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MAN IS NOT ALONE

a philosophy of religion

Abraham Joshua Heschel

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MAN IS NOT ALONE

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MEANING OUTSIDE THE MIND

1 The Sense of the Ineffable

THE AWARENESS OF GRANDEUR

There are three aspects of nature which command man's attention: power, loveliness, grandeur. Power he exploits, loveliness he enjoys, grandeur fills him with awe. We take it for granted that man's mind should be sensitive to nature's loveliness. We take it equally for granted that a person who is not affected by the vision of earth and sky, who has no eyes to see the grandeur of nature and to sense the sublime, however vaguely, is not human.

But why? What does it do for us? The awareness of grandeur does not serve any social or biological purpose; man is very rarely able to portray his appreciation of the sublime to others or to add it to his scientific knowledge. Nor is its perception pleasing to the senses or gratifying to our vanity. Why, then, expose ourselves to the disquieting provocation of something that defies our drive to know, to something which may even fill us with fright, melancholy or resignation? Still we insist that it is unworthy of man not to take notice of the sublime.

Perhaps more significant than the fact of our awareness of

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within our reach but beyond our grasp; not the quantitative aspect of nature but something qualitative; not what is beyond our range in time and space but the true meaning, source and end of being, in other words, the ineffable.

THE ENCOUNTER WITH THE INEFFABLE

The ineffable inhabits the magnificent and the common, the grandiose and the tiny facts of reality alike. Some people sense this quality at distant intervals in extraordinary events; others sense it in the ordinary events, in every fold, in every nook; day after day, hour after hour. To them things are bereft of triteness; to them being does not mate with non-sense. They hear the stillness that crowds the world in spite of our noise, in spite of our greed. Slight and simple as things may be—a piece of paper, a morsel of bread, a word, a sigh—they hide and guard a never-ending secret: A glimpse of God? Kinship with the spirit of being? An eternal flash of a will?

Part company with preconceived notions, suppress your leaning to reiterate and to know in advance of your seeing, try to see the world for the first time with eyes not dimmed by memory or volition, and you will detect that you and the things that surround you—trees, birds, chairs—are like parallel lines that run close and never meet. Your pretense of being acquainted with the world is quickly abandoned.

How do we seek to apprehend the world? Intelligence inquires into the nature of reality, and, since it cannot work without its tools, takes those phenomena that appear to fit its categories as answers to its inquiry. Yet, when trying to hold

the cosmic is our consciousness of *having to* be aware of it, as if there were an *imperative*, a compulsion to pay attention to that which lies beyond our grasp.

THE SENSE OF THE INEFFABLE

The power of expression is not the monopoly of man. Expression and communication are, to some degree, something of which animals are capable. What characterizes man is not only his ability to develop words and symbols, but also his being compelled to draw a distinction between the utterable and the unutterable, to be stunned by that which is but cannot be put into words.

It is the sense of the sublime that we have to regard as the root of man's creative activities in art, thought and noble living. Just as no flora has ever fully displayed the hidden vitality of the earth, so has no work of art ever brought to expression the depth of the unutterable, in the sight of which the souls of saints, poets and philosophers live. The attempt to convey what we see and cannot say is the everlasting theme of mankind's unfinished symphony, a venture in which adequacy is never achieved. Only those who live on borrowed words believe in their gift of expression. A sensitive person knows that the intrinsic, the most essential, is never expressed. Most—and often the best—of what goes on in us is our own secret; we have to wrestle with it ourselves. The stirring in our hearts when watching the star-studded sky is something no language can declare. What smites us with unquenchable amazement is not that which we grasp and are able to convey but that which lies

an interview with reality face to face, without the aid of either words or concepts, we realize that what is intelligible to our mind is but a thin surface of the profoundly undisclosed, a ripple of inveterate silence that remains immune to curiosity and inquisitiveness like distant foliage in the dusk.

IS THERE AN ENTRANCE TO THE ESSENCE?

Analyze, weigh and measure a tree as you please, observe and describe its form and functions, its genesis and the laws to which it is subject; still an *acquaintance* with its *essence* never comes about. Looking at things through the medium of our thoughts remains an act of crystal-gazing; the pictures we induce happen to be part of the truth, nevertheless, what we see is a mental image, not the things themselves. Hastily running down the narrow path of time, man and world have no station, no present, where they can get acquainted. Thinking is never co-temporal with its object, for it follows the process of perception that took place previously. We always deal in our thoughts with posthumous objects. Acting always behind perception, thinking has only memories at its disposal. Its object is a matter of the past, like a moment before the last: so close and so far away. Knowledge, therefore, is a set of reminiscences, and, our perception being always incomplete and full of omissions, a subsequent combination of random memories. We rarely discover, we remember before we think; we see the present in the light of what we already know. We constantly compare instead of penetrate, and are never entirely unprejudiced. Memory is often a hindrance to creative experience.

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Thinking is fettered in words, in names, and names describe that which things have in common. The individual and unique in reality is not captured by names. Yet our mind necessarily compromises with words, with names. This is an additional reason why we rarely find the entrance to the essence. We cannot even adequately say what it is that we miss.

Is it necessary to ascend the pile of ideas in order to learn that our solutions are enigmas, that our words are indiscretions? A world of things is open to our minds, but often it appears as if the mind were a sieve in which we try to hold the flux of reality, and there are moments in which the mind is swept away by the tide of the unexplorable, a tide usually stemmed but never receding.

THE DISPARITY OF SOUL AND REASON

The awareness of the unknown is earlier than the awareness of the known. The tree of knowledge grows upon the soil of mystery. Next to our mind are not concepts, words, names, but the nameless, the inexpressible, being. For while it is true that the given, the apparent is next to our experience; *within* experience it is otherness, remoteness, upon which we come. Concepts are delicious snacks with which we try to alleviate our amazement. Try to think reality itself, forget what you know, and you realize at once your distressing famishment. We should not expect thoughts to give us more than what they contain. Soul and reason are *not* the same. It seems as if concepts and our own selves were strangers who somewhere in the endlessness of time met and became friends. They often

mate and often alienate, for the benefit of both. The more incisive the awareness of the unknown and the more sustaining our immediate grasp of reality, the more trenchant and unrelenting becomes our realization of that disparity.

Just as the simple-minded equates appearance with reality, so does the overwise equate the expressible with the ineffable, the logical with the metalogical, concepts with things. And just as critical thought is conscious of its not being identical with things, so does our self-reflecting soul bear in its heart an awareness of itself, distinct from the logical content of its thoughts.

The awareness of the ineffable is that with which our search must begin. Philosophy, enticed by the promise of the known, has often surrendered the treasures of higher incomprehension to poets and mystics, although without the sense of the ineffable there are no metaphysical problems, no awareness of being as being, of value as value.

The search of reason ends at the shore of the known; on the immense expanse beyond it only the sense of the ineffable can glide. It alone knows the route to that which is remote from experience and understanding. Neither of them is amphibious: reason cannot go beyond the shore, and the sense of the ineffable is out of place where we measure, where we weigh.

We do not leave the shore of the known in search of adventure or suspense or because of the failure of reason to answer our questions. We sail because our mind is like a fantastic sea shell, and when applying our ear to its lips we hear a perpetual murmur from the waves beyond the shore.

Citizens of two realms, we all must sustain a dual allegiance: we sense the ineffable in one realm, we name and exploit reality in another. Between the two we set up a system of refer-

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ences, but we can never fill the gap. They are as far and as close to each other as time and calendar, as violin and melody, as life and what lies beyond the last breath.

The tangible phenomena we scrutinize with our reason, the sacred and indemonstrable we overhear with the sense of the ineffable. The force that inspires readiness for self-sacrifice, the thoughts that breed humility within and behind the mind, are not identical with the logician's craftsmanship. The purity of which we never cease to dream, the untold things we insatiably love, the vision of the good for which we either die or perish alive—no reason can bound. It is the ineffable from which we draw the taste of the sacred, the joy of the imperishable.

2 Radical Amazement

REASON AND WONDER

The greatest hindrance to knowledge is our adjustment to conventional notions, to mental clichés. Wonder or radical amazement, the state of maladjustment to words and notions, is, therefore, a prerequisite for an authentic awareness of that which is. ✓✓

Standing eye to eye with being as being, we realize that we are able to look at the world with two faculties—with reason and with wonder. Through the first we try to explain or to adapt the world to our concepts, through the second we seek to adapt our minds to the world.

Wonder rather than doubt is the root of knowledge. Doubt comes in the wake of knowledge as a state of vacillation between two contrary or contradictory views; as a state in which a belief we had embraced begins to totter. It challenges the mind's accounts about reality and calls for an examination and verification of that which is deposited in the mind. In other words, the business of doubt is one of auditing the mind's accounts about reality rather than a concern with reality itself; it deals with the content of perception rather than with perception itself.

Doubt is not applied to that which we have an immediate awareness of. We do not doubt that we exist or that we see, we merely question whether we know what we see or whether that which we see is a true reflection of what exists in reality. Thus, it is after perception has been crystallized in a conception that doubt springs up.

Doubt, then, is an interdepartmental activity of the mind. First we see, next we judge and form an opinion and thereafter we doubt. In other words, to doubt is to question that which we have accepted as possibly true a moment ago. Doubt is an act of appeal, a proceeding by which a logical judgment is brought from the memory to the critical faculty of the mind for re-examination. Accordingly, we must first judge and cling to a belief in our judgment before we are able to doubt. But if we must know in order to question, if we must entertain a belief in order to cast doubt upon it, then doubt cannot be the beginning of knowledge.

Wonder goes beyond knowledge. We do not doubt that we doubt, but we are amazed at our ability to doubt, amazed at our ability to wonder. He who is sluggish will berate doubt; he who is blind will berate wonder. Doubt may come to an end, wonder lasts forever. Wonder is a state of mind in which we do not look at reality through the latticework of our memorized knowledge; in which nothing is taken for granted. Spiritually we cannot live by merely reiterating borrowed or inherited knowledge. Inquire of your soul what does it know, what does it take for granted. It will tell you only no-thing is taken for granted; each thing is a surprise, *being is unbelievable*. We are amazed at seeing anything at all; amazed not only at particular values and things but *at the unexpectedness of being as such*, at the fact that there is being at all.

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PHILOSOPHY BEGINS IN WONDER

A philosophy that begins with radical doubt ends in radical despair. It was the principle of *dubito ut intelligam* that prepared the soil for modern gospels of despair. "Philosophy begins in wonder" (Plato, *Theatetus* 155D), in a state of mind which we should like to call *thaumatism* (from *thaumazein*—to doubt) as distinguished from skepticism.

Even before we conceptualize what we perceive, we are amazed beyond words, beyond doubts. We may doubt anything, except that we are struck with amazement. When in doubt, we raise questions; when in wonder, we do not even know how to ask a question. Doubts may be resolved, radical amazement can never be erased. There is no answer in the world to man's radical wonder. Under the running sea of our theories and scientific explanations lies the aboriginal abyss of radical amazement.

Radical amazement has a wider scope than any other act of man. While any act of perception or cognition has as its object a selected segment of reality, radical amazement refers to all of reality; not only to what we see, but also to the very act of seeing as well as to our own selves, to the selves that see and are amazed at their ability to see.

THE MYSTERY WITHIN REASON

The ineffable is not a particular puzzle to the mind, as, for example, the cause of volcanic eruptions. We do not have to

go to the end of reasoning to encounter it. The ineffable is, as we have said above, something with which we are confronted everywhere and at all times. Even the very act of thinking baffles our thinking, just as every intelligible fact is, by virtue of its being a fact, drunk with baffling aloofness. Does not mystery reign within reasoning, within perception, within explanation? Where is the self-understanding that could unfurl the marvel of our own thinking, that could explain the grace of our emptying the concrete with charms of abstraction? What formula could explain and solve the enigma of the very fact of thinking? Ours is neither thing nor thought, but only the subtle magic blending the two.

What fills us with radical amazement is not the relations in which everything is embedded but the fact that even the minimum of perception is a maximum of enigma. The most incomprehensible fact is the fact that we comprehend at all.

It is impossible to be at ease and to repose on ideas which have turned into habits, on "canned" theories, in which our own or other people's insights are preserved. We can never leave behind our concern in the safe-deposit of opinions, nor delegate its force to others and so attain vicarious insights. We must keep our own amazement, our own eagerness alive. And if we ever fail in our quest for insight, it is not because it cannot be found, but because we do not know how to live, or how to beware of the mind's narcissistic tendency to fall in love with its own reflection, a tendency which cuts thought off its roots.

The tree of knowledge and the tree of life have their roots in the same soil. But, playing with winds and beams, the tree of knowledge often grows brilliant, sapless leaves instead of fruits. Let the leaves wither, but the sap should not dry up.

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What is subtle speculation worth without the pristine insight into the sacredness of life, an insight which we try to translate into philosophy's rational terms, into religion's ways of living, into art's forms and visions? To maintain the stir and flow of that insight in all thoughts, so that even in our doubts its sap should not cease to flush, means to draw from the soil of what is creative in civilization and religion, a soil which only artificial flowers can dispense with.

The sense of the ineffable does not hush the quest of thought, but, on the contrary, disturbs the placid and unseals our suppressed impressionability. The approach to the ineffable leads through the depth of knowledge rather than through ignorant animal gazing. To the minds of those who do not make the universal mistake of assuming as known a world that is unknown, of placing the solution before the enigma, the abundance of the utterable can never displace the world of the ineffable.

Souls that are focused and do not falter at first sight, falling back on words and ready-made notions with which the memory is replete, can behold the mountains as if they were gestures of exaltation. To them all sight is suddenness, and eyes which do not discern the flash in the darkness of a thing perceive but series of clichés.

EXPERIENCE WITHOUT EXPRESSION

Always we are chasing words, and always words recede. But the greatest experiences are those for which we have no ex-

pression. To live only on that which we can say is to wallow in the dust, instead of digging up the soil. How shall we ignore the mystery, in which we are involved, to which we are attached by our very existence? How shall we remain deaf to the throb of the cosmic that is subtly echoed in our own souls? The most intimate is the most mysterious. Wonder alone is the compass that may direct us to the pole of meaning. As I enter the next second of my life, while writing these lines, I am aware that to be swept by the enigma and to pause—rather than to flee and to forget—is to live within the core.

To become aware of the ineffable is to part company with words. The essence, the tangent to the curve of human experience, lies beyond the limits of language. The world of things we perceive is but a veil. Its flutter is music, its ornament science, but what it conceals is inscrutable. Its silence remains unbroken; no words can carry it away.

Sometimes we wish the world could cry and tell us about that which made it pregnant with fear-filling grandeur. Sometimes we wish our own heart would speak of that which made it heavy with wonder.

THE ROOT OF REASON

Do we owe all we know to discursive thinking? Does our syllogistic power bear the whole brunt? Reasoning is not the only motor of mental life. Who does not know that more is contained in our convictions than has been crystallized in definable concepts? It is a misconception to assume that there is nothing in our consciousness that was not previously in per-

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ception or analytical reason. Much of the wisdom inherent in our consciousness is the root, rather than the fruit, of reason. There are more songs in our souls than the tongue is able to utter. When detached from its original insights, the discursive mind becomes a miser, and when we discover that concepts bring no relief to our outraged conscience and thirst for integrity, we turn to the origin of thought, to the endless shore that lies across the logical. Just as the mind is able to form conceptions supported by sense perception, it can derive insights from the dimension of the ineffable. Insights are the roots of art, philosophy and religion, and must be acknowledged as common and fundamental facts of mental life. The ways of creative thinking do not always coincide with those charted by traditional logicians; the realm where genius is at home, where insight is at work, logic can hardly find access to.

3 The World Is an Allusion

A COGNITIVE INSIGHT

It is not in a roundabout way, by analogy or inference, that we become aware of the ineffable; we do not think about it *in absentia*. It is rather sensed as something immediately given by way of an insight that is unending and underivable, logically and psychologically prior to judgment, to the assimilation of subject matter to mental categories; a universal insight into an objective aspect of reality, of which all men are at all times capable; not the froth of ignorance but the climax of thought, indigenous to the climate that prevails at the summit of intellectual endeavor, where such works as the last quartets of Beethoven come into being. It is a cognitive insight, since the awareness it evokes is a definite addition to the mind.

A UNIVERSAL PERCEPTION

The sense of the ineffable is not an esoteric faculty but an ability with which all men are endowed; it is potentially as

common as sight or as the ability to form syllogisms. For just as man is endowed with the ability to know certain aspects of reality, he is endowed with the ability to know that there is more than what he knows. His mind is concerned with the ineffable as well as with the expressible, and the awareness of his radical amazement is as universally valid as the principle of contradiction or the principle of sufficient reason.

Just as material things offer resistance to our spontaneous impulses, and it is that feeling of resistance that makes us believe that these things are real, not illusory, so does the ineffable offer resistance to our categories.

What the sense of the ineffable perceives is something *objective* which cannot be conceived by the mind nor captured by imagination or feeling, something real which, by its very essence, is beyond the reach of thought and feeling. What we are primarily aware of is not our self, our inner mood, but a transsubjective situation, in regard to which our ability fails. Subjective is the *manner*, not the *matter* of our perception. What we perceive is objective in the sense of being independent of and corresponding to our perception. Our radical amazement responds to the mystery, but does not produce it. You and I have not invented the grandeur of the sky nor endowed man with the mystery of birth and death. We do not create the ineffable, we encounter it.

Our awareness of it is potentially present in every perception, every act of thinking and every enjoyment or valuation of reality. Since it is an incontestable fact, no theory of man would be complete if it were left out. It is attested to by undaunted triumphant explorers who, when they have reached the peak, are more humble than ever before.

Subjective is the absence not the presence of radical amaze-

ment. Such lack or absence is a sign of a half-hearted, listless mind, of an undeveloped sense for the depth of things.

The ineffable, therefore, may be verified by every non-sophisticated man who must come upon it in his own unmitigated experience. This is why all words that hint at the ineffable are understandable to everybody.

Without the concept of the *ineffable* it would be impossible to account for the diversity of man's attempts to express or depict reality, for the diversity of philosophies, poetic visions or artistic representations, for the consciousness that we are still at the beginning of our effort to say what we see about us.

We have characterized the perception of the ineffable as a universal perception. But if its content is not communicable, how do we know that it is the same in all men?

To this we may say that while we are unable either to define or to describe the ineffable, it is given to us to point to it. By means of *indicative* rather than descriptive terms, we are able to convey to others those features of our perception which are known to all men.

Perceptions of beauty are not expressed by definitions either, and because that which we sense is not identical in all regards, the descriptions offered are highly divergent. Yet we assume that they all mean essentially the same. This is because the reader recognizes in the descriptions the essence of a perception in which he shares, although the descriptions themselves differ widely.

The ineffable is not a synonym for the unknown or the non-descript; its essence is not in its being an enigma, in its being hidden behind the curtain.

What we encounter in our perception of the sublime, in our radical amazement, is a spiritual suggestiveness of reality, an *allusiveness* to transcendent meaning. The world in its grandeur is full of a spiritual radiance, for which we have neither name nor concept.

We are struck with an awareness of the immense preciousness of being; a preciousness which is not an object of analysis but a cause of wonder; it is inexplicable, nameless, and cannot be specified or put in one of our categories. Yet, we have a *certainty without knowledge*: it is real without being expressible. It cannot be communicated to others; every man has to find it by himself. In moments of sensing the ineffable we are as certain of the value of the world as we are of its existence. There must be a value which was worth the world's coming into existence. We may be skeptical as to whether the world is perfect. Yet, even its imperfection admitted, the preciousness of its grandeur is beyond question.

Thus, while the ineffable is a term of negation indicating a limitation of expression, its content is intensely affirmative, denoting an *allusiveness* to something meaningful, for which we possess no means of expression. Usually we regard as meaningful that which can be expressed, and as meaningless that which cannot be expressed. Yet, the equation of the meaningful and the expressible ignores a vast realm of human experience, and

Man is not alone

is refuted by our sense of the ineffable which is an awareness of an allusiveness to meaning without the ability to express it. That the sense of the ineffable is an awareness of meaning is indicated by the fact that the inner response it evokes is that of awe or reverence.

4 To Be Is to Stand For

THE UNIVERSALITY OF REVERENCE

Reverence is an attitude as indigenous to human consciousness as fear when facing danger or pain when hurt. The scope of revered objects may vary, reverence itself is characteristic of man in all civilizations. Let us analyze a rather common and perhaps universal example of such an attitude, the inner structure of which will prove to be the same in all examples—whatever the object revered may be. Obviously, we can never sneer at the stars, mock the dawn or scoff at the totality of being. Sublime grandeur evokes unhesitating, unflinching awe. Away from the immense, cloistered in our own concepts, we may scorn and revile everything. But standing between earth and sky, we are silenced by the sight. . . .

Why is it impossible to be overbearing in the face of the universe? Is it because of fear? The stars could do us no harm, if we ridiculed them. Is it because of a fear inherited from our primitive ancestors, an atavistic superstition that should be discarded? No one who is unprejudiced is able in the presence of grandeur to declare that such reverence is fatuous or absurd. Is it a higher form of egotism? No sane person could cherish the desire to venerate himself. Reverence is always for someone else; there is no self-reverence.

Ignorance is not the cause of reverence. The unknown as such does not fill us with awe. We have no feelings of awe for the other side of the moon or for that which will happen tomorrow. Nor is it might or mass that arouses such an attitude. It is not the prize-fighter or the millionaire but the fragile old man or our mother whom we find venerable. Nor do we revere an object for its beauty, a statement for its logical consistency or an institution for its purposefulness.

Nor do we ever revere the known; because the known is in our grasp, and we revere only that which surpasses us. We do not revere the regularity of the year's seasons, but that which makes it possible; not the calculating machine, but the mind that invented it; not the sun, but the power that created it. It is the *extremely precious*, morally, intellectually or spiritually, that we revere.

Reverence is one of man's answers to the presence of the mystery. This is why, in contradistinction to other emotions, it does not rush to be spoken. When we stand in awe, our lips do not demand speech, knowing that if we spoke, we would deprave ourselves. In such moments talk is an abomination. All we want is to pause, to be still, that the moment may last. It is like listening to great music; how it reaps the yield from the fertile soil of stillness; we are swept by it without being able to appraise it. The meaning of the things we revere is overwhelming and beyond the grasp of our understanding. We possess no categories for it and would distort it if we tried to appraise it by our standard of values; it essentially surpasses our criteria.

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REVERENCE—A CATEGORICAL IMPERATIVE

The objection may be voiced that a psychological reaction is no evidence for an ontological fact, and we can never infer an object itself from a feeling a person has about it. The feeling of awe may often be the result of a misunderstanding of an ordinary fact; one may be overawed by an artificial spectacle or a display of evil power. That objection is, of course, valid. Yet what we infer from is not the actual feeling of awe but the intellectual certainty that in the face of nature's grandeur and mystery we must respond with awe; what we infer from is not a psychological state but a fundamental norm of human consciousness, a *categorical imperative*. Indeed, the validity and requiredness of awe enjoy a degree of certainty that is not even surpassed by the axiomatic certainty of geometry.

We do not sense the mystery because we feel a need for it, just as we do not notice the ocean or the sky because we have a desire to see them. The sense of mystery is not a product of our will. It may be suppressed by the will but it is not generated by it. The mystery is not the product of a need, it is a fact.

That sweep of mystery is not a thought in our mind but a most powerful presence beyond the mind. In asserting that the ineffable is spiritually real, independent of our perception, we do not endow a mere idea with existence, just as I do not do so in asserting: "This is an ocean," when I am carried away by its waves. The ineffable is there before we form an idea of it. To the spirit of man his own spirit is a reliable witness that the mystery is not an absurdity, that, on the contrary, things

known and perceptible are charged with its heart-stripping, galvanizing meaning.

MEANING OUTSIDE THE MIND

Our assumption that there is meaning in things which has the quality of inspiring the human mind with awe implies a principle that may come as a surprise to many readers; namely, that meaning is something which occurs *outside the mind* in objective things—independent of subjective awareness of it. We do, indeed, claim that meanings, just as facts, are independent of the structure of the human mind and given with or within things and events. In abstract analysis we distinguish and divide between fact and meaning, yet in actual perception they are given together. There are no naked, neutral facts. Being as such is inconceivable; it is always endowed with meaning.

Meaning is not man's gift to reality. To assume that reality is chaotic, bare of significance, as long as man does not approach it with the magic touch of his mind, would be to deny that nature behaves according to law. The essence of thought is discovery rather than invention.

In the common man's perception facts appear with a minimum of significance, while to the artist the fact overflows with meaning; things communicate to him more significance than he is able to absorb. Creative living in art, science and religion is a denial of the assumption that man is the source of significance; he merely lends his categories and means of expression to a meaning which is there. Only those who have lost their

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sense of meaning would claim that self-expression rather than world-expression is the purpose of living.

EXPECTEDNESS AND CERTAINTY OF MEANING

Expectedness of meaning, the certainty that whatever exists must be worth while, that whatever is real must be compatible with a thought, is at the root of all our thinking, feeling and volition. It is reason's oracle or axiom, on its vindication we stake all we possess, and there is no refuge from it but self-slaughter and the will to madness. Always looking for some intrinsic quality in reality that would exhibit its significance, we are sure that the hidden and unknown will never turn out to be absurd or meaningless. There is a transcendent *preciousness* that surpasses our power of appreciation, and of which our highest values are but a faint indication. The world is resplendent with such preciousness; we sense it wherever we go, with our hearts too feeble or unworthy to fathom it.

Should we condemn that certainty as a wild audacity, since it fails to be constantly vindicated? Or is it our mind which is to be blamed for misunderstanding its own expectation, for its compromising with some of its vagaries and eccentric notions, thus distorting what was originally an authentic insight? The notion that supreme meaning must be self-advertising like a clock, the tendency to fling favorite anthropocentric conceptions at the world, have made a caricature of mystery. The scandal of trying to adapt meaning to our minds, of constantly seeking what is the universe worth to us, may, indeed, seal the doom of our understanding of meaning.

Science does not try to fathom the mystery. It merely describes and explains the way in which things behave in terms of causal necessity. It does not try to give us an explanation in terms of logical necessity—why things *must* be at all, and why the laws of nature *must* be the way they are. We do not know, for example, *why* certain combinations of a definite kind form a constellation which goes with the phenomena of electricity, while others with the phenomena of magnetism. The knowledge of how the world functions gives us neither an acquaintance with its essence nor an insight into its meaning, just as the knowledge of general physiology and psychology does not give us an acquaintance with the Dalai Lama whom we have never met.

Trying to pierce the mystery with our categories is like trying to bite a wall. Science extends rather than limits the scope of the ineffable, and our radical amazement is enhanced rather than reduced by the advancement of knowledge. The theory of evolution and adaptation of the species does not disenchant the organism of its wonder. Men like Kepler and Newton who have stood face to face with the reality of the infinite would have been unable to coin a phrase about the heavens declaring the glory not of God, but of Kepler and Newton; or the verse: "Glory to man in the highest! for man is the master of things."

Scientific research is an entry into the endless, not a blind alley; solving one problem, a greater one enters our sight. One answer breeds a multitude of new questions; explanations are

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merely indications of greater puzzles. Everything hints at something that transcends it; the detail indicates the whole, the whole, its idea, the idea, its mysterious root. What appears to be a center is but a point on the periphery of another center. The totality of a thing is actual infinity.

ALL KNOWLEDGE IS A PARTICLE

There is no true thinker who does not possess an awareness that his thought is a part of an endless context, that his ideas are not taken from the air. All philosophy is but a word in a sentence, just as to a composer the most complete symphony is but a note in an inexhaustible melody. Only when intoxicated with our own ideas do we consider the world of spirit a soliloquy; ideals, thoughts, melodies our own shadows. The rich in spirit do not know how to be proud of what they grasp, for they sense that the things which they comprehend are outbursts of inconceivable significance, that there are no lonely ideas roaming about in a void, to be seized and appropriated. *To be* implies to *stand for*, because every being is representative of something that is more than itself; because the seen, the known, stands for the unseen, the unknown. Even the most abstract mathematical formula to which we may reduce the order of the universe arouses the question: What does it signify? The answer will necessarily be: It represents the majesty of that which is more than itself. At whatever climax of thinking we may arrive, we face transcendent significance.

The world's mystery is either chaos without value of any kind, or is replete with an infinite significance beyond the

reach of finite minds; in other words, it is either absolutely meaningless or absolutely meaningful, either too inferior or too superior to be an object of human comprehension.

Yet, how would we know of the mystery of being if not through our sense of the ineffable, and it is this sense that communicates to us the supremacy and grandeur of the ineffable together with the knowledge of its reality. Thus, we cannot deny the superiority of the ineffable to our minds, although, for the same reason, we cannot prove it.

On the other hand, the fact of our being able to sense it and to be aware of its existence at all is a sure indication that the ineffable stands in some relationship to the mind of man. We should, therefore, not label it as *irrational*, to be disregarded as the residue of knowledge, as dreary remains of speculation unworthy of our attention. The ineffable is conceivable in spite of its being unknowable.

IS THE INEFFABLE AN ILLUSION?

Against our affirmation of the ineffable the following argument may be raised: Granted that certain meaning-qualities are given within reality, there are certainly other meaning-qualities which, while we take them to be real, are mere illusions. We do not claim, for example, that there is something in reality that corresponds to the grotesque images of demons worshiped in primitive religious cults. Is not the ineffable, too, a mere word, a sham? Does its being meaningful to us necessarily prove that there is something for which it stands? What is the guarantee that the awareness of the ineffable is

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more than a subjective impression? Let us accept a theory and say it is a dream that grows at the mind's frontier, the magical offspring of intense but wishful thinking! Yet the smooth and elegant way which this theory offers is deceptive; it is, in fact, too slippery to walk on. Why in the world should man desire or postulate a marvel that he can neither master nor grasp, that fills him with terror and humility? Theories are always magnanimous, but their test comes when applied. Is it imaginable that an international academy of scholars should one day proclaim: there is nothing to revere; the mystery of life, of heaven and earth, is but a figment of the mind?

To assert that the most sensitive minds of all ages were victims of an illusion; that religion, poetry, art, philosophy were the outcome of a self-deception is too sophisticated to be reasonable. Bringing discredit on the genius of man, such an assertion would, of course, disqualify our own minds for making any assertion. It is true that the history of religion abounds in examples of idols and symbols that had meaning to certain people but were meaningless to others. But did they really stand for nothing? We can point to psychical complexes which have presumably affected the desire to produce those primitive idols as well as to their ludicrousness and perversity. Yet, rejecting them as willful products of the mind does not vitiate the sense of mystery implicit in the urge to produce and worship them. The idol-worshipper's error begins in the process of expressing his sense of mystery, when he begins to relate the transcendent to his conventional needs and ideas and tries to specify that which is beyond his grasp. In that process motives come into play that have nothing to do with his original insight. He begins to regard the instru-

mental as final, the temporal as ultimate, thus distorting both the facts he adores as well as the quality of the divine he is bestowing upon them. He still has to hear: "Thou shalt not make unto thee a graven image, nor any manner of likeness." No thing can serve as a symbol or likeness of God—not even the universe.

On a lovely summer afternoon an influential educator admired the sky. His little girl turned and asked: "What is there beyond the sky?" The father gave her a "scientific" answer: "Ether, my child." Whereupon the girl exclaimed: "Ether!" and she held her nose . . .

5 Knowledge by Appreciation

A PERCEPTION AT THE END OF PERCEPTION

We are rarely aware of the tangent of the beyond at the whirling wheel of experience. In our passion for knowledge, our minds prey upon the wealth of an unresisting world and, seizing our limited spoils, we quickly leave the ground to lose ourselves in the whirlwind of our own knowledge.

The horizon of knowledge is lost in the mist produced by fads and phrases. We refuse to take notice of what is beyond our sight, content with converting realities into opinions, mysteries into dogmas and ideas into a multitude of words. What is extraordinary appears to us as habit, the dawn a daily routine of nature. But time and again we awake. In the midst of walking in the never-ending procession of days and nights, we are suddenly filled with a solemn terror, with a feeling of our wisdom being inferior to dust. We cannot endure the heartbreaking splendor of sunsets. Of what avail, then, are opinions, words, dogmas? In the confinement of our study rooms, our knowledge seems to us a pillar of light. But when we stand at the door which opens out to the infinite, we realize that all concepts are but glittering motes that populate a sunbeam.

To some of us explanations and opinions are tokens of the wonder's departure, like a curfew ringing the end of insight and search. However, those to whom reality is dearer than information, to whom life is stronger than concepts and the world more than words, are never deluded into believing that what they know and perceive is the core of reality. We are able to exploit, to label things with well-trimmed words; but when ceasing to subject them to our purposes and to impose on them the forms of our intellect, we are stunned and incapable of saying what things are in themselves; it is an experience of being unable to experience something we face: too great to be perceived. Music, poetry, religion—they all initiate in the soul's encounter with an aspect of reality for which reason has no concepts and language has no names.

THE WAY OF EXPEDIENCY

Most of our attention is given to the expedient, to that which is conducive to our advantage and which would enable us to exploit the resources of our planet. If our philosophy were a projection of man's actual behavior, we would have to define the value of the earth as a source of supply for our industries, and the ocean as a fishpond. However, as we have seen, there is more than one aspect of nature that commands our attention. We go out to meet the world not only by way of expediency but also by the way of wonder. In the first we accumulate information in order to dominate; in the second we deepen our appreciation in order to respond. Power is the language of expediency; poetry the language of wonder.

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When seeking to expand our knowledge for the sake of gratifying our passion for power, the world turns out to be alien and weird; while the knowledge we acquire in our yearning to invoke appreciation is a way of discovering our unison with things. With information we are alone; in appreciation we are with all things.

THE WILL TO WONDER

As civilization advances, the sense of wonder almost necessarily declines. Such decline is an alarming symptom of our state of mind. Mankind will not perish for want of information; but only for want of appreciation. The beginning of our happiness lies in the understanding that life without wonder is not worth living. What we lack is not a will to believe but a will to wonder.

To intercept the allusions that are submerged in perceptibilities, the interstitial values that never rise to the surface, the indefinable dimension of all existence, is the venture of true poetry. This is why poetry is to religion what analysis is to science, and it is certainly no accident that the Bible was not written *more geometrico* but in the language of poets. However, the ineffable as sensed by the artist is anonymous, it is like a foundling. To the religious man nothing is ever deserted or unclaimed; it is as if God stood between him and the world. The most familiar retires from his sight, and he discerns the original beneath the palimpsests of things.

Our self-assured mind specializes in producing knives, as if it were a cutlery, and in all its thoughts it flings a blade, cutting the world in two: in a thing and in a self; in an object and in a subject that conceives the object as distinct from itself. A mercenary of our will to power, the mind is trained to assail in order to plunder rather than to commune in order to love. Moreover, selective as our attention necessarily is, beholding one thing, we overlook all others which, being out of control, set our authority at naught.

When ceasing to convert the world into objects of our abstraction, man comes to realize that he is treated like a satellite by his own mind, which keeps him from getting in touch with reality itself and never gives its own secret away, debarring him from the essence rather than initiating him into it.

Where man meets the world, not with the tools he has made but with the soul with which he was born; not like a hunter who seeks his prey but like a lover to reciprocate love; where man and matter meet as equals before the mystery, both made, maintained and destined to pass away, it is not an object, a thing that is given to his sense, but a state of fellowship that embraces him and all things; not a particular fact but the startling situation that there are facts at all; being; the presence of a universe; the unfolding of time. The sense of the ineffable does not stand between man and mystery; rather than shutting him out of it, it brings him together with it.

To our knowledge the world and the "I" are two, an object and a subject; but *within* our wonder the world and the "I" are one in being, in eternity. We become alive to our living in the great fellowship of all beings, we cease to regard things as opportunities to exploit. Conformity to the ego is no longer our exclusive concern, and our right to harness reality in the service of so-called practical ends becomes a problem.

Things surrounding us emerge from the triteness with which we have endowed them, and their strangeness opens like a void between them and our mind, a void that no words can fill. How does it happen that I am using this pen and writing these lines? Who are we to scan the esoteric stars, to witness the settings of the sun, to have the service of the spring for our survival? How shall we ever reciprocate for breathing and thinking, for sight and hearing, for love and achievement? Some prolonged, mind-piercing evidence weans us then from mistaking the benignity of the world for ownerlessness, its symbolic living for dull order.

One of the greatest shocks that we experience in our childhood comes with the discovery that our needs and deeds are not always approved by our fellow-men, that the world is not mere food for our delight. The resistance we encounter, the refusals we incur, open our eyes to the existence of a world outside ourselves. But growing older and stronger, we gradually recover from that shock, try to forget its dolorous lesson and apply most of our ingenuity to enforcing our will on nature and men. No recollection of our past experience completely upsets the arrogance that time and again jams the traffic in our mind. Dazzled by the brilliant achievements of the intellect in science and technique, we have been deluded into

believing that we are the masters of the earth and our will the ultimate criterion of what is right and wrong.

IS THE WORLD AT THE MERCY OF MAN?

We are today beginning to awake from a state of intoxication, from a juvenile happiness with the triumphs of our wisdom. We are beginning to realize in what a sad plight both nature and man would be if they were completely at the mercy of man and his vagaries. We must not be deceived by the limited splendor of theories that answer none of our most vital problems and only ridicule the inborn urge to ask the most crying, urgent question: What is the secret of existence? Wherefore and for whose sake do we live? Only those who have not tasted the terror of life, only those who claim that it is a pleasure to live and that more and only pleasure is in store for the generations to come, can deny the essential necessity of asking: Wherefore? For whose sake?

WE SING FOR ALL THINGS

The practical mind pays more attention to the commas and colons in the great text of reality than to its content and meaning, while to the sense of the ineffable things stand out like marks of exclamation, like silent witnesses; and the soul of man is an urge to sing for all beings about that for which they all stand. All things carry a surplus of meaning over

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being—they mean more than what they are in themselves. Even finite facts stand for infinite meaning. It is as if all things were vibrant with spiritual meaning, and all we try to do in creative art and in good deeds is to intone the secret strain, an aspect of that meaning.

As long as we see only objects we are alone. When we begin to sing, we sing for all things. Essentially music does not describe that which is, rather it tries to convey that which reality stands for. The universe is a score of eternal music, and we are the cry, we are the voice.

Reason explores the laws of nature, trying to decipher the scales without grasping the harmony, while the sense of the ineffable is in search of the song. When we think, we employ words or symbols of what we feel about things. When we sing, we are carried away by our wonder; and *acts of wonder* are signs or symbols of what all things stand for.

6 A Question beyond Words

WE DO NOT KNOW HOW TO ASK

The universe is an immense allusion, and our inner life an anonymous quotation; only the italics are our own. Is it within our power to verify the quotation, to identify the source, to learn what all things stand for?

The question is the beginning of all thinking. In knowing how to ask the right question lies the only hope of arriving at an answer. In asking a question we must faintly anticipate something of the nature of what we ask about. On that account, the question about the ultimate source of all reality is one we do not know how to ask. It concerns something which cannot be pressed into our finite categories, put in chains of a sentence and converted into a definite matter to be inquired into. Formulas—such as: What is the ultimate origin of the universe? What is behind all events?—are travesties of what is overwhelmingly given to our pristine sense of wonder. Is it the origin we want to ask about and not the presence, goal and task of the universe? Do we know where to draw the line between the unknown origin and the known product, or where the source ends and the derivation begins? Even the

sentence structure of such formulas is pregnant with logical assumptions which upon close analysis disclose immense difficulties.

A profound awareness of the incongruity of all categories with the nameless, unfathomable omnipresence of the mystery is a prerequisite for our efforts in reaching toward an answer. The more we beware of letting our incomparable question be adulterated or even stifled by inadequate formulations, the better will be our chance of braving final, specious answers.

WHEREFORE? FOR WHOSE SAKE?

For in our anxiety, all caution and prudence are forgotten. Neither sage nor savage is able to circumvent the problem: Who is the great author? Why is there a world at all? What is the sense of being alive?

Despite our conquests and might, we are like blind beggars in a labyrinth who do not know at which door to knock to obtain relief for our anxieties. We know *how* nature acts but not *why* and *for whose sake*; we know that we live but not why and wherefore. We know that we must inquire but not who has planted in us the anxiety to inquire.

Intimidated by the vigor of agnosticism that proclaims ignorance about the ultimate as the only honest attitude, modern man shies away from metaphysics and is inclined to suppress his innate sense, to crush his mind-transcending questions and to seek refuge within the confines of his finite self. Yet such an attitude is a trap, both inconsistent and self-de-

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ceptive. In insisting that we are unable to know, we exhibit a knowledge which we claim is unattainable. The allegation that there is no ultimate meaning sounds shrilly in the deep stillness of the ineffable.

Is it possible to evade the ultimate issue by withdrawing within the confines of the self? The awareness of wonder is often overtaken by the mind's tendency to dichotomize, which makes us look at the ineffable as if it were a thing or an aspect of things apart from our own selves; as if only the stars were surrounded with a halo of enigma and not our own existence. The truth is that the self, our "lord," is an unknown thing, inconceivable in itself. In penetrating the self, we discover the paradox of not knowing what we presume to know so well.

WHO IS "I"?

Man sees the things that surround him long before he becomes aware of his own self. Many of us are conscious of the hiddenness of things, but few of us sense the mystery of our own presence. The self cannot be described in the terms of the mind, for all our symbols are too poor to render it. The self is more than we dream of; it stands, as it were, with its back to the mind. Indeed, to the mind even the mind itself is more enigmatic than a star. Elusive is the manner in which the human mind operates; the ideas, the bricks of which convictions are made, are symbols the meaning of which man never fully penetrates, and what he wishes to express is submerged in the unfathomable depth of the unconscious. Be-

yond my reach is the bottom of my own inner life. I am not even sure whether it is the voice of a definite personal unit that comes out of me. What in my voice has originated in me and what is the resonance of transsubjective reality? In saying "I," my intention is to differentiate myself from other people and other things. But what is the direct, positive content of the "I": the blooming of consciousness upon the impenetrable soil of the subconscious? The self comprises no less unknown, subconscious, than known, conscious reality. This means that the self can be distinctly separated only at its branches; namely, from other individuals and other things but not at its roots.

All we know of the self is its expression, but the self is never fully expressed. What we are, we cannot say; what we become, we cannot grasp. It is all a cryptic, suggestive abbreviation which the mind tries in vain to decipher. Like the burning bush, the self is aflame but is never consumed. Carrying within itself more than reason, it is in travail with the ineffable. Something is meant by the simile of man. But what?

As we shall see,* to exist implies to own time. But does a man own time? The fact is that time, the moments through which I live, I cannot own, while the timeless in my temporality is certainly not my private property. However, if life does not belong exclusively to me, what is my legal title to it? Does my essence possess the right to say "I"? Who is that "I" to whom my life is supposed to belong? Nobody knows either its content or its limits. Is it something that withers or is it something that time cannot take away?

As an individual, as an "I," I am separated from external reality, from other men and other things. But in the only

* Compare p. 200

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relation in which the "I" becomes aware of itself, in the relation to existence, I find that what I call "self" is a self-deception; that existence is not a property but a trust; that the self is not an isolated entity, confined in itself, a kingdom ruled by our will.

What we face in penetrating the self is the paradox of not knowing what we presume to know so well. Once we discover that the self in itself is a monstrous deceit, that the self is something transcendent in disguise, we begin to feel the pressure that keeps us down to a mere self. We begin to realize that our normal consciousness is in a state of trance, that what is higher in us is usually suspended. We begin to feel like strangers within our normal consciousness, as if our own will were imposed on us.

Clear-sighted souls, caught in the tension of the lavishly obvious and the clandestine stillness, are neither dazzled nor surprised. Watching the never-ending pantomime that goes on within an ostentatious, turbulent world, they know that the mystery is not there, while we are here. The truth is we are all steeped in it, imbued with it; we are, partly, it.

I AM THAT I AM NOT

And God said unto Moses:

I Am that I Am, and He said:

Thus shalt thou say to the children of Israel,

I Am hath sent me unto you.

(Exodus 3:14)

I am endowed with a will, but the will is not mine; I am endowed with freedom, but it is a freedom imposed on the

will. Life is something that visits my body, a transcendent loan; I have neither initiated nor conceived its worth and meaning. The essence of what I am is not mine. *I am what is not mine*. I am that I am not.

Upon the level of normal consciousness I find myself wrapt in self-consciousness and claim that my acts and states originate in and belong to myself. But in penetrating and exposing the self, I realize that the self did not originate in itself, that the essence of the self is in its being a non-self, that ultimately man is not a subject but an *object*.*

NO SUBJECT TO ASK

It is easy to raise verbally the question: Who is the subject, of which my self is the object? But to be keenly sensitive to its meaning is something which surpasses our power of comprehension. It is, in fact, impossible to comprehend logically its implications. For in asking the question, I am always aware of the fact that it is I who asks the question. But as soon as I know myself as an "I," as a subject, I am not capable any more of grasping the content of the question, in which I am posited as an object. Thus, on the level of self-consciousness there is no way to face the issue, to ask the absolute question. On the other hand, when we are overtaken with the spirit of the ineffable, there is no logical self left to ask the question or the mental power to stand as the judge with God as an object, about the existence of whom I am to decide. I am

* See p. 128

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unable to raise my voice or to sit in judgment. There is no self to say: I think that . . .

There is, indeed, no speculative level where the question could be raised. We either do not sense the meaning of the issue or, when realizing what we ought to ask about, there is no logical subject left to ask, to examine, to inquire.

7 The God of Philosophers

GOD AS A PROBLEM OF SPECULATION

Traditionally the ultimate question is phrased in terms of speculation. Taking as its point of departure the world or the order of nature, we would ask: Do the facts of this world suggest the presence or existence of a supreme intelligence?

Science is based upon the assumption that there are intelligible laws in nature which can be observed, conceived and described by the human mind. The scientist did not invent these intricate laws; they were there long before he set about to explore them. In whatever way, then, we try to conceive the reality of nature—as a mechanism or as an organic order—it is given to us as a meaningful whole, the processes of which are ruled by strict principles. These principles are not only inherent in the actual relations between the components of reality, they are also intrinsically rational if our minds are capable of grasping them.

But if rationality is at work in nature, there is no way to account for it without reference to the activity of a supreme intelligence.

The probability, therefore, that the universe came into being without design is infinitesimally slight, while the probability that intelligence is at the root of being is so strong that not even the foundation of science enjoys a greater likelihood. The coming about of the universal order by sheer accident—which is an irrational category—appears far less plausible to our minds than its coming about at the hand of a superrational designer.

It is a matter of no great difficulty to discover some subtle fallacies in the speculative proofs. It may be said, for example, that the presence of order in the world does not prove the existence of a divine mind which is above and apart from that order. From order we may only infer the existence of a higher cause, but not the existence of a being which transcends all causality. Or, to put it logically, the universe as conceived by us is a closed system of logical relations, and all we may infer from it is an ultimate logical structure. By assuming the existence of an ultimate mind or being beyond the universe, we pass from the realm of logic to that of ontology. Logically, it may be claimed, there is no justification for assuming the existence of an ultimate being. What we may observe in nature is a mechanical order, not a living consciousness. Consequently, all the human mind may assume is the existence of an ultimate mechanical force, a blind power of fate. As philosophers, therefore, we abstain from believing in the existence of a supreme being endowed with will and intelligence.

Such abstention is fully in keeping with our habits. We behave as if nature were like a tree lashing out of an unmarked primordial grave and we, men, are alive by mistake, by chance or by an oversight.

The world is treated by us like a mighty oak, from which

children lop off twigs and boughs, while tourists carve their names into its bark.

The speculative arguments are either cosmocentric or anthropocentric. To the cosmological argument for the existence of God, the design and reality of the universe are the point of departure. Its question is: What is the ultimate cause of all that exists? The principle of causality serves as the ladder on which the mind climbs up to a supreme being; He is looked for as an explanation for natural events, as a scientific solution to a problem. Similarly, Kant's moral argument for the existence of God starts from moral premises. If morality is to be more than an empty dream, the union of virtue and happiness must be realized. Now, experience shows abundantly that in the empirically known system of nature there is no dependence of happiness on virtue. The union must therefore be effected for us by a supreme power, not by us. Thus, it becomes a postulate of morality that there is an absolutely wise and holy supreme being.

The essential weakness of these arguments lies in the fact that their point of departure is not a religious but a cosmological or an anthropological problem. But there is also a unique religious situation, in which the mind is primarily concerned not with the problems of nature and man—urgent and important as they are—but with God; not with the relation of the world to our categories but with the relation of the world to God.

Another deficiency of the speculative proofs for the existence of God lies in the fact that even if their validity should be beyond dispute, they prove too little. What is the gist of these proofs? It is the claim that given certain facts of experience, such as the rational order of the universe, God is the necessary hypothesis to explain them. Since a conclusion cannot contain more than what the premises imply, a god derived from speculation is at best as much as our finite knowledge of the facts of the universe would demand, namely a hypothesis. From a rational justification of our creed, we may gain the idea that the existence of God is as probable as ether in physics or phlogiston in chemistry, a hypothesis that can easily be refuted or rendered superfluous by a change of premises. Furthermore, granted that the existence of a being endowed with supreme genius and wisdom has been demonstrated, the question remains: Why should we, poor creatures, be concerned about Him, the most perfect? We may, indeed, accept the idea that there is a supreme designer and still say: "So what?" As long as a concept of God does not overpower us, as long as we can say: "So what?"—it is not God that we talk about but something else.

The idea of a supreme designer may serve as a source of intellectual security in our search for the design, law and order of the universe, giving us a guarantee for the validity of scientific theory. However, the universe may be accepted as a stroke of genius, the stars as brilliant with significance, and yet our souls would not cease to be haunted by a fear of futility, a

fear that could not be overcome by a belief that, somewhere in the infinite recesses of the Divinity, there is a well of wisdom. Is it order that matters supremely? Is order the utmost that divine wisdom could produce? We are more anxious to know whether there is a God of justice than to learn whether there is a God of order. Is there a God who collects the tears, who honors hope and rewards the ordeals of the guiltless? Or should we assume that the empires of thought, the saintly goals, the harmonies and sacrificial deeds of the honest and the meek are nothing but images painted upon the surface of an ocean?

PHILOSOPHY OF RELIGION

The issue which philosophy of religion has to discuss first is not belief, ritual or the religious experience, but the source of all these phenomena: the total situation of man; not what or how he experiences the supernatural, but why he experiences and accepts it. The question is: What necessitates religion in my life and in yours?

Philosophy of religion is not philosophy of a philosophy, the philosophy of a doctrine, the interpretations of a dogma, but the philosophy of concrete events, acts, insights, of that which is immediately given with the pious man. The dogmas are merely a catalogue, an indispensable index. For religion is more than a creed or an ideology and cannot be understood when detached from actual living. It comes to light in moments in which one's soul is shaken with unmitigated concern about the meaning of all meaning, about one's ultimate commitment which is part of his very existence; in moments, in which all

foregone conclusions, all life-stifling trivialities are suspended; in which the soul is starved for an inkling of eternal reality; in moments of discerning the indestructibly sudden within the perishably constant.

There is much we can achieve in our quest of God by applying rational methods, provided we remember that, in matters that concern the totality of life, all higher attainments of our personality should be brought into play, particularly our sense of the ineffable.

8 The Ultimate Question

WHAT MAN DOES WITH HIS ULTIMATE WONDER

The speculative proofs are the result of what man does with his reason. But speculation, as we know, is not our only source of certainty. However precious the helping hand, the vital guidance and the sobering stress of reason, it does not ease the pensive burden which the world is forcing us to bear, the compulsion to care for things not convertible into mental edifices. There is, indeed, another kind of evidence for what God is and means. It is the result of what man does with his ultimate wonder, with his sense of the ineffable.

Mankind could never have brought forth the endless stream of its God-awareness out of the rock of finite facts by analyzing the design of its geological layers. Indeed, when we go beyond analysis, trying to see the rock as a rock and to ponder on what it means *to be*, it turns away its face from our scrutinies, and what remains is more unlikely, more unbelievable, than the mysterious ground of being. Then it dawns upon us that the world of the known is a world unknown, except in its functional outposts; that to entertain the notion, as if life were lucid and familiar, would be to welter in a fairy tale.