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The Transient and the Absolute

An Interpretation of the Human Condition and of Human Endeavor

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MORDECAI ROSHWALD

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To the beloved memory
of Miriam,
my companion
through the winding path of life.

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Introduction

The title and the subtitle of the present work, though intended to define and announce its subject matter, require some clarification to fulfill this function. Let us start with the subtitle, or its components.

"An interpretation" sounds quite modest. It stands in place of "a theory," which would have been much bolder. The temptation to call the present attempt "a theory" was rejected due to certain misgivings. A theory, as is well-known, tries to offer a full and exhaustive explanation of the subject to which it is addressed. We make no claim to such a full and comprehensive explanation of man's condition and endeavor. We might have used the phrase "a philosophical interpretation" instead of "an interpretation," were it not that the epithet "philosophical" would evoke images either of a rigorous and technical discipline, or, at the other extreme, of a vague and inarticulate outlook. The present attempt is neither of these. It is conceived in a direct, nontechnical manner, which may have been characteristic of philosophy in its earlier stages, when it meant "pursuit of knowledge and wisdom" addressed to fundamental and universal matters. In this sense this *is* a philosophical interpretation. However, to avoid misunderstanding due to the current usages or misusages of the word "philosophy" or "philosophical," the simpler term "interpretation," unqualified by ambitious epithets, was employed. Indeed, the wording chosen was "*an* interpretation," to allow for other valid and possibly coexistent interpretations.

Yet, to counterbalance our self-restraint and humility, the rest of the subtitle testifies to the ambitious nature of the project. For the thing to be interpreted is nothing less than "the human condition and human endeavor." "Human" is a description which covers men and women every-where and in all times—at least since there has been evidence of the nature of human beliefs and institutions. In this sense the present attempt is within the realm of what is sometimes referred to as "philosophical anthropology," a discipline which tries to understand the universal man in universal terms.

The present work is addressed to man as a social being and to man as a solitary creature. It does not prejudge human condition and endeavor by a commitment to a psychological, or an economic, or a sociological, or a religious or any other established approach aiming at the comprehension of humanity. It may be all of these, some of these or none of these. What approach is actually adopted and how it can be characterized should become clear in due course.

Why do we make a distinction between human condition and human endeavor? The reason for it is in the assumption, which can be corroborated by observation and experience, that man is subject to certain conditions of biology and environment and attempts to shape his existence by a deliberate effort. The dividing line between these two aspects of human experience is not always clear. In a broad sense, it could be said that civilization in its diverse manifestations is the expression of human endeavor rather than of human condition. Technology, from the most primitive artifacts to recent sophistication in the diverse branches of production, as well as political and social institutions, arts and sciences, all testify to the wide range of human endeavor. They may, however, affect the human condition. Findings in medicine may prolong and improve man's biological condition. Military techniques and technology may endanger, or safeguard, the existence of communities and nations. On the other hand, civilization or culture in any given society may be conceived as one of the aspects of the human condition into which each individual is born. We do not choose the place and culture of our birth, but are placed in a given setting. Thus, the conditions under which we live are not limited to biological factors and geophysical and geographical environment, but encompass the social and cultural environment as well. Yet, to emphasize the endeavor again, not only the social institutions and the cultural achievements are, in the last resort, the products of man's endeavor and creativity, but man also affects his geographical limitations by physical mobility, his geophysical conditions by technical inventions, his biological constraints by scientific findings and techniques, his very existence by crime and warfare.

If the upshot of this cursory analysis is that the distinction between the human condition and human endeavor is blurred and that the two are intertwined, the distinction still remains valid. It remains objectively true that there are certain conditions to which man is subject, as there are certain regions which can be affected and controlled by human action. This objective situation is also reflected in human perception: we know that there are limitations to what we can achieve by the combined effort of reason, passion and will; but we are also aware that we are not mere pawns dropped on the chessboard and moved by an invisible hand, but remain, to some extent, the players. What is the extent of human participation in human destiny, what are the limits of human endeavor, how far can the conditions be pushed? This is a matter on which individual, as well as cultural, perceptions differ. Some people may virtually submit to fate, while others think that the "sky is the limit." Hardly any civilization, and probably very few individuals, go to the extreme of total acceptance of conditions, or to the opposite of unlimited trust in man's capacity to shape his destiny.

The distinction between the human condition and human endeavor is not only valid, but it is also significant, for it brings to our attention the fact that we, as human beings, if not the masters of our destiny, are participants in the shaping of our lot. The fault for our failing is not entirely in our stars, but to some extent in ourselves. We may be active contributors to our success, as we may be active participants in our failures. We cannot abrogate our part of the responsibility for our fortunes. We can attempt to improve our lot on earth, as we can undermine and destroy the conditions of our existence.

Which of these two ways is characteristic of man? Is man a constructive, or a destructive creature? Are his endeavors beneficial, or harmful? These fundamental questions have been a subject of controversy. Some opinions have followed or echoed the dictum that "the imagination of man's heart is evil from his youth."[1] The notion of the original sin has played a formidable role in the Christian theology. Sigmund Freud's psychoanalytic theory is in some ways analogous to it. These positions seem to stress the sinful and destructive factors in human behavior, or even human condition. Other approaches emphasize the possibility of a rational and beneficent civilization. Thus Plato designed his model society.[2] Francis Bacon envisaged a society guided by reason and science.[3]

Which of these basic attitudes is right? Is human endeavor constructive, or destructive? Are we the victims of our sin, whether original, or acquired? Or are we our own saviours—potentially, if not actually?

There is no clear-cut answer to these questions. They seem to be as enigmatic today as they were centuries and millennia ago. The evidence of times past and of the present points to the paradoxical conclusion that humanity both promotes its well-being and undermines it; that it is committed to its welfare and its destruction. This conclusion echoes the Zoroastrian perception of the forces of good and evil contending with each other on a cosmic scale. Whatever may be happening in the cosmic order, or disorder, the earthly situation seems to support the notion of such a struggle.

Be this as it may, the present work does not address the ethical problem of humanity. It does not attempt to unravel the forces of good and evil in human endeavor, or the elements of good and bad in the human condition. At least, this is not a problem to be tackled directly, even if we shall conclude this study with some broad, normative observations. The ostensible and primary aim of this study is to comprehend man's condition and endeavor. We shall try to show how two general principles dominate human experience, appearing and reappearing in different forms and guises. These two principles, announced in the title of the present work, require some introductory explanation as well.

"The transient and the absolute" is a title which suggests a contrast, two opposed principles facing each other. This, indeed, has been our intention in selecting and juxtaposing the two concepts. Yet if this was the intent, was the choice adequate? Is "the absolute" the clear-cut opposite of "the transient"? Are they on the opposing sides of the same axis? Or is there a basic asymmetry between the two concepts? Let us examine the point.

If "transiency" indicates the phenomenon of quick passage through time, it should have been confronted with its opposite from the dimension, or universe of discourse, of *time*—namely, with "permanence." If the intent was to express the *substantive* contrast between change and stability, the title should have been "the changing and the immutable." If the intention was to oppose the relatively insignificant with the all-important, some such evaluative terms as "the trivial and the weighty" should have been selected. If the *relationship* to other factors and conditions was the foundation of the distinction, the title should have been "the relative and the absolute."

Instead, the title contrasts "the transient" with "the absolute." Seemingly, it picks out the first concept from the realm of *time* perception and its alleged opposite from the domain of *relationships*, and disregards the stricter logical demand of using the opposites within one sphere of discourse.

Yet the juxtaposition of "the transient" with "the absolute" is neither incidental nor arbitrary. In selecting these particular concepts and juxtaposing them with one another, our intention was to indicate the central argument of the present work. "The transient" stands for those aspects of human experience which are fleeting, changing, depending on other factors, while "the absolute" expresses the elements which are thought to be permanent, which are conceived as immutable, which are independent, or virtually independent, of circumstances. Obviously, the absolute, endowed with all these qualities, is viewed as weightier than things transient. Moreover, "the absolute" also conveys the sense of perfection, which not only contrasts with the fleeting experiences, but also elevates it above them. Thus the absolute is not simply an opposite to what is not absolute, but it is the perfect, or what is perceived as perfect, against which the other experiences fade into a vast multitude of imperfections.

It is these various nuances and associations which "the absolute" and "the transient" evoke that make the title of the present work representative of the idea developed in the following pages, namely, that the two principles and their occasional juxtaposition inform and affect human condition and human endeavor. Consequently, tracing these principles will provide a significant insight into human experience.

Indeed, this work will attempt to show that the notions of the transient and the absolute are central to human outlook, and it will illustrate how these two principles are expressed in different ways and under diverse guises in various spheres of man's life. The two elements, confronting each other, become manifest in individual consciousness, in communal institutions, in religion, in politics, in art, in science, in philosophy. As this is a universal phenomenon, though the pattern of the transient and the absolute may vary in diverse civilizations, we are facing here a broad common denominator of human experience.

The role of the transient and the absolute in man's condition and endeavor can be addressed from two different starting points. One way would be to assert the objective role of these principles. This would attribute to the transient and the absolute a metaphysical status, an existence transcending human experience and essentially independent of it, even if the two principles are reflected also in man's awareness and life. If, for example, we should assert that God, or truth, or beauty are absolute principles or entities, while wind, or sunshine, are transient, these entities and phenomena may be deemed as existing or appearing objectively, whether perceived by human beings or not. Of course, once the objective situation concerning absolutes and transients is ascertained, human relationship to it or involvement in it may be worthwhile to examine.

Another way, which we shall use, follows the subjectivist approach. Rather than starting with an objective truth, which may be difficult to substantiate, it will look at the consciousness of the individual as the starting point. To be sure, "the individual" really means the subjective "I," the introspective and observant myself, and it is extended to other selves on the assumption of the basic similarity of the perceptive and emotional faculties of human beings. Such an assumption amounts, in fact, to a statement of the *objective* existence of others. In this sense, the position transcends pure subjectivism, which would lead to solipsism.

Therefore, when we choose the seemingly subjectivist approach, this is not done with the conviction that it is superior to the objectivist stand: as we have seen, it does not, it cannot, remain *purely* subjectivist. Our choice may be partially due to a personal preference, and partially due to a conviction that our thesis will be made more understandable and plausible, when argued from the standpoint of the individual awareness. The way the transient and the absolute are experienced by *me* can be reproduced, with relative ease, by the individual readers, for whom therefore I presume to speak. Indeed, we may refer to the individual in general, assuming a basic uniformity of human experience. On this seemingly fragile point, which is widely accepted, however, the subsequent edifice can be built.

Chapter 1

Personal Experience

We start with the assumption that the source of the distinction between the transient and the absolute is in the personal experience—my experience and the similar experience of other human beings. This personal experience is gained from introspection and from observation of what appears to us to be the world around us.

One's awareness of oneself proceeds on two tracks, as it were. On the one hand, we see ourselves as living creatures whose lives are limited in time, who come into existence through a biological process, and who disappear after a period of time through biological decay. In this sense, we see ourselves as not essentially different from other living creatures. We are fully aware of the transient nature of our existence.

This awareness is built on viewing our immediate surroundings. We witness birth and death, youth and old age, in human beings and in animals. We see ourselves—through our sensations and in the mirror—as changing. Moreover, the stories about our ancestors and the reading of history impress on our minds the transiency of human life, the fleeting nature of the existence of even the most powerful and the most illustrious. "Man is like to vanity: his days are as a shadow that passeth away,"[1] as the Psalmist eloquently conveys this awareness.

On the other hand, however, we have also another sense of ourselves. Although man may be changing and is aware of it, he also has a sense of his own identity as something fixed and fundamentally immutable. When he says "I," he may feel that referring to himself at fifty he refers to the same person who was at one time only twenty, fifteen, ten years old. The person has grown, developed, learned many things, performed certain functions in society, and yet, in some basic sense, remained the same. "I" retains its fundamental identity, irrespective of the passage of time.

This awareness of the stable self has further consequences. It seems to deny the evidence of the transiency of the individual existence. The "absolute self," if we may call it so, has all the world reflected within itself and absorbed by itself. It is the depository of all the experiences and acquired knowledge of the individual. One's mind can be likened, to use modern analogy, to a combination of chips on which knowledge of diverse nature can be collected in an endless succession. The entire universe—from astronomy to microbiology—can be inscribed in one's mind or soul. And not only knowledge, but also emotions, ambitions, strivings, hopes, dreams, involvements are found there in one proximity, in a single bundle. The next person, as well as the entire humanity, can be stored there. The initiative to further explore and to act originates there and guides the behavior of the individual. The chips are ever active and expanding.

Can all this immense wealth be annihilated in a trice—by a piece of lead, or an invisible microbe or virus—or come to an end through gradual physical decay? Can the world—for the whole world is encapsuled in the individual's mind—be destroyed by a triviality? This is hard to perceive, and so the "I" sees itself as something which must last forever. It is hard for it to think of itself as a passing phenomenon, as a brief interlude between nothing and nothing. Nor does it make sense for it to consider itself as a mere nervous system with a relatively highly developed brain. It is difficult for it to see itself as one specimen of a species which has evolved from a protozoon over a span of millions of years. The very capacity of the "absolute I" to reflect on such possibilities, to look at them in a detached way, from the so-called scientific perspective, *sub specie aeternitatis*, lends it a quality of eternity, of timelessness, of perfection, of absoluteness.

And yet, this "I" has also the capacity of reflecting that this absoluteness is a mere illusion, that it is a subjective feeling which has no support in other observable data, except the peculiar self-awareness and the confidence in its own unconditional existence. The "absolute I" may marvel at its splendid self-awareness, and yet conclude that in the last resort this awareness is only a figment of the other's, the "transient I's," imagination, yearning, wishful thinking. The supposedly "absolute I" may conclude that it is only a mirror of the real but transient "I," and that the mirror is not truthful but augments and perfects the real "I" into a grand illusion, the illusion of an "absolute I."

Such doubts, if they are entertained, can rarely be accepted by human beings with graceful resignation. It is extremely difficult for the rich and manifold awareness of man, which can contain vast knowledge, capacity of artistic and intellectual enjoyment and creation, diverse sentiments and emotions, to accept itself as a passing phenomenon. It does not make sense to us—intellectually and emotionally—to exist for a brief time only, if we can absorb knowledge of millennia and concern ourselves with eternal truths. Therefore, if we are not confident that our personality, in its self-awareness as an absolute, is actually immortal or eternal, we are fiercely attracted to some other manifestations of reality, or what we may perceive as reality, which will be deemed as absolute. Or we may create something to which we attribute the quality of the absolute. Indeed, even if we retain the confidence in our ‘‘absolute I,’’ we tend to look for absolute reality outside it, we want to extend the domain of the absolute. Thus, it can be said, that we cling to the notion of the absolute, whether we are confident of the absolute nature of our souls or minds or not. We seek the absolute by sublimation of our yearnings, if we lose the confidence in our own absoluteness; or by the extension of our quest, if we retain that confidence. The need for the absolute is at the root of our existence.

Yet, at the same time, we remain aware of the transient aspect of our existence, of the changing and passing nature of the current life. Thus our lives progress, as it were, on two roads—the high road of the absolute and the low road of the transient. In some individual cases, as well as in certain civilizations, one road or the other becomes dominant. Some philosophies or religions stress the absolute almost to the exclusion of the transient, and the adherents to such beliefs are deeply affected by them. Then there are societies in which the sense of transiency is, by and large, the ruling principle. Yet it is virtually impossible to find cases in which one of the two elements is totally absent. It can be said that humanity as we have known it proceeds along the two roads, leads a dual existence, expressing the twofold awareness of man. Of course, the adjustment of the two orientations in life varies with individuals, as well as with cultures, though the dual perspective persists.

While the awareness of the transiency and the quest for the absolute, or, for that matter, the concern for the transient and the sense of the absolute, coexist in human mind—and its extension, human culture—the relationship between these two elements is somewhat enigmatic. The dual awareness of the ‘‘I’’ would suggest a constant grappling and struggle, a fierce internal dialogue, an attempt to find a logical, or emotionally satisfying, solution. Yet, while this occasionally takes place, it is not usually the rule. Normally, man follows the urges, or imperatives, of his two selves along parallel lines, without attempting to bring them into a unified and consistent system. Instead of a dialogue, the two selves each conduct their own monologue, without listening to the other self. The eternal soul and the mind involved in daily affairs may be aware of each other, but they tend to refrain from a dialogue, probably because of the realization that the paradoxical nature of human existence cannot be resolved, that man must remain a dual creature, tied to the transient and the absolute at the same time. The two parallel lines of consciousness defy the geometrical definition and occasionally touch—as we have shown above in our analysis—but then they drift apart and follow their separate paths. The individual—and the culture—find an accommodation between the two principles, but this is mostly a practical adjustment and not a logical or harmonious coordination.

Thus the care for one's health and the concern for the immortality of the soul, the search for bargains in the store and the seeking of eternal scientific truths, the digging in the garden and the experience of the beauty of a musical composition coexist with one another without actually meeting each other. We pursue both paths, and we are aware of doing so, but we do not measure one by the yardstick of the other, for, despite some valiant philosophical and theological efforts, in the last resort they do not have a common denominator.

The basic duality of the human condition and way-of-life is sensed and indirectly expressed in the story of creation in the first chapter of Genesis. The philosophical perception there is expressed with deceptive simplicity. After God had created heaven and earth and after the creation of vegetation and diverse species of living creatures—from whales and fish to winged fowl, cattle and creeping things—God created man. Yet this act is not just a sequel to, another episode in, the creation of the world and the living creatures; for God created man "in his own image," after his likeness.[2]

This account clearly conveys the puzzlement of its writer, or the folk tradition that composed or sustained the story, about the nature of man. On the one hand, any observer can see that mankind is just another of the species of living creatures, sharing with them various biological characteristics. This notion is expressed by the inclusion of man in the general account of creation. Yet we face the peculiar addition that man was created in the image of God. Thus the story expresses the awareness that man, though in one sense a part of the living kingdom, in another sense is peculiar and different. Although this is not articulated in the story, this difference includes human capacity to create artifacts, to form a way-of-life, to shape a civilization and—a point indicated in the biblical account—the capacity to rule over the animal kingdom. One could add that man has the capacity and the inclination to reflect—including the reflection about the world he lives in and about his own condition—a tendency practiced in the first chapter of Genesis. These peculiar characteristics of man are symbolically expressed in the notion that he was created in the image of God.

The image of God is, in the biblical context, a rather vague concept. It is not God as painted by Michelangelo on the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel; it is not an anthropomorphic deity. On the contrary, it is man who is conceived as theomorphic, while God remains an idea which cannot be given any visible or tangible form. Yet God remains a being absolute—

eternal, perfect, omnipotent. Man, by being created in the image of God, participates in this absoluteness in some undefined way. Perhaps he does it due to the sense of power which humanity succeeds to wield. It may be the capacity of and the quest for knowledge, or for ethical perfection, or a combination of both, that is humanity's share in the absolute. The nature of what is the image of God, or what it precisely symbolizes, is left vague in the biblical story, perhaps deliberately so. The notion, however, that man—transient as the other creatures—has also another side to him, namely, the absoluteness which is conveyed in the idea of God, is clearly suggested.

Another ancient text, from a different cultural orbit, expressed the idea of the absolute in man in its own peculiar way. Again the idea is conveyed in an indirect manner, implicitly, but it is not the worse for it.

The text in question is Plato's *Apology*, which is the speech of self-defense of Socrates before the popular court of Athens in 399 B.C. In this speech Socrates asserts his lifelong commitment to seek wisdom and to exhort his fellow citizens to care about knowledge and the improvement of their souls, attainable by the sincere quest for truth. In the words of Socrates, the protagonist of Plato's dialogue:

> Men of Athens, I honour and love you; but I shall obey God rather than you, and while I have life and strength I shall never cease from the practice and teaching of philosophy, exhorting any one whom I meet and saying to him after my manner: You, my friend, . . . are you not ashamed of heaping up the greatest amount of money and honour and reputation and caring so little about wisdom and truth and the greatest improvement of the soul.[3]

"Money and honour and reputation" appear to be transient values, while "wisdom and truth and the greatest improvement of the soul" seem to be absolute values. It is the latter that Socrates sees as the desirable focus of human endeavor, and so he regards it his duty to explain to his fellow human beings the role and importance of these pursuits in the scheme of human existence.

Socrates' commitment to the absolute, which involves both the teaching of truth and virtue and living according to them, is unconditional. He himself sets an example of a conduct and life in accordance with his convictions: whatever he considers as absolute overrides what he views as transient. Life as it is manifested in man's terrestrial existence is a transient phenomenon, while virtue, the right way of conduct, is an absolute imperative. Therefore, he declares to his judges: "Either acquit me or not; but whichever you do, understand that I shall never alter my ways, not even if I have to die many times."[4]

The assertion of the absolute is also reflected in Socrates' reaction to the death sentence inflicted on him. While admitting ignorance of the meaning of death, he explores the possibility that "death is a journey to another place, and there . . . all the dead abide." Socrates welcomes such an eventuality, for it would enable him to continue his commitment to seek truth and to insist that others follow in his path: "I shall then be able to continue my search into true and false knowledge; as in this world, so also in the next; and I shall find out who is wise, and who pretends to be wise, and is not."[5] The mission of Socrates, his commitment to what he thinks of as being of absolute worth, does not alter in the other world. Possibly, the statement of Socrates here has a touch of irony. Even so, the capacity to exericise irony in the face of death is itself an assertion of the absolute spirit over the transient physical life.

The intimations of Socrates in *The Apology* are developed into a doctrine in another Platonic dialogue, *Phaedo*. There the idea is put forward, directly and explicitly, that man consists of body and soul, and while the former is transient, the latter is immortal: "the soul is in the very likeness of the divine, and immortal, and intellectual, and uniform, and indissoluble, and unchangeable; and . . . the body is in the very likeness of the human, and mortal, and unintellectual, and multiform, and dissoluble, and changeable."[6]

It could be suggested that the self-assertion of Socrates as an individual whose moral convictions overcome the limitations of his earthly existence, which is the picture provided by *The Apology*, is extended, developed and generalized into the theory that man has a soul which is the absolute element which should guide the individual, as it guided Socrates. Man who is ruled by the soul is virtuous, while he who allows his body, with its desires and pleasures, to dominate the soul pollutes it and corrupts his personality.[7]

The way to the perfection and improvement of the soul is by concentration on reflection, on pure thinking, on essences which are immaterial and unchanging.[8] The eternal essences are the subject matter of intellectual contemplation and they range from geometry to ethics. Reflection on truth—absolute truth in the realm of numbers, beauty, right—is the supreme exercise for the soul. Pursuing the truth about these essences is the task of the philosopher and in fulfilling this task he improves his soul, the absolute element in his personality. It would seem that this example is the way to perfection for humanity at large, and this would be the reason why Socrates had embarked on teaching his fellow citizens to care for "wisdom and truth and the greatest improvement of the soul."

The transfer of the sense of the "absolute I," and its contrast with the "transient I," into the doctrine of the transient body and the eternal soul has played a major role in the self-perception of mankind. Its clear articulation by Plato—who may have borrowed some of his ideas from the

Pythagoreans, themselves influenced by the Orphics—served as a foundation for adoption by Christianity, and to a lesser degree by Judaism.

Without entering into a detailed and intricate history of the perception of the soul in Christianity, there are a few salient features of this perception which should be pointed out. We need not explore here the role of the concept of the soul in Judaism, which is less central to this system of belief.

One peculiarity of the Christian belief is the relationship between the soul of the individual human being and God. While, as we have seen, Plato speaks of the soul as "the very likeness of the divine," the perfection of the soul is for him an end in itself. The attainment of such perfection is an immanent process and does not require a cooperation with or a reaching out to a transcendant being, to God. In Christianity soul is not, in this sense, self-sufficient. The soul of the individual, which was created by God, strives to surrender to God. Although it may be distracted by sin, the soul's essential direction is the union with God. It wants to dissolve in God.

This relationship of the soul with God has certain paradoxical consequences. On the one hand, the individual soul is free: thus it can sin, or lead a person to a righteous life. But if, in this sense, it seems to be a sovereign entity, and enjoys (if this is the right word) free choice, it also benefits by divine grace which may help it to do the right thing. The significance of such divine help, the importance of God reaching out to man and thus assisting him to do right, is stressed in varying degree in diverse Christian denominations, but it forms a significant element in all.

This close and mutual relationship between the individual soul and God—man reaching out to God and God in his grace helping man—is the consequence of linking the Platonic doctrine of the soul with the Judeo-Christian concept of God as a being involved in human affairs. A compassionate deity cannot remain separate and aloof in respect of man; and man, the creation of God and created in the image of God, has, as it were, a built-in factor which makes him strive to unite with his creator. Thus, man's striving for the absolute in Christianity, while akin to the Platonic pursuit, also involves divine participation and close relationship of man with God.

There is another significant difference between the Platonic and the Christian perception of the soul. For Plato the activity and perfection of the soul is conceived as purely intellectual. It is the intellect, the dispassionate contemplation, the detached pursuit of truth, that constitutes the absolute in human existence and endeavor. For Christianity the activity—"the action" or "the act" would be more appropriate terms in this case—of the soul is not only intellectual. It involves intellect, passion and will. It is a total act. It is the whole, undivided personality that must turn to God. A mere intellectual exercise would not do. Indeed, the intellect may play a minor and insignificant role in the soul's act, which is an all-encompassing commitment, an act of faith.

Thus the transfer or the extension of the personal sense of the absolute into the doctrine of the soul in Christianity differs from that in Greek philosophy, despite the resemblance which is rooted in the influence of Greek thought on Christianity. The difference, in the last resort, is due to the substantive and "temperamental" divergence of philosophy and religion, of anthropocentric reflection and the passionate search for God, a transcendental, absolute being responsive to humanity.

Perhaps the most clear and emphatic linking of the awareness of self with the notion of mind or soul as an absolute substance can be found in the philosophy of René Descartes (1596–1650). In his search for certain knowledge, he starts from the assumption of total doubt. Consequently, he negates the existence of everything and regards sense perception as a delusion. Even so, he reaches the conclusion that even this thorough skepticism cannot deny the existence of the skeptic. By virtue of being the doubting thinker, he exists. The conclusion, of course, is not Descartes' private one, but is pertinent to humanity at large and to each individual man. One's body may not exist, one's sensing may be misleading, as the dream experience indicates. All may have to be discarded in the search for certainty, except the experience of reflection, which proves the existence of the reflecting man. In the words of Descartes: "Thinking? Here I find what does belong to me: it alone cannot be separated from me. *I am, I exist.*"[9]

This basic link between thinking and awareness of existence gives the mind, the thinking agent, a primary significance. Although, in the course of his speculative philosophy, Descartes sees the possibility for a valid perception of the physical world, he still asserts that "nothing is more easily and more vividly apprehended by me than my mind."[10] Moreover, while the human body is divisible, for a man can lose a limb, the human mind which is united to the body "is not thereby diminished."[11] While the body "is no longer the same, if a change takes place in the structure of some of its parts," the human mind remains always the same, even if it thinks, wills or senses diverse things. "Thus it follows, that while the body may, indeed, easily enough perish, the mind is in its own nature immortal."[12] Thus Descartes, in his peculiar philosophical reasoning, gives precedence to mind over body. The mind is the absolute, as compared with the transiency of human body. (The word "mind" is in this context the translation of the Latin *mens* used by Descartes, though in the French version of the exposition of his philosophy he refers to "l'esprit, ou l'âme de l'homme," that is to say, "spirit or soul.")

It appears from his general argument that Descartes sees the thinking process as the essence of the human spirit or soul, even though it has other capacities. Thus, we can conclude, it is the self-awareness of the "I," revealed in the fundamental doubt of Descartes, that became enthroned as the supreme and immortal soul.[13] Indeed, one could rephrase his famous statement "Cogito, ergo sum" (I think, therefore I am)[14] and suggest that his argument can be summed up by saying: "Cogito, ergo anima est" (I think, therefore the soul exists). The absoluteness of the soul or mind is established as the cornerstone of the human condition.

The notion of the nature and peculiar condition of man is expressed with great sensitivity by Descartes' younger contemporary, Blaise Pascal (1623–1662). As Pascal allows free play to his sentiments, and not only to reasoning, his statements often take a poetic quality, which Descartes' rigorous thinking does not allow. This approach may be the reason why Pascal addresses not only the greatness of humanity, but also its weakness, an aspect which Descartes by and large ignores. To put it in our terms, Pascal stresses the transient, besides pointing to the absolute, in the human condition.

Some of his reflections seem to echo Descartes, in stressing the thinking capacity of man as against his physical aspect: "I can indeed imagine a man without hands, feet . . . I cannot, however, imagine man without thought: it would be a stone or a brute."[15] Or Pascal simply extols reason in man in a categorical statement: "Thought forms the greatness of man."[16]

Yet Pascal also stresses the transient nature of man: "Man is but a reed, the weakest in the realm of nature . . . There is no need for the entire universe to arm itself in order to crush him: a vapor, a drop of water is sufficient to kill him." Yet this painful consciousness of the fragility of man is juxtaposed with the capacity to think which asserts human dignity and greatness. For if Pascal states that "Man is but a reed, the weakest in the realm of nature," he immediately adds: "but a thinking reed." And even though he can be so easily crushed and destroyed, "should the universe crush him, man would still be nobler than that which kills him, for he knows that he is dying and recognizes the advantage which the universe has over him, the universe knows nothing of it." Thus the loneliness of man in the universe is juxtaposed with his awareness, with the capacity to think, which lends him dignity. "All our dignity, therefore, is in thought."[17]

The contradictory dual condition of man is apparent also from another, moral perspective, which constitutes another aspect of humanity. It is important that man be made aware of it and avoid a one-sided self-perception. "It is dangerous to stress and make man see how much he is like the beast, without showing him his greatness. It is also dangerous to insist and make him see his greatness without his baseness." Man is neither like a beast nor like an angel.[18] This awareness of his duality and of his limitations does not absolve man from the endeavor to favor one element in himself over the other. Man should approve of himself, "because his nature makes him capable of good; but this must not make him love the baseness in himself." Man should "hate the lust in himself . . . so that it does not blind him to make his choice, and that it does not stop him when he will have made his choice."[19]

The moral overtones, which are often discernible in the distinction between the transient and the absolute, are most explicit and emphatic in the case of Pascal. He not only extols human reason, but also man's potential goodness, which can be regarded as another absolute. He wants man to adhere to the goodness in himself, and overcome his baseness. He wants man to ally himself with the noble element in himself. This insistence is linked to Pascal's religious belief, an aspect which need not concern us here. However, we can transcribe Pascal's stand to our inquiry and present it in our perspective: he not only discerned the absolute element in the human condition, but, in advocating moral commitment, he presented the absolute as a major objective of human endeavor.

The glorification of the absolute in man as against the transient in him, which has been exemplified in the various instances above, must not make us ignore the fact that in some cases it is the transient condition which is felt more deeply, while the absolute, or the "I" which tries to attain the sense of its absoluteness, is given up in the face of the realization of human finiteness. A few examples will illustrate the point.

Thus complains Job: "My days run swifter than a weaver's shuttle, and come to an end without hope. Remember that my life is wind: mine eye shall not return to see good . . . As the cloud is spent and gone, so he that descendeth underground shall not rise."[20] There is here a sense of despair about the possibility of a continuation of human existence after the end of the transient stay on earth. The image of the weaver's shuttle conveys the idea of transiency in terms of a pastoral civilization. The simile of a vanishing cloud expresses the same idea in cosmic terms. There is a touch of bitter irony in the verse "Remember that my life is wind." The original Hebrew word, translated by "wind," is *ruaḥ*, which also means "breath" and "spirit." Thus, *ruaḥ* may stand for the breath of life and the spirit of God, as well as for wind, both strong wind and the ethereal movement of air which symbolizes a thing without substance, a fleeting and hardly noticeable phenomenon. Using the word *ruaḥ* to describe human life, Job apparently wants to convey the idea that the spirit of man, with its alleged aspirations to divine origin and affinity with the absolute, is no more than a passing movement of air with affinity to nothingness.

In a similar vein writes Ecclesiastes:

> For that which befalleth the sons of men and befalleth the beast is one and the same: as the one dieth, so dieth the other, and they have all one spirit; and the advantage of man over beast amounts to nothing: for all is vanity. All go unto one

> place; all are of the dust, and all return unto the dust. Who knoweth the spirit of the sons of man, whether it goeth upward, and the spirit of the beast, whether it goeth downward to the earth?[21]

The Hebrew *ruaḥ*, which appears here again, is translated as "spirit," but it could also mean "breath of life." Whatever the association, however, the Preacher reduces human spirit to that of the animals, and both to nothing. The absolute in man is given up in despair.

Here is an example from around 1600, expressed in English verse, in which the poet, facing the tombs in the Westminster Abbey, comments on the human condition:

Mortality, behold and fear,
What a change of flesh is here!
Think how many royal bones
Sleep within these heaps of stones . . .
Where from their pulpits seal'd with dust
They preach, "In greatness is no trust." . . .
Here the bones of birth have cried
"Though gods they were, as men they died!"[22]

The aspiration to greatness, and the glory and the power which kings attain, does not reflect upon or affect the individuals concerned beyond their temporary earthly existence. They may have been "gods" during their lifetime, but this was but a fleeting status. If the condition even of the most illustrious men is of a transient nature, ordinary human beings can certainly expect no more hold on eternity.

In a similar vein, a modern Italian poet expresses his despair of the cherished values of man—the imagined absolutes—in face of the futility of human efforts and endeavors and the transiency of life. After despairing to penetrate the mystery of art, after seeking in vain for the mysteries of nature, after futile attempts to vindicate the oppressed, and so on, he reaches the following conclusion about human life and its significance:

Behind us a furrow,
sterile, oblique, slight,
remains. We lived in vain.

Before us, in darkness,
Death is without face.
—Glory!—We shall die in vain.[23]

Thus, individual life, leaving only a slight furrow, which is not even straight, and which remains sterile, is worthless and transient. Death, itself faceless and meaningless, cannot be redeemed by glory. The act of “Glory” at which man may clutch in an attempt to give meaning and absolute worth to his death remains an illusion; it, too, cannot redeem the reality of vanity and transiency.

Chapter 2

Theoretical Questioning

The doubts individuals experience about the reality and permanence of the "absolute I," the mind, the spirit, the soul, are expressed also on the theoretical-systematic level. What the poet conveys in an outcry of anguish, or the philosopher pronounces with the air of resignation, the disciplined and systematic mind of a scientist or a scientific theorist expresses in a dispassioned system or theory, and tries to substantiate it by factual evidence, rationally analyzed. These thinkers can reach their skeptical conclusions out of a direct pursuit of the problem, or stumble across them while pursuing a wider scientific endeavor.

Yet such conclusions are not above criticism. There is always a possibility that the argument is flawed, or the data on which the theory is based are not carefully scrutinized. Historical evidence shows that theories debunking all human claim to the absolute and those asserting the uniqueness and the spiritual nature of the mind or soul have vied with each other again and again. Antiquity had its materialistic atomists and their formidable opponents, such as Plato. Various forms of modern materialism have met their diverse critics and opponents, too.

While it is outside the scope of this study to explore the history of this controversy, we shall submit a brief exposition of three theories which imply a denial of the independent and sovereign soul or mind, and we shall attempt to show that such conclusion is not above doubt. This does not mean that the independence, let alone immortality, of the soul is thereby proven. It only indicates that the issue remains unresolved. It is this lack of resolution that is instinctively felt by the "I" and which motivates it to find an expression for its own yearnings for the absolute.

The three examples explored here are based in three different, though not unrelated, domains, namely, those of biology, anthropology and economics. In other words, they are based on the perception of man as a biological, biosocial and economic, or bio-socioeconomic, being.

The modern biological perception of man, his condition and endeavor, is firmly rooted in the evolutionary theory—primarily associated with the scientific research of Charles Darwin. The consequences of the theory of biological evolution are that man evolved from other, less developed, creatures, and these in turn had descended from still less developed beings. Thus, humanity is traced back to the most primitive forms of life.

This view is adopted and expressed by H. G. Wells:

> The prevailing opinion among men of science is that man, like all other mammals, is descended from ancestors of a lowlier kind, that he and the large apes, the chimpanzee, the orang-outang and the gorilla, had once a common ancestor, and that this ancestor was evolved from yet lower forms, from some earlier type of mammal which was itself descended from a theromorph reptile, and this again from a series of amphibians, and these from primitive fish.[1]

This line of thought has been pursued further to look for the simplest organisms as the origin of all life, and even to the point where the preorganic changed into the organic.

It is not the details of this reconstruction of evolution that are of interest to us. The important thing is the basic idea that man, *homo sapiens*—not only in the technical sense designating the species, but also in the literal sense, “man endowed with knowledge, wisdom”—originated from some creature which does not share his intelligence and his capabilities. The fact that the evolution of man from his humble origins took millions and millions of years cannot break the connecting chain. However far man may have gone in the evolutionary process, he is humbled and pulled down by the basic assertion that he is no more than the ultimate—ultimate so far—stage of a biological process. Whether looking at an aquarium, or exploring protozoa under a microscope, man, in a certain sense, to some degree, looks at himself.

To be sure, man has some very distinctive characteristics which he does not share with other living beings. Thus, as Julian Huxley points out,[2] man has the capacity for abstract thought and for synthesis. The first finds its expression in such a domain as mathematics, the second in art. Yet, though Huxley fully acknowledges the uniqueness of man as manifest in some of his faculties, he regards even these qualities as the product of a *biological* development. Even though man transcends his prehuman ancestors in such a distinctive way that allows him to create mathematics and art, as well as develop conscience—to name some of the peculiarities of humanity—he remains a biological phenomenon; he is the ultimate product of the chain of evolution. Thus, man is reduced to the status of a transient species. Whatever claim he may have to the absolute by pointing to his reason, his creativity, these are, in the last resort, only complex and sophisticated evolvements of a biological and transient process.

This conclusion can be countered by some arguments which point to the validity of the absolute. It can be said that the distinctive human intelligence and creativity, man's power of abstraction and of synthesis, to use Huxley's formulation, transcend biology and evolution. For while evolution is explained by biological determinism, abstract thinking and artistic creation cannot be explained without the autonomous nature of truth and the independent quality of beauty. Mathematical, scientific or philosophical conclusions claim to be true not because they are biologically beneficial, nor are they deemed false because they are detrimental to the survival of the species. They are true or false as determined by criteria which have nothing to do with biological survival and evolution, but are independent and sovereign, unchanging and absolute.

One can go one step further and point out that biology itself as a science, and evolution itself as a theory depend on the human mind, while the evolutionists see the mind as the product of evolution. This science and this theory could not come into being without the capacity and involvement of the mind in the exploration of reality and the formulation of propositions guided by certain valid and absolute yardsticks of reason. In the words of Joseph Needham, who broadens the statement to cover natural science at large: "Materialism . . . or what comes to the same thing, natural science regarded as a philosophy, suffers from one serious defect; namely, that being a theory it happens to be a product of mind. It is never easy to see on what ground a materialist can have sanction for his materialism, since materialism is nothing if not a system of thought."[3]

This argument, in fact, gives the mind, or the mental activity, the Cartesian *cogito*, primacy over the findings and conclusions of thought. It announces: "The reality of thought is assured; the reality of matter depends on thought." Or, to give it a Cartesian touch, one could say: "I think that the world is all matter; therefore it cannot be all matter." This argument does not abolish matter, but it gives preference to and assures the existence of thought. Indeed, one can still develop a theory of human nature which is essentially materialistic-biological, and yet have to admit that the grand edifice stands on a point which remains outside it. This point has a claim on the absolute.

Not only does thought as a sovereign factor exist, but it forms, along with its wide ramifications, a significant part of human essence. It constitutes an important drive in man's existence, in defiance of the assumptions of the evolutionary and materialistic theories. Had man, or human nature, been concerned only with biological survival and material conditions, there would be no place for those involvements of the mind which reach beyond physical needs. As pointed out by W. G. Everett, human values cannot be reduced to narrow utilitarian standards, and least of all "a mere multiplication of the means of physical welfare can ever satisfy a being who is capable of a passionate desire to know the truth, to feel the quickening power of beauty, and to reverence goodness."[4] It is these distinctive endeavors of man that have been singled out as his highest aspirations. Aristotle singled out the contemplative capacity, the activity of reason aiming at truth for its own sake, as the highest virtue.[5] Others, as noted, have added the quest of beauty and goodness.

The significant point of these assertions in the present context consists in the implications for the metabiological aspects of human endeavor, even if man's basic condition remains biological. Man may be rooted in the ground, but he reaches for the stars. He may be chained to the cycle of life and evolution, but he detaches himself in the quest for values which are not material. These values, as we have pointed out, are not determined by biological needs and by biological evolution. They belong to a different, nonmaterial and nonpragmatic category. They may be deemed to belong to the realm of the absolute.

Julian Huxley, who sees "the appearance of the human mind" as "the latest step in evolutionary progress," views man as transcending the natural process. For the mind enables man to steer the way of progress in a manner "less dilatory, less wasteful, and less cruel" than that of natural selection. Man can determine his own values, and direct change according to them. "To put the matter in another way, progress has hitherto been a rare and fitful by-product of evolution. Man has the possibility of making it the main feature of his own future evolution, and of guiding its course in relation to a deliberate aim."[6]

Thus, even if the unique status of man is the product of biological forces, it places man in a metabiological position. He may be bound by the laws of physics according to which an automobile functions, but he can direct the vehicle in whichever direction he chooses. This capacity to direct seems to transcend the biological limitations and imperatives. It reflects a dimension of man which is *sui generis*.

Indeed, this capacity of humanity to choose its course contains the capability of misleading itself. As we know all too well, if man has the potential of moral and social progress, he has also the capacity to inflict upon himself a catastrophe. He has done it many a time in the recorded history, and, with the help of modern technology, his capability of inflicting a disaster on himself and other living species has reached cosmic proportions. Thus, it can be argued that man's freedom to choose his way, for better or for worse, does not fit the evolutionary scheme of life. Whether we like it or not, there is no assurance of the survival of the fittest, the cleverest or even the luckiest.

This conclusion, in the context of the present argument, merely adds another reason for doubting the exclusive role of biological determinism in controlling the human condition. There are other factors in the nature of man which not only find their nonbiological expression—whether in music, philosophy, science and the like—but also may control man's destiny. These factors, whatever their consequences, may belong to the realm of the absolute.

One of the modern schools of social anthropology is functionalism, associated with its propounder Bronislaw Malinowski. It aims at a comprehensive theory of culture, a term used by anthropologists to indicate the manifold techniques and institutions of society—economic, social, spiritual. Culture in this sense encompasses technology, economic enterprise, law and morals, social organization, science, religion, art and so on. In other words, culture is the sum total of that aspect of human activity which differentiates man from other animals. Thus a theory aiming at the explanation of culture virtually addresses itself to the issue of the nature of man. Obviously, it touches on the problem whether there is in man an element of independent spirit, of sovereign mind, of an absolute self.

Malinowski's fundamental contention is that the intricate fabric of human culture, in whichever specific form it may manifest itself, is in the last resort attributable to man's biological or physiological needs. The response to those needs may vary from one tribe to another, from one civilization to another, but in each case the primary mover and the ultimate beneficiary of the complex fabric of cultural institutions is man as a biological being. In fact, culture is explained teleologically: it fulfills a function for attaining an end. The end is the biological need, the means is culture. In Malinowski's own words, culture "must be understood as a means to an end, that is, instrumentally or functionally."[7]

Functionalism explains, quite convincingly, that the basic need for food, which man shares with other animals, involves, in the case of man, techniques for food production, storage and provision, which assure a better and more reliable supply. It is beyond dispute—to adduce the case of contemporary society—that we are better off in having scientifically controlled food production, modern means of transportation of food, supermarkets for distribution, than we would be if each of us had to fend for himself as the birds do. The cultural means of science, technology, economic organization, which are involved in the supply of food, are of enormous benefit to us. Culture is an efficient human device to serve our biological needs in this instance.

In a similar way it is shown that the need of biological continuity through reproduction involves, in the case of man, cultural forms and institutions, such as family, which are best suited for the protection of children during the long years of maturation. Marriage and kinship, and the legal and moral norms, and even religious practices controlling family relations, can be shown to be beneficial for the attainment of the biological urge for the continuation of the species. Provision of shelter—again attained by a combination of technological skills, economic institutions, legal prescriptions—is another cultural means responding to a basic physiological need.[8]

The cultural response to biological needs involves not only technical means, but also further removed measures. To ensure a steady, reliable and abundant production of food, for example, we need not only adequate machinery and fertilizers, but also scientific research, procedures for scientific communication, legal regulations controlling ownership of implements of production, financial institutions to facilitate the economic enterprise. While many of these activities may be far removed from the basic biological needs, they are indispensable for the satisfaction of those needs. Once we rely on the cultural fabric to provide our needs, each ingredient of culture is essential for the fulfillment of the function. To follow this example, we have only to imagine the breakdown of the system which finances farmers' needs to realize how seriously it would impair the production of food.

While this shows the dependence of man on the rational elements of his culture for his survival and well-being, Malinowski goes a step further and suggests that also the nonrational and even the irrational ingredients of culture fulfill a positive role and an important function for man with his biological or biopsychological requirements. Besides knowledge, with its obvious pragmatic application, there are beliefs and practices which are not founded on strict rational premises which man needs for his survival. In his words:

> Magic and religion can be, in my opinion, functionally interpreted as the indispensable complements to pure rational and empirical systems of thought and tradition. . . . The bridging of gaps in human knowledge and the rounding off of the big lacunae in the appreciation of destiny and fate led man to the assertion of supernatural forces. Survival after death is probably one of the earliest mystical hypotheses, related perhaps to some deep biological cravings of the organism, but certainly contributing to the stability of social groups and towards the sense that human endeavors are not as limited as purely rational experience shows.[9]

In short, the realm which is often referred to as spiritual, the yearning for the absolute, as we see it in our context, is essentially explained as yet another means for gratifying the basic needs of man. The same would, of course, be true of the rational and scientific efforts of man.

While the functional theory seems plausible and can explain much in human behavior and social institutions, especially in respect of primitive cultures on which anthropology focuses, it does not explain everything. This is most evident when the theory is tested in respect of the more developed societies. Malinowski's explanation virtually suggests that each culture is the best of all possible cultures for a given society, or, at least, that such a culture is a good and useful response to the basic human needs of the society in question. The human mind, in its diverse faculties, serves man's animal needs in a helpful and constructive manner, which is expressed in the manifold manifestations of culture. The difference between man and other animals is that the former has the assistance of the mind to provide for the needs which essentially are common to both. To put it from our perspective, the active mental endeavor of man is subject to his transient condition.

Yet, one can ask, is there no more to the mind's activity than to serve man's biological needs? Take the realm of scientific inquiry. True, it can be and has been most useful in leading to technical application which, in turn, greatly eased the satisfaction of man's physical needs. But then man has inquired into the nature of the universe, into the meaning of life, into the laws governing the motion of the planets, into the logical proofs of geometrical theorems, at least from the times of ancient Greece to this day. Much of it has been purely theoretical. It is noteworthy that Aristotle explicitly stated that it is the contemplation of truth for its own sake that is the highest endeavor of man. How can this vast edifice of nonpragmatic pursuit of knowledge be explained in terms of biological needs?

The enjoyment of beauty may originate in some human instinct, which could explain the functional response of the creative artist who supplies the diverse creations to benefit humanity. Still, it would be far-fetched to regard this quest as a biological need, and there is no evidence that it is required for the survival of the species. Still less can one explain the creation of an odd artist who gets no response to his work in his lifetime, as has happened to occasional painters, composers and writers. It is much easier to attribute artistic creativity to some element in the human mind which transcends the function of providing for the biological needs of humanity. Such an element seeks the eternal, the absolute.

If we take the world of religion, the realm of beliefs which are not the product of rational observation and analysis, it may well be true that such beliefs are of immense psychological benefit to humanity, whether in primitive or advanced stages of development. Yet it will be more difficult to explain the spontaneity of new religious movements, which deviate from or oppose the established religions. A functionalist might suggest that such new beliefs emerge because the old religion proved inadequate to respond to novel conditions of society. The Roman society at a certain stage found the established religion flat and switched to Christianity. Still it is somewhat moot whether this transition can be explained merely by changing economic and political conditions and concurrent new psychological needs, without recourse to man's sovereign emotions, yearnings and judgments. And then what about the heretic movements that were suppressed and ultimately failed? Why should they have emerged, if their ultimate failure seems to indicate their functional worthlessness in the first place? Do not such heresies indicate the essential independence—for good or for ill—of the human spirit; its sovereign yearning for what it perceives as an absolute truth?

Perhaps even greater difficulty for the functionalist theory is posed by individual dissenters, whether in the field of religion or rational reflection. How can we explain functionally the doubts of Job in the benevolence of God? What beneficial function is there in the proclamation of Ecclesiastes, "Vanity of vanities, all is vanity?" What biological or social benefit was to be found in the philosophical stance of Diogenes the Cynic, who turned his back on society and its institutions? Are not all these testimonies to the sovereignty of the human spirit, which can blaze its own path without regard for the well-being of the physiological creature which happens to be endowed with such an independent spirit?

Then men—sometimes groups of men—can adhere to ways and beliefs which are clearly detrimental to their well-being, or even survival. This is the case of various idealists and ideological movements operating in a hostile environment. Sometimes such adherence typifies a national-religious minority. Thus Jews in the Middle Ages, by remaining faithful to their tradition, in fact chose discrimination and repression when conversion to Christianty would have opened for them economic opportunities and social equality. Often they chose exile rather than conversion, and many individuals suffered martyrdom rather than deny their faith. Such behavior cannot be explained as beneficial to biological survival. It could be explained as working for the survival of a culture, but then culture under these circumstances would not be explicable in terms of biological needs. It would more plausibly have to be seen as the expression of a belief in the absolute value of a certain way-of-life.

Nor does functionalism explain the destructiveness of which men are capable, notably when it takes the form of organized warfare. To be sure, an organized defense may fulfill the function of protecting a tribe or a nation from an invasion by a neighbor. However, an open-minded negotiation and goodwill of both sides to the dispute would be a much better way of resolving the conflict, while assuring the survival of many individuals who are sacrificed in a war. In modern warfare millions of people paid with their lives and nations sacrificed fortunes, while good sense could have saved this extravagant waste. In our own times the survival of the entire species may be threatened by modern warfare, and even a modicum of biological self-interest should have led to the establishment of world institutions with an effective power to resolve conflicts in a peaceable way. Yet any such plan is considered utopian and unrealistic. Apparently, the forces or the notions which affect or control human will, or human will in the configuration of political organization, do not exclusively aim at biological self-preservation. This does not mean that international conflicts are the product of the independent spirit of man; they may be the result of some instinct, or complex of instincts including hostility, suspicion, pugnacity. Whichever may be the cause of these conflicts, the functional theory does not suffice to explain them.

Incidentally, as we shall try to show, one ingredient in the self-centeredness of human groups which occasionally engage in warfare, may be sought in the quest of the individual to find an expression of his yearning for the absolute in the tribal or national group, which is seen as transcending the life of a biological person. Such a sublimation of the sense of the absolute may be gratifying to some deep human urges, but prove quite harmful to man's biological well-being or even survival. Conceivably, one could extend the premises of functionalism and include among human needs the quest for the absolute, besides the urge of the transient biological needs. But then one would have to introduce the recognition of contradictory needs and accept the notion of the paradoxical nature of human condition, besides the acknowledgement of an element which transcends the confines of biological determinism.

While functionalism sees human culture as determined by man's biological needs, Marxism regards man's condition and endeavors as determined by his material needs. The difference, though philosophically minor—for man's material needs are, in the last resort, biological needs—is substantively significant. It leads Malinowski to link cultural response to diverse *physiological* requirements, while Marx and his followers focus their attention on the manner in which the material needs are provided for. In this sense, Marxian determinism appears *economic* rather than biological or physiological. Still, both theories can be classified as belonging to materialist determinism.

Another difference between the two approaches is that Malinowski's picture of human culture is relatively static, while Marx's is emphatically dynamic. Although Malinowski cannot possibly ignore cultural changes, there is in his approach the implicit assumption of a harmony between man's physiological needs and his cultural response, so that at any moment in time there is the supposition of a beneficial relationship between the need and the response, between biology and culture. The situation is radically different in the Marxian theory. Here, though man starts his economic endeavors in response to his basic needs, he soon develops an economic organization and a corresponding social structure which twist his condition into an endemic iniquity and a continuous struggle, which is anything but harmonious. The imbalance of the situation propels the society into strife and change which, though following an inner logic, is experienced as a series of upheavals. These supposedly logical though dramatic changes are referred to as being dialectic, which, as is well-known, is the epithet that characterizes Marxian materialism.

Dialectical materialism, because it admits and stresses social change, naturally becomes a philosophy of history. The strife and the struggle enacted in history allow Marxism to admit the reality of undesirable situations, which functionalism finds hard to accommodate with its static-idyllic tenets. In this sense Marxism retains the capacity to admit folly and evil in history. Yet these are not perceived as manifestations of man's sovereign will or independent spirit, but as necessary consequences of historical development, as expressions of economic-social determinants. When, in the course of history, things change for the better and ultimately a perfect society emerges, this again is not the outcome of rational human conclusion and corresponding action, but of the necessary evolution of history, controlled by economic-social imperatives. In other words, despite the change and the drama, men are not actors, but acted upon by the complex of laws emerging from man's needs and the manner of satisfying them.

Let us recapitulate the fundamentals of Marxism as a philosophy of man and society in a more concrete manner. Frederick Engels, Marx's collaborator and popularizer, formulated it succinctly:

> The materialist conception of history starts from the proposition that the production of the means to support human life and, next to production, the exchange of things produced, is the basis of all social structure; that in every society that has appeared in history, the manner in which wealth is distributed and society divided into classes or orders is dependent upon what is produced, how it is produced, and how the products are exchanged. From this point of view the final causes of all social changes and political revolutions are to be sought, not in men's brains, not in man's better insight into eternal truth and justice, but in changes in the modes of production and exchange. They are to be sought, not in the *philosophy*, but in the *economics* of each particular epoch.[10]

Thus we start from the need "to support human life" to which the means of production and distribution are addressed. This *economic* response to *biological* needs involves *social* organization. For the means of production and of exchange are appropriated by a certain group of people who own and control them, in contrast with others who do not. Thus the emergence of the dominant social class and the subject class or classes becomes the concomitant of economic organization. The class structure is not rigid, but changes with economic transformations. As modes of production change and develop with new economic and technological modes, there are shifts, or even revolutions, in the class structure and in the nature of the dominant class. All these changes are not due to human reason, insight or choice. They are the consequence of economic forces, of a mechanism which operates in human relations but is not controlled by man.

The insignificance of human spirit is also emphasized by the doctrine of the "superstructure." In the words of Engels: "the economic structure of society always furnishes the real basis, starting from which we can alone work out the ultimate explanation of the whole superstructure of juridical and political institutions as well as of the religious, philosophical and other ideas of a given historical period.''[11] This means, to amplify the above statement with others by Marx and Engels, that the substance of philosophical and religious ideas, or the value of law and of political institutions, cannot be *judged* by absolute, objective standards, but have to be *explained* by the economic structure of the relevant time and place. There is no such thing as philosophical truth, or a good and worthy civilization. There is only an opinion fitting a certain condition, a constitution suited to a period the nature of which is determined by the economic-social structure. The ruling class of each period is the direct beneficiary of the ``spiritual'' facets of culture of its time, and it directly or indirectly controls the opinions and the political institutions of the society.

The historical changes occur through the operation of economic-social forces, which are essentially independent of human will. These changes will eventually, for reasons which need not concern us here, bring about the transformation of the capitalist society into the communist society. The basic step in this change will be the nationalization of the means of production. By converting the means of production into state property, the working class would enact a far-reaching revolution, a revolution to put an end to all revolutions, and, in a fundamental sense, to history as we have known it. By nationalization of the means of production, the ruling class, which now owns them, would be abolished and a classless society established. With no class division, all antagonism would be abolished. Indeed, the state itself would disappear, for it serves only as a means of the ruling class to coerce and exploit the rest of society. Moreover, the new situation would secure economic abundance and a just distribution of wealth, ``to each according to his needs.'' In short, society would reach a stage of perfection which would all but abolish any need for change other than continuous progress.

The picture of this future is described by Engels in glowing terms:

> Then for the first time, man, in a certain sense, is finally marked off from the rest of the animal kingdom. . . . The whole sphere of the conditions of life which environ man, and which have hitherto ruled man, now comes under the dominion and control of man. . . . Man's own social organization, hitherto confronting him as a necessity imposed by nature and history, now becomes the result of his own action. The extraneous objective forces that have hitherto governed history pass under the control of man himself. . . . It is the ascent of man from the kingdom of necessity to the kingdom of freedom.[12]

Thus we reach not only a state of bliss, but also the status of freedom. The constraints of nature—apparently the conditions of life which are the primary mover of economic enterprise and organization—come under human control, and the historical determinism, which has controlled man through the rigors of class domination and the hardships of class struggle, will give way to free human decisions.

The upshot of this theory is that it abolishes itself. It discards human freedom and the sovereign authority of the human mind until that moment in a necessary historical development when a change must occur which will give man his new status. While humanity has been manipulated by extraneous forces through history and the human spirit has been enslaved by socioeconomic forces, the future holds a total change, a reversal of roles. Man shall rule, and history—if it can still be called so—will obey. As, implicitly, humanity endowed with the new freedom is devoid of any ill will and egoism, the flow of history will be placid, harmonious, beauteous.

Thus, the apogee of Marxian theoretical speculation redeems the absolute in man, just as the fundamentals of the theory reduce humanity to subservience to socioeconomic determinism. In this sense, one could suggest, Marxism itself offers criticism of its notion of superstructure. Philosophical ideas and social institutions will, at one stage, become the expression of man's free mind and independent judgment, rather than being the outcome of socioeconomic determinants. To rephrase it in our terms, man's transiency will be superseded by his ascent into the kingdom of the absolute.

To be sure, the concept of superstructure can be questioned on more fundamental grounds. One can doubt the Marxian proposition that the constraints of a certain social regime—whether feudal or capitalist—make human ideas and ideals *totally* dependent on that regime, or shaped by the economic system on which the regime is founded. Shakespeare's plays may well reflect the class structure of his times in one sense, yet in another they transcend such limitations. Hamlet is a prince, yet his social status is not the essence of his character; Hamlet as a human being hesitating between reflection and action stands for a universal and perennial problem. The poetry of Dante, or the prose of Tolstoy, reflect the place and time of each, as well as the social and political structure of their respective environments. Yet each of them in his own way conveys feelings and problems in a manner which transcends the historical limitations. Can an Aristotle, a Hume, a Kant be explained, or explained away, as a mere superstructure of their diverse societies? Do they not primarily and overwhelmingly express ideas *sub specie aeternitatis*, which must be attributed to the independent element in the human mind? How can one reduce Euclidan geometry, or any other branch of mathematics, to the operations of socioeconomic determinants?

And what about Marx himself? If his proposition that philosophy—notably social philosophy—reflects the economic structure of the society of his time is true, then the Marxian theory should be regarded as the expression of capitalism and its interests, for Marx conceived his ideas under that system. This, obviously, would undermine the objective validity of Marxism, a position which Marx and his followers would fiercely oppose because Marxism claims to be absolutely and unconditionally true. If so, philosophy is not *always* subservient to economic conditions, and at least one exception to the rule must be allowed, namely, that of Marxism itself.

If, however, man's spirit retains some freedom, or if some men can elude the determinism of socioeconomic factors, then a window is opened for genuine intellectual reflection, which could well include the planning of a better life and a better society. Man's "insight into eternal truth and justice," which Engels derides, may have practical relevance to human condition. Philosophy, and not only economics, may affect human society. The absolute spirit, and not only the changing material conditions, comes to play a primary role in human affairs. Indeed, such an assumption is absolutely necessary if Marx and Marxism are to be given a fair chance to influence human matters, as both Marx and Engels attempted to do with great energy and persistence.

Ingenious as they may be, the various attempts to explain human condition and endeavor in a materialistic manner do not succeed in explaining *all* of man's nature and activity. As it should be quite clear by now, every theory, as a theory, implicitly excludes itself from its own explanation, for it must claim to be true, and the notion of truth cannot be subordinated to biological or material causes. It stands outside them in uncovering the nature or the pattern of their operation. Thus, however *transient* the condition of man may be according to one theory or another, the theory asserting it claims for itself the status of *absolute* truth. Then, as we have seen, there are other weaknesses in the materialistic explanations which lead to the conclusion that there is more to man than what they suggest.

As we have seen, this extra dimension of humanity which touches on the absolute need not be entirely or exclusively noble and beneficial. If man's organized warfare is not attributed to his biological or economic needs, but is at least partially the result of his free will, there is no reason to rejoice at this manifestation of freedom. The metamaterial aspect of man can lead to beneficial consequences, such as search and discovery of truth, as it can bring about disastrous developments, such as the pursuit of what is conceived as a noble ideal at the expense of immense human suffering.

Our purpose has not been to show the nobility of human spirit, though there is this aspect to it, but its existence which can be expressed in diverse ways. The existence of the "absolute I," of the awareness of self which transcends its daily and temporal limitations, which has been based on introspective experience and on subjective perception, emerges as human spirit, when asserted as an objective and general phenomenon. "I think, therefore I exist in the absolute sense" has been generalized and objectified into the perception "Human spirit exists."

This existence and the nature of it have become one of the deepest concerns of man, as we have indicated. The uncertainty which hovers around the problem, the paradoxical confrontation, on the subjective level, between the sense of transiency and absoluteness, and, on the objective level, between the flow of things and the immutable spirit, has had a stimulating impact on man and on the civilization he creates. Man has persistently sought reassurance that his "absolute I" is not a figment of imagination or a mere wishful notion; that human spirit, whichever way it may be conceived, is not a chimera. He has created such reassurances by extending his "absolute self" to various domains of civilization or culture, or by sublimating the basic sense of its absoluteness into ideas and ideals transcending the domain of the "I." It is our objective to trace this quest of the absolute—one could say, the creative quest of the absolute—in the various regions of man's culture.

At the same time the "transient I" does not disappear. It is confronted by the changes, fortunes and misfortunes which human beings experience as individuals and as groups. Sometimes its presence is overwhelming; occasionally it is dwarfed by the dominance of the absolute in one form or another. By and large, it is rarely ignored, and it forms a constant factor in the consciousness of the individual, and therefore also in man's culture. Therefore, in pursuing the manifestations of the absolute in human endeavor, we must not overlook the expression of the transient.

The presence in man's awareness of the absolute and the transient may lead to a tug of war, with one element or the other asserting itself as dominant. The conflict, or at least centrifugal tendency, is inherent in the situation. For each awareness is powerful, and they are profoundly different. Each measures the other by its own standards: the "absolute I" looks down on the transient with an attitude oscillating between disdain and compassion, while the "transient I" regards the absolute with the ambivalence of admiration and skepticism.

Yet, more characteristically, the two elements arrive at some *modus vivendi*, or even at a harmonious coexistence, for man craves for unity of perception and for peace of mind. Thus the two selves try either to form a unified outlook which will accommodate both, or to establish a parallel activity mutually tolerated. Therefore, in the quest for the expression of the absolute and the transient in human civilization, attention will also be paid to the ways in which a collaborative or a tolerant relationship is formulated between the two elements in various domains of culture.

Chapter 3

Individual Activity

Man's daily activity, as soon as he is an adult, is largely devoted to the economic pursuit of providing for his and his family's needs. In an earlier stage of life he prepares, through education and apprenticeship, for the eventual economic function. In old age, as his economic activity declines, he benefits from the employment in his earlier years. The work which man performs—whether in production, distribution, services—affects, and usually benefits, other human beings, which is the reason for his earnings and benefits. Yet this work can be looked at by the performer from his own private, egotistical angle as an activity which is advantageous to him in enabling him to provide for his and his family's needs.

It is the nature of this activity and of the needs it comes to gratify that they change. The needs expand with the growth of the family and so man tries to increase his income. The appetite for a higher standard of living may grow as the income increases through success in one's work or business. Then there may be circumstances under which the income declines and compels one to change one's standard of living. Thus, despite the importance of economic activity to the individual and society, it is subject to change. Such change may be slow and even, as in the medieval society, or sudden and drastic, as in the capitalist system.

Significantly, despite the realization of the changeable nature of economic life, man looks for stability in this domain. Most of this quest can be explained by utilitarian and pragmatic considerations, though there may be an undercurrent of the quest for the absolute here. One likes to have a steady occupation, because of the advantages it carries for the individual. Yet the affiliation with an occupation or a profession also offers a contact with stability, or even permanence. Thus one does not say: "I am engaged in teaching," "I do some business," "I make my living by taking care of human health," "I help people in litigation." One prefers to announce: "I am a teacher," "I am a businessman," "I am a doctor," "I am a lawyer." By connecting one's personality with a profession, one implicitly dons a mantle of something grander than an individual manner of making a living, something transindividual and transtemporal. One makes, as it were, a step from the regular directory to the Yellow Pages, to a directory which transcends individual limitations and remains essentially intact despite the flux of change.

Similarly, insurance—life insurance, health insurance, home insurance—is not merely a practical and utilitarian arrangement, with its obvious advantages. Here, too, there may be overtones of the quest for stability and even absolute security. The insurance seems to assure the individual that, whatever happens to him, his economic value will remain intact. To be sure, this assurance does not satisfy one's sense of self-importance, for it takes care only of the economic facet of man and does not cover his biological condition, let alone his existence. Yet there is here an element of that absolute which man craves for and which is so elusive.

One can discern similar double concern—the pragmatic and the psychological-existential—in other facets of man's economic life. Stability of work, stability of income, or regularity of increase in wages, provision for various fringe benefits—all these have their overtones of stability, and perhaps also a touch of the absolute, besides their transient advantages.

The quest for the absolute in individual activity is much more clearly discernible in human involvement in matters which are not aimed at economic needs. This quest tends to express itself in activities whose primary objectives are of a nonpractical nature.

Take the case of an involvement which ostensibly is connected with economic activity—the instance of a wealthy person who is committed to making money, even though he cannot make a personal use of it. The person has all that he and his family need and desire, and so whatever money he earns he reinvests only in order to make more money. He ardently devotes his mind, energy and time to the pursuit of increasing his wealth—a pursuit which turns more and more futile in terms of concrete benefits, as it becomes increasingly successful. Here we have an inverse Sisyphus, a man not frustrated in his efforts, but oversuccessful, which makes the success apparently meaningless.

This irrational devotion to the *means* of making money, while the *end* of the activity has long been satisfied, could be explained by inertia. Once a person gets used to making money, it is hard for him to break the habit. Yet there is another aspect to it. To the economically successful person, the success itself may become an important manifestation of reality. It may turn into a symbol of something that transcends one's personal existence.

Making money may be perceived as an involvement with an absolute. In contrast to the widely prevalent notion which regards this kind of dedication to economic endeavors as exaggerated materialism, as limitless greed, it may be more properly seen as an expression of a quest for the absolute, a quest which essentially differs from greed for material things.

The quest for the absolute is more visibly expressed in men's attempts for gaining publicity and public recognition. These objectives can be undertaken in different ways by various individuals. In the political domain they take the shape of high office, whether that of president or prime minister in modern democracy, or dictatorial head of state in some other regimes. In earlier times the role of the king or the emperor, besides elevating the individual to an exceptional status of political power, had the additional bonus of hereditary continuation, which clearly symbolized the transcendence of human transiency. Lesser political office may carry less of the sense of the absolute, but it still elevates the officeholder above the ordinary citizen and perhaps secures a small niche in the future annals of the nation for the fortunate individual, and thus offers some kind of gratification.

Public esteem, and thus a sense of reaching beyond ordinary human limitations, can be gained outside the realm of political life. Acting, in theater or on the screen, performance in popular sports, the role of a popular newscaster on television, carry their glamor, and thus a touch of what is perceived as the absolute. The penchant to break records in various sports, even if this may mean running a certain distance in the space of a few seconds less, may reflect the quest for the absolute as well. The record-breaker is at the top of his branch of sports, an absolute in sphere, until another individual establishes a new record. The zest with which some individuals climb to the highest mountain peak is another instance of the quest to transcend the quotidian and to reach for the stars.

In our times, reaching for the stars has virtually been turned from a metaphor into a literal achievement. The technological achievements—whether in human landing on the moon, or sending a rocket which can relay information about distant planets—typify the new avenues of the quest for the absolute. Yet these are only novel modes of a perennial trend, which can be traced back to discoveries of new lands, charting of sea routes and the like. This avenue of the quest for the absolute is symbolized in the story of Babel, the attempt of man to build "a city and a tower, whose top may reach unto heaven."[1] The quest has been deeply ingrained in humanity.

While only the few attain records in sports, or become prominent in other domains of public activity, the many are emotionally involved in the success of the few. Indeed, that success itself depends on the admiration of the public. This admiration is often mixed with vicarious enjoyment.

The public empathetically puts itself in the place of the sprinter, the mountain climber, the movie star, the political leader, and thus gets an indirect gratification from the contact with what it vaguely perceives as the absolute.

Another region, of a different kind, in which men try to reach for the absolute is that of knowledge and art. These, to be sure, are two essentially distinct domains, but they have a common characteristic relevant to our exploration. Unlike the quest for honor and public recognition, which is largely dependent on excellence and prominence in the field of activity, the pursuit of knowledge and artistic activity provide a contact with the absolute without demanding excellence and record-breaking. To be sure, a prominent scientist, or an outstanding writer or painter, may get greater satisfaction than their respective colleagues who have done less well, or who are less gifted. Yet the very contact with knowledge, the very quest for aesthetic accomplishment, offers a glimpse into the domain of truth or of beauty, the realm of the absolute. In this sense the contemplative activity, if we may broaden the Aristotelian term to include also the arts, can provide more of this particular gratification to more people than the more selective public honors, or, for that matter, the unusual economic achievements. It is noteworthy that Aristotle regards contemplation as the activity of God, and therefore sees it as the highest and most desirable activity of man.[2] We might parallel this view by suggesting that contemplation, in our broader sense, is the easiest and best way to achieve contact with the absolute, or, to put it differently, contemplation is the simplest way for sublimating the urge for the absolute—at least in contemporary civilization.

Significantly, the quest for practical knowledge, which aims at dealing with transient affairs, does not provide the same kind of gratification *because* it is addressed to transient things. It is knowledge oriented toward the immutable, or looking for the permanent formula of the changing phenomena, that is felt as approximation to the absolute. To be sure, in modern science the dividing line between the theoretical and the applied is not always clear, and thus the practical scientist often enjoys some of the spiritual elation of his theoretical colleague.

A distinction should be made, both in the pursuit of knowledge and of art, between the creative person and the passive recipient. The creator has the obvious advantage of a sense of contribution to the realm of knowledge or of beauty, of being a partner—even if a mini-partner—of the absolute. This is the case if the contribution is of intrinsic value. A momentary splash, a best-seller, which obviously meets with favorable public response but which has little lasting merit, may be gratifying as a public honor rather than as a contribution to the absolute. This does not mean that, subjectively at least, contribution to knowledge or to artistic creation is necessarily more gratifying to the sense of the absolute of an individual than one or other kind of public honor.

It may be added that it is often difficult for the creator himself to assess the significance of his work. Sometimes an outstanding work is recognized as such almost immediately, but sometimes the recognition arrives posthumously, as in the famous case of Vincent Van Gogh. The subjective feeling of the artist or the writer may be misleading both ways: he may overestimate his work, or underestimate it. Yet the quest for attaining a niche in the absolute is there, and an external reassurance is helpful. Some scientists and writers get such a reassurance by being awarded a prize, from Nobel award to lesser ways of recognition. Others, on finding themselves in a catalogue of a public library, see in that a contact with the absolute.

The passive recipient of knowledge—nonpractical knowledge—or the passive enjoyer of the arts, whether music, literature or painting, are in a different category than the genuine contributors. Yet this does not make insignificant their contact with the world of the immutable and everlasting. The person who reads a Platonic dialogue, after a thorough preparation and with good understanding, is, as it were, taken out of the flux of time and the limitations of place, and converses with Socrates. In a comparable manner, one may find oneself in the world of Shakespeare, Dante or Tolstoy. Although each of these was a historical, and thus transient, figure, and though the creations of such outstanding individuals are stamped with the mark of their diverse epochs and cultures, they transcend these limitations and have a perennial and universal appeal. They are perceived as belonging to the realm of the absolute, and a person affected by such creations feels touched by the absolute. The greater his understanding of or sensitivity to the great creation, the closer and weightier his contact with the absolute.

The importance to the ordinary individual of this kind of contact with the absolute is all too often ignored. Many people think that to make a good living and have good social life, within the family and in a wider circle, are sufficient conditions for a good life. The need for a continuous contact with the nonpractical absolute may not be realized during one's active life. Once, however, a person retires from economic activity and has time on his hands, the absence of that contact is felt as a great vacuity. A person who has cultivated intelligent reading, philosophical reflection, listening to music, playing chess, looking at the stars, religious meditation, will have a kind of psychological support and a spiritual or intellectual meaning in his retired life, which a person who only knows how to be involved in transient affairs will miss.

Indeed, this kind of contact with the absolute is probably needed by persons in every stage of life. Even the gainfully employed adult may miss an important facet of human existence if his daily activity is restricted to passing and changing affairs, important as these may be. A man attends to his current needs, is attentive to the changing political scene and the benefits and hazards it entails. All this is a response of his transient self. The absolute self, however, even if often dormant, needs its own food and wants to express its distinctive essence. A continuous contact with the realm of the absolute—knowledge, art, logical exercise and the like—will offer the right nourishment and allow self-expression to the dormant self. The life of an individual which is balanced between the current affairs and the contact with the perennial will gratify the dual nature of man, his transient and his absolute self. A life devoid of contemplation, unless some powerful other absolutes take its place, will in a sense be poor. In the words of the English poet:

> A poor life this if, full of care,
> We have no time to stand and stare.[3]

A few words should be added about the nature of the so-called passive contemplative involvement. It may appear as if such a noncreative interest is of a thoroughly passive nature. A person stares at things beautiful, listens to the music of Mozart or Verdi, reads *War and Peace*, follows the argument of Kant, and his mind partakes of and absorbs the absolute. Yet such description of the process is less than accurate, for mental absorption is more intricate than the capillary suction of blotting-paper. In perceiving beauty of one kind or another, the mind is actively involved in selecting, in judging, in the ultimate enjoyment. In expanding its knowledge, the mind does not simply register information but is involved in relating various elements of perception or understanding to each other. To comprehend a law of physics, for example, the observable data, the controlled experiment and the mathematical formula have to be interrelated by the mind—a process far from mere passive absorption. The resolution of a previously unseen problem in geometry by a high school student is for him his own discovery. The empathetic reading of a novel or viewing of a drama involves an emotional participation and an intellectual comprehension. Indeed, it is the activity of the mind which, as it were, participates in the absolute that is crucial for the sense of satisfaction derived from the contemplative experience.

The contemplative involvement of the individual may require more activity in one realm than another, and, perhaps more typically, a different kind of activity in different spheres of contemplation. Listening to music in this sense differs from playing chess. Moreover, as indicated, there remains a significant difference, a qualitative gap, between the creator and the recipient—between the composer and the listener, between the writer and the reader, between the philosopher and his disciple. Yet, to modify our initial statement, this difference is not between the active creator and the passive beneficiary, but between the creator, whose contemplative power is of a peculiar intuitive nature, and the recipient, who actively participates in the truth and beauty created by the unique genius of some outstanding individuals.

One can discern the quest for the absolute also on a different plane of human endeavor, namely, in the acquisitive activity of human beings. While this expression of the yearning for the absolute may appear as mundane and trivial when compared with contemplation in its diverse forms, it may be worth mentioning in order to illustrate our general argument.

While the economic activity of most people is directed toward the supply of their current needs, which are essentially related to the transient facets of human existence, there is some acquisitive activity which is not guided by economic needs, but seems to reflect a peculiar variety of the quest for the absolute. What we have in mind here is not the quest for amassing wealth for its own sake in which some rich people engage, a point discussed earlier. We refer to the widespread tendency of people—sometimes even poor people—to acquire goods which are not of substantive value to them, that is to say, which they cannot consume or benefit from in any material sense. These, it would seem, are craved for because they symbolize the imperishable, the permanent, the absolute.

Take the case of gold and other precious metals and of precious stones. To be sure, once these are accepted as valuable, people can buy them as an investment. The question remains, however, why they are perceived as valuable in the first place. Their intrinsic usefulness to man has been rather limited, and in some cases, that of precious stones, nil. Yet they seem to have been regarded as of high value through ages. Indeed, precious metals have often been accepted as the standard of economic value, either by having coins made of them, or by serving as the backing-up system of national currency.

In many civilizations trinkets and other ornaments of gold and silver have been ardently sought. The servant of Abraham, in search of a wife for Isaac, gave Rebekah, the bride-to-be, ‘‘jewels of silver, and jewels of gold.’’[4] A gold watch is still regarded as a symbol of value. Utensils made of silver are highly esteemed, even if they do not function any better than those made of a less costly metal. Families in hard circumstances would in some societies go out of their way to buy silver cutlery for their marrying children. Wedding rings have to be made of gold or platinum. Some people would go hungry rather than part with a trinket of gold or a diamond ring.

While some of the value attached to precious metals and stones may be due to their relative rarity, they also are exceptionally durable and thus symbolize the immutable and, it would seem, become subconsciously associated with the absolute. A thing which does not rust and does not crumble stands out among one's possessions, against the perishable things, as eternal. At least, it is suggestive of eternity. We need perishable food and clothing which wears out for our transient existence; we cherish the metals and stones because they remind us of the constancy of the absolute.

Perhaps in an essentially similar way we value ancient things, or antiques. Here too rarity plays a role, but the antique also symbolizes, if not eternity, then a long life. By surpassing the span of individual human existence, or even of a few generations, it can symbolize a "relative" absolute, if we may be allowed to put it paradoxically. Therefore, the older the antique the more valuable it is. Also, the better preserved it is the more costly it becomes. Immutability through time is a powerful testimony to the absolute.

If the antique is a family heirloom, it is even more cherished. In this case the chattel expresses the continuity of the family, in spite of the transiency of the generations. The notion of immortality in this case affects the individual in a more direct manner, even if it remains subconscious. The heirloom has been the family's possession for a few generations and it may be preserved for some more. The present owner, in some vague manner, extends his own existence backwards and forwards by contact with the possession.

Another kind of property which seems to enjoy a preferential status because of its apparent association with the absolute is real estate. The ownership of a solid house, or of a tract of land—when such ownership is not of a temporary nature, a property bought as a hedge against inflation or for speculation—is often viewed as a concrete possession in contrast to some abstract assets. As such property does not visibly change and remains tangible, it carries with it the notion, often mistaken, that it is essentially immutable, that it has a "real" value, that it is, as the phrase actually puts it, real estate. By contrast, business, negotiable documents, paper money may be regarded, again often mistakenly, as flimsy and ephemeral. The abstract expression of value lends it an air of unreality.

Hence the various stories about peasants who, despite hardship, would not sell their land, or people who would not part with their house despite the good price they were offered and their need for money. The glorification of attachment to land or house is usually magnified if the property is ancestral patrimony. Again, the association of individual possession with family property adds to the immutable or absolute real property another dimension. The owner not only maintains a contact with the absolute, as manifest in real property, but he is also one link in a chain of owners of this property in the same family, and thus bound with them in their common quest of eternity. One could say that he looks for a connection with the absolute in space, as he looks for it to be assured through time.

In summation, in acquisition and holding of property, domains of human activity which would be inherently expected to be an economic response to the transient needs of man, one can detect manifestations of behavior inconsistent with this assumption. Some of man's acquisitive and proprietary behavior seems to be explicable not in purely economic terms, but by a hidden quest for the absolute. Not only does man not live on bread alone, but he does not toil in the sweat of his brow for bread only. He also looks for possessions which, in a mysterious way, convey the sense of the absolute.

Another instance of activity which belongs to the sphere of finances and at the same time is connected to the absolute is the strange phenomenon of gambling. Indeed, it can be said to be a confrontation with the absolute. Gambling takes different technical and institutional forms, ranging from roulette in such elegant places as Monte Carlo, through various lotteries, to some illegal ventures on street corners in some cities. The gambler may belong to any stratum of society, and the stakes may vary accordingly. There are occasional gamblers and there are habitual gamblers who often experience great personal hardships because of their addiction.

These differences are not our concern in the present context. What is of interest to us is the essential allurement which underlies any case of gambling. There is in gambling a sense of mystery. Why should a rational man or woman—for, at least, some gamblers are essentially rational persons—risk any amount of money on a game in which the odds are against him or her. As is well-known, statistically, any gambling favors the entrepreneur, whether private or public, who sets up the game to make money and not to distribute it. To be sure, some individuals win—for if there was no chance for players, there would be no allurement—but most do not, and so the probability of losing is clearly greater than that of winning. Why, then, is the gambler attracted to risking his money in such a game?

It seems to us that the fundamental, though not always fully recognized, urge to gamble lies in the quest to confront fate or destiny and overcome it, or take advantage of it, hang onto its coattails for a brief moment. There is in a gambler a sober, yet intoxicating, realization that the ball eventually must fall in "his" slot of the roulette, or that ever so often, however rare the occasion, the one-armed bandit will produce a jackpot. Such an occurrence is fated, inevitable. It may be conceived as decided by fate or fortune, by an absolute destiny. True, there are those many incidents when the money staked is lost, but these appear as transient manifestations which the gambler chooses to regard as fleeting shadows, while his eye is focused on the brilliance of fortune hiding underneath the smoothly revolving roulette. It is his ambition to create a contact with this hidden absolute, to ally himself with it, or to force it to yield its bounty.

It is this vague notion of fate, fortune, absolute—a personified force—which makes the success in gambling so sweet and failure so bitter, for it must be realized that making money in gambling does not give the same satisfaction as earning money through regular work. The gratification of the gambler is much greater. He feels "lucky." Being lucky means that one has had a contact with the mysterious absolute and partaken of it. Losing money in gambling is painful not only because of the financial loss, but also because the gambler feels to be "unlucky." He has failed to manipulate fortune, or has been rejected by it. Yet such a failure or mishap need not be considered a final verdict, and so the gambler tries again, and again and again.

To be sure, an individual does not *have* to be intoxicated with the idea of seeking the absolute in this particular way. Having lost once, or a few times, he may say to himself that this is merely a game, and a costly one, and that fortune or fate may be an elusive metaphysical concept at best, or a figment of imagination at worst, and pursuing it makes no sense. Having reached such a conclusion—whether with full or dimmed awareness—he will give up gambling and pursue his transient activities, while looking for another way, and another domain, for getting a hold on the absolute. As we have seen and as we shall see, there are many other opportunities for associating oneself with the absolute.

It may be mentioned in this connection that the element of the quest for fortune, fate, the absolute in gambling can be detected, in a less risky and dangerous form, also in other human activities. A business entrepreneur, when he succeeds in making a particularly advantageous deal, considers himself "lucky." His satisfaction in this case is not only measured by the financial gain, but also by a sense of exceptional occurrence which is a revelation of luck, or fortune—not unlike in the case of a jackpot. The same may be true of a writer who gets an enthusiastic response to his book, a politician who meets with a surprising success, and so forth. Such an experience elevates the fortunate individual from the drab, monotonous flux of prosaic routine, from the realm of the transient, to the kingdom of the absolute.

Another category of behavior which, in contrast to the former class, looks for stability of occurrence rather than for exceptional events, is what we call habit. Yet, paradoxically, this quest can also be attributed to the yearning for the absolute. Habit expresses the quest for the fixed and unchanging elements in the flux of activities of ordinary people. It is in the nature of habit that some kinds of conduct are adhered to for no other ostensible reason than to gratify some psychological impulse, which may well be rooted in the quest for an absolute anchor in the fluid pattern of human behavior.

Habits may vary. One person may dress in a manner he is used to, with little or no attention to vogue. Another person may always dress for dinner, even if the occasion is entirely informal otherwise. Still another may insist on polishing silver once a month. A person may persist in taking a walk every day along the same route at the same time.

In cases of this kind we explain the behavior as resulting from the force of habit, which is not an explanation at all, but merely a classification of behavior. The explanation of this phenomenon may be elusive and controversial, but our interpretation is that a habit has a stabilizing impact on the life of the individual in that it introduces a fixed pattern—be it in a relatively trivial domain of one's life—in an existence which is open to the ups and downs of chance or fortune. Things change around us—we make money and we lose it, we advance in our career and we encounter adversity, we are elated or depressed by some news. Into this continuous and unpredictable flux an element of permanence is introduced by the constant habit. Be what may, dinner is served at a fixed hour. Be what may, the orange juice is waiting at breakfast. Be what may, the grandfather clock is wound on Friday. Thus, our habit provides an anchor in the turbulent sea of change. It suggests the absolute in the transiency of daily affairs.

Closely related to habit is custom. Although it does not fall into the category of individual activity, which is discussed in the present chapter, it is mentioned here because of its affinity to habit. One could say that custom is habit transposed into the life of a society. Habit is adherence to an individual mode of conduct without any conscious impelling reason. Custom indicates the constancy of such behavior when typical of a society. We may have a customary national dress, we follow customary forms of greeting, there are customary forms of polite conduct, and so on. To be sure, it can be suggested that customs have their good reasons and justification. Greeting people in a polite manner improves human relations, common dress enhances the sense of national or tribal unity, and so on. These reasons, however, are provided by sociologists, just as the good reasons for habits have to be sought in psychology. To the actor himself, the person who observes customs, or habits, the behavior is adhered to without any conscious justification. It simply is the way one behaves.

Apart from the various explanations provided by sociologists, it can be said again that customs introduce an element of stability into social behavior. Society is open to changing fortunes as much as an individual. It is open to winds of change, which occasionally blow very hard. This gives individuals, of which society consists, a sense of social transiency, which compounds their sense of personal impermanence. Social customs, which have to be observed irrespective of the vicissitudes of circumstances, are a counterweight to the unforeseen and feared. They suggest the uniform and the permanent, the absolute, in a reality which may be changing and which thus unsettles the peace of mind.

Customs, as well as habits, are not a constant constant. Under the impact of various factors, many customs may be given up, and some individuals change their habits too. We are inclined to think that customs prevail in older and simpler societies, while little attention is paid to such incomprehensible rules in complex modern societies. To rephrase it from our perspective, this merely means that the relationship between the transient and the absolute in this particular sphere varies from one society to another. Yet, significantly, there has not been a society without an element of change, nor a society without some customary rules. Similarly, there is probably no individual without some habits, nor one whose behavior is exclusively habitual. The transient and the absolute in this respect coexist in a variety of ways, but both form an ingredient in the actual manifestation of conduct.

Chapter 4

Crucial Changes in Life

The current needs of man involve him in economic pursuits, a time-and energy-consuming activity, open to changes and vicissitudes. At the same time, as we have seen, man looks for the eternal, the absolute, and finds it in different ways and manners. However, beside the economic needs of man, there are other basic facets of human existence which are of a biological, or a biologically rooted, nature. A link to biology implies transiency, but, as we shall see, transiency elicits the quest for its opposite—stability, permanence, the absolute.

One biological manifestation which humanity faces is the birth of new life. This, as a rule, is a joyous occasion, which should not pose any psychological or social problems. Yet the birth of a child and its growing into maturity is a process of change—the startling change from nothing into something, and then the amazing transition from infancy to childhood and adolescence. A change, even a joyous change like this, calls forth a response which conveys a quest for stability. The transient has to be anchored in the absolute.

Another crucial moment in human experience is the meeting of opposite sexes with view to propagating the species. This, of course, does not happen out of a conscious biocosmic imperative, but takes social forms and is colored by psychological motivation. Yet, whatever the nature of the complex manifestation, again we face a novelty, a change, and characteristically it is accompanied by an expectation of, or exhortation for, stability and permanence in the relationship between the parties and in the institution of the family which they create.

The encounter with death is the most unsettling experience in normal human life. The disappearance of a close person from the scene seems to clearly indicate the transiency of human existence, the biological limitations of human life. Here the challenge to the sense of the absolute which humanity cherishes is greatest. Consequently, the responses to this transition, manifested in various forms, exhibit an ardent quest for pemanence.

Let us substantiate these general points by introducing the established responses to each of these instances in human life.

A new baby is, as a rule, given a name. While this can be considered a matter of convenience for social needs, it can also be said that a name converts a child from a biological phenomenon into an individual within society, which gives it more weight and suggests the solidity and stability of a person as against the transiency of a specimen of a species.

Moreover, this name is, in some societies, the name of a deceased parent or grandparent, or another relative, or, following other customs, the name of a living parent or relative. In any such case the name symbolizes the continuity, the permanence, of human existence in face of the transiency of the individual human being. The tendency to discover in the child the traits, physical or mental, of one or another ancestor expresses the same inclination to look for continuity, or even permanence, in the transient.

The Christian custom of giving a child the name of a saint, and the Jewish usage of selecting the names of venerable biblical characters for newborn babies, indicate an attempt to link the individual child and person with a stable, eternal tradition. The passing biological phenomenon is implanted in the socioreligious entity, which is perceived as lasting and absolute, and thus becomes a link in, and part of, an order which transcends biology.

The establishment of family names in Europe started with noble families in the Middle Ages and then spread to other strata of society. It may be thus connected with class structure and with snobism, besides being an indispensable convenience in times of telephone directories and income tax identification. Yet this practice seems to have originated from a sense of family pride and of the wish to see the newborn baby as the continuation of the family, which implicitly is perceived as timeless. Significantly, in the Bible, which has no family names, there is a great stress on genealogy. Who begat whom seems to matter, a sentiment which embodies the belief in the worth of continuity: the family and tribal connection through the ages assure a kind of permanence to the individual, or at least make him a partner to a permanent entity.

Besides being given a name, an infant is usually elevated from its biological limitations and admitted into the community by such ceremonies as baptism or circumcision. Infant baptism, widely practiced by Christians, assures the entrance of the newborn into the Christian society. Circumcision of male infants on the eighth day after birth is conceived by Jews as admitting the child into the covenant of Abraham with God[1] (i.e., into the community of Israel). Circumcision is given a comparable importance in Islam. Such a ceremonial admission of the infant into the society, whatever its form, is of great importance to the family and the community. It conveys the sense of incorporating the fragile newborn into something greater, into a community of men, approved and sanctioned by God, which thereby transcends the limitations of biology. Through the ceremony the infant becomes human in a new way. Another dimension is added to his existence, a dimension which claims affinity to the absolute.

This communal-religious involvement in the biological existence is sometimes repeated at adolescence, through such ceremonies as confirmation in Christianity, or *bar-mitzvah* in Judaism. The difference between these occasions and the ceremonies concerning newborns is that the acceptance into the community at adolescence is linked to discretion and understanding on the part of the initiated youngster. Therefore, the ceremony is usually preceded by a certain amount of preparation concerning the nature and obligations of Christianity or Judaism, as the case may be. The Jewish boy, on reaching the age of thirteen and becoming *bar-mitzvah*—which connotes "a man obligated to observe the commandments"—becomes technically considered an adult, a member of the community. This community, it must be remembered, is not a mere civic organization, but the Lord's people. Thus the boy, by becoming a man, achieves a link to the absolute. As the communion, like the baptism, is conceived as a sacrament, the individual's connection to the absolute is *mutatis mutandis* established here as well.

The strong attraction between two individuals of the opposite sex which often, though not always, precedes marriage and leads to it, is usually referred to as love. Ostensibly, love is a psychological manifestation which is motivated by a biological urge for the continuation of the species. In other words, love can be explained as a psychological mechanism instinctive in a species, which serves best the purpose of survival. Conceivably, such an urge has developed through the process of natural selection. The fact that humans, like other species, can be propagated also without great emotional attachment of the partners to the process—a fact which undermines such an explanation—could be countered by pointing to the biological need of a long period for human maturation. As children need a protective environment for many years—unlike most animals, which become independent in months—there is a biological incentive for a family environment, which can be best established on the foundations of attraction and love between the parents.

Whatever the exact nature of this explanation, it presents love as a functional response to a biological urge, and as the latter is a transitory phenomenon in an individual life, so the former would be of a passing nature. This may, in fact, often be the case in reality. Indeed, all too often the emotional attraction between the parents of a child or children may fail to last long enough for the fulfillment of the parental function, and ends in a separation or divorce when the progeny is at a tender age.

Yet it is noteworthy that often the perception of love transcends the biopsychological dimensions and is felt to be, by the people involved, an absolute commitment between two individuals, unaffected and unaffectable by circumstances and any other objectives. This kind of attraction focuses not only, and not primarily, on the objective qualities and suitability of the other person, but on some individual, often elusive, peculiarities, which are particularly appealing to the eye of the beholder. It is difficult to find any connection between this kind of attraction and the biological urge of the species. It is rather a manifestation of an attempt to single out an individual relationship above and beyond the flux of wider biological imperatives, to establish it as an absolute feeling and commitment in contrast to the transiency of the biological process.

Characteristically, for this kind of love, it even elevates the relationship between the genders above the objective of procreation. An interesting testimony to this effect—especially as it is expressed in an ancient social setting in which having children was openly regarded as the essential purpose of marriage—can be found in the Bible. It is the story of Elkanah and his two wives, one with children and the other barren, told in the first chapter of I Samuel. Elkanah was more generous to Hannah, the barren wife, "for he loved Hannah." As Hannah wept, craving for a child and nagged by the fecund adversary, Elkanah said to her: "why weepest thou? . . . and why is thy heart grieved? am not I better to thee than ten sons?"[2] This kind of devotion to the beloved is also reflected in the story of Jacob and Rachel. The fertility of Leah, who was imposed on Jacob by Laban's ruse, seems in no way to have altered Jacob's profound attachment to her younger sister.[3]

Love, unconditional and absolute love, which is extolled above biological urges, social conventions or psychological dispositions, has been the theme of countless stories and poems in various times and places. This does not mean that the transient kind of love—changing, declining or crumbling due to whim or to circumstances—has been forgotten. For that matter, absolute love has occasionally been ridiculed as an irrational, senseless infatuation, as it may seem from the sober realistic point of view.

Characteristically, we find the two contradictory notions expressed by Shakespeare, who is a master in presenting divergent attitudes in a convincing manner. Thus, in one of his sonnets he writes:

> Love is not love
> Which alters when it alteration finds . . .
> O, no! it is an ever-fixed mark
> That looks on tempests and is never shaken . . .[4]

Yet, in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, a juice from a certain herb dropped in Titania's eyes makes her fall in love with Bottom, a coarse man with an ass's head, whom she finds irresistibly beautiful. The irrationality of love is conveyed here in stark symbolism. The point is rubbed in by Bottom himself who soberly states that "reason and love keep little company together now-a-days."[5] The absurd infatuation is easily undone in the play, which may be read as an indication of the transiency of love.

Thus love has been perceived by man in an ambivalent, as well as manifold, manner. It may be the highest, all-sweeping emotion which defies the passage of time, and it may be an absurd and passing infatuation. It may be the peculiar human way of expressing a basic biological condition and urge, and it can be an emotion transcending the biological limitations and even defying them in the name of the individual, spiritual commitment.

Significantly, the duality of the passing and the constant with respect to relations between the sexes is manifest also in the institution of marriage. Marriage, as an institution, testifies to the expectation of stability of the relations between the partners to it. Had the biological urge been regarded as a sufficient guarantee for both reproduction and taking care of children, there would have been no need for a social and religious form and sanction which is expressed by the wedding ceremony and the marriage contract. In fact, the biological urges—which are open to changes and fluctuations, which may result in switching from one partner to another and thus undermine the stability of the family—are not trusted; they are harnessed into and circumscribed by legal, social and often religious forms of a binding contract and certain strict taboos. There are contractual obligations in a marriage, such as providing for the economic needs of the spouse, and there are certain prohibitions, such as refraining from extramarital sexual relations. In other words, a degree of constancy, of permanence, is infused into a relationship which may be rooted in biological needs.

Besides this, in certain cultures marriage seeks to give an institutional expression also to the psychological-emotional commitment, perhaps even to the ideal of absolute love. While many civilizations allow the dissolution of marriage under certain well-defined conditions, some, like the Roman Catholic Church, see in marriage an absolute commitment for life. Marriage becomes sacred and the dissolution of marriage is a sacrilege, as is adultery. Marriage becomes "an ever-fixed mark." The principle of the absoluteness of marriage is adhered to to such an extent that, in the rare cases when the church allows separation, this is not considered a divorce but the annulment of the marriage, that is to say, the *de facto* dissolution of the partnership is based on the legal fiction that the marriage was never valid.

While the Catholic approach is a rather extreme form of viewing marriage as an absolute commitment, it is noteworthy that this sentiment seems to be fairly widespread outside this church. Thus in traditional Christian and Jewish communities, in which divorce is permitted, it certainly has not been encouraged, and has often been regarded as some sort of a stigma on the divorcees. The notion that one of the partners is "guilty," which has been preserved in the English law, is an indirect indication of the perception of the basic inviolability of marriage, essentially an absolute relationship.

The encounter with death has a profoundly destabilizing impact on human beings. It shows to the living the physical disintegration of another—often close—human being, and it points to the eventual death of the survivors. Being and not-being confront each other in stark reality, and fundamentally it is not-being that is the winner in this encounter, as the living reflect on death and realize the finality of their own biological existence.

It is this crucial confrontation that stimulates a monumental reaction of the sense of absoluteness of the self. It tries to overcome death, to wrench out of its grasp some permanence, some kind of being which is not, and cannot be, annihilated. Man contends with death and makes attempts to deny its finality. Let us look into some of these efforts.

It is noteworthy that diverse civilizations put up some visible marks to commemorate the dead. These may range from a modest tombstone to an elaborate mausoleum. It could be asked why even a monarch should invest wealth in building a useless edifice such as a gigantic pyramid, or Taj Mahal, to commemorate the dead. The answer seems to be in the quest to counterbalance the physical disintegration of a human being by something which, because of its solidity, size or beauty, symbolizes the eternal and absolute. Significantly, even the humbler tombstones are made of stone, and the inscription commemorating the departed is carved into it: it is meant to remain forever.

In some special cases the practice is quite opposite: there is no monument to the dead and the place of burial remains unknown. Thus, it is said of Moses that he was buried "in a valley in the land of Moab . . . ; but no man knoweth of his sepulchre unto this day."[6] Elijah, we are told, "went up by a whirlwind into heaven."[7] So in this case there would not be any tomb at all. Interestingly, the places of burial of the kings of Saudi Arabia remain unmarked and unknown. These traditions and practices should not, however, be interpreted as the acceptance of the finality of human life which cannot be redeemed. As they are related to cases of prominent individuals, or men of high social standing, the plausible explanation is that the absence of a monument and the unknown location of burial underscore the eternity of the person in question. A tomb, however magnificent, is associated with the physical remains of a person who is not alive anymore. The absence of such a physical testimony makes it easier to accept the reality of the metaphysical, the eternity of the departed.

The custom of cremation, which has been widespread in various parts of the world from ancient times and renewed in some modern civilizations, may seem to be devoid of any illusion of or allusion to eternity. Ostensibly, it underscores the finality of death. Yet this is not necessarily the case. In various cultures the cremation of the body is understood to facilitate the departure of the soul into some spiritual region. The contrasting ancient Egyptian practice of mummification of the body—that is to say, an attempt to preserve the body in perpetuity—clearly expresses the ardent intent to overcome physical death by physical means.

The attempt to wrest the departed from the clutches of transiency is expressed also in various ceremonies, which invoke the survival of the spirit, the sanctity of the diseased and his moral and spiritual qualities. The identification of the eternal element may vary in accordance with the religious belief, but even the agnostic will cherish and extol the nobility and other virtues of the departed, which, in some unspecified manner, make him transcend the biological existence.

The ceremonies intended to assure a contact with the absolute usually start with the burial service, or its equivalent, when the survival of the spirit is mentioned in word, and sometimes in a symbolic or sacramental act, such as the sprinkling of holy water. Then there are various ways of remembering the dead—whether by lighting a candle in the church, or a memorial candle at home on anniversaries and certain holidays in Jewish practice. The eulogy of the dead, especially of public figures, on various annual occasions, is another, often secular, manifestation of attempts at the immortalization of mortals.

While all these are visible manifestations of asserting the absolute in the face of transiency, the problem of death is also faced squarely by the development of certain beliefs which, in fact, justify some of the ceremonial practices. While engraving the name and epitaph on a tombstone need not be connected to a religious belief, a candle in the church or mummification clearly express a system of belief concerning the human condition which attributes to man an element of the absolute. Such beliefs have usually been linked to a faith in God, or in various deities, though, in principle one can conceive the notion of the immortality of the human soul without the supporting belief in the existence of God. Some consideration should be given to these beliefs.

The lot of man after death is not clearly defined in the Old Testament. *Sheol*, which is the underground to which the dead descend, seems to indicate a place of some shadowy existence, or semi-existence, or perhaps even a sense of the end of individual existence. When compared with the perspective of later religious developments, not much solace is offered by this source for the survival and eternity of the soul. The Greek Hades, where the dead are the shadows of their former selves, shows a remarkable affinity with *Sheol*.

If these beliefs seem to be uncertain about the survival of the individual, or even doubt it, in view of the evidence of the earthly experience, other beliefs show much more confidence in the continuity of human existence after death. One such belief is that of reincarnation or metempsychosis. It assumes that the soul, or some spiritual element, migrates on a person's death to another person, or, in some beliefs, to another animal or even plant. These beliefs are shared, in a broad sense, by some primitive cultures and by the ancient Greek religion and even philosophy. The belief in reincarnation was adopted by some Christian sects in the Middle Ages and by Jewish mysticism, but did not strike roots in the mainstream of these religions. Reincarnation plays an important role in Hinduism, where the soul ascends, or descends, by being born again in a human being of a higher or lower caste, as a reward or punishment for its performance in earlier earthly existence.

Greater consolation is provided by the belief that the human soul is essentially immortal and, on death, it does not return to another body, but continues its existence in some undefined form. Belief of this kind is shared by post-biblical Judaism and Christianity. The post-mortal existence is often depicted as a state of absolute bliss and communion with God—not to mention the saints and the righteous. Indeed, this kind of belief implies that the earthly existence is rather bleak when compared with the perfect joy and fulfillment of the spirit in the future. A rabbinical parable puts it this way: "This world is like an ante-chamber before the world to come; prepare yourself in the ante-chamber, so that you may enter the great hall."[8]

The belief in the survival of the soul became linked to the basic notion of reward and punishment for man's conduct during his earthly existence. In this perception, which rabbinical Judaism and Christianity share (though the latter stresses it more), men after death do not necessarily embark on an existence of bliss, but are classified according to their deserts. Some ascend to Paradise, while others descend to Hell. In further refinement of the doctrine, Paradise and Hell are divided into several departments or levels, and each deceased individual is dispatched to his proper division. Catholics add the Purgatory, which is a temporary region of atonement, a prelude to an eventual ascension to Paradise.

Perhaps somewhat inconsistent with the beliefs in the survival of the soul is the belief in the individual resurrection of the dead, which rabbinical Judaism and Christianity share. This tenet is linked to eschatological beliefs—whether the appearance of the Jewish Messiah, or the Second Coming, which will establish a new cosmic order. The resurrection is not merely the revival of the soul, but the reappearance of the individual person, body and soul. This, in fact, amounts to a simple, one might say simplistic, denial of the finality of death: in the last days the dead will come to life, and apparently they will never die again.

The various beliefs and speculations about the continuation and even permanence of individual existence, in spite of the evidence of death, are characteristic of man's assertion of the absolute in a domain nearest to his concern. Yet, however great the motivation for this belief, it is noteworthy that a degree of doubt all too often accompanies it. Men can assert their trust in the survival of the soul, or in resurrection, or in departure to Paradise. Yet, at the same time, they may feel far from certain that this actually will happen.

The doubt may be voiced directly, whether by open skeptics in our times, or opposing religious factions in earlier times. Thus two millennia ago the Saducees rejected the belief in survival after death, while the Pharisees affirmed it. However, a more important indication of the realization of the temporal limitation of human existence, in spite of the adherence to beliefs which trust in man's permanence, are indirect expressions of diffidence and concern.

There are few cultures in which death, even if perceived as a transition to residence in Paradise, or a similar blissful situation, is looked upon with joy. Even if the above-mentioned rabbinical parable views terrestrial life as a mere preparation for the true existence, there is no evidence in Judaism of eagerness to die. On the contrary, death is looked at with grief and universally regarded as deplorable. Thus the Jewish memorial prayer, chanted at burial or in commemoration of the dead on certain holidays in the synagogue, while referring to the Garden of Eden where the soul of the departed will find peace, is chanted to a tune which is the quintessence of sorrow and anguish.[9] The verbal assertion of blissful eternity is belied by the musical tune which expresses the tragical awareness of death and transition. Similarly, human finality is remembered in the Christian burial ceremony—"earth to earth, ashes to ashes, dust to dust"—along with the assertion of resurrection and eternal life.

Thus, almost universally, death is a mournful occasion and is accompanied by rites and customs stressing the sadness of the occasion. Commemoration of the dead is also characterized by sorrow and sadness. All the assertions of the immortality of the soul notwithstanding, the vanishing of an individual from the family and the community and his disappearance from the earthly abode are a change which the survivors close to him experience as a loss, an irreparable loss.

This is probably the reason why the various beliefs in the survival of the soul are not sufficient to gratify man's yearning for the absolute. Man looks for additional comfort, for more assurances, beside these direct beliefs. He looks for the absolute also outside his own individual self and the selves of his fellow beings. He looks for it in the discoveries of his mind and in the creations of his spirit, as well as in collective objectives and social ends.

Chapter 5

Religion

A major area of human perception and activity into which the urge for the absolute is projected is that of religion. Religion can be defined as a system of beliefs and practices which focuses on powerful and immortal beings or being, referred to as gods or God.

The nature of the divinity believed in may vary in different systems. The divinity may be all-knowing and almighty, as is usually the case in monotheistic religions, or both the knowledge and the might of gods may be restricted, as was the case in the ancient Greek beliefs, and in various other polytheistic systems. The very existence of many gods seems to imply that they are not almighty, as each is in charge of a certain domain of reality. The gods, or God, may be just and/or compassionate—again a characteristic of monotheistic creeds—and they may be unfair and partial to their own favorite individuals or nations, as Greek mythology testifies. They may be implacable and they may be open to human argument, gifts or magical manipulation. Whatever the differences, however, gods are all conceived as immortal. This element of absoluteness remains the lowest common denominator of deities in the diverse systems.

Interestingly, in polytheistic religions gods may be born, though they do not die. In monotheistic systems the infinite future existence of God is usually extended, in a symmetrical way, to the past. God has been from eternity and will last into eternity. Indeed, in some theological speculations God is perceived as timeless, as existing beyond the dimension of time—one could say, the way a geometrical theorem lies outside the limitations of time. These refinements of the notion of immortality only emphasize the perception of the absolute which is associated with the concept of God.

The monotheistic systems usually attribute absolute qualities to God also in other cardinal ways. One such quality, as already indicated, is omnipotence. The power of God is unlimited and He can do whatever He wishes. Besides wielding absolute or unlimited power, God may be deemed to be perfectly just, and also full of compassion for living beings, notably humanity. Thus absolute moral qualities are added to and linked with absolute power and immortality.

The combination of these absolutes in one entity may create some theoretical problems. As is well-known, the question has often been raised how an omnipotent and just and compassionate God can tolerate iniquity and misery, which is a part of human experience. Apparently, either He is not omnipotent, or else He is not just and merciful. The problem is not faced by the Zoroastrian religion, which sees the world as the arena of struggle between the forces of good and evil, headed by Ahura Mazdah and Ahriman, respectively. Monotheistic religions cannot offer such a clear-cut solution to their problem and look for more complex answers to the fundamental query.

The issue is of interest in the present context, for it is a clear example of how human concepts about the absolute can lead to a conflict. The attempts to resolve such a conflict in the present instance should be briefly mentioned here.

One way is to assert that whatever suffering the just, or whatever enjoyment the unjust, have experienced in their respective lives, their just reward or punishment will be complemented and apportioned to them in the world to come. Thus the belief in the continued existence of the individual after death, which is of such great importance to man's quest of the absolute, helps to resolve the present problem as well.

Another answer is that man cannot comprehend the ways of the Lord who, combining wisdom with compassion, besides omnipotence, deals with human beings in the right way. The questioning by man of God's treatment of humanity is due to the limitations of human intelligence. The answer, as far as man is concerned, is to trust in God, to trust blindly.

Irrespective of such attempts to resolve these basic theological problems, diverse religions have exhibited certain preferences as to the kind of absolutes they stress in connection with their concept of God. It may be justice, it may be mercy, it may be omnipotence, or diverse combinations of these, that are selected as the main attributes of God, and thereby as the leading principle informing the religious life. The issue may become even more complex in that the religious ideals may focus on social issues and on the individual in varying degree, and combine this orientation with the qualities attributed to God. It is worthwhile to examine these implications by a closer look at two cardinal examples, those of Judaism and Christianity.

Judaism, looked at from this perspective, could be characterized as a religion dominated by the ideal of justice and equity. While, inasmuch as Judaism is a religion, this involves such elements as belief in God, and various rites and ceremonies, and though Judaism can be described as a national religion, the overriding idea which informs it is justice as an absolute principle.

The idea is clearly expressed already in the Pentateuch, when Abraham, informed by the Lord of the impending destruction of the sinful Sodom and Gomorrah, shows concern about the possibility of some righteous people perishing there. Such an eventuality is so preposterous in his opinion that he dares to admonish the Lord in a rather stern manner: "That be far from thee to do after this manner, to slay the righteous with the wicked: and that the righteous should be as the wicked, that be far from thee: Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?"[1] The concern for justice exemplified in this story takes the form of an ardent injunction in another passage in the Pentateuch: "Justice justice shalt thou pursue."[2] Justice is a principle which ought to be actively pursued and not merely passively adhered to.

The prominence of the principle of justice in the Bible is expressed in diverse laws regulating punishments for various offenses, while insisting that the judges neither "respect persons" nor take bribes.[3] Justice is universal, and the same law applies to the humble and to the mighty. Ahab the king, whose wife connived in a judicial murder of Naboth the Jezreelite, to enable the king to appropriate the latter's vineyard, is confronted by Elijah the prophet who, in the name of God, announces an ignominious death of the royal couple and an end to the rule of the dynasty.[4] The fervent commitment to justice is conveyed in many other laws, exhortations, stories, which cannot be elaborated here.

Underlying the notion of justice is a sense of humaneness, which becomes evident in a variety of practical injunctions. Thus, for example, the Sabbath rest is extended to the servants or slaves and to the cattle.[5] There is special care to assure that the underprivileged not be exploited: "Thou shalt not pervert the judgment of the stranger, nor of the fatherless; nor take a widow's raiment to pledge."[6] Various injunctions take care of charity for the poor, a foreshadowing of what we call social legislation. There is concern for not causing an accidental death: thus a "battlement" (in fact, a bannister) has to be built on the roof to prevent an accidental fall.[7]

In brief, the picture gained from the legislative and moral injunctions is of a system striving toward a society in which humaneness and brotherly concern for fellow human beings is ever present in the consciousness of people and constantly applied in practice. Justice is not essentially the enforcement of law, but action in accordance with the notions of fairness and equity, out of concern and compassion for humanity, and even living creatures at large. There is no contradiction between justice and compassion. Justice is based on compassion, which has to be expressed in a way that is fair to all. The implementation of this ideal requires a stern code of punishment (by men and God) and reward (by God), which is only just. Besides being just, it should not be regarded as uncharitable, as some critics of Judaism allege, for there is no other way of translating the ethical principles of compassion into social reality.

The Bible, and later Judaism, contain many commandments and injunctions which seem purely ritualistic, and some biblical laws may be cruel. So are various biblical stories told with approval and attributed to divine commandments. The inhumane elements, however, have either been left behind or discarded, and they have not marred the humane essence of Judaism for at least two millennia. As to the ritualistic side, which by its very nature is more visible than the moral intent and action, it is no more than a complement to the moral-religious essence, and, in a way, an attempt to assure the application of that essence to everyday life.

Judaism is not a religion relegated to holidays and Sabbaths, to weddings and deaths. It is, in its deep sense, a way of life with quotidian application. The orthodox observance of Judaism is a monumental effort to assure the continuous presence of God in the consciousness and behavior of the individual and the community. The orthodox Jew has regular prayers three times a day, wears "fringes" in the borders of a special garment to remind him of the commandments of the Lord,[8] has a blessing for the consumption of various foods, for breaking bread and for washing hands in preparation to break bread. There are blessings for new moon, for seeing the wise and for catching a glimpse of the mighty. There is a blessing on hearing a thunder, and there is a prayer in expectation of the rainy season; there is a blessing for escaping danger, and there is one for experiencing a misfortune. God remains in the mind from the moment of awakening—a blessing there too—until falling asleep after a short prayer in bed.

The divine presence (one is tempted to say, forced on God through countless observances) is, in the last resort, not only an expression of the purely religious quest for proximity to the absolute power, but also a constant reminder of the commandments, of the ethical absolute of justice and charity. God is perceived as the perfectly just and compassionate being, and invoking Him is a means for informing life with these principles. Life, transient and changing, oscillating between fortunes and misfortunes, is set on the course of the absolute by the rigorous adherence to divine law and by the constant invocation of divine presence. The flux of life is sanctified, which, in our context, means that the transient is clad in the mantle of the absolute.

Christianity can be contrasted with Judaism as a religion which puts a predominant stress not on the ethical perfection of the social order, but on the salvation of the individual. Whereas Judaism aims at a *society* which lives in accord with the absolute ethical injunctions and thus becomes "a kingdom of priests, and an holy nation,"[9] Christianity allows the *individual* to reach for the absolute by his total commitment to God.

The logical source of this difference of emphasis can be sought in diverse ethical perspectives, which need not necessarily mean different ethical judgments. Both systems, for example, look at murder with abhorrence. The Judaic perspective, however, stresses the consequences of the act for the victim, while the Christian angle emphasizes the corruption of the perpetrator of the crime, the harm done to the agent's soul. Conversely, while Judaism sees the beneficial consequences of good deeds to society, Christianity stresses the spiritual benefit to the doer.

The Judaic concern for the consequences of action has clear social implications, for the good act or the transgression are seen as affecting the community; hence the significance of law in Judaism, a norm controlling human activity with view to social benefit. The Christian preoccupation with the agent or doer results in stressing motivation and intent rather than works, and to relative belittling of the significance of law. While the strict observance of the commandments is the way to approach the absolute in Judaism, it is the purity of commitment and belief that brings man to the proximity of God and to salvation in Christianity.

Therefore, the sinner in Judaism remains a sinner, if his act of harm to another individual or society cannot be undone, as in the case of manslaughter. Characteristically, theft is punished by return of double the value of the stolen good, that is, by undoing the social harm. In Christianity, the sinner, however atrocious and harmful his crime, has the door open to repentance, and if he genuinely regrets his action, his soul will be saved.

Indeed, Christianity provides a peculiar way for individual redemption. Jesus Christ, having been sent by God to suffer death, by virtue of his martyrdom provides redemption for all the sins of his future followers, on the condition that they believe in him and repent of their sin. In the eyes of God all the sinners can be forgiven. Redemption means total delivery from sin and the damnation that would result from it. It is an act which wipes off the sin from the moral slate of the individual. Thus it is not the criminal law which is the means of achieving perfection, but individual faith in the Redeemer. In the words of the Apostle Paul, "a man is justified by faith without the deeds of law."[10]

Jesus Christ, who is the means for the countless redemptions, becomes the focal figure in Christian theology. Significantly, he assumes a twofold dimension, human and divine. He appeared in human shape and died a human death: in this sense he exemplifies the transient. Yet he is the son of God and the divine Redeemer, and thus represents the absolute. The combination of the transient and the absolute in the same person—whatever difficulties it may present for theology—is of great comfort to man,[11] for it brings the figure of Christ close to *homo transiens*, as it gratifies the hidden craving of *homo absolutus*. This does not mean that Christ is conceived as man. He becomes, in fact, an inverted man: the inkling of the absolute which man may feel in himself becomes the main characteristic in Christ, while the sense of transiency which overwhelms man is merely a secondary trait in Christ. Yet, by having the double essence, Christ becomes a more reachable absolute than God in His unmitigated absoluteness could ever be.

It is understandable, therefore, why Christianity, by and large, has not produced an observant community, like that of orthodox Jewry, which saturates its daily life with commandments and observances and which strives for a continuous sanctification of life. What Christianity demands is primarily an ardent belief in God and Christ. Although this belief has ethical implications for human conduct, it is the faith which is in the forefront of human consciousness. It could be said that one gets hold of the absolute not through continuous and consistent conduct, but through sporadic acts of faith. It is the *last* confession and absolution that protects the Catholic from damnation, and not the sum total of a lifetime of behavior.

Only in the monastic orders does one find in Christianity the continuous preoccupation with religion, the unceasing reaching for the absolute, which is standard in the orthodox Jewish community. By contrast and characteristically, the theo-ethical presence is striven to in Judaism within the framework of normal social and family life and not in celibate orders. In Judaism the absolute has to be sought in the transient order, in the normal setting of human life, and not by separation from it, let alone its denial. The proof of adherence to the absolute is in abiding by it within the limitations of transiency imposed on man. Searching for the absolute outside the framework of normal life would mean alienating the absolute from the bulk of humanity, from *homo transiens* as we know him.

Looked at from another perspective, Judaism and Christianity, as well as Islam, are religions of revelation. In other words, they do not merely assert their theological truths and prescribe their codes of behavior (both elements, the descriptive and the prescriptive, perceived as absolutes). They also link religion to an occurrence in history, to an event believed to have happened in a specific place and time.

In the case of Judaism, God is said to have directly contacted Abraham, Isaac and Jacob and made them certain promises. The most crucial revelation, however, is that at Mount Sinai, where the tribes of Israel, gathered at the foot of the mountain, received the Ten Commandments after having concluded a covenant to follow in the ways of the Lord. The Ten Commandments are the quintessence of Judaism, and the Tables on which they were inscribed became the most important religious object, placed in the

Ark of the Covenant in the Holy of Holies of the Temple. The substance and the symbol of the absolute religious-ethical perception are clearly and emphatically identified. Yet the absolute—the revelation itself and the formulation of the doctrine—is linked to a historically perceived occurrence: "In the third month, when the children of Israel were gone forth out of the land of Egypt, the same day came they unto the wilderness of Sinai."[12] That is the concrete setting into which the monumental event is to be introduced. The absolute is to take place in the flux of transiency.

This setting of the absolute event in the context of the transiency of time and history serves a definite purpose: it lends the absolute, which is miraculous, elusive, remote, the quality of an actual, tangible event. The fact that the divine revelation took place at a definite place and time allows it to be felt as a historical and thus actual experience, despite its unique ahistorical nature. The absolute, by being coated in historicity, becomes more real without losing its supernatural quality.

The story of Jesus, as told in the Gospels, is also a story of a divinely ordained occurrence which is set in a concrete historical situation. The life and death of Jesus, the Messiah (i.e., the God-sent deliverer), is linked to Jerusalem and Galilee and Roman rule over Judea. The social and political setting lend the religious manifestation a sense of concreteness. The absolute becomes a historical event and thus what might have passed as a myth turns into a fact. The relative proximity of the events and the link with Pontius Pilate, whose existence and function are corroborated by other sources, make the story more tangible than the more distant encounter at Sinai.

Even more factual is the manifestation of the absolute religious truth in Islam. Here the revealer of the absolute is an undisputed historical figure, with recorded political-military actions which affected wide regions in his lifetime and the era immediately following. The revelation becomes here more historical also because it depends less on miracles. Yet its historicity, its link to the transient, does not diminish its significance as the embodiment of the absolute truth in the eyes of the believers.

The monotheistic religions are emphatic expressions of the human attempt to reach for the absolute. Each religion tries to do it in its own way, as we have noted, particularly in the case of Judaism and Christianity. Yet in each of the systems there is a realization that its hold on the absolute is not complete, that it falls short of expectations, for both systems aim not only at providing the individual or the community with a way to reach out to God and to do right. They also want to assure their respective followers that God will respond and do so generously and fully, in conformity with absolute principles and attributes linked to Him.

The divine response, however, as manifested in human experience, is far from being complete and perfect. The Jewish quest for justice and humaneness has not led to the full and firm establishment of these conditions in respect of the Jews and of humanity. It is also realized that justice restricted to one community, humaneness confined to one society, would be in a precarious situation and could be swept by the turbulence of iniquity and barbarism from without. Christianity too admits the presence of sin and depravity, of human failing in action and intent. Not all the sinners genuinely repent, nor are all the righteous truly just. The world is far from being perfect.

The realization of the gap between the hoped for ideal and the present reality led to the emergence of eschatological dreams and speculations, to the vision of "the last days." Without setting a chronological determination—the biblical phrase "the last days" remains ambiguous and enigmatic in its attempt to impose an ending to the sequence of time—these visions try to forecast the realization of the ideal at some point in the future. They seem to say that, imperfect as the situation is in human experience, there will come a time when the order of things, or rather the disorder and the malaise, will come to an end and be reversed. The ideal, in its absolute form, will be established in reality, and it will not be subject anymore to struggle and to the vicissitudes of circumstances and hostile forces.

The substance of the eschatological visions of Christianity and Judaism differs in accordance with the nature of each system. While this is a wide subject which cannot be dealt with properly in the present context, a brief indication of the eschatological message of each religion, its notion of the absolute fulfillment, may be attempted.

A fair representation of Christian eschatology is given in St. Augustine's *The City of God*, completed in 426 A.D. The establishment of the last days will be preceded by apocalyptic events, which are already foreshadowed in the Bible, the Old and the New Testaments. As Augustine sums up the future event, there will be the last judgment administered by Jesus Christ, in which the devil and the wicked will be condemned to eternal agony and suffering, while the just and the saints, all resurrected, will live in eternal blessedness.[13] Thus the world will become the abode of total perfection. There will be no more strife between sin and repentance, evil and good. There will be no more struggle and suffering. In our terminology, the transiency of sin and conflict will be superseded by the constancy of righteousness and harmony. The salvation of the individual, and the world consisting of perfect individuals only, will be absolute.

The eschatological vision of Judaism, while partially overlapping with the Christian expectations, has as its primary focus the future community of man. Characteristically, it will be established by the equitable enforcement of justice by the God-sent Messiah: "But with righteousness shall he judge the poor, and reprove with equity for the meek of the earth."[14] Typically also, the rule of righteousness will lead to universal humaneness, which is represented by a harmonious nature: "The wolf also shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the kid.''[15] Whether this is meant literally or not, there can be no doubt that it is intended, in the least, to apply to human relations, including the international scene; for, as Isaiah puts it in another prophecy, ''nation shall not lift sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more.''[16] Thus, absolute justice and humaneness—universal peace being a major expression of these ideals—will rule the world. The ethical ideal of Judaism will be fulfilled.

Although some religions reach their absolute aim in an eschatological vision, they do not overlook the need for a contact with the absolute also in the current state of affairs. This, as we have seen, is provided by the doctrine, the moral commandments and various forms of piety. It is also supplemented by the institution of concrete, and even tangible, forms which come to assure the believers of the essential contact with God and what He stands for.

A cardinal means for offering a concrete contact with the absolute is the religious ceremony. Virtually all religions have some ceremonies, though the stress on ceremony may vary. The sacrifice to God or to gods in antiquity was a cardinal way of contact with the deity. The ritual associated with it—such as the nature of the sacrifice and the detailed requirements and regulations linked to the presentation of the offering—enhanced the significance and the solemnity of the occasion. Restriction of sacrifices to a holy place, or to a temple, and the establishment of a priestly caste entrusted with sacrifices and some other religious ceremonies, characteristic of ancient Israel, are among the means emphasizing the sacred nature of the religious observance, that is to say, of its link to the absolute.

Christianity adopted some of the practices of antiquity, including those of ancient Israel, though the church modified them in its own way. Thus the Catholic priest remains a person consecrated to provide a contact with God for ordinary men and women, but his function is not inherited, as it was in Israel, but personally chosen. That it requires celibacy is a testimony to the importance attached to the dedication to a sacred role. An unmarried priest symbolizes and embodies a person who is beyond the natural order of things, who is above the transiency of current life. One could say perhaps that such a person, such a dedicated priest, represents the absolute. The apogee of this perception is embodied in the institution and person of the pope, the vicar of Christ.

The Eucharist, which Roman Catholics see as the actual transformation of bread and wine into the body and blood of Christ, is in some ways reminiscent of ancient sacrifices, but in a way it is far more than that. It not only provides a channel of communication with deity, as sacrifices do, but it reenacts the self-sacrifice of Christ which redeemed human sins. The act of redemption takes place in the church again and again. The absolute descends to earth and puts its stamp on the lives of the sinful and transient human beings. Other sacraments also represent in a tangible way the absolute in its manifestation in the transient world.

For Protestants the Eucharist is not the actual miracle of transubstantiation, but rather a symbol of Christ's death and the redemption of sin. Thus its role as a concrete contact with the absolute is somewhat diminished. The lesser stress on religious ceremony and the abolition of priesthood also testify to the reduction of the level of concrete representation of the absolute. There are, of course, theological reasons for this development, which need not concern us here.

Judaism too experienced a change in this respect. The destruction of the Temple put an end to daily sacrifices and the priests lost their essential function. Religious ceremony was largely transferred to the synagogue where sacrifices were not allowed and were substituted by prayers. This more refined form of communication with God was less ceremonious and less tangible. The rabbinical guidance was of a spiritual nature—less than priestly ritual for the simpleminded, though more important for the sophisticated. Still, certain tangible symbols were either introduced or, if already existing, enhanced.

Thus the Torah scrolls, which are kept in the synagogue in the holy chest, a reminder of the Ark in the Holy of Holies in the Temple, became a tangible representation of the absolute. Containing the moral commandments of God, they came closest to a tangible manifestation in a religion which strictly forbids any visual representation of divinity. Significantly, the scrolls of the Torah are the object of ceremonious veneration. Their writing by a qualified scribe involves purification and dedication. When the scrolls are taken out of the chest during the services, the congregation stands up. When they are transferred from the chest to the rostrum through the aisles of the synagogue for public reading, the cover of the scrolls is sent kisses by those present, and so on. The quest for a sacramental manifestation of the absolute finds its gratification even under conditions which are circumstantially (because of the destruction of the Temple) and intentionally (because of the prohibition of visual images of divinity) obstructive to such a manifestation.

Christianity does not share with Judaism the prohibition of representing divinity in a tangible manner. Consequently, images, if not of God the father, then of God the son, Jesus Christ, abound inside and outside churches, predominantly among the Catholics. While these representations are meant as a symbol, they mean much more than that to the ordinary believer. The image of Jesus on the cross, or the cross itself, became holy, sacramental. It became identified with the absolute message of Christianity. Whether above the altar, or on the roof of the church or on the neck of the believer, it brings the absolute message home.

The commitment of man to the quest of the absolute through religion is evident not only in the beliefs and observances, the expectations and the symbols, the rites and the ceremonies of various religions. This devotion is also apparent from the amount of energy and wealth dedicated to religious concerns, and the consequent quality and quantity of tangible achievements related to religion.

It is noteworthy that even among the most primitive tribes, where the provision of necessities absorbs virtually all the energies of man, we find an expression of religious beliefs not only in ceremonies and institutions, but also in art. The art may take the form of some primitive carving and some ceremonial dancing. To the modern observer, unless he has the trained eye of an anthropologist, this may seem rather trivial, but from the perspective of the tribal society the religious belief and its artistic expression are an important facet of life.

The place of religion in the life of a community is much clearer to a lay observer when he looks at more advanced civilizations. Anyone who faces a medieval cathedral cannot fail to realize the amount of work, devotion and genius invested in the magnificent structure, with its sculptural work, stained glass windows and the like. France and Italy, as well as other countries in Europe, abound in such cathedrals and churches—the greatest architectural landmarks there from the early Middle Ages, through the Renaissance, until fairly recent times when secular architecture has largely taken over. The competing structures in those centuries were the castles and the palaces, but, on the whole, one can say that the churches were dominant.

The place of the mosque in Moslem civilization is comparable, if perhaps not equal, due to the religious limitations which prohibit artistic reproduction of humans and animals in Islam. Jewish synagogues were much humbler than either churches or mosques, because of the social position of Jews in the lands of their dispersal and the relatively smaller communities.

The amazing thing, however, is the amount of wealth and work dedicated to religious architecture and art even in times of a general low standard of living. While the construction of the Chartres cathedral, or the cathedral of Siena, may have been promoted by some powerful circles of the Catholic Church and its wealthy adherents, it is inconceivable that works of art on such a colossal scale could be accomplished without a widespread devotion. It is plausible that the magnificence of a cathedral testified, for the community which it was to serve, to the glory of God and to His presence, to the reality of the absolute within the transient world.

Religious beliefs have been expressed also in other artistic forms. The amount of painting and sculpture based on Christian motifs is limitless and often of the highest excellence. The work of art, because it is meant to endure, is conceived both as an adequate representation of the absolute and as the right tribute to it. Musical composition too has reached some of its marks of excellence in the realm of religious themes, usually intended for liturgical service. This is true not only of Christianity, but also of Judaism, which is not subject to doctrinal restrictions in respect to this artistic expression. Here again the sense of the absolute which is inherent in sublime music seemed suitable to accompany the cult of the absolute.

It may be worthwhile to append to the discussion of religion the subject of astrological beliefs and practices. The planets and the stars are not accorded a spectacular status in the monotheistic religions. They are a part of the universe created by God. This is not the case in some polytheistic systems, in which planets and stars may be regarded as being of divine nature. Sun and moon worship has been practiced in various civilizations.

However, even when the heavenly bodies were not literally conceived as deities, they were often regarded as controlling human affairs, or as indicating human fortunes, and astrology, being an attempt to unveil human destinies by gazing at the stars, was based on such beliefs. They apparently originated in ancient Babylonia and spread from there to ancient Greece and Rome, as well as to India and China. Significantly, astrology was not discarded either by Arabs or by Christians as late as the fifteenth century.

What is of interest to us is a possible relationship between astrology and the transient-absolute perspective. It is plausible that the importance ascribed to heavenly bodies was associated with their apparent immutability. In contrast to man and other living beings, in contrast to the vicissitudes of history to which nations are subject, the heavenly bodies appear in the sky with perfect regularity. True, some seem stationary, while others move, but the movement is not an indication of an inner change, and, as study and observation indicated to the ancients, the movements follow a regular pattern. Thus the firmament with its hosts of heaven were looked up to as eternal and absolute, as well as immense and perfect. By contrast man and nation seemed puny and transient. No wonder that man looked for guidance from the absolute yet visible entities for the unsteady and precarious fate of human beings. Nor is it surprising, for that matter, that heavenly bodies were sometimes regarded as deities: for were they not eternal, indestructible and beyond reach?

The heavenly bodies, even when finally deprived of their divine or mystical status, retained some of their importance as the symbols of the eternal and the absolute. The regularity of the movement and the mutual relationship of the sun, the earth and the moon assure their status as standards for measuring time by the diurnal, monthly and annual cycles. Astronomy continued to be kept alive even when astrology had declined.

Interestingly, fundamental changes in astronomical theories had an impact beyond the confines of scientific circles. This, we believe, was the case because of the link of the issue to the absolute. The best illustration in this respect is the transition from the geocentric theory of Ptolemy to the heliocentric theory of Copernicus. The Copernican assertion that the earth is not the center around which the sun and the planets revolve, but that the earth and other planets revolve round the sun, met with fierce opposition by the church and brought Galileo, the supporter of the new theory, before the Inquisition which forced him to renounce it. This opposition, it would seem, was not only due to the religious concern about the disagreement between the heliocentric theory and the Scriptures. The resistance to this theory may have largely been due to the inherent reduction of the status of the earth in the realm of the absolutes. Earth as a planet revolving round the sun is less perfect and important—less absolute, so to say—than an earth served by a revolving sun. Thus, characteristically, Aristarchus of Samos (third century B.C.), who already advocated the heliocentric theory, is said to have aroused the opposition of his contemporary Cleanthes, a Stoic philosopher who, according to Plutarch, ‘‘thought it was the duty of the Greeks to indict Aristarchus of Samos on the charge of impiety for putting in motion the hearth of the Universe.’’[17] Cleanthes, like the Inquisition, voiced the understandable preference of humanity for a closer association with the ‘‘more’’ absolute, as earth would be in a geocentric system.

In our own times it may seem that astronomy has been reduced to being a science among other rational disciplines aiming at the comprehension of reality. With the enormous technological developments, much more information is available today about the heavenly bodies than ever before. In some ways, they are more accessible, especially due to exploratory vehicles with various instruments relaying information back to earth. The moon could even be trodden upon by men. While this further demystifies the firmament, the continued interest in the field, and the vast resources and effort devoted to it, are a testimony to the continued regard for this sphere of the absolute. Even if the planets and the stars are not anymore considered eternal, their astronomical longevity gives them as much of the aura of the absolute as is attainable in our critical age, and the expanse and multitude of the heavenly bodies impress on man his own limitations. Through the exploration of the universe man attains a sense of participation in the virtually eternal and limitless. Those who are neither astronomers nor astronauts may still participate in the explorations vicariously and thus get a sense of this variety of the absolute.

While astronomy, and the related astronautical ventures, may have retained some of the quasi-religious residues of astrology, and while they have retained their lofty status because of the inherent link to the absolute, some men have looked for and found the absolute in the physical world closer to them, a world which is referred to as nature.

Nature, while it is continuously changing, preserves its basic character, maintains its *pattern* of change. The seasons repeat themselves, precipitation and sunshine play their game again and again, heat and cold fluctuate with relative regularity, plants and animals perpetuate their existence in an established manner. The seeming transiency of nature may be seen as an essential immutability, that is to say, as an absolute. This chameleon-like absolute is close to human observation and experience. Indeed, man can see himself as an ingredient of this regularly transient absolute, and thus get solace from participating in the absolute in his own individual, transient way.

One cardinal expression of viewing nature as an absolute, even as *the* absolute, is pantheism—a philosophy or belief which regards nature, or the universe, as God. God, instead of being an entity outside the universe and its possible creator, becomes immanent to nature. Pantheism, whether as a philosophy or a religion or a blend of the two, has assumed different modes in various times and places, an issue which need not concern us here. The common denominator of this diversity is the sense of awe toward nature and the sense of the basic unity and cohesion of the universe. The approach is also gratifying to its followers in that it makes them a part of the divine whole.

Various polytheistic religions in antiquity and various primitive societies, while not strictly pantheistic, believe in the supernatural essence of various natural phenomena, especially those related to fecundity and reproduction. In other words, they see in the biological process an element of the absolute, eternal, divine. Various rites and ceremonies have aimed at assuring the fertility of man, beast and plant; that is to say, they have tried to bend the absolute to the needs and advantage of the community, to assure that it benefits from the cosmic cycle. Even though these cults serve their own pragmatic and transient objectives, they are rooted in the notion of the absolute powers controlling the natural phenomena.

In our own times, in the modern civilizations, there is another manifestation of respect and awe for nature. This is the trend to preserve certain regions in their “natural” form, which means to bar them from direct exploitation by man, which would involve changing the physical conditions of the region. This attitude should be distinguished from those ecological concerns which are addressed to the short- or long-term benefits to man, which may be essentially pragmatic and anthropocentric. Barring human interference in certain reserves of “wilderness,” on the other hand, is usually motivated by genuine respect for nature, an entity of an absolute value, which is to be saved from the often ruthless expansion of *homo transiens*.

Even more spectacular in this sense are the attempts to save some species of animals or plants which may be endangered by the human modification of ecological surroundings. Such species may vary from the

Siberian tiger to some tiny fish about whose existence most laymen are ignorant, or to some Alpine flower. As human well-being may not be affected by the existence of the tiny fish and as the disappearance of ferocious tigers or crocodiles may actually save human individuals, the commitment to save such species must be explained as an expression of regard for nature, which is viewed as an absolute. True, the species, whether endangered or not, are not regarded as eternal, but assumed to have evolved through the evolutionary process of natural selection—a process which allows the survival of some and the decline of others. A consistent Darwinian approach would not shed more tears for the Siberian tiger than for the extinct dinosaur. Yet, though those concerned usually accept the evolutionary theory, they cannot but see in a species the manifestation of the absolute, which they try to preserve in perpetuity.

Chapter 6

Philosophy

While religion—as a system of beliefs and as a cult and practice—involves the masses, philosophy is the domain of the few. While religion seems to manifest itself in virtually every society, whatever its level of cultural development, philosophy thrives selectively. This does not mean that the higher the development, say, in science and technology, the greater the trend to philosophical reflection. Such a correlation is by no means clear. Ancient Greek civilization, where philosophy was not only born but grew to impressive maturity, was not particularly advanced in technology, and its scientific approach was essentially of a theoretical nature, which comes close to philosophical reflection. The contemporary world, particularly in the United States, which excels in technology and enjoys great economic prosperity, seems to give dominance to pragmatic considerations and, by and large, shows comparatively little advancement in philosophical reflection.

Thus philosophy appears to be rather like a sporadic and occasional manifestation, not unlike the flowering of one or another branch of art in some places at some times, though, like art, it is not unaffected by traditions and cultivation. Whatever the circumstances of philosophical creativity, however, it is clearly and directly related to the problems of transiency and the absolute. This should be made obvious from the understanding of the nature of philosophy.

Philosophy literally means love of wisdom. It is this love as it is applied to the pursuit of knowledge of a fundamental and most general nature that is conveyed by this term in its exact sense. Thus, while the knowledge of certain aspects of nature lies within the domain of physics and while other facets are within the realm of biology, philosophy would aim at the comprehension of nature in all its manifold manifestations. While the knowledge of human nature may be divided among physiology, psychology, sociology and so on, a philosophical approach attempts to find the basic principle or principles which will make humanity comprehensible in all its diversity of manifestations.

Our basic thesis, that the absolute and the transient are the fundamental principles which explain the manifold expressions of the human condition and endeavor, being basic and comprehensive, is philosophical in nature. In this chapter, however, we do not intend to show that our inquiry is philosophical, but to argue and illustrate that the issues of the absolute and the transient have been central to philosophical inquiry and speculation throughout the history of the discipline. This will, in practice, be done by showing how various philosophical systems can be viewed from the perspective of our philosophical premises of the transient and the absolute.

However fundamental and comprehensive in its intent, philosophy itself is often divided into branches, even though there may be connections among them. We shall focus here on three such fields: ontology, theory of knowledge and ethics, and on the important problem of determinism. Ontology deals with the nature of being or reality, while theory of knowledge attempts to define how knowledge is attained. These two fields are closely related. Indeed, in some philosophies they are perceived as two sides of the same medal; for, it can be argued that what reality is can be determined only through human knowledge. Reality, as far as human experience is concerned—and how can man reach beyond his experience?—is the outcome of knowledge. Yet, other philosophies assume the existence of reality irrespective of knowledge, though they cannot assert much about its nature without resorting to cognition. Be it as it may, ontology and theory of knowledge remain closely related, and thus will not be treated separately.

Ethics deals with the problem of the nature of moral judgments and their justification. What is the yardstick of, or reason for, determining certain actions or behavior as good or desirable, and others as reprehensible or evil? What is the meaning of good and evil? This field may be largely independent of the theory of knowledge and of ontology, though occasionally there may be a link between these fields. If, for example, ontology should determine that a just and benevolent God rules the universe, such an assumption may have consequences for determining desirable conduct. Still, except for incidental connection, ethics will be discussed separately here. Related to the field of ethics, though also connected to ontological issues, is the problem of determinism and indeterminism. This will be discussed separately in the present chapter.

We cannot, of course, follow the absolute and the transient in all the systems of philosophy from antiquity to the present day. We shall merely take a few cardinal, and therefore more familiar, examples and show how they could be viewed from our perspective. While, as already indicated, philosophy has been of interest to relatively few, its importance cannot be measured by popularity. It has to be sought in the intrinsic merit of the philosophical approach.

In man's attempt to comprehend the world and himself, philosophy has served both as the initial framework for asking the pertinent questions and as the conclusive summation of scientific and general experience. The philosophical questions may be larger and grander than the answers given to them—whether by philosophers or scientists—but this does not nullify the importance of such questions, for two reasons: first, because questions led to answers, however unsatisfactory these may have been; and second, because the questions themselves express the human quest for knowledge, which is a major avenue of search for the absolute. As to the conclusive summation of knowledge which philosophy may offer, its merit consists in providing an overall picture for man's diverse inquiries, of relating them to one another, of understanding the whole. This accords with the nature of man's basic quest for knowledge which, in itself, can be seen as a primary mental urge, and thus beyond the possibility or need of justification. Conceivably, this need for a total, comprehensive and united view is another expression of the quest for the absolute.

The contrast between two philosophies, each of which took an extreme position on the issue of change and stability, of the transient and the absolute, can be best illustrated by an example from ancient Greece, in the early fifth century B.C. The example may be somewhat simplistic, primarily because only fragments from the sayings or writings of the relevant philosophers are extant. Yet simple examples may illustrate the issue with great clarity.

A central statement of one of these philosophers, Heraclitus (c. 535–c. 475 B.C.), is reproduced by Plato: "Heraclitus is supposed to say that all things are in motion and nothing at rest; he compares them to the stream of a river, and says that you cannot go into the same stream twice."[1] The simile underscores the notion of the perpetual motion. Moreover, if we accept Plato's interpretation of this doctrine, the motion is not only change of place, but also substantive change. In other words, all things "are changed as well as move in place."[2]

This continuous flux in reality has some implications for human knowledge of reality. If the perceived and the percipient are all the time changing, there can be neither absolute things nor absolute knowledge. There is only continuous change in the outer world and in the individual perception of the changing things. Even consensus about things perceived would be impossible, and so no knowledge in the accepted sense of the word is attainable.[3]

This brief presentation includes Plato's basic criticism of a philosophy which is committed to the doctrine of continuous flux. In its extreme form such a philosophy leads to total relativism, which outrules the possibility of knowledge. Possibly, Heraclitus did not go to such an extreme. Some analyses of some of the fragments attributed to him suggest that he assumed that a certain stability, some kind of a divine principle, underlies the universal change.[4] In other words, transient as the world manifestations are, they are bound by an absolute principle. Indeed, even the assertion of transiency must except itself from its dictum to retain validity, even if we have no statement of Heraclitus to this effect.

Yet, despite these reservations, Heraclitus remains historically—because of the presentation of Plato, followed also by Aristotle—the extreme representative of a philosophy which focuses on transiency and change, on the relative and elusive nature of things and of knowledge. It is to exemplify this stand that he has been introduced here.

The antithesis to the philosophy of Heraclitus is the doctrine of Parmenides (born c. 514 B.C.).[5] Where Heraclitus saw flux, Parmenides asserted permanence. Where Heraclitus asserted change, Parmenides insisted on stability. His basic notion is that only Being is real, while not-being cannot exist. This truism leads him to deduce that Being could not have been created, for not-being could not have existed. Thus Being has always existed, and, for similar reasons, will always exist. In other words, Being or reality is timeless and absolute, while becoming is an illusion. He describes this reality as one, indivisible, unchanging sphere.

These ontological statements have their counterpart in cognition. The perception of truth is the apprehension of Being. Knowledge is strictly parallel to reality. As the knowledge of truth is achieved by logical argument, of the kind followed above, the reliance on senses is implicitly discarded. Thus, in Plato's dialogue *Parmenides*, the protagonist approves of Socrates for not caring "to examine the perplexity in reference to visible things . . . ; but only in reference to objects of thought, and to what may be called ideas."[6] Truth, conceived in this manner of pure reasoning, becomes, like Parmenidesian reality, immutable, eternal, absolute.

Although the doctrine of Parmenides is hard to accept in its totality in view of commonsense human experience (surely the spherical, eternal, unchanging reality appears to us absurd), there are aspects of his philosophy which have had a profound influence on subsequent thought. One is the notion that matter is eternal, though it may change form: here we face an ontological absolute. Another is the assumption (eagerly adopted by Plato, as we shall see) that reliable knowledge has to be sought through purely logical thinking, as exemplified in mathematics, and not through the inexact and fluctuating sense perception. There is here a clear preference for knowledge which is timeless and absolute over a kind of knowledge which is inaccurate and which is subject to change.

Plato (c. 427–c. 347 B.C.), whose writings have established the foundations of philosophy, shows a clear penchant for the absolute. For him the absolute exists objectively, though it is not the solid sphere of Parmenides, and there is a way for the recognition of the absolute truth, which means that there is the possibility of absolute knowledge.

The perception of the senses, which are organs of our body, does not reveal reality, and the reliance on the senses for the apprehension of truth is misleading (as intimated in the above reference to the dialogue *Parmenides*). In the words of Plato, the body is a hinderer in "the actual acquirement of knowledge" and the senses, such as sight and hearing, are "inaccurate witnesses." The truth can be attained by the soul or the mind when dissociating itself from the body and the senses.[7] The soul should "trust in herself and her pure apprehension of pure existence."[8] What this means is that the way to acquire reliable knowledge is primarily not through observation but through reflection. It is the logical principles, rather than experience, that are the foundation of knowledge. The abstract intellectual reflection precedes the experience apprehended through the senses, which without the guidance of pure logic would be chaotic. Mathematics precedes physics, geometry precedes mechanics, principle precedes pragmatic consideration. The realms of intelligible knowledge are absolute, as the contrasting domain of the sense-perceptible is transient and elusive.

The objective world toward which the human mind or soul addresses itself in its pursuit of knowledge is Plato's famed "world of ideas." The ideas are not mental reflections of the reality which the mind perceives; the mind conceives ideas, which exist independently of human cognition. The idea of the triangle, an area enclosed by three straight lines, has its own eternal, timeless, absolute existence, which man may *discover*, but does not invent or create. In the same manner, there exist other ideas, whether from the realm of geometry or mathematics, such as equality or magnitude, or from the domain of ethics, such as piety, justice or virtue. The world as we experience it, the imperfect and changing picture of our perception, is only a shadow cast by the perfect and immutable entities called ideas. This is true of the physical phenomena, as well as of the moral domain in which human behavior may fall short of the absolute ethical principles.[9]

Thus the absolute and the changing are contrasted by Plato, both on the ontological level and with reference to cognition. Clearly, Plato prefers what he sees as absolute to the ephemeral and transient phenomena, and knowledge addressed to the absolute over opinion formed out of the flux of perceptions. In his quest for the immutable and absolute Plato goes one step further. He subjects the world of ideas to the supreme idea of the good, which is the source both of reality and of the knowledge of reality: "the good may be said to be not only the author of knowledge to all things known, but of their being and essence."[10] Thus an absolute principle, which is of an ethical nature, is the source of reality and its comprehension. The absolute enthroned over reality combines, in its own peculiar manner, power and goodness.

This kind of an absolute brings Plato close to the monotheistic religions which see in God omnipotence and justice with compassion. The bridge toward religion is more clearly expressed by Plato's disciple, Aristotle, though, as we shall see, important differences persist between the Greek philosophical monotheism and the Judeo-Christian perception of God.

The God of Aristotle is, like the idea of good, the essence of all perfection and He is, likewise, immaterial. Being the ultimate perfection, He does not change nor is he subject to motion, for "if a thing is moved, it can be otherwise than it is,"[11] and the change of anything perfect "would be for the worse."[12] All God does is think, and, being the most perfect, He thinks about Himself. Thus the Parmenidesian notion of the eternal and immobile ascribed to material substance is transferred to the realm of the spiritual, where it is more palatable.

Yet the question arises: what relevance has this kind of a self-centered and remote God to the universe in general and to humanity in particular? The answer is that the imperfect world, by looking at the perfect God, is moved by the love of God to emulate Him and to improve itself. This is particularly the case of man, who has the capacity to think in a detached manner. Thus God, while withdrawn from the universe, is the cause of progress. The absolute, in being the model of perfection, becomes the *telos*, the end and aim, of things transient. The absolute rests, while the transient moves toward it.

This philosophical speculation combines the notion of the absolute with the acceptance of the transient, just as the monotheistic Judaism and Christianity do. However, while the latter religions allow God activity and involvement in human affairs (indeed, expect it), the Greek notion of the absolute precludes any outward action of the absolute entity. Aristotle secures the connection between the absolute and the transient—particularly in respect of man, who is aware of the duality—by making the transient move and change on its own by its striving toward the absolute. God, instead of being an active creator and an involved actor, turns into an indirect mover by being the object of admiration. The action proper is that of the less perfect beings. The universe becomes a kind of self-propelled transiency striving toward the perfect and immutable absolute.

Modern philosophical thinking has usually focused on the problem of knowledge as against the ancient Greek stress on the nature of reality. To be sure, theory of knowledge and ontology are closely linked, as indicated earlier, but the emphasis of one aspect or another, or the starting point at which the philosophical inquiry begins, lends it a distinctive character.

René Descartes (1596–1650) is usually regarded as the first modern philosopher. His initial philosophical search aimed at ascertaining the indubitable, or absolute, truth. While he admits that "in practical life . . . it is sometimes necessary to follow opinions which we know to be uncertain," he was determined to seek truth which could not be doubted.[13] The point is significant from our perspective, for it shows that the philosopher is aware of the common and accepted way of forming opinions and acting on the strength of such opinions, yet is unhappy with the situation because it falls short of the quest for the absolute truth and its guidance. The approximate and pragmatic, changing and fluid truth is not sufficient.

As we have seen earlier, in Chapter 1, the first step toward his goal made Descartes ascertain, with absolute conviction, that his soul existed. He argued that, even if all his perceptions and ideas were a delusion, his act of perceiving and thinking was real. Hence the famous "I think, therefore I am." From the determination of his spiritual existence (for his body could still be a delusion) Descartes proceeds to prove the existence of God. Whether his proofs are logically valid or not need not concern us here. What is of interest to us is the philosopher's faithful pursuit of the road of absolute truth, and nothing less than absolute truth. Descartes accepts the existence of God because he is convinced of having proved it.

Once God, who is a perfect being, is there, the assurance is provided that what man perceives with clarity and distinction as being true is not a delusion, for clearly, a perfect being would not mislead us. Indeed, the clear ideas in the human mind originate in God, "all that is in us comes from him."[14] By contrast, our mistaken ideas originate from nothingness.

The step from the certainty of our own existence to that of the existence of God is a crucial one, for it assures us the feasibility of the establishment of an edifice of true knowledge. All man has to do is ascertain that each step in the accumulation of knowledge appears to him clear and distinct (i.e., true), and the conclusion will not be misleading. God appears to be like a benevolent schoolmaster who watches over his pupils in their process of learning. As long as they keep to the rules, they will acquire the knowledge which emanates from him.

Thus the doubt and the uncertainty, which are the starting points of Descartes, are superseded by confidence and certainty. The elusive, fluid, questionable perception of reality gives way to the construction of a reliable and absolutely true picture. It is outside our concern here to relate or describe what is the picture of the physical and spiritual world which Descartes evolved out of his premises; what is important to us is to realize that he thought that a truthful picture of reality was within the reach of man, because of God's existence and His concern for man. Knowledge and search of truth are attainable objectives. Man is not doomed to the ephemeral and elusive; he is privileged to reach for absolute truth and valid knowledge.

While in Descartes' philosophy the foundations of knowledge are established by speculative and deductive reasoning, the approach of John Locke is, essentially, diametrically opposed to such a method. John Locke (1632–1704) sees human knowledge as assembled and constructed inductively, as built from countless human impressions. Eventually, even the idea of God is constructed by man from a combination of elementary notions derived from experience. Locke does not reject the ephemeral, transient, elusive perceptions, but looks to them for the building blocks of knowledge. Although he might call it absolute, even if this absoluteness is somewhat less conspicuous than in the case of Descartes, it is derived and constructed from fragmented and disjointed elements.

John Locke's philosophy is the philosophy of commonsense, often regarded as characteristic of the British civilization, as Descartes' abstract logic may typify the Gallic culture. Grounded in everyday experience of ordinary human beings, Locke's theory of knowledge can be described as having its roots in the transient, for what is more transient than the experience of the senses and introspection, which Locke summons for his analysis of human understanding as well. Yet, out of the myriad of atomic experiences he constructs a plausible, stable reality.

In *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, Locke asserts that man's mind is initially like "white paper, void of all characters, without any ideas."[15] This blank is eventually filled with a great amount of knowledge, but this result is the consequence of a cumulative process of the formation of ideas. The Lockean ideas must not be confused with the Platonic ones. The former are not eternal, immutable, and do not exist irrespective of man. They are not formed by "pure" thinking, but through a physiological and psychological process. They are the notions man forms through his sense perceptions and through inner reflection. Such notions as warm, soft, sweet, and such introspective notions as joy, reasoning, believing, are examples of the basic ideas man forms and accumulates.

Out of such elements of experience, the human mind also builds other kinds of ideas, which are compounded or derived. By "combining several simple ideas" a new complex idea is created. Thus the combination of a certain shape, hardness and color will result in the idea of a table. The various objects that we perceive and refer to by name are such complex ideas. Other kinds of ideas are those derived from a combination of certain simple or complex ideas. "Beauty, consisting of a certain composition of colour and figure, causing delight to the beholder" is one example of this kind. Then there are ideas resulting from comparison of two ideas. Further, such notions as father, brother, subject, client, are expressions of relations between distinct ideas.[16]

Characteristically, Locke's notion of self, of personal identity, is just another idea derived from the sources of experience mentioned above. "*Self* is that conscious thinking thing . . . which is sensible or conscious of pleasure and pain, capable of happiness or misery, and so is concerned for itself, as far as that consciousness extends."[17] There is no great declaration of the discovery of the great absolute existence here: "Cogito, ergo sum." Self is an idea, formed through introspection, of the recipient of various feelings and the agent of various thoughts—an important idea, but not the cornerstone of the absolute. It remains one of the ideas, among many others, constructed from the flux of transient emotions and passing sensations.

Does all this make Locke a latter-day reincarnation of Heraclitus, Heraclitus as traditionally perceived? Is Locke oblivious to the absolute and totally resigned to the fluidity of the world in human consciousness, as well as on the ontological level?

The answer is a modified no, or a guarded yes. Locke builds human knowledge out of the flux of passing sensations and reflections. In this sense there is an affinity between him and what we like to attribute to Heraclitus. Yet he also introduces, perhaps not quite consistently, other elements into his system. The most crucial is what he calls "this certain and evident truth,—That there is an eternal, most powerful, and most knowing Being."[18] Once *deus ex machina* makes his appearance (Locke believes to have *proven* his existence), we have the absolute to stabilize the flux of transient ideas. "I think God has given me assurance enough of the existence of things without me." Man can essentially rely on his sense perceptions to form a true picture of reality.[19] The Cartesian argument of God being the guarantor of man's true cognition is echoed here. Yet the echo is somewhat feeble; for Locke largely remains aware of the imperfection of human knowledge. There is some knowledge which is certain, but "in the greatest part of our concernments" God "has afforded us only the twilight . . . of probability." Thus man must be aware of his limitations, but aspire to more knowledge and greater perfection. Absolute knowledge becomes an ideal toward which, groping in the fluid twilight, man can gradually ascend.[20] The absolute survives as a teleological principle.

If Locke finds some support for the absolute in a philosophical system essentially built on the transient, there was a more consistent follower of the empiricist philosophy who carried the Lockean premises to their ultimate conclusions. These do not offer the consolation of reliable, let alone absolute, knowledge or being. This ultimate propounder of skepticism was the Scottish philosopher David Hume (1711–1776).

Locke, though stressing the actual fleeting experience as the source of all knowledge, assumed certain principles of stability in this flux. Thus he took for granted that the notions of identity and substance reflect reality. These elements—one could say, absolute elements—introduce some stabilizing factor into the torrent of experience. His argument is that as we cannot conceive "that two things of the same kind should exist in the same place at the same time, we rightly conclude, that, whatever exists anywhere at any time, excludes all of the same kind." We have ideas of three kinds of substances: God, finite spirits and intelligences, and bodies or particles of matter.[21] What this means is that the combination of ideas which is called a piece of lead, or a table, forms an entity which is distinct from another one, such as a piece of gold, or a chair or another table. Similarly, the combination of ideas which I choose to call John Smith is a distinct "finite spirit" which exists as such in time and must not be confused with the person of George Brown. Each maintains his own identity. Even when two substances of different kinds blend, as does the body and the spirit of John Smith, this does not affect the principle of the continuity of John Smith's identity.

David Hume, with merciless logic, shows that consistency with the principles of empirical philosophy precludes the acceptance of the notion of substance and of the continuity of identity which is built on substance. If all our knowledge is derived from the impressions we get through our senses and from inner reflection, as both Locke and Hume assert, a valid notion of substance must be obtained from these sources too. Yet we never see, smell or feel substance. All we perceive is color, smell, shape and so on. "The idea of a substance . . . is nothing but a collection of simple ideas, that are united by the imagination, and have a particular name assigned to them."[22] Thus we cannot be assured of anything more than the momentary conjunction of certain impressions, which *may* be repeated on next occasion, but need not *necessarily* remain constant. Our knowledge is at the mercy of the flux of perceptions which we have no reason to assume to be bound by a solid and stable principle.

The elusiveness of any material substance is complemented by a comparable evasiveness of substance in what Locke calls "finite spirits." Indeed, Hume asserts that we cannot even have a legitimate knowledge of our own selves. What I perceive is "heat or cold, light or shade, love or hatred, pain or pleasure. I never can catch *myself* at any time without a perception, and never can observe any thing but the perception."[23] Thus the supposed knowledge of oneself, let alone of other selves, is merely an illusion derived from associating a succession of outer impressions or inner reflections. The notion of substance underlying such a succession and of the identity of oneself and other selves has no valid foundation.

The third substance of Locke, God, the absolute of the absolutes, fares no better at the hands of Hume. If the source of knowledge is experience, in the literal and narrow sense, and if the unity or identity of self as the recipient of experiences is questioned, how can the objective existence of divinity be established? To pursue the question further, we may address ourselves to the common notion of God as a force that creates. However, "if no impression, either of sensation or reflection, implies any force or efficacy, 'tis equally impossible to discover or even imagine any such active principle in the deity."[24] The elusiveness of the notion of force, which is not derived from an impression, is closely connected to the doubts about the notion of causality, for which Hume is famous. In questioning causality he undermined not only religion, but also the theoretical foundations of scientific thought, or, for that matter, of commonsense thinking. This deserves some consideration.

The common notion of causality assumes that two occurrences which take place in succession again and again indicate that the first is the cause of the second. Hume questions the validity of such reasoning. He points out that, when one occurrence follows another, we witness the two happenings, but we have no impression of a link between them. When such a sequel of occurrences is repeated many times, what we actually perceive is the repetition, but this provides no justification for the assertion that the sequence will appear also in the future. "Thus not only our reason fails us in the discovery of the *ultimate connexion* of causes and effects, but even after experience has inform'd us of their *constant conjunction*, 'tis impossible for us to satisfy ourselves by our reason, why we shou'd extend that experience beyond those particular instances, which have fallen under our observation."[25] Hume is aware, of course, that men reach conclusions such as the linking of events as causes and effects and expecting their recurrence, but he defines it as the tendency of the mind to associate ideas, or impressions; that is to say, as a *psychological* phenomenon which has no valid claim to serve as a vehicle of *knowledge*.

The conclusion from Hume's arguments is devastating, both for ontology and for cognition. Our knowledge consists of sensations and reflection, but they do not indicate the existence of an outer world, or of the perceiver for that matter. It is only the experience of perception that can be asserted with certainty. This flux of impressions cannot be said to be imprinted on our *mind*, for the existence of the mind cannot be assumed. "I think" only proves the occurring of a thinking process. The great flood of impressions which I experience is acted upon by imagination, which links these impressions, or the ideas formed out of them, in certain ways and expects their orderly recurrence, but this mental propensity cannot rightfully claim to represent an objective situation. Thus there can be no predictive knowledge, and man is restricted to a futile recording of past, disconnected, perceptions. All is transient, and absolute knowledge or being, or any residues of the absolute, are mere wishful thinking.

Hume is fully aware of the consequences of his philosophical analysis. He admits "that the understanding, when it acts alone . . . entirely subverts itself, and leaves not the lowest degree of evidence in any proposition, either in philosophy or common life." The way to "save ourselves from this total scepticism" is by means of "fancy," which inclines us to trust that the repeated conjunction of events in the past will recur in the future. It is this imaginative propensity which also makes us believe in the existence of substances independently of our sensations.[26] In other words, Hume realizes that a world perception which completely excludes any absolute knowledge and confines itself to the chaotic transiency of perceptions is not one that man can endure, nor can he live according to its tenets. Yet, how can a rational being trust in imagination and fancy? The *need* for the absolutes cannot in itself establish their validity, nor does it cancel the philosophical argument which led to the skeptical stance. Hume has too much respect for rational thinking—perhaps this is the only absolute he implicitly acknowledges—to ignore or brush away its destructive conclusions.

Hume did not resolve the dilemma between the strict demands of his reasoning, which led to utter skepticism, and the practical urge of humanity, which he admittedly shared, to lean on some elementary assumed knowledge even if it is not rationally justifiable. An attempt to provide a philosophical solution to this problem was made by the famous German philosopher Immanuel Kant (1724–1804).

Kant squarely addresses the problem of the possibility of reliable knowledge of the so-called external world, though the basic material for this knowledge consists of sense perceptions whose chaotic transiency seems to elude any rhyme and reason. Where is the solid substance and the reliable causality on which knowledge could be built, if, as Hume has shown, they are not perceived by our senses or our reflective capacity?

Kant's answer is that our mind is endowed with certain forms of apprehension which *precede* the sense impressions and organize them into a meaningful and coherent perception. Without such forms of apprehension, which he calls categories, we would not have been able to perceive the manifoldness of sense impressions and to comprehend them. With the active help of the categories, the chaotic variety absorbed by the senses is processed and formed into knowledge. Thus the categories *enable* us to apprehend the phenomenal world of nature. In Kant's words, "Categories are concepts which *a priori* prescribe laws to phenomena, and thereby to nature, as the embodiment of all phenomena."[27]

This does not mean that we can know nature as it really is, for our perception is limited to appearances, or phenomena. Nature may have its absolute existence, but our knowledge can be built only through sense perceptions. In this sense, Kant stands apart from the Cartesian approach and follows the empiricism of Locke. However, he disagrees with Locke by asserting that sense perceptions alone are inadequate for forming knowledge. They must be assisted by the categories, which are not the *consequences* of experience, but are conceived *a priori*, as a condition for comprehensible experience. Sense perceptions unassisted are meaningless; categories without sense data are mere forms without content. The combination of the two makes cognition possible.

Kant provides a table of categories which consists of four classes, each with three subdivisions. This elaboration need not concern us here. It will suffice to illustrate his approach by referring to the concept of substance and of causality, which, as we have seen, Hume has analyzed out of existence.

The concept of substance provides unity for various persistent sensations and thus makes us affirm a thing perceived. By assuming *a priori* the substance of a thing to be called table, we can bind the *a posteriori* sensations of hardness, oblong shape, certain color, and form the notion of a table. Our senses absorb only qualities, but the category of substance forms the object which binds these qualities. To put it in a syntactical form, the substance is the subject about which the qualities are predicated. Similarly, we can think of the soul "as a full and necessary unity of all the mental powers."[28] These assertions of substance must not, however, be taken to be the faithful reflections of reality. About it, Kant warns us, paying tribute to Hume's skepticism, we know nothing.

Similarly, in the case of a visible change, we assume *a priori* an event which may have been the cause of such a change and look to identify it. Thus if a piece of "wax, which was earlier hard, melts, I can perceive *a priori* that something must have preceded (e.g., sun heat), which made this happen in accordance with a constant law."[29] In other words, we are not merely soaking in sense perceptions or impressions. We actively look for connections, which then render our sense perceptions meaningful.

Thus the world, according to Kant, becomes an intelligible image. The sensations, puzzling and confusing by themselves, can be put together with the help of the categories into a comprehensible picture. This picture does not enjoy the status of an ontological absolute. Concepts like "the world" or "nature" used for the knowable are merely figures of speech, for we cannot reach beyond our cognition, even with the help of the categories. Yet the picture we form enjoys an inner coherence, which our reason has imposed on it.

While this is a far cry from the certainty sought and believed to have been found by Descartes, it is a more pleasing conclusion than that of Hume. Kant reaches his salutary conclusions by elevating such notions as substance and causality from being mere *fancy*, as Hume argued, to becoming a *logical* principle. He transfers these concepts from the realm of *psychology*, where Hume placed them, into the domain of valid functions of reason. He transforms these concepts from being unwarranted consequences of experience into legitimate forms of perception which precede and are the necessary conditions of experience. While all this does not assure the attainability of absolute truth, it makes the pursuit of knowledge, be it circumscribed by human limitations, feasible for man. That is as much of the absolute in this domain as, in Kant's judgment, could be redeemed after the great doubts cast by Hume. The achievable knowledge hovers in the twilight between the transient chaos and the absolute order of objective reality.

The philosophical grappling with the absolute and the transient is also manifest in the field of ethics. Ethics, as the study of right behavior, faces the manifoldness of human actions and reactions, and it attempts to subject the variety and flood of these to some simple principles which would provide a clear and definite answer to which behavior is right and which is wrong. In other words, it intends to formulate an absolute criterion, or set of criteria, for judging actions as right or wrong, good or evil.

Some philosophies, to be sure, deny the existence of such an absolute criterion, and maintain that right and wrong are relative—relative to the individual, or the society, or the epoch or the specific culture. As to the systems which adhere to the notion of a universal and generally valid criterion of right and wrong, they vary in their judgment about the nature of that universal yardstick. When looked at from our perspective, the field of ethics too displays a diversity, ranging from the total transiency of relativism to the posture of absolute stability.

One of the clearest confrontations between the perception of ethical standards as absolute and as relative can be found in Plato's dialogue, *Gorgias*. There the point of view which denigrates the notions of binding morality is vigorously expressed by Callicles. He repudiates the accepted perception of justice by regarding it as a mere convention of the weak majority designed to curb the natural urge of the strong to use their power for their own benefit. Thus, the weak say "that dishonesty is shameful and unjust; meaning, by the word injustice, the desire of a man to have more than his neighbours." To this false ideology of the many weak, Callicles juxtaposes the rightful claim of the few powerful: "nature itself intimates that it is just for the better to have more than the worse, the more powerful than the weaker; and in many ways she shows, among men as well as among animals, and indeed among whole cities and races, that justice consists of the superior ruling over and having more than the inferior."[30] The gist of Callicles' argument is that morality is based on mere *convention*, which has some ulterior motives, whereas in *nature* the rule is that the mighty—whether an individual, a species, or a nation—reaps the benefits of its superiority. Seemingly, this philosophy asserts a new morality when it states that it is *just* for the more powerful to have more than the weaker; in fact, it rejects morality by claiming that the order of nature should prevail over the human notions of right and wrong. It sees the order of nature as the absolute, while the moral judgment becomes a mere consensus without any valid justification. Morality becomes a mere defensive shield of a coalition of weaklings. It is, at least it ought to be, a passing phenomenon, a transient manifestation to be wiped out by the absolute law of nature.

Callicles makes this point by expressing a wish for the emergence of the true and successful implementor of his philosophy: "But if there were a man who had sufficient force, he would shake off and break through, and escape from all this; he would trample under foot all our formulas and spells and charms, and all our laws which are against nature: the slave would rise in rebellion and be lord over us, and the light of natural justice would shine forth."[31]

The idea that this natural justice—what we normally call the injustice of the mighty—is the absolute, while moral justice is a conventional sham, is rejected by Socrates, alias Plato. In his view, the pursuit of good is related to some standards which he implicitly takes as being firm and absolute. In the case of man, it is the perfection of his soul which is the objective of the moralist, and the way to attain it is to instill in man such virtues as temperance and justice. Temperance involves the control of lusts and desires, which might otherwise lead man to conduct "a robber's life." Justice controls his relations to other men.[32] These virtues in man are linked to and embedded in a moral order of the universe: "communion and friendship and orderliness and temperance and justice bind together heaven and earth and gods and men, and . . . the universe is therefore called Cosmos or order, not disorder or misrule."[33] Thus it is moral order—characteristically for Plato, related to cosmic harmony—that is the absolute, while the appearance or eruption of self-seeking might and power is a manifestation, hopefully transient, of misrule and disorder.

One of the most prominent attempts in the history of philosophy to establish morality on absolute foundations was made by Immanuel Kant. He looks for the manifestations of pure morality and for the principle which guides the unquestionably moral behavior. This cannot be derived from our *experience* of human behavior, but must look for a source which *a priori* formulates the rule of conduct for mankind, just as the categories are *a priori* concepts facilitating perception. Thus Kant asserts "that all moral concepts have their abode and origin fully *a priori* in reason . . . ; that they cannot be abstracted from any empirical and therefore merely incidental perception; that in this purity of their origin lies their dignity to serve us as the supreme practical principles."[34] The epithet "practical" in the context of *a priori* pure reasoning need not surprise us. In Kantian terminology it simply means that the pure reasoning in this domain is not addressed to the perception of the outer world, alias coordination of the sense data, but to the guidance of human conduct, which is not a matter of contemplation but of practice.

The possibility of forming a principle of moral guidance for man is contingent on the assumption of the freedom of will. An action which results from external influences cannot be deemed as inherently moral. It must be dictated by the free will of the agent; it must be autonomous in this sense. In other words, Kant postulates the free will of the individual as the absolute condition of morality.

The moral principle which emerges from the application of pure reason, through free will, to matters of human conduct is the categorical imperative. It is an absolute command to act in the right manner, irrespective of circumstances and conditions. It is announced in a universal manner which, derived *a priori* and thus not based on experience, is characterized by its formal, rather than substantive, quality: "act only according to that maxim which you can at the same time will to become a universal law."[35]

Interestingly, and perhaps paradoxically, the categorical imperative, which imposes a strict law for a morally *necessary* conduct, is derived from the *free* will of a rational being. This peculiar link between the absolutes of pure reason and free will, on the one hand, and the absolute demands of the moral law, on the other, is fully realized by Kant: "The will is not only subject to the law, but subject in such a manner, that it must be viewed as 'self-legislating' and, precisely because of it, subject to the law (of which it can regard itself as originator)."[36]

The categorical imperative is amplified by a perception of man as a rational being, which is implicitly assumed in the formula of right conduct. Indeed, the implication is spelled out by Kant as he asserts that all rational beings, which include humanity, should be regarded as ends and not only as means: "Man and in general every rational being 'exists' as an end in itself, 'not only as a means' for a use that pleases this or that will; in all his actions aimed at himself as well as at other rational beings, he must always be considered 'also as an end.' "[37] Thus the moral universe becomes inhabited with rational beings who acknowledge their individual intrinsic worth, each being an end, and act in a manner which agrees with a universal law, the categorical imperative. One could say that morality is conceived as an absolute principle regulating the actions and relations of absolute beings.

Looked at from our perspective, Kant's approach could be criticized for ignoring the problems of transient values in its exclusive preoccupation with absolute principles, for while we should regard human beings—ourselves and others—as ends, we are also means. In choosing a profession, I may look at the prospective satisfaction derived from it—that much for myself as an end: but I may have also to decide whether it will enable me to provide for myself, or be of help to other people, thus turning myself into means for my needs or social requirements. When I employ a secretary to type my manuscript, again I use her as a means for my objectives. To be sure, when Kant asserts that man exists not *only* as a means, he implies that using men as means may be allowed, provided one considers them also as ends. Still, the question remains, how far should each consideration apply? When does the use of services amount to ignoring man's stature as an end? When wages are not adequate? When working conditions are harsh? When human beings are enslaved, as they were in antiquity? The answer to these questions does not clearly emerge from Kantian principles, except for the case of enslavement, when hardly any consideration is left for human beings as ends.

Does the categorical imperative in its basic form resolve this problem? Obviously, if the employers of slaves applied to their practice a universal maxim, which would mean that they will all humanity to be slaves, the conclusion would be absurd, for there would be no masters who could own slaves. Yet, *mutatis mutandis*, the occupations of teachers, doctors or carpenters would not hold up to a universal maxim either, though these are useful and valuable occupations, and certainly Kant did not regard them as contraventions of morality. He simply ignored the need to include issues of partial and relative value within the orbit of moral evaluation, and to consider them beside those issues which are absolute and common to humanity as a whole.

Indeed, even the universal and absolute notion of man as an end is open to questions. Every man is an end, but what is it in him that represents the absolute? Is it his happiness? But what does happiness consist of? Is it his development and perfection? But what does that involve: emotional growth, intellectual improvement, creative capacity? Is it his reasoning capacity? But then man, unlike Aristotle's God, does not reason about reason, but applies his faculty to various objectives. These are not empty questions, but problems which may be investigated and possibly answered. However, they can be neither ignored nor subsumed under an absolute formula which does not pay adequate attention to the complex and varied substance of the human condition and endeavor. The intricate nature of humanity, including the transient elements, must not be ignored by an absolute ethical formula.

Sharply contrasting with the Kantian approach which derives the ethical principles from pure reason—a sphere of the absolute, one could say—is the approach of Jeremy Bentham, who builds his ethical system on the analysis of human experience. Such an approach, one could say, tries to derive a general principle from the apparent flux and diversity of the human condition. Thus, while Kant bases his ethics on deductive reasoning, Bentham founds it on induction.

Jeremy Bentham (1748–1832) rejects the notion, common to many moralists and characteristic of Kantian ethics, that duty and obligation is the central issue of morality. In a typically truculent manner, he makes the following statement: "A man, a moralist, gets into an elbow chair, and pours forth pompous dogmatism about *duty*—and *duties*. Why is he not listened to? Because every man is thinking about *interests*. It is a part of his very nature to think first about interests." Kant would have retorted that, whether this is man's nature or not, it has absolutely nothing to do with moral obligation, which by its very nature is entirely independent of human interests. Bentham, however, asserts that there is a clear link between the two and that "to interest, duty must and will be made subservient."[38]

While this may sound like an outright rejection of ethics, in the way

Callicles repudiated morality, this is not truly the case. Bentham believes that an ethical system can be built out of the bricks of individual self-interest. Indeed, the fact that it is a part of man's "very nature to think first about interests," far from making us despair of the possibility of ethics, is the foundation of it. Let us see how Bentham's edifice is constructed, starting with the basic building bricks.

Bentham states that every man acts out of his own interest, which consists of obtaining the maximum happiness. "The first law of nature is to wish our own happiness." Happiness itself is defined as "the possession of pleasure with the exemption from pain." This assertion is, of course, a psychological statement and not an ethical proposition. Man may be seeking pleasure and avoiding pain, but this does not indicate that he *ought* to behave in such a manner, that it is *virtuous* to follow the line of self-interest. Yet Bentham makes the transition from the psychological to the ethical domain: "And what is virtue? It is that which most contributes to happiness,—that which maximises pleasures and minimises pains. Vice, on the contrary, is that which lessens happiness, or contributes to unhappiness."[39]

This step from a descriptive to a normative statement, from psychology to ethics, has been criticized as lacking logical validity. The fact that man likes something does not prove that he ought to like it. Yet one could reformulate Bentham's statement in a manner which would meet the objection. One could suggest a modification of Bentham's proposition to read that there is in man an instinctive, natural, self-evident approval of happiness, and that this *normative* attitude is the foundation of ethics. Such an instinctive approval could be compared with the moral legislation of Kant's pure reason: though different in substance and nature, both could be regarded as a basic characteristic of the human mind, the source of moral judgment as conceived by two different philosophies.

There is another difficulty concerning Bentham. If man's natural inclination is to pursue happiness and avoid pain, why is there need to preach the doctrine, not to mention the fact of the existence of widespread misery? If men pursue happiness, they should all be as happy as feasible. The answer of Bentham is that unhappiness is the consequence of bad calculation, and the moralist can teach men how to compute happiness and pain correctly. Men are misled by the immediate pleasure and forget the eventual pain. They may ignore the displeasure of others and its consequences, which may outweigh the enjoyment of the individual, and so forth.[40] Ethics, in its applied form, becomes a prudent and careful calculation of the psychological and social pluses and minuses of action, always measured by the yarsticks of pleasure and pain. The objective remains the positive balance, which should be as high as possible.

If this sounds like a reduction of ethics to a pragmatic guide on how to be happy and enjoy life, one should bear in mind that Bentham aims not only at the happiness of the individual, but the happiness of all human beings. Indeed, he goes so far as to argue for the happiness of all sensitive beings. Writes Bentham:

> The object then of these pages is to promote human happiness—the happiness of every man. . . . It is to extend the dominion of happiness wherever there is a being susceptible of its impressions; nor is the sphere of benevolent action bounded by the human race . . .
>
> It were, indeed, greatly to be desired that some benevolent moralist should take the animal creation under his patronage, and establish their claims to the protection of legislation. . . . Perhaps this event is hardly to be anticipated, while so large a portion of the human race itself are . . . treated like the inferior animals—not as *persons*, but as *things*.[41]

The implication that all human beings should be treated as persons and not as things is clearly reminiscent of the Kantian absolute that men should be considered as ends and not merely as means. As Bentham's yardstick for ethical consideration is not the rationality of the being but its sensitivity, the ethical umbrella may cover even the animal kingdom. While Bentham does not develop this element in his system, its presence indicates the intent to address the problem of happiness and well-being in a *universal* manner, which brings it into the domain of the absolute.

Notwithstanding this intent, a major problem Bentham's system faces is how to assure that the happiness, naturally and rightfully pursued by the individual, will result in the happiness of all, in a happy society. The danger, of course, is that every person, while pursuing his interests, will ignore and trample on the interests and well-being of others.

The answer that Bentham provides is manifold. One way to prevent an exaggerated self-regard which ignores social interest is the appropriate legislation of the ruling powers.[42] This, of course, is a social measure, which takes for granted the detached and objective judgment of the legislators who, like Bentham himself, think about the society rather than their own self-interest. They would have to be impartial judges of the situation. We might say, they would have to be elevated above the flux of individual pursuit of happiness, a point on which Bentham failed to elaborate and about which he has been criticized.[43]

Another point Bentham makes is to acknowledge that the mental makeup of man contains also an element of "social affection," which makes us enjoy the joys of our friends and suffer from their pain.[44] This psychological factor is helpful for the establishment of social ethics, though one wonders what Bentham would have suggested if humanity was defective in this respect, as it all too often is.

Perhaps another factor which he mentions would come to the rescue, namely, the social disapproval of a person whose actions detrimentally affect the well-being of others. The ‘‘popular and the social sanctions’’ will supplement the above-mentioned legal sanctions.[45]

Yet this statement is also open to criticism. What if the individual commits a crime which will enhance his happiness, if he can be sure not to be caught? Neither the arm of the law nor the reaction of public opinion will touch him. If we ignore the element of sympathy in the mental make-up of the criminal, which may well be absent, there should be no objection on the part of Bentham to the crime. The criminal pursued his own self-interest, and increased his amount of happiness. Yet, if everybody did the same, the result would be quite contrary to the happiness of all. So the act of this individual cannot be the *right* act, and individual self-interest is not the exclusive guide to universal good. We need some additional principle to assure *general* morality and happiness.

Bentham’s system exhibits the weakness of an ethical philosophy which, focusing on the plurality and diversity of individual pursuits, ignores the need for some absolute principles to control and guide such pursuits. The quest for happiness of each cannot be translated into the achievement of happiness of all without introducing some principle of a just division of happiness, or establishing some basic rule determining the *right* of each person to a minimum of well-being. Bentham comes close to it by speaking of the happiness of every sentient being, but he does not properly link this sentiment with the dominant notion of the personal pursuit of happiness as the primary rule of conduct. The calculation of pain and pleasure introduces an element of objectivity, though obviously the application of such an arithmetical formula to the myriad transient situations of pain and pleasure affecting human beings is bound to encounter serious difficulties.

The ethical systems of both Kant and Bentham show how difficult it is to balance the considerations of the absolute and the transient in the formulation of a philosophy of morals. Kant may have failed by ignoring the actual complexity of the flux of human actions and relations, while stressing the absolute nature of the categorical imperative. This imperative fails to apply to all the situations which have to be judged and evaluated from the moral viewpoint. Bentham, while attentive to human psychology and man’s practical endeavors, attempted to distill from this flux the yardstick of moral judgment. This yardstick has been widely questioned, but even if a hedonistic value system could be established as a primary attitude of man, it would not be sufficient for a comprehensive ethical philosophy. Additional principles—regulating the division, the just division, of happiness—would have to be added. Bentham implies as much, but does not develop his intimations into solid, absolute guidelines.

These observations are not meant as a comprehensive analysis of and judgment on the systems of Kant and Bentham. They are only intended to show how these philosophies come short of adequately relating the absolute and the transient in the building of an ethical system. There are, of course, various other systems, not explored here, which, in attempting to formulate the criterion or criteria for right and wrong, good and evil, had to relate the absolute principle to the fluid reality.

One philosophical issue which vividly reflects the contrast of the absolute and the transient is that of determinism and indeterminism. Determinism is the doctrine which asserts that whatever happens is not the consequence of incidental circumstances or configuration of factors, but a necessary and unavoidable occurrence. Indeterminism asserts the incidental nature of events. These opposite doctrines can be of universal scope and encompass any event, whether physical or biological, inanimate or human. More typically, they are addressed to human behavior, and this entails some important problems of religion and ethics.

One doctrinal approach, with comprehensive implications, sees all reality as founded on matter and motion. Whatever happens in the wide cosmos, or in the minute manifestations of matter and biology, is ultimately reducible to moving matter. Psychic and psychological manifestations are also reducible to physical factors. Therefore, theoretically if not in practice, the laws governing or revealing the material universe would reveal the nature of the world in its great complexity, and thus make it possible to predict developments and events. The future is written by the laws of physics and thus it is, in principle, predetermined. There are laws—even if we do not know more than some of them—which in their totality constitute an *absolute* formula, describing and predicting all the *transient* phenomena.

To be sure, a materialistic philosophy does not have to be wedded to a deterministic doctrine. It is possible to hold a view that only matter is real—and emotions, sentiments, ideas are reducible to matter—and yet deny the necessary occurrence of events. It is possible to assume that "Chance governs all," that is to say, that events are not governed by any firm law or principle. Things happen as they happen, but they did not have to happen the way they did. They could have happened in a different manner. Nothing is predetermined. The transient is transient and subject to no absolute rule or law.

It is noteworthy that neither determinism nor indeterminism is usually adopted in its respective pure and extreme form. The mechanical materialist will admit, at least, that for the time being we are quite far from being able to make predictions about human behavior which would stand a comparison with our predictions of the movements of heavenly bodies. The deterministic notion, in spite of its absolutist intent, is tempered by the admission of the elusiveness of the apparently transient. The indeterminist, while denying the rule of absolute laws (and he may be supported by the quantum theory in physics), will accept the usefulness of statistics for approximate predictions in various domains of natural and biological phenomena and even of human behavior. Statistical truth may fall short of an absolute law, but it is relatively stable and reliable when juxtaposed with the chaotic flux of events.

The stance of the determinist, who sees the absolute as ruling the transient, appears under various guises. It can be the position of a materialistic-mechanistic philosophy, as we have already seen. It may be the creed of a semi-religious outlook, which is characteristic of the ancient Greek drama. In the words of Sophocles, to quote one example,

> For Fortune with a constant ebb and rise
> Casts down and raises high and low alike . . .[46]

Of course, here the rule of the mysterious absolute force, from which there is no escape, is addressed to humanity, and thus has practical consequences. The same is true in the case of religious beliefs in monotheistic systems. Here the definition of God as an omniscient being may be easily interpreted to mean that He also knows the future in every detail. Thus His absolute knowledge dictates, as it were, not only the phenomena of nature, but also the actions of men and nations. All the transient events are, in truth, the expression of an absolute will.

The deterministic outlook, when addressed to man, encounters some peculiar difficulties. It impinges on the notion of human freedom of choice of action, usually referred to as the principle of free will. This principle is of great importance to man's sense of his own individuality and dignity. If I cannot decide what I shall do, but any decision of mine, far from being reached by *me*, is only the product of my social background, psychological make-up, or of a mysterious fate, or divine prescience, then I am not what I perceive myself to be. I am not a free agent, a sovereign being deciding on his actions, but a pawn in the hands of some known or unknown power. Moreover, such denial of free will has implications for moral responsibility. If I am not acting out of my free will, then I cannot be lauded for my good behavior, nor blamed for my reprehensible action. I deserve as much praise as a good implement and as much blame as a poor tool; that is to say, I may be judged good or bad, but in no way credited with merit or demerit because of my deeds and action.

Naturally, there is a fierce opposition to determinism when applied to humanity by various advocates of free will. Significantly, this doctrine of human indeterminism is quite different from materialist indeterminism, which juxtaposes chance and necessity. While both are opposed to the rule of necessity, the doctrine of free will establishes vis-à-vis determinism not the chaos of undefined transiency, but the absolute of human choice. Free will versus determinism means the confrontation of two absolutes: the absolute of law of nature, or of fate, or of God's will, on the one hand, and the absolute of human judgment, reason, will, on the other hand.

There are many philosophical arguments and semi-philosophical assertions of free will and they cannot be traced and explored here. Two examples may be quoted, however, to illustrate the point. One is a characteristically vigorous and challenging statement put by Shakespeare into the mouth of one of his dramatic characters: "This is the excellent foppery of the world, that, when we are sick in fortune, . . . we make guilty of our disaster the sun, the moon, and the stars: as if we were villains by necessity; fools by heavenly compulsion; . . . and all that we are evil in, by a divine thrusting on; . . ."[47] The statement repudiates the rule of extraneous necessity over human action—whether it be stars or God. It asserts the freedom of man to choose his way both in respect of his own fortune and well-being and in the case of moral action. Thus man is conceived as a free agent in the realm of the pursuit of his personal objectives and in the domain of right and wrong. Interestingly, the words are put into the mouth of Edmund, an arch villain in *King Lear*, a man who ruthlessly pursues his own ambitions and entirely disregards moral considerations. Yet he, and implicitly Shakespeare, emphasize his responsibility for the course of action taken by him.

A cogent statement asserting free will and human responsibility for man's action is made by Plato in *Phaedo*. There Socrates, awaiting the death penalty and refusing to escape from prison, explains that the true cause for his situation is not in the composition of his body of muscles, bones, joints and so on, which enables him to move, but in "that the Athenians have thought fit to condemn me, and accordingly I have thought it better and more right to remain here and undergo my sentence." To be sure, Socrates does not dispute the importance of physical conditions: "without bones and muscles and the other parts of the body I cannot execute my purposes." The crucial factor, however, in determining one's behavior or action is the mind which has a free choice and is not constrained by physical factors. Therefore, to say that Socrates acts in the manner he does because of physical factors, and "that this is the way in which mind acts, and not from the choice of the best, is a very careless and idle mode of speaking."[48] The sovereignty of the human mind and the freedom of will are clearly asserted here.

As the example of Plato shows, the doctrine of free will does not assume that human volition operates in a vacuum. The physical conditions are relevant to human action. Obviously, one could not start flying like a bird because one willed to do so. A decision to move to another location depends on physical fitness and/or means of locomotion. However, the physical conditions being attainable, the choice to use them in one way or another is made by the individual who exercises his mind and will. Thus man can be said to be subject to two domains, the domain of the physical world which entails certain limitations and possibilities, and the domain of his mind which allows him to reach judgments and make decisions. This is what the Socratic statement implies, even though it stresses the weight of the moral-mental domain.

The case for mental freedom within the constraints of a deterministic system is reiterated and elaborated with great clarity by a contemporary philosopher, Gilbert Ryle. Referring to the mechanistic explanation of the world, he dispels the fear that this system would lead to such an explanation of biological, psychological and sociological phenomena, and thus put an end to the notion of the freedom of human volition. Ryle rejects this argument by stating that such mechanistic laws, present or future, may "govern everything that happens, but they do not ordain everything that happens." He adds: "Indeed they do not ordain anything that happens. Laws of nature are not fiats." To explain the point he adduces the analogy of the chess game. The players follow certain rules, which strictly control the movement of the diverse figures, but these rules do not preordain the game. The players retain their freedom to make good and bad moves. The rules are the same for all the games, yet every game remains unique. "The rules are unalterable, but the games are not uniform."[49] Thus the two absolutes, the determinism of the outer conditions and the self-assertion of the mind and will, coexist in a symbiotic relationship.

Significantly, this kind of coexistence is also manifest in some religious perceptions which accommodate the absolute knowledge and will of God with the absolute sense of human freedom of choice. As we have already indicated, the theological perception of God in monotheism as an omnipotent and omniscient being implies His knowledge of the future, which, if applied to every specific human action, precludes free will. Yet, if man is not free to choose between right and wrong, he cannot be blamed or rewarded for his action, and morality becomes meaningless. The absolute of theology confronts here the absolute of morality. As monotheistic religions assume that God is also just, and thus could not punish transgressors, the problem turns into a crucial theological issue.

This problem has preoccupied many minds in Judaism, Christianity and Islam, and has met with different responses—occasionally contradictory responses within one religion. We cannot and need not explore the complexities of this perennial controversy, but shall point out the prevalent stance in this respect in the oldest of the above religions.

The classical rabbinical statement on this issue, going back about two millennia, is: "Everything is foreseen, and the choice is given."[50] The cryptic statement simply states two contradictory positions, without resolving them. Another Talmudic saying takes a clearer stand when it proclaims that "Everything is in the hands of Heaven, except the fear of Heaven."[51] Here man's capacity to obey God and follow in His ways is clearly excluded from divine prescience and determination. This, with some exceptions, has been the stance of Jewish philosophers and theologians, as exemplified by Rabbi Moses of Narbonne (fourteenth century). He argues that "divine knowledge, just as it contains the essence of all things, it also includes the essence of human will, to wit, man's capacity to choose freely among various possibilities. However, which particular possibility man decides upon and chooses in each case—this is not included in divine knowledge."[52] Thus the domain of free choice, the prerequisite for the meaning of moral action, is saved from the absolute affirmation of divine omniscience.

Significantly, this position is clearly implied in the foundation of Judaism, that is, the biblical text, where it is stated simply and without recourse to philosophical concepts. Here are the words of Moses, addressed to the tribes of Israel:

> See, I have set before thee this day life and good, and death and evil; In that I command thee this day to love the Lord thy God, to walk in his ways, and to keep his commandments and his statutes and his judgments, that thou mayest live and multiply: and the Lord thy God shall bless thee in the land whither thou goest to possess it. But if thine heart turn away, so that thou wilt not hear, but shalt be drawn away, and worship other gods, and serve them; I denounce unto you this day, that ye shall surely perish.[53]

God sets the rules: follow His commandments and you will prosper, reject them and you will perish. But God does not determine the nation's, or the individual's, action. They have the freedom to choose. There is the absolute realm of morality, commanded by God and sanctioned by reward and punishment. But human capacity to choose freely is a fundamental, an absolute element of the human condition. God proposes, man disposes.

In this biblical example it is not divine *prescience* that is juxtaposed with free will, but it is the *moral code*, implied in the divine commandments, that confronts man's freedom to choose. It is the absolutes of morality and of freedom that face each other. Indeed, such a confrontation could have been presented without recourse to God, were it not that He is perceived as the embodiment of the right way and as the guarantor of just compensation for human conduct. Thus absolute justice is made to complement the free choice of the right way.

Chapter 7

The Order of Nature

One way in which man has tried to find an anchor in the absolute has been to look for constancy in the manifestations of nature. To be sure, the immediate experience of nature seems to indicate transiency there, too. The climate is open to changes, whether daily or seasonal. The fertility of land is not constant. Precipitation or lack thereof may produce abundance of food, or famine. Sudden storms may frighten man, sometimes with good reason. The sea may provide good passage, or endanger the seafarers. Man's coexistence with nature is open to whims and vicissitudes.

True, man has tried to find consolation and comfort in religious beliefs, which encompassed nature and its whimsical behavior. Some quasi-religious philosophies enthrone nature as an absolute, as we have seen. Yet man looks for comfort in this respect not only on the level of quasi-mystical belief, but also in the quest for more "tangible" regularity and predictability, which would assure the solid character of the physical phenomena on which he depends or which affect him. Man would like to find some formula behind the overwhelming diversity and change which he observes in nature, a formula which would be stable and reliable, immutable and useful. Some of such attempts through the history of mankind have been satisfied with a pragmatic sense of regularity and stability, while others have ventured into religious and philosophical foundations and sought an absolute meaning, a purpose, to the manifestations of nature, as previously indicated. Some despaired and saw no more than a meaningless chaos in nature, despite some regularity which observation or science could discover or provide.

Some cardinal points in this search for the absolute in nature are worth exploring. They range from mythical and religious notions to sophisticated scientific laws and mathematical formulations. We shall look at this search from the vantage point of the decreasing scale of absoluteness—starting with the perception of a purposeful and regulated universe and ending with the view which admits only the chaotic and enigmatic conglomeration of unruly phenomena. Interestingly, the decline from the maximalist to the skeptical does not necessarily correspond to the passage of time. The controversy is, to some extent, perennial and ahistorical.

A confidence-inspiring view of nature confronts us in the first chapter of Genesis. The very fact that nature, as man knows it, is the creation of God, an omnipotent and benevolent God, is the guarantee of its inherent perfection. The sense of the imposition of divine order and meaning on the chaotic and frightening elements is clearly conveyed by the brief yet vigorous description of the state of things before God's act of creation: "And the earth was desolate and empty; and darkness was over the deep waters."[1] Whatever God created in the six days is approved by Him as good or very good. A natural order, including man himself, has been established and it is imprinted with the knowledge and goodwill of God. Having been created by the absolute, it implicitly is informed with the quality of the absolute.

The image of the universe and nature is amplified and elaborated in Psalm 104, which, incidentally, is broadly based on a more ancient Egyptian hymn to Aton, the sun god. In the Psalm, God is perceived as the creator of the world and as the sustainer of the order of nature:

> He sendeth springs into the valleys; they meander through mountains. They give drink to every beast of the field: the wild asses quench their thirst. Above them shall the fowls of the heaven have their habitation, which send forth their voice from among the branches. He watereth the hills from his chambers: the earth is satiated by the fruit of thy deeds. . . . He appointed the moon for seasons: the sun knoweth its descent. Thou makest darkness, and it is night: wherein all the beasts of the forest do creep forth. The young lions roar after prey, and seek their food from God. As the sun ariseth, they gather, and lay down in their dens. Man goeth forth unto his work and to his labour until the evening. O Lord, how manifold are thy works! In wisdom hast thou made them all.[2]

The world is perceived here as a regular, orderly and harmonious cosmos. There is an interconnection among the various natural phenomena, such as sunshine and living creatures, rain and vegetation. The complex and manifold order of nature is designed for the well-being of living creatures. There is purpose and meaning to the system, whose working is assured by God's involvement. God, in His wisdom, is the guarantor of the natural order.

Such an optimistic perception of nature as an orderly and wisely arranged system is echoed in *De consolatione philosophiae*, a composition of Boethius (c. 475–525). Here, too, there is harmony in the universe and order in nature, and God reigns over it all:

> If thou wouldst see
> God's laws with purest mind,
> Thy sight on heaven fixed must be,
> Whose settled course the stars in peace doth bind . . .
> This sweet consent
> In equal bands doth tie
> The nature of each element
> So that the moist things yield unto dry . . .
> The flowery year
> Breathes odours in the spring,
> The scorching summer corn doth bear,
> The autumn fruit from laden trees doth bring.
> The falling rain
> Doth winter's moisture give.
> These rules thus nourish and maintain
> All creatures which we see on earth live.
> And when they die,
> These bring them to their end,
> While their Creator sits on high,
> Whose hand the reins of the whole world doth bend.[3]

Significantly, there is more stress in *The Consolation of Philosophy*, when compared with the biblical passages, on laws and regularity and the nature of the elements, and God seems to operate through them, rather than being directly involved. The universe is perceived as an orderly system in itself, even though the divine origin of natural laws and God's supervision of the whole remain unquestioned. It is the harmony and order that seem to be the subject of the writer's interest, though they also testify to the intent and wisdom of the creator.

In the history of science, as distinct from philosophical and theological ideas, the laws of nature become the clear focus of human interest. The scientific interest reached a remarkable bloom in the seventeenth century, though the new direction could be discerned earlier. The most notable representative of that scientific bloom, who may be singled out for the purpose of our discussion, was Sir Isaac Newton (1642–1727). In the words of the popular verse,

> Nature and Nature's laws lay hid in night.
> God said "Let Newton be," and all was light.[4]

These innocent verses are revelatory of the shift in the perception of the universe. Instead of the biblical "Let there be light," which produces light by a divine fiat, we have here the divine will creating Newton who, in turn, sheds light on nature and explains it to humanity. The role of God in creating nature is not contested, either by these verses or by Newton himself. The new enthusiasm, however, is not directed at the divine creation and supervision, but at the human understanding of the order of nature, and this was achieved by the work of Newton and other men who formulated the new science. It can be said that the new science detaches itself from the religious belief and becomes anthropocentric, as it relies on the capacity of human reason to comprehend nature, and does not insist on seeing and admiring divine wisdom and will in the manifestations of natural phenomena. The cautious distancing of Boethius is outpaced here by a complete detachment.

The laws of physics annunciated by Newton need not concern us here, but as an example of the quality and nature of the new approach we may quote his law of universal gravitation: "Every particle of matter attracts every other particle with a force varying directly as [i.e., directly proportional to] the product of their masses and inversely as the square of the distance between them."[5] There are two striking elements in this proposition. One is the universality, which encompasses *every* particle of matter, from the heavenly bodies to the apple falling from a tree. Like God, who takes care of the sun, the moon and the stars, as well as of earthly affairs, the law of physics embraces the large and the small; it encompasses heaven and earth. The other point is that the law is not vague; it is not an inaccurate statement, but is formulated in mathematical terms and consequently is precise. It announces not merely a qualitative truth, but a quantifiable and quantified rule. Truth can be measured.

To be sure, this new absolute, the exact law of physics, which became enthroned over the perception of the universe and nature, did not in itself assure purpose and meaning to the system. To look for that one still had to append science to the metaphysical realm of divine goodwill, wisdom, involvement. Such a link was not *required* by the new physics, though it could be opted for. If this somewhat weakened the sense of the absolute which the religious contemplation of the universe provided, much was left intact, or even gained in a sense, due to the universality of the law and to its precision. Moreover, the law could be tested and retested by man. The scientific man may have been giving up the full confidence in the absolutely meaningful and purposeful guidance of the universe by God, but he gained the sense of an absolute understanding of nature by himself, or at least progressing toward such an understanding.

The pursuit of scientific exploration and formulation, exemplified and symbolized by Newton, has been going on ever since, spreading into diverse domains and niches of nature. The last three hundred years or so have witnessed an enormous expansion of scientific knowledge—knowledge which attempts to formulate predictive and mathematically expressed laws. True, not all fields have proved amenable to such formulation and scientists had to be flexible in their interpretation of the flux of phenomena in some domains. Biology, for example, has eluded the predictive exactness of astronomy. Yet the overall panorama of nature became that of an intricate entity whch was being mapped by laws, be it of diverse nature, and thus mastered. Although, in a sense, nature may have been perceived as the absolute at which the transient humanity looked with awe, in another sense, nature was a conglomerate of transient phenomena caught into the net of human knowledge, which was aiming, with increasing success, at a comprehensive and absolute understanding.

The increasing *understanding* of nature by man, expressed in predictive laws, led also to great success in *mastery* over nature. Theoretical science facilitated advance in applied science. Knowledge gave spur to technology. Man expressed his quest for the absolute not only through knowing, but also through doing. He showed his capacity to reach for the absolute not only in perception, but also through power.

This quest was, of course, as old as man's material civilization. The point is stated with clarity in the Greek mythology. Here is how Aeschylus conveys it through the mouth of Prometheus, the mythical god who taught science and technology to mankind:

> I taught them to determine when stars rise and set—
> A difficult art. Number, the primary science, I
> Invented for them, and how to set down words in writing—
> The all-remembering skill, mother of many arts.
> I was the first to harness beasts under a yoke
> With trace or saddle as man's slaves, to take man's place
> Under the heaviest burdens; put the horse to the chariot,
> Made him obey the rein, and be an ornament
> To wealth and greatness. No one before me discovered
> The sailor's waggon—flax-winged craft that roam the seas.[6]

The application of knowledge to human needs and ambitions has, in the last two centuries or so, reached fantastic dimensions, and shows no signs of relaxation. Humanity has attained a mastery over nature beyond any Promethean dreams, though such dreams continue to run ahead of reality. What used to be revolutionary yesterday is antiquated today. In the fields of transportation, communication, production, new techniques facilitate enormous expansion and increasing ease in achieving the goals. Humanity relies on mechanical and electronic devices, as well as on scientific discoveries in biology, to an ever-increasing degree. Man has a sense of power over nature, which makes him feel its master and lord, a veritable miracle-performing god.

Yet this sense of man's enormous power is not altogether absolute, for despite his control over nature through science and technology, man remains fragile. He can propel himself into the outer space and look at earth from a divine perspective, and yet an invisible virus or another malady may easily incapacitate him temporarily or permanently. At one moment, with weapons capable of destroying cities and countries with the ease displayed by God at Sodom and Gomorrah, man may feel almighty; at another instant he may not be able to move from his sickbed. In one sense he feels to have absolute power over nature and the world, but in another way he senses the condition of his transient nature.

Science and its application has its limitations. Not *every* aspect of nature—especially human nature—has come under the control and mastery of man. Nor can man ever achieve the extent and kind of mastery which would satisfy all his yearnings, particularly in respect of his own biological condition. Thus the greater the mastery, the more pronounced the realization of that sphere of human existence which must remain transient and which depends on vicissitudes of circumstances.

Moreover, it is not only the practical realization of human limitations which curbs the sense of an absolute command over nature. Also, the theoretical perception of science does not, in the last resort, amount to an absolutely regulated universe, necessarily abiding by man-discovered laws. Newton spoke of the forces of nature, to which he attributed the regularity of physical phenomena. In other words, he assumed the existence of some underlying substance which seemed to account for and guarantee the stability and absoluteness of the laws of nature. However, as Bertrand Russell points out, "the modern physicist . . . merely states formulae which determine accelerations, and avoids the word 'force' altogether." While, as Russell says, this is merely giving up "the faint ghost of the vitalist view,"[7] it also means depriving the laws of physics of some ontological guarantee of their absoluteness.

Eventually, modern physics, in addressing high velocities and small particles, could not apply to them Newton's laws and had to search for additional formulae in the Relativity Theory and in Quantum Mechanics. This in no way made the perception of the laws of nature crumble, but it pointed to their flexibility, to the elusive secrets which may not allow us trust in the finality and absoluteness of human formulations about the manifestations of matter. Some elements of transiency raised their shaky heads, despite the formidable domination of the laws of nature.

Beyond that, the overall picture of the universe as a permanent establishment, whether of God or nature, has suffered from the impact of the naturalistic, scientific approach. Man's reliance on science made him inquire not only into the laws of physics, but, using these laws, man attempted to uncover the beginnings of earth and even of the entire universe. Once an answer was provided to this question, it inadvertently suggested an answer also to the problem of the ending of the cosmic order.

The question of the origin of the world was, of course, asked also by the less knowledgeable men of antiquity, as well as in various primitive cultures. The answer there, to quote the biblical example, was that the earth and the heavenly bodies were created by God. This implied that they will continue to exist as long as God wills them to exist. Aristotle, approaching the problem through philosophical speculations, concluded that the universe is eternal: it had no beginning and it has no end.

The modern scientific approach, based on astronomical observation and on laws of physics, reached quite different conclusions about the origin of our world. Immanuel Kant (1724–1804) and Pierre Simon Laplace (1749–1827), independently of each other, developed the hypothesis that the earth, along with other planets, came into being out of a nebular matter revolving round the sun, which had detached itself due to centrifugal force. Eventually, it took the shape of solid planets, including earth, as we know them. Twentieth-century theories, addressing themselves to the entire universe, also speak of origin and evolution of the countless stars, which include, of course, the sun. The beginning of it all may have been an explosion, which led to the dispersal of matter and the formation of galaxies.

We need not go into a speculation about what the end of the universe might be. It is enough that we assume that the sun, like other countless stars, will in the end either explode or turn cold. In either case this would mean the end of life on planet Earth. The fact that, as far as we know, such an ending is due only in some billions of years may be an emotional consolation, but it is not a resolution of the problem man faces. The problem is that humanity turns from a planned and purposeful entity into an episodic occurrence. Evolved on a solidified matter called earth from simpler forms of life, themselves the consequence of accidental chemical combinations, humanity emerged, existed and is bound to vanish. Looked at *sub specie aeternitatis*, man and his world are no more than a transient phenomenon.

To be sure, man attained the capacity to get a glimpse into the nature of the universe and into his own place in it. However insignificant that place—and man may have succeeded in making it somewhat more significant by his various endeavors—the *realization* of the situation, the *awareness* of the mystifying condition, may well touch on a superhuman element which is beyond and above the biological existence of the species. There may be an element of the absolute here. And yet, some may counter, what of it? The realization of nothingness does not outweigh it. The absolute knowledge of transiency cannot change it.

Interestingly, these gloomy conclusions, while implicit to the modern scientific view, could have been reached also in an age when most men trusted in the divine guarantee of the sense and meaning of human existence. In the context of a culture which encapsuled its claim for the absolute in the belief in the omnipotent and benevolent God, a philosophy was formulated which questioned the meaning of the natural order and denied its relevance to the human condition. Let us convey it in the words of the biblical text:

> Vanity of vanities, said the Preacher, vanity of vanities; all is vanity. . . . A generation goeth, and a generation cometh; but the earth standeth for ever. The sun also ariseth, and the sun goeth down, and it hasteth to the place where it ariseth. The wind goeth toward the south, and turneth about unto the north; it whirleth about continually, and the wind returneth again according to its circuits. All the rivers run into the sea, yet the sea is not full; unto the place where the rivers go, thither they go again. . . . Whatever hath been, shall be; and whatever hath been done, shall be done: and there is nothing new under the sun.[8]

Significantly, the Preacher does not deny the natural order. But while the Psalmist sees in it the beautiful design of God and so admires it, Ecclesiastes regards this order as a mere monotonous repetition which is entirely meaningless. There may be an absolute regularity in nature, but to man it is senseless. The transient generations cannot derive solace from the eternity of the earth. The watcher of nature—the sun, the wind, the waters, all abiding by some eternal laws—cannot enjoy or admire it. It only underscores for him the lack of stimulus and novelty, the meaninglessness of it all: "Whatever hath been, shall be; . . . and there is nothing new under the sun." The laws of nature are there, but what difference do they make to man? The absolute and its continuity are not questioned, but they are completely divorced from the transiency of human life. Man looks at the universe and at nature as at a completely alien entity. All man can say in conclusion is that "all is vanity."

We have reviewed human endeavor to find order in the domain of the universe and nature, whether through religious belief or scientific effort. The results of these endeavors range from complete trust in the regularity and purposefulness of nature to a sense of man being lost or totally alienated from the natural setting, whether due to scientific conclusions or to philosophical despondency.

The question can be asked: what is the right conclusion in this regard? Does the universe, as comprehended by man, offer an anchor for him, or is it an illusion of an absolute, and, in truth, a mere episode, be it a very lengthy episode, taking place between nothing and nothing?

In attempting to answer this question, a distinction must be made between the scientific response to the problem and the philosophical and/or theological answer. When we deal with the laws of Newton and their modifications by other physicists in later times, we confront scientific interpretations of nature. When we deal with the biblical passages from Genesis and the Psalms, we face a theological stance. Boethius represents a theological-philosophical synthesis. Ecclesiastes exemplifies a philosophical dimension; perhaps one should say, a certain kind of a philosophical temperament or mood.

In respect to the theological and philosophical attitudes, one cannot but either embrace them or repudiate them. This depends on one's own beliefs and disposition, which are hardly subject to a logical analysis or rational discussion. Some individuals will identify with the Psalmist, while others will sympathize with Ecclesiastes. Perhaps the same person may one time see the universe from this and on another occasion from that angle.

We are on a firmer ground in respect to the scientific laws. The laws of Newton and others, which claim to be predictive and which are expressed in precise mathematical terms, can be subject to verification. As long as they are not denied by occurrences which do not fit their formulae, and are confirmed by countless events which are explainable by them, they remain valid, solid, absolute. If and when certain occurrences elude their formulation, a revision is needed, either limiting the existing law to certain kind of phenomena, or changing the law to make it encompass the new observations. This has been the practice of science and there can be no rational objection to it. In science we are looking for the absolute law; we formulate a law which we believe to be absolute and keep it, unless and until new observation makes the absolute less so, and requires modification.

What about the scientific speculations about the beginning and the end of the universe and the planet? Are they to be accepted as rationally founded, absolute truths? The answer to this question is no more than a solid "perhaps."

It can be said that the hypotheses about the beginning and the ending of the universe, while they are derived from scientific knowledge, in fact constitute steps into speculative philosophy. The basic problem of cosmogony, the question about the beginning of the universe, touches on an insoluble philosophical issue of what beginning means. Whatever be decided as the beginning, we can ask what was before that. Thus we can reason that there can be no actual beginning of the world. Yet to say that something has always existed puzzles our minds as well. What is "always"? How can anything come into existence if it is supposed to have always existed? The antinomian nature of such questions, which confound man's reasoning capacity, has been shown by Kant.[9] This is true also of the ending of the universe. After it ends, there still will be something. Can existence end? It is hard to conceive of such ending, though it may perhaps be less difficult to conceive an endlessly continuing existence than a never beginning one. In any case, the antinomian nature of these problems, the contradictory arguments which defy a logical resolution, place them in the domain of philosophical speculation rather than of scientific, verifiable or deniable, exploration.

To be sure, there can be little consolation for humanity in this evasive answer. If the universe as we know it comes to an ending, it may matter little how to call the existence after that event. For that matter, we need not go beyond the hypothesis of the extinction or explosion of the sun, which would mean the end of life on earth without touching the tricky problems of the antinomies. Such a hypothesis may well rest within the available scientific knowledge without transcending into the realm of philosophical speculation. The antinomies will remain unresolved, but the end of life may become a physical fact.

Yet, even in this case it can be argued that physics and astronomy, as well as biology, do not explain all our human experience. The mind and the spirit have not been reduced to, or explained by, the laws of physics or other natural sciences. True, if spiritual existence depends on physical existence, even if it is different in kind, then the end of the latter will mean the end of the former. If, however, there is some kind of an independent spiritual existence, then we face here an absolute which does not depend on the laws and theories of nature, nor is subject to the cataclysmic predictions of scientists. The independent existence of spirit is, however, a problem which has resisted a conclusive answer so far.

Chapter 8

The Collective

One way in which the quest for the absolute has been expressed by mankind is in seeing it in the collective. Aware that the individual, in his physical manifestation, is but a transient phenomenon, the society—whether tribe, nation, state or any other collective body—was looked at as a possible embodiment of the stable, the permanent, the absolute.

This kind of expression of the yearning for the absolute has certain characteristics which are missing in the more spiritual forms of the quest: unlike those forms, the collective is of a concrete nature. The belief in God, or in the survival of the individual soul, depends on imagination, which is strengthened by hope and wishful thinking. Powerful as such a combination may be, it is not always free of doubt, of some nagging thought that it may be an illusion. It is not accidental that we find various instances of incredulity and demand for a concrete reassurance by God in various stories of the Bible which recount human encounter with the Almighty or His messengers. Thus Sarah laughs at the announcement that she would bear a child when Abraham and she are quite old, even though it comes from the mouth of divine messengers.[1] When Moses is addressed by God at the burning bush and sent on the mission to liberate Israel, he persistently raises the question of his suitability as a divine messenger and has to be equipped with various ‘‘signs,’’ tangible and visible miracles, to reassure him and his prospective audience.[2] Gideon, appointed by God to deliver Israel from the Midianites, submits the divine message to various tests, some of which appear like a scientific experiment.[3] Then, of course, there are the many accounts of miracles, both in the Old and New Testaments, which attempt to lend the spiritual notion of divinity a concrete evidence.

Significantly, the stress on social morality which characterizes Judaism also required a support. This, as we have seen, was provided by linking morality to the will of God, another intangible absolute, and by promising punishment and reward—if need be, in the "last days," envisaging a concrete situation which will fulfill the demands of universal justice.

By contrast, seeing the collective as the absolute does not require such props, though occasionally they are resorted to. The collective in which the individual finds himself is here to see and to feel. It seems to have an existence of its own; it continues despite the limited lives of the individuals of whom it is composed; it is continuously replenished by newly born and maturing individuals, while others grow old and die. Thus its continuity, perhaps even immortality, can be easily accepted, and the individual, even if merely a tiny ingredient of the whole, can see himself as a part of a great and lasting entity, of an earthly absolute.

This does not mean that the collective has necessarily a stronger hold on everybody in every period than, say, religion or morality. People have the capacity of believing in the intangible with the same or even greater ardor than committing themselves to the concrete. Yet the rather constant appeal of the collective to the bulk of humanity in various times and in diverse places is a testimony to the force of this kind of notion of the absolute.

The collective may appear under different forms and in diverse modes: it may be a clan, a tribe, a nation, a state (i.e., a political organization). It also varies in its extent—from a small community to humanity itself. It is not, however, our intention to explore this variety or to classify it systematically. We shall only try to offer some cardinal examples of the collective perceived as the absolute. They will be discussed under three headings: the state, the nation and the universal collective. Comments on the major symbols of some collectives will conclude the picture.

The perception the state as an entity which is to be cherished, which deserves the self-sacrifice of men, which is of supreme value, which is absolute, is very eloquently conveyed in the famous funeral oration of Pericles, as recounted by Thucydides. The example is particularly illustrative, for it relates the death in battle of citizen-warriors to the collective for which they fought.

Pericles praises the city-state of Athens on account of its democratic constitution, equitable laws, love of freedom, concern for wisdom and for beauty. He sums it up in the following statement: " 'In a word I claim that our city as a whole is an education to Greece, and that her members yield to none, man by man, for independence of spirit, many-sidedness of attainment, and complete self-reliance in limb and brain.' " Thus it is the excellence of the *polis* of Athens, the intrinsic value of the life it provides, that elevates it to the pedestal of admiration. Moreover, also the military and political power of the state are viewed as of paramount importance, and Pericles sees these attributes as justifying a historical fame for Athens: " 'Great indeed are the symbols and witnesses of our supremacy, at which posterity, as all mankind to-day, will be astonished." ' Consistently, he sees Athenian territorial and maritime expansion as "eternal memorials."[4]

Noteworthy is the notion that the value of the state is in its excellence, and not merely in its being a fatherland to its citizens. This excellence is not purely moral, but emphasizes the good life it provides, though there are clear moral implications in equality, freedom and so on. Besides these elements, there is also the notion of world fame and history, the view of Athens as impressing mankind and posterity. Thus, one could say, Athens both provides the good life for the living contemporaries, and enjoys, as it were, a universal renown which will last into the future.

These, when compared with some more recent expressions of patriotism, may sound like guarded and restrained statements. While the power of the state is glorified, at least some of its value is due to the benefits of its citizens. The state is not the only end, nor the individual merely a means. Yet, as the speech continues, the perception of the state as the absolute, and of the citizens-warriors as transient, becomes emphatic. Speaking of the fallen soldiers, Pericles states: " 'There no hearts grew faint because they loved riches more than honour. . . . Counting the quest to avenge her [the city's] honour as the most glorious of all ventures, and leaving Hope, the uncertain goddess, to send them what she would, they faced the foe.' "[5] Riches, representing private ambition, contrasts with and is sacrificed to the public concern, to honor. Private hope gives way before the glory of public commitment. The collective asserts its supremacy as a kind of an absolute over the transient, though not insignificant, individual. The soldiers are mourned, but Athens shines as the tangible absolute: " 'Fix your eyes on the greatness of Athens as you have it before you day by day, fall in love with her, and when you feel her great, remember that this greatness was won by men . . . who . . . sacrificed their lives as the best offering on her behalf.' " It is in this self-sacrifice that the soldiers, transient individuals, reach for the eternal, the absolute, as they receive "praise that will never die," and "a home in the minds of men, where their glory remains fresh. . . . For the whole earth is the sepulchre of famous men; and their story . . . lives on far away . . . , woven into the stuff of other men's lives."[6] Thus, in a certain sense, the transient individual attains an absolute status through the self-sacrifice to the collective.

The relationship between the individual and the state is explored in a philosophical manner by Plato, who provides his own answer as to the desirable status of each. Plato's stand is epitomized in the parable of the statue in the *Republic*.

The state, according to Plato, should consist of various classes, each performing its function for the whole society, and doing it in the most reliable and efficient manner. Thus there would be farmers, craftsmen, merchants and so on, each class and individual adjusting his style of life to the function he performs, and not the other way around, the function to individual preferences. One of the classes, a very important one, would be the guardians, whose function is to uphold the law and the government and to defend the state. Plato—as usual putting his argument into the mouth of Socrates—prescribes for the guardians a very rigorous manner of life, insisting on hard training, precluding private family and property, as well as any luxury, in order to assure their devotion to the state and the state only and an efficient performance of their duties. These demands make Adeimantus, an interlocutor, to object that, though the guardians virtually control the state, "they are none the better for it." For while others can acquire land, build beautiful houses and enjoy life, the guardians are barred from these pleasures. In other words, the question is raised, if we may translate it into modern terminology, as to the relationship between, and the relative importance of, the duties to the collective and the rights of the individual.[7]

The answer of Socrates is "that our aim in founding the State was not the disproportionate happiness of any one class, but the greatest happiness of the whole." To underscore the point he adduces the parable of the statue:

> Suppose that we were painting a statue, and some one came up to us and said, Why do you not put the most beautiful colours on the most beautiful parts of the body—the eyes ought to be purple, but you have made them black—to him we might fairly answer, Sir, you would not surely have us beautify the eyes to such a degree that they are no longer eyes; consider rather whether, by giving this and the other features their due proportion, we make the whole beautiful.

The happiness of the guardians, as that of the members of other classes, must be subject and dedicated to the happiness of the state, which in this context really means the excellence and perfection of the state. The ideal state of Plato, like Athens for Pericles, is the absolute to which the sectional—and one could add, transient—interests of the individual must be sacrificed, if necessary. "And thus the whole State will grow up in a noble order, and the several classes will receive the proportion of happiness which nature assigns to them."

The notion of the organized collective obtains, at the hands of Plato, an aesthetic coloring. It is probably not incidental that Plato likens the construction of the state to the making of a statue, an art in which the Greeks excelled. As artistic beauty partakes of the absolute, so does the work of political art. As plastic art is subject to the absolute rules of nature, so politics must submit to its inherent logic. This places the state as the absolute end, to which the individual must submit as a transient means.

Such a position may have been difficult to accept in modern times, notably in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, when the individual was, in a sense, elevated to the rank of the absolute. Philosophers of this era talked of man's, individual man's, rights, which were embedded in the laws of nature and in reason; that is to say, in absolute principles. Thus John Locke (1632–1704) spoke of the rights to life, health, liberty and possessions.[8] This insistence on the rights of the individual is faithfully echoed in the American Declaration of Independence of July 4, 1776, which asserts that all men "are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights," such as "Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness." The connection to God and the unalienable nature of rights emphasize their absolute value and nature, and by implication the elevated status of their beneficiary, the individual. It is the pursuit of happiness of the individual, and not the beauty of the statue, or the noble order of the state, that is the absolute.

Yet, even in this intellectual environment, there were attempts to glorify the state as the absolute, though without impinging on the status of the individual as a being entitled to the elevated status accorded him by the Enlightenment. It was Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712–1778), in his treatise *Du Contrat Social* (1762), who tried the seemingly impossible endeavor of linking the two absolutes, the collective and the individual, in a feasible coexistence.

Rousseau was aware of the problem inherent in his undertaking, and gave it his own formulation: "Some form of association must be found as a result of which the whole strength of the community will be enlisted . . . , in such a way that each, when united to his fellows, renders obedience to his own will, and remains as free as he was before." The whole strength of the community and the freedom of each man, the collective entity and the individual right—how can these be combined without encroaching on one another? The answer to this query is the social contract. It is concluded by and among all the individuals who give up all their rights and powers and put them under the direction of the general will. The body politic, the collective will, thus created, though forming a new entity, is also the sum total of the individuals who compose it, and therefore its absolute authority (absolute, because *all* the rights were given up by the individuals) cannot be in conflict with the rights and wills of those individuals. They are both the rulers and the ruled, sovereign and subject, and therefore remain free.[9] Thus the absolute power, the authority, the moral status of the collective coexists with the absolute rights and freedom of the individual.

Yet this seemingly perfect formula cannot ignore the possibility that an individual will be at variance with the collective authority, that he will wish to follow his own will and ignore the decisions of the state, despite being a legal partner to its foundation. To avoid such a contingency, says

Rousseau, the social contract must contain an implicit undertaking, "that whoever shall refuse to obey the general will must be constrained by the whole body of his fellow citizens to do so." And Rousseau adds his famous paradoxical comment—"which is no more than to say that it may be necessary to compel a man to be free."[10] Thus it would seem that it is the collective that retains the absolute authority and the individual is reduced to a subservient status. Rousseau, however, would not admit it, for he claimed that the individual—one might say, the individual in his right mind and morally correct—must freely agree with the decisions of the general will, and thus acts and reacts out of his absolute fundamental freedom.

This, in the last resort, amounts to accepting the state as the absolute and giving up the claim of the individual to absolute rights; for if the general will is the will of the majority, the rights of the minority may be trampled upon. To be sure, Rousseau did not identify the general will (*volonté generale*) with the will of all (*volonté de tous*), which is the sum of individual wills. The general will is the true expression of the common interest. Yet, how practically to arrive at it remains unclear.[11] Thus the state is given absolute authority over the individual in the name of freedom which seems to vanish. Whether it is the rule of the majority, or some mysterious expression of the true will of the body politic, for all practical purpose the state in this conception becomes the absolute, and the individual is subject to its authority and deprived of any inviolable rights.

The practical application of this trend of thought, though not intended by Rousseau, has been the totalitarian state; that is to say, a state which regarded itself as the absolute collective entity with unrestrained or total right to control the individual or any social group or organization within the state's domain. Unlike the liberal state, which respects some rights of the individual as absolute or nearly so, the totalitarian philosophy and practice assumes that *all* the rights of the individual, if he ever had such, are entrusted to the will of the state, a will which, whether general or not, is regarded in some mysterious way as the true will of the collective. A totalitarian state may be fascist and regard the state as the embodiment of the nation, which has a life of its own. It may be communist, and see the state as the supreme means for the realization of the classless society. It could be even democratic, if the government were elected by a popular vote, but because of the sectional interests or convictions of the majority, decided to trample over the rights of minorities and individuals. Ancient Sparta was a totalitarian state, though the ruling class had some democratic institutions. The common characteristic of the totalitarian system is that it regards the state as an absolute power which has the right to subject the individual and society to whatever conditions the state considers suitable and to demand of its citizens whatever sacrifices the state decides upon.

The perception of the state as an absolute and the individual as subservient to it is, in principle, reversed by the liberal philosophy. This view was conveyed by John Locke and others, but given a fuller and more sophisticated expression by John Stuart Mill (1806–1873). His point of view deserves a brief mention, for it will illuminate the doctrine of the adoration of the state by providing a contrasting attitude, which insists on the individual being the absolute entity vis-à-vis the state. Needless to say, Mill's philosophy deserves consideration on its own merits as well.

Speaking of government, which is of course the active agency of the state and thus may be viewed here as virtually identical with it, Mill clearly asserts that it is "only a means," its objective being the aggregate interests of humanity or society.[12] Thus government and state become means, while humanity is elevated to the status of a worthwhile end. To transpose it to our theme, the state drifts toward transiency, while humanity soars toward the absolute.

Yet humanity or society is a broad term, subject to different interpretations. Is it society as a historical or cultural entity, or society as an aggregate of individuals, that is referred to here? Moreover, Mill speaks of the *interests* of humanity. Many conflicting ends may be covered by this term—from economic interests to cultural endeavors, from national ambitions to private concerns.

While Mill does not belittle the importance of social and cultural traditions, which constitute the conditions into which men are born and in which governments operate, his stress is on the individual. Also, while he is aware of the material needs of men, he emphasizes their mental qualities. That the government has to deal with the management of practical affairs in an effective manner is fairly obvious and needs no elaboration. Mill adds and stresses, however, a much more controversial function of government: "The first element of good government, therefore, being the virtue and intelligence of the human beings composing the community, the most important point of excellence which any government can possess is to promote the virtue and intelligence of the people themselves." These qualities are important because human well-being is "the sole object of government," and because the good qualities "supply the moving force which works the machinery."[13]

Thus it is man, man as an individual, who is the primary beneficiary of government, both due to its administrative functions, and because his mental qualities can benefit from government promotion, even though in turn they promote the working of the government. These mental qualities are virtue and intelligence; that is to say, they are in the domain of morals, or of a particular moral perception which stresses individual development. Man and his moral perfection, including intellectual development, are established as the absolute goal of human endeavor, while state and government are but means—and not the only means—for attaining this objective. Politics becomes an important, though not exclusive, means for the focal goal of humanity—intellectual and moral self-improvement.

How can government improve its citizens in the moral sense? How can the state become an educational institution in this broad sense? Mill's answer is that the fulfillment of this function depends on the *form* of government. While a despotic government, even if fair and benevolent, obstructs human development, democracy, or, as Mill calls it, popular democracy, encourages and promotes it.

The qualities which Mill wants enhanced are intelligence, moral involvement, active participation. A benevolent despot may genuinely care for his subjects, but they will not need to care for themselves or for others under such a regime, and so will not be required to use their minds, their moral judgment, or become actively involved in public matters. By contrast, a form of government which invites and encourages the participation of ordinary people in public affairs stimulates those people to think, to take a moral stand, to be agents and no mere beneficiaries. As we have indicated, it is these attitudes and qualities that Mill extols—the character "which struggles against evils" rather than "that which endures them," a type which shapes circumstances rather than that which bends to them.[14] As this active character is best developed by a participatory system of government, "nothing less can be ultimately desirable than the admission of all to a share in the sovereign power of the state."[15]

Thus, instead of the general will superseding the will of all, we have the will of all involved in the general affairs. The collective will, deprived of its mystique, retains its importance as a beneficial machine for the welfare of the people, but its main benefit is that it demands that the people, the individuals, work with the machine, and thus progress morally and intellectually. They and their perfectibility are the goals—one might say, the absolute goals—while the machine remains what a machine is, a means. Perhaps it is not transient, but lasting; yet it is subservient to the goals.

The state as an absolute vis-à-vis the transient individual essentially conveys the notion of the present collective, the political entity as the individual perceives it in his own time span. Although it may well be realized that the state existed yesterday and will continue tomorrow, the stress is on its present power and authority. The general will of Rousseau is not the will of former generations, but of the present, *any* present, generation. It could be said to be both, limited to the current situation and outside the dimension of time. The statue of Plato is a parable representing the state in any time and place, and is even more clearly atemporal.

Yet the notion of the collective is often, and perhaps more characteristically, conceived in conjunction with a historical, time-related perception, as is in some way the case of Athens in the Periclean oration. The realization that a collective, one with a distinct identity, originates before the individuals' lives and continues beyond them, lends it the air of a long, continual existence, or even of immortality. These notions are not usually attributed to the state, but to such entities as tribe or nation, even if they often overlap with the political entity, the state.

Tribal society represents the original form of a collective awareness which views the social unit as maintaining its identity through time. The historical perception of society or community is typical of members of a tribal society, as well as of a national community. This time-awareness is not due to any philosophical perspective, but the consequence of the observation of biological continuation extended beyond the individual life span. Let us elaborate the point in more concrete terms.

Man is born into and reared within a family. He witnesses the growing and passing of generations within his kinship group. The biological process, with its sociological ramifications, such as family structure and kinship rules, progresses through time. It is easy, virtually self-evident, for the individual to assume that the process witnessed by him must have been going on for a long time before his birth and will continue for an indefinite time after his death. Thus the notion is established of a social unit which is organic rather than the consequence of human will, like the state of Plato or Rousseau.

This nucleus of a time-spanned social unit, the family, is extended beyond one's familiar niche, for the individual observes that families are created by the marriage of their members to the members of other families. These are the biological conditions of the survival of society or of its growth. The marriages tend to be contracted between individuals who speak the same language, share the same religious beliefs, observe the same customs. This similarity may be due to assimilation, whether voluntary or enforced, or because of the common origin of the various families. It is the latter explanation which is mostly favored, and thus the tribal awareness is established. The whole tribe is believed to be the descendant of the original founder and his family.

The question can be asked, and has been asked, about the origins of this founder, and why should he, and not, say, his father, be regarded as the originator of the tribe. The answer to this query is usually related to the notion of tribal identity. The founding father is believed to have established the distinctive social and cultural identity of the tribe, which makes it unique, even if it is biologically related to other tribes.

A perfect illustration of such tribal awareness is provided in the Bible. Abraham is perceived as the originator of the tribes of Israel. His father Terah is mentioned, but remains irrelevant. His relative Lot is the father of the founders of two other tribes or nations—Moab and Ammon—but these are outsiders as far as the descendants of Abraham are concerned. Significantly, the genealogy of Abraham is traced back to Noah and his son Shem, the survivors of the flood,[16] and Noah in turn is traced back to

Adam, the first man.[17] Thus, the biological relationship to the species is acknowledged. The genealogical claim is, however, given a new beginning—a social-cultural beginning—for Israel by Abraham who, by virtue of his personality or God's decision, or both, establishes the identity of his progeny. This historical event (history steps here into the biological sequence) is symbolized by the following verses: "Now the Lord had said to Abram, Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father's house, unto a land that I will shew thee: And I will make of thee a great nation."[18]

This notion of the establishment of a historical beginning for the tribal, national existence is carefully cultivated by following up the story of Abraham with the biographies of his son Isaac and, in turn, Isaac's son Jacob. The new identity of the family, after being traced through these three generations, comes to rest on the twelve tribes of Israel, whose heads are the sons of Jacob, alias Israel, his adopted name. While these tribes retain a sense of separate identity for some time, they also see themselves as combining into a larger tribal nation, which is referred to as *Benei Israel*, the children or the sons of Israel. Characteristically, the phrase "the children of Israel" is used consistently as the name of the nation in the Pentateuch, Joshua and Judges, gradually giving way to Israel.

While the identity of the nation is in one sense social-cultural, the notion of the biological relatedness remains important. The consciousness of the biological link of the nation makes the ties comprehensible and valuable, for it means that in the last resort the tribe or the nation is a large family. Family is a social unit which is easily understood and which has a strong emotional appeal. It is perceived as an extension of one's person, and one's person is perceived as the extension of the family. The tribe, or the tribal nation, thus facilitates the individual's sense of being a part of it, as well as its being a part of him. As the nation or tribe has existed for a long time and may continue indefinitely, the individual who is a member of it may feel that his own transiency is anchored in a body eternal, in an absolute.

At the same time, the historical perception of the tribal origin lends the members a sense of separateness from other tribes or nations, and thus offers them a sense of distinctive identity. It imprints on the individual consciousness the conviction that the tribe one belongs to, whose distinctive language, beliefs and way of life one experiences, is not an incidental and transient product of circumstances—geographical, economic and other—but a deliberate choice made by an ancestor and established as the destiny of his progeny. This belief in a historical destiny also elevates the tribal or national awareness to the domain of the absolute.

Characteristically, the ancient Greeks, or Hellenes, also had a legend according to which they were the progeny of Hellen. He had three sons—Aeolus, Dorus and Xuthus. Thus the Greek tribes of the Aeolians, the

Dorians, the Achaeans and the Ionians—the last two the descendants of Xuthus' sons, Achaeüs and Ion—as well as the Hellenes at large, become established by a historical myth, as are the tribes of Israel. That the significance of this myth in Greek history is not comparable to the weight of the Israelite perception of national origin in that nation's awareness is primarily due to the fact that Greek tribal division was rather early superseded by the establishment of independent city-states which cultivated their own collective identity.

Similarly, there are reports of Tacitus that the Germani (German peoples) cultivated a tradition according to which their three main branches of Inguaeones, Hermiones and Istaeuones originated from the three sons of one man, himself the son of a god. The same eponymous ancestors appear in a Frankish document a few hundred years later.[19] While this is an esoteric instance, in view of the scarcity of information about the German tribes in antiquity, the parallelism of the tribal awareness and its fundamental historic-mythological pattern in distinct and diverse civilizations is noteworthy.

While the sense of adoration of and commitment to the nation, seeing in it an absolute entity, has manifested itself on various occasions in human history, it reached a stage of ripeness, clear awareness and wide dominance in the last two hundred years or so. During that period, reaching a point of culmination in one country or another at one time or another, this strong approval of the nation as the absolute (a sentiment known as nationalism) found its expression in theory, in popular attitudes and in political action in various parts of the world.

Such a widespread phenomenon, which is closely bound with diverse nations and not only with a universal ideology, could not have been restricted to one philosophical formulation. In a sense one could say that almost every nationalistically inclined nation formed its own philosophy of nationalism. Moreover, such philosophy may have experienced changes and modifications over generations. Consequently, English nationalism differed from its French counterpart, and the German concept of nationalism of Herder was hardly recognizable in the attitudes of Treitschke, just as one would find it difficult to uncover Mazzini in the fascist nationalism of Mussolini. This great diversity precludes any detailed exploration of the doctrine and attitude covered by the concept in the present framework. What will be done is a formulation of a few cardinal types of nationalism, which vary from one another significantly. The types discussed do not exhaust the list, nor need they be the most important historically. They illustrate, however, some of the principal ways in which the nation figures as an absolute in the consciousness of people and peoples.

One type of nationalism could be described as essentially egotistic. It expresses the awareness of an individual member of a nation who sees this nation as distinctly his own and thereby existing apart from other nations. While this may be the essential feeling in any national sentiment, in this egotistic variety the awareness is stronger and is restrained by few, if any, reservations. It is the individual's nation that is preeminent in his feelings, and any other possible loyalties—to humanity at large, to a church, to the family—are secondary at best. This attitude also means, and this is a crucial factor, that the fact that the individual's nation is of paramount importance to him does not imply that this individual empathizes with a similar sentiment of an individual of another nation. Our individual may understand such an attitude, but in his devotion to his own nation, such an understanding does not create any emotional bridge, nor does it restrict the egotistic nationalistic aspirations, which easily disregard the yearnings, interests and concerns of other nations.

A characteristic trait of this approach is the stress on the blood relationship which links the nation at present with former generations. In a way, this is a continuation of the ancient tribal perception in the modern setting, where it is somewhat more problematic in view of the well-known ethnic mixture which affected most of the European nations. The point is admitted by a major exponent of this kind of nationalism, the German historian Heinrich von Treitschke (1834–1896). Yet he sees in the notion, or the myth, of "blood-relationship" (*Blutverwandtschaft*), whether real or imaginary, an important bond; if need be, "a wonderful illusion" (*wunderbare Illusion*).[20] This stress on a natural bond (*natürliches Band*) is an important element in this nationalism, which likes to point to the organic nature of the nation, its being alive over countless generations of individual life spans. Indeed, this kind of nationalism turns the succession of dead generations into an integral and focal part of the living nation. In the words of the French writer Maurice Barrès (1862–1923), "For us, the fatherland is the soil and the ancestors, it is the land of our dead."[21] The land, its concreteness and its endurance through the ages, enhances the sense of the absolute foundation of the nation, a point which is not restricted to the egotistic variety of nationalism.

The natural-organic essence of the nation affects—or ought to affect, according to this philosophy—the mode of thinking of the individual member of the nation. Rather than seeing himself as endowed with an independent reason which allows everyone to pursue truth, he should submit to the ancestral moulds of thinking. As Barrès puts it, "There are no personal ideas; the ideas . . . are general ways of feeling and they reemerge in all the beings of the same organism." Our ancestors "think and speak in us," and "the whole sequence of descendants is only one being."[22] In other words, the nation, as an organism which lasts over generations, turns the individual into a part of that living continuity. By submitting to it, and renouncing his own personal judgment, he turns his transiency into a part of the collective, transgenerational absolute of the distinctive nation.

This sentiment is in tune with Treitschke's approach when he asserts that the state, which is the national state, has to be comprehended in terms of forces and not of principles.[23] In other words, the collective is not the creation of reason and judgment, which are ultimately the expression of the individual, but the outcome of forces operating in history, which engulf the individual. The absolute has to be sought in the macrocosm of historical entities, and not in the imagined sovereignty of individual intellect.

The view of the nation as a living organism existing among other such entities *could* lead to a philosophy of peaceful and harmonious coexistence of nations, but in the case of the egotistic nationalism it did not, for, as already intimated, this kind of nationalism stresses one's own nationality and does not bother too much about other nationalities. It tends to see one's own nation as superior, in culture, in resources of genius, in power. Occasionally, it extends its sense of superiority to what it considers a race, in the case of Treitschke, to what he considered the Arian part of the white race. The superiority of the race or nation entitles it to expand and colonize parts of the world: Treitschke admired the success of the English in this respect.[24] In his opinion, it also entitled the Germans forcefully to germanize the Polish province under their rule—whether because the German culture was deemed superior, or because the Germans had the power to do so, or for both reasons. A comparable endeavor of the Russians to russify their German subjects was viewed by him as an outrage: "this attempt at the de-germanization of a German land . . . is undeniably barbarism."[25] The inconsistency is characteristic of a nationalism which looks at the phenomenon of nationalities from its own vantage point and which gives preference to forces over principles. The absolute is *my* nation, not nation as such. In the familiar English phrasing, "My country, right or wrong."

Contrasting with the egotistic nationalism is the concept of nationalism which displays understanding and full tolerance for other national entities than one's own, and which may even try to combine nationalism with the ideal of individual freedom and universal harmony, that is, with other normative absolutes.

One exponent of this kind of nationalism was the German philosopher and man of letters Johann Gottfried von Herder (1744–1803). Herder stressed the cultural aspect of nationality, primarily as it expresses itself in a particular language, which "is the organ of our soul-forces, the medium of our innermost education." While this emphasis was used also by egotistic nationalists, for Herder *each* civilization and language has a place in the sun, and the diverse nations contribute in their own ways to the progress of humanity: "one people should learn incessantly with and from other peoples, until all have understood the difficult lesson that no people is specially chosen by God, but that truth must be sought, and the garden of common good cultivated, by all." This insistence on the separate, yet coexistent and even cooperative cultural life of various peoples is naturally opposed to force and coercion as an expression of nationalism. The nations as collectives need not and must not fight each other—Herder abhorred war and violence—but rather complement each other in the process of universal human development. Nor does the importance of the nation obliterate the significance of the individual. For despite the importance of the national community—which is bound by the peculiar deep sense of the common language and culture—the individual is not a mere means for the collective end. Every God's child is perceived by the Almighty "as if this creature was the only one of His world." The individual is both a means and an end, as are the other entities. Thus, instead of subordination of the transient individual to the absolute collective, we face here a harmonious—one might say, perhaps, organic—interrelation of the absolutes of the individual, the nations and humanity at large.[26]

The approach of Herder is reflected in the thought of Giuseppe Mazzini (1805–1872) who, unlike Herder, was also a political activist, deeply involved in the movement for the unification of Italy. Although a most ardent nationalist, and, unlike Herder, stressing the political self-determination of nations, Mazzini did not see nationalism as the exclusive ideal, and the nation as the only absolute. There are two collective ideals which he extols, the Fatherland and Humanity. The two are not in conflict: nationality should be a part and a component of humanity at large. This means not only the rightful existence of diverse nationalities, but also "the *liberty* and *equality* of the peoples." Thus the relationship of the various nations is defined by normative principles which convey the sense of a moral absolute. Moreover, the realization of the harmony of the collectives does not contradict the status of the individual: "As we believe in the liberty and equality of the peoples, so do we believe in the liberty and equality of the men of every people, and in the inviolability of the human *Ego*."[27] These liberal beliefs affected Mazzini's politics and made him an ardent and consistent republican.

The link between nationalism and a commitment to a specific form of government is not essential, for one can see in nationality and in a national state a worthy ideal without special concern for the nature of the regime ruling such a state. Yet the ideal of a national state *may* be linked to a political philosophy; thus one may see in hereditary monarchy the right form of national state, as the Japanese have done, or view the republican or democratic form as the true expression of the national identity and spirit, as Mazzini did. It is characteristic of some of the influential French perceptions on this matter that they have linked nationalism with democracy, besides painting nationalism with other bright colors of the spectrum of human ideals.

A prominent example in this respect is the French historian Jules Michelet (1798–1874). He extols the virtue of the collective by contrasting it with the individual: "The individual man is materialistic, he gladly applies himself to local and private interest; human society is spiritual, it tends . . . to reach the high and abstract unity of the fatherland" (*à atteindre la haute et abstraite unité de la patrie*).[28] France reaches the utmost peak in this respect, because it is the most profoundly united nation and thus attains a clear national personality, which approaches, more than any other nation, an individual personality.[29] The apparent inconsistency of using the individual as the measure of collective perfection and regarding him as implicitly inferior to the collective, because of his concern for material rather than spiritual goals, need not concern us here. Michelet was not a philosopher, and his analogies and distinctions should be seen as attempts of a man of letters to convey his ideas and emotions.

The inner coherence and unity of France is not the result of any political imposition, let alone coercion. It springs from the will, sentiment, instinct of the people. Michelet enthusiastically praises the political development during the French Revolution which led on 14 July 1790, on the say of 14,000 representatives, to the unification of France's diverse provinces into a national federation, into a national union. This act of unification, viewed as being short of a miracle, is "a return to nature," for it is the expression of human sociability, which overcame the historical obstacles of local rivalry, customs, tolls. Suddenly, people recognized their similarity and overcame the divisive obstacles of many generations. The Assembly which achieved it acted not in a formal or an official manner. "The enthusiastic reports addressed to the fatherland (which the Assembly represented), they are love letters." What fills Michelet with admiration is the fact that, despite the diversity of people, types, localities and even hostility, "there is nothing there which does not indicate the pure love of unity."[30]

One can detect in the analysis of Michelet the reverberations of Rousseau's doctrine of the *volonté generale*. France, despite the individual and sectional differences, attains in the Revolution a level of social cooperation which makes it speak with one true voice. It is not a voice of political compromise, but the voice of political freedom, and such a freedom results not in conflicts, or even a sensible mutual adjustment, but in national unity. While in Rousseau's perception such an achievement is attainable in any political society which follows his doctrine, Michelet sees this achievement as unique to France and its national genius. The national distinction of France is bound with popular and therefore democratic—revolutionary, if need be—involvement in national affairs. National unity involves the entire nation.

This peculiar national character of France carries the kernel of a universal message; for France is ready, even eager, to spread this democratic message to other nations. The Revolution is the French attempt to save mankind.[31] The French mission to mankind is embedded in some fundamental qualities of the nation: "This nation has two powerful qualities which I do not discern in any other. It has, at the same time, the principle and the legend." The principle is that of fraternity (*la fraternité*). The legend or tradition is that of humanity (*l'humanité*)—universal moral ideal like the preceding principle. It appears under different forms, such as Saint Louis, Joan of Arc and "our young generals of the Revolution."[32]

Thus the sense of the absolute commitment to the fatherland and to national unity coexists and is intertwined with a universal ideal of selfless concern for humanity, an active belief in the fraternity of man. The selfless universalism of France is both a matter of philosophical principle and of national tradition; it is reflected in the mystical figure of Jeanne d'Arc and in the generals of the Revolution. The absolutes of universal ethical notions are implemented in French history through reason and through heart, the two faculties of man which themselves have a claim on the absolute.

The idea that this fraternity and generosity of France is linked to the generals, whether young or not, and obviously to wars, especially those of the Revolution, does not bother Michelet. Indeed, he waxes eloquent about some of the encounters and victories which manifest the great spirit of France. In his depiction the tragedy of war all but disappears in view of the national-universal greatness of the occurrence. Here are some of his comments on the battle of Jemmapes (November 6, 1792):

> It was a scuffle, and a very bloody one, in which each man of the French army was engaged in a close combat and used side-arms, in which our recruits . . . forced the triple redoubts which were defended by the Hungarian grenadiers. . . .
>
> Oh youth, oh hope! The limitless power of conscience and of the sense of right! (*sentiment du droit*) . . . who could resist it? . . . Our volunteers well hesitated for a moment when on this rough escarpment they met face to face the furious muzzles of bronze. . . . They picked themselves up and found something in themselves which made them a soul of iron. . . . What was it? The right of the human kind (*Le droit du genre humain*), and that resounding voice of France: "Right cannot retreat."
>
> Right marched onto the redoubts and triumphed over them. It entered with our men into the ranks of the vanquished. Liberty, in striking them, set them free . . . (*La liberté, en les frappant, les émancipa*).[33]

The above conclusion is reminiscent of Rousseau's argument that "it may be necessary to compel a man to be free," but in this case it is the nations which may be forced into freedom by the inspired and selfless French forces. The absolute Right, promoted by a dedicated nation, does not stop at any sacrifice, nor is it constrained by scruple, which seem to be relegated to the transient realm of means, painful as they may happen to be.

The notions of Michelet, combining nationalist sentiments with political and ethical ideals, lead to the belief in France's mission for mankind, a mission so noble that it is entitled to resort to such means as military struggle and warfare. The philosophy of nationalism linked to a sense of a transnational mission—the combination of the two absolutes reinforcing each other—can be found in other quarters. One such example is the idea of Pan-Slavism.

A prominent exponent of this outlook was Nicolai Yekovlevich Danilevsky (1822–1885). For him the pursuit of a universal moral ideal is not to be undertaken by an involvement in such trends in Europe, nor by a direct concern for humanity, freedom and civilization. The pursuit of an absolute universal ideal is through *separation* from these trends and the exclusive commitment to the Russian and Slav aims and perceptions. Only by such a national, or semi-racial, dedication, can Russia "advance every higher objective, whatever its name—humanity, freedom, civilization etc."[34] This emphatic demand for dissociation from the European ideas and pursuits and insistence on the distinctive Russian and Slav ways is rooted in the belief in the existence of a profound chasm between the European, or Germanic-Roman, civilization, and its Russian counterpart. This difference is conceived in terms of a universal philosophy of history and civilization: "The mainstream of world history begins with two sources on the banks of the old Nile. One of these, the heavenly divine, goes through Jerusalem and the city of the Tsars and, maintaining its immaculate clarity, reaches Kiev and Moscow; the other one, earthly human, separates again into two mainstreams, culture and politics, and flows through Athens, Alexandria, Rome into the lands of Europe."[35] Obviously, "heavenly divine" is superior to "earthly human." Danilevsky further asserts that the Greek Orthodox version of Christianity is the only true one, which makes Russia the legitimate successor of Israel and Byzantium, the chosen people. The Russians attained this distinction because of their true Christian religious disposition.

Besides the religious preeminence, Russia is also endowed with a strong political sense, and with a solid socioeconomic base. The political sense is expressed by, among other things, the Russian's reluctance to misuse freedom: "his capability and usage to obey, his respect for and confidence in government authority, the lack of love of power and reluctance to meddle in things in which he does not feel competent."[36] While these qualities would largely be regarded in the West as docility, which borders on the denial of one's human dignity and undermines one's capacity to carry the responsibilities of citizenship, for Danilevsky—who is not a disciple of Locke or Rousseau, and who does not share the philosophy of John Stuart Mill—these are sterling political qualities. The cultural excellence of Russia, in Danilevsky's judgment, though in some ways lagging behind the European civilization, is still in its early stages, due to the relatively late political self-determination of the nation. In short, in Danilevsky's view, Russia excels, or will excel, in every aspect of civilization, and is superior to its Western neighbors.

The peculiarity and excellence of Russian civilization has certain political consequences, according to Danilevsky. Russia ought to help other Slavs—whose civilization is fundamentally similar to that of Russia—to attain the conditions for self-expression by gaining political freedom and by embracing the Greek orthodox version of Christianity. This may mean conflict with Turkey and other countries opposed to this mission, which will lead to the establishment of a liberated Slav region in Eastern Europe under the hegemony of Russia. The Poles, who have been subject to the cultural influence of the West and were Roman Catholics, are deemed to have lost their Slav soul. Their unification with Russia in the nineteenth century, though regretfully not voluntary, is endorsed by Danilevsky,[37] and is a clear indication that those Slavs who refuse to be free under the supremacy of Russia have to be forced into this freedom. In short, the practical implications of the belief in Russian destiny, in the absolute distinction and superiority of its civilization, are expansion and conquest—both political and cultural. The alleged absolute truth recognizes neither political boundaries nor established cultural and religious differences.

While the sense of moral distinction and superiority attributed to a nation, and the concomitant idea of a mission to humanity, has often been linked to national expansion and war and conquest, this has not been a universal rule. Interestingly, unlike the Pan-Slav and French case, the prototype of the perception of "the chosen people" expresses a sense of national distinction and moral dedication without the accompanying quest for projection of power or enforcement of supposed salvation.

The biblical story which makes God choose the children of Israel as his "treasure from all the peoples"[38] is clealy subject to the condition that Israel obeys the Lord and abides by the agreement with Him. The essence of this agreement is that Israel must observe a strict regimen of religious and moral behavior in its private and social life. That is the ultimate meaning of God's statement: "And ye shall be unto me a kingdom of priests, and an holy nation."[39] The implication for other peoples, for humanity at large, of this divine distinction is not any right of Israel to enforce the true morality, or to use its status of a chosen nation for justifying expansion and conquest. No special license is given here to young generals, or to mighty tsars, to expand and to conquer. Indeed, in the words of the prophet, the choice of Israel means particular severity of divine punishment for transgressions: "You only have I known of all the families of the earth: therefore I will punish you for all your iniquities."[40] The choice of the nation does not result in special *rights*, but in special *obligations*.

If there is a transnational consequence to the special religious-moral status of Israel, it is the mission of the nation to set a universal *example* of the right life. It is in this sense that Zion is elevated in the eschatological prophecy of Isaiah, who expects the nations to flow unto "the house of the God of Jacob" to be taught to "walk in his paths."[41] If Israel returns to the Lord and adheres to truth and righteousness, the nations "shall bless themselves in him [in Israel], and in him shall they glory," proclaims Jeremiah.[42] The chosen people may, in the words of deutero-Isaiah, become "a light of the nations."[43] In brief, the ideal of the devout religious and moral life controls the nation and maintains its essential purity. This is not interpreted, or used, to justify privilege and expansion beyond the nation's abode and domain. If there may be any expansion, it is of a purely spiritual and moral nature, and evidently it will proceed through spiritual and moral means, through understanding and learning, and not through a feat of arms.

Significantly, this pristine perception of the national ideal is preserved in the modern revival of Jewish nationalism. One of the prominent exponents of Zionism, Asher Ginzberg (1856–1927), known by his pen name Ahad Ha'am, sees the principle or justice or righteousness as the focal characteristic of Judaism throughout its history. It is symbolically expressed in the story of the life of Moses, elaborated in the teaching of the prophets, and it has served as the absolute principle guiding the people through history.[44] In other words, the transiency and vicissitudes of national history are subject to and overshadowed by a moral absolute. The implication of this perception is that the nation gets within the reach of the absolute not because it is a nation, or because it may be powerful at one time or another, but because it embraces a cardinal moral principle and submits to it. In the final resort it means that nationalism chooses ethics, and not the biohistorical existence of the nation, as its absolute foundation.

The quest of the absolute as expressed in nationalism has taken various avenues. It oscillates between egotistic nationalism, which sees in one's own (pure, exclusive and total) nationalism the absolute, which does not modify the sense of national ideal by any other consideration, and, at the other extreme, a nationalism which subjects one's national awareness and commitment to a religious or moral absolute, to an extraneous principle. Between these two poles there are philosophies which link nationalism with the notion of universal humanity and ethical absolutes in different ways. In these cases it is not always clear whether the transnational connection is genuine or sham, whether the link to extraneous absolutes is the product of true conviction and feeling, or whether the ulterior motive of ruthless egotistic nationalism merely sugar-coats its philosophy with a pretense to a nobler absolute. In practice one may find that often such transnational nationalism is perceived by some of its followers at its face value, while others merely use it in their pursuit of a purely egotistic national ambition.

The vision of the absolute as a collective occasionally embraces a universal entity. In contrast to a state, or a nation, which assumes and acknowledges to be an entity among other comparable collective bodies, the notion of a universal collective looks at and promotes a single entity which, at least potentially if not actually, encompasses humanity itself.

One instance of such perception is associated with the Catholic Church in the Middle Ages. The very name "Catholic" indicates universality, which does not mean that the church saw itself as actually encompassing the entire humanity, but which reflects its intent and belief of eventually embracing the human kind, even if that happened only with the second coming of Christ.

This idea was more specifically expressed in the polemical writings of some popes and their supporters, usually in their controversies with kings and emperors about the respective power of the ecclesiastical and the temporal authority. To be sure, a widely accepted notion was that the popes and the emperors or kings each ruled in their own domains, that is to say, in the church and the kingdom respectively. Yet some popes and their supporters, implicitly or explicitly, challenged this view, and argued for the supreme authority of the pope, as the head of the Catholic Church, over and above the secular rule of princes.

The idea of the supremacy of the church over the state was emphatically expressed by John of Salisbury (1120–1180): "This sword, then, the prince receives from the hand of the Church, although she herself has no sword of blood at all. . . . The prince is, then, as it were, a minister of the priestly power, and one who exercises that side of the sacred offices which seem unworthy of the hands of the priesthood."[45] Although the point is not stressed here, the supremacy of the church over the political authority also implies that the universal Catholic Church is the absolute entity, while the particular state is merely a means, and thus inherently inferior.

Occasionally, secular government is perceived not merely as inferior to the church, but as being outright wicked and sinister, the domain of Satan. Thus wrote Gregory VII, pope from 1073 to 1085: "Who does not know that kings and rulers took their beginning from those who, being ignorant of God, have assumed, because of blind greed and intolerable presumption, to make themselves masters of their equals, namely men, by means of pride, violence, bad faith, murder, and nearly every kind of crime, being incited thereto by the prince of this world, the Devil?"[46] By contrast, the Catholic Church is the embodiment of *civitas Dei*, the commonwealth of God, and its leader, the pope, is the vicar of Christ.

Thus, whether the church stands as the embodiment of perfection vis-à-vis the state which embodies evil, or whether the church is the highest authority to which the state ought to be subservient—both views were occasionally expressed by the same person—its preeminence is vigorously asserted. The basic ground for this stand is the view of the church as a religious and moral institution; as a kingdom of priests, to use the biblical phrase; as the embodiment of the absolute theo-ethical imperative. As the church was also conceived to be catholic, universal—truly so in the days to come, but on the way to it by encompassing the many kingdoms of Europe—the sense of the absolute derived from the association with God was linked to and strengthened by the sense of the transpolitical and transnational collective embracing all the Christians. To what extent and how many Christians felt at one time or another the citizens of *civitas Dei*, how much did the concept of the church as the absolute, universal and religious-moral, collective affect the individuals of one epoch or another, is a matter beyond statistical evidence. The idea must have had a strong hold on the minds of a good many people in Europe in the eleventh through thirteenth centuries, to judge by the capacity of the popes to struggle, though not always successfully, against emperors and kings in the name of this ideology.

A quite different example in which a certain ideology lends its power and influence to promote a notion of a universal collective is that of Marxism. As is well-known, the slogan with which the Manifesto of the Communist Party concludes its revolutionary appeal reads: "Working men of all countries, unite!"[47] This appeal is aimed at workers across national boundaries and in this sense assumes a vast transnational collective. The idea of such a collective has played a significant role in the consciousness of the followers of Marxism. In a sense, one could say, the universal collective of the "working men," or, as it is often called in Marxian terminology, the proletariat, becomes a kind of an absolute collective, to which the individual worker bows with respect and affection.

This universalism of Marxism reaches, however, beyond the international proletariat; for, according to the Marxian doctrine, the historical development will eventually lead to the victory of the proletariat over the bourgeoisie, to the collective ownership of the means of production, and the consequent establishment of the classless society. At that time all humanity will turn into working men; only they will not be exploited workers, but a humanity united in its effort to produce and benefitting from the fruits of production in an equitable manner. Thus the appeal to the "working men of all countries," while limited to a social class now, envisages a classless working population which is not only transnational, but truly universal, a population which embraces all mankind. One could say that, *mutatis mutandis*, this is the realization of the Marxian *civitas Dei*—a universal collective informed with the absolute norm of social justice.

The idea of a universal humanity overcoming barriers and boundaries and living in peace, without the help of either Christianity or Marxism, has been expressed and promoted in various forms and diverse places. Here is an example of such a sentiment in the enthusiastic verses of Friedrich Schiller, excerpted from his hymn "To Joy" (1785):

> Joy, thou beautiful spark of gods,
> Daughter from Elysium . . .
> Thy charm binds again
> What fashion held wide apart,
> All men become brothers
> Where thy soft wing rests.[48]

While here it is spontaneous joy which awakens humanity to its sense of basic similarity and collective unity, it could have been some other element, such as love, brotherhood, universal religious consensus and so on, which at one time or another was put forward as the reason for ignoring the divisions among men. Typically, Schiller sees the separation of humanity—apparently into states and nations—to be the result of fashion. By contrast, mankind's unity becomes the expression of nature, and thus much more weighty and significant.

The perception of the entire humanity as one ultimate collective, advocated as an absolute ideal for one reason or another, has not gained the support and following which limited collectives, such as state or nation, have often obtained. The international proletarian solidarity collapsed under the impact of national loyalties at the outbreak of World War I, to the consternation of socialists. The transnational claims of the Catholic Church could not withstand the claims of allegiance of states and nations the moment these solidified. The claim to universal brotherhood of mankind in the name of various inspired ideals has fared even worse. The reason for the weakness of the ideal of the universal collective, as compared with the appeal of the limited collective of state or nation, is that the latter provides a more visible and concrete entity for the individual. A state has its organs and functions which the subject or citizen experiences in his everyday existence. The nation has usually a common language and culture which make it easy for the individual to be aware of it and to participate in its life. Indeed, he may find it impossible to ignore these expressions of collective existence. Humanity at large—or even a sector of humanity which is scattered over the globe, such as the working class or a universal church—tends to become a less concrete entity, and the commitment to it a somewhat ephemeral ideal. It is easier for human beings to see a limited but concrete collective as an absolute than a universal but elusive one. Even if the collective is infused with a strong normative principle, such as religious belief, such spiritual elements are more effective in strengthening the allegiance to a limited and concrete social entity than when they are applied to the somewhat amorphous and elusive humanity at large. The biological bonds of humanity prove to be weaker than the artifices of culture and social organization.

While the loyalty of the individual to the collective he perceives as the absolute is largely expressed in deeds and action, there are also certain symbols which characterize this attitude. Whether these are deliberately created by the leaders of the collective, or emerge out of the yearning and demand of the individuals, or are due to a combined urge from both sides, need not concern us here. The important thing is that, once these symbols are established, they are venerated and respected and become a powerful tool for impressing the value and the power of the collective on the minds of the individuals, and for preserving and cultivating the impact of the collective from one generation to another, for assuring its absoluteness.

As in our times it is the combination and the virtual identity of the nation and the state which is the dominant form of the absolute collective, it is the symbols of this entity which will be the subject of our consideration. One such symbol is the national banner, which, as a rule, is treated with reverence and exhibited on various festive and ceremonious occasions. In the United States, perhaps because it has relatively few other national symbols, pledging "allegiance to the flag of the United States of America and to the Republic for which it stands" is a daily ritual in public schools. Another widespread symbol is the picture of the nominal or actual head of government, such as a king or a president, displayed in government offices, and sometimes in schools and other public institutions. While occasionally this may amount to personality cult—especially in totalitarian states, where the leader is perceived as expressing and shaping the national destiny—the pictorial image may be understood as a mere symbol of the state-nation, as is the case of Great Britain where royalty wields no political power but remains a powerful symbol.

Another symbol of the national state, which happens to be more amenable to analysis because it is expressed in words besides being sung or played, is the national anthem. Such a hymn has been characteristic of the national state, though occasionally it was composed and adopted when a national collective aspired to self-determination but was actually rather distant from attaining it (as in the case of Poland and Israel). National anthems have been introduced only during the last two hundred years or so, and some fairly recently with the establishment of new states.

Yet, however recent some anthems may be, the words of the hymn almost always try to evoke some sense of the absolute, through a link to the fatherland or the nation, through association with God or some moral ideal, by extolling some noble principle and the like. Let us illustrate the point by a few examples.[49]

The French anthem *La Marseillaise* opens with the famous words:

Allons enfants de la Patrie,
Le jour de gloire est arrivé.
(Let's go, children of the fatherland!
The day of glory has arrived.)

"Fatherland" and "glory" clearly link the hymn to the sphere of the absolute.

The present anthem of the German Federal Republic opens with the words:

> Einigkeit und Recht und Freiheit
> für das deutsche Vaterland!
> (Unity and right and freedom
> For the German fatherland!)

Again we encounter the absolute geographic-historical compound expressed in the word "fatherland." Beside it appear such other absolutes as "unity," a national aspiration, and "right" and "freedom," which evoke universal moral principles. To be sure, "right" and "freedom" are claimed here for "the German fatherland." Yet in the context of nationalist emotion, which easily detaches itself from the strictures of logic, this does not reduce their appeal as absolutes.

The Star Spangled Banner refers to "the land of the free and the home of the brave." Again we have "the land," a firm, absolute anchor for most anthems, and then the reference to "free," a condition meant to carry absolute value, and to "brave," conceived as an absolute virtue.

The fairly recent Canadian anthem (1980) proclaims:

> O Canada! Our home and native land!
> True patriot love in all thy sons command.

Besides the "native land"—weaker than *patrie* or fatherland, but chosen perhaps because of the large proportion of recent immigrants in the Canadian population—we confront here also "patriot love." The phrase evokes notions of the absolute, because of the emotive power of love and of patriotism.

If the American and Canadian anthems are comparatively less ardent than some of their European counterparts, the anthem of their original mother country, Great Britain, seems almost entirely devoid of absolutes. It seems hardly more than an expression of good wishes for the queen or king, as the case may be—a hymn more suitable for a royal birthday than as a national anthem. Yet such a conclusion would be superficial, for one has to take into account the English tendency for understatement and the reluctance to express emotions, which may have affected even the anthem. Then it has to be realized that the monarch is the symbol of the state and the nation, and "God Save the Queen" really means "God Save Great Britain." Of course, the invocation of God indicates the intent to entrust the well-being of the nation to God; that is to say, give it an absolute assurance, or hope and pray for such an assurance. It is also noteworthy that, while national anthems are played or sung in most countries only on solemn occasions, with the audience standing at attention, a few bars of the British anthem used to be played also in English theaters and cinemas at the conclusion of the performance. The custom underscored the firm anchor of national presence and loyalty, contrasting with the transient nature of the entertainment.

Chapter 9

Political Authority

Political authority has often been linked with the notion of the absolute. The claim to absoluteness could have been made by the carriers of such authority and their spokesmen, but it has also often been accepted, and sometimes even expected, by the ordinary people, subject to such authority. For both reasons political authority deserves an examination in the context of our study. To do that, the meaning of authority should be ascertained first.

Authority has been defined as the power or right to command and enforce obedience. This is the meaning of the word in the context of a political framework, or a quasi-political organization, such as some churches. Indeed, the presence and assignation of authority is an essential ingredient of the state, for a social organization would not be considered a state if it did not have a government with authority over the state and its inhabitants. The government can be considered the tangible manifestation of the abstract notion of authority. In fact, our use of the term will not insist on a distinction between the two, and occasionally we shall use ‘‘authority’’ not only as the right and power to rule, but also as the ruling institution.

By and large, governments enjoy respect and obedience of those subject to them. This attitude may vary in degree between absolute self-effacement and dignified respect. It may oscillate between reluctant acceptance and willing cooperation. These varied attitudes depend on diverse factors which need not concern us here. What is of interest in the present context is the degree to which various forms of government claim and attain the aura of the absolute, and how this attitude may be modified in certain instances.

This issue overlaps with the traditional distinction between monarchies and popular governments, but must not be confused with it, for though, generally speaking, we tend to associate the rule of kings with the notion of absolute authority and democracy with limited government, there are monarchies which are not absolute and popular regimes which are. Indeed, to quote another category, even political authority which is perceived as originating from God, the ultimate absolute, need not necessarily lead to absolute government, as we shall further see. Consequently, rather than using such broad categories of political regimes, we shall look at a variety of examples of political authority, whatever their formal description, and try to ascertain in each case how they are related to the notion of the absolute and how this perception affects the nature of the rule.

The discussion of political authority, in the abstract sense of the term, must pay attention not only to government, but also to laws; for while laws can be regarded as a means of governing a state, they are also, in a broad sense, a source of authority, being conceived as general rules equally binding on all. This raises the issue of the relationship between the law and the government, both claiming the status of an absolute authority. The resolution of such a potential conflict is not the same in various political settings, as we shall see when discussing some notable examples.

One cardinal model of political authority has been the monarch, whether called prince, king, emperor, kaiser or the like. The essence of this form of authority is the concentration of power in the hands of one person whose rule is mostly, but not always, hereditary. There have been such notable exceptions to hereditary monarchs as the elected kings of Poland from the late sixteenth century to the end of the eighteenth century, or the Roman system in the second century under which the emperor adopted his successor. By and large, however, kingship tends to be hereditary, on the explicit or tacit assumption that the capacity to rule is transmitted biologically, or in some other mysterious way, within the chosen family, and out of the practical concern to assure the smooth continuity of political authority and prevent contest for the position of the ruler.

One characteristic of monarchy is the elevation of the role of the monarch above and beyond the other functions of men in the state and society. The king, or the emperor, is not just a ruler, but he and his function are conceived and presented as quite extraordinary and beyond comparison with any other position within the community. Thus, the king is crowned, resides in a palace, has a court to serve him, is addressed as "majesty," and so on. In antiquity, in the monarchies of the Middle East and eventually in the Roman Empire, subjects of whatever social status would prostrate themselves before the ruler. In brief, a deliberate effort to create a distance between the monarch and the people was made, and it has persisted, in varying degree, through the ages. It did not vanish even when the king became a limited monarch, or even when virtually all of his power was taken away. He still remained the symbol of authority and as such was furnished with pomp and ceremony, and paid respect and homage, above any other person. In essence, he was established as the symbol of the absolute political authority, the authority over the state and the nation.

The intent to link the role of the monarch with the absolute often pursued this purpose by claiming a connection of the political authority to the realm of religion, the unquestionable domain of the absolute. This has been done in a variety of ways. One was simply to claim that the king is god, or son of god. This was the official conception of the ancient Egyptian kings, who were identified with the god Horus, described as the sons of the sun god and the like.[1] Alexander of Macedonia, on conquering Egypt, assumed the old tradition and proclaimed himself the son of the god Ammon Ra—probably to enhance the acceptance of his rule in the Persian Empire, which he was busy conquering. The Roman emperor, while initially assuming the modest, almost republican, title of *princeps*, which meant the first among equals, soon became *imperator*, which clearly indicated full command and power over the state, and then emperor worship was instituted to enhance the absolute authority of the ruler. While the deification of the emperor was a political device rather than an actual belief, the ceremony associated with the religious worship of the emperors made them virtually indistinguishable from their Middle Eastern prototypes.

It is noteworthy that in monotheistic systems, in which the king could not be a god, or a god's son, the attempt to link the institution of the monarch to divine authority, to the absolute, was not given up. This is well documented in the Bible, in which the establishment of kingship in Israel is effected, despite some misgivings and initial reluctance, by Samuel the prophet, acting on behalf of God. Significantly, the choice of Saul is perceived as made by God: "And Samuel said to all the people, See ye him whom the Lord hath chosen, that there is none like him among all the people?"[2] The choice of the king by God is also enhanced by a ceremony, which was to become the prototype for instituting a king in European history from the ninth century on, namely, the anointment of the designate king: "Then Samuel took a vial of oil, and poured it upon his [Saul's] head . . . , and said, Indeed, the Lord hath anointed thee to be a ruler over his inheritance."[3] The ritualistic, perhaps sacramental, act of anointment expresses the divine sanction and approval of the choice of king. Without such a confirmation, a man could not be the ruler of the Lord's people. With it, the human rule assumes a transhuman dimension; it carries the sense of divine will, of an absolute authority.

The monarchic authority in Europe consciously and deliberately assimilated this divine umbrella for itself. It asserted the fundamental claim that the institution of monarchy is derived from God Himself. Thus, to quote an example, Dante proclaims: "It is established, then, that the authority of temporal monarchy descends without mediation from the fountain of universal authority,"[4] In the words of James I (1566–1625), spoken at the beginning of the seventeenth century, "The State of Monarchy is the supremest thing on earth" and kins are "God's Lieutenants upon earth, and sit upon God's throne."[5] Such theoretical claims were given a concrete expression when the king was anointed in a public ceremony, following the sacred biblical precedents. The function of the pope, or another dignitary of the church, as the anointer was occasionally used as an argument for asserting the church's supremacy over the king's secular authority, but the king's claim of divine sanction was not thereby necessarily affected: the monarch remained the Lord's anointed and his authority linked to the absolute will of God. It is noteworthy that even in a constitutional monarchy, which makes the king dependent on the will of the people, he may retain the link with the realm of religion, the sphere of the absolute, by asserting to hold his position also by the "grace of God."

While kings and emperors have claimed the support and sanction of heaven for their rule, and some in antiquity were even presented as being themselves divine, it is worth noting that the idea of the rule of God Himself over a nation, or a community of people, was also formed in antiquity. Seemingly the rule of king-god and the rule of God, evidently through some human functionary, amount to one and the same thing. Actually, these two forms of absolute authority are profoundly different from one another. The rule of the Egyptian king-god, or of the divine Roman emperor, or even of the European absolute king who claimed divine sanction, are all manifestations of the attempt of the political authority to strengthen its grip on the state or the nation by invoking the supernatural and absolute power of divinity. On the other hand, the rule of God, or theocracy in the strict sense of the word, is the expression of the belief that the supernatural absolute power, which is also the embodiment of moral perfection, rules over the community of men. Monarchy uses divinity to enhance its power, while theocracy implies that power is used for the establishment of the good society.

The concept of theocracy is clearly conveyed in the biblical account of the early history of Israel. It is God who delivers the children of Israel out of Egypt, it is He who leads them through the wilderness of Sinai, and eventually brings them into the Promised Land. When they settle there and are pestered by various enemies, the people cry unto Him for help and deliverance.

To be sure, the Lord's rule and help is executed through human agents. There is Moses who implements the divine rule during the wandering in Sinai, there is Joshua who succeeds him during the conquest of Canaan, and, after the Israelites settle down, there are the judges who fight the sporadic oppressors of Israel. However, none of these are kings, none establish a dynasty. The individual human ruler, if he may be so called, is perceived as the executor of the divine rule, and it is the Lord who chooses him—which seems to preclude the establishment of a dynasty. Indeed, in the case of the judges, they appear only because of some special adverse circumstances; they are *ad hoc* functionaries of the Lord, even if they seem to remain "judges" after having fulfilled their special roles.

This notion of theocracy, the actual rule of God to whom human authority is subservient, is clearly expressed by one of the judges, Gideon. When the men of Israel, in recognition of Gideon's successful campaign against Midian, offer him kingship—"Rule thou over us, both thou, and thy son, and thy son's son"—Gideon answers: "I will not rule over you, neither shall my son rule over you: the Lord shall rule over you."[6]

The theocratic conception of government has significant implications for the attitude toward earthly authority. Unlike the monarchic system, which tends to elevate the ruler to the level of deity, or at least claims divine sanction for the king's rule, and which turns the monarch into a being far above the rest of the society, the theocratic notion recognizes such a gap only between God and the people. All human beings, even if great leaders and even if appointed by the Lord, remain human. The sense of the absolute is reserved for God only and, implicitly, cannot be alienated from Him, or acquired by a human being, however perfect he may happen to be. It is the Lord, and the divine principle of right and justice, which remain perennial and eternal, which carry absolute authority; men cannot attain this status.

Consequently, men, despite individual differences in capacity and virtue or political function, remain transient and therefore, in a fundamental sense, equal. Characteristically, even when earthly monarchy is envisaged as a possible institution in the Pentateuch, the scriptures stress that the king must not elevate himself above the people. He is warned not to multiply horses, wives, silver and gold, and admonished to fear the Lord, "That his heart be not lifted up above his brethren" (i.e., the other members of the national community).[7] Under God, the absolute, men remain essentially equal. While this condition is not to be confused with democracy—it is the Lord who rules over the people, not the people over themselves—the egalitarian stance of theocracy has an affinity to democratic principles and may facilitate a democratic regime.

The concept of theocracy was not limited to the early stages of the history of Israel. Eventually, it became linked to eschatological expectations, to the hope of the realization of the perfect rule of God over His people, or even the entire world, in the last days. In the words of the prophet: "And the Lord shall be king over all the earth: in that day shall there be one Lord, and his name one."[8] The same sentiment is echoed by John the Baptist when he preached, "Repent ye: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand."[9] While the eschatological theocracy has had no concrete political implementation, it has been a powerful factor in the minds of the believers of whatever denomination.

The theocratic principle has also affected the perception of the Roman Catholic Church, a concrete human institution. This perception sees the church as the earthly embodiment of, or approximation to, *civitas Dei*, the commonwealth of God, and the pope as the earthly representative of God, or of Christ. To be sure, the pomp and ceremony surrounding the vicar of Christ may not have always accorded with the humble perception of *all* humanity in the Christian concept of theocracy. Indeed, the ecclesiastical princes were occasionally inclined to emulate their secular counterparts. Yet the sense of human humility and equality persists among those who may be regarded as true Catholic priests, irrespective of their rank in the hierarchy of the church. Nor should one overlook the egalitarian meaning of such symbolical gestures as the washing of the feet of a poor man by the pope on the Holy Saturday (the day after Good Friday), a counterweight to the usage of kneeling before the pope and kissing the Fisherman's Ring on his hand. While this custom may be intended as an act of submission to the church, the symbolical obeisance rubs off on the prince of the church. In brief, the Roman Catholic Church, looked at as a semi-political entity with clearly defined authority of its hierarchy of priests, headed by the pope, seems to have oscillated through its history between the ideal of theocracy and the model of secular monarchy. Theoretically, no doubt, it recognizes only God and the Christian teaching as absolute. In practice, it has not been free from according the pope the superhuman status verging on the image of a king whose heart is lifted above his brethren.

The democratic view of political authority sees as the absolute neither a king nor God, but the people: *Vox populi, vox Dei.* It is the voice and will of the people that has to be accepted as the voice of God, as the ultimate and absolute authority.

Perhaps the most ardent and extreme exponent of this doctrine was J. J. Rousseau. As we have seen, according to him, the general will, which is the will of the people when they consider the issues in a public spirit, is the supreme authority in the state. As it encompasses the entire body of the citizens, the government and the state become actually identical. Significantly, Rousseau thought that this absolute source and expression of authority cannot be alienated, must not be delegated to a functionary of any kind. The will of the people is sovereign, is the absolute fountain of authority, and must remain so: "I maintain, therefore, that sovereignty, being no more than the exercise of the general will, can never be alienated, and that the sovereign, who is a collective being only, can be represented by no one but himself. Power can be transmitted, but not will."[10]

In contrast to this approach, John Locke, who also saw the people as the primary source of legitimate government, allows for the delegation of the people's natural authority to political institutions, which comprise the legislature, as well as the judiciary and the executive. While the people *may* retain the legislative power in their hands, as Rousseau argued they *must*, they may also entrust it in the hands of a few select men, or even in the hands of one person.[11] The difference between the fundamental democratic conceptions of Rousseau and Locke is founded in their diverse notions of the absolute base of the political entity. For Rousseau this base is the *will* of the people, and, as he stresses, will cannot be alienated. For Locke the doctrinal base is the *rights* of the people, the individual people—the rights to life, liberty and estate—and it is these absolute rights which have to be protected in the best practicable way. They can be protected by government, which remains but a means, and thus need not be regarded as subject to rigid and absolute structural requirements.

The difference between Locke and Rousseau on this fundamental point affects not only their conclusions on the issue of delegation of popular authority. It also affects their notions of the relationship between political authority and the individual, Rousseau favoring the first while Locke elevates the second. The political authority in Rousseau's doctrine, because it is the expression of the will of the people, is absolute and allows no restrictions and limitations. True, Rousseau states that the power, property and liberty of the individual, alienated by the establishment of the political authority, are not taken away but only limited by the concern for "the well-being of the community." But he immediately adds that "the sovereign alone can determine" the extent of such limitation.[12] In contrast, Locke's doctrine assumes the paramount value of the basic rights of the individual, and the *restriction* of the authority of the governing bodies to the safeguarding of these rights. In his words, "the power of the society . . . can never be supposed to extend farther than the common good." The government's function is "to be directed to no other end but the peace, safety, and public good of the people."[13]

It is this functional perception of government, which means that its authority is limited to its function as against the basic value of human rights, that turns Locke's doctrine into the foundation of liberal democracy, a democracy which sees itself as the guardian of human rights. It is these rights which are the absolute, while the government, even popularly based government, is but a means. It does not have that attribute of unquestionable absolute status, which the general will of Rouseau, or the king-god of Egypt or the divinely appointed monarch claim. In modern practice, the democratic state, while claiming great powers for the popularly elected government, retains, be it in varying degrees, the notion of the individual and his basic rights as being the foundation and the end of its authority. Indeed, some of these rights are occasionally legally formulated and the government is forbidden to infringe on them. On other occasions, such rights are protected by convention. In any case, this attitude expresses the view that man's rights are the absolute element in the complex fabric of political institutions and government.

The perception of the absolute in government occasionally focuses not on the monarch alone, or on the people only, but on both. In other words, there is a division of the absolute between two elements, which, of course, may create the problem of how the divided absolute retains its unity, or how the divided absolutes coexist.

One example of this kind is the constitutional monarchy. Such a monarchy can reserve certain authority for the king, while the people or their elected representatives have the authority in other matters. The English constitutional history provides a good example of such division of authority between the king and Parliament. The exact perimeters of authority of each have changed over centuries, the king losing and the Parliament gaining power in the process. While the details of this development are outside our concern, the important point in the present context is that in principle this system recognizes the absolute right of the king to govern and the absolute right of the people to rule. It recognizes monarchy and democracy (or oligarchy at one time) as partners in a rightful form of government. As is well-known, such coexistence of two distinct principles has not always been idyllic, and the two opposite absolutes collided in a civil war in the seventeenth century. Today such a conflict is unimaginable, because the Crown has been reduced to a symbolical absolute, while the Parliament, and a government based on it, actually rule the country.

Another coexistence of the elements of the popular will and of monarchic authority, both seen as elemental, does not seem to face any problem of collision. It avoids such a possibility by fusing the two absolutes. In this case the monarch, whose rule is absolute, is seen as expressing the will of the nation, also an absolute. The two absolutes merge into one. This mystical union was formulated in an enthusiastic manner with regard to the Russian regime in the nineteenth century by Danilevsky:

> The moral peculiarity of the Russian constitution lies therein that the Russian people forms a self-contained organism, which focusses itself in its Czar in a natural manner—not by means of a more or less artificial state-mechanism, but rather by deeply rooted popular opinion; accordingly, the Czar represents the living realization of the political self-awareness and will of the people, so that his thinking, feeling and will communicates itself to the entire nation.[14]

While this organic meeting of the two absolutes (the people's awareness and will and the Czar's sentiments and volition) does not give any precedence to any of them, just as there is no precedence in the working of an organism for any of its parts, in fact this doctrine entrusts all power in the hands of the ruler. In practice, it is much easier to know the stand of the Czar than the opinion of the people, especially as constitutional institutions are denigrated as "artificial state-mechanism."

This perception of the unity of the popular and the monarchic absolutes infuses the authority of government with passion and devotion beyond and above the support given to ordinary absolute monarchs, for to the external authority of kings, even their divine sanction, is added the myth of personal and collective consent. The ruler is not only justified by his connection to a deity, a tradition, a revelation, but he is also the embodiment of the popular will, or even the national destiny which encompasses many generations.

It is these notions which reappeared in the twentieth century, not in the adulation of the Czars, but of various national leaders in the so-called fascist regimes. These leaders, on the strength of their charismatic appeal and powerful party mechanism, claimed to represent the true will of the people and the historical aim of the nation. Their claim of these absolutes, taken at face value by many of their followers, strengthened their authority, which was also enhanced by the notion that they were individuals chosen by gods or destiny to play a special role in the history of their country. In view of such absolutes, the mechanisms and legal forms crumbled and accepted social norms were swept away. They were seen as puny and transient when compared with the absolutes of destiny's choice and the nation's will.

While political authority has been embodied in institutions which involved concrete and visible human representation—whether in the figures of kings, members of parliament and the like—such authority has also been expressed in binding normative rules, in obligatory principles of conduct, that is to say, in laws. Laws, as binding and enforceable rules of behavior, are found wherever there is a political society, that is, a society with an apparatus to enforce such rules. In certain primitive societies, where there may be no such apparatus, there are still rules of conduct generally adhered to, though they would be usually defined as customs. Even such customary rules may be supported by sanctions—religious belief, public censure, respect for tradition. Thus one could say that laws, in a broader sense, accompany man throughout the societies he has formed in any part of the world.

Laws are usually held in high respect. The obvious, though not always proclaimed, reason is the social self-interest. Relations among human beings, and between the individual and society, have to be regulated to facilitate social existence and cooperation. The degree of respect accorded to laws and their status in society may vary. This largely depends on the perception of law which varies between the notion that the laws are immutable and absolute principles and the view that they are merely useful guiding rules. These, though important, are subject to change due to new circumstance or change in social norms. Often a distinction is made between laws which are absolute, or nearly so, and laws which are pliable and adjustable to needs and circumstances. A fundamental problem arises as to the relationship between the human political authority, whether monarchic or other, and the law. Which of the two is supreme in the case of conflict? All these considerations have a bearing on the perception of law as an expression of the absolute.

Some clear examples of the perception of law as the absolute norm, to which all, including the ruler, must bow, can be found in ancient Greece. One illustration of such an attitude is provided by Herodotus. He reports a conversation between the Persian king Xerxes and a former Spartan king Demaratus, an exile in Persia. The conversation takes place after Xerxes marshals his troops and is filled with confidence of their prodigious strength. He asks Demaratus whether the Greeks will offer resistance to such a force. Demaratus, referring to Sparta or Lacedaemon, answers that his countrymen would never accept enslavement and that they would meet the Persians on the battlefield, irrespective of the relative number of troops. This makes no sense to Xerxes, for two reasons. The overwhelming force of the Persians would make Spartan resistance senseless. Then, as the Persians are under a single master, their fear of him "might make them courageous beyond their natural bent"; indeed, if need be, they might be urged by lashes to fight. The free Spartans, on the other hand, without an absolute authority over them, could easily escape to save their lives. To this Demaratus answers that, when fighting in a body, the Lacedaemonians are the bravest in the world, and he reconciles this statement with their freedom and absence of a master and absolute ruler in the following manner. "For though they be free men, they are not in all respects free; Law is the master whom they own, and this master they fear more than your subjects fear you. Whatever it commands they do."[15] The lesson Demaratus, or Herodotus, wants to convey is that freedom can be reconciled with discipline, and that the authority of the law is more effective than the fear of lashes. Herodotus could not make Demaratus state such an opinion to Xerxes directly and assert that law is intrinsically superior to a despotic rule, that law is the true ruler of men, free men.

The supremacy of law over the monarch's decree is spectacularly expressed in the famous drama by Sophocles, *Antigone*. Antigone disregards the edict of Creon, the king of Thebes, who on the penalty of death prohibits to bury the body of her brother, who was killed in an unsuccessful attempt to conquer the city. The confrontation between the king and Antigone provides an opportunity for presenting contrasting views on the relative weight of kingly authority and law. The king's view, expressed in the following verses by the Chorus, sees his authority as supreme and as the fountain of law:

Thy word is law; thou canst dispose of us
The living, as thou will'st, as of the dead.[16]

Antigone, confronting Creon, rejects this perception of authority, and the self-effacement before the king's law:

. . . for these laws were not ordained of Zeus,
And she who sits enthroned with gods below,
Justice, enacted not these human laws.
Nor did I deem that thou, a mortal man,
Could'st by a breath annul and override
The immutable laws of Heaven.
They were not born to-day nor yesterday;
They die not . . . [17]

Clearly, the law of the king (*nomos*) is but the expression of a mortal man (*thnetos*). It does not originate from Justice (*Díke*), eternal Justice which resides with gods. In contrast to the human law, there are "the immutable unwritten laws of Heaven" or "of the gods" (*agrapta kasphalé theón nómina*), which have no beginning and no end, which are eternal. It is these laws that are supreme and absolute, and to them all human beings, whether subjects or kings, owe obedience. A man, even a king, must not override such absolute laws.

A third instance of the perception of law as an absolute imperative, which must not be disregarded even if it threatens one's life, is witnessed in the case of Socrates awaiting his death after having been condemned by the Athenian court. Although the sentence is regarded by Socrates as unjust, he rejects the opportunity to escape from jail. His argument is that in escaping he would be attempting to overturn "the laws, and the whole state." This he must not do because the laws and the state command absolute obedience. This loyalty is rooted in an implicit agreement between the laws and the citizen, testified by the citizen's voluntary acceptance of the state's institutions and by his stay in the city, to obey the laws' commands.[18] Thus the laws are elevated into the position of absolute imperatives, in respect of which even one's life is to be perceived as transient. While this may still raise the issue as to how such an absolute can be wrong, or mistaken, as it appears to have been in the case of Socrates, there is an answer to this as well. The laws are right; only their application may have been wrong: Socrates is "a victim, not of the laws but of men."[19] Thus the absolute demand of justice is reconciled with the absolute authority of the law. (The possibility that an escaping Socrates would be causing harm to the unjust judges and not to the law is not explored.)

The biblical perception of law, to switch to another ancient culture, consistently sees it as the domain of the eternal and the absolute. The law is perceived as originating from the determination of God, which assures its status. While the terms used for the normative injunctions of the Lord vary—it may be "the words," "the commandments," "the statutes," "the judgments," to quote the accepted English rendering of the various Hebrew terms—the essential point is that the norm is a divine commandment and thus carries an authority which is both absolute and ultimate. This nature of the law goes so far as to preclude any other normative regulations: "Ye shall not add unto the word which I command you, neither shall ye diminish from it, to keep the commandments of the Lord thy God."[20] The body of the divine law retains its accomplished and perfect status, which must not be impaired by human tampering.

The absolute nature of the law clearly resolves the problem of the relationship between human authority and the legal principle. The human ruler, even if a king, even if the Lord's anointed, is subject to the law as any other Israelite is. The king is not *legibus solutus*, unbound and unrestrained by law; he must accept it as the supreme authority. The Pentateuch, evidently aware of the danger of the corruptive impact of power, is quite explicit on this point:

> And it shall be, when he sitteth upon the throne of his kingdom, that he shall write him a copy of this law in a book. . . . And it shall be with him, and he shall read therein all the days of his life; that he may learn to fear the Lord his God, to keep all the words of this law and these statutes, to do them: that his heart be not lifted up above his brethren, and that turn not aside from the commandments, to the right hand or to the left.[21]

No place for a Xerxes or a Creon here. God's law reigns and the people have to accept it and abide by it, irrespective of their rank and station in life.

While it is hard to estimate to what extent this perception of the absolute supremacy of law was actually adhered to by the kings and potentates of ancient Israel, there are instances in the Bible which clearly point to the vitality of this principle. Thus when David, the powerful and successful king, commits adultery and kills Uriah "with the sword of the sons of Ammon," he is chastised by Nathan the prophet and promised a divine punishment.[22] Similarly, Ahab and his royal wife, who commits a judicial murder on Naboth, are reprimanded by Elijah and assured a divine retribution.[23] While there may not have been a judicial apparatus to bring David or Ahab to justice, the accountability for the transgression of law is vigorously asserted. The eventual misfortunes and disgrace of the offending monarchs are forecast by the contemporary prophets and interpreted by them as punishment for the grave offenses. If a skeptic may question the authenticity of the biblical account, he would still have to admit that the interpretation of the chronicler sees the royal misfortunes as the wages of sin, as punishment for transgressions. Indeed, these episodes are used as an exemplary tale of the supremacy of the divine-moral law over kingly greed and might. In the perception of the spiritual leaders of Israel, the law of God is absolute and no rank or social position can absolve a person from abidance by it.

Interestingly, a position which questions the absolute and supreme authority of laws, over and above the resolution of the ruler, can be found in Plato. This, despite the position he ascribes to Socrates as the unconditional adherent to law, as indicated above. The gist of Plato's surprising and controversial argument against the absolute supremacy of law focuses on two issues: the imperfection of law and the capacity of the perfect ruler. These should be briefly examined.

The imperfection of the law is inherent in the fact that laws are general rules which attempt to encompass enormous diversity of individual cases, with view to establish the best conduct and behavior: "The differences of men and actions, and the endless irregular movements of human things, do not admit of any universal and simple rule. And no art whatsoever can lay down a rule which will last for all time." The attempt of the law to be eternal only compounds and underscores its failure to encompass the multiplicity of cases under a rule. The uniform application of law, far from being laudable, is actually narrowminded and stupid: "But the law is always striving to make one [rule];—like an obstinate and ignorant tyrant, who will not allow anything to be done contrary to his appointment, or any question to be asked—not even in sudden changes of circumstances, when something happens to be better than what he commanded for some one."[24] Plato's criticism reflects a fairly widespread opinion which doubts the correctness of following the rule, or the precedent, in view of the many instances when applying the same rule to different persons and circumstances (say, imposing the same fine on a pauper and a millionaire) amounts to travesty of moral justice. The attempt to subject the infinite flow of transient behavior to a universal normative absolute is doomed to failure.

By contrast, the man who is truly wise, the man who commands comprehensive knowledge, could rule beneficially disregarding the laws: "For if a man were born so divinely gifted that he could naturally apprehend the truth, he would have no need of laws to rule over him; for there is no law or order which is above knowledge, nor can mind, without impiety, be deemed the subject or slave of any man, but rather the lord of all."[25] Significantly, the reason for the supremacy of the perfectly wise man over law is Plato's belief in the sovereignty of mind and knowledge, living mind and knowledge. It is the mind, the active and supreme intellect, which is the absolute, and not the formal rule. The owner or owners of such intelligence can take care of the betterment of man and society, taking into consideration the peculiarity of circumstances and individuals, just as the pilot of a ship takes care of the ship and the crew "not by laying down rules, but by making his art a law."[26] Thus the political leader pursues an art, inspired by knowledge.

Plato's ardent argument for the rule of the truly wise, for the combination of mind and power, for the philosopher becoming the king, was recognized, even by him, as not quite practical. Indeed, he admits that the kind of mind he is looking for is rare, if not altogether absent, and so "we must choose law and order, which are second best."[27] And so he can virtually, though reluctantly, reverse himself and enthrone the law above the ruler: "For that state in which the law is subject and has no authority, I perceive to be on the highway to ruin; but I see that the state in which the law is above the rulers, and the rulers are inferiors of the law, has salvation, and every blessing which the gods can confer."[28] Thus once the ideal of the rule of the absolute wisdom is given up, the law is elevated to the status of the absolute in the body politic.

If Plato's position on the issue of the supremacy of law or the ruler is somewhat ambivalent, there are abundant examples of attitudes which give clear preference to the ruler over the law. Some of these take the shape of a reasoned, quasi-philosophical argument. A good case of this kind can be found in the writings of James I, king of Great Britain, who has the rather unusual distinction of attempting to combine his preaching with practice. If this did not make him exactly a philosopher-king, it can be said that it produced an example of a would-be-philosopher-king.

The subjection of law to the king's will, in the judgment of James I, is based on his perception of monarchy. As already mentioned, he sees the king as wielding absolute authority in the kingdom—indeed, as "the supremest thing upon earth," and apparently second only to God in the scheme of the universe: "For Kings are not only God's Lieutenants upon earth, and sit upon God's throne, but even by God himself they are called Gods." This claim is justified by a reference to the Bible (Psalm 82:6), based on a misinterpretation, and also by a substantive analogy:

> Kings are justly called Gods, for that they exercise a manner of resemblance of Divine power upon earth. . . . God hath power to create, or destroy, make, or unmake at his pleasure, to give life, or send death, to judge all, and to be judged not accomptable to none. . . . And the like power have Kings: they make and unmake their subjects: they have the power of raising, and casting down: of life and death: Judges over all their subjects, and in all causes, and yet accomptable to none but God only.

There follow other arguments, such as the king being like a father to his subjects and thus having an absolute authority over them, and his being like "the head of the natural body" (the society at large)—arguments which need not be elaborated here.[29]

This absolute elevated status assures the king supremacy over the law. To be sure, a good king governs according to his laws, but the monarchic will is their foundation: "For although a just Prince will not take the life of any of his subjects without a clear law; yet the same laws whereby he taketh them, are made by himself, or his predecessors; and so the power flows always from him self." Thus the king can "make new laws and statutes," as well as "interpret and mitigate" the existing laws.[30] It is the king's will which is declared the absolute, while the law, with all due respect, is subject to the king's decision.

While in certain systems law is viewed as the supreme and absolute authority, in others the ruler is the sovereign, beyond and above the law. Whichever way this may be, law is not entirely immune to human interference, for law is created by human beings one way or another. Thus its theoretical supremacy cannot ignore the fact that at one point it was the product of a legislator who, in a way, was superior to it.

This obstacle for the perception of law as the absolute and supreme authority has occasionally been circumvented in one way or other. In the case of ancient Israel, the notion that law is God-given excludes any *human* legislator and does not impair the belief in the supremacy of the law over the people, ruler and ruled alike. Another way of overcoming the problem is ascribing a nation's original legislation to a mythical or quasi-mythical figure. Thus the Spartans attributed their constitution to Lycurgus and regarded it as inviolable. Solon, a venerated historical figure to whom the fundamental democratic constitution of Athens was attributed, may have added to the aura of veneration accorded the constitutional laws.

Even so, much as laws can be venerated as the absolute above and beyond the authority of rulers or ruling bodies, they are almost always subject to change and modification, which must be effected through human action. The absolute stature of the laws cannot ignore the transient nature of human affairs. Even the most absolute and venerated legal system must take cognizance of the flux of changing conditions and respond to them. The absolute and the transient are bound to interplay.

A perfect instance of such a process is provided by the legal development in Judaism. Ostensibly, the biblical notion, as mentioned earlier, that the entire body of law is God-given, and the injunction that nothing must be added to it or diminished from it, preclude any human interference with law and any modification to fit novel circumstances, let alone new attitudes and opinions. Yet the Judaic practice proved different. The adjudicators of the Law of the Pentateuch from perhaps the third century B.C. became increasingly involved in the interpretive adjustment of the law. The rabbis, as they are generally referred to, developed over the subsequent centuries an elaborate system in which the biblical law, the specific adjudication, and various rather flexible interpretations and additions (claiming to originate in an oral divine revelation to Moses at Sinai), combined into a sophisticated and pliable body of law. This process has continued virtually throughout the history of orthodox Judaism. Theoretically, the law remained the sacred commandments of the Lord, absolute, eternal, immutable. In practice, the law became subject to modifications, adjustment, development.

This apparent paradox proved to be a remarkable symbiosis of the principles of absoluteness and transiency in law, for the reverence in which the biblical law was held involved more than paying lip service to the idea that it was divine. The rabbis venerated the biblical law and any modification involved great circumspection and formal justification. Moreover, the law of the Pentateuch remained the substantive foundation of the system. The absolute nucleus was preserved. As to the changes and adjustments, they have been regarded as the true interpretation of the divine law, not its abrogation. The rabbinical scholars and judges were, in the common perception of their contemporaries and in their own consciousness, not secular legal experts, but pious commentators of the word of God. One could say that, however pragmatic their approach and however flexible their legislative work, they remained in a sense partners to divine legislation, they were participatory theocrats. The transient elements in their work were informed by the spirit of the absolute.

On the other hand, the biblical law, absolute and immutable, did not lead to legal ossification, as it might have done without the rabbinical involvement, but tolerated some change and progress. Indeed, by being viewed as the ultimate authority for change—for adjustments were usually related to some verse in the Bible—it lent the aura of the absolute to the new interpretation. Thus, in a manner of speaking, not only the rabbis participated in the divine legislation, but God became involved in the rabbinical interpretation and adjudication.

This point is symbolically conveyed in a Talmudic fable which makes God discuss in His Heavenly Academy matters of the interpretation of the Law, and if He and the Academy disagree, the issue is referred to Rabbah bar Nahmani, a distinguished rabbinical scholar in Babylonia.[31] The image of God with a Heavenly Academy, which parallels a human one, let alone the idea that it is an earthly scholar who resolves a disputed problem in Heaven, is, of course, meant as a story or a fable. However, such a story conveys the profound conviction that the legislative-adjudicating work of the scholars is a sacred process, worthy of the Almighty. Moreover, man can attain the absolute in his commitment to the interpretation of the Law by being able to resolve heavenly difficulties, as it were. The divine and the human, the absolute and the transient, become fruitfully intertwined.

In other civilizations, less ardently committed to the idea of the divine origin of law, the issue of the absolute and the changing in the legal system was confronted and addressed in a different way. Thus in ancient Greece there prevailed a sense of awe for the law in its pure moral manifestations. This kind of law was sometimes referred to as *thémis*, which in the Homeric poems is the name of the goddess personifying law, custom and equity.[32] Thus law in this broad sense is elevated above human decision and conceived as a body of absolute norms. Such, of course, is the perception of the law expressed by Antigone in Sophocles' drama, as we have noted. The norm known as *nómos*—which is the common equivalent of law and which often came to mean statutory law—was still highly revered, as can be seen from the attitude of Socrates, mentioned earlier. *Nomoi*, laws, were considered as inspired by gods, even if legislated by men. In distinction to them, any decree passed by the legislative authority was referred to by another name, *pséphisma*, which was held to be of a lesser normative stature and expected not to be in conflict with *nómos*.[33] That this was not always actually the case need not concern us here. What is of interest to us and what transpires from these terminological distinctions is the attempt to elevate the law to the sphere of the absolute and immutable, while preseving the notion and the practice of adjustability of the basic norms and principles to changing attitudes and circumstances. The absolute and the transient were linked and came into contact, even if this did not always result in peaceful coexistence and cooperation, as the conflict between Creon and Antigone symbolized.

In modern times the differentiation between fundamental laws and rules and those subject to changing opinion, and the mutual adjustment of the two systems, have taken a different form. Let us illustrate it by adducing the example of the United States, even though it is not universally followed.

As is well-known, the Constitution of the United States defines the institutions of government and their respective functions, while the Bill of Rights safeguards such rights as freedom of religious worship, freedom of speech, security from arbitrary arrest and so on. Such rights of the individual, as well as the constitutional rules controlling the operation of the government, are perceived as absolute, and are deemed to be above and beyond the control of the legislature. In other words, such basic rules and such fundamental rights are above the transient will of the people. As to this will, which is highly respected in democracy, it operates through the duly elected Congress, whose legislation is affected by changing conditions and attitudes, and thus is flexible.

This general distinction between what is absolute and what is transient in the fabric of law is not purely theoretical, but is backed up by the practical system of judicial determination, if a conflict between these two categories of law occurs. It is up to the judiciary, assumed to be an objective authority, independent of the legislature and the executive, to determine whether any statute contradicts the Constitution or its amendments (such as the Bill of Rights). In case it finds such a contradiction to be present, it simply annuls the statute. Thus the transient laws, to apply our distinction, remain subject to the absolute laws of the Constitution, and the principle is enforced by an established, constitutionally determined, procedure.

To be sure, even the Constitution is not absolute, and can be changed. Such a change, however, is subject to special rules, such as proposal by two-thirds vote in both houses of Congress and ratification by three-fourths of the states' legislatures. Obviously, the intent behind this regulation is not to make the Constitution subject to the changing will of the people, but to allow a modification only if it is based on a very widely held sentiment. One might say, to put it in the spirit of Rousseau, the Constitution wanted to assure that any amendment would be the expression of the "general will." This approach has produced the intended results, as the Constitution and the Bill of Rights have remained intact since their ratification in 1789, and the total of amendments added during the succeeding two centuries just about equalled in number the ten original ones comprised in the Bill of Rights.

It has been argued that the judicial review of legislation and various adjudications of the Supreme Court amount, in fact, if not in theory, to a continuous change of the Constitution. The rigid nature of the Constitution, as some opponents of the fixed character of constitutional laws may describe it, has been subjected to these gradual modifications, which affect the system and make it less inviolable than it may appear to be.

While the point may be admitted, it should be pointed out that the adjudication and review in question have not significantly changed the basic principles and injunctions of the fundamental laws of the Constitution and its amendments. These are, for all practical purpose, held in reverence, almost as much as the law of the Pentateuch is held by its rabbinical interpreters. Despite the readiness to change and the penchant for innovation, which may be characteristic of the American society, the insistence on holding to the absolute in the realm of law has been maintained in respect of the Constitution and its amendments, while a great flexibility was allowed in statutory legislation under the umbrella of those nearly absolute norms.

Chapter 10

Aesthetic Expression

One tendency of mankind which is virtually universal is aesthetic expression. It is manifested in literature and art, in the broad sense of these terms. We distinguish in literature among poetry, story, drama, and in art among architecture, sculpture, painting. Music, in its diverse forms, and dance may come under this category as well.

It is not our intention to deal with the possible, or nigh impossible, detailed and systematic classification of the forms of expression of the aesthetic genius of humanity; nor shall we try to cover the variety of aesthetic manifestations, let alone their diversity in various times and cultures. Our purpose is to show how the absolute and the transient tend to interplay in this wide and diversified domain of human endeavor. This can be done by way of cautious generalizations, illustrated by examples from various fields of aesthetic expression. The examples will be culled from works which can be deemed familiar in the so-called Western civilization.

Some categories of aesthetic expression will not be dealt with at all, whether due to the limitation of space, or because the analysis would require a degree of technical competence which is not mastered by most of the readers, or, for that matter, by the present author. Thus the wide field of music is deliberately excluded, except for a brief comment, though a more thorough analysis of this field from our perspective could be attempted by a musicologist.

It must be stressed that dealing with aesthetic composition from our perspective is not intended as an attempt to construct an aesthetic theory, or to criticize existing theories. Such theories have their own place in man's attempt to understand the nature and the mystery of beauty as it is perceived by humanity. Our approach merely intends to show how the basic duality traceable in the essential nature of the human condition, and in a wide range of human endeavor, can also be detected in works of beauty.

Aesthetic expression is the creation of relatively few individuals, while it is enjoyed by the many. Both the creation and the enjoyment are not analytical processes, but essentially spontaneous acts and responses. The present analysis—and this is essentially true of aesthetic theories as well—may have *some* influence on the creator and the recipient, but is in no way a *crucial* factor in the creation or enjoyment of a work of beauty. These are the product of human faculties other than the analytical mind. Therefore our analysis may essentially contribute to the *understanding* of aspects of creation and enjoyment, rather than to the creation and enjoyment themselves. Of course, one can derive some satisfaction also from such an understanding.

Our analysis will first deal with the field of literature, including prose, poetry and drama; then art—architecture, sculpture and painting—will be discussed; finally, dance will be analyzed.

One could open with a statement of Aristotle which, though addressed to poetry, actually covers imaginative literature at large. Aristotle points out that the difference between the poet and the historian is not in the *form* of composition, the first writing in verse and the second in prose, for the work of Herodotus in verse would still remain history. The difference is in substance: “They are distinguished by this, that the one relates what has been, the other what might be. On this account poetry is more philosophical and a more excellent thing than history: for poetry is chiefly conversant about general truth, history about particular.”[1]

While this is a distinction between the particular and the general, rather than between the transient and the absolute, it can be argued that the general, being a phenomenon which recurs in various times and places, is essentially a constant manifestation, and in this sense converges on the absolute. True, the wrath of Achilles, or the cunning of Odysseus, need not be characteristic of every person. Yet the characterization of a fictional figure reflects a human tendency which has persisted and which in all likelihood will last, and thus constitutes a constant, against which transient individual variants can be measured. The life story of an Alcibiades or a Pericles, or any other historical figure, on the other hand, is peculiar and unique, implanted in its own time and place, and thus transient—unless, of course, the impact the person may have had on his nation or humanity is considered, which may be lasting and thus, in a sense, absolute.

Indeed, it can be said that one major reason why works of literature appeal to the readers is the relevance of such works to the individual life and concerns of those readers. We can compare our anger with the temperament of Achilles, we can measure our cleverness with the resourcefulness of Odysseus. If they were creatures with nonhuman disposition, they would not strike any sympathetic chord in our minds, and consequently we would not find much interest in them.

The general appeal of works of literature is connected not only to human traits of mind or character, but also to human relations or interacting, which exhibit a perennial consistency. Conflict, devotion, misunderstanding can serve as an absolute feature in literature, easily recognizable by the reader and awakening in him a resonant chord. Also a social situation, such as being privileged or underprivileged, will be recognized as long as society does not become a community of equals, and as long as the memory of unequality is not erased. The same is true of a situation revealing some basic condition of man—whether his susceptibility to error and mishap, or encountering a lucky turn, and so on.

It must be pointed out, however, that though the work of literature has these universal elements, which constitute the absolute in this context, they are expressed in concrete and specific forms, which are peculiar to the protagonists and the setting of the literary work. The wrath of Achilles is human anger, and thus universal; yet, it is also the anger of a Greek warrior of a certain epoch, who fights with weapons of his time, and is involved in a conflict of a particular nature. Homer, in depicting Achilles, deals with the general and the particular, with the absolute and the transient. In his own time, and in times relatively close to the composition of *Iliad*, the historical transient feature of Achilles, as well as the entire work, was more clearly recognized by the readers than it is today. But even now we may find interest in the peculiar, though long gone, aspects of the epos. They are of historical interest, as we put it, while some facets are of perennial significance. The one does not preclude the other; it does not even intrude on the other. They coexist and complement each other, as indeed they must, for a work dealing with anger, or love or sagacity in the abstract would be an essay in psychology or morals, just as a work dealing with a historical warrior might be a chronicle of a transient individual. A work of letters, or poetics in Aristotle's sense, is characterized by the *combination* of the universal and the particular, the perennial and the temporal, the ubiquitous and the local.

The point can be illustrated by almost any classic in literature. Any tragedy of Shakespeare is both, set in a specific time and place and at the same time carries a perennial meaning. Hamlet is a prince of Denmark and the drama thus named abounds in the atmosphere of a royal court; yet it conveys problems of relations between son and mother, and above all the confrontation between philosophical contemplation and practical action, which characterizes some of the more complex stages of humanity at any place and time. *King Lear* exhibits royal politics and intrigues, as well as filial loyalty and deception, exemplified in Lear's daughters, and other virtues and vices informing the actions of other characters. It is, of course, the moral aspects of the play that carry a perennial meaning.

Tolstoy's *War and Peace* is rich in describing the Russian aristocratic society in the early nineteenth century, with all its historical and local peculiarities, and the events of the Napoleonic campaign in Russia. At the same time, besides being a historical and sociological novel, it explores the perplexities of human existence and the meaning of man's life (notably in the character of Pierre Bezuhov)—again a universal issue. Of course, the human relations of friendship, love and the like, exhibited in the story and enacted by its protagonists, are also of interest irrespective of time and place.

The biblical story of Joseph and his brothers, to quote a familiar literary example from a distant time and culture, depicts particular people in a setting of pastoral and agricultural economies of the semi-nomadic Jacob and his descendants and the settled powerful kingdom of Egypt. The setting is far removed from the modern industrial society, as is the sale of Joseph as a slave to Egypt and his successful rise from prison to the administration of a great kingdom. While all these exotic circumstances, which are long gone, may be of some interest to the reader, the gist of the story is its perennial facets. It is the ambition of Joseph, the envy of his brothers, the uprightness of some of them who want to save Joseph from the malice of others, the virtue and loyalty of Joseph, the lust of his Egyptian master's wife, the insight and foresight of Joseph as the administrator of Egypt's economy, his compassion and magnanimity toward his brothers—it is these elements in the story that remain relevant in any time and place, including our own, and thus are felt to be of lasting meaning and significance.

Besides this fairly obvious mixture of the peculiar and the universal, the transient and the lasting, in many literary works, one can point to another manifestation of the interplay of the episodic and the absolute in the artistic composition of a work. We occasionally face a literary description in which the evolving plot, or human encounter or action, is set against the background of countryside, or city, or season or some other natural phenomena. Thus a scene evolves against the setting sun, the quiet sea, the rolling hills, or the mountain peaks, in an anonymous place, or in a geographically defined location. The characters in a story may converse to the accompaniment of the rustling autumn leaves, or depart into the thin drizzle of the afternoon.

The common denominator of such diverse situations is that the episode, which is unique and transient, is narrated against a background which is solid, recurrent, eternal, or at least long lasting. The rain, the autumn, the mountains, the city, are there to stay, or to recur periodically, while the story develops and evolves in its own transient manner. The contrast between the stable and the changing, between the transient and the absolute, is aesthetically gratifying, for whatever reason. One fairly obvious reason is that it provides the fictional story with a real ground and thus creates the sense of verisimilitude in the reader. There is, however, more to it in all probability. The meeting between the transient and the absolute, being a fundamental aspect of the human condition, evokes a responsive chord in the reader, and thus becomes aesthetically pleasing or stirring. A few examples may illustrate the point.

Thomas Mann, in his story *Death in Venice*, depicts a middle-aged man who revisits the famous city. Here is how the contrast between the transient and the permanent is reflected in one passage:

> He saw it once more, that landing-place that takes the breath away, that amazing group of incredible structures the Republic set up to meet the awe-struck eye of the approaching seafarer: the airy splendour of the palace and Bridge of Sighs, the columns of lion and saint on the shore, the glory of the projecting flank of the fairy temple, the vista of gateway and clock. . . . No one should approach, save by the high seas as he was doing now, this most improbable of cities.[2]

The awe-inspiring monuments of Venice appear as solid, eternal, glorious. The protagonist sees them "once more," which implies and stresses the transiency of the experience: a man can catch a glimpse of the absolute on a few occasions and no more. The moment is glorious and has to be experienced to the full, and thus the dramatic appearance of the view from the sea enhances the savoring of the absolute by the transient observer. The moment is brief—elating and painful.

The point is made again, with reference to another aspect of the city, in a more explicit manner:

> It was the well-known route: through the lagoon, past San Marco, up the Grand Canal. Aschenbach sat on the circular bench in the bows, with his elbow on the railing, one hand shading his eyes. They passed the Public Gardens, once more the princely charm of the Piazzetta rose up before him and then dropped behind, next came the great row of palaces, the canal curved, and the splendid marble arches of the Rialto came into sight. The traveller gazed—and his bosom was torn . . . The hardest part, the part that more than once it seemed he could not bear, was the thought that he should never more see Venice again.[3]

"Never more"—the negative absolute which tears the transient human being from the absolute beauty of the place reverberates here painfully. The encounter of the transient and the absolute does not insinuate here a wistful but gratifying experience. It is rather felt as the tragedy of human limitations in the face of the absolute. The full realization of these limitations only adds insult to injury.

Here is another illustration of the encounter of the transient and the eternal in a short story of Joseph Conrad, *The Secret Sharer*. The scene depicts a captain on coming face-to-face with his anchored ship, and is conveyed by him.

> She floated at the starting-point of a long journey, very still in an immense stillness, the shadows of her spars flung far to the eastward by the setting sun. At that moment I was alone on her decks. There was not a sound in her—and around us nothing moved. . . . In this breathless pause at the threshold of a long passage we seemed to be measuring our fitness for a long and arduous enterprise, the appointed task of both our existences to be carried out, far from all human eyes, with only sky and sea for spectators and for judges.[4]

While the intended focus of the passage is to convey the intimate relationship and the silent communication between the captain and the ship, there is the underlying contrast between the transient and the timeless. There is the anticipated journey, long but final, juxtaposed with the immense stillness, an intimation of the absolute. There are the shadows of the spars, a transient and insubstantial phenomenon, resulting from the setting sun, an occurrence real and eternal. There is the anticipation of an arduous voyage—again, long but passing. This enterprise is to be watched and judged by eternal spectators—the sky and the sea. The picture is of a real situation, but it may be also construed as symbolizing man's transient life as set in the framework of the absolute.

Here is how Flaubert uses the interplay of the transient and the absolute in depicting the idyll of love between Emma and Léon in *Madame Bovary*:

> They sat in the low-ceilinged room of a tavern, on whose door hung black fishnets . . . Later they lay down on the grass and embraced in the shade of the poplar trees. They wanted to live forever in this tiny spot . . . In their joy it seemed to them the most magnificent place on earth. It was not the first time that they had seen trees and blue sky and grass, that they heard water flowing and the wind rustling through the leaves, but they had certainly never before admired all these things so much.

Here the objective transiency of life is virtually forgotten by the protagonists who, in their love, associate themselves with nature—trees, sky, water, wind—the eternal, the absolute. At the same time, the writer and the reader realize the illusory nature of the lovers' confidence.

Indeed, the author underscores it, ever so subtly, a few lines further, when he depicts Emma on a boat with Léon, apparently as seen by him: "She sat facing him, leaning against the bulkhead, the moon coming down on her through one of the open shutters . . . Her head was raised and her hands clasped. She was staring at the sky. Occasionally the shadows of the willows hid her completely, then she reappeared suddenly like a vision in the moonlight."[5] Here she—or they by implication—does not anymore blend with nature, but is separate from it. She is merely staring at the sky. She becomes ephemeral, as the moon and the shadows of trees play with her appearance—a mere transient vision, dependent on the goodwill of the absolute.

The blending, or the juxtaposition, of the transient and the absolute may also appear in poetry, whether as a simile, or a metaphor, or in some other manner. A few examples will illustrate the point.

An ancient canticle, ascribed to Moses, opens with the following words:

> Listen heavens and I will speak
> And the earth will hear the utterance of my mouth.[6]

The poetic sermon that follows is considered so important that heaven and earth are invoked as witnesses to it. The eternal nature of the witnesses does not stress here the transiency of Moses' address, but points to its importance, to its absolute value. Yet the sermon is delivered by Moses, who is consistently perceived as no more than a human being. His personal statement "I will speak" resounds as the assertion of an individual and transient being. The contrast between this voice of a single man and the absolute truth he is going to announce, with heaven and earth as witnesses, reverberates through the verse. It evokes the interplay of the transient and the absolute to which humanity is so distinctly attuned.

A short poem of Herrick, "To Dianeme," opens with the following verses:

> Sweet, be not proud of those two eyes
> Which starlike sparkle in their skies . . .[7]

The comparison of beautiful eyes to stars may sound hackneyed, but it reflects nonetheless the meeting of the transient and the eternal. This conjunction serves to embellish the passing beauty by association with the lasting heavenly bodies, though it may also, as happens in this poem, underscore the limitations imposed on the earthly beauty of Dianeme, or any woman.

The well-known poem of Wordsworth, "The Daffodils," opens with the following lines:

> I wander'd lonely as a cloud
> That floats on high o'er vales and hills . . .

The loneliness of the poet, an individual human being, is compared to the solitude of a cloud that floats through the sky. Although both are transient, there is still the contrast between the puny walking man and the lofty floating cloud, a contrast suggestive of the difference between the weak and the mighty manifestations of nature. The point is reinforced when a few lines further the field of daffodils is compared to the stars on the milky way:

> Continuous as the stars that shine
> And twinkle on the milky way,
> They stretched in never-ending line
> Along the margin of a bay . . . [8]

Here it is the daffodils that appear delicate and fragile when compared with the eternal stars. Yet the comparisons, both of the poet and the flowers, to the monumental manifestations of nature are not meant to diminish the significance of the former or to elevate the importance of the latter. The contrast is there, but it is resolved in an overall harmony. Indeed, the monumental is brought down and embraced in the range of human comprehension and feeling. The cloud is humanized by being described as lonely, and the stars, mighty as they may be, twinkle on the milky way. Thus the absolute is assimilated through the vision of the poet, through the perception of a transient human being.

A poem of Lamartine, by mixing the eternal and the human, aims at an opposite effect—the alienation of the immortal universe from man. The hymn, entitled "Eternity of Nature, Brevity of Man," opens with the following lines:

> Roll on in your paths of flame,
> Ye stars, kings of immensity!
> Jeer at and crush my soul
> By your near-eternity![9]

While pursuing the theme of the transiency of man in the face of the absoluteness of nature, Lamartine uses the metaphor "kings of immensity" with respect to the stars. This, far from humanizing them as the twinkling does in Wordsworth's poem, only emphasizes their remoteness and aloofness. For it is "immensity" that dominates the verse, and "kings" are incidental, or perhaps an ironical anthropomorphism, the irony aimed at man himself. Yet the interplay of the transient and the absolute lends the poet's purpose additional strength, as it does, *mutatis mutandis*, to the verses of Wordsworth.

The mixture of the transient and the eternal is well reflected in the following autobiographical statement of a poet, written in prose, yet in a poetical spirit. This is how Heinrich Heine defines his date of birth: "The last moon lights of the eighteenth and the first dawn of the nineteenth century played about my cradle."[10] The emerging but transient life of the poet is not only balanced between the centuries, but viewed in the perspective of moon lights and dawn. Thus not only the contrast between human life span and the quite different time-scale of centuries is suggested here, but also time is contrasted with the pictorial and, in a sense, more absolute moon lights and dawn. (The original German *Morgenrot* is more suggestive of a visual image than "dawn.") The sense of human transiency in an absolute universe is imprinted on the newborn. Yet, at the same time, there is no sense of absolute alienation from the cosmic order. The moon lights and the dawn *play* about the cradle: the metaphor suggests a harmony between the newborn and nature. Thus the interplay of the absolute and the transient in this brief statement produces an ambivalent, bittersweet, effect, by and large characteristic of Heine's poetic genius.

As all these examples show, the poet can use the interplay between the transient and the absolute to his own purpose. He can use it to express harmony between the two spheres, or to indicate the gap between them, a peaceful coexistence, or an ambivalent affinity between them, and so on.

In the field of arts, architecture is the most visible, because of its physical exposure and large scale. It may, of course, be impressive because of aesthetic perfection. We refer here to monumental architecture, which is usually of a public nature and deliberately intends to impress or please the society or the community, or at least its dominant part. Occasionally, a private person of means may attempt to have a monumental structure built with the intent to please himself and impress others.

A peculiar characteristic of this form of art is that, unlike sculpture and painting (or, for that matter, literature), it is not exclusively devoted to pleasing men and impressing them, but also to fulfilling a certain more or less practical function. The building may be devoted to religious worship or to entertainment, it may house government offices or be the residence of a monarch, it may be designed for an educational institution, or even serve as a mausoleum. Thus the practicality of the structure is subject to a flexible definition. Whatever the function of the edifice, however, there is an attempt to make it grand and beautiful, to combine the function with an aesthetic achievement. The building has to transcend its function to be considered an architectural accomplishment in our sense. Therefore, a colossal industrial structure, which perfectly suits its purpose but is otherwise of no distinction, is not of interest to us in the present context. The same is true of a theater or a concert hall with perfect acoustics and ventilation which remains a nondescript building.

It can be suggested that, while the function of the building serves the transient needs for which it is built, the grandeur and beauty of the edifice evoke the sense of the eternal and the absolute. This sense is also enhanced by the material used for construction. It is usually of a solid and lasting quality. The grand design and the material, and above all the aesthetic aspect, leave the impression of the eternal and the absolute, and are meant to create such a perception.

Let us explore the relationship among these elements in architecture in a more specific manner, starting with religious edifices. That such buildings have been a most prominent category of monumental architecture in various epochs and civilizations should not be surprising. At one time a temple was regarded as the house of the deity or deities, and thus had to be built of lasting material and given preeminence over other buildings. As it often was also a place of worship, while the deity may have become elusive and only symbolically present in the temple or the church, it had to accommodate the believers, and this required a building of vast dimensions. Above all, however, the aesthetic splendor which was sought and accomplished in religious edifices is a reflection of the importance of religion in the lives of human societies (though not necessarily the measure of their religiosity, for some religions and sects shun ostentatious worship). In other words, it is natural for men who see in their religious creed and observance the identification with the absolute to link their worship with the physical expression of the absolute available to humanity—a solid, grandiose and beautiful structure, in this case.

We witness the splendor of religious buildings in the ruins of the Acropolis in Athens, in the Hagia Sophia in Istambul, which served as a church and a mosque in turn, in the many Gothic cathedrals of France, in the Renaissance churches of Italy, to mention some of the most prominent instances. In each case the aesthetic magnificence is astounding, the sense of the absolute is palpable. The effect is so overwhelming because of the overall grand design, and the elaborate and artistic manner in which the building is adorned, not to mention the choice materials used for the construction. The carved stone and the stained glass windows in the Gothic cathedral, the mosaic in the Byzantine churches, the columns, the ceilings, the altar in a Renaissance church—they all respectively blend with and complement the building. The design, both grand and beautiful, and the aesthetic attention to detail, collaborate in aspiring to perfection. Both join in dedication to and yearning for the religious absolute.

Significantly, places of worship have been built in diverse styles. It can be said that to some extent diverse religions have chosen different and distinct ways of architectural beauty. Yet occasionally the same building served in succession as a place of worship for different religions. Also some religions have used different styles for their places of worship. Byzantine, Romanesque, Gothic, Renaissance, Baroque are some of the cardinal styles in which Roman Catholic cathedrals were built. While each style may be related to a peculiar religious mood, and occasionally to the overall religious perception, it is noteworthy that various and diverse styles can evoke the sense of great aesthetic satisfaction in the onlooker, whether he is a participant worshipper or not, and sometimes can even stir some religious chord in the mind of the visitor, even if he does not profess the specific belief, or any creed at all. This is a testimony to the aesthetic power of the architectural masterpiece and to man's yearning for the absolute to which religion tries to respond.

Another class of monumental architecture is palaces and castles. The ostensible function of the edifice is to house a king, or a prince, or a magnate—that is to say, to provide a service for a transient human being. Yet there is another role such buildings fulfill, namely, to show to the subjects of a monarch, or the dependents of a magnate, how powerful and important the dweller of the edifice is and how significant is his social role. This is expressed by the large scale and the solidity of the building, as well as by its aesthetic features. All these symbolize and convey the sense of the absolute, and, by being associated with the resident and his function, lend him and his family or dynasty, as well as his public role, the aura of the absolute. It is not accidental that absolute monarchs have shown a special tendency for constructing monumental buildings.

The Louvre palace in Paris, or the Versailles near Paris, in their truly grand design, testify to the absolute power of the Bourbon monarchs, and to the importance of the country ruled by them, to this day. Various châteaux of the Loire region are of much lesser proportions, but still succeed in impressing the onlooker with the power and the glory of their one-time owners. A building like the Palazzo Ducale in Venice, with its harmonious and restrained Gothic touch and overall delicacy, more than substitutes in beauty for its comparatively lesser dimensions. One way or another, such masterpieces of architecture leave the impression of immortality on the onlooker, even if the political power associated with them, which at one time profited from such impressions, is long gone. The conversion of such palaces into museums, and the collections of works of art housed there, enhances their weight and stature in a different way, by dedicating the building to the display of works of beauty which are perceived as more lasting than political power. In this sense, the palaces become even more faithful symbols of the absolute than in the days when they served their designated original function.

Monumental mausoleums are much rarer than either places of worship or palaces. Yet they deserve to be mentioned, because of some outstanding examples. Their practical function is limited to one person or one family, and the edifice is entirely out of proportion to its technical function. The obvious reason for building a colossal and possibly beautiful mausoleum is the wish to convey the greatness, the importance, the immortality of the person for whom the structure is built. The great pyramids in Egypt are perhaps the most conspicuous example of an attempt to show to posterity the immortality of the Pharaohs buried in them. Yet, though great works of engineering, and a testimony to an enormous expenditure of resources and labor to assert the greatness of a diseased monarch, their claim to be great works of art may be questioned. Different is the case of the Taj Mahal, where the claim for the absolute is clearly in the aesthetic achievement.

The relationship between the physical dimensions of an architectural monument and its aesthetic aspects should now be addressed. Both, in a way, express the attempt to reach the absolute, though each does it in a different way. While people are impressed by the grand and by the beautiful, their response to the combination of the two is even deeper. We shall try to illustrate such a combination by a few examples. These will not be selected from the most grandiose and complex instances, such as the Cathedral of Chartres, or of Milan, or St. Peter's basilica in Rome, or San Marco's in Venice, or the palace of Versailles with its magnificent grounds. The richness and the manifoldness of the works of art adorning such monumental edifices is too complex for a brief analysis. We shall choose some relatively more modest examples, and even there focus on some limited aspects of the edifice to make our point.

Let us have a look at the chapel of King's College in Cambridge.[11] The high and lofty ceiling impresses one by the sense of space and grandeur, as does the fact that the walls and the vault form a continuous monolithic oneness, and are actually made of stone, a solid building material. On the other hand, the famous ornamental stonecutting in the vault introduces the sense of delicate beauty, so much more impressive as it is elicited from such a heavy material as stone. Thus we associate the architectural accomplishment with the absolute, both because of its grandeur and power, and because of its delicacy which seems to belie the power. Yet the two perspectives, of power and daintiness, coexist, and in a way reinforce each other.

The campanile of Giotto in Florence[12] is another example. The bell tower is eighty meters high, which makes it impressively grand when compared with the regular buildings. Yet the size is mollified both by structure and ornamentation. The delicate arched openings or windows, divided by thin columns, almost suggest a fragile beauty. The exterior of polychrome marble, the colors arranged to form symetrical patterns, further mollify the structure and make it congenial, which stern grey stone could not do. Thus the campanile reaches for the sky and appeals to the heart. It tries to attain the absolute both ways.

One of the castles of the Loire region is the Renaissance Château de Chenonceaux.[13] Built on a river, with a long wing on supporting arches extending into the stream, it produces its own reflection in the water, which enhances its charm and introduces an image of symmetry, as the two castles face each other across the natural mirror. The beautiful, artfully arranged garden in front of the building complements the overall aesthetic appeal. The stone, a solid building material, and the size are effectively balanced by the shape, location and setting—the result gratifying to the sense of harmony and the aesthetic judgment.

The famous *mezquita*, or the one-time mosque of Córdoba in Spain, provides another example.[14] The mosque is of enormous dimensions, not in height, but in its surface area. This had a practical purpose, namely, to accommodate big crowds of worshippers. Yet the size also leaves the impression of power—power of faith, power of the faithful, power symbolized in a huge solid structure. This power through size is also accentuated by the 850 pillars inside the building. At the same time these pillars, made of polished stone of different kind and color, and supporting moorish arches with alternating red and white sections, convert the huge place into cris-crossing aisles. All this introduces a sense of luxury and coziness, a kind of palpable beauty, heaven come down to earth. The contrast with a Gothic cathedral is striking, and it may well be related to theological differences between Islam and Christianity. What matters in our context is the quest for the absolute in the artistic design as it is intertwined with the expression of the absolute in the large scale of the edifice.

The elements of grandeur and beauty in various works of architecture differ. For one thing, grandeur, as well as beauty, can be expressed in different ways. Then great aesthetic sense can be instilled in the grand design, as it may be expressed in details. The relationship between the grand and the detail, or sometimes between the form and the ornament, varies from monument to monument, and cannot be reduced to any general formula. The *mezquita* and King's College chapel cannot be compared in this regard, but also a Gothic and a Renaissance church exhibit different ways of blending these elements. Yet the general tendency to pursue the quest of the absolute in a combination of the solid and the grand with the delicate and beautiful seems characteristic of monumental architecture.

Sculpture and painting differ from architecture in that they do not serve a practical function, and thus their value depends solely on their artistic accomplishment. This notion may be somewhat modified in that both sculpture and painting may play a religious role, as they have done in various pagan religions and, *mutatis mutandis*, in Christianity. Some primitive sculpture and painting may have fulfilled a magical function. Thus the representation of animals may have been believed to help in a hunting expedition, as is usually assumed in the case of such prehistoric representations found in the caves of southern France. It can be said that, at least, the *intent* of artistic creation in such cases was practical. Still, despite all these reservations, it can be said that, by and large, sculpture and painting can be regarded as pure art.

Sculpture is a medium of human expression which also differs from architecture in another respect: it does not use size for conveying the sense of the absolute, as monumental architecture often does, but relies on the aesthetic perfection only. Yet there are some notable exceptions to this rule. Thus the ancient Egyptians tended to carve colossal figures, such as the Sphinx at Giza,[15] the gigantic figures of Rameses II at the entrance to a temple in Abu Simbel,[16] and the like. The ancient Greeks also occasionally made very large statues, such as that of *Athena* by Pheidias,[17] or *Zeus* by the same artist.[18] Some sculpture of the Far East, such as the colossal *Amita Buddha* of bronze in Japan,[19] ought to be mentioned, as well as the modern portrait sculpture of four American presidents, carved in the mountain of the Rushmore Memorial.[20] Yet, if viewed from a wide perspective, it can be said that sculpture has essentially relied on other effects than those of size, namely, on artistic ingenuity.

While the dimensions do not play an important role in sculpture, the material used for the work of art is significant. Artists have resorted to various materials in this field—terra-cotta, wood, stone, various metals. Broadly speaking, preference was given to stone and metal in sculpture intended to represent the absolute. The reason for this preference was obviously the durability of the material: whoever aimed at the absolute had to use material that would last for ages. In this respect, sculpture is more closely linked to material factors than painting, which looks for perfection virtually only in the aesthetic form.

In focusing on statues of human beings, it could be said that they oscillate between conveying a religious idea and expressing a perception of humanity. The countless works of art depicting Christ on the cross symbolize the divine sacrifice conveyed through human martyrdom and the salvation of man entailed in this sacrifice. Clearly, the theme of the sculpture in this instance converges with the realm of the religious absolute. The work of art may try to express the religious idea and emotion in its own manner, and reinforce the belief by attaining aesthetic perfection. The various statues of saints, so notable in medieval churches, also belong in this category, as do the statues of Mary, the mother of Jesus. In some cases the religious idea takes on an additional allegorical meaning, as in the magnificent composition of Michelangelo, the *Pietà*.[21] The idea of mercy, a moral absolute, is conveyed by the figures of mother and son, Mary and Jesus, a combination of the human and the divine, the transient and the absolute. The aesthetic perfection of the sculpture, carved in marble, blends with the moral and religious absolutes.

The use of sculpture for allegorical representation was fairly widespread in various times. Perhaps the origin of this trend has to be sought in ancient Greece, where the various gods often represented specific virtues and accomplishments. Athena represented wisdom and military power. Aphrodite symbolized love and beauty. Eros was the god of love. Hermes represented prudence and cunning, and so on. The personification of a general quality in myth and in popular belief facilitated the works of art which attempted to convey the universal quality in a specific visible and tangible form, and tried to do it in a way that would reach aesthetic excellence and thus reach for eternity.

Statues have often immortalized individuals who were deemed remarkable—whether by others or by themselves—because of accomplishments in politics or other fields of human endeavor. Thus we have statues of rulers from ancient Pharaohs and such Greek leaders as Pericles, to Roman emperors and various other kings, princes and warriors, whose images in marble embellish European capitals and major cities. Poets, musicians, preachers, philanthropists can also be found in the parks and squares of metropolitan centers in various parts of the world. All this points to the attempt to lend the air of the absolute—expressed in durable stone and in a form striving for aesthetic perfection—to individuals of great, or supposedly great, achievement. If not everybody could reach for the absolute, the statues seem to suggest, then some individuals could attain it by their life accomplishment, as their imperishable statues and beautiful sculptures testified.

It is noteworthy, however, that sculpture has not been reserved for outstanding individuals only. It has also been eager to represent the ordinary human being, and, by engraving him in bronze or marble, to convey the idea that he, too, has a claim to the absolute. This kind of sculpture often focuses on the nude body, perhaps in the effort to express the notion that its essence is not fragility and transiency, but strength and, above all, beauty. The artist expresses the feeling that the human being, by being created in the image of beauty, has a hold on the absolute.

This attempt achieved its utmost success in ancient Greece and in the Italian Renaissance, which in this domain successfully emulated antiquity. There would be no point in enumerating examples of this genre in the present context. We shall only single out the famed statue of Myron, *Discobolos*, or discus-thrower.[22] The remarkable thing about this statue is that it captures a body posture of an athlete on the point of throwing a discus. It is a brief moment, yet the entire body concentrates on the impending act, and the beauty of this total physical concentration is perfectly conveyed by the artist. The passing moment is immobilized in stone and made eternal. Thus one is led to believe that even the transient effort contains within itself the manifestation of beauty, of the absolute. Perhaps one can go beyond that and see in the effort to throw the discus to the furthest point a symbol of humanity striving for great deeds, for utmost achievement. The human body, and mind, though transient, can aim at great things, and in doing so elevate human existence to perfection, to the absolute.

As already suggested, painting is the purest form of visual artistic expression, in that its claim to the absolute depends almost solely on the artistic perfection and not on the material it uses. It cannot use such props as the solidity of marble to impress on the viewer the permanence of the work of art, as sculpture and architecture can. Moreover, by being two-dimensional and thus, theoretically, less than the transient manifestations of reality it depicts, painting is at a disadvantage in an attempt to reach for the absolute. Yet painting of excellence tries to do exactly this and proves highly successful in approximating its goal. Its success in this respect is almost exclusively due to the artistic genius of the painter, even if there is a technical dependence on the quality of the canvas or other foundation and of the paint, as well as on the physical conditions of preservation.

As is well-known, painting succeeds in overcoming its two-dimensional limitation and in creating the visual illusion of the three-dimensional reality. If in this sense painting has essentially overcome its inherent disadvantage when compared with sculpture, it can be added that in some other respects it enjoys an advantage over its sister art. Painting, because of the precision and the delicate touch of the brush, can express nuances which are beyond the capacity of the carving artist. This is fairly evident when we compare the facial expression of a marble portrait and of a painted one. Generally speaking, it is the body and the muscles to which the sculptor can do justice, while the painter, capable of expressing these in a masterly way, can also excel in conveying the facial expression and thereby the "soul" of the painted person. Moreover, painting commands the spectrum of colors, which add another dimension to the work of art. Sculpture, even when it resorted to colors, could not use them in a way which is comparable to the subtle nuances of painting. Finally, painting is much less restricted than sculpture in the range of its subjects. It does not have to limit them to human and animal figures, or some well-defined and confined objects. Painting can depict a countryside—a large panorama, including the land and the sky, and interspersed with various details. It can reproduce a crowd in a certain setting; that is to say, a scene in which the people are assembled for a certain purpose. All this allows painting a much greater variety than available to sculpture. We have paintings of individuals, and of groups and crowds. We have paintings of scenery, with or without human beings. We have paintings of people in rooms and halls, gardens and streets. We have paintings of trees and flowers, of seas and rivers. All these are depicted in a riot of colors, the combination of which is one of the distinctions of the art itself.

What can this multifaceted capacity do for the quest for the absolute? How can this artistic range serve the search for beauty? In view of the enormous diversity of painting, in subjects, style, technique, dimensions, the answer to this question becomes even more difficult than in the case of architecture and sculpture. By way of generalization it can be said that *any* painting, by attaining artistic perfection, comes close to the absolute. Whether the subject of painting is a religious theme, a historical figure, the human body, a certain mood of joy or sadness, a view of nature and so on—painting it constitutes an attempt to elevate it into the realm of beauty and the absolute. Even if the subject be elusive or a mere passing moment, by capturing its peculiar character and conveying it in a work of art, it is transferred into the realm of the absolute, or as near to it as possible. To substantiate this general statement, let us analyze a few outstanding examples and show what particular idea or impression they succeed in transposing into the realm of the absolute through their remarkable artistry, whatever the style.

Take the figure of Adam in Michelangelo's great mural, the *Creation of Man*.[23] It combines the biblical theme with a perception of the human body which is derived from the cultural heritage of ancient Greece. The attention paid to Adam's anatomy and physical strength elevates this aspect of the essence of man to the realm of perfection, enhanced by the sense of human pride and joy in the body. At the same time, the facial expression of Adam is one of innocence—indeed the face is rather boyish as compared with the body of an adult. The face is turned toward God, the creator, in recognition and perhaps gratitude. In short, there is in the face and the lack of self-consciousness conveyed in it, combined with the semi-reclined body, the image of humanity before the fall. It is the idea of the original innocence and, perhaps, the hope for innocence to be regained—ideas related to deep religious and moral notions of Christianity—that are expressed here as well. Thus the absolutes of the body and of the soul are enshrined in the masterly painting.

If Michelangelo's Adam aims at representing humanity at large, in its physical and spiritual sense, Leonardo da Vinci's famed *Mona Lisa*[24] seems to fascinate us by conveying the sense of an individual person. Mona Lisa does not represent humanity, though she is very human, or womanhood, though she is quite feminine, or her epoch, though she is dressed in the garb of her times. She is primarily herself, a distinctive person. When one watches the painting in the original, one becomes aware of its unique power. This is not only because it is an accomplished work of art in the technical sense; its peculiarity is in the subtle feeling of an elusive reality which it creates. It is the feeling of facing Mona Lisa's concrete personality which, though real, is undefinable and puzzling. We may suggest that this personality is expressed by the eyes, or by the hardly noticeable smile—if a smile it is—playing round her lips, or whatever else we may detect. Essentially, however, it is our realization of a distinctive individual, with a certain *je ne sçais quoi* which is the mark of the individual, that confronts and charms us here. Leonardo succeeded in conveying it in such a forceful way that the painting speaks to us half a millennium after its creation and is likely to do so as long as it lasts. Indeed, time is irrelevant in this face-to-face meeting with a person. Thus Leonardo conveyed here the sense of the absolute essence, not the transient one, of an individual, and insinuated the rightful claim for the absolute of every individual.

A Jewish Rabbi by Rembrandt,[25] though a portrait of an individual, represents a people and the plight of a people. The face of the rabbi is rather melancholy—certainly there is no spontaneous *joie de vivre* left in him. He is a man who has suffered and whose soul is marked by the experience. Yet he is not bent, or subdued. He is not a martyr. He retains his dignity. He is, at the same time, rather puzzled, almost in a detached, contemplative manner. A Jewish face like that is not limited to time and place, and thus the rabbi may well represent the Jews in their dispersal, as a suffered and suffering minority, experienced in woes and puzzled by the inhumanity of man, and perhaps even by the indifference of God. Yet the suffering and the questioning do not impair the sense of dignity and cultural identity. Thus what some may refer to as Jewish destiny—even if Jewish historical condition would be a more appropriate term—is translated into an immobile, unchanging, in a way absolute visual presentation in a portrait painted by a remarkable artist.

Another outstanding painter expresses another domain of life in one of his pictures. Pieter Bruegel's *Peasant Dance*[26] is very different from Rembrandt's portrait. It is a painting not of an individual, but of a collective. It does not represent a people, but a social class, that of the peasants. It does not convey a historical development or continuity, but a social or sociological phenomenon. To be sure, the peasants are dressed in the garb of Bruegel's times and apparently in the Flemish manner, and thus placed in time and region. Yet, essentially, the picture conveys the solidity and the perennial nature of peasantry. It seems to suggest that, whatever the vicissitudes of history, peasants will remain a constant and viable foundation of humanity. They are as solid as the setting in which their hilarity is depicted, a setting which includes some humble houses, trees and a church. This basic statement in no way idealizes the social class: the people are gross, their faces rough, their movements lack any elegance. The individuality of the various figures does not significantly distinguish them from one another, which almost suggests that peasants are a biological subspecies, a social category and no more. Yet the picture is not a caricature. The peasants are what they are and the fact that, besides toiling, they can also amuse themselves, underscores their humanity. All this is captured in form, color and composition—the latter aspect essential for a collective picture—with a vividness which succeeds in translating this perception of peasantry into the realm of perennial art, a domain of the absolute.

On the Terrace by Renoir[27] is a portrait of a woman and a child, apparently her daughter. The woman and the girl are very properly dressed—indeed, she conveys the impression of a person who would be dressed and dress her child in a proper way, as the occasion demands. The facial expression of the woman is also proper; it retains the individual personality, but is quite controlled. One can recognize in the woman and the child perfect representatives of the middle class, of the bourgeoisie. Yet this is in no way a critical, let alone derogatory, presentation of the members of this class. The painting seems to suggest that the woman and the girl, in being representative of the bourgeoisie, are also representative of civilized humanity. The proper dresses, the right kind of hats, the controlled expression of the woman and even of the girl, who seems to follow in the path of her mother—they all testify to the condition of humanity as benefitting by civilization and enriched by it. Humanity and civilization are not in conflict, but blend into a happy combination. Looked at from the less confident perspective of the late twentieth century, this image of harmony between man and his civilization, still widespread before the Great War, is particularly arresting, for it immortalizes the idea of a civilized humanity.

To sum it up, it can be said that, while a work of art like a great painting in a sense merely imitates transient reality, as Plato would have it, in another sense it immortalizes an idea, an aspect of reality, or at least a perception of the artist. The rabbi of Rembrandt, a woman and a girl on a terrace painted by Renoir, Mona Lisa, may all be imitations in form and color of concrete and transient individuals. Yet the artists, by focusing on these individuals, and by interpreting some aspects of their personality, expressed something fundamentally human, something that transcends the lives of their respective subjects. In doing so, they elevated the transient into the world of ideas, virtually absolute ideas in the Platonic sense. Contrary to Plato's thinking, such an elevation is possible not only by logical reasoning and intellectual effort, but also by a work of art.

Dance is an artistic form of expression which seems to have developed, largely independently, in various times and societies. It has served diverse psychological and social functions. In some primitive societies it has had a magical function: it may have been an attempt to influence deities, or animals to be hunted. War dances may have served as a means to excite the warriors to aggressiveness. Courtship dances have their own obvious purpose. Some dances may simply express joy and exhilaration, as was the case of Miriam and her companions who "went after her with timbrels and with dances," when the Israelites escaped the pursuing Egyptians.[28] Whatever the function of the dance, however, it always adheres to some aesthetic perception. This may be strict and formal, or spontaneous and improvised, but the sense of form is an essential component or aspect of dancing. The linkage of dance with music—whether a mere rhythmical beat, or a more elaborate melodic and rhythmic tune—underscores the relationship of dance to the broader sphere of man's sensitivity to and quest of beauty.

While the great variety of dances and their multiple functions make it impossible to deal with this form of aesthetic expression in a comprehensive manner, let us focus on one category and try to identify in it the pursuit of the absolute. We shall choose the ballet, because it is widely familiar and, while aiming at entertainment, it is virtually exclusively directed to convey beauty, without performing additional functions.

Ballet has been defined as "a series of solo and concerted dances with mimetic actions, accompanied by music and scenic accessories, all expressive of a poetic idea or series of ideas, or a dramatic story, provided by an author or choreographer."[29] This definition stresses that a ballet is the expression of an idea or a story, that there is a certain meaning behind the dance. In other words, a ballet is not mere acrobatic hopping or technical virtuosity, but it represents a certain idea and is the creation of an artist, the choreographer. In this sense, one could compare a ballet to a work of sculpture, or a painting, which obviously are the creations of an artist. Indeed, some of the great choreographers stressed the affinity between those arts and the ballet. Thus, writes the famed dancer and choreographer Carlo Blasis (1803–1878): "It is in the best productions of painting and sculpture that the dancer may study with profit how to display his figure with grace and elegance." He further testifies that some of his compositions were suggested to him by the paintings and sculptures rescued from the ruins of Herculaneum in southern Italy.[30]

Yet, while the artistic essence of the ballet can be likened to painting and sculpture, one must not overlook the basic differences. Both sculpture and painting arrest the subjects of their art in time, and thus transfer them into the sphere of the eternal and absolute, even if the subjects are transient. Ballet, on the other hand, is a transient performance and as such can be absorbed only at the time of its occurrence. In this sense, whatever it succeeds in elevating to the absolute can be perceived through passing moments only. (To be sure, the modern capacity to preserve a ballet performance on film changes its intrinsic limitation, even if it is granted that filmed performance falls short of live entertainment.) Still, this basic disadvantage of ballet as an art form is compensated to some extent by the capacity of ballet to express an idea in actual motion rather than in a static form.

While a ballet can depict a story or an idea, which may in themselves claim a hold on the perennial or the absolute, it is the distinctive *form* of this art that calls for an interpretation in our context. What is it in the art of the ballet that can be seen as approaching the domain of the absolute? Even though ballet can be seen, and has been perceived, as imitative, it is so only in a certain superficial sense. The ballerina may imitate a swan or a sleeping beauty, or a girl in love, say, in *Romeo and Juliet.* Yet her movements are far removed from nature and reality. The pirouetting and the turning on the tip of the toes, to mention some standard techniques of ballerinas, are not natural movements, nor do they convey the sense of reality, which normally seems firm-footed. The *tour en l'air* (i.e., complete turning in the air) performed by male dancers, is not natural either. All these and other such techniques are designed to convey an abstract idea—a certain ideal notion or yearning.

The ballerina often represents the sense of ethereal beauty and lightness. The male dancer tends to express the notion of strength and physical self-control. In a way, they both represent an idealized perception of humanity. They are the portrait of humanity as angels, angels in the physical sense. They are images of humanity as bodies without sweat, blood and tears, as perfect anatomy without physiological burdens and limitations. They are humanity defying, as it were, the laws of gravity, humanity free and strong, elegant and beautiful. They are a dream of physical perfection in the absolute aesthetic sense, and by displaying it in movement, and to the ethereal sounds of music, they present this illusion in such a convincing way that the audience is charmed into this physical paradise. The dream of absolute physical perfection is sustained by the beauty and elegance of the dance, and any failing in the virtuosity of the performance threatens to dispel the charm, just as the artistic accomplishment magnifies and enhances it. This is why the achievements and the names of the great artists in this field are remembered by the lovers of this form of entertainment, for, though an entertainment, it aims at an ideal of human physical perfection, at a dream of an aesthetically absolute, though not real, world.

The subject of the claim of the aesthetic expression to the absolute should not be concluded without saying a few words about music. While music appreciation may be subject to expertise and while it may be difficult, or impossible, to reach a consensus as to which music is truly beautiful and which merely enjoys wide popularity, it can be said that most people who have been exposed to music have their own likings and preferences. Such a favorite may be an operatic tune, or a symphonic performance, a violin or a piano concerto, an operetta or a Neapolitan song, or more likely, a combination of compositions from some of these and other genres. Whatever one's choice, however, the compositions which are admired are for the admirer the embodiment (if this is the right metaphor) of perfect beauty, of the absolute in the domain of art. Thus each individual can have his own preferred kind of beauty and enjoy it.

This simple fact, while analogous to preferences in painting or dance, has a special practical significance. Unlike painting or sculpture or architecture, which are bound to a certain location—at least as far as the original masterpiece is concerned—music can be "carried" by an individual. He can hear it performed in specific locations and on some occasions, and he can have it on a record or a tape in our times. He can, and always could, memorize the tune and sing or whistle it to himself. Thus music becomes the most portable of artistic forms, along with the written word. Indeed, unlike the written word, it can be even enjoyed while one is otherwise occupied. Thus it is perhaps the easiest way of reaching out for the absolute in the realm of aesthetic creation.

Conclusion

In the present study of the role of the transient and the absolute in human life and the diverse manifestations of these principles, the focus of our inquiry has been the situation as it is, rather than the desirable role of these two elements in the fabric of life. We have tried to understand rather than judge. We have attempted to explain rather than advise. Still, some evaluative conclusions, however broad and general, ought to be pointed to.

We have tried to show that the basic human condition, as well as the manifold human endeavors, are based on and related to the transient and the absolute. This factual statement can be amplified by a normative assertion that the combination of these two elements in personal life, as well as in various transactions of human culture, is essential to human well-being. To put it in other words, a way-of-life which is exclusively based on or dedicated to only one of these principles is fundamentally lacking and results in dissatisfaction or failure.

The need for a balance between the transient and the absolute in the life of the individual has been clearly conveyed in Chapter 3, where the analysis carried clear normative implications. It may be briefly stated here that the realization of the value of such a balance can initially be found in antiquity. Thus we find in the Pentateuch the well-known adage ‘‘that man doth not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of the Lord doth man live.’’[1] While in its context the statement is meant to emphasize the dependence of man on divine goodwill, it also contrasts the material transient element and the spiritual element of divine guidance, the absolute which is also indispensable to human beings.

Aristotle, to turn to another ancient civilization, emphasizes the value of contemplation for man, which is the highest activity and resembles divine activity: “the greater the opportunity for studying, the greater the happiness, not as an incidental effect but as inherent in study.” Yet this unqualified recommendation for involvement with absolute truth and knowledge must be tempered, in the case of man, with mundane concerns of biological existence: “But we also need external well-being, since we are only human. Our nature is not self-sufficient for engaging in study: our body must be healthy and we must have food and generally be cared for.”[2] In Aristotle’s case, his conception of what man is provides the norm for human behavior.

We have seen in Chapter 3 that individuals look for various absolutes to balance their pursuit of transient needs. Some try to introduce stability—a substitute for the absolute, or a derivative of it—to their transient activity in such diverse ways as habit or insurance. Some identify with record-breakers in one field or another, or get the taste of the absolute through contact with perennial ideas and the like. We have seen how the absolute is sought in politics, in religion, in art and other spheres of human endeavor. All this offers to individuals, in various situations and circumstances, a way, and often a choice, to balance their transient pursuits by a quest for the absolute.

What is the right balance, how many absolute commitments does a man require, how deep should one’s nonpractical involvement be? Such questions elude a definite answer. The answer may, to some extent, depend on individual personality: some people have a stronger penchant for the absolute than others. The answer may be also related to the nature of the social and cultural framework: some civilizations offer a greater choice of absolutes than others. Thus a monolithic (not to say totalitarian) society limits the choices and insists on the communal and ideological absolute as the paramount choice. Assuming the intrinsic value of freedom, which in this case means a wider choice of absolutes, we would say that such freedom is better suited to the needs and aspirations of mankind than a prescribed choice. Indeed, this freedom in itself can be seen as an absolute, which underlies the various absolutes one can choose under its auspices.

Assuming the overall importance of this freedom, we shall not try to prescribe any norm as to the desirable amount, intensity or quality of absolutes adoptable by the individual. Let him balance his transient pursuits by learning, piety, artistic involvement, public commitment and so on. Let him put into this pursuit as much of his mind and emotion as he wishes, or as he is impelled to by his inner drive. Our basic contention is that, as man is in need of a balance between transient and absolute involvement, it is important that he be given the opportunity and the guidance to seek such balance. This means that those who are bogged down by hard economic conditions and have no leisure for other than transient pursuits deserve help, as do those whose successful commitment to economic gain makes them forget their souls' need of the absolute. On the other hand, those who are overcommitted to the absolute, in one form or another, have to be reminded, in the words of Aristotle, that "we are only human," and our transient condition must be attended to as well.

To evaluate civilizations from our perspective is not an easy task. Yet, while it would be difficult to prescribe an optimal balance between the transient and the absolute in a civilization, if such an ideal balance exists at all, one can point to instances of imbalance. Thus it could be suggested that a society in which leisure is reserved for a thin upper layer of the community (while the bulk of it is compelled to hard working conditions) prevents most of its members from having the opportunity to be involved in absolute pursuits—at least outside the realm of religion and adulation of authority. Similarly, a society which does not provide education for all its members restricts the opportunity for many an individual to pursue the absolute in certain regions of mental endeavor. Therefore, a society condoning slavery, or abject poverty or illiteracy—besides offending the norms of basic equity—transgresses against the principle of equilibrium between the transient and the absolute. The nature of the transgression in this case is in ignoring the claim and right of all the individuals to such an equilibrium.

Another example of imbalance would be a society in which the balance among the pursuits themselves was the problem. Thus we could face a situation in which great stress is put on some absolute pursuits to the neglect of important transient needs. Take the case of medieval Europe. The intellectual efforts there focused on scholastic speculations, grappling with religious and philosophical ideas, while scientific and technical studies which might improve the material conditions of man were largely neglected. Magnificent cathedrals were built, an impressive testimony to the commitment of religious belief to the absolute, but the housing conditions of the common people were miserable.

Conversely, there may be civilizations which overemphasize the transient needs and concerns, and neglect the absolute. Perhaps the contemporary American civilization, which also affects other nations, is in this category. The stress in school on learning skills and viewing education at large as preparation for occupation and career, to the neglect of study for the sake of stimulating intellectual curiosity and enlarging knowledge, is one symptom of the preponderance of concern for the transient over involvement in the absolute. Another such symptom is the quest for excitement and distraction in entertainment to the neglect of demand for aesthetic and intellectual quality, as documented by television programs and, to a great extent, by the quality of the printed material. Such trends result in what is called a superficial way-of-life, or, in our terms, human existence which is deprived of strong ties to the realm of the absolute, and thus, in the final analysis, makes life less full and less satisfying.

While the value of the absolutes is derived from the fundamental urge of man for some kind of relationship to them, their place in the fabric of civilization is enhanced by a quality inherent in their nature. Contrary to a transient commodity, which is usually limited in quantity, things absolute are, in their very essence, inexhaustible. Thus the quantity of food available in a household, or at a dinner table, is limited, and, under certain conditions, if one member of the family eats more, the other has less. If, however, we contemplate a great work of art, or read a masterpiece of literature, or listen to great music, the enjoyment of any one individual is in no way diminished by the enjoyment of the same experience by other people, irrespective of their number. Once the work of art has been created, it never diminishes. Like the burning bush, it never decreases by being consumed.

The wide enjoyment of things absolute—in art, in religion, in national commitment—has significant psychological and social consequences. Psychologically, it makes each individual capable of attaining greater humanity, greater personal value, greater dignity, by partaking of the absolute, or absolutes, of his choice. Whatever one's circumstances, one has access to some absolutes at least, whether through religion, national consciousness or some form of art. Then there is the social implication of being, in some fundamental way, on an equal footing with others, even the rich and the mighty. In this sense, the humble peasant in the Middle Ages on entering a church—let alone a magnificent cathedral—could experience the virtually tangible contact with the absolute, or a combination of the religious and artistic absolutes, as much as the duke and the prince.

These reflections on the transient and the absolute by no means exhaust the problem of right and wrong in the lives of individuals and societies. There remain many issues of vital importance which have to be addressed. Looking at these from our perspective, there are conflicting transient interests of an individual, as there are conflicts among individuals pursuing the same transient endeavors, such as amassing wealth. There are disputes among social entities concerning their transient interests and aspirations. Then there are disagreements about absolutes, among individuals and among nations. In the latter case they may lead to religious or ideological wars. An individual may dispute an accepted social notion of an absolute ideal, or a transient practice, which may result in his persecution. In short, there are a myriad of instances of problems, often with consequent iniquities, which the distinction between the transient and the absolute cannot resolve. To treat such cases a system of practical ethics has to be applied. This, obviously, is outside the purview of the present study.

Having said that, it is still feasible to make a general comment on the relationship between the perspective of this study and normative judgment, starting with the distinction between the transient and the absolute.

The lives of individuals are set in a situation in which transient needs and concerns, as well as absolute yearnings and beliefs, constitute the ever-present factors on which man depends and toward which he strives. The individual could be likened to a spider making his way through a web composed of cross-cutting threads of the transient and the absolute. Or he could be compared to a dot on a plane, the position of the dot being determined by the two coordinates, independent of each other, but jointly describing the location of the dot. In fact, the situation of the individual is more complex, for he not only moves through the plane, but may be tied with various transient concerns and varied absolutes at the same time. This situation, *mutatis mutandis*, is also characteristic of diverse cultures. They, too, develop trends in pursuing transient needs, as well as in selecting and adhering to absolutes.

The way of the individual, and of society, as far as conscious choice and action are concerned, is affected by judgment and evaluation. What is true or false, right or wrong, beautiful or ugly, worthwhile or worthless, is of primary importance to us, and serves as a practical guide, or rather a set of guides, in life. These normative principles are, in a way, independent of the distinction between the transient and the absolute.

Yet there is an interaction between the transient-absolute perspective and the realm of normative judgment. The normative approach is helpful in providing practical guidance in the maze of transient endeavors and absolute beliefs. They have to be adjusted to one another in a harmonious, or at least not conflicting, coordination, and this can be achieved only with the help of deliberate evaluation. On the other hand, the evaluative process in our lives is helped by understanding the role which the transient and the absolute play in our condition and in our pursuits. Colliding ideals and ideologies, conflicting private and public concerns, diverse personal pursuits, need adjustment and resolution, which call for a careful normative judgment. Stimulated by this challenge, our judgment may improve and mature, and rise to the fulfillment of this difficult task.

Notes

INTRODUCTION

1. Genesis 8:21.
2. See Plato, *Republic*, especially Books II–VII.
3. See Francis Bacon, *The New Atlantis* (1627).

CHAPTER 1

1. Psalm 144:4.
2. Genesis 1:26–27.
3. Plato, *Apology* 29, B. Jowett's translation.
4. *Apology* 30.
5. *Apology* 40–41.
6. Plato, *Phaedo* 80, B. Jowett's translation.
7. *Phaedo* 81.
8. *Phaedo* 78–79.
9. René Descartes, *Meditations on First Philosophy (Meditationes de prima philosophia*), 1641. Quoted from the translation by Norman Kemp Smith of *Descartes' Philosophical Writings* (London: Macmillan & Co., 1952), Meditation II, p. 205 in the above volume.
10. Ibid., Meditation II, p. 211.
11. Ibid., Meditation VI, p. 261.
12. Ibid., Synopsis, pp. 193–194.
13. To be sure, Descartes hesitated as to whether the immortality of the soul can be demonstrated by a direct philosophical argument, or whether it can be asserted only through divine revelation. See ibid., translator's footnote on page 183.
14. Descartes, *Discours de la Méthode*, 1637, Part IV. The Latin translation of this work, which is the source of the Latin quotation, was published in 1644.

15. Blaise Pascal, *Pensées* (first published in 1669, posthumously), Section VI, 399. Translated by the present author from the edition of Les Éditions Variétés, Montreal, 1944.

16. Ibid., Section VI, 346.

17. Ibid., Section VI, 347.

18. Ibid., Section VI, 418.

19. Ibid., Section VI, 423.

20. Job 7:6–7 and 7:9. The King James translation is modified to convey the sense of the Hebrew original more faithfully.

21. Ecclesiastes 3:19–21. Again the translation deviates from the King James Version.

22. F. Beaumont, "On the Tombs in Westminster Abbey." Quoted from *The Golden Treasury*, selected by Francis Turner Palgrave (London and New York: Oxford University Press, 1861, World's Classics series 1948), Book II, 67, p. 60. Francis Beaumont was born in 1584 and died in 1616.

23. Gabriele D'Annunzio, "In vano," *Poema Paradisiaco* (1891–1892), in *Poesie Complete* (Bologna: Nicola Zanichelli Editore, 1959), pp. 139–141. The verses, translated by the present writer, read in the original (p. 141) as follows:

> Dietro di noi un solco
> sterile obliquo lieve
> resta. Vivemmo in vano.
> D'innanzi a noi, nel buio,
> la Morte è senza face.
> —Gloria!—Morremo in vano.

CHAPTER 2

1. H. G. Wells, *The Outline of History*, revised edition (New York: Doubleday & Co., 1949), Book II, Chapter 6, Section 1.

2. Julian Huxley, *The Uniqueness of Man* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1941), pp. 1–33.

3. Joseph Needham, "Evolution," in *Encyclopaedia of the Social Sciences* (New York: Macmillan, 1931), Vol. 5, p. 654, col. 2.

4. Walter Goodnow Everett, *The Uniqueness of Man*, University of California Publications in Philosophy, Vol. 16, No. 1 (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1932), p. 26.

5. See Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, Book X.

6. Julian Huxley, *The Uniqueness of Man*, especially pp. 32–33.

7. Bronislaw Malinowski, *A Scientific Theory of Culture* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1944), pp. 67–68.

8. The above theme is elaborated in Malinowski, Chapter X: "Basic Needs and Cultural Responses."

9. Ibid., pp. 173–174.

10. Frederick Engels, *Socialism: Utopian and Scientific* (New York: International Publishers, 1935), p. 54. (First published in French translation in 1880 and in the German original in 1883.)

11. Ibid., p. 51.
12. Ibid., pp. 72–73.

CHAPTER 3

1. Genesis 11:4.
2. Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, Book X.
3. The concluding lines of "Leisure" by William Henry Davies (1871–1940).
4. Genesis 24:53.

CHAPTER 4

1. See Genesis 17:9–14.
2. I Samuel 1:1–8.
3. See Genesis Chapters 29 and 30.
4. William Shakespeare, Sonnet 116.
5. *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, Act III, Scene I, lines 147–148.
6. Deuteronomy 34:6.
7. II Kings 2:11.
8. *Pirke Avoth* (a tractate of the *Mishnah*), Chapter 4, 21. Translated from the Hebrew by the present author. One of the available translations into English is by Judah Goldin, entitled *The Living Talmud: The Wisdom of the Fathers* (New York: New American Library, 1957).
9. The prayer, *El maley rahamim* (God full of mercy), can be found in the appropriate Jewish prayer books.

CHAPTER 5

1. Genesis 18:25.
2. Deuteronomy 16:20. Our translation tries to approximate the letter and the spirit of the Hebrew original, rather than follow the King James rendering, which reads: "That which is altogether just shalt thou follow."
3. Deuteronomy 16:19.
4. I Kings, Chapter 21.
5. Exodus 20:10.
6. Deuteronomy 24:17.
7. Deuteronomy 22:8.
8. Numbers 15:38–40.
9. Exodus 19:6.
10. Romans 3:28.
11. The Council of Chalcedon, held in 451, stated that Christ has two distinct natures, one human and one divine, but that they are united in one person.
12. Exodus 19:1.
13. Aurelius Augustine, *De Civitate Dei (The City of God*), Book XXII.
14. Isaiah 11:4.
15. Isaiah 11:6.
16. Isaiah 2:4.

17. Quoted from Bertrand Russell, *History of Western Philosophy* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1946), pp. 237–238.

CHAPTER 6

1. Plato, *Cratylus* 402a, B. Jowett's translation.
2. Plato, *Theaetetus* 181.
3. Ibid., 160.
4. See G. S. Kirk, *Heraclitus: The Cosmic Fragments* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1954), especially p. 370 and p. 385.
5. The philosophy of Parmenides has to be primarily extracted from his poem "On Nature," which is extant, though some parts of it are missing. The poem is not crystal clear and is subject to somewhat varying interpretations on some points. Plato's *Parmenides*, whether an authentic dialogue with Parmenides or not, complements the above text in many ways.
6. Plato, *Parmenides* 135d–e.
7. Plato, *Phaedo* 65.
8. Ibid., 83.
9. The contrast between the true absolute ideas and their shadowy changing reflection on the level of human experience, the allegedly "real" world, is reiterated in various ways in Plato's dialogues. One of the best illustrations is the parable of the cave, in *Republic*, Book VII, 514ff.
10. *Republic*, Book VI, 509.
11. Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, Book XII, 1072b. Quoted from the Loeb Classical Library edition.
12. Ibid., Book XII, 1074b.
13. Descartes, *Discourse on Method*, Part IV. Quoted from Norman Kemp Smith, *Descartes' Philosophical Writings* (London: Macmillan & Co., 1952), p. 140.
14. Ibid., p. 145.
15. John Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, Book II, Chapter I, Section 2.
16. Ibid., Book II, Chapter XII and ff.
17. Ibid., Book II, Chapter XXVII, Section 17.
18. Ibid., Book IV, Chapter X, Section 6.
19. Ibid., Book IV, Chapter XI, Section 3.
20. Ibid., Book IV, Chapter XIV, Section 2.
21. Ibid., Book II, Chapter XXVII, Sections 1 and 2.
22. David Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, 1739, Book I, Part I, Section VI. Quoted from the edition by L. A. Selby-Bigge (Oxford: At the Clarendon Press, 1896).
23. Ibid., Book I, Part IV, Section VI.
24. Ibid., Book I, Part III, Section XIV. Cf. also Book I, Part IV. Section V.
25. Ibid., Book I, Part III, Section VI.
26. Ibid., Book I, Part IV, Section VII.
27. "Kategorien sind Begriffe, welche den Erscheinungen, mithin der Natur, als dem Inbegriffe aller Erscheinungen, Gesetze *a priori* vorschreiben." In Immanuel Kant, *Kritik der reinen Vernunft* (1781), second edition, 1787, edited by Heinrich

Schmidt (Leipzig: Alfred Kröner Verlag, 1925), p. 118 (p. 163 of the original edition, as marked in the margin). Translated by the present author. The title of the book in English translation is *Critique of Pure Reason*.

28. "Eine vollständige und notwendige Einheit aller Gemütskräfte." Ibid., p. 469 (p. 799 in the original edition).

29. Ibid., p. 466 (p. 794 in the original edition).

30. Plato, *Gorgias* 483, B. Jowett's translation.

31. Ibid., 484.

32. Ibid., 507.

33. Ibid., 508.

34. Immanuel Kant, *Grundlegung zur Metaphysik der Sitten*, second edition, 1785 (Munich: Bremer Presse, 1925), p. 38. Translated by the present author. The work in English translation is entitled *Foundations of the Metaphysics of Morals*.

35. "Handle nur nach derjenigen Maxime, durch die du zugleich willen kannst, dass sie ein allgemeines Gesetz werde." Ibid., p. 48.

36. Ibid., p. 59.

37. Ibid., p. 55.

38. Jeremy Bentham, *Deontology* or *The Science of Morality*, from the manuscripts of Jeremy Bentham arranged and edited by John Bowring (London: Longman, Rees; Edinburgh: William Tait, 1834), Vol. I, pp. 10–11.

39. Ibid., p. 17.

40. Ibid., pp. 84–85.

41. Ibid., pp. 13–14.

42. Ibid., p. 129.

43. Cf. the following: "There is an obvious lacuna in Bentham's system. If every man always pursues his own pleasure, how are we to secure that the legislator shall pursue the pleasure of mankind in general?" Bertrand Russell, *History of Western Philosophy*, p. 805.

44. Bentham, *Deontology*, pp. 83–84. See also pp. 169ff., where Bentham elaborates on the nature and origins of sympathy.

45. Ibid., pp. 166–169.

46. Sophocles, *Antigone*, lines 1158–1159, translated by F. Storr (Cambridge, Mass. and London: Loeb Classical Library, 1912).

47. Shakespeare, *King Lear*, Act I, Scene III, lines 129–139.

48. Plato, *Phaedo* 98–99.

49. Gilbert Ryle, *The Concept of Mind* (London: Hutchinson, 1949), pp. 76–78 & ff.

50. *Pirke Avoth*, Chapter 3, 15.

51. *The Babylonian Talmud*, Tractate *Berakhoth*, page 33b.

52. Quoted from Yitzhak Julius Guttmann, *Hafilosofia shel Hayahaduth (The Philosophy of Judaism*), an expanded Hebrew translation of the German original of 1933 (Jerusalem: The Bialik Institute, 1963), p. 190.

53. Deuteronomy 30:15–18.

CHAPTER 7

1. Genesis 1:2. The King James version reads: "And the earth was without form, and void; and darkness was upon the face of the deep." Familiar as these verses

are, whether in the original Hebrew or in translation, they pose problems as to the exact meaning of certain words used there. *Tohu va'bohu* is probably more accurately translated by "desolate and deep" than by "without form, and void." The word *tehom* is associated with waters and with depth. At one time it may have been the name of some mythical monster of an aquatic nature. "Deep waters" may be a closer approximation than "the deep." To be sure, both the conventional rendering and our translation convey the idea of chaos and desolation.

2. Psalm 104:10–13 and 19–24. The King James version has been occasionally modified.

3. Boethius, *De Consolatione Philosophiae*. Quoted from Bertrand Russell, *History of Western Philosophy*, p. 391.

4. Quoted from Bertrand Russell, p. 560.

5. Newton's *Philosophy of Nature*, Selections from His Writings edited by H. S. Thayer (New York: Hafner Publishing Company, 1953), p. 197. This is the general formulation of the law of gravitation, though it is not found in this manner in Newton's own *Principia*.

6. Aeschylus, *Prometheus Bound*, lines 455–464. Translated by Philip Vellacott (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1961).

7. Bertrand Russell, p. 561.

8. Ecclesiastes 1:2, 4–7, 9. King James version modified.

9. See Immanuel Kant, *Kritik der reinen Vernunft*, pp. 276–278 (pp. 454–457 of the original edition). Kant discusses there the two contradictory positions, namely, that the world has a beginning in time and is limited in space, and that it has no beginning and is endless. He calls such contradictory positions "antinomies of pure reason" (*Antinomien der reinen Vernunft*).

CHAPTER 8

1. See Genesis 18:9–15.

2. Exodus 4:1–17.

3. Judges 6:17–23 and 36–40. It is the last passage in which we are told that a fleece of wool had to soak in dew leaving the earth on one occasion, and the reverse to be the case on another, that exemplifies the experimental-scientific nature of the quest for reassurance.

4. The quotations are from Thucydides, *The History of the Peloponnesian War*, edited in translation by Sir R. W. Livingstone (London and New York: Oxford University Press, 1943), Book II, Section 41.

5. Ibid., Section 42.

6. Ibid., Section 43.

7. The above argument and the following account of the parable of the statue, including the occasional quotations, are taken from Plato, *Republic*, Book IV, 419–421, B. Jowett's translation.

8. John Locke, *Two Treatises of Government* (1690), Book II, Chapter II, 6.

9. Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *The Social Contract*, Book I, Chapter VI. Quoted here from the English translation by Hopkins, included in Ernest Barker (editor), *Social Contract* (London and New York: Oxford University Press, 1960).

10. Ibid., Book I, Chapter VII.

11. Ibid., Book II, Chapter III.

12. John Stuart Mill, *Considerations on Representative Government* (1861), Chapter II. Quoted from Bobbs-Merrill edition, New York, 1958, pp. 15–16.

13. Ibid., Chapter II, p. 25.

14. Ibid., Chapter III, p. 47.

15. Ibid., Chapter III, p. 55.

16. See Genesis 11:10–27.

17. See Genesis Chapter 5.

18. Genesis 12:1–2. The Hebrew *moledet* is translated in the King James version as "kindred." In fact it means both "kindred" and "the ancestral location," a combination for which there is no English equivalent.

19. See *Encyclopaedia Britannica* 1960, Vol. 21, p. 977, article on "Teutonic Peoples."

20. Heinrich von Treitschke, *Politik* (Leipzig: Verlag von S. Hirzel, 1897), First Volume, p. 278.

21. The French text reads: "Pour nous, la patrie, c'est le sol et les ancêtres, c'est la terre de nos morts." Maurice Barrès, *Scène et doctrines du nationalisme* (Paris: Félix Juven, 1902), p. 63.

22. Ibid., pp. 17–18.

23. Treitschke, First Volume, pp. 269–270.

24. Ibid., p. 273.

25. Ibid., pp. 281–282. The quotation in the original reads: "Dieser Versuch der Entdeutschung eines deutschen Landes . . . das ist unleugbar Barbarei" (p. 282).

26. The analysis of Herder's approach is largely based on Hans Kohn, *The Idea of Nationalism* (New York: Macmillan, 1944), Chapter VII, Section 17, pp. 427–441 and the relevant elaborate notes. The quotations from Herder's writings are also culled from this source.

27. Joseph Mazzini, *Essays: Selected from the Writings, Literary, Political, and Religious* (London: Walter Scott, 1887), The quotations are from p. 47.

28. Jules Michelet, *Histoire de France au Moyen Age*, Livre III. Quoted from Michelet, *Extraits* (Paris: Librairie Hachette, 1934), p. 87. Translated by the present author.

29. Ibid, p. 85.

30. Jules Michelet, *Histoire de la Revolution*, Livre III, Chapitre XI. *Extraits*, pp. 230–236.

31. Jules Michelet, *Le Peuple. Extraits*, pp. 188–189.

32. *Le Peuple*, 3*e* partie, Chapitre V. *Extraits*, p. 211.

33. Jules Michelet, *Histoire de la Revolution*, Livre VIII. *Extraits*, p. 252.

34. N. Y. Danilevsky, *Russia and Europe: An Inquiry into the Cultural and Political Relations of the Slav World and of the German-Latin World* (1869). The quotations are translated by the present author from the German translation of the Russian original by Karl Nötzel (Stuttgart and Berlin: Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt, 1920), pp. 243–244.

35. Ibid., p. 326.

36. Ibid., p. 300.

37. Ibid., p. 296.

38. Exodus 19:5. The King James version reads "a peculiar treasure unto me

above all people," which is not accurate. "Above all" as against "from all" can be misleading.

39. Exodus 19:6.

40. Amos 3:2.

41. Isaiah 2:2–3.

42. Jeremiah 4:1–2.

43. Isaiah 42:6. See also 49:6. The King James version reads "a light of the Gentiles," though the Hebrew *goyim* simply means "nations" or "peoples." The quotation is cited here on the assumption that the "servant of God" in this and other passages of Deutero-Isaiah stands for the collective of Israel and not for an individual Messiah.

44. See Ahad Ha'am's essay on "Moses" in Ahad Ha'am, *Nationalism and the Jewish Ethic* (New York: Schocken Books, 1962). The essay was originally published in Hebrew in 1904. Cf. also the following statement of Renan: "la croyance obstinée que, grâce à Israël, la justice régnera sur la terre, devient, dans la pensée du pieux juif, une sorte d'obsession." Quoted from "Identité originelle et séparation graduelle du judaïsme et du christianisme" (1883) in Ernest Renan, *Discours et conférences* (Paris: Calman Lévy, 1887), p. 321. (The obstinate belief that, thanks to Israel, justice will rule over the earth, becomes a sort of an obsession in the thought of the devout Jew.) Here justice is not merely the essence of Judaism, but also its universal mission, a point with which Ahad Ha'am concurs.

45. John of Salisbury, *Policraticus*, 1159, Chapter III. Quoted from the English translation of the Latin original, as reproduced in Francis William Coker, *Readings in Political Philosophy* (New York: Macmillan, 1938), p. 184.

46. From the letter of Gregory VII to Hermann of Metz of 1081, Quoted from George H. Sabine, *A History of Political Theory*, second edition (London: George G. Harrap & Co., 1948), p. 206.

47. Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *Manifesto of the Communist Party*, 1848. Quoted from the English edition by the Foreign Language Press, Peking, 1972, p. 76.

48. Translated by the present author from the opening verses of "An die Freude." The original reads as follows:

> Freude, schöner Götterfunken,
> Tochter aus Elysium,
> Wir betreten feuertrunken,
> Himmlische, dein Heiligtum.
> Deine Zauber binden wieder,
> Was die Mode streng geteilt,
> Alle Menschen werden Brüder,
> Wo dein sanfter Flügel weilt.

49. The following quotations from national anthems are taken from W. L. Reed and M. J. Bristow (editors), *National Anthems of the World*, sixth edition (Poole, Dorset: Blandford Press, 1985).

CHAPTER 9

1. Cf. "Pharaoh," *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 1960, Vol. 17, p. 689.

2. I Samuel 10:24.

3. I Samuel 10:1. The translation deviates from the King James version. "Ruler" may be more appropriate than "captain." While "Is it not because the Lord hath anointed thee" is more literal, the affirmative version—"Indeed, the Lord hath anointed thee"—better conveys the intended sense of the original, in our opinion.

4. Dante Alighieri, *De Monarchia* (written probably about 1310) first published in 1559. Quoted here from the English translation by Aurelia Henry (Boston and New York: Houghton, Mifflin and Co., 1904), Book III, Chapter XVI, 8 (p. 205).

5. James I, "A Speech to the Lords and Commons of the Parliament at White Hall," 21 March 1609. Quoted from Charles Howard McIlwain (editor), *The Political Works of James I* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1918), p. 307.

6. Judges 8:22–23.

7. Deuteronomy 17:16–20.

8. Zechariah 14:9.

9. St. Matthew 3:2.

10. J. J. Rousseau, *The Social Contract*, Book II, Chapter I. Quoted from Ernest Barker (editor), *Social Contract*, p. 190.

11. John Locke, *Two Treatises of Government*, Book II, Chapter X, 132. Quoted from Ernest Barker, pp. 76–77.

12. Rousseau, *The Social Contract*, Book II, Chapter IV.

13. John Locke, *Two Treatises*, Book II, Chapter IX, 131.

14. Danilevsky, *Russia and Europe*, p. 266.

15. Herodotus, *History*, Book VII, 103, Quoted from the translation by George Rawlinson.

16. Sophocles, *Antigone*, lines 213–214. The original with facing English translation by F. Storr, Loeb edition (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press and London: Heinemann, 1912).

17. Ibid., lines 450–458.

18. Plato, *Crito*, 50–51, B. Jowett's translation.

19. Ibid., 54.

20. Deuteronomy 4:2. The King James version modified.

21. Deuteronomy 17:18–20.

22. See II Samuel Chapters 11 and 12.

23. I Kings Chapter 21.

24. Plato, *Statesman*, 294, B. Jowett's translation.

25. Plato, *Laws*, 875, B. Jowett's translation.

26. Plato, *Statesman*, 297.

27. Plato, *Laws*, 875. Cf. also *Statesman*, 300.

28. Plato, *Laws*, 715.

29. The above account is taken from "A Speech to the Lords and Commons of

the Parliament at White Hall," 21 March 1609. Reproduced in McIlwain, pp. 307–308.

30. *The Trew Law of Free Monarchies*, a pamphlet published in 1598. Quoted from McIlwain, p. 63.

31. *The Babylonian Talmud, Baba Mezia*, 86a. Available also in English translation (London: Soncino Press).

32. See entry "Themis" in E. H. Blakeney (editor), *Smith's Smaller Classical Dictionary*, revised edition, Everyman's Library (London: Dent and New York: Dutton, 1937).

33. Cf. entry "Law, Greek," *Encyclopaedia of the Social Sciences*, Vol. 9, pp. 225–229, especially p. 226.

CHAPTER 10

1. Aristotle, *Poetics*, translated by Thomas Twining (1789), Everyman's Library (London: J. M. Dent and New York: E. P. Dutton, 1943), Part II, VI, p. 20.

2. Thomas Mann, *Death in Venice (Der Tod in Venedig*), 1912, in Thomas Mann, *Stories of Three Decades*, translated by H. T. Lowe-Porter (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1936), pp. 391–392.

3. Ibid., p. 406.

4. Joseph Conrad, *The Secret Sharer*. Quoted from Christopher Isherwood (editor), *Great English Short Stories* (New York: Dell Publishing Co., 1957), p. 16.

5. Gustave Flaubert, *Madame Bovary*, 1857, translated from the French by Mildred Marmur (New American Library, 1964), Part III, Section III, pp. 243–244.

6. Deuteronomy 32:1. Translated from the Hebrew text.

7. Robert Herrick (1591–1674), "To Dianeme." Quoted from Francis Turner Palgrave (editor), *The Golden Treasury*, Everyman's Library (London: Dent and New York: Dutton, 1906), p. 77.

8. William Wordsworth (1770–1850), "The Daffodils," quoted from Palgrave, p. 267.

9. Alphonse de Lamartine (1790–1869), "Éternité de la nature, brièveté de l'homme." Translated from Lamartine, *Harmonies* (Paris: Librairie Larousse), p. 54. The French text of the passage reads as follows:

> Roulez dans vos sentiers de flame,
> Astres, rois de l'immensité!
> Insultez, écrasez mon âme
> Par votre presque éternité!

10. Quoted from Heine, *Gedicht und Gedanke*, selected by Werner Kraft (Berlin: Schocken Verlag, 1936), p. 5. The German text reads: "Um meine Wiege spielten die letzten Mondlichter des achtzehnten und das erste Morgenrot des neunzehnten Jahrhunderts."

11. The building of the chapel of King's College was begun in 1446 and completed in 1515.

12. The *campanile* was planned by Giotto and its construction started by him in 1334. It was finished after his death by Andrea Pisano and Francesco Talenti.

13. The castle was built on the river Cher, under the rule of François I. The wing extending into the river, which gives it the distinctive character, was added by Philibert Delorme, a distinguished French architect (1515–1570).

14. The mosque was built originally in the eighth century and vastly enlarged in the ninth and tenth centuries. The character of the mosque was partially impaired by the conversion of a part of it into a Christian church of a strikingly dissonant architectural design.

15. The Great Sphinx is 189 feet long. It was made during the 4th dynasty, about 2700 B.C.

16. The four colossi represent the seated figure of Rameses II. Each carved statue is 65 feet high. The sculpture is from the 19th dynasty, about 1270 B.C.

17. The statue of Athena was dedicated in 438 B.C., under the rule of Pericles, on the Acropolis. The statue is not extant.

18. The statue of Zeus, seven times the natural size, stood in the god's temple at Olympia. It has been destroyed.

19. The statue, made in the thirteenth century, is located in Daibutsu, Japan.

20. The Mount Rushmore memorial in South Dakota exhibits the colossal heads of four presidents—Washington, Jefferson, Lincoln and Theodore Roosevelt—carved in the mountain. The sculptor was Gutzon Borglum (1867–1941).

21. The *Pietà* is located in St Peter's, Rome.

22. Myron lived in the fifth century B.C., and practiced his art in Athens. The original *Discobolos* is lost, but a Roman copy of the statue has survived.

23. The *Creation of Man* is one section of the pictures on themes from Genesis, painted on the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel in the Vatican, an accomplishment of Michelangelo Buonarroti (1475–1564).

24. *Mona Lisa* or *La Gioconda* of Leonardo da Vinci (1452–1519) is exhibited in the Louvre, Paris.

25. *A Jewish Rabbi* by Harmens van Rijn Rembrandt (1606–1669) is located in the National Gallery, London.

26. The *Peasant Dance* by Pieter Bruegel (1525–1569) is located in the Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna.

27. *On the Terrace* by Pierre Auguste Renoir (1841–1919) is exhibited in the Art Institute of Chicago.

28. Exodus 15:20.

29. Mark Edward Perugini, *A Pageant of the Dance and Ballet* (London: Jarrolds Publishers, 1935), p. 20.

30. Ibid., p. 187.

CONCLUSION

1. Deuteronomy 8:3.

2. Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, Book X, 1178b. Translated by Martin Ostwald.

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