
ELEVEN EUROPEAN MYSTICS

By Rudolf Steiner

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PREFACE TO THE FIRST EDITION, 1901

What I discuss in this work previously formed the content of lectures which I gave in the course of the past winter at the theosophical library in Berlin. I had been invited by Count and Countess Brockdorff to talk on mysticism before an audience to whom the things dealt with in this connection are a vital question of great importance. — Ten years ago I would not yet have dared to comply with such a wish. This must not be taken to mean that the world of ideas to which I give expression today was not alive in me at that time. This world of ideas is already wholly contained in my *Philosophy of Spiritual Activity*, (Berlin, 1894). But in order so to express this world of ideas as I do today, and thus to make it the basis of a discussion as is done in this work, something is needed in addition to an unshakeable conviction of its conceptual truth. This requires an intimate familiarity with this world of ideas, such as can only be attained in the course of many years of one's life. Only now, after I have acquired this familiarity, do I dare to speak in the way which one will discover in this work.

He who does not encounter my world of ideas with an *open* mind will discover contradiction upon contradiction in it. Only recently have I dedicated a book on the philosophies of the nineteenth century (Berlin, 1900) to the great scientist Ernst Haeckel, a book which I terminated with a justification of his ideas. In the following expositions I speak with assenting devotion about the mystics from Meister Eckhart to Angelus Silesius. Of other “contradictions” which someone or other might enumerate, I shall not speak at all. I am not surprised if I am condemned by one side as a “mystic,” by the other as a “materialist.” If I find that the Jesuit priest **Müller** has solved a difficult chemical problem, and if I therefore agree with him without reservations *in this matter*, one can hardly condemn me as an adherent of Jesuitism without being considered a fool by the judicious.

One who like myself goes his own way is bound to be exposed to many misunderstandings. But fundamentally he can bear this easily. Such misunderstandings are generally self-evident for him when he considers the mental make-up of his critics. It is not without humorous feelings that I look back upon many a “critical” judgment I have received in the course of my career as a writer. At the beginning everything went well. I wrote about Goethe and in connection with him. What I said sounded to many as though they could fit it into their preconceived notions. This was done by saying, “A work such as Rudolf Steiner's introductions to the scientific writings of Goethe can be described honestly as the best that has been written on this question.” When later I published an independent work I had already become much more stupid. For now a benevolent critic gave the following advice: “Before he continues to reform and brings his *Philosophy of Spiritual Activity* into the world, one must urgently advise him first to penetrate to an understanding of those two philosophers (**Hume** and **Kant**).” The critic unfortunately knows only what he can manage to read in Kant and Hume; thus he really only advises me to see nothing in these thinkers beyond what he sees. When I shall have achieved this he will be satisfied with me. When my *Philosophy of Spiritual Activity* appeared, I was in need of being judged like the most ignorant beginner. This judgment I received from a gentleman whom hardly anything forces to write books except the fact that there are innumerable volumes by others, which he has not understood. He informs me with much thoughtfulness that I would have noticed my mistakes if I “had pursued deeper psychological, logical, and epistemological studies;” and he immediately enumerates for me all the books which I should read in order to become as clever as he: “Mill, Sigwart, Wundt, Riehl, Paulsen, B. Erdmann.” — Especially diverting for me was the advice of a man who is so impressed by the way he “understands” Kant that he cannot even imagine someone's having *read* Kant and nevertheless having an opinion different from his. He therefore indicates to me the chapters in question in Kant's writings from which I might acquire an understanding of Kant as profound as his own.

I have here adduced a few *typical* judgments concerning my world of ideas. Although they are insignificant in themselves, they appear to me to be well suited to indicate symptomatically certain facts which today constitute serious obstacles in the path of one who writes on questions of higher cognition. I must go my way, no matter

whether one gives me the good advice to read Kant, or whether another accuses me of heresy because I agree with Haeckel. And so I have written about mysticism without caring what the judgments of a credulous materialist may be. I would only like, so that no printer's ink is quite needlessly wasted, to inform those who may now perhaps advise me to read **Haeckel's** *The Riddle of the Universe*, that in the last months I have given about thirty lectures on this book.

I hope to have shown in my work that one can be a faithful follower of the scientific philosophy and still seek out the paths *to the soul* into which mysticism, *properly understood*, leads. I go even further and affirm: Only one who understands the spirit in the sense of *true* mysticism can attain a full understanding of facts in the realm of nature. One must only beware of confusing true mysticism with the "mysticism" of muddled heads. How mysticism can err I have shown in my *Philosophy of Spiritual Activity*.

Berlin, September, 1901

PREFACE TO THE 1923 EDITION

In this work more than twenty years ago, I wanted to answer the question, Why do a particular form of mysticism and the beginnings of modern scientific thinking clash in a period from the thirteenth to the seventeenth century.

I did not wish to write a "history" of the mysticism of this period, but only to answer this question. The publications which have appeared on this subject in the past twenty years do not, in my opinion, furnish any grounds for making any changes in the answer. The work can therefore reappear in the main unchanged.

The mystics who are dealt with here are the last offshoots of a way of inquiry and thinking which in its details is foreign to present-day consciousness. However, the disposition of soul which lived in this way of inquiry exists in thoughtful natures at the present time. The manner of looking at objects of nature with which, before the period characterized here, this disposition of soul was connected, has almost disappeared. Its place has been taken by present-day natural science.

The personalities described in this book were not able to transmit the earlier way of inquiry to the future. It no longer corresponds to the cognitive powers which have developed in European man from the thirteenth and fourteenth century onward. What Paracelsus or Jacob Boehme preserve of this way of inquiry appears only as a reminiscence of something past. In essence it is the disposition of soul which remains to thoughtful men. And for it they seek an impulse in the inclinations of the soul itself, while formerly it arose in the soul when the latter observed nature. Many of those who incline toward mysticism today do not want to kindle mystical experiences in connection with what present-day natural science says, but with what the works of the period described here contain. But in this way they become strangers to what most occupies the present.

It might appear as though the present-day knowledge of nature, seen in its true character, does not indicate a way which could so incline the soul as to find, in mystical contemplation, the light of the spirit. Why do mystically inclined souls find satisfaction in Meister Eckhart, in Jacob Boehme, etc., but not in the book of nature, insofar as, opened by knowledge, it lies before man today?

It is true that the manner in which this book of nature is discussed today for the most part, cannot lead to a mystical disposition of soul.

It is the intention of this work to indicate that this manner of discussion does not have to be used. This is attempted by speaking also of those spirits who, out of the disposition of soul of the old mysticism, developed a way of thinking which also can incorporate the newer knowledge into itself. This is the case with Nicolas of Cusa.

In such personalities it becomes apparent that present-day natural science too is capable of a mystical intensification. For a Nicolas of Cusa would be able to lead his thinking over into this science. In his time one could have discarded the old way of inquiry, retained the mystical disposition, and accepted modern natural science, had it already existed.

But what the human soul finds compatible with a way of inquiry it must, if it is strong enough, also be able to extract from it.

I wanted to describe the characteristics of medieval mysticism in order to indicate how, separated from its native soil, the old way of conceiving things, it develops into an independent mysticism, but cannot preserve itself because it now lacks the spiritual impulse which, through its connection with inquiry, it had in earlier times.

This leads to the thought that those elements of more recent research which lead to mysticism must be sought for. From this inquiry the spiritual impulse which does not stop at the darkly mystical, emotional inner life, but ascends from the mystical starting-point to a knowledge of the spirits, can be regained. Medieval mysticism atrophied because it had lost the substratum of inquiry which directs the faculties of the soul upward to the spirit. This book is intended to provide a stimulus for extracting from more recent inquiry, when properly understood, those forces which are directed toward the spiritual world.

Goetheanum in Dornach bei Basel, Switzerland

Autumn, 1923

MYSTICS, NATURAL SCIENCE & THE MODERN WORLD

There are magic formulas which continue to act in perpetually new ways throughout the centuries of the history of ideas. In Greece one such formula was regarded as an oracle of Apollo. It is, "Know thyself." Such sentences seem to contain an infinite life within themselves. One meets them in walking the most diverse paths of spiritual life. The more one advances, the more one penetrates to an understanding of all phenomena, the deeper appears the meaning of these formulas. At many moments in the course of our meditations and thoughts they flash like lightning, illuminating our whole inner life. At such times there arises in us something like the feeling that we perceive the heartbeat of humanity's development. How close we feel to personalities of the past when one of their sayings arouses in us the sensation that they are revealing to us the fact of their having had such moments! One then feels oneself brought into an intimate relationship with these personalities. Thus for instance, one becomes intimately acquainted with **Hegel** when, in the third volume of his *Lectures on the History of Philosophy*, one comes upon the words:

"Such stuff, one says, are the abstractions we behold when we let the philosophers dispute and quarrel in our study, and decide matters in this way or in that; these are abstractions made up of mere words. — No! No! They are acts of the universal spirit, and therefore of fate. In this the philosophers are closer to the master than those who feed upon the crumbs of the spirit; they read or write the cabinet orders in the original: it is their function to take part in writing them. The philosophers are the mystics who were present at the act in the innermost sanctuary and who participated in it."

When Hegel said this he experienced one of the moments described above. He spoke these sentences when he had reached the end of Greek philosophy in the course of his analysis. And through them he has shown that the meaning of Neoplatonist wisdom, of which he speaks at this point, was at one time illuminated for him as by a stroke of lightning. At the moment of this illumination he had become intimate with such spirits as Plotinus and Proclus. And we become intimate with him as we read his words.

And we become intimate with the solitarily meditating vicar in Zschopau, Valentin Weigel, when we read the words of introduction to his booklet, *Know Thyself*, written in 1578.

“We read in the old sages the useful proverb, ‘Know thyself,’ which, although it is principally used to refer to worldly behavior, such as, Look well at yourself, what you are; Search in your bosom; Judge yourself, and leave others uncensored: although it is, I say, used in human life with respect to behavior, yet we may well apply this saying, ‘Know thyself,’ to the natural and supernatural understanding of the whole man, so that man shall not only look at himself and thus remember what his behavior should be with respect to other people, but also understand his nature, internally and externally, in the spirit and in nature: whence he comes, of what he is made, and what he is meant for.”

From his own points of view Valentin Weigel has thus arrived at insights which were summed up for him in the oracle of Apollo.

A similar road to understanding, and the same position with respect to the “Know thyself,” can be ascribed to a series of penetrating spirits beginning with Meister Eckhart (1260–1327) and ending with Angelus Silesius (1624–1677), to which Valentin Weigel also belongs.

What is common to these spirits is a strong feeling that in man's self-knowledge arises a sun which illuminates something beyond the incidental individual personality of the beholder. What **Spinoza** realized in the ethereal height of pure thought, that “the human soul has a sufficient knowledge of the eternal and infinite nature of God,” lived in them as immediate perception; and for them self-knowledge was the path by which this eternal and infinite nature was to be reached. It was clear to them that self-knowledge in its true form endows man with a new sense which opens to him a world that has the same relation to what can be attained without this sense as does the world of the physically sighted to that of the blind.

It would not be easy to find a better description of the importance of this new sense than that given by **J. G. Fichte** in his Berlin lectures in the year 1813.

“Imagine a world of people born blind, who therefore know only those objects and their conditions which exist through the sense of touch. Go among them and speak to them of colors and of the other conditions which exist only for sight through the medium of light. Either you will speak to them of nothing, and it will be better if they say so, for in this way you will soon notice your mistake, and, if you cannot open their eyes, will put an end to this fruitless talk.

Or for some reason they will want to give a meaning to your teaching; in this case they will only be able to understand it through what they know from touch: they will want to feel the light, the colors, and the other conditions of visibility; they will think that they feel them, will, within the realm of touch, make up something that they call color and deceive themselves with it. Then they will misunderstand, turn things around, and misinterpret.”

Something similar may be said of that toward which the spirits under discussion strove. In self-knowledge they saw the opening up of a new sense. And in their opinion this sense leads to insights which do not exist for one who does

not perceive in self-knowledge that which differentiates it from all other kinds of knowing. One to whom this sense has not opened itself thinks that self-knowledge arises in a way similar to knowledge through external senses, or through some other means acting from the outside. He thinks, "Knowledge is knowledge."

However, in one case its object is something situated in the external world, in the other case it is in his own soul. He hears only words, at best abstract thoughts, in what, for those who look deeper, constitutes the basis of their inner life namely, in the dictum that in all other kinds of knowing the object is outside of ourselves, while in self-knowledge we stand inside the object; that every other object comes into contact with us as something completed and closed, while *in our self we actively and creatively weave what we observe in ourselves*.

This may appear as an explanation consisting of mere words, perhaps as a triviality, but if properly understood, it can also appear as a higher light which illuminates all other knowledge in a new way. He to whom it appears under the first aspect is in the same situation as a blind man to whom one says, "A brilliant object is there." He hears the words, but for him brilliance does not exist. One can unite in oneself the sum of the knowledge of a period; if one does not perceive the significance of self-knowledge, then in the higher sense all knowledge is but blind.

Independent of us, the world lives for us because it communicates itself to our spirit. What is communicated to us must be expressed in the language characteristic of us. A book would be meaningless for us if its contents were to be presented to us in an unknown tongue. In the same way the world would be meaningless for us if it did not speak to us in our language. The same language which reaches us from the realm of objects, we also hear in ourselves. But then it is we who are speaking. It is only a matter of listening aright to the transformation which occurs when we close our perception to external objects and listen only to that which then sounds in ourselves.

It is for this that the new sense is necessary. If it is not awakened, we think that in the communications about ourselves we perceive only communications about an object external to ourselves; we are of the opinion that there is something hidden somewhere which speaks to us in the same way as do external objects. If we have the new sense we know that its perceptions are quite different from those which refer to external objects. Then we know that this sense does not leave outside of itself that which it perceives, as the eye leaves outside of itself the object it sees, but that it can completely incorporate its object within itself.

If I see an object, the object remains outside of me; if I perceive myself, I myself enter into my perception. One who seeks some part of his self outside what is perceived, shows that the essential content of what is perceived has not become apparent to him. **Johannes Tauler** (1300–1361) expressed this truth in the apt words: "If I were a king and did not know it, I would not be a king."

If I do not become clear to myself in my self-perception, then I do not exist for myself. But if I do become clear to myself then in my most fundamental nature I possess myself in my perception. No part of me remains outside of my perception. **J. G. Fichte** strongly indicates the difference between self-perception and every other kind of perception in the following words:

"It would be easier to get most people to consider themselves to be a piece of lava in the moon than a *self*. He who is not in agreement with himself about this understands no thoroughgoing philosophy and needs none. Nature, whose machine he is, will lead him without his doing anything in all the acts he has to perform. In order to philosophize one needs independence, and this one can only give to oneself. — We should not want to see without eyes, but we should also not affirm that it is the eye which sees."

The perception of oneself is thus at the same time an *awakening* of the self. In our knowing we connect the nature of things with our own nature. The communications which things make to us in our language become parts of our

own self. A thing which confronts me is no longer separate from me once I know it. That part of it which I can take in is incorporated into my own nature. When I awaken my own self, when I perceive what is within me, then I also awaken to a higher existence what I have incorporated into my nature from the outside. The light which falls upon me when I awaken, also falls upon what I have appropriated to myself of the things of the world. A light flashes in me and illuminates me, and with me everything I know of the world. Everything I know would remain blind knowledge if this light did not fall upon it. I could penetrate the whole world with my knowledge; it would not be what it must become in me if knowledge were not awakened to a higher existence within me.

What I add to things by this awakening is not a new idea, is not an enrichment of the content of my knowledge; it is a raising of knowledge, of cognition, to a higher level, on which everything is endowed with a new brilliance. As long as I do not raise my cognition to this level, all knowledge remains worthless to me in the higher sense. Things exist without me too. They have their being in themselves. What does it mean if with their existence, which they have outside without me, I connect another spiritual existence, which repeats things within me? If it were a matter of a mere repetition of things, it would be senseless to do this. — But it is a matter of a mere repetition only so long as I do not awaken to a higher existence within my own self the spiritual content of things received into myself. When this happens, then I have not repeated the nature of things within me, but have given it a rebirth on a higher level.

With the awakening of myself there takes place a spiritual *rebirth* of the things of the world. What things show in this rebirth they did not possess previously. There outside stands a tree. I take it into my mind. I throw my inner light upon what I have apprehended. Within me the tree becomes more than it is outside. *That part of it which enters through the portal of the senses is received into a spiritual content. An ideal counterpart to the tree is in me. This says infinitely much about the tree, which the tree outside cannot tell me.* What the tree is only shines upon it out of me. Now the tree is no longer the isolated being which it is in external space. It becomes a part of the whole spiritual world living within me. It combines its content with other ideas which exist in me. It becomes a part of the whole world of ideas, which embraces the vegetable kingdom; it is further integrated into the evolutionary scale of every living thing.

Another example: I throw a stone in a horizontal direction. It moves in a curved line, and after some time falls to the ground. In successive moments of time I see it in different locations. Through reflection I arrive at the following: During its movement the stone is subject to differing influences. If it were only under the influence of the impulse I gave to it, it would fly on forever in a straight line, without any change in its velocity. But the earth also exercises an influence upon it. It attracts it. If I had simply let it go without giving it an impulse, it would have fallen vertically to the earth. During the fall its velocity would have constantly increased. The reciprocal action of these two influences produces what I actually see.

Let us assume that I was not able to separate the two influences mentally, and to reconstruct mentally what I see from their combination according to certain laws; matters would remain at that which is seen. It would be a spiritually blind looking-on, a perception of the successive positions occupied by the stone. But in fact matters do *not* remain at this. The whole process occurs twice. Once outside, and there my eye sees it; then my mind lets the whole process occur again, in a mental fashion. My inner sense must be directed upon the mental process, which my eye does not see, in order for it to realize that with my own forces I awaken the process in its mental aspect. One can again adduce a dictum of J. G. Fichte, which makes this fact clearly intelligible.

“The new sense is thus the sense for the spirit; that sense for which *only* the spirit exists and nothing else, and for which the other, the given existence, also assumes the form of the spirit and becomes transformed into it, for which therefore existence in its own form has actually disappeared . . . This sense has been used for seeing as long as men have existed, and everything great and excellent in the world, and which alone makes mankind endure,

has its origin in the visions of this sense. But it was not the case that this sense saw itself in its difference from and its opposition to the other, ordinary sense. The impressions of the two senses became fused; life split into these two halves without a unifying bond.”

The unifying bond is created by the fact that the inner sense perceives the spiritual, which it awakens in its intercourse with the external world, in its spirituality. Because of this, that part of things which we take up into our spirit ceases to appear as a meaningless repetition. It appears as something new in opposition to what external perception can give. The simple process of throwing a stone, and my perception of it, appear in a higher light when I make clear to myself the task of my inner sense in this whole matter. In order to combine intellectually the two influences and their manners of acting, a sum of mental content is required which I must already have acquired when I perceive the flying stone. I thus use a mental content already stored within me upon something which confronts me in the external world. And this process of the external world is integrated into the pre-existing intellectual content. In its essence it shows itself to be an expression of this content. Through a comprehension of my inner sense the relationship of the content of this sense to the things of the external world thus becomes apparent to me.

Fichte could say that without a comprehension of this sense, for me the world splits into two halves: into things outside of me, and into images of these things within me. The two halves become united when the inner sense understands *itself*, and therewith realizes what kind of light it sheds upon things in the process of cognition. And Fichte could also say that this inner sense sees *only* spirit. For it sees how the spirit illuminates the world of the senses by integrating it into the world of the spiritual. The inner sense lets the external sensory existence arise within it as a spiritual essence on a higher level. An external thing is completely known when there is no part of it which has not experienced a spiritual rebirth in this way. Every external thing is thus integrated with a spiritual content, which, when it is seized upon by the inner sense, participates in the destiny of self-knowledge. The spiritual content which belongs to a thing enters wholly into the world of ideas through the illumination from inside, just as does our own self. This explanation contains nothing which is either capable of a *logical* proof or requires one. It is nothing but a result of inner experiences. One who denies its purport only shows that he lacks this inner experience. One cannot dispute with him any more than one disputes about color with a blind man.

It must not however be asserted that this inner experience is made possible only through the gift possessed by a few chosen ones. It is a common human quality. Everyone who does not refuse to do so can enter upon the path to it. This refusal however is frequent enough. And one always has the feeling when one meets with objections made in this vein: it is not a matter of people who cannot acquire the inner experience, but of those who block their access to it by a net of various logical chimeras. It is almost as if someone who looks through a telescope sees a new planet, but nevertheless denies its existence because his *calculations* have shown him that there can be no planet in that location.

At the same time there exists in most people a definite feeling that with what the external senses and the analytic intellect perceive, not all of the nature of things can be given. They then think that the remainder must lie in the outside world, just as do the objects of external perception themselves. What they should attain by perceiving again, with the inner sense and on a higher level, that is, the object which they have perceived and seized upon with the intellect, they displace into the outside world as something inaccessible and unknown. They then speak of limits to cognition which prevent us from attaining the “thing in itself.” They speak of the unknown “nature” of things. That this “nature” of things becomes clear when the inner sense lets its light fall upon things, they will not acknowledge.

An especially telling example of the error which lies hidden here was furnished by the famous “Ignorabimus” speech of the scientist, **Du Bois-Reymond**, in the year 1876. Everywhere we should go only so far as to see manifestations of “matter” in the processes of nature. Of what “matter” itself is, we are not to know anything. Du Bois-Reymond

asserts that we shall never be able to penetrate to the point where matter haunts space. But the reason we cannot penetrate to this point lies in the fact that nothing whatsoever can be found there. One who speaks like Du Bois-Reymond has a feeling that the understanding of nature gives results which point to something else, which this understanding itself cannot give. But he does not want to enter upon the path which leads to this something else, namely the path of inner experience. Therefore he is helpless when confronted by the question of "matter," as by a dark mystery. In the one who enters upon the path of inner experience things come to a rebirth; and what in them remains unknown to external experience then becomes clear.

Thus the inner life of man not only elucidates itself, but also external things. From this point an infinite perspective for human cognition opens up. Within glows a light which does not confine its luminosity to this interior. It is a sun which illuminates *all* reality at once. Something appears in us which unites us with the whole world. We are no longer merely the single accidental man, no longer this or that individual. In us the whole world reveals itself. To us it discloses its own interconnection, and it shows us how we ourselves as individuals are connected with it. Out of self-knowledge is born knowledge of the world. And our own limited individuality takes its place spiritually in the great interconnection of the world because something comes to life in it which reaches beyond this individuality, which embraces everything of which this individuality is a part.

Thinking that does not use logical prejudices to block its own path to inner experience will always come to recognize the essential nature working within us. This connects us with the whole world, because through it we overcome the contrast of inner and outer in relation to ourselves. **Paul Asmus**, the prematurely deceased, clear-sighted philosopher, comments on this state of affairs in the following way (cf. his work: *The Self and the Thing in Itself*, p. 14f.):

"We shall make this clearer to ourselves by means of an example. Let us imagine a piece of sugar; it is round, sweet, impenetrable, etc.; all these are qualities we understand; there is only one thing in all this that appears to us as something absolutely different, that we do not understand, that is so different from us that we cannot penetrate into it without losing ourselves, from the mere surface of which our thought timidly recoils. This one thing is the bearer of all these qualities, and is unknown to us; it is the very essence which constitutes the innermost self of this object. Thus Hegel says correctly that the whole content of our idea is only related to this dark subject as an accident, and that we only attach qualifications to this essence without penetrating to its depths. Since we do not know the essence itself, such qualifications ultimately have no truly objective value, being only subjective.

In comprehending thinking, on the other hand, there is no such unknowable subject in which its qualifications are only accidents, *rather the objective subject falls within the concept*. If I comprehend something, it is present in my concept in its totality. I am at home in the innermost sanctuary of its nature, not because it has no essence of its own, but because it compels me, *through the necessity, poised over both of us*, of the concept, which appears subjectively in me, objectively in it, to *re-think* its concept. As Hegel says, through this *re-thinking* reveals to us, that just as this is our subjective activity, *it is at the same time the true nature of the object*."

Only those who can also illuminate the processes of thinking with the light of inner experience can speak in this way.

In my *Philosophy of Spiritual Activity*, starting from different points of view, I also have pointed to the primordial fact of the inner life:

"There is thus no doubt: in thinking we hold a corner of the world process where we must be present if anything is to take place at all. And it is just this which is important. This is

just the reason why things confront me in such a mysterious fashion: because I am so unconcerned with the process of their becoming. I simply find them present. But in thinking, I know how it is done. Therefore there is no more primordial point of departure for the contemplation of the whole world process than thinking.”

To the one who regards the inner experience of man in this way the meaning of human cognition within the whole world process is also clear. It is not an unimportant addition to the rest of the world process. This is what it would be if it represented only a repetition, in the form of ideas, of what exists externally. But in *understanding* occurs what does not occur anywhere in the external world: the world process confronts itself with its own spiritual nature. This world process would be forever incomplete if this confrontation did not take place. With it the inner experience of man becomes integrated into the objective world process; the latter would be incomplete without it.

It can be seen that only that life which is dominated by the inner sense, man's highest spiritual life in the truest sense, thus raises him above himself. For it is only in this life that the nature of things is revealed in confrontation with itself. Matters are different with the lower faculty of perception. The eye for instance, which mediates the sight of an object, is the scene of a process which, in relation to the inner life, is completely similar to any other external process. My organs are parts of the spatial world like other things, and their perceptions are temporal processes like others. Their nature too only becomes apparent when they are submerged in the inner experience.

I thus live a double life: the life of a thing among other things, which lives within its corporeality and through its organs perceives what lies outside this corporeality, and above this life a higher one, which knows no such inside and outside, and extends over both the external world and itself. I shall therefore have to say: At one time I am an individual, a limited I; at the other time I am a general, universal I.

This too Paul Asmus has put into apt words (cf. his book: *The Indo-European Religions in the Main Points of their Development*, p. 29 of the first volume):

“We call the activity of submerging ourselves in something else, ‘thinking;’ in thinking, the I has fulfilled its concept, it has given up its existence as something separate; therefore in thinking we find ourselves in a sphere that is the same for all, for the principle of isolation, which lies in the relationship of our I to what is different from it, has disappeared in the activity of the self-suspension of the separate I; there is only the *selfhood common to all*.”

Spinoza has exactly the same thing in mind when he describes the highest activity of cognition as that which advances “from the sufficient conception of the real nature of some attributes of God to the sufficient cognition of the nature of things.” This advance is nothing other than illumination of things with the light of inner experience. Spinoza describes the life of this inner experience in glorious colors:

“The highest virtue of the soul is to apprehend God, or to comprehend things in the third — the highest — kind of cognition. This virtue becomes the greater the more the soul comprehends things in this way of cognition; therefore the one who grasps things in this way of cognition attains the highest human perfection and consequently becomes filled with the highest joy, accompanied by the conceptions of himself and of virtue. Hence from this kind of cognition springs the highest possible peace of soul.”

One who comprehends things in this way transforms himself within himself; for at such moments his separate I is absorbed by the cosmic, universal I. Cosmic beings do not appear in subordination to a separate, limited individual; they appear to themselves. At this level there is no longer any difference between Plato and me; what separates us belongs to a lower level of cognition. We are only separate as individuals; the universal which acts in us is one and the same. About this fact also one cannot dispute with one who has no experience of it. He will always insist: Plato

and you are two. That this duality, that all multiplicity is reborn as unity in the unfolding of the highest level of cognition, cannot be proved: it must be *experienced*. Paradoxical as it may sound, it is true: the idea which Plato represented to himself and the same idea which I represent to myself are not two ideas. They are one and the same idea. And there are not two ideas, one in Plato's head, the other in mine; rather in the higher sense Plato's head and mine interpenetrate; all heads which grasp the same, *single* idea, interpenetrate; and this unique idea exists only once. It is there, and the heads all transport themselves to one and the same place in order to contain this idea.

The transformation which is effected in the whole nature of man when he looks at things in this way is indicated in beautiful words in the Indian poem, *The Bhagavad Gita*, of which Wilhelm von Humboldt therefore said that he was grateful to his destiny for having permitted him to live until he could be in a position to become acquainted with this work. The inner light says in this poem:

“An external ray from me, who has attained to a special existence in the world of personal life, attracts to itself the five senses and the individual soul, which belong to nature. When the effulgent spirit materializes in space and time, or when it dematerializes, it seizes upon things and carries them along with itself, as the breath of the wind seizes upon the perfumes of flowers and sweeps them away with itself. The inner light dominates the ear, the touch, the taste, and the smell, as well as the mind; it forms a bond between itself and the things of the senses. Fools do not know when the inner light flames up and when it is extinguished, or when it unites with things; only he who partakes of the inner light can know of this.”

So strongly does *The Bhagavad Gita* point to the transformation of man that it says of the “sage” that he can no longer err, no longer sin. If he seems to err or sin he must illuminate his thoughts or his actions with a light in which that no longer appears as error and as sin which appears as such to the ordinary consciousness.

“He who has raised himself and whose knowledge is of the purest kind does not kill and does not defile himself, even though he should slay another.”

This only indicates the same basic disposition of the soul, springing from the highest cognition, concerning which Spinoza, after describing it in his *Ethics*, breaks into the thrilling words:

“With this I have concluded what I wanted to set forth concerning the power of the soul over the affections and over the freedom of the soul. From this it appears how superior is a wise man to an ignorant one, and how much more powerful than one who is merely driven by passions. For the ignorant man is not only driven in many directions by external causes and never attains to true peace of soul, but he also lives in ignorance of himself, of God, and of objects, and when his suffering comes to an end, his existence also comes to an end; while the wise man, as such, hardly experiences any agitation in his spirit, but rather never ceases to exist in the as it were necessary knowledge of himself, of God, and of objects, and always enjoys true peace of soul. Although the path I have described as leading to this appears very difficult, it can be found nevertheless. And it may well be troublesome, since it is found so seldom. For how is it possible that, if salvation were close at hand and to be found without great effort, it is neglected by almost everyone? But everything sublime is as difficult as it is rare.”

Goethe has adumbrated the point of view of the highest cognition in monumental fashion in the words:

“If I know my relationship to myself and to the external world, I call it truth. And thus everyone can have his own truth, and it is still always the same truth.”

Everyone has his own truth, because everyone is an individual, distinct being beside and together with others. These other beings act upon him through his organs. From the individual point of view, where he is placed, and according to the nature of his faculty of perception, he forms his own truth in intercourse with things. He achieves his relationship to things. Then when he enters into self-knowledge, when he comes to know his relationship to himself, his particular truth becomes dissolved in the general truth; this general truth is the same in everyone.

The understanding of the suspension of what is individual in the personality, of the I in favor of the universal I, is regarded by deeper natures as the secret revealing itself within man, as the primordial mystery of life. For this too Goethe has found an apt expression: "And as long as you do not have this: Die and Become! You are only a dreary guest on the dark earth." (*Blessed Longing*)

What takes place in the inner life of man is not a mental repetition, but a real part of the universal process. The world would not be what it is if it were not active in the human soul. And if one calls the highest which is attainable by man the divine, then one must say that the divine does not exist as something external to be repeated as an *image* in the human spirit, but that the divine is *awakened* in man. For this **Angelus Silesius** has found the right words:

"I know that *without* me God cannot live for a moment; if I come to naught He must needs give up the ghost." "God cannot make a single worm without me; if I do not preserve it with Him, it must fall apart forthwith."

Such an assertion can only be made by one who premises that something appears in man without which an external being cannot exist. If everything which belongs to the "worm" also existed without man, it would be impossible to say that the worm must "fall apart" if man does not preserve it.

In self-knowledge the innermost core of the world comes to life as spiritual content. For man, the experiencing of self-knowledge means an acting within the core of the world. One who is penetrated by self-knowledge naturally also performs his own actions in the light of self-knowledge. In general, human action is determined by *motives*. **Robert Hamerling**, the poet-philosopher, has rightly said (*Atomism of the Will*, p. 213f.):

"It is true that man can do what he wills, but he cannot will what he wills, because his will is determined by *motives*. He cannot will what he wills. Let us examine these words more closely. Do they contain a rational meaning? Would freedom of willing then consist in being able to will something without cause, without motive? But what does willing mean if not *to have a cause* for preferring to do or to aspire to this rather than that? To will something without cause, without motive, would mean to will something *without willing it*. The concept of motive is inseparably connected with that of willing. Without a definite motive the will is an empty *capacity*; only through the motive does it become active and real. It is thus quite correct that the human will is not free insofar as its direction is always determined by the strongest motive."

For every action which does not take place in the light of self-knowledge, the motive, the cause of the action, must be felt as a compulsion. Matters are different when the cause is included within the bounds of self-knowledge. Then this cause has become a part of the self. The will is no longer determined; it determines itself. The conformity to laws, the motives of willing, now no longer predominate *over* the one who wills; they are one and the same with this willing. To illuminate one's actions with the light of self-observation means to overcome all coercion by motives. Thereby the will places itself into the realm of *freedom*.

Not all human actions bear the character of freedom. Only that acting which is inspired in each one of its parts by self-observation is free. And because self-observation raises the individual I to the universal I, free acting is that

which proceeds from the universal I. The old issue of whether the will of man is free or subordinated to a general regularity, an unalterable necessity, is an improperly posed question. Those actions which are performed by man as an individual are unfree; those are free which he performs after his spiritual rebirth. Man is thus, in general, not *either* free or unfree. He is the one as well as the *other*. He is unfree before his rebirth, and he can *become* free through this rebirth. The individual upward development of man consists in the *transformation* of this unfree willing into one which bears the character of freedom. The man who has penetrated the regularity of his actions as being his own, has overcome the compulsion of this regularity, and therewith his unfreedom. Freedom is not a fact of human existence *from the first*, but rather a *goal*.

With free acting man resolves a contradiction between the world and himself. His own deeds become deeds of the universal existence. He feels himself to be in full harmony with this universal existence. Each dissonance between himself and another he feels to be the result of a not yet fully awakened self. But the destiny of the self is that it finds contact with that universe only by being separated from itself. But they would not be human in the highest sense if, as distinct I-beings, they did not raise out of themselves to the universal I. Above all, it is characteristic of human nature that it should overcome a contradiction which is intrinsic to it.

The one who will allow spirit to be only the logical intellect may feel his blood run cold at the thought that things should experience their rebirth in the spirit. He will compare the fresh, living flower outside, in the fullness of its colors, with the cold, pale, schematic *thought* of the flower. He will feel especially uncomfortable at the idea that the man who takes his motives for acting out of the solitude of his self-knowledge should be freer than the spontaneous, naïve personality which acts out of its immediate impulses, out of the fullness of its nature. To such a man, who sees only the one-sided logical aspect, one who submerges himself within himself will appear as a walking schema of concepts, as a phantom, in contrast to one who remains in his natural individuality.

One hears such objections to the rebirth of things in the spirit especially among those who are, it is true, equipped with healthy organs for sensory perception and with lively drives and passions, but whose faculty of observation fails when confronted with objects of a purely spiritual content. As soon as they are expected to perceive something purely spiritual, their perception is wanting; they are dealing with the mere shells of concepts, if not indeed with empty words. Therefore, when it is a matter of spiritual content, they remain the “dry,” “abstract men of intellect.” But for one who has a gift of observation in the purely spiritual like that in the sensory realm, life naturally does not become poorer when he enriches it with spiritual content. I look at a flower. Why should its rich colors lose even the smallest part of their freshness if it is not only my eye which sees the colors, but *also* my inner sense which sees the spiritual nature of the flower as well? Why should the life of my personality become poorer if I do not follow my passions and impulses in spiritual blindness, but rather illuminate them with the light of a higher knowledge? The life reflected in spirit is not poorer, but fuller and richer.

Only those who see spirit only as a collection of concepts abstracted from sensory perceptions fear the impoverishment of soul through an ascent to spirit. People who lift themselves through spiritual vision to a life that goes beyond the senses in terms of meaning and reality are free of such fear. Sensory existence grows pale only through abstractions; sensory existence appears in its true light for the first time through “spiritual sight” and loses nothing of its sensory richness.

MEISTER ECKHART

The conceptual world of Meister Eckhart wholly radiates the feeling that things are reborn as higher entities in the spirit of man. He belonged to the Order of the Dominicans, as did the greatest Christian theologian of the Middle Ages, Thomas Aquinas, who lived from 1225 to 1274. Eckhart was an admirer of Thomas in the fullest sense. This is

altogether understandable when one examines the whole conceptual framework of Meister Eckhart. He considered himself to be as much in harmony with the teachings of the Christian church as he assumed such an agreement for Thomas. Eckhart did not want to take anything away from the content of Christianity, nor to add anything to it. But he wanted to produce this content anew in *his* way. It is not among the spiritual needs of a personality such as he was to put new truths of various kinds in place of old ones. He was intimately connected with the content which had been transmitted to him. But he wanted to give a new form, a new life to this content. Without doubt he wanted to remain an orthodox Christian. The Christian truths were his truths. Only he wanted to look at them in a different way than had Thomas Aquinas, for instance. The latter assumed two sources of knowledge: *revelation* for faith, and *reason* for inquiry.

Reason understands the laws of things, that is, spirit in nature. It can also raise itself above nature, and in the spirit grasp, from one side, the divine essence which underlies all nature. But in this way it does not achieve an immersion in the *full* essence of God. A higher truth must meet it halfway. This is given in the Scriptures. It *reveals* what man by himself cannot attain. The truth of the Scriptures must be taken for granted by man; reason can defend it, can endeavor to understand it as well as possible by means of its powers of cognition, but it can never produce it out of the human spirit. What the spirit *sees* is not the *highest* truth, but is a certain cognitive content which has come to the spirit from *outside*. St. Augustine declares that within himself he is unable to find the source of what he *should believe*. He says, "I would not believe the Gospel if the authority of the Catholic church did not move me to do so."

This is in the sense of the Evangelist, who refers us to the external testimony: "That which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, of the Word of life . . . that which we have seen and heard declare we unto you, that ye also may have fellowship with us." (John 1:1,3)

But Meister Eckhart wishes to impress Christ's words upon us: "It is expedient for you that I go away: for if I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you; but if I depart, I will send Him unto you." (John 16:7) And he explains these words by saying, "It is as if he said: You have taken too much joy in my present image, therefore the perfect joy of the Holy Ghost cannot be in you." Eckhart thinks that he is speaking of no God other than the one of whom Augustine and the Evangelist and Thomas speak, and yet their testimony of God is not his testimony.

"Some people want to look upon God with their eyes, as they look upon a cow, and want to love God as they love a cow. Thus they love God for the sake of external riches and of internal solace; but these people do not love God aright . . . Foolish people deem that they should look upon God as though He stood there and they here. It is not thus. God and I are one in the act of knowing." (Sermons 16, 7)

Such declarations in Eckhart are based on nothing but the experience of the inner sense. And this experience shows things to him in a higher light. He therefore does not think that he needs an external light in order to attain to the highest insights:

"A master says, God has become man; through this all mankind is raised and exalted. Let us rejoice that Christ our brother has ascended by his own strength above all the angelic choirs and sits on the right hand of the Father. This master has spoken well, but in truth, I do not set great store by it. What would it avail me if I had a brother who was a rich man, and for my part I were a poor man? What would it avail me if I had a brother who was a wise man, and I were a fool? . . . The Heavenly Father brings forth his only-begotten Son in Himself and *in me*. Why in Himself and in me? I am one with Him, and He cannot shut me out. In the same act the Holy Ghost receives its being, and it arises through me as it does through God. Why? I am in God, and if the Holy Ghost does not take its being from me it does not take it from God either. I am not shut out in any way." (Sermons 6, 7)

When Eckhart reminds us of the word of Paul: "Clothe yourselves in Jesus Christ," he wishes to give to this word the following meaning: Become submerged in yourselves, plunge down into self-contemplation, and from the depths of your being God will shine upon you; He will outshine everything for you; you have found Him within yourselves; you have become united with God's essence. "God has become man so that I might become God." In his treatise, *On Solitude*, Eckhart expresses himself on the relationship of external to internal perception:

"Here you must know that the masters say that in each man there are two kinds of men: one is called the external man, that is, sensuousness; man is served by five senses, nevertheless he acts through the force of the soul. The other man is called the inner man, that is, the interior of man. Now you must know that every man who loves God does not use the faculties of the soul in the external man any more than is required by the five senses; and the interior does not turn to the five senses except as it is the director and guide of the five senses and watches over them so that, in their strivings, they do not pander to animality."

One who speaks in this way about the inner man can no longer look at the external, sensory nature of phenomena. For he becomes aware that this *nature* cannot confront him in any outer, sensory world. To him one might object, What have the things in the outside world to do with what you add to them out of your spirit. Trust your senses. They alone give you intelligence of the outside world. Do not falsify with a spiritual trimming what your senses give you in purity, without decoration, as a picture of the external world. Your eye tells you what a color is like; nothing that your spirit apprehends concerning the color is in the color. From the point of view of Meister Eckhart one would have to answer: the senses are physical devices. Their communications about things therefore can concern only the physical aspect of things. And this physical aspect of things communicates itself to me by the excitation of a physical process within myself.

Color as a physical process of the outside world gives rise to a physical process in my eye and in my brain. Through this I perceive the color. But in this way I can perceive in the color only what is physical, sensory. Sensory perception excludes all those aspects of things which are not sensory. It divests things of all that is not sensory in them. If I then proceed to the spiritual, the idea-content, I only re-establish that aspect of things which sensory perception has effaced. Hence sensory perception does not show me the deepest nature of things; rather it separates me from this nature. Spiritual comprehension, comprehension by the idea, again connects me with this nature. It shows me that within themselves things are of exactly the same spiritual nature as I myself.

The boundary between me and the external world is abolished by the spiritual comprehension of the world. I am separated from the external world insofar as I am a sensory thing among sensory things. My eye and the color are two different entities. My brain and the plant are two. But the idea-content of the plant and of the color, together with the idea-content of my brain and of the eye, belong to a unified idea-entity.

This view must not be confused with the widespread anthropomorphizing worldview which thinks that it comprehends the things of the external world by ascribing to them qualities of a psychical nature, which are supposed to be similar to the qualities of the human soul. This view says: When he confronts us externally, we perceive only sensory features in another man. I cannot look into the interior of my fellow man. From what I see and hear of him I make inferences as to his interior, his soul. Thus the soul is never something I perceive directly. A soul I perceive only within myself. No man sees my thoughts, my imaginings, my feelings. And just as I have such an inner life beside the one which can be perceived externally, so all other beings must have one too. This is the conclusion of one who takes the position of the anthropomorphizing world view.

That part of a plant which I perceive externally must in the same way be only the outside of an interior, of a soul, which in my thoughts I must add to what I perceive. And since there exists for me only a single inner world, namely my own, I can only imagine the inner world of other beings to be similar to my own. Thus one reaches a sort of universal animation of all nature (panpsychism). This view rests on a misunderstanding of what the developed inner sense really offers. The spiritual content of an external thing, which appears to me within myself, is not something added in thought to the external perception. It is no more this than is the spirit of another man. I perceive this spiritual content through the inner sense, just as I perceive the physical content through the external senses. And what I call my inner life, in the sense indicated above, is by no means my spirit in the higher sense. This inner life is only the result of purely sensory processes; it belongs to me only as a totally individual personality, which is nothing but the result of its physical organization.

When I transfer this interior to external things, I am in fact indulging in idle fancy. My personal inner life, my thoughts, memories, and feelings are in me because I am a creature of nature with such and such an organization, with a certain sensory apparatus, with a certain nervous system. I cannot transfer this *human* soul of mine to things. I could do this only if somewhere I found a similarly organized nervous system. But my individual soul is not the highest spiritual part in me. This highest spiritual part must first be awakened in me by the inner sense. And this spiritual part which is awakened in me is at the same time one and the same with the spiritual in all things. Before this spiritual part the plant appears directly in its own spirituality. I need not endow it with a spirituality similar to my own. For *this* world view all talk about the unknown “thing in itself” becomes devoid of meaning. For it is precisely the “thing in itself” which reveals itself to the inner sense.

All talk about the unknown “thing in itself” is only due to the fact that those who speak in this way are incapable of recognizing the “things in themselves” in the spiritual contents within them. They think that within themselves they recognize only unsubstantial shadows and phantoms, “mere concepts and ideas” of things. But nevertheless since they have an *intimation* of the “thing in itself” they think that this “thing in itself” conceals itself, and that limits are set to the human powers of cognition. One cannot prove to those who labor under this belief that they must seize the “thing in itself” within themselves, for they never would acknowledge this “thing in itself” if one showed it to them. And it is just a matter of this *acknowledgment*. Everything Meister Eckhart says is penetrated by this acknowledgment.

“Consider a simile for this. A door opens and closes on a hinge. If I compare the outer boards of the door to the external man, then I shall compare the hinge to the inner man. Now when the door opens and closes the outer boards move back and forth, while the hinge remains constantly immobile, and in no way is changed thereby. And here it is the same.”
(*On Solitude*)

As an individual creature of the senses I can investigate things in all directions — the door opens and closes. If I do not let the perceptions of the senses arise within me spiritually I shall know nothing of their essence — the hinge does not move. The illumination mediated by the inner sense is, in Eckhart's conception, the entry of God into the soul. He calls the light of knowledge which is lit by this entry, the “spark of the soul.” The place within the human being where this “spark” is lighted is “so pure, and so high, and so noble in itself, that no creature can be in it, but only God alone dwells therein in His pure divine nature.” One who has let this “spark” light up within himself, no longer sees *merely* as man sees with the external senses, and with the logical intellect, which orders and classifies the impressions of the senses; rather he sees how things are in themselves.

The external senses and the ordering intellect separate the individual human being from other things; they make of him an individual in space and in time, who also perceives other things in space and in time. The man illuminated by the “spark” ceases to be an individual being. He annihilates his isolation. Everything which causes the difference

between him and things, ceases. That it is *he* as an individual being who perceives, no longer can even be taken into consideration. The things and he are no longer separated. The things, and thus also God, see themselves in him. "This spark is God, in such a way that it is an united one, and carries within itself the image of all creatures, image without image, and image above image." In the most magnificent words does Eckhart speak of the extinction of the individual being:

"It must therefore be understood that to know God and to be known by God is the same. We know God and see Him in that He makes us to see and to know. And as the air which illuminates is nothing but what it illuminates, for it shines through this, that it is illuminated: thus do we know that we are known and that He causes Himself to know us." (Sermon 35)

It is on this foundation that Meister Eckhart builds up his relationship to God. It is a purely spiritual relationship, and it cannot be formed in an image borrowed from the individual life of man. God cannot love His creation as one individual man loves another; God cannot have created the world as a master builder constructs a house. All such thoughts disappear in face of the inner vision. It is in the *nature* of God that He loves the world. A god who could love and also not love is formed in the image of the individual man.

"I say in good truth and in eternal truth and in everlasting truth that into every man who has gone within himself God must pour Himself out to the limits of His ability, utterly and completely, so that He retains nothing in His life and in His being, in His nature and in His divinity; everything must He pour out in fruitful fashion." (Sermon 34)

And the inner illumination is something which the soul necessarily must find when it goes down into its depths. From this it already becomes evident that the communication of God to mankind cannot be thought of in the image of the *revelation* of one man to another. The *latter* communication can also be left unmade. One man can close himself off from another. God must communicate Himself, in conformity with His nature.

"It is a certain truth that God must seek us, as if all His divinity depended upon it. God can no more do without us than we can do without Him. Although we may turn away from God, yet God can never turn away from us." (Sermon 49)

Consequently the relationship of man to God cannot be understood as containing anything figurative, borrowed from what is *individually* human. Eckhart realizes that part of the accomplishment of the primordial nature of the world is that it should find itself in the human soul. This primordial nature would be imperfect, even unfinished, if it lacked that component of its framework which appears in the human soul. What takes place in man belongs to the primordial nature; and if it did not take place the primordial nature would be only a part of itself. In this sense man can feel himself to be a *necessary* part of the nature of the world. Eckhart expresses this by describing his feelings toward God as follows:

"I do not thank God for loving me, for He cannot keep from doing so, whether He wants to or not, His nature compels him to it . . . Therefore I shall not beg God that He should give me something, nor shall I praise Him for what He has given me." (Sermon 77)

But this relationship of the human soul to the primordial nature must not be understood to mean that the soul in its individual character is declared to be one with this primordial nature. The soul which is entangled in the world of the senses, and therewith in the finite, does not as such already have the content of the primordial nature within itself. It must first develop it in itself. It must annihilate itself as an individual being. Meister Eckhart has aptly characterized this annihilation as an "*un-becoming*" ("*Entwerdung*").

“When I reach the depths of divinity no one asks me whence I come and where I have been, and no one misses me, for here there is an *un-becoming*.” (Sermon 26)

This relationship is also clearly expressed in the sentence:

“I take a basin of water and place a mirror in it and put it under the wheel of the sun. The sun casts its luminous radiance upon the mirror, and yet it is not diminished. The reflection of the mirror in the sun is sun in the sun, and yet the mirror is what it is. Thus it is with God. God is in the soul with His nature and in His being and His divinity, and yet He is not the soul. The reflection of the soul in God is God in God, and yet the soul is what it is.”

The soul which gives itself over to the inner illumination recognizes in itself not only what it was *before* the illumination; it also recognizes what it has become only *through* this illumination.

“We are to be united with God essentially; we are to be united with God as one; we are to be united with God altogether. How are we to be united with God essentially? This is to be accomplished by seeing and not by being. His being cannot be our being, but is to be our life.”

Not an already existing life — “being” — is to be understood in the logical sense; but the higher understanding — “seeing” — is itself to become life; the spiritual, that which belongs to the idea, is to be experienced by the seeing man in the same way as the individual human nature experiences ordinary, everyday life.

From such starting-points Meister Eckhart also attains a pure *concept of freedom*. In ordinary life the soul is not free. For it is entangled in the realm of lower causes. It accomplishes that to which it is compelled by these lower causes. By the “seeing” it is raised out of the region of these causes. It no longer acts as an individual soul. In it is exposed the primordial essence, which cannot be caused by anything except itself.

“God does not compel the will, rather He sets it at liberty, so that it wills nothing but what God Himself wills. And the spirit can will nothing but what God wills; and this is not its unfreedom; it is its true freedom. For freedom is this, that we are not bound, that we be free and pure and unadulterated as we were in our first origin, and when we were wed in the Holy Ghost.” (Sermon 29)

It can be said of the enlightened man that he himself is the entity which determines good and evil from within. He cannot do otherwise than accomplish the good. For he does not serve the good, rather does the good live within him.

“The righteous man serves neither God nor the creatures, for he is free, and the closer he is to righteousness, the more he is freedom itself.”

What then must evil be for Meister Eckhart? It can only be an acting under the influence of the lower view, the acting of a soul which has not passed through the state of un-becoming. Such a soul is selfish in the sense that it wills only *itself*. Only externally could it bring its willing into harmony with moral ideals. The seeing soul cannot be selfish in this sense. Even should it will *itself*, it would still will the mastery of the ideal; for it has made itself into this ideal. It can no longer will the goals of the lower nature, for it no longer has anything in common with this lower nature. It is no compulsion, no deprivation, for the seeing soul to act in the sense of moral ideals.

“For the man who stands in God's will and in God's love it is a *joy* to do all the good things God wills, and to leave undone all the evil things which are against God. And it is impossible for him to leave a thing undone which God wants to have accomplished. As it would be

impossible for one to walk whose legs are bound, so it would be impossible for one to do ill who is in God's will." (Sermon 29)

Furthermore Eckhart expressly protests against an interpretation which would see in his view a license for anything the individual might want. It is just in this that one recognizes the seeing man, that he no longer wants anything as an individual.

"Some men say: If I have God and God's freedom, then I can do everything I want. They understand these words amiss. As long as you can do anything which is against God and His commandment, you do not have God's love; you can only deceive the world into the belief that you have it."

Eckhart is convinced that for the soul which goes down into its depths, in these depths a perfect morality will appear, that there all logical understanding and all action in the ordinary sense have an end, and that there an entirely new order of human life begins.

"For everything the understanding can grasp, and everything desire demands, is not God. Where understanding and desire have an end, there it is dark, there does God shine. There that power unfolds in the soul which is wider than the wide heavens . . . The bliss of the righteous and God's bliss is one bliss; for when God is blissful, the righteous are blissful."

JOHANNES TAULER

In **Johannes Tauler** (1300–1361), **Heinrich Suso** (1295–1366), and **Jan van Ruysbroeck** (1293–1381) one encounters personalities in whose life and work appear in a most impressive manner those movements of the soul which a spiritual path such as that of Meister Eckhart causes in profound natures. If Eckhart seems to be a man who, in the blissful experiencing of spiritual rebirth, speaks of the qualities and nature of knowledge as of a picture he has succeeded in painting, then the others appear as wanderers to whom this rebirth has shown a new road which they mean to walk, but the end of which for them has been removed to an infinite distance. Eckhart describes the splendors of his picture, they the difficulties of the new road.

One must be quite clear about man's relationship to his higher insights in order to be able to represent to oneself the difference between such personalities as Eckhart and Tauler. Man is entangled in the world of the senses and in the laws of nature, by which the world of the senses is dominated. He himself is a result of this world. He lives because its forces and substances are active in him, and he perceives and judges this world of the senses in accordance with the laws by which it and he are constructed. When he directs his eye upon an object, not only does the object appear to him as a sum of interacting forces dominated by the laws of nature, but the eye itself is already constructed according to such laws and forces, and the act of seeing takes place in harmony with these laws and forces. If we had attained the utmost limits of natural science, in all likelihood we could pursue this play of natural forces in accordance with natural laws into the highest regions of the formation of thought.

But in doing this we already rise *above* this play. Do we not stand above all mere conformity to natural laws when we survey how we ourselves are integrated into nature? We *see* with our eye in accordance with the laws of nature. But we also *understand* the laws in accordance with which we see. We can stand on a higher elevation and survey simultaneously the external world and ourselves in interplay. Is not then a nature active within us which is higher than the sensory-organic personality which acts according to natural laws and with natural laws? In such activity is there still a partition between our inner world and the external world?

That which judges here, which gathers insights, is no longer our individual personality; rather it is the universal essence of the world, which has torn down the barrier between inner world and outer world, and which now embraces both. As it is true that I still remain the same individual in external appearance when I have thus torn down the barrier, so it is true that *in essence* I am no longer this individual. In me now lives the feeling that the universal nature speaks in my soul, the nature which embraces me and the whole world. Such feelings live in Tauler when he says:

“Man is as if he were three men, an animal man, as he is according to the senses, then a rational man, and finally the highest god-like man. . . One is the external, animal sensual man; the other is the internal, rational man, with his rational faculties; the third man is the spirit, the highest part of the soul.” (cf. Preger, *History of German Mysticism*, Vol. 3, p. 161.)

How this third man is superior to the first and second, Eckhart has expressed in the words:

“The eye by which I see God is the same eye with which God sees me. My eye and God's eye is one eye and one seeing and one knowing and one feeling.”

But in Tauler another sentiment lives with this one. He struggles through to a real conception of the spiritual, and does not constantly intermingle the sensory-natural with the spiritual, as do false materialists and false idealists. If Tauler, with his way of thinking, had become a scientist, he would have had to insist that everything natural, including the *whole* man, the first and the second, was to be explained in entirely natural terms. He would never have transferred “purely” spiritual forces into nature. He would not have spoken of a “functionalism” in nature, imagined in accordance with human examples. He knew that where we perceive with the senses no “creative thoughts” are to be found.

Instead, there lived in him the strongest consciousness that man is a merely natural being. And since he felt himself to be a curator of the moral life, not a scientist, he felt the contrast which separates this natural being of man and the seeing of God, which arises in a natural way within the natural, but as something spiritual. It was just in this contrast that the meaning of life appeared before his eyes. Man finds himself to be an individual being, a creature of nature. And no science can reveal anything more to him about this life than that he is such a creature of nature. As a creature of nature he cannot go beyond the state appropriate to a creature of nature. He must remain within it. And yet his inner life leads him beyond it. He must have confidence in something no science of external nature can give and show him. If he calls this nature the existing, he must be able to advance to the view which acknowledges the non-existing as the higher.

Tauler does not seek a God who exists in the sense of a natural force; he does not seek a God who has created the world in the sense of human creations. In him lives the recognition that even the concept of creation of the teachers of the Church is only an idealized human creating. It is clear to him that God is not found in the same manner as science finds natural processes and natural laws. Tauler is conscious that we cannot simply add God to nature in our thoughts. He knows that one who thinks God in his sense, does not have any other content in his thoughts than one who has grasped nature in thought. Therefore Tauler does not want to think God; he wants to think divinely. The knowledge of nature is not *enriched* by knowing God; it is *transformed*. The knower of God does *not* know *something different* from the knower of nature: he *knows differently*. The knower of God cannot add a single letter to the knowledge of nature, but through his whole knowledge of nature a new light shines.

What basic sensations dominate the soul of a man who looks at the world from such points of view will depend on how he regards the experience of the soul which spiritual rebirth brings. Within this experience man is wholly a natural being if he looks at himself in interaction with the rest of nature; and he is wholly a spiritual being if he

considers the state to which his transformation brings him. One can therefore say with equal justice: The greatest depths of the soul are still natural, and also, they are already divine. Tauler, in conformity with his way of thinking, emphasized the former. No matter how deeply we penetrate into our soul, he said to himself, we always remain individual human beings. But nevertheless, universal nature glows in the depths of the individual soul.

Tauler was dominated by the feeling: You cannot detach yourself from individuality, you cannot cleanse yourself of it. Therefore the universal essence cannot appear in you in its purity; it can only shine into the depths of your soul. Thus in these only a reflection, an *image* of the universal essence appears. You can transform your individual personality in such a way that it gives back the image of the universal essence; this universal essence itself does not shine in you. From such conceptions Tauler came to the idea of a Divinity which never entirely merges with the human world, never flows into it. He even expressly insists upon not being confused with those who declare the interior of man to be something divine in itself. He says that the union with God

“is taken by ignorant men to occur in the flesh, and they say that they should be transformed into the divine nature; but this is wrong and a mischievous heresy. For even in the highest and most intimate union with God the divine nature and God's essence are high, indeed higher than all height; this leads into a divine abyss, and no creature will ever partake of it.”

Tauler wants to be deservedly called a believing Catholic, in the sense of his time and of his vocation as a priest. He is not intent upon confronting Christianity with another point of view. He simply wants to deepen and spiritualize Christianity through his views. He speaks of the contents of Scripture as a pious priest. But nevertheless, in his world of ideas the Scriptures become a means of expression for the innermost experiences of the soul.

“God accomplishes all His works in the soul and gives them to the soul; and the Father brings forth His only-begotten Son in the soul, as truly as He brings Him forth in eternity, neither less, nor more. What is brought forth when one says: God brings forth in the soul? Is it a similitude of God, or is it an image of God, or is it something of God No, it is neither image nor similitude of God, but the same God and the same Son whom the Father brings forth in eternity, and nothing but the lovely divine Word, which is the other Person in the Trinity; this does the Father bring forth in the soul . . . and it is from this that the soul has such a great and special dignity.” (Sermon 83)

For Tauler the narratives of the Scriptures become the garment in which he clothes the events of the inner life:

“Herod, who drove away the Child and wanted to kill Him, is an image of the world, which still wants to kill this Child in the pious man, wherefore one should and must flee it if one wants to keep the Child alive within oneself, while the Child is the enlightened, believing soul of every man.”

Because Tauler directs his attention to the natural man, he is less concerned with describing what happens when the higher man enters into the natural man than with finding the paths which the lower faculties of the personality have to take if they are to be translated into the higher life. As a curator of the moral life he wants to show man the ways to the universal essence. He has absolute faith and confidence that the universal essence will begin to shine in man if the latter so arranges his life that there is a place for the divine in him. But this universal essence can never begin to shine if man shuts himself off in his bare, natural, separate personality. Thus isolated within himself, in the language of Tauler, man is only a part of the world, an individual creature. The more man encloses himself within his existence as part of the world, the less can the universal essence find a place within him.

“If man is truly to become one with God, all the faculties of the inner man too must die and become silent. The will must be turned away from even the good and from all willing, and must become will-less.”

“Man must escape all the senses, turn all his faculties inward, and attain to forgetfulness of all things and of himself.”

“For the true and eternal word of God is spoken only in the desert, when man has left his own self and all things behind, and stands alone, deserted, and solitary.” (Sermon 45a)

When Tauler had reached his highest point the following question came to occupy the center of his mental life: How can man destroy and overcome his individual existence within himself, so that he can take part in life in the sense of the universal life? For one who is in this situation, his feelings toward the universal essence become concentrated in the one thing: reverence for this universal essence, as for that which is inexhaustible and infinite. He says to himself: No matter what level you have attained, there are still higher prospects, still more sublime possibilities. As definite and clear for him as is the direction his steps must take, so clear is it to him that he can never speak of a goal.

A new goal is only the beginning of a new road. Through such a new goal man has reached a *degree of development*; the development itself extends into the immeasurable. And what it will achieve on a more distant level it never knows on the present one. There is no knowing the final goal; there is only a *trusting* in the road, in the development. There is a knowing of everything man has already achieved. It consists in the penetration of an already existing object by the faculties of our spirit. For the higher inner life *such* a knowing does not exist. Here the faculties of our spirit must first translate the object itself into existence; they must first *create* an existence for it which is like the natural existence. Natural science examines the development of living beings from the simplest to man himself, the most perfect. *This* development lies completed before us. We understand it by penetrating it with our mental faculties. When the development comes, one does not *find* a further continuation already existing. He himself accomplishes the further development. He now *lives* what he only *knew* at earlier levels. He *creates* objectively what, according to his spiritual natures, what he only *re-created* at preceding stages.

That the truth does not coincide with what exists in nature, but embraces both what exists naturally and what does not exist: Tauler is wholly filled by this in all his sentiments. We are told that he was led to this conviction by an enlightened layman, a “Friend of God from the Oberland.” There is a mysterious story in this. There are only conjectures about the place where this Friend of God lived, and about who he was there are not even conjectures. He is said to have heard much about Tauler's manner of preaching, and thereupon to have decided to go to Tauler, who was then a preacher in Strasbourg, in order to fulfill a certain task concerning him. The relationship of Tauler to the Friend of God and the influence which the latter exercised on him are described in a work which is printed together with Tauler's sermons in the oldest editions under the title, *The Book of the Master*. In it a Friend of God, in whom the one who entered into relations with Tauler is said to be recognizable, tells of a “master,” who has been identified with Tauler himself. He tells how a revolution, a spiritual rebirth, has been brought about in a “master,” and how the latter, when he felt his death approaching, called the Friend to him and asked him to write the story of his “enlightenment,” but to take care that no one should ever find out who the book deals with. He asks this because all the insights which proceed from him are yet not his alone.

“For know that God has performed everything through me, poor worm that I am, and thus it is not mine, but God's.”

A scholarly dispute which has developed in connection with this matter is not of the least importance as far as its essentials are concerned. On the one hand¹, the attempt has been made to prove that the Friend of God never

¹ Denifle, *The Writings of the Friend of God in the Oberland*

existed, that his existence was invented, and that the books attributed to him originated with someone else². Wilhelm Preger³ has endeavored with many reasons to support this existence, the genuineness of the writings, and the correctness of the facts relating to Tauler.

It is not incumbent upon me here to illuminate by obtrusive research a human relationship of which one who knows how to read the relevant writings knows full well that it is to remain a secret.⁴ It is entirely sufficient to say of Tauler that at a certain stage of his life a change such as the one I am about to describe occurred in him. Here Tauler's personality is no longer in question, but rather a personality "in general." As regards Tauler we are only concerned with the fact that we have to understand the transformation in *him* from the point of view indicated below. If we compare his later activity with his earlier, the fact of this transformation is immediately evident. I omit all external circumstances and relate the inner soul processes of the "master" under "the influence of the layman." What my reader imagines who the "layman" and the "master" are, depends entirely upon the disposition of his spirit; I do not know if what I myself imagine them to be is applicable to anyone else.

The master instructs his listeners about the relationship of the soul to the universal essence of things. He speaks of the fact that man no longer feels the natural, limited faculties of the individual personality to be active within him when he descends into the profound depths of his soul. There it is no longer the individual man who speaks; it is God. There man does not see God, or the world; there God sees Himself. Man has become *one* with God. But the master knows that this teaching has not yet fully come to life within him. He thinks it with the intellect, but he does not yet live within it with every fiber of his personality. Thus he teaches about a state which he has not yet fully experienced within himself. The description of this state corresponds to the truth, but this truth is worth nothing if it does not acquire life, if it does not bring itself forth as existence in the real world.

The "layman" or "Friend of God" hears of the master and his teachings. He is not less penetrated with the truth the master utters than is the latter himself. But he does not possess this truth as a thing of the intellect. He possesses it as the whole force of his life. He knows that one can utter this truth when it has come to one from the outside, without living in its sense in the least. In that case one has nothing within oneself beyond the natural understanding of the intellect.

One then speaks of this natural understanding as though it were the highest, identical with the action of the universal essence. This is not so, because it was not acquired in a life which, when it approached this knowledge, was already transformed and reborn. What one acquires as a *merely* natural man remains *merely* natural, even if later one expresses the main feature of the higher knowledge in words. The transformation must come out of nature itself. Nature, which in living has developed to a certain stage, must be developed further by life; something new must come into being through this further development. Man must not merely look back upon the development which has already taken place, and consider as the highest what is *re-formed* in his mind concerning this development; he must *look forward* to what has not yet been created; his knowledge must be the *beginning* of a new content, not an *end* of the content of the previous development.

Nature advances from worm to mammal, from mammal to man in a real, not in a conceptual process. Man is not merely to repeat this process in spirit. The spiritual repetition is only the beginning of a new real development, which, however, is a spiritual reality. Man then understands not merely what nature has brought forth; he carries

² Rulman Merswin

³ *History of German Mysticism*

⁴ These relevant writings, among others, are: *Of a self-willed worldly-wise Man who was shown the Way to Humble Obedience by a holy secular Priest*, 1338; *The Book of the Two Men*; *The Captured Knight*, 1349; *The Spiritual Stairs*, 1350; *Of the Spiritual Ladder*, 1357; *The Book of the Master*, 1349; *Story of Two Young 15-Year-Old Boys*.

nature further; he transforms his understanding into living action. He brings forth the spirit within himself, and from then on this spirit advances from one stage of development to another, just as nature advances. The spirit initiates a natural process on a higher level.

When one who has understood this speaks about the God who sees Himself within man, this speaking takes on another character. He attaches little value to the fact that an insight already obtained has led him into the depths of the universal essence, but his spiritual disposition acquires a new character. It continues to develop in the direction determined by the universal essence. Such a man not only *looks* at the world in a different way from one who is merely rational: he *lives* his life differently. He does not speak of the *meaning* which life already has through the forces and laws of the world; rather he gives a *new* meaning to this life.

No more than the fish has in itself what appears as mammal at a later stage of development, does the rational man already have in himself what is to be born out of him as a higher man. If the fish could understand itself and the things around it, it would regard its fish-hood as the meaning of life. It would say: The universal essence is like the fish; in the fish the universal essence sees itself. Thus the fish might speak as long as it merely holds fast to its intellectual understanding. In reality it does not hold fast to it. In its actions it goes beyond its understanding. It becomes a reptile, and later a mammal. In reality the meaning it gives to itself goes beyond the sense which mere reflection suggests to it.

Thus must it also be with man. In reality he gives himself meaning; he does not stop at what he already is, and which reflection shows him. Understanding leaps beyond itself, if only it understands *itself* the right way. Understanding cannot derive the world from an already completed God; it can only develop in a direction toward a God from a seed.

The man who has understood this does not want to look at God as something that is outside of him; he wants to treat God as a Being that walks with him toward a goal which, at the outset, is as unknown as the nature of the mammal is unknown to the fish. He does not want to be the knower of the hidden or self-revealing, existing God, but the friend of the divine action and operation, which is superior to existence and non-existence. The layman who came to the master was a "Friend of God" in this sense. And through him the master was transformed from a contemplator of the nature of God into "one who lives in the spirit," who not merely contemplated, but *lived* in the higher sense. Now the latter no longer brought concepts and ideas of the intellect from within himself; these concepts and ideas sprang from him as living, real spirit. He no longer merely edified his listeners; he moved them deeply. He no longer plunged their souls within themselves; he led them into a new life. This is told us symbolically: through the effect of his sermon about forty people fell down and were as if dead.

THEOLOGIA GERMANICA

A leader into such a new life is represented by a work⁵, the author of which is unknown. Luther first made it known by having it published. The philologist, Franz Pfeiffer recently reprinted it from a manuscript of the year 1497, with a translation in modern German facing the original text. The introduction to the work announces its intention and its goal: "Here the Frankfurter begins and says exceedingly high and beautiful things of a consummate life." This is followed by "the preface concerning the Frankfurter:"

What is expressed in this booklet the omnipotent, eternal God has uttered through a wise, judicious, truthful, righteous man, his friend, who was formerly a Teutonic Knight, a priest and a custodian in the house of the Teutonic Knights in Frankfurt; it teaches many lovely

⁵ *Theologia Germanica*

insights into divine truth, and especially how and by what one can recognize the true and righteous Friends of God, and also the unrighteous, false, free spirits, who do much harm to the holy Church.

By “free spirits” one is to understand those who live in a world of ideas like that of the “master” described above before his transformation by the “Friend of God”. The “true and righteous Friends of God” are those who think in the way of the “layman.”

One can further ascribe to the book the intention of acting upon its readers in the same way as the “Friend of God from the Oberland” acted upon the master. One does not know the author. But what does this mean? One does not know when he was born and when he died, and what he did in the external life. That the author wanted these facts of his outer life to remain forever secret is something which belongs to the way he wanted to act. Not the “self” of this or that man, born at a certain time, is to speak to us, but the selfhood on the basis of which the “particularity of individualities” (in the sense of the words of Paul Asmus, cf. above) first develops.

If God were to take unto himself all men who are now and who have ever been, and were to become man in them, and were they to become God in Him, and if it did not happen in me too, my fall and my estrangement would never be remedied, unless indeed it happened also in me. And in this restoration and improvement I can and should do nothing but merely and purely suffer what is done, so that God alone does and accomplishes everything within me, and I suffer Him and all His works and His divine Will. But if I do not want to suffer this, and possess myself in attributes of the self, that is in My and I, in Me and the like, then God is hindered, so that He cannot, pure and alone and without obstacle, accomplish His work within me. Therefore also my fall and my estrangement remain unremedied.

The “Frankfurter” does not wish to speak as an individual; he wants to let God speak. Of course he knows that he can only do this as an individual, separate personality, but he is a “Friend of God,” that is, a man who does not want to depict the nature of life through contemplation, but who wants to point out, through the living spirit, the *beginning* of an avenue of development.

The discussions in the book represent various instructions on how this road is to be attained. The basic idea always returns: man is to cast off everything connected with the view that makes him appear as an individual, separate personality. This idea seems to be carried out only with respect to the moral life; it must also be applied to the life of higher understanding. One must destroy in oneself what appears as separateness, then the separate existence ceases; the all-life enters into us. We cannot possess ourselves of this all-life by drawing it to us. It comes into us when we silence the separate existence within us. We possess the all-life least just when we regard our individual existence as if the All already reposed within it. The latter only appears in the individual existence when this individual existence does not claim that it is something.

The book calls this claim of the individual existence the “assumption” (*Annehmen*). Through the “assumption” the “self” makes it impossible for the all-life to enter into it. The self then puts itself as a part, as something incomplete, in the place of the whole, of the complete.

The whole comprises and embraces all beings in itself and in its being, and without and outside which there is no true being, and in which all things have their being; for it is the being of all things and is in itself unchangeable and immovable, and changes and moves all other things. But the world of divided and incomplete beings has sprung from the whole, or which it becomes, just like a brilliance or a shining which flows from the sun or from a light and appears as something, as this or that. And this is called creature, and none of

these separated entities is identical with the whole. *And therefore the whole also is not identical with any of the separate entities . . .* When the whole appears, one rejects what is distinct and separated. But when does it appear? I say: When it is known, felt, and tasted in the soul, insofar as it is possible. The lack is wholly in us and not in it. For just as the sun illuminates the whole world and is as close to one man as to another, a blind man nevertheless does not see it. But that is not a defect in the sun, but in the blind man . . . If my eye is to see something it must be cleansed of, or freed from, all other things . . . One might want to ask: Insofar as it is unknowable and incomprehensible for all creatures, and the soul is a creature, how can it be known in the soul? The answer this: the creature is to be known *as a creature*.

This is like saying that all that is creature is to be regarded as creature-ness and as created, and is not to regard itself as an I and as selfhood, which latter makes this knowing impossible.

For in that creature in which the complete is to be known, creature-ness, being created, I, selfhood and the like must be lost and come to nothing. (Chapter 1)

Thus the soul must look into itself; there it will find its I, its selfhood. If it stops at this, it separates itself from the complete. If it regards its selfhood only as something loaned to it, as it were, and destroys it in spirit, it will be seized by the stream of the all-life, of the complete.

“If the creature takes on something good, such as being, life, knowledge, insight, capacity, in short all that one should call good, and deems that it itself is this or that this belongs to it, the creature, or is of it: as often and to the extent that this happens, it turns itself away.” There are “two eyes in the created soul of man. One is the possibility of looking into eternity; the other, of looking into time and into the creature.” “Man should thus stand and be free without himself, that is without selfhood, I, Me, My and the like, so that he seeks and purposes himself and what is his as little in all things as if it did not exist; and he should also estimate himself as little as if he did not exist, and as if another had performed all his works.” (Chapter 15.)

With relation to the author of these sentences too it must be considered that the conceptual content to which he gives a direction through his higher ideas and feelings is that of a pious priest of his time. Here it is not a matter of the conceptual content, but of the direction; not of the ideas, but of the spiritual disposition. One who does not live in Christian dogmas as this author does, but rather in concepts of natural science, imprints other ideas on his sentences; but with these other ideas he points in the same direction. And this direction is what leads to the overcoming of selfhood through this selfhood itself. It is in his self that the highest light shines for man. But this light only gives the right reflection to his world of ideas when man is aware that it is not the light of his self, but the universal light of the world. Therefore there is no more important knowledge than self-knowledge; and at the same time there is none which so completely leads beyond itself. When the “self” knows itself aright it is already no longer a “self.” In his words the author of the book under discussion expresses this as follows:

“For God's nature is without this and without that and without selfhood and I; but the nature and peculiarity of the creature is that it seeks and wills itself and what belongs to it, and the “this” and “that”; and from everything it does or leaves undone it wants to receive profit and advantage. But where the creature or man loses his own being and his selfhood and himself, and goes out of himself, there God enters with His own Being, that is with His Selfhood.” (Chapter 24.)

Man ascends from a conception of his “self” in which the latter appears to him as his *essence*, to one where he sees it as a mere organ in which the universal essence acts upon itself. In line with the ideas of our book it is said: “If man

can reach the point where he belongs as much to God as a man's hand belongs to him, then let him rest content and seek no further." (Chapter 54.) This is not to say that man should stop at a certain point of his development; rather, when he has come as far as is indicated in the words above, he should no longer pursue investigations about the meaning of the hand, but rather *use* the hand, so that it can serve the body to which it belongs.

HEINRICH SUSO

Heinrich Suso and Jan van Ruysbroeck had a spiritual disposition which can be described as genius of soul. Their feelings are drawn by something resembling instinct to the point to which Eckhart's and Tauler's feelings were led through a higher life of ideas. Suso's heart turns ardently toward a primordial essence which embraces the individual man as well as the whole remaining world, and in which, forgetting himself, he wants to be absorbed like a drop of water in the great ocean. He speaks of this yearning for the universal essence not as of something which he wants to grasp in his thoughts, but he speaks of it as of a natural impulse which makes his soul drunk with the desire for the annihilation of his separate existence and for the rebirth in the all-embracing activity of the infinite essence.

"Turn your eyes to the being in its pure and bare simplicity, so that you may abandon this and that partial being. Take only being in itself, which is unmixed with non-being, for all non-being denies all being; thus the being in itself also denies all non-being. A thing which is still to become, or has been, does not exist now in its essential presence. Mixed being or non-being can however be recognized only by the aid of a mark of the universal being. For if one wants to understand a thing the reason is first met by being, and that is a being which effects all things. It is not a divided being of this or that creature, for the divided being is ever mingled with the otherness of a possibility of receiving something. Therefore the nameless divine being must in itself be a universal being, which sustains all divided beings with its presence."

Thus speaks Suso in the autobiography which he composed with the aid of his disciple, Elsbet Stäglin. He too is a pious priest and lives wholly in the Christian realm of ideas. He lives in it as if it were completely unthinkable for someone with his spiritual *direction* to live in a different spiritual *world*. But of him too it is true that one can combine another conceptual content with his spiritual direction. This is clearly indicated by the way the content of the Christian doctrine becomes an inner experience for him, while his relationship to Christ becomes one between his spirit and the eternal truth, of a purely conceptual-spiritual kind. He has written a *Little Book of Eternal Wisdom*. In this he lets the "eternal wisdom" speak to its "servant," that is, presumably, to himself:

"Do you not recognize me? How is it you are even sunk down, or has consciousness deserted you because of your great distress, my tender child? It is I, compassionate wisdom, who have opened wide the depths of bottomless compassion, which is even hidden to all the saints, in order to receive you and all repentant hearts in kindness; it is I, the sweet, eternal wisdom, who became poor and miserable in order to bring you back to your dignity; it is I who suffered bitter death in order to bring you back to life! Here I stand, pale and bloody and loving, as I stood by the high gallows of the Cross, between the strict judgment of my Father and you. It is I, your brother; look, it is I, your spouse! Everything you ever did against me I have utterly forgotten, as if it had never happened, if only you now turn completely to me and do not part from me again."

For Suso, everything material-temporal in the Christian conception of the world has, as one can see, become a spiritual-ideal process within his soul. From some chapters of the above-mentioned autobiography of Suso it might appear as if he had let himself be led not by the mere activity of his own spiritual faculties, but by external

revelations, by spirit-like visions. But he clearly expresses his opinion on this. One attains the truth only by exercise of reason, not through some revelation.

“The difference between pure truth and doubtful visions in the professing substance . . . I shall also tell you. A direct seeing of the bare Divinity is the right, pure truth, without any doubt; and any vision is the nobler the more reasonable and imageless it is, and the more like this bare seeing.”

Meister Eckhart also leaves no doubt that he rejects the view which sees the spiritual in substantial-spatial forms, in apparitions that can be perceived in the same way as sensory ones. Thus spirits like Suso and Eckhart are opponents of a view such as that which expresses itself in the Spiritualism that developed in the 19th century.

JAN VAN RUYSBROECK

Jan van Ruysbroeck, the Belgian mystic, walked the same paths as Suso. His spiritual road found a spirited opponent in Jean de Gerson (born 1363), who was for some time Chancellor of the University of Paris, and played an important role at the Council of Constance. It throws some light on the nature of the mysticism cultivated by Tauler, Suso, and Ruysbroeck if one compares it with the mystical endeavors of Gerson, whose predecessors were Richard of St. Victor, Bonaventura, and others.

Ruysbroeck himself fought against those whom he counted among the heretical mystics. The latter he considered all who, on the basis of an unconsidered intellectual judgment, hold all things to be the emanation of *one* primordial essence, and who thus see in the world a diversity only, and in God the unity of this diversity.

Ruysbroeck did not count himself among these mystics, for he knew that one cannot reach the primordial essence by a contemplation of things themselves, but only by raising oneself from this lower to a higher way of thinking. Similarly he turned against those who without further ado wanted to see in the individual man, in his separate existence (in his creature-ness), his higher nature also. He much lamented the error which effaces all differences in the world of the senses, and lightly says that things are different only in appearance, while in essence they are all the same.

For a way of thinking such as Ruysbroeck's this would be just as if one were to say: That for our eyes the trees of an avenue converge in the distance does not concern us. In reality they are everywhere equally distant, therefore our eyes must accustom themselves to seeing correctly. But our eyes do see correctly. That the trees converge is due to a necessary law of nature, and we should not object to our way of seeing, but rather understand in the *mind* why we see in this way.

The mystic too does not turn away from the things of the senses. He accepts them as being sensory, as they are. And it is also clear to him that they cannot become other through any intellectual judgment. But in the spirit he goes beyond the senses and beyond reason, and only then does he find unity. He has an unshakeable *belief* that he can develop to the point of seeing this unity. Therefore he ascribes to human nature the divine spark which can be made to shine in him, *to shine of itself*.

It is different with spirits of Gerson's kind. They do *not* believe in this *shining of itself*. For them what men can see always remains something external, which must come to them externally from one side or another.

Ruysbroeck believed that the highest wisdom must become apparent to the mystical vision; Gerson believed only that the soul could illuminate the content of an external teaching (that of the Church). For Gerson mysticism was nothing but one's having a warm feeling for everything which is revealed in the content of this teaching. For

Ruysbroeck it was a belief that all content of this teaching is also born in the soul. Therefore Gerson reproves Ruysbroeck for imagining not only that he possesses the capacity to see the universal essence with clearness, but that an activity of the universal essence manifests itself in this seeing.

Ruysbroeck simply could not be understood by Gerson. They were speaking of two totally different things. Ruysbroeck has his eye fixed on that life of the soul which lives its God; Gerson sees only a life of the soul which wants to love a God whom it never will be able to live within itself. Like so many others Gerson too fought against something which was foreign to him only because it would not fit his experience.

CARDINAL NICOLAS OF CUSA

A gloriously shining star in the firmament of medieval spiritual life is Nicolas Chrypffs of Cusa (near Treves, 1401–1464) He stands upon the heights of the learning of his time. In mathematics he has produced outstanding work. In natural science he may be described as the precursor of Copernicus, for he held the point of view that the earth is a moving heavenly body like others. He had already broken with the view on which the great astronomer, Tycho Brahe, still relied a hundred years later when he flung the following sentence against the teaching of Copernicus: “The earth is a coarse and heavy mass, unsuited for movement; how can Copernicus make a star of it and lead it around in the atmosphere?” Nicolas of Cusa, who not only encompassed the knowledge of his time but developed it further, also to a high degree had the capacity of awakening this knowledge to an inner life, so that it not only elucidates the external world but also procures for man that spiritual life for which he must long from the most profound depths of his soul. If one compares Nicolas with such spirits as Eckhart or Tauler, one reaches an important conclusion. Nicolas is the scientific thinker who wants to raise himself to a higher view as the result of his research into the things of the world; Eckhart and Tauler are the believing confessors who seek the higher life through the contents of their faith. Nicolas finally reaches the same inner life as Meister Eckhart, but the content of the inner life of the former is a rich learning. The full meaning of the difference becomes clear when one considers that for one who interests himself in the various sciences there is a real danger of misjudging the scope of the way of knowing which elucidates the different fields of learning. Such a person can easily be misled into the belief that there is only one way of knowing. He will then either under — or over — estimate this knowing, which leads to the goal in things pertaining to the different sciences. In the one case he will approach objects of the highest spiritual life in the same way as a problem in physics, and deal with them in terms of concepts that he uses to deal with the force of gravity and with electricity. According to whether he considers himself to be more or less enlightened, to him the world becomes a blindly acting mechanism, an organism, the functional construction of a personal God, or perhaps a structure directed and penetrated by a more or less clearly imagined “world soul.” In the other case he notices that the particular knowledge of which he has experience is useful only for the things of the sensory world; then he becomes a skeptic who says to himself: we cannot know anything about the things which lie beyond the world of the senses. Our knowledge has a boundary. As far as the needs of the higher life are concerned, we can only throw ourselves into the arms of a faith untouched by knowledge. For a learned theologian like Nicolas of Cusa, who was at the same time a natural scientist, the second danger was especially real. In his education he was after all a product of Scholasticism, the dominant philosophy in the scholarly life of the Church of the Middle Ages, which had been brought to its highest flower by Thomas Aquinas (1225–1274), the “Prince of Scholastics.” This philosophy must be used as a background if one wants to depict the personality of Nicolas of Cusa.

Scholasticism is in the highest degree a product of human ingenuity. In it the logical faculty celebrated its greatest triumphs. One who aims to elaborate concepts in their sharpest and clearest contours should serve an apprenticeship with the Scholastics. It is they who provide the highest schooling for the technique of thinking. They have an incomparable agility in moving in the field of pure thought. It is easy to underestimate what they were capable of accomplishing in this field. For in most areas of learning the latter is accessible to man only with difficulty.

Most people attain it clearly only in the realms of counting, of arithmetic, and in thinking about the properties of geometric forms. We can count by adding a unit to a number in our thoughts, without calling sensory images to our help. We also calculate without such images, in the pure element of thought alone. As for geometric forms, we know that they do not completely coincide with any sensory image. In the reality of the senses there exists no (conceptual) circle. And yet our thinking occupies itself with the latter. For objects and processes which are more complicated than numerical and spatial structures, it is more difficult to find conceptual counter-parts. This has led to the claim made in some quarters that there is only as much real knowledge in the various fields of investigation as there is that in them which can be measured and counted. This is as decidedly wrong as is anything one-sided; but it seduces many, as often only something one-sided can. Here the truth is that most people are not capable of grasping purely conceptual when it is no longer a matter of something measurable or countable. But one who cannot do this in connection with higher realms of life and knowledge resembles in this respect a child who has not yet learned to count in any other way than by adding one pea to another. The thinker who said that there is as much true knowledge in any field of learning as there is mathematics in it, did not grasp the full truth of the matter. One must require that everything which cannot be measured and counted, is to be treated in the same conceptual fashion as numerical and spatial structures. And this requirement was respected by the Scholastics in the highest degree. Everywhere they sought the conceptual content of things, just as the mathematician seeks it in the area of the measurable and countable.

In spite of this accomplished logical skill the Scholastics attained only a one-sided and subordinate concept of cognition. According to this concept, in the process of cognition man produces in himself an image of what he is to grasp. It is quite obvious that with such a concept of cognition, one must place all reality outside of cognition. For in the process of cognition one cannot then grasp a thing itself, but *only an image* of this thing. Man also cannot grasp himself in his self-knowledge; what he grasps of himself is only an image of his self. It is quite in the spirit of Scholasticism that someone who is closely acquainted with it says (Karl Werner in his *Franz Suarez und die Scholastik der letzten Jahrhunderte*, Francisco Suarez and the Scholasticism of the Last Centuries, p. 122): "In time man has no perception of his self, the hidden foundation of his spiritual nature and life; . . . he will never be able to look at himself; for either, forever estranged from God, he will find in himself only a bottomless dark abyss and endless emptiness, or he will, blessed in God, and turning his gaze inward, find only God, Whose sun of grace shines within him, and Whose *image* reflects itself in the spiritual traits of his nature." One who thinks about all cognition in this way has only a concept of that cognition which is applicable to external things. What is sensory in a thing always remains external to us. Therefore into our cognition we can only receive images of what is sensory in the world. When we perceive a color or a stone we cannot ourselves become color or stone in order to know the nature of the color or of the stone. And neither can the color or the stone transform itself into a part of our own nature. But it must be asked, Is the concept of such a cognition, focused as it is upon the external in things, an exhaustive one? — It is true that for Scholasticism all human cognition coincides *in its essentials* with *this* cognition. Another writer who knows Scholasticism extremely well, (Otto Willmann, in his *Geschichte des Idealismus*, History of Idealism, V. 2, 2nd ed., p. 396) characterizes the concept of cognition of this philosophy in the following way: "Our spirit, associated with the body as it is in earthly life, is primarily directed toward the surrounding world of matter, but focused upon the spiritual in it; that is, the essences, natures, and forms of things, the elements of existence which are akin to it and provide it with the rungs by which it ascends to the supra-sensory. The field of our cognition is thus the realm of experience, but we should learn to understand what it offers, penetrate to its sense and idea, and thereby open to ourselves the world of ideas." The Scholastic could not attain a different concept of cognition. He was prevented from doing so by the dogmatic teaching of his theology. If he had fixed his spiritual eye upon what he considered to be a mere image, he would have seen that the spiritual content of things reveals itself in this supposed image; he would then have found that God does not merely *reflect* Himself within him, but that He *lives* in him, is present in him in His essence. In looking within himself he would not have beheld a dark abyss, an endless emptiness, nor

merely an image of God; rather would he have felt that a life pulses in him which is the divine life itself, and that his own life is the life of God. This the Scholastic could not admit. In his opinion God could not enter into him and speak out of him; He could only exist in him as an image. In reality, the Divinity had to be presupposed outside the self. Thus it had to *reveal* itself through supernatural communications from the outside, and could not do so within, through the spiritual life. But what is intended by this is exactly what is least achieved. It is the highest possible concept of the Divinity which is to be attained. In reality, the Divinity is degraded to a thing among other things, but these other things reveal themselves to man in a natural manner, through experience, while the Divinity is to reveal Itself to him supernaturally. However, a difference between the cognition of the Divine and of the creation is made in saying that, as concerns the creation, the external thing is given in the experience, that one has *knowledge* of it. As concerns the Divine, the object is not given in the experience; one can only attain it through *faith*. Thus for the Scholastic the highest things are not objects of knowledge, but only of faith. It is true that, according to the Scholastic view, the relationship of knowledge to faith is not to be imagined in such a way that in a certain field *only* knowledge reigns, in another *only* faith. For “cognition of the existing is possible for us, because it originates in a creative cognition; things are *for* the spirit because they are *from* the spirit; they tell us something because they have a meaning which a higher intelligence has put into them.” (O. Willmann, *Geschichte des Idealismus*, History of Idealism, V. 2, p. 383.) Since God has created the world according to His ideas, if we grasp the ideas of the world, we can also grasp the traces of the Divine in the world through scientific reflection. But what God is in His essence we can only grasp through the revelation which He has given us in a supernatural manner, and in which we must believe. What we must think concerning the highest things is not decided by any human knowledge, but by faith; and “to faith belongs everything that is contained in the Scriptures of the New and Old Covenant, and in the divine traditions.” (Joseph Kleutgen, *Die Theologie der Vorzeit*, The Theology of Antiquity, V. 1, p. 39.) — We cannot make it our task here to describe in detail and to explain the relationship of the content of faith to that of knowledge. In reality, the content of all faith originates in an inner experience man has had at some time. It is then preserved, according to its external import, without the consciousness of how it was acquired. It is said of it that it came into the world through supernatural revelation. The content of the Christian faith was simply accepted by the Scholastics as tradition. Science and inner experience were not allowed to claim any rights over it. Scholasticism could no more permit itself to create a concept of God than science can create a tree; it had to accept the revealed concept as given, just as natural science accepts the tree as given. The Scholastic could never admit that the spiritual itself shines and lives within man. He therefore drew a limit to the jurisdiction of science where the field of external experience ends. Human cognition could not be permitted to produce a concept of the higher entities out of itself. It was to accept revealed one. That in doing this it actually only accepted one which had been produced at an earlier stage of human spiritual life, and declared it to be a revealed one, this the Scholastics could not admit. — In the course of the development of Scholasticism therefore, all those ideas had disappeared from it which still indicated the manner in which man has produced the concepts of the Divine in a natural way. In the first centuries of the development of Christianity, at the time of the Fathers of the Church, we see how the content of the teachings of theology came into being little by little through the inclusion of inner experiences. This content is still treated entirely as an inner experience by Johannes Scotus Erigena, who stood at the height of Christian theological learning in the ninth century. Among the Scholastics of the succeeding centuries this quality of an inner experience is completely lost; the old content is reinterpreted as the content of an external, supernatural revelation. One can therefore interpret the activity of the mystical theologians Eckhart, Tauler, Suso and their companions by saying: They were inspired by the content of the teachings of the Church, which is contained in theology, but had been reinterpreted, to bring forth a similar content out of themselves anew as an inner experience.

Nicolas of Cusa enters upon the task of ascending by oneself to inner experiences from the knowledge one acquires in the different sciences. There can be no doubt that the excellent logical technique the Scholastics had developed and for which Nicolas had been educated, furnishes an excellent means for attaining inner experiences, although

the Scholastics themselves were kept from this road by their positive faith. But one will only understand Nicolas completely when one considers that his vocation as priest, which raised him to the dignity of Cardinal, prevented him from making a complete break with the faith of the Church, which found its contemporary expression in Scholastic theology. We find him so far advanced along a certain path that every further step would of necessity have led him out of the Church. Therefore we understand the Cardinal best if we complete that step which he did not take, and then in retrospect illuminate what had been his intention.

The most important concept of the spiritual life of Nicolas is that of “learned ignorance.” By this he understands a cognition which represents a higher level, as opposed to ordinary knowledge. Knowledge in the subordinate sense is the grasping of an object by the spirit. The most important characteristic of knowledge is that it gives information about something outside the spirit, that is, that it looks at something which it itself is not. In knowledge, the spirit thus is occupied with things thought of as being outside of it. But what the spirit forms in itself concerning things is the *essence* of things. Things are spirit. At first man sees the spirit only through the sensory covering. What remains outside the spirit is only this sensory covering; the essence of things enters into the spirit. When the spirit then looks upon this essence, which is substance of its substance, it can no longer speak of knowledge, for it does not look upon a thing which is outside of it; it looks upon a thing which is a part of itself; it looks upon itself. It no longer knows; it only looks upon itself. It is not concerned with a “knowing,” but with a “*not-knowing*.” It no longer *grasps* something through the spirit; it “beholds, without grasping,” its own life. This highest level of cognition, in relation to the lower levels, is a “not-knowing.” — It will be seen that the essence of things can only be communicated through this level of cognition. With his “learned not-knowing” Nicolas of Cusa thus speaks of nothing but the knowledge reborn as inner experience. He himself tells how he came to have this inner experience. “I made many attempts to unite my thoughts about God and the world, about Christ and the Church in one fundamental idea, but of them all none satisfied me until finally, during the return from Greece by sea, the gaze of my spirit lifted itself, as if through an inspiration from on high, to the view in which God appeared to me as the highest unity of all contrasts.” To a greater or lesser extent the influences which derive from a study of his predecessors are involved in this inspiration. In his way of thinking one recognizes a peculiar renewal of the ideas we encounter in the writing of a certain Dionysius. Scotus Erigena, mentioned above, had translated this work into Latin. He calls the author “the great and divine revealer.” These writings were first mentioned in the first half of the sixth century. They were ascribed to that Dionysius the Aeropagite mentioned in the *Acts of the Apostles*, who was converted to Christianity by Paul. Here we shall not go into the problem as to when these writings were really composed. Their contents had a strong effect on Nicolas, as they already had on Johannes Scotus Erigena, and as they must also have been stimulating in many respects for the way of thinking of Eckhart and his companions. The “learned not-knowing” is prefigured in a certain way in these writings. Here we shall record only the main feature of the way of thinking of these writings. Man first comes to know the things of the sensory world. He reflects on their existence and activity. The primordial foundation of all things must lie higher than the things themselves. Man therefore cannot expect to grasp this primordial foundation with the same concepts and ideas as he grasps the things themselves. If therefore he attributes to the primordial foundation (God) qualities which he knows from lower things, these qualities can only be auxiliary ideas of the weak spirit, which draws the primordial foundation down to itself in order to be able to imagine it. In reality, therefore, no quality which lower things have can be said to belong to God. It cannot even be said that God *is*. For “being” too is a concept which man has formed in connection with lower things. But God is exalted above “being” and “not-being.” Thus the God to Whom we ascribe qualities is not the true one. We arrive at the true God if we imagine a “Supergod” above a God with such qualities. Of this “Supergod” we can know nothing in the ordinary sense. In order to reach Him, “knowing” must flow into “not-knowing.” — One can see that such a view is based on the consciousness that out of what his sciences have furnished him man himself — in a purely natural way — can develop a higher cognition, which is no longer *mere knowledge*. The Scholastic view declared knowledge to be incapable of such a development, and at the point where knowledge is supposed to end, it had faith, based on an

external revelation, come to the aid of knowledge. — Nicolas of Cusa thus was on the way toward once again developing *that* out of knowledge which the Scholastics had declared to be unattainable for cognition.

From the point of view of Nicolas of Cusa therefore, one cannot say that there is only one kind of cognition. Cognition, on the contrary, is clearly divided into what mediates a knowledge of external things, and what is itself the object of which one acquires knowledge. The former kind of cognition rules in the sciences which we acquire concerning the things and processes of the sensory world; the latter kind is in us when we ourselves *live* in what has been acquired. The second kind of cognition develops from the first. Yet it is the same world to which both kinds of cognition refer, and it is the same man who shares in both. The question must arise, How does it come about that one and the same man develops two kinds of cognition of one and the same world? — The direction in which the answer to this question is to be sought was already indicated in our discussion of Tauler (**cf. above**). Here this answer can be formulated even more definitely with regard to Nicolas of Cusa. First of all, man lives as a separate (individual) being among other separate beings. To the influences which the other beings exercise upon one another, in him is added the faculty of (lower) cognition. Through his senses he receives impressions of the other beings, and he works upon these impressions with his spiritual faculties. He directs his spiritual gaze away from external things and looks at himself, at his own activity. Thus self-knowledge arises in him. As long as he remains upon this level of self-knowledge he does not yet look upon himself in the true sense of the word. He can still believe that there is some hidden entity active within him, and that what appears to him as *his* activity are only the manifestations and actions of this entity. But the point can come at which it becomes clear to man through an incontrovertible inner experience that in what he perceives and experiences within himself he possesses, not the manifestation, the action, of a hidden force or entity, but this entity itself in its primordial form. He can then say to himself: All other things I encounter in a way ready-made, and I, who stand outside them, add to them what the spirit has to say with regard to them. But in what I myself thus creatively add to things in myself, in that I myself live, that is what I am, that is my own essence. But what is it that speaks in the depths of my spirit? It is knowledge that speaks, the knowledge I have acquired about the things of the world. But in this knowledge it is not some action, some manifestation which speaks; something speaks which keeps nothing back of what it has in itself. In *this* knowledge speaks the world in all its immediacy. But I have acquired this knowledge from things and from myself, as from a thing among things. Out of my own essence it is I myself and the things who speak. In reality I no longer merely express my nature; I express the nature of things. My “I” is the form, the organ through which things declare themselves with regard to themselves. I have gained the experience that I experience my own essence within myself, and for me this experience becomes enlarged into another, that in me and through me the universal essence expresses itself, or, in other words, knows itself. Now I can no longer feel myself to be a thing among things; I can only feel myself to be a form in which the universal essence has its life. — It is therefore only natural that one and the same man should have two kinds of cognition. With regard to the sensory facts he is a thing among things, and, insofar as this is the case, he acquires a knowledge of these things; but at any moment he can have the higher experience that he is the form in which the universal essence looks upon itself. Then he himself is transformed from a thing among things into a form of the universal essence — and with him the knowledge of things is changed into an utterance of the nature of things. This transformation however can in fact be accomplished only by man himself. What is mediated in the higher cognition is not yet present as long as this higher cognition itself is not present. It is only in creating this higher cognition that man develops his nature, and only through the higher cognition of man does the nature of things come into actual existence. If therefore it is required that man should not add anything to the things of the senses through his higher cognition, but should express only what already lies in them in the outside world, then this simply means renouncing all higher cognition. — From the fact that, as regards his sensory life, man is a thing among things, and that he only attains higher cognition when as a sensory being he himself accomplishes his transformation into a higher being, from this it follows that he can never replace the one cognition by the other. Rather, his spiritual life consists of a perpetual moving to and fro between the two poles of cognition, between *knowing* and *seeing*. If he shuts himself

off from seeing, he foregoes the nature of things; if he were to shut himself off from sensory knowing, he would deprive himself of the things whose nature he wants to understand. — The same things reveal themselves to the lower understanding and to the higher seeing, only they do this at one time with regard to their external appearance, at the other time with regard to their inner essence. — Thus it is not due to things themselves that at a certain stage they appear only as external objects; rather it is due to the fact that man must first transform himself to the point where he can reach the stage at which things cease to be external.

It is only with these considerations in mind that certain views natural science elaborated in the nineteenth century appear in their proper light. The adherents of these views say to themselves: We hear, see, and touch the things of the material world through the senses. The eye, for instance, communicates to us a phenomenon of light, a color. We say that a body emits red light when, by the mediation of our eye, we have the sensation “red.” But the eye gives us this sensation in other cases too. If it is struck or pressed, if an electric current passes through the head, the eye has a sensation of light. Hence in those instances also in which we have the sensation that a body emits light of a certain color, something may be occurring in that body which does not have any resemblance to color. No matter what is occurring in outside space, as long as this process is suitable for making an impression upon the eye, a sensation of color arises in me. What we perceive arises in us because we have organs that are constituted in a certain way. What goes on in outside space remains outside of us; we know only the effects which external processes bring forth in us. Hermann Helmholtz (1821–1894) has given expression to this idea in a clearly defined way. “Our perceptions are effects produced in our organs by external causes, and the way such an effect manifests itself is of course substantially dependent on the kind of apparatus acted upon. Insofar as the quality of our perception gives us information about the characteristics of the external influence by which it is caused, it can be considered as a *sign* of the latter, but not as a *likeness* of it. For of an image one requires some kind of similarity to the object represented: of a statue, similarity of form; of a drawing, similarity of the perspective projection in the field of view; of a painting, in addition to this, similarity of colors. But a sign need not have any kind of resemblance to that of which it is a sign. The relationship between the two is limited to this, that the same object, exercising its influence under the same circumstances, calls forth the same sign, and that therefore unlike signs always correspond to unlike influences . . . If in ripening berries of a certain variety develop both a red pigment and sugar, then red color and sweet taste will always be found together in our perception of berries of this kind.” (cf. Helmholtz: *The Facts of Perception*, p. 12 f.) I have characterized this way of thinking in detail in my *Philosophy of Spiritual Activity*, and in my *Riddles of Philosophy*, 1918. — Let us now follow step by step the train of thought which is adopted in this view. A process is assumed in outside space. It produces an effect upon my sensory organ; my nervous system transmits to my brain the impression produced. Another process is effected there. I now perceive “red.” Now it is said: The perception of “red” is thus not outside; it is in me. All our perceptions are only *signs* of external processes, the real character of which we know nothing. We live and act among our perceptions, and know nothing about their origin. In line with this way of thinking one can also say: If we had no eye there would be no color; nothing would then transform the external process, which is unknown to us, into the perception “red.” For many this train of thought is something seductive. Nevertheless it rests upon a complete misinterpretation of the facts under consideration. (If many contemporary natural scientists and philosophers were not deluded to a truly monstrous degree by this train of thought, one would not have to talk about it so much. But this delusion has in fact vitiated contemporary thinking in many respects.) Since man is a thing among things, it is of course necessary that things should make an impression upon him if he is to find out anything about them. A process outside of man must give rise to a process in man if the phenomenon “red” is to appear in the field of vision. One must only ask, What is outside, what inside? Outside is a process which takes place in space and time. But inside doubtless is a similar process. Such a process exists in the eye and communicates itself to the brain when I perceive “red.” I cannot directly perceive the process which is “inside,” any more than I can immediately perceive the wave motion “outside,” which physicists consider corresponds to the color “red.” But it is only in this sense that I can speak of an “outside” and an “inside.” Only on

the level of *sensory perception* does the contrast between “outside” and “inside” have any validity. This perception leads me to assume a spatial-temporal process “outside,” although I cannot perceive it *directly*. And, further, the same perception leads me to assume such a process within me, although I cannot perceive it directly either. But, after all, I also assume spatial-temporal processes in ordinary life which I cannot directly perceive. For example, I hear a piano being played in the next room. Therefore I assume that a human being with spatial dimensions sits at the piano and plays. And my way of representing things to myself is no different when I speak of processes *within* me and *outside* of me. I assume that these processes have characteristics analogous to those of the processes which fall within the domain of my senses, only that, for certain reasons, they are not accessible to my direct observation. If I were to deny to these processes all those qualities my senses show me in the realm of the spatial and the temporal, I would in truth be imagining something like the famous knife without a handle of which the blade is missing. Thus I can only say that “outside” occur spatial-temporal processes, and that they cause spatial-temporal processes “inside.” Both are necessary if “red” is to appear in my field of vision. Insofar as it is not spatial-temporal I shall look for this red in vain, no matter whether I look for it “outside” or “inside.” The natural scientists and philosophers who cannot find it “outside” should not attempt to look for it “inside” either. It is not “inside” in the same sense in which it is not “outside.” To declare that the entire content of what the world of the senses presents to us is an inner world of perceptions, and to look for something “external” corresponding to it, is an impossible idea. Therefore we cannot say that “red,” “sweet,” “hot,” etc. are *signs* which as such, are only caused to arise in us and to which something quite different on the “outside” corresponds. For what is really caused *in us* as the effect of an external process is something quite different from what appears in the field of our perceptions. If one wants to call what is *in us* signs, then one can say: These signs appear within our organism in order to communicate perceptions to us which, as such, in their immediacy are neither inside nor outside us, but rather belong to that common world of which my “external world” and my “interior world” are only parts. It is true that in order to be able to grasp this common world I must raise myself to that higher level of cognition for which an “inside” and an “outside” no longer exist. (I am well aware that people who rely on the gospel that “our entire world of experience” is made up of sensations of unknown origin will look down haughtily upon this exposition, in somewhat the same way as Dr. Erich Adikes in his work, *Kant contra Haeckel* says condescendingly: “For the time being, people like Haeckel and thousands of his kind philosophize merrily on, without worrying about any theory of cognition or about critical introspection.” Such gentlemen of course have no suspicion of how paltry *their* theories of cognition are. They suspect a lack of critical introspection only in others. We shall not begrudge them their “wisdom.”)

It is just on the point under consideration here that Nicolas of Cusa has excellent ideas. His keeping the lower and the higher cognition clearly separated from each other permits him on the one hand to gain a full insight into the fact that as a sensory being man can have *within himself* only processes which must, as effects, be unlike the corresponding *external* processes; on the other hand, it preserves him from confusing the inner processes with the facts which appear in our field of perception and which, in their immediacy, are neither outside nor inside, but are elevated above this contrast. — Nicolas was “prevented by his priestly cloth” from following without reservations the path which this insight indicated to him. We see him making a good beginning with the advance from “knowing” to “not-knowing.” But at the same time we must observe that in the field of “not-knowing” he has nothing to show except the theological teachings which are offered to us by the Scholastics also. It is true that he knows how to develop this theological content in an ingenious manner. on providence, Christ, the creation of the world, man's redemption, the moral life, he presents teachings which are altogether in line with dogmatic Christianity. It would have been in keeping with his spiritual direction to say: I have confidence that human nature, having immersed itself in the sciences of things on all sides, is able from within itself to transform this “knowing” into a “not-knowing,” hence that the highest cognition brings satisfaction. Then he would not have accepted, as he has, the traditional ideas of soul, immortality, redemption, God, creation, the Trinity, etc., but would have upheld those which he himself had found. — But Nicolas, personally was so penetrated with the concepts of Christianity that he could well believe

he was awakening his own proper “not-knowing” within himself, while he was only putting forth the traditional views in which he had been educated — However it must be considered that he was standing before a fateful abyss in human spiritual life. He was a *scientific* man. And science at first removes man from the innocent concord in which he exists with the world as long as the conduct of his life is a purely naïve one. In such a conduct of life man dimly feels his connection with the totality of the universe. He is a being like others, integrated into the chain of natural effects. With knowledge he separates himself from this whole. He creates a spiritual world within himself. With it he confronts nature in solitude. He has become richer, but this wealth is a burden which he bears with difficulty. For at first it weighs upon him alone. He must find the way back to nature through his own resources. He must understand that now he himself must integrate his wealth into the chain of universal effects, as nature herself had integrated his poverty before. It is here that all the evil demons lie in wait for man. His strength can easily fail. Instead of accomplishing the integration himself, when this occurs, he will take refuge in a revelation from the outside, which again delivers him from his solitude, and leads the knowledge he feels to be a burden back into the primordial origin of existence, the Divinity. He will think, as did Nicolas of Cusa, that he is walking his own road, while in reality he will only find the one his spiritual development has shown him. Now there are three roads — in the main — upon which one can walk when one arrives where Nicolas had arrived: one is *positive faith*, which comes to us from outside; the second is *despair*: one stands alone with one's burden and feels all existence tottering with oneself; the third road is the development of man's own deepest faculties. *Confidence* in the world must be one leader along this third road. *Courage* to follow this confidence, no matter where it leads, must be the other.

Addendum III. In a few words I hint here at the road to the cognition of the spirit which I have described in my later writings, especially in *How does one Attain Knowledge of the Higher Worlds*, *Outline of Occult Science*, *Riddles of the Soul*.

AGRIPPA OF NETTESHEIM

The road which is indicated by the way of thinking of Nicolas of Cusa was walked by Heinrich Cornelius Agrippa of Nettesheim (1487–1535) and Theophrastus Paracelsus (1493–1541). They immerse themselves in nature and, as comprehensively as possible, seek to explore its laws with all the means their period makes available to them. In this knowledge of nature they see at the same time the true foundation for all higher cognition. They themselves seek to develop the latter out of natural science by letting science be reborn in the spirit.

Agrippa of Nettesheim led an eventful life. He was descended from a noble family and was born in Cologne. He studied medicine and jurisprudence at an early age and sought to inform himself about natural phenomena in the way customary at the time in certain circles and societies, or by contact with a number of scholars who carefully kept secret whatever insights they gained into nature. With such purposes he repeatedly went to Paris, to Italy, and to England, and he also visited the famous Abbot Trithemius of Sponheim in Würzburg. He taught in scientific institutions at various times and here and there entered the services of rich and noble personages, at whose disposal he placed his talents as a statesman and scientist. If his biographers describe the services he rendered as not always above reproach, if it is said that he acquired money under the pretext of being adept in secret arts, and of securing various advantages to people by means of these arts, this is counterbalanced by his unmistakable and ceaseless urge to acquire the entire learning of his time honestly and to make this learning deeper in the spirit of a higher cognition of the world. In him distinctly appears the endeavor to achieve a clear position with regard to natural science on the one hand, with regard to higher cognition on the other. Such a position is attained only by one who has an insight into the ways by which one reaches the one and the other cognition. Just as it is true that at last natural science must be raised into the region of the spirit if it is to lead into higher cognition, so it is true that it must at first remain in the field proper to it if it is to provide the right foundation for a higher level. The “spirit in nature” exists only for the spirit. As certainly as nature is in this sense spiritual, as certain is it that nothing perceived in nature by bodily

organs is immediately spiritual. Nothing spiritual can appear to my eye as being spiritual. I must *not* seek the spirit as such in nature. I do this when I interpret a process of the external world in an immediately spiritual way: when, for instance, I ascribe to plants a soul which is only distantly analogous to the human soul. I also do this when I ascribe a spatial or temporal existence to the spirit or the soul itself; when, for instance, I say of the eternal human soul that it lives in time without the body, but still in the manner of a body, rather than as pure spirit. Or when I even believe that the spirit of a deceased person can show itself in some kind of sensorily perceptible manifestations. Spiritualism, which commits this error, thereby only shows that it has not penetrated to the true conception of the spirit, but wants to see the spirit directly in something grossly sensory. It fails to understand the nature of the sensory as well as that of the spirit. It deprives of spirit the ordinary sensory phenomena, which take place hour by hour before our eyes, in order to consider something rare, surprising, unusual as spirit in a direct sense. It does not understand that for one who is capable of seeing the spirit, what lives as “spirit in nature” reveals itself, for instance, in the collision of two elastic spheres, and not only in processes which are striking because of their rarity and cannot be immediately grasped in their natural context. In addition, the spiritualist draws the spirit down into a lower sphere. Instead of explaining something that takes place in space and that he perceives with the senses by means of forces and beings which in turn are only spatial and sensorily perceptible, he has recourse to “spirits,” which he thus equates completely with the sensorily perceptible. Such a way of thinking is based on a lack of capacity for spiritual comprehension. One is not capable of looking at the spiritual in a spiritual manner, therefore with mere sensory beings one satisfies one's need for the presence of the spirit. To such people the spirit does not show any spirit; therefore they seek it with the senses. As they see clouds sailing through the air, so they also want to see spirits hurrying along.

Agrippa of Nettesheim fights for a true natural science, which does not attempt to explain the phenomena of nature by spiritual beings which haunt the world of the senses, but sees in nature *only* the natural, in the spirit only the spiritual. — One would of course completely misunderstand Agrippa if one were to compare his natural science with that of later centuries, which has altogether different data at its disposal. In such a comparison it might easily appear that he still refers what is due only to natural causes, or based on erroneous data, to the direct action of spirits. Moritz Carriere does him this injustice when he says — although not with ill will —, “Agrippa gives a long list of the things which belong to the sun, the moon, the planets, or the fixed stars, and receive their influences; for instance, related to the sun are fire, blood, laurel, gold, chrysolite; they bestow the gift of the sun: courage, serenity, light . . . The animals have a sense of nature which, more exalted than human reason, approaches the spirit of prophecy . . . Men can be enjoined to love and hate, to sickness and health. Thus one puts a spell upon thieves that enjoins them from stealing somewhere, upon merchants so that they cannot trade, ships and mills so that they cannot move, lightning so that it cannot strike. This is done with potions, salves, images, rings, charms; the blood of hyenas or basilisks is suitable for this purpose, — *one is reminded of Shakespeare's witches' cauldron.*” No, one is not reminded of it, if one understands Agrippa aright. He did of course believe in things which were considered to be indubitable in his time. But we do this today also with regard to what is nowadays considered “factual.” Or is one to believe that future centuries also will not throw much of what we set up as indubitable facts into the store-room of “blind” superstition? It is true that I am convinced that there is a real progress in man's knowledge of facts. When the “fact” that the earth is round had once been discovered, all earlier suppositions were banished into the realm of “superstition.” Thus it is with certain truths of astronomy, of biology, etc. The doctrine of natural descent, in comparison with all earlier “hypotheses of creation,” represents a progress similar to the insight that the earth is round compared to all previous suppositions concerning its shape. Nevertheless I am aware that there is many a “fact” in our learned scientific works and treatises which will no more appear as fact to future centuries than does much of what is maintained by Agrippa and Paracelsus to us today. It is not a matter of what they considered to be a “fact,” but of the spirit in which they interpreted these facts. — In Agrippa's time one found, it is true, little comprehension of the “natural magic” which he advocated, and which seeks in nature the natural, and the spiritual

only in the spirit; men clung to the “supernatural magic” which seeks the spiritual in the realm of the sensory, and against which Agrippa fought. This is why the Abbot Trithemius of Sponheim advised him to communicate his views as a secret doctrine only to a few chosen ones, who were able to rise to a similar conception of nature and spirit, for “one gives only hay to oxen and not sugar, as to songbirds.” It is perhaps to this abbot that Agrippa himself owes the right point of view. In his *Steganographie*, Steganography, Trithemius has written a work in which he treats, with the most veiled irony, the way of thinking which confounds nature with the spirit. In this book he appears to speak entirely of supernatural phenomena. One who reads it as it stands must believe that the author is speaking of the conjuring of spirits, of the flying of spirits through the air, etc. But if one omits certain words and letters of the text there remain, as Wolfgang Ernst Heidel showed in the year 1676, letters which, when assembled into words, describe purely natural phenomena. (In one case for instance, in a formula of incantation, one must completely omit the first and the last word, and then cross out the second, fourth, sixth, etc. of those remaining. In the remaining words one must again cross out the first, third, fifth, etc. letter. What remains, one then assembles into words, and the formula of incantation is transformed into a communication of a purely natural content.)

How difficult it was for Agrippa to work his way out of the prejudices of his time and to raise himself to a pure conception, is proven by the fact that he did not let his *Philosophia occulta*, Secret Philosophy, appear until the year 1531, although it had been composed as early as 1510, because he considered it to be immature. Further evidence of this is given in his work, *De vanitate scientiarum*, Of the Vanity of the Sciences, where he speaks with bitterness about the scientific and general activity of his time. There he says quite plainly that only with difficulty has he liberated himself from the delusion of those who see in external events direct spiritual processes, in external facts prophetic hints about the future, etc. Agrippa proceeds to the higher cognition in three stages. At the first stage he deals with the world as it is presented to the senses, with its substances, and its physical, chemical, and other forces. Insofar as it is viewed at this stage he calls nature elemental. At the second stage one regards the world as a whole in its natural connections, in the way it arranges everything belonging to it according to measurements, number, weight, harmony, etc. The first stage brings those things together which are in close proximity to each other. It seeks the causes of a phenomenon which lie in its immediate environment. The second stage looks at a single phenomenon in connection with the whole universe. It carries out the idea that each thing is under the influence of all the remaining things of the universal whole. This universal whole appears to it as a great harmony, of which every separate entity is a part. The world, seen from this point of view, is designated by Agrippa as the astral or celestial one. The third stage of cognition is that where the spirit, through immersion in itself, looks directly upon the spiritual, the primordial essence of the world. Here Agrippa speaks of the spiritual-soul world.

THEOPHRASTUS PARACELSUS

The views which Agrippa developed about the world and man's relationship to it we encounter in a similar, but more complete form in Theophrastus Paracelsus. They are therefore better considered in connection with the latter.

Paracelsus characterizes himself when he writes under his portrait, “No one who can stand alone by himself should be the servant of another.” His whole position with regard to cognition is given in these words. Everywhere he himself wants to go back to the foundations of natural science in order to ascend, through his own powers, to the highest regions of cognition. As a physician he does not simply want to accept, like his contemporaries, what the old investigators who at the time were considered authorities, as for instance Galen or Avicenna, had affirmed in times gone by; he himself wants to read directly in the *book of nature*. “The physician must pass through the examination of nature, which is the world, and all its causation. And what nature teaches him he must commend to his wisdom, not seeking anything in his wisdom, but only in the light of nature.” He does not recoil from anything in order to become acquainted with nature and its manifestations from all sides. For this purpose he travels to Sweden, Hungary, Spain, Portugal, and the Orient. He can say of himself, “I have pursued the art in danger of my life and have

not been ashamed to learn from strollers, hangmen, and barbers. My teachings have been tested more severely than silver in poverty, anxiety, wars, and perils." What has been handed down from old authorities has no value for him, for he believes that he can only attain the right conception if he himself experiences the ascent from natural science to the highest cognition. This experiencing in his own person puts the proud words in his mouth, "One who wants to pursue the truth must come into my realm . . . After me, not I after you, Avicenna, Rhases, Galen, Mesur! After me, and I not after you, you of Paris, you of Montpellier, you of Swabia, you of Meissen, you of Cologne, you of Vienna, and whatever lies on the Danube and the river Rhine, you islands in the sea, you Italy, you Dalmatia, you Athens, you Greek, you Arab, you Israelite; after me, and I not after you! Mine is the realm!" — It is easy to misjudge Paracelsus because of his rough exterior, which sometimes hides deep seriousness behind jest. He himself says, "Nature has not made me subtle, nor have I been raised on figs and white bread, but rather on cheese, milk, and oat bread, and therefore I may well be uncivil to the hyperclean and the superfine; for those who were brought up in soft clothes and we, who were brought up among fir-cones, do not understand each other well. Thus I must seem rough, though to myself I appear gracious. How can I not be strange for one who has never gone wandering in the sun?"

Goethe has described the relationship of man to nature (in his book on Winkelmann) in the following beautiful sentences: "When the healthy nature of man acts as a whole, when he feels himself to be in the world as in a great, beautiful, noble, and valued whole, when harmonious ease affords him a pure and free delight, then the universe, if it could experience itself, would exult, *as having attained its goal, and admire the climax of its own becoming and essence.*" Paracelsus is deeply penetrated with a sentiment like the one that expresses itself in such sentences. Out of this sentiment the mystery of man shapes itself for him. Let us see how this happens, in Paracelsus' sense. At first the road which nature has taken in order to bring forth its highest achievement is hidden from the human powers of comprehension. It has attained this climax; but this climax does not say, I feel myself to be the whole of nature; this climax says, I feel myself to be this single man. What in reality is an act of the whole world feels itself to be a single, solitary being, standing by itself. Indeed, this is the true nature of man, that he must feel himself as being something other than what, in the final analysis, he is. And if this is a contradiction, then man can be called a contradiction come to life. Man in his own way is the world. His harmony with the world he regards as a duality. He is the same as the world is, but he is this as a repetition, as a separate being. This is the contrast which Paracelsus perceives as microcosm (man) and macrocosm (universe). For him man is the world in little. What causes man to regard his relationship with the world in this way is his spirit. This spirit appears to be bound to a single being, to a single organism. By its whole nature, this organism belongs to the great chain of the universe. It is a link in it, and has its existence only in connection with all the others. The spirit, however, appears to be an outcome of this single organism. At first it sees itself as connected only with this organism. It tears this organism loose from the native soil out of which it grew. For Paracelsus a deep connection between man and the entire universe thus lies hidden in the natural foundation of existence, a connection which is obscured by the presence of the spirit. For us humans, the spirit, which leads us to higher cognition by communicating knowledge to us and by causing this knowledge to be reborn on a higher level, has at first the effect of obscuring for us our own connection with the universe. For Paracelsus human nature thus at first falls into three parts: into our sensory-corporeal nature, our organism, which appears to us as a natural being among other natural beings, and which is just like all other natural beings; into our hidden nature, which is a link in the chain of the whole world, which thus is not enclosed within our organism, but sends out and receives influences to and from the whole universe; and into the highest nature, our spirit, which lives its life only in a spiritual manner. The first part of human nature Paracelsus calls the *elemental body*; the second the ethereal-celestial or "*astral body*;" the third part he calls *soul*. — In the "*astral*" phenomena Paracelsus thus sees an intermediate level between the purely corporeal phenomena and the true phenomena of the soul. They will become visible when the spirit, which obscures the natural foundation of our existence, ceases its activity. We can see the simplest manifestation of this realm in the world of dreams. The images which flit through our dreams, with their

peculiar, significant connection with events in our environment and with our own internal states, are products of our natural foundation which are obscured by the brighter light of the soul. When a chair collapses near my bed, and I dream a whole drama, which ends with a shot fired in a duel, or when I have palpitations of the heart, and dream of a seething stove, then meaningful and significant natural manifestations are appearing which reveal a life lying between the purely organic functions and the thinking processes taking place in the bright consciousness of the spirit. With this realm are connected all the phenomena which belong to the field of hypnotism and of suggestion. In suggestion we can see an acting of man on man, which points to an interrelationship between beings in nature that is obscured by the higher activity of the spirit. In this connection it becomes possible to understand what Paracelsus interprets as an “astral body.” It is the sum of the natural influences to which we are exposed or can be exposed through special circumstances, which emanate from us without involving our soul, and which nevertheless do not fall under the concept of purely physical phenomena. That in this field Paracelsus enumerates facts which we doubt today, has no importance when looked at from the point of view I have already adduced above.

— On the basis of such views of human nature Paracelsus divides the latter into seven parts. They are the same as we find in the teachings of the ancient Egyptians, among the Neoplatonists, and in the Cabala. Man is first of all a physical-corporeal being; hence he is subject to the same laws to which *every* body is subject. In this sense he is thus a purely *elemental* body. The purely corporeal-physical laws combine in the *organic* life process. Paracelsus designates the organic laws as “Archaeus” or “Spiritus vitae;” the organic raises itself to spiritlike manifestations which are not yet spirit. These are the “*astral*” manifestations. From the “*astral*” processes emerge the functions of the “*animal spirit*.” Man is a sense being. He combines his sensory impressions in a rational manner by means of his reason. Thus the “*rational soul*” awakens in him. He immerses himself in his own spiritual products; he learns to recognize the spirit as spirit. Therewith he has raised himself to the level of the “*spiritual soul*.” At last he understands that in this spiritual soul he experiences the deepest stratum of the universal existence; the spiritual soul ceases to be an individual, separate one. The insight takes place of which Eckhart spoke when he felt that it was no longer *he himself* who spoke in him, but the primordial essence. Now that condition prevails in which the universal spirit regards itself in man. Paracelsus has expressed the feeling aroused by this condition in the simple words: “And this which you must consider is something great: there is nothing in Heaven and on earth which is not in man. And *God*, who is in Heaven, is in man.” — It is nothing but facts of external and internal experience that Paracelsus wants to express with these seven fundamental parts of human nature. That what for human experience falls into a plurality of seven parts is in higher reality a unity, is not thereby brought into question. The higher cognition exists precisely to show the unity in everything which in his immediate experience appears to man as a plurality because of his corporeal and spiritual organization. On the level of the highest cognition Paracelsus strives to fuse the living, uniform, primordial essence of the world with his spirit. But he knows that man can only know nature in its spirituality if he enters into immediate intercourse with it. Man does not understand nature by peopling it, on his own, with arbitrarily assumed spiritual entities, but by accepting and valuing it as it is as nature. Paracelsus therefore does not seek God or the spirit in nature; but for him nature, as it presents itself to his eye, is immediately *divine*. Must one first attribute to the plant a soul like the human soul in order to find the spiritual? Therefore Paracelsus explains the development of things, insofar as this is possible with the scientific resources of his time, entirely in such a way that he regards this development as a sensory process of nature. He lets everything arise out of the primordial matter, the primordial water (Yliaster). And he regards as a further process of nature the separation of the primordial matter (which he also calls the great limbus) into the four elements, water, earth, fire, and air. When he says that the “*divine word*” called forth the plurality of beings from the primordial matter, this is only to be understood in somewhat the same manner as the relationship of force to matter is to be understood in modern natural science. A “*spirit*” in the real sense is not yet present on this level. This “*spirit*” is not an actual cause of the natural process, but an actual result of this process. This spirit does not create nature, but develops out of it. Many words of Paracelsus could be interpreted in the opposite sense. Thus, for instance, he says: “There is nothing corporeal that does not carry a living spirit hidden within it. And not only *that* has life which stirs and moves, such as men, animals, the worms in the

earth, the birds in the sky, and the fish in the water, but all corporeal and substantial things.” But with such sayings Paracelsus only wants to warn against the superficial view of nature which thinks that it can exhaust the nature of a thing with a few “rammed-in” concepts (to use Goethe's apt expression). He does not want to inject an invented nature into things, but rather to set all the faculties of man in motion in order to bring forth what actually lies within a thing. — It is important not to let oneself be misled by the fact that Paracelsus expresses himself in the spirit of his time. Rather, one should try to understand what he has in mind when, looking upon nature, he sets forth his ideas in the forms of expression of his time. For instance, he ascribes to man a twofold flesh, that is, a twofold corporeal constitution. “The flesh must therefore be understood to be of two kinds, namely, the flesh whose origin is in Adam, and the flesh which is not from Adam. The flesh that is from Adam is a coarse flesh, for it is earthly and nothing but flesh, and is to be bound and grasped like wood and stone. The other flesh is not from Adam; it is a subtle flesh and is not to be bound or grasped, for it is not made of earth.” What is the flesh that is from Adam? It is all that has come down to man through his *natural* development, which he has therefore *inherited*. To this is added what in the course of time man has *acquired* for himself in intercourse with his environment. The modern scientific concepts of *inherited* characteristics and of characteristics *acquired through adaptation* emerge from the above-mentioned thought of Paracelsus. The “subtler flesh,” which makes man capable of spiritual activities, has not been in man from the beginning. He was “coarse flesh” like the animals, a flesh that “is to be bound and grasped like wood and stone.” In the scientific sense the soul is therefore also an *acquired* characteristic of the “coarse flesh.” What the natural scientist of the nineteenth century has in mind when he speaks of the inheritances from the animal world, is what Paracelsus means when he uses the expression about “the flesh whose origin is in Adam.” These remarks, of course, are not intended to obliterate the difference which exists between a natural scientist of the sixteenth and one of the nineteenth century. After all, it was only the latter century which was capable of seeing, in the full scientific sense, the forms of living organisms in such a connection that their natural relationship and their actual descent as far as man became evident. Science sees only a natural process where Linnè in the eighteenth century still saw a spiritual process, which he characterized in the following words: “There are as many species of living organisms as there were, in principle, forms that were *created*.” While Linnè thus had to transfer the spirit into the spatial world and assign to it the task of producing spiritually, of “creating” the forms of life, the natural science of the nineteenth century could ascribe to nature what is nature's and to the spirit what is the spirit's. Nature itself is assigned the task of explaining its creations, and the spirit can immerse itself into itself where it alone is to be found, within man. — But while in a certain sense Paracelsus thinks quite in the spirit of his time, yet just with regard to the idea of *development*, of *becoming*, he has grasped the relationship of man to nature in a profound manner. In the primordial essence of the world he did not see something which in some way exists as something finished, but he grasped the divine in its becoming. Hence he could really ascribe a self-creating activity to man. If the divine primordial essence exists, once and for all a true creating by man is out of the question. Then it is not man, who lives in time, who creates, but God, Who is eternal. For Him there is only an eternal becoming, and man is a link in this eternal becoming. That which man forms did not previously exist in any way. What man creates, as he creates it, is an original creation. If it is to be called divine, this can only be in the sense in which it exists as a human creation. Therefore in the building of the universe Paracelsus can assign to man a role which makes him a co-architect in this creation. The divine primordial essence *without* man is not what it is *with* man. “For nature brings forth nothing into the light of day which is complete as it stands; rather, man must complete it.” This self-creating activity of man in the building of nature, Paracelsus calls alchemy. “This completion is alchemy. Thus the alchemist is the baker when he bakes the bread, the vintager when he makes the wine, the weaver when he makes the cloth.” Paracelsus wants to be an alchemist in his field, as a physician. “Therefore I may well write so much here concerning alchemy, so that you can know it well and learn what it is and how it is to be understood, nor be vexed that it is to bring you neither gold nor silver. Rather see that the arcana (remedies) are revealed to you . . . The third pillar of medicine is alchemy, for the preparation of remedies cannot take place without it, *because nature cannot be put to use without art*.”

Thus **Paracelsus'** eyes are directed in the strictest sense upon nature, in order to discover from nature itself what it has to say about its products. He wants to investigate the laws of chemistry in order to work as an alchemist in his sense. He considers all bodies to be composed of three basic substances, namely, of salt, sulphur, and mercury. What he so designates of course does not correspond to what later chemistry designates by this name, any more than what Paracelsus considers to be a basic substance is one in the sense of later chemistry. Different things are designated by the same names at different times. What the ancients called the four elements, earth, water, air, and fire, we still have. We call these four "elements" no longer "elements" but states of aggregation, for which we have the designations: solid, liquid, aeriform, etheriform. Earth, for instance, for the ancients was not earth but the "solid." The three basic substances of Paracelsus we can also recognize in contemporary concepts, but not under the homonymous contemporary names. For Paracelsus, solution in a liquid and combustion are the two important chemical processes of which he makes use. If a body is dissolved or burned it is decomposed into its parts. Something remains as residue; something is dissolved or burns. For him the residue is salt-like, the soluble (liquid), mercury-like; the combustible he calls sulphurous.

One who does not look beyond such natural processes may be left cold by them as by things of a material and prosaic nature; one who at all costs wants to grasp the spirit with the senses will people these processes with all kinds of spiritual beings. But like Paracelsus, one who knows how to look at such processes in connection with the universe, which reveals its secret within man, accepts these processes as they present themselves to the senses; he does not first reinterpret them; for as the natural processes stand before us in their sensory reality, in their own way they reveal the mystery of existence. What through this sensory reality these processes reveal out of the soul of man, occupies a higher position for one who strives for the light of higher cognition than do all the supernatural miracles concerning their so-called "spirit" which man can devise or have revealed to him. There is no "spirit of nature" which can utter more exalted truths than the great works of nature themselves, when our soul unites itself with this nature in friendship, and, in familiar intercourse, hearkens to the revelations of its secrets. Such a friendship with nature, Paracelsus sought.

VALENTIN WEIGEL

Paracelsus was primarily concerned with developing ideas about nature that breathe the spirit of the higher cognition he advocated. A kindred thinker who applied the same way of thinking to man's own nature in particular is Valentin Weigel (1533–1588). He grew out of Protestant theology as Eckhart, Tauler, and Suso grew out of Catholic theology. He had precursors in Sebastian Frank and Caspar Schwenckfeldt. They emphasized the deepening of the inner life, in contrast to the church dogma with its attachment to an external creed. For them it is not the Jesus whom the Gospels preach who is of value, but the Christ who can be born in every man out of his deeper nature, and who is to be his deliverer from the lower life and his leader in the ascent to the ideal. Weigel quietly and modestly administered his incumbency in Zschopau. It is only from his posthumous writings printed in the seventeenth century that one discovers something about the significant ideas he had developed concerning the nature of man. (Of his writings we shall mention here: *Der güldene Griff, Alle Ding ohne Irrthumb zu erkennen, vielen Hochgelährten unbekannt, und doch allen Menschen nothwendig zu wissen*, The Golden art of Knowing Everything without Error, unknown to Many of the Learned, and yet Necessary for all Men to Know. — *Erkenne dich selber*, Know Thyself. — *Vom Ort der Welt*, Of the Place of the World.) Weigel is anxious to come to a clear idea of his relationship to the teachings of the Church. This leads him to investigate the foundations of all cognition. Man can only decide whether he can know something through a creed if he understands *how* he knows. Weigel takes his departure from the lowest kind of cognition. He asks himself, How do I apprehend a sensory thing when it confronts me? From there he hopes to be able to ascend to the point where he can give an account of the

highest cognition. — In sensory apprehension the instrument (sense organ) and the thing, the “counterpart,” confront each other. “Since in natural perception there must be two things, namely the object or counterpart, which is to be perceived and seen by the eye, and the eye, or the perceiver, which sees and perceives the object, therefore, consider the question, Does the perception come from the object into the eye, or does the judgment, and the perception, flow from the eye into the object.” (*Der güldene Griff*, chap. 9) Now Weigel says to himself, If the perception flowed from the counterpart (thing) into the eye, then, of one and the same thing, the same complete perception would of necessity have to arise in all eyes. But this is not the case; rather, everyone sees according to his eyes. Only the eyes, not the counterpart, can be responsible for the fact that many different conceptions of one and the same thing are possible. In order to make the matter clear, Weigel compares seeing with reading. If the book did not exist of course I could not read it; but it could be there, and I would still not be able to read anything in it if I did not know the art of reading. Thus the book must be there, but of itself it cannot give me anything at all; everything that I read I must bring forth out of myself. That is also the nature of natural (sensory) perception. Color exists as a “counterpart;” but out of itself it cannot give the eye anything. On its own, the eye must perceive what color is. The color is no more in the eye than the content of the book is in the reader. If the content of the book were in the reader. he would not have to read it. Nevertheless, in reading, this content does not flow out of the book, but out of the reader. It is the same with the sensory object. What this sensory object is outside, does not flow into man from the outside, but rather from the inside. — On the basis of these ideas one could say, If all perception flows from man into the object, then one does not perceive what is in the object, but only what is in man himself. A detailed elaboration of this train of thought is presented in the views of Immanuel Kant (1724–1804). (I have shown the erroneous aspect of this train of thought in my book, *Philosophy of Spiritual Activity*. Here I must confine myself to saying that with this simple, straightforward way of thinking Valentin Weigel stands on a much higher level than Kant.) — Weigel says to himself, Although perception flows from man yet it is only the nature of the counterpart which emerges from the latter by way of man. As it is the content of the book which I discover by reading and not my own, so it is the color of the counterpart which I discover through the eye, not the color which is in the eye, or in me. On his own path Weigel thus comes to a conclusion which we have already encountered in the thinking of Nicolas of Cusa. In his way Weigel has elucidated the nature of sensory perception for himself. He has attained the conviction that everything external things have to tell us can only flow out from within ourselves. Man cannot remain passive if he wants to perceive the things of the senses, and be content with letting them act upon him; he must be active, and bring this perception out of *himself*. The counterpart alone awakens the perception in the spirit. Man ascends to higher cognition when the spirit becomes its own object. In considering sensory perception, one can see that no cognition can flow into man from the outside. Therefore the higher cognition cannot come from the outside, but can only be awakened within man. Hence there can be no external revelation, but only an inner awakening. And as the external counterpart waits until man confronts it, in whom it can express its nature, so must man wait, when he wants to be his own counterpart, until the cognition of his nature is awakened in him. While in the sensory perception man must be active in order to present the counterpart with its nature, in the higher cognition he must remain passive, because now *he* is the counterpart. He must receive his nature within himself. Because of this the cognition of the spirit appears to him as an illumination from on high. In contrast with the sensory perception, Weigel therefore calls the higher cognition the “light of grace.” This “light of grace” is in reality nothing but the self-cognition of the spirit in man, or the rebirth of knowledge on the higher level of seeing. — As Nicolas of Cusa, in pursuing his road from knowing to seeing, does not really let the knowledge acquired by him be reborn on a higher level, but is deceived into regarding the church creed, in which he had been educated, as this rebirth, so is this the case with Weigel too. He finds his way to the right road, and loses it again at the moment he enters upon it. One who wants to walk the road which Weigel indicates can regard the latter as a leader only up to its starting-point.

JACOB BOEHME

What we encounter in the works of the master shoemaker of Görlitz, Jacob Boehme (1575–1624), is like the jubilation of nature, which, at the peak of its development, admires its essence. Before us appears a man whose words have wings, woven out of the blissful feeling that he sees the knowledge in himself shining as higher wisdom. Jacob Boehme describes his condition as a devotion which only desires to be wisdom, and as a wisdom which desires to live in devotion alone: “When I wrestled and fought, with God's assistance, there arose a wondrous light in my soul which was altogether foreign to wild nature, and by which I first understood what God and man are, and what God has to do with man.” Jacob Boehme no longer feels himself to be a separate personality which utters its insights; he feels himself to be an organ of the great universal spirit which speaks in him. The limits of his personality do not appear to him as limits of the spirit which speaks out of him. For him this spirit is omnipresent. He knows that “the sophist will censure him” when he speaks of the beginning of the world and of its creation, “since I was not there and did not see it myself. Let him be told that in the essence of my soul and body, when I was not yet the I, but Adam's essence, I was indeed there, and that I myself have forfeited my felicity in Adam.” It is only in external similes that Boehme can intimate how the light broke forth within himself. When as a boy he once is on the summit of a mountain, above where great red stones seem to close the mountain off, he sees an open entrance, and in its depths a vessel containing gold. He is overcome with awe, and goes his way without touching the treasure. Later he is serving his apprenticeship with a shoemaker in Görlitz. A stranger walks into the store and asks for a pair of shoes. Boehme is not allowed to sell them to him in the master's absence. The stranger leaves, but after a while calls the apprentice outside and says to him, Jacob, you are little, but one day you will become an altogether different man, at whom the world will be filled with astonishment. At a more mature period of his life Jacob Boehme sees the sunshine reflected in a burnished pewter vessel; the sight which confronts him seems to him to reveal a profound mystery. From the time he experiences this manifestation he believes himself to be in possession of the key to the mysterious language of nature. — He lives as a spiritual hermit, supporting himself modestly by his trade, and at the same time setting down, as if for his own memory, the notes which sound in him when he feels the spirit within himself. The zealotry of priestly fanaticism makes his life difficult. He wants to read only that scripture which the light within himself illuminates for him, but is pursued and tormented by those to whom only the external scripture, the rigid, dogmatic creed, is accessible.

Jacob Boehme is filled with a restlessness which impels him toward cognition, because a universal mystery lives in his soul. He feels himself to be immersed in a divine harmony with his spirit, but when he looks around him he sees disharmony everywhere in the divine works. To man belongs the light of wisdom, yet he is exposed to error; there lives in him the impulse toward the good, and yet the dissonance of evil can be heard throughout the course of human development. Nature is governed by great natural laws, and yet its harmony is disturbed by superfluities and by the wild struggle of the elements. How is the disharmony in the harmonious, universal whole to be understood? This question torments Jacob Boehme. It comes to occupy the center of his world of ideas. He wants to attain a conception of the universal whole which includes the inharmonious too. For how can a conception explain the world which leaves the existing inharmonious elements aside, unexplained? Disharmony must be explained through harmony, evil through good itself. In speaking of these things, let us limit ourselves to good and evil; in the latter, disharmony in the narrower sense finds its expression in human life. For this is what Jacob Boehme basically limits himself to. He can do this, for to him nature and man appear as one essence. He sees similar laws and processes in both. The non-functional is for him an evil in nature, just as the evil is for him something non-functional in human destiny. Here and there it is the same basic forces which are at work. To one who has understood the origin of evil in man, the origin of evil in nature is also plain. — How is it possible for evil as well as for good to flow out of the same primordial essence? If one speaks in the spirit of Jacob Boehme, one gives the following answer: The primordial essence does not exist in itself alone. The diversity of the world

participates in this existence. As the human body does not live its life as a single part, but as a multiplicity of parts, so too does the primordial essence. And as human life is poured into this multiplicity of parts, so is the primordial essence poured into the diversity of the things of this world. Just as it is true that the whole man has *one* life, so is it true that each part has its own life. And it no more contradicts the whole harmonious life of man that his hand should turn against his own body and wound it, than it is impossible that the things of the world, which live the life of the primordial essence in their own way, should turn against one another. Thus the primordial life, in distributing itself over different lives, bestows upon each life the capacity of turning itself against the whole. It is not out of the good that the evil flows, but out of the manner in which the good lives. As the light can only shine when it penetrates the darkness, so the good can only come to life when it permeates its opposite. Out of the “abyss” of darkness shines the light; out of the “abyss” of the indifferent, the good brings itself forth. And as in the shadow it is only brightness which requires a reference to light, while the darkness is felt to be self-evident, as something that weakens the light, so too in the world it is only the lawfulness in all things which is sought, and the evil, the non-functional, which is accepted as the self-evident. Hence, although for Jacob Boehme the primordial essence is the All, nothing in the world can be understood unless one keeps in sight both the primordial essence and its opposite. “The good has swallowed the evil or the repugnant into itself . . . Every being has good and evil within itself; and in its development, having to decide between them, it becomes an opposition of qualities, since one of them seeks to overcome the other.” It is therefore entirely in the spirit of Jacob Boehme to see both good and evil in every object and process of the world; but it is not in his spirit to seek the primordial essence without further ado in the mixture of the good with the evil. The primordial essence had to swallow the evil, but the evil is not a part of the primordial essence. Jacob Boehme seeks the primordial foundation of the world, but the world itself arose out of the abyss by means of the primordial foundation. “The external world is not God, and in eternity is not to be called God, but is only a being in which God reveals Himself . . . When one says, God is everything, God is heaven and earth and also the external world, then this is true; for everything has its origin from Him and in Him. But what am I to do with such a saying that is not a religion?” — With this conception as a background, his ideas about the nature of the world developed in Jacob Boehme's spirit in such a way that he lets the lawful world arise out of the abyss in a succession of stages. This world is built up in seven natural forms. The primordial essence receives a form in dark acerbity, silently enclosed within itself and motionless. It is under the symbol of *salt* that Boehme conceives this acerbity. With such designations he leans upon Paracelsus, who has borrowed the names for the process of nature from the chemical processes (cf. above). By swallowing its opposite, the first natural form takes on the shape of the second; the harsh and motionless takes on motion; energy and life enter into it. Mercury is the symbol for this second form. In the struggle of stillness with motion, of death with life, the third natural form (sulphur) appears. This life, with its internal struggle, is revealed to itself; henceforth it does not live in an external struggle of its parts; like a uniformly shining lightning, illuminating itself, it thrills through its own being (fire). This fourth natural form ascends to the fifth, the living struggle of the parts reposing within itself (water). On this level exists an inner acerbity and silence as on the first, only it is not an absolute quiet, a silence of the inner contrasts, but an inner movement of the contrasts. It is not the quiet which reposes within itself, but which has motion, which was kindled by the fiery lightning of the fourth stage. On the sixth level, the primordial essence itself becomes aware of itself as such an inner life; it perceives itself through sense organs. It is the living organisms, endowed with senses, which represent this natural form. Jacob Boehme calls it sound or resonance, and thus sets up the sensory impression of hearing as a symbol for sensory perception in general. The seventh natural form is the spirit elevating itself by virtue of its sensory perceptions (wisdom). It finds itself again as itself, as the primordial foundation, within the world which has grown out of the abyss and shaped itself out of harmonious and inharmonious elements. “The Holy Ghost brings the splendor of majesty into the entity in which the Divinity stands revealed.” — With such conceptions Jacob Boehme seeks to fathom *that* world which, in accordance with the knowledge of his time, appears to him as the real one. For him facts are what the natural science of his time and the Bible regard as such. His way of thinking is one thing, his world of facts another. One can imagine the former as

applied to a quite different factual knowledge. And thus there appears before our mind a Jacob Boehme who could also be living at the turn of the nineteenth to the twentieth century. Such a man would not penetrate with his thinking the biblical story of the Creation and the struggle of the angels with the devils, but rather Lyell's geological insights and the "Natural History of Creation" of Haeckel. One who penetrates to the *spirit* of Jacob Boehme's writings must come to this conviction.⁶ (We shall mention the most important of these writings: *The Coming of the Dawn. The Three Principles of the Divine Essence. Of the Threefold Life of Man. The Eye Turned Upon Itself. Signatura rerum* or of the birth and designation of all beings. *Mysterium magnum*.)

GIORDANO BRUNO

In the first decade of the sixteenth century, at Castle Heilsberg in Prussia, the scientific genius of Nicolas Copernicus (1473–1543) is erecting an edifice of ideas which will compel men of succeeding epochs to look up to the starry heavens with conceptions different from those which their ancestors had in antiquity and in the Middle Ages. To the latter, the earth was a dwelling-place resting at the center of the universe. The stars, on the other hand, were for them entities of a perfect nature, the movement of which proceeded in circles because the circle is the image of perfection. — In what the stars showed to the human senses one saw something belonging directly to the soul or the spirit. The objects and events of the earth spoke one language to man; another language was spoken by the shining stars which, in the pure ether beyond the moon, seemed to be a spiritual being that filled space. Nicolas of Cusa had already formed different ideas. Through Copernicus the earth became for man a fellow creation among the other heavenly bodies, a star that moved like others. Everything in the earth which appeared to man as being different, he could now attribute only to the fact that it is his dwelling-place. He was compelled to stop thinking in different ways about the phenomena of this earth and about those of the remainder of the universe. His sensory world had expanded into furthest space. What reached his eye from the ether he now had to accept as belonging to the sensory world, like the things of the earth. He could no longer seek the spirit in the ether in a sensory fashion.

All who henceforth strove for higher cognition had to come to terms with this expanded sensory world. In earlier centuries, the meditating spirit of man had stood before another world of facts. Now it was given a new task. It was no longer the things of this earth alone which could express their nature out of the interior of man. This interior had to enfold the spirit of a sensory world, which fills the spatial universe everywhere in an identical fashion. — It was such a task that confronted the thinker from Nola, Philotheo Giordano Bruno (1548–1600). The senses have conquered the spatial universe for themselves; now the spirit is no longer to be found in space. Thus man was directed from outside to seek the spirit henceforth only where, on the basis of deep inner experiences, it had been sought by the glorious thinkers who have been discussed in the preceding expositions. These thinkers draw out of themselves a conception of the world to which men later are to be compelled by a more advanced natural science. The sun of ideas which later is to fall upon a new conception of nature, with them is still beneath the horizon, but its light already appears as a dawn in a time when men's thoughts about nature are still enveloped in the darkness of night. — For the purposes of science the sixteenth century gave the heavens to that world of the senses to which they rightfully belong; up to the end of the nineteenth century this science had progressed so far that from among the phenomena of plant, animal, and human life also it could give to the world of sensory facts what belongs to it. Neither up in the ether nor in the development of living organisms can this science henceforth look for anything but factual-sensory processes. As the thinker of the sixteenth century had to say: The earth is a

⁶ This sentence must not be understood as meaning that the investigation of the Bible and of the spiritual world would be an aberration at the present time; what is meant is that a "Jacob Boehme of the nineteenth century" would be led by paths similar to those which led the one of the sixteenth century to the Bible, to the "natural history of creation." But from there he would press forward to the spiritual world.

star among stars, subject to the same laws as other stars, so the thinker of the nineteenth century must say, "Whatever his origin and his future may be, for anthropology man is only a mammal; specifically he is that mammal whose organization, needs, and diseases are the most complicated, and whose brain with its wonderful capacity, has reached the highest degree of development." (Paul Topinard, *Anthropology*, Leipzig, 1888) — On the basis of this point of view attained by science, a confusion of the spiritual with the sensory can no longer take place, if man understands himself aright. An advanced science makes it impossible to seek in nature a spirit conceived along the lines of the material, just as sound thinking forces us to seek the cause of the advance of the hands of a clock in the laws of mechanics (the spirit of inorganic nature), not in a special demon who causes the movement of the hands. As a scientist, **Ernst Haeckel** justifiably had to reject the clumsy conception of a God thought of in the same way as something material. "In the higher and more abstract forms of religion this corporeal manifestation is abandoned, and God is worshiped only as '*pure spirit*,' without body. 'God is a spirit and he who worships Him must worship Him in spirit and in truth.' Nevertheless, the spiritual activity of this pure spirit is exactly the same as that of the anthropomorphous, divine personality. In reality this immaterial spirit too is not thought of as incorporeal, but as invisible, gaseous. We thus come to the paradoxical conception of God as a *gaseous vertebrate*." (Haeckel, *Welträtsel*, *The Riddle of the Universe*, p. 333.) In reality, a sensory-factual existence of something spiritual can only be assumed where an immediate sensory experience shows the spiritual; and only that degree of the spiritual can be assumed which is perceived in this manner. The excellent thinker, B. Carneri, could say (in the work, *Empfindung und Bewusstsein*, *Sensation and Consciousness*, p. 15): "The sentence, No spirit without matter, but also no matter without spirit — would justify us in extending the problem also to plants, or even to the first rock we come across, where hardly anything could be said in favor of this correlation." Spiritual processes, as facts, are the results of different functions of an organism; the spirit of the world does not exist in the world in a material manner, but only in a spiritual manner. The soul of man is a sum of processes in which the spirit appears most immediately *as a fact*. But it is *only* in man that the spirit exists in the form of such a soul. And to seek the spirit in the form of a soul elsewhere than in man, to think of other beings as endowed with a soul like man, is to misunderstand the spirit; it is to commit the most grievous sin against the spirit. One who does this, only shows that he has not experienced the spirit itself within him; he has only experienced the external manifestation of the spirit that holds sway in him: that is, the soul. But this is just as if somebody were to mistake a circle drawn in pencil for the true mathematical-ideal circle. One who does not experience within himself anything but the soul-form of the spirit, feels impelled to assume such a soul-form also in non-human things, in order not to have to stop at gross sensory materiality. Instead of thinking of the primordial foundation of the world as spirit, he thinks of it as a world soul, and assumes a general animation of nature.

Giordano Bruno, under the impact of the new Copernican conception of nature, could grasp the spirit in the world, from which it had been expelled in its old form, only as a *world soul*. When one immerses oneself in Bruno's writings (especially in his profound book, *Of the Cause, the Principle, and the One*) one has the impression that he thought of things as being animated, although in different degrees. He has not in reality experienced the spirit within himself; therefore he imagines it in terms of the human soul, in which form alone it has confronted him. When he speaks of the spirit he understands it in this way. "The universal reason is the innermost, most real, and most characteristic faculty, and is a potential part of the world soul; it is something everywhere identical, which fills the All, illuminates the universe, and instructs nature in bringing forth its species as they should be." It is true that in these sentences the spirit is not described as a "gaseous vertebrate," but as a being like the human soul. "A thing however small and minute, has within itself a portion of spiritual substance which, if it finds the substratum to be suitable, strives to become a plant or an animal, and organizes itself into a body of some kind, which is generally called animated. For spirit is to be found in all things, and there is not the most minute body which does not contain such a portion of it that it animates itself." — Because Giordano Bruno had not really experienced the spirit as spirit within himself, he could confuse the life of the spirit with the external mechanical functions by

means of which Raimon Lull (1235–1315), in his so-called *Great Art* had attempted to unveil the mysteries of the spirit. A modern philosopher, Franz Brentano, describes this *Great Art* as follows: “On concentric, individually turnable circular disks various concepts were inscribed, and then the most diverse combinations were produced by this means.” What coincidence superimposed upon a particular turn, was formed into a judgment about the highest truths. And in his many wanderings about Europe, Giordano Bruno appeared at various universities as a teacher of this *Great Art*. He had the boldness to think of the stars as worlds that are completely analogous to our earth; he enlarged the vision of scientific thinking beyond the earth; he no longer thought of the *heavenly bodies* as *corporeal* spirits, but he still thought of them as spirits of the *soul*. One must not do an injustice to this man whom the Catholic church made to atone for his advanced ideas with death. It was an enormous achievement to enfold the whole heavens in the same conception of the world that up to that time had been applied only to the things of the earth, even though Bruno still thought of the sensory as of something belonging to the soul. —

ANGELUS SILESII

As a personality that made what Tauler, Weigel, Jacob Boehme and others had prepared shine once more in a great spiritual harmony, Johann Scheffler, called Angelus Silesius (1624–1677) appeared in the seventeenth century. The ideas of the above-mentioned thinkers appear in his book, *Cherubic Wanderer, Ingenious Aphorisms in Rhymes*, as though gathered in a spiritual focus and shining with a heightened luminosity. And everything Angelus Silesius utters appears as such an immediate, spontaneous revelation of his personality that it is as though this man had been destined by a special providence to embody wisdom in a personal form. The spontaneous way in which he lives his wisdom is shown by the fact that he expresses it in sayings which are also admirable for their artistic form. He floats above all earthly existence like a spiritual being, and what he utters is like the breath of another world, cleansed from the very beginning of all those coarse and impure elements from which human wisdom can free itself at other times only with difficulty. — In the sense of Angelus Silesius only he partakes of true cognition who makes the eye of the All to see within himself; only he sees his acts in their true light who feels them to be performed within himself by the hand of the All: “God is the fire in me, and I the light in Him: do we not intimately belong to each other?” — “I am as rich as God; there is no grain of dust that I (Believe me, O Man) do not have in common with Him.” — “God loves me above Himself; if I love Him above myself I give Him as much as He gives me out of Himself.” — “The bird is in the air, the stone lies on the land; the fish lives in the water, my spirit in God's Hand.” — “If you are born of God, then God blossoms in you; and His divinity is your sap and your ornament.” — “Stop, whither are you running; Heaven is in you; if you seek God elsewhere you will forever miss Him.” — For one who feels himself to exist in the All in this way, every separation between himself and another being ceases; he no longer feels himself to be a separate individual; on the contrary, he feels everything about himself to be a part of the world, while his true essence is identical with this universe itself. “The world does not hold you; you yourself are the world that, in you and with you, keeps you so strongly prisoner.” — “Man does not have perfect bliss till the oneness has swallowed the otherness.” — “Man is all things: if he lacks one, he himself truly does not know his wealth.” — As a sensory being man is a thing among other things, and his sensory organs bring to him, as to a sensory individuality, sensory information about the things in space and time outside of him; but when the spirit speaks in man, then there is no outside and no inside; nothing that is spiritual is here and nothing is there; nothing is earlier, and nothing is later; space and time have disappeared in the contemplation of the universal spirit. It is only as long as man sees as an individual that he is here and the thing is there, and only as long as he sees as an individual, is this earlier and this later. “Man, if you let your spirit rise above place and time you can at every instant be in Eternity.” — “I myself am Eternity when I leave time, and gather myself together in God, and God in myself.” — “The rose which your external eye sees here, has bloomed like this in God through Eternity.” — “Sit down in the center, and you shall see everything at once: what happens now and then, here and in Heaven.” — “As long, my friend, as you have place and time in mind, you shall not grasp what God and Eternity

are.” — “When man withdraws from multiplicity and communes with God, he reaches unity.” — With this the height has been climbed where man goes beyond his individual self and abolishes every contrast between the world and himself. A higher life begins for him. The inner experience which takes place in him appears to him like the death of the old life and a resurrection in the new. “When you raise yourself above yourself and let God act, then shall the Ascension take place in your spirit.” — “The body must elevate itself in the spirit, the spirit in God, if you, O Man, wish to live in Him forever in bliss.” — “As much as my I pines away and diminishes in me, so much is the Lord’s I strengthened thereby.” — It is from this point of view that man can understand his significance and the significance of all things in the realm of eternal necessity. The natural universe appears to him in a direct way as the divine spirit. The thought of a divine, universal spirit which could have its being and continuance above and beside the things of the world, fades away as a concept that has been surmounted. This universal spirit appears to be so poured out into things, to have become so much one nature with them, that it could not be imagined any longer if even a single part of its being were imagined as absent. “There is nothing but I and You; and if we two do not exist, then God is God no more, and the heavens shall fall.” — Man feels himself to be a necessary link in the chain of the world. His acts no longer have any element of arbitrariness or individuality. What he does is necessary in the whole, in the chain of the world, which would fall apart if what he does were taken out of it. “Without me God cannot make a single worm; if I do not preserve it with Him, it must straightway fall to pieces.” — “I know that without me God cannot live for an instant; if I come to nothing then He must needs give up the ghost.” — It is only on this height that man sees things in their true nature. He no longer needs to attribute, from the outside, a spiritual essence to what is smallest, what is grossly sensory. For such as this smallest is, in all its smallness and gross, sensory nature, it is a part of the All. “No dust mote is so poor, no dot is so small, but the wise man sees God in it in His glory.” — “In a mustard-seed, if you can understand it, is the image of all higher and lower things.” — On this height man feels himself free. For coercion exists only where one can still be compelled by something from the outside. But when everything external has flowed into the interior, when the contrast between “I and world,” “outside and inside,” “nature and spirit,” has disappeared, then man feels everything which impels him only as his own impulse. “Fetter me as strictly as you want, in a thousand irons; nevertheless I shall be wholly free and unfettered.” — “When *my* will is dead, then *must* God do what I will; I myself prescribe to Him the pattern and the goal.” — Now all externally imposed moral norms cease to exist; man becomes his own measure and goal. He is not subject to any law, for the law too has become *his* nature. “The law is for the wicked; if no commandment were written, the godly would yet love God and their neighbor.” — On the higher level of cognition the *innocence of nature* is thus given back to man. He accomplishes the tasks which are set for him with the awareness of an eternal necessity. He says to himself, Through this iron necessity is given into your hand to withdraw that part which is assigned to you from this same eternal necessity. “O Men, learn from the flower of the field how you can please God and be beautiful at the same time.” — “The rose is without why; it blooms because it blooms; it pays no attention to itself, nor asks whether one sees it.” — When man arises to the higher level he feels in himself the eternal and necessary impulse of the universe, just as the flower of the field; he acts as the flower blooms. In all his actions the awareness of his moral responsibility grows into the immeasurable. For what he does not do is withdrawn from the All, is a killing of this All, insofar as the possibility of such a killing lies with him. “What is it not to sin? Do not ask much; go, the silent flowers will tell you.” — “Everything must be slain. If you do not slay yourself for God, eternal death shall at last slay you for the Enemy.”

EPILOGUE

Almost two and a half centuries have passed since Angelus Silesius gathered together the profound wisdom of his precursors in his *Cherubinic Wanderer*. These centuries have brought rich insights into nature. **Goethe** opened a great perspective into natural science. He sought to pursue the eternal, iron laws of nature’s action up to that peak where they bring forth man with the same inevitability with which, on a lower level, they produce a stone (cf. my

book, Goethe's Conception of the World). Lamarck, **Darwin**, **Haeckel** and others have continued to work in the spirit of this way of thinking. The "question of all questions," that concerning the natural origin of man, was answered in the nineteenth century. Other problems in the realm of natural processes connected with this question, have been solved. Today one knows that one need not step outside the realm of the factual and sensory in order to understand, in a purely natural fashion, the sequence of beings in its development up to man. — And the nature of the human "I" too has been illuminated by the discernment of **J. G. Fichte**, which has shown the human soul where it should seek itself and what it is (cf. **above**, and the section on Fichte in my book, *The Riddles of Philosophy*). **Hegel** has extended the domain of thought over all fields of being, and has endeavored to grasp in thought the external, sensory existence of nature as well as the highest creations of the human spirit, together with the laws by which they are governed (cf. my presentation of Hegel in *Rätsel der Philosophie*, v. 1) — How do the spirits, whose thoughts have been traced in this work, appear in the light of a conception of the world which takes into account the scientific achievements of the periods succeeding theirs? They still believe in a "supernatural" history of creation. How do their thoughts appear when confronted by the "natural" one which the science of the nineteenth century has developed? — This science has not given anything to nature which does not belong to it; it has only taken from it what does not belong to it. It has banished from it everything which is not to be sought in it, but is to be found only within man. It no longer sees something in nature that resembles the human soul and that acts in the same way as man. It no longer lets the forms of organisms be *created* by a manlike God; it traces their development in the world of the senses in accordance with purely natural laws. Meister Eckhart as well as Tauler, and Jacob Boehme as well as Angelus Silesius, would needs feel the most profound satisfaction in the contemplation of this natural science. The spirit in which *they* wished to regard the world has passed in the fullest sense into this conception of nature *when it is properly understood*. What they could not yet do, that is, to place the facts of nature into that light which had arisen in them, would no doubt have become their desire if this natural science had been accessible to them. They could not do this, for no geology, no "natural history of creation" told them of the processes of nature. The Bible alone, in its own way, told them of such processes. Therefore, as well as they could, they sought the spiritual where alone it is to be found: within the human being. Today they would employ quite different resources than at their time in order to show that, in a form accessible to the senses, the spirit is only to be found in man. Today they would entirely agree with those who seek the spirit as fact, not at the root of nature, but in its fruit. They would admit that the spirit in the sensory body is the *result of development*, and that such a spirit cannot be sought on lower levels of development. They would understand that no "creative thought" was active in the formation of the spirit in the organism, any more than such a "creative thought" made the ape develop out of the marsupials. — Our present time cannot speak about the facts of nature in the same way as Jacob Boehme spoke about them. But today also there is a point of view which brings the way of thinking of Jacob Boehme close to a conception of the world that takes account of modern science. One need not lose the spirit when one finds in nature only what is natural. It is true that today there are many who think that one must slip into a shallow, dry materialism if one accepts the "facts" discovered by natural science without further ado. I myself stand completely upon the ground of this natural science. I have the definite conviction that with a conception of nature such as that of Ernst Haeckel, only he can become shallow who approaches it with a world of ideas that is already shallow. I feel something higher and more glorious when I let the *revelations* of the "natural history of creation" act upon me than when I am confronted with the stories of supernatural miracles of the Creed. I know of nothing in any "holy" book that reveals to me anything as sublime as the "dry" fact that, in the womb, every human fetus rapidly goes through a succession of all those forms through which its animal ancestors have evolved. Let us fill our mind with the magnificence of the facts our senses perceive, and we shall care little for the "miracles" which do not lie within the course of nature. If we experience the spirit within ourselves we do not require one in external nature. In my *Philosophy of Freedom* I have described my conception of the world, which does not think that it is driving out the spirit because it regards nature in the same way as do Darwin and Haeckel. A plant, an animal, do not gain anything for me if I people them with souls of which my senses tell me nothing. I do

not seek a “deeper,” “spiritual” nature of things in the external world, I do not even assume it, because I believe that the cognition which illuminates my inner self preserves me from doing so. I believe that the things of the sensory world are what they appear to us to be, for I see that a true self-knowledge leads us to seek in nature nothing but natural processes. I seek no divine spirit in nature, because I believe that I perceive the essence of the human spirit in myself. I calmly acknowledge my animal ancestors, because I believe I understand that where these animal ancestors have their origin, no soul-like spirit *can be active*. I can only agree with Ernst Haeckel when he prefers “the eternal stillness of the grave” to such an immortality as many a religion teaches (cf. Haeckel's *Welträtsel*, *The Riddle of the Universe*, p. 239). For I find a degradation of the spirit, a repugnant sin *against the spirit*, in the conception of a soul which continues to exist after the fashion of a sensory being. — I hear a shrill dissonance when the facts of natural science in Haeckel's presentation encounter the “piety” of the creeds of many contemporaries. But in creeds which are in but poor harmony with natural facts, there resounds for me nothing of the spirit of the higher piety which I find in Jacob Boehme and Angelus Silesius. This higher piety is rather in full harmony with the action of the natural. There is no contradiction in becoming penetrated with the insights of modern science and at the same time in entering upon the road which Jacob Boehme and Angelus Silesius pursued in their search for the spirit. One who enters upon this road in the spirit of these thinkers need not fear that he will slip into shallow materialism if he lets the secrets of nature be described to him by a “natural history of creation.” One who interprets my ideas in this sense will understand in the same way as I the last saying of the *Cherubic Wanderer*, which shall also sound the last note of this work: “Friend, it is enough now. If you wish to read more, go and become yourself the writing and the essence.”

[Footnote added to the 1923 edition: The last sentences above must not be misinterpreted as expressing an unspiritual conception of nature. Through them I only wanted to emphasize strongly that the spirit which lies at the root of nature must be found *in* it, and is not to be brought into it from the outside. The rejection of “creative thoughts” refers to an activity which is similar to human activity, and proceeds according to ideas of usefulness. What is to be said about evolutionary history one may find in my book, *The Theory of Knowledge in Goethe's Conception of the World*, preface to the new edition.]