

# The Two Selves: Coomaraswamy as Man and Metaphysician

by  
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*"The Gods entered into man, they made the mortal their house". His passible nature has now become "ours": and from this predicament he cannot easily recollect or rebuild himself, whole and complete. We are now the stone from which the spark can be struck, the mountain beneath which God lies buried... "You" and "I" are the psycho-physical prison and Constrictor in whom the First has been swallowed up that "we" might be all.... He in whom we were imprisoned is now our prisoner; as our Inner Man is submerged in and hidden by our Outer Man. It is now his turn to become the Dragon-slayer; and in this war of the God with the Titan, now fought within you, where we are "at war with ourselves," his victory and resurrection will be also ours, if we have known Who we are. It is now for him to drink us dry, for us to be his wine.<sup>1</sup>*

Coomaraswamy's late years were a time of eloquence: *e-loquence*, he would have been apt to write, in order to emphasize that words come out from a source. Out of what did he speak? What sustained his eloquence? In the passage taken from *Hinduism and Buddhism* as epigraph, it is clear that the ideas, myths, and images of many traditional cultures circulate around a center. Coomaraswamy is like a magician who has worked them all into a single long scarf or temple banner and swirls them in the air before the reader. If we ask which ideas or images were most important to him, which are the ones

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<sup>1</sup> AKC (Ananda K. Coomaraswamy), *Hinduism and Buddhism*, New York, 1943, pp. 8-9.

that he worked into the banner with particular care, we may be able to fill in an extremely important part of his biography: his search for self-knowledge. It is just this that can be identified as his "centre": a search. If we fail to understand at least something of this inmost element of his biography, we run the risk of being rather indifferent spectators at the end of his life, when just this element became more important than any other. The easy way out for author and reader would be to say that all one really must do is read certain essays and books in which Coomaraswamy most clearly expressed his understanding of the meaning and purpose of human existence: read *Hinduism and Buddhism* through, "*Akimcaññā: Self-Naughting*," "The Vedānta and Western Tradition," "*Svayamātrnnā: Janua Coeli*," "Who is 'Satan' and Where is 'Hell'?" and other essays where the traditional psychology is discussed.<sup>2</sup> The hard way out, in fact an impossibility, would be to review the whole of traditional psychology as Coomaraswamy assembled it from Eastern and Western and, as he would say, Northern and Southern sources. Between the easy and the impossibly hard there must be an appropriate path to follow—and so our discussion of his search becomes itself a search.

Coomaraswamy recognized himself in the psychological, metaphysical, and religious ideas of traditional texts far more than in the great ideas of twentieth-century psychology. He made the equation: "traditional philosophy = metaphysics = ontology = theology,"<sup>3</sup> and to these could be added the terms "psychology, or rather pneumatology," which figure in the title of his most outstanding unpublished paper, "On the Indian and Traditional Psychology, or rather Pneumatology."<sup>4</sup> With this distinction between psychology and a science of the spirit (*pneuma*) we plunge into his thought, which was both a careful re-expression of traditional thought and a series of reflections about himself. This double perspective is important. For example, the struggle of the God and the Titan is a myth that he recounted in several different contexts—Vedic and Greek

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<sup>2</sup> Each of these essays, with the exception of *Hinduism and Buddhism*, will be re-printed in the Bollingen Coomaraswamy. Meanwhile they may be found in, respectively, *The New Indian Antiquary*, Vol. III, 1940 ; *The American Scholar*, Vol. VIII, 1939 ; *Zalmoxis*, Vol. II, 1939 ; and *Review of Religion*, Nov. 1947.

<sup>3</sup> AKC, Letter to S.E., 20 February 1941, private collection.

<sup>4</sup> To be published in Bollingen Coomaraswamy, Volume II.

among others, but it also signified something for him in the context of himself, for he was "at war with himself," to paraphrase the passage. It should be said at this point that Coomaraswamy's thought went beyond his experience, as a light flashes out beyond its source, and that a man's inner experience is "a secret between himself and God".<sup>5</sup> He no more demanded of his readers that they at once experience the struggle of the God and the Titan in themselves than he demanded it of himself; what he wished was to expound very richly this traditional psychology which is also a metaphysic and a myth, in order to prepare both his own mind and the reader's for a subsequent "verification." He often used the term "verification" in preference to "realization," probably on the one hand because "realization" had become a *mot-clef* of popular Orientalism and on the other because this term expressed his conviction that the inner life has to be approached intentionally and actively, as much in a scientific spirit as in a spirit of prayer.

The traditional doctrine which seems to have been primordial in Coomaraswamy's thought is the idea of Two Selves.

Our whole metaphysical tradition, Christian and other, maintains that "there are two in us," this man and the Man in this man; and that this is so is still a part and parcel of our spoken language in which, for example, the expression "self-control" implies that there is one that controls and another subject to control, for we know that "nothing acts upon itself," though we forget it when we talk about "self-government." Of these two "selves," outer and inner man, psycho-physical "personality" and very Person, the human composite of body, soul, and spirit is built up. Of these two, on the one hand body-and-soul (or –mind), and on the other, spirit, one is mutable and mortal, the other constant and immortal; one "becomes," the other "is," and the existence of the one that is not, but becomes, is precisely a "personification" or "postulation," since we cannot say of anything that never remains the same that "it *is*." And however necessary it may be to say "I" and

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<sup>5</sup> The phrase is from AKC's "Mahātmā," *Calcutta Review*, 3rd Series, Vol. LXVI, 1939; reprinted in *The Fire Sermon: Essays on Art, Metaphysics, and Culture* by Ananda K. Coomaraswamy, edited by Roger Lipsey, to be published in 1973 in the Penguin Metaphysical Library.

"mine" for the practical purposes of everyday life, our Ego in fact is nothing but a name for what is really only a sequence of observed behaviours.<sup>6</sup>

Coomaraswamy returned many times to this doctrine, expounding it first in the terms of one tradition, then in the terms of another. He pointed out in general the important role of repetition in traditional cultures: people in them wish to be reminded again and again of essentially the same things, either of ideas that are never well enough understood, among intellectuals, or of a relation with divinity that is never pure enough, among worshippers (a category that by no means excludes intellectuals, as Coomaraswamy liked to illustrate through the example of Śāṅkarācārya).<sup>7</sup> In his comments on the value of repetition, it is easy to hear Coomaraswamy himself speaking.

When he joked about the repetitions in his own writings, he called them "the same old stuff", but in fact it was a serious occupation for him to reformulate fundamental truths many times over.

... In the words of Eckhart, "Holy scripture cries aloud for freedom from self." In this unanimous and universal teaching, which affirms an absolute liberty and autonomy, spatial and temporal, attainable as well here and now as anywhere else, this treasured "personality" of ours is at once a prison and a fallacy, from which the Truth shall set you free: a prison, because all definition limits that which is defined, and a fallacy because in this ever changing composite and corruptible psycho-physical "personality" it is impossible to grasp a constant, and impossible therefore to recognize any authentic or "real" substance. In so far as man is merely a "reasoning and mortal animal," tradition is in agreement with the modern determinist in affirming that "this man," so-and-so, has neither free will nor any element of immortality... Tradition, however, departs from science by replying to the man who confesses himself to be only the reasoning and mortal animal that he has "forgotten who he is" (Boethius, *De Consol.*, prose vi), requires of him to

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<sup>6</sup> AKC, "Who is 'Satan' and Where is 'Hell'?" *op. cit.*, p. 51.

<sup>7</sup> Cf. AKC, "The Origin and Use of Images in India," in *The Transformation of Nature in Art*, Cambridge (Mass.), 1934; New York, 1956.

"Know thyself," and warns him, "If thou knowest not thyself, begone" (*si ignoras te, egredere*, Cant. 1.8). Tradition, in other words, affirms the validity of our consciousness of being but distinguishes it from the so-and-so that we think we are... Liberation is not a matter only of shaking off the physical body—oneself is not so easily evaded—but, as Indian texts express it, of shaking off all bodies, mental or psychic as well as physical.<sup>8</sup>

In some passages, Coomaraswamy seems to be saying that the "little self" is a danger and delusion from which the wise wish to be totally free:

Freedom is from one's self, this "I" and its affections. He only *is* free from virtues and vices and all their fatal consequences who never became anyone, he only *can* be free who is no longer anyone; impossible to be freed from oneself and also to remain oneself. The liberation from good and evil that seemed impossible and is impossible for the man whom we define by what he does or thinks and who answers to the question, "Who is that?", "It's me," is possible only for him who can answer at the Sundoor to the question "Who art thou?", "Thyself." He who fettered himself must free himself, and that only can be done by verifying the assurance, "That art thou." It is as much for us to liberate him by knowing Who we are as for him to liberate himself by knowing Who he is...<sup>9</sup>

In the war between Self and self, between the purposes of the Spirit and the purposes of body and psyche, Coomaraswamy seems often, as we said, to have declared *guerre à outrance*: the "self-naughting" which would permit the greater Self to live more in the open, must be carried very far and carried out very seriously, in his view of things. When one has felt the truth of such a saying as this from the *Enneads*: "Other than that single, all-inclusive Life, all other life is darkness, petty, dim and poor,"<sup>10</sup> how does one live from that point on, and in what frame of mind? Coomaraswamy was not under the

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<sup>8</sup> AKC, "*Akimcaññā*: Self-Naughting," *op. cit.*, pp. 1-5.

<sup>9</sup> AKC, *Hinduism and Buddhism*, *op. cit.*, pp. 16-17.

<sup>10</sup> Plotinus, *The Enneads* VI, 6.15, quoted by AKC in "On the Indian and Traditional Psychology, or Rather Pneumatology," *op. cit.*

impression that he was living in a way that would permit him to admit "that single, all-inclusive Life" into his everyday life, but he was preparing for that day, and the preparation itself already had some of the practices, some of the results, and quite thoroughly the point of view of the later stage. He was preparing a house for himself, so to speak, and although not yet living in it, perhaps only passing through it to add this and that necessary feature, he looked forward to moving in and could reasonably expect that he would find things in order and at the place where he had seen them during preliminary visits.

How is the Victory to be won in this Jihad? Our self, in its ignorance of and opposition to its immortal Self, is the enemy to be convinced. The Way is one of intellectual preparation, sacrifice, and contemplation, always presuming at the same time guidance by forerunners. In other words, there is both a theory and a corresponding way of living which cannot be divided, if either is to be effective... Our end will have been attained when we are no longer anyone. That must not, of course, be confused with annihilation; the end of all becoming is in *being*, or rather, the source of being, richer than any being...

There can be no greater sorrow than the truly wise man can feel, than to reflect that "he" is still "someone" (*Cloud of Unknowing*, Ch. 44). To have felt this sorrow (a very different thing from wishing one had never been born, or from any thought of suicide) completes the intellectual preparation. The time has come for action. Once convinced that the Ego is "not my Self" we shall be ready to look for our Self, and to make the sacrifices that the quest demands. We cannot take up the operation in its ritual aspect here (except, in passing, to stress the value of ritual), but only in its application to daily life, every part of which can be transformed and transubstantiated. Assuming that we are now "true philosophers," we shall inevitably begin to make a practice of dying. In other words, we shall mortify our tastes, "using the powers of the soul in our outward man no more than the five senses really need it" (Meister Eckhart, Pfeiffer, p. 488); becoming less and less sentimental ("sticky") and ever more and more fastidious; detaching ourselves from

one thing after another. We shall feed the sensitive powers chiefly on those foods that nourish the Inner Man; a process of "reducing" strictly analogous to the reduction of fleshly obesity, since in this philosophy it is precisely "weight" that drags our Self down, a notion that survives in the use of the word "gross" = sensual. Whoever would *s'eternar, transumanar*, must be "light-hearted."<sup>11</sup>

Better than any other, this passage suggests Coomaraswamy's view of his own way of life in later years. His closest friends knew that this was the inner form of his life, and at least one even cautioned him not to take the practice of self-naughting beyond certain limits. George Sarton wrote him a brief note "...re self-naughting. It can not be done permanently *in* the world; there are various sayings of Christ confirming this. And even in India a man must become a *samnyāsin* in order to carry self-naughting to perfection."<sup>12</sup> Coomaraswamy had thought about this question and had several responses to it, the first being something in the nature of a retort, a direct response, and the second a refinement of his understanding of the war between the higher and lower parts of human nature. His direct response was as follows:

It will be seen that in speaking of those who have done what was to be done, we have been describing those who have become "perfect, even as your Father in heaven is perfect." There will be many to say that even if all this holds good for the all-abandoner, it can have no meaning for "me" who, *en étant un tel* am insusceptible of deification and therefore incapable of reaching God. Few or none of "us" are yet qualified to abandon ourselves. But so far as there is a way, it can be trodden step by step... A long stride has been taken if at least we have learned to accept the idea of the naughting of self as a good, however contrary it may be to our "natural" desire, however *aller menschen fremde*. For if the spirit be thus willing, the time will come when the flesh, whether in this or in any other ensemble of possibilities forming a "world", will be no longer weak. The doctrine of self-

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<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>12</sup> George Sarton, postcard to AKC, 30 November 1940, Coomaraswamy Family Collection.

naughting is therefore addressed to *all*, in the measure of their capacity, and by no means only to those who have already formally abandoned name and lineage.<sup>13</sup>

It is interesting in this passage to find Coomaraswamy insisting on a certain measure of self-discrimination, a certain measure of non-co-operation with the lower forces in man as an intelligent way to live, at the same time as he takes evident delight in exercising his eloquence and his command of traditional ideas and imagery. The ultimate aim is to know that "I am that," to know in an utterly simple way, as these words suggest, that I am not different from God (taking the word "I" to mean the inmost part of each man); but meanwhile there is a lot of living to do. Coomaraswamy's delight in his *métier*, in the exercise of his powers *as a man*, is all the evidence needed to recognize that his self-naughting was not totalitarian in practice. He in fact lived much of the time *between* Self and self: it is at the in-between place that he naturally took up his station, although he longed very deeply to be through once and for all with the trivial and destructive Outer Man. This understanding of something in-between came into his writings time and again, and tended to humanize (but not all-too-humanize) his ascetic impulse towards self-naughting. We are "archetypal inwardly and phenomenal outwardly",<sup>14</sup> as he so brilliantly wrote. Is it possible to be both voluntarily, to enlarge inner experience, certainly the more lacking of the two, without destroying the Outer Man?

...What follows when the lower and the higher forms of the soul have been united? This has nowhere been better described than in the *Aitareya Aranyaka* (2.2.7): "This Self gives itself to that self, and that self to this Self; they become one another; with the one form he (in whom this marriage has been consummated) is unified with yonder world, and with the other united to this world." The Agathos and Kakos Daimons, Fair and Foul selves, Christ and Antichrist, both inhabit us, and their opposition is within us. Heaven and Hell are the divided images of Love

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<sup>13</sup> AKC, "*Akimcaññā*: Self-Naughting," *op. cit.*, p. 16.

<sup>14</sup> AKC, "Kha and Other Words Denoting 'Zero,' in Connection with the Meta-physics of Space," *Bulletin of the School of Oriental Studies (London)*, Vol. VII, 1934, p. 492 ; to be reprinted in Bollingen Coomaraswamy, Volume II.



and Wrath *in divinis*, where the Light and the Darkness are undivided, and the Lamb and the Lion lie down together. In the beginning, as all traditions testify, heaven and earth were one and together; essence and nature are one in God, and it remains for every man to put them together again in himself.<sup>15</sup>

...The intention of initiation is to communicate from one to another a spiritual or rather intellectual impulse that has been continuously transmitted in *guru parampara-krama* from the beginning and is ultimately of non-human origin, ...whereby the contracted and disintegrated individual is awakened to the possibility of a reintegration (*samskarana*); ...metaphysical rites, or "mysteries" (which are in imitation of the means employed by the Father to accomplish His own reintegration, the necessity for which is occasioned by the incontinence of the creative act) are, like the analogous traditional scriptures, intended to provide the means of intellectual operation; but the "Great Work," that of accomplishing the reunion of essence with Essence, must be done by himself within himself.<sup>16</sup>

Each of these passages evokes wholeness: man is not called on to deny entirely any part of his nature, but to bring higher and lower, Essence and essence, into harmony. It is worth remembering that Coomaraswamy often wrote of the needs of the "whole man" in his works on art and aesthetics. The whole man: not a superhuman Self which has no need of works of art since nothing can be reflected of which it is not already aware, nor the "psycho-physical vehicle" which needs only functional efficiency in works of art, but a *whole* man who instinctively wishes a "polar balance of physical and metaphysical" in the objects that make up his environment. In framing this conception, Coomaraswamy was both reporting on a quality that he found in traditional art and appealing to his contemporaries to take another look at their own manufactures and "supports of contemplation" (paintings and so on).

But having found the idea of "reintegration" in Coomaraswamy's thought, we should

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<sup>15</sup> AKC, "Who is 'Satan' and Where is 'Hell'?" *op. cit.*, p. 58

<sup>16</sup> AKC, "On the Pertinence of Philosophy," originally published in *Contemporary Indian Philosophy*, London, 1936, p. 131 for this passage ; to be reprinted in *The Fire Sermon*, *op. cit.*

not be tempted to underestimate his will to understand in what way man is fooled by his own nature, tragically fails to recognize all his constituents because he sees only those that "appear." The "chariot," the vehicle is an excellent thing, but he insisted on distinguishing it from the unnoticed Person who uses it to get around. These are the terms of a traditional Indian simile that he used quite often.

The chariot, with all its appurtenances, corresponds to what we call our self; there was no chariot before its parts were put together, and will be none when they fall to pieces; there is no "chariot" apart from its parts; "chariot" is nothing but a name, given for convenience to a certain percept, but must not be taken to be an entity (*sattva*); and in the same way with ourselves who are, just like the chariot, "confections." The Comprehensor has seen things "as they have become" (*yatha bhūtam*), causally arising and disappearing, and has distinguished himself from all of them...<sup>17</sup>

Coomaraswamy's term "the Comprehensor," a translation of Sanskrit *evamvit*, is another word that designates the Self. He defined it carefully in *Hinduism and Buddhism*; it evokes his aspiration towards an inner *activity*, an activity of understanding which would be logically prior although not necessarily temporally prior to acts of any other kind. In his definition, we can recognize the direction that he wished to go and must already have gone to an admirable degree.

When the Indians speak of the Comprehensor (*evamvit*) of a given doctrine, they do not mean by this merely one who grasps the logical significance of a given proposition; they mean one who has "verified" it in his own person, and is what we knows; for so long as we know only *of* our immortal Self, we are still in the realm of ignorance; we only really know it when we become it; we cannot really know it without being it.<sup>18</sup>

Another passage expressing his understanding of activity can help us to recognize

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<sup>17</sup> AKC, *Hinduism and Buddhism, op. cit.*, p. 59 ; cf. pp. 72-73.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.* p. 65.

that his ideal was not some form of idle intelligence. In his furthest speculation concerning the destiny of the divine part of man, a speculation that *seems* to follow it in a peregrination outside of the mortal body—which was only its prison but not its tomb—he describes its nature as both restful and active, wholly detached and wholly involved.

Impossible... to think of an identification with the Divine Essence that is not also a possession of both its natures, fontal and inflowing, mortal and immortal, formal and informal, born and unborn. An *ablatio omnis alteritatis* must imply a participation in the whole life of the Spirit, of "That One" who is "equally spirated, despirated" (Rg. Veda X. 129.2), eternally "unborn" and "universally born."<sup>19</sup>

Otherworldly as this may sound, it reflects in absolute terms how Coomaraswamy wished to be in this life, not because this double condition of involvement and detachment is "better" or much admired by traditional sagacity, but because it appeared to be in fact his condition, to be recognized and experienced insofar as his faculties would permit.

With this passage, we have gone far enough to have the taste of Coomaraswamy's search for self-knowledge. What still needs to be emphasized, however, is the importance to him of the idea of death. If there is warfare between Self and self, there must also be deaths.

If, indeed, "the kingdom of heaven is within you," then also the "war in heaven" will be there, until Satan has been overcome, that is, until the Man in this man is "master of himself," *selbes gewaltic*... But this is not only a matter of Grace; the soul's salvation depends also on her submission, her willing surrender; it is prevented for so long as she resists. It is her pride... the Satanic conviction of her own independence (*asmi-mana, ahamkara, cogito ergo sum*), her evil rather than herself, that must be killed; this pride she calls her "self-respect," and would "rather die" than be divested of it. But the death that she at last, despite herself, desires, is

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<sup>19</sup> AKC, "The Pilgrim's Way," *Journal of the Bihar and Orissa Research Society*, Vol. XXIII, 1937, pp. 5-6, Note 3.

no destruction but a transformation.<sup>20</sup>

The battle will have been won, in the Indian sense and the Christian wording, when we can say with St. Paul, "I live, yet not I, but Christ in me" (Gal. II. 20); when, that is to say, "I" am dead, and there is none to depart when body and soul disintegrate, but the immanent God. Philosophy is, then, the art of dying. "The true philosophers are practitioners of dying, and death is less terrible to them than to any other men...and being always very eager to release the Soul, the release and separation of the soul from the body is their main care" (Phaedo 67 D, E.). Hence the injunction "Die before you die" (Rwini, *Mathnawi*, VI. 723f., and Angelus Silesius, *Cher. Wandersmann*, IV. 77). For we must be "born again"; and a birth not preceded by a death is inconceivable.<sup>21</sup>

Coomaraswamy had a marvellous collection of traditional references to the "death in life." The two most shocking were drawn from Eckhart and Rûmi: the Christian said that "the kingdom of God is for none but the thoroughly dead"; the Muslim spoke of a "dead man walking."<sup>22</sup> When Coomaraswamy cited texts such as these, he was not only using them for his purpose at a given moment but inviting the reader to go back to the texts themselves. The image from the *Mathnawi*, for example, which he often cited, is so shocking that many readers will eventually go to the trouble of looking it up in context, and by doing so they are better able to measure its significance than through Coomaraswamy's brief allusions. We might do this here, as a sample of the kind of reading that Coomaraswamy urged. The *Mathnawi* text is as follows:

"O seeker of the mysteries, if you wish to see a dead man living—Walking on the earth, like living men; yet he is dead and his spirit is gone to heaven;

One whose spirit hath a dwelling-place on high at this moment, so that if he die, his spirit is not translated,

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<sup>20</sup> AKC, "Who is 'Satan' and Where is 'Hell'?" *op. cit.*, pp. 54, 57.

<sup>21</sup> AKC, "On the Indian and Traditional Psychology, or Rather Pneumatology," *op. cit.*

<sup>22</sup> Cited by AKC in "*Akimcaññā*: Self-Naughting," *op. cit.*, p. 4, and elsewhere.

Because it has been translated before death: this mystery is understood only by dying, not by using one's reason;

Translation it is, but not like the translation of the spirits of the vulgar: it resembles a removal during life from one place to another

If any one wish to see a dead man walking thus visibly on the earth, Let him behold Abu Bakr, the devout, who through being a true witness became the Prince of the Resurrected.

In this earthly life look at the Siddiq Abu Bakr, that you may believe more firmly in the Resurrection."

Mohammed, then, was a hundred spiritual resurrections here and now, for he was dissolved (naughted) in dying to temporal loosing and binding.

Ahmad (Mohammed) is the twice-born in this world: he was manifestly a hundred resurrections."<sup>23</sup>

We may constate right away that to go back to the text raises more questions than it answers: the "foreign" atmosphere of Islam is in this passage, as well as a good number of ideas and images that will be unfamiliar even to very serious Western readers. Nonetheless we learn something from it; we begin to see that if "true philosophers are practitioners of dying," they are also practitioners of being reborn. The "dead man walking," Abu Bakr, turns out to be anything but *a memento mori*. He is an exemplary man, to whom all can turn for evidence of the resources in human nature.

For Coomaraswamy, then, the idea of death was very close; death entered into the creative inner process of "self-negation and Self-realization," as he once described it,<sup>24</sup> and he was not prepared to say that "death in life" is just a literary analogy to the real and final death of the psycho-physical vehicle. Something indeed dies, just as it would

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<sup>23</sup> Reynold A. Nicholson, *The Mathnawi of Jalálu'ddin Rumi*, translation and commentary, new edition, London, 1968. This passage, Book VI, II. 742-751. Editorial apparatus excluded as quoted here.

<sup>24</sup> AKC, "Rgveda 10.90.1: aty atisthad dasanguldm," *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, Vol. LXVI, 1946, p. 161.

later, but tradition affirms that to die in life permits a birth of still more life. For many years before his own death, Coomaraswamy had reflected about the meaning of death, both the final one that everyone recognizes and the inner one towards which the texts point.

He was absolutely confident of the presence in human beings of a part that never dies because it was never born, an immortal part. Because of this, he had little fear, at least little imaginary fear.

I do not know whether the empirical psychology has ever attempted to deal with man's natural fear of death; the traditional psychology affirms that one who has known his own, immortal, and never-aging Self, cannot fear (Atharva Veda, X. 8. 44).<sup>25</sup>

Knowledge of traditional doctrine was not a means of self-defence against a particular incident feared in the future, but rather an element in a complete circle of doctrines which concerned itself with life *and* death. In fact, he had the insight that any kind of looking ahead would be a distraction from the acts of understanding necessary just where he was. In a study of "The Symbolism of Archery," he expressed this most clearly. In a certain way, the validity of traditional doctrine must be judged in part by the appearance of insights: if a philosophy, even the venerable philosophy that Coomaraswamy studied, does not foster individual insights which are both in harmony with itself and recognizably individual, then there must be something wrong.

The actual release of the arrow, like that of the contemplative, whose passage from dhyana to samadhi, contemplatio to raptus, takes place suddenly indeed, but almost unawares, is spontaneous, and as it were uncaused. If all the preparations have been made correctly, the arrow, like a homing bird, will find its own goal; just as the man who, when he departs from this world "all in act" (krtakrtya, katam

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<sup>25</sup> AKC, "On the Indian and Traditional Psychology, or Rather Pneumatology," *op. cit.*, Note 118.

karniyam), having done what there was to be done, need not wonder what will become of him nor where he is going, but will inevitably find the bull's eye, and passing through that sun door, enter into the empyrean beyond the "murity" of the sky.<sup>26</sup>

These lines come very close to being a piece of practical advice. An element often missing in Coomaraswamy's intentional expositions of "self-naughting" is some indication of how interesting it can be, but here in this comment which suggests that one must really take care of one's life when it is one's hands, and really trust when it is no longer in hand, we can see that "self-naughting" must have been of absorbing interest. Which self to naught?: the one that in this world is too lazy to "do what there was to be done"; in the other world, the one that tends to fear, that is helpless and anxious instead of helpless and open.

We have already had occasion to mention Coomaraswamy's paper on "The Vedânta and Western Tradition." In the second part of it, he represented through an extensive use of the symbolic properties of the circle the inward voyage that can be made from the outermost circumference, where man thinks of himself as "so-and-so", progressively past concentric fences, to the common center where his consciousness is not different from that of the "Spectator, the Universal Man" enthroned there, who has been watching his progress inwards from the beginning. In itself, this description is not as rare as all that. It is true that as an art historian who learned the lessons of his field, Coomaraswamy was able to represent this symbolism in such a way that the reader can visualize it—one has the impression of an Italian Renaissance landscape, peculiarly drained of colour but still carefully detailed and eminently habitable. But aside from this small triumph, the representation of an inward voyage through the divisions of a *mandala* is the stock in trade of popular Orientalism, which he merely practiced far better than most when the opportunity came up. Perhaps it is unfair to speak of the article in this way, but these are thoughts that come to mind when one reflects on a, passage towards the end where he

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<sup>26</sup> AKC, "The Symbolism of Archery," as reprinted in *Studies in Comparative Religion*, Vol. 5, No. 2, 1972, p. 72.

describes a transition in consciousness that one would be hard put to find in another author. It is a passage where something entirely distinctive in Coomaraswamy can be recognized.

"No man cometh to the Father save *through* me." We have passed through the opened doorways of initiation and contemplation; we have moved, through a process of a progressive self-naughting, from the outermost to the innermost court of our being and can see no way by which to continue—although we know that behind this image of the Truth, by which we have been enlightened, there is a somewhat that is not in any likeness, and although we know that behind this face of God that shines upon the world there is another and more awful side of him that is not man-regarding but altogether self-intent—an aspect that neither knows nor loves anything whatever external to itself. It is our own conception of Truth and Goodness that prevents our seeing Him who is neither good nor true in any sense of ours. The only way on lies directly *through* all that we had thought we had begun to understand: if we are to find our way in, the image of "ourselves" that we still entertain—in however exalted a manner—and that of the Truth and Goodness that we have "imagined" *per excellentiam*, must be shattered by one and the same blow. "It is more necessary that the soul lose God than that she lose creatures... the soul honors God most in being quit of God..."<sup>27</sup>

Certainly a powerful song, perhaps above all in its evocation of the "other side of God." Through this passage we can taste once more Coomaraswamy's sense of the drama of inner life—not so much the ups and downs, peripaties and dénouements of falling in and out of love or in and out of good fortune, which he knew perfectly well from his younger days, but the drama of the search for God, a movement towards some things, away from others. In his later years, Coomaraswamy was trying to free himself from his biography.

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<sup>27</sup> AKC, "Vedānta and the Western Tradition," *op. cit.*, pp. 243-244.