

# WHEN THE WORD-ANIMAL DISCOVERS SIGNLESSNESS

## A Reflection on the Possibility of the Mystical

© 2005 Luther Askeland

## CONTENTS

|   |            |
|---|------------|
| <b>Preface</b>  | <b>i</b>   |
| <b>Chapter Outline</b>  | <b>iv</b>  |
| <b>Chapter 1: “Rava created a man . . . “</b>                     | <b>1</b>   |
| <b>Chapter 2: The Paradox</b>                                     | <b>14</b>  |
| <b>Chapter 3: The Dance of Instinct and Intuition</b>             | <b>28</b>  |
| <b>Chapter 4: The Great Doubt</b>                                 | <b>54</b>  |
| <b>Chapter 5: The Turn</b>  | <b>71</b>  |
| <b>Chapter 6: Coincidentia Oppositorum</b>                        | <b>84</b>  |
| <b>Chapter 7: The Signless Element</b>                            | <b>107</b> |
| <b>Chapter 8: The Names of Essence</b>                            | <b>118</b> |
| <b>Works Cited</b>  | <b>135</b> |
| <b>Abbreviations Used in Citations</b>                            | <b>138</b> |
| <b>Capsule Description of Some Referenced Authors and Schools</b> | <b>139</b> |

## Preface

Even when we were still limited, for information, to newspapers, TV, and radio, and when science still had not progressed beyond the polio vaccine and atomic bombs, we were often told how “sophisticated” we were compared with all previous generations. And thanks to good nutrition and large doses of sex in advertising, we often heard how quickly, compared with earlier generations, our children “matured.” Today, of course—witness such developments as the Web, the Genome Project, and missile defense—we have advanced further still. But could it be that these mantras about our sophistication and maturity—about our unparalleled awareness of “what is” and of “how things are”—are something less than unexamined assumptions? Could they be pure nonsense?

The following work takes up this question in relation to our most immediate and intimate sensings of “who we are” and “where we are,” and of who or what we should aspire to become. It attempts a description of the way in which such sensings manifest in “modern consciousness,” as well as an analysis of some ways in which these sensings were verbalized, in the past, in the major philosophical and religious traditions of both East and West. While doing so, it dwells at considerable length on the way in which awareness in us is molded by language, for we naturally and habitually accept language, that is, “verbal signs,” as the primary *mediator*, to us, of “who” and “where” we are. Hence the title’s implied, and tentative, definition of humankind as the “word-animal,” the animal of the *logos*.

In what follows I will frequently argue, contrary to those mantras, that in many matters involving these basic sensings and perceptions traditional consciousness was much more aware—much keener and more observant, much more *alert* to “where we are” and “who we are”—than modern consciousness. This does not mean, however, that in making my argument I adopt any traditional premises or claims—for example, the “existence of God,” the “sole reality of *brahman*,” or “emptiness,” as my own. Nor does it mean that I embrace as gospel any particular way in which any particular tradition has *verbalized* its awareness, for all such verbalizings, including my own, are historical and therefore transient. What it does mean is that when I read Meister Eckhart, or when I reflect, for example, on the teachings of India’s Samkhya, it seems to me that I have entered into a sounding of reality—of *This*—which penetrates almost *immeasurably* more deeply than anything I find in the writings, say, of Freud, Einstein, or Heidegger. In my own case, it means that those old or even “ancient” texts have helped, more than anything else, to bring to the surface, and to invigorate, my own obscure, innermost “sensings” and “intuitions.” And it means, as far as some chapters of the present work are concerned, that I explore certain traditional teachings in considerable detail, and argue for their superior “alertness,” but that overall I have attempted to verbalize those shared sensings and intuitions out of my own thought and experience. To that end I have introduced a number of original concepts, terms, and metaphors, and have attempted to formulate them throughout using the words and phrases which are my own, those of this “historical moment.”

Though the term itself appears in it but rarely, the work's central question, as indicated in the subtitle, is that of the possibility of "the mystical." I do not use the word to mean something arcane, shadowy, or magical which may or may not exist somewhere "way out there" in a kind of spiritual or metaphysical outer space. Instead my usage of the term is circumscribed, first, to the realm of things which have the aura of "the sacred," or of "divinity" or "the numinous"—something preternaturally alive, extraordinary, powerful, quickening, and astonishing; concentrated in a particular name, it can be suggestive of a "person," as is the case with 'God' and 'Allah', or of a more impersonal, but equally real, presence, as with '*brahman*', or of that profound "neither something nor nothing" which Buddhists call *shunyata*, "emptiness." And then more narrowly and precisely, and as the very opposite of that "something shadowy" just mentioned: by "mystical" I mean the utterly intimate and *immediate* "experiencing" or "knowing" of that dense and compelling presence, even the immediate experience of vanishing into or simply *being* it. I mean, in other words, the *most* immediate of all possible conscious experiences. Since images, words, and concepts are signs or symbols—are *mediators* of something "mediated"—"the mystical" will tend to be associated with their absence; and so for example, and as the traditions, as we shall see, sometimes put it: to approach God, the soul must first empty itself of all images, words, and concepts; or in the *Upanishads*' words, *brahman* is "where neither eye nor word nor mind goes," or "that unattained from which words and the mind turn back," (*Upanishatsamgrahah*, 2, 26, my translation). So it is that an attempted exploration of the mystical easily becomes a journey of the "word-animal" into "signlessness."

The first three chapters, which explore our various perceptions and valuations of alternative modes of being and of being conscious, are framed as a description and analysis of what I call the "Other Paradox"—it is "other" in relation to the "Platonic Paradox," which asserts that mind's "lower" sensibilities can be elevated and purified into the godlike aspirations of philosophy. While the Platonic Paradox asserts that the lower can *become* the higher, the Other Paradox points to a paradoxical similarity, if not *identity*, in some primary ways in which human beings may perceive or define the *best* possible ways to be and to be conscious, and the worst. To mention, for now, two brief examples: a famous twentieth century novel by the Austrian Robert Musil bears the title *The Man Without Qualities* (*Der Mann ohne Eigenschaften*)—as the negative connotation of the title suggests, Musil focuses on the absence of defined individuality, or of clear, determinate "identity," in the novel's anti-heroic central character. In Indian thought, on the other hand, one of the most frequent and characteristic Sanskrit terms used to describe or evoke the *greatness* of highest being, and especially of *brahman*, is *nirguna*, the precise meaning of which is "without qualities." Second: Camus writes that the human heart's "wild longing for clarity, its need for "reducing (reality) to terms of thought," must finally confront, in anguish, the world's lack of rationality—this confrontation between the passionate need to know and unknowable reality constitutes the tragedy and absurdity of the human condition (Camus, 16). For Dionysius, on the other hand, the highest, most joyful, and even most "knowing" condition we can possibly achieve is that supreme experience in which, after "renouncing all that the mind may conceive," one is "supremely united to the completely unknown by an inactivity of all knowledge" (Dionysius, 137). My attempt to explicate and document this "Other Paradox" forms the focal point of the first two chapters; and on the basis of that analysis I offer an account of human consciousness as the "dance of instinct and intuition in

chapter three.

Those first three chapters attempt a kind of topography of primary human ways to be and to know, one which includes a description of “normal life” and “normal consciousness.” Working within the framework created in those chapters, the next four proceed to explore how human consciousness, as I have described it, contains within itself the possibility of a particular transformation or *process*. That process involves a turning away from “normal” perceptions and ideals of being and of being conscious, the emergence of new perceptions, and the initiation of movement towards entirely different modes of being and knowing. This movement completes itself in chapter seven with awareness’ entry into the “signless element.” The eighth and final chapter proceeds to consider whether and how language might be used to relate to that “wordless” realm which the “word-animal” has now entered.

Some readers of the text have suggested that I accompany it with the chapter-by-chapter summary which I had prepared. I have therefore inserted it immediately following this Preface, and readers may consult it as they see fit. Since some of the historical individuals or schools of thought I mention or quote may be unfamiliar to some readers, I include at the end a brief sketch of those I take to be lesser known. There is considerable reference to foreign, especially Sanskrit, terms, and I have attempted to explain them as fully as needed when I introduce them. In order to avoid possible complications in readers’ use of the text, I have entered those terms in anglicized form, omitting all diacritics. Abbreviations used in citations are also explained at the end, immediately following the list of works cited.

\* \* \* \* \*

## Chapter Outline

Chapter One: “Rava Created a Man . . .”

In this chapter I first introduce and initially define the “Other Paradox” (please see the Preface for an introductory definition). Subsequently, the focal point of the chapter becomes the analysis of “normal consciousness,” the aim being to arrive at an understanding of its conception of “the worst possible state.”

Section one introduces and contrasts the “Platonic Paradox” and the “Other Paradox.” In section two I describe normal consciousness and normal life (with reference to Jewish legend) as a “golem project,” the attempt to achieve particularized being and awareness in the collective verbally comprehended world of “the clear, common light.” In our golem projects, we seek to “concentrate” and “crystallize” our amorphous being and knowing, to create ourselves. I contrast the normal life of golem projects in the clear, common light with the private world of solitude, and with the ominous “fringes” surrounding our normal world.

In section three I discuss how “floating solitude” and despair can carry consciousness out towards those fringes, analyzing despair as an experience of isolation from “normal life” and as the collapse of one’s golem project. Section four then moves to a closer analysis of what those “fringes” are. They represent a formless “nothingness” which normal consciousness regards as the worst possible state, the very opposite of the ideal “golemic” state of defined, individuated being and awareness. But that nothingness is also what we *are*, that is, the formlessness we are trying to “concentrate and crystallize” into golemic being.

Chapter Two: “The Other Paradox”

In chapter one I moved through an analysis of normal consciousness to an understanding of its picture of our “worst possible state.” Chapter two is an account of traditional philosophical and theological conceptions of the best possible state—of “perfect being and knowing.” This makes it possible at the end of chapter two to restate (now as a “confirmed hypothesis”) the Other Paradox, namely, the identity of these “worst” and “best” possible states.

In section one I survey traditional conceptions of perfect being as unchanging, simple, indefinable, indeterminate, non-acting, formless, nameless, nonverbal, and even as “nonbeing,” as “nothingness.” Section two documents traditional conceptions of a “perfect consciousness” as immutable, simple, and formless (and therefore entirely nonverbal), and even as not thinking, as *unconscious* (in relation to what we can imagine as “conscious”).

In section three I then point out the striking parallel between our normal conceptions of the appalling “non-golemic” being and knowing of “the fringes,” and these traditional conceptions of perfection. At this point, then, the Other Paradox has been explained and its essential elements set forth.

Chapter Three: “The Dance of Instinct and Intuition”

The argument for the “validity” of the Other Paradox having been completed, I inquire in chapter three into its significance. The answer is given in two central points: first, that the Other Paradox points towards a historical trend, a shrinking and dulling of awareness, and second, that the Paradox and this historical trend point towards an understanding or even definition of human consciousness as the unique “dance of instinct and intuition.”

In section one I explain the first of those two points, contrasting the vast, many-sided triple world (the strictly human world, the entire natural world, the world of “the gods”) traditional consciousness inhabited with the one-dimensional “strictly human” world within which “modern consciousness” is confined.

In section two I explain the second point. Beginning with the basic category of the “instinctive,” or the “biological,” I explore perception by means of signs (including *verbal* signs) as the given “instinctive” mode of animal perception. The notion of “habit” (instinct which continues of its own momentum even when no longer needed) is introduced as an important ally of instinct. I explain how the basic workings of instinct-habit lead, in normal consciousness, to its thirst for “golemic” being and knowing. Intuition is then described as a “voice” which, like Socrates’ *daimonion*, inexplicably “comes to us,” as it were from outside “biology.” It whispers its triple-sheathed message: that all golem projects are doomed; that golemic being and knowing are not even desirable, but the very opposite of the truly desirable; and that there exists an uncontained, undivided reality to which, moreover, we are closely related.

In section three I note that this “dance” is hardly apparent in modern consciousness. The explanation is that in modern consciousness, instinct and above all habit have all but perfectly restored the hegemony of instinct-habit which obtains in all known forms of animal life other than ours. But if we look away from modern consciousness to tradition, the endless, constantly varied dance (the singular “dance-agon”) of instinct-habit and intuition becomes apparent. Section four documents intuition’s strong presence in traditional collective awareness, relating tragic drama, myths of the fall, and the traditional perceptions of perfect being and knowing surveyed in chapter two, respectively, to intuition’s three “whisperings.”

Section five begins with a brief review of the first four chapters. As for the Other Paradox’s significance, it concludes that the Paradox is a verbal microcosm or crystal within which we can see that dance of instinct-habit and intuition which is our essence, but which is being lost in “modern consciousness.” I conclude that this and other particular points about that interplay which have now come to light suggest a reorientation: the realization that we have not left tradition “behind,” but have much to learn from *it*.

#### Chapter Four: “The Great Doubt”

This chapter focuses on the doubt and bewilderment which can invade normal consciousness if it should begin to attend to intuition’s whisperings.

Section one contrasts the inevitably limited doubts of normal consciousness (illustrated by Descartes) with the *uncontained* doubt which intuition’s whisperings can engender. As it becomes the meeting place of instinct-habit and intuition, awareness is caught between two diametrically opposed sensings of “where I am,” “what I am,” and “how to be.” This doubt relates to action as well as thought—for example, the traditional figure of that “renouncer” of “normal life,” the

*samnyasin*, shows at least that one can attempt, in defiance, of instinct-habit, to lead a life orchestrated solely by intuition.

Section two takes note of two additional paradoxes which now appear: just as I begin to take up the great questions of where and what I am, and what I should do, that very “I” begins to dissolve; and as I take up those questions in earnest, all my usual means to answer questions become questionable themselves. Doubt culminates then in something like a return to chaos, a place outside “the world” and prior to both the “I” and all logic.

#### Chapter Five: “The Turn”

This chapter’s theme is the process of transformation or conversion—the “turn”—which is initiated if consciousness, emerging from the “great doubt,” undertakes to remake itself and its life to accord with intuition’s threefold whispering.

Section one introduces the notion of “the turn,” portraying it as a venturing out from land onto open sea, as a turn from the clear, common light to the “fringes” and from dreams of golemic being and knowing to intuition’s vision of perfect being and knowing. It involves the abandonment of my “golem project,” and the displacement of instinct-habit by intuition as what it is in me that says “I.” I discuss traditional accounts of the turn as the attempt to approach and assimilate to perfect being and perfect consciousness. Since such perfection is uncontained and indivisible, turning consciousness thus becomes a new “project.” Given the nature of the perfection it now seeks, it must become a project of “dilation and simplification” diametrically opposed to the old project of “concentration and crystallization.”

Section one has viewed the turn in its “Platonic” essence. But in its implementation the turn is complicated by two factors, and they are explored in section two. First, as an assimilation to the infinite, the turn is itself an infinite and so unending process. Second, instinct-habit remains powerful, and indeed, “turned” life requires “animal” life as its matrix. This means that if I as “modern consciousness” turn, I become the ongoing dance of instinct-habit and intuition. Complexity, contradiction, doubt, and “paradox” will persist.

#### Chapter Six: “*Coincidentia Oppositorum*”

Chapter six deals with the practice, work, or “yoga” which it is essential for turning consciousness to undertake.

Section one explains that the turn, being a “nonspontaneous” and infinite transformation, requires an “infinite” work or works, that is “yogas.” The aim of such work is positive, for it is approach and assimilation to perfect being and knowing, but its first essential work is negative and twofold: a “Yoga of Stillness” to bring affectivity to rest, and a “Yoga of Dis-enchantment” to release consciousness from its condition of being “spellbound” by signs, above all by verbal signs. This “enchanted” condition is the normal condition of instinctive consciousness and reflects the normal biology of perception. It leads each “sign-animal” to equate its species’ and its own particular signs with reality, with *This*.

As an example, section two offers an account of a particular Yoga of Dis-enchantment I refer to as one of “*coincidentia oppositorum*.” After referring to the term’s history, especially in relation to Nicholas of Cusa, I explain how this particular yoga can break the spell which leads normal



consciousness to spontaneously identify its particular multiple, delimited, verbalized, sign-made “the world” with reality. That world is constructed of pairs of opposites, formed by binary opposition. As they are brought into coincidence or “fused” in this yoga, they necessarily lose all their particular identity and reality—all that distinguishes them from their “opposite”—so that both are dissolved. I pay particular attention to the most important pairs of opposites, above all “being” and “nonbeing,” and “I” and “the world out there.”

At the end of section two I point out that such a yoga “dissolves” the entire verbalized “the world,” constructed as that world is out of myriad pairs of opposites. To normal consciousness it will now seem that “nothing is left.” But of course a “meditation” cannot abolish reality. Consciousness remains, but no longer “spellbound” by signs; and reality remains, but just as it is in itself, prior to all delimitation, division, and “comprehension” by verbal signs.

#### Chapter Seven: “The Signless Element”

This chapter explores that “reality” within which consciousness finds itself after the Yoga of Coincidentia Oppositorum has dissolved the verbalized, sign-made “the world.”

Connecting with the end of chapter six, I suggest that consciousness’ newborn alertness to pure, unprocessed reality free of all preconceptions, divisions, and limitations is an experience like that of suddenly finding oneself in a wholly new and unfamiliar element or medium. After making reference to Eastern and Western terms for various “gross” and “subtle” elements, and after discussing the point that organisms, unless suddenly deprived of them, are naturally-paradoxically oblivious to their “life-elements,” I proceed to look more closely at this new “medium” turning consciousness now inhabits.

Like any organism’s “life-element,” and unlike anything in “the world,” it is constant and all-encompassing, but what strikes consciousness most of all is its *mode* of being, for it is an intimate presence signlessly and immediately known, known, that is, by direct “contact.” Such presence, reality prior to all delimiting sign-comprehension, is nonverbal, wholly indeterminate. I relate it to the traditional notion of the “absolutely infinite,” concluding that it is, in a way transcending the opposites, both “infinite” and “one.” What all this adds up to is that the “signless element” resembles those fringes from which normal consciousness flees, and more importantly: as something uncontained, indivisible, and nonverbal, the signless element is like, or just is, that “perfect being” tradition has delineated and towards which turning consciousness has turned.

Concluding the chapter, I point out that turning consciousness’ *awareness* of the signless element is also uncontained, undivided, and unchanging, and so resembles tradition’s “perfect knowing.” This means that consciousness itself has been transformed as it were into a single “nerve,” uniform throughout, which has but one “object,” the signless element, and which “knows” that object by immediate “contact,” and not mediately through signs. In this way consciousness, which once aspired to know “how things are” in “the world,” has become, instead, the “perfect knowing” of “perfect being.”

#### Chapter Eight: “The Names of Essence”

I begin the chapter by pointing out that since the “dance” continues, intuition now tries to harness it to *its* goals. For example, it attempts to use verbal signs to “say the unsayable,” to bring

something of the taste or scent of uncontained, undivided, nonverbal reality into words. This then becomes my initial definition of the “philosophy of the mystical” or of “mystical theology.”

The first issue facing such a philosophy or theology is that of naming the “nameless” element which consciousness has now entered, and which displaces “the world” as the enclosing “life-medium” of turned life. This then becomes the primary topic of section one. I discuss various terms I have been using, such as ‘*This*’, ‘reality’, ‘the uncontained’, etc. Then I take up the name ‘God’ as (in English) that “unnameable” reality’s special name—other languages use ‘*brahman*’, ‘Shiva’, ‘Allah’, etc. The name ‘God’ is the great “non-name,” for it does not by any means refer to a “specifiable something”; and it is the great “anti-name,” for it marks the end of all words and, like the Yoga of Dis-enchantment, dissolves our verbalized “the world.” But even just because it is these two things, it is also, as in the Jewish tradition, “*the name*.” To have coined the word ‘God’ is the greatest achievement of English, is its widest, most alert, most lucid moment.

Section one completes my account of the transformation from normal consciousness’ life in “the world” to turning consciousness life in the “signless element.” In section two I attempt by way of conclusion to appraise the significance of that change. I suggest that the archetypal creative event or act takes the form of a breakthrough or rupture of plane, a leap out of “the given.” After the “breakout” from nonbeing to being, from inanimate being to living being, and from insentient life to sentient life in signs, I add turning consciousness’ leap from conscious life in signs to conscious life outside signs in the signless element or in “God” as the fourth great leap. In two ways, it is even the greatest of the four. For it is the first leap taking place in the light of self-awareness, and second, it is a leap out of all the others and out of all the opposites, a breakthrough out into the absolutely “uncontained.”

\* \* \* \* \*

## Chapter 1: “Rava created a man . . .”

The effects of that vast blunder it sometimes whispers through us we have made—I mean of that old, perhaps irremediable wrong turn which just by itself explains why, right now, awareness in us is not boundless and seamless lucidity, why our very being is not perfect joy—extend even to the paradoxes we seemingly choose to ponder. It may be that *all* paradoxes delight us just because of their festive atmosphere rich with colorful metamorphoses and contradictions, their unexpected and ironic twists, their pleasantly improbable juxtapositions. But then those we relish above all display an additional element: in the end all those polarities and contradictions are marvelously reconciled and explained, with breathtaking economy, by one or two simple principles. Plato was among the first to circulate that archetypal paradox which pictures the innumerable *kinds* of human motive as the myriad disguises or metamorphoses of just one. Thus perceived, the passion raging in a human being who has been shaken, intoxicated, even “maddened” by the visual beauty of a human body is as it were the mere larval or raw material which with time may metamorphose into the love of music, a fascination with mathematics, skill in dialectic, the cultivation of virtue; at last—and only *because* it once was deranged by body, by flesh, that is, by certain passing configurations and nuances of color, form, and movement—that lover’s madness will be transmuted into the exalted vision of the wisdom-lover who now dwells above body and time in an eternal, indescribable realm even “beyond being.”

By now, more than a score of centuries later, innumerable amplifications and variations of the Platonic Paradox have become commonplace. In its wild growth, the shoot of love easily blossoms overnight—so the Paradox—into the most tender solicitude, a glittering and fragile reverence, spontaneous generousities, avowals, and consecrations. Trampled upon or cut back, it may resprout as dogged hatred or insatiable cruelty. Forced underground, it may reemerge much later and far away as a poem, a mathematical formula, war, an art collection or an addiction, as the continent’s richest and unhappiest woman or man, as a stubborn idleness, sudden suicide, as the vain, unheeded soliloquy of a grimly planned, meticulously orchestrated failure. Decades later, an obsession which body, now scarcely remembered, once ignited in body may nevertheless flourish as the daily easing of others’ suffering, as duty towards the amorphous and infinite future, as oneness with all that *is*. That biological madness may have aged into an attenuated and pale sentimentality, or transmuted by time’s alchemy, may have matured into genuine erotic love. In the spacious rooms and crowded passageways of the great dance hall this paradox conjures up, we continually observe women and men, stags and does, fish, Paris and Helen, Penelope and Odysseus, pinetrees, turtles, poets, murderers, Falstaff and his bawds, philosophers and their Truth. We see heroes, their lined, earnest faces already shadowed by premonitions of doom, dancing with their imminent or fading achievements and tragic defeats. In the gestures and eyes of the mystics, engulfed in their infinite courtship of the nameless Beloved, we discern obscure, ephemeral traces of ecstatic and harrowing nights. Indeed, what our gaze takes in here is the entire human spectacle, for there is no act, impulse, or thought which is not a movement or gesture, a veiled or brazen look, from Eros’ ubiquitous, infinitely variegated dance.

Familiar as it is, the Platonic Paradox retains its surprise and its allure. In the very moment

its paradoxical quality jars the mind most agreeably, it seems to thrust us into the center of vast comprehendings. Plato's Paradox explains the vast, labyrinthine world of human emotion, impulse, and action as originating from and as explicable from within. It portrays that world's innumerable and diverse forms, with all their vivid, seemingly unresolvable contradictions and polarities, as the metamorphoses of a single principle. Just because of its broad monistic sweep, such a paradox is untestable, and so has the great virtue that it cannot be disproved. It lends itself to unending reflection and discussion; at all times it welcomes new elaborations and variations. Since it is a hypothesis free of logical contradiction, it possesses a cardinal philosophical virtue: it is at least *conceivable* that it is true.

But like so many other pronouncements, paradoxical or not, the Platonic Paradox is marred by a critical flaw, one which connects it, moreover, to that fatal error to which I have already referred. The flaw is the fact that this paradox's primary effect is only to lead us ever farther astray, to entice us ever farther along the wrong path. Just by taking on and by seeming, by means of the marvelous economies and astonishing conjurations of paradox, to lay bare the great labyrinth of human emotion, motive, and action, it encourages our instinctive and habitual, but otherwise unsupported, supposition that we can fathom this place, that we can describe and explain "ourselves." It shores up our customary assumption that reality—that *This*—is a verbal phenomenon amenable to verbal designation, description, and explanation, and reenforces our habitual perception of ourselves as "beings" or "events" we can describe and explain. It projects the general view that words are not one of the myriad things *within* reality, but reality's magical key. Thereby it induces us to keep searching for and proposing "explanations"; it confines awareness within the sphere of its verbalized "comprehensions." As if we were not sufficiently removed already, it carries us ever farther from that unfamiliar, perhaps saving lucidity we glimpse after just one solitary, unswerving, truth-facing hour of asking "what is *This*?"—I mean the lucidity which made of Socrates the "wisest of men," and which his pupil Plato too easily forgot: the singular and revolutionary cognition that the one thing we can know is that we know nothing, the realization that *This* and we rest quietly somewhere outside all sensory and verbal perceiving, that it is only by breaking out of "human thought" that we can reach and inhabit this place, can at last draw near to what we already and unthinkably are.

Less familiar, but much more open to that Socratic wisdom, is another paradox. Compared with those paradoxes which simplify and reduce their worlds to known, measurable quantities, it is expansive and centrifugal, a thrown rock's orbbed, relentlessly growing wave. Instead of resolving contradictions with paradoxical derivations and alchemies, it multiplies them; instead of using one of the opposites to explain them all, it enables us to transcend them. It does not make this place more familiar and comprehensible, but less so, makes "where we are" greater than smaller. By provoking consciousness to burst out of its particular comprehendings, it thrusts it into the uncomprehended and uncontained. It leads thought, not to safe harbor, but out into an open sea. Far from the luminous clarity of Plato's divine Forms, its gods are Rilkean and "dark." It shows us *This*—it lets us glimpse the world, the gods, and ourselves—as something wild and pristine: a virgin element still unhandled, untouched, something prior to this moment not even observed.

The Other Paradox takes as given the commonplace observation that in our actual and normal condition, we fluctuate across a vast middle range bordered by the two extremes—

conceivable, but perhaps never realized—of absolute perfection and utter failure. But then: if we explore, at one extreme, the dark boundaries of consciousness into which we banish the gloom, the shades and hungry ghosts, the debris, all the harrowing images of abandonment, ignominy, nonentity, vacancy, and madness which loom as the worst possible fate which might befall us, and if by way of contrast, we then seek out our species' most searching and profound picturings of perfection—of the highest possible state of being and of awareness—it paradoxically turns out that a comparison of these two utterly antithetical extremes displays, not opposition or even contrast, but simple identity. This paradoxical similarity forms the very heart of the Other Paradox. It consists in the fact that our most exalted and far-reaching images of absolute perfection, and our image of the worst possible condition we can imagine for ourselves, are the same image. We picture the gods—*brahman* or God or the perfected, the most alert, far-seeing, and accomplished master or sage—as peacefully-blissfully enjoying a condition which, considered as a possibility for us, is the most dismal and appalling fate we can imagine, a specter we immediately banish to those outer fringes of consciousness to which our worst nightmares are perpetually consigned.

\* \* \* \* \*

ii.

I can best explain what I mean by such perfection, and above all by that desolate spectral life which haunts the fringes of consciousness—and so be in a position to explore the Other Paradox—only after defining, and then situating them within, their context: that interior expanse of “normal” life which these boundary phenomena merely fringe. “All consciousness,” writes Schelling, “is concentration, ingathering, a drawing together of oneself.” (Schelling, Part I, Volume 8, p. 74.) Beginning with these words translated from Schelling's German, let us attempt to describe that central life.

We instinctively seek to draw all that is dispersed, fluid, and unformed about ourselves into a center, to “concentrate” our tenuous, spectral reality into one dense, defined, indubitably real essence. Why? Our goal is to work this “concentrate”—ourselves—into the form of a human being and then to create for this human being its “my life.” There are legends like that of Rabbi Rava, dark narratives of golems and homunculi in which someone attempts with the aid of magic to usurp God's role and create a man or woman. Though they are suffused with an aura of aberration, pathetic clumsiness, and ruin, these stories exercise a singular appeal. Let us derive the secret of this uncomfortable fascination from the following suspicion or fact: the golem legend portrays a melodrama of attempted creation we are all programmed, or perhaps doomed, to undertake. For we are all laboring to concentrate the amorphous and ill-prepared commencement we are into a human being, to cast something living, formed, and real that will correspond with our name, will be the proud referent, visible to all, of the hypnotic, insistent, unremitting diphthong “I.” Let us briefly consider the where and the what of these melancholy campaigns.

The “where” is itself a center, a shared clearing—I shall call it the “clear, common light.” The place in which we perform the work of concentration is clear because it is a place in which distinct persons, things, and events manifest themselves to us as named, defined, and known. It is common because this knowledge is communicable and so “public,” because what happens here can

be observed, attested to, told, and retold by all participants. What makes both this clarity and this commonness possible is verbal perception or “language” in the form of one of its many dialects, for example, English. English, or Chinese, Arabic, Bihari, etc., together with the vast but finite world of particular things and events—of “this” and “that”—it evokes, is the medium which joins us together as a public dwelling in the clear, common light. It is *its* world we inhabit, perceive, and share.

Let us note that this public world is also the “where” of almost all the phenomena we usually call “private.” For the fact is that we seek reality and definition—that is, we work at creating our golem—within two distinguishable realms of the clear, common light. One is the great public of the community at large: empire, nation, city-state, tribe, region, local community; the other is the small public or audience of family and intimates, what we usually call the private. This distinction between the great public at large and the much smaller and more intimate domestic “public” is important, but it is not as profound as the antithesis between this twofold public world and the truly private. For both publics are publics of the clear, common light. In both cases we dwell together with others in a shared world that is self-evidently named, intelligible, and communicable. In both a shared language is the medium, catalog, and organizer—as it were the creator—of that common world.

The truly private, however, is another realm. It hovers in obscurity outside the clear, common light, outside the known, outside English. The truly private is furtive, formless, unspoken, uncounted, its being a dark and uncanny un-Berkeleyian being no mind can perceive. It is the scarcely perceptible respiration of a solitary moose—a moose no human being will ever see—dozing in the cool noontime nothingness of the woods. It is a gopher walking or digging in the darkness of its tunnel—in that tunnel there are no such things as “tunnels” or “gophers,” no such state as “existence.” The truly private is a vast world, but since it exists outside the clear, common light, its un verbalized events don’t really “happen,” and its unnamed “things” seem not to exist. The individual biographies of all bees; a thorough retelling of all the dreams men and women have ever dreamt; the last visions and thought-fragments of the dying after all communication has ceased—these innumerable possible volumes do not belong even in theory to “world history.” We shall see that the truly private is a black hole which miraculously opens out onto other worlds, even “God.” Ordinarily, however, we concede to it at the very most a shadowy or purely technical reality. A joy we cannot share with someone is a sadly aborted joy, an untold joke no joke. After a few seconds or hours, the illuminations of solitude, unrecorded and so leaving no mark in the shared world, vanish into “nothingness.” But on the other hand: a computerized bank statement; an insincere compliment; a breezy, internally inconsistent news report—they are “real.”

The “what” is our golem project: a curious attempt by that something we are to turn itself into a particular human being dwelling in the clear, common light. I have said that the clear, common light is a place of definition, communication, and shared knowing, a place in which all things are understood as this or that within the common medium of English. The golem project is our attempt to consummate the work of Schellingian concentration by forming a distinct and particularized living thing—“ourselves”—which exists in the clear, common light in full possession of the mass and density of true being, and which displays there an identity, life, and story visible to all in that light which shines upon everything that is “real.” Consciousness begins therefore as awareness of its own sad formlessness, of its dispersed, drifting, spectral tenuousness, of itself as a kind of emptiness or hollow potentiality, the purely embryonic and amorphous—right now it is “nothing,” and its one

chance for reality is to become “something” *someday* in the clear, common light. Consciousness seeks first to “concentrate”, to draw itself together, seeks then to crystallize this separate but formless mass into particular living form. By means of this vast and daunting alchemy, it aspires to transmute the obscure, meager haze it is into a fully formed human being: a complete and flawless golem moving in, and fully illuminated by, the clear, common light.

In this work of concentration and crystallization, both being and knowing are of essential importance. We seek first of all to become so that we can most gloriously *be*. Since the clear, common light is the place our golem is to inhabit, it follows that the kind of being to which we aspire is the kind which has currency in that shared world. Our aim, consequently, is not just to be, but to be *something*: a distinct, fully formed human being with a particular, even unique, identity, with specifiable qualities, its own story, a perspicuous “explanation,” a cogent “justification.” Golemic being comes then to be associated with the possibility of verbal identification, definition, and narration, with existence as a particular this or that. To the particularity of my being corresponds—in perfect correlation—the particularity of my name. My unique name—‘Luther’, ‘Luther Askeland’—denotes that unique one-membered and transient genus, that individual, that “human being” I am, or rather: it alludes to and somehow demands or predicts that successfully assembled and animated human being which one day will fill the emptiness I now am.

But through our golem project we aspire to a certain “knowing” as well, to certain events and conditions within consciousness. At the time of my golem project’s consummation, awareness in me, just like my being, will be perfectly concentrated and crystallized. My amorphous and fleeting notions about the world will give way to lucid and unwavering perceptions, in English, of “where I am” and “how things are.” My doubts and confusions will vanish, displaced by Mosaic awareness of “how to be.” But the very heart of this consummating lucidity—and in its contrast to my present bewilderments its most gratifying element—will be my perfected self-knowing. For in my golem project I seek above all two things: that this “I” will concentrate and crystallize into perfected golemic being, and that awareness in me will be similarly transmuted into fully formed self-awareness of that being I have attained. Using my particular language, I shall be able without hesitation to think or say, “This is my story.” In my project’s glorious consummation, I shall rest at last in fully spelled out and henceforth unchanging awareness of “who I am.”

Further, since this knowledge is vouchsafed by declarative sentences and so easily communicated, my future self-knowing can also become “common knowledge.” My attainment of golemic being will therefore be a fully public fact, something visible to all, an attainment recorded and communicable in the clear, common light, that is, in “English.” In the obsession with fame this particular element of the golem project becomes master and arbiter of all else: heedless of what I *am*—or now in thoroughly Berkeleian fashion simply equating being with being perceived—I let all my being consist in, and all self-perception be determined by, whatever perception of me prevails for the moment in the clear, common light.

In these ways we have all become ad hoc magicians—desperate rather than deliberate, strangely unpredictable rather than wise—laboriously drawing or concentrating our dispersed, drifting, vaporous, purely nominal reality—our appalling *unreality*—into a central point. We defend this embryonic mass against the setbacks of fate, the assaults of others, the perverse resistance of things, our own doubts and fleeting capitulations. We pack it together. We try to press out of it all

that is formless, purely private, incommunicable, unknowable, random, unjustifiable, all that is related to “nothingness.” We knead it. With an earnestness sometimes heartrending to contemplate, we do our best to shape it into a human figure, a distinct, fully formed individual human being which *must* be recognized as such in the clear, common light. That successfully created golem will be revealed—someday—as the definitive and permanent referent of my name. It will form the content of my tranquil, wonderfully precise, unerring, lucid self-contemplation, will be the protagonist of my publicly circulated story, the subject of my future eulogy. For through my golem I seek not only to be, but always—at the very least—to have been. Once I have succeeded, at some point in the future, in transforming myself into “something,” I do not want ever again to slip back into the dismal nonbeing of pure formlessness. Somewhere and somehow my golem’s existence must be eternally recorded in the clear, common light. It must be forever true that “I” have been.

\* \* \* \* \*

iii.

Clearly there is something quixotic, even messianic, about the golem project. That human being we are working so hard to create is as it were the purely personal messiah of our own particular history. The golem is the savior who someday will redeem me from the formless nothingness and the vague flux of consciousness as which I begin. My golem constitutes that future reality which will balance out my present unreality and justify my present travail. My identity, once established, will be permanent, for though the world and we ourselves are made of time and change, my definitive golemic being, certified in the clear, common light by my eulogy, will be immune.

Perhaps there are corners in the soul which are never blind to this fantastic aspect. Perhaps the soul always knows, though with a repressed knowing, that its golem project is doomed, that this personalized messiah will never walk as dreamed and desired, that the celebration of this personal paradise or millennium will never take place. It may always secretly realize that all its victories are paper victories, ringing triumphs in the little world of first person and third person declarative sentences, but bizarre and dismal tales of odd squanderings when overheard, barely, in the vastness of the infinite and unchanging. Yet instinct almost always sweeps aside the interjections of intuition and reflection. Our gaze returns, then, to the clear, common light, to the center, the “world”; becoming again the never-ending work of concentration, consciousness—“we”—labors again to clothe its bare name in a thin sheath of reality. In day-to-day life, attention and energy are consumed by one’s golem project; reflection uses itself up in continual assessments and reassessments of the project’s progress. In normal life, consequently, it is only on particular “abnormal” occasions that we are forced out of, or escape, our Rabbi Rava-like magician’s posture. On these occasions we look around us; we consider other forms and nonforms of life. As we do so, that peripheral wasteland which forms the gloomy outer boundaries of consciousness draws closer. The phenomenon most likely to introduce us to these fringes is solitude.

There is a form of solitude—I shall call it “tactical”—in which one withdraws for a time from the agitation and distractions of the shared world, but simply in order to engage more efficiently in a particular aspect or phase of the concentration and crystallization effort. In tactical solitude I work in “private” at making things, doing things, or acquiring skills which will contribute to the assembly



and vivification of my golem, and which therefore will enable me someday to *be* something in the clear, common light. In what might be called “therapeutic solitude”, on the other hand, one withdraws on a more or less planned and regular basis in order to “escape” for a while from the collective world, to heal wounds and regain strength, and so to be able to return afresh to golem-building activities in the clear, common light. Both tactical and therapeutic solitude are instrumental forms of solitude, that is, they are solitudes integrated within and even subordinate to the golem project. Their affiliation is therefore more public than private; in them we carry the public world along with us into our solitude.

But there is another form of solitude—“floating solitude”—in which the tether binding us to our golem project is at least temporarily broken. Floating solitude may be voluntary or the unexpected result of circumstances. I may simply yield to a sudden impulse to do nothing—to drift—or I may find myself in a situation in which I am temporarily cut off from all possibility of working on my golem. Whatever the cause, the soul now has its back turned to those sheltered coves and inlets in which our golem projects, our “lives,” normally pass; it is now drifting towards an open sea. Characteristic of floating solitude is a marked lessening of the hold exerted on us by the clear, common light, by all our shared knowing. All our words, which normal consciousness experiences as perfectly coincident with things and with *This*, detach themselves and rest in our hands, suddenly inert and unexplained, suddenly and uncannily *de trop*. There quickens in us an embryonic awareness of previously unnoticed possibilities, of remote horizons and virgin worlds. But what is equally characteristic of this third form of solitude is the precipitousness with which discomfort and even the beginnings of panic can set in. Why?

Let us reflect again on the Schellingian dictum and on the golem project. Consciousness, “normal life,” is golem project, the ongoing work of concentration and crystallization. But in floating solitude this arduous, even Sisyphean labor is suspended and a reverse process of dispersal, of volatilization, sets in. In solitude all the clear delimitations, precise contours, firm anchorings, secure knowings, and hard-won identities of the clear, common light begin losing their cogency; that alien environment in which awareness now finds itself—solitude’s—is disturbingly imprecise, shadowy, formless, is chaos’ familiar and welcoming kin. Simultaneously private and boundless, it lacks all definition, all measure. In this way the inviting open sea of floating solitude now begins to manifest itself as that gloomy fringe which always lines consciousness. But the particular sensations which penetrate most deeply, and which may trigger the first still governable upsurges of panic, have to do with one’s golem, the projected magical result and the sole *raison d’être* of the life of concentration. For now that awareness is adrift in floating solitude, the work of concentration and crystallization is suspended. Consciousness has begun to assimilate to the sprawling, seemingly edgeless fringes, thus reversing the concentration process. Awareness is no longer crystallized in this or that language’s declarative and interrogative sentences. The clear, common light, dwarfed by solitude’s unnerving, alluring immensities, shrinks to an isolated dim light seen within the vague outline of departed shores. In floating solitude all those factors which have given birth to my golem project, and which have nourished it, explained it, and justified it, are now in the process of being dissolved.

The inevitable and alarming consequence of all this—the source of consciousness’ incipient panic—is evident: all its laboriously created life now begins to drain out of that pathetic,

half-finished golem. The golem, the creation of which has been our reason for being, is now losing its shape and mass. Its energy, always erratic at best, has evaporated. Its gestures have no precision or decipherable meaning, its halting, explosive movements no apparent purpose. The look in its eyes, no longer even hinting at something human or animal, is the uncanny look of an errant, impossibly doomed machine. What is now disintegrating is my attempt to turn myself into a particular, identifiable, knowable, self-luminous human being dwelling in the clear, common light. What is now coming apart is my distinct individual reality as this or that, my identity, my own attainment of being and knowing, my half-finished biography, my eventual eternally valid definition—all the form, substance, story, explanation, and justification with which I have tried to answer the question—to fill the unnerving vacancy—which is my name. And all that remains is something alien to the clear, common light, to verbal comprehensions, and to all familiar forms of being and of being conscious; all that remains is something indefinite, a diffuse and formless something that bears a disturbing resemblance to “nothing.” It is easy to understand why we, faced with such auguries and reminders of our own “nothingness”, soon turn our back on solitude and return to company, even bad company, and the shared world. Now we can resume the familiar work of trying to turn ourselves into “something”; now our golem, temporarily disabled by solitude, can be revived and reactivated by a fresh infusion of “normal” life.

In floating solitude we usually gain no more than a passing glimpse of the fringes. Having drifted out into the purely private, we soon get our fill, and usually it is easy to find our way back to the clear, common light and the life of concentration. Consequently, in normal life our most serious encounters with the fringes occur, not in floating solitude, but in that most unwelcome solitude we call “despair.” In despair, as in floating solitude, consciousness inhabits regions far from the clear, common light, and its normal life of concentration and golem-making is suspended. But in despair that severance from normalcy is neither casual nor voluntary, and despair cannot be remedied simply by returning to company. Instead, despair is an involuntary, prolonged, infernal solitude in which the soul is banished from the clear, common light and locked, seemingly without remedy, within the purely private. “Depression” extrudes an invisible, oddly immaterial, impenetrable barrier which isolates us from the clear, common light, from “the world.” Looking through it at the very obverse of our own despairing condition, we observe—without hope—the successful and soon-to-succeed golem projects of the others. Contemplating those remote others from the gloomy fringes into which we have been cast, we imagine their lucid minds, their concentrated and crystallized knowledge of how things are, how to be, and who they are, their “self” possession. But now all contact is impossible—they and we no longer live in the same “world.” And in ours—the world of despair—it is as if we are forever locked in the truly private as in a hell, both torture chamber and asylum, where agony and madness must at last coalesce.

It follows that despair is marked by forms of golem sickness much more acute than those encountered in floating solitude. In despair it becomes a question whether our now motionless golem will ever stir again, whether that look of clumsily, earnestly *trying* to be human will ever return to those errant vacancies which once almost were eyes. Indeed, we might define despair as the complete collapse of the golem project. In despair consciousness throws off the exhausting, unavailing, no longer bearable work of concentration; it contemplates—it may even begin resigning itself to—the image of destiny as defeat. In despair we recognize that our golem will never perform

its perfect, messianic walk in front of the others and ourselves. We acknowledge that our dream of magical self-creation—of making ourselves into and then *being* a particular someone, a completed golem visible to all in the clear, common light—will never be realized; indeed, now that we are relinquishing it, it seems clear to us that the entire project has obviously been a fiasco, a transparently doomed and misbegotten venture, from the very beginning.

These recognitions and capitulations come to a head in the general symptom of despair: the disintegration of the “I,” that is, the melting away of all the golemic being and knowing “I” have been feigning, both to others and to myself, to possess or to be in the process of acquiring. For now it is vividly and painfully clear to me that all the others enjoy concrete, individual definition and reality, but I do not. Illuminated by the clear, common light on the other side of the barrier, the others already are “somebody” or at the very least are in the process of making “something” of themselves. As for me, I neither am nor am becoming anything in particular, and so the dispersed, vague, chimerical quality of my spectral nonbeing hovers in pathetic contrast to the others’ concentrated and invulnerable density. All I have is that name I have always had, that empty space, that mere shell which clings to me more and more as an accusation, the bitter-tasting antithesis to my sorely needed vindication. I am nothing, or it might be said that I exist, but simply on a grammatical technicality. For this purely nominal existence of mine lacks all definition and distinct particularity, all palpable form. The one thing I am is the failure to have become anything, my one quality the absence of all qualities. As this emptiness I pass through time, but I accumulate no story, no destiny, no justification. I now am, and shall forever remain, just “nothing.”

Further: my knowing, just like my being, is bereft of concentrated substance, of crystallized form. All my embryonic, phantasmal, continually fluctuating beliefs, opinions, and certainties are now dissolved in despair’s limitless and homogeneous emptiness. I am all too aware—on the other side of the barrier—of the teeming, unhesitating assertions of the others. There in the perfect lucidity of the clear, common light, they all have won clear understandings of “how things are” and “who they are,” but I know nothing. Severed from things, my futile words circle aimlessly. And consciousness, transformed by that self-dissolution which is despair, is no longer concentrating consciousness or awareness illuminated and formed by the clear, common light, but a formless emptiness, a diffuse, floating, totally fluid subjectivity. It is a nothing which knows only its own—“my”—nothingness. Or it is something like madness, for madness is no longer to belong, no longer to share in the self-evident knowings which, by creating the clear, common light, fix and illumine “the world.” Madness is: unlike all the others, no longer even to know “where” or “who” I am.

Though the process is longer and more arduous, we usually find our way out of despair as we do out of the other solitudes. Sooner or later the day comes when we return, with a measure or simulacrum of restored optimism, to our magician’s work of golem-creation in the clear, common light. What matters here, however, are the larger perspectives solitude’s welcome or unwelcome deflections open. For now that we have examined normal—that is, concentrating and crystallizing—consciousness, and have explored some ways in which drifting solitude and despair carry us out into realms outside and alien to the clear, common, light, we have in our view those gloomy boundary areas of consciousness which figure so prominently in the paradoxical geography of the Other Paradox.

\* \* \* \* \*

iv.

What, then, are those fringes? What are we to make of the darkness which enshrouds them, the specters which haunt them, the debris which litters them, the incessant aura of despair, craziness, failure, and abandonment which suffuses them? Their dismal imagery proclaims that they hover on our periphery as the appalling antithesis of golemic millennium, as the embodiment of the worst of all possible conditions and fates. They are the “other” place, the dark obverse and negative of the substantial, luminous world of the clear, common light. Bereft as they are of all golemic qualities, they are the netherworld where all that is formless, unquantifiable, unspecifiable, and nameless—all that has failed to achieve particular being and knowing—dwells submerged in utter unreality and oblivion, the most unbearable and unthinkable of fates.

More than anything else, the fringes are our worst “nightmare,” but at the same time the following is also significant: we cannot easily dismiss this gloomiest of visions as we usually can dismiss a gratuitous, seemingly irrelevant bad dream. For as floating solitude and despair in particular suggest, the relation between the fringes and consciousness is not just circumstantial and fleeting. Indeed, the fringes are a visualization of my golem project’s origins, what I originally am. They are the dark, formless waters, the chaos—something prior to all particular being, saying, and knowing—I am struggling to mold into spatial, temporal, verbal form, that is, into a “human being” endowed with a narrable “my life.” They are that original nothingness I will always be unless I can concentrate this nothingness and then crystallize it into something distinct and specifiable, something that can be talked and thought about in English. They are the cipher, the hollow name, which is all I am until the day comes when, having achieved genuine being and knowing, I shall take my place in the clear, common light. They are what I am prior to becoming “someone,” that is, a publicly recognized focal point of observation, definition, description, and explanation, the achiever and owner of a particular story, eulogy, and vindication. They are what precedes, surrounds, and seems to oppose the clear, common light, are a sprawling, formless awareness not yet concentrated and crystallized into specific perceptions; they are the embryo’s privacy, a dark obliviousness alien to light which the light has not banished.

All this means: the fringes are the dreary, unpromising raw material of my golem. It is this nothingness which I am paradoxically, astonishingly attempting to distill into a fully formed human being dancing its millennium—“my” millennium—in the clear, common light. As long as I remain in the light and in normalcy, my dream is that someday not one single shred of that original nothingness will cling to my golem—whatever I cannot concentrate and crystallize into golemic being and knowing I shall cut away. Just like a magician I shall be able to pass a hoop in all directions around the woman or man I have made.

Further, the fringes are not only that nothingness which is my beginning. They are—so solitude and despair in particular lead me to realize or suspect—what I still *am*. For the fact is that normal consciousness’ golem project is always a work “in progress.” I never *am* that completed someone, am never “finished.” My golem’s millennial, always merely prospective dance never achieves its glorious and blissful consummation: actual entry into the present tense of my unfolding story, of what right now in fact is only my bleak, contentless non-story. Consequently, I still *am* no

more than that beginning, am even at this point only the raw material of a still non-existent golem. And still further, my forebodings and dark intuitions—and, for that matter, the most detached, “rational” calculation—suggest to me that the fringes are also my future, my destiny. For my golem’s dance—its celebration of that glorious moment when I at last have become nothing but indubitable being and lucidly crystallized knowing—will always “pend.” I shall remain the aching unreality and inchoate awareness I was and am.

The fringes are the nothingness which is my beginning, are the absence I now am insofar as I am not yet a particular defined something or someone, are my eternal lack of being, definition, and vindication. The fringes are my future, my doom. I find in them the entirety—the Aristotelian beginning, middle, and end—of that most intimate and unwelcome tragedy which is now conveying me without mercy or even attention through, and will soon cast me out of, time. I have called them the fringes because when normal consciousness eyes them at all, it glances towards them as towards something remote and unreal, something peripheral, a phantasmagorical Hades glimpsed in an odd moment of pure privacy. For it they are a sideshow, something alien to and dwarfed by the lucid world of defined, particularized being and knowing, by “the light.”

Now we see, however, that the so-called fringes are not mere reflections of irrelevant and passing anxieties. They are, instead, the clear, common light’s most formidable alternate and antithesis. In that profound dualism we now begin to glimpse, the clear, common light and the fringes loom as two great contraries. Indeed, it would be easy to draw this revaluation of the two regions out into a full reversal. For the more we look, the more the fringes appropriate to themselves the aura and weight of actuality, of truth. They are the nothingness, the “not yet,” and the non-advent of millennium—the oblivion—which are the reality of my past, present, and future. But on the other hand, the clear, common light with its golem projects is always the merely possible, a place of plans, drawn-out waitings, and unrealized expectations, a kind of diversion and self-forgetting, the projection of consciousness into an eternally absent and unreal someday. It is not the fringes, but rather normal consciousness and normal life—so the solitudes begin to persuade us—that is phantasmagoric and adventitious, a spectral something woven from unrealized cravings and fantastic anticipations, mere “show.”

For normal consciousness, the fringes’ nebulous gloom, and the darker shadows of those paralyzed or awkwardly moving spirits which inhabit it, are only curious silhouette and distant horizon. Now they have become all too relevant. It is they, rather than the future’s dancing golem or my current golem-in-progress, which show forth what I actually am. For the desolate landscape of the fringes and the shadowy figures which haunt it form a tableau displaying my inner self and actual condition. Their erratic, seemingly pointless gestures and movements act out my substanceless non-story. They are my myriad doubles, intimate and unnerving soul-portraits. The empty, formless, sprawling immensity they inhabit is my own vague and diffuse unreality, is the absence in me of crystallized substance, is my nonbeing, my eternal “not yet.” That darkness is my own unformed, uncircumscribed, contentless, dolorously unilluminated consciousness.

Shades are said to be spirits of the dead which refuse to depart because they still long for life. In a more intimate way they embody our own dark perception that we do not yet possess *being*, and that *life*, for us, has not yet begun. Buddhism’s hungry ghosts suffer because their huge, ravenous bellies ache beneath necks so thin that not the tiniest morsel of food can pass through. Their

relentless hunger is our own unsatisfied need for the actuality and life that are currently denied us; the ghosts themselves vividly exhibit the plight—nonbeing longing in vain for being—which is our essence. Gaunt, pallid figures, apparitions of lunacy which hunger for knowing as their hungry ghost counterparts long for being, pace the fringes' gloom with an uncannily resolute aimlessness. Their halts and grimaces, the cracked grins, the empty, unseeing eyes straining erratically into horizonless vacancy are a mirror showing us that drifting flotsam, that emptiness, that very inability to know or formulate “who we are” to which we give the name ‘consciousness’. Everywhere in the fringes one sees scattered heaps of debris, the inert remains of rudimentary golems inevitably abandoned at some stage of their Sisyphean “progress.” They are the palpable results—are all that remains—of our earlier attempts to achieve being and knowing in the clear, common light. They—rather than the imagined eulogy which will fix our eternal identity and story—prefigure the bleak destiny of the golem project we now are.

I conclude: the fringes are our very worst nightmare, one in which to our apparent misfortune we are all too deeply and intimately involved. For the fringes are—simultaneously, and most precisely, vividly, and appallingly—the image of two conditions: the worst possible condition we can imagine, and our subliminally perceived actual condition. It is this peculiar conjunction of dreadfulness and intimacy which accounts for our characteristic attitudes and responses to them. It explains our customary pretence that the fringes are something negligible, scarcely real. It explains why, in normal life, we resolutely banish “the fringes” to places at or even beyond the edges of awareness, places remote from the luminous “center.” It also explains why as we approach them only in thought, our response quickly elevates from unease to alarm to horror.

What we require or think we require—what that boundless void within us seems to crave—is the very antithesis of the fringes: the golemic being and knowing of the clear, common light, that is, concentrated and defined reality, a life story, a lucidly concentrated and crystallized consciousness organized into secure comprehendings of how things are, how to be, and where and who I am. Our need, massive and compelling, is for individual existence which can be clearly seen, lucidly known, unambiguously told. This is the “ideal,” and in normal life it is the attempt to achieve this still unrealized goal—our golem project—upon which we eagerly seek to focus our own and the others’ attention.

But our reality is the very opposite, and it is the fringes which display it to us. In a mirror they show us the gulf which separates us from the condition to which we aspire, show us that our actual condition is the very condition we most want to avoid. They show us the nothingness which is our beginning, the vacancy which is our present state, the future’s oblivion. Our horror is horror at our own appalling birthright, at ongoing life’s perennially empty “not yet,” at approaching doom. The fringes show us that one “progress” which is the mindless and ironclad syllogism of our defeat. They are the hell which is the searingly, intolerably real counterpart to our golem’s unreal, fantastic millennium. We contemplate them in horror because to dare look at them is to be shown, in the sudden, intimate dismay of the closed door and confining darkness, the true radiograph of our being, an X-ray in whose devastating vacancies we discern nothing at all. The fringes were and are the chaos, the formless, dark waters from which we are struggling to emerge. To sense that we are still encompassed by those waters, to feel undercurrents drawing us out and down from the land and light, to guess that our name, the one pale omen of possible reality we possess, will soon vanish into

the depths—this is to feel close around us the ever more constricted and inescapable embrace of our patient, infernal undoing, is to learn at last how it feels to be and to know oneself to be a specter, one of those shades or hungry ghosts.

\* \* \* \* \*

## Chapter 2: The Paradox

I have portrayed normal consciousness as concentrating-crystallizing consciousness subliminally and anxiously aware of remote “fringes.” And I have portrayed normal life as a golem project, the life of attempted golem creation in the clear, common light. Normalcy, however, is always juxtaposed to or even surrounded by its antithesis, the abnormal. We have already observed how consciousness can find itself, either by choice or involuntarily, in drifting solitude or the solitude of despair. But beyond this, at any time any number of powers can intervene, seizing consciousness and then transporting it, with or without its consent, out of normalcy. In a way already familiar to the Platonic Paradox, for example, you may be seized without warning by Eros. Perhaps you all at once realize—because you are alone in unfamiliar mountainous terrain or not alone in a dark corridor—that your life is in danger. Or in a condition already marked by exhaustion, bewilderment, and dark apprehensions of finality, you and the others are herded out of the crowded, foul boxcar into the camp. At once normalcy and one’s golem project are forgotten, and now consciousness, seized by elemental forces, attends to just one thing: the attainment of the beloved; the identification and assessment of the danger; the despairing attempt just to hold on, somehow, to that dubious lone remaining possession, life.

Normalcy, which is always encompassed by the abnormal and subject to its welcome or unwelcome interventions, is also relative. What is “normal” here and now, is not necessarily the norm elsewhere and at other times. After tales like those of Rabbi Rava first appeared in the Talmud a millennium and a half ago, the golem remained for centuries an object of speculation and fascination within Jewish esoteric thought. Its emergence as a theme within Western culture in general in the early nineteenth century, that is, the time of Schelling, suggests that these legends resonate in a special way for “modern consciousness.” Why? I hypothesize it is because we moderns are related in a unique and most profound way to the notion of the attempted creation of human beings by human beings. For modern consciousness, unlike any other, the golem project possesses an absolute urgency because golemic being and knowing are the only kind of being and knowing we can imagine. For us, not to attain concentrated, particularized being and knowing is to be and to know *nothing*. Tradition, however, has recognized and even preferred other forms. Its keenest, subtlest, most considered perceptions of the highest, most desirable forms of being and of awareness are found in its inquiries into that which is supremely “real.” In these vast, collective, often millenia-long explorations of “God,” “*brahman*,” “the One,” “the *Tao*,” “emptiness,” “suchness,” etc., we encounter our species’ most sustained effort to grasp what absolute perfection might be, and how we might then attain, perceive, or otherwise relate to it. To examine these perceptions is, simultaneously, to chart the remaining unexplored half of the Other Paradox, for it is precisely in what we dismiss as “the fringes” that tradition paradoxically finds both being’s and knowing’s highest, most desirable forms.

According to tradition, what kind of being are we to attribute to supreme reality or a perfect being? What sort of being does God or *brahman* enjoy, or suchness exhibit? For Augustine God alone possesses true being. The divine “you” which Augustine addresses throughout the *Confessions* is “that which truly is.” It is “being in a supreme degree,” and the theologian adds at



once that God is “immutable” (Augustine, 124, 8). Among other things Aquinas attributes to God infinity, immutability, “absolute simplicity” (Aquinas, 28,32). It is a given for Shankara and other Vedantins that *brahman*, which alone is real, is *kutasthanitya*, that is, “changeless and constant.” The heroes of legend are entwined with events, story, and heroic “life,” and are exposed to the ever-present possibility of glory and tragedy, but the highest imaginable form of being, for both the Christian theologian and the Vedantic philosopher, is a being outside and beyond time. It follows that this most perfect being has no history, no story or biography. Indeed, since actions are events in time and involve change, a perfect being will have no connection with them, will “do” nothing. According to Plotinus, consequently, the One neither acts nor moves (Plotinus, 211). Eriugena writes that God “neither acts nor is acted upon,” Eckhart that God is “ohne Werk,” that is “without works” (O’Meara, 91; *DP*, 408). It is a cardinal tenet of the Vedanta that *brahman* is non-acting (*akriya*: see, for example, *BSBh*, I, 33). Unlike “the others” concentrating and crystallizing their golems in the clear, common light, and like us in despair, God is not “doing anything” or “going anywhere,” and quite simply has no “life,” or if we choose to call God’s being a life, it is a life in which “nothing happens,” an existence utterly without change. Indeed, if things did begin to “happen” and God or *brahman* acted or changed in any way, thereby beginning to have a life and a story, that could only signal a most unwelcome deterioration, a dramatic fall from its state of perfect, unchanging, actionless, eventless, absolutely simple being.

To possess perfect being—so the tradition further—is to have no identity, no definition, no determinate “form.” That something we are concentrating from nothing in the clear, common light will not remain an amorphous mass, but must crystallize into a defined human being possessing a unique combination of story and qualities. In that light we define what something is by first categorizing it within a genus and then differentiating it from that genus’ other members. But according to Aquinas God cannot be defined in this way, for “neither is there in Him composition of genus and difference, nor of subject and accident,” and so God is “absolutely undetermined” (Aquinas, 32, 68). Medieval philosophy’s reference to God—like Spinoza’s reference to substance—as “infinite” entails the denial of “any kind of determination and description” (Wolfson, I, 135). We cannot attribute either genus or species to *brahman*, and as Shankara points out, “that which is not a member of any genus and so on cannot be indicated by words” (*Upad*, I, 18,30; Potter, 193). Somewhat more loosely than by such strict definition, we identify and explain what something is by delineating its attributes. But it is a commonplace in the Vedanta that *brahman* has none—this absolutely perfect being is *nirguna*, “without qualities,” and consequently *arupa*, “formless.” The Christian way of negation, first formulated by Dionysius, consists in the systematic denial of all the qualities we might conceivably ascribe to God, including life, goodness, divinity, existence, etc. For Eckhart, consequently, God is a “something” which is neither “this” nor “that” (*DP*, 164). Only that which has crystallized into a particular form possesses definition and specifiable identity, but Plotinus says of the One that it is “without form”; it has “no definition, no limit” (Plotinus, 231). Lao Tzu portrays the *Tao* as “formless” and “without shape.” Its condition is not that of something concentrated and crystallized, but that of the Un-carved Block, a pure given no one has yet “improved” (Waley, 174, 193, 178).

A being which possesses perfect being will not be amenable to verbal definition and cannot be verbally described. Can it be so much as identified? Can it be named? If God, *brahman*, the

*Tao*, or suchness is unconcentrated and uncrystallized, cannot be categorized, and is entirely devoid of specifiable form or attributes, it is not delimited in any way and so does not exist as a distinct, specifiable individual. God's being, writes Eckhart, is not individualized being as this or that, but being pure and simple (*DP*, 192, 325). Since God's existence is not delimited or particularized in any way, but is the pure unqualified act of being, Aquinas quotes with approval Damascene's characterization of such "being itself" as "an infinite and indeterminate sea of substance" (Aquinas, 123). Indeed, Aquinas argues that the name "He who is" (*Qui est*) is the "most proper" name of God precisely because of its indeterminacy. For that name includes no hint of particularized "determinate" being. Since it "determines no mode of being, but is related indeterminately to all," it can name that "infinite ocean of substance" (Aquinas, 123).

Proceeding from the reflection that perfect being is other than and incompatible with specifiable, definable individual existence, it is possible, however, to arrive at other views concerning the "divine names." Indeed, "He who is" is not a name in the conventional way, for the field of reference of names is the cohort of individual persons and things we designate, by those names, as individuals distinct from, opposed to, and delimited by other individuals. But since the existence of *brahman*, God, the *Tao*, suchness, etc., is not individual existence, the use of proper names in relation to them is inappropriate and misleading. Aquinas himself affirms that the names we apply to God "fail to express His mode of being" (Aquinas, 99). Others, having registered how the conventions and assumptions of naming belie the nature of perfect being, have drawn the obvious conclusion. Dionysius plainly says that God has no name (*PsD*, 217). Eckhart tells his listeners that they should not approach God "as God." They should seek him as he truly is—that is, as "without a name"—in a place free of and prior to all names, a place "where he has *no* name" (*DP*, 198, 348, 385). Ibn al-'Arabi asserts that "the Essence has no name" (Chittick, 62). The origin of all things, that from which "Heaven and Earth sprang" is—so Lao Tzu—"the Nameless" (Waley, 141). Ashvaghosha writes that "all things from the beginning transcend all forms of verbalization, description, and conceptualization." What are we to make then of that most crucial term and name 'suchness'? Far from naming an individual entity, it is "the limit of verbalization wherein a word is used to put an end to words" (Ashvaghosha, 33).

Traditional texts repeatedly affirm that perfect being cannot be identified, defined, described, or named. As the *Mandukya Upanishad* says of the *Atman*, it is—among many other things—"unseen," "ungraspable," and "without distinguishing characteristics." Consequently, we cannot think it, nor can we designate it or point to it with words (Hume, 392). The Buddha, most truly, is "not an object and cannot be contacted," is "neither seen, heard, distinguished, nor known" (*VNS*, 92). All these particular perceptions come together in one inclusive perception of the absolutely nonverbal nature of perfect being, its foreignness to and incompatibility with all sensory and verbal signs, its habitation of some other, purely nonlinguistic realm. And since existence within our shared world is existence as nameable, verbally identifiable, definable, and describable being, perfect being is "invisible" in the clear, common light. Its perfect being—beyond speech, beyond thought, incommunicable—is purely private and "elsewhere."

Here, too, tradition boldly articulates such sweeping perspectives. Affirming the incommensurability which obtains between words and perfect being, Dionysius generalizes that God is "beyond all speech"; "there is no affirmation we can make of him, nothing we can deny of him"

(PsD, 215, 218-219). In these lines Dionysius echoes Plotinus, who had already referred to the One as “a principle not to be conveyed by any sound,” just as Plotinus reaffirms Plato’s view that the highest reality does not admit of verbal expression (Plotinus, 231; Louth, 13). Aquinas asserts that God’s substance is “incommunicable” (Aquinas, 123). According to Ibn al-‘Arabi, “reflection upon the Essence of God is impossible” (Chittick, 62). Neither speech nor thought relate—so Candrakirti—to “the true nature of things” (Candrakirti, 178). For a Vedantin the cornerstone of all knowledge consists in the two or three Upanishadic “supreme sentences” (*mahavakyas*) such as “That art thou” which proclaim the Self’s identity with that absolute perfection which is *brahman*; but the Vedantin Sureshvara paradoxically defines the meaning of these Supreme Sentences as “what no sentence can mean” (Kocmarek, 28, my translation). This disparity between perfect being and the forms of golemic being visible in the clear, common light looms as well in traditional imagery. Plotinus’ famous phrase portrays soul’s union with perfect being as a purely private “flight of the alone to the Alone.” And for Dionysius God dwells in a realm soul reaches only after leaving behind “everything that can be known by the normal processes of mind.” To enter it is to enter a fringes-like “divine darkness” (PsD, 209).

Tradition’s perfect being—unbounded, indeterminate, unsayable, unimaginable, nonverbal—is the antithesis of concentrated and crystallized golemic being, that is, being which is accessible to and as it were exists *in* verbal perception. Such perfect being is imperceptible in the clear, common light; it is a radically different, utterly nongolemic “substance” which normal consciousness cannot discern. A way to bring home this absolute disparity—given our habitual tendency to equate being with particularized, describable, limited being in the clear, common light—is to deny outright that God, *brahman*, etc. “exists.” Such a denial is in fact necessarily included within Dionysius’ comprehensive denial, referred to above, of *any* affirmation we might make about God. Consequently, just as God is neither truth nor goodness nor Godhead, so is he “none of the things that have being” (PsD, 217). In India it is a Vedantic commonplace that being cannot be attributed to the supreme *atman-brahman* (*Upad*, I, 13, 20; 19,19). In the West the paradoxical denial of existence to perfect being has its roots in Plato’s previously mentioned references to the supreme realm “beyond being.” In Plotinus the practice evolves into a straightforward denial of being in relation to the One. Indeed, since the One is a principle not to be conveyed by any sound, our best description of it “carries only the denial of particular being” (Plotinus, 231). Having entered the Christian tradition with Dionysius, the denial of God’s existence surfaces again in Eriugena and Eckhart. In one of the sermons just referred to, Eckhart describes God as bared not only of all names, but of being as well. His position in the *Parisian Questions* is that God has no existence (*PQP*, 48).

To ensure that we do not confuse perfect being with that individuated golemic being we habitually associate with the term, one further step, going even beyond denial of a perfect being’s existence, remains. It is a method of reversal which attributes terms diametrically opposed to ‘being’ to that supremely perfect reality. Applying this method, the Kabbalist David ben Abraham Ha-Laban depicts En-Sof—that is, the Infinite, or God—as “Nothing” (Scholem, 25). According to Eriugena, the Nothing from which God creates the world is God himself (Eriugena, III, 173). Similarly for the Madhyamika Buddhist, emptiness is the ultimate principle and term, the true nature of all things, the sole reality. But at the same time, we must not “take our stand” on emptiness or

imagine that we perceive anything by means of that verbal sign. Instead, we must realize that emptiness is itself “empty” (Candrakirti, 150; *LSPW*, 144).

\* \* \* \* \*

ii.

To be, but not to be anything in particular; to exist as diffuse, amorphous, unbounded, wholly “indeterminate” substance, neither concentrated nor crystallized; to have no history, no life, no definition, no intelligible identity or character; not yet to have become anything or anyone in particular; to lack individual existence; to be no genuine identifiable “I”, and so to have none of the things which make for reality in the clear, common light; to be, in one’s dark, innermost reality, nameless; to be more like “nothing” than like “something”—we can already glimpse how perfect being, traditionally conceived, contrasts with the golemic being we seek in the clear, common light, and how on the other hand it bears an uncanny resemblance to our own wretched existence at the fringes as we picture it in the extremities of floating solitude and despair.

But we can attain a complete view of these alignments, and so of the constituent elements of the Other Paradox, only after first taking a look at knowing as well. For it is with knowing and awareness—with “consciousness”—as with being. That golem we seek to create and become is a magical creature in which knowing as well as being has been concentrated and crystallized. My golem—that future, messianic “I”—will be a fully-formed human being from whom all shreds of nothingness have been pruned away. This realization of my “being” is an event members of both publics will observe and confirm. And corresponding to this open recognition in the clear, common light there will arise within me a perfectly concentrated and crystallized awareness, for it is also an essential element of my golem project that I achieve a particularized knowing and self-knowing to which no obscurities cling. This knowledge will include my culminating, fully crystallized comprehension of “how things are” and “how to be,” of my own particular and eternally valid story, of “who I am.” I shall be able to contemplate, and to communicate, this knowledge, cast in the radiance and precision of English sentences. In the climactic moment in which, having attained true being, my golem dances, that knowing in me will also have become final and complete.

Such golemic awareness, a perfecting of the fragmentary and often wavering knowledge I now have, contrasts sharply with that fringe awareness which can invade consciousness in conditions of floating solitude and despair. Then the hard won knowings I have been concentrating and crystallizing begin to fade; all those ripening verities, our embryonic comprehension of ourselves and of this place, turn to haze; words lose their hold on us, and English begins to fall out of us and we out of it. Consciousness now has neither form nor contents. I have said that in normal life we associate the fringes with danger, despair, craziness, and defeat. Yet it is fringe awareness, not that concentrated and crystallized golemic consciousness, which more closely resembles conceptions of perfect knowing which long held sway.

Of the common threads running through many traditional delineations of the most perfect condition consciousness conceivably might attain, let us note three. Such an awareness is, first, immutable, nontemporal, “eternal.” Samkhya’s vastly influential conception of the purusha as absolutely pure, undivided, “liberated” consciousness includes the important claim that the purusha

is *kutastha*, that is, unchangeable, immovable (Zimmer, 285). Since it is none other than *atman-brahman*, the pure consciousness—*cit, samvit, caitanyam*—of the Shivaite Tantras, is similarly unchanging (Woodroffe, 26). Padma Sambhava refers to that supreme reality he calls the “One Mind” as “imperishable,” “eternal,” and “timeless” (*TBGL*, 211, 230). For Aquinas God’s knowledge, just like his substance, is altogether invariable and immutable. God does not know things “successively in time,” but “in eternity above time,” “simultaneously” (Aquinas, 157, 140).

Second, awareness in its perfection is perfectly simple; it is not divided, differentiated, or compounded in any way. Like *brahman*, Samkhya’s *purusha* is qualified by no attributes. It is without parts or division, “utterly simple” (Zimmer, 285; Larson, 81). Of *brahman* Shankara asserts that “simple non-differentiated intelligence constitutes its nature” (*BSBh*, II, 157). Padma Sambhava’s One Mind is “without duality,” “uncompounded,” and “transcendent over differentiation”; it is “void of quality as the sky” (*TBGL*, 211, 230). For Asanga it is axiomatic that consciousness in its very highest form is *nirvikalpajnana*, that is, “undifferentiated cognition” (*BTh*, 253). Aquinas describes divine awareness as “one simple act of knowledge,” and Copleston elaborates: “God’s intellect is identical with His undivided essence and cannot receive determinations or any sort of composition” (Aquinas, 128; Copleston, II, ii., 79).

Third, a perfected awareness is unbounded, formless, “infinite.” Huang Po refers to the One Mind as “completely detached from form” and as “omnipresent” (HP, 33, 35). The pure consciousness of the Shaiva Tantras is *aparicchinna* and *arupa*, unlimited and formless. Padma Sambhava refers to the One Mind as “without form.” (*TBGL*, 213). Like many others, Asanga evokes both the pure simplicity of perfect knowing and its transcendence of all limits of measure and form by referring to it as like the infinite sky, or “like space.” (Asanga, 245). For Aquinas that infinite spiritual being we more or less properly call “God” necessarily possesses “infinite intelligence.” (Copleston, II, ii., 76).

Such accounts, gazed upon as the vague and inert objects of our desultory contemplation, may seem innocuous, may seem even to be alluding with theological extravagance and imprecision to that perfected golemic consciousness we ourselves hope, someday, to possess. But if we then begin to relate these traditional descriptions more rigorously and concretely to what counts as knowing in the clear, common light, and to that vehicle—language—upon which all actual and ideal golemic knowledge depends, that casual impression must yield. It begins then to come home to us that our “perfect knowing” and perfect knowing traditionally conceived in fact constitute two incommensurable ways of knowing, two antithetical and mutually exclusive forms of consciousness. One is saturated by, dependent on, and unthinkable *without*—and the other entirely disengaged *from*—language. One is a concentrating and crystallizing consciousness dwelling within and organized by sensory and verbal signs, the other an undelimited and formless consciousness from which all signs are necessarily excluded.

Language, and so all our actual and anticipated knowings in the clear, common light, are permeated, first of all, by temporality, for we assign each event to its particular spot in “time”—in a past, present, or future “tense”—just as we locate all things within “space.” My life until “now,” my golem project’s origin and evolution, its current operations and manifestations, my golem’s impending triumphant walk—all were, are, or will be events in time. My story, framed by time and assuming the form of temporal succession, is the progressive narrative disclosure of those timebound

events. But for that traditional perfect knowing—immutable, nontemporal, “eternal”—there are no verb tenses, no before and after, no present opposed to and delimited by past and future, no “time” within which events might occur and destinies unfold. And where there is neither event nor sequence of events, there is no sequential narrative mimicking that sequence, no “story” to tell, no “my life” even to contemplate.

Second, language, and so all our customary and anticipated knowings, are also marked by differentiation and multiplicity—indeed, differentiation is the very hallmark and wellspring of their formation, is their essence. Linguistic meaning is crystallized by separation and opposition—above all by the binary separation, opposition, and reciprocal delimitation—of ‘is’ and ‘is not’, ‘here’ and ‘not here’, ‘this’ and ‘that’, ‘true’ and ‘false’, ‘good’ and ‘bad’, ‘I’ and ‘the world’, etc. These polarities, and the myriad finer gradations of opposition into which they in turn subdivide, create or disclose a differentiated world of particular events in time, and of specified, delimited persons and things in space. On them rest all our verbal perceivings of “how things are,” “what is happening,” “what has happened,” “what or who that is,” “how to be,” and “who I am.”

But a perfectly simple, wholly undifferentiated “awareness” cannot be separated into multiple perceptions or contain a multiplicity of signs. It will not distinguish, and so will not even perceive, the entities, events, and conditions which form the seemingly self-evident objects or focal points of all our knowings. In that singular condition which is that of an absolutely perfect consciousness or of God’s knowing, there will be no distinctions between past, present, and future, between present and absent, this thing or person and that thing or person. There will be no “how things are” standing in opposition to how they are not, and so no verbal perceiving of “how things are” either “eternally” or “now.” There will be no nouns or verbs, no grammar or vocabulary, no questions, answers, or propositions of any kind. In that supreme awareness, free of all discriminations of subject and object, there is no pronoun ‘I’ and so no perception of anything as “not-I” or as “other than I.” There are no immutable verbal truths to contemplate, no “the world” or “human beings” to observe, no perfect or eternally divine “self” to enjoy, just as there is no temporal “I” or “my life” which that divine consciousness might recall, contemplate, or describe.

Whether it occurs “in reality” or only “in our minds,” differentiation engenders the variable manifold of time and space. It calls forth and identifies the particular individual persons, things, and events—all limited, transient, and bound to a particular time and place—which fill that world. The wild profusion of verbal distinctions, and so of particular entities and events, is such that our verbally perceived world easily takes on a labyrinthine quality—in fact, we shall observe later that a freer, keener consciousness recognizes each sensory and verbal perception as belonging to an infinite series of possible perceptions of the same “object.” Within the sphere of consciousness’ normal functioning in the clear, common light, however, such infinite perspectives are discreetly ignored, and apparent limit and order are imposed upon the welter of presentations. Limitation results, not only from the fact that each individual thing, quality, and event is opposed to and delimited by others, but even more decisively from the inevitable fact that in actual use our repertoire of nouns and verbs—and so the world-catalog of “things” and “events”—is finite. Apparent order is imposed by the principle of binary opposition. It constructs linguistic meaning as a vast structure of polarities passing through myriad gradations from the most elementary—‘is’ and ‘is not’, ‘good’ and ‘bad’—to the fine shadings of ‘irreverent’ and ‘sacrilegious’, ‘shy’ and

‘demure’. Just because of the delimitation and order language imposes, the perfect knowing and perfect consciousness to which we aspire in the clear, common light, an ideal version of our present fragmented knowing and busily concentrating consciousness, will be a marvel of crystallized form, mind’s lucid and finite “cosmos.” In this respect, too, our ideal of knowing is therefore the antithesis of that traditional perfect knowing, a consciousness which as we have seen is unbounded, formless, acosmic, “infinite.”

Once we attempt—in particular relation to language, and concretely—to picture the actual operation of a nontemporal, undifferentiated, unbounded, and formless consciousness, we begin to fathom the abyss separating our word-dependent and word-saturated knowing from traditional conceptions of a perfect consciousness which does not employ and is not in any way involved with verbal signs. Aware of this disparity, and so of the alien, thoroughly “abnormal” nature of these traditional views, we are better equipped to enter into the sometimes striking logic of their richly diverse elaboration. Samkhya’s eternally uninvolved and liberated purusha is “pure contentless consciousness.” It neither “thinks” nor “acts,” and has no relations of any kind, so that we can picture it only as “sheer contentless presence.” Since there is in it no thought or perception—no specifiable *awareness*—its very existence is registered only by another necessarily less perfect perceiver, the *buddhi* or “intellect,” which takes note of the *purusha* only by means of the wholly negative apprehension that it itself is not “pure consciousness” (Eliade, 16; Larson, 77, 81).

In the wholly undifferentiated supreme consciousness (*parasamvit*) of nondual Shaivism, there is no duality of subject and object, no perception of any ‘I’ opposed to any ‘This’ (Woodroffe, 33). Mahayana Buddhism’s perfect knowing, the Perfection of Wisdom, “cannot be expounded, or learnt, or distinguished, or considered, or stated, or reflected upon . . . Where there is no perception, appellation, conception or conventional expression, there one speaks of ‘perfect wisdom’” (*BT*, 149-50). As summed up by Copleston, Plotinus’ the One has neither thought nor will. “Not thought, because thought implies a distinction between the thinker and the object of his thought; not will, since this also implies distinction” (Copleston, I, ii., 209). “God is the One, beyond all distinctions whatsoever: He cannot even distinguish Himself from Himself, and so is beyond self-consciousness” (*Ibid.*, 210).

Aware of the radical contrast between tradition’s and our future golem’s perfect knowings, we are better able, not only to understand particular variants of the traditional ideal, but also to appreciate the significance of their more common patterns and currents of thought. The fact, for instance, that such a perfect consciousness is nonverbal—for awareness cannot be outside time, undifferentiated, formless, and undelimited if it is saturated by or even involved with language -- means that its conversion into the currency of the clear, common light—language—is impossible. Such awareness cannot be explained or talked about, cannot be made “public,” cannot be caught by any verbal sign. Since it is incommunicable, its home and realm, inevitably, is the truly private.

Plotinus’ perfect knower is therefore solitary and “utterly unmingling,” is his famous “the Alone” (Plotinus, 235). One of Eckhart’s favorite themes is *Abgeschiedenheit*, that is, “withdrawnness,” “apartness,” “seclusion,” the state of having withdrawn to a place “apart.” Soul which has achieved this condition abides outside time in the eternal; indeed, that which makes God God is nothing but his unchanging (*unbewegliche*) *Abgeschiedenheit* (*DW*, V., 541). Seen metaphorically as place, this true privacy is “the wilderness, apart from all creatures,” “a hidden

silent darkness,” the Godhead’s “silent desert” (*DP*, 368, 421, 316). In Indian religion and philosophy in general, and above all in Samkhya and Yoga, the term *kaivalya* is a primary designation for the condition of perfect consciousness. Various English renderings in Monier-Williams’ great dictionary—“isolation,” “absolute unity,” “perfect isolation,” “detachment from all other connections,” “beatitude”—rough out the absolute privacy this term connotes.

We should not imagine, moreover, that an “absolute” awareness will have carried verbal signs along with it into its perfect isolation, as normal consciousness carries its golem project with it into tactical solitude. In *Abgeschiedenheit* or *kaivalya* that perfect consciousness engages in no secret, purely private verbalizing. For as we already have seen: for a perfectly simple, undifferentiated knowing, there will be neither subject nor object, neither self nor not-self. In that wordless perfection the sentences “I am aware” and “I am,” and the very words ‘I’, ‘aware’, and ‘am’, cannot exist. So remote, private, and unobserved is this condition of perfect knowing that it remains—in our terms—something hidden, something entirely “unknown” to perfect knowing itself.

The terms ‘consciousness’ and ‘awareness’ normally suggest to us, not only awareness of a world outside the self, but also an inward sense or experience of self-intimacy and selfhood; but the relation of perfect consciousness to itself now looms, paradoxically, as the utterly “unconscious” intimacy of the unperceived with itself. Utterly unlike that verbally lucid self-awareness—that perfectly crystallized, serenely pondered, readily communicable self-knowledge—our golemic future holds, the self-intimacy of tradition’s perfect consciousness more closely resembles the equally obscure and private, equally inconceivable “inwardness” of a rock or the sky. For normal consciousness in the clear, common light, who we are and our *knowing* who we are are two entirely distinct phenomena belonging to the equally distinct categories of being and knowing. But we now see that tradition’s perfect knowing—simple, nonverbal, undifferentiated—is nothing but utterly unqualified, wholly indeterminate “presence.” And there consequently is no way we can distinguish it from “perfect being,” to which the very same nondescription applies.

We can now understand another striking conclusion—as important as the finding of pure privacy—to which the tradition’s seemingly innocuous generalities about perfect being and knowing often lead: their identity. In God—so Aquinas—“to be is the same as to understand” (Aquinas, 133). In his commentary on John, Eckhart affirms that in God, “reality and intellect are the same” (*EE*, 133). Ashvaghosha writes that a Buddha’s Mind is “no other than the essential nature of all things” (Ashvaghosha, 90). And this means: the supremely perfect “knowing” of a perfect being or of “God” is so free of qualities, simple, undifferentiated, formless, and unspecifiable that to our bewilderment it seems to vanish into that other wholly indeterminate “pure presence” which is the perfect entity’s perfect being itself.

Aware of the chasm separating such traditional conceptions of perfect knowing from ours—for we conceive that perfect awareness as contained, pervaded, and formed by language while the tradition postulates their absolute separation—we are better able, finally, to understand the *most* startling recurring theme of the traditional accounts. For the same reflections and logic which have led these explorers of perfection to deny “being” to perfect being have also led them to deny “knowing” and “consciousness” to perfect knowing and perfect consciousness. Since a perfect being, as wholly indeterminate, has no identity, definition, form, qualities, story, name, or even being, and since its nontemporal, undifferentiated, undelimited, formless, nonverbal knowing cannot



include anything like the pronoun ‘I’, what meaning could we possibly attach to the sounds “a perfect being’s self-knowledge”? And since in the undivided simplicity of perfect consciousness there can be no differentiation between subject and object or between “I” and world, and so no further subdividings of that world into persons, things, events, and conditions, what could possibly be meant by references to that perfect consciousness’ omniscience, its complete knowledge of “how things are”? Since this “perfect” knowing is wholly unlike—is in fact the *antithesis*—of everything we normally think of as knowing, would it not be more reasonable to conclude that a supremely conscious perfect being knows neither itself nor anything else, that its perfect knowing is a perfect unknowing, its divine consciousness wholly unconscious?

Past contemplators of perfection have long since cleared and charted the paths of this very logic. We have already seen that neither Samkhya’s purusha nor Plotinus’ the One “thinks”; the former is “contentless consciousness,” the latter “beyond self-consciousness.” India’s various “orthodox” and “heterodox” traditions echo the Samkhya’s views. The supreme reality “without a second” which Shankara variously calls “*brahman*,” “*atman*,” and “pure consciousness,” is without mind, does not “know itself,” and has no such thing as “experience” (*Upad*, I, 3,4; Potter, 95; Deussen, 175). The highest Shiva or pure consciousness of nondualistic Shaivism is also *amanas*, that is, “mindless” (Woodroffe, 27). The Buddhist Ashvaghosha assures us that the One Mind is “free from thoughts” (Ashvaghosha, 37). From the perspective of normal consciousness, one might speculate that Perfect Wisdom is perfect because of its complete comprehension of how things are and should be, its perfect self-knowledge, and its omniscience. But the Saptashatika, a text of the “Perfection of Wisdom” school, discloses to us on the contrary that perfect wisdom is perfect “because of its non-existence” (*BT*, 151).

From Plotinus and his successors, the logic and exploration of divine ignorance pass into Christianity’s mystical theology. Dionysius writes that God, who is “above all being and knowledge,” “has no imagination or opinion or reason or understanding . . . nor is he knowledge or truth or kingdom or wisdom” (PsD, 209, 217). Eckhart tells the listeners to one of his sermons that God possesses neither knowledge nor reason” (Pfeiffer, 282, 20, 29). “In the most hidden recesses of its nature,” so Eriugena, the Divine Nature “is unknown even to itself” (Eriugena, III, 187).

\* \* \* \* \*

iii.

I have now explored the golemic being and knowing to which we aspire in the clear, common light, as well as that fringe being and knowing which, whether it is glimpsed as a mere curiosity on the horizon or is inwardly discerned as our past, present, and future reality, we instinctively shun. I have examined tradition’s account—perhaps a vain exercise in wishful thinking, perhaps astonishingly, unthinkably, miraculously true—of utter perfection. How, then, shall we array and epitomize the numerous beings and knowings we come across in the clear, common light, on the fringes, and in those earlier conceptions? What is the Other Paradox? In answer to the first of these two questions I conclude that the forms of being and knowing which we discern on the fringes, and the being and knowing which traditional reflection discovers when it seeks to discover absolute perfection, are identical, and that they stand together in unanimous

contrariety to their shared antithesis: golemic being and golemic consciousness.

For if I drift in floating solitude or am carried by despair out of normal life, and if my then troubled gaze, having been torn from its customary reverie on my future golem, falls upon that eery self-portrait—the fringes—what kind of being do I see? And what sort or mode of being have Western philosophers and theologians, Indian acharyas, and other contemplators of perfection seen when they attempted to discern the essence and scope of perfect being? I see, and they saw: existence without change or development; being which, because it has no relation to time, spins out no “my life” and so no biography, no story; being which, after all these years or even eternity, still has not “done anything” or even been involved in any “event.” For them and for me, that undelimited being—that still uncarved block—has neither outline nor border. It is “unconcentrated,” diffuse, formless. Not having particularized itself in any way as either person or thing, it is wholly indeterminate. It has no attributes, no identity, no definition. To assign to it a proper name, thus furnishing it with the trappings of individualized existence, does nothing but conceal and falsify its nature. This wholly unconcentrated and uncrystallized being cannot be described, explained, or justified. Nameless, it cannot be “identified” or verbalized in any way. It is incommunicable, something absolutely invisible in the verbalized world of the clear, common light. It dwells in a solitary and purely private darkness. Since this “being” lacks all the elements we usually associate with being, it would be a thousand times more reasonable to call it “nonbeing” or “nothing” than to refer to it as “being” or “something.”

But on the other hand, golemic being—my being “in progress” in the clear, common light—is in every respect the perfect converse of the being I have just described. It is concentrated and crystallized in time. It is endowed with specifiable qualities, a particular life, identity, and definition. Its individuality, proclaimed by the fanfare of a proper name, is communicable and public. Its story can, and someday *will*, be told, and then it—then “I”—will be registered, narrated, explained, and vindicated in that clear, common light.

My knowing, as I drift in floating solitude or am swept by despair towards or even into the fringes, is similarly congruent with traditional delineations of perfect knowing, and once again both stand in perfect contrast to golemic consciousness. Neither fringe awareness nor a perfect or divine awareness is “in progress” or “going” anywhere. Neither has a “future.” Both are amorphous, unconcentrated, uncrystallized, and undifferentiated, are sprawling, absolutely indeterminate consciousness lacking all trace of specifiable boundaries, organization, relation, or context. Within such “knowing,” the rudimentary and utterly alien perception “I am” and the rudimentary and alien specification “I” cannot occur. As consciousness which does not crystallize into sentences or any verbal form, and which in fact has no verbal elements of any kind, it cannot be communicated or even discerned in the clear, common light. Since it is nothing but indefinable presence, it blends without distinction into that other indefinable presence which is its being. Since it rejects all verbal elements, and since it stands in perfect contrast with everything we ordinarily think of as knowing, it would much more properly be called unknowing, unconsciousness, the *absence* of self-awareness.

And again by contrast, golemic knowing is temporal and evolving. It is concentrated and crystallized into a discrete, perspicuous, public, readily communicable cognitions. In golemic knowledge, consciousness in me is differentiated into lucid verbal perceivings—comprehendings firmly anchored in “reality”—of “how things are,” “who I am,” “what is happening,” “how to be.”

My very self and essence lend themselves to the most perspicuous verbal illumination, can be cast without remainder into story and description. Someday I shall contemplate that story and description—and my lucid explanation and my vindication—and they shall shine forth in words all can see in the clear, common light.

On their way to the Other Paradox these findings merge in one preparatory and just in itself paradoxical observation: our most searching and exalted delineations of what absolute perfection might be are, simultaneously, precise descriptions of our actual condition. For as we have seen, all the vividly detailed facticity, the individuating narratives, descriptions, and definitions, and the crystalline identities of golemic existence and consciousness are “future,” are mere millennial ideality, a perpetual, quixotic, strictly euphemistic “work in progress” doomed, as we also have seen, never to come to rest in the actuality—the exultant *present tense*—of its utopian fait accompli. Our present condition, the only condition we have ever known, is that of the unconcentrated and uncrystallized. We have not advanced an inch—“so far”—out of that amorphous being and indeterminate consciousness, that lack of identity, that absence of definition which constitute our beginning. That is to say, our condition always has been and still is the condition of *brahman*, God, Perfect Wisdom, the supreme *Tao*, etc.

Let us then attach to this transitional perception—for by doing so we put in place the last piece required for the Other Paradox—awareness of one other phenomenon we already have clearly observed: we regard our actual condition as undesirable, even intolerable. We cannot imagine modes of being and of knowing which might be worse. Our state seems to us, in fact, to be one of intolerable and humiliating *nonbeing*, of ignominious, even slightly lunatic *unknowing*. Our golem projects, our hectic laborings to put our original being and knowing behind us, posit as their one desperate and impossible destination the attainment of a condition infinitely removed from and diametrically opposed to our actual—our only past and present—state.

To restate—now that we have explored its context and its particulars—its previous definition: the Other Paradox is the fact that the image we have of the best possible condition and the image we have of the worst possible condition are the same image. It is the fact that our perceptions of destiny’s utterly contrary extremes—the most exalted perfection even a god might achieve, and the most wretched fate which might befall any being—are the same perception. I have traced the first of these two picturings by examining some of our most sustained and searching inquiries into perfect, even “divine,” being and knowing. I have outlined the second by exploring the fringes which encircle normal life as its ominous and dismal horizon. The Other Paradox formulates the result of these inquiries. It is the fact that we picture absolute perfection in the same way we picture ruination and utter shipwreck. It is the fact—ironic in the “rational animal”—that we reverently, adoringly, longingly contemplate in God or *brahman* a condition which, regarded as a possibility for us, is the most dismal fate we can imagine, an appalling nothingness and oblivion from whose very prospect we spontaneously flee.

Like all sensory and verbal perceptions, the Other Paradox lends itself to the most luxuriantly divergent—to infinite—reformulations, variations, implications, amplifications, revisions, and refutations. The first of two paradoxical corollaries I shall mention here is the following: our lives are diligent attempts to escape a condition which our most careful and probing assays have judged to be perfect, even “divine.” Put from a different perspective, normal life is a

constant striving to achieve modes of being and knowing which are as remote as possible from—which are the antithesis of—those modes we regard as the highest and most desirable, as the “best.”

Indeed, so repugnant to us is the spectacle of our present godlike condition that we eagerly do all we can to avoid noticing it. Nietzsche put another paradox into circulation when he proposed that the primary function of language is to enable us to deceive others about our objectives and motives. Freud broadened and deepened it by suggesting that the person it is most urgent to deceive concerning our objectives and motives is ourselves—in this way language and self-consciousness become instrumentalities enabling the self to conceal itself from itself. We can extend these surmises, and in so doing integrate them within the first corollary of the Other Paradox, with the following formulation: all of normal life and normal consciousness, and the vast, variegated “the world” they inhabit, are a diversion. If those ingenious and colossal distractions from ourselves—distractions we refer to as “our lives” and as “the universe”—do not exist, we have been compelled to invent them. We throw ourselves early and late into our golem project; we attend to the “we” which is “in the making” rather than the “we” we are; we explore the terrain—“the world”—where our golem someday will dance; we banish our original and actual condition to the fringes; we steadfastly avert our sometimes nomadic gaze from the horizon’s dolorous spectacle—all so that we will not be reminded, will not be forced to contemplate or just glimpse for a moment, the condition of godlike being and knowing which right now is ours.

The second corollary is that God or Shiva, or that unsayable hidden essence all names fail to name, glories and exults in, and draws its inexhaustible joy from, the very condition from which we spontaneously launch, each morning upon arising, our anxious and ill-fated flight. For those who have most carefully considered the nature of perfect being and knowing have also attended to perfection’s response to its own perfection. And as we might expect—for here at least there is no “paradox”—they portray that reaction as an infinite divine pleasure all our joys and ecstasies partially and imperfectly echo.

According to Aquinas, for example, God’s blessedness, which is the highest blessedness and happiness possible, consists in the contemplation of his own essence (Aquinas, 469). Eckhart makes frequent reference to God’s *Freude*, *Lust*, and *Wonne*, that is, his joy, spiritually voluptuous pleasure, delight, bliss. As unity, so Ruusbroec, God is “blissful enjoyment” (Ruusbroec, 149). Of the One Mind, which at the same time is our original Buddha-nature, Huang Po says that “it is glorious and mysterious peaceful joy” (HP, 35). In both Buddhist and Hindu Tantras the ultimate, innermost essence of being and consciousness is *mahasukha*, the “great bliss.” The Vedantin’s final attainment is the immediate realization of *brahman* “without qualities,” but the last three words we are permitted before passing beyond differentiated awareness are *sat-cit-ananda*, “being-consciousness-joy.”

We can therefore conclude, paradoxically, that absolute perfection—that God or *brahman*, that Shiva, En-Sof, Perfect Wisdom, the nameless *Tao*, or what some Buddhists simply call *parinishpanna*, the “completely perfected”—has found the secret of godlike being, the key to divine awareness, and a god’s uncontained ecstasy just in the desolate gloom, and among the debris, specters, and hungry ghosts, of those fringes we so doggedly shun. God’s infinite, unthinkable reality is made of the scraps, cobwebs, and dust—all the unwanted, discarded odds and ends—we are forever sweeping out into the darkness. What enables *brahman* to be, and to exult in being,

*brahman*, is that very absence of definition and identity which constitutes our failure and explains our despair. The plenitude of En-Sof's divinity is woven just from the vague shreds and frayed ends of the disheartening nothingness we are constantly paring away from ourselves. Shiva has appropriated that formless vacancy—that undifferentiated and unfocused quality, that lack of all specifiable content—which signals the disintegration, in us, of all knowing. In him it has become the unimaginable lucidity of divine consciousness which now, eternally and unsayably, is his.

We long to be able to say who we are, but his very inability to say who he is is God's omniscience. Our lack of vindication burdens and wearies us, but the absolute impossibility that he should be vindicated is his eternal justification. Each day we long for something new, a change carrying us closer to golemic millennium, but a god's first response, each morning upon awakening, is infinite and joyful relief that nothing has changed, that it still is and knows "nothing." We struggle to escape the dark waters and formless mysteries of our origins; the infinite *Brahman* rests, marveling and content, in the dark waters and formless mysteries of its origins. We dress ourselves up in words so as to conceal from others and from ourselves the shame of our nothingness, but Shiva exults in his nudity, his non-containment by any name, his breakout from all limiting awareness of being "Shiva" or "God." To lack all individual reality; the failure just to be an identifiable "someone" to whom a name might be attached; oblivion—these bitter seals and capstones of our final ignominy loom before the divine consciousness as the omens and regalia of its freedom from all arbitrary and suffocating confinement. That ultimate privacy where our abandonment slowly disintegrates into madness is the hidden garden of the purusha's undisturbed plenitude, the still darkness of the Godhead's serenely rapturous *Abgeschiedenheit*. The nothingness which devours us is, for God, the felicitous absence of anything which might retard or attenuate joy's flow. The appalling abyss into which we fall is the unfathomable source and springhead of that delight's eternal upwelling. The fringes, those wastes formed of desolation, despair, and madness, lie spread out before the Perfection of Wisdom as a holy and edgeless desert. There she roams, free of all division and limit, and has happily lost track of all things, even herself.

\* \* \* \* \*

## Chapter 3: The Dance of Instinct and Intuition

Of course, and as the Nietzschean-Freudian paradox brings into the open, our haphazard, protean self-comprehendings—the wild harvest of our frequently invoked “self-consciousness”—are largely imagination’s work, a kind of interior mythology in which each perception of who, what, or why I am enjoys a brief cogency, then weakens, and soon is expelled by one of its myriad equally insubstantial and fugitive rivals. So much more suspect are then the inevitably faltering attempts of philosophers and theologians to explain absolute perfection, or to convey to us what might be meant by syllables like ‘God’, ‘*brahman*’, ‘reality’, ‘suchness’, and ‘the Way’. It may be that *brahman*, the sole existent, or that the supreme act of being we call “God” is in fact too pervasive, too intimate, and too elemental for our minds to grasp or our nerves discern, and so even the most profound theological reflection traffics largely in the unreal. Perhaps the final paradox, and the hidden spring which drives philosophy’s unending reflection, is the fact that reality—that essence, that *This*—is what enfolds us most intimately and what we most intimately *are*, yet nothing we can utter or imagine addresses or even relates to it. Regarded from this perspective, philosophy and theology, or what India simply called a *darshana*, “a seeing,” is simply the first curious, bemused sniff consciousness takes when it becomes alert enough to be startled by *This*. It is the word-animal’s attempt to process that which cannot be processed in any way, is the endeavor to bring into one’s particular sign-world that intimately ubiquitous presence which exceeds and ultimately dissolves *all* worlds.

Yet theology is the queen of the sciences, philosophy the love and pursuit of wisdom. The six *darshanas*, flanked by great “heresies” such as Buddhism, are assiduous and wide-ranging seeings from the most metaphysical of subcontinents. All these vast “Western” and “Eastern” endeavors constitute our deepest, keenest inhalation of the strange scent of this place, our most searching interrogation of its savor. What could be more important, or more interesting, than what happens when thought reaches the very outermost limits of thought, when the subtlety of the neuron intersects there with the ultimate paradoxes and with mind-breaking mystery? The formulations, negations, and images which issue from such inquiries into being and knowing, and their possible perfection, are therefore most worthy of attention. And the ways in which we, in “normal life,” perceive and relate to the various modes of existence and consciousness are in any case of interest to *us*.

But how are we to regard the paradoxical relationship *between* these two clusters of ideas, valuations, responses, and images? What shall we make of the Other Paradox? I have already said that the Paradox is expansive and liberating, that it provokes Socratic wisdom, and opens views into greater worlds. But this cannot be the case if it remains merely an isolated curiosity, a quaint but inert oxymoron unrelated to other phenomena. To be something more, the Paradox must connect with other levels and forms of our reflection on *This*. It must interact with other manifestations of our perennial attempts at self-portraiture. It must suggest new perspectives on our experience, and on what is desirable, what possible. Of course: just in itself, anything we might consider discloses itself to a patient contemplation as the inexhaustible wellspring of infinite perceptions and interpretations. Further, it sprawls outwards into an unending series of ramifications,

interdependencies, and interactions, so that any thought or perception ultimately leads to, implies, and requires all the infinite others. Of the Other Paradox's consequently inexhaustible linkages, implications, and reorientations, I shall briefly consider one, then explore another in more detail.

The Other Paradox is, first, a prism separating out essential elements of consciousness' historical development and transformation. That transformation is a reduction in consciousness' range of movement and world from the spacious to the narrow and parochial, a contraction in its temper from boldness to anxious timidity, the gradual submersion of once keen alertness in complacent dullness. Traditional conceptions of perfect being and knowing such as those I have cited here spring from a vast, bold, energetic reflection, a great collaboration of soul and intellect spanning continents and centuries, and richer than any individual participant could possibly realize. On the other hand, modern consciousness' operative identification of perfection with golemic being and knowing is an unreflected projection soon reduced to mere habit. Though it shapes the individual and collective experience of modern consciousness, it is by no means a consciously formulated or adopted *darshana*, theology, philosophy, or creed.

It is true—just as traditional consciousness frequently enough displays a capacity for automatic reflex and habitual response, so modern consciousness is capable of reflection. But in spite of its own pretensions, that reflection is relatively confined, hedged about as it is by myriad restrictions, fears, and limitations of perspective. The primary reason for this parochial quality is the fact that modern consciousness' world, its horizon of both actuality and possibility, is relatively small. In the past, as now, human beings inhabited a human world, divided into smaller private and greater public realms, and consisting of the various persons, human actions, and fabricated objects—cultural artifacts and tools—of the kind so familiar to us. But unlike its modern counterpart, traditional consciousness was further stimulated, enriched, and transformed by its constant intimate involvement with the non-human natural world, and so it came to see the human world as integrated within a greater natural world teeming with forms of life, forms of perception, and rhythms other than ours.

Further, traditional consciousness' expansive openness, the result of influences and tendencies diametrically opposed to the modern drive towards centripetal “concentration,” carried it out beyond the limits of the perceived natural world—beyond the “normal,” the visible, beyond what can be contained within the familiar sphere of sensory and verbal comprehending—into that elusive, disturbingly and enticingly illimitable, wholly other “supernatural” sphere we can call in shorthand the world of “the gods.” If and when reflective consciousness, inhabiting so vast and varied a world, should undertake to inquire into the nature of perfect being and knowing, it inevitably had at its disposal a spectrum of possibility much broader and more diverse than ours. It would naturally be led, for instance, to consider the possibility that perfection is best perceived and defined in terms of those overleapings of form, measure, quality, and speech it intuits within that outermost, all-inclusive sphere, the “divine.”

But as consciousness has become “modern,” its world—its total sense and perception of what *This* is—has contracted. And as its world shrinks, consciousness itself becomes timid, *borné*, parochially anxious. The perspectives opened up by traditional tensions between the natural, familiar, and comprehensible, and the “supernatural,” the unfamiliar—the many abysses and infinities of awareness in which all our confident certainties are unmasked as mere hebetude and

limitation, an astonishing oblivion to where we are—honed traditional consciousness to some its keenest perceptions. Now, however, awareness is dulled by its uniformly knowable and familiar world. The great natural world enclosing the human world has been dethroned, and survives now in truncated form only as “raw material,” as “natural and recreational resource.” Our “surroundings” consist primarily of our own fabrications, and knowledge is “information.” Those two other and greater worlds—the worlds of the gods and of nature in its entirety—which enclosed, supported, and enriched the specifically human world, have vanished. Their disappearance has left human beings narrowly preoccupied only with one another and with purely “human” things. Its result is a diminished environment within which those two most precious things—our curiosity and our conscious attention—are consumed by mechanical and electronic devices.

Quite naturally: it will not occur to an awareness which is confined—which has let itself *be* confined—within such a narrow, homogeneous, one-dimensional world to inquire into possible modes of being and knowing different from those it instinctively-habitually pursues within that world. It will not occur to it that forms of being and knowing other than golemic being and knowing are even possible. Or if and when it does go so far as to reflect, it will be hampered by the provincial’s spontaneous tendency to regard his own peculiar customs as intrinsic and universal—as for example Schelling who, standing at the threshold of the modern world, unhesitatingly and mistakenly asserts that *all* consciousness is “concentration.”

The historical transformation towards which the Other Paradox points—and which helps explain why, in the Paradox itself, traditional reflection can dismiss as the epitome of imperfection those golemic qualities modern consciousness desperately seeks—embodies just in itself a remarkable *historical* paradox. For in the past human awareness was more intensely and frequently confronted by the absolute demands of animal life relating to bare survival; and in addition to movement and all the actions mobility makes possible, the particular talents which animals have evolved to meet those demands are the talents of sensory and verbal perception—indeed, it is within that elusive, but complementary and essential realm of perception that acts are selected and orchestrated. Its sheer biological fragility—its constant vulnerability to disease, famine, attack, unpredictable catastrophe—consequently required of traditional consciousness that it remain close to sights, sounds, and words, that it alertly inhabit the clear, common light, carefully attending to, sorting out, and processing declarative and interrogative sentences, and taking full cognizance of the immediate and particular.

But during those freer periods when it was not seized, confined, and formed by animal life’s overmastering demands, traditional consciousness traveled easily out into modes of perception and worlds far removed from those biology requires and employs. Then traditional consciousness contemplated nature in all its richly variegated magnitude. Beyond everything it could name and comprehend, it caught glimpses of something unbroken, boundless, and all-containing. It sensed the presence, transcending all accident, of pure essence. In striking contrast, modern consciousness is not exposed daily to immediate hazard. It has much more opportunity than did traditional consciousness to explore worlds not shaped by animal life’s primary demands. But then as we have seen: modern consciousness has lost contact with those other worlds. With its inevitably diminished sense of actuality and of possibility, it continues from sheer momentum—from “habit”—to circle continually in the same orbit: of verbalized knowing within the clear, common light, of golem



projects, of the familiar and the particular. Beyond the confines of the purely human world, it perceives no greater natural world to which it intimately belongs, no mysterious world of the gods which it might approach or which might approach it. Outside its single uniformly human sphere there are only shadows and specters, a dismal nothingness, “fringes.”

\* \* \* \* \*

ii.

The Other Paradox points, first, to a historical transformation in which consciousness’ world, and consequently consciousness itself, are reduced in both dimension and complexity. But then again, and secondly, this historical process is merely an episode—one particular playing out in time -- of a state of affairs which always obtains within human consciousness, and which in fact constitutes its distinguishing mark, our conspicuous and enduring signature. That condition looms before reflection as an ongoing event, a great, seemingly unending drama growing out of an uncanny and inexplicable encounter. It is an undefined and voluminous dance which pervades individual human consciousness and whose steps also become the various historical manifestations and transformations we can trace in time. The dance itself is no single-mindedly “romantic” dance, but an unpredictable ritual dance we might also call a vast and ornate combat, a great simultaneously epic and baroque *agon*. It is the singularly uncanny—because contextless and archetypal—*pas de deux* we observe when two powerful, mysterious, and unpredictable presences, each utterly unknown and alien to the other, find themselves inescapably at close quarters, it being their strange destinies to occupy, eternally, the same space.

One of them is the formidable presence formed from our most deep-seated instincts and habits, our biological inheritance. For human consciousness is—so at least we name and phrase it in this one of out an infinite number of possible places and times—a biological, zoological, neuronal phenomenon. It is the exotic, infinitely elusive activity of nervous systems, an adaptation which like all adaptations serves life. One biologically valuable contribution of nervous systems is the invention and ongoing production of “perception,” more or less complex collocations and sequences of signs, organized in terms of binary opposition, which then loom in animal consciousness as its world. Worlds, in turn, range from the primordially simple world of the planarian, whose nervous system only distinguishes between lighter and darker, to our complex, finely graduated world, formed of interwoven sensory and verbal perception, and ranging from elemental oppositions such as dark and light, cold and hot, or ‘good’ and ‘bad’, to distinctions as fine as that between ‘suppose’ and ‘surmise’. In this way animal consciousness arises just as an unvarying awareness of and orientation towards sensory or sensory and verbal signs, the contents of perception. That one dancer—instinct—does not recognize or respond to anything else; in signs, that is, in a more or less complex field of sights, sounds, names, smells, declarative and interrogative sentences, verbal commands, etc., it has its only content, reference point, care, and desire.

So decisively can instinct place its stamp upon consciousness—insofar as it both creates and molds it—that even when all an animal’s needs are temporarily met, awareness continues from sheer inertia or momentum—from “habit”—to dwell among and to respond to signs, the only thing that it “knows.” In this way habit is like the potter’s wheel which goes on spinning after the pot is complete; it resembles the object which, hurled into empty space by an initial thrust, continues from

sheer inertia its unvarying and eternal flight. Within human consciousness, as within all animal consciousness, this loyal underling and deputy—"habit"—takes charge whenever instinct rests.

I have already touched on the fact that modern consciousness in particular displays the vast influence which can accrue to habit. For in us awareness is often released from instinct's immediate urgencies and demands, but then during those broad stretches of freed up time, consciousness continues like a perpetuum mobile to describe—from sheer habit—instinct's ancient movements. Hence our perpetual craving, whether we are seized for the moment by animal necessity or in fact are "free," for sensory and verbal signs, for sights, sounds, smells, utterances, screens with movement, a printed page; hence our dismay, our quickly escalating agitation like that of the addict, when awareness in us is not contained and permeated by continually new sensory or verbal stimuli, for particular sights, smells, sentences, etc., are soon processed and exhausted, so that we require new ones, require a steady flow of movement and change. And hence, above all, that restless, driven quality of the golem project. For the question and absence we are reverberate throughout the equally vast interior and exterior spaces each of us inhabits, sowing in our depths a longing for substance, for essence, for being. But insofar as awareness in us is the exclusive creation of instinct and habit, it knows only that named, delimited, determinate, defined "golemic" being which can be contained within verbal signs and seen in the clear, common light. If I do not attain to such an existence—so instinct and habit tell me—I shall never amount to, shall never *be*, anything at all.

I have said that the animal nervous system and its exotically elusive activity—consciousness—have been enriched, in us, by the appearance of that new *kind* of sign we call "language"; and this has given rise to the familiar claim that our possession of language, or some particular mode of language such as "reason" or "science," is what sets us apart. Language constitutes—so we often hear—our definition, our uniqueness as the *logos* animal. Language, or at any rate "reason" or "science," raises us out of animal life and instinct. But as we also have seen: verbal perception is a mode of perception by means of signs, and their organizing principle is that of binary opposition. Further, as in all other species, awareness in us, even "rational" and "scientific" awareness, instinctively dwells within its particular signs, treating them as reality, as "the world," as *This*. All of our various modes of perception by means of verbal signs remain, therefore, within the mold of animal perception. Like one wave of settlers within a much vaster migration, language involves the application to a new territory of well-established practices created and first implemented elsewhere. The appearance within us of verbal signs consequently does not represent the emergence of something radically and mysteriously new, like the break which occurs with the very emergence of signs or life. It lacks the mind-breaking quality of that supreme rupture of plane which takes place when *is not* gives way, suddenly and inexplicably, to *is*.

But then on the other hand we can discern within human consciousness—and so far as we know within it alone—a second factor the very presence of which alongside instinct and habit represents a much more radical break or innovation. It categorically sets us "apart" and so truly defines us, for with all the quickening and disquieting mystery of the preternatural it carries us and our story outside the orbits of zoology, biology, history, and sign-perception, outside all those things we so diligently pretend to understand. For there dwells within us a voice or form of awareness—intuition—which, having somehow come alongside instinct-habit, is now engaged with it in an unending, enigmatic, infinitely complex agon-dance. Socrates, that supreme advocate and archetype

of rational inquiry into human conduct and values—into “the good”—nevertheless acknowledged the thoroughly *irrational* provenance of some of his most important decisions. Far removed from all rationality and calculation, he merely yields to a divine/demonic force, his *daimonion*: a “kind of voice,” an “oracle or sign which comes to me” (Kaufmann, 110). Conceptions of a second self—a person’s “genius,” a double, attendant spirits, divine locutions, a profounder dream-self, the “unconscious”—are found everywhere. Yet the very term with which I allude to this other presence, like Socrates’ ‘*daimonion*’ and all those other terms, implies the confession, or the straightforward Socratic assertion, that we cannot easily explain what or who this mysterious visitor is or whence it comes. All we can say is that it just “comes to us,” just as the great mystery of *is* has breached, inexplicably, the seemingly impassable barrier of *is not*.

Indeed, as soon as we attempt even a preliminary definition of intuition, our inquiry is baffled by a strange doubleness, a profound equivocation. For on the one hand this voice which “comes to us” often seems to be nothing more than a faint whisper emanating from an undefined location on the very periphery of awareness. Its origin, unlike instinct-habit’s, is wholly mysterious. No instinct or habit supports it, and to “biology” or “animal life” it seems to bear no relation. We hear the voice, but cannot identify or even suspect whose voice it is. Nor can we even begin to assess or explain it, for there exists no context within which we might place it. It is “disembodied,” is pure voice uninterpreted by any gesture or face. It arises, as it were, from a place preceding all standards and criteria. It is speech taking place before there are any explanations or justifications or norms, is speech prior to any *logic* of speech.

But then again there are times when our recondite visitor seems to speak, now with compelling pathos, authenticity, and authority, from a center within us—from a place of pure essence prior to all accident—we usually forget that we have. Like the inexplicable rising of *is* out of *is not*, it looms then as a supreme mystery, as revelation, a final unveiling which simultaneously quickens, disturbs, and bewilders. Or we may have been listening to intuition’s peculiar voice with polite detachment, just as we listen to someone from remote regions whose odd assumptions and perspectives complement her equally unfamiliar accent. But then we are caught up short by occasional phrases and intonations in which the unknown intruder clearly insinuates a privileged relationship, in which it even seems to be implying that it is nothing less than our true self. Within our guest’s inscrutable manner we begin to sense the astonishing, disturbing, subliminally intriguing presumption that consciousness’ most transparent, relevant, and intimate syllable ‘I’ actually belongs, by virtue of the most ancient and venerable claims, to it.

Intuition’s insinuations—obscure, unsupported, exotic, strangely authoritative, utterly consequential—can only bring a measure of disarray into consciousness, accustomed as it is to being ruled and shaped by instinct and its powerful proxy and heir, habit. And this confusion within us can only intensify the more audibly the actual contents of intuition’s whisperings resonate through consciousness’ ambiguous and tenuous spaces. For it soon becomes clear that intuition shares no common ground with instinct and habit, clear that it is their determined antagonist in almost every respect. It alludes with casual dismissiveness to the way in which instinct-habit has organized consciousness. It seems to call into question the entire world of the clear, common light, that manifold spatial-temporal-verbal “reality” of which normal consciousness—so we instinctively-habitually suppose—is “conscious.”

And what easily disturbs us more acutely and intimately: intuition introduces into reflection the view—*its* view—that golem projects and golemic perfections are nothing but a digression, and that the pursuit of them is a fatal squandering, a most wretched and costly blunder, a deflection from the project or person “I” manifestly *should* have become. It whispers to me—as if it were something obvious, something *given*—that the *last* thing I should want for myself is: identity, definition, form, concentrated and crystallized existence as a particular “someone”; or an equally concentrated and crystallized knowing of “who I am” and “how things are”; or a “my life” which can be narrated, explained, and vindicated. It invites me to turn aside from the signs, the verbalized clear, common light, and the golem projects which are all instinct and habit—all animal consciousness—knows, and to reorient myself instead towards an obscure and unspecified “elsewhere.” It speaks as if I have a reality outside all form, a destiny outside all particularized being and knowing, all story. And it suggests to me that my great blunder, my wretchedness, is that right now I am living as if oblivious to that reality and that destiny, in which oblivion I have lived, inexplicably, all along.

This singular encounter between instinct-habit and intuition—a voluminous unchoreographed dance of infinitely varied steps, gestures, movements, and attitudes; a dance-agon, as amenable to rivalry and conflict as to anything else, between two utter strangers come together in *us*—is what distinguishes, what even constitutes, human awareness. This confrontation, the chance meeting as it were of the champions of two unrelated, incommensurable, mutually incomprehensible species, is the strange meeting and dance *we are*. What I have already written offers us two keys to an understanding of the seemingly more accessible dancer, instinct-habit. First, the elementary processes of biology and adaptation to which I have referred explain—they seem to us to explain—instinct-habit’s origin and nature. Second, the various elements of normal consciousness and normal life I have described are its work. Indeed, since instinct-habit normally exercises operational control over consciousness, we gain familiarity with it most readily just by examining the particulars of that operation: the complex structuring, by instinct-habit, of sensory and verbal perception and so of basic “awareness”; the orienting of attention around those two focal points—“the world” and “I”—which emerge from the structuring process; the design, instigation, and implementation of golem projects; the sweeping of all anti-golemic elements out into the fringes.

But on the other hand: we first encounter intuition just as that enigmatic, fascinating, disquieting guest, a voice, oddly soft even as it becomes unexpectedly blunt, that “comes to us.” We can best approach it, therefore, not by attending—as we did with instinct—to what it does, but just by listening more closely to what it says. Doing so, we begin to appreciate the depths and intricacies of this thoroughly “abnormal” communication, one which often takes place half-subliminally, like so much of importance, at the very edge of consciousness. It is comprised of whispers within whispers, of a multi-layered advocacy, a vast, threefold revelation or mirage.

We are already familiar, in fact, with the outermost—and so the most audible, most readily heard—sheath of intuition’s layered whisperings, for it is a thesis we hear, entertain, and perhaps even temporarily embrace when normal life and normal consciousness are sabotaged by despair. It is the stark postulate that there will be no millennium, that golem projects invariably and inevitably fail, that the golem project I am—that the odd, disconcertingly haphazard venture I have inadvertently become—is doomed like all the others to fail. In my golem project I seek, against all the odds and in reckless defiance of plain evidence, an impossible victory over time and nothingness.

For particular life arrives finally at a particular and definitive death. The handful of moments granted a particular *is* are soon displaced by an eternal and irremediable *is not*. In my golem project I seek to infuse substance into this disturbingly hollow name, and to endow the absence I am with description, story, definition, explanation, and vindication, but soon all—even that name which gives rise to all else as nothing gives rise to something—will dissolve in oblivion.

For that matter: consciousness' immediate goal and dreamed of provisional triumph—just the first leaping, exultant steps of my golem's millennial dance—will never take place. All too significantly I steadfastly shun the experiment, but if I should attempt it, I soon realize that I cannot even *conceive* just how that nothing I am might be transformed into a particular golemic “someone,” or where in this absence there might be found the materials for true presence, or precisely what that process is by means of which the pretence or semblance of form is transmuted into actual form. Nor can I picture how that Heraclitean flux which is consciousness might crystallize—might be fixed even for one minute—in unwavering, indubitable, luminous, fully particularized empyrean knowing.

Intuition, as unpredictable in its speech and behavior as it is obscure in its origin, lets fall the question if it is not supreme folly to seek immutability in the evanescent, substance in the pure gossamer of shimmering and diaphanous perception, wholeness in the particular, essence in accident. The alchemist's vain, tireless investigations in search of the philosopher's stone, the adventurer obsessed by his dream of that first sighting of and entry into El Dorado, the Taoist adept who seeks to isolate or blend the chemical-metallurgical elixir of immortality—these figures function for us as images of the eccentric, the quixotic and fantastical. But then intuition whispers to us that these doomed utopians are we ourselves seen in mirrors reflecting the inmost reality of our golem projects, our obsessed “my life.” It portrays golemic being and knowing—that unambiguous, irrefutable, all-determining future triumph—as the magical philosopher's stone, the illusory golden city, the fantastical elixir of immortality and fountain of youth we all seek in the clear, common light. Those unyielding, tireless, then at last suddenly shipwrecked quests show forth the trajectory of our own lives. Their particular pathos, that curiously moving conjunction of certain defeat with patent folly, is ours.

Normally if we—above all “we” as modern consciousness—are at all aware of intuition, it is only as an oblique, indistinct murmur at the fringe; but in moments of floating solitude, or within despair's harsher, more desperate isolation, its enigmatic voice may catch our attention with such evocations of doom. And if we, prodded further along by despair or perhaps just by the more tranquil wish to explore where we are, to see *This*, now pay closer heed to intuition's delicately traceried monologue, we soon begin to hear another whispering: softer, obscurer, more unsettling and enticing, as it were another murmur that lay concealed under the outermost whisper of doom. Taking instinct-habit's golem project on its own terms, intuition's first “intuition” points out that it fails on those very terms, for it is a project doomed never to reach its goal. Now, however, intuition begins to unfold its own agenda and perspective, insinuating that golem projects, even if easily and fully realizable, must at all costs be avoided. Normal consciousness is thirst for concentrated-crystallized being and knowing, normal life a Sisyphean effort to satisfy that thirst. But now that soft-spoken and relentless contrarian of unknown provenance—“intuition”—is intimating to me that my golem project is a blunder, not simply because it will fail, but even moreso because its goals, golemic being and knowing, are utterly undesirable to begin with.

It is fitting that the West's classic formulation of this second vaster intuition—of this very soft, very disturbing whisper which implies that our instinctive, habitual, *normal* practice is to dream the wrong dream and choose the wrong path—should lie hidden away as an innocuous aside in a Dutch philosopher's letter of 1674 to a Mennonite merchant residing in Amsterdam. While discussing a question in geometry raised by his correspondent, Spinoza makes brief allusion to the general principle that “*determinatio negatio est*,” that is, “determination is negation.” Applying the principle—which has its roots in the very meaning of the Latin *determinare*, “to bound,” “to limit”—to visible forms, Spinoza regards geometrical figure as created as it were by cutting away “the whole of matter considered indefinitely.” To conceive a figure is to conceive a determinate, that is, a delimited, thing. “This determination, therefore, does not appertain to the thing according to its being, but, on the contrary, is its nonbeing.” And so: since figure is “nothing else than determination, and determination is negation, figure, as has been said, can be nothing but negation” (Spinoza, II, 370).

To exist as something determinate is to exist as something specifiable, particular, delimited, formed, “finite.” Only to the determinate can we attribute definition, identity, name, particularized existence as this or that. In normal life we seek determinate being and determinate knowing, but now intuition, adopting the Spinozistic—and medieval—principle, would have us regard them as “negation.” What underlies this dramatic and sweeping condemnation?

We have already seen that the verbally structured world normal consciousness inhabits in the clear, common light is particularized and structured through the subtle, infinitely ramified application of binary opposition, the establishing of “difference.” Such a process divides being or substance—divides *This* parsed as noun—into a multitude of particular classes and individuals. And in that world: to be any particular thing is to have been separated out from everything else. It is to be “other than” and “opposed” to, to *not* be, all the others. Consequently, determinate being, or “definition,” or “identity,” is achieved through delimitation and exclusion, that is, negation.

Nor is the relation between any one determinate entity and all the others one of equals. Any particular being—“you,” “I”—is set off by difference and negation from the teeming multitudes of other beings it is not, and from the now negated possible selves it itself might have become. I shall gain my particular being, identity, comprehensions, story, and vindication only by abjuring and casting off the infinite *other* actual and possible beings, knowings, and destinies which surround me. I define myself as occupying a particular identifiable place in space and time only only in opposition to—only by “negating”—the infinite spaces and times where and when I am not. Of course: with its prelude whisper, intuition has already suggested to me that I never *shall* achieve that golemic being and knowing I seek, for collapse and dissolution await my golem project as they await every other. But now, uncovering the second strand of its argument, my enigmatic visitor proposes, even seems to take for granted, golemic perfection's inherent undesirability. For to achieve identity, definition, particularity, or even to be a fully formed golem joyously dancing its millennial dance is—intuition now implies—to have reduced myself to the infinitely small, to the vanishing point, is to be a momentary tremor of particularity lost in the overwhelming sea of particularity which I, just *because* I have become that one concentrated and crystallized point, am not.

Insofar as awareness in me is exclusively a creature of instinct and habit, it remains confined

within the unconscious axiom—the antithesis of Spinoza’s—that as a concentrating-crystallizing of being or knowing, determination is something “positive,” is affirmation and actualization. But now as that mysterious voice which “comes to me” unravels into a thousand delicately winding threads its insinuation that determination, on the contrary, is negation, unfamiliar perspectives and possibilities glimmer tenuously within consciousness. I contemplate the possibility—for this is intuition’s unmistakable drift—that fully realized golemic being and knowing are not perfection, but the very opposite of perfection, its impossibility and negation.

Conforming to instinct and habit, I have unhesitatingly assumed that names designate focal points of concentrated-crystallized being only potential in me, but already actual in the others; now, however, I entertain intuition’s suggestion—here in Dignaga’s classic “Eastern” account, and prefiguring Spinoza—that names and indeed all words “do not signify an essence, or a universal, or anything positive, but the mere exclusion (*apoha*) of all other things, the negation of everything else” (*BTh*, 269). The clear, common light, that world of particular persons, things, and events so unlike the shadowy realm of the fringes, has been for me the place within which all being is concentrated; now I momentarily picture that entire world as a place of negation, an almost infinite absence. My thoughts having been loosened by intuition, I catch a glimpse, from a wholly unfamiliar angle, of my future golem. Even as it attains, impossibly, its golemic completion and perfection, and just as impossibly dances its millennial dance, it now seems to me to remain eerily unsubstantial, a dismal fringes-like creature, the sad child of limitation, “negation’s” pale, wasted son.

Having gained entry and so disturbed the habitual flow of thought, intuition’s transvaluation of values slowly ramifies throughout consciousness. I am now visited by the thought that my golem project and the clear, common light do not define what and where I am, nor can they offer what I seek, for they are something alien to my true self. I now see any particular identity, definition, being, or life I might seek as arbitrary, immaterial, adventitious. Looking back in astonishment and dismay, I recall how now abandoned golem projects, promoted by momentary circumstance and mere chance, seized consciousness. I see the pursuit of one particular form of golemic being as opposed to all the others as circumstantial accident rather than interior essence, see the adoption of one out of the innumerable ways consciousness can be organized into golemic knowing as a purely random event.

Like one who senses a great weather-change gradually massing on the western horizon, I am aware, as the intuition of determination as negation gradually infiltrates consciousness, of my golem project, all golem projects, and the entire world of the clear, common light as becoming suffused by a vast aura of incongruity, digression, aberration, error. I take note of a possible generalization and thesis: that the craving for golemic definition and reality which drives all golem projects is in fact the symptom and consequence of a monumental error, a cataclysmic going astray. It may be—so, at least, intuition momentarily beguiles me into thinking—that my desire to know and above all to be able to *say* both to myself and to others where and who I am shows that I am lost, entangled in an unknown and primordial confusion. It occurs to me now to think—obscurely, almost wordlessly, for this intuition flows from that mysterious and wordless source where thoughts inexplicably well up out of “nothing”—that the very last thing I should want for myself is definition, identity, form, a particular “my story,” a certain “my life.” Above all else—and just because “determination is

negation”—I must free myself from all “determinate” being, must guard against the fate of being a particular “this or that,” must make sure not to “become something,” not to “know something.” I must flee as far as I can from the confinement and prison of knowing “This is where and who I am.”

Consciousness’ initial intuition of inevitable golemic failure lies coiled around its subtler, more labyrinthine intuition that determination is negation; and now that we have unraveled some strands of that second intuition, we begin to expose at intuition’s very core a third. Heretofore the enigmatic visitor’s prophetic axioms have been marked by a consistently somber tone of negation and doom. Now, however, her paradoxical, elliptical, strangely hieratic divagations—which seem to emerge from an unknown place prior to all thought and speech, and now more than ever run perfectly contrary to instinct and habit—are entirely “positive.” For it soon appears that this third innermost intuition is the intuition of an unbounded, beginningless, unbroken “something,” of an unimaginable and perfect wholeness. That *daimonion* which inexplicably “comes to us” speaks now of an unflawed essence to which we are profoundly linked, of an unlimited and undivided knowing which is consciousness’ true state. Having shed its outer cloaks of negation and doom, intuition now whispers to us from its very heart and innermost secret chamber that “where we are”—that *This*—is greater, indeed immeasurably and unthinkably other and greater, than that clear, common light—that enveloping “the world”—we instinctively-habitually identify as “where we are.” And it hints that our own innermost, most elemental and intimate affinity and bond is with that unbounded, that unthinkably perfect “thing.”

Guided by the Spinozistic disclosure, emanating from intuition’s middle layer, that determination is negation, we come to see any particular thing, first of all, as vulnerability and absence, as always already reduced to the vanishing point by the infinite sea of *excluded* particularity which surrounds and negatively defines it—in this way the second intuition, more secret and fertile, deepens our understanding, retroactively, of the first. Similarly, it is only by looking back from the perspective of consciousness’ most inward and hidden intuition that we can fully appreciate the significance of the second. Only then do we understand that determination is negation, not only or even primarily because it involves differentiation from—and so the exclusion and negation of—the myriad other particular things one is not. Determination is negation, first of all, because it necessarily involves departure from the “indeterminate,” from, that is, the uncontained, the unbroken, the infinite, that which has not been delimited or divided in any way. As in Spinoza’s example: a particular geometrical figure exists, not only as the negation of all other particular figures, but also, and still more significantly, by separating itself out from—and so no longer *being*—the unbounded and undifferentiated space, now infinitely “other and greater,” to which, formerly, it belonged.

In this way consciousness’ third inexhaustibly affirmative intuition enables us to perceive, retrospectively, that the negation effected by determination—or by “definition” or “identification” or the process of becoming a particular something or someone—is an immeasurable, an infinite negation. For if I reduce *This*, perceived as unbroken and boundless totality, to a differentiated, finite world of particular things, the scope of that reduction cannot be measured. And if I, separating myself out from that totality, seek a condition of determinate being and knowing within it, I am aspiring to my own immeasurable and infinite diminution.

Further: this infinite negation is one of kind as well as of quantity. A particular geometrical



form is not only infinitely less than boundless space, but infinitely “other” than it—consequently, they are incomparable, incommensurable. The same infinite alienation occurs when *This*, not only infinitely reduced but also infinitely *altered*, looms before consciousness—not as the unbroken and infinite—but as the clear, common light, “the world.” And as I labor by means of my golem project to establish myself in the clear, common light as a particular identifiable and describable “someone,” I am actually working to bring about, not only my infinite diminution, but also my equally infinite self-estrangement. The elusive, bewildering whisperings winding their way out of intuition’s deepest interior, having deepened our overall awareness of determination as “negation,” are therefore also able to shed a more particular light on that sense of aberration, of primordial error and wrong turns, to which I have referred. For they imply that what we normally think of as awareness is simply attention *averted* from that perfect and unbroken boundlessness within which we dwell. They let us glimpse our lives as the most perverse of projects, desperate attempts—for the sake of an infinite smallness we never shall attain—to free ourselves from the infinite itself.

Retrospectively and by implication, the whisperings emanating from intuition’s most secret interior deepen our understanding of the easier, more elementary intuitions which enclose it. Speaking just for itself from those depths, that faceless and inscrutable murmuring lets fall intuition’s most diaphanous and far-reaching insinuations. Invariably, it takes the infinite as its starting point, and in relation to that boundlessness, all finitude—all determinacy, specification, and form—is a twofold infinite negation. Letting us hear the most subtle, most delicate whispers hidden within layer upon labyrinthine layer of its whisperings, intuition intimates now that reality—*This*—is infinitely greater than the verbalized “the world” of the clear, common light, is something unthinkable and infinitely *other* than it. It suggests to me that I am by no means what I have perceived myself to be, for my innermost affinity and kinship is with that infinite, that secret and undivided essence, which infinitely transcends “the world” and is, rather than it, my true home. It proposes that reality, and my own reality, are to be found, not in determinate, finite worlds like that of the clear, common light, but in the perfectly “indeterminate” fringes.

It is true: in floating solitude and in despair consciousness becomes aware of—or feverishly imagines—that subterranean identity intuition now proclaims. For in such solitude and in despair we acknowledge that our present reality—what we have concentrated and crystallized “so far”—is mere fringe reality, that is, diffuse, indeterminate, substanceless being which in fact is more truly *nonbeing*, nothingness. But then while our instinctive-habitual response has always been to abhor and flee that nothingness, and then to try, yet again, to blot it out by accumulating golemic being and knowing, intuition now proposes a complete reevaluation, a response utterly contrary to all “normal” response.

Specifically, intuition now suggests to us the most novel idea that we welcome and embrace our nothingness, for it constitutes our “divine condition.” Our uncanny visitor intimates that the fringes’ formless and unmeasured quality—their disturbing lack of outer edge or horizon—is a form of perfection, that those fringe-inhabiting figures I have perceived as dismal specters possess the secret of genuine life. It whispers that my own reality is to be found in the “nothingness” which obtains there. It intimates that I might weave, from the pallid, seemingly wasted biology of that place, a life which most truly and intimately is “mine.” And it lets reverberate within me the thought that the boundless lucidity for which I am destined is akin, not to the clear, common light’s precisely

sculpted verbal perceptions, but to solitude's and despair's—to the fringes'—diffuse, wordless “unknowing.” The work of words, it whispers, is to delimit and divide, and so words are of use only in relation to the delimited and divided, to the imperfect, the unreal. They can only *misrepresent*—can only cover, only carry awareness *away* from—what is perfect and real.

Insofar as I am a creature of instinct and above all of habit, there exists in me no distance or even distinction between awareness itself, and the river of sensory and verbal perceptions which incessantly flows through it. This fusion—this instinctive and perpetual nondiscernment—gives the formula for that most commonplace and remarkable of experiences: “the obvious.” It explains the motley, swelling plethora of our certitudes, explains why we, the “rational animal,” should also be the species which knows—in thousands upon thousands of mutually contradictory ways and with unblinking certainty—“who,” “where,” and “what for” we are. Perhaps because there is nothing “rational” about these self-evident truths—for their normally tight hold on consciousness is a matter of instinct and habit, and requires the *absence* of serious examination—they are vulnerable to the accumulating force of intuition's whispered, unfamiliar, equally groundless arcana. Occasionally the reality of death overcomes mind's resistance, and then I am jarred by the stark, all-too-vivid realization “I may in fact *die* soon.” In a similar way intuition's meandering and cryptic utterances erode the confining walls of the obvious. And what I then contemplate is not imminent death, but the prospect that everything I have thought, said, and done up to this point has depended on and flowed from a vast miscalculation, an all-containing, all-creating error. The infinity I now sense is an infinite gap between my perceptions of who and where I am, and who and where I in fact *am*.

It has been self-evident, for example, that something is “missing,” so that a project of some kind is required, a doing or making, in fact a “making” of “myself.” But now intuition speaks, cryptically and enticingly, as if what is “required” already is, indeed *is* in infinite superabundance. It implies that *the* great act or event has already occurred. In some mysterious way the millennium is right now taking place, is taking place in fact within *me*. I, however, have been unaware of this, unaware of what most truly “defines” where and who I am. And it is only because I have been oblivious to all this—only because of that bottomless miscalculation consciousness in me *is*—that I have lost myself in these bizarre and melancholy customs: to perceive *This* as “the world,” and “the world” as a stage for projects whose protagonist “I” am; to dream dreams of concentration and crystallization; to crave definition, identity, particularized being; to aspire to a clear, determinate comprehending of “who I am”; to labor feverishly-unavailingly to create—because I have wholly forgotten myself—that mechanical and parodistic simulacrum: my “golem.”

\* \* \* \* \*

iii.

The intrusion of its unexplained visitor, “intuition,” transforms human consciousness into the scene—so far as we know, the only scene—of a singular, thoroughly unclassical because wholly improvised, unpredictable, and unbounded drama of encounter and confrontation. Instinct-habit seeks to maintain in us the absolute supremacy with which it rules all other species, and the prescription for such perfect hegemony is: consciousness—that is, “I”—will identify my own species’ and my own particular sensory-verbal perceptions as “the world,” outside which there is “nothing.” Intuition, disturbing the homogeneity of biology and animal life, whispers on the contrary, and paradoxically, that that “nothing” contains “all.” In its ambiguous, oracular, uncredentialed, rambling, enticing impartations, it intimates that we should make our way out to the very limits of all our signs and look out, even that we let ourselves fall out of “the world” into that “nothingness”—that uncontained and unbroken “everything”—in which “the world,” like a single point on an infinite page, merely floats.

Because intuition has invaded instinct’s ancient and exclusive domain, and because it holds its ground there—even making veiled claims to rightful command of verbal consciousness’ pivotal syllable “I”—these two formidable presences are brought perforce into relation. And because instinct-habit and intuition are utterly unknown and alien to each other, their unanticipated and unprecedented meeting becomes a wary mutual scrutiny, a cautious, perpetually experimental testing. Within time’s slowly unfolding spaciousness, the confrontation manifests variously as an intricate, labyrinthine duel, a soundless, unwitnessed—and for that very reason singularly dramatic—combat, an exploration of possible compatibilities and *modi vivendi*, courtship, attempts at union and then at complete separation. Viewed from the fullness of time, it is a grand, unscripted, eternally improvised ritual of encounter and confrontation, a primordial, cosmic dance—unhurried, stately, fateful. Human consciousness is the broad meadow or savanna which hosts this singular confrontation. We are the creature within which the reverberations and outcomes of this wholly unanticipated, still wholly unpredictable confrontation are perpetually working themselves out.

I write as if our defining essence—our bewildering uniqueness—is this: in us animal life is invaded by something other than animal life, biology interrupted by the utterly unbiological. Just in us the nervous system and its self-evident, irrefragable sensory and verbal perceptions are challenged by something from outside sign-perception, something beyond all “comprehending.” And I assert that the great consequence and demonstration of this intrusion is the dramatic confrontation—an unending, unscripted ritual, agon, or dance—between instinct-habit and intuition which distinguishes and defines human consciousness.

But then: reviewing my opening account of normal consciousness and its life in golem projects in the clear, common light, I observe that manifestations of this defining, primary phenomenon are conspicuous just by their absence. Instead, “normal” consciousness—so Schelling, and so my own earlier account—is concentrating consciousness, that is, consciousness single-mindedly working to concentrate and crystallize the nothingness with which it begins into a finished, dancing golem. And indeed the following is true: that particular mode of consciousness we can now identify more narrowly and precisely as modern—as “our”—consciousness is one in which instinct-habit, having thrust intuition out to the shadowy verge of awareness, has all but restored, in us, the

monolithic hegemony with which it rules undisputed all other species.

I have already alluded to the historical factors which explain this near perfect restoration of biology's ancient unity. Increasing oblivion to the natural world which surrounds us as well as to the all-encompassing world of mystery and "the gods" reduces and dulls consciousness, and in twofold consequence of this oblivion: consciousness is left unaware of *other* modes of sign-perception; and it no longer responds to or even notices that which eludes *all* sensory and verbal signs. At the same time, the exclusively human world which is all that remains is saturated by a great flood of verbal signs—"information"—which, freed from all competition and even from any comparison, immediately overwhelms human consciousness, taking easy, all but exclusive possession. The result is a nearly complete reversion to that condition—the spontaneous equating of one's own and one's own species' signs with reality—which uniformly characterizes animal consciousness and provides the generic formula for all biological worlds. To verify modern consciousness' return to a simpler, purely zoological condition we need only observe the following in ourselves: it no longer even *occurs* to us that reality—that *This*—could be anything other than "the universe" with its vast, chaotic assemblage of "planets," "hills," "birds," "the President," "Friday," "my boss," "I," "you," "the car," "the computer," "pharaohs," "Beethoven," etc.

Developments such as those which have produced modern consciousness reduce the unknown intruder, intuition, to a purely defensive and marginal position. In the collective life of such a consciousness, there will be no public acknowledgment of the "indeterminate," no allusions to the sign-transcending infinite, or "the unsayable," or "the One." Instead, our particular sign-made world looms before us as, obviously, "the world." We know "where we are" and "what is happening." The details of "who we are" are being finalized. This restoration of biology's monolithic ascendancy—that is, the simplification of human consciousness to verbalized instinct-habit and the simplification of *This* to the one-dimensionality of the clear, common light—leaves intuition but one refuge and means of survival: a holding action at the very edges of awareness, "the fringes."

As a result, it is only in purely private ways, or when it is itself thrust out towards those fringes, that modern consciousness is exposed to intuition's subversive whisperings. It is only in the sealed privacy of despair that such consciousness sometimes contemplates intuition's outermost sheath, its Cassandra-warning that all golem projects are doomed. It must have floated or been carried to remote outposts or peripheries far from the transparent world and the self-evident certainties of the clear, common light before it can encounter the thought—intuition's second sheath—that "determination is negation." In chapter one I made reference to our occasional awareness of a primordial wrong turn, and said that in floating solitude and despair, consciousness sometimes perceives its golem project as doomed, or the very pursuit of golem projects as self-betrayal. I described normal consciousness' perception of the fringes as the realm of the indeterminate, the unquantifiable, the nonverbal. In these various ways, but piecemeal, garbled, and as it were as the voice of despair, normal consciousness makes marginal contact with intuition's whisperings. As for an affirming awareness—one not occasioned by and occasioning despair—of that boundless, indivisible, unsayable reality beyond particularity and beyond signs which forms the inmost center, and the sole burden and justification, of intuition's heteroclitic representations, it survives in modern awareness only as the private search of individuals or of small, scattered groups

of such individuals. Or in the airless spaces of modern consciousness' more "normal" collective religious life, "the gods" are present, regularly and most tenuously, between church walls. Here all contact with those gods, reduced as it is to a weekly hour or two in such confines, is sealed almost as perfectly as is despair from "normal" space and time. It and they will not interfere with life in the clear, common light, the real "the world."

This development—biology's seemingly unmitigated triumph—nevertheless contains within itself its own striking paradox: in its wake, instinct is left nearly as marginalized as is intuition. For modern consciousness is not seized by the exigencies of animal life and drawn, willy-nilly, into signs as one of our species' primary instruments of survival. Awareness in us is not absorbed by that marvelous adaptation—perception by means of both sensory and verbal signs—because of the presence or imminence of pain, injury, starvation, death, the vast array of necessity's army with which sign-perception enables all species to cope. We have seen, in fact, that such constraint—elemental necessity seizing consciousness and demanding, for survival's sake, its exclusive attention to signs—is a more frequent occurrence in traditional consciousness.

Instinct and intuition are the two formidable and imposing protagonists which constitute human consciousness as the singular presence it is. But what now once again emerges as the distinguishing feature of modern consciousness is the rise to eminence and power, in the wake of instinct's and intuition's decline, of the former's mechanical imitator and heir, habit. Confined to its one-dimensional, purely human world, and saturated by sensory and above all verbal signs of its own making, modern consciousness automatically posits those signs—from sheer inertia and habit—as constituting "where we are," as being *This*. Meanwhile instinct ebbs into repose. And intuition, surviving now only in those stray moments or individuals within which habit temporarily fails, clings—its faint whisperings all but unheard—to its now wholly marginalized life.

\* \* \* \* \*

iv.

The foregoing most dispiriting picture, which a painter or creator of masques might title "the triumph of habit," must fortunately adjust to greater perspectives once we widen our gaze from that anomaly, modern consciousness, to the full canvas and historical spectacle of our species. It comes home to us then that human consciousness—that "we"—are the more than epic plain upon which the two cosmic strangers, instinct and intuition, are joined in uncanny and eternal dance. We have already seen that compared with its modern counterpart, traditional life is more fragile, is closer to the edge, more vulnerable to pain, disease, general calamity, and unrespecting, ubiquitous death. Seized and drawn into the stark drama of animal life by necessity's harsh grip—for it has not yet won that breathing space of relative ease which makes possible modern consciousness' mechanical iterations—traditional consciousness flows into decisions and actions charged with instinct's elemental power. Even more significantly, intuition, not yet reduced to the remote specter of the fringes it is for us, looms in tradition as consciousness' bold guest and instinct's great rival. Accustomed to dwell within that greater triple world we have largely forgotten, traditional consciousness finds our own specifically human world less "self-evident," less the obvious prototype for how things are and must be. It knows, from daily experience, that we are but one

branch of nature's great tree; it is more open to the whisperings which "come to us," calling into question the shared truths of our time and place while seeming to suggest other forms of "time," and "place" more real and enduring than any familiar "place."

Then, as now, instinct-habit is a powerful force within collective active life, and in shaping the actions of most individuals. But if we examine the various manifestations, collective as well as individual, of traditional consciousness' *reflective* life, we discover that they often are outgrowths of intuition's suggestive whispers. That is to say: intuition frequently takes over and becomes the speaker—the collective "we"—of traditional consciousness' shared perceptions. The mysterious voice, now accepted by the community as "our" voice, articulates in *its* clear, common light the final truths of "how things are." It indicates the overall shape and draws in the most critical divides of the community's shared "the world." In this way intuition assumes a protagonist's role in life's continual interplay between act and reflection, and in traditional reflection's keen interrogation of where and who we are. And as a consequence, traditional life and reflection are pervaded by reverberations of that primeval encounter, the great ritual-struggle-dance of instinct and intuition, which is our uniqueness, our device and eternal signature, our "mark."

An example of the way in which intuition's mysterious voice can become the publicly acknowledged voice of traditional consciousness' shared reflection is furnished by the golem legend itself. This tantalizing conception—the artificial or "magical" creation of a human being—has received through the course of its history shifting emphases and interpretations relating it to several of intuition's layered whisperings. For now let us note that some versions of the tale echo intuition's plainest, most audible utterance, one that is also familiar to us from despair. It is the recognition that our golem's future millennial dance is a mirage, that our life-consuming golem project is quixotic and impossible, that a few moments' reflection suffice to establish that it is doomed. In traditional golem tales this recognition manifests itself most concretely and decisively in the fact that the project is vitiated by some critical flaw in the golem itself. For example, the creature is often portrayed as unable to speak, or it may be prone to break out in uncontrolled destructive behavior (see Scholem, 166, 193). The power of genuine creation is God's alone. Any attempt by human beings to create a human being, any "golem project," can only fail.

Until recent times, the narratives and possible construction of golems have been preoccupations confined largely to Kabbalistic and Hasidic circles. But in striking harmony with these narratives of attempted creation, the tradition displays a more widely disseminated and established form within which intuition confronts instinct—not in the sealed privacy of despair, but publicly and ceremoniously in the clear, common light—with particularity's inevitable doom. Since modern consciousness clings to its golem project as a possible way out of nothingness, its one hope for being, it notoriously avoids thoughts of golemic failure and of the "I"'s definitive failure, death. Tradition, however, has been willing to take on this harsh and arduous contemplation, intuition's first offering, and the most powerful, vivid, and solemn form taken by this contemplation is tragedy. Of the traditional West we can say that where and when its dominant rhetoric is not religious, it is tragic. At such times, as at all times, individual and collective action are dominated first of all by instinct-habit, but in the public performance of tragic drama, intuition boldly portrays individual life in instinct's particularized world as tragic, as doomed. Here the *daimonion*, our inscrutable visitor, is permitted to create our most mysteriously compelling—our greatest—"plays."

Tragedy fascinates in that it confronts us, directly and vividly, with the mysterious conjunction and dance we are, in the following way: the dramatist, intuition, places before us a doomed protagonist, instinct. Intuition shows us the clear, common light as tragically flawed, shows the verbally particularized “the world” as a tragic world and all golem projects as doomed. Tragedy’s starting point is that enticing particularized world, a fool’s paradise which consciousness, molded and used by instinct-habit, inevitably perceives and inhabits. Thus formed, consciousness invests all desire and all will in particularity. There it will find “the good,” “happiness,” “fame,” “paradise,” all its triumphs. In particularity’s world it will gloriously consummate the golem project it is. For such normal concentrating and crystallizing consciousness, particularity’s current configuration—its “the world”—is the field upon which its golem project is now deployed. The future is a welcoming, most cooperative emptiness, a void which consciousness then fills with dreams of project completion, of golemic millenium.

But the very fabric of particularity—of a spatial, temporal world differentiated by and crystallized within verbal signs—is, so our “demonic” dramatist, the stuff of tragedy. Its innermost workings and causalities can only produce tragic effects. Those verbal signs have already imposed upon consciousness this tenuous and intimate “I,” the unpromising raw material which urgently requires, and without which there could not even *be*, a golem project. But those same signs have also placed over against the “I” the teeming, multifarious world of particularized persons, things, and events, a near-infinite which engulfs and dwarfs consciousness, for it is the unimaginable, overwhelming vastness “I” am not. And above all: insofar as consciousness is organized by language, by “Greek” or “French” or “English,” it is enclosed, without appeal or the slightest opening, by “time,” and time is particularity’s greatest vulnerability, its already certain doom. In its naïveté, consciousness used by instinct dreams the future as its dancing golem, its happily completed, oft iterated story, its eternal record and vindication. But the very grammar of time dictates that any particular *is* must give way at last to its eternal *is not*, that particularity’s movement, always, is movement into the soundless, obliterating embrace of the past tense, that at last this “I” disappears from the ever changing catalog of existing entities, that every person and thing, finally, will pass into oblivion, will be “spoken of” no more.

In the collective experience of tragedy, intuition shows us the essence and fate of particularity, thus conceived. In tragedy we are surprised, having glanced up from our usual absorption in golem projects, to see in the mirror tragedy holds up to us the unexpected lines of our face, our usually forgotten “tragic” mask. We behold, spread out as spectacle before us, verbal perception’s inmost code; we see the deep and secret grammar, the hidden structure, within all our comprehendings. Instinct perceives and craves the particular. It demands the impossible, plenitude within the finite particularities of golemic being and knowing. In tragedy this tension is released in the one way it might be released: with instinct’s, and with particularity’s, destruction. As a modality of instinct, consciousness fills the void around it—and fills above all that most generous void, the future—with fantasies of steadily accumulating or fully attained being and knowing. But then the tragic dramatist, intuition, lets that consciousness and those fantasies run up against particularity’s inexorable laws, laws which stymie consciousness and at last overwhelm it.

The tragedian typically portrays that irresistible force, which descends upon particularity, not with millennium, but with dissolution, as “fate” or “the gods.” Her method is to place at the center

of dramatic action one or several human beings of great charisma and power who seem, already, to have scaled the heights of golemic knowing and above all being, or who at the very least are more likely to achieve them than anyone else. The action itself is their fall from this more or less illusory plenitude. For the community for whom the play is enacted, the collective implication is evident: if even the “great”—the most able and powerful, fortune’s favorites—cannot achieve or maintain genuine being and knowing in particularity’s world, how can we? How can anyone?

In tragedy consciousness’ fantasies of the future, generated by instinct, are displaced by intuition’s perception of particularity’s inevitable fate. As audience we yield to the perception of our golem projects as doomed projects; we contemplate the tragic quality of “our lives.” The catharsis experienced in tragedy derives therefore from our acknowledgment of tragic story as our true story. In this recognition we gain release from the tensions and Sisyphean exertions of consciousness’ daily self-deception, its repression of awareness that its own golem project is a blunder, is, even on its own terms, doomed. Tragedy’s exhilaration, paradoxical and profound, flows from the freedom with which it temporarily endows us, for during that brief time we seem to stand *above* concentrating consciousness, its golem projects, and its iron command to make ourselves into “something,” to create for ourselves a “my life.” In tragedy we therefore begin moving towards other forms of awareness. It is given us to see our lives as that enigmatic visitor and tragic writer, intuition, sees them. We let awareness broaden out to embrace that even greater mystery—animal life’s encounter, in an unknown *This*, with “something else,” with “the gods,” with “fate”—which is what we are.

The origins of tragedy lie within the vaster world of traditional religion, a world of myth and ritual, of prophetic, theological, philosophical, and mystical “seeing.” In tragedy, intuition takes control—not of acts and lives themselves—but of traditional consciousness’ collective *perception* of those acts and lives. In this shared experience human life and golem projects come to be seen, even in their own terms, as “tragic.” They are viewed in terms of the outermost layer of intuition’s complex vision. But even more profoundly, widely, and variously than its scion—tragedy—religion itself shapes tradition’s shared clear, common light, its “the world.” It molds and suffuses collective perceptions of who and where we are, and what is happening. And in the formation of those perceptions intuition’s influence is as pervasive as it is in tragedy. Indeed: while tragedy informs traditional consciousness with the perspectives of intuition’s outermost, most readily comprehensible layer, tradition’s collective religious perceptions are often expressions of intuition’s more elusive inner layers and core. In those perceptions the voice which “comes to us” becomes the primary designer of tradition’s clear, common light. In them intuition’s searching and complex vision shapes the tradition’s collective awareness of “how things are.”

The philosophical formula for intuition’s middle sheath is Spinoza’s “determination is negation.” Grafted onto time and constructed, not from abstractions but from the basic elements of story, that layer’s archetypal *narrative* formulation is tradition’s endlessly varied myth of a fall. The role of this great myth, as of all myth, is not to provide information—in this case, historical information about “what has happened”—for its own sake. Instead, it gives public voice to intuition’s second whisper by portraying our present condition—our life in “the world,” our entanglement in and pursuit of particularity, our concentrating consciousness and golem projects—as a “fallen” condition, a diminution, “negation.” And it mythically communicates this perception of



our present state by dwelling upon that singular past event or series of events—our loss of an obscure perfection, of an originally perfect being and knowing—which subsequently defines where we all begin the moment we enter “the world.”

In bleak profusion, myth varies intuition’s disclosure to us of our ancient error and aberration, the root of our present state. To chronicle intuition’s second whisper, the myth of our fall focuses all our attention on the defining moment: our species’ primordial first entry onto that wrong path which all subsequent generations blindly follow. The myth uses narrative to elucidate that “blunder,” that profound sense of an ancient, fatal “wrong turn,” to which my very first sentence alludes. It confronts us with vivid stories of exile, expulsion, and separation; of a gradual, cumulatively fateful self-alienation within perfect being and knowing—within the godhead—itsself; of primordial acts of weakness, perversity, or defiance; of the eager trading away of gold for clay, of essence for accident; of a primordial ignorance, the seedbed of desire, pain, time, and death; of the infinite dreaming itself finite; of an infinite self-forgetfulness, confusion, and oblivion gathered into the perceptions “I” and “the world,” a boundless amnesia contained in the thought “I know who I am.” Elements of such myth survive in some of the golem stories themselves. They are pervaded by an eery gloom, an aura of wrong turnings, misbegotten ventures, fiasco. Not only will the attempt to create a human being fail, but even more pointedly: the very attempt is itself an aberration, a blunder, an attempted usurpation. Just to undertake it is already to have begun moving down the wrong path.

Whether moved by instinct or sheer habit, normal concentrating consciousness deploys its golem project within the present, but lets its gaze feed upon images of that chimerical future when all will celebrate in the clear, common light its project’s consummation. Traditional expressions of intuition such as golem stories and tragedy, or the sheer emotion of despair, disrupt such reveries; and now consciousness, informed by perceptions of a mythical fall, begins to assume an entirely new configuration. Insofar as it looks beyond the present, it no longer loses itself in fantasies of the future, but more soberly contemplates a past mistake, an ancient going astray. Such reflection inevitably leads, in turn, back to that primal wrong turn’s dismaying and all-too-relevant legacy: not the works-in-progress and airy expectations, but rather the meager, wayward *actuality* of my present condition. The fall fixes and defines my present condition precisely as “fallen,” as negation, as the “no longer” of what I once was. What marks my present state is not something I am or am making myself into, but what I no longer am. Because of the fall, I now *am* lack and privation, am the loss of essence and of an original plenitude, a heedless wandering away from my true self.

I have already described normal concentrating and crystallizing consciousness as haunted by such perceptions of its own lack of substance, its “nothingness”—indeed, it is this very dread which impels it into its plans to amass golemic being and knowing. But now intuition, having recast its obscure, idiosyncratic middle whispering into dramatic myths of aberration and diminution, suggests to me that the very existence in me of normal concentrating and crystallizing consciousness constitutes my “fall.” *Any* golem project—so I now hear—is just in itself that primordial error, that wrong path along which I now move wrapped in a curious and grievous blindness. Following it, I move ever farther away from my true self. Carried along by instinct-habit, I am ever more heedless of that unthinkable thing, process, or mystery—“reality,” *This*—which is where I am.

\* \* \* \* \*

v.

I have written that intuition's second murmur attains its full significance and persuasive force only in dependence on a tacit third. Determination—that is to say, definition, identity, form, measure, particularized being as this or that, particularized knowing of this or that—is negation, not only because it requires the exclusion of all other particularity, but also and primarily because it is an infinite negation, for it comes into being only by abolishing the indeterminate, by *excluding—by not being*—the undivided and boundless. Spinoza's declaration therefore posits the infinite as pre-existent, as "given." For the philosopher the infinite is conceptually and existentially prior to its infinite negation and impoverished substitute, particularity; and we can now see that myth, grafted as it is onto time, projects this priority as temporal. Humanity's fall, inevitably, must follow upon an earlier "prelapsarian" condition. And so myths of a fall, gesturing now towards intuition's most secret and quickening mystery, let loom in their background a perfection, an unbroken plenitude of being and knowing, which once, at least, was ours.

Philosophical and mythical renderings of intuition's middle sheath tacitly assume an original freedom from determination, a beginning as "unfallen." In its third, most obscure and occult revelation, intuition brings those perfections into the foreground, where it dwells upon and affirms them. Abjuring the endlessly expanding complications of persuasion and argument—for it is now deliberating with us within those cavernous subterranean mind-spaces which precede, underlie, and at some point create all "rationality" and "means of persuasion"—it whispers to us with a hieratic simplicity that the unbroken and boundless *is*, and that it itself, that "I," am linked to that miraculous something by the most intimate if inexplicable affinities. Within tradition's clear, common light—so much more varied, expansive, and alert than ours—public manifestations such as tragedy and myths of our fall suffuse collective awareness with intuition's two outer layers. We can now observe that they coexist in traditional consciousness with other great public forms which voice intuition's ultimate and unreservedly auspicious communication: its affirmation, prior to and beyond all negation and tragedy, of the unbroken and boundless; and its assurance that in spite of all error and aberration we can move towards it if, indeed, at this very moment we are not already, inexplicably and unthinkably, "there."

In varied ways adapted to the nuances of time and place, that vast phenomenon we call "religion" almost universally makes this affirmation. Numerous rites both individual and collective "abolish time," reverse the "fall," bring to "paradise," or at the very least make possible our ritual participation in original perfection. Here, too, important currents of the golem legend furnish examples. For among Hasidic adepts golem creation often figured not only as the theme of certain stirringly instructive narratives, but also as a possible act, a meditative ritual exemplifying that participation. As soon as it was "finished," the ritually produced golem was then immediately destroyed, the act of creation itself having "confirmed man in his likeness to God" (Scholem, 181).

In religious utterance, as in ritual, we often discern, now "public" and triumphant, intuition's subtlest, most inward, most stirring intimation, and indeed: proclamation of "the perfect" and of our relation or possible relation to it is the hallmark and center of gravity of religious speech. But if we then look within such utterance for a particular form and body of verbal expression, analogous to

tragedy and the nearly universal myth of a fall, by means of which intuition's third whisper reverberates through, colors, and even decisively shapes traditional picturings of "the world," we need only recall chapter two with its account of tradition's contribution to—its one "pole" of—the Other Paradox. For the great consciously and unconsciously collective effort I surveyed there—the alert and assiduous probing, at the very boundaries of awareness and of language, of Augustine, Aquinas, Ashvaghosha, Eckhart, Plotinus, Lao tzu, Dionysius, the *Upanishads*, Samkhya, Huang Po, the Shaivite *Tantras*, the *Yoga Sstras*, Eriugena, etc.—is, precisely, an exploration and affirmation of perfect being and knowing.

Like intuition in its boldest, most confidential disclosures, their words direct our attention to a word-transcending perfection of being and of awareness which is changeless, undivided, boundless, indeterminate. Like it, they suggest to us that our most important relation is to that perfection; they encourage us to attend to it, to seek to come into its presence, or according to them: the most profound reflection and analysis finally reveals that even now—somehow—we *are* it. All therefore would immediately understand the Buddha's affirmation—his unequivocal articulation in *Udana* of intuition's most profound whispering—that "there is an Unborn, Unbecome, Unmade, Uncompounded"; if there were not, there would be no escape from what is "born, become, made, and compounded" (*BT*, 76). And in myriad ways all offer variations on Lin-chi's description—*intuition's* description—of his listeners, and so of each of us, when he discloses that "the person here listening to the Dharma has no form, no characteristics, no root, no beginning, no place he abides, yet he is vibrantly alive" (Lin-chi, 36).

\* \* \* \* \*

v.

Exploration of the Other Paradox and its resonances has carried us from Schelling's "consciousness is concentration" to the Buddha's discovery of something beginningless, unbroken, unconditioned, and real. It has led from the analysis of golem projects enacted in the clear, common light to Lin-chi's beginningless, formless, even *placeless* person "without qualities," his enigmatic "true person of no rank," his word-picture of actual human presence—of our already existing, but invariably overlooked *perfection*—as "this lone brightness without fixed shape or form" (Lin-chi, 25). After introducing the Other Paradox and Schelling on consciousness in chapter one, I analyzed "normal" concentrating and crystallizing consciousness, including its occasional solitudes; I attempted to describe and place in context the worst and most feared condition such a consciousness can conceive. In chapter two I explored traditional conceptions of perfect being and knowing, and having done so could state the Other Paradox: the identity of that "worst possible condition" and that "perfection," a commonality of qualities and non-qualities diametrically opposed to their polar opposite, golemic being and knowing. My concern in the present chapter has been the ramifications, linkages, and significance of the Other Paradox. What are we to make of it, and what does it have to do with *us*?

To begin, I said that the Paradox points towards a historical diminution in the alertness and spaciousness of human consciousness. I claimed, secondly, that it reflects a most elementary, indeed a defining, phenomenon: human consciousness as the infinitely complex and ambiguous dance of instinct-habit and intuition. Having already explored the workings of instinct-habit in chapter one, I

spelled out what I mean by ‘intuition’, describing its peculiar visitor status and its three “whisperings.” I noted that the dance is hard to discern in modern consciousness, for in it intuition is banished to the very fringes, and pointed out the additional paradox that in modern consciousness instinct itself has been supplanted for the most part by pure animal habit. In tradition, on the other hand, intuition dances as instinct-habit’s full-fledged partner and rival. Illustrating this last point, I have just described important ways in which traditional collective perceptions and reflection are pervaded by intuition’s threefold annunciation. Here the Other Paradox makes an essential particular contribution, for while tragedy and myths of a fall communicate intuition’s first two whisperings, it is those traditional conceptions of perfect being and knowing—one of the two poles of the Other Paradox—which impart the third, intuition’s innermost, ultimate word. But what is its overall contribution and significance? Adding up what these chapters have brought to light, and drawing together their various analyses and strands, let us once again and conclusively ask: how does the Other Paradox now hover before us? What new perspective or perception does it offer? Just what does it mean to *us*?

The Other Paradox is a verbal microcosm, a small, dense word-crystal which, letting all accident pass through and disappear, holds and reflects pure essences. In it we can perceive the mysterious encounter—agon and ritual and dance—which defines us. In its small compass the singular nature of human consciousness is distilled, the vast spectrum of tensions and energies constituting awareness displayed, the true history of their eternal combinings and separations made plain. For on the one hand, in calling attention to modern consciousness’ characteristic golem project, the Other Paradox is able to show us the operation of instinct-habit, with its thirst for particularity and its drive towards concentration and crystallization, in virtually pure form, that is, undisturbed by intuition. But then on the other: by turning to traditional theological and philosophical picturings of perfect being and knowing, it shows us intuition, given virtually free play, carrying awareness in the very opposite direction. For such purely “intuitive” reflection is not confined, as modern consciousness typically is, within habits left over from once vital animal needs, nor is it seized by the inexorable necessities of animal life. Given free rein, it culminates in a vision of perfect, even divine, being and knowing as something diametrically opposed to the concentrated, crystallized being and knowing of a finished golem. In this way the Other Paradox shows us the two champions and rivals, instinct-habit and intuition, facing one another from afar; and so the entire, scarcely surveyable field of encounter between two utterly disparate and alien energies—the encounter *we are*—stands clearly revealed.

The Other Paradox reveals our incessant struggle to avoid or to flee a condition our most profound reflections perceive as perfect and godlike. We daily devote ourselves—so the Paradox—to attaining the very opposite of what we discern in our most reflective, alert and spacious moments as the ideal, even the divine, state. In this way the Other Paradox’s dense crystal enables us to see and then contemplate both the essence and the unfolding ramifications of the tension-filled polarity which defines us: on the one hand, the animal life in sensory and verbal signs which instinct and habit engender, and on the other, the triple-layered perception which intuition whispers—or which just “comes to us”—from uncharted depths within or without.

For given an awareness quickened by obscure sensings of that unbounded, unbroken being and knowing which forms the center of intuition’s revelations, its other more exterior whisperings

inevitably follow. We see, for example, that a life devoted to other, not to mention perfectly antithetical, forms of being and knowing must constitute a negation, a wandering away from our most profound destiny and affinity, a “fall.” And given the utterly contradictory and “irrational” venture consciousness normally is, we can easily understand intuition’s dark whispering that golem projects are tragic, are doomed to fail; we can well understand that a creature whose unceasing and herculean strivings, born from instinct but now supported only by habit, are disavowed and even opposed by its most deep-seated divinations, will be perpetually vulnerable—at all their varying levels of lucidity, intensity, and frequency—to the attrition wars of anxiety, to the sieges and blitzkriegs of despair. But then again: these keenly sensed intuitions, the fruits of reflection, can just as easily be thrown into disarray themselves, overwhelmed as they often are by the incessant and powerful demands of life, the forces of biology and “instinct.” Then consciousness assumes the poses, undertakes the actions, and lets itself be contained and controlled by the sensory and verbal perceptions, upon which animal necessity seems to insist. All these phases and alchemies of the dance, and others as well, the Other Paradox reveals to our alert meditation.

Within tradition, the event, perhaps unique in the cosmos, which defines us—the encounter and ritual dance of instinct-habit with intuition—is vigorously expressed and vividly present in the collective awareness. Of tradition we can say, very generally speaking, that the encounter takes place all along the crucial border separating action and reflection, and still generally speaking, that intuition and instinct-habit rule respectively those two great regions, thought and act. The tensions and dramatic interplays this makes possible are revealed to us in the following: within tradition it is given to today’s reflection, controlled as it is by intuition, to make visible in the great public’s clear, common light the dark essence of today’s actions—even as tragedy shows forth in the theater the tragic fall of kings, the king rules in the palace and unknown to himself is piecing together the details of his particular fall.

In “modern” life, on the other hand, manifestations of this singular conjunction and interaction—of this dance—are largely absent. In this “modern” age human essence is being effaced; our special mark—our signature—is fading away. Now habit, instinct’s dull heir, dominates reflection as well as action. It is habit, therefore, which pervades and manages public perceptions of “how things are.” As we have seen, intuition is reduced to the transient and individual, to substanceless purely private worlds of anxiety, floating solitude, and despair, to the fringes’ remote, shadowy, half-mad realm. As a result, that singular encounter within mystery which we are is pushed off the public stage and out of normal awareness. Habit, seemingly triumphant, rules both act and perception. Only rarely, and then only in privacy’s invisible and scarcely real realm, does it encounter its now spectral rival, intuition, and then a ghostly parody of the encounter we are takes place. Here, then, is another paradox, a paradox of “modern consciousness.” For even as we become oblivious, in our modern insularity, to the rest of animal life, we are retreating from the defining event, the meeting in us of instinct-habit and intuition, which in spite of all commonality distinguishes us from all other species. Even as we confine ourselves just within *our* signs and within the exclusive sphere of “the human,” we are sleepwalking back, unawares, into that vast monolith: animal perception’s automatized and uniform—because intuitionless—world.

Exploration of the encounter, in us, between instinct-habit and intuition has led back to the

Other Paradox, now seen from this perspective: it is our defining crystal, within which the varied and historically differentiated facets of that unprecedented meeting display themselves to reflection and meditation. And in turn, that reflection now brings us back to our very starting point, to Schelling and concentrating consciousness, to the golem project, to a particular form of human consciousness which at first seemed self-evident and “normal,” but which now presents itself to us as atypical and as “modern.” For seen in the microcosmic crystal of the Other Paradox, that modern consciousness appears to us now in a strikingly new and different light. Its background and foil are formed by tradition’s keenest, most profound perceptions of perfect being and knowing, perceptions which constitute the “other” half of the Other Paradox. Bereft—except for occasional scentings of doom—of any of the intuitive whispers which inform traditional consciousness, and seldom requiring the vitality of instinct, awareness is now swallowed up by perceptions and projects which are purely habitual. So remote and alien have its own most deep-seated intuitions become to it—such is the skewing and diminution which has taken place—that modern consciousness responds to their ecstatic vision of perfect being and knowing, as the Other Paradox shows, with either incomprehension or horror.

But as we have seen (and this qualification is of particular and personal importance to us insofar as you and I are avatars of “modern consciousness”), that modern consciousness to which we now return is by no means the generic “concentrating consciousness” with which we began. Looking inward upon our own awareness, we at first take it—and I approached it so at the beginning of this writing—as “consciousness,” as representative of consciousness in general. As modern, we are even inclined to regard ourselves as typifying an advanced form of human consciousness. For we know of no “fall”; and as a consequence of its constant repetition, the cliché of our constantly deepening “sophistication”—that last remnant of “progress”—remains self-evident,

But the foregoing examination of the Other Paradox, of the historical development it illuminates, and of the mysterious encounter and dance it microcosmically displays, suggests a very different perspective on modern consciousness. According to it, modern consciousness is a diminished and impoverished consciousness, awareness in a state of regression. As seen in the transforming light of the Other Paradox, modern consciousness is itself enacting and authenticating—at this very moment and before our very eyes—the ancient myth of our fall. Compared with traditional consciousness’ triple world, its horizons are diminished; its depleted sense of “where we are”—of *This*—is cramped, one-dimensional, unvarying, dully and parochially anthropocentric. Traditional consciousness was aware, collectively and publicly, of the profound dichotomies and tensions which define it—which define *us*—but modern consciousness, alert only to the perceptions and demands of instinct now ossified as habit, does not hear intuition’s enigmatic and quickening whisperings, or at most perceives the vast realm spun out of those whisperings only as the dismal fringes it glimpses but occasionally, and then only in the isolated unreality of despair.

Of the consciousness we have acquired or become just by virtue of living—of having learned to speak, think, and feel—in “modern” times, we therefore can say that it discerns but little of the mystery within which it finds itself, little of *This*. We can say that for the most part it is oblivious to the vast, richly variegated event or landscape it itself is. Reflecting on the world, ourselves, and our awareness of both, it now no longer seems to us that we are a privileged or even generic and universal, but rather a receding—a sadly or tragically *ebbing*—consciousness. In

becoming modern consciousness, we have not learned, but instead forgotten; we have become duller rather than keener. We know nothing of paths tradition has repeatedly traversed and then perhaps left behind. With respect to tradition, therefore, our first work is not to discern how it might relate to us, but how we might be brought into relation to it, might begin to approach what it already *is*. We begin (though it may even be that this is precisely where divine consciousness or divine being itself eternally begins) -- in the nowhere of absolute beginnings. We thought we “knew where we were.” But to our surprise it turns out that we still have everything—the infinite, the inexhaustible—to learn.

\* \* \* \* \*

## Chapter 4: The Great Doubt

Quick as it is to draw back from the sudden panics and the slowly corrosive disquietudes released by its sporadic driftings towards fringe-awareness, modern consciousness gradually settles into a life of unresisting, even eager captivity to instinct-habit; and so through long stretches of time it remains confined—for during these spells of pure normalcy it “knows” nothing else—within that familiar sensory and verbal element which is the clear, common light’s “the world.” But then if such consciousness—if “you” or “I”—should begin seriously to heed intuition’s subversive whisperings, it soon begins to drift or be carried out of the clear, common light into greater solitudes. Once there, it soon senses that “where I am”—that *This*—is swelling to unprecedented dimensions and assuming previously unsuspected forms of complexity and depth. This unmeasured vastness, where terra firma’s incessant landmarks vanish in the infinity of an edgeless sea, is the realm of the unknown, the possible, the uncertain. In this ambiguous and fluid element there are no secure footholds or Parmenidean fixities. Here the old familiarities and confident knowings no longer hold.

It is true: in their more evolved forms, those two correlates—sign-consciousness and its enveloping sign-made world—can themselves easily suggest to their contemplator infinite magnitudes. They have an aura of unending division and particularization, of limitless complexity. Yet behind this apparent vastness and this seemingly inexhaustible multiplicity one soon discerns the confined lucidities and the wearying uniformities of a single formula eternally repeated. For as we have seen, both normal consciousness and its world—like all animal consciousness and all sign-made “animal” worlds—are uniform, limited, and irresistibly “self-evident” just because they reflect the workings of one creator, instinct-habit, and because that creator itself knows and brings to bear, untiringly, one monolithic principle: the generation of more or less complex biological “the worlds” by means of the binary opposition of sensory or sensory and verbal signs.

But then if it should happen that intuition’s biologically heterodox whisperings begin to infiltrate consciousness, and to here and there take hold, the situation is dramatically changed. Then awareness itself is no longer constituted by a single monolithic force, but spreads out to become the field upon which two diametrically opposed energies contend. No longer the unanimous expression of a single formula, consciousness now *is* that contention and opposition, is that suddenly boundless space filled with the movements and tensions of its two protagonists. Now I can no longer identify “what I am” with an easy, self-evident name or phrase, for “what I am” is just that unending, ambiguous, unaccountable, unpredictable, constantly shifting dance.

As consciousness itself is transformed in this way, so, inevitably, is its world, its reflexively comprehended or obscurely sensed “where I am.” As it can in the eery aftermath—all too dense with reality—of a sudden and fatal accident, *This* all at once takes on the aura of the unexpectedly vast and open. “Where I am” is now transformed into the unknown: an unfamiliar sea, a great labyrinth, an abyss, mystery. Just *because* awareness has now slipped out of million year old neuronal pathways—because biology’s perception mechanisms, the clear, common light’s truisms and fixed points, and the hoary ethos of instinct and habit no longer hold when *This* becomes “oceanic”—consciousness is now keenly and perhaps painfully aware, among other things, of the *loss* of familiarity and certainty, the disappearance of “the known.” Bereft of its usual bearings,



disoriented, it may now be engulfed by Rumi's "bewilderment," or by the feeling, described by John of the Cross, of being "lost on the road" (Rumi, 224; *DN*, 69). Consciousness itself, no longer either "concentrating" or "crystallizing," swells out instead into Ch'an's vast "doubt-sensation" (*I-chin*). And "where I am," no longer submitting to the rote syllables 'the world', dilates out into a dense and amorphous question, Ch'an's "ball of doubt" or "doubt-mass" (*I-tuan*). In this way—and after countless eons of existence as instinct and as habit—the delicate, sign-inhabiting neuron which now at last extends its dendritic processes out beyond signs is now also for the first time entering into the immeasurable, all-consuming "great doubt" (*ta-i*; see Gregory, 352-353).

I have portrayed normal consciousness as regulated, and normal life's shared world as pervaded and structured, by the unspoken, unexamined, "self-evident" shared truths which illuminate both. When we meet and begin to converse in the narrowly circumscribed—the "landlocked"—clear, common light, we never allude to or even inwardly note our verbal encounter's unvarying and indispensable premise: prior to and deeper than all our particular doubts and questions, we know "where" and "who" we are; we know "how things are"; we know "what is happening" and "how to be"; we know—without even needing to consider the matter—that the language we speak is a medium eminently suited to disclose and communicate all these things. In our nervous system, as in all animal perception, consciousness is perfectly, seemingly inseparably fused with its essential signs, that is, those signs which are indispensable to the animal's basic orientation, and so it does not occur to us to doubt that we are "in the world" and now are "talking," that we one day were "born" and on another will "die," that "you" are a "human being," that "I" am "Luther Askeland," etc. Only in the course of our further refinement and detailing of these and other givens—only, that is, within the protective cocoon of the "basic" and "obvious"—do doubt and bewilderment arise.

Because modern consciousness is no "dance," being instead the virtually exclusive creation of instinct-habit, its inevitably circumscribed and diminutive doubt-sensations and doubt-masses remain confined *within* the cocoon of the obvious—there they are limited to partial doubts concerning this or that aspect of particular sensory and verbal perceptions. As modern consciousness, I can wonder about the particular contents of "the world," about the particular qualities of particular "persons" and "things," about the particular golem project which would be best for "me." Any more expansive and comprehensive doubt directed towards the all-encompassing cocoon of the obvious—for example, the doubting of sensory and verbal perception as such, or doubt about the bedrock certainties that "I" am "Luther Askeland," am "in the world" and "in Minnesota," etc., or doubt that I know anything by "knowing" that this is "2005" or "Tuesday"—is not a permitted doubt, much less an essential experience on the path to knowing, or a meditational desideratum. Indeed, for modern consciousness such doubt is a clear sign of madness, such "disorientation" a strictly clinical or pathological condition.

Just *because* Descartes' philosophizing begins with a concerted attempt to doubt, that progenitor and archetype of modern consciousness perfectly illustrates such consciousness' very limited capacity to question its underlying premises about *This*, itself, and the means by which it "knows" them. In his *Discourse on Method* and his *Meditations* he tells us that he has undertaken to doubt all "which may be brought within the sphere of the doubtful," to "reject as absolutely false everything as to which I could imagine the least ground of doubt," and even to suppose that an all-

powerful “evil genius . . . has employed his whole energies in deceiving me” (Descartes, I, 144, 101, 148). Against the backdrop of this adventurous program, the “doubt-mass” Descartes proceeds to muster tellingly illustrates the narrowly limited scope of modern doubt. For it soon becomes clear that for Descartes, rejecting every conceivably doubtful thing as “absolutely false” amounts only to a doubting of some, but not all, verbal propositions, and to doubt concerning how he is to interpret the sensory perceptions of “light,” “sound,” etc., he cannot doubt that “he” “has.”

Approximately two thousand years earlier, the Buddhists already denied the existence of the “self” or “I,” regarding it instead as a verbal fiction. Accordingly, they began analyzing all statements about “I” or “me” into statements involving no supposed “person.” A few centuries later, Nagarjuna argued that all statements asserting the existence or the nonexistence of both persons and things are riddled with hidden contradictions and so utterly incoherent—when we pronounce them, it may seem to us that we are saying something, but in fact we are not. In his time it was already a Buddhist commonplace that verbal perception’s applicability is limited to the conventional “everyday” world—to the provisionally, relatively, conversationally “real”—and that words and sentences simply do not apply *paramarthasat*, that is, in relation to the truly real. For actual reality—*This*—transcends all our verbal categories and verbal distinctions. It can only be covered over or falsified by verbal signs which purport to name it and by combinations of verbal signs which purport to disclose “what it is.”

In Descartes, however, we discover mind once again transfixed by that aboriginal biological spell which effects the perfect fusion of consciousness with its essential signs. For unlike Buddhist and other traditions before him, Descartes cannot *imagine* consciousness not confined within and organized by verbal signs. He can conceive awareness only as concentrated and crystallized around the intimate syllable ‘I’. The Buddhists and countless others had long since, and repeatedly, considered the question, but as he doubts “everything,” it doesn’t occur to him even to ask, generally, how those enigmas we call “words” and “sentences” relate—if they relate at all—to reality, to *This*. For him the syllables ‘is’ and ‘am’ suggest no puzzle, broach no mystery. In the thought of Descartes, consequently, it is simply assumed that the sound ‘I’ names an entity and that other sounds identify verbalizable, clearly comprehended “acts.” It is unquestioningly accepted as certain, therefore, that the I-entity “thinks,” and so must “exist.” About these perceptions and inferences there is nothing mysterious or questionable. Here there is not the slightest uncertainty or loose end, no chance even for a malicious and omnipotent being to trick him. Descartes simply cannot doubt—for it doesn’t even occur to him that one *could* doubt—these operations with words. They are “very clearly and distinctly,” even “necessarily” true (Descartes, I, 101, 150, 157-158).

In nonverbal animal consciousness, in “normal” consciousness, and in Cartesian “modern consciousness”—that is, in all instinctive and habitual sign-consciousness not yet visited or complicated by intuition—the underlying nature of doubt is uniform and constant, like such consciousness itself. It is true that as a result of the theoretically unlimited process of multiplication by sign division and opposition, the myriad forms of sensory and sensory/verbal consciousness display great contrasts and variations in their relative degrees of complexity and nuance. And it is also true that such differences of degree manifest themselves in their doubting as well. But the fact that this great spectrum of consciousness, when not yet intruded upon by intuition, is the monolithically organized creation of instinct-habit determines the shared quality—contained—and

the predetermined range—limited—of its doubting capacity.

So it is that a deer ignores most of the signs in its sensory field; to others it makes an immediate response free of all “doubt.” In a limited number of circumstances it also happens that the deer will stop and hesitate, will be “in perplexity” concerning how to interpret and respond to certain signs. But here again: its perplexity is limited to certain questions, above all the assessment of a perceived possible threat. Such an instance of “doubting” is therefore merely a contained and limited episode—a most useful particular adaptation—within the eternal cyclical pattern of animal behavior: to perceive particular sights, sounds, etc., and then, immediately and unhesitatingly, or perhaps after doubt and a wary evaluation, to act. To the deer’s sensory signs we have added verbal perception, but our doubts arise like its within a limited set of circumstances, and like its doubts, they invoke a limited set of questions. At such times we will not know “what to think” or “what to do,” and may seem to ourselves to be engulfed by “great doubt.” But here again: so long as consciousness in us reflects only the workings of instinct-habit, our uncertainty is nothing more than a limited, passing interlude contained and sheltered within that greater clear, common light and ongoing “my life” in which, as concerns what is basic and essential, we know “where we are,” “who we are,” and “how to be.”

It follows that for normal or modern consciousness, as for any consciousness under the sole aegis of instinct-habit, the unknown is always enfolded within and so limited by the known. In the clear, common light the unknown is a gap or pocket of uncertainty within the comforting matrix of the certain, the doubtful a temporary flaw in a greater, never-doubted lucidity. Verbal doubt enters only into those interstices not already filled by our teeming verbal certainties “I think,” “I am,” “God exists,” “ $E=Mc^2$ ,” “I was born and someday will die,” “John spoke,” etc. But when consciousness, no longer the exclusive captive and instrument of instinct-habit, lets itself become or finds that it is being transformed into the eternal dance of instinct-habit and intuition, that cocoon-like matrix of “the obvious” is dissolved. Since no encompassing certainties remain to contain, shape, and limit the doubtful, consciousness soon finds itself collapsing outwards into a vast doubt-sensation, a dizzyingly unbounded disorientation. And it becomes aware of *This* as transforming itself into an edgeless question, a great doubt-mass spread out without limit by the diametrically opposed, infinitely contrary axioms, definitions, and adjurations instinct-habit and intuition project.

As consciousness is transformed into a pure doubt-sensation and “the world” disappears into the ubiquitous doubt-mass *This* has become, all certainties and secure footholds vanish—only for purposes of comic relief might one now contemplate the notion of searching for sentences “clearly and distinctly” true. As long, for example, as consciousness in me was molded solely by instinct-habit, there could be no doubt about my perceptions of “where I was.” I was “in the world,” “in the universe,” “in Minnesota.” I was, obviously, in “space” as well as in “time,” and I could pinpoint with finely differentiated verbal and numerical precision just “where I was” within each.

But now intuition has come to me from a somewhere outside myself and outside “the world,” or perhaps from an unknown “somewhere” within, a place hidden from the habitual “I”; and it is planting the thought that all these blindly acquired and mechanically repeated phrases which seem to crystallize my spatial and temporal orientation are in fact embarrassing demonstrations of my limitations, of my dull ignorance and inattention, my calamitous *mis*perception and underestimation of “where I am.” For what my habitual, self-evident comprehendings show is that I

treat the unbroken as if it were divided, and the boundless as something limited. I naively approach that which eludes and exceeds all signs having already spontaneously assumed that mine can seize, contain, and disclose it. This superlatively wrong-headed approach—so intuition—has two primary effects: the infinite diminution and the infinite falsification, in my presumed “comprehending” of it, of “where I am,” of *This*. And in a more general way those verbal consequences of my inattention and my misunderstanding—the ritually repeated certainties that I am “in the world” and “in Minnesota,” that this is “2005,” etc.—have an additional consequence: they lull me still deeper into that dullness, and entangle me more intricately and securely in that confusion, in which until now I have passed my life.

Stretched out as it now is across the expanse at whose opposing edges instinct-habit and intuition point in perfectly contrary directions, consciousness can only react with uncertainty and disorientation, can only be torn, or vacillate, between infinitely remote extremes. Suppose that after an hour concentrating all thought on forming the paragraph just before this one, I stand up. For just one extraordinary instant or atom of time during that minute ascent—and within each of the infinitely divisible instants which constitute one second, undoubtedly, innumerable enlightenments might be won and lost—consciousness in me is nothing but awareness of something nonspatial and unlimited, something no word has encompassed, no name has named. It is as if in one instant I had collapsed out into and now everywhere touch that edgeless, strangely luminous reality or presence which right now and most vividly is “where I am,” is *This*. But minutes later as I walk down the gravel road towards Irvin’s, the driver of a delivery vehicle stops to ask for directions to Houston. Without hesitation or the slightest inner sense of confusion, I identify “where we are” and explain how to get “there” from “here.” Only as the car disappears down the road do I ask myself if I was right ten minutes ago or now; and perhaps I further ask: what is to be said or thought if there is no such thing as being “oriented” or “disoriented”? What if the very notion of a “where I am” is merely one more superstitious, magical, mythical fabrication, like the Cartesian “I,” like “America,” like “Thor.”

Off the road now and walking by the bur oaks on the path to and past Irvin’s long-empty shack, I try to channel whatever lucidity I can mobilize into the one great question where am I, what is *This*? For a moment I seem to brush against my meager question’s infinite answer, seem to be *in* nothing but boundless, unbroken, unsayable reality. And during the next moment I seem to see most clearly: boundless, unbroken, unsayable reality is always “where I am,” is always what I move into when I move, what I breathe in when I inhale. But then with the very first response of mine with which I seek to think, feel, or say this “reality”—or to enact it in a gesture, or echo it in an act—I have already missed it and slipped past it, and am being carried down a particular path which like all particular paths leads away from *This*. And then again a few minutes later I try to recollect my now scattered and confused awareness, and so ask myself once again where I am, what is *This*? But this time nothing happens. Now consciousness in me is only the visual perception of color and form, the acoustic perception of pitch, volume, and tone, the verbal perceptions ‘maple’, ‘path’, ‘hawk’, ‘Irvin’s’. Beyond them I discern nothing. The delicate nerve ends of awareness which minutes ago were fired by something closer and greater than all named things now flail vainly in sterile vacancy. And now I don’t know what to make of this failure or of that earlier “contact”; I don’t know—I am stretched out between two utterly disparate and antagonistic ways of perceiving or perhaps not

perceiving—“where I am.”

The same unlimited doubt—a swelling flood tide of possibility, labyrinthine confusion, and vacillation no longer held back by bulwarks of “the obvious”—engulfs all my old certainties about the “I” that “I am.” As modern consciousness, I—that nameless something which now writes ‘I’—am as spellbound as is Descartes by this uniquely hypnotic diphthong, am no more able than he to doubt it. Of course, I also know “where I am”—“the universe,” “the world out there”—but then “the world out there” is the non-interior, non-intimate half of the I-world duality into which English, the container and template of verbal awareness within me, has divided *This*. As opposed to “the world out there,” it is the “I” which is immediately present to me—which *seems* at least to be immediately present to me—in pure intimacy and transparency, thereby enabling me to know with irrefragable Cartesian certainty both that and what I am.

It is true that numerous peripheral questions and nuances remain in doubt—total clarity concerning “who I am” must await my final definition at the time of golemic completion. It is also true that if and when awareness strays towards the fringes, I begin to recognize in myself much that is amorphous and undefined, begin to sense that I am closer to nothing than to something—that is why most of the time I am careful not even to glance towards the fringes. But in the clear, common light, and “normally,” I know the self-evident fundamentals, and countless details, of “who I am.” I know the bedrock facts that “I” “exist,” and that “I” am “Luther Askeland” and “a human being.” I can describe “my life” and the person—the perfected golem—I am in the process of becoming. Further, that unique self-transparency which belongs to, and may even define, the “I” means that in many matters relating to me I am the preferred or even the only knowledgeable witness. Better than anyone else, I—sometimes I alone—know what I am thinking and feeling, what I have been doing, what I saw and heard, what my story is, what my projected eulogy and vindication will be. Consequently, when you and I meet in the clear, common light, our talk’s premise will be that we have roughly equal access to and knowledge of “how things are” in “the world,” but as for me, it will be understood—that is, we will spontaneously, unthinkingly take it as given—that I am the privileged knower of “how things are” with “me,” as you are with “you.”

Normally consciousness in me is fixed in this instinctive-habitual presupposition of its own self-evident, easily verbalized self-transparency, but to the extent that it now comes under the influence of intuition, that biologically adaptive animal confidence is transformed into an ominously swelling mass of doubt. Here, as before, intuition’s whisperings seem to come from remote, alien regions, and to propose perspectives and intimations perfectly contrary to our instinctive-habitual certainties. And indeed, it is as if that obsessive and labyrinthine topic—the “I”—spurs intuition to its most contrarian extremes. For apropos that perfect “self-transparency”: intuition now suggests to me that it is precisely where I am most certain—that is, in my presumed self-knowledge—that I am most egregiously mistaken. It is just in that experience of interior transparency that my most baleful error is revealed, my most glaring blindspot exposed.

Oblivious as I have always been to *This*, and so having from the very beginning confused those mutually delimiting verbal signs, ‘the world out there’ and ‘I’, with reality—with *This*—awareness in me has attached itself to and still clings to that cordoned off, sign-based “I” as what it most intimately knows, as what “I” in fact “am.” Perpetuating, unawares, animal perception’s ancient confounding of realms—its spontaneous equation of one’s species and one’s own particular

signs with the real—I have then been led, naturally and inevitably, to perceive that verbally delimited “I” as determinate and named, and consequently as one of the describable entities in the spatial-temporal realm of named things. In this way “I” have become this or that easily identifiable “person” inhabiting this or that specifiable “place” within the limits of a particular “time.” And in this way “I” have come to be framed and delimited by those seemingly definitive temporal certainties, “my birth” and “my death.”

All this flows from that supreme, primordial error: the presupposition that what is real in me is something signs can reach and disclose, the unhesitating and ungrounded expectation that there is such a thing as knowing, by means of words, “who I am.” For what is real in me—what it is that, having let itself be contained and organized by the uncanny diphthong ‘I’, takes itself to be “Luther Askeland”—is something other than and prior to signs, and consequently cannot be encompassed or parsed by them. So that if it makes sense at all to speak of the “who” or “what” that “I am,” it can only be as that sign-transcending—and so immeasurable, indivisible, unspecifiable, and inconceivable—someone or something, as a most uncanny and baffling “other,” as an elusive and unthinkable god or animal not yet identified, not even “observed.”

As the traditional Jewish narrative captures or prefigures normal consciousness’ single-minded existence as “golem project,” so a traditional tale which in its presuppositions and plot effectively reverses the golem legend shows forth the profound antitheses, doubts, and vacillations concerning “who I am” which transform consciousness visited and infiltrated by intuition. As we have seen, the would-be makers of a golem begin with the nothingness of earth’s “formless matter,” and then just by bringing to bear their own creative power and skill, attempt to create a complete human being. And analogously, as normal consciousness I begin as nothing, and can become “something” only through self-creation—normal life, the life of concentration and crystallization, is that sustained act of magic. But all this is as it were reversed in traditional conceptions and tales of the royal or divine foundling. For one day as she carries on with her normal life, typically a life of toil if not outright suffering, it occurs to the “foundling,” or it is suggested to her, that by birth and by nature, she is royal or divine, and therefore that she is someone entirely different from—indeed is the very opposite of—that exiguous creature of small circumstance all the others and she herself have “known” her to be.

The makers of golems—and we ourselves insofar as we remain “normal consciousness”—hover around the half-finished creature which is our work, our attention consumed by the process itself and by that future in which success or failure will be decided. As for the foundling, or, rather, *possible* foundling—for the evidence she incessantly ransacks fascinates, but soon exhausts itself in the inconclusive—the one supreme question and single focal point of all her attention is not a future being she might make or transform herself into. The one issue is what she already—what she right now—*is*. And as concerns that all-important present being—her very essence—all previous self-knowing has vanished in an edgeless sea of doubt. For of course she may well be the familiar “Louise” she and all the others have always understood her to be; she may be that “Little Agnes” it has never even occurred to her to doubt that she “is.” But then again: she now knows nothing for sure, and can rule out nothing for sure. It is possible that she *is* someone singular and extraordinary, a being of an entirely different order, a kingly or somehow even holy presence which has come from and belongs “somewhere else.” And this other possibility overflows with such promise and mystery,

and suggests such a dazzling, impossible, mind-breaking actuality—which even at this very moment would be radiantly if indiscernibly true—that she scarcely dares contemplate it, but at the same time refuses to surrender it, and in despair turn away.

If awareness in me, having outgrown normalcy's tightly controlled monologue, flows out into the fluctuating and unpredictable colloquy of instinct-habit and intuition, it soon happens that I, just like the foundling, no longer know "who I am." As normal consciousness I was—obviously—a human being-in-progress, was in laborious transition from the nothingness which was my beginning to that condition of concentrated and crystallized golemic existence which will be my end. But now I hear from intuition—and of course, the miraculous perfect veracity of the guest's astonishing claims is always *conceivable-possible*—that "where I am" is not the familiar "the world," but a boundless, unbroken, unsayable something. I hear that my origin—my birthright, my original essence, my home—cannot be found in the multiple, constantly changing "the world," but awaits me in or even *as* that unthinkable perfection. My innermost being, my rightful and true destiny, everything that is truly and unqualifiedly *real* within this mystery the sound 'I' clumsily indicates belongs with—for it is most intimately related to—that dark and lucid radiance. My beginning—so intuition—is not in and as nothing, but within and as the boundless and the unbroken; from the very beginning, therefore, I timelessly *am* infinitely more than any golem I might conceive. And only because I have been oblivious to this or have forgotten this—only because I have lost all contact with everything in me that is essence, is real—could I even contemplate undertaking something like a golem project, whose inevitable and ruinous effect is: to perpetuate my amnesia, to seal me ever more tightly within my oblivion, to wind me year after year in ever more layers of grotesque misunderstandings, abridgments, and truncations of the unthinkable "who I am."

\* \* \* \* \*

ii.

Those two great orienting illuminations which indeed are the two primary sources of the clear, common light's light—the verbal orientation "where I am" and the verbal orientation "who I am"—have now spread out, transformed into a dense and uncontained doubt-mass, and consciousness itself, having surpassed the certainties which once sheltered it, sprawls out in a vast bewilderment; yet the doubt-mass and the doubt-sensation which the world and consciousness now are becoming are not yet complete. We seek these two supreme orientations not only or not even primarily for their own sakes—that is, just so that we might perceive and then contemplate "where" and "who" we are—but because such spontaneously embraced and subsequently unquestioned certainties create and fix in place the inclusive framework within which we can choose and act. Our knowledge of "where" and "who" we are forms that outermost ring of certainty which encloses and guarantees our knowledge of "how to be." Enclosed within these three great knowings, we are then in position to choose, plan, describe, explain, and justify our actions and our golem projects, our "my life."

In normal life, doubt concerning "how to be," like all other doubt, is limited, held in check by consciousness' enclosing certainties. My doubts concerning choice and action are therefore limited to particular questions, often purely tactical, about which particular golem project to choose,

how best to carry it out, etc. In this way the certainties within which normal consciousness confines itself facilitate that essential and ubiquitous animal phenomenon: the unhesitant act. By way of contrast, the foundling exemplifies a thoroughly “abnormal” situation. Within her consciousness a vertiginously swelling sense of the *possibly* true soon overwhelms and breaks out of all the confining rings of the obvious. Concerning “who she is” and also concerning “where she is”—for the familiar world of her accustomed daily life may be her home, but may also be the place of her exile, of her *loss* of home, her imprisonment—nothing is certain. As for “how to be,” the two utterly contrary courses of action which now offer themselves to her transform the realm of choice and action into one great mass of doubt no longer contained by great and obvious truths. For she can choose to carry on as before, but then on the other hand she can instead strike out on an entirely new path, undertaking to recover or return to that which is—which might be—her royal being and destiny, her mysterious divine life.

Within normal consciousness which has been invaded and enlarged by intuition, a similar transformation now begins. For if “where I am”—if *This*—is something infinitely other than and greater than “the world,” if I, unknown to myself and in spite of my presumed self-transparency, am something infinitely other and more than “Luther Askeland,” and if my astonishing birthright and proper destiny is to behold, inhabit, or somehow be that otherness and that miraculous perfection, then, obviously, my golem project and any golem project I might contemplate are the misbegotten schemes of benightedness and delusion, and just as obviously: instead of aspiring to construct a future “something” out of the “nothing” and “not yet” I have misunderstood myself to be, I should reverse course entirely and seek to recover, seek at last to truly *be*, what I originally, miraculously, and unthinkably am.

But then again, and as the *next* step in the all too crystalline logic of doubt: within that consciousness which has received such a visitation, there no longer *are* any confining certainties or fixed points which might lend credence to the blandishments and urgings of intuition, or for that matter to the once irresistible formulas of instinct-habit. Now that the latter no longer exerts exclusive control over consciousness—and so no longer determines “how things are”—and now that awareness itself has broken out through the confining barriers of the obvious and the undeniable, and so become pure doubt-sensation, “I” know only confusion, disorientation, and bewilderment concerning “how to be,” “what to do.”

Even if it is that most general of actions—the action “to be” as opposed to “not to be”—action is always particular, that is, opposed and delimited by its contrary and its alternatives. Carried more or less blindly into action by instinct-habit, normal consciousness cannot merely embrace golem projects in general, but as a result of circumstance, choice, and accident is always clad in a particularized “my life” which it then continually reviews, reassesses, and adjusts. So long as the foundling remains unaware of any particular actions she might undertake to investigate or attempt a return to her possibly royal or divine state, her doubts concerning “what to do” remain theoretical, and the only concrete actions she can undertake are the familiar acts of her normal life. Similarly, it might seem to normal consciousness that at least in the realm of “how to be” and “what to do,” it is relieved of bewilderment’s full measure, for so far at least intuition’s advocacy of a quest for perfect being and knowing is not accompanied by any elucidation of what that undertaking—particularly and concretely—might be.



But here, too, doubt's syllogism proceeds undeterred—indeed, it advances now to its final, argument-clinching next step, reminding us as it does so of our narrowness and relative lack of experience vis-à-vis the past. For a brief review soon makes it clear that in this matter as in so many others, tradition has already confronted, struggled with, and framed its own varied answers to questions and issues we are just beginning to face, so that our work, first of all, is simply to reach those first outposts and vantage points where it long since stood. Earlier I pointed to ways in which intuition's triple-sheathed whisperings have entered and even dominated traditional public manifestations of collective awareness as embodied in story, legend, tragedy, and myth. By contrast, those imperatives of animal life formed in the great matrix of instinct flow out above all in the need to choose and to act, so that in the realm of traditional *action* as opposed to that of awareness and reflection, instinct-habit often holds sway. Even here, however, this dominance is far from absolute, and so we find: in traditional life, as opposed to modern, that mysterious invader intuition, which already plays a dominant role in shared reflection, has often boldly entered and even laid claim to vast areas of action as well.

For example, particular places, times, and acts—Olympus, “heaven,” the Sabbath, sacrifice, worship—are set aside for “the gods” and their observances. Or more tellingly, the quintessential elements and forms of normal life itself are understood to be derived from and closely related to the divine world. So it is that the establishment of a social order or the building of a house reenacts and so participates in the world's creation, that marriage and sexual intercourse paraphrase or even repeat this or that divine union, that as I work I seem to disappear into and to become a certain god's or hero's mythical labors, that the pursuit of liberating knowledge and that ultimate transformation we call “death” both assume the form of a journey to “the gods.” Here the very acts which constitute normal life as instinct has shaped it have now in turn become the very acts in which intuition's vision and prescriptions are to be realized. Here—and the *Bhagavad Gita* is perhaps tradition's supreme verbal monument of this “paradoxical” coalescence—instinct-habit and intuition *seem*, at least, to dance in perfect accommodation and accord.

The eternal, unpredictable, perpetually evolving dance of instinct and intuition never resolves itself, however, into a single unvarying movement or step, and no harmony is ever perfect or final. For example, in various important ways intuition may exert genuine influence even in the sphere of collective life and “public” action, but at the same time it must remain aware of instinct's characteristic objective: to reduce intuition's role—if there must be one—to that of legitimating with its “mystique” instinct-habit's monolithic rule. It is therefore not surprising that tradition offers copious examples of ways in which intuition, abandoning the attempt to realize itself within forms of life created and first molded by another, separates itself from that life and undertakes to create *new* forms designed with just one aim in mind: to attain to an awareness and to lead a life—that is, to achieve forms of knowing and being—informed as much as is possible by intuition alone. Related to the issue at hand, these precedents demonstrate that consciousness' bewilderment concerning action need not remain purely theoretical—tradition has already created and now holds out before us vivid and compelling archetypes showing how we might act in particular ways to carry out *in life* intuition's call, to enact the visitor's “how to be.”

Perhaps the most complete and dramatic paradigm of such action is that complex of perceptions communicated by the Sanskrit terms *bhikshu* (“beggar,” “religious mendicant”),

*paramahansa* (“great migrating bird,” “supreme ascetic,”), *sadhu/sadhvi* (“holy man/holy woman,” “saint”), and above all *samnyasin*, derived from a verb meaning “to throw down.” A *samnyasin* is a “renouncer,” one who has wholly abandoned “the world,” an ascetic, a religious mendicant. The *samnyasin* has but one aim or project: to follow the whisperings of intuition to the further possible degree and so to attain to, enter into, and even become that supreme reality which is *This* and to which—so that final, uncannily resonating whisper—the *samnyasin* is more intimately related than to anything or anyone else.

Regarding the figure of the *samnyasin* as it were from without and in relation to the social context—our shared life in the clear, common light—from which he now has removed himself, Varenne graphically spells out the particulars and the consequences of this drastic severance. From the time of his renunciation—and the declaration of his unalterable decision is a particular and most solemn act—the *samnyasin* is “cut off from everything that constitutes the ordinary fabric of life in the world—external activities, family bonds, social advantages” (Varenne, 95). Having renounced all civil status—so that, for example, he is now not a member of any caste, not even the lowest—he has no place in the community. Homeless, the *samnyasin* cannot so much as enter the home of a “twice-born” Hindu, that is, one belonging to the three higher castes, nor can he beg for food until evening. The unconditional and irrevocable quality of this “throwing down”—so that from the perspective of normal life and of society it is just as if the *samnyasin* has died—is revealed above all in this: at the moment he makes his vows and becomes “one of the walking dead,” his heirs immediately inherit; his former wife assumes the status of widow (Varenne, 95-96).

Just as vividly, but in this viewing as it were from *within*, Zimmer lays out the essentials of this transformation. To be born in India is to be born into a most minutely prescribed social role, and during the first two stages of life, that of the student and the householder, the self is contained and molded by—is nothing other than—that social definition. After a transitional third stage as “forest-dweller” one then completes life as a wandering holy beggar, a *bhikshu*. Now at last the social mask which has hidden one’s true self can be completely removed. “The anonymities of the forces of nature that operate within him; the curious performances, successful or unsuccessful, upon which his social character depends; the landscape and life incidental to his time and place of birth; the materials that pass through and constitute for a time his body, charm his fancy, and animate his imagination”—all these now vanish, displaced in the *bhikshu*’s awareness by something other and greater. In this his life’s culmination, the homeless wanderer now becomes the “anonymous, ubiquitous, and imperishable ground of all existence.” Henceforth—so Zimmer, quoting Shankara—he “lives identified with the eternal Self and beholds nothing else” (Zimmer, 158-160).

\* \* \* \* \*

iii.

Once that striking and most verifiably real traditional figure—the *samnyasin*—takes his place at one extreme of possibility and turns to face, in utter dissimilitude at the other, normal golem-inspired consciousness laboring diligently to “make something out of itself” in the clear, common light, it is evident that particular concrete ways to translate intuition’s exhortations into action can be and indeed have been found; and so as concerns the allied questions “how to

be”/”what to do,” the doubt-mass consciousness has now entered is *not* limited to the purely “theoretical,” is in fact not limited by anything at all. Of those paramount, seemingly self-evident truths which illuminate, encompass, and form normal consciousness, thereby initiating it into what is basic and obvious concerning “where we are,” “who we are,” and “how to be,” none remain. Impelled outward in contrary directions by the diametrically opposed assurances and intimations of instinct-habit and intuition, consciousness now finds itself carried out into an infinite sea of pure possibility, of unlimited doubt.

In retrospect we can now see that the seeds of this unprecedented disorientation are already present in the Other Paradox itself. For as concerns normal consciousness and the alternatives to it, examination of the Other Paradox brings to the surface essential facts to which such consciousness, engrossed in its golem project, is oblivious: that the creation of the “clear and distinct”—of “the obvious”—requires the prior confinement and limitation, the “determining,” of consciousness; that in its periods of greatest alertness and most far-seeing vision, human consciousness displays neither uniformity nor inner consistency, but all the tensions and conflicts of its eternally shifting, unpredictable dance; that the dancers are two disparate, seemingly unrelated energies suffusing awareness with diametrically opposed sensings of where and what it is, and of the forms of being and knowing to which it should aspire; that in this dance nothing remains of the “clear and distinct” or of “the obvious.” No longer locked in the predictable biological uniformities of pure animal consciousness, *human* awareness has the potential to evolve into complex states of contradiction—the Other Paradox is as it were a verbal surfacing of this anthropological event. Now as consciousness, discovering the great doubt, sails or is carried out into an edgeless sea of possibility and uncertainty, and is itself being transformed into an infinite doubt-sensation, it is beginning not just to contemplate, but to be informed by—is itself beginning to *live* and to *be*—paradox and contradiction. And as if to remind it of bewilderment’s origins within that condition the Other Paradox discloses, two fresh paradoxes now come into view.

The first is that just when I finally undertake to confront in full earnest the most essential questions concerning where and who I am, and what I am to do, the axis around which all these urgent explorations revolve—that verbally specified, familiar, most intimately comprehended “I”—begins to dissolve. As a golem-in-progress in the clear, common light, I knew who I was—within the broader perspicuities of my knowing, I was the perfectly lucid center, an intimate space of pure self-transparency. But now as we have seen, self-awareness in me is being drawn out across a boundless expanse by two contrary perceptions of “who I am.” Instead of being centered in an “I,” consciousness is now the struggle to decide who “I” am, to determine whether, in me, instinct-habit or intuition will clothe itself in and control—will be the voice that says—“I.” Now there is only infinite doubt concerning “who I am,” so that in the edgeless doubt-sensation consciousness has become there remains not even the most shadowy “I”-center or “I”-node into which “I” might gather myself and ask who “I” am. The “I” is the focal point of the great doubt, but in the great doubt—so this first paradox—the “I” disappears. Looking for the object of my questioning, for “myself,” I now find only the opaque, the unknown. Where I *was* I now only glimpse, momentarily, an animal never before seen, a vague shape or shadow vanishing into the doubt-mass all has become.

The second paradox is that just when I undertake at last and in full earnest to confront those ultimate questions, I find that nothing remains of the array of means I once had—which this

dissolving “I” once had—for carrying out such interrogations. For as we have seen, consciousness is no longer the exclusive instrument of a single monolithic force, but is now the tension—the continually fluctuating dance—occasioned by the encounter in it of two competing and antithetical energies. Nowhere in the vast, sprawling labyrinth *This* has become are there any Cartesian certainties, first principles, or obvious truths enabling consciousness even to begin assessing the two opposing, mutually incompatible ways of perceiving “how things are” and “how to be” which constitute the contradiction it itself now is. Nowhere is there a fixed point where doubt might be resolved, and from which new knowings might be derived.

Instead and to the contrary: consciousness’ only discoveries now are discoveries of additional sources and forms of doubt, new vistas and depths of bewilderment, new gaps and flaws in its “logic.” Its only “progress” is to discern with increasing acuity the frailty of all those “self-evident” and “indubitable” concatenations of words whose sway was once absolute. And indeed, now that intuition has joined the dance, and in so doing has put an end to instinct-habit’s hegemony and cast doubt upon all the luminous certainties which once ruled it, awareness now reminds us of the adolescent who, shaking off the formerly irresistible spell of the parental world, begins to observe and inwardly try other paradigms. And as in that adolescent: the more doubting consciousness considers the one form of perception—instinct-habit’s—which in the past it accepted as obviously “true,” the more progress it makes in appreciating that first archetype’s arbitrary and contingent nature, in gauging the depths of its frailties, and in discerning its flaws.

To illustrate with one example this unraveling of instinct-habit’s authority, and so of all the the axioms and first principles those two begetters of normal consciousness have imprinted as the basis and starting points of all reasoning: in the early stages of doubt, consciousness will likely accept certain arguments conferring upon instinct-habit an initial authority and credibility which intuition clearly lacks. After all, intuition just “comes to us,” and comes “privately.” It is a guest with no credentials or reputation, indeed with no public recognition of any kind. On the other hand: our sensory and verbal perceptions—all that we see, hear, smell, touch, taste, read, think, and say by means of sensory or verbal signs—are not simply what everyone blindly equates with reality. They are the carefully selected outcome of millions of years of neuronal adaptation. They are firmly rooted in our very biology and in life itself just by virtue of the fact that they have stood the rigorous tests of time and of harsh experience. Their great, initially persuasive warrant therefore is this: perception by means of signs is what works for us and for countless other species as well. It must therefore be closely related to reality, and in any case: if we ignore, deny, or defy it, we will not long survive.

But now that doubting consciousness has been alerted to that which a strictly biological awareness instinctively misses—that my species’ and my own particular signs are one thing, and reality quite another—it also begins to observe the widening cracks in such reasonings, cracks which soon spread throughout the entire edifice of instinct-habit’s logic. For the first time, for example, I realize that the ‘we’ whose survival is in question—and the entire series ‘survival’, ‘life’, ‘biology’, ‘reality’, ‘time’, ‘instinct’, ‘intuition’, ‘sight’, ‘touch’, ‘thought’, etc., and all the sentences which state how those perceptions “work” for us -- are themselves verbal signs. I note that this interior debate in which I am now entangled is taking place, in its entirety, within the confines of verbal signs. And then I ask myself how the very signs which a particular sign-system has created can be

used to authenticate or assess, or even just to “signify,” that entire system? And I further ask: How can a mode of consciousness constituted exclusively by those signs and molded just by that system possibly pose as that system’s “rational” assessor?

Doubting consciousness is now advancing towards an observation whose attainment marks a new plateau in that gradual, exceptionless dissolution of all fixed points and of all logic now underway. It is the observation that all systems of signs—the planarian’s single pair of lighter and darker; or whales’ complex, and to us inaccessible, sensory world; or that entire system of our sensory and verbal signs which, reified into “persons,” “events,” and “things,” we are pleased to call “the universe”; or Euclid—are finite and above all closed systems. For any awareness contained by it, any such system *is* absolute reality, is “the obvious,” “the given,” “the world.” But for a consciousness which has slipped outside it, the ancient neuronal spell is broken, and now that same system of signs, which *itself* belongs to no “system,” inevitably hovers before it as something arbitrary and inert, a mysterious ball—it would make no sense to think of it as either “true” or “false”—floating unsupported, and without connection to anything else, in the void.

From its first whisper intuition has done nothing to conceal the one particular and the one general attribute—non-support of its theses; a pervasive absence of logic—which are mingled with, and somehow may even contribute to, the allure of its conversation. After failing to identify itself or display any credentials, it spins no argument, invokes no authority, attempts no sorties under the banner of “the obvious.” Its elusive, hieratic, simultaneously tantalizing and suspect manner is that of one who is or feigns to be an initiator into mysteries—a *mystagogos*—who has come to us from and now beckons us towards a place below and prior to all explanations, arguments, certifying, reasons, and verbal certainties, that is: a place below and prior to—a place immeasurably closer to unsayable reality than is—all logic.

Instinct-habit, its rival, would have us regard the sensory and verbal perceptions it has engendered as supported by logic, as guaranteed by millenia of experience now vested in what “we all know” about “how things are.” At all times it is—it purports to be—the voice of reason, of “common sense,” of “the obvious.” But now the paradoxical dissolution of all fixed points and all logic just when they are needed is revealed most tellingly in this: alongside the patent, long-acknowledged groundlessness of intuition, I now perceive with increasing clarity the equally perfect groundlessness of instinct-habit. Both exemplify the non-rational, anomaly; in its very existence each somehow entails the defiant *overcoming* of “the probable” and “the obvious.” Unvalidated by any context, intuition inexplicably “comes to us.” And equally unsupported in that chaos-like void in which doubting consciousness, having slipped outside signs, now sees it float, instinct-habit, inexplicably, is just “there.”

For consciousness wound in the voluminous folds of the great doubt, *This*—“where I am”—is now one vast mass of doubt. Awareness itself is now an unalloyed doubt-sensation, and its one activity—its “what I’m doing”—is just to doubt, to be “bewildered,” to be ever more “disoriented.” The three ultimate questions which confront consciousness, the diametrically opposed answers instinct-habit and intuition propose, the enigmatic dancers themselves—for the most part these are the focal points of consciousness’ doubt. But there will also be times during this seemingly endless process of doubt’s magnification and intensification when doubting consciousness’ attention will also be directed towards the very act of doubting itself. When that happens—when doubt in me has

become a questioning and doubting of that very doubt—my innermost awareness of and relation to myself has been transformed in the following way: just there where a luminous, unreservedly intimate self-transparency once obtained, or *seemed* to obtain, there is now only a dark and futile floundering, bewilderment's helplessly turning bewilderment even about itself.

The particulars of this final disorientation take shape in a way which mirrors the coming to be of previous bewilderments. Awareness is stretched out across a vast field of doubt, this time between two appraisals of that very doubt—instinct-habit's and intuition's—which are alien and perfectly contrary to one another. For at times during the great doubt I will be all but persuaded by instinct-habit's disdain for the entire bewilderment process. And then it will seem to me—will almost seem—that this disintegration of consciousness into pure doubt marks the pathetic end of my golem project, my definitive failure. While the others have been drawing ever closer towards their day of triumph—towards the millennial plenitude of golem completion in the clear, common light—I have permitted my ungainly, still rudimentary golem to dissolve in pure doubt. I have let come to bitter fruition that destiny I have always known deep within would be mine: to be swallowed up at last by those terminal bewilderments and disorientations incarnate in the crazed visages of the fringes, and so in “my life” to have “failed,” to come to “nothing.” But then to provide that perfect, because incalculable, balance which makes unresolvable doubt possible: at other times intuition will whisper to me from bewilderment's other extreme—and sometimes then I will almost or momentarily believe *it*—that my doubt marks not the pathetic failure of my golem project and “my life,” but the most radiant of beginnings. This great doubt—so it whispers somewhere within me—is that infinite and fertile darkness which precedes and signals an ultimate dawn. If I but let it lead the way, it will guide me towards a place of the most perfect being and the most luminous knowing, a place where those limiting, deluding, sign-based spatial and temporal notions—“my birth,” “my life,” “my death,” “my destiny”—do not apply.

Like all the avatars of consciousness, doubting consciousness always carries within itself the seeds of infinite transformations. At all times it is only a question of time until doubt modulates into new forms of doubt, adopts new perspectives on doubt, uncovers new reasons both to proceed with its doubt and to cast doubt aside. But with the addition of consciousness' reflexive doubt of doubt itself, this enumeration of the great doubt's primary objects of doubt, and this exploration of the two paradoxes which deepen it, are complete. Consciousness itself is now pure doubt-sensation. As for those “objects of doubt”—above all the questions where and who I am and what I am to do; the conflicting answers to these questions emanating from instinct-habit and intuition; the ambiguous “the world”; the enigmatic dancers themselves; doubt itself—they themselves are increasingly shadowy shapes turning darkly in the sprawling and amorphous doubt-mass *This* has become.

As concerns the guiding principles and canons of thought which doubting consciousness can now bring to bear to resolve its dilemma: there remains not one fixed point where it might begin. If there were, consciousness now has no logic which might enable it to move *from* that point. And prior to all these considerations: there remains no specifiable “I,” no verbal capsule or site, within which consciousness can so much as locate *itself*, for doubting consciousness is, inevitably and infernally, an “I”-dissolving consciousness, awareness which at last loses all verbal touch with “itself.” We can “solve”—that is, we can imagine to ourselves that we have solved—the enigmas which now disorient, bewilder, or simply overwhelm consciousness only by retreating into old

routines and certainties, that is, by becoming duller and narrower, less *conscious*, than consciousness now is. Instead, let us contemplate the metamorphosis consciousness now has passed through and the elemental condition it now has attained. Let us examine more closely the singular and profound turning point at which it now stands.

Consciousness itself, which once seemed to itself to be securely domiciled in the unparalleled intimacy and transparency of the verbally self-constituting, self-determining “I,” is now nothing but doubt about “who I am.” In relation to itself it is the mentally paralyzed amnesiac, the bewildered *possible* foundling. Its one remaining intimacy is that of the unknown with itself. The world, once the clear, common light, is now a dark, private, infinite labyrinth. That “the world,” so easily named and so easily cataloged, once had the taste of the familiar, the given; “the world” was just what you would expect. Now everything about it is veiled, obscure, impenetrable. “The world”—*This*—is terra incognita, an unknown something no one has and no one ever will even begin to imagine—now to me in my bewilderment it is as if just in this very moment, all things, and I in their midst, were suddenly, inexplicably, and above all still without *names* coming to be.

Consciousness itself is now neither “normal” nor “modern.” No longer the exclusive product of pure habit, it has become one of the recurring turns or passages in instinct-habit and intuition’s unending dance. Like that dance, *as* that dance, it is unknown and unpredictable, habit’s opposite. In the past all its traffickings were with—and indeed it itself was constituted by—signs, but now those signs are losing their contours in something signless. Its previous life was a life among fixed points on solid ground. It knew “how things were.” It had its bearings. Now on open sea, it discerns no fixed point by which it might set its location. The single and ubiquitous “point” which remains—the infinite sea—cannot be divided or mapped, cannot be circumscribed.

As long as it is the creature of habit, consciousness is the still-spinning potter’s wheel, is echo and residue, effect. As normal and as modern, it lives on the surface of *This*, but now as doubting consciousness it begins to enter the depths. One image above all brings home to us the essence of the particular metamorphosis consciousness now is—it is the image of consciousness as passing or falling out of “the world” and entering instead into chaos. Like those fringes which normal consciousness dreads, and like that perfect being intuition’s cryptic utterances intimate, that chaos which is doubt’s final perfection and habitat is unmeasured and formless. Itself uncontained, and containing within itself no parts which might be opposed to others, it is not amenable to perceptual processing by means of signs’ familiar work of delimitation, division, and juxtaposition. It contains none of “the world’s” familiar elements because it precedes the creation of the world and its elements—to enter it is as it were to return to what *This* is before “the world” is made.

For a consciousness complicated, quickened, and broadened by doubt, its entry into chaos is therefore entry into an unthinkable “place” where there is in fact no “where” and “who” I am, no “the world” or “I.” Here there can be no such thing as “getting one’s bearings,” no map, no compass. I cannot reason my way out of chaos because that place or event or condition—“chaos”—*precedes* all reasons, all logic, all particular facts. Chaos, however, is not only prior to the world; it is also the dark, infinite scene of its coming to be, its source. The unplumbed shoreless waters of chaos are an element—not of repetition and effects—but of origins, of first and material causes, of first flowings and parturitions. Doubting consciousness finds no “I” here, for chaos is that absence of place where the “I” is first made. In chaos awareness finds no fixed points and no logic, and so

sprawls out in infinite disorientation, because this is the nothingness wherein logic, and all holding and starting points, and all awareness-delimiting orientations, and everything obvious—prior to all “facts” and “principles of sound thinking” and to that “obvious”—first come to be.

As that place, prior to all “place,” of creation, chaos is the matrix of impossible leaps, of mind-breaking crossings, of unforeseen flights out of pure abyss. It was or timelessly is in the dark shelter of chaos that life appears where previously there is no life, and that perception arises where heretofore there was none. Chaos is the non-place where existence itself, the supreme mystery of *is*, emerges from the unfathomable, seemingly inescapable depths of *is not*. Consciousness which has metamorphosed into the great doubt, and so has entered or even become chaos, is therefore also in the domain of the supreme crises, the primordial crossroads and turning points, Rubicons not just of imperial but of infinite consequence. What transpires here is of the utmost importance—it is no effect, but the original as it were groundless and uncaused cause from which immeasurable effects will follow. But as we also have seen: “choice” and “action” here are nothing like the choices “we make” and the actions “we perform” in the clear, common light. Here in chaos I do not “make” my choice, nor am I something distinct from it. Instead, I first come into being as the choice—as the inexplicable event—I am. In this place prior to all logics, reasons, and facts, a leap will either be made or not be made—will either astonishingly just *be* or not be. Only later, and then as it were as an afterthought, will that pure leap once again clothe itself in and appear, even to itself, as “I.”

\* \* \* \* \*



## Chapter 5: The Turn

I, that not necessarily identifiable or self-comprehending “writing-I” which constructs these lines, have seemed at least provisionally to conclude: doubt culminates in consciousness’ entry into a primordial chaos, more oceanically diffuse and disorienting—more “chaotic”—than any labyrinth, from which worlds and all things within them are born. Such, however, is the inexorable fecundity of perception, as well as of doubt, that this latest verbal perception or “thought,” like all the others, does not rule, remain undisputed, or long retain that welcome aura of fresh plausibility any idea not tried for a while enjoys. A diametrically opposed view, equally arguable and in the end just as groundless, will therefore soon make its way into awareness, avidly promoted by instinct-habit. It is the view that what consciousness is now entering is not myth’s great chaos—the place of beginnings, “the mother”—but that equally mythical entropy in which all things dismally end. In this way all is made doubtful once again, and the doubting process, the seemingly endless alternation of dull vacancies with the barren strife of irreconcilable perceptions, resumes.

We have seen that its enclosing “where I am”—that is, the verbalized “the world”—is perceived by normal consciousness as familiar and normal, just what one would expect; and we have seen that such consciousness experiences the verbalized “I” it identifies as itself as a perfect self-transparency immediately perceived. In this way normal consciousness, ingeniously constructed by instinct and then slowly casehardened by habit, is tethered to normalcy and familiarity by its instinctive-habitual belief: I know the basics, the “self-evident” essentials, of “where and who I am,” of “how things are” and “how to be.” To exist as pure doubt-sensation—that is, to assume and then maintain a stance contrary to its instinctive and customary mode, and so come into collision course both with biological imperatives and with habit—necessarily engenders conflict, fear, and stress, above all in modern consciousness unaccustomed to such interior complications. Buddhist Mahayana texts in particular are well aware that a standard, even expected response of normal consciousness to the vast and disorienting perspectives of intuition is, as the *Perfection of Wisdom in Eight Thousand Lines* has it, to “tremble,” “despair,” and “despond,” to become “stolid” and “dejected,” to be “cowed,” “frightened,” and “terrified,” and so at last, not surprisingly, to “turn away” (Ashta, 84).

Even at these extremes of doubt, it may therefore well happen—indeed, it is perhaps the most likely outcome—that having gathered together all its strength, instinct-habit succeeds in throwing off this alien, most unbiological “great doubt” so as to return consciousness to the clear, common light, to normalcy. Retreating from this greatest and most dangerous of all floating solitudes, I will then seek to assure myself, just as I did when discarding the others, that I am now returning to “the real world” and to “my real life.” I will do my best to coax awareness back into the protective shelter of the familiar, the pale of “the obvious,” will resume the campaign to bar all thoughts of the “mad” and “the impossible”—that is, everything smacking of “the fringes”—from consciousness. I will pick up my half-finished golem where it lies and in a mood-blend of relief and dejection uncertainly don once again “my life.”

At the very least—for instinct-habit, with all its wile, strength, and primeval tenacity, never absents itself for long or entirely from the dance—I will not escape contact with that conflict and

anxiety doubt inevitably generates. Even if I as doubting consciousness do not “turn away,” there will most certainly be times when, in the sutra’s words, I am “dejected,” “cowed,” “terrified,” etc. At times no prospect will seem more agreeable than the prospect of working once again on my golem within the shared life of the clear, common light. But then something may hold me back. At the last minute I may be no more able than is the foundling to abandon the thought: perhaps even now I already *am another*. I may be swayed by the dramatic and final appeal of intuition, which whispers to me that to turn back now would be just as if nonbeing had drawn back from becoming being, as if matter had let pass the chance to become living matter, as if unconscious life had refrained from complicating, adorning, and enchanting itself with sensory and verbal sign’s phantasmagoric show.

Then it may happen (and the existence of the *samnyasin* demonstrates that it can and *does*): within the doubt-sensation consciousness has become, a leap or crossing previously unknown to that consciousness is being made, or somehow already has been made. It is a movement which resembles or even partakes of that most improbable of all leaps, the flight of *is* up out of the bottomless depths of *is not*. In the moment of breakthrough, doubt’s climactic moment, the old has already vanished, the new already arrived. I cannot say what I am doing, or why I do it, or where I am going, for in the crossing itself all knowing is displaced by sheer *event*—here “what,” “where,” and “why” do not exist. I cannot even say that “I” groundlessly choose the other and new, for any “I” is sequel, an *effect* of that groundless “choice.” But *in* that sequel memory will likely cast about for words which might catch something of this singular breakthrough. And here, too: having anticipated us, having in different times and places already searched for such words, tradition offers an archetypal image. Christianity speaks, for example, of *metanoia*, or more familiarly of “conversion,” that is, a complete transformation, a “change of heart” which is, etymologically and concretely, an about-face, a “turning round.” Buddhists of the Yogacara picture the enlightenment or awakening event *ashrayaparavrtti*—a turning away from, a turning round, a “revolution at and of the base” in which the very foundations of consciousness are completely “reversed,” are as it were turned inside out.

To us who now seek to imagine it, and above all to any consciousness which *is* it, such a *metanoia* or *ashrayaparavrtti*—“the turn”—is a vast and ponderous process, as if the world itself were a great ship which now undertook to reverse course. Bringing to bear the primary images, verbal perceptions, and polarities which reflection on the Other Paradox has yielded, we may glimpse in a provisional and partial way its features. For example, in all previous floating solitudes I have always remained in sight of land—that fixed, familiar shoreline is always near my gaze and thoughts, is clearly my base and destination, my “home.” But with that momentous sea change—“the turn”—all this is changed. Turning my back on old ports, I cast out into open sea. Now the infinitely receding horizon is where my gaze does its searching or at times comes to rest. Not land’s multifarious life, but a boundless and monistic openness, is now “home.”

Further, in the turn I turn away from the clear, common light. I turn towards, and begin advancing towards, the fringes. Now my back is turned towards that bright center of things: the mapped, the determinate, the self-evident; I now face—I now begin to gauge my lack of bearings by surveying—the remote and shadowy periphery. I relinquish the shared “the world” and peer out into a horizon which may be the infinite and may be nothing. I exchange what is public and accessible

for the private and incommunicable. I abandon the measured, word-illuminated human world for a Stygian world of specters and ghosts.

Turning away from shared life in the clear, common light, I necessarily turn away from the instinctive-habitual apprehendings of being and knowing which inform and propel it. I shall therefore no longer equate being with determinate being, that is, with the verbally delimited and specified—the “named”—which then can be described, narrated, explained, assessed; indeed, all these operations with verbal signs shall now constitute for me a symptomatology of nonbeing, signals that what is being presented to me by means of them and under their aegis is not and cannot be “the real.” I shall no longer associate knowing with determinate perceptions, crystallized in verbal signs, of “how things are,” “what is happening,” and “how to be”, for I no longer regard knowing as a verbal act or event. For me, henceforth, both being and knowing will partake just of that which golemic being and knowing exclude, that is, the unmeasured, the indeterminate, the formless, the unbroken, “the One.” The being to which I now turn is pure, immediate, boundless presence not yet reduced to particularized being; the knowing I now glimpse and begin to approach is an equally immediate and boundless awareness neither contained within nor formed by particular sensory or verbal signs.

In turning away from the world of the clear, common light and from its visions of golemic being and knowing, I inevitably relinquish the project I had undertaken in that realm and under their tutelage. In relation to golemic being my sole concern now becomes: not to be or to seek to be a particular “someone,” not to spin out from sheer absence a particular “my life.” As for golemic knowing, my one aim now must be: not to understand anything. Above all it is essential now that I not have the slightest idea “where I am” and “who I am,” and what I am “to do.” Dismantling my golem and letting it lie, I therefore walk away from my golem project. I pass out of story, vindication, and destiny, out of “my life.” Hesitantly, full of eager unease, I begin moving out of signs into the signless, out of the measured “the world” into a boundless something which resists all names.

Pictured in these ways, the turn is consciousness’ reorienting of itself to face an unfamiliar field containing an entirely new array of objects. Turning away from land, the world of the clear, common light, golem projects, and golemic being and knowing, I simultaneously turn 180° towards and begin moving towards their opposites. In this way the process now underway is a “conversion,” a turning-round. But the turn is also a *paravrtti*—a revolution, an absolute reversal, a “revulsion”—which takes place within and utterly transforms the *ashraya*, that deepest ground of consciousness where all the particular orientations and manifestations of consciousness are first formed. And here as well: as we begin searching for ways to picture and make verbal approach to this all-important interior process, images, perceptions, and distinctions first brought forth by reflection on the Other Paradox come to our aid.

For example, the “I” which, having turned away from the world of the clear, common light, is now turned towards the fringes, is no longer that original “I,” but its very opposite; and such reflection has yielded terms which now enable us to picture this opposition and this transformation in the following way: intuition has now displaced its dance partner and rival, instinct-habit, as the mysterious energy which is my innermost being, the force in me that surfaces as and says “I.” The *ashraya*, that substratum or “basis” on which all else depends, inhabits or rather *constitutes* the

hidden creative depths—the first and innermost life—of consciousness. It is the place of turns, crossings, makings, and leaps where that gossamer and tenacious phosphorescence—“consciousness”—first arises in and from chaos; and it is from it, that is, from the *ashraya*, that consciousness then further rises to disclose and veil itself, simultaneously, in the verbalized surface presence and self-presence sounded in the pronoun-diphthong “I.” In the turn—and for the first time in “history”—instinct-habit is forced to vacate, and intuition occupies and becomes, that mystery in the depths, consciousness’ matrix. And it is just because of this interior revolution at the “base”—just because the hidden thinker and pronouncer of ‘I’ in me has been displaced by its opposite—that consciousness *outwardly* has turned and reoriented itself. For what happens “outwardly” is that consciousness, reflecting the great interior transformation, now turns to face and to begin moving towards that open sea, those fringes, and that vision of boundless, unbroken being and knowing which intuition, the new occupant of the *ashraya*, has *always* regarded, inwardly and “intuitively,” as home.

Reflection on the Other Paradox yields images, perceptions, and dichotomies which help us picture, however rudimentarily, the singular turn consciousness may venture or become; and now the last of those perceptions—the image of intuition taking the place of instinct-habit as that inmost center, itself signless and nameless, which crystallized in signs becomes “I”—points us towards another wellspring of tentative comprehendings: tradition. In a profound, even ultimate sense it is true that pure seamless reality—that *This*—is utterly trackless and imageless, that here the very notions of direction and location, and so even the contrary notion of losing one’s way, vanish, but significantly if not ultimately: bringing to bear its remarkable energy and acuity, traditional consciousness has sought to sketch in words provisional geographies of the turn. Especially if we begin as “modern consciousness,” our very first turning movements naturally seem to us most daring and hazardous, “existential.” The glimpses and emotions which follow are unnervingly and enticingly alien, so that our first halting steps towards the fringes strike us as a pioneer venture into the wholly unknown. For the tradition, however, this territory is familiar ground, a variously-mapped place of experiences, goal-settings, and possible first steps which are as preliminary as they are essential.

Since traditional consciousness is long since familiar with the place we, as turning modern consciousness, now enter, and since it has anticipated, with inexhaustible richness and variation, the perceptions which now begin their slow, unending gestation within us, contact with it can only serve to deepen and multiply those perceptions. Early on, for example, it may occur to us to picture the turn as a setting sail and as a voyage, our backs now resolutely turned to land and its life, out onto the open sea. Yet in this perception we merely repeat the *Dashabhumika*’s thousand-year old image of the bodhisattva as like “a great seafaring boat” which, no longer “laboring . . . in the shallows . . . sails out on to the great ocean of Bodhisattvahood” (*BTh*, 237). Aware of “the oceanic” as a traditional image relating to the turn and to turned life, we can then explore its many applications and variations. For Rumi, “the world’s forms” are foam upon that infinite sea which is God (Rumi, 22). Eckhart pictures the soul’s relations to God as like that of the drop of water which, poured into the ocean, *becomes* ocean (*DP*, 410).

But as we also have seen, that initial exhilaration in being at last on “open sea” may—indeed most likely *will*—soon give way to the novice seafarer’s dejection and dread. As modern

consciousness, and in spite of that consciousness' "individualism," we are daunted as indeed all human consciousness is daunted by the prospect of turning definitively away, like the *samnyasin*, from the clear, common light's shared life and collectively maintained perceptions, for after all: to isolate oneself by not seeking what "we all seek" is already, as it were by definition, to have "failed"; and to not know "what we all know" is, already, to be "mad." Keenly aware of the likelihood and the probable consequences of such a response—that is, return first to the doubt-state, soon followed by headlong flight back to instinct-habit and normalcy—the traditional literature of meditation includes among the initial exercises turning consciousness should continually undertake: put behind you all thought of "the world's" perceptions of "how things are" and "how to be," of the desirable and the undesirable, of what is "known" and what "mad"; do not concern yourself with whatever approving or disapproving opinions of you others may have; do not let yourself be governed or influenced—as you have been influenced and governed until now—by what others "will think"; indeed if anything, hope that others will think ill of you—that will enable you to practice indifference, and help protect you from being controlled by their high regard, the "good name" you enjoy in the clear, common light.

I have portrayed the turn not only as a voyage out onto open sea, but also as the abandonment of our golem project, a turning away from familiar conceptions of and strivings for particularized being and knowing. Yet this account, just like images of voyage and the oceanic, merely inflects analyses of the self and its possible turn long since given. I have written, for example, that abandonment of my golem project means that I no longer seek to "be something" or to "make something" of myself; but already centuries ago the Sufi's stark goal for himself as a particular identifiable individual is *fana*—"annihilation"—for "a true Sufi is he who is not" (Schimmel, 16). Through two and a half millenia Buddhism has taught that there is in fact no self to perfect, construct, or even annihilate, for quite simply: the empty sound 'I' has no referent. The Vedanta asserts that illusory verbal perceptions of the form "I perform this or that act," or "I experience this or that," or "I have such and such qualities" merely betray our confusion, for our true Self is undivided and infinite; consequently, the extent to which we make such statements or have such thoughts simply measures our ignorance of "who we are." Ruusbroec portrays conversion as "a simple death like passing into a state devoid of form" (Ruusbroec, 167). And Eckhart speaks frequently of *Selbstentäusserung*, an act of letting go in which I divest myself of myself. In this process one becomes "nameless"; as an individual existent, one is "destroyed" (*DP*, 353, *DW*, V., 545).

Whatever golemic being I possess as a particular individual-in-progress in the clear, common light is now to be annihilated, and as I turn away from the clear, common light, the same fate awaits all my golemic knowing, that is, all particularized awareness by means of sensory and verbal signs, or in other words: all the identifiable manifestations—the entire *contents*—of my complex, incessantly evolving interior life. The *Yoga Sūtras* confront us straightway with their astonishing definition: yoga is *citta-vrtti-nirodha*, the "cessation of conscious activity" (Patanjali, 6, my translation); in so doing it calls for the stopping or "shutting down" of that chaotic, seemingly irrepressible wellstream of particular sensory perceptions, somatic sensations, thoughts, feelings, memories, etc., which normally seem to us to constitute "conscious" life.

The Buddhist Ashvaghosha also advocates the practice of "cessation," the discarding of all

thoughts and perceptions (Ashvaghosha, 96). At about the same time in the West, Evagrius describes that eminently desirable condition of consciousness he calls “immobility of mind.” He is defining “pure prayer,” not “yoga,” but in terms reminiscent of Patanjali he defines it as “the expulsion of thoughts,” an emptying which leaves awareness in a simple and formless condition free of words and images (Chadwick, 102, 90). Nearly a millennium later, Eckhart counsels an abandonment of all our knowing so that we might enter unknowing and darkness (*DP*, 433). “Since God is formless and figureless,” writes John of the Cross, the soul draws closer to Him when it itself is “empty of form and figure” (*CW*, 630).

For the most part these terms and images—annihilation, renunciation, death, expulsion, cessation, divestment—are austere negative in form; but then let us recall that what they are negating, golemic being and knowing, is itself a negation and diminution, a going astray, a fall. They involve, therefore, the negation of a negation, consciousness’ attempt to break out from its constricted condition as a particularized “I” within that covering and negation of *This* known familiarly as “the world.” The turn, however, is not only a turning away, but a turning to—and a beginning to move towards—true being and knowing as they hover in intuition’s visions and whisperings. And here, too: though it seems to us as modern consciousness that we now venture boldly out into a vast unknown, and though it is profoundly true that boundless and unsayable reality is eternally virginal, so that all contact with it is always incomparable and always the first, it is also true that tradition, having ventured out upon these waters again and again, has left to us accounts of experiences, dangers, and navigational strategies from which we, the tyros, may learn.

I have already examined tradition’s, and so intuition’s, vision of that perfect being and knowing, the antipode to golemic being and knowing, towards which turning consciousness now orients itself. From that vision tradition has then drawn perceptions and images enabling it and us to picture the uncertain first movements such consciousness now undertakes. The movements’ goal can only be to advance towards that remotely sensed perfection, to begin somehow to participate in it or assimilate to it, perhaps even to become it or to realize, most unexpectedly, that one already *is* it. In short, and as Plotinus and many others have written: having forsaken its old dream of golemic completion in the clear, common light and turned instead towards intuition’s vision of perfection, turning consciousness now seeks to “become godlike” (Plotinus, 55).

In incisive and unequivocal language tradition unhesitatingly proceeds to spell out the profound alchemy in our being and our knowing which must be achieved on our way to that goal. One must lose oneself, writes Ruusbroec, “in a state devoid of form or measure”—that most desirable condition is “unified, empty, and imageless.” Put differently, we should enter into the “modeless being of God,” into “this fathomless abyss of simplicity” (Ruusbroec, 147, 152, 171). Evagrius writes that to approach God, who is simple and infinite being, the mind must free itself of all complexity. It must become “naked” or “bare,” a condition of pure simplicity achieved by first stripping away all passions, then all thoughts and images (Chadwick, 90-91). According to Eckhart we should seek a knowing “without measure or mode” (*DP*, 334). We should seek nothing less, so Plotinus, than to become a “perfect work.” Gathered into the purity of our being, we will attain an inner unity which cannot be shattered. There we become or are “that only veritable Light which is not measured by space, not narrowed to any circumscribed form . . . , but ever unmeasurable as something greater than all measure and more than all quantity” (Plotinus, 55).

The sea and the “veritable Light” to which Plotinus refers recur frequently in the tradition as concrete sensory images of that perfect being and knowing which now fill consciousness’ inner gaze, yet the Plotinian passage points also towards a third, which may be even more apt: the sky’s unplumbed blue or black, infinite space. Western contemplatives, circumscribed in their search for sensory images of perfection by Aristotelian conceptions of the cosmos and of space as finite, have turned, first, to the seemingly edgeless sea, and then to images of a groundless abyss, Ruusbroec’s “fathomless abyss of simplicity.” In Asia, however, intuition engaged in the same search has found in its immediate sense of infinite space an additional, most fertile source.

Here the first two of traditional Buddhist meditation’s four *arupyasamapattis*, or “formless attainments,” are of seminal importance. According to Buddhaghosha, one enters the first only after “passing quite beyond all perceptions of form” and “by not attending to the perception of manifoldness”; then, “on thinking ‘Endless Space’, he dwells in the attainment of the station of endless space.” In the second, this sense of spatial infinity becomes the stepping stone to infinite awareness, for “by passing quite beyond the station of endless space, on thinking ‘endless consciousness’, he dwells in the attainment of the station of unlimited consciousness” (*BM*, 118). Later, both within Buddhism and in other traditions, infinite space as an object of meditation and an image of perfect being and knowing is frequently invoked. That perfect being and knowing which Huang Po refers to as the One Mind—and which indeed is all that exists—“transcends all limits, measures, names, traces and comparisons.” In spite of this incomparability, it is, however, “like the boundless void which cannot be fathomed or measured”; it is “void, omnipresent, silent, pure,” and since we “are” it, we can awaken to it by awakening to ourselves (*HP*, 29,35). For the uncannily numinous “I” which addresses us from the stanzas of Shankara’s *A Thousand Teachings*—numinous because, as the expression of perfect awareness, it necessarily-unthinkably is the voice of the sole existent, *brahman*—it is therefore natural to say: “I am . . . like the sky, . . . all-pervading, imperishable, auspicious, uninterrupted, undivided” (*Upad*, 120).

I have written that the doubt-sensation may resolve itself into conversion, or *ashrayaparavrtti*, just as the chaos of *is not* resolves itself, inexplicably, into *is*. Having turned its back to the clear, common light—to that glittering realm of sensory and verbal signs we have called “the world”—such a “resolved” consciousness then faces and begins moving towards the fringes. Viewed metaphorically, the turn is a forsaking of land and its life for an uncertain voyage to and on open sea. Viewed descriptively, and using terms engendered by analysis of the Other Paradox, it is my conversion from dreams of golemic being and knowing, and from the attempt to realize those dreams through my golem project, to intuition’s vision of perfect being and knowing. It is the most intimate and consequential of metamorphoses, for in it, intuition displaces instinct-habit as that enigmatic principle or energy, hidden in the depths of consciousness, which controls, and itself surfaces within, the equally enigmatic syllable “I.”

I have also written that tradition has already anticipated such metaphors and descriptions. According to its bounteous portrait of this momentous event, the turn is an ocean voyage, or the coursing of a mountain stream which at the end of its journey will vanish into or become the sea. It is a reversal, a sloughing off of knowing and name, annihilation. The turn is my death as one kind of creature and my rebirth as another. It is my transformation into—or my realization that I am—something formless, something “undivided,” “incomparable,” “immeasurable.” In that new life my

being and knowing, no longer terrestrial, assimilate to the sea, to sky, to seamless, unthinkably infinite space.

Just in itself consciousness is always, if nothing else, sheer presence. In the turn, for example, intuition displaces instinct-habit as that intimate and indefinable presence, itself prior to all delimited selfhood, which then in us thinks and says “I.” But it is also characteristic of consciousness to have or to be project—this is so even if the most arduous and glorious project it can undertake should paradoxically be: just to abide as pure unqualified, undelimited, indivisible presence. Early in these pages I described normal consciousness as constituted, and normal life as subsequently formed, by its golem project. I portrayed the project itself as comprised of the parallel labors of concentration and crystallization—by carrying out these two works, I shall transmute the sprawling, amorphous nothingness I now am into a finished golem. In a similar way—a way, further, which makes plain the absolute reversal which now takes place—we can now identify the two primary labors or elements of the very different project “turned” consciousness now begins to become.

Before the turn I worked to concentrate my vague self into a substantial and compact nucleus of permanent being, and to gather my hazy awareness into a central core of irrefragable Cartesian knowing. I laboriously crystallized my amorphous being into my particular “identity” and particular “my life,” as I worked to transform my formless consciousness into crystallized verbal comprehendings of “where and who I am,” “how things are,” “what is happening,” “how to be.” But now as turning consciousness I turn away from golem projects, concentration, and crystallization. My “project” now is the very opposite, my work a twofold work of dilation and simplification. Breaking out of my identity and story and golem-in-progress, I shall let myself dilate or fall out into—let myself begin to *become*—unbounded, a thing unmeasured. And as waves magically vanish into calming sea, as clouds slip away into the infinite blue expanse of a clearing sky, I shall let all the crude, awkwardly joined together limbs, works, and thoughts of my still rudimentary and shapeless golem crumble away, shall seek instead the undivided, the seamless. My project now is to become skylike or godlike, to dilate and simplify towards the edgeless and unbroken, towards that perfect, infinite “One.”

\* \* \* \* \*

ii.

Of any description it is true—eternally—that it is the meager commencement, at best, of a possible description. To undertake to describe something is to launch oneself, with effortless confidence, down a penumbral, sinuous, infinite forest path the first few yards of which we have casually scanned. It is to be seduced, briefly, by perceptions which then at later points will be periodically qualified, denied, and discarded before being embraced once again. In outline—as it were in contemplation of their gestalt, essence, or Platonic form—I have described the doubt-sensation, the doubt-mass, and the turn; I have identified the new project of dilation and simplification which turned consciousness then becomes. Continuing this Platonic reflection, one might further conclude that with the turn, that Other Paradox which I have analyzed as defining our



condition is finally resolved, and so disappears from view. For as we have seen, as normal consciousness I sought being and knowing precisely where I most inwardly knew they were not to be found. I fled in horror from those fringes where—so I acknowledged in my keenest and most honest moments—my reality, destiny, and perfection lay. With the turn, however, these contradictions are resolved. Having turned, I now begin to embrace my innermost intuitions and promptings. Since I now abide in harmony with myself, I no longer *am* “paradoxical.” I am the foundling who, intuiting her true birthright and essence, now directs all her thoughts and her steps—not at all paradoxically—towards “home.”

With the Platonic perception that the turn resolves consciousness’ doubt into a new project of dilation and simplification, and that in so doing it even dissolves the Other Paradox itself, we have, however, only completed the first few steps of this description’s path, have merely arrived at *its* first turn. And once we take that turn, we are confronted by new sights—two in particular—which greatly complicate our evolving sense of the new life turned consciousness now begins. Of these two, the first is the infinite. For as long as we were “normal consciousness,” we shunned the indeterminate, the undefined, the unmeasured, the uncontained. As normal consciousness we were accustomed solely to finite acts, events, and processes with their classic beginnings, middles, and ends—even the golem project itself is an extended though delimited action we once began, presently implement, and “someday” will complete.

In my new life, therefore, I may well assume at first that the nongolemic event I now have become can be circumscribed by signs like ‘conversion’, ‘*ashrayaparavrtti*’, ‘the turn’. I will likely suppose—from habit—that the “turn” is something I can understand. I may think of it as a finite process or action I can undertake, sustain, and even hope to complete. But now with my first glimpse of “the infinite,” it begins dawning on me that what I have called the turn is a process of such vastness and dense perplexity that I shall never complete or for that matter even comprehend it. I begin now to realize that the infinite action I now am—infinately—becoming differs from and dwarfs the sign ‘turn’ as the sea itself mocks our frail syllables ‘the ocean’, ‘the sea’.

Even if they are “religious” or “mystical,” determinate picturings of “how things are” can never do full justice to, and consequently stand in perpetual tension with, this dawning recognition. Since completion of the turn is obviously not possible during one earthly life—and indeed is *never* possible, for it is an infinite process—Gregory of Nyssa must temporarily suspend orthodox perceptions of heaven as “beyond change.” Given that “no limit can be set to our progress towards God,” it follows that throughout eternity, eternally changing and evolving soul will “always discover more and more” (Louth, 88-89).

In the context of its much vaster temporalities, Indian reflection contemplates the perfection process as an immense work carried out through innumerable births spanning the arisings and dissolutions of countless universes. Yet Gregory’s vision of unending, and so never completed, progress and discovery more accurately registers the implications of “the infinite” for the logic of the turn. For in the turn I turn towards and begin moving towards, begin assimilating to, the infinite. It is the nature of finitude’s movement towards the infinite, however, to itself be an infinite, eternally ongoing process—for example, a series of continually higher numbers, none of which ever crosses over and becomes itself “infinite,” thereby ending the movement. The following, therefore, must be clear: the approach, adaptation, or attunement of finite being and knowing to the infinite can never

be completed. Further, as long as “consciousness” or “I” exist in juxtaposition to something else—that is, as long as there is verbal awareness or “thought”—complexity has not been resolved into simplicity, division into perfect unity. Turning consciousness’ adaptation to that “One” which also is infinite is therefore a never ending approach or approximation, is *itself* infinite.

In the wake of such reflections I may surmise that in the one lifetime which is “mine,” I can only aspire to take a few steps along the infinite path I have entered, can take in only one or two of its infinite prospects and complete but one or two of its innumerable swings. But then this further thought may well arise: all the stages of an infinite journey or process are infinitely removed, and so *equally* removed, from the movement’s at *all* times infinitely remote destination. Consequently, no step or series of steps can bring me any closer to my “goal,” no later step carries me beyond the first. I might therefore conclude that I am always taking just that first step, am always just beginning; but then I recognize: even after taking that very first step, I am still infinitely removed from my goal, just as I was before I even *thought* to turn.

An infinite journey is therefore a journey we never begin; at best, we can only be about to begin. The turn is something we—at best—might be ready or perhaps nearly ready to undertake. But then again—and now we have all at once come upon another unexpected swing in the intricate curve we have been negotiating—without simultaneously turning *away* from it, how can a limited awareness even turn towards—how can finitude so much as address or relate, how direct its inevitably selective and limiting attention *towards*—the directionless, the unbounded, the uncontained? How does one turn towards *omnipresence*, how “focus on” totality, the infinite “the real”? If I cannot, then I can neither address nor relate to—I cannot even conceive or picture, much less throw myself into—the infinite act I now thought I had become.

The path, which at first seemed easy enough, or at least possible, to set foot upon, has quickly become a winding, obscure, unpredictable, labyrinthine, unlimited passage with no “other end”; what loomed before us as the Platonically perspicuous “the turn” has transformed itself into an unimaginable, seemingly impossible infinite event or act. And now, if we haven’t already done so, we will soon come in view of that *second* “complicating” phenomenon, one which, unlike the infinite, is already familiar, for it is that dance of instinct-habit and intuition which human life in its enigmatic ripeness is. It is true that the turn, observed in the celestial simplicity of its Platonic definition and form, is my reorientation away from the clear, common light and towards the fringes. It is my transformation into a work of dilation and simplification, a reversal of my former golem project. Above all, it is intuition’s displacement of instinct-habit as the controlling force deep within which says and is “I.” In us, however, intuition cannot survive without its rival and dancing partner. Life itself is impossible without “matter,” and the neuron’s phantasmal, strangely immaterial cinema must have as its host and theater the living cell. In a similar way, the matrix which turned consciousness and turned life indispensably require is that “normal” animal life, including the normal functioning of animal sign-consciousness—without them there can be no turned awareness or turned life at all.

Further, the biological is the dogged, the tenacious. Even if it were dispensable, instinct-habit would not willingly cede any of its billion-year old rule of consciousness, a dominion which in all other species is exclusive and absolute. Further still, the inexplicable visit to us of intuition, its exotic whisperings, our first halting attempts to respond to those whisperings—all these are as it

were the initial breach in the perfect uniformities of instinct-habit's great empire. They are only the first harbingers of an unimaginable summer, the uncanny commencement within the realm of biology and the neuron of something unbiological and sign-transcending. So regarded, the mere impulse to turn is itself a prodigy. And we can only regard with still greater astonishment every single moment during which turned life merely manages to survive, as at first it must, in the gaps and crevices of instinct-habit's vast, pullulating, heretofore undeviating world.

When I, above all I as modern consciousness, turn, it consequently does not happen that habit's near monolithic rule quickly gives way to intuition's equally undisputed dominion. Instead I now begin my metamorphosis into that event tradition so richly and variously enacts or is: instinct-habit and intuition's unending dance. It is most certainly true that the turn is "real" and has a direction. It is a reversal in the depths, is a great ship whose rudder now has turned, a River Amazon whose waters have now undertaken to reverse course. It is true, moreover, that the turn is something monumental and unprecedented—in the turn the neuron seeks to break out of neuronal perception, finitude to transcend all particularity and all limitation. But nonetheless: all the while during that illimitable movement which is my turning towards and my journey towards perfection, I shall also incarnate instinct-habit and intuition's dance. Even as it "dilates" and "simplifies," my being will reflect the shifting interplay, the tensions, the changes in tempo, the alternating distancings and closings of the two dancers. Since they are contraries, I myself will persist as contradiction, as discord. Because one of the two dancers views with horror the thoroughly antigolemic perfection towards which the other now begins to guide me, I remain in my very being "paradoxical."

As for my awareness—my "knowing"—that contradiction which is my being will once again manifest itself in disorientation and bewilderment, in recurrent "doubt." I am now turning towards and beginning to move towards the unbroken boundlessness divulged by intuition, yet I often hear that cunning, appalled, unyielding rhetorician—instinct-habit—insisting that I now, unbelievably, am recklessly discarding the one opportunity given me to achieve identity and definition, to become "someone," to gain a clear understanding of "how things are," to comprehend "who I am." I hear its incessant Cassandra warning that the path I so perversely have chosen leads just to crazed vacancies of awareness, to a wretched absence of being, to knowing and being "nothing." And indeed, there will be occasion later to return to the following important point: the various avatars and degrees of bewilderment with which we already are familiar, and which have as their ultimate source the collision of instinct-habit with intuition, do not disappear, but instead are infinitely magnified, when consciousness turns towards the infinite. For the infinite has its own infinite logic, and within the dizzying spaciousness and fecundity of that logic, every verbal perception is proved and then disproved, again and again, and in the course of each proving and disproving infinite additional perceptions, with their refutations and counter-perceptions, will all have their few moments to surface and seem to prevail.

If therefore you or I, beginning as "modern consciousness," undertake to turn, that reorientation also takes the form of a transition from existence circumscribed and controlled largely by habit to life as that dance of instinct-habit and intuition which tradition often displays. It inevitably manifests itself in our keener awareness of human being and human consciousness, in their fullness, as *being* that ambiguous dance-agon, and so as composed, among other things, of dissonance, paradox, and contradiction. Instead of finally resolving all doubts, it enhances the range

and magnitudes of doubt's possible topics, even as it stimulates our own capacity for bewilderment. It does not return us to predictability and to habit, but projects us into a place of great leaps and crossings, of transformation without end.

Like the unresisting phrases 'to build a house' 'to repair the window' 'to write a book', the easy syllable 'turn' nevertheless conceals, therefore, a thousand perplexities, obstacles, subplots, Rubicons, and adventures. For as we now have seen: in spite of the simplicity of its Platonic form, the turn is saturated with abyss and immensity. To turn is to become an infinite dilation; but at each moment of that unthinkable and unlimited act, I remain finite. Turning, I become infinite simplification; but just because I now am that unlimited process—am division eternally becoming one—I shall never *be* "one." Further, with the turn consciousness in you or me does not even resolve itself seamlessly into that problematic, because "infinite," movement of dilation and simplification. For the turn portends, among other things, that we will more keenly sense and more intensely *be* that unprecedented and unpredictable interplay of instinct and intuition—that is, that dance-agon, with all its rivalry, paradox, and contradiction—with which human being in its fullness complicates the uniformity of animal life. It is true that the turn's complexities, depths, and seeming impossibilities do not equal the occult and insuperable barrier with which *is not* seems to block the emergence of *is*. But in the realm of life and of acts, we cannot imagine an undertaking greater, or more complex or formidable, than this infinite and inconceivable act.

As we become alert to these perplexities and this immensity, we can also more fully understand something else: turning consciousness' proneness to feel doubtful, anxious, or even overwhelmed; the possibility—when the path's two complications first come into view—that turning consciousness in the Sutra's words will be "cowed," "dejected," and "terrified." And we begin as well to understand why tradition by no means portrays "the path" as promising an effortless, festive, untroubled, exclusively joyful ride. We see why the *samnyasin*, alluding to conventional brahmanic ritual, should regard his own way—because it involves his very *self*—as a more demanding and perfect "sacrifice," and why familiar sights and sounds along Zen's way include painful blows, withered and broken limbs. We discern more clearly why Yun-men should tell the monks that "you will suffer wherever you go," how Candrakirti could write that the truth "destroys the person of feeble insight and small mind," and why the penetrating phrase most closely associated with one of the West's great avatars of turned consciousness and turned life draws our attention just towards the God-journeying soul's "dark night" (Chung-Yuan, 292; Candrakirti, 234).

Aware of the journey's endlessness, and of the tension-filled dance which forever remains one of its elements, we can also understand something else: turned consciousness' occasional wish just to imagine the end of all struggle, the resolution of every contradiction, paradox, and doubt. We can understand its longing, above all, to contemplate turned life's mind-breaking consummation: its blossoming into, its *becoming*, infinite and one. As we have seen, such a life requires as its matrix that "normal" animal life, sustained by instinct and habit, which supports it—consequently, consciousness never gets entirely *beyond* the elements of change, conflict, and contradiction inherent in the dance. And second: the very nature of turning consciousness' movement towards perfection—its infinity—excludes the possibility of completion, of final stasis. That "ultimate perfection" is therefore doubly impossible within the trajectory of one lifetime or a even million, and the second reason implies its impossibility, even, in "eternity." Yet turning consciousness has found

a way to realize its “occasional wish” to imagine perfection, and it has done so, paradoxically, in conjunction with thoughts of that moment in “my life” we usually perceive as the most difficult, most dreadful, and last.

In life as we know it there is just one instant—the last—in which instinct-habit is no longer required, for now there remain no future life-instants to will, ensure, or prepare. In that extreme moment, instinct-habit—that is, all the operations, including the sensory and verbal perceptions, of normal life—has become useless and can therefore give way. Further, that final instant is the instant of the “I”’s final breakup, finitude’s dissolution. In it all determination, limitation, and negation, all division, and all perception by means of sensory and verbal signs also therefore “give way.” Now that animal life and finitude itself are both breaking up, nothing remains which might oppose or limit that process of *infinite* dilation and simplification which is the innermost essence of the turn. And this means: just in that final moment the way is cleared for intuition to take full possession, flooding dying, disintegrating consciousness, which now is “dead to the world,” with an infinite and seamless content.

Reporting that they have reached that final moment and then miraculously returned, some recount how they have hovered—with awareness wholly transformed—over their own body and over “life.” In terms of the foregoing, they have flown up out of their now inert golem project into an edgeless, cloudless, peaceful sky. They have experienced the unthinkable consummation of the dilation-simplification process, have known what it is to be uncontained and one.

The Tibetans have beautifully thought that in the dying person’s last moment, normal consciousness vanishes and one sees instead reality’s “Clear Light.” Unlike “the world’s” light, which discloses multiplicity in constant change, this supreme Clear Light is the pure oneness of light before it is fractured into prismatic color. As “the Clear Light of Pure Reality,” it knows no bounds. The “dazzlement” it produces in dying consciousness is like “an infinitely vibrant landscape” in the spring. The Clear Light is also pure “unmodified” or non-particularized awareness “like void and cloudless sky,” is “naked, spotless intellect . . . without circumference or centre.” For the woman or man who “recognizes” the Clear Light and becomes one with it, the bonds of illusion and samsara are broken, and any future birth will be her voluntary birth as an awakened one—a buddha—determined to liberate all the world. (See *TBD*, lxxiii, 29,89,91,95,135.)

\* \* \* \* \*

## Chapter 6: Coincidentia Oppositorum

Certainly we cannot dismiss that last, glorious moment “out of the body,” or as the divinely transparent and unlimited “Clear Light,” as impossible—as we walk at sunset, must not our lengthening shadow, before it can vanish, first become infinite? Apart from and before that moment, however, turned life is never a harmony within which all tensions and contradictions are permanently resolved; it is, instead, an ongoing process of infinite transformation unfolding among great leaps and dramatic crossings, and always within the context of instinct and intuition’s never-ending dance. Conversion understood as a transfer of loyalties from one set of verbal perceptions—from one “the world,” “belief,” “creed,” or named and word-comprehended “god”—to another, or even as a change of particular identity, as “my” transformation into a “new person,” is relatively speaking easy. What is not easy in any sense is: finitude’s adjustment to the unfamiliar and unfathomable spaciousness of the infinite; protean multiplicity’s assimilation to unchanging oneness; sign-consciousness’ uncontained fall out of itself, its dizzying transformation into the transcendence of signs. In the crystalline simplicity of its Platonic form, turned life is an antigolemic project of dilation and simplification, is my movement towards and participation in the perfect being and knowing intuition’s whispers announce. We have seen, however, that this new project, just in itself, is infinite in its scope, and consequently infinite in its implied duration. And since its incessant matrix and context is the dance of instinct-habit and intuition, it is turned life’s fate always to be opposed, cunningly and tenaciously, even within the very event—“me”—to which it belongs.

Further still, just to listen with pleasure to the hermetically seductive *sounds* of intuition’s siren whisperings is one thing; to translate those invitations into life and act quite another. I have already written, for example, of a certain apportionment of authority and of roles often discernible in tradition: let intuition take charge of religious observances, philosophical reflection, and the collective visions of myth and of art, but in the realm of action and “life,” instinct-habit will rule. In almost all realms, moreover, it is true of beginnings that very few will ever reach their potential completion, their “natural” maturation and end. We can now see that this is true above all of that unaccountable veer in the depths of chaos which initiates the turn. Just in themselves, the two already mentioned “complications” portend that turned life as an ongoing event will not casually or spontaneously sustain itself. It will not just “happen.” And all this means: for turned life in me to have even a chance to take root and grow, I must direct my attention, energies, and intelligence to that end. In this way the infinite movement—the infinite new project—I have become quickly assumes as well the form of an infinite *work*, a *praxis* or discipline, that is, “yoga.”

That Sanskrit noun is from the verbal root *yuj*, which referred originally to the harnessing of horses. With time ‘yoga’ took on a variety of more or less closely related meanings: any joining together; magic recipe; method; a spiritual method, means, or practice leading to ultimate realization or liberation; diligence; meditative absorption (see Varenne, 78-79). I shall use the term here with reference to that work of self-transformation which is an indispensable element of turned life. Generally speaking, yoga, which is infinite in its aim, scope, and manifoldness, is what I myself do to bring my awareness and my being into conformity with the underlying Platonic form of that new life. A yoga is any particular method, means, or practice I use as I attempt to harness “myself” to

that life's dilating, simplifying movement.

In its conception and aim yoga is boundlessly yea-saying, for it serves that turned life which has now begun its unending journey into horizonless and undivided being, into an unbounded and seamless knowing. Its indispensable first work, however, is "negative," a seemingly unyogic *unharnessing*. For as we have seen, prior to the turn all my being and knowing—"I"—have been securely, even unresistingly harnessed to instinct-habit and to the golem project it has led me to become; and when I turn, instinct-habit does not by any means abandon the field. Instead it holds its own, and the dance-agon we are, only now reaching its full potential of tension, energy, and intensity, begins in earnest.

Later in these pages I shall more fully explore—as enduring, sometimes unexpectedly fruitful, elements of turned life—the manifold hostilities, intrigues, truces, reassessments, wary collaborations, attractions, and even embraces which mark this eternally shifting dance, for as we shall see: there are times when those seemingly alien and incommensurable rivals become strangely compatible and complementary, times even when it is as if instinct-habit's ingeniously camouflaged role from the very beginning has been just to prepare the way for intuition, to make possible consciousness' discovery of and movement towards absolute, unthinkable perfection. Just as turned life begins, however, it is essential that a space be cleared where that nascence can at least establish itself and begin to unfold, and this means: instinct-habit must be deprived of its accustomed role as the sole dancer, must be made to yield that ancient, exclusive control of consciousness which until now has been unquestioned and automatic. In terms of yoga's ancient etymon, before "I"—before being and knowing in me—can be harnessed to intuition and its project, that "I" must have been freed, at least in part, from instinct-habit's eternal biological yoke. Two yogas are essential to this initial unharnessing-liberating work.

The first is the Yoga of Stillness, of Sanskrit's *shama*. It is a yoga which brings the wandering, agitated mind "to rest." Normal life—so Buddhism's recurrent image—is *ajavamjavibhava*, a restless movement to and fro. The driver and holder of the reins is instinct or its pale stand-in, habit. In us as throughout the animal kingdom, the reins themselves, instantaneously leading us now this way, now that, are predominantly "affective." They are sensations, emotions, moods, impulses, drives—for example: physical and emotional pleasure and pain, hunger and thirst, the innumerable forms of physical, psychological, social, and spiritual desire, aversion, hope, and fear, all of which oscillate in unending, delicately sensitive interaction with the flux of an animal's perceived sensory or sensory-verbal field. In us, above all in us as modern consciousness, our golem project is closely intertwined with our affective repertoire. Success in our golem project will be the supreme pleasure, failure the ultimate pain. The apparent successes and failures of others' projects, our own project's vicissitudes and constantly shifting omens, our accumulation, lack of, or loss of those attributes, achievements, wares, and pleasures which adorn a successful "my life"—all imperiously command our attention and then impel us into that ceaseless movement "to and fro."

As long, however, as consciousness is seized, agitated, and thrust into action by its sensations and emotions—by its entire affective repertoire—instinct-habit and biology still rule, and turned life cannot even begin. And beyond that: all the while after it *has* "converted," nothing would be easier for that turned consciousness than to slip back into habit's familiar and easy pathways; at all times even after the turn, it remains exposed and vulnerable to dogged instinct's eternal

persuasions, waylayings, attritions, and blitz-like assaults. I may seem to have turned, to have embraced intuition. In my being and my knowing I may seem to discern ongoing processes of dilation and simplification, a steadily increasing distance from “the world.” But then just in one moment a mere glimpse, movement, sentence, smell, or memory may ignite this or that sensation-emotion, so that consciousness is at once flooded by—is now once again nothing but—fear, pain, desire, envy, joy, or hope.

In an instant biology can seize turned life and carry it back into its matrix, the uniform, pre-dance monism of animal life. By some means therefore—for example, by creating forms of life which, even as they promote turned attitudes and behavior, gradually reduce those “passions”; or by attempting, in a mode of heroic defiance, to conquer them unaided in direct, starkly dramatic confrontation—it is essential that consciousness be brought to rest, that it arrive at a stillness where biology, acting through sensation and emotion, no longer incessantly carries it this way and that. That means is the Yoga of Stillness. Intent as modern consciousness is on concentrating and crystallizing its being and its knowing, it is largely incomprehending, when not simply unaware, of the energy, creativity, and clear-sighted practical intelligence traditional consciousness has brought to bear on the question how that very concentrating and crystallizing consciousness might best be brought to rest—at most, modern consciousness finds here techniques possibly applicable to the second previously mentioned solitude, the “therapeutic.” But as for plain evidence of the importance which the traditional literature of turned consciousness and turned life itself assigns to the Yoga of Stillness: the sheer volume of the attention, analysis, instruction, and exhortation it devotes to this theme probably exceeds that given to any other.

Within the characteristic institutions of traditional turned life—the communal life of monastery, vihara, and ashram; anchoritism; the unattached life, solitary or shared, of wandering mendicancy—the stilling of consciousness is an omnipresent work and aim. These great life-forms are the natural matrix within which were created the most systematic and thorough techniques for bringing all inner agitation—that is, all “normal” emotional, volitional, and intellectual processes—to complete rest. Evagrius, the source of many conceptions which would shape Western Christianity’s ascetic-contemplative life, asserts for example that that life’s goal—gnosis, direct knowledge of God—must be preceded by the attainment of *apatheia*, a state of non-feeling free of “greed, lust, avarice, melancholy, anger, accidie, vainglory, and pride” (Chadwick, 89). John of the Cross follows a long tradition when he identifies the primary “feelings or passions” as four: “joy, hope, sorrow, and fear.” They are to be “stilled,” “put to sleep”—“As long as these passions reign in the soul, they will not allow it to live in the tranquillity and peace necessary for the wisdom it can receive . . .” (*CW*, 237, 239, 362-363).

The Vedanta characteristically stresses that knowledge alone brings about liberation, but among the “qualifications of those called to the study of the Vedanta,” Shankara includes the “means” tranquillity, restraint, renunciation, and resignation (Deussen, 81). Of the two general categories of Buddhist meditation, one is devoted to *vipashyana* or “insight”; the other, typically preceding it, is: *shamatha*: quietude, calmness, coming to rest. Perhaps the most well-known particular formulation of the Yoga of Stillness is that comprised of the first six of the eight stages or “limbs” of yoga outlined in the *Yoga Sutras*. The seventh and eighth, dhyana and samadhi, have as their aim immediate awareness of supreme reality. Their indispensable prerequisite, however, is



completion of the first six: arrival by a process involving restraint, spiritual discipline, posture, breath control, withdrawal of the senses, and mental concentration at a state of calm self-possession or absorption in which “the consciousness is dissolved” (Varenne, 99, 126).

The institutions just mentioned, which make possible a total religious life clearly demarcated from normalcy, are the fertile soil within which the Yoga of Stillness could germinate and flourish in rich abundance; yet such is the immeasurable spaciousness of turned life—and such tradition’s inexhaustibly creative response to that expanse—that the possibility of working to attain stillness within “normal” life has been explored as well. The Hasid lives in “the world,” but in the *Book of the Devout*—so Scholem—two of the three qualities which “above all others go to make the true Hasid” are “ascetic renunciation of things of this world” and “complete serenity of mind” (Scholem, 92). The protagonist-hero of one of Mahayana Buddhism’s most influential sutras, the *Vimalakirtinirdesa Sutra (The Teachings of Vimalakirti)*, is not a bodhisattva or even a monk, but a layman, a “householder.”

Vimalakirti lives with his wife and children, wears jewels and ornaments, eats and drinks like others, and occasionally “realized some profit in his worldly activities.” He uses “serenity,” that is, *shamatha*, to “check stirring thoughts,” so that “although a layman, he was free from all attachments to the three worlds.” Indeed, his purity, insight, and “skill in means” are such that he is the one supremely qualified to instruct monks, nuns, children of the gods, and even bodhisattvas in the profoundest secrets of true meditation and perfect wisdom. Those instructions include the admonition to cultivate *shamatha*, yet such cultivation requires neither seclusion from the world nor formal exercises. Instead: “to sit is not necessarily to meditate . . . Not to abandon the way of the teaching and yet to go about one’s business as usual in the world, that is meditation.” Here *apatheia* or *shamatha*, that condition of composed inner quiescence which nuns and monks strive for in a place apart from the world, can also be sought and won in normal life. Indeed—and an important strand of Ch’an Buddhism is an enactment of this thought Vimalakirti so vividly embodies—no practice is more efficacious and no enlightenment more glorious than that practice carried out and that enlightenment won in the very context of normalcy, of “everyday life” (*VNS*, 16, 19; Dumoulin, I, 50).

This discovery of a new path simultaneously opposed and complementary to monastic-eremitic forms is characteristic. Unfolding within that infinite movement the turn initiates, tradition’s endlessly creative exploration of the means to achieve stillness leads again and again to the discovery of contrasting, even seemingly contradictory yogic “ways.” For example, the attempt to free oneself from the affects and from all traces of their influence can lead to dramatically heroic confrontations with the most elementary sensations of pain, heat, and cold, and so produce one of the more colorful realms of religious life. By contrast, and more moderately and pragmatically: monastic life’s characteristic way to tranquillity is to combine a gentler asceticism with the curtailment of disturbing “worldly” influences and requirements such a life brings in its wake.

Further: one traditional way to stop consciousness’ incessant flow is to sit quietly in zazen or practice wordless prayer; its equally well-known “opposite” is to use signs themselves to transcend signs, repeating a mantra or *dhikr*, or wrestling with a koan, until normal verbal consciousness passes away or all at once bursts out of itself. In a monastic setting, all the agitating complexities of decision-making are avoided by submitting unreservedly to the will of another; by contrast, and in

the manner of Vimalakirti, I can seek inner stillness while continuing to make decisions and to act in “the world.” The practitioner of the Yoga of Stillness may tame sexual desire by assiduously avoiding situations which arouse it, or by seeking out those very situations and heroically confronting it there, or by satisfying it, either in principled conformity to—or even in principled violation of—conventional morality’s norms, for as the Tantras put it: “just as a thorn may be removed by means of a thorn, so those who know how, remove passion by means of passion itself” (*BT*, 221).

Just in itself the Yoga of Stillness is inexhaustible in its requirements as in the rich diversity of its forms; and in the carrying out of turned life’s first great work—to unharness consciousness from instinct-habit—and for that matter throughout the infinite work which follows, the Yoga of Stillness plays a central and indispensable role. But just on its own it is unable to complete that initial unyoking. The singular task performed by the Yoga of Stillness is to bring turned life and turned consciousness to the following point: in my life I am no longer impelled now this way, now that, by the affects my sensory and verbal perceptions engender, and consciousness itself is no longer possessed and animated by those affects. Consequently, insofar as this first essential yoga achieves its aim, consciousness’ life as an agitated emotive-volitional response to particular sensory and verbal signs—to “sights,” “smells,” “sounds,” “thoughts,” “sentences”—is brought to an end.

Even after this most difficult unyoking, however, the *original* lines and traces with which instinct-habit has harnessed consciousness remain intact. For it is still the case that the objects and contents of consciousness are particular sensory and verbal signs, still true that consciousness, though no longer responding with this or that “passion,” is still contained and organized by those signs. And the all-important consequence of this is: those sensory and verbal perceptions continue to determine consciousness’ basic perspective and orientation. As a result, it still unthinkingly supposes that “where it is”—that “reality,” that *This*—is presented to it through its signs, is given and defined by *them*.

I have already described how animal consciousness is universally and instinctively bound to its own species’ and to its own individual signs; how it responds, spontaneously and intensely, to them alone; and how for any particular animal consciousness, its particular constellation of sensory or sensory and verbal signs constitutes its world. In us this biological automatism manifests itself most strikingly, and with the most far-reaching consequences, in the unreflective way in which we relate, normally, to our own verbal signs. We are the “rational animal,” but from pure “animal” instinct—that is, blindly, without considering or even being aware of what we are doing—we spontaneously regard the particular nouns of our particular language as the catalog of “what is,” as the roster of all the “persons” and “things” which fill “the world.” The inevitable result is: it is obvious to us as speakers, for example, of English, that “where we are”—that “reality”—consists precisely and multitudinously of “I,” “you,” “the world out there,” “chairs,” “space,” “my mother,” “presidents,” “cancer,” “that tree,” “America,” “novels,” etc., and that reality, thus inventoried, is then more fully disclosed in the English sentences—sentences revealing “how things are,” “what is happening,” etc.—which specify that motley throng’s individual qualities, relations, and acts.

The unspoken, unthought, and therefore all the more deep-seated and “irrational,” premise—the notion that our sensory and above all our verbal perceptions miraculously parallel, and so catalog and disclose the real—is the particular form taken in us by that original harnessing, the binding of

consciousness to its signs, which constitutes animal consciousness as an instrument of animal *life*. Our instinctive yielding to it first brings into being that “the world” to which our emotions and our volitions then relate; and this means: that process of “yielding” and being “yielded to” is itself the *primary* event harnessing consciousness to instinct-habit, one which makes possible its subsequent and secondary harnessing by sensation-emotion.

As we have seen, that primary harnessing event—consciousness’ submission to its own signs, and so to the sign-made “the world”—is a reflex, as unreserved as it is automatic. As such it is reminiscent of the similarly absolute and “irrational” surrender which takes place in hypnotic trance. It echoes or rather *is* the archetypal manifestation of all we have imagined about mind’s instantaneous, unconditional yielding to a magic charm or spell. And indeed: we observe here within *ourselves* the workings of that ubiquitous primordial “spell” which constitutes and defines animal consciousness. Having cast that spell, having bewitched consciousness so that it is entranced and enthralled by its own sensory and verbal signs—so that perceiving them, it perceives “reality,” perceives “the world”—instinct-habit has harnessed and bound consciousness most securely (it may even have thought eternally) to its own designs.

As long, however, as consciousness remains enchanted in this way—that is, in the way generic to animal consciousness—it remains sealed within a sign-made, and so determinate, multiple, divided, describable, thinkable “the world.” Its perceivings and reflections, and all its subsequent attitudes, emotions, impulses, and projects, will necessarily be directed just towards particular verbally identifiable persons, things, events, and conditions in that world. It will not have the capacity to discern, touch, or in any way sense the boundless, the undivided, the unsayable—that which *exceeds* all signs and all conception. By means of the Yoga of Stillness I may have reached a state of perfect *apatheia*, but if, transfixed by biology’s primordial spell, I remain securely sealed in the sign-made world, the meager result will only be my complete indifference to that “the world” which still seems to me to be “where I am,” to be *This*.

Turned life’s first great work, the unharnessing of consciousness from instinct-habit, must therefore include a second yoga, a spell-breaking or dis-enchanting yoga which liberates consciousness from its primordial bewitchment. Such a Yoga of Disenchantment will de-automatize the relationship between consciousness and its signs, will identify and resist the processes by means of which awareness is seized and controlled, prior to all thought, by them. It will work to bring consciousness to a condition where it is not only not emotively “affected,” but is no longer contained and organized, by its signs, a condition in which they no longer delimit and define where and what it is. Only if the Yoga of Stillness is complemented in this way by the Yoga of Disenchantment can awareness be brought to that perfectly simple, imageless, formless condition Evagrius advocates. Only in this way can it reach the state, described by Ashvaghosha, in which all thoughts of anything “seen, heard, remembered, or conceived . . . and even the thought of discarding them,” have been “put away” (Ashvaghosha, 96).

I have written that turned life always has as its setting the dance of instinct-habit and intuition, and that within the vastness of turned life itself their singular commerce assumes infinite varying, sometimes sharply contrasting forms. Among other things this means, as we later shall see, that turned consciousness can enter into equally manifold and divergent relations with its own sensory and verbal signs. Later, therefore, it may sometimes happen that turned consciousness will

come to terms with those signs, or even embrace them as aiding, perhaps even as essential to, turned life. In turned life's early stages, however, that first work of unharnessing, which includes the Yoga of Disenchantment, is urgently required. The great spell which binds consciousness *must* be broken, above all so that consciousness, thus freed from old automatisms, can become alert to modes of being and knowing not found in "the world." Only later, therefore, and secondarily, does that initially indispensable process of dis-enchantment also have this consequence: it helps insure that any *future* rapprochement between consciousness and signs will not involve a reactivation of the "spell," and so a return to consciousness' exclusive regulation by biology and instinct. It makes it more likely that any future "embrace" reuniting consciousness with its signs will follow just from the premises of turned life itself.

The need to be "unbound"—to be freed from animal perception's ancient spell—which now confronts turning consciousness is an essential, and also a most formidable and daunting, work. For the transformation of consciousness the Yoga of Disenchantment endeavors to achieve is not the mere exchange of certain favored verbal perceptions—of certain "beliefs"—for others, or the comparatively easy replacement of one behavior mode by another. Like the Yoga of Stillness it seeks instead to suspend an automatic and instinctive response, a reflex; indeed and as we have seen, the ancient biological reflex upon which this second yoga "works" is even more deep-seated than the affects. Like the endeavor to bring the passions to rest, the challenging and monumental work of breaking consciousness' primordial spell is therefore an ongoing, a permanent even "infinite" work—it will require the sustained bringing to bear of great energy and intelligence all the while the dance continues.

Further still, this second "unharnessing" yoga will avail little unless it is always preceded and accompanied by the first. For even if I should succeed in partly or wholly breaking animal consciousness' defining spell, it is still the case that the emotions—desire, love, anger, fear—implacably insist, wherever and whenever they arise, on the absolute "reality" of their particular objects, and so of the entire "the world" which is their stage. Consequently, a seemingly "dis-encharnted" world which all at once contains a particular verbally identified person or object I "love" or "hate" is immediately restored to "reality," that is, to its old status as the spellbinding, sign-made "the world." It is a world I cannot question, a world in which, in spite of all yogas of disenchantment, I am now once again tightly sealed.

Turned life's initial work of unharnessing consciousness from instinct-habit is therefore composed of two indispensable and complementary endeavors. The Yoga of Stillness first brings consciousness to a condition of rest in which it is no longer haphazardly seized, agitated, and then impelled into action by intricate webs of sensation, emotion, and volition evolved through millions of years of animal life. It interrupts the ancient, instinctive biology of the affect, and in so doing prepares the way for the Yoga of Disenchantment. In its immensity and its subtlety this second yoga even exceeds the first. For to undertake the Yoga of Disenchantment is to confront and challenge normal consciousness' formative and most deep-seated reflex: its equation of its—or of its group's or species'—particular signs with reality, with *This*. Practicing the Yoga of Disenchantment I seek to free consciousness, not only from the emotive *effects* of my signs, but from its very possession and bewitchment by their primordial, magical, world-creating spell.

As a result of the Yoga of Stillness, I am no longer carried to-and-fro, and consciousness is

no longer suffused or stirred, by affective responses to the particular persons, things, and events which constitute my particular “the world.” As a result of the Yoga of Disenchantment, those manifold, fluctuating, determinate contents of the verbalized world no longer hover before me as the self-evident given, as what is “at hand.” That world no longer defines for me what reality is. It no longer is where I—obviously—am. In this way the Yoga of Disenchantment begins to transform my innermost sense of what *This* is. But since animal consciousness is constituted by the great spell—by its equation of its particular signs *with This*—the end of its bewitchment also means that consciousness itself is being redefined and reconstituted, is becoming another form or mode of consciousness. All the pages which follow are an exploration of this second “unharnessing” yoga, and of the transformation of consciousness, the perceptions, the experience, the additional yogas, and the life or inexhaustibly varied lives towards which such a yoga leads. To begin, I shall describe—briefly and by way of illustration—one of that yoga’s approaches, entrances, or “methods,” one of the infinite ways in which turning consciousness can set out, can begin to work at its infinite unbinding, liberating work.

\* \* \* \* \*

ii.

The Latin syllables *coincidentia oppositorum* call to mind Nicholas of Cusa, who sometimes writes that all opposites coincide “in” God, at other times that God is above, prior to, or beyond their coincidence. God is beyond distinctions such as that between motion and rest, activity and passivity, time and eternity, oneness and plurality, being and nonbeing; since that most perfect being is in this way beyond all distinction and classification, we cannot even begin to form a concept of Him, and “the more an intellect understands the degree to which the concept of God is unformable, the greater this intellect is” (Hopkins, 21-22). But in spite of this renowned European connection, one can generalize that the particular preoccupations and perspectives most hospitable to the Latin phrase are more fully developed in other—above all, in India’s—traditions. Indian thought’s historically most prominent “seeing” or “school” is known specifically as the Non-dual (*advaita*) Vedanta. One striking example of Buddhism’s preoccupation with this theme is the *Vimalakirtinirdesha Sutra*’s climactic ninth chapter on “The Dharma-Door of Nonduality.” By way of showing how one may enter that door, each of thirty-one bodhisattvas in turn identifies a particular pair of opposed conceptions—for example matter and voidness, happiness and misery, transcendental and mundane—which one who seeks “nonduality” must leave behind.

Certain phenomena attended to during the exploration, above, of the Other Paradox enable us to understand why a philosopher-theologian engaged in the contemplation of perfection, or turned consciousness endeavoring to glimpse, approach, touch, or become it, should attend most closely to the opposites, above all to ways in which they might be unified or transcended. For it is clear that as soon as there is just one pair of opposites, there is division—the opposites are therefore a great threat to that seamless unbrokenness which is a hallmark of perfection. Less obviously, but just as significantly, a universe which has come into being by the differentiation of opposites, and which consists of a limited number of such mutually delimiting pairs, is itself necessarily finite. As such it is incompatible with the uncontained boundlessness of intuition’s perfect being and knowing. And

third: as we have seen, the opposites in question—being and nonbeing, alive and not alive, thing and event, matter and consciousness, within and without, etc.—structure and constitute that very world of verbally identified things, persons, events, qualities, and relations which language proposes, indeed, which language *forms* just by bringing to bear the binary opposition of verbal signs. And this means: the opposites evoke and even embody a nameable, describable, explainable, verbally determinate world utterly antagonistic to that realm of nonverbal perfection turning consciousness now seeks.

Since they create finitude and division, the opposites frustrate the double movement of dilation and simplification which gives direction to turned consciousness and forms the underlying action of turned life. In that they embody the principle—the binary opposition of verbal signs—which generates the self-evident and verbally inventoried, verbally mapped “the world” by which normal consciousness is spellbound, the opposites loom as the particular instruments and enforcers of our enchantment. To point out with reference to the opposites what I have already said of instinct-habit in general: though turning consciousness—unless it simply turns back from and so *abandons* turned life—will never return to that pre-turn condition in which it was contained, organized, and bewitched unawares by the opposites, we shall see that in the course of its unending journey it may come to relate to them in a great variety of ways tolerant, friendly, and even amorous as well as contentious. All rapprochement, however, follows upon and assumes prior hostilities, a severance of “good relations.” And in the present case that earlier falling out naturally occurs just as turned life begins, when turning consciousness, seeking to break the powerful and ancient hold of instinct-habit, works not only to bring the passions to rest, but also to attain “disenchantment,” that is, to break the spell cast on it by its signs, above all by its own verbal signs. The opposites, however, are the essential and the most clearly visible instruments of that bewitchment, and as a result: turning consciousness’ unharnessing work naturally, almost inevitably, comes to include a particular, critically important confrontation just with *them*.

In fact, the more carefully we consider the opposites and the peculiar role they play in consciousness’ construction of “the world,” the more clearly we discern how singularly qualified they are to become *the* focal point of the entire confrontation between bewitched consciousness and its own bewitching signs which is now taking shape. For with a most remarkable clarity the opposites show forth the structure of my world—and so of my “enchantment”—from its deepest foundation or lack of foundation to its most refined ornamentations. They are the astonishingly simple formula or key to my seemingly so spacious, massive, and heterogeneous—to my as it seems impenetrably labyrinthine—world. Just by listing them in hierarchical fashion—for example: ‘being’ and ‘nonbeing’, ‘living being’ and ‘nonliving being’, ‘animal life’ and ‘plant life’, ‘human’ and ‘nonhuman’ animal, ‘human female’ and ‘human male’, etc.—I can most perspicuously view the vast array, now ordered on a scale of increasingly refined binary opposition, of my verbal signs; and then in an instant I can redirect my attention to that strangely exact and perfect double: “reality,” that is, the parallel, identically ordered world of “actual” persons, things, and events—of “existents,” “living things,” “animals,” “plants,” “human beings,” “women,” “men,” etc.—which, with uncanny and clonelike precision, my own word-repertoire replicates and so lucidly “brings to mind.”

This other array—the vast host of “actual” persons, things, and events flawlessly and exhaustively mimicked by any English, or as the case may be Phoenecian or Sindhi or Gothic,

dictionary—is that “clear, common light,” that “the world,” within which and by which consciousness is enchanted. It is the inevitably finite, divided, sign-made, sign-accessible—and therefore familiar, therefore blandly “normal”—world which encloses animal consciousness when, blindly following instinct and habit, it takes its own particular signs to constitute reality, to be *This*. And because those reality-constituting signs, in our case, are verbal as well as sensory, reality for us is *also* “verbal,” is linguistically transparent, verbally “comprehended,” is even the expected, the “self-evident.” Only our enchantment-induced confusion—the fact that we spontaneously have projected the contents and structure of language onto reality, thus reducing and remaking *This* into language’s spectral clone and double—can explain the astonishing fact: offhand I cannot think of one real, existing thing in all of being for which we do not have a name. Only it explains why, having “driven last Saturday to Decorah,” I now can disclose to you absolutely, fully, and unequivocally—and just by using *those very words*—exactly “what I did,” and “when.”

Because hierarchically ordered binary opposition is the structural key to our language—and subsequently, because of our world-forming enchantment, to our “reality”—a yoga which takes aim precisely at the opposites is preeminently suited to disrupt and even break the spell leading to that confusion of word and thing. For if biological worlds, just like systems of signs, are created by the unfurling—the differentiating out—of opposites, it must also be possible to deactivate them by reversing the process, that is, by fusing the opposites back together, thereby restoring the original state. The Yoga of Coincidentia Oppositorum is such a yoga. It uses the principle or key with which normal consciousness’ “the world” was made to unmake it again.

Two things—for example, the centers of two concentric circles—coincide in that they occupy the same space and correspond to each other so perfectly that they are indistinguishable, are in effect the same “thing.” But since they are perfectly contrary to one another, opposites necessarily dwell “apart” in non-coincident mutual exclusion—light cannot also be darkness, and something living cannot also be dead. Clearly, two things which are opposites can coincide only after being brought together and somehow unified or fused. But they cannot coalesce as long as they still possess those mutually incompatible identities, definitions, and qualities which distinguish them and which normally, and necessarily, keep them apart. We can therefore picture the Yoga of Coincidentia Oppositorum as one in which we successively bring pairs of opposites—great and small, matter and mind, life and death—together and slowly fuse them. As they are made to coalesce, their names, definitions, identities, and all the contrasting things we can say and think about them engage, are forced together in a powerful grinding, rasping, and flaking action, and then at last are utterly stripped away as their fusion is made complete and the now unrecognizable, now indistinguishable opposites perfectly “coincide.”

Within the greater biological context of signs, any linguistic dichotomy—for example, ‘earth’ and ‘outer space’—exemplifies animal consciousness’ adaptive construction of biological worlds by means of the binary opposition of sensory and verbal signs. More narrowly, such opposites typify the way in which human consciousness in a particular time and place spontaneously takes its own transient and local verbal signs as an inventory and map of reality, and then just as spontaneously accepts the entities those signs specify *as* reality, as constitutive of *This*. Enchanted as we are, we do not coolly-pragmatically employ the sounds ‘earth’ and ‘outer space’ as adaptations which help us get around *in* reality. Instead we have always already assumed that they are special

keys *disclosing* reality. Beyond the words themselves we glimpse the reified words, or things—“the earth,” “outer space”—we see them as naming; and having discovered these “opposites,” we proceed to integrate them into the hierarchy of the real. “The universe,” which contains all that exists, and which as such stands opposed to “unreal,” “imaginary,” and “visionary” worlds, is presently our all-inclusive sign identifying “where we are.” Prompted by it to perceive *This* first of all as spatial, and following the brain’s ancient binary pathways, we have then divided the vast three-dimensional space of “the universe” into two contrasting milieus: “the earth,” “outer space.”

The former is the close at hand, is the familiar great ball—infinately variegated on its surface—which is our fragile “island,” our “home”; in comparison with “the universe,” it is more particularly, vividly, and intimately-sentimentally “where we are.” Earth’s opposite, “outer space,” is utterly remote and alien, a dark, vast, edgeless, absolutely *unhomelike* emptiness. This other portion of “the universe” is, most decidedly, where we “are not,” and being there would be different from—would not surprisingly be “diametrically opposed” to—being “on earth.” Such is the spellbinding power of these signs that in the moment we merely utter or even think them, our ancient restlessly scanning brain—normally caught up in the uncertain details of our project—gains a moment of rest and satisfaction. For we are reminded then that at least as to basics, we know what *This* is. As to basics, we know “where we are.”

But this spell is broken, and the reassuring-confining mood of comprehension it conjures up is dissolved, when the opposites which are the instrument of this entire enchantment are fused in the Yoga of *Coincidentia Oppositorum*. For like all opposites, the pair “earth” and “outer space” can unite as one only if each sheds everything about itself which distinguishes it from the other. As I bring them together in consciousness, therefore, the earth’s distinguishing qualities as the near, the familiar, “home,” etc.—and outer space’s contrary qualities—are necessarily stripped away. In the moment they perfectly coincide, none of those qualities will remain. The mutually exclusive definitions, identities, and essences which made earth “earth” and outer space “outer space” are now obliterated—indeed, we can now clearly see how those determinate identities were products just of their separation, for each emerged as a nameable, specifiable, identifiable “something” only as they moved apart out of an original shared chaos or nothingness into diametrical, mutually delimiting and defining opposition.

But our normal “the world” *consists* just of such defined, delimited, and so specifiable golemic entities—only they are perceptible, are “distinguishable,” in the clear, common light. Earth and outer space, having been stripped of all determinate being, have therefore at the very same time been eliminated from “the world.” They no longer belong to the inventory of “real things.” From a worldly perspective, they no longer *are*. In the empty space they once occupied there no longer *is* an “earth” or “outer space” one might identify as part of reality, or as an element of *This* vitally important to the explanation of “where we are,” and that is to say: now we neither are nor can be enchanted by them.

As for the verbal signs themselves—‘earth’, ‘outer space’—which first conjured up that now vanished pair, they have lost their spellbinding potency, for as we just saw: yoga has now removed—has barred from “the world”—the two “things” they normally conjure up. But unlike the “things”—their uncanny doubles—they once named, the words are still at hand. I can still say or think them, can still find them on the list of verbal signs. But deprived as they now are of their



magic, they no longer have the power to contain, divide, or organize awareness. The mere silent repetition of those syllables no longer releases a pulse of luminous certainty that I know “where I am.” Now that the Yoga of Coincidentia Oppositorum has deprived the two signs of their possible objects, of their very “meaning,” they are merely the discordant, vainly contentious names of two utterly indistinguishable, of two “distinguishable only in name,” non-things. Stripped of their magical power, they are inert and limp, are “mere words,” “mere signs.” As a result, they have not only lost their organizing control over consciousness. They have also lost their once astonishing capacity—their mana, their godlike revelatory power—to disclose to consciousness “what is” and “how things are.” No longer do they seem to me to unveil “the world.” No longer do they spatialize, partition, or in any way seem even to relate to *This*.

Applied—in the manner just applied to “earth” and “outer space”—to the innumerable pairs of sign-based opposites from which any human “the world” is made, the Yoga of Coincidentia Oppositorum removes in slow succession the myriad forms and contents which constitute the yogin’s normal reality, her verbally comprehended “where I am”; simultaneously it renders inert and lifeless the opposing pairs of verbal signs whose magical power to spellbind consciousness first conjured up those forms and contents. In this way—that is, by abolishing “the world” and deactivating the signs—the Yoga of Coincidentia Oppositorum achieves its particular goal: the disruption of consciousness’ enchantment, the breaking of signs’ primordial spell.

Just by accomplishing this, however, it also frees awareness from the no longer desired consequences of that enchantment. I have already explained how an enchantment which uses the opposites as its primary instrument necessarily confines awareness within, and organizes it in conformity to, a divided, finite, verbally cataloged and described world. By breaking the great spell which holds animal consciousness entranced, the Yoga of Coincidentia Oppositorum simultaneously liberates awareness from its aboriginal containment within the manifold, bounded, sayable, and thinkable. It removes the supreme obstacle in the way of that “unworldly,” un-animallike project of dilation and simplification which turning consciousness seeks to become. Just by performing its work of dis-enchantment, it frees awareness to turn towards the undivided, the uncontained, frees it to move towards that which is outside signs and biology. It creates an opening which makes possible for turning consciousness a fall out of words, a transcending of all signs and conception, of all “human thought.”

\* \* \* \* \*

iii.

To be brought together in such fashion and then—in spite of their seeming contrariety—to be fused as “earth” and “outer space” have now been fused; to be thus ground and peeled away, to be made to efface one another in a coming-together which mirrors, inversely, the differentiation and fanning out of opposites by which sign-worlds are made—that is the fate the Yoga of Coincidentia Oppositorum now has in store for all the perceived contraries by which our particular shared world is formed and from which it is constructed. And in its relations to all the pairs of verbal opposites which have enchanted it, to be dis-encharnted; to become free of that subtle, all-pervasive, previously unremarked bewitchment which has led it to equate its own particular verbal signs with reality, with

*This*; to overcome, now that it has abandoned its former project of concentration and crystallization, the obstacles blocking its new project of dilation and simplification—that is the liberation, the unprecedented release, consciousness now attains. By advancing paradoxes of the “Platonic” type—that is, by seeking to explain all the world’s diverse and contrary phenomena as originating from just one member of one pair of opposites, for example from eros—one attempts to render coherent and so *save* the world of opposites, thereby shoring up consciousness’ containment within that world. The Yoga of Coincidentia Oppositorum will now work to achieve an entirely different end: to dismantle the world of opposites pair by pair, and so upon completion of this gradual abolition to enable consciousness at last to glimpse that undivided, boundless, unsayable reality which the opposites have blotted out with their vast, hypnotic world, and which in so doing they have represented to us instead as a thing divided and limited, a thing we can “understand.”

Since the Yoga of Disenchantment is indispensable all the while instinct-habit and intuition continue—in turned life as in unturned—their unending dance, there will be ample occasion to apply the Yoga of Coincidentia Oppositorum to the most detailed and subtle distinctions. To begin, however, turning consciousness which undertakes this particular practice will seek—even as the aforementioned ninth chapter of *Vimalakirtinirdesha Sutra* seeks—to identify and focus on fundamentals. It will work above all on bringing into coincidence those elementary pairs of opposites which define the primary forms and contents of its familiar world in that world’s various spatial, temporal, material, conceptual, moral, and religious dimensions. Applying the Yoga of Coincidentia Oppositorum one after the other to these pairs, turning consciousness will slowly fuse and abolish the forms which have structured its world. And pair by pair it will slowly empty that world of its primary contents, that is, it will successively decompose those hierarchically ordered elementary realities which the nouns of its language—that serendipitously exact, thorough, and identically ordered contents table of “the real”—so perspicuously make known.

In the carrying out of this practice as in so many other movements of turned life, perspectives and perceptions engendered by reflection on the Other Paradox soon display their usefulness and importance. For the primary structural opposites which frame the Other Paradox—being and nonbeing, knowing and unknowing, millennium and ruin—play equally important roles in normal consciousness’ comprehendings of its “the world” and its “my life”; and reflection upon them in connection with the Other Paradox has in fact already begun to prepare us for disenchanted consciousness’ experience of those thoroughly “antagonistic” and “mutually exclusive” opposites as fused in a paradoxical harmony, as impossibly or vanishingly “one.” For indeed and as we already have seen, much of the paradoxical quality of the Other Paradox turns just on the perception that absolute being and pure nothingness are indistinguishable and so already *are* one. Alike in their contrast to golemic being, they have neither boundary nor division, neither identity nor definition. Both are formless, uncrystallized, indeterminate, and indescribable, so that the self-perceived failure sees herself, just as tradition has seen perfect being, as pure “emptiness,” as “nothing.” It is true that tradition’s perfect being and the fringes’ dismal nonbeing unanimously oppose their common contrary—golemic being—but since in their inmost natures or non-natures they do not oppose or delimit one another in any way, they themselves have already loomed before us as indistinguishable and coincident, as “one.”

The Other Paradox has similarly prepared us for a yogic fusion of knowledge and nescience.

For in perfect contrast to all particularized, sign-based, golemic knowing of “how things are,” the sprawling, amorphous unknowing of the fringes, and perfection’s luminous, even divine knowing, are alike in being undifferentiated, formless, signless, unchanging, and incommunicable. In the vacancy of the madman and in a god’s unthinkable awareness there are no words or sentences, no “ideas” or “thoughts”—such a god is as remote as is the amnesiac from words to comprehend, think, say, or even wonder “who she is.” And as we already have seen, that infernal condition of being “nothing” and “no one” from which our golem project at last will deliver us, or to which the project’s failure will eternally consign us, is itself that perfect freedom from all “determination”—from all *negation*—which is a god’s eternally inexhaustible paradise, glory, and joy. And that is to say: in the course of contemplating the Other Paradox we have already glimpsed absolute millennial triumph and ignominious failure—have already heard the most joyful “Yes” and the most despairing, abandoned “No”—as one.

Thus prepared for its yogic work by the Other Paradox, turning consciousness will fuse those opposites—being and nonbeing—which structure, above all, the world’s “objective” realm. It will bring into coincidence those two most important pairs of the subjective inner realm: knowledge and ignorance, success and ruin. Extending its practice to the world’s various dimensions mentioned above, it will unite—and so annihilate in their determinate being—earth and outer space, here and not here, future and past, change and permanence, matter and mind, person and thing, birth and death, consciousness and unconsciousness, sanity and madness, light and dark, hard and soft, good and bad, true and false, silence and sound, etc. Practicing the Yoga of *Coincidentia Oppositorum*, I will give special attention to those pairs I use to verbalize the most frequent and deep-seated concerns of my inner life. If I am preoccupied above all with a person, or with truth, or with goodness, I will particularly attend, therefore, to the fusion of person and thing, true and false, good and bad.

As I move in succession from one pair to another, that pervasive quality of turned life—its infinity—soon makes known its uncanny and quickening presence within the Yoga of *Coincidentia Oppositorum* itself. I may attempt to move in at least somewhat orderly fashion down the various hierarchies, but must soon recognize: just in their sheer number the pairs of opposites which are the materials upon which this work works are overwhelming, for each of those hierarchies, which themselves are most numerous, bifurcates, all but endlessly, into countless sub-orders based on ever finer oppositions-distinctions.

A second factor compounds this “infinity.” For the turning of consciousness still takes place in the context of the great dance we are or potentially are, so that as we have seen, turning consciousness exhibits—much more vigorously and fully than does modern or “normal” consciousness—the divided, dancing nature of human consciousness in its perhaps unprecedented, biology-transcending complexity. Swayed by intuition, it is turning towards the signless, but that most formidable sign-loving dancer—instinct-habit—has not gone away. One of this non-departure’s important consequences, adding greatly to the labors of this yoga, is direct and predictable. For I soon find—such are the tenacity and the enduring power of instinct, and the momentum of habit coasting its ancient pathways—that I must return again and again to work on pairs, previously fused, which unattended to have begun “underground” to regain their consciousness-binding mystique. But there is also another consequence—subtler, more ambiguous,

more complex. For given the vastness and manifoldness of simultaneously turning and dancing consciousness itself, there easily arises a previously unknown blending of energies disposed to create new “post-conversion” pairs of verbal opposites, and this in turn means: even as it annihilates normal consciousness’ familiar “the world,” turning consciousness is susceptible to enchantment by a new sign-made “turned” world it itself now constructs.

Earlier pages have already acquainted us with numerous verbal polarities from which such a new “the world” might be created: the clear, common light and the fringes; golemic being and knowing and tradition’s perfect being and knowing; instinct-habit and intuition; normal consciousness and turning consciousness; the determinate and the indeterminate; finite and infinite; many and one. Letting itself be contained and organized by these newly adopted signs, allowing itself to be *enchanted* by them just as it formerly was enchanted by those rooted in biology and animal life, turning consciousness thereby encloses itself—perhaps not even aware of what it is doing—within new verbal comprehendings of “where I am,” of “what I am doing,” and of “my life.” In this way—in which consciousness’ instinctive-habitual reflexes graft themselves into the fresh tissue of intuition’s turned life—I myself play a most important role in keeping “infinite” the work with which the Yoga of Coincidentia Oppositorum confronts me. For even as I turn, I almost inevitably create, and then come to attach particular importance to, new pairs of opposites; and just because of their “particular importance,” these new pairs soon acquire a place among my most unyielding obstacles as I seek to transcend all verbal opposites, and so to break out of all divided, limited, sayable, thinkable worlds.

The traditional literature of turned life is very aware of this subtle, “natural,” and pervasive propensity to use new pairs of opposites to create a new consciousness-organizing “turned” language and a new awareness-containing “turned” world; and so it frequently warns against the proclivity of turning consciousness to sabotage itself—or at any rate to create much new “work” for itself—in this way. Of Buddhism’s vast Perfection of Wisdom literature in particular we can say that its primary aim is precisely to ensure that its Buddhist reader-meditator will be left with no Buddhist concepts whatsoever, and so with no possible Buddhist language or “world”—Ch’an’s striking and well-known accounts of sutra-destroying masters are merely metaphors or dramatic extensions of this inherited Mahayana aim. And so specifically and in relation to the opposites: it is no accident that many of the pairs of opposites singled out for dissolution in the *Vimalakirtinirdesha Sutra*’s chapter on the door to nonduality are polarities—samsara and nirvana, path and no-path, self and no-self, matter and emptiness, bondage and liberation—constituting verbalized Buddhism’s very core. With their disappearance, the abolition of Buddhism as a verbal presence—“the Buddhist world”—is complete, and so at last the “door” to nonduality stands open.

Like turned life itself, the Yoga of Coincidentia Oppositorum is unending, for as we now have seen, those practicing it are perpetually uncovering, returning to, or even creating new pairs of opposites whose contrasting, verbally determinate, mutually delimiting essences must then be ground, or reground, away in the fusion process. Climactically, and as Nietzsche, recalling an ancient inference, formulated it for us moderns: the appalling-alluring notion of infinity includes within itself the prospect of infinite repetition. As an infinite work, the Yoga of Coincidentia Oppositorum naturally displays such “eternal returns,” above all to beginnings, to those ultimate pairs of opposites which founded, and which now support and rule, the “hierarchies.” And indeed,

as consciousness continues to turn, those ultimates become more and more the focal point of its disenchantment work, just as the undertaking to remove a tree, which may begin with desultory trimmings of branches, becomes at last a long, laborious struggle with the root. Consciousness thus engaged in this work will therefore tend to return, again and again, to many of the great opposites already mentioned: being and nonbeing, knowing and unknowing, finite and infinite, oneness and multiplicity, etc. And with time as it moves along this yoga's sinuous and unending path—and as it becomes more familiar with the verbal hierarchies and with being's unerringly equivalent "great chain"—it will likely find itself being drawn to devote increasing attention to two pairs, and then at last above all to one member of one of those final pairs.

The first of these two ultimate pairs was just mentioned: being and nonbeing, that is, existence and nonexistence, 'is' and 'is not'. These opposites constitute as it were the first fracturing of *This*, its first delimiting enclosure within opposites. They transform unenclosed, unknown, unimaginable, "wild" reality into a contained, divided, much less imposing and troubling something to which, moreover, our very words and sentences are the key.

The other pair issues from and depends on it, for more familiarly we think and speak of the totality of all that "is" as "the world," and the first, most deeply rooted polarity by means of which "the world" is divided and organized consists in the primordial differentiation of the exterior, alien, "other" realm "out there" from the intimate, transparent, domestic space "in here." It is the initial splintering of the verbally comprehended "where we are" into the opposing, mutually exclusive spheres of the "objective" and the "subjective," of "not-I" and "I," of "the world out there" and "I." It is the establishment of profound distinction and separation—henceforth self-evident, irrevocable, and unbridgeable—between the "first person" which "I" am and all the other "persons" and all the "things" which "I" am not, an elementary opposition which, further ramified, soon leads consciousness to distinguish places where "I" am from places where "I" am not, to oppose "my" feelings, thoughts, and acts to the feelings, thoughts, and acts of "others," to react in very different ways to what is said about "me" and what is said about "someone else" or about "that tree," etc.

The two pairs of opposites—'is' and 'is not', 'I' and 'the world out there'—are the ultimate antitheses which first enclose verbal consciousness and by which it is first divided and organized; as such they are as it were the maker of normal consciousness, the imperious mystagogue which has lead sign-bound awareness out of strictly sensory experience into the exotic enchantment of verbal signs. Inevitably, a turning consciousness which is engaged in the Yoga of Coincidentia Oppositorum in order to free itself from that enchantment must undertake to confront, seize, and fuse those two quintessential polarities, thereby bringing their dominion to an end. That turning consciousness has not directed its yoga towards the very heart of its own enchantment until it has challenged them is brought home to us by their strong presence in *Vimalakirtinirdesha Sutra's* chapter on entry into the nondual. Three of the thirty-one bodhisattvas speak respectively of the need to pass beyond the dualities of "subject and object," "ego and non-ego," and "ego and its objective". And the very first bodhisattva invokes the Mahayana Buddhist refusal to affirm either "is" or "is not," asserting instead that the door to the nondual is the cardinal Buddhist virtue of *anutpattikadharmakshanti*, literally, "nonemergent-dharma patience," an untroubled, forbearing acceptance of the fact that nothing has ever "come to be," and therefore that right now nothing "is."

These two pairs provide the perceptual fundamentals which first create and then first map the

sign-made cosmos of normal consciousness. They are the prime sorcerers and first orchestrators of our enchantment. But then of these four ultimate verbal signs, one quickly establishes itself as supremely important, and as the preeminent enchanter of consciousness; and having asserted its claim to such importance and preeminence, it takes its place unopposed as awareness' absolute focal point, the sign-designated entity around which—perceptually, affectively, and volitionally—everything else revolves. That original archetype of all usurpers of power—the 'I'—is the seemingly innocuous diphthong whose usually unfelt grip will also prove all but unbreakable. It is the peerless magician, for it alone possesses or rather itself *is* the ultimate magic spell. Since our regular use of 'I' has made it familiar and self-evident, we pronounce or think it—we *yield* to it—mindlessly-unremittingly, that is, from pure habit. And since it functions as the verbal center from which all sentences as it were radiate, it is the keystone in whose absence the entire verbal world—the shared world of utterance in the clear, common light, and the world of silent interior utterance, or “thought”—must at once fall into chaos.

Without doubt, the sheer incessancy of its use and its role as consciousness' indispensable, all-organizing center help account for the primacy of the “I,” but a still more important source of its compelling importance lies elsewhere. In relation to the very first pair of opposites, consciousness begins by identifying itself as something that “is”—thereby it pictures itself as something in “the world,” and so as a particular entity which verbal signs can isolate, name, and describe. And then in relation to that second ultimate pair: whenever consciousness becomes *self*-conscious, it always finds itself verbalized as “I,” and it finds that “I”—that is, itself—placed within and identified with the interior, subjective portion of the verbally bifurcated “the world.” Captured, contained, and organized in this way by the verbal sign 'I', identifying itself wholly *with* that sign and thereby defining itself as other than and opposed to “the world out there,” consciousness subsequently exists within the totality—“the world”—as one relatively insignificant entity barely discernible in the swarming hosts of persons and things.

But just because of that identification—just because consciousness is now present to itself as a verbalized “I” identified with the peculiarly intimate spaces “in here”—that faint, isolated, seemingly insubstantial and weightless flicker of subjectivity, or even of golemic “nothingness,” that pronoun names must become the focal point of consciousness' attention and concern. Surrounded as it is by “the world out there,” that intimate center becomes the incessant “I” involved in relations with innumerable persons and things in the encompassing world. Having become it, it will now begin to appear, inevitably, as the subject of an endless string of declarative and interrogative sentences. It will be the verbally enclosed center from which love, anger, and all the passions radiate, and back into which myriad pleasures, pains, joys, and sorrows flow. It will be the bearer of a thousand hopes and fears—indeed, most of the agitation the Yoga of Stillness must “still” is consciousness' agitation just about the “I.” And as we have seen, that “I” is also destined to become consciousness' main challenge and work, the focal point—and the creator, material, and sole reason to be—of “my” golem project.

Normal consciousness comes to identify itself exclusively, and most significantly and fatefully, with the particular verbal sign 'I'; in consequence, almost everything in “the world”—that is, almost everything which “is”—presents itself to consciousness first of all as something which “I” am not. This critically important element—the simultaneous emergence of an “identification with”

and an “alienation from”—is unique to the process of “I” enchantment, yet the general *manner* in which this verbal sign enchants normal consciousness mirrors the way in which all verbal signs enchant. Bewitched by it as by any other sign, consciousness does not relate to it simply as a phenomenon in itself, but rather as identifying a separate entity—“I”—which together with all other entities and events constitutes “the world”; it is as if I immediately passed through the sound itself into that perfectly corresponding being which—as if by magic—had materialized *from* it. In this way “I” come to picture “myself” as “a person,” “a man,” “alive,” etc., and so—in addition to that primary “otherness”—also as *resembling* the others, that is, as one identifiable, particular, clearly delimited being in a world of myriad such beings. I see myself as amenable, like all things, to processing by means of verbal signs, as a “someone” who, like all other persons, can be verbally identified, described, and explained. I now am one who at any moment can be gloriously or ignominiously laid bare by that life story which I or you or even “they” can tell.

We have seen: the diphthong ‘I’ is the audible or the ghostly interior sound I incessantly make, is the perennial, constantly trafficked hub of my sentences. It is the sound with which awareness in me delimits and first defines itself, is as it were the way in which consciousness is present to itself. The particular “person” which has materialized from it, and which awareness passes into as it lets itself be enclosed in the sign, is like all other persons someone in “the world.” But also and above all: that “person”—now much more ambiguous, intimate, “subjective,” and even close to “nothing”—is that with which consciousness *identifies* itself, is precisely and absolutely decisively just what “I” am. For the “I” is one pole of the two original opposites which establish “the world’s” primary perceptual contents and structure, and upon which the entire verbal world depends; and of the two ultimate opposites which first divide and map the world within which it finds itself, the “I” is the one with which consciousness identifies itself affectively as well as perceptually, while it perceives the other—“the world out there”—precisely as what “I” am not.

That biologically felicitous adaptation operative in all animal perception—the binding of consciousness by signs—is therefore supremely present in the spell the sign ‘I’ casts upon normal consciousness. Completely unnoticed, it brings it about that the “I”—perceptually and affectively and volitionally—is charged with immeasurably more mana than any other sign. It leads consciousness to vest ultimate importance in “my” present and future condition. It shrouds the verbally perceived “I” in its virtually sacrosanct aura of the inevitable, the inviolable, the unchallengeable -- therefore, it is sheer madness just to raise questions about the three syllables ‘I exist’. As a result of this greatest of all enchantments, that peculiar, potentially endless drone or hum—‘I’—is now the universal spell, the incessantly repeated mantra by which all verbal consciousness is spellbound.

Those pages of the *Discourse* and the *Meditations* which make plain the constricted nature of Cartesian doubt also let us observe, as in an X-ray, the usually invisible workings of this enchantment, let us see how modern consciousness, above all, is irresistibly transfixed by its spell. For as Descartes sets out to identify everything about which even the slightest doubt might be possible, he soon finds that he can doubt the entire contents of the “world out there.” He can entertain the thought that there may be no colors, no figures, no earth. It is conceivable that all of geometry is false, is even possible that his very body is a phantom he sees as in a dream. But the “I,” in perfect opposition to everything else, is impervious, flawless, invulnerable—nowhere does it offer

the slightest purchase to the most direct assaults or the keenest, most astute probings of doubt. The spell with which this sign binds Cartesian consciousness is perfect, is absolute. And so the doubter of all that can be doubted submits immediately and unreservedly to the unchecked power and dominion of the hypnotic syllable 'I'. Nor—something we have already have seen—does it occur to him to doubt the amenability of reality, of *This*, to perception by means of the vast system of verbal signs founded by and on the primordial opposition of 'is' and 'is not'. Members of those two supreme pairs can therefore combine as subject and verb, as a sentence, and at once Cartesian consciousness is captured and molded—is *bound*—by that most occult and enchantingly “certain” of verbal spells: “I am.”

Routed by two overpowering pairs of opposites and above all by the supremely spellbinding sign which leads them, Descartes' campaign of doubt quickly melts away, but just *because* those pairs and that sign are the principal creators, organizers, and enforcers of its enchantment, turning consciousness practicing the Yoga of Coincidentia Oppositorum must come to see engagement with them as constituting the very heart of its work. And now most fortunately for it, and as if to encourage it, as it prepares for this undertaking, not to “despair” or to “turn away,” perceptions stimulated by reflection on the Other Paradox once again come to its aid. We have already seen that the Other Paradox itself prepares us for the fusion of the first pair, for its elementary formulation turns on the paradoxical identity of perfect being and absolute nothingness. As for the second pair, analysis of the Paradox and of its import has already alerted us to intuition's unhesitating dismissal of instinct-habit's sign-based, polarity-based comprehendings. These “comprehendings”—so intuition -- only cover, reduce, and so negate *This* as they verbally encompass and fix it by imposing upon it pairs of opposites such as 'I' and 'not-I'. They only entangle us more intricately as they proceed further to subdivide the “I” into feelings, thoughts, body, past, “my life,” etc., and the “not-I” into the myriad discrete, particularized, “determinate” persons and things of the clear, common light, of “the world out there.”

But another factor which surfaced early on in the foregoing exposition of the Paradox—and more specifically in that exposition's analysis of normal consciousness—contributes even more, for it reflects a more intimate probing of that seemingly immovable “I” at the very center of verbal consciousness' enchantment. That revealing, now paradoxically encouraging phenomenon is the profound suspicion about “myself”—a suspicion somehow more certain, more immediately “known,” than any Cartesian certainty—which lies coiled deep within normal consciousness and then surfaces in the various solitudes. It is the sense that this hypnotic “I”—this verbal, perceptual, volitional, affective center on which awareness seems to turn—in fact lacks all definition, all specifiable identity, all particularized *being*. It is the apprehension, which in despair takes exclusive possession of consciousness, that I am not someone or something, but began as and still remain “nothing.”

Solitudes and despair aside, this alarming self-perception is normally held in check below the surface of awareness, and the effort to hold it there is manifest in that determined refusal to reflect which contributes to a golem project's feverish and obsessive quality. But for turning consciousness seeking to break its enchantment by bringing opposites into coincidence, the remembrance of those old hauntings soon becomes an auspicious sign and most instructive presbyter, for it reminds me that long *before* thoughts about enchantment or opposites' coincidence



had even occurred to me, I have glimpsed the nothingness of the “I.” It lets me recall that I already have pictured—have somehow *experienced* or been present in—*This* as a place or event or mystery in which, impossibly and quickeningly, “I” was nowhere to be found.

Thus encouraged by reflection on the Other Paradox, turning consciousness now undertakes the most arduous, most essential, most infinite labor within this yoga’s infinite work: to bring into perfect coincidence those mutually exclusive events or conditions which the verbal signs ‘is’ and ‘is not’ denote, and so to abolish them; and to fuse, and so annihilate, those antithetical, mutually defining and delimiting entities to which the words ‘I’ and ‘the world out there’ have seemed to refer. To state a perception I shall elaborate more fully later: the word ‘is’ is an ultimate word, a word at the outermost edge or first appearance of meaning; therefore we cannot explain or define it using other words, all of which—except for its opposite ‘is not’—it somehow includes. With ‘is’ we seem to refer to an indeterminate and so boundless event or act, to a manifestation of presence which embraces and makes possible all the vitality of all verbs, the entire mass and substance of all nouns. ‘Is not’ is the very absence of all those things, pure vacancy, mere void. But now as I slowly bring them together and make them “one,” all those differences are perforce stripped away. In the moment perfect coincidence is achieved, nothing which identifies or distinguishes either one—presence or absence, life or death, plenitude or vacancy—remains. And this means: other than the names, nothing at all of the event “is” or of the non-event “is not” remains.

The biological-perceptual function of the verbal antithesis ‘I’ and ‘the world out there’ is that of all sensory and verbal opposites: to separate and distinguish, to discover or invent difference. Deprived of that function, such signs have no further use or meaning. The juxtaposed pair of mutually exclusive, verbally comprehended *entities* those two signs represent exists for consciousness only as a consequence of and as defined by that separation. The existence of each as an identifiable something depends on the separate and contrary existence—on the otherness—of the other, so that for them the elimination of all difference is simultaneously the cessation of all being. I have defined the sound ‘I’ as referring to the subjective, transparent, intimately known person “in here.” Its opposite is the vast, objective, external, multifarious, frequently enigmatic and impenetrable three-dimensional “world out there.”

Since each of the two signs owes its use and meaning—and each of the two “things” owes its determinate golemic being—to the process of differentiation which has separated and opposed them, the inevitable consequences of the reverse process of fusion are clear. As turning consciousness practicing the Yoga of *Coincidentia Oppositorum* reunites the two things, all the contrasting qualities which distinguished and separated them are necessarily ground away. The “I” is stripped of everything which separated it out as “I.” “The world out there” loses all the qualities which marked it as “the world out there.” As they fuse, the golemic being drains out of each, so that there no longer *are* two identifiable identities—or *any* identifiable entity—to which the verbal signs ‘I’ and ‘the world out there’ might refer.

Of course, and as generally happens in this yoga: the signs themselves remain. I—that unnameable something now suddenly broken free as it were from the sound ‘I’—can still pronounce the syllables ‘I’ and ‘the world out there’. But now they have no magical power to mesmerize, enclose, divide, and form consciousness, no theurgy to conjure up “things.” Now, in fact, they have neither meaning nor use, nor can consciousness any longer pass unthinkingly through them into the

“things,” for the opposing entities formerly materialized from them no longer exist. It is as if the sound ‘the world’, which once grandly evoked “all that is” and so seemed to encompass all of *This*, now suddenly lay in my hand as something unexplained or extra—a thing inert, disabled, unrelated to anything else. With surprise I realize: heretofore I have never stopped, even once, to take note of and direct my full attention towards the verbal sign ‘I’, for awareness in me always passed instantaneously through the sign into that supremely exigent, attention-consuming “myself” I discerned just beyond.

But now that I finally attend to that “first person” sign, which once bound consciousness so artfully that it did not even suspect its enchantment, it lies before me as something *de trop*, something unfamiliar and as it were from “elsewhere,” a mystery I no longer can even call a “verbal sign.” Inert, functionless, mana-less, the suddenly unexplained “signs” remain. But the things to which they formerly corresponded and which they named—“the world out there” and “I,” and indeed, the entire verbalized “the world” words once conjured up—have vanished. They no longer shine before and within consciousness as reality, as “where I am” and “what I am.” Fused and so abolished, they can no longer stand before me as constituting—as being—*This*.

To normal consciousness it will seem that such a yoga simply obliterates “all that is.” It will perceive these fusions and dissolutions as cancelling out the entirety of exterior and interior reality—as removing everything both “subjective” and “objective,” that is, all persons, things, acts, events, conditions, experiences, feelings, and thoughts, indeed the entire contents of “the universe”—so that in such a yoga’s destructive wake, I am left with “nothing at all,” not even with “myself.” And indeed: in the light of what I have already written, the conclusion thus drawn by normal consciousness is not only understandable; it is just what we would expect.

For as we have seen, animal consciousness is aware solely of its own particular signs, so that for any such consciousness, its signs are the sole contents of its world. Having added verbal signs to its sign repertoire, such consciousness comes to perceive a world of entities, events, and conditions—exact duplicates uncannily materialized from its verbal signs—which seem immeasurably more solid and “real” than the signs themselves and which normal consciousness predictably perceives as constituting “where it as,” as being *This*. In this way normal consciousness spontaneously embraces the shared world—the “clear, common light”—of its particular shared system of signs as the one true system of things, as “the real,” so that as we also have seen: anything not included within the system—for example, anything infinite, undivided, and nonverbal, or anything on or beyond “the fringes”—is spectral and unreal, is “nothing at all.”

But now the Yoga of Coincidentia Oppositorum, using as its key the very principle of binary opposition by which sign-worlds are constructed, has systematically unmade that world, has emptied that “one true system of things” of its entire contents. Now there are no determinate, verbally identifiable persons, things, events, classes, or conditions. The verbally designated acts or conditions—to be, not to be—no longer enter into consideration. The putative entities designated by the sounds ‘I’ and ‘the world out there’—even that entire “the world” encompassing “all that is”—have vanished. Now reality as a sign-accessible phenomenon is no more; there is “nothing at all,” mere void. In this most unfamiliar place within which consciousness now finds itself, there is nothing normal consciousness—verbal consciousness exclusively shaped by instinct and habit—possibly *can* perceive, so that for it “nothing at all” remains, not even “myself.”

But then if just for one moment we can shake off the old enchantment within which that peerless visionary—the neuron—has bound itself, we see that we might just as well apply a Spinozistic logic and instead conclude: what this abolition of the “determinate” has achieved, astonishingly and wonderfully, is the elimination of all *negation*. And in any case, after the most elementary review and reconsideration we will see the following become obvious: that interior yogic work I have referred to as the Yoga of Coincidentia Oppositorum cannot possibly abolish reality, cannot in any way alter or impinge upon *This*. All the while during this work and even following its infinitely remote completion, whatever was still is, undiminished.

It is true that the Yoga of Coincidentia Oppositorum removes the enchanted “the world” of sign-duplicating persons, things, events, classes, and conditions which normally encloses consciousness, providing the stage upon which “I” then will pass “my life.” It is also true that just by removing that world of reified signs, such a yoga renders impossible any continuation of consciousness’ old habit—which would be presumption and hubris if it weren’t so naive—of equating that world and its contents, all of which are determinate, finite, multiple, divided, changing, nameable, and conceivable, with reality, which we have no reason to regard as any of those things. And it is true as well that by thus depriving consciousness of its habit, this yoga disrupts and at last breaks up consciousness’ enchantment, its condition of being entranced by all the entities—the familiar “the world”—emanating from its own signs. The world which the Yoga of Coincidentia Oppositorum abolishes is therefore an *enchanted* world. Within consciousness itself it only dispels *enchantment*. But it does not and cannot in any way alter reality. At its completion, I have been freed from all possible spatial, temporal, categorical, historical, scientific, and autobiographical determinations—that is, from all delimiting verbal fixings—of *This*; but what is more important and only now begins to dawn upon or even overwhelm me: I am still in *This*.

Normal consciousness’ anxious or dismissive response that now there is “nothing,” though predictable, therefore misses the point of what is happening. The work of fusion and elimination I have called the Yoga of Coincidentia Oppositorum seeks to eliminate, not reality, but our instinctive-habitual sense of familiarity with reality, our enchanted certainty that we know “where we are.” Such a yoga does nothing to “the real,” but seeks instead to transform consciousness itself in its inmost, most intimate relation *with* it. It works, not on *This*, but on *us*. Its effect is to end our enchantment, that is, to render inert that deep-seated, unconscious assumption-presumption—the instinctive equating of my signs with *reality*—which heretofore has predetermined and governed my perceptions of and relation to *This*. And that effect is achieved by taking away those strange doubles of our verbal signs—the contents of my particular “the world”—which all the while during the years of my enchantment have appropriated for themselves the substantiality of true “substance,” the reality of the real.

Of the Yoga of Coincidentia Oppositorum we therefore can say that it brings to completion that essential, preliminary “Cartesian” work of clearing away which Descartes, oblivious as he was to his own enchantment, scarcely began. For what the Yoga of Coincidentia Oppositorum abolishes—what it *frees consciousness from*—are all those inherited frames of reference, preconceptions, presuppositions, conjoinings, inferences, and strange animal leaps of faith which secretly fashion normal consciousness’ enchantment and its sense of reality, and which endow *This*, even before I begin consciously to ponder it, with its drab aureole of familiarity, its taste of the

obvious, the long-since expected, the already encompassed, processed, and fully “absorbed.”

As we have seen, the great “remover”—the Yoga of Coincidentia Oppositorum—brings about such liberation just by removing that lone barrier which stands between bare awareness and pure reality, “the world.” For all those assumings, equatings, “leaps of faith,” etc., are the mechanism—the great biological loom—of my enchantment, and what it is they have woven is my “normal” seemingly so lucid and indubitable experience of my English, or Japanese or Dutch, “the world.” By eliminating “the world,” the Yoga of Coincidentia Oppositorum performe puts an end to my my enchantment. In removing it, it takes away that vast, brimming, utterly compelling cosmos—the peculiar “double” materialized from language’s equally crowded repertoire of verbal signs—which heretofore has engulfed all awareness and which, even if I tried, still covered and so blocked all perceiving of *This*. That singular and now nameless presence—formerly “the neuron” or “consciousness” or “I”—is free at last of its enchantment and its “the world.” And in consequence of that twofold liberation, for the very first time it now is able to gaze upon and to approach, no longer covered by anyone’s preconceivings and expectations, that other equally mysterious presence: bare reality in its own eternally uncircumscribed, unprocessed, uninterpreted, unsayable, unthinkable fullness. Perhaps like two opposites, or like two lovers or some ancient and perfect oneness, these two someones or somethings can now at last come together, at last “coincide.”

\* \* \* \* \*

## Chapter 7: The Signless Element

To have practiced the Yoga of Coincidentia Oppositorum or made use of some other means of dis-enchantment; thereby to have dissolved the all-inclusive “the world” with its intimately urgent “I” and its immense, labyrinthine “world out there”; and so now to find itself encompassed and pervaded, instead, by nothing but pure unprocessed reality—by *This* not yet overlaid, skewed, trimmed down, or fixed by arbitrary preconceptions of *This*—that is the unprecedented and bewildering transformation turning consciousness has now undergone, is the condition it now *is*. Verbally, and so imperfectly and in the manner of limitation and distortion, the unprecedented is approachable, however, only through comparison with the previously “known,” only, that is, by means of simile and metaphor, so that in attempting to begin moving or gesturing verbally towards what is happening, I now venture to portray turning consciousness’ present condition in the following way: it is just as if it had become immediately aware of a ubiquitous, irreducible, previously unknown, not even suspected element. Or more precisely: consciousness is now transformed into the pure apprehension-sensation of that unchanging, all-pervasive element which is all it ever has inhabited or ever will. It has immediate knowledge of its boundless “life-element,” the unchanging, edgeless, sign-free medium through which it moves, the holder and infinite host of its life.

The Greek and Latin *stoicheia* and *elementa*, and Sanskrit’s *bhuta*, *mahabhuta*, and *dhatu*, are syllables tradition has given us to denote “the elements,” those most basic constituents, often four in number, of our familiar “the world.” As a source of heat and as the sun, fire is indispensable for all life. But then birds and mammals, and fish, respectively, require the elements air and water, and the oxygen they contain, with an even more pressing urgency—those two elements are therefore the utterly essential life-mediums of their inhabitants. Still other creatures, less like us in their ways and so less “understandable,” cannot live unless they remain in their cold, damp, dark, heavy element: earth.

Tradition sometimes refers as well to a “finer” fifth element. Sanskrit’s *akasha*, often translated as “space” or “ether,” names that infinite, motionless, indivisible “ethereal” element which as we have seen is frequently invoked as an image of perfect being and knowing; and Samkhya’s distinction between *tanmatra* (“subtle element”) and *mahabhuta* (“gross element”) gained wide currency. The West knew of a pure *quinta essentia*, a “fifth essence,” from which stars and planets are made, and which is “free from generation and destruction, from change of quality or size” (Ross, 97). And “finer” yet: beyond the ultimately illusory “material elements,” Buddhist texts frequently refer to ultimate reality itself as the *dharmadhatu*, the “element of *dharma*,” or as it frequently is translated, the “reality-element.”

That oxygen-bestowing medium which is a particular animal’s indispensable life-element is its intimate, unchanging companion and ambience, its lifelong elemental “home”; if anything does, it is what deserves to be thought of as that second, lifelong womb cradling and forever nurturing the already born. Nothing is closer to the bird or to us than the enveloping air through which it flies and we move. Apart from those times which for that very reason are utter calamity, and wherever it swims, the fish is enclosed and sustained by its watery medium.

But then: the particular economies of adaptation have shaped animal awareness so as to relate to this constant, intimate, absolutely indispensable presence—the animal’s “element”—in a biologically understandable but logically perverse way. It is true that an organism’s wholly involuntary and unconscious “autonomic” nervous system typically includes in its repertoire responses to factors always present, such as gravity or water pressure. But unlike it, the “conscious” and “somatic” activity of nervous systems—perception by means of sensory signs—is focused upon determining and choosing among behavioral *options*; consequently, it discerns and reacts only to difference and change. The range of awareness of any such sign-using consciousness is therefore limited just to those things and conditions present in some but not in all places, and existing at some but not at all times. Animal consciousness perceiving by means of signs cannot discern—for it has not been *made* to discern—things, events, or conditions obtaining always or everywhere, which for example is to say: if we were “eternal,” we would remain eternally oblivious to that remarkable fact. And so in the present case, and most paradoxically, just *because* its element—its intimate life-medium—is at all times and in all places its essential and constant habitation, animal consciousness necessarily remains at all times perfectly oblivious to that most requisite and most intimate thing.

A fish, for example, makes fine discernings of particular sounds, colors, movements, and smells, but since its life-element is always absolutely essential and so always there, it lives and someday will die without having in any way registered that watery element which at all times is its home. So it is with all animals, including us. Right now I see the computer screen. I hear the fan and smell the cup of chicory at my right hand. But as for that absolutely indispensable, unalterably present, and incomparably intimate life-medium and life-element—“air”—I do not see or in any way sense it, and normally do not even think of it as one of the “things” in this room. Between me and the screen, so it naturally-instinctively seems to me, there is “nothing at all.”

Since sign-based consciousness is naturally and inevitably unaware of the ubiquitous and unchanging, it is clear that if such a consciousness *should* somehow become sensible of its element and life-medium, its experience of it and its awareness of it will be experience and awareness of an entirely unfamiliar kind. As concerns “what” is perceived, it will be the unprecedented *conscious* awareness of an omnipresent and unchanging “object.” But initially consciousness will be most struck by *how* its element is present to it, namely, as a previously unknown and not even imagined perfect intimacy, and by the peculiar *mode* of consciousness’ own awareness of that most intimately present “thing.” For consciousness now immediately knows—or just is the pure sensation *of*—its element; and that “knowing” possesses a mode and degree of immediacy otherwise not found in what it so far has called “conscious life.”

To be sure, normal consciousness customarily portrays itself as thoroughly or even excessively caught up in the immediate and sometimes all too intimate “the world.” But it is a commonplace that we in fact are often absent from the immediate present, and instead living in the future or past. Put into terms engendered by investigation of the Other Paradox, that commonplace is: impelled by its golem project, normal consciousness has always already passed through the pure immediacy of the present moment into narrative recollection of the “no longer” and strategic planning of the “not yet.” And above all, such consciousness habitually absents itself from the immediate present in order to dwell in expectation within that future millennial event—my golem’s dance—which will justify and show forth the meaning of that “present,” will indeed justify and

explain, retroactively, the entirety of “my life.”

But there is also another way—less obvious, but more deeply embedded and more consequential—in which normal consciousness at all times has already absented itself from what is most intimate, and so has already missed “immediacy.” For as we have seen: carried by the spell which has transfixed it, sign-enchanted normal consciousness passes instantaneously *through* the sensory and verbal signs themselves into the enchanted spectral world of persons, things, events, classes, and conditions those signs magically emanate. Consequently, such consciousness never attends specifically to, and so is strangely oblivious to, the very sights, sounds, touches, smells, and tastes—and the specialized word-sights and audible or inwardly rehearsed word-sounds and sentence-sounds—which actually constitute the immediately perceived, that which is palpably-intimately present to awareness. And so most paradoxically: later on in these pages there will be occasion to explore, as one possible movement *within* turned life, turning consciousness’ “re-turn” to those immediately present, but formerly instantaneously passed through, sensory and verbal signs themselves. Then it can be considered how consciousness might for the very first time attend directly to *them*, and how it may even integrate those mysteries and immediate presences into its infinitely turning awareness, and into the experiences and yogas of turned life.

Normal consciousness distractedly inhabits a strangely remote and elusive “the world”—whose very existence its philosophers have therefore felt they must prove—which is mediated to it indirectly by means of sensory and verbal signs. But now turning consciousness finds itself plunged in that ubiquitous and constant, but unfamiliar, “element”—reality emptied of “the world”—and what first strikes it so forcefully, just because it has been sign-congested normal consciousness, is the signless intimacy of that element’s presence, the pure and unbroken immediacy of its touch. All verbal signs have been rendered inert by the Yoga of Coincidentia Oppositorum. Since it itself has been brought to rest by the Yoga of Stillness, no sensory signs seize consciousness, carrying it into verbalized multiplicity, into “the world.” It is as if awareness, thus calmed and thus disentangled from signs, now touched unmediated reality—now inhabited *This*—as an element or medium not yet diminished by preconception or comprehension, not yet skewed by particular expectation, not yet captured by number or name.

That intimate sign-transcending presence—pure reality, *This*—is closer than anything ever before touched. It is that which, as long as consciousness was “normal,” was too close, too omnipresent and enduring, too constant, too simple, primordial and “elemental” to be discerned. But now consciousness, no longer “normal,” has as it were become a single bare nerve, has become pure signless wakefulness and naked receptivity. Its delicately searching nerve ends have reached out into a “nothingness” in whose darkness they now encounter an immutable and infinite object. Or more vividly and “elementally”: it is like a fish which, its attention wholly turned from the constantly changing phantasmagoria of colors, shapes, sound, and tastes which until now have constituted its world, is suddenly and preternaturally able to feel, against every scale covering the surface of its entire fish body, that great watery element which is its enfolding and constant “where it is,” its home.

No longer organized by the opposites, no longer enchanted or contained by “the world,” bare consciousness is now wholly exposed to that previously unknown but now equally bare “reality-element” whose enveloping, strangely intimate presence it now feels flowing against and through it.

Like the fish, it is just the astonished discovery—the pure sensation—of “where it is.” To that consciousness, guided by intuition, it must seem that the oceanic medium it now knows with this unprecedented kind and degree of immediacy is its quintessential life-element, its true matrix, native place, and home. Quite naturally: the ubiquitous and constant can be present to alert awareness only *as* the intimate, and the only way the intimate can be truly known is “immediately.” But there is another factor as well which calls consciousness’ particular attention to, and which itself intensifies, that singular experience of immediacy with which reality’s element-like intimate presence now is known.

As we have just seen, the very nature and workings of normal consciousness as a particular form of awareness necessarily lead it to be entirely oblivious to, and so to have no relation with, its own constant and indispensable life-element. Consequently, if the latter ever does break in upon that oblivion, it does so with the composure-shattering force of the unfamiliar, alien, and bewildering, of something truly new which for that very reason cannot be “recognized” or made a part of “the old.” In this way the suddenly *discovered* intimate is doubly “immediate.” And such a heightened immediacy is what consciousness now experiences as it all at once finds itself, no longer in “the world,” but enclosed and pervaded instead by a ubiquitous, constant, and intimate element—*its* element—which, however, it cannot conceive and has not named, and which until this moment it could not anticipate in any way.

That ubiquitous, unchanging, sign-transcendent medium—*This* not yet reduced to “the world”—within which disenchanted consciousness now finds itself can only be *intimate* presence, can only be *immediately* known; and among other things that is to say: it cannot be *mediated* to consciousness through or by means of something else, for example, by means of sensory or verbal signs. As an element-like presence it is, moreover, the primordial, the “elemental,” a something prior to all beginnings; as such, it *precedes* all verbal signs. The oceanic medium now enveloping consciousness can therefore be “described,” negatively, as a signless and nonverbal medium, as the wordless element. Sensory and verbal signs had their place in “the world,” in biology’s sign-mediated realm of persons, things, and events. But now that consciousness, having dissolved “the world,” is immersed in the reality-element, it finds itself in an entirely different realm where old sign-usages do not take hold and the signs themselves are curiosities, coins from a former life and world.

It follows that the signless element, unlike “the world” itself and its manifold contents, cannot be verbally identified or delimited. The moment I seek to define, categorize, or describe it, or just, using words, to interrogate it, I have already lost contact, for in my confusion I have approached it as if it were what it most decidedly is not: a something in “the world,” a sign-made “worldly” thing. To seek to apply any of the verbal opposites to it involves a confounding of planes or realms, for it isn’t the *kind* of thing—an “entity” or “event” in “the world”—to which any member of any pair of opposites might apply. Consequently, I have already missed it and am carried ever farther from it the longer I continue to ask whether it is something “objective” or “subjective,” or a “person” or “thing,” or whether it “is” or “is not.” Just to ask myself “what it is” or “where I now am” is to be returning to confusion and enchantment, for within the reality-element there *is* no verbal “what it is,” nor—because there is no such thing—could there be such a thing as knowing, or not knowing, “where I am.”



The wordless element enveloping a consciousness which has extricated itself from the opposites cannot be, or bear any resemblance to, or be related to, anything we might verbalize, that is, anything we might say, think, or conceive. No worldly sign, sensory or verbal, can make that unnamed something present to awareness—indeed all such signs can do is to cover it and to congest awareness, for it is always pure nonverbal presence which can only be immediately known. As that “unworldly” sign-transcending presence, it is subtle and elusive like edgeless space, into which all signs instantaneously vanish. It is a dense, impervious, darkly gleaming ore on which no sign can gain purchase, and from which all our words at once fall away. Or fusing those opposing images we can say with the Buddhists that the signless reality-element is diamondlike: a transparent, immobile, impenetrable, adamant, infinite sky-crystal.

All the other “entities” consciousness has encountered—even the Greeks’ four or Samkhya’s ten or today’s 103 elements—have been mutually delimiting phenomena in the world of opposites, and so determinate. We can verbally identify them as this or that, can specify whether or not—and where and when—they are, can categorize them as persons, things, events, states, qualities, etc. But as the signless element, awareness’ newly discovered life-medium is wholly indeterminate. No name, classification, or sentence can contain it, no verb capture its nonverbal presence in or rather as that other realm outside every ‘is’ and ‘is not’. It is not *in* “space” or “time,” for it precedes—it is more “elemental” than—whatever it is consciousness perceives when contained by the sign ‘space’, when transfixed by the sign ‘time’.

Further, discovery of that previously unnoticed element is consciousness’ first encounter with the genuinely incomparable and incommensurable, with true, mind-breaking *singularity*. For though their relations are defined by mutual delimitation or even direct opposition, all other things—that is, everything consciousness has ever known—share a common essence or substance; all are as it were one family, all born from the same matrix. They are similar in that all are constituents of a particular manifold “the world,” each being just one of the myriad things in that world. All are conjured up by verbal signs—we reach each one *mediately* by passing instantaneously through its particular sign into its strangely remote and abstract realm, the realm of “persons” and “things.” As constituents of a sign-made “the world,” all display the same particularized, delimited, determinate, sign-accessible mode—that is, the *golemic* mode—of being. And because they are “family” in these ways, they can be related and compared as belonging to this or that class, and in terms of place, time, magnitude, importance, value, complexity, productivity, etc.

In discovering the signless element, however, consciousness has its first experience of no longer being in “the world,” and of encountering something not from “the world,” something which, like an anti-world, now fills the place “the world” once occupied. Heretofore, moreover, consciousness has only known things mediated by verbal signs, but the signless element is known only immediately and only when words are absent. Of all the things of which consciousness ever has been conscious, this is the first one and the only one which *cannot* be conjured up by signs, *cannot* be “signified,” for its presence manifests that singular, utterly unfamiliar, wholly nongolemic mode of being which can be discerned only when, consciousness having attained dis-enchantment, all signs are inert, all signified things have vanished, and awareness is bared to its still unprocessed—to its not yet fixed, not yet “comprehended”—life-element, to *This*.

That preternaturally gifted fish can perhaps interrelate and compare the myriad sounds,

colors, shapes, and smells of its kaleidoscopic world, but when it all at once becomes aware of the dense, liquid presence, everywhere and at all times, of the sea itself, it has at last encountered something utterly singular and incomparable. So it is now when, the verbal field having vanished, consciousness remains alone with and in the signless element's peculiarly spacious and fluid densities. Since it is utterly unlike all worldly things in its mode of being and its manner of being present, and since it belongs, moreover, to an entirely different realm, and is in fact that realm's sole inhabitant, the reality-element has nothing with which it might be compared. In the absence of all common measures, it is incommensurable.

All the sign-based things and events normal consciousness perceives jostle against others comparable with them within the vast, teeming categories of 'is' and 'is not', of 'persons' and 'things', etc., yet language, bringing to bear sign-perception's universal principle of binary opposition, naturally opposes 'the one' to 'the many', 'singularity' to 'plurality', 'the incomparable' to 'the comparable'. In this way the ancient biology of sensory and verbal perception has engendered a category—"the unique", 'the incomparable', 'the one of a kind'—which no *object* of animal perception, nothing, that is, encountered in any biological world, can possibly fill; consequently, we have come to use those signs merely as vague terms of exaggerated praise or even of dismissal. But now that all opposites and so all worlds have been dissolved, consciousness is at last exposed to something—the signless element—which alone qualifies for that most "unworldly" category: the incomparable and incommensurable, the absolutely unique, Latin's *sui generis*, Sanskrit's *advitiya*, that is, "that which has no second." And upon its exposure to it, consciousness experiences that unprecedented and most unworldly experience: with an alertness keener and more spacious than ever before, to be most intimately-vididly aware of being enclosed and held and unexplainably quickened by one single, unsayable, incommensurable, incomparable, immeasurable thing.

The rich and unfamiliar air-like something which turning consciousness now as it were breathes—the densely liquid sky-crystal through which it moves—is nonverbal and signless, is wholly indeterminate, an utterly singular and incomparable presence. But then intuition, and Spinoza and the medievals, have already equated determination with negation and with finitude, and clearly in the present case: all else—that is, "the world"—having vanished, there remains nothing which possibly *could* set limits to, or bound, or impose an edge on the signless, indeterminate, and consequently infinite, element. Further, since it is pure singularity to which no "second" thing might even be compared—for it does not share any category with any other thing—it is omnipresent and oceanic, is infinite, in an unprecedented, peculiarly "incomparable" way.

By distinguishing between the *in suo genere infinitum* and the *absolute infinitum*, that is, between the "infinite in its own kind" and the "absolutely infinite," tradition has already illuminated the peculiar condition the union of infinity and incomparability implies. Wolfson explains that by referring to a line, number, or intellect as "infinite in its own kind," Spinoza and his medieval predecessors indicate that it belongs to a class of comparable things, has no limit, and consequently surpasses all other members of its class. Here there is "a common standard and a comparison of the thing measured with other things of its kind" (Wolfson, I, 135).

The absolutely infinite, however, is "a substance whose essence is unique and so incomparable that it cannot suffer any form of limitation and hence cannot have any form of positive

description.” Consequently, “absolutely infinite’ means an absolute exclusion from the universe of finitude, determination, and description. It implies uniqueness and incomparability; there is no kind to which it may be said to belong.” For Spinoza ‘infinite’ in this sense “stands . . . for such terms as ‘unique’, ‘incomparable’, ‘homonymous’, ‘indeterminate’, ‘incomprehensible’, ‘ineffable’, ‘indefinable’, ‘unknowable’” (Wolfson, I, 133-138). Clearly, ‘absolutely infinite’ suggests singularity and imperviousness to sign-comprehendings much more than it suggests great magnitudes, and indeed singularity of a most “singular” kind: the realm or plane it inhabits is a realm where nothing else can *be*.

Everything finite or infinite in its own kind we might name—number, infinite number, space and time, infinite space and time, etc.—is contained *within* our world or verbal field, for ‘number’, ‘infinite number’, etc., are verbal signs themselves, and “number,” “infinite number,” etc., the remote, elusive, ambiguous reified sign-entities emanated from them; and “the world” easily contains the latter—for example, “space” and “infinite space”—for even after words have hardened into our enchantment’s spectral “things,” they still do not require actual, but only as it were verbal, space. In contrast, the absolutely infinite transcends the world. It inhabits—its edgeless presence fills and completely exhausts—a wholly other realm or plane, where it manifests its thoroughly unworldly mode of being.

Spinoza’s and the medievals’ “absolutely infinite” can initially seem as distant and abstract as those remote beings which populate normal consciousness’ world. Those speaking of it may seem only to have introduced into the already teeming world one more pair of opposites, the two “infinities.” And indeed, so it inevitably *must* seem to normal consciousness, enchanted as it is by the manifold of reified signs. For that consciousness instinctively-habitually takes what is tenuous and mediated as the measure of “concreteness”; and it cannot so much as imagine consciousness abiding or experience taking place outside, or in an unthinkable timelessness somehow *after*, “the world.” But as we have seen, the absolutely infinite is indeterminate, ineffable, indefinable, beyond description—it is a nonverbal phenomenon which cannot be encompassed or mediated by means of signs, and so does not belong to the opposites. And secondly, and more positively and importantly: Spinoza portrays consciousness’ awareness of the absolutely infinite “substance,” not at all as indirect, remote, or abstract, but as an immediate knowing, intuition; it is knowledge “as clear as that with which we also know our body” (quoted by Wolfson, I, 165).

In these ways the *absolute infinitum* we come across on the brittlely fracturing—on the hermetic-resplendent—pages of old philosophers and theologians is indistinguishable from that element-like sea or medium which consciousness, having been stilled and disenchanting, now immediately and exclusively discerns. And conversely, and most bewilderingly or just miraculously, that intimate signless presence—*This* emptied of “the world”—in which nameless, edgeless lucidity, no longer “I,” now is immersed seems to manifest, perfectly, the absolute sign-transcending infinity of Spinoza’s infinite, or rather: since the *absolute infinitum* is unique, is *advitiya* in its perfect Plotinian aloneness, what is present to turning consciousness now can only be the infinite itself, the very model Averroës, Crescas, and Spinoza themselves immediately “knew,” as they knew their own body, and used.

For where is awareness when it dwells just in *This* emptied of all sign-based particularity, when its habitation is pure reality not yet narrowed and sorted out by biology? Where am “I” when I

am here, but “here” is no longer in any way “the world”? I am in the sign-impervious “signless” element, in something unprecedented and intimate and unsayable. I am in a reality which never even *could* have been expected, for it is that which, even now, I cannot even begin to conceive. I am enclosed by the incomparable, by something I do not “recognize,” for everything I have known had its verbal “what it is” or “who she is,” but the incommensurable signless element—but immediate reality, *This* just in itself—does not.

And then above all and so miraculously and confoundingly that I scarcely dare venture framing the mind-breaking thought: that incomparable and incommensurable something “I” am in is the infinite, is that incomparable “absolute infinite.” Until this moment the sign-made “the world” has blotted it out, so that while inhabiting the uncontained, I have been aware just of the contained. But now “the world” is dissolved, and the verbal signs which once bound consciousness within that world are inert. Nothing remains which might oppose or delimit or just *be* something other than *This*, so that now to be in *This* is to be in the infinite, in reality that is nothing but unbounded, horizonless opening. The absolute infinity of the signless element is the infinity of edgeless sky. Its space, everywhere, is the space of openings, of commencement, is the shining and crystalline virginal space of spacious doorways and vast thresholds. It is infinite portal without lintel or frame, is a movement or gesture, *before* all “time,” signaling an unending and infinite disembarkation, is a great blossoming flower out into whose ever expanding circle of efflorescence awareness now is carried, and in whose infinite petals awareness now opens up.

As the infinite, no longer covered or disguised by “the world,” flows unimpeded against and through me, I am visited by another formerly impossible perception. For I have at the very least *begun*, hesitantly, to recognize: I am in the unbroken. The unsayable “where I am” I am in right now—*This*—is that very unsayable and infinite thing which prompted Shankara to write *advitiya*; it is that thing, directly known at least four times, which again and again drew forth from the unknown event or process reduced by us to “Plotinus” the world-displacing syllables *to en*.

That “One” which turning consciousness now inhabits is unbroken—is without crack or flaw—for it is impervious to the instruments of division and differentiation, signs. It is unique, is “without a second,” for outside signs and limitation there is only *the* signless, *the* uncontained, *the* indivisible “the One.” Unlike it, all biological worlds, epitomize profusion, “the many.” To be any form of sign-made animal consciousness is to be sealed within division, multiplicity, difference, change. As normal consciousness I have only known a chaotic and limitless multiplication of things and events filling here and not here, now and not now; and usually unseen in that vast multitude, each provisional individual entity was itself analyzable into an infinite series of ever smaller, endlessly multiplying parts.

When I dwelled, sign-enchanted, in “the many,” the mere syllables ‘I’m in Norway’, ‘I’m in America’, ‘in Boston’ sealed me, more efficaciously and more securely than any wall, within one particular place, simultaneously creating my innumerable absence from all the rest. I turned towards, and directed my acts, words, thoughts, and feelings towards, or turned away from, first this and then that person or thing. Enclosed and enchanted by time, I spontaneously thought of “this” as “Tuesday,” as “November,” as the “end” or “beginning” of a “millenium.” As much as by this or that named place, I was enclosed within the “modern age,” within “history.” I inhabited and knew a poor iota of “space”; I would come and go—“my life” would begin and end—within a mere moment

of “time.” But as turning consciousness immersed in the signless element, “I” do not move from one limited, verbalized, inevitably confining “place” to another, for “where I am”—“here”—is *This*, is one undivided, infinite “place.” “I” am not in, encompassed, or carried along by “today” or “the times” or “history,” for now that awareness, having slipped out of biology and the world, has entered the real, “now” can only be the unchanging, horizonless, timeless, signless, unthinkable “now” of “the One.”

“I am in the infinite,” “Where I am—*This*—is the unbroken, the One”—such are the Delphic enunciations, the seeds of unending meditations, questionings, and attunements, which now surface within turning consciousness. And indeed, and in relation to those perceptions which have framed and guided these pages’ particular perceptions: turning consciousness *is* now making its way out into that formless, eventless, unspecifiable, purely private, nameless, uncannily “unconscious,” unnervingly “non-existent” realm normal consciousness perceives and shuns as the fringes. It has entered or, rather, has at last begun to discern, all around and through it, that similarly formless, eventless, indeterminate, nameless, and, above all, infinite and indivisible something which tradition has portrayed as perfect being. It now inhabits—or at least has inhaled the quickening scent and tasted the incomparable taste—of that unbroken, uncontained, sign-transcendent perfection intuition has promulgated, of that perfect reality towards which it, as turning consciousness, now forever turns.

But then as we have seen, this displacement of every sayable “where I am” by the incomparable signless element—that is, by “perfect being”—is possible only because consciousness itself has become an infinite metamorphosis into otherness. And as we now can see, that latter process can only be the unending transformation of turning consciousness itself into “perfect knowing.” I have written that tradition’s and intuition’s perfect knowing, unlike worldly or golemic knowing, neither perceives nor itself undergoes change, for it is nontemporal; that being free of all distinctions, forms, and delimitings, it is simple and infinite; and that it therefore is a knowing, wholly unlike normal consciousness’ knowing, not contained within, utilizing, or communicable by means of verbal signs.

In it, consequently, there is nothing *like* our instinctive-habitual knowing of “persons,” “things,” and “events” in “the world.” It does not traffic in verbal perceivings of “how things are” or “what is happening,” of “where I am” or “who I am.” Since it has dissolved the distinction between “I” and “the world out there,” it is not isolated within normal consciousness’ verbalizable “self-awareness.” Instead, such a knowing is the unchanging, simple, unbounded, signless, and therefore *immediate* sensing of that golemic “nothingness” which is the signless element, is perfect being, is *This*; and indeed, and as we also have seen, such a perfect knowing seems scarcely distinguishable from—seems always on the verge of disappearing into or uniting with—that perfect being it now so incomprehensibly and intimately knows.

Most clearly: the capacity for immediate sign-free awareness of the signless element—that is, for the perfect knowing of perfect being—is not found in the repertoire of sign-made normal consciousness. For as we have seen, its knowing is all *mediate*, is an indirect knowing by means of verbal signs. Since it reacts only to difference and to change, its inevitable habitation is multiplicity and change. It does not, indeed *cannot*, discern anything ever-present or all-pervading, and so its instinctive-habitual condition is oblivion to that ever-present and all-pervading something, its own

life-element, which at all times attends, encompasses, and holds it. Oblivious as it is to its native element—its infinite and unsayable “home”—it never knows the very thing which, more than anything else, it cannot *be* without.

But turning consciousness, having undertaken the Yogas of Stillness and Disenchantment, and having broken out of signs and the world out into the signless element—into perfect being—*is* now endlessly acquiring-becoming that most marvelous faculty, perfect knowing. For it has broken out of those enchanted and enchanting entities—“space” and “time”—and at least for now has put the verbal signs ‘space’ and ‘time’ aside. As it has broken out of “the world,” so has it expelled from within itself the verbalized, comprehended “I” which once defined—which once most intimately *was*—it. No longer an “I” in “the world,” no longer supposing there *are* such things as “how things are” or “who I am”—for it has divested itself of all signs—consciousness is now uncontained, undifferentiated, undivided alertness. It is a naked touching of its own ever-present and all-pervading life-medium, is the immediate wordless sensation of unbounded, undivided, sign-free reality, of *This*.

Consciousness’ metamorphosis—from its existence as a pursuit of determinate, verbal golemic knowing of “the world” and of “myself” to existence as an immediate nonverbal knowing of the signless element—necessarily involves its complete reorientation and reconstitution as an instrument of awareness. It requires as it were the emergence of a new form of sensorium or nervous system, the inexplicable growth of an entirely new and unfamiliar *type* of nerve whose earliest stages, perhaps, were the tenuous filaments of intuition’s faint whisperings from the “fringe.” In us the “old” system is formed by the innumerable, highly specialized nerves which display to consciousness the six kinds—five sensory and one verbal-numerical—of signs. Its very image is the delicately twining neuron, something infinitely ramified and stranded. In us it has become a great dendritic labyrinth coiled again and again on itself, a phantasmagoric universe of simultaneous ignitions, pulse-journeys, outflarings, and oscillations which then, ingeniously synthesized and transcribed, flow into that consciousness it itself has made as the correspondingly complex, kaleidoscopic, initially so plausible “the world.”

Consciousness’ “new” nervous system, on the other hand, is a single undifferentiated awareness-event or “nerve” with but one substance and function, and of uniform consistency throughout. Unlike biology’s neuron, it possesses the perfect symmetry and simplicity of infinite clear sky. Unlike it, the new nerve has but one “object,” and that object, the signless element, is wholly unlike all previous objects, for it is unchanging, infinite, and itself perfectly simple. The new sensorium consisting of but one nerve which turning consciousness has become employs no signs. It is fired just by direct contact with its element: pure reality prior to all appropriation, alteration, and abridgment by signs. Since it has but one object, it is immediate awareness fired by uncontained, unsayable reality, or else it discerns nothing at all. If that nerve, having achieved perfection, could expose itself utterly to the intimate, encompassing, all-pervading presence of the signless element, the touch of the uncontained would produce in it an infinite sensation perhaps indistinguishable from the uncontained itself. Or it would be as if that copiously diverse and distracted biological cosmos—as if that entire fish body—were transmuted into one uniform, infinitely sensitive nerve drenched in a single sensation: the fused touch-smell-taste of infinite and everlasting sea.

Just because of the sheer closeness, for it is as if he or she first creates and then fills a space

*between us and all our verbal perceivings, we find it so hard to impose verbal fixings, ordinarily so close to hand, on a lover—she has displaced them, and thereby rendered all classifications and judgments moot. But there is something more enduring than eros, and more enigmatic and unclassifiable, more immediately present, than any lover, and that is sign-transcending infinite reality, is the signless element, is This. And now turning consciousness has become alert to its presence—has discerned its touch—by becoming still and dis-enchanted, by dissolving the sign-made “the world,” by setting aside all the sensory and verbal signs which heretofore have veiled reality, so that it loomed before consciousness as something faded and less than it is, and seemed to be what it is not.*

The fervor of contact, of the touch, is the aim of love, but also its food and fuel—from it flows all the energy which will create and sustain love’s *life*. So it is now with that other even more intimate and immediate contact, the firing of the bare single nerve consciousness now is by the touch, outside all sign-comprehendings, of the signless element. I have written of turned life that its infinity, and in particular an infinite movement’s freedom from all particular endpoints and destinations, imply that it always is just beginning, and now we can see: the touch—that is, the firing of consciousness’ new nerve by direct contact with uncontained, unbroken, unsayable reality, the perfect knowing of perfect being, -- is the beginning of that beginning, the principle of that first principle. It is from the spark of contact between consciousness and the signless element that the new life is born. Around that ardor the new life will form, and from it its energy will be drawn. It will be a life, not in “the world,” but *within* that element whose encompassing, life-giving touch it now knows. We have seen that an eagle or pike or bear will never notice its constant life-element, much less that indispensable oxygen it draws from it. Normal consciousness passes its time in a sign-made past or future, and normal life draws its energy, not even from illusory presents, but from dream-spun futures which never *will* “materialize.” But for turning consciousness the touch itself, which can only be *now*, is turned life’s center, and aim, and source, and that contact occurs *now* within the edgeless and signless luminescence, within the pure and perfect knowing, consciousness now is—in this other, greater birth, the newborn is most uncustomarily and most spaciouly *aware* even as it takes its first breath of the unknown and necessary air.

\* \* \* \* \*

## Chapter 8: The Names of Essence

It is just because it has practiced the Yoga of Coincidentia Oppositorum—and because, in so doing, it has repealed “the world”—that turning consciousness is no longer present to itself as a diverse verbalized “I” confronting and enclosed by a voluminous verbalized “world out there,” but instead, like a diver’s entire body in the moment of entry, is the single-nerved wordless sensation of a new element. And such a turning consciousness remains alive to this previously unknown life-medium—to this perfection within which the uncontained seems to flow against it, and where it itself seems to touch the unbroken—only as long as the suspension of perception by means of signs obtains. Here, therefore, golemic knowing is to be avoided at all costs. It is essential that consciousness shun all comprehendings of “what *This* is” and “what I am,” and that it not permit itself to be recaptured and reconfining within the formerly spellbinding but now disabled signs ‘I’ and ‘the world out there’. All turning consciousness can “know” of that new element, dense as the sea and edgeless as the sky, which it now inhabits, therefore is: “Just that otherness which cannot be said or thought—that mystery upon which sign-consciousness cannot even *focus*—just that is reality, is ‘where I am’, is *This*.”

But then turned life is also and always movement along an infinite and infinitely sinuous path. Furthermore, and as I already have written, that singular encounter between instinct-habit and intuition we call “human consciousness” is an unending, ceaselessly modulating dance. Instinct-habit works, tirelessly and doggedly, to draw consciousness back into biology’s life in signs, and to enclose it there within those old staples “I,” “the world out there,” and “my life.” In a moment, the imperious urgencies and calamities of animal life can recapture turning consciousness, tearing it out of its newly discovered element and plunging it back into that tragicomic phantasmagoria, “the world.”

And for its part: intuition soon begins to reason that if the dance is to go on, then let *it* be the one to choreograph the dance, and let the dance itself be transformed into movement expressing and furthering *turned* life. I have already mentioned turning consciousness’ propensity, inherited from instinct-habit, to formulate verbal comprehendings of its new life and thereby to enclose itself once again within signs and a new verbalized “turned world.” But now intuition, moved in part by its awareness of and its desire to overcome that very tendency, conceives a new and contrary project: to utilize just for its own non-normal, wholly extra-biological purposes those sensory and verbal perceptions—those signs—which heretofore have been the hallmark of biological “knowing.” And “mystical theology,” which adopts *verbal* signs as its particular vehicle and material—as its enigmatic, paradoxical, and refractory “clay”—soon becomes a or even the cornerstone of this unprecedented sign-using work.

As I shall explore more fully later, mystical theology seeks to breathe new life—a life from beyond normal consciousness and biology, and so from beyond signs themselves—into those verbal signs the Yoga of Disenchantment has left functionless and inert. Its thoroughly reasonable first axiom and self-admonition is: as long as the dance, and so reflection and communication by means of verbal signs, are going to continue, let that thought aspire to think *pure reality*, let that speech vibrate just with the signless element, let it utter *This*. But given the relation, or rather the



inconceivable non-relation, between words and *This*, that is also to say as the axiom's plain corollary: let our best or even our only thought be thought about the unthinkable; and let us fervently and exclusively devote ourselves, insofar as we engage with words, to attempting to say what can't be said.

In this way that event or mystery—"mystical theology," the "philosophy of the mystical," "mystical *darshana*"—condenses *out* of an awareness which infinitely exceeds all possible articulation. And so for the most reasonable of reasons it becomes turning consciousness' paradoxical attempt to bring into words something of the scent or taste of that other which exceeds, immeasurably and incomparably, all words. It seeks to dwell *verbally* in that uncontained, indivisible, utterly nonverbal element which turning consciousness now feels—to its astonishment and bewilderment—as its home and unsuspected native country, its unsayable, quickening, mind-breaking "where I am." The first challenge confronting such a theology or philosophy is the question how—within the suddenly miniscule, fluid, and themselves "unknown" confines of verbal space—it might evoke or allude to that signless element. And so mystical theology must first of all ask: how does one identify the indeterminate, or turn towards omnipresence, or name the nameless? How can verbal signs, those instruments of enchantment, veiling, delimitation, and division, be used instead to point awareness towards bare, virginal reality not yet processed or covered over—not yet seemingly circumscribed or seemingly divided—by signs? By means of what gesture or movement might that fish indicate, or just direct its *own* attention towards, the all-encompassing, all-pervading, ever-present sea?

I have already alluded to turned life's natural element as *This*, the utterly nonverbal and unthinkable "where we are." Demonstrative pronouns point, thereby singling out a particular someone or something. But in this case what is "singled out" remains wholly indeterminate, for mystical theology's use of the term '*This*' is a use occurring outside the opposites. *This*, therefore, is not part of something else, nor does it have parts, nor is it something opposed to—and so delimited by—any "that." The mystical-theological use of the term does not delimit *This* as either a "thing" or an "event," as something interior—"subjective" or exterior—"objective," as either "someone" or "something." It points towards pure uncontained, undivided, unverbally present presence not opposed to or bordered by any absence, for here where there are no verbal opposites to limit or divide, there is only *This*.

Used in such a way, the term '*This*' does not circumscribe or define, but merely gestures towards *This*. In a similar way mystical theology alludes to that element, so utterly unlike "the world," which turning consciousness now inhabits as "reality," as "the real." That medium is "reality" for as we have seen, it is what remains—it is that dense boundlessness consciousness at last discerns—after biology's ancient spell has been broken and the enchanted world of the opposites has vanished. Consequently, mystical theology's usage of the term 'reality', like its usage of '*This*', does not involve the opposites. The "reality" to which such a theology alludes is no defined, comprehended entity or condition standing in clearly marked off opposition to "unreality." It is not a *conceived* reality, reality perceived by means of verbal signs and the opposites, but just *This*—just "pure reality"—not yet conceived or interpreted, not yet *thought*. Indeed, since *This*—since reality—is the utterly nonverbal element consciousness first senses after all the opposites and all preconceptions have been removed, not even those supreme, world-pervading verbal opposites—

neither 'is' nor 'is not'—enjoy any application or bear even the slightest relation to it. As do all other words, they immediately fall away from its dense mass.

As pure reality no longer covered by the opposites—no longer hidden by “the world”—that new element encloses awareness as perfect “immediacy,” as sheer “presence.” It is also “the signless,” for it is something wholly other than and infinitely exceeding all signs, and it is discerned by consciousness only insofar as consciousness has broken out of its normal state of containment and organization by them. As the signless, it is also “the unsayable” and “the unthinkable.” And immediate signless, unsayable, unthinkable reality—*This* as pure presence—is also that which intuition has long since intimated, that is, “the uncontained” and “the unbroken.” Here again, and as we already have seen, these terms apply only because their mystical-theological use has been preceded by the fusion and consequent dissolution of all verbal opposites. For *This* is absolutely “infinite” and “one” just because it is an incomparable, utterly nonverbal element outside the opposites. There no name can even begin to encircle its unthinkable sign-transcending boundlessness. And no description can anatomize its seamless and impervious “oneness,” no phrase find a crack or crevice where it might take hold.

Those curious visitors to eye and ear—‘*This*’, ‘reality’, ‘immediacy’, ‘pure presence’, ‘the signless’, ‘the unsayable’, ‘the unthinkable’, ‘the infinite’, ‘the one’—are as it were signs which mystical theology has found in the realm of the opposites, but then, by means of processes such as the Yoga of *Coincidentia Oppositorum*, has removed therefrom, purging them of all contrariety and limitation. Having done so, mystical theology can then use those signs to motion towards the wholly unfamiliar and unknown element which flows around, against, and through consciousness after it breaks out of signs and opposites, that is, out of “the world.” But then tradition, or just language itself, has bequeathed to us another even more startling, resonant, and “mystical” syllable, one which all along—and so even prior to all purgations—has about it something of the scent and taste of absolute otherness, of pure opening, of simultaneously unbounded and intimately present reality which instantaneously dissolves, upon contact, all speech and all thought.

Unlike such English words as ‘*uncontained*’, ‘*signless*’, or ‘*unbroken*’, that anomalous English vocable—‘God’—transcends all reference, even the purely formal, to negation or absence. As if by a miracle, it carries out its seemingly impossible word-work: to carry all the seamless unboundedness conveyed by ‘*This*’ or by ‘reality’ into the singularity and vivid immediacy of the proper noun. Though normal consciousness, impelled by instinct and habit, will inevitably seek to draw such a mana-laden sign into the enchanted world of the opposites, and so to approach its presumed referent as a particular identifiable, more or less describable and comprehensible being, it resists such integration and always seems to abide, as Eckhart writes, “apart.” Since the English sound ‘God’—or, in other tongues, sounds such as ‘*Gott*’, ‘*deus*’, ‘*theos*’, ‘*Allah*’, ‘*brahman*’, and ‘*Shiva*’—vibrates within awareness in this way as already resonant with pure uncontained reality, that mystical theologian and specialist in *coincidentia oppositorum*, Nicholas of Cusa, naturally uses *it* when he wishes to point towards the infinite, unbroken, sign-transcending element beyond, and utterly incommensurable with, polarity. And so it is specifically of *God* that he writes that God “is not an other or an opposite for anything else,” and that “He precedes . . . all otherness and all contractedness.” It is “God,” and nothing or no one else, that is “above all opposition” (Hopkins, 135, 151).

To preserve the syllable ‘God’ as a kind of movement in sound towards that infinite and indivisible signless element which the opposites, that is, “the world,” normally blot out—and then specifically to counteract our instinctive-habitual impulse to associate God with this or that opposite—mystical theology often makes a practice of systematically enumerating and denying those supremely entrancing pairs within which awareness most easily is re-entangled. God, therefore, “neither stands still nor moves, keeps silence nor speaks”; God is “neither darkness nor light, error nor truth”; God is “none of the things that have no being, none of the things that have being” (PsD, 217). God is, unthinkably, “beyond everything simple and everything composite, beyond everything singular and everything plural, beyond every limit and all unlimitedness” (Nicholas of Cusa, in Hopkins, 151). *Brahman* transcends all the opposites, even that of *sat* and *asat*, that is, being and nonbeing (Potter, 304). If, then, ‘God’ alludes to that element and encompassing life-medium which turning consciousness becomes aware of only when its enchantment and its enchanted world have vanished, and if we cannot use any of the verbal opposites to sort out what “God” is—if “God” is not “person” or “thing,” “one” or “many,” “good” or “bad,” etc., and if we cannot even say either that God “exists” or “doesn’t exist”—then it is clear that the sound ‘God’ has no determinate reference. It does not direct our attention towards any particular entity, person, force, thing, principle, condition, movement, or act of any kind.

But then it is the function of names to guide our attention in just this way. A name singles out a particular thing or kind of thing in “the world”—indeed, the very name proclaims its referent’s discreteness, its separateness from all other “things.” Once the object has been isolated by name, we can then direct just towards *it* our further verbal attentions, interrogations, and comprehendings, and we can also involve it as an object or instrument of our verbally comprehended emotions, volitions, and actions, can include it among the cast and props of “my life.” But ‘God’ does not refer to any particular or identifiable thing, not even to that greatest thing—“the world,” “the universe”—which is the totality of all verbally designated things, of all that “is.” According to the canons of normal usage, therefore, ‘God’ does not function as a name. Though it seems to belong to the verbal realm and to the class of names, it is no name, rather a non-name.

As a non-name, a true anonym, the English word ‘God’ cannot function as the subject of a normal nonmystical-theological sentence, or as the object of such a sentence’s action. It does not identify a particular someone or something which then can undergo further determination by means of verbal description, narration, and explanation. Since there is no “entity” corresponding to the sound ‘God,’ there cannot conceivably be such a thing, condition, or event as “what God is” or “what God does.” There can be no state of affairs such as “the existence of God” or “the nonexistence of God”—the very expressions are nonsense, an impossible commixing of words with the nonverbal element. I have already referred to traditional accounts of perfect being, or of God, as nameless. Superficially, a statement which in one breath refers to God by name and then says that God is nameless is a contradiction; but if ‘God’ is a non-name, the appearance of solecism disappears. It is with perfect logic, therefore, that Nicholas of Cusa simultaneously uses the “non-name” and denies the “name” as when he concludes “Thus we do not give God the name ‘one’ or ‘three’ or call Him by any other name whatsoever. Rather we remove from God every name for any conceivable thing.” Nor does Dionysius contradict himself when he unhesitatingly and categorically writes, specifically of “*God*,” that “he has no name” (Hopkins, 109; PsD, 217).

Further, the non-name ‘God’ is also the great anti-name, the sign whose paradoxical effect is to dispel all other verbal signs. In order to break the spell of words, and so to dissolve the enchanted world of reified signs that spell conjures up, turning consciousness has at its disposal various Yogas of Disenchantment such as the Yoga of Coincidentia Oppositorum—indeed, such practices are permanently indispensable features of turned life. But then as an unexpected gift or even something like a miracle: in its various branches, language itself often offers turning consciousness a single word the mere saying, inward repetition, or recollection of which contains within itself the potential to undermine all other signs and thereby to dispel “the world.” Imperceptibly weaving animal perception’s universal enchantment in the depths of consciousness, instinct and habit enmesh all sign-using consciousness in the unstated axiom “My signs are *This*”; the result in us is our normally unquestioned certainty that we know “who we are” and “where we are,” that we are continually learning more about “what is” and “how things are,” that each day we talk and think about “what is happening.” That single syllable—‘God’—is as it were the supremely subversive antonym intuition has surreptitiously planted within language itself to dissolve our unsuspected entrancement. Having found or created it in those same obscure places below the surface of consciousness where the spell it counteracts also operates, intuition then waits to bring the sound ‘God’ to the surface as the great counter-spell, the supreme *word* of dis-enchantment and liberation.

Pronounced or just recalled, the anti-name ‘God’ intimates an unbounded potency and hegemony which renders all other words inert and consumes “the world.” It opens a sudden, unexpected sound-chasm into which the serried host of named persons, things, events, and states we have equated with reality—with *This*—vanishes. Breaking in upon consciousness’ enchantment in this way, the anti-name ‘God’ lets sweep through awareness an alertness, perhaps only momentary, in which turning consciousness is wholly beyond the impulse to confuse signs with reality, beyond all containment by signs, beyond all verbal orientings. It liberates awareness from its comprehendings, frees it from its naive, futile, self-imprisoning error of supposing there is a possible verbal act or state called “knowing where I am,” that there exists a *verbal* “what *This* is.” For just like Candrakirti’s ‘nirvana’, the word ‘God’ names no being, but most gloriously signals *sarvaprāpancōpashama*, “the coming to rest of all named things.” Just like Ashvaghosha’s *tathata*, or “suchness,” the anti-name ‘God’ by no means completes or even contributes anything to our verbal knowledge, for it is instead the great knowledge-dissolving and world-dispelling mantra, the very “limit of verbalization wherein a word is used to put an end to words” (Ashvaghosha, 33).

Further still—and here we encounter a paradox in the relation, or rather nonrelation, between signs and *This* which exceeds even that Other Paradox consciousness itself embodies until it turns: just *because* that incongruous morpheme ‘God’ is a non-name, and just *because* it is the supreme anti-name which neutralizes all signs and instantaneously swallows up all worlds, it is the one true name, is the mind-breaking syllable which, more than any other English word, comes to us already carrying within itself the scent, taste, and feel of that uncontained, indivisible, unsayable, unthinkable signless element—pure reality—which consciousness enters when it breaks out of signs. Just because it is no name at all and is as it were the great foe and dissolver of names, it is what the Kabbalists refer to, with gingerly awe, as “*the name*.” As a non-name, a word unlike all other words, ‘God’ is the one sign reality cannot shatter or reject. Since in every tone and vibration it eschews all particular reference, and declares instead its freedom from all delimitation, it is the sign

best able to name the real, to evoke *This* in its naked reality, not yet delimited or divided—not yet remade and reduced to what it is not—by verbal signs. And since ‘God’—or ‘*brahman*’, or ‘Allah’—is in this way the supreme word and one and only name, the theology or philosophy of the mystical naturally adopts it as its first word, the crux and archetype of all mystical-theological speech.

The paradoxical fact that a non-name and anti-name should turn out to be the most resonant, the densest, the most reality-laden of names—should in fact be “*the name*”—is rooted in the paradoxical relationship between signs and *This* to which I have referred. For as we have seen, names are signs, and within the protean forms of sensory, or sensory and verbal, perception, configurations of signs enclose each consciousness in its particular “the world”: a limited, manifold, fluctuating sign-transparent biological event *within* reality which animal consciousness, following instinct-habit and oblivious to whatever eludes and exceeds its particular signs, unhesitatingly perceives *as* reality. In this way words, which in their normal use can only conjure up the seemingly sayable and thinkable, and which necessarily envelop consciousness within division, manifoldness, and finitude, become as it were antagonists of the sign-transcending element. They groom consciousness for—they guide it towards, they enable it to contemplate, discuss, desire, and seek—everything *except* reality, everything except *This* as it is in itself, not yet processed into something else by our particular collection of signs. With instinct’s uncanny genius and skill they confine consciousness within a “the world,” blocking all possible access to *This*, for just with that rudimentary verbal lesson and axiom “I am Luther Askeland and out there is the world of people, things, and events,” I am sealed off from—I have lost all possible contact with—the innermost, utterly nonverbal and signless “where I am,” with the intimate and unthinkable “the real.”

The name which *can* evoke and gesture towards world-transcending reality must then be a word unlike all others. It must be a word, infinitely more mysterious even than the inexplicable sign ‘is’, which comes to us from a place wholly outside “the world.” It will be the sign of the wholly unfamiliar and unexpected, of that which cannot be “discussed” or even “desired.” It will exceed everything we can infuse into the sign ‘infinite’. Unlike all other words, it will not mediate—instead of inviting consciousness to pass through it into a “the world” of persons, things, and events, it will thrust awareness into pure and signless immediacy. All of which is to say: that name must be a non-name and anti-name, a verbal anomaly dense with otherness and transformation, a miraculous—an impossible—sign-mutation which as it is heard or seen or thought is present to consciousness as the undoing of all other words, a kind of magic, in sound, within which vibrates the uncontained presence of the real.

It is true that the hieratic, inwardly echoing syllable ‘God’ can be appropriated by normal consciousness, which then handles it as a name like other names, integrating it into the verbally mapped world of opposites. The conventionalized name’s imagined referent then becomes—along with rivers, I, you, America, telescopes, depression, sky, Scriabin, Tuesday, etc.—one of the innumerable beings and events which taken all together seem to normal consciousness to constitute *This*. Thus diminished, God is a particular entity subject to further *determinatio* by means of the various opposites as personal or impersonal, one or many, involved or indifferent, etc.

In another and much more positive way it is *also* true that this sign’s appearance as a verbal rather than sensory sign is no accident, so that later I must return to the important point that verbal

perception, which unlike sensory perception is able to signify its own negation and thereby conceive an absolute otherness, becomes by virtue of that singular aptitude *the* place where signless reality can first enter into, can begin even to permeate, the realm of signs. It is further true—and to this, too, I must return—that just in itself, even the lowliest, most tenuous and fugitive sign-glimmer flickering for its brief moment in the most rudimentary of nervous systems is more than anything else a great mystery, something unnameable, and so godlike, and therefore that at all times during the course of turning’s infinite movement, such a glimmer has the capacity to astonish, quicken, and instruct turning consciousness, even to become the focal point of turning consciousness’ yogic work. And further still, and even beyond all these particular mystical-theological considerations about God and signs, it is simply and miraculously true that all actual and possible propositions, and their denials, and all sights, sounds, touches, tastes, and smells, are koans, seeds of an inexhaustible interrogation or contemplation which sooner or later must propel consciousness out of its animal life within signs into that dense, omnipresent signless element or medium within which they and we always, though for the most part unawares, exist.

But since it is our continual fate—even at that border where sign consciousness is surprised by the signless, and the contained may all at once fall bewildered out of itself into the uncontained—to be embracing or suddenly seized by what we can formulate only as provisional, infinitely oversimplified, infinitely inexhaustible oversimplifications, I now embrace and write at the head of all those other mystical-theological truths this one: all other words are provisional and wavering, are liable at any moment to give way, leaving behind “nothing” at all, for this language I now write and you now read has but one authentic, lasting, truly serious word, one sound-site of unwavering, unqualified, infinite revelation, one dense, indissoluble, strangely animate syllable where reality itself—uncontained, unbroken, unsayable, intimate—rises up out of a sound to flow around and through us.

We have already seen that the English sign ‘God’ vibrates, as do signs like ‘YHWH’, ‘Allah’, and ‘Shiva’ in other languages, with a yogic magic of its own—as the great anti-name, it is *the* mantra of disenchantment which as it exorcises the opposites and “the world,” breaks the vast spell cast by the totality of all other words. During those other innumerable times when turning consciousness, listless and bewildered on its winding, infinite path, feels itself entangled within signs and utterly unable to shake off either “I” or “the world,” the sign ‘God’ draws near as a promise of disenchantment and sign of hope, for it is the manifestation, the comforting word-presence, of an energy or reality exceeding both. In this way, when God is absent—that is, when that exposed God-nerve turning consciousness has become is not being fired by God—God’s sign can stand in as a reminiscence and anticipation of God, as God’s surrogate, God’s nearby-ness in words.

To this we can now add that the unprecedented word-discovery ‘God’, like ‘*brahman*’ and ‘Vishnu’ in Sanskrit and ‘*Tao*’ in Chinese, is the sound of increase and magnification, for in removing “the world” it takes away the infinitely less so that consciousness might encounter the infinitely more. As the evocation of that something unsayably more, ‘God’ is the sign of quintessence, of the heart and marrow of things; ‘God’ is *the* name of that one true, infinite, indivisible, unimaginable, adamant, and ever-present substance which exists “just in itself, and not in another.” By miraculously naming the infinite, it startles consciousness itself into an infinite seeing or touching. And so above all: not because it is a non-name or anti-name, but just because it

is *the* name, the uncanny English sound-presence ‘God’ looms as that tongue’s supreme achievement, its incomparable darkly glimmering treasure, its great moment of seeing and unveiling. Like all languages, the one I now use sags across vast expanses of that dull and sluggish darkness Samkhya calls *tamas*, and then in other places is aflame with the desiring, angry, pained or joyous, inexhaustibly cunning energy which is *rajas*, and occasionally shines with that pure and brilliant word-intelligence—that *sattva*—which is the highest and most godlike of the world’s three *gunas*, qualities or “strands.” But just in one of its innumerable words does English achieve what it does not even contemplate doing anywhere else, for in and with that one inexplicable syllable, ‘God,’ English flows out into an uncontained and preternaturally alert—an “unworldly”—lucidity. Just with *it*, it is as if that frail and continually shape-changing measuring stick, our words, had been able to reach the ocean’s floor, had impossibly plumbed, struck, and made hum reality’s outermost, unthinkably infinite ring.

Because it is that place in English where English vanishes—because it marks the place where the strange conjunction, in us, of uncontained signless reality with signs brings forth that infinite and perfect resonance which is *the* word—the sign ‘God’ declares or just *is* nothing but pure opening. It is sheer luminous transparency through which consciousness can pass out of signs and comprehension by means of signs into the signless, boundless, and incomprehensible, that is, into the real. I have just written that turning consciousness may seek out the stillness, the spacious recollection, and the good auguries this sign emanates when it feels itself remote from or losing touch with the signless element itself—for this reason alone it is true for turning consciousness that after God, the next most precious thing is *the* name by which God impossibly-namelessly is named. But ‘God’ is also the exclamation of breakthrough and liberation which consciousness may utter when, passing through and out into that uncontained opening, it seems to itself to become infinite dilation, seems to know nothing but—or for a moment just seems to *be*—that something “unbroken.”

At that time the syllable ‘God’ is the joyful and astonished cry which spontaneously fills awareness upon immersion in the unknown element. It is as it were the Archimedean “I have found” of the fish which, after these millions of years, is suddenly alive everywhere on its body to that all-encompassing and heretofore unknown and undreamed of reality: “the sea.” In that moment of infinite lucidity outside all verbal imaginings of a “who I am,” or “what” or “where,” or “what *This* is” or “how things are”—for consciousness has now passed wholly out of signs and is engulfed and pervaded just by the boundless, indivisible, darkly gleaming signless-element—the one thing that still might be said is “God,” is just “Now I’m in God.”

\* \* \* \* \*

ii.

Of course—and above all after it has come home to consciousness that uncontained reality is a thing apart, something impervious to capture and translation by verbal signs—the words in themselves matter but little. It is not a question of saying “God,” “God,” or of reading, thinking, uttering, or writing out sentences containing signs such as ‘the real’, ‘the uncontained’, ‘the signless’, etc. What matters is just that consciousness should actually touch, move through, and let

itself be invaded and saturated by—should let itself be nothing but—that dense, undivided, infinite, unthinkable, medium the sound ‘God’ miraculously evokes. It is not God’s sayable name, but God’s intimate, immediately known, and unsayable *reality*, that counts.

This is so, even if contact with that reality is imperfect and intermittent, even if, as is inevitable in the early stages of this unending transformation, the single nerve which turning consciousness now is becoming is but rarely, fleetingly, and incompletely fired by it. For reality’s touch, even if rare, fleeting, and incomplete, is more powerful in its immediate and its long-term effects than the recollection or utterance of any word; and indeed, its greatest influence on turned life may well be subconscious rather than conscious. India has long assumed or known that all our choices and acts—our karmas—implant potent, subliminally active residues within the life-stream. These are the *v\_san\_s*, the “perfumings,” “impressions,” or “latencies” which decisively shape all future states of mind, dispositions, choices, and acts—in this way what I do, choose, or even think right now will survive as an active formative energy operative in everything I think, feel, and do hereafter. But then: no act we might perform “perfumes” consciousness as intimately and pervasively as does the experience of being fired, however fleetingly, by unsayable reality, the signless element.

That singular event—the touch—may seem bereft of all measurable duration. In this most subtle and volatile of experience-realms, it is as if that instant of uncontained free flight out of all horizons into an infinite and crystalline lucidity has been consummated—has already begun fading into “the past”—before unwieldy consciousness even begins turning to focus upon it. In this way turning consciousness may touch the uncontained and the unbroken for only a moment, so that its “time” *in* God is infinitesimal; but as we have seen, just in that instant of being a single bare nerve fired by the touch of the signless element, it receives turned life’s essential nourishment. For just one such moment, a time too quick for awareness to catch, suffices for turning consciousness to be suffused or charged with—or just transmuted into—energies which will remain to inform and shape the future moments of turned life.

As it continues, this mystical-theological exploration will more closely consider some of the possible contents of those future moments and that turned life. Seeking to expose—to coax into verbal signs—something of that life, it will undertake a fuller contemplation of turning consciousness’ life in the signless element, in “God.” Turning to the seemingly innocuous verbal sign of being or existence—‘is’—it will seek to draw out of that familiar syllable something of the unfathomable mystery it contains. At a certain point this mystical-theological undertaking will undertake to explore how turning consciousness perceives and relates to words in general, and how, in particular, it can and does relate to them and use them in mystical-theological speech itself. It will attend, as well, to the question how turning consciousness comes to relate, in turned life, to the enchanted and enchanting “the world” which once emanated from the totality of its sensory and verbal signs, and just as significantly: it will explore the importance, in turned life, of those immediately perceived sensory and verbal signs themselves.

Clearly: even within the ambiguous realm of mystical-theological speech—which like everything else finally melts away into pure reality, into “God”—and most certainly within this one *attempt* at such utterance, more remains unsaid than has been or ever will be said. All of mystical theology’s epilogues are by nature, therefore, still preface, all its conclusions and summings the



earliest stages of an unstateable hypothesis' first rough draft. And because of this, as well as in spite of this, I have already in these pages once ventured such a provisional mystical-theological summing up, a first wide look at the life of movement towards perfect being and knowing which begins with the turn.

I wrote then that this movement is infinite, for it transcends every describable or conceivable destination. I portrayed that infinite journey as perpetually just beginning or just about to begin, portrayed it also as fluctuating, paradoxical, and non-monolithic, for its ever-present matrix or host is that protean dance-agon of instinct and intuition which defines human life. Between then and now I have described two yogas vitally important to turned life's never-ending movement. I have explored turning consciousness' first discovery of that signless element, its own unchanging and usually unnoticed life-medium, which in its infinity, simplicity, and transcendence of all signs—its perfect being—is now immediately present to consciousness. I have examined some of the sounds—'pure reality', '*This*', 'God'—by means of which that quintessential element, turning consciousness' infinite "sea," is mystically-theologically named. These additional explorations can only make us more alert to the magnitude and the significance of that vast process the turn initiates. And they encourage me once again to think that now, prior to all further contemplations of its infinite phases and elements, it is possible to glimpse turned life as a whole, to perceive or scent something of its essence.

God, being beyond all opposites and all conception, is therefore beyond even the most momentous or seemingly divine change, is even infinitely beyond all relation to those three verbalizing-delimiting syllables: 'constancy'. But the ultimate supremely creative and consequential events or acts taking place *within* conception—those three or four impossible dawns which have brought into being the landscape, paradigms, premises, limits, and measure of all other events—invariably take the form of an unexpected, because unprecedented, break or leap out of the given, and therefore natural and "obvious," into the unknown. That archetypal event-form, the Platonic template which all lesser events hazily duplicate, emerges out of "nothing" as an ecstatic, untaught, uncontained collapse, fall, or dilation out into the uncontained. It is a setting sail on the open sea, an unfettering, breakout from an arbitrary and suffocating confinement which previously was not even suspected, for that confinement seemed to be reality itself. Such an absolute genesis, breakthrough, or "rupture of plane" necessarily involves as well a comparable transformation in whatever it is that has "broken out." As in the complete metamorphosis of the butterfly, there is therefore a complete change of nature as well as of place, an ecstatic breaking out from—a moulting or shedding of—the "leaper's" own former reality.

For example, there is but one logical state of things, one state which strikes the mind as truly natural and normal, and that is nothingness. The most reasonable, the one truly comprehensible condition is the condition of 'is not'—if there were nothing at all, then at last there would be something we could explain. No other conceivable condition seems so perfectly to rule out all possibility of displacement or even the slightest modification. No state of affairs seems more stable, no trammels more secure, no confinement so thorough and subtly invincible as the diabolically perfect, because purely immaterial, confinement of 'is not'. We cannot even begin to explain how, if in this moment there is nothing at all, there could in the next moment even *possibly* be something, much less can we explain how and why there might always have been "something." But then—and

this is the supreme archetype of every ecstatic transmutation and liberation—instead of “nothing,” there has most unexpectedly, unnaturally, and illogically come to *be* “something.” Something—that mysterious “leaper” and crosser of planes within ‘is not’—has unimaginably and impossibly broken its cunningly perfect shackles, and as it did so it itself was transformed, just as unthinkably, from not-being to being, from ‘is not’ to ‘is’.

That first and greatest breakthrough is a leap out of confinement within ‘is not’, where everything except “nothing” is impossible, out into the unlimited possibilities of ‘is’. And here as well: as long as there are no further leaps and as long as there is only “what is,” just to *be* will not loom in any way as confining, but just as reality, the norm. But then just as being broke out of the constraints of nonbeing, the inanimate has broken through the barrier of pure thingness, becoming life falling out into the infinite possibilities of life. And then again, where there was only insentient life, a third most ardent and protean leaper, “consciousness,” has broken out of insentience and oblivion into the vast spaces of perception by means of signs, spaces I shall later explore, in fact, as infinite, for each sign belongs to an infinite series of equally possible, equally valid signs. To normal sign-consciousness, too, the mode of being its own leap has established will not be felt as confinement, but rather as the self-evident norm. When another remarkable leap transforms it into the user, as well, of *verbal* signs, it will not be part of its normal instinctive-habitual repertoire to distinguish between the luminous, sign-made realm it inhabits and what it now refers to as “the real.” But then in its last great liberation and transformation, consciousness breaks out of animal life’s containment within signs by signs. It collapses out into—it itself appears to be becoming or dissolving into—boundless, unbroken, unsayable, sign-transcendent reality itself.

The infinite act these last hundred-odd pages have been viewing—the arduous disentanglement of consciousness from signs so that instead of “time,” “space,” and “the world,” it abides in, is nourished by, and moves through the dense, infinite, signless element—is therefore one of that handful of supreme leaps through reality’s apparent limits into the unmapped and unknown. Along with the others, it has marked out the great divisions and created the great forms constituting the quaternary geography—to be, to be alive, to be sign-consciousness living within signs, to be turning consciousness breaking through into the uncontained and indivisible signless element—of “what is.” The Greek *ekstasis* literally denotes a “standing out from,” a standing “outside.” The first three great leaps result in such a standing outside a previous condition—nonbeing, inanimateness, insentience—now shown, now perhaps even perceived, as captivity, as constraint. And as it dissolves its sign-enchancement, turning consciousness becomes the fourth great ecstasy—just as ‘is’ has arisen, impossibly, from within ‘is not’ itself, so consciousness now is breaking out of the very signs of which it is made.

The first three world-creating eruptions out of a previously unsuspected but now manifestly restrictive confinement are also “enstatic,” for what now “stands out from” also stands *within* a new realm which imposes its own seemingly normal, or else not even suspected, limits. To apply that distinction between two infinities already invoked, the realms of inanimate being, unconscious life, and unturned consciousness are all “infinite in their own kind,” for the possible individual manifestations within each are infinite, yet each forms a separate class, so that without a leap out of the limits of its world, the inanimate cannot become animate, the unconscious conscious, or sign-consciousness a sign-free dwelling within the signless element. But that unspecifiable, and so even

nameless, uncontained otherness—God—which turning consciousness, having broken out of “the world,” enstatically stands “within” is an “absolute infinite.” It cannot be related to anything else, and since thought cannot even begin to encompass or divide it, it cannot conceivably be measured, enumerated, or delimited—cannot be “sized up”—in any way. To have entered its realm is for the very first time to have passed outside all horizon, to inhabit that “one” that is “uncontained.”

Approached literally, the verbal signs ‘ecstasy’ and ‘enstasis’ invite us to dwell upon a motionless condition—stasis—perhaps following upon a projection out of oneself or something else unnamed. In its inmost living center, however, the archetypal creative event is not stasis but kinesis. Its essence is that very leap or projection—that unprecedented movement or birth—itsself, rather than any future congealings into static thingness, fixed qualities, or states. That kinetic essence is nothing but verb, pure event: an expansive, liberating, dizzying, “ecstatic” breaking through and breaking out of this or that seemingly insuperable outermost boundary into an equally absolute “unknown.” All that will follow depends on, and the entire event-mystery uncoils within, that climactic, all-deciding Rubicon moment of crossing over in which what until that moment has not even been conceived—and so has not even been “impossible”—breaks out of what until that moment has been “the real.” It is in such an ecstatic *movement* of breaking out that ‘is’ emerges, impossibly, out of ‘is not’, life out of lifeless matter, perception out of insentience, and fourth and last, God-inhabiting consciousness out of sign-made perception and “the world.” For even earlier it was possible to describe the turn as a first germination or leap within that “chaos” which is the creative event’s matrix and native place; and now we can more clearly see: it is in just such an archetypally creative movement that pure, undivided, unlimited, ecstatically liberated consciousness, continuing that “germination,” breaks out into uncontained, sign-transcending reality, leaving behind it the broken shell, “the world,” within which it was confined, divided, and organized—was forever being made and remade—by sensory and verbal signs.

I have written that the infinity of the journey turning consciousness undertakes means not only that it is unending, but also entails, more paradoxically, that every step taken is just the first step, or even: the journey’s very first gesture or movement is always, at best, about to commence. Both absences—of a journey-completing last step, and of a first step—direct our attention to the pure kinesis of that leap or breakthrough which forms the very quick of turned life and so establishes it as an elemental creative event. For in the totality of its infinite Platonic form, turned life is itself an unending, infinite leap, an eternal breaking out from finitude into the uncontained. It involves an absolute, infinite change of place, for it is consciousness’ unending flight out of the world—out of every conceivable conjecture or picturing of “where I am”—into God’s edgeless reality. And it necessarily brings with it an analogous reversal—an infinite and so unending, inexhaustible transformation—within consciousness itself: from being contained by signs to containing *them*, from control by instinct-habit to guidance by intuition, from limited golem projects of concentration and crystallization to existence as unbounded dilation and never perfect simplification, from consciousness contained and fixed by a particular comprehension of “who I am” to awareness forever falling out of the very notions of “how things are “ and “who I am.”

As for that second absence, the fact that turning consciousness always has an infinite path lying before it, and so, at its most alert and “infinite,” is never more than about to begin: it means that turning consciousness is forever coming up to and discovering that first glorious dawning and

breakthrough, the very moment of the leap itself. Again and again, therefore, it will be given the gift of thinking: “Now for the very first time that bare awareness “I” now am has at last glimpsed *This*, has grazed the immeasurable and unsayable, has felt the signless element, its life-element, on its bare skin. Just *now*—fatefully and ecstatically and as always for the very first time—I plunge out into the real.”

In its infinite Platonic form turned life always is—and in its eternal commencement turned life always is *becoming*—pure creative event, the fourth of the four supreme leaps, breakouts, or ruptures of plane. But I have also written that turned life’s infinite path winds, coils, and turns back upon itself—for the dance of instinct-habit and intuition persists—and that turning consciousness therefore is perpetually vulnerable to necessity’s and to instinct’s imperious interventions, and to bewilderment, internal resistance, and weariness, not to mention the possibility of a partial or complete “re-turn,” all the degrees of project-abandonment and retreat. In its unending turning movement it never passes beyond the need for work—for “yoga”—and again and again it must retrace paths it already had traversed, must undertake difficult metamorphoses it had already seemed, several times, to “complete.” But then at the other extreme, and as it were as immeasurable, unpredictable reality’s compensation, a gift given to turning consciousness exceeding anything I have described so far: there are times when turning consciousness fully becomes the archetypal event, times when, in an instant, it seems not only to be, but impossibly to complete, that infinite leap into uncontained reality which, within the realm of “what is,” is the fourth and, as far as we know, ultimate liberation.

In us thoughts instinctively-habitually leap, not into the signless element, but over into new thoughts; they, in turn, only maintain and reinforce signs’ enchantment, and subsequent containment and organization, of consciousness, and so lead us every farther away from nonverbal reality. But then within turning consciousness it sometimes happens, in a manner which cannot be predicted, accounted for, or contrived, that just as it approaches its end, a thought all at once gives way or opens up, and quickly slipping out through that gap, awareness seems to fill and plumb infinite reality. In that single second of omnipresence and omniscience, which the *Shiva Sutras* refer to as an instant of perfect knowing—an *unmesha*, an “opening of one’s eyes”—between two thoughts, consciousness knows or rather ecstatically just *is* the primordial event, is the *totality* of that breakout or leap; within the space of one instant it seems impossibly to complete the infinite movement of dilation and simplification it at all other times so haltingly and imperfectly attempts. During that moment, which contains all of an infinite movement or act, and so contains or resumes, and so *is*, all four great leaps or creations, there is neither limitation nor horizon, nothing but uncontained, undivided, wordless, utterly unimpeded, already perfect and infinite all-seeing outward flow. Over in an instant, it is succeeded again by “thought,” but its *karma*-like effect will persist as long as there are recollections, moods, impulses, and undertakings still impregnate with its “perfume.”

My present mystical-theological theses—that the primordial event or creative act is an unprecedented leap, impossible to “preconceive,” out of the given and seemingly ineluctable into the unimagined; that each of the four great realms within “what is” has been brought into being by such a leap; and that sign-consciousness’ breaking forth out of containment by signs so as to sprawl or flow, uncontained, out into the infinite and undivided signless element is one of those four—have for us as the “rational,” that is, the word-animal, a particular implication. It is that turned

consciousness' movement of breaking out from the opposites and "the world," and its beginning to discern and to inhabit the signless element, define the particular way in which *we* can participate, fully and consciously, in the innermost essence and mystery of the act, of the "creative" event. For both temporally and conceptually all the other great leaps precede us. As something which is, and is alive, and is contained and organized by sensory and verbal signs, normal consciousness clearly follows in the wake of those first three transformations. All too clearly it is, normally, their dull, passive, largely oblivious descendant or handiwork, their "effect."

It is true—and I shall later return to this important point—that just by virtue of possessing sign-consciousness, we carry within us those already completed leaps into existence, life, and perception by means of signs. And it is true that as we become more alert, we can find our way back to those great crossings, can recover or even enter into or become them. But the fall out of signs and "the world" into that dizzying taking away of all horizons and all limitations which is God is not a prior event we merely reenact or recover, for it takes place for the very first time in us. Buddhist texts iterate that human birth is a unique privilege, for in animals, hungry ghosts, and the denizens of the hells, consciousness is too dull or tormented to seek enlightenment, and in the heavenly realms of the gods, it is, while that rebirth lasts, too content. As a modification or perhaps just as an extension of their point I now write: our species' singular privilege is to be the host, womb, or birthplace of—or rather, by becoming turned life just to *be*—that last great leap. To exist as consciousness breaking out of its confinement within biological perception's six signs and to fall, instead, out into uncontained signless reality—into God—is the unprecedented, the previously unimagined and impossible, daybreak we can become, is indeed the culmination of that series of mind-breaking dawns which begins when 'is' rises, impossibly, through the impregnable barrier and out of the perfect logic of 'is not'.

From that implication "for us" which I have just identified it is possible to infer yet another: turning consciousness' leap out of signs into the signless element—its shedding of the neuron's weightless and glittering "the world" so as to dwell just in the density of unsayable reality—far exceeds in its compass and consequences all the changes we are accustomed to regard as life's most profound transitions. Within the ongoing movement of normal consciousness and life between birth and death, the most striking transformation is the crossing over from containment by sensory signs to containment by both sensory and verbal signs which marks the transition from infant to child. But from the larger perspective of the greatest chasms and leaps, the child's acquisition of language is a relatively small shift occurring within the single realm of animal perception by means of signs. Its place, therefore, is in the line of steady, evolutionary, non-leaping development from the visually darker and visually lighter of the planarian to Einstein's verbal-mathematical ' $E=mc^2$ '.

We habitually regard birth and death as the two ultimate transitions framing every life. But conception itself is a change which takes place entirely within the continuities of cellular life, while physical death is the retreat of life back into matter, a *recrossing* of the line between 'is alive' and just 'is'. It is not a leap, but as it were the taking back of a leap, a victory of sorts for 'is not'. But then on the other hand, and to contemplate "death" from the vantage point of all the great leaps: when, as sign-made consciousness perceives it, "death comes" to one who has broken out of signs into unbroken reality—then those unnameable interior spaces and that event-mystery we blindly verbalize as "she's dying" are already nothing but boundless, seamless, unsayable otherness from

which the “I” and “the world,” and those spectral sign-made opposites—“living” and dying”—long since have vanished.

As for other transitions experienced between birth and death, it happens that adolescent consciousness “breaks away” from the particular verbal perceptions which also contain and organize “parental” consciousness, but only to enter another similar containment and organization by other signs. And in analogous ways through all of life, the ongoing abandonment and adoption of particular creeds, theories, perspectives, opinions, and self-comprehendings—that is, consciousness’ sloughing off of certain containing-organizing phrases and sentences quickly followed by self-enclosure within still others—is commonplace. For the rest, the notable transitions are marriage, the birth of children, the slowly crystallizing success or failure of golem projects. All these take place within that one realm which is life in sensory and verbal signs, the collective clear, common light. They are events, or repetitions of events, within a continuous journey initiated by leaps made long before us. Or just as metaphorically, they are the predictable botanical processes which, repeated ad infinitum, and within the limits of numerous minor, similarly repeated individual variations, create the forest canopy’s vast and uniform plane.

By contrast, the turn represents the unprecedented, utterly inexplicable emergence, on one of those many branches, of an unknown seed from which germinates a shoot from outside botany, something that is “life,” but not “biology.” Or less metaphorically and as directly as I can put it: awareness in us has arrived at the most dramatic divide and most fateful of boundaries—at the “rational animal’s” or “sign-consciousness” or just at “our” supreme Rubicon—when, prompted and guided or misguided by intuition, it finds itself pressing out against the outermost edge of verbal signs, the uncanny edge of your or my “the world.” It can of course turn back and return to the clear, common light, to what perhaps will be able to persuade it, again, that it is “the obvious,” “the real.” Or having come to that place which is the one great divide and boundary it is given to us to approach, it can leap or break out of all it knows and doesn’t know—out of all that “is” and all that “is not”—into that dense, unmeasured unthinkable something which is our unsayable “where we are,” which is *This*.

I have portrayed—and later shall more fully explore—turned life as life, first of all, in the signless element. But I shall also take up, as turned life’s second focal point and habitation, that primordial breakout-liberation which is the unthinkable leap of ‘is’ out of the cunningly subtle, seemingly escape-proof bonds of ‘is not’. For turning consciousness characteristically seeks to enter with infinitely growing alertness into that greatest of all breakthroughs, one which, as we have seen, we as beings who *are* already carry, usually unawares, within us. Turning consciousness’ own eruption out of the world into the uncontained is a halting reenactment of that first impossibly perfect and seemingly infinite leap. Yet there is a perspective from which the one ecstatic breaking-out movement we ourselves can undertake—and which turned life *is*—surpasses even that original commencement in which being rises, impossibly, out of nonbeing’s bottomless depths. And in fact: from that perspective, the particular breakthrough or rupture of plane which can take place just in *us* is the climax and consummation of the three great leaps which have gone before.

For us at least—and perhaps just because it invariably accompanies and seems even to make possible our unchoreographed, open-ended dance—there is something singularly rare and precious about consciousness, this volatile, diaphanous, perpetual, stubborn, unfailingly intimate flame. Just

in itself, before its thousandfold refractions and dispersals in the dreamlike kaleidoscope of perception, its still radiance strikes us as *our* quintessence, the inmost secret ardor of whatever it is that we are. The Vedantins and others have taught that everyday verbal perceptions can be referred to as conscious only because they, occurring “close” to it, are bathed in true consciousness’ perfect light. It is the light which illuminates dreams, is that pure self-luminosity, the *svayamprabha*, of the “Self” which remains when all particular perceivings cease.

But the primordial breaking out of ‘is’ from ‘is not’, and the next two leaps from being to life and from life to life in signs, all take place, so far as we know, in the absence of that light. Their occurrence is unobserved and unrecorded, the first and greatest taking place, in fact, within the absolute oblivion and darkness of ‘is not’. In us, however, something which “is” can be luminously aware that it has worked its way out to the bewildering outermost limits of the presently “known” and “possible,” to the limits of “what is.” Because we, so far as we know, are the first in whom intuition breaks in upon instinct and begins making use of its signs, we are the place or event in which for the first time confined consciousness can discern its confinement. We are the first to arrive, knowingly, at one of the ultimate boundary lines, a place of fateful leaps and fateful turnings back. We are the first who can *consciously* be that leap. I have written that turned life can be the scene of an ecstasy and illumination, in time a mere instant, in which it is, and then is aware of itself as just having *been*, infinite dilation. In such moments it is given us to be the host in whom that paradigmatic event-mystery—the leap, breakout, liberation—at last knows and is wholly transparent unto itself.

Consciousness is therefore further precious to us—consciousness radiates that infinite, reassuringly native warmth—because in it ‘is’ attains its highest flight out of ‘is not’, because it resumes and contains and renders *conscious* all previous flights. But further still, and now as a recognition and appreciation, rather, of “our” breakthrough’s mind-breaking singularity, its own freedom from any “second”: as a leap out of all the opposites, that self-luminous last leap—our leap—is in fact a leap *out* of all the others. For those earlier crossings—from ‘is not’ to ‘is’, from ‘inanimate’ to ‘animate’, from ‘insentient’ to ‘sentient’—are leaps from one opposite to another, which is to say: they are movements *within* the realm of opposites, limitation, and the sayable; indeed, they themselves are the great creative ruptures of plane which first bring into being our opposite-made “the world,” then proceed to create and stake out its great divisions and realms.

That final leap, however, is a leap out of all conception, out of “the world.” In it consciousness breaks out of the separations, finitudes, and particular enchantments those previous leaps have accomplished, and discovers and immerses itself, instead, in the hitherto unsuspected, wholly “unworldly,” infinite, undivided signless element. It is as if the opposites and those earlier leaps and signs themselves had come to be—and as if that something we both evoke and camouflage with the sign ‘consciousness’ had come to perceive them—just so that consciousness would then be able to leap out of them into pure reality, *This* free of all qualification. It is as if the purpose of all bruitable accident is to prepare the way for unsayable essence. The Samkhya affirms that the vast tangible, visible, intelligible world of space and time exists just so that it might finally be recognized as *not* conscious—once “seen,” it withdraws like a modest dancer, and pure consciousness, the *purusha*, can abide eternally in itself. In like manner we can say that the miraculous universe and we ourselves—or rather, the miraculous enchanted *perceptions* of a “the universe” and of “I” and

“we”—have come into being just to stake out, and then to fix consciousness’ attention upon, a great sign-made vision of immensity and intimacy which, when it at last disappears, God can fill.



## Works Cited

- Asanga. *La somme du grand vehicule d'Asanga*. Translated by E. Lamotte. Louvain: Museon, 1938.
- Ashvaghosha. *The Awakening of Faith*. Translated by Yoshito S. Hakeda. New York: Columbia University Press, 1967.
- Augustine. *Confessions*. Translated by Henry Chadwick. Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1992.
- Camus, Albert. *The Myth of Sisyphus*. Translated by Justin O'Brien. New York: Vintage Books, 1960.
- Candrakirti. *Lucid Exposition of the Middle Way*. Translated by Mervyn Sprung. Boulder: Prajna Press, 1979.
- Chadwick, Owen. *John Cassian: A Study in Primitive Monasticism*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1968.
- Chittick, William C. *The Sufi Path of Knowledge: Ibn al-'Arabi's Metaphysics of Imagination*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1989.
- Chung-Yuan, Chang, tr. *Original Teachings of Ch'an Buddhism* (selections from *The Transmission of the Lamp*). New York: Random House, 1969.
- The Cloud of Unknowing and Other Works*. Translated by Clifton Wolters. Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1978.
- Conze, Edward. *Buddhist Meditation*. New York: Harper & Row, 1969.
- Conze, Edward, ed. *Buddhist Texts through the Ages*. New York: Harper & Row, 1964.
- Conze, Edward. *Buddhist Thought in India*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1970.
- Copleston, Frederick. *A History of Philosophy*. New York: Doubleday, 1962.
- Dionysius. *Pseudo-Dionysius: The Complete Works*. Translated by Colm Luibheid. Mahwah: Paulist Press, 1987.
- Descartes, Rene. *The Philosophical Works of Descartes*. Translated by Elizabeth S. Haldane and G.R.T. Ross. New York: Dover, 1955.
- Deussen, Paul. *The System of the Vedanta*. New York: Dover, 1973.
- Dumoulin, Heinrich. *Zen Buddhism: A History*. New York: Macmillan, 1988.
- Eckhart, Meister. *Deutsche Predigten und Traktate*. Edited and translated into modern German by Josef Quint. Munich: Diogenes Verlag, 1979.
- Eckhart, Meister. *Die Deutschen Werke*. Edited by J. Quint. Stuttgart: Die deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft, 1963.
- Eckhart, Meister. *Parisian Questions and Prologues*. Translated by Armand Maurer. Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1974.
- Eckhart, Meister. *Meister Eckhart: The Essential Sermons, Commentaries, Treatises, and Defense*. Translated and edited by Bernard McGinn and Edmund Colledge. Mahwah: Paulist Press, 1981.
- Eliade, Mircea. *Yoga: Immortality and Freedom*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1971.

- Eriugena (John Scottus). *Periphyseon*. Translated by I.P. Sheldon-Williams. Dublin: Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies, 1981.
- Evans-Wentz, W.Y., ed. *The Tibetan Book of the Great Liberation*. London: Oxford University Press, 1968.
- Gregory, Peter N., ed. *Sudden and Gradual: Approaches to Enlightenment in Chinese Thought*. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1987.
- Hopkins, Jasper. *A Concise Introduction to the Philosophy of Nicholas of Cusa* (includes translation of *De Possess*). Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1978.
- Huang Po. *The Zen Teachings of Huang Po*. Translated by John Blofeld. New York: Grove Press, 1958.
- John of the Cross. *The Collected Works of St. John of the Cross*. Translated by Kieran Kavanaugh and Otilio Rodriguez. Washington, D.C.: ICS Publications, 1979
- John of the Cross. *Dark Night of the Soul*. Translated by E. Allison Peers. New York: Image Books, 1959.
- Kaufmann, Walter, ed. *Philosophic Classics* (includes Plato's *The Apology*). Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1961.
- Kocmarek, Ivan. *Language and Release*. Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1985.
- The Large Sutra on Perfect Wisdom*. Translated by Edward Conze. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984.
- Larson, James and Bhattacharya, Ram Shankar, ed. *Samkhya: A Dualist Tradition in Indian Philosophy* (vol. 4 in *Encyclopedia of Indian Philosophies*). Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987.
- Louth, Andrew. *The Origins of the Christian Mystical Tradition*. Oxford: Clarendon, 1981.
- Lin-chi. *The Zen Teachings of Master Lin-Chi*. Translated by Burton Watson. Boston: Shambhala, 1993.
- O'Meara, J.J. *Eriugena*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988.
- Patanjali. *Yoga Philosophy of Patanjali* (includes *Yogasutra*). Translated by P.N. Mukerji. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1983.
- The Perfection of Wisdom in Eight Thousand Lines & Its Verse Summary*. Translated by Edward Conze. San Francisco: Four Seasons Foundation, 1973.
- Plotinus. *The Six Enneads*. Translated by Stephen MacKenna and B.S. Page. (Great Books of the Western World, vol. 17.) Chicago: William Benton, 1952.
- Pfeiffer, Franz. *Meister Eckhart*. Leipzig: Goschen, 1857.
- Potter, Karl H., ed. *Advaita Vedanta*. (vol. 3 in *Encyclopedia of Indian Philosophies*.) Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981.
- Ross, W.D. *Aristotle*. New York: Meridian Books, 1959.
- Rumi. *The Sufi Path of Love*. Edited and translated by William C. Chittick. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1983.
- Ruusbroec, John. *The Spiritual Espousals and Other Works*. Mahwah: Paulist Press, 1985.
- Schelling, Friedrich Wilhelm Joseph. *Samtliche Werke*, Part I, vol. 8. Stuttgart and Augsburg: J.G. Cotta'scher Verlag, 1861.
- Schimmel, Annemarie. *Mystical Dimensions of Islam*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina

- Press, 1975.
- Scholem, Gershom G. *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism*. New York: Schocken Books, 1954.
- Shankara. *The Vedanta Sutras of Badarayana* (with the commentary of Shankara). Translated by George Thibaut. New York: Dover, 1962.
- Shankara. *A Thousand Teachings*. Translated by Sengaku Mayeda. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1992.
- Spinoza, Benedict de. *Works of Spinoza*. New York: Dover, 1981.
- The Thirteen Principal Upanishads*. Translated by Robert Ernest Hume. Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1983.
- Thomas Aquinas. *Introduction to St. Thomas Aquinas* (selected writings). Edited by Anton C. Pegis. New York: Random House, 1948.
- The Tibetan Book of the Dead*. Edited by W.Y. Evans-Wentz. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1960.
- Upanishatsamgrahah*. Edited by J.L. Shastri. Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1970.
- Varenne, Jean. *Yoga and the Hindu Tradition*. Translated by Derek Coltman. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1976.
- The Vimalakirti Nirveda Sutra*. Translated by Charles Luk. Berkeley: Shambhala, 1972.
- Waley, Arthur. *The Way and its Power* (with complete translation of *Tao Te Ching*). New York: Grove Press, 1980.
- Wolfson, Harry Austryn. *The Philosophy of Spinoza*. New York: Meridian Books, 1960.
- Woodroffe, John. *The Serpent Power*. New York: Dover, 1974.
- Zimmer, Heinrich. *Philosophies of India*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1971.

## Abbreviations Used in Citations

*Ashta* = *The Perfection of Wisdom in Eight Thousand Lines & Its Verse Summary.*

*BM* = Conze, *Buddhist Meditation.*

*BSBh* = Shankara, *The Vedanta Sstras of Badarayana.*

*BT* = Conze, *Buddhist Texts through the Ages.*

*BTh* = Conze, *Buddhist Thought in India.*

*CW* = John of the Cross, *The Collected Works of St. John of the Cross.*

*DN* = John of the Cross, *Dark Night of the Soul.*

*DP* = Eckhart, Meister, *Deutsche Predigten und Traktate.*

*DW* = Eckhart, Meister, *Die Deutschen Werke.*

*EE* = Eckhart, Meister, *Meister Eckhart: The Essential Sermons, Treatises, Commentaries, and Defense.*

*HP* = Huang Po, *The Zen Teachings of Huang Po.*

*LSPW* = *The Large Sutra on Perfect Wisdom.*

*PsD* = *The Cloud of Unknowing and Other Works.*

*TBD* = *The Tibetan Book of the Dead.*

*TBGL* = Evans-Wentz, *The Tibetan Book of the Great Liberation.*

*Upad* = Shankara, *A Thousand Teachings.*

*VNS* = *Vimalakirtinirdesa Sutra.*

## Capsule Description of Some Referenced Authors and Schools

- Asanga.. Mahayana Buddhist, a leading representative of the “Yogacara” school. Probably fourth century C.E.
- Ashvaghosha. Mahayana Buddhist, best known as the author of *The Awakening of Faith* (in Mahayana), which now is found only in Chinese, though it *may* have been originally written in Sanskrit. Third to fifth century C.E.
- Buddhaghosha. “Hinayana” Buddhist of the fifth century C.E., best known as the author of *The Path of Purity*, a monumental work in Pali on meditation.
- Candrakirti. Mahayana Buddhist, probably seventh century C.E. Best known for *The Lucid Exposition of the Middle Way*, a commentary on the *Madhyamikakarikas* of Nagarjuna.
- Dignaga. Buddhist philosopher-logician of the fifth or sixth century C.E.
- Dionysius. A, if not *the*, central figure in the origins of Christian mysticism. Not certainly identified, he probably lived in the fifth or sixth century. He wrote under the name of Dionysius, who is identified in the the *New Testament* as an Athenian converted by Paul, so that he is frequently referred to as “Pseudo-Dionysius.”
- Eriugena. An Irishman also known as “John the Scot.” Ninth century Christian philosopher and theologian long connected with the court of the French kings.
- Evagrius. Fourth century Christian ascetic and contemplative. Wrote in Greek.
- Gregory of Nyssa. Christian philosopher-theologian in Asia Minor. Fourth century.
- Huang-po. Chinese Ch’an master of the ninth century. A teacher of Lin-chi.
- Ibn al-‘Arabi. Islamic philosopher and mystic of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries.
- Lin-chi. Chinese Ch’an master of the ninth century.
- Nicholas of Cusa. Fifteenth century philosopher and Renaissance man, strongly influenced by the Neoplatonic tradition in Christian mysticism.
- Patanjali. Author of the *Yoga Sutras*, the classical formulation of yoga philosophy. Lived in the second or third century of the C.E.
- Rumi. Thirteenth century Sufi poet and mystic.
- Samkhya. A major school of Indian philosophy of great importance in the development of Indian thought. It is “dualistic,” positing an unbridgeable polarity between “Nature” and “Spirit.”
- Shankara. The classic formulator of the philosophy of the Vedanta. Eighth or ninth century C.E. His great commentary, the *Vedanta Sutras of Badarayana*, is his most important work.
- Sureshvara. A direct pupil of Shankara. One of the most prominent thinkers of the Vedanta.
- Vedanta. Perhaps the most well-known school of Indian philosophy. Stresses the identity of the Self (the *Atman*) with *brahman*.
- Yun-men. Chinese Ch’an master of the ninth and tenth centuries.

\* \* \* \* \*