

# The Force of Traditional Philosophy in Iran Today<sup>i</sup>

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HAVING been asked by a friend to contribute an article to this Review I would wish it to take the form of a testimony, in other words to speak as a philosopher and not just as an historian of philosophy. My testimony will therefore be that of an Occidental who is both a philosopher and an Iranologist. The combination of these two specialties is not necessarily comfortable; it usually implies a certain solitariness, for those with whom one can hold converse are few in number. It requires that one should aim at elevating one's horizon enough to be able to take in simultaneously things which long-established routines have led us to see in isolation from each other.

In saying this I have particularly in mind the limitations of the history of Islamic philosophy as it has long been studied in the West. There has been a keen interest in translations into Syriac or Arabic from Greek, in the legacy which Greek philosophy passed on to the Islamic civilisation; and this interest has extended as far as the translations from Arabic into Latin made in the Twelfth Century at Toledo which passed on to the Latin Scholastics part of the work of Avicenna (Ibn Sina). It is from this angle, the angle of what was known of it by Mediaeval Latin philosophy, that it has been customary to measure the interest of Islamic philosophy. Under these limitations what Islamic philosophy made known to us was always something related to what it was agreed to call the "golden age" of Islamic civilisation, Baghdad between the Fourth and Tenth Centuries. Under these conditions it is by no means surprising that the student of Islamic philosophy should have seemed to fall, more or less, into the category of the archaeologists.

On the other hand, to dispute the unique privilege of this "golden age," to intimate that Islamic philosophy went on from it to fulfil a brilliant destiny elsewhere, on non-Arab soil, especially in Iran, is to arouse, seemingly, a discreet irritation, as if one had disarranged the tidy files of an historian. However, it is allowable for this historian of philosophy to perceive that many things have happened since Averroes (Ibn Rushd), precisely where he had not been in the habit of going to look for them. The things which took place in Iran already before the Safavid Renaissance, and which have taken place since, are such that they call for a synchronous and comparative view by reason of convergences so remarkable that it becomes the task, not of the historian, but of the philosopher as such to deal with them.

This it is which motivated the title of these few pages, the inevitable allusive brevity of which must be excused. In using the word "force" (*actualité* in the original French) I did not have in mind, needless to say, the meaning attached to the word *actualité* in the daily press and the cinema. I meant precisely what is meant by the Greek *Energeia* of which the Latin *actualitas* was a not altogether happy translation. It is the idea of a force, whether latent or in action, which has the inherent power to produce certain effects, just as action is inherent in the transitive verb, which in Greek is called "energetic." And it is this strong meaning, the energetic meaning of this

*energeia* which must simultaneously give its meaning to the idea "traditional," when we speak of the *Actualité* or "Force" of "traditional philosophy."

At this point we must begin by freeing ourselves from the false images which weigh down the idea of tradition and the traditional. Most often these words appear weighted down with a load of what is called the past. They evoke the idea of a dead weight cumbering the road; from this "modern" man must, it is supposed, free himself if he wants to "progress," it being understood that this past has been "outpassed." Such is a common mode of speech, and it formulates a mistake, or rather it formulates something far more serious than a misunderstanding—a state of unconsciousness. This summary concept indeed implies that we have never been aware of the fact that life and death, and also present, past and future are not *in things*, whether present or past or to come, but are qualifications and attributes of the soul always "in the present." There are living souls which, by the *energeia* of their love, communicate life to everything that comes to them. And there are souls which, beneath an external appearance of life, are dead, and congeal into their own death everything they come near.

But the philosopher takes account of the fact that it is one thing to feel oneself *in a world* into which the soul is cast as a captive and quite another to experience the world as a world which lives *in me*, as a world living *in the soul* and by the soul. It is one thing to be established as a fixture in a philosophical system of which one is the captive, and quite another to make for this system a dwelling-place in oneself. The past is not something "outpassed." It is a question of understanding what once made this past possible, what made it take place, what was its future. In the very degree to which a soul recovers possession of this possibility, because it is mysteriously congenital to it, that soul is itself in its turn the actual future of that possibility. It frees what we call the past from the weight which made it the past.

The decision, refusal or taking on, is thus in essence the *event*, and the event does not take place in *things*, but in the *soul*. And this decision is in essence a new birth, the birth of the soul. Those people for whom the whole idea of tradition is like a dead weight are bearing the weight of their own inner death. For them tradition is indeed no more than a funeral procession; but who is responsible for that? Those responsible are, first of all, those "traditionalists" who imagine that tradition means marching in the funeral procession. The task of those who know it means something very different is to break up the funeral procession, to live their tradition as being every time a new birth, their own spiritual rebirth. Unless they do live thus they will merely lengthen the funeral procession.

This is why tradition is essentially a renaissance, and every rebirth is a reactivation of a tradition "in the present." And this is also why the act of tradition always implies "present time"—of course not the year 1967 or any other date, but the present as such, the "present" to which the Carolingian renaissance in the West in the 8th Century, the Byzantine renaissance in the 10th and the European Renaissance in the 16th gave back what, apart from such establishing or rebirth, would have been merely dead antiquity.

Of course we are here in Teheran today especially concerned with the Iranian renaissances, those which are specifically and directly the concern of philosophy and the philosopher. But if the philosopher—not the mere historian of philosophy—is to be able to bear witness to them, which means speaking of them otherwise than as something belonging to the past, he can do so only if, in some sense, these philosophical renaissances also dwell in him. That is why, if these pages are more especially addressed to young Iranian philosophers, they are also the testimony

of a Western philosopher to the significance for him of traditional philosophy in Iran, a philosophy which is not monolithic but extremely diverse, and to the significance, here and now, for some of his brother philosophers in the West, of the discovery of a tradition not hitherto within our field of view. This testimony will therefore lead to an encouragement to young Iranian philosophers not to fall into an infatuation with this or that ephemeral philosophical ideology which happens to be fashionable, but to remain aware that their inquiry into the themes of Western philosophy of today can only bear fruit if they are able to make a counter check on it by using the traditional philosophy in which their own culture is rooted. Much time and study is needed for such a counter check, but without it they are liable to lose their soul in the adventure.

When I first came to Iran twenty-two years ago in September 1945 I had just spent six years at Istanbul, where I had been able to bring out the first volume of an edition of the *Philosophical and Mystical Works of Suhrawardi, Shaikh al-Ishrâq*. So I came to Iran to find the traces of the *Ishraqiyun*. Certainly it was at that time possible to have serious conversations on this subject with certain venerable Shaikhs; but what seems to me new and rich in promise today, at the very heart of an Iran which has for some years been making a tremendous leap forward, is that such conversations have now become possible, and even common, with young men in whose hearts the traditional philosophy of Iran is deeply rooted. In evidence I gladly point to my colleague and friend Professor al-Sayyid Hossein Nasr.

Let us be quite clear what I am driving at. It is common enough today for an astronomer, a physicist, or a chemist to go to a foreign country to find out what his colleagues have gained, what they have observed, what experiments they have carried out in their laboratories. He will come back enriched in knowledge; he will have penetrated more deeply into what constitutes the proper and direct object of astronomy, or physics, or chemistry. Perhaps his colleagues may have taught him something of this *object* which had eluded him. And nobody doubts that these various sciences do indeed attain to their proposed object.

Now compare with this the adventure of our philosopher or meta-physician. He comes, let us say, to Iran to learn what his brother metaphysicians have for their part observed and how far they have penetrated. Can he be sure of being greeted on his return with a perfect understanding, if he should take it into his head to declare that he knows a little more concerning the suprasensory worlds, about the spiritual universe? He will, naturally, be understood provided he talks of the historical—or, better still, of the social—importance of the systems of thought which his colleagues have discovered to him. For what matters is to situate them "in their period," in their "social setting; that is "positive science." As for the spiritual universe these metaphysicians talk about, its interest is only as a pretext for sociological investigations. In brief, our philosopher is in the same position as would be an astronomer 'to whom objection was made that the more refined instruments he had been able to use abroad had not enabled him to get to know even one more galaxy. It is as if he were assured that there is no such galaxy, but that what is of interest, what is positive and scientifically worth-while, is the astronomers' syndicate and its social problems.

In saying this I am hardly at all caricaturing the results of the deep-rooted agnosticism generally professed today by Western philosophy. And the illustration I chose was suggested to me by Suhrawardi himself when he affirms that if, in astronomy, one gives one's confidence to the observations of Hipparchus and Ptolemy, it is equally proper to give one's confidence to the observations of those to whom it has been given to penetrate into the *Malakût*.<sup>ii</sup> The attitude here is resolutely gnostic. And it follows that in the eyes of the agnostic all traditional philosophical

knowledge has inevitably the air of a funeral procession. Contrariwise, this same knowledge every time includes for the gnostic a new birth, a renaissance, because it is really only knowledge if it is a penetration into the spiritual universe, into the *Malakût*, and because no man can penetrate into the *Malakût* who has not been born a second time, as Haydar `Amuli reminds us. Traditional philosophical knowledge is transmitted only on that condition; failing that, it would be merely a handing over of baggage from one dead soul to another.

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Such seems to me to be the deep meaning of the philosophy of *Ishrâq* as it was established by Suhrawardi, together with the ethic it comprises. A philosophical knowledge which does not lead to a personal spiritual realisation is vanity and a waste of time. But any search for spiritual experience which is not supported by a solid philosophical formation runs the risk of getting lost in the deserts of neuroses and psychoses. Now it is precisely this conjunction of philosophical knowledge and spiritual experience which characterises the "theosophy," or "divine wisdom" which Suhrawardi, *Shaikh al-Ishrâq*, wanted, to see reborn in Iran when he made himself—to use his own oft-repeated expression—"the resurrector of the theosophy of the ancient Persians." And this rebirth, or resurrection, in no way took on the air of being an insurrection against the spirituality of Islam: far from being that, it was through the resources of this spirituality that Suhrawardi succeeded, through an admirable bringing into play of the spiritual hermeneutics of *ta'wil*,<sup>iii</sup> in laying the foundations in the all too short life which was ended by his martyrdom at Aleppo.

This work of his is a superlative demonstration of the identity of tradition (trans-mission, or handing on) and rebirth. It may be that, before Suhrawardī, nobody had taken into consideration that the sages of ancient Iran—those whom he names the *Khusrawaniyûn* after the name of ecstatic ruler, Kay Khusraw—were the forerunners of the "Eastern"<sup>iv</sup> theosophers, the *Ishrâqiyûn* of Islamic Iran. Even if one were determined to explain the existence of Suhrawardī by the social conditions of his times (and how could one truly get at these?), it would still remain true that the position he took up in respect of those times, the judgement he expressed, simply cannot be explained by the conditions of those times. The existence of Suhrawardī was required, and his spiritual individuality, unforeseeable and inexplicable by any causal mechanism, for the lineage of the *Ishrâqiyûn* to be trace-able back to the *Khusrawâniyûn*, in fact for their anteriority as precursors of the *Ishrâqiyûn* to come about, and for that anteriority to be promoted to the status of an *event*. At this point there arose an inversion of time: the irruption of Suhrawardī into history breaks up history and the weight of historicity, because it is the work of Suhrawardī which absolves and frees the past of ancient Iran from its discontinuity in relation to Islamic Iran. So true is this that thence-forward it is to him that the former line of sages of ancient Iran owes its significance. He opens the future to that lineage by making the *Ishrâqiyûn* the spiritual posterity of ancient Iran. Indeed since his time the "*Khusrawâniyûn*" truly *are* the predecessors of the *Ishrâqiyûn*." This is because Suhrawardī does not limit himself to relating the history of the philosophy of ancient Iran; he himself verily *is* that history.

To put it in another way, Suhrawardi really showed himself to be the heir of the

*Khusrawâniyûn* theosophers of ancient Iran. To show things in this way I will quite simply refer to one of the most eminent thinkers among Shi'ah Iranians, Sayyid Haydar Amuli of the 8th Century (cf. his *Jâmi a`l-asrâr*, Sections 953 ss of the present writer's edition). Sayyid Haydar has set out admirably the difference between what he calls "knowledge acquired from outside" (*`ulûm kasbiya*) and "knowledge possessed by right of innate heritage" (*`ulum irthiya*). The former presupposes the medium of human teaching; it calls for a dialectical effort and prolonged search. Essentially it is concerned with the sciences of phenomena, of the manifested, in short with the exoteric sciences (*`ilm al-zâhir*). These are the ordinary, "official" sciences (*`ulûm rasmiya*). The organs by which they are acquired and transmitted are intellection (*`aql*) and historical transmission (*naql*). They correspond to what are commonly called today the philosophical and historical sciences, or, to put it more precisely: speculative philosophy and positive theology (*ma`qul* and *manqul*). More simply: the rational and the traditional sciences. But the strict meaning Haydar Âmoli leads us to attach to the term "traditional" precisely goes beyond the connotation of the term *manqul* as a term qualifying knowledge transmitted by tradition. And it is just because it does so that this strict meaning ought to preserve "tradition" from figuring in a funeral procession.

This strict meaning is the meaning Haydar Amuli gives to knowledge belonging to the second group, that of knowledge possessed by right of innate heritage, and the case of Suhrawardi eminently falls into this category. What does this show? Our Shi'ah theosopher strongly underlines the difference between a double affiliation and a double heritage; one affiliation is purely external (*nasab sûri*), the other is purely spiritual (*nasab ma'nawi*). There is a purely external heritage (*mirath sûri*), and there is a purely spiritual heritage (*mirath mü'nawi*). The affiliation and heritage of the first category are precisely everything that is the concern of the official sciences, philosophy and theology, the exoteric sciences, in brief everything that is commonly designated by the terms *ma`qûl* and *manqûl*. But the affiliation and heritage belonging to the second category concern essentially the knowledge hidden beneath phenomena, the knowledge of the inner, of the esoteric (*`ilm al-bâtin*).<sup>v</sup> And whereas the organs of the exoteric sciences are *'aql* and *naql*, the organ of the sciences of esoterism is *kashf, ilhâ* divination, intuitive perception, visionary intuition, inspiration. The resulting type of knowledge is no longer precisely either philosophy or theology, but rather science of the heart, divine wisdom, *theosophia* in the etymological sense.

In the writings of Haydar Amuli the expression *'ilm irthi* essentially designates this category of knowledge which blossoms forth, not from some dialectical construction, but from a divination which is divine inspiration. We must, however, insist that the possibility and legitimacy of such inspiration are both guaranteed and also disciplined by the idea of the *walâyat* (the divine proximity which makes the Imam to be near to God and near to man); that is why Haydar Amuli, in his gnostic formulations—in which the idea of the Imam is naturally an important feature—calls the Imam the true Adam (*Adam haqiqi*, the spiritual Adam, the metaphysical Adam). Herein lies the justification for his qualification of this knowledge as "possessed by right of innate heritage." Indeed all the gnostics (the *`urafa'*) are the heirs of this spiritual Adam, who is in a true sense their father, for this Adam has hidden "beneath the ground of their heart" the deposit of knowledge which is not merely "human science" but "divine science."

Certainly effort is needed if one is to enter into possession of this heritage, but the effort does not produce the treasure any more than it affects its quality of being a heritage. And only one who is in a true sense the heir, the spiritual heir, is in a position to be able to uncover this

treasure, to dig it up and to bring it to light; this he can do as soon as he has seen that it is to him that the deposit has been entrusted. Waking up to this awareness is not the outcome of some dialectical effort; essentially it is a spiritual birth (*wilāda rūhaniya*). Entry into possession of the spiritual heritage is in essence a new birth, a renaissance. So there is no tradition, no transmission of a divine deposit, except when this deposit is passed on to the heir, to him who has the right to it; and he enters into possession of it only on condition of passing through a new birth. It is this birth which makes him the spiritual heir, and this quality does not depend on human choice. If, then, Haydar Amuli's concept of *ulum irthiya* is the authentic concept of "traditional sciences," it follows that tradition only comes to look like some funeral procession if those who get hold of it are precisely those who are not the true heirs.

When it is not so "The *Force* of Traditional Philosophy" really takes on the *energetic* meaning which I tried to show at the outset. If transmission of the spiritual heritage presupposes and provokes new birth, and if one must pass through this new birth in order to be the heir, then the heir who comes to be reborn is not a man "in the past"; in essence he is there, "in the present." With each heir, one after another, tradition does not cease to be reborn "in the present." The heir is himself the tradition "in the present." That is why I referred to the specifically Shiite gnostic terminology of Haydar Amuli in order better to "place" the case of Suhrawardi as one to put forward as an example to serve as model for all those who feel the force of the traditional philosophy of Iran today.

I have especially in mind the way in which Suhrawardi, in his mystical tales, understands the meaning of certain well-known figures of the Avesta and the Shāh-Namah : the Grail of Kay Khusraw, the birth of Zal, the death of Isfandyar (in the tale of the "Archangel in Purple," *'Aql--i surkh*). It seems that we can here grasp how there comes about the mysterious passage from the heroic epic to the mystical epic, which is a phenomenon fundamental for the spiritual culture of Iran as a whole. And it is precisely the mystical tales of Suhrawardi which make it possible for us to denounce the emptiness of the current opposing of *tradition* to *new creation*. Nobody was more traditional than Suhrawardī, since he succeeded in attaching the "Eastern" (*ishraqi*) tradition of Islamic Iran to the "Eastern" tradition of Zoroastrian Iran, the heir of which he felt himself to be. But at the same time it is also true that no thinker could be more creative than he, for without him that "Eastern" tradition would no longer exist; this renaissance would never have taken place. It must also be said that *tradition* implies a perpetual *re-creation* and new birth; apart from this it would be no more than a "de-creation," or what has been called above a funeral procession. And in this new creation it is precisely this tradition which is itself re-created, just as the recited epic (the *hikayat*) is recreated in and by the person of the reciter with whom, in the act of recitation, it makes but one. It is just here that we can feel the passage from the heroic epic to the mystical epic.

We are still in the lineage of Suhrawardi when we evoke the name of the most enchanting figure of the School of Ispahan flowering with the Safavid Renaissance, Mulla Sadrā Shirāzi, for Mulla Sadrā erected alongside the *Hikmat al-Ishraq* (Eastern theosophy) a monumental commentary which is his very personal work. The elements integrated into the traditional philosophy of Iran are thus not lacking in complexity : there is the school of Avicenna; there is the *Ishraq* of Suhrawardi; there is the mystical theosophy of Ibn `Arabi; and there is the *corpus* of the *hadith* of the holy Imams who, nourishing and stimulating from the very beginning the philosophical meditation of the Shi 'is, are the immediate cause for the great philosophical renaissance of the 16th Century taking place in an Iranian Shi `i setting, a thing unparalleled

elsewhere in Islam. The monuments of thought built up on these *hadith* by Mullâ Sadrâ and by Qâzi Sa'id Qummi are the decisive witness to this; they show us the activity of creative thinking at work, thinking by which the tradition is, as such, recreated "in the present." Great indeed is the latitude of initiative open to these traditional thinkers. When they know they are the first to uphold certain theses, they expressly say so, but they have the more awareness that, thanks to this, the tradition is placed by them "in the present."

Mulla Sadrâ belongs to the lineage of the *Ishraqiyûn*, which does not prevent him from bringing about a real revolution in the metaphysic of being, only he is aware that in this he meets the *Ishraqi* requirements. Suhrawardi had still expounded the venerable metaphysic of the essences. Mulla Sadrâ Shirâzi set up with a great dialectical apparatus a metaphysic of being which gives to the act of being, to the fact of *existence*, priority over essence. This because the act of being is susceptible of an infinite number of degrees of intensification and enfeeblement, and each time it is this degree of the act of being which determines and modifies what being is, that is, its essence at that particular degree. There follows from this an infinite perspective in which the intensifications of being are projected to an horizon so lofty as to embrace all levels of pre-existence and super-existence as compared with this world. This metaphysic of existence opens out to a meta-physic of the Presence which is also a metaphysic of testimony, for the ocular witness (*shahid*) is one who is "present."

Elsewhere, in editing and translating one of his books (the *Kitab al-Masha'ir*, I have sketched the radical difference separating Mullâ Sadrâ's metaphysic of *existence* from what has in our day taken the name "existentialism." For Mulla Sadrâ the degree of existentiality is seen in terms of Presence, which does not mean in terms of being present to this world, the supreme finality of which would be to immerse being in "being for death." For him a being is present to itself just in so far as it is separated from, and triumphs over the conditions of this world, which is subject to extension, to volume, to duration and to distance. The more it is separated from this world, the more it is separated from what conditions absence, occultation, darkness, unconsciousness, the more it is also freed from "being for death." The more intense the degree of Presence, the more intense also the act of existing, and so also from that point does this existence exist for "beyond death." Being, as Presence, is not a presence ever more and more involved in this world because it has shut itself off from access to the hierarchy of worlds; it is a presence to all worlds beyond death. The whole of Mulla Sadrâ's philosophy of the resurrection makes this fundamental intuition explicit.

The sources of this intuition, as they become explicit in his work, enable us to make a series of observations. In the West the fate of the metaphysic of being has oscillated between two terms: "to be" and "being"—*esse* and *ens*. For metaphysicians like Mulla Sadrâ the secret of the act of being, of existing, transcends both the substantive *form*—*mawjûd*, *ens*—and the infinitive *form*—*wujûd*, *esse*. The secret must be sought in the imperative form, that which originally and primordially puts the word in the imperative—Arabic *KUN*, Latin *esto*. In this imperative the Word, which is the Spirit, eternally blossoms—and therefore also the phenomenon of the Holy Book, revealed from heaven—setting the whole problem of the relationship between the Word and the Book, between the appearance of the letters enunciated and an understanding of their true meaning, which is their spiritual meaning. From this follow all the themes of the doctrines of prophethood and of the Imams enunciated as their own by the Shi `is, as for our Iranian philosophers it is among the Shi `is that philosophy is "at home," taking on the lofty form of a "prophetic philosophy." To understand the spiritual meaning is to be "present" in relation to

those who are at once the Treasure and the Treasurers of the Book. When Mulla' Sadra goes deeply into the meaning of the famous saying of the Prophet: "he who knows himself knows his Lord," he enables us to read, through this Self, as if in filigree, both the presence *of* the Imam and a being present *to* the Imam, thus accomplishing a radical interiorisation of the doctrine of the Imam as a fruit of his philosophical meditation and his spiritual experience. And it is for this reason that we said that the metaphysic of Presence culminated, in the case of Mullâ Sadrâ in a metaphysic of testimony, the primordial figures in which are the "Fourteen Immaculate Ones" as primordial theophany: they are eternal Witnesses, present to Him for whom they bear witness, and who is, through them, present to Him for whom these witnesses testify.

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No doubt all this has been said too quickly and there should have been page-long quotations from Mullâ Sadrâ. But our object here was just to give a glimpse, a presentiment, of what the traditional philosophy of Iran can mean for us today. So we shall once more underline two positions of essential theses which are for Mullâ Sadrâ bound up with his metaphysic of being and which—as a number of recent symptoms enable me to state—are destined to bear fruit in certain Western philosophers of today, because they correspond to their own preoccupations.

First of all there is the affirmation of the *`alam al-mithâl*,<sup>vi</sup> of its function and its necessity in the plan of the worlds. Suhrawardi was the first to found and fix its ontological rank; and we, in our turn, have had to extract from Latin a new technical term to designate this *`alam al-mithâl* as the "imaginal world." This was necessary to prevent any confusion with the imaginary, and it appears that people are little by little becoming familiar with this word and its meaning. The imaginal world, then, stands on the level of the *Molokai*, that is, of the world of the soul, intermediate between the world of the intelligence (*`aql*, Greek *Nous*) and the world of sensory perception (*Mulk*). It is as objectively real as the worlds between the levels of which it stands. It is the world of events of the Soul, of visionary events, of eschatology and of the resurrection, events just as real as those of the physical world, but situated at a different level. Consequently it requires the ordaining for it of its own organ of perception as valid on its own level as the intuition of the intellect and sensory perception are at their own respective levels.

Thus we come to the second thesis: that organ is the active Imagination, which must not be confused with "imagination" in the sense of "fancy," which is the organ of every kind of folly. As revolutionary in this as in his metaphysic of being Mullâ Sadrâ makes this active Imagination a spiritual organ, independent of the physical organism and surviving it. It is, as it were, the "subtle body" of the soul.

It would be impossible to overestimate the importance and the consequences of these theses. They run right across what at any rate most of Western philosophy has since Descartes been accustomed to accept. If we had to create the term *imaginal*, with the help of a Latin dictionary, this is another symptom of the situation. Given over to the dilemma of thought and extent, setting the spirit in opposition to matter and only able to apply to the spirit qualities opposed to those of matter, Western philosophy has found itself faced with a sterile dualism and a great void. No longer was it possible to conceive of spiritual Forms, in the plastic sense of the term, real



substances existent in themselves and having also their own "extension." On the other hand Mullâ Sadrâ and his kind were able to surmount with ease the dualism which opposes matter to spirit. The posthumous becoming of the human being, and also cosmology as a whole, include a need for "spiritual matter." Certainly the idea of this goes back to Proclus the Neoplatonist and the neo-Empedocles who were known in Islam, but it is even more closely related to the *spissitudo spiritualis* of the Cambridge Platonists who were approximately contemporary with Mulla Sadrâ.

The consequences of all this are far-reaching. A false spiritualism opposed to a false materialism has itself become incapable of conceiving of spiritual events. That is why we see today certain Western theologians bogged down in the pseudo-problem of a "demythologising." Why, we may ask, did not this pseudo-problem arise for a Qazî Sa'îd Qummî, when he commented on the "story of the White Cloud" (*hadith hal-ghamâma*)? The Shi'î philosopher had no need to "de-mythologise" the story of the Imam drawing away certain disciples to penetrate into the *Malakût*. The event is neither myth nor yet history in the meaning ordinarily given to that term; the event is assuredly real but takes place at a different level and in a different time from the events for which the qualification "real" is habitually reserved, just because they belong to the sensory realm. From the outset the *`âlam al-mithâl* makes it possible to surmount the opposition in face of which the religious philosophy of today finds itself exhausted, asking, when faced with the facts of sacred history; is this myth or is it history? The ontology of the imaginal world makes possible the answer: neither the one nor the other. It seems that the two theses relative to Imagination and the imaginal especially throw into relief for us the force of Mulla Sadra's traditional philosophy. This force should *eo ipso* call up, for fruitful comparison, a counterpart, that of a whole parallel tradition in the West the only misfortune and the great merit of which is that it has remained on the sidelines in relation to the official schools, those which have (alas!) ended by accepting the dismissal of philosophy in face of the human and social sciences. This tradition includes both the Hermetic Platonists of the Renaissance and the disciples of Jacob Boehme right up to Louis-Claude de Saint-Martin in France. Unfortunately the texts are scattered and barely accessible. I can assure you that there are some who think it urgent to remedy this penury.

I have suggested above how to follow Mulla Sadrâ in order to understand in what respects the philosophy of existing differs from "existentialism" and its afflictions. Perhaps someone would say that existentialism is already outdated and surpassed, and that another ideology has taken its place and become the rage almost everywhere under the name of "structuralism." Let us come to this question to end off and approach it by evoking the discipline of *ta'wil*. Here I am thinking of the monuments of *ta'wil* erected all down the centuries by such Iranian thinkers and mystics as Rilzbahan Baqli Shirâzi, `Ala' ad-Dawla Samnanî, Haydar Amuli, Sayyid Ahmad `Alawi, the son-in-law of Mir Dâmâd, Mulla Sadra himself and others. *Ta'wil*, the spiritual hermeneutic of the Book, as practised by these thinkers, presupposes, since it is founded on the science of correspondences, an intuition of what we have called "structure." It leads to an understanding of the spiritual truth at every level of the worlds to which the meaning of the text is taken, the spiritual truth being at each of these respective levels the literal truth. What takes place is just what takes place in music when a melody remains the same, if transposed to a different pitch, because the structure remains although its sound elements are changed.

To someone who has meditated and gone deeply into the *ta'wil* practised by our thinkers, "structuralism" does not reveal anything very new. But, as in the case of existentialism, a capital

and symptomatic difference shows up. The structuralism of today has attempted—and that is its merit—to put forward problems while escaping from the yoke of historicism. It opposes a synchronous perception to the dispersal of systems related to moments succeeding one another in chronological time, to the *diachronism* of history. Unfortunately it does not on that account escape from its congenital agnosticism and seeks to retain only outlines devoid of content. Structuralism is no more than a repetition of a Kantian formalism from which the transcendental subject has vanished. It seems that structures can be got rid of without anyone noticing a catastrophe; but the catastrophe is already there.

In contrast to this I think of the texts in which Qâzi Sa'id Qummi has examined in depth the theme "The Face of God and the Face of man" like a "structure" which the traditions of the Imams set before him. If there is one structure which is well set in the light by the theosophers of the Divine Names in Islam it is the essential bipolarity constituted by God revealing himself to man and man to whom God reveals Himself. The one of these does not subsist without the other, whereas the Unrevealed eludes every human negation and every affirmation. And then, from the finitude inherent in man, the cry of Nietzsche, "God is dead," can only reach the God who was a God *for* man. But if the structure be such that one of the two terms cannot subsist without the other, how could man survive the "death" of his God? The question is already answered: man would not long have survived. Already one very recent philosophy supposes that what we call man and humanism is only an invention of the last centuries, an invention doomed soon to disappear. Man: a dream dreamed by nobody. It is no longer the *ta'wil* of the Book but the *ta'wil of man* which is here lacking, perhaps for lack of the training which is a necessary preliminary to the former... perhaps also for lack of having heard of the "polar" dimension of the Perfect Man (*Insan kamil*).

I am aware that an extreme condensation has been necessary in these pages in order to meet the narrow limitations of time and space, and I shall not attempt any recapitulation before concluding, since they are themselves already a brief recapitulation. At the outset I indicated that the force of traditional philosophy in Iran, the meaning of which I have tried to suggest, concerns us, who are philosophers of the West, just as much as it concerns our brothers in Iran. The foregoing pages will have illustrated this idea. Consequently I would particularly like to draw the attention of young Iranian philosophers to the example of my colleague Gilbert Durand, Professor at the University of Grenoble, a young master who brilliantly perpetuates among us the tradition of the late regretted Gaston Bachelard. In his recent researches we have seen this young philosopher facing up simultaneously, on the one hand to the formalism of structuralism (while deciding in its favour as regards its aim of a synchronous perception) and on the other hand to the hermeneutic which tries to give a content to the empty schematicism put forward by structuralism but which falls into the diachronic dispersion of historicism. Philosophy has for its task to oppose both these currents, proclaiming itself to be "gnostic" and "docetic": gnostic in surmounting those timidities and constraints which have finally led to agnosticism docetic by taking account of the fact that real events are not what material data propose, the data deemed to be recognisable by just anybody—"historical" data in the usual meaning of the term—but the invisible having its fulfilment in the *Malakût*. And if that word figures here once again it is because in a most remarkable way one feels in the thought of Gilbert Durand the direct and conscious influence of what Mullâ Sadrâ and his school teach us about the imaginal world and active Imagination. I can hardly better close than by bringing out, however briefly, this force of the traditional philosophy of Iran in the teaching of a French philosopher of today.

I add only this. Among the many traditional tales which transmit to us the compact teaching of the Fifth Imam, Muhammad Baq̄r, is one in which he declares that if the verses of the Book had meaning only in relation to the persons and circumstances for which they were revealed, the Koran would long ago have been dead. Now the Koran is living till the day of Resurrection, its meaning being fulfilled from one believer to another. It can be said that in this way the holy Imam baffled in advance the traps of historicism and formulated perfectly the secret of an active hermeneutic which ceaselessly makes a new meaning blossom forth and ceaselessly actualises in the present the esoterism of a tradition which does not "belong to the past." The question for us is then this: Shall we be capable of doing what Suhrawardī did? Shall we be able to give to physics and to human sciences of today their as yet unformulated metaphysical meaning? Or are we going to leave the field free for babbling improvisations? I have just quoted a memorable discourse of the Fifth Imam. I feel it is echoed in a distich of Hafiz, which I would gladly take as my personal motto, for it answers the very questions I have been putting:

"Let the inspiration of the Holy Spirit but breathe once more—Others in their turn will do what Christ has done."

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<sup>i</sup> A lecture to the Faculty of Letters and the Humanities at the University of Teheran, November 13th, 1967

<sup>ii</sup> The celestial world of permanent Sovereignty. *ta'wil*: literally, to take a thing back to its

<sup>iii</sup> origin.

<sup>iv</sup> In Arabic the root letters. *Shin-ra'-qaf* have the basic significance of "East" which is in fact the meaning of the word *sharq*, while *ishrâq* means "sunrise," "illumination."

<sup>v</sup> Be it noted in passing that here is an indication enabling us to provide an equivalent for our technical term : phenomenology. We give that name to analysis which discloses the intention hidden beneath a phenomenon, beneath what is apparent, beneath the *zâhir*. So phenomenology is exactly *kashf al-mahjub*, *kashf al-asrar*.

<sup>vi</sup> Often translated in English as "the world of analogies."