

# The Primacy of Intellection

by

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Source: *Studies in Comparative Religion*, Vol. 16, Nos. 3 and 4. (Summer-Autumn, 1984). © World Wisdom, Inc.  
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*The essay below appeared first in the French journal *Connaissance des Religions* (Vol. 1, No. 1, juin, 1985) and then in translation in *Studies*. It later appeared as a chapter in the book *To Have a Center* (World Wisdom, 1990). The version below is from a new translation of the essay, approved by the estate of Frithjof Schuon.*

It has been said that the proof of an affirmation is incumbent upon him who enunciates the thesis, not upon him who rejects it; but this is a perfectly arbitrary opinion, for if someone owes us a proof for a positive affirmation, he equally owes us one for a negative affirmation; it is not the positive character of the affirmation, it is the absoluteness of its character that obliges us to prove it, whether its content is positive or negative. There is no need to prove an inexistence that one supposes, but one is obliged to prove an inexistence that one affirms. It is true that those who deny the supernatural do not lack arguments which in their eyes are proofs of their opinion, but nonetheless they imagine that their opinion is a natural axiom that needs no demonstration; this is rationalist juridicism, not pure logic. Theists, on the contrary, feel that it is normal to support by proofs the reality of the Invisible, except when they speak *pro domo*, basing themselves upon the evidence of faith or gnosis.

The ontological proof of God—expressed by Saint Augustine and developed by Saint Anselm—has often been misinterpreted even since the Middle Ages. It does not signify that God is real because He can be conceived, but on the contrary that He can be conceived because He is real: in other words, the reality of God entails, for our intellectual faculty, certitude concerning that reality, and this certitude in its turn entails, for our rational faculty, the possibility of conceiving the Absolute. And it is precisely this possibility of reason—and *a fortiori* the pre-rational intuition of the intellect—that constitutes the characteristic prerogative of man.

In the critique of the ontological proof of God, the error consists in not seeing that to imagine some object is in no way the same thing as to conceive the absolute, or the Absolute as such; for what matters here is not the subjective play of our mind, but essentially the absolute Object that determines it, and which, in the final analysis, even constitutes the very reason for the existence of human intelligence. Without a real God, man is not possible.

In speaking of the ontological argument, we have in mind the essential thesis and not the partly problematical reasonings which are supposed to uphold it. Fundamentally, the basis of the argument is the analogy between the macrocosm—metacosm and the microcosm, or between God and the soul: in a certain respect, we are That which is, and consequently we can know all that is, and therefore Being as such; for if in one respect there is incommensurability, there is also analogy and even identity, otherwise we would be nothingness pure and simple. The principle of knowledge does not of itself imply any limitation; to know is to know all that is knowable, the knowable coinciding with the real, given that the subject and the object are indistinguishable *a priori* and in the Absolute: to know is to be, and conversely. This brings us to the Arabic saying: "He who knoweth his soul, knoweth his Lord"; without forgetting the injunction of the oracle at Delphi: "Know thyself." If we are told that the Absolute is unknowable, this relates, not to our principal intellectual faculty, but *de facto* to a particular modality of this faculty; to a particular husk, not to the substance.

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In the domain of human thought there are few things as pathetic as the need to "prove" *Ātmā* or *Māyā*; for to say that these two things—"if they exist"—are absolutely remote is to say implicitly that they are absolutely near; too near, in a certain sense, to be provable. The following is a fallacious argument: since all that is not the Absolute—"supposing that It exists"—is enclosed in *Māyā*, how can we know the Absolute, and consequently the Relative as such, given that our knowledge quite obviously lies within *Māyā*? Our reply—and it follows from our preceding considerations—is that neither of these two notions pertains absolutely to *Māyā*: the first because its very content situates it outside Illusion, even though the notion qua notion obviously pertains to the illusory order; and the same holds true for the second notion, that of *Māyā*, precisely: if it necessarily pertains to Illusion as an intellectual or mental phenomenon, it is nonetheless linked to *Ātmā* since it does not exist except in relation to It; without *Ātmā*, *Māyā* is not possible. This amounts to saying that the notion of Illusion is a ray of *Ātmā* entering

into *Māyā*, in a less direct fashion no doubt than is the case for the notion of *Ātmā*, but nonetheless in a real, or relatively real, manner. We could also say that the notion of the Real is real, or that the notion of the Absolute is absolute, in the same way that it has been said that “the doctrine of Unity is unique.” The idea of the illusory, of the relative or the contingent, is linked to that of the Real and benefits from the same logical and ontological rule.

The proof of the pure logician is on the whole based upon a starting point that is “contrary to nature”—if man is viewed in his primordial and normative integrity—namely an ignorance and a doubt which, precisely, are not normal to man as such; the argumentation of the pure metaphysician on the contrary—even if he happens to employ the language of the logician as a dialectical stratagem—is founded, not upon doubt, but upon analogy and, more profoundly, upon identity both intellectual and existential. If, analogically speaking, Reality is the geometric point, the knowledge that we have of it corresponds either to the concentric circles or to the radii which are both centrifugal and centripetal, for on the one hand Truth emanates from the Real, and on the other hand Knowledge extends to the Real. The point, the circle, the radius, and also the spiral: these are the graphic symbols of Knowledge, whatever be the symbol—or relation—that predominates according to the aspect considered.

Ramanuja and others have maintained that the Shankarite doctrine of the two “hypostases” of the Divine Self—*Brahman* as such and *Brahman* as *Māyā*—is false because it introduces, it would seem, an unintelligible and irreducible duality into the Absolute; but this is an artificial argument, because it considers the problem in only one respect, while deliberately neglecting another most essential one. The absolute Self is pure Subject; now contingent subjects also are nothing but subjectivity or consciousness, and it is in this respect, and not with respect to contingency—or projection and reverberation—that *Brahman* or *Ātmā* is one and indivisible. As for *Māyā*, it proceeds necessarily from the very nature of *Ātmā*—on pain of being a pure impossibility—and proves the Infinitude, All-Possibility and Radiation of *Ātmā*; *Māyā* exteriorizes and unfolds the innumerable potentialities of *Ātmā*. *Māyā* cannot not be, and to deny it is not to know the nature of the supreme Self.

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To ask for the proof of intellection—hence of a direct, adequate and infallible knowledge of the supernatural—is to prove that one does not have access to it, and, analogically speaking, it is like asking for the proof of the adequacy of our elementary sensations, which no one doubts, on pain of not being able to live. But the absence of metaphysical intellection in most men of the “iron age” does not for all that close the door to the saving supernatural, as is shown by the phenomenon of revelation, and the subsequent phenomenon of faith, both of which presuppose a kind of elementary—but in no way insufficient—intuition, which we could term “moral” and sometimes even “aesthetic”; for in fact, the reality of God penetrates all our being. To doubt this is to make of oneself “a house divided against itself.”

In fact, when God is removed from the universe, it becomes a desert of rocks or ice; it is deprived of life and warmth, and every man who still has a sense of the integrally real refuses to admit that this should be reality; for if reality were made of rocks, there would be no place in it for flowers or any beauty or sweetness whatsoever. Similarly for the soul: remove faith—including that element of faith that forms part of gnosis—and the soul becomes impoverished, chilled, rigid and embittered; or it falls into a hedonism unworthy of the human state; moreover, the one does not preclude the other, for blind passions always overlay a heart of ice, all told, a heart that is “dead.” Thus, there is an ostentatious and “humanitarian” charity which, at bottom, is no more than the psychological compensation for spiritual bitterness or hatred of God.

Be that as it may, pure rationalism<sup>[1]</sup> aims at passing for the pinnacle of “exact thought,” or for the only exact thought, for exactitude as such; however, it must not be forgotten that rationalism, or the “criticism” which systematizes it, comprises arbitrary and practically pseudo-mystical arguments, such as the Kantian thrust against the intuitive certitudes of the believer: to have recourse to this certitude is, it would appear, “to make abusively an objective reality out of a subjective ideality”; now where does this philosopher get the knowledge that this “ideality” is not a reality? He speaks of the “delusion of the enthusiast” (*schwärmerischer Wahn*) which would consist in knowing supernatural entities through sentiment; by what right does he speak thus, since he has never experienced such a sentiment? This leads us to the opinion according to which he who denies an affirmation does not have to prove his negation, given—so it would appear—that a proof imposes itself only upon him who affirms; as if the peremptory negation of something which one does not know were not an affirmation in its turn! Moreover, how can one not see from the outset the initial contradiction of “criticism”: namely the illusion of being able to define the limitations—clearly conjectural—of reason starting from reason itself. It is to wish to legislate—*analogically speaking*—on the possible limitations of the optic nerve with the help of the visual faculty; or it is to wish to hear hearing, or to grasp with the hand the capacity of grasping.<sup>[2]</sup>

Nevertheless, the possibility of determining the limits of reason does exist; but it exists only starting from—and by means of—the pure intellect, hence precisely from what the Kantian criticism denies without the shadow of a proof. We will perhaps be told—although this would mean sidestepping the issue—that criticism has long been obsolete, and that it is not worth fighting the dead; no doubt it has been obsolete philosophically and in a literary sense, but not practically, for it survives in its fruits, or fruit, namely the quasi-official abolition of speculative intelligence, which in the final analysis means: the abolition of specifically human intelligence, or of intelligence pure and simple.

After all, Pascal’s wager is not to be disdained; what gives it all its force are not merely the arguments in favor of God and our immortality, but also the importance—quantitative as well as qualitative—of the voices in favor of these two capital notions, that of God and that of our soul; we have in mind here the power and majesty of the Sacred Scriptures and the innumerable army of sages and saints. If these great men are not qualified to speak in the name of man, then there is no such thing as man.

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#### NOTES

[1] This epithet is not a tautology, since Aristotle and even Plato are readily numbered among the rationalists, when in fact they never claimed to draw everything from reason alone.

[2] In order to discredit faith and seduce believers, Kant does not hesitate to appeal to pride or vanity: whoever does not rely on reason alone is a “minor “ who refuses to “grow up “; if men allow themselves to be led by “authorities “ instead of “thinking for themselves, “ it is solely through laziness and cowardice, neither more nor less. A thinker who needs to make use of such means—which on the whole are “demagogic “—must be really short of serious arguments.