

HENRY CORBIN AND SUHRAWARDĪ'S ANGELOLOGY

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1. *Oriental Light*

A fundamental aspect that characterizes the philosophy and spirituality of the Iranian Islam, according to Corbin, is expressed by the term *ishrāq*, meaning dawn (*cognitio matutina*, matutinal knowledge, or *aurora consurgens*) of the "Orient". The *Ishrāqīyūn* are "Oriental" philosophers in the metaphysical sense of the word "Orient"; more commonly they are known as "Platonists of Persia", in contrast to the Peripatetics (neo-platonized Aristotelians) of Islam. The great figure of this philosophy is Shihāb al-dīn Yahyā Suhrawardī (1155–1191), who died in Aleppo at the age of thirty-six as a martyr. His masterpiece, *The Theosophy of the Oriental Light* (*Hikmat al-Ishrāq*), or simply *Oriental Theosophy*, incorporates the wisdom of the ancient sages of Persia, their Philosophy of Light and Darkness, into the prophetic tradition of the Qur'an. Suhrawardī considered these Zoroastrian sages to be the direct inheritors of a line that goes back to the antediluvian prophet Idrīs and the Hebrew Enoch, whom Muslim authors identified with Hermes. In Suhrawardī's opinion, this *sophia perennis*, which combined formal training and purification of the soul, also existed among the Greeks up to the time of Aristotle. The Oriental tradition was taken up by Shī'ite philosophers and constituted a very important element in Persian philosophical thought during the later Middle Ages and in the theosophy of Mullā Sadrā.

Suhrawardī's *Theosophy of the Oriental Light* is not a theoretical treatise, but an instrument of meditation and spiritual realization. Oriental knowledge is based on the theosopher's *presence* to the light (*ishrāq*), it postulates an interior vision, a waking up to oneself—illumination which is the dawn of the soul's presence to the object of its vision, its angel. Suhrawardī had a direct vision, visionary percep-

tion of the Light. He saw *all* the forms and figures existing in this world as icons or images, as shadows and silhouettes of the forms "made" of immaterial light existing in the *mundus imaginalis* (*Ālam al-Mithāl*). Corbin maintains that he who refuses to believe in his testimony can do only one thing: discover for himself the conditions under which the visionary phenomenon shows itself to those who see it. Any other type of criticism of the visionary events misses the event by prejudging its specific mode of being. Nevertheless, for Suhrawardī spiritual experience that is not grounded in sound philosophical education, is in danger of degenerating and going astray, just as philosophy that does not culminate in personal spiritual realization is vain speculation. The supreme sage is he who unites theory and praxis. In Corbin's words, "there is no true philosophy which does not reach completion in a metaphysic of ecstasy, nor mystical experience which does not demand a serious philosophical preparation."¹ The wisdom of the sage is "speculative" knowledge in that it transforms the being of the sage into a *speculum*, a polished mirror reflecting the pure Lights of the spiritual world.² Suhrawardī's visions, his presence to the Light, enabled him to see that Zoroaster, the prophet of ancient Persia, belonged to the hierohistory of the people of the Book, and it was because of this assertion that he met his martyr's end.

The spiritual state of the perfect Oriental sage is designated by Suhrawardī as *ta'alla*, connoting deification; it corresponds to *theosis* of the Byzantine mystics and to what the late Neoplatonists grouped under the name of *theurgy*. In the Suhrawardian vision of the world, every species is the *theurgy*, the hieratic work of its angels. Unlike the theologians "who say divine things", the *theurgoi* are "those who work divine things." *Theurgy* is "divine work" because it endows man with divine nature, with a "specific individuality" of an angel. It is a process of deification (apotheosis) and angelification. The basic idea here, as in other gnostic systems, is that the physical death must be rendered inoffensive through mystical, initiatory death. As a saying, attributed to the Prophet, has it; "Die before you die."³

Suhrawardī's "Oriental Light" must be understood in connection with the fundamental Zoroastrian and Mazdean notion of

Xvarnah (Persian *khurrah*), Light of Glory. In the present context, the word "Light" corresponds to the philosophical term "existence" in the sense of *actus essendi*. Light is the one and single reality, the source of the phenomenal world making it possible for anything to be revealed. Being or existence is an all-luminous substance, pure luminescence. In Corbin's opinion, the identification of Light and Being is effected by conceiving light as universal matter — *materia prima universalis*. All the degrees of being — from the most subtle down to the state of extreme condensation — participate in this universal matter common to all that is called spirit and body. Between spiritual and bodily or material beings there are only "intervals of degree." A metaphysics of Light, centered on the idea of "spiritual matter", transcends the false dilemma of materialism and idealism: there exists only one Light, differentiated in multiple degrees of condensation and subtlety. In this view, which must not be confused with philosophical monism, spiritual reality is not something abstract, but concrete spirituality. Corbin, together with the gnostics, professes "spiritual realism."⁴

Suhrawardi was not a dualist. His project was to resurrect, not the exoteric teachings of the Zoroastrians, but their esoteric doctrine based on the unity of the divine principle. The Iranian form in which the Zoroastrian dualism is overcome is Zervanism. Zervan, infinite Time, is perceived as the original deity whose thought produces two "sons": Uhrmuzd, the principle of Light, and Ahriman, the principle of Darkness, the child born from doubt, obscuring the thought of Zervan. However, even this view, which tacitly posits co-eternity of two principles, did not satisfy the gnostics of Islam. In the transformed version of neo-Zoroastrianism, Zervan is no longer the supreme Principle, but one of the beings of Light, the highest ranking angel in the Pleroma. Darkness is born not from the original Light (as in Zervanism), but from a catastrophe that takes place in the angelic Pleroma, from a "drama in heaven". In this way the principle of metaphysical unity is preserved, and at the same time a characteristic feature of Zervanism remains intact: it is doubt, a sort of vertigo of nothingness that, having afflicted the angel Zervan, generates through him the Other, the Ahrimanian Darkness. As a result of this doubt, he is demoted from the rank of the Third Intelligence

to that of Tenth Intelligence and becomes the demiurge of our world (spiritual Adam). Metaphysical dualism is thus replaced with anthropological dualism: Ahriman and his demons now correspond to the inferior part of the soul. Corbin is convinced that this has nothing to do with the Manichean profession that "beings which surround us are either 'white' or 'black'. The state in which we live is precisely one of 'mixture'.⁵

The Zoroastrian *Xvarnah* combines the Greek notions of *doxa* (glory) and *tykhē* (fate, destiny). As *doxa* (luminous halo), it is a suprasensible reality: as *tykhē*, it is perfectly concrete and individuated.⁶ The fundamental view behind this conjunction is that the essential suprasensible reality (*deus absconditus*) is perceived and known by perceiving and knowing its personal manifestations (its angel). The theosophers therefore apprehend *Xvarnah* as one of the personal figures of the subtle world of Light, or as one the *Yazatas* ("the Adorable Ones"), who are the angels proper to Mazdaism (*Dii-angeli* of Proclus). *Xvarnah* in effect signifies the soul itself in its twofold function: as the eternal archetype and as the norm (destiny) of the terrestrial individuality. It is the pre-existing and sacralizing energy of the soul that individuates a particular terrestrial being and irradiates around him its protective *aura*. The *aura gloriæ* cannot be detached from its individual manifestation without endangering, even destroying, the latter. In short, *Xvarnah* is the goal to destiny (Greek *tykhē*) and the guide towards the goal; it is *doxa* and destiny in one. In other words, the way (destiny) is itself the goal. In this capacity, the Light can never become the *object* of vision; on the contrary, it is precisely that which enables seeing, which makes us see. It is the goal of vision, and at the same time the guide towards the goal.⁷

Besides *Yazatas*, there are countless feminine celestial entities called *Fravarti*, "those who have chosen", i.e., chosen to fight on behalf of Ohrmuzd, and who resemble the German *Valkyries*. *Fravarti* are the tutelary angels and the heavenly archetypes of beings. In Ibn 'Arabī, they are "eternal hexeities", archetypes of each individual being in the sensible world, his latent individuation in the world of Mystery.⁸ Every earthly being has its *Fravarti*, a heavenly archetype or Angel. Corbin calls this dual structure a

dualitude which is more essential to Mazdean cosmology than its most commonly remembered *dualism* of Light-Darkness. For the latter “merely expresses the dramatic phase undergone by the Creation of Light when invaded and blemished by the demonic Power...”⁹

2. “Of every thing we have created pairs.”

In the Oriental theosophy of Suhrawardī (as well as in Shī‘ism and Ismā‘ilism), anthropology is only a phase of angelology: there are no angels separate from matter and from souls destined to animate material organic bodies. The Angel is the equivalent of the Aristotelian form by virtue of which each body is able to exist; instead of being a “metaphysical luxury”, he is the light, the angel-light watching over and guarding each thing. As a writer has observed, Suhrawardī “sees angels everywhere; they are as numerous as the fixed stars, i.e., innumerable.”¹⁰ The basic pre-supposition in this scheme is that the soul has a celestial origin and is seeking a way to escape from its terrestrial prison or its “Occidental exile”, so as to return to its original home. The soul upon entering the body is divided into two parts; one — its celestial twin (*pneuma*) — has remained in heaven, and the other has descended into the prison or “fort” of the body. The destiny of the fallen soul is to search for its other half, its heavenly prototype residing in the Orient of Light, the *Morgenland* of the German Romantic poets. The “Orient” is the *Arabia felix* (Yemen), the lost paradise and the goal of spiritual pilgrimage.

Philosophically expressed, the soul is a complete substance independent of the organic body, which serves only as its temporary abode. The “real body” of the soul, its angel, is a celestial body of a pure, still “immaterial matter” or a “garment of light” which it must don once again. Our present lot is a transitory status; what we call “man” is only a Not-yet. Man and indeed all existence is called to undergo an angelomorphosis — the passage from “angelicity in *potentia*” to “angelicity in *actu*.” What this means is that every action and every event in the world is referred back to the person of the angel. The essences of all things are defined in terms of *their* persons. “Everything takes place as though the question

'Who is it?' were substituted for the question 'What is it?' - as though to name the *person* were to define its *essence*." This is also the function of *ta'wīl* to lead back everything that exists in the world in the state of potential angelicity to actual angelicity, for "even while one is materially present in this world, there is a mode of being in Paradise."¹¹ *Ta'wīl* is essentially a *reductio ad modum angelicum*. Corbin formulates this fundamental thought as follows: "... every creature is comprised of his earthly part and of its celestial counterpart, his archetype or angel. Hence through every reality it is possible to discern a person — that is, to grasp this reality *as* or *in* its celestial person."¹²

The Angel is the inner spiritual guide, "the invisible master" reserved "for all those who are called to a direct unmediated relationship with the divine world"¹³ i.e., a direct, personal, and immediate bond with the Godhead. The question to be resolved at this point is whether we are dealing here with an archetype or with a real person. Corbin's answer is: neither or rather both. To be a disciple of the angel means, phenomenologically speaking, that his presence is experienced simultaneously as a person and as an archetype, i.e., as "person-archetype"; his archetypal unity and identity is compatible with the plurality of his concrete exemplifications. As "the master of all those who are masterless", he shows "*each one* how to attain the spiritual state he himself has attained and which he typifies." In other words, what enables him to be at once his own person and an archetype, is his ability "to exemplify himself as many times as he has disciples."¹⁴

The angel does not guide all his disciples uniformly to the same goal. Each disciple is led to his own "eternal individuality" (his theophany) corresponding to his "inner heaven", to the specific form of his own being. The underlying idea here is that God is not limited to any particular way of manifesting Himself. In His essential being (i.e., as *deus absconditus*), God transcends all forms. But He is inseparable from forms, i.e., from a certain *situs* in space and time insofar as He is *deus revelatus*. From this it follows that God who demands one man's worship need not be worshipped and obeyed by other men, because their God may assume other forms of manifestation. On the other hand, Corbin is emphatic in emphasizing that

denial of the angel and of the necessity of the angelic realm in general (as in Averroes) has grave consequences. A person without his angel is "at the the mercy of a single undifferentiated Omnipotence, from which all men are equidistant, lost in the religious or social collectivity. When this happens, each man tends to confound *his* Lord . . . with the Divine Being as such and to wish to impose Him upon all . . . Having lost his bond with his specific Lord-archetype (that is, having lost his knowledge of himself), each ego is exposed to hypertrophy [Jung's monotheism of consciousness] that can easily degenerate into spiritual 'imperialism'." ¹⁵

The Zoroastrian-Suhrawardian angelology as a form of religion cannot be reduced to an abstract and monolithic type of monotheism. Angelology, according to Corbin, goes hand in hand with what he calls *kathenotheism* or "mystical *kathenotheism*." ¹⁶ The basic idea behind this term is that the Divine Being appears in the heart of the believer in accordance with the aptitude or receptivity of his heart. In each instance the heart gives its colour to the divine form it receives. What we are witnessing here, in effect, is the mystery of divine individuation, for *kathenotheism* is "the hierophanic category" of 'every instance.' The highest mode of the soul's existence "culminates neither in the void of its own isolation nor in uniformly nameable divine presence, but in a rigorous and irreplaceable individuation (*kath ena, singulatim*) of that divine presence." ¹⁷ God, without ceasing to be itself a hypostasis, can exist totally in each of its individuations. The fundamental category of *kathenotheism* is the "presence of the totality in the each" ¹⁸ Hence the famous *Ṣūfī* maxim: "He who knows himself, knows his Lord." The Lord is not the quintessential Godhead, but the God in one of his innumerable Names, the God manifested in the believer's soul. According to *Ṣūfī* teaching, each concrete being originates in the particular divine Name which leaves a trace in him and is his particular Lord. It is this Lord who in the *Ṣūfī* attains through self-knowledge or whom he fails to attain through ignorance.

Expressed differently, it is imperative, in the gnostic context, to realize that our wholeness includes, besides the ego-personality, another person, a transcendent counterpart, our "eternal individuality" (*Fravarti*), the *a priori* of our being. Ibn 'Arabi (1165–1240),

one of the greatest masters of Sūfism, sees angels as latent archetypes of beings, the "eternal hexeities." The eternal hexeity is the archetype of each individual in the sensible world, his latent individuation in the world of Mystery.¹⁹ But this invisible and spiritual presence can only be experienced *con-spiration* or *sympathy* — a reciprocal and simultaneous attraction between the empirical person and his alter ego. The sympathy in question (*unio sympathetica*) is likened by the neoplatonist Proclus to the heliotrope, a flower that follows in its movements the movements of the sun.²⁰ The *sympathy* is its own proof of what is at stake. Islamic theosophers are unanimous in emphasising that God cannot be proved by something other than God. God can be known only through God. In other words, divine things (*res divina*) are assimilated only through divine revelation or inspiration.

On another occasion Corbin describes the connection between self-knowledge and the knowledge of God as follows: "thy God is the mysterious Figure that appears as thy 'horizon', thy *hādd* [witness] which is thy 'limit' and also thy companion of initiation. Thine Angel is the Angel of this theophany of thine which is the measure of thy being."²¹ But every *hādd* has its own *hādd*: from one rung in the hierarchy to another, each God has his own God, and to perceive this "superior" God (*hādd*) is to perceive new divine manifestation (theophany) at a new level. Thus it becomes clear, says Corbin, that "the invisible unity at the summit of . . . summits is not the unity of an 'All-powerful' in an immediate and equidistant relation with all the Ones: there are successions and repeated integrations of dyadic unities or bi-unities."²² As in the case of *progressio harmonica*, the adept's soul passes from one octave to a higher octave, to a height or pitch that is qualitatively different, yet the soul remains the same, because from pre-eternity, its relationship to the Lord is the same. The relationship between the soul and its Lord is not a collective or identical relationship shared by all alike in respect to one and the same object, but a unique, individual relationship of bi-unity (1 x 1), that is, a relationship of love: "real presence of one alone to one alone and for one alone, in a dialogue *unus-ambo*"²³ (bi-unity). In gnostic terms, the relationship of bi-unity is based on the idea that the seeker is himself a particle of divine light that is being sought. According to Najm Kubrā, the secret of mystical

kathenotheism is this: "each time a *light rises up from you, a light comes down toward you* and each time a flame rises from you, a corresponding flame comes down toward you."²⁴

Elaborating on this theme, Corbin suggests that the gnostic conception of bi-unity (implying homology between each and All), forms the foundation of the only strict ethic — the ethic that makes a man responsible for himself. For if it is true that "the form of your love (for any of your brothers) is yourself," or that "your love is equivalent to what you are," then it follows that "you must first do right by yourself; all the rest merely follows from this." In other words: "you are responsible, that is, you *answer for*, the vision that is given to you of your God; the form of your vision and your worship, like the form of your love, are equivalent to what you are. And it is precisely this priority of *being over doing* that forms the foundation of reciprocity" ²⁵ All depends on the quality of light within us. This, of course, implies a complete subversion of the social perspective that has taken possession of the modern religious consciousness. The question among the gnostics is not "What you have done for your *brothers*," but "What you have done *with yourself* and for yourself." Specifically, where the canonical text. (Matt., 25: 35–46) has: "Each time you did these things for the least of these my *brothers*, you did it for me", the gnostic version has: "The Lord will gather together the just and the wicked . . . The just will say to Him: When were you hungry and thirsty, when were you in prison? And the Lord will say to them: You speak rightly, but all that you have done *for yourself* (or, 'to your selves,' or 'to your own souls' . . .), that you have done for me (or 'to my Self')."²⁶

What is propounded here, according to Corbin, is the priority of the subjective condition. "For, after all, no one can be at peace with his brothers . . . who is not first of all at peace with himself Your love is only worth what *you are*."²⁷ In another version we have the following words: "Your contemplation is worth whatever your being is worth: your God is the God you deserve. He bears witness to your being of light or to your darkness."²⁸ In angelological terms, your angel (the heavenly witness) contemplates you with the same look with which you contemplate him. There is a "mystical reciprocity: the contemplated is the contemplator and vice versa"²⁹ The reason for this is that "the witness can only respond to you in

the correspondence of a co-response."³⁰ In a word, "all depends upon whether our *ability to comprehend*, our *hermeneutics*, has or has not sufficient dimension at its disposal."³¹

It must be emphasized that the conjunction of the divine (the angel) and the human is *not incarnation* on the sensible plane of material history and chronological events. Rather, it is accomplished in the realm of active Imagination, whose function is precisely to extract, as in the alchemical *opus*, the subtle organism of light, the soul, from its obfuscation in the opacity of a purely temporal existence. The *conjunctio* takes place on the plane of the events of the soul, which is the place of what Paracelsus called "true imagination." The saving event is the purification, recovery and resurrection of the "true imagination", of the *astrum in homine* (Paracelsus). The essential function of imagination is not to construct something unreal (imaginary), but to effect the transmutation and dematerialization of sensory data, to change the physical datum, imprinted upon the senses, into a pure, unblemished mirror, a spiritual transparency. In this sense, the activity of imagination is the same as that of *ta'wīl*: to unveil the hidden reality of things, to occultate (make problematic) the apparent and to manifest the hidden. Consequently, the appearance of the angel cannot take place on the plane of the earthly, historical and physical humanity; it is not incarnation but theophany, a divine anthropomorphosis on the level of the spiritual universe. Every angelophany is theophany and vice versa.³²

We must now return to the Zoroastrian/Suhrawardian angelology. A characteristic feature of Zoroastrianism is that Ohrmuzd (the Avestan Ahura Mazda) or the "Lord of Wisdom", always appears surrounded by six Powers of Light forming the divine Heptad (a group of seven). These seven Zoroastrian angels, however, are not simply "aspects" of the supreme divinity, but Seven Powers (*Amahraspands*), the Seven Avestan *Amerta Spenta*, "the Holy Immortals". Their holiness is an active and activating energy that communicates and grants being to all things. Furthermore, there is among the seven Archangels something like a *unio mystica*, which, according to Corbin, differentiates the divine Heptad from the official monotheism as well as from the current ways of describing polytheism. We are confronted here with kathenotheism: *each* of the angels of the Heptad can be meditated in turn as "actualizing the totality of

the relations common to the others.”³³

The basic function of the supreme Archangels is to exercise providential and creative activity over various sectors of creation — men, animals, fire, metals — a work in which they are helped by *Yazatas*. Every earthly being has thus a heavenly archetype or angel. Corbin insists that this dual structure of all beings (*dualitude*) must be distinguished from the Manichean type of *dualism*. Within a *dualistic* framework, the revelation of Being-Light (*Xvarnah*) is conceivable only in hierarchical terms, i.e., as a progressive degradation occultation of the Light, beings who possess a more intense degree of light exercise dominion over those who have a lesser degree of Light, while the latter are subordinated to the former. The procession of the Many from the One is schematized in accordance with the relation between dominion and subordination. But this relation, which obtains at all levels of being, is essentially a relation of love; the lesser lights are attracted by the source from which they “emanate.” The result is that the totality of beings is envisioned as an order, a hierarchy of couples (syzigies) corresponding to the distribution of the degree of enlightenment or obfuscation. The *élan* of love is nothing less than the aspiration, the nostalgia of beings to re-emerge from their darkness, a process of the redemption of Light through the instrumentality or the medium of love.³⁴

What we are witnessing here, in effect, is the identification of the Zoroastrian angels with the Platonic Ideas. According to Corbin, this identification is a major “spiritual fact” of Suhrawardī’s Oriental theosophy. It is not the result of superficial syncretism, but of a direct personal vision followed by *ta’wīl*, an angelological interpretation of the Platonic theory of Ideas.³⁵

In Suhrawardī’s scheme, every species of beings (for example, the species of plants) has a tutelary angel taking care of that species and is called “the Lord of the Species.” The difficulty we are facing here is to understand the kind of ontological participation (*methexis*) that occurs between the angel of the species (the celestial archetype or hypostasis) and the individual exemplifications of this species. The angel of each species is not a sort of collective entity, not the universal of the species in which particular beings participate. For Suhrawardī, an angel is neither a logical universal nor personified abstraction (allegory) nor a concrete singular existing in the sensible world, but a

"spiritual form", the essence of an individual. For example, we can speak of the Socraticity of Socrates, which is neither a logical universal nor the individual Socrates of the sensible world. "Socraticity . . . is a spiritual form of the individual being, because the principle of individuation is not the matter, as in Aristotelian Thomism, but form."³⁶

Corbin's point, stressed throughout his work, is that we must not limit the notion of the concrete to the sensible world, because there are also *spiritual concrete* entities ("spiritual realism") possessing their own kind of unity and their own specific "concrete" determination. These specific "unities" (Avicenna's specific individualities) are what Suhrawardī means by angels and the only way of apprehending them as such is to posit the ontological *sui generis* reality of the *mundus imaginalis*, which is the theatre of their apparition (*mazhar*). The tragedy of our culture, in Corbin's opinion, consists in the inability to perceive essences otherwise than in the form of logical universals. One can write a theoretical philosophical treatise by manipulating logical universals; or, alternatively, one can write or make history (or a novel) by arranging concrete singulars. But one writes a mystical epic or a visionary recital (recital of initiation) only by means of metaphysical universals, i.e., by means of essences manifesting themselves on the level of the *mundus imaginalis*.³⁷

Angel is a "metaphysical universal" or better a "*spiritual individuality*" existing in itself and for itself, an Intelligence that belongs to the world of Light, and as such it cannot become immanent (incarnated) in the world of matter. It is equally inadmissible to think of the angel as a model existing for the sake of those who are below him. The angel is a person-archetype and in this sense a "model", but this does not mean that he *needs* his species (the individuals). The angel exists not for the sake of the species governed by him, but the other way around: the species exist for the sake of the angel: it is the angel who is the finality of the species which he governs because he is, *in person*, its *perfect state*. The species is the theurgy (icon, image) of the angel. Significantly, Suhrawardī calls the angel the "mother of the species," whose solicitude extends equally to the entire species and to *each* member of the species. He appears *every* time to *every* member of the respective species by individualizing himself as its Perfect Nature. In the case of man, the

Angel of Humanity (Tenth Intelligence or the Agent Intellect in Avicenna's cosmology, the Holy Spirit or the Angel Gabriel of theologians) individuates his relationship with each human individual as *his* Perfect Nature, for "the infinite price attached to spiritual individuality makes it inconceivable that salvation could consist in its absorption into a totality, even a mystical one."³⁸ It should not be without interest to note that the homologue of Perfect Nature in the *Upanishads* is called *sakshin*, "the man in man" who is also the eye-witness, looking on at, but not involved in, not sullied by the actions and inner states of man: "Two friends with beautiful wings, closely entwined, embracing one and the same tree; one eats its sweet fruit, the other does not eat, but looks on."³⁹

The mission of the Perfect Nature is to individuate the relationship of each gnostic to *his* angel, for man's total structure is that of bi-unity, a *unus-ambo*. There is an identity of essence without confusion of persons. From another perspective, what takes place between an individual and his Perfect Nature is *communicatio idiomatum*, an exchange of attributes. A similar thought is found in Buddhism, where the Buddha individuates his relationship with each follower of the Middle Path. The Japanese scholar Nishitani speaks of interpenetration or "interdependency of part upon part and of part and whole". This is best illustrated by the Hall of Mirrors, in which "each mirror (individual being) reflects (or 'contains') the central Buddha image as well as every other mirror in the hall (the universe). Thus the whole can be said to be *in* the part as truly as the part is *in* the whole"⁴⁰

We may summarize the basic themes of the Oriental theosophy as follows. First, there is the injunction to know oneself ("I know myself"). An analysis of this proposition leads to a fundamental distinction between "me" or "I", who is the knowing subject, and the Self, who is the known or recognized object. The first is the ego of our ordinary, quotidian experience; the second is the real, authentic, essential and permanent Self, the eternal archetype, "personal angel", "Perfect Nature" (Suhrawardī), "Witness in Heaven" (Sūfism), "Man of Light" (Gospel of Thomas), personal guide.

Second, we have the statement "He who knows himself (his 'soul') knows his Lord." Self-knowledge results in re-union of the

apparent "I" and the transcendent "I. To know oneself is to become (again) what I (potentially) am and have never ceased to be. Re-union is *return* to the celestial "I", the reality of which is that of a *mirror* facing me and in which I recognize myself, my real face. To break the mirror is to destroy this re-union.

In Suhrawardī's recitals, the relation between "I" and Self is typified by two wings of the angel Gabriel, the angel-archetype of humanity. The right wing is pure, absolute Light processing the *Nous*, the Perfect Nature. The left wing, turned towards non-being, has a dark imprint, the shadow processing the terrestrial soul and the world of mirage and illusion.⁴¹

To know oneself, then, is to know the "Giver of Forms," the *Dator formarum*, and to know the latter is to practise the fundamental maxim of the spirituals of Islam: he who knows himself, knows his Lord.⁴²

Finally we have the theme of *spiritual ascent*. Gnosis is salvific knowledge in the sense that salvation is effected by unveiling our *origin*: there is an interconnection, indeed identity between knowing *who we are* and knowing the place, the "where" from which we come, our provenance. This is the idea of history as a cycle closing upon itself and opening again at every instant. Our existence is only an episode "between two eternities", or rather, we proceed from eternity to eternity.⁴³

The upshot of the above is that the real being of the soul is not solitude, but *dualitude*. As a verse of the Qur'ān (51:49) has it: "Of every thing we have created pairs." In turn, dualitude implies pre-existence of the soul. The gnostic soul has a "history": it did not begin to be by coming into this world, but has "descended" from the *mundus imaginalis*. In gnostic terms, the "descent" is the result of a split, a laceration of a primordial wholeness. The permanent structure (wholeness) of the human being is dualitude, which Corbin consistently distinguishes from *duality* (dualism), imposed on man by "Occidental exile." Dualitude is "unity of essence without confusion of persons."⁴⁴ The formula *par excellence* of this kind of unity is the symbol $1 \times 1 = 1$: the unique multiplied by the Unique. What this symbol conveys is neither pseudomystical monism nor abstract monotheism isolating the personal divinity from the

worshipper. Dualitude means not that there are two unique entities added to each other so as to make up *two*, but rather that there are two unique entities, which multiplied by each other, make up precisely the one Unique.⁴⁵

NOTE and REFERENCES

1. Henry Corbin, *Spiritual Body*, p. 110. Spiritual or visionary perception should not be confused with *extrasensory* perception of physical facts or states of other minds. A visionary is perceptually aware of the existence and character of spiritual beings and events outside space and time as these terms are ordinarily understood. Suhrawardī's visions, his presence to the Light (*ishrāq*), enabled him to see that Zoroaster, the prophet of ancient Persia, belonged to the hierohistory of the people of the Book. It was because of this assertion of the validity of personal inspiration that Suhrawardī met his martyr's end.
2. See Corbin, *En Islam iranien* II, p. 41.
3. See *ibid.*, pp. 41–46.
4. See Corbin, "Le récit du Nuage Blanc", pp. 198, 252–54; cf. *En Islam iranien* III, pp. 243, 328. (The idea of universal prime matter is present among the Cambridge Platonists (*spissitudo spiritualis*) and the followers of Jacob Boehme and Swedenborg).
5. See Corbin, *Spiritual Body*, pp. 6–7; cf. *En Islam iranien* II, pp. 29–32; pp. 54–56.
6. See Corbin, *En Islam iranien* II, p. 85. *Doxa* or *aura gloriae* is represented in iconography by the luminous halo surrounding the priests and kings of Mazdean religion, and later the figures of the Buddha and Bodhisattvas, as well as the heavenly figures of primitive Christianity.
7. See Corbin, *En Islam iranien* II, p. 83; cf. pp. 88–91. The Light of Glory is the archetypal image of the soul, *Image Animae*, "the organ by which the soul perceives the world of light that is of the same nature as itself, and through which . . . the soul effects its transmutation of physical data" (Corbin, *Spiritual Body*, p. 14; cf. p. 29). There is a double or reciprocal reflection of the same Light: the world of things (material earth) becomes a mirror in which the soul sees itself and is enriched by this seeing. In its pre-existence, the soul was only capable of "global knowledge," i.e.,

knowledge of the metaphysical universals, whereas through its conjunction with the body it became capable of discerning "the minute particulars" (Blake) of things. The descent into darkness is not a gratuitous or absurd happening, but a necessary "fall" for it augments and diversifies the Light (see Corbin, *En Islam iranien* III, pp. 245—46).

8. See Corbin, *Creative Imagination*, p. 210.
9. Corbin, *Spiritual Body*, p. 10.
10. Annemarie Schimmel, *Mystical Dimensions of Islam* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1975), p. 261.
11. Corbin, "Cyclical Time in Mazdaism and Ismailism", p. 165.
12. *Ibid.*, pp. 137, 167
13. Corbin, *Creative Imagination*, p. 55.
14. *Ibid.*, p. 60.
15. *Ibid.*, p. 210.
16. *Ibid.*, p. 233; cf. pp. 121, 302.
17. Corbin, "Cyclical Time in Mazdaism and Ismailism", p. 139. In India it is said that "He takes the forms that are imagined by His worshippers" Cited in Coomaraswamy 2: *Selected Papers: Metaphysics*, ed. Roger Lipsey (Princeton University Press, 1977), p. 36. According to Plotinus, "all is offered but the recipient is able to take only so much (*Ennead* VI. 4. 3). The Thomistic principle has it that "the thing known is in the knower according to the mode of the knower" (cited in Coomaraswamy, *ibid.*, p. 36). Corbin in his use of the term "kathenotheism", follows Betty Heimann, *Indian and Western Philosophy, a Study in Contrasts* (London, 1937), p. 35).
18. Corbin, "Divine Epiphany and Spiritual Birth in Islamic Gnosis", p. 155.
19. See Corbin, *Creative Imagination*, p. 210.
20. See *ibid.*, pp. 105—107; cf. p. 173. Certain Jewish mystics interpreted the *Song of Songs* as a passionate dialogue between the human soul and the active angelic Intelligence (Holy Spirit, Angel Gabriel, *Madonna Intelligenza*). In his *Book of Theopanies*, Ibn 'Arabi writes: "For if you approach me: It is because I have approached you. I am nearer to you than yourself, than your soul, than your breath". (cited in Corbin, *Creative Imagination*, p. 175).
21. Corbin, "Divine Epiphany and Spiritual Birth in Ismaili Gnosis", p. 148; cf. *The Man of Light*, p. 11. In Manicheism and angelology of Valentinian gnosis, Christ's angels are Christ himself, because each Angel is Christ related to individual existence (see *ibid.*, p. 16).

22. Corbin, *ibid.*, p. 148; cf. *En Islam iranien* II, p. 133: "The *Imago Templi* and Secular Norms", p. 172.
23. Corbin, *The Man of Light*, p. 84.
24. *Ibid.*, p. 73.
25. Corbin, "Divine Epiphany and Spiritual Birth in Ismaili Gnosis", p.152.
26. Corbin, *Cyclical Time and Ismaili Gnosis* (London: Kegan Paul International, 1983), pp. 162—63.
27. *Ibid.*, p. 164.
28. Corbin, *The Man of Light*, p. 92.
29. *Ibid.*, p. 106.
30. *Ibid.*, p. 91.
31. *Ibid.*, p. 93.
32. See Corbin, *Creative Imagination*, p. 298, note 22.
33. Corbin, *Spiritual Body*, p. 8.
34. See Corbin, *En Islam iranien* II, pp. 107—110.
35. See *ibid.*, p. 114.
36. *Ibid.*, p. 263. Author's trans.
37. See *ibid.*, p. 265. Besides Suhrawardī's and Avicenna's recitals. Corbin mentions the *Ring of Niebelung*, *Roman de la Rose*, Raymond Lull's *The Philosophical Tree of Love*.
38. Corbin, *The Man of Light*, p. 16; cf. *En Islam iranien* II. bk. II. Chapter VI; Nasr, *Three Muslim Sages*, pp. 71—74. The Perfect Nature is the *agathos daimon* or *dimon paredros*, a personal protector "everywhere accompanying and leading the one in his care." As Poimander (in *Shepherd of Hermes*) says: "I am with thee everywhere". (cited in Corbin, *The Man of Light*, p. 27).
39. *Svetāśvatara Upanishad. The Principal Upanishads*, ed. Radhakrishnan (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1953), p. 733.
40. Keiji Nishitani, *Religion and Nothingness*, trans. with an Introduction by Jan Van Bragt (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982), pp. xi-xii; cf. pp. 148—53.
41. See Corbin, *En Islam iranien*, II, pp. 137, 298.
42. See *ibid.*, p. 329.
43. *Ibid.*, p. 265.
44. *Ibid.*, p. 3231 cf. p. 224.
45. See *ibid.*, p. 33; cf. p. 334. Apart from the Islamic gnosis, variations on the theme of *dualitude* are found in the Gospel of Thomas. The logion 84

speaks of "images which are in front of us." The image or the icon is pre-existent, eternal, and constitutes the integral person of the gnostic; it belongs to the world of *Malakūt*. The gnostics are the images of their angels, and he who meets the angel is meeting a *concrete* reality, his celestial Double, the alter ego. Similar thoughts are also found in the "Acts of Thomas" (Chapters 108--13), containing the "Song of the Pearl" or "Hymn of the Soul", in "Gospel of John" (the episode of the Samaritan), in the "Book of *Pistis Sophia*", in Mandeian and Mazdean gnosis, Liturgy of Mithra, in alchemy, in Swedenborg, Balzac, etc. (see Corbin, *En Islam iranien* II, pp. 308--309).