

The "Eclipse of God" and Existential Mistrust

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I stood on a lofty mountain and saw a gigantic man and another a dwarf; and I heard as it were a voice of thunder, and drew nigh for to bear; And He spoke to me and said: I am thou, and thou art I; and wheresoever thou mayest be I am there. In all I am scattered, and whatsoever thou willest, thou gatherest Me; and gathering Me, thou gatherest Thyself.

*—from the apocryphal
Gospel of Eve*

MARTIN Buber's metaphor, "Eclipse of God," is well known to everyone concerned with the problem it purports to describe; the "existential mistrust" which he saw everywhere about us, and to which he referred explicitly in certain contexts, he saw as a consequence of that "eclipse." He hoped to overcome these two disasters by way of his dialogic model, based upon his over-arching metaphor of the "I-Thou" relation between man and God and between man and man.

Obviously there is a sense in which the whole of Buber's teaching can be construed between these terms—the "I-Thou" relation on the one hand, and the "Eclipse of God" with the consequent existential mistrust which it breeds upon the other. Fortunately, it is not our task to evaluate or otherwise appraise the teachings of Martin Buber; we wish, rather, to note the terms which he employs to specify the present troubles of our world, and then to see in what respects his diagnosis is confirmed or qualified by the literary evidences about us, and how these evidences perhaps require of us at once a more radical awareness and a more radical revision of the collective unconscious than is dreamt of in Buber's philosophy or in his way of posing the problem.

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I

I do not mean to denigrate or undervalue Buber's contribution to our understanding of the problem. We are all under obligation to him and his work. His *Ich und Du*, first published in 1922 (the same year, literarily speaking, that saw the appearance of Eliot's *Waste Land* and Joyce's *Ulysses*) remains one of the great books, if not one of the great poems, of our epoch. But precisely for this reason—it being now some 47 years later, and his own work having entered into the complicities of our deeper seeing—we must note with some care the presuppositions of his way of seeing.

Doubtless this great Seer would dispute my speaking of his "I-Thou relation" as a metaphor. In his *I and Thou* he asserts that "He" is a metaphor, but "Thou" is not.¹ "Thou," it would appear, is his name for Tillich's God beyond "God," or for the "Source," or the "Transcendent," or the "Presence," to use some other of his favorite designations. But it would seem to me that these are all quite as much metaphors as "the Holy" (Das Heilige), or the "Void" of Zen Buddhism, or the "still point of the turning world," or Miss Marianne Moore's "metaphysical newmown hay." They are all attempts to point to the dimension of ultimacy and Mystery that we all experience and to embody it partially by speaking of the experienced but undisclosed unknown by way of something known. But, then, here we are already at the crux of all of our problems of contemporary reorientation: the question as to whether any static, or Absolutistic, or dualistic models for speaking in these dimensions are anymore "meaningful," or communicate increments of feeling or knowing that effectively point to or signify existential equivalents in the experience of those who no longer dwell under the Absolutistic or dualistic models.

Buber himself is ambivalent on this point, and therefore difficult to do justice to in a paragraph. When he speaks of the Ultimate as "Source" or as "Presence" or as the *Mysterium Tremendum*, we, as readers of Heidegger, Marcel and Rudolph Otto, can see his language functioning on the side of his sense of ultimate Mystery. When he says that we cannot be helped "to an ideal reconcilia-

¹ *I and Thou*; tr. by Ronald Gregor Smith (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1942), p. 112.

tion by any theological device,"² and inveighs against "structures" and "systems," we, as students of Kierkegaard and existentialism generally, see him leaning away from traditional modes of thinking and saying. When he says that "reversal is the recognition of the Center (with a capital "C") and the act of turning again to it,"³ we, as poetic and philosophical (i.e., amateur) depth-psychologists, say to ourselves, "Aha! now he is getting to the heart of the matter!" and when he writes

Of course God is the "wholly Other;" but he is also the wholly Same, the wholly Present.

Of course He is the *Mysterium Tremendum* that appears and overthrows; but He is also the mystery of the self-evident, nearer to me than my I. . . .⁴

—when he writes this, we say he is one with Meister Eckhart and Jeremiah. When he speaks of the sickness of our age as being like that of none other, and as requiring for our healing, therefore, "a spiral descent through the spiritual underworld, which can also be called an ascent to the innermost," we are persuaded that he knows both the secrets of mythology and depth psychology as well as those of Heraclitus. When he says that this way is dangerous and radical and paradoxical, that "where there is danger, the rescuing force grows too,"⁵ we rejoice inwardly, recognizing in this last line an unacknowledged borrowing from Hölderlin; and then, again, when Buber notes that "the *It* is the eternal chrysalis, the *Tbou* the eternal butterfly,"⁶ we understand him completely: he is a poet, and therefore perhaps we shall not have to take him seriously.

But then what is more serious than butterflies?—especially if not taken seriously?

As butterflies come to the newly planted flowers,
Bodhidharma says, "I know not."⁷

² *Ibid.*, p. 96.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 100. ⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 79.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 56. ⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 17.

⁷ *Ku-tsun-bun Yu-Ju*, 41; quoted in Alan Watts: *The Way of Zen* (New York: Mentor Books, Pantheon Books, 1959), p. 166.

This is the one side of Buber's teaching; and it is supported by his appeals to Heraclitus, Lao-tze and the tales of the Hasidim.

There is, however, another side which invades this sense of the Mystery and coerces it towards the traditional dualistic models. A certain literalism attaches at times to the terms of Buber's "I"—"Thou" relation; his language continues to assert the terminological screen of "transcendence" and the "Absolute," of that which is "over against me," of "holding fast to the living God," of betweenness and encounter and of Pascal's "God of Abraham," phrases held not metaphorically or archetypally, but as he says, in a "real," "existential" and "actual" sense of which language as metaphor would somehow seem to deprive it.

The importance of this linguistic difference is clear when we turn to his metaphor of "eclipse" as applied to the enormous and compendious shattering of symbolic meanings in our time. The "eclipse of the light of heaven, eclipse of God" is indeed, for Buber, "the character of the historic hour through which the world is passing."⁸ But Buber's eclipse metaphor is quite literally like an eclipse of the sun—that is, of Transcendence as such ("our *vis-a-vis*") in a dualistic continuum. It is "something that occurs between the sun and our eyes, not in the sun itself."⁹

In the interests of this metaphor he rejects Nietzsche's saying that God is dead, thus taking the metaphor somewhat literalistically, though he agrees that the phrase "dramatically sums up the end situation of the era."¹⁰ Likewise he rejects the inference which Sartre draws from the silence of the transcendent, namely, that therefore God does not exist. With Heidegger's metaphor of the absence of God, he has much more in common. He notes that Heidegger allows for the possibility that after the imageless era of the present time is passed, "a new procession of images may begin," that the holy will reappear "in new and still unanticipated forms."¹¹ But he is sceptical of Heidegger's view that the "death of God" implies that contemporary man has shifted the idea of God from the realm of objective being, the realm of a self-subsisting suprasensual world, to the realm of radical immanence; and by the same token he is sceptical

⁸ *Eclipse of God* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1952), p. 34.

⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 30.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 33, 95.

of Heidegger's persuasion *a la* Hölderlin, that this is a time when God's failure helps—that if our experience today of negation is radical enough it may bring us to the point where a new point of departure for the Western consciousness, or a recovery of a “fundamental ontology,” may become possible. He concedes that he does not understand Heidegger's notion of being: which suggests that in the zones of ontological reflection Martin Buber's thinking remains enmeshed in the traditional rhetoric, just as his summation symbol, “God,” often sounds like that which Wallace Stevens referred to as “that Gold Self aloft, Alone. . . looking down,” and hence untouched by what is most radical in the metaphors of “death,” “absence,” “loss,” “disappearance,” and even “eclipse,” which terms whirl today in every direction seeming, like swords, to prevent our wishful return into that hermetic Eden of intellectualistically oriented thinking which has comprised the tradition of Western metaphysics from Aristotle down to fairly recent times.

We should also note in passing that Jung also, in Buber's judgment, fits into the “God is dead” category. Jung's views of God as a projection of the Unconscious, or as an autonomous psychic content, despite his disclaimer that these were empirical rather than metaphysical statements, appears (for Buber) to reduce God to the status of a *function* of the Unconscious, of *my* unconscious (as though the unconscious were itself somehow an irrational function of my rational ego), and therefore unrelated to or subversive of the “I-Thou relation” in its externality and over againstness in the context of the living encounter with God.

The inclusion of Jung in this essay in *The Eclipse of God*, together with the exchange that followed it, is a strange episode in the literary life of Martin Buber. For it would seem, as surely as with Heidegger, that at the deepest root of their thinking these two would have much in common. One suspects that Buber's defensiveness arises from the sense of threat that he feels at the point where Jung's theory of the Unconscious subverts the classical model of a person, and thus, by extension, threatens the adequacy of the “I-Thou relation” model which is the presiding metaphor (or “representative anecdote”) of Buber's way of seeing things. Despite Buber's acceptance (noted above) of Meister Eckhart's view that God is nearer to me than I am to myself (a statement which Jung also approves), his “I” and his “Thou” must, it would appear, retain the primacy of the rationalist ego (even that “moi” described by Pascal as

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"Hateable"). But this means that the person tends to be deprived of its depth dimension: it becomes more and more a mind in a body over against God and the world. Its encounters become lacking in depth; its dialogue is no longer a movement through a logos of depth, but remains cerebral and assertive, instead of watchful and attentive to the creative *élan* that comes out of silence.

Something of the newer understanding of the person can be gleaned from the following statement of Erich Neumann:

We have . . . to realize that the false, personalistic interpretation of everything psychic is the expression of an unconscious law which has everywhere constrained modern man to misinterpret his true role and significance. Only when we have made it clear to what degree the reduction of the transpersonal to the personal springs from a tendency which once had a very deep meaning, but which the crisis of modern consciousness has rendered wholly meaningless and nonsensical, will our task be fulfilled. Only when we have recognized how the personal develops out of the transpersonal, detaches itself from it but . . . always remains rooted in it, can we restore to the transpersonal factors their original weight and meaning, lacking which a healthy collective and individual life is impossible.¹²

What seems to be suggested in all of this is that insofar as our language and speech retains either wittingly or unwittingly the models for world or for self of the classical, dualistic, absolutistic, or intellectualistic kind, it perpetuates and propels the sickness it would cure. In this way also, the Judaeo-Christian tradition in its authoritarian and dogmatic forms, may also become subject to existential mistrust.

Therefore, when Martin Buber, in 1952, at the conclusion of his lecture tour in the United States, urged that the only hope for this hour lay in our recognizing that only from the *source*, from its origin and its depth, "can the true hope of healing come," he was pointing not merely to international conflict and societal mistrust, but also to the condition of man. "Existential mistrust," he held, "is the sickness itself. But the destruction of trust in human existence is

¹² *The Origins and History of Consciousness* (New York: Pantheon Books, Bollingen Series XLII, 1954), Introduction, p. xxiii.

the inner poisoning of the total human organism from which this sickness stems."¹³ The sickness is massive; it is to be overcome only through the renewal of the dialogical relation, through the overcoming of existential mistrust.

But once again I have the feeling that Buber's view of the nature or dimensions of this mistrust is not sufficiently radical. I mistrust his view of mistrust! With Buber, it is not a matter of his *faith*. I do not feel of Buber that his faith unfaithful makes him falsely true; it is rather that his diagnosis stops too soon, that his trust too trustful makes him rightly wrong. He complains against Nietzsche, for example, that in his praising of the art of mistrust and the game of seeing through and unmasking, he knew but halfway what he was doing—that it is precisely this psychological and sociological game of unmasking that must today be refused. Yet I remember arguing, in a book that I published just twenty-five years ago, that “there comes a midnight hour in which each one must unmask!”—and, since it seemed to me that the same principle applied also to any profound transitional moment in the life of a culture, I was impressed with Karl Jaspers' thesis that “he who wishes to find his way to the origin of crisis must pass through the lost domain of truth, in order to revise it possessively; must traverse the domain of perplexity to reach decision concerning himself; must strip off the trappings of the masquerade, in order to disclose the genuine that lies beneath.”¹⁴ As for Nietzsche, his thesis of unmasking has two dimensions, both of which, in our moment of time, have a bearing upon his hypothesis of the death of God. First of all, his unmasking is directed toward philosophers and their philosophies: he doubts

whether a philosopher *can* have “ultimate and actual” opinions at all: whether behind every cave in him there is not, and must necessarily be, a still deeper cave . . . an abyss behind every bottom, beneath every “foundation.” Every philosophy is a foreground philosophy. . . . Every

¹³ *Pointing the Way*, edited and tr. with an intro. by Maurice S. Friedman (New York: Harper & Row, publishers, Harper Torchbook, 1963), p. 224.

¹⁴ Stanley Romaine Hopper, *The Crisis of Faith* (New York: Nashville: Abingdon-Cokesbury Press, 1944), p. 22; quoted from *Man in the Modern Age* (New York: Henry Holt & Co., 1933), pp. 89–90.

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philosophy also *conceals* a philosophy; every opinion is also a *lurking-place*, every word is also a mask.¹⁵

But the unmasking is directed secondarily to ourselves:

Wanderer, who art thou? . . . whoever thou art, what is it that now pleases thee?

What will serve to refresh thee? Only name it, whatever I have I offer thee!

To refresh me? To refresh me? Oh, thou prying one, what sayest thou! But give me, I pray thee—

"What? what? Speak out!"

Another mask! A second mask!¹⁶

But at the same time, Nietzsche also knew that

at the bottom of our souls, quite "down below," there is certainly something unteachable, a granite of spiritual fate.

It is this deeper destiny from which a man grows, knows, ascertains; and though he reaches certain solutions, beliefs, convictions by way of so-called "learning," later on he comes to see that these are "only footsteps to self-knowledge, guide-posts to the problem which we ourselves are. . . ."¹⁷

We must assume, then, that while unmasking may, in a time such as ours, be played very deftly or even very crudely, it is nevertheless a game played with a purpose: it aims to strip the trappings from off the epoch's masquerade; it aims to make us aware of that which has become meaningless and sham in our pretensions and relationships; it aims to bring to light the true centers of our cultural mistrust; it aims to unmask our historical presumptions and confront us with the primary mysteries of being and self-identity; it aims to play us,

¹⁵ *Beyond Good and Evil* (in *The Philosophy of Nietzsche*; New York: The Modern Library, Random House, Inc., n.d.), No. 289, p. 606.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, No. 278, p. 600.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, No. 231, p. 539.

lure us, exhort us, or trick us into the core, the heart, the crux, the still point of this whirlwind hour in the hope (perhaps also in the faith) that we shall find the residual flaw in the way we have been seeing things, and be released into a fresh understanding of the nature and "meaning" of things.

To put it in more formal terms, the existential mistrust which we know today is at once a mistrust of our language of ultimacy (of our God-language and our metaphysics: "we feel," as Ortega y Gasset once put it, "that the traditional ways are useless to solve our problems");¹⁸ it is a mistrust of existence and of ourselves; it is a mistrust of the premises of our self-knowledge; and it is a mistrust of the hidden agenda lurking in our grammar (we are under the necessity of liberating our grammar from logic, as Heidegger says);¹⁹ and it is finally a mistrust of the picture of things, the frame, through which we have been bidden to look at things (or, as Wittgenstein put it so unmistakably, "A picture held us captive. And we could not get outside it, for it lay in our language and language seemed to repeat it to us inexorably.")²⁰ In short, our existential mistrust is today compendious and total. But we must also say, with Heidegger, that we lack today a grammar for grasping entities (or Buber's existential relations) in their Being: which means that the problem lies very deep in our modes of understanding, presents us in fact with what Heidegger calls "an enigma *a priori*"—we already live in an understanding of Being (since an understanding of Being is already included in conceiving anything that we have encountered as an entity); but mean-while the meaning of Being continues to be veiled in darkness, remains, that is, withdrawn in its essential Mystery.²¹ "Is it accidental," comments Heidegger, somewhat wryly, "that no headway has been made with this problem in over two thousand years? Has the question already been perverted in the very way it has been approached—i.e., in the ontologically unclarified separation of the Real and the ideal?"²²

The death of God, or his absence, or his eclipse, or his reticence, is a metaphori-

¹⁸ *The Dehumanization of Art and Other Writings on Art and Culture* (Garden City: Doubleday Anchor Book, 1956), p. 125.

¹⁹ *Being and Time*, tr. by John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson (London: SCM Press, 1962), p. 209.

²⁰ *Philosophical Investigations, I* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1958), pp. 48, 48e.

²¹ *Op. cit.*, p. 23.

²² *Ibid.*, p. 259.

cal way of saying "Yes!" to that question. It would appear that we have reached today the catastrophe of this drama; and it is Buber himself who (given the poetic efficacy of his language) has outlined the principle of reversal implicit in all the deepest dramas of cultural transfiguration:

In each new aeon (he wrote in *Ich und Du*) fate becomes more oppressive, reversal more shattering. And the theophany becomes ever *nearer*, increasingly near to the sphere that lies *between beings*, to the Kingdom that is hidden in our midst, there between us. History is a mysterious approach. Every spiral of its way leads us both into profounder perversion and more fundamental reversal. But the event that from the side of the world is called reversal is from God's side called salvation.²³

This admirable passage, with its profound penetration into the secrets of all metamorphosis in depth, contains the principle to which I shall appeal in the balance of this argument; I shall suggest rather that *Poetry* is a mysterious approach; every spiral of its way leads us both into profounder perversion and more fundamental reversal, perhaps more fundamental even than history. For it is true that "poetry invented the unicorn, the centaur and the phoenix" and is "the birth and rebirth of the first morning forever" (Delmore Schwartz). It is as profound as Buber in his intuition of God's showing himself (theophany), becoming manifest, being brought into the light (since *phaino*, φαίνω, to bring to the light of day, comes from the stem *pha* φα, like *phōs* φῶς, the light, or fire). God, through his theophany, shows himself in a double movement, at once perverse and revealing—which is disconcerting and, of course, slightly perverse (and terribly revealing), or, as we usually put it, slightly absurd. It suggests humor in the God-head, or pathos perhaps, as when we overhear Rachel in Ramah weeping for her children. The principle is complex and as astonishing as an incomprehensible environment of stars in which galaxies burgeon like dandelion seeds puffed by a child on a gay summer morning. It is as profound as Whitehead's cosmology, or McLuhan's principle of interfaciality; but we must at the same time see that it is as simple as Whitman!

²³ *I and Thou*, pp. 119–20.

A child said What is the grass? fetching it to me with full hands;
How could I answer the child? I do not know what it is anymore than he.

To recapitulate, then, we may say: (1) that Buber's metaphor of "eclipse" is amply confirmed by contemporary literature; but that the figural terms of the metaphor are not radical enough to embrace the paradoxical sense of desolation and release which we today experience: our astronomy of choice has changed, we are faced with a challenge no longer Ptolemaic. Similarly (2), Buber's sense of existential mistrust is rightly discerned but too restrictedly placed: the traditional figurations of theology, metaphysics, ego-identity and grammar are called into question. The Emperor "isn't wearing any clothes" is not what is relevant; what is relevant is that there is a procession, but no recognizable Emperor. The politics of faith have changed.

But (3), given the deepening of the questions proposed, that which is deepest in Buber acquires a new relevance by way of his concepts of theophany and reversal. Contemporary literature corroborates, in the most striking manner, these mysteries. Moreover (4), since contemporary literature at the same time *embodies* the enigma that it seeks to solve, it is, by extension, (5) the *place* where the seeming contradictions of theophany and reversal are occurring. It is in our works of art and literature that we may look, therefore, for the first signs of the new myth that is forming at the heart of the world. This may be put otherwise, of course, in more academic language: as in the following claim of Walter Abell:

Psycho-historically considered, art (and, we would add, literature) is one of the cultural symbols into which society projects existent states of underlying psychic tension. These states of tension, in turn, are generated by historical experiences involving the entire range of individual and social life, including technological and economic life. As imagery symbolizing underlying and often unconscious psycho-historical depths, works of art function in the mental life of society much as do dreams in the experience of an individual. Thus, we are led to conceive the higher forms of cultural expression in any society as manifestations of a "collective dream."²⁴

²⁴ *The Collective Dream in Art* (New York: Schocken Books, 1966), p. 5.

II

The corroborations of literature are manifold. We have seen "fear in a handful of dust," and the eternal Footman, of course, holds our coats, and snickers. We have seen the rough beast, his hour come round at last, slouching towards Bethlehem to be born. We have seen men contracting rhinoceritis and a pride of pachyderms go thundering across our bodies politic. We have heard that

The heaven of Europe is empty, like a Schloss
Abandoned because of taxes.

We have listened to Lucky's formal thinking, his schizophrenic theological word salad, so non-sensically full of sense:

Given the existence . . . of a personal God . . . outside time without extension who from the heights of divine apathy a divine athambia divine aphasia loves us dearly with some exceptions for reasons unknown . . . and suffers . . . with those who for reasons unknown are plunged in torment. . . .

Or, more simply,

Nobody knows what love is anymore.
Nobody knows what happened to God.

And we know the poet's program:

Throw away the lights, the definitions,
And say of what you see in the dark

That it is this or that it is that,
But do not use the rotted names. . . .

Poetry

Exceeding music must take the place
Of empty heaven and its hymns,

Ourselves in poetry must take their place,
Even in the chattering of your guitar.²⁵

These are now familiar idioms of our compendious complaint.

But what does it mean to say that "poetry, *exceeding* music, must take the place of our empty heaven and its hymns"; or, and this is of equal importance, what does it mean to say that "ourselves *in* poetry must take their place"? The poet assumes here an enormous, perhaps a mistaken and inflated, role. It is nevertheless essential (in this time between "the gods that have fled" and "the god that is coming"), perhaps even unavoidable, that we should move into this mode of seeing—a necessity that may be glimpsed briefly by way of three perverse reversals, each founded upon a paradox, but containing that double movement—the descent through the spiritual underworld, which can also be called an ascent to the innermost—which Buber discerned as necessary to the healing of our time.

The first of these paradoxes has been stated well by Kafka: "*What is laid upon us is to accomplish the negative; the positive is already given.*"²⁶ This is, from a theological point of view, a form of the great enigma of Original Sin,²⁷ which Kafka also understood quite well. His great parables, the *Castle* and the *Trial*, are comic expressions (without benefit of theology) of both the necessity and the difficulty of accomplishing the negative. They are expressions of our failure to stop blocking our way, of our refusal to step out of our cage though its bars are yards apart, of our willfully overlooking the spring by the side of the road despite our very great thirst. They are trifling recapitulations of our expulsion from Paradise,

²⁵ Citations, in order, from:

Wallace Stevens: "Owl's Clover," *Opus Posthumous* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1957), p. 53.

Samuel Beckett, *Waiting for Godot* (New York: Grove Press, 1954), p. 28.

Kenneth Rexroth, "For—," in *Penguin Modern Poets 9: Denise Levertov, Kenneth Rexroth, William Carlos Williams* (London: Penguin Books Ltd., 1967), p. 64.

Wallace Stevens, "The Man with the Blue Guitar," *The Collected Poems of Wallace Stevens* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1954), pp. 183, 167.

²⁶ "Reflections on Sin, Pain, Hope, and the True Way," in *The Great Wall* (New York: Schocken Books, 1946), No. 24, p. 284.

²⁷ Cf. *Ibid.*, No. 35, 52, 70, 79.

that eternal occurrence which obscures the fact that we are continuously there in actual fact (the positive is given) "whether we know it or not."

But it is also the enigma *a priori* already specified by Heidegger (page 54, above) —the curious paradox that we already live in an understanding of Being, but meanwhile the meaning of Being continues to be veiled, withdrawn in its essential Mystery. Similarly, in Heidegger's "Conversation on a Country Path," it is this same problem of accomplishing the negative that the three persons in the dialogue are discussing. They are seeking "releasement" from the negative. They recognize that man, by his very nature, belongs to Being—here denominated as "that which regions." But man belongs to it not occasionally, nor spasmodically, but, as the "Scholar" says, prior to everything. It is that prius of which we cannot really think, because it is the presupposition of all thinking; and it is thus man's nature to be released into that which is prior to all thought. For this reason, Being as that-which-regions cannot be conceived at all so long as we are trying to represent it to ourselves: that is, "forcibly bring before ourselves an objectively given relation between an object called "man" and an object called 'that-which-regions'" —(or, in theological parlance, between an object called "man" and an object called "God"). And then the "Scholar" in the conversation observes that it is the very nature of man that he *should* be released (that is, accomplish the negative) to that-which-regions because man *belongs to it* so essentially that "without man that-which-regions cannot be a coming forth of all natures, as it is."²⁸

I leave this last suggestion for the moment in order to focus more firmly upon this Kafka paradox. For it seems quite probable that men must be tricked out of the negative, for the negative already masquerades as the positive. Perhaps it was not for nothing that Kafka wrote parables, and aphorisms, and deliberately exploited the devices and strategies of the dream—which are themselves a form of wit, the wit of the Unconscious. How we love to witness the Unconscious of *somebody else* play wondrously upon his words in such a way as to expose him publicly by way of (what we have come to call) the Freudian slip. Similarly, it was not for nothing that Hermes, that surprising emissary of the gods, was both a magician and a trickster; and, while he agreed, on taking his

²⁸ "Conversation on a Country Path," in *Discourse on Thinking* (New York: Harper & Row, 1966), p. 83.

job appointment at the hands of Zeus, to always tell the truth he did not agree always to tell the *whole* truth. (It is worth noting, perhaps, in passing, that despite all the discussion in recent years of hermeneutic in theology these characteristics of the archetypal hermeneut have been disregarded—suggesting, perhaps, that our grasp on the nature of interpretation is still bound by the traditional grammar, repeating itself endlessly, in our language, and has yet to accomplish its own negativity.)

Contemporary literature (and much art as well) is a literature of trickery. It is a literature of wit, epigram, aphorism, paradox, surprising juxtapositions and arbitrary representations, "Poetry is quick as tigers, clever as cats, vivid as oranges" (Schwartz). Much as the Id, in Freud's explorations of wit in the Unconscious, masks its wishes, its dream work, in outlandish but witty images in order to by-pass the repressive censorship of the Super-Ego and thus get through to the Ego, so also much contemporary drama sets itself, its "play," before us in an intriguing charade, circumventing the censorship of our unconscious conventional attitudes in order to tease us out of conformity and back into time. One has only to mention Beckett's "Godot" and "End Game," Genet's "The Blacks," or Pinter's "A Slight Ache" to become at once aware of the dimension of riddle and charade that is in them.

It is significant indeed, when we come to the end of our era, and are brought to stand between the times, dispossessed and disconcerted, that the strategies of our arts should take these riddling forms. It is a strategy of unmasking, of shocking us loose from our unexamined premises, and of confronting us (from within, from within our own wrestling with the hook of the cleverly devised riddle) with the primary Riddle itself (over-ruled and forgotten in our tight coherence-tested systems), with the great Enigma *a priori*. It is a way of accomplishing the negative, of tricking us out of our supposed fixed knowledge and into a learned ignorance: into an awareness, that is, of what reality is not.

Once again, it is worth noting in passing, that the strategies of much contemporary literature are not unlike those employed by the Zen Masters of Japan in their use of the *koan*. The *koan*, as we all very well know, is a Zen technique employed by the Zen Master to help his student to accomplish the negative. It takes the form of a perverse question, a quasi-riddle, of a rhetorical block thrown against my opposing analytical ego in order, through releasement, to let my deeper Self come through. "What is the sound of one hand clapping?"

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"What was the image of your original face before you were born?" These are questions on which the student must meditate, and bring answers, until suddenly he *sees* the question in a new light; that is, does his *seeing* differently. There is a sense in which the *koan*, the question, is itself the answer. The learner has had to "work through" the forms of his own conventional seeing to realize a breakthrough into what we westerners would call the "ground" of his own consciousness. It is interesting that Thomas Merton should have given one of the best statements as to what the *koan* is: "The koan," he wrote, "is not something other than the self. It is a cryptic figure of the self, and it is interpreted insofar as the student can become so identified with the *koan* that it revolutionizes and liberates his whole consciousness, delivering it from itself."²⁹

It would be interesting if certain Biblical texts could be proposed to us as *koan* questions in self-understanding: What is the meaning of the proposition, "Before Abraham was, I am"—a saying attributed to Christ; or, "He that hath seen me hath seen the Father." Was the author of the Gospel according to Thomas hearing differently, that is to say heretically, from the way in which the other Gospel authors heard, when he records the familiar conversation:

Jesus said . . . : Make a comparison to Me and tell Me whom I am like.

(Peter and Matthew give conventional answers.)

Thomas said . . . : "Master, my mouth is not capable of saying whom Thou art like.

Jesus said: I am not thy Master, because thou hast drunk, thou hast become drunk from the bubbling spring which I have measured out.

And He took him, He withdrew, He spoke three words to him.³⁰

If this were my introductory *koan* for my course in Introduction to the New Testament, I being asked what were the three words spoken to Thomas, what would be my response after ninety days? If I said (1) it does not read like the Gospels, (2) they did not say this at Nicea, (3) it is not in the Institutes, and (4) it is obviously of Gnostic origin!—would I pass the course with honors? or

²⁹ Thomas Merton: *Mystics and Zen Masters* (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1967), p. 236.

³⁰ Log 12-13 (83), p. 9.

would the Master be justified in taking up his staff to administer a sharp knock behind my ears?

III

If we concur, then, in Kafka's paradox (namely, that what is laid upon us is to accomplish the negative, because the positive is already given) it is but a little step to the second paradox. Kierkegaard put it very well by observing that *as soon as the uncertainty of all things "has been thought infinitely," the Deity will be present.*³¹ This surprising statement appears, at first, to be only a re-statement of the proposition that when we have accomplished the negative, the positive (as the Deity) will be present. Which is quite correct, of course. Nevertheless it adds something, by the insertion of (what may, indeed, be a rhetorical flourish) the term "infinitely." When the uncertainty of everything is *thought infinitely*, the Deity will be present.

We may come at its meaning in a variety of ways.

First, we may observe what Kierkegaard himself noted: namely, the strange paradox that it is the "supreme passion of the Reason to seek a collision, though this collision must in one way or another prove its undoing. The supreme paradox of all thought is the attempt to discover something that thought cannot think." Thus thinking would explore the limits of its own powers, even by way of performing critiques upon itself. What the Reason collides with, according to Kierkegaard, is the Unknown. Which is neither man, nor any other known thing; so, says Kierkegaard, let us call this unknown something: *God.*³² Thus, quite suddenly, the Deity is present!—logically!

An interesting parallel argument appears in Eastern philosophy, in the doctrine of no-mind. It consists in evacuating from the mind all obstacles of ego-centric self-consciousness. A no-mind keeps nothing in it. It flows, it responds spontaneously to that which is given. It is like the state of innocence in the Garden of Eden, says Suzuki. It is like "spirit" or "pneuma" or "having the mind of Christ," says Thomas Merton. Martin Buber, speaking of it in terms of "Tao," meaning the way, the path, says that it is like the Heraclitean *logos*.

³¹ *Concluding Unscientific Postscript* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1941), p. 80.

³² *Philosophical Fragments* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1936), pp. 29, 31.

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Lao-Tze himself says, it cannot be thought, it has no image, no word, no measure. "The right measure of the Tao is itself." Nonetheless, "it can be found through seeking," in a unified life. There it is not recognized and known, but possessed, lived, and acted upon. "Only he who reaches it in silence and fulfills it with his being has it," say the books of Lieh-tzu.³³ Thus, again, the Deity is present!

But the Deity is not present because I *say* it is present. And once again my thinking must be thought infinitely. But then, it would appear, to think *infinitely* is precisely to learn how not to "think," if by thinking I remain caught in the processes of reasoning. And to think that I must not get caught so is, paradoxically, to continue thinking so. Thus, an ancient Japanese poem says:

To think that I am not going
To think of you any more
Is still thinking of you . . .
Let me then try not to think
That I am not going to think of you.³⁴

It would seem, by extension, that the same dilemma confronts us with any "death of God theology:" the God of whom I am *not* going to think anymore because he is dead continues to be very much alive in my thought of his deadness. In this sense the death of God theology runs the risk of remaining caught in the same language games with the theology that precedes it. Both belong to the same contextual system. That is to say, neither the presence of God, in the one case, nor his "death" in the other, has been thought infinitely. But today, God's failure helps: which means that the recession of Christendom's symbolic system, along with the classical world-view, renders everything uncertain. This is an advantage because (1) the negative may be accomplished, and (2) the uncertainty may be thought infinitely and the Deity surprisingly be present, though not present certainly in the way we had expected: that is, as forcibly bringing before ourselves an objectively given relation between an object called "man" and an object called "God." In short, it is not a problem of thought at all, but rather, in terms of the enigma *a priori* it is a question of being

³³ Cf. Buber, *Pointing the Way*, p. 46.

³⁴ Quoted in D. T. Suzuki, *Zen and Japanese Culture* (New York: Pantheon Books, Bollingen Series LXIV, 1959), p. 112.

open to that which is prior to all thinking, and to become one with (to use Heidegger's language) "the hidden coming forth of that nature"—of the "that-which-regions."

Which brings us back to Heidegger's claim, consideration of which we deferred some moments ago (see page 59, above), when we were focusing on Kafka's proposal that we must learn how to accomplish the negative. It is the very nature of man, it was held, that he should be released to that-which-regions because man belongs to it so essentially that without man that-which-regions cannot be a coming forth of all natures, as it is. Kafka helps us here. He says,

You do not need to leave your room. Remain sitting at your table and listen. Do not even listen, simply wait. Do not even wait, be quite still and solitary. The world will freely offer itself to you to be unmasked, it has no choice, it will roll in ecstasy at your feet.³⁵

And Rilke, in his *Elegies*³⁶ (IX), exclaims,

Earth, isn't that what you want: an invisible
re-arising in us?

.....

What is your urgent command, if not
transformation?

.....

Supernumerous existence
wells up in my heart.

(*Überzähliges Dasein
entspringt mir im Herzen.*)

IV

It may be observed now that these two ecstasies (that of Kafka and that of

³⁵ *Op. cit.*, p. 307.

³⁶ *Duino Elegies*, IX, tr. by J. B. Leishman and Stephen Spender (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., Inc., 1939), II. 68-80, p. 77.

Rilke), while witnessing to the same mystery, to the same Presence, do so nevertheless in opposite ways—the one from the perspective of man's responsiveness to that-which-regions, and the other from the perspective of the need of that-which-regions for man's open and construing response. As though, when uncertainty is thought infinitely and the Deity quite suddenly is present, it is present in a paradoxical way—as being both unconcealed and more firmly and deeply hidden. Kafka's simplicity both reveals and conceals; Rilke's complexity both unconceals and hides. The infinite becomes present in my not-doing, my listening, my waiting; the infinite becomes present in my doing, my seeing, my becoming the bee of the invisible. This means that precisely at the point where our second paradox comes clear, a third paradox supervenes—as though beneath every cave a deeper cavern must appear.

How shall we describe this third perversity? What formula will speak it without containing it? For it is clear by now that our problem is not merely a logical problem; it is also psychological and metaphysical. But the third paradox, incorporating these, makes it aesthetic and religious. It is as though Aristotle—who raised logic to the apex of philosophy's pyramid, suppressed the surprises and heterogeneities of our practical world by way of the syllogistic model for knowing and the principle of radical subsumption and subordination under the logical class concept—were today being up-ended. We aim today rather at truth as a function of the reconciliation of opposites through aesthetic models of configuration and constellation in a polarized field of incessant activity. Thus Whitehead can say, "The ultimate metaphysical principle is the advance from disjunction to conjunction, creating a novel entity other than the entities given in disjunction." Thus "philosophy is akin to poetry," and "God" is "the measure of the aesthetic consistency of the world. . . . The actual world is the outcome of aesthetic order, and the aesthetic order is derived from the immanence of God."³⁷

Or it is as though Kant, for whom knowledge was a unifying act brought about in a formal way by his doctrine of the categories, were today being transposed into a radically different key—an aesthetic and vitalistic key in

³⁷ Citations are from *Process and Reality* (New York: The MacMillan Co., 1929), p. 32; *Modes of Thought* (Capricorn Books, G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1958), p. 237; *Religion in the Making* (New York: The MacMillan Co., 1930), pp. 99, 105.

which the radical heterogeneity of things is not nullified by the conceptual synthesis, but which retains, as Philip Wheelwright puts it so well, its "irrepressible element of paradox, or dramatic tension, and of unresolved ambiguity."³⁸ This implies (and I place myself with Wheelwright here) that the new way of seeing is a "poetic envisionment of things" and that, in consequence, we must affirm "the ontological status of radical metaphor."

But what does it mean to speak of radical metaphor?

Obviously it means more than Aristotle meant when he classified metaphor as adornment, thereby relegating aesthetic vision to a peripheral point on the far horizons of metaphysical thinking. It means rather that, at bottom, all language is metaphorical, is a naming. It is a saying that *this* (of which I "know" something from experience) is like *that* (of which I know less). Thus I am carried across from the known to the relatively unknown. This is epiphor, as Wheelwright has shown. But there is another mode of metaphor. This is *dia*-phor—the movement *through* the opposites, effecting that reconciliation of the unlike through a shock of awareness similar to the theater of the absurd or the *koans* of the Zen Master. For the epiphor seeks conformity between its first known image and the unknown, thereby suppressing the burgeoning heterogeneity of things. Mushrooms and eggs and tea-cups and bodies and chairs do not proliferate in epiphoric drama (as they do in the diaphoric extravagance of Ionesco's theater). The epiphoric principle is intrinsic to the *analogia entis*, which informs our classical theology, and permits us to mount to heaven on the ladders and stairs of Being. The diaphoric principle points to an analogy of a contrary kind, to a movement between the opposites, to an *analogia crucis*, bringing us down from heaven to the place where that-which-regions seeks to express itself as the "coming forth of all natures, as it is."

Is it not remarkable that, in the demise of a symbol system, people in our time are not merely thrown back somewhat desperately upon themselves, but mistrust existentially the ultra-sophisticated or complex in order to seek solace in the simple.

Go to the shine that's on the tree
 When dawn has laved with liquid light
 With luminous light the nighted tree

³⁸ *The Burning Fountain* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1954), p. 96.

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And take that glory without fright.

.....

Then go to the earth and touch it keen,
Be tree and bird, be wide aware
Be wild aware of light unseen,
And unheard song along the air.³⁹

While this poem is mainly epiphoric, its shock of recognition is effected through diaphoric strategies, much as with the Japanese *haiku*. These too are simple: as Basho's most famous one:

| | |
|---------------------------|----------------------|
| <i>Yoku mireba</i> | If you look closely |
| <i>Naruzuna bana saku</i> | A flower is blooming |
| <i>Kakine kana</i> | Under the hedge |

What is effected here is an adroit juxtaposition of the unbounded infinite and the mystery of the particular in such a way as to make us *see* this flower in its singular uniqueness; that is, to become aware of the unfathomable mystery (the enigma *a priori*) that is intrinsic to any concretion whatsoever. In short, just as we start from the enigma *a priori* on the one hand, so we come upon radical metaphor on the other, which is the recognition of the "as" factor in all our seeing and knowing, or, as Heidegger expresses it, the *as* as a "constitutive state for understanding, existential and *a priori*."⁴⁰

The vision is Heraclitean, and it is significant that Martin Buber, in 1958, addressed himself to the topic, "What is Common to All." He extolled, in this address, Heraclitus' proclamation of the *logos* as that which is common to all, and commuted this concept (as the key concept in Heraclitus' thinking) to his own view of dialogue as the means of salvation from our contemporary existential mistrust.

Once again, the term *logos* in Buber's contexts, tends to function rationalistically, losing its ratios of psychical depth and losing its thrust as one metaphor in a cluster of vitalistic metaphors which, taken together, convey something of Heraclitus' vision of things. The Heraclitean *logos* must be placed alongside

³⁹ "Go to the Shine That's on a Tree," *Richard Eberhart: Selected Poems 1930-1965* (New York: New Directions, 1965), p. 27.

⁴⁰ *Being and Time*, p. 190.

his other metaphors of the bow, the lyre, fire, harmony, and strife—all vitalistic metaphors and figurations of the unity of opposites. Behind all these is his notion that *Pbuisis* (the concealed nature of all things) loves to hide: or, better, *pbuisis* is a *gryphos*, riddle or enigma. Thus *logos*, within this vision, becomes a metaphor for the speech of things, for expressiveness, and for the conception of ontology as utterance. And this, indeed, is the final form of the final paradox.

For the paradox persists, and no one is more aware of it than the contemporary poet. Wallace Stevens, who spent his life probing just this conundrum, who knew that we have reached the point of radical need, and so require “Another chant, an incantation, as in Another and later genesis. . .” saw nevertheless the deeper contradiction in the paradox:

Adam (he wrote, in “The Pure Good of Theory”)
 Whose mind malformed this morning metaphor,
 While all the leaves leaked gold. His mind made morning,
 As he slept. He woke in metaphor: this was
 A metamorphosis of paradise,
 Malformed, the world was paradise malformed. . .
 Now, closely the ear attends the varying
 Of this precarious music, the change of key

Not quite detected at the moment of the change
 And now, it attends the difficult difference.
 To say the solar chariot is junk

Is not a variation but an end.
 Yet to speak of the whole world as metaphor
 Is still to stick to the contents of the mind

And the desire to believe in a metaphor.
 It is to stick to the nicer knowledge of
 Belief, that what it believes in is not true.⁴¹

⁴¹ “The Pure Good of Theory,” *The Collected Poems*, p. 331.

IV

It would be difficult to summarize the argument of this paper more succinctly, so far as it seeks to accomplish the negative and to focus our uncertainty infinitely in order that the Deity, the positive, that which is already given, might be glimpsed through his creative Presence.

Stevens is saying, of course, that Adam failed to see how the leaves, as given, all leaked gold in the morning of creation. And so he imposed a second world upon the world as given, and so malformed through his metaphor the positive already given. Now, in our time, we are aware of that change of key, and say, that God is dead, that the myth has died, that the solar chariot is junk. To qualify that metaphor now, as our argument has been doing and as Stevens' own notes "Towards a Supreme Fiction" also were doing, and to appeal to an ontology of radical metaphor, may still be a sticking to the contents of the mind (we not having learned the Zen facilities of the open unmythicized response of no-mind; and hence we stick to the nicer knowledge of belief, the knowledge, that is, that what we believe in is not true). It is possible that it may take a while yet for us to think our latter day uncertainty infinitely, into the metaphysics of newmown hay, into the wonder of grass in the hands of a child, or into the simple motions, as Rilke put it, of learning how to "dance the orange."

Rilke proposed that perhaps we have made a mistake in trying to look *at* God, thus making an object of Him, standing over against us; perhaps we ought, as he said, to see as God sees—in which case, God would be behind us, so to speak, like the enigma *a priori*, and we would be looking in the same direction as he is looking, seeing as he sees, participating, that is, in his creative life, even as the poet today strives to be one with his poem, participating thereby in the ontology of utterance, provided of course that the utterance comes from a psychical source deeper than the cavern beneath his inmost cave.

The movement of our argument has been circular, beginning with the metaphor of the eclipse of God surrounded by the harkings and carpings of our existential mistrusts, and concluding precisely where we began—having sought meanwhile to accomplish the negative: a descent to the spiritual underworld, on the one hand, and an ascent to inwardness, on the other—the exchange, that

is, for one way of seeing things for a possible other. This other implies an aesthetic ethos, and a theology no longer comprised of theologies, but of the modes and manners of theopoiesis.

Thus, as we move toward theophanies of reversal, we shall see dramas of charade and parable, of wit and dream; we shall see quests and journeys—journeys like that of man, the little comedian as the letter “c,” sailing to a new land in order “to make a new intelligence prevail” (Stevens). There will be the journeys of Abraham and those of Orpheus. And some of them, like the traveller in the *Anabasis* of St. John Perse, will “foretell (us) the time of a great blessing and the felicity of leaves in our dreams.” This will be the moment “when the phoenix escapes from the golden net and . . . the crane breaks the bars of its cage” and when men will ask, on every chance road to Emmaus, “who is that third one walking always beside you?”

But since this also may be a parable, we should perhaps conclude more modestly, with our heap of broken images in the time, as it has been said, of the God who, mercifully, does not exist. Which is a little like saying, Thanks be to God for the God who is not.

The layman Hō once asked the master Baso:

What is it that transcends everything in the universe?

Baso answered: I will tell you after you have drunk up all the waters of the West River in one gulp.

Hō said: I have already drunk up all the waters of the West River in one gulp.

Baso replied: Then I have already answered your question.