, not about itself, but about objects. As fire does not burn itself, so the self does not know itself, and the knower can have no knowledge of a thing that is not its object. Therefore through what instrument should one know the knower owing to which this universe is known, and who else should know it? And when to the knower of Brahman who has discriminated the Real from the unreal there remains only the subject, absolute and one without a second, through what instrument, O Maitreyi, should one know that Knower?²⁵

This celebrated Upanishadic question, "How shall the Knower be known", is thus presented as essentially a question of logic. It is impossible to know that by which we know all that we know. The point is essentially the same as that made by Wittgenstein in the *Tractatus*, that the eye does not enter into its own field of vision.²⁶ This may not suffice to prove the existence of the Self, as taught by Shankara; but it shows that we ought to be very hesitant to ascribe to him any appeal to the "non-rational". It is essentially the logical point which structures the metaphysical claim.

This Immutable, O Gargi, is never seen by anybody, not being a sense-object, but is Itself the Witness, being vision itself. Likewise It is never heard, not being an object of hearing, but is Itself the Hearer, being hearing itself. So also It is never thought, not being an object of the mind, but is Itself the Thinker, being thought itself. Similarly It is never known, not being an object of the intellect, but is Itself the Knower, being intelligence itself. Further, there is no other witness but This, the Immutable; this Immutable Itself is everywhere the Witness, the subject of vision.²⁷

The eye does not go there, nor speech, nor mind. We do not know (Brahman to be such and such); hence we are not aware of any process of instructing about It.

That (Brahman) is surely different from the known; and again, It is above the unknown – such was (the utterance) we heard of the ancient (teachers) who explained It to us.

That which is not uttered by speech, that by which speech is revealed, know that alone to be Brahman and not what people worship as an object.

That which man does not comprehend with the mind, that by which, they say, the mind is encompassed, know that to be Brahman and not what people worship as an object.

That which man does not see with the eyes, that by which man perceives the activities of the eye, know that alone to be Brahman and not what people worship as an object. . . .²⁸

In view of the claim that is sometimes made that Hinduism is essentially an “empirical” religion, inviting people to try it out for themselves, and not requiring uncritical assent to any theories or dogmas,²⁹ it is interesting that the text I have just quoted from the Kena Upanisad elicits from Shankara the comment:

The text, “Thus we heard” etc. states how through a succession of preceptors and disciples was derived the purport of the sentence which establishes as Brahman that Self of all which is devoid of distinguishing features, and is the light of pure consciousness. Moreover, Brahman can be known only through such a traditional instruction of preceptors and not through argumentation, nor by study (or exposition), intelligence, great learning, austerity, sacrifices, etc.³⁰

It seems to be the point of this that precisely because Brahman is without distinguishing features, there is absolutely no way in which we can arrive at knowledge of It: our knowledge of It can only be a function of Its own knowledge of Itself. Finally there is, for Shankara, only the Self, of course, only Brahman. There is therefore something intrinsically odd about the idea of any kind of coming-to-know of Brahman. But, granted that “we” begin in a

state of ignorance, some kind of process, even if it is strictly all an illusion, is involved in “our” coming out of ignorance into knowledge. But this process cannot be originated within ignorance, it must “come from” Brahman. It must be a “revelation” of some kind, and a revelation which cannot be subjected to the canons and criteria which are applicable within the sphere of ignorance.

This would seem to open the way for a thoroughly irrationalist kind of fideism and fundamentalism; it would seem to leave no room for a rational approach to God. But is this really the case? Shankara certainly does not write as an irrationalist! And the same can surely be said of others who equally insist on the impossibility of arriving at any real apprehension of what God is without some kind of divine revelation. The later neo-Platonists, for instance, are highly scholastic in their idiom, yet they appeal constantly to the authority of such revelations as those given in the Chaldean Oracles, as well as to the authority of Plato. And St Thomas is quite clear that the *prima veritas* can only be known by faith, yet this does not stop him arguing that it is possible to argue for the existence of God. Reason indicates that there must be a “God”, but cannot know what God is; but it can know that it cannot know, and so can without abandonment of rationality acknowledge its dependence on revelation.

The relationship between God and reason is most properly stated in terms of the derivation of reason from God. Reason cannot comprehend its own source, but it can comprehend itself as coming from a source. The religious mind thus apprehends itself simultaneously as being obedient to authority (which it cannot strictly “comprehend”) and as being reasonable. It is a misunderstanding of dogma, then, to oppose it to rationality.

The essential point seems to be that it is always a mistake to conceive of God as “object”. Literally the Kena Upanisad warns us off “what people worship as ‘this’ (*idam*)”; Shankara explains that this means “as a limited object, possessed of distinctions created by limiting adjuncts”.³¹ God cannot be treated as a “particular”, he is not an *item* in reality. But any kind of process of discovery would only yield a “this”, and so could not yield “God”. The big mistake we make is to want to pick God out, to identify him over against something else. This means that any conceivable kind of apprehension of God must be internally corrected, and this applies to any process of ratiocination or religion; and surely we must also say that it applies to anything that appears to be an “experience” of God. It is not simply that God is not present in such ratiocination, such religious exercises, such experience; he *is* present, because he is – at least in the view of Shankara – the essential subject of everything. But he is not a “particular”, and our limited acts of intellect or religion or any kind of experi-

encing faculty can never but be “particular”. To discern the presence of God in them must always involve a correction.

This is why it is important to say that the mind does not encompass God, it is encompassed by him. This is an idea found not only in the Upanisads but also in Jewish and Christian texts.³²

It also indicates the way in which the *via negativa* must operate. To go around simply saying “Neti, neti,”³³ would only achieve half the process. As has been pointed out often enough by critics of apophaticism, “characterization by negation is still characterization, and is still positive characterization: *omnis negatio est determinatio*”.³⁴ Fully-fledged apophaticism, if it is really to take us beyond all characterization, must go even beyond negative characterization too. That this is the intention seems clear from Shankara’s comment on “Neti, neti”: “The particle ‘iti’, repeated twice, covers all possible predications that are to be eliminated by the two negative particles, as when we say, ‘Every village is beautiful’.”³⁵ Shankara is referring to the Sanskrit idiom of using a repeated word to indicate universality (village-village = every village). All possible predications are to be eliminated, not just those which happen to be formulated positively, otherwise we shall still be seeking to arrive at It by making comparisons, and so will end up with a God who is defined as being particular over against other particulars. This is why apophaticism inevitably involves negating the negations. Brahman is not only not known, he is also not unknown. According to the Gita, Brahman is “not being nor is it not-being”.³⁶

Double apophaticism is quite explicitly taught by Proclus. In his commentary on Plato’s *Parmenides* he notes that negation can indeed be a way of defining something: a thing is what it is in contradistinction to something else which it is not.³⁷ But the ultimate source of everything is, *inter alia*, the source of all distinctions, and so cannot feature amongst those things which are distinguished. This is why often both sides of a distinction or a contradiction are denied of the One.³⁸ But the One is not just the antithesis of everything else, either. As Proclus points out in the *Platonic Theology*, in the last analysis all talk about the One is self-defeating. Strictly speaking there is nothing at all that can be said about it, and that applies to negations as well as to positive statements.³⁹

Negative theology is sometimes taken to justify the most extravagant use of paradox and contradiction, but this is certainly not Proclus’ view. He points out that Plato “always respects the principles of contradiction”, but contradiction can only arise within articulate speech. Where there can be no propositions, there can obviously be no contradiction. But that does not mean that you can say what you like about the One. “In order not to be accused of introducing new doctrines into our inherited philosophy, we

say that, for the inexpressible, contradictory propositions are both false, that they make the distinction between true and false only in the sphere of the expressible, and that in no sphere are they ever both true".⁴⁰ The inexpressible is the source of all intelligibility and of all that can be said,⁴¹ and if we find ourselves wanting to say things about it that appear to be contradictory, that only shows that we are trying to express something that cannot be expressed. It is possible, and, for a Platonist like Proclus, it is necessary always to try to indicate the way in which anything we may want to say is related to everything else, and so to indicate its derivation from higher principles which in turn derive ultimately from the One. Thus there is no justification for actual contradiction.

This means that it is not enough for us just to lapse into mystical silence. The end, maybe, is silence (but even that needs to be qualified, as we shall see). But the way into the silence must be articulate and rational thought.⁴² The cataphatic way, even if it is less penetrating than the apophatic, is still necessary. It is the proper ordering of what can be said that directs us effectively towards what cannot be said.

And we must never forget that, however abstruse and mystical it becomes, the initial thrust of Platonism is always the desire to understand how understanding is possible. The quest is for the ultimate ground of intelligibility, which is, for a Platonist, almost if not entirely identical with the quest for the ground of language.

Impressed by Proclus' interest in theurgy, people have sometimes been inclined to dismiss Proclus as a superstitious irrationalist, playing at philosophy. Dodds quotes Geffcken as saying that Proclus and his school are "philosophasters sleep-walking in a Utopian world".⁴³ But this is extremely unfair, as Dodds himself recognizes. It is quite true that Proclus unambiguously declares the power of theurgy to be "superior to all human wisdom and knowledge".⁴⁴ But he equally unambiguously disallows the possibility of our arriving at the heights without using our rational and intellectual powers to the full. "How shall we come closer to the One if we do not stir up the one in the soul, which is a kind of image of the One in us; according to the most accurate of the ancient oracles, this is the way in which, par excellence, we are filled with God (literally, enthusiasm occurs)? But how could we make this one and the flower of the soul light up, if we have not first been active in our minds (*nous*)? It is the activity of the mind (*nous*) which brings the soul to its tranquil, stable condition and activity. But how could we attain to the perfect working of the mind (*nous*), if we did not proceed by way of rational concepts, using complex ways of understanding before we come to more simple ways?"⁴⁵

There is no question, then, of simply trying to bypass or

ignore the exercise of the discursive reason. And, in terms of Proclus' whole system, there is very good reason indeed for limiting the capacity of both *logismos* and *nous*. As has been noticed, his ontology has a kind of "bulge" in the middle. The higher the cause, the greater its efficacy, and so the longer its reach. This means that there is a curious affinity between the very highest cause (the One) and the very lowest effect (matter). This is an important philosophical justification of theurgy.⁴⁶ And being is a higher and further-reaching cause than intellect. This suggests that intellect in us must be transcended, if we are to attain to the heights. Knowledge and intellection can never, in us, be more than a partial response to the One. The soul must turn away from intellection and "run back to its own subsistence", and give itself trustingly to the Good. This is faith, that upstart virtue whose appearance is so unexpected in neo-Platonist writers, but which almost certainly derives from the Chaldean Oracles, not from Christian influence.⁴⁷ The highest state of the mind is to rest in silent, unanalysed, awareness of "the secret essences of intelligible objects"; but the One "has its place above the silence".⁴⁸ Beyond the silence of the intelligibles there is a mysterious possibility of "contact" with the One. This depends on our readiness to go beyond the partial response which is possible to our mental faculties, and allow the "one in us" to draw us to the One. And this "one in us" is mysteriously said to be a "seed of that non-being" which is the One.⁴⁹ That is to say, just as the One is beyond all differentiation, so there is in us something of the same non-differentiation. If we would be united with our Source, we must be prepared to give up being anything in particular (a view which Eckhart heartily endorses).⁵⁰ This is evidently a call to us to be more than just minds. It is not evident that it really involves anything like a mere denial or abandonment of our minds. Apart from the text I have already quoted to prove that this is not Proclus' view, it is worth reflecting that it is a highly articulate and rational system which indicates the importance of that which is not (simply) reason. (And, of course, if the one in us is a seed of non-being, it too, to some extent, must escape from both sides of the antithesis reason-non-reason).

It is generally agreed that neo-Platonism contains a doctrine of mystical experience, and that Plotinus, at least, had mystical experiences. The matter has been excellently discussed by J. M. Rist.⁵¹ There is no need to go into that now. But it is not correct to say, as Dodds does, that "the One is unknowable save in a *unio mystica*".⁵² It is not clear that the One is ever "knowable" in any way. It is the precondition of all knowledge, but is not itself known. Plotinus and Proclus find considerable difficulty in choosing the most suitable language for describing how we are made one

with the One, and the word “contact” (*synaphé*) seems to be the least misleading. But, though union with the One is, in fact, the ontological presupposition for knowledge of anything, consciousness of union with the One (and “consciousness” is perhaps a misleading term) is not a necessary precondition. It is reflection on knowledge that leads to the postulation of the One, and to the definition of the possibility of an ascent to awareness of the One.

It might be argued that the whole metaphysics of the One derives from a mystical experience, in that it all derives from Parmenides, who presents himself as having been supernaturally enlightened by a helpful goddess.⁵³ But even then it should be pointed out that what the goddess does is take Parmenides through a very stiff logical argument, and that the typical products of Eleatic philosophy are logic and linguistic philosophy. It is difficult, then, to see this philosophy of the One as being at any stage simply non-rational. It is a rational system that indicates what reason can do and what it cannot do.

It will take a separate article to explore some of the ways in which Christian theology has taken up the idea of ineffability and inconceivability, and some of the reasons for its insistence on them. For the moment, let us just take stock and see where we have got to.

It appears, at the moment, that the inexpressible does not come on the scene as a primary datum of experience, though there is some evidence that some people have claimed to have some “experience” of it. It appears within highly articulate and rational systems, as a reminder that rationality and intelligibility are not self-generating. Reason is not the measure of all things, it operates within a context which is simply given. If it fails to respect this, it ceases to respect the laws of its own operation and becomes irrational. But this does not mean that we should posit some distinct sphere of the non-rational to go alongside the rational. Reason and the limits of reason belong inseparably together. It is part of what it means for us to be reasonable that we should recognize that we are not just pure reason.

This means that rationality has a built-in self-correcting principle within itself. Reason, when it is working properly, is a humble faculty. In the theology of the early Greek church, an important element in our spiritual growth is the development of “rational wonder”,⁵⁴ and this is the proper mean between two contrasting errors: we may be rational, but devoid of wonder; or we may be full of wonder, but without reason. Neither state will do us much good.

This suggests that it is a mistake to contrast reason with experience, as some people seem to want to do. The correction that there has to be in the exercise of the reason must also be operative

in our "experience". At least none of the philosophical or religious systems we have been looking at offers any encouragement at all to those who wish to take their stand on experience over against thought and argument. The rational "neti, neti" with which the mind refuses to identify as God anything that it can objectify conceptually has to carry over into refusal to identify anything that is experienced as an object as God. Just as the Tao pervades all things, but is not one thing among the rest, so too we can in one sense say that we "experience" God in all our experience; but yet God is not an item among our "experiences". As the archdeacon in Charles Williams' novel reminds himself, "Neither is this Thou, yet this also is Thou".⁵⁵ What we experience is not not God; only we have to be careful how we situate God in what we experience.

And what of the more general reaction against rationality with which we began the previous article? Surely we must say that the attack is well-meant but confused. It is perfectly right to resist a tired rationalism which knows nothing beyond the virtue of logical consistency. But it should be resisted, not because it is too rational, but because it is not rational at all. As Chesterton remarked, the mad man is not the one who has lost his mind, but the one who has lost everything else.⁵⁶

e. e. cummings may be right to say that "life is not a paragraph", but that is no reason for preferring kissing to wisdom.⁵⁷ If kissing is not wise, it is unlikely to prove such a very desirable fate after all. It is a false "wisdom" that knows nothing of kissing. But it is a precarious kissing that knows nothing of wisdom. It is surely the person who lives attentively and reasonably who can actually make the most of his life, including his sensual life. It is the man who knows his way round (which is a rational affair) who is most likely to be relaxed and tolerably at peace in his life (including his bodily life). It is the man who has undergone the torment of playing scales who can let rip on the piano. It is the man who has learned what it means to look who can, when it is appropriate, enjoy his leaping. When reason palls, we may easily be tempted to take refuge in the irrational. But it takes a singularly dogged rationalist to hang on to his unreason when it too has, in turn, begun to pall.

To see how reason functions truly within its whole context of life and truth (neither of which were invented by reason) is surely the likeliest formula for contentment. "Impossibility exhilarates like wine", as Emily Dickinson (who complained about being "shut up in prose") remarked.⁵⁸ But it is the rational mind which can recognize and enjoy impossibility.

1 Tao Te Ching, §1. I quote from the translation in Wing-Tsit Chan, *A Source Book in Chinese Philosophy* (Oxford, 1963).

2 Ibid. §25.

- 3 Ibid. §4.
- 4 Ibid. §11.
- 5 Ibid. §20.
- 6 Ibid. §19.
- 7 Ibid. §18.
- 8 Ibid. §18.
- 9 Ibid. §17. 47; and especially §57.
- 10 Ibid. §16.
- 11 Ibid. §52,
- 12 Ibid. §16.
- 13 Ibid. §14.
- 14 Ibid. §1.
- 15 Ibid. §11.
- 16 Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus, 6.45.
- 17 Ibid. 6.522.
- 18 Ibid. 4.114; 6.13; 5.62.
- 19 Ibid. 5.143; Notebooks 3.6.15.
- 20 Tractatus, 5.61.
- 21 Ibid. 5.471ff.
- 22 Ibid. 5.143.
- 23 Notebooks, 3.6.15.
- 24 Cf Gareth Moore, *Some Fundamental Aspects of the Logic of Mysticism* (Unpublished Thesis), pp. 15ff.
- 25 The Brihadaranyaka Upanisad, with Shankara's commentary. I quote from the translation by Swami Madhavananda (Calcutta, 1965). II iv 14.
- 26 Tractatus, 5.633f.
- 27 Brihad. Up. III viii 11.
- 28 Kena Up. I 3ff. I quote from the translation by Swami Gambhirananda (Calcutta, 1972).
- 29 E.g. Vivekananda, *Raja-Yoga* (Calcutta, 1966), chapter I.
- 30 Kena Up. (ed. cit.) p. 48.
- 31 Ibid. p. 51.
- 32 E.g. Genesis Rabbah 68:9; Philo, *Leg. All.* I 44; Hermas, 26; Gospel of Truth, 22:25-7; Clement of Alexandria, *Strom.* II 2,6,2.
- 33 Brih. Up. II iii 6.
- 34 *Mysticism and Philosophical Analysis*, p. 211.
- 35 Brih. Up. (ed. cit.), p. 347.
- 36 Bhagavad Gita, 13:12.
- 37 *In Parm.* VII p. 68.
- 38 *In Parm.* 1076, 29ff.
- 39 *Theol. Plat.* II 10.
- 40 *In Parm.* VII p. 72.
- 41 *Theol. Plat.* II 6.
- 42 Cf *In Parm.* 1071, 25-37; *Theol. Plat.* II 11.
- 43 E. R. Dodds, *Proclus: The Elements of Theology* (Oxford, 1963), p. xx.
- 44 *Theol. Plat.* I 25.
- 45 *In Parm.* 1071, 25-37.
- 46 Cf R. T. Wallis, *Neo-Platonism* (Duckworth, 1972), pp. 156f.
- 47 *Theol. Plat.* I 25; cf. Wallis, p. 154.

- 48 *In Parm.* VII p. 46.
 49 *In Parm.* 1082, 10.
 50 E.g. *On Detachment*.
 51 J. M. Rist, *Plotinus* (Cambridge, 1967), chapter 16.
 52 Dodds, *Elements of Theology*, p. 311.
 53 Parmenides, fragment 1.
 54 Gregory Thaumaturgus, *Farewell Speech to Origen*, 111; Basil, *In Hexaem.* I 10f; V 8.
 55 *War in Heaven* (Faber paperback edition), p. 137.
 56 *Orthodoxy* (Fontana edition), p. 19.
 57 e. e. cummings, *since feeling is first* (quoted in the previous article).
 58 Emily Dickinson, *Poems*, 838; 613.

(*To be continued*)

A Tale From Old Argentina

Michael E. Williams

Recently attention was focussed on the Church in Latin America by the Puebla conference of bishops, but we must not forget that last year, 1978, was not only the year of the World Cup but also that of Jim Jones and the mass suicides. Those events in Guyana were as photogenic as any papal visit or assembly of bishops and perhaps even more difficult for a secular world to comprehend. Such mass religious hysteria is unusual in any continent but the fundamentalist religious beliefs that seem to have accompanied it have been increasing recently and the activities of apocalyptic groups like the Mormons have become a feature of life in the shanty towns. For some, these happenings are an anglo-saxon excrescence on the fair face of South America. True enough, flight from the world usually takes a different form in Latin countries. The situation does not lead men to indulge in fantasies about a new Jerusalem or Jonesville here on earth. The most they can hope for is to take time off and spend it in the company of fellow sufferers who may teach them how to transmute their present cares and troubles into something of mystical value. There is a down-to-earth realism in the suffering Christ and the Mater Dolorosa in a world where incarceration, flaying, and swords of sorrow are no idle metaphors. But we must not forget that these religious forms have their secular counterpart. In the dark days of the late nineteen twenties after the fall of Hipolito Yrigoyen the unevangelised masses of Buenos Aires found a liturgical release from their cares in the tango. 'Un pensamiento triste que se puede bailar', as E. S. Discepolo described it.¹ But when a change for the better came with the revolution and the advent of Peron, Discepolo ceas-