

# PSYCHOLOGY

René Guénon  
**(attribution)**

**Introduction, notes and selection of  
illustrations by  
Alessandro Grossato**

## Editor's note

The publication of an unpublished work attributed to René Guénon in 2001, the fiftieth anniversary of the death of the metaphysician from Blois, is undoubtedly a significant event in the field of traditional studies.

Alessandro Grossato, professor at the universities of Trieste and Gorizia, and a great connoisseur of Guénon's work, who procured and edited this treatise, is convinced of its authenticity. And indeed, the arguments he puts forward in support of this thesis in his introduction seem well-founded.

However, the publisher, who bears a responsibility, must be cautious and cannot honestly share this conviction without reservation.

Of course, the publisher wholeheartedly hopes that those close to Guénon – his family in particular

— irrefutable  
authorship of Guénon. In the event that the Publisher has set aside a reserve to compensate any legitimate rights holders.

# Introduction

*A truly "hermetic" "story"...*

As often happens in history, when great charismatic intellectual masters die, they leave behind a trail of followers, imitators and disciples who, if the phenomenon continues with sufficient intensity over time, naturally tend to coalesce into increasingly closed groups, dedicated both to faithfully transmitting the written and oral teachings of the departed master and to 'protecting' them, sometimes obsessively, from the outside world (1). A recent biography of Jacob Boehme (2) has highlighted and documented an important and, in many ways, astonishing German example of this kind of posthumous 'loyalty', dating back to the 17th century but continuing uninterrupted into the 20th century. This is not the only incredible case, nor even the most persistent, of hidden survival — on the margins of

commonly known history — which are culturally significant and which centuries manage to maintain within them a reflection of these rare experiences. intellectual and spiritual, originally linked to extraordinary figures. In reality, the phenomenon of the survival of particular beliefs and doctrines in extremely closed groups, or sometimes even in single family nuclei, is much more widespread and, we might say, even more generalised than one might think, if we consider in particular both the secret survival of persecuted heretical forms such as Manichaeism and Catharism, and the preservation of the faith of the fathers after conversions imposed by political or religious authority or religious authorities, or in any case dictated by various kinds of opportunism, as has been verified throughout history in the case of the major religions, notably Judaism and Islam. And we could multiply the examples almost indefinitely (3). This is certainly one of the most seriously overlooked aspects of a vast and complex history, which is finally being gradually shed light on today by a few rare and meritorious researchers, such as Frances Yates, Antoine Faivre and Giorgio Galli, including in academic circles.

René Guénon was also the subject of this posthumous loyalty to the "master", which, depending on the case, can be positive or negative, despite the fact that during his lifetime he always refused to have disciples in any form whatsoever.

---

1 — This has to do with an aspect of "spiritual posterity," to which Guénon alludes on various occasions, but certainly in the most external sense.

2 — Flavio Cuniberto, *Jakob Böhme*, Morcelliana, Brescia, 2000.

3 — One of the most important is certainly that of the noble families of Northern Europe in the early Middle Ages, whose Christianisation often covered the tenacious and prolonged maintenance of ideas and beliefs dating back to their recent Celtic and Germanic origins, as is evident from both the onomastic etymology and the heraldic symbolism of these lineages — but not only.

or (4). As we know, various groups directly inspired by him, of varying quality no doubt, have sprung up here and there around his presumed "disciples" (5), especially in France, Italy and Romania. For decades, these groups have been transmitting and feeding, both in original and copy form, an underground stream of letters, writings and other documents from Guénon or his collaborators and interlocutors, which flows unknown to most people, through a very dense network of faithful individual transmissions, a veritable kind of "Guénonian *samizdat*".

It is from these various terminals of such a ramified traditional Guénonian chain that the typed text (6) of this precious *Psychology* comes, which we consider without hesitation to be very worthy of publication. It would indeed be a real shame to leave these "philosophical" pages by René Guénon hidden away, as they are always very clear, as we shall see, and often no less intensely illuminating than those of his other works, which have now become famous.

### *A complete course in psychology, written between 1917 and 1918*

Exactly fifty years after his death, almost in response to the irreverent and, to say the least, "burlesque" "assumptions" made some time ago by Umberto Eco about the existence of unpublished works by René Guénon that are as little known as they are important, a truly important unpublished work has finally emerged from the shadows, a real book, and what's more, one entirely devoted to a subject that may be unexpected for Mr. Eco: psychology, no less! This confirms the saying that it is always better not to cry wolf in vain because, as the semiologist Eco should know, *nomina sunt omina*.

That the work in question is truly by René Guénon is proven not only by the faithful chain of transmission of the typewritten text, which we have scrupulously verified from two different sources (7), but above all by its content, and even by certain expressions that recur in this author's work, such as the expression "a metaphysical impossibility" in chapter XXIX, devoted to *Freedom*. The typed text of 127 pages is, all in all, sufficiently correct and clean, precisely because of the presence of a few trivial spelling mistakes and some obvious transcription uncertainties - often going so far as to interrupt the text by the points of suspension — apparently due to

The copyist's misunderstanding of certain phrases or words gives the impression to be the result of careful work, accomplished by someone unknown, copying from a manuscript that was most likely the original written by Guénon. It

---

4 — Obviously for fear of what has unfortunately happened on occasion, thus eliminating at the root any possible ambiguity on this subject.

5 — Which, as we have said, simply never existed. Tradition is something too ancient, too great and too serious to be dependent on the ambitions, approximations, hypotheses and improvisations of individuals or groups who flatter themselves that they can pose, or even solve problems that are beyond them.

6 — A copy is with the Publisher.

7 — A chain that probably also concerned the original manuscript that was supposed to be in Roger Maridort's possession.

These are by no means random notes taken during lessons by some student (8) and subsequently arranged as best they could by that student – something they certainly could not have accomplished at this level – nor are they simple notes and outlines written by Guénon for the purpose of oral development during lessons.

As we shall see, there is important and decisive evidence that René Guénon did not like to improvise when teaching, but was in the habit of reading long texts that had been carefully written and edited. The fact that the original context was in any case academic is revealed by a slight excess of repetition, which symptomatically reflects a certain discursive form of the text. However, the structure of the work is clearly that of a book proper, organised coherently and almost complete, with an epigraph (9) and a developed and perfectly organised table of contents, even if some chapters, for example, appear much less defined and complete than others, betraying quite obviously their derivation from simple, undeveloped plans.

If our initial hypothesis is correct, i.e. that our typed text is a direct copy of the original manuscript, the fact that the thirty-first and final chapter, which was to be devoted to *Instinct*, is explicitly indicated as "missing" shows either that it was never actually written or that it was already lost at the time of the first transmission of the text to the chain mentioned above. Guénon devotes other passages of his text to instinct (pp. 46, 107, 110, 126), so that it is possible to conceive, in part, what he essentially wanted to say about it:

Finally, instinct is not a faculty essentially distinct from intelligence [...] and we must refrain from opposing it to the latter. On the contrary, we must consider it as a special case, a species of intelligence. (p. 46).

We can assume that living beings have a tendency to use their sensations, more or less subconsciously, as signs of what to seek or avoid, and these signs are, as signs, creations of intelligence, which in this respect obeys what Spinoza calls the tendency to persevere in being and to increase it. Thus, at the origin of physical emotions there would be a

---

8 — This is the hypothesis, undoubtedly erroneous, suggested to us by one of our sources, from which we obtained one of the two identical photocopies of the typed text. However, as we shall see later, it could be a genuine *dictation*.

9 — In the typed copy, it reads: "Know thyself", and here it is rendered in its more correct form. This is the famous phrase written in Greek on the pediment of the Temple of Apollo at Delphi, a phrase to which Guénon refers in many of his writings and to which he devotes an entire article (René Guénon, "Know thyself" in *Mélanges*, Gallimard, Paris, 1976, pp. 48-57), in which, among other things, he writes: "it is older than the history of philosophy, and it also transcends the domain of philosophy. It is said that these words were inscribed above the door of Apollo at Delphi. They were then adopted by Socrates, as they were by other philosophers, as one of the principles of their teaching, despite the differences that may have existed between these various teachings and the goals pursued by their authors." (*Ibidem*, p. 49). By adopting it as the epigraph to his *Psychology*, Guénon therefore means to signify that, while developing his discourse within deliberately established "didactic" limits, the point of view from which he situates himself here always remains superior to the purely philosophical point of view.

intellectual element, at least subconscious, the product of which, moreover, has become fixed and recorded in the organism through habit and heredity, so as to become something analogous to a kind of instinct.

Thus, in order to explain these so-called physical emotions, it is necessary, as with purely psychological emotions, to take into account both the organism and the intellect: these two kinds of emotions are therefore not essentially different. (p. 107).

As for altruistic feelings themselves, what makes them possible is imitation: we willingly and, in a way, naturally put ourselves in the place of our fellow human beings. The result is a kind of contagion of feelings, which is precisely what sympathy is, in the etymological sense of the word. Sympathy can thus be explained as originating in the association of ideas and feelings, and it can then be reinforced by reflection, which allows us to find reasons to justify what was initially only an almost instinctive tendency.

We would add that there are as many kinds of altruistic inclinations as there are possible specifications of this tendency or this kind of instinct that we have just mentioned. Altruistic inclinations include, in particular, love proper and friendship, as well as the moral sentiments that we will discuss later. (p. 109).

The chapter on instinct should have been the last in a series of four concluding chapters, comprising successive examinations of the psychological concepts of will (ch. XXVIII), *freedom* (ch. XXIX), *habit* (ch. XXX) and, precisely, *instinct* (ch. XXXI, missing), as is also evident from this statement by the author:

One could say that habit, which is a true acquired inclination, starts from the will and ends in instinct, through an indefinite series of intermediate degrees. (p. 126).

And so, curiously, the last important chapter of this *Psychology* ends up being the one devoted to *Freedom*, as will be the case in the very last chapter of *The Multiple States of Being*. Is this a mere coincidence? Even though references to the metaphysical point of view appear more than twenty times throughout the book, it is striking that in this chapter of *Psychology*, René Guénon uses it much more diffusely than in the rest of the text, as if he wanted to give a glimpse of a deeper and more traditional perspective. Let us say that, at least at the end of this short work, this "mark" of transcendence, impossible to ignore, which Guénon wanted to imprint as best he could in all his texts, even secondary ones, could not be missing. It seems to us

highly probable that the failure to write the last chapter is the most obvious sign, and almost the "seal", of the fact that Guénon at some point decided not to publish this book, keeping it both for his own rereading and as a useful *pro memoria*, to be consulted when writing other later texts dealing, more or less directly, with psychological subjects.

When could Guénon have written this work? Since he explicitly wanted to deal with psychology from a non-metaphysical but almost exclusively philosophical point of view (10), even if he introduces corrections and additions (which we will highlight), and since the form of the exposition is clearly didactic and discursive, as we have already pointed out, it is obvious that the text must have been written at the time when Guénon was giving one of his many philosophy courses in the first part of his life. It should be remembered that it was precisely in the first two decades of the 20th century that "classical psychology" collapsed at an ever-increasing rate: on the one hand, it was transformed into the new science of psychoanalysis, and on the other hand, this new science of psychoanalysis, as a science, had an ever-deeper influence on all Western philosophical thought. These are two fundamental stages in the anti-traditional movement. Let us pause for a moment to consider the significant sequence of these crucial dates, which mark the definitive maturation of both Freudian and Jungian psychoanalytic theory:

1900: first edition of Freud's *Traumdeutung*; 1906:

international recognition of psychoanalysis;

1909: Jungian psychotherapeutic method of "active imagination"  
(see *below*);

1912: complete transformation of psychoanalysis into a genuine cultural movement of broader scope, destined to influence not only the arts and sciences, but also contemporary public opinion as a whole;

1913: formal and definitive break between Freud and Jung; 1916: Jungian theory of the collective unconscious;

1917-1919: Jungian theory of the dominant forces or archetypes of the collective unconscious.

Guénon, a contemporary of these events, was certainly deeply struck by them. So much so that he felt compelled to use his philosophy classes as a pretext to write a timely clarification on the subject, in which he did not yet explicitly mention Freud or Jung, so as not to give them excessive importance, as he would necessarily do in the following decades when he wrote, much later:

Moving from philosophy to psychology, we

---

10 — Between the ancients and the moderns, there are some thirty philosophers and psychologists whose ideas and theories are cited in the text. However, as we shall see, the structure and form given to the treatment of the subject matter, while remaining within the limits clearly established at the outset by the author, are entirely personal to Guénon.

we note that the same tendencies appear in the most recent schools in an even more dangerous form, because instead of being expressed only in simple theoretical views, they find practical application of a highly disturbing nature; the most "representative" of these new methods, from our point of view, are those known under the general designation of "psychoanalysis ." (René Guénon, *The Reign of Quantity and the Signs of the Times*, Gallimard, Paris, 1970, p. 303).

We have already discussed elsewhere (11) the role of psychoanalysis in the work of subversion which, following the materialistic "solidification" of the world, constitutes the second phase of the anti-traditional action characteristic of the entire modern era. We must return to this subject, for we have noticed that the psychoanalytic offensive has been going further and further, in the sense that, by attacking tradition directly under the pretext of explaining it, it now tends to distort the very notion of tradition in the most dangerous way. In this regard, it is necessary to distinguish between the unevenly "advanced" varieties of psychoanalysis: psychoanalysis, as it was first conceived by Freud, was still limited to a certain extent by the materialist attitude he always intended to maintain; of course, it nevertheless already had a distinctly "satanic", but at least this prevented it from claiming to address certain areas, or, even if it did claim to do so, it only achieved rather crude counterfeits, hence the confusion that was still relatively easy to dispel. Thus, when Freud spoke of "symbolism", what he abusively referred to as such was in reality merely a product of the human imagination, varying from one individual to another, and having nothing in common with authentic traditional symbolism. This was only a first step, and it was left to other psychoanalysts to modify their "master's" theories in the direction of a false spirituality, so that they could, through a much more subtle confusion, apply them to an interpretation of traditional symbolism itself. This was especially the case with C. G. Jung, whose first attempts in this field date back quite some time; it is worth noting, because it is very significant, that for this interpretation he started from a comparison he believed he could establish between certain symbols and drawings made by patients; and it must be acknowledged that these drawings do indeed sometimes bear a kind of "parodic" resemblance to the real symbols, which is rather

---

11 — See *The Reign of Quantity and the Signs of the Times*, ch. XXXIV, "The Misdeeds of Psychoanalysis".



disturbing as to the nature of what inspires them. What made matters much worse was that Jung, in order to explain what purely individual factors did not seem to account for, found himself led to formulate the hypothesis of a so-called "collective unconscious", existing in some way in or beneath the psyche of all human individuals, to which he believed he could attribute both the origin of the symbols themselves and that of their pathological caricatures. It goes without saying that the term "unconscious" is completely inappropriate, and that what it serves to designate, insofar as it may have any reality, belongs to what psychologists more commonly refer to as the "subconscious", that is, the lower extensions of consciousness. We have already pointed out elsewhere the confusion that is constantly made between the "subconscious" and the "superconscious": the latter, by its very nature, completely escapes the domain of psychological investigation, and when psychologists happen to become aware of some of its manifestations, they never fail to attribute them to the "subconscious". It is precisely this confusion that we find here again: that the productions of patients observed by psychiatrists come from the 'subconscious' is something that is certainly not in doubt; but, on the other hand, everything that is traditional, and in particular symbolism, can only be related to the "superconscious", that is to say, to that through which communication with the supra-human is established, whereas the "subconscious" tends, on the contrary, towards the subhuman. (René Guénon, "Tradition and the 'Unconscious'", in *Études Traditionnelles*, July-August 1949, reprinted in *Symboles fondamentaux de la Science sacrée*, Gallimard, Paris, 1962, (chapter V), pp. 63-64).

And again concerning the "superconscious":

On the other hand, since the field of psychology has not expanded upwards, the "superconscious" naturally remains as completely foreign and closed to it as ever; and when it happens to encounter something related to it, it claims to annex it purely and simply in assimilating it to the "subconscious"; this is particularly evident in the almost constant nature of his supposed explanations concerning things such as religion and mysticism, as well as certain aspects of Eastern doctrines such as yoga (René Guénon, *Le Règne de la quantité et les signes des temps*, Gallimard, Paris, 1970, p. 305).

However, Guénon already makes a splendid demolition in this *Psychology* of the most dangerous notion introduced, promoted and almost imposed by psychoanalysis,

namely that of *the unconscious* (see *below*).

All these considerations, and various others concerning the form, which we have discussed, and the content (12) lead us to believe that we can therefore further and more precisely narrow our focus to the period when Guénon taught, first in Sétif, Algeria, from September 1917 to October 1918, and then in Blois, France, also for only one year (13). In Blois, Guénon had only five students, with whom he sat around a round table. And it is precisely one of these students who gave a valuable account of how these lessons unfolded, which Guénon never simply presented orally, but always read from a text that had been specifically prepared, such as our own:

"According to the direct testimony of one of the four survivors of this singular class, Guénon, not being a teacher, dictated for hours on end a course that he himself had written... So when the students were tired of writing, they tried to get their teacher to talk about his oriental obsessions (!). This classic trick was usually successful (14)."

It should be noted that a few years later (1921), with the publication of *Introduction générale à l'étude des doctrines hindoues* (General Introduction to the Study of Hindu Doctrines), a decisive turning point occurred in many respects in Guénon's life and work. René Guénon's language changed definitively in a purely traditional direction, both in his books and in his articles, becoming absolutely explicit in form as well as content, without conceding anything to anyone. This is certainly another decisive reason for the failed publication of *Psychology*. It would have been necessary to rewrite it from top to bottom, adopting a purely metaphysical point of view and inserting more authentic elements, drawn mainly from Eastern doctrines. And this is, in essence, what Guénon did in part, notably in *Man and His Becoming According to the Vedanta*, and in other writings, which we will recall as we go along. Only one early research project devoted to a mathematical science, that of infinitesimal calculus, will be taken up again on a

---

12 — For example, the fact that of the thirty-one philosophers and psychologists mentioned by Guénon, all but two (who died in 1937 and 1941 respectively) had died in the second decade of the 20th century.

13 — Paul Chacornac writes (*La Vie simple de René Guénon*, Chacornac, Paris, 1958, pp. 56-57): "...on 27 September 1917, Guénon was appointed professor of philosophy in Algeria, in Sétif (... ) In October 1918, he returned to France and, with his wife and aunt, moved to Blois to live in the residence of the Me du Foix. Some time later, he was appointed professor of philosophy at the Augustin-Thierry College in that city."

14 — J. Mornet, "René Guénon à Blois," in *Bulletin de l'Association des Anciens Élèves du lycée de Blois*, 1954, p. 5. Quoted by P. Chacornac, *La Vie simple de René Guénon*, Chacornac, Paris, 1958, p. 58. Furthermore, we have the direct testimony of Guénon himself. First, in his correspondence with Noëlle Maurice-Denis Boulet, Guénon informs him in detail about the conditions of his teaching activity in Sétif: "I don't know if Germain has told you what classes I have to teach here: in addition to philosophy, I teach French in the first year and Latin in the first and second years, which I don't enjoy at all, I can assure you [...] I have very few students in philosophy: only three [...] Unfortunately, there are many more students in Year 11 and Year 12, and marking their assignments takes up a lot of my time, so that, until now, I have not been able to do any work for myself. *I don't even know what I would do if I didn't have my lessons all prepared in advance.*" Letter — unpublished — dated 3 January 1918. Then, in a letter dated 16 February 1919, he indirectly confirms that even in Blois he remains faithful to his teaching method: "Once again, I have been forced to interrupt my letter... to write summaries of ancient history for sixth form pupils!" (Editor's note, emphasis added).

completely metaphysical foundations (René Guénon, *Principes du Calcul infinitésimal*, Gallimard, Paris, 1973), in order to provide, at least in this case, an adequate example of the restoration of a traditional science that had become exclusively secular. This was something that psychology as such, obviously, due to its excessive limitations, did not deserve in his view.

### *Traditional sacred sciences and secular sciences*

Before considering the more strictly intellectual values of these pages, it is first necessary to recall a few fundamental distinctions that Guénon himself emphasised on more than one occasion between *traditional sacred sciences* and simple *secular sciences*, the latter often constituting the materialistic residue of the former:

...all the discussions that have arisen concerning the nature and value of infinitesimal calculus offer a striking example of this absence of principles that characterises secular sciences, that is to say, the only sciences that modern people know and even conceive of as possible. We have often pointed out that most of these sciences, even to the extent that they still correspond to some reality, represent nothing more than mere denatured residues of some of the ancient traditional sciences: it is the lowest part of these which, having ceased to be related to principles and thereby lost its true original meaning, has ended up developing independently and being regarded as knowledge sufficient in itself, although, in truth, its intrinsic value as knowledge is thereby reduced to almost nothing. (René Guénon, *Principes du Calcul infinitésimal*, Gallimard, Paris, 1973, Foreword, p. 7).

There are therefore two radically different and even incompatible conceptions of science, which we can call the traditional conception and the modern conception. We have often had occasion to refer to these

"traditional sciences" that existed in antiquity and the Middle Ages, which still exist in the East, but whose very idea is totally foreign to Westerners today. (René Guénon, *The Crisis of the Modern World*, Gallimard, Paris, Chapter IV

"Sacred Science and Profane Science," p. 70).

By seeking to radically separate the sciences from any higher principle on the pretext of ensuring their independence, the modern conception deprives them of any profound meaning and even of any

real interest from the point of view of knowledge, and can only lead to a dead end, since it confines them to an irremediably limited domain. (René Guénon, *The Crisis of the Modern World*, *op. cit.*, pp. 74-75).

Next, it is interesting from our perspective to note what Guénon writes after briefly reviewing a few examples of traditional sciences that have degenerated in the modern age, such as physics:

A few examples will be useful in order to better understand what is at stake; and, first of all, we will take an example of very broad scope, that of "physics" as understood by the ancients and by moderns; moreover, in this case, there is no need to leave the Western world to see the profound difference that separates the two conceptions. (René Guénon, *The Crisis of the Modern World*, *op. cit.*, pp. 71-72).

And further on, after discussing astrology and alchemy (*ibid.* pp. 79-81), he says that other examples could be given, citing – what a coincidence! – psychology, while making all the necessary distinctions:

We will limit ourselves to these few examples; however, it would be easy to give others, taken from somewhat different fields, and showing the same degeneration everywhere. We could thus show that psychology as we understand it today, that is, the study of mental phenomena as such, is a natural product of Anglo-Saxon empiricism and the spirit of the 18th century, and that the point of view to which it corresponds was so insignificant to the ancients that, even if they sometimes considered it incidentally, they would never have thought of making it a special science; whatever might be valid in it was, for them, transformed and assimilated into higher points of view. In a completely different field, it could also be shown that modern mathematics represents, so to speak, only the shell of Pythagorean mathematics [...] (René Guénon, *The Crisis of the Modern World*, *op. cit.*, pp. 81-82).

This important passage constitutes further indirect proof that Guénon had in mind the urgency and possibility of making the necessary corrections in the specific field of psychology as well. And that, at least for himself and some of his students, he had probably already made such a fundamental correction. Moreover, the reference to mathematics that immediately follows reminds us of another study similarly devoted to the rectification of a modern science,

that on infinitesimal calculus. Today we can say that, in many respects, these are two twin works.

### *Psychic and psychological*

The first fundamental distinction to be made is between *psychological* and *psychological*:

[Not only] does psychologism imply a very limited conception of the human individual and his or her possibilities, since 'classical' psychology limited itself to considering only a few of the more external and superficial manifestations of the 'mental' element. That is why, let us note in passing, we wish to distinguish between the two terms 'psychic' and 'psychological', retaining the former in its etymological meaning, which is incomparably broader, given that it can be applied to all the 'subtle' elements of individuality, whereas only a very small part of them fall within the domain known as 'psychological'. (Guénon, "Sulla perversione 'psicanalitica'", in *Preci-sazioni necessarie. I saggi di "Diorama — Regime Fascista"*, Il Cavallo alato, Padova, 1988, p. 132) (15).

What is properly 'psychic', in fact, is the subtle state; and, in making this assimilation, we take the word 'psychic' in its primitive sense, the one it had for the ancients, without worrying about the various much more specialised meanings that have been given to it later, and with which it could no longer even be applied to the subtle state as a whole. As for modern Western psychology, it concerns only a very restricted part of human individuality that where the

"The mental realm is directly related to the physical realm, and given the methods it employs, it is incapable of going any further; in any case, the very object it sets itself, which is exclusively the study of mental phenomena, strictly limits it to the realm of individuality (René Guénon, *Man and His Becoming According to the Vedanta*, Paris, 1947, p. 108).

We retain the words "psychism" and "psychic phenomena" because they are the most commonly used, and also because we have no better ones at our disposal; but they are not without their critics: thus, strictly speaking, "psychic" and "psychological"

---

15 — The text of this article exists only in Italian.

should be perfectly synonymous, and yet this is not how they are understood. So-called "psychic" phenomena are entirely outside the realm of classical psychology, and even if we assume that they may have some connection with it, this connection is in any case extremely tenuous; Moreover, in our opinion, experimenters are deluding themselves when they believe they can indiscriminately classify all these facts under what is commonly referred to as "psychophysiology". (René Guénon, *L'Erreur spirite*, Éditions Traditionnelles, Paris, 1952, p. 79).

In other words, psychology should only concern itself with what we might call "phenomenal consciousness", that is, consciousness considered exclusively in relation to phenomena, without questioning whether or not it is the expression of something else, which, by definition, no longer falls within the realm of psychology.

— It follows from this

that psychology, whatever some may claim, has exactly the same relative nature as any other specialised and contingent science, and that it has no more to do with metaphysics; moreover, we must not forget that it is only a very modern and "secular" science, with no connection to any traditional knowledge whatsoever. (René Guénon, *Les États multiples de l'Être*, Véga, Paris, 1973, p. 47 and note 2).

Modern psychology as such, dating back at most to the 16th and 17th centuries, according to Guénon, must therefore be considered as an almost exclusive fruit of Anglo-Saxon empiricism, and more particularly of Locke's work, even if some people have mistakenly sought to find antecedents in certain aspects of Buddhist doctrine, where:

There are even sometimes speculations which, if considered only superficially, may suggest psychology, but obviously this is not properly psychology, which is entirely Western and, even in the West, very recent, since it really only dates back to Locke; one should not attribute to Buddhists a mentality that proceeds specifically from modern Anglo-Saxon empiricism. (René Guénon, *Introduction générale à l'étude des doctrines hindoues* [General Introduction to the Study of Hindu Doctrines], Villain et Belhomme — Éditions Traditionnelles, Paris, 1983, chapter IV "À propos du Bouddhisme," p. 173).

This is precisely what Guénon asserted, further proof of authenticity, in his *Psychology*, using almost the same words:

The term psychology was first used in the 16th century, and even experimental psychology is of even more recent origin: its establishment as a distinct science dates only from the end of the 17th century and [goes back] to John Locke. It should not be concluded from this that the questions dealt with by this psychology were entirely unknown to the ancients, but only that they did not particularly interest them, so that they considered them only incidentally and without feeling the need to bring them together into a body of clearly defined doctrines. (*Infra*, pp. 23-24).

Guénon further states explicitly (*ibid.*) that what he will be dealing with here is strictly speaking only *positive* or *experimental psychology*:

When we speak of psychology, we may be referring to two very different things, which it is essential to distinguish clearly: on the one hand, metaphysical psychology, that is, the knowledge of the soul considered in itself in its true nature, and, on the other hand, psychology proper, positive or experimental, which is only the study of mental phenomena and which, as a result, must be regarded as a science of facts in the same way as the physical and physiological sciences. We are concerned only with the latter.

*The non-existence of the unconscious, the reality of the 'superconscious' and the 'subconscious'*

We feel it is important to highlight the development given here to the critique of this notion of the unconscious, which is the basis of all psychoanalysis (ch. III). Indeed, this concept is destroyed at its root, especially by the exemplary demonstration, which only Guénon could make, that all psychological phenomena as such are always, through their indissoluble link with consciousness, absolutely conscious. Guénon later wrote a sentence that certainly explains, in part, why he felt at a certain point the need to devote one of his many philosophy courses specifically to psychology, consciously experiencing this authentic historical turning point that saw what remained of philosophical thought drawing ever more enthusiastically on the supposed discoveries of so-called "depth psychology", to the point of almost flattening itself on some of its basic notions:

In this regard, perhaps even more than in any other, we cannot be too wary of any appeal to the "subconscious", to "instinct", to infra-rational "intuition", or even to a "vital force" more or less poorly defined, in a word, all those vague and obscure things that new philosophy and psychology tend to exalt, and which lead more or less directly

to contact with the lower states. (René Guénon, *The Reign of Quantity and the Signs of the Times*, Gallimard, Paris, 1970, p. 319).

He then goes on to write about the relationship between consciousness and the "subconscious":

The organic consciousness just mentioned naturally falls with into this that psychologists call the "subconscious"; but their great mistake is to believe that they have sufficiently explained what they have in fact merely given a name to, under which they classify the most disparate elements, without even being able to distinguish between what is truly conscious to some degree and what only appears to be so, nor between the true "subconscious" and the "superconscious", that is, between what proceeds from states that are respectively lower and higher than the human state. (René Guénon, *Man and His Becoming According to the Vedanta*, Paris, 1947, p. 134, n. 2).

It is generally accepted, it is true, that clear and distinct consciousness is not the whole of consciousness, that it is only a more or less considerable portion of it, and that what it leaves outside itself may far exceed it in extent and complexity; but, while psychologists readily acknowledge the existence of a 'subconscious', even sometimes abusing it as a convenient means of explanation, indiscriminately including in it everything they do not know how to classify among the phenomena they study, they have always forgotten to consider, correlatively, a 'superconsciousness' (René Guénon, *Les États multiples de l'Être*, VEGA Paris, p. 49).

To clarify further the reality and incredible, indefinite extension of the "subconscious":

It is nonetheless true that the "subconscious" corresponds to a reality; however, it contains everything, and psychologists, within the limits of the means at their disposal, would find it very difficult to bring any order to it. First, there is what we might call 'latent memory': nothing is ever completely forgotten, as proven by the fairly frequent cases of abnormal 're-experiencing'; (...) There are also all the "predictions" and "premonitions" that sometimes, even normally, become quite clearly conscious in certain people; (...) each of us can be connected, through this obscure part of ourselves, with beings and things



of which they have never been aware in the usual sense of the word, and there are countless ramifications that are impossible to define.

However, he immediately adds that, as with everything concerning the "superconscious":

Here, we are far removed from the concepts of classical psychology (René Guénon, *L'Erreur spirite*, Éditions Traditionnelles, Paris, 1952, pp. 104-105).

Finally, as for the so-called "collective unconscious", Guénon admitted the existence of something similar, which he preferred to call, more correctly, "collective memory":

Another important point should be made: among the many diverse things that the "collective unconscious" is supposed to explain, "folklore" must naturally be included, and this is one of the cases where the theory may appear to have some semblance of truth. (René Guénon, *Symboles fondamentaux de la Science sacrée*, Gallimard, Paris, 1962, p. 65).

### *The "art of memory" and creative imagination*

Of great interest are chapters XIII and XIV, devoted respectively to *The Association of Ideas and Images*, and *Memory*. Their content shows how well acquainted Guénon was with the Hermetic tradition relating to what was known as the 'art of memory' (16), particularly developed in the Middle Ages by the traditional author of great intellect Raymond Lulle and his followers, and the subject of well-known studies by Frances Yates of the Warburg Institute (*Giordano Bruno e la tradizione ermetica*, Laterza, Bari, 1969 and *L'arte della memoria*, Einaudi, Turin, 1972), and Joan Couliano (*Eros e magia nel Rinascimento. La congiunzione astrologica del 1484*, Il Saggiatore, Milan, 1987). Together with chapters XV and XVI on *The Reproductive Imagination* and *The Combinatory Imagination*, they constitute in a certain sense the "heart" and the most "original" part of this *Psychology*. Greater light on this complex and very important subject could be shed by an in-depth study of the extremely ambiguous works of

---

16 — Curiously, one of the Guénonian circles that currently jealously guards a typed copy of the *Psychology*, is convinced that it should not be disclosed because it contains a kind of mysterious "key" that could be used for unspecified "magico-political" purposes in "the art of memory" mentioned above. Apart from the obvious naivety of such a belief, let us remember that this text was prepared and read by Guénon in a purely academic setting; this is indicative of the degenerative processes that afflict most "Guénonian" groups and factions, both old and new. Moreover, the group in question includes members who were once actively involved in the practice of ceremonial magic.

Giordano Bruno, especially with regard to their iconographic aspect. Bruno drew dozens and dozens of diagrams relating to both the 'art of memory' and the 'art of combination', two of which, as few people have probably noticed, adorn the covers of many of René Guénon's books, published noticed this—adorn the covers of several books by René Guénon, published by Gallimard (17). What is extraordinary is the very close resemblance between the graphic patterns of these Brunian diagrams and those of Hindu *yantras* (18), not to mention the techniques relating to their operative use, where we see that this resemblance, far from being purely formal, is pushed to a truly unsuspected, almost unbelievable degree. In reality, this vast subject of *the rotae combinatoriae* should be revisited with great attention in both the Western and Eastern worlds, going far beyond the superficial and simplistic comparisons that have been made thus far. And it is, we repeat, precisely Giordano Bruno who can provide, for such research, not only abundant but also extremely explicit material, provided one has the patience to read his numerous writings, which are of considerable complexity (19).

We said that the other decidedly surprising argument in Guénon's text is undoubtedly that in chapters XV and XVI, devoted to the use of *the formative* and *combinatory imagination*, a notion that was already present *in nuce* in Aristotle and would find particular development, especially in the field of magic, during the Renaissance:

The notion of imagination, a magical intermediary between thought and being, the embodiment of thought in image and the position of image in being, is a concept of the utmost importance that plays a leading role in Renaissance philosophy and is found in Romanticism. (Koyré, *Mystiques, Spirituels, Alchimistes du XVI<sup>e</sup> siècle allemande*, Gallimard, Paris, 1955, p. 60, n. 2, quoted in Corbin, *L'Imagination créatrice dans le Soufisme d'Ibn'Arabî*, Flammarion, Paris, 1976, p. 139).

So much so that many of the 'technical' elements of what Guénon explains here very discreetly, some of which are truly unique and significant, can easily be found by reading Joan Couliano's masterpiece (*Eros e magia nel Rinascimento. La congiunzione astrologica del 1484, op. cit.*), devoted to magic in the Renaissance. This notion would ultimately be taken up again with some success, this time under the name of active imagination by the "psychologist of

---

17 — These are respectively *Principes du calcul infinitésimal* (1973) and *L'Ésotérisme de Dante* (1981). These images were probably suggested to the publisher by Jean Reyor.

18 — However, identical patterns can also be found in the works of Jewish *Kabbalah* and Islamic *Tasawwuf* Islamic Tasawwuf.

19 — And, if you like, of a perilous nature, without a doubt. But no more so than many other Western and especially Eastern works, which for years now have been circulating even in railway station kiosks.

depths" Carl Gustav Jung, than *the creative imagination* of the Heideggerian and Islamising philosopher Henry Corbin, who used it mainly to explain certain doctrinal aspects of Islamic *Tasawwuf* (see in particular Corbin, *L'Imagination créatrice dans le Soufisme d'Ibrî'Arabî*, *op. cit.*), but not only that. Admittedly, if we were to take a closer look at what Carl Gustav Jung's active imagination technique actually consisted of, we would be in for some big surprises. And Jung himself made no secret of this at the time. Because of its extraordinary importance, it is worth quoting in full what the psychologist and historian of science Richard Noll summarises in this regard (*Il profeta ariano. Origini di un movimento carismatico*, Mondadori, Milan, 1999, pp. 190-191), quoting Jung himself:

Once, while I was writing, I said to myself, 'What am I doing? This is certainly not science, so what is it?' And a voice said to me, 'It is art.' The voice turned out to be that of a woman Jung knew (20). The psychiatrist then wondered whether his unconscious was giving shape to an alternative personality, as happens in cases of multiple personality disorder. He decided to interact with this voice, responding with his own voice that what he was doing was not art. In order to further engage the voice, he resorted to a technique used by mediums: "Well," I thought, "it doesn't have the same vocal centres that I have, so I told it to use mine, which it did, coming out with a long speech. This is the origin of the technique I developed to deal directly with unconscious content." Jung admits here, in short, that his psychotherapeutic method of active imagination is based on spiritualist techniques. (...) For a time, however, he resorted, for psychotherapeutic purposes, to the technique of speaking first aloud, normally, then in falsetto, and then he moved on to conducting the dialogue in the form of automatic writing. In November 1913, he felt as if, in his own words, he "was in analysis with a spectre and a woman".

It seems to us that we can do without any comment (21).

---

20 — Sabina Spielrein (1885–1941), formerly his patient for psychotic hysteria, and later his lover.

21 — In truth, Jung's "confession" fully answers the question posed by René Guénon: "There is, moreover, a very obscure point concerning the very origin of this transmission: since it is obviously impossible to give to others what one does not possess oneself, and since the invention of psychoanalysis is, moreover, a very recent thing, where did the first psychoanalysts get the 'powers' that they communicate to their disciples, and from whom could they themselves have obtained them?" psychoanalysis is, moreover, a very recent development, where did the first psychoanalysts get the 'powers' they communicated to their disciples, and by whom could they themselves have been 'psychoanalysed' in the first place? This question, which is only logical to ask, at least for anyone capable of a little reflection, is probably very indiscreet, and it is more than doubtful that a satisfactory answer will ever be given; but, in truth, there is no need for one in order to recognise, in such a psychic transmission, another truly sinister "mark" due to the connections to which it gives rise: psychoanalysis.

Much richer and more sophisticated, however, is Corbin's notion of *creative imagination*, as he succinctly summarises it:

On the one hand, we retain the notion of *imagination* as the *magical* production of an *image*, the very type of magical action, indeed of all action as such, but par excellence of all creative action; and on the other hand, the notion of the image as a body (a *magical* body, a *mental* body) in which the thought and will of the soul are embodied. Imagination as a magical creative power which, giving birth to the sensible world, produces the Spirit in forms and colours; the world as *Magia divina* "imagined" by the "magical" divinity, this is the ancient doctrine, typified in the juxtaposition of the words *Imago-Magia*, which Novalis rediscovered through Fichte. But here an initial warning is in order: this *Imaginatio* must not be confused with fantasy. As Paracelsus already observed, unlike *Imaginatio vera*, fantasy (*Phantasy*) is a game of the mind, without foundation in nature, it is only "the cornerstone of madmen". (Corbin, *Creative Imagination in the Sufism of Ibn Arabi*, *op. cit.*, p. 139).

In truth, this theme of the art of memory in connection with that of creative imagination is of the utmost importance, and we promise to return to it soon. We believe, moreover, that even the few images chosen here to support René Guénon's text on *psychology* can stimulate reflection on an aspect of the Hermetic tradition that has been largely ignored until now and which holds more than one surprise.

Alessandro GROSSATO

presents, in this respect, a rather terrifying resemblance to certain "sacraments of the devil!" (René Guénon, *The Reign of Quantity and the Signs of the Times*, Gallimard, Paris, 1970, pp. 312–313).

## Warning

The presence of the symbol [...] always indicates the probable absence of words, sentences or paragraphs from the presumed original manuscript; similarly, sentences and words enclosed in square brackets [ ] are always additions made by A. Grossato, based on contextual evidence or other necessities.

All footnotes are by A. Grossato (22). The typewritten copy contains no notes, either by the author or by others.

The few illustrations accompanying some of the passages in the text, and the related captions, were chosen and added by A. Grossato.

---

22 — Where he deemed it appropriate to facilitate the reader's understanding of the text or to supplement its content, and useful to identify certain minor philosophers.

**"Know thyself"**

## Chapter I

# The subject of psychology

### — *Distinction between psychological phenomena and physical and physiological phenomena*

When we talk about psychology, we may be referring to two very different things, which it is essential to distinguish clearly from the outset: on the one hand, metaphysical psychology, that is, the knowledge of the soul considered in itself in its true nature, and on the other hand, psychology proper, positive or experimental, which is only the study of mental phenomena and which, as a result, must be regarded as a science of facts in the same way as the physical and physiological sciences. We are concerned only with the latter.

The term psychology was first used in the 16th century, and even experimental psychology is of more recent origin: its establishment as a distinct science dates only from the end of the 17th century and [goes back] to John Locke (23). This should not lead us to conclude that the questions dealt with by psychology were entirely unknown to the ancients, but only that they did not particularly interest them, so that they considered them only incidentally and without feeling the need to bring them together into a body of clearly defined doctrines.

The first question that arises in psychology is this: "Are there original psychological phenomena or, in other words, are the phenomena that are the subject of psychology truly distinct from those studied by other sciences?" If this were not the case, psychology, instead of being an independent science, would have to be reduced to being only a part or branch of some other science, such as physiology, and indeed, Auguste Comte (24) wanted to make it part of physiology and part of sociology. It is therefore necessary, in order to understand what psychology should be, or rather to know whether there should really be a psychology, to resolve this preliminary question first and foremost.

I — We will first admit that phenomena that are not psychological exist as they appear upon immediate observation, and we will show that if they exist in this way, there are other very different phenomena opposite them that are psychological phenomena.

The question is usually posed as follows: "Are there psychological phenomena distinct from physiological phenomena?", because it has been hypothesised that psychological phenomena are merely a duplicate, or epiphenomenon, of physiological phenomena; but the question must be broadened, and it is worth

---

23 — John Locke (Wrington, Somerset, 1632 — Oates, Essex, 1704), English philosopher. Through his *Letter Concerning Toleration* (1689) and his *Treatise of Civil Government* (1690), he emerged as the champion of liberalism.

24 — Auguste Comte (Montpellier 1798 — Paris 1857), French philosopher and sociologist. Founder of positivism. With regard to psychology (see in particular his *Essay on Human Understanding*), he rejected the psychology of his time (i.e. introspection).

He sought to answer the question: "Can psychological phenomena be reduced to physical phenomena?" Physiological phenomena are physical phenomena, at least from an observational point of view, and if we accept that psychological phenomena differ from physical phenomena in the ordinary sense of the word, i.e. that what happens in living beings cannot be reduced to a series of simple physical or chemical reactions, we implicitly admit the presence of psychological elements without which such a difference would be inexplicable, and consequently we admit that psychology must have an independent existence.

Let us examine the main characteristics that distinguish physical phenomena from psychological phenomena.

Physical phenomena occur in space and time; they are either juxtaposed and formed of parts juxtaposed in space, or they are related, at least indirectly, to extension. This gives rise to other characteristics: developing in space, physical phenomena are localisable; developing in both space and time, they are measurable by means of movement.

On the contrary, psychological phenomena have no extent; the sensation of sight itself, as a sensation, cannot be said to have any extent; one cannot say that a series of sensations forms a length: even though psychological phenomena resemble physical phenomena, they differ from them in an essential way. Physiological phenomena consist solely of movements of the organs, whereas there is nothing analogous for psychological phenomena. As a result, physiological phenomena can, like other physical phenomena, be localised, that is, situated in space, whereas psychological phenomena cannot. At most, only certain physiological conditions of some psychological phenomena can be localised, not the phenomena themselves; since they have no spatial character, they cannot be measured in themselves, because only extension can be measured directly: for what is not extended, measurement is only possible indirectly by means of a spatial representation, but even with this indirect measurement, we can measure the duration of psychological facts, not the facts themselves.

Psychological facts are, or appear to be, in time, and this temporal character is common to them and to physical facts, but the absence of spatial character is sufficient to mark a difference in nature between the two. Psychological phenomena, whether through their content or, above all, through their concomitants (the action of the external environment and organic reactions), very often, if not always, correspond to physical phenomena, but the two are nonetheless profoundly different, for they are heterogeneous in their nature and even in their correspondences.

We have said that psychological phenomena are not measurable, and we must maintain this despite the attempts of psychophysicists: the results they have achieved prove nothing against this assertion; moreover, when we speak of intensity in psychology, for example the intensity of a sensation, we do not take this word in its true quantitative sense, and what we call difference



difference in intensity is in reality only unequal complexity and pure qualitative difference, therefore something that is not really measurable.

The more we consider psychological phenomena, the more we see that they differ from other facts and that, as a result, they must have special laws. We also directly observe the existence of special laws, which demonstrates that we are dealing with a truly special kind of fact.

There are particularly striking differences between the modes of perception of these two kinds of phenomena: physical phenomena are known through the senses, while psychological phenomena cannot be known in the same way because they do not fall within the realm of the senses, precisely because, as we have said, they are devoid of spatial character.

Everything that falls within the realm of the senses is necessarily situated in time and space. Psychological phenomena must therefore be known in another way, and indeed they are known more directly than external facts, but from another perspective. While physical phenomena are objects of perception for all beings endowed with the power of sensation, psychological phenomena are incommunicable: each individual can only be aware of the psychological phenomena that occur within themselves.

Different consciousnesses can transmit these phenomena to each other by means of perceptible signs, but this is only ever a translation, and the nature of this perceptible intermediary between two consciousnesses, which, while communicating indirectly in this way, nevertheless remain closed to each other in reality, marks the difference between phenomena of consciousness and perceptible phenomena.

With regard more specifically to the difference between psychic phenomena and physiological phenomena, it may be added that the parallelism between physiology and psychology, which is often emphasised, does not always occur in reality. For example, there have been cases of physiological paralysis not accompanied by psychological paralysis.

In general, it can be said that there are more examples of the psychological influencing the physiological than of the physiological influencing the psychological. Finally, certain psychological laws have no physiological equivalents.

By posing the question as we have done so far, we can distinguish between two series of phenomena, psychological phenomena and physical phenomena, between which there may be correspondences, but which are not really parallel and which show independence and originality even in the way they act on each other.

This is the conclusion we arrive at in this way, which we can formulate as follows: ' If there really are physical and physiological phenomena as they appear to immediate observation, there are, opposite them, phenomena that are different in nature and in their laws, namely psychological phenomena, and consequently there is room, alongside physics and physiology, for psychology, because this science now has a truly distinct, original and real object. II

II — If we now consider the physical phenomenon (including the physiological phenomenon) in its scientific conception, it is also impossible to confuse it with the psychological phenomenon.

Modern physics and chemistry tend essentially to study perceptible phenomena by abstracting from them, as it were, and substituting the concept of vibratory and wave movements.

Physical or chemical phenomena are therefore considered to be mechanical phenomena; we do not need to investigate here whether this reduction is entirely legitimate, it is sufficient for us that it corresponds to the point of view taken by current science. As for mechanics, it studies movement by representing it with geometric elements; it therefore falls within the realm of geometry in terms of its method, if not entirely in terms of its subject matter. Furthermore, in geometry, figures can be replaced by algebraic formulas, and algebra is, in essence, only a part of logic: the logic of quantity.

Science therefore tends, in order to study phenomena, to eliminate what seems to constitute their very reality and replace it with the abstract.

In doing so, science in a sense expands the field of psychology, because the phenomena, considered as it does, are little more than states of consciousness: movement itself is merely the analogue of an ordinary sensation. Ultimately, explaining sensory phenomena through movement is simply explaining sensations through one of them: it is therefore easy to see that the more science advances in a certain direction, the more it makes room for psychology and the more it makes plausible the idea of a reality other than the one it studies and which constitutes its own domain; and the more science advances in this way, the more it must give up reducing the psychological to the non-psychological.

Science studies the external world as a set of phenomena that are essentially unconscious of themselves, but among these phenomena there are consciousnesses whose activity bears no resemblance to what is physical phenomena for science.

If science were to admit physiological phenomena that cannot be reduced to physical or chemical phenomena, psychic phenomena could not be reduced to these physiological phenomena.

Indeed, although thought must to a large extent adapt to the conditions of organic life, it is also a perpetual reaction on the life of something that is superior to life and has ends higher than those to which life tends. Moreover, how could we distinguish the living from the non-living if not by what we already see as something psychological?

III — We can go further, because the psychological phenomenon is, as we have already said, more directly perceived than external phenomena; it is given more immediately than the latter, which, in order to be perceived, that is, to enter the realm of consciousness, must necessarily also take on a psychological character, and indeed it is only in this capacity that their existence as phenomena is conceivable, the very word "phenomenon" etymologically meaning that which appears (*φαίνεσθαι*).

Thus, not only can the psychological phenomenon not be a duplicate of the

physical phenomenon, but rather it is the latter which, as a phenomenon, regardless of the external reality to which it corresponds, should be considered a double of the psychological phenomenon.

Thus, the question we asked is, in a way, reversed, and we could now ask whether there are really any phenomena other than psychological phenomena. On the other hand, this conception does not conflict with the requirements of science: whether the external phenomenon is merely a double of the psychological phenomenon or has an independent existence, it is nonetheless true that the theories developed by science on the subject allow for predictions that come true, which is sufficient to justify them logically and practically.

Therefore, assuming that external physical phenomena are as they appear to immediate observation, or as science envisages them, psychological phenomena cannot arise from them; they cannot be either a product or a transformation of them. They are something of a different nature and must therefore be the object of an equally different science.

## Chapter II

### Method of psychology

We have already said that psychology is the study of mental facts, and we have thus distinguished it from that part of metaphysics which deals with the nature of the soul. The method to be used in psychology is that of all factual sciences: observation and induction.

Hypothesis may play a role, but of course only on condition that it is subsequently verified. Deduction may also appear, but when used in this science, as in other sciences of fact, it is primarily an extension of induction.

Where possible, experimentation should also be used because it is more reliable than pure observation and because there are laws that cannot be discovered without its help.

Deduction is sometimes a real means of invention, either to discover a new law or to draw from an already known law a consequence that had not yet been noticed, to link together laws whose connection had not been seen; for example, through deduction, it has been possible to link memory to habit.

But observation and experimentation present special difficulties in psychology: first, here the subject and the object are one and the same, and it is not usual for the mind to turn in on itself in this way. But this difficulty can undoubtedly be overcome through effort; long efforts are also required in other sciences, which has not prevented them from achieving results and reaching a high level of development.

The extreme complexity of the facts of consciousness in most cases is also noted, but here we will give the same answer as before: careful observation, experience, and comparison of similar cases can at least partially remedy this difficulty.

Another difficulty, more serious at least in appearance, is that there are psychological facts that cannot be studied without causing them to disappear, for example anger, but is it not possible to study them through memory? If we allege the shortcomings of memory, what experience can we trust, since there is practically no fact of consciousness in which memory does not play a role?

Our preconceived ideas can also influence the mental facts we observe in ourselves and modify them to a certain extent, but in addition to resorting to memory, we can then use objective observation instead of subjective observation.

Finally, a human individual cannot distinguish between what is individual in him and what is properly human; however, comparing individual psychologies can easily correct this flaw.

There are also some very specific difficulties involved in psychological experimentation: firstly, experimentation is sometimes impossible for moral reasons; for example, one cannot communicate a vice in order to better

observe it, nor can one inflict suffering on one's fellow human beings in order to see the effects.

Experimentation is also not possible when it comes to phenomena that are beyond our grasp by their very nature, such as the ultimate relationships between thought and the movements of brain matter. However, experimentation is possible and interesting in many cases when we can do the equivalent of what is done in other factual sciences: for example, in hypnotism, the subject is isolated from all external influences other than those of the experimenter; their mind is even isolated from their body, and all causes of internal phenomena are reduced to a single one, which is the idea or feeling communicated to the subject.

These are almost entirely psychological experiments; there are others of the same kind, which can even be carried out in conversation by asking questions and especially in education, which is a kind of continuous suggestion. On the other hand, psychophysiology and psychophysics are almost entirely experimental: in short, the results obtained prove that experimentation is possible and that, combined with observation, whether subjective or objective, it is capable of yielding important results.

In any case, the subjective and introspective method is the necessary starting point for all investigations in psychology. It is through observation and internal analysis that we first learn about the facts to be studied; even in order to observe what is happening in others, we must relate the signs that others give us of what is happening in them to phenomena already known through internal observation.

Child psychology, clinical psychology, ethnic psychology, animal psychology and comparative psychology are often referred to as ancillary methods; in reality, they are modes of the objective method, always characterised by observation and experimentation.

The clinical method in particular is valuable in helping us to understand the place occupied by a particular activity in our overall mental activity and in enabling us to see, as it were, an enlarged view of facts that their usual tenuousness would not allow us to observe.

However, we must not forget that it is always with our own consciousness that we study what happens in other beings, however different they may be from us: this is a source of numerous and almost inevitable misinterpretations, which prevent us from attaching too much importance to all these ancillary methods, even though new observations may in some cases correct the old ones to a certain extent.

The starting point for any psychological study is to classify the facts to be studied as accurately as possible; research must be carried out through observation and experimentation, and we must strive, as far as possible, to reduce the complicated causes of phenomena to simpler ones.

It is also necessary to seek all the ancillary information that other sciences, particularly physiology, can provide, but without forgetting that the psychological can only really be explained by the psychological and that the results of psychophysics and psychophysiology should not be given exaggerated importance.

## Chapter III

### **Consciousness, subconsciousness, unconsciousness**

Having shown what the object of psychology is and what method is appropriate to that object, the first question to be addressed is that of consciousness, for consciousness, however it may be defined, is the common form of all psychological facts, both emotional and volitional as well as strictly intellectual.

First and foremost, as it is necessary to agree on the precise meaning and exact scope of the terms we use, we must take care to note that when we speak of consciousness in psychology, we do not give this word the common meaning it has in everyday language, that is, the special meaning of moral consciousness: this can be considered at most as forming a very particular domain within the broader domain of psychological consciousness.

No thought, feeling or volition can be separated from consciousness: it would be like talking about a thought that is not thought, a feeling that is not felt, or a volition that is not willed.

The thesis that there are unconscious psychological phenomena is therefore contradictory in its very terms: is not the essential condition of a psychological phenomenon that it be perceived?

We do not mean, however, that every psychological fact involves the act of reflection that consists in thinking that one thinks, feels, or wills, but at least it is certain that there is no thought, for example, without the thinking being knowing, at least to some degree, that it is thinking.

Moreover, the essence of the mental phenomenon consists in being perceived; without this, nothing would distinguish it from other phenomena, nothing would remain if this were taken away. Thus, just as the psychological phenomenon is not a mere epiphenomenon of the physiological phenomenon, so consciousness is not a mere epiphenomenon of the physiological phenomenon.

Every psychological fact is conscious and vice versa: certain philosophers were wrong to make consciousness a separate faculty, which for them was, in relation to psychological phenomena, like an eye watching objects pass before it. In reality, neither consciousness nor psychological phenomena are intelligible without each other: without psychological phenomena, consciousness is only an empty form, and without consciousness, phenomena no longer have a separate nature and it is impossible to distinguish them from non-psychological phenomena.

It remains for us to establish in some detail that there is no psychological unconscious, although this may seem obvious from what we have already said.

The question can be posed as follows: "Everything that is conscious to any degree (since we are taking the term consciousness in its broadest sense and

clear and distinct consciousness does not necessarily constitute all consciousness) can be said to be psychological," and this is a point that no one disputes, but can we say conversely that "Nothing that is unconscious is psychological" or that "There is no psychological unconscious"? Everything here obviously depends on the meaning we give to the word psychological.

If we see it as synonymous with conscious, by definition the question is thereby resolved or rather eliminated, and we must recognise that in almost all branches of philosophy there are questions that exist only because they are poorly posed; However, we must always be aware of the reasons why these questions may have arisen in the first place and, on the other hand, an assimilation such as that of the psychological and the conscious, if it were to be purely verbal, would not be of great interest.

Indeed, consciousness in its general sense still needs to be clearly defined, and then it would be necessary to prove that the unconscious exists, otherwise the field of psychology would encompass all possible phenomena and all other sciences would cease to have any *raison d'être*, except as mere branches of psychology (this is the question previously posed in this form: "Are there really phenomena other than psychological phenomena?")

Or, to avoid this difficulty, it would be necessary to specify that psychology does not study conscious phenomena specifically, which implies that there are unconscious phenomena, but rather phenomena insofar as they are conscious, while other sciences study phenomena (the same or others) from other perspectives or in other ways.

If we now admit that the nature of a phenomenon as a phenomenon, in the sense of appearance, and without concern for what may lie behind this appearance, is basically nothing more than the aspect or point of view from which it is considered, it will be legitimate to consider psychological phenomena, i.e. phenomena viewed from the point of view of consciousness, as constituting a special class of phenomena or a particular case of phenomena in general, since consciousness is then nothing more than the point of view from which psychology studies phenomena and no longer something that is supposed to belong to certain phenomena to the exclusion of others.

Under these conditions, therefore, there is no need to presuppose that there are different categories of phenomena that are irreducible to one another, but only to admit (which does not imply any particular hypothesis) that in order to study phenomena we can take a number of different points of view, and it is these points of view that constitute for us the objects of so many distinct sciences.

Psychology will therefore be one of these sciences, the one that studies phenomena as conscious, that is, from the point of view of consciousness.

Phenomena that can be considered in this way, and which we do indeed consider in this way, will be called psychological.

Without prejudging the nature of consciousness, these explanations, by clarifying how the object of psychology should be understood, make even more obvious the assertion that there can be no psychological unconscious; however, in fact,

Some psychologists have acknowledged this unconscious: we are certain that it can only be an illusion, but we must ask ourselves what could have given rise to this illusion.

We have already said that clear and distinct consciousness may not be the whole of consciousness, and indeed it is far from encompassing everything that psychologists who acknowledge the unconscious feel compelled to relegate to this unconscious, which will lose all reason for existing if we show that there is in fact and logically a subconscious.

The subconscious is still conscious, although it is outside the realm of clear and distinct consciousness: it is like a kind of extension or prolongation of consciousness, and demonstrating the existence of this subconscious will dispel any argument in favour of the so-called psychological unconscious.

First of all, psychological phenomena that last too briefly cannot be clearly conscious; when these phenomena are too quickly covered up by those that follow them, it is easy to understand that they cannot be noticed, let alone remembered afterwards, at least under ordinary psychological conditions.

This is enough to make us understand the existence of subconscious psychological phenomena, that is, psychological phenomena that are conscious, but to a lesser degree and therefore capable of making us believe that they are unconscious. Then there are phenomena that were truly conscious, which everyone agrees to regard as such, but which cannot be remembered.

It is therefore not enough that memory cannot find any trace of a phenomenon for us to be entitled to regard that phenomenon as having been truly unconscious.

A number of contemporary psychologists have believed they had reasons to admit the existence of a plurality of consciousnesses within us: if this is the case, as it is true that we are not clearly aware of the consciousnesses subordinate to the central consciousness, it is obvious that these communications are not fully conscious to the central consciousness and that the activity of the subordinate consciousnesses can only be subconscious.

It must be said, moreover, that this plurality of consciousnesses is only a rather debatable hypothesis: the truth is that the self is much more complex and possesses a much more relative unity than is generally believed, but to account for this complexity, it suffices to consider extensions of normal consciousness, without these extensions being considered as constituents of other distinct and more or less independent consciousnesses.

The fact remains that these extensions, however we view them, are part of what we call the subconscious.

But there are other, more conclusive arguments in favour of the subconscious, starting with this one: sometimes memory captures the subconscious in the act, so to speak, for example when, after hearing the clock strike distractedly, we count the strokes from memory, or when we notice a noise just as it stops.

It cannot be argued that facts whose memory is clearly conscious have been



unconscious; since these facts were not clearly conscious, the term subconscious is the only one that fits here.

Inner analysis brings us even closer to the subconscious: when we experience a vague sadness or a vague joy, we see, on reflection, that we had concerns capable of inclining us towards sadness or joy that we had not yet noticed.

Reflection then has the effect of increasing the intensity of what was already in the consciousness, or in other words, of making clearly conscious what was only subconscious. If we consider the facts known as unconscious mental work, it is difficult not to conclude the same.

It also happens that our memories follow one another without the mind being able to remember a conscious intermediary between two links in the chain: even then, it is a gratuitous assumption to suppose that there is a purely physiological intermediary between two phenomena that are truly psychological, and on the other hand, if we admit that every physiological phenomenon must have corresponded to a psychological phenomenon, there is no reason to regard the latter as not having been at least slightly conscious, especially since it is difficult to see how anything happening outside consciousness could ultimately influence it.

The phenomenon of suggestion also supports the idea of the subconscious, and this is tended to be proven by the very conscious anxiety of the subject who finds himself unable to obey the suggestion at the predetermined moment.

Many experiments also prove that living beings have a deep knowledge of organisation, a knowledge that is not clearly conscious, but it cannot be entirely outside consciousness because when it reveals itself, for example in certain hypnotised subjects, and becomes clearly conscious, it would be incomprehensible to say that consciousness did not already contain what is then manifested.

Finally, if we do not accept the subconscious as an explanation for memory, if we want to explain it solely by a physiological mechanism or by a so-called psychological unconscious, we may be able to explain reminiscence but not recognition.

We could cite many other facts, such as cases of ancestral memory and certain dream phenomena.

Let us now return to the theoretical and rational reasons that rigorously demonstrate the impossibility of the psychological unconscious:

1 — As we said from the outset, the psychological unconscious is truly unthinkable and contradictory; yet logic forbids us from talking about things that cannot even be thought of, and anything that implies contradiction can only be an impossibility.

2 — Rightly or wrongly, Leibniz (25) has been used to defend

---

25 — Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz (Leipzig 1646 - Hanover 1716), German philosopher and scholar. Among his many works, the first one, entitled *De arte combinatoria* (1666), devoted to the "art of memory", is worth mentioning here. Also, for his explicit doctrinal references to a spiritually undistorted Hermeticism, he is certainly the philosopher most esteemed by Guénon, who would quote him constantly throughout his

the psychological unconscious in the name of the principle of continuity. According to this principle, for example, when we cease to be clearly and distinctly aware of hearing the sound of a bell fading away, we would cease to be aware of it altogether, but the sensation would still linger, albeit unconsciously, and it would be impossible for it to drop abruptly to zero, as this would represent a discontinuity in its decline. This argument is merely specious: first, there are many reservations to be made about the value of the principle of continuity, which is far from being as universally applicable as Leibniz would have liked and which, in the form in which he stated it, even leads to completely illogical consequences. There are undoubtedly things in nature that are continuous, such as space and time, but continuity is not a property common to everything that exists: numbers, for example, are discontinuous.

In psychological phenomena too, observation shows that there is discontinuity; this is true of the supposed intensity of sensations. But let us move on. It could well be that at a certain moment the impression produced by the external stimulus was too weak to correspond to a psychological fact, however weak it may be: in this case there would be, at the same time, neither consciousness nor sensation, and consequently no unconscious sensation.

But we can go further: the strict application of the principle of continuity leads to the opposite of the thesis we are contesting: if it is impossible for sensation to suddenly drop to zero, the same must obviously be true of consciousness; consciousness and sensation will both decrease indefinitely at the same time. Once we accept that the principle of continuity applies to everything, it must apply to consciousness as well as sensation.

3 — Proponents of the psychological unconscious also invoke the principle of causality, which they state in this form: "Every part of a cause must produce a proportional part of the effect produced by the total cause"; for example, if we hear the sound of a thousand waves, we must also hear the sound of a single wave and even that of each of the water droplets that make up that wave, but here there is no longer any consciousness, so these sensations are unconscious sensations.

This argument has been countered by the response that a certain minimum amount of the cause may be necessary to produce the effect that this cause produces when it acts in more considerable proportions: it is therefore possible that the sound of more than one drop of water and even more than one wave is necessary for a sensation to occur, and then there is no reason to assume consciousness below the point where the sensation ceases to occur.

Moreover, as before, the principle invoked, if applied rigorously, leads directly to the theory we support; if this principle is true, then it must be said that if the sound of a thousand waves produces an effect that is a conscious sensation, the sound of a single wave must produce an effect of the same nature, that is, also a conscious sensation, albeit a very slight one.

---

work. Of note in our context is his *New Essays Concerning Human Understanding* (1704) against Locke's theories.

4 — Some psychologists say that sensation and consciousness are inversely related, and they claim that where sensation is very intense, there is no longer If, instead of simply saying consciousness, they said reflective consciousness or reflection, one could agree with them: for example, someone who is in the grip of a very violent feeling no longer judges themselves, but they still know what is happening inside them.

If they cease to know this, if they faint when the emotion is violent, consciousness ceases, or almost ceases, but with it all sensations and feelings cease.

In short, there is no argument in favour of the psychological unconscious, which we can only regard as a pure and simple impossibility, whereas there are many arguments in favour of the subconscious.

A further remark is necessary here: clear and distinct consciousness, or normal consciousness, can be considered as occupying, in a manner of speaking, the central region of the domain of integral consciousness and, as we have said, it has extensions that occupy the rest of this domain.

Now, it is obvious that we can envisage extensions extending in various directions from the common centre to which they are attached, but the word subconscious, by its composition, seems to indicate that these are only lower extensions of consciousness, and these are indeed what we usually envisage under this name.

So if we accept the subconscious (and from everything we have said, we must accept it), it seems that we must also accept, by correlation, a superconscious, that is, a set of higher extensions of consciousness, which psychologists do not generally do.

However, some have used the term superconsciousness, but in a completely different sense; these are psychologists who accept a plurality of consciousnesses and call the central consciousness superconsciousness as opposed to subordinate consciousnesses: used in this way, the term is nothing more than a useless neologism, since it refers to nothing more than consciousness itself.

The same is not true when we contrast superconsciousness with subconsciousness, as we do, distinguishing it at the same time from ordinary consciousness, but since the study of what superconsciousness thus understood may be falls outside the domain of classical psychology, we cannot dwell on it further here and must confine ourselves to these few indications on this point.

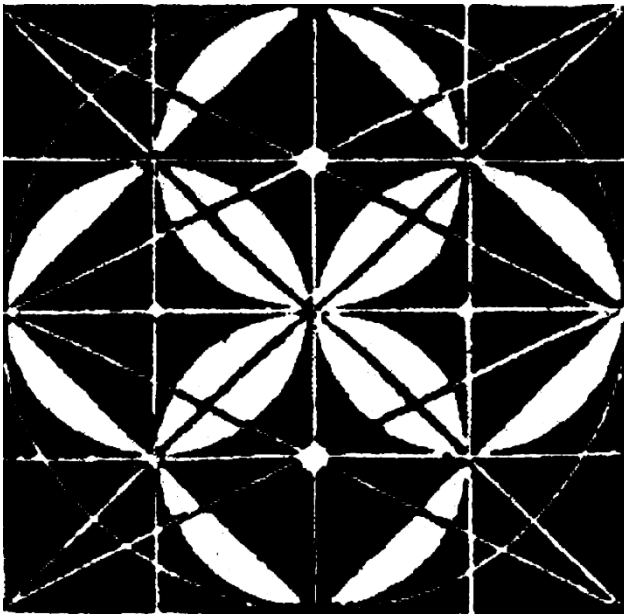


Fig. I. *Figura Mentis*, also known as *Atrium Minervae*. As we shall see, the innermost four-petalled "lotus" only "blooms" in the successive graphic development constituted by the *Figura Intellectus* (see below, fig. 10). As for the complex hexagonal figure inscribed in the square, it represents *more geometrico* the syllogistic connection, as the archetype of all possible logical forms conceivable by the mind (see Bruno, *Il Sigillo dei Sigilli e i diagramme ermetici*, edited by Ubaldo Nicola, Mimesis, Milan, 1995, p. 92). Reproduction taken from the work *Articuli centum et sexaginta adversus huius tempestatis mathematicos atque philosophos*, Prague 1588, by Giordano Bruno.

## Chapter IV

### The Nature of Consciousness

We have established that there is no psychological unconscious, or in other words, that no psychological phenomenon is separable from consciousness, but we have not yet discussed the nature of consciousness, and we will now examine various theories that have been put forward on this subject.

Consciousness is not the result of a difference between two physiological states, unconscious as such, or between two psychological states, unconscious nevertheless, the two states in question being either two different sensations or the same sensation that increases and decreases. Undoubtedly, for consciousness to be maintained at a certain level or for there to be clear and distinct consciousness, there must be a continual differentiation between the states that pass through consciousness, for consciousness quickly becomes dulled by habit, but such differentiation is not an essential and indispensable condition of all consciousness.

Consciousness is not the result of a difference between two pure physiological states, because for consciousness to occur in this hypothesis, it would have to have as its direct cause a third physiological state, which would be like the resultant of the first two. This would lead to the bizarre conception that the combination of two physiological states would generate consciousness, while each state taken separately would produce a sensation, which, when combined with the other, would serve as the content of consciousness, which in itself is only a container. How, then, could the fusion between this consciousness and these sensations take place?

Consciousness is not the result of a difference between two physiological states accompanied by a sensation that is unconscious (psychologically unconscious), because then we would have two different kinds of physiological activity, albeit of the same nature, one generating consciousness and the other sensation. The two acts of the first kind would each generate an unconscious sensation, while the act of the second kind, which is the result of the first two, would generate awareness of the sensation. This explanation, as strange as the first, is rejected by the same reasoning.

Consciousness is not the immediate result of the difference between two unconscious sensations (psychological unconscious). Indeed, it is not clear how a difference could play a real role in consciousness if it were not a reality in that consciousness, i.e. a difference that is already conscious.

Furthermore, how could the unconscious produce consciousness if consciousness is the feeling of a difference? Does this feeling not presuppose that the two terms between which this difference is felt are already conscious? It is not clear why the difference between two sensations should be more conscious than these two sensations themselves.

Finally, if consciousness begins by being the feeling of a difference or even by simply assuming a difference, we can say that consciousness is impossible,

that it can never arise. Indeed, although a feeling of difference presupposes at least a duality of states that explains it, its nature is nonetheless simple. But then it is like so many other sensations or any other psychological fact. It can therefore only exist in consciousness thanks to the existence of another feeling or at least an unconscious sensation: we see that in this assumption, the possibility of consciousness recedes indefinitely.

We can also present things in this way: if a first sensation is, for consciousness, as if it did not exist, the second becomes the first in relation to the third, which becomes the second, and so on indefinitely, leading us to the same conclusion as before.

If we say that two or more simultaneous states can have the same effect as two or more successive states, the last objection falls away, but the others remain.

Moreover, consciousness always presents itself as an apprehension of simple elements or composite elements, whose composition is perceptible to that consciousness. Undoubtedly, the physiological and even psychological antecedents of a clear and distinct sensation are highly complex, but we can resolve this difficulty and avoid being rejected on the basis of the objections previously outlined, while taking into account everything that physiology teaches us about the cause of our sensations, if we conclude as follows: clear and distinct consciousness is not the whole of consciousness; it always presupposes multiplicity and change (and change implies multiplicity), and if this multiplicity and change, which are always required for there to be clear and distinct consciousness, are not found in it, it is found in the subconscious, that is to say, still within consciousness. We must admit that for each external cause, vibration or undulation capable of producing a real effect in our organism, there must correspond subconscious sensations. It is readily accepted that there are corresponding sensations; is it so difficult, then, to add that these sensations must be subconscious, since logic leads us to this conclusion, just as science leads us to accept sensations that remain unknown to clear and distinct consciousness?

In reality, what remains most astonishing is the possibility of an enormous multiplicity of events occurring in a short interval of time, but apart from the fact that this difficulty is no greater in the subconscious theory than in the unconscious theory, we must not lose sight of the fact that time is entirely relative, that its continuity allows us to envisage a succession of intervals as close together and as small as we wish (below the limits of our distinct perception) and that, moreover, this multiplicity that we have to consider is not necessarily required in all cases, but can also be simultaneous.

It is true that the consideration of this simultaneity, as introduced, is opposed to certain theses quite often accepted by psychologists, according to which two or more different psychological facts cannot coexist, but we can only see these theories as gratuitous hypotheses, based, in essence, on an overly simplistic conception of the series of psychological phenomena under a form linear. Any la complexité réelle de ces

phenomena are in no way consistent with such a conception.

If it is true, as all of the above tends to demonstrate, that the unconscious can never explain the conscious, then clear and distinct consciousness should be explained by the subconscious in cases where it cannot be explained by itself. It must follow that it will be necessary to seek and give a psychological interpretation of all the so-called physical or physiological facts on the psychological or mental, more commonly and also more improperly called the moral, but we are only pointing out this consequence here.

To explain consciousness, we also speak of a difference between a subject and an object, a difference that must be felt or thought to some degree for consciousness to occur. It is often objected to this theory that the distinction between subject and object must not be primitive, that the idea of the thinking subject in the thinking subject itself is too abstract to exist from the outset, and that the same is true of the idea of an object.

This may be true, and in any case the theory that all sensation is at least somewhat conscious is certainly much simpler than this one, but there is more: the distinction between subject and object is far from being as fundamental as is usually assumed, and there are certain modes of thought that can be perfectly conscious and are even of the highest order, where such a distinction cannot exist.

How, then, can one argue that this distinction is a necessary condition of consciousness?

Mr Ribot (26) seeks to explain consciousness through the activity and unity of bodily organs and functions: this solution may seem appealing at first glance, but it falls far short of offering the clarity it promises.

Let us distinguish between three things:

- 1 — Our idea of the self as an independent being.
- 2 — The fact of consciousness, which, as we have shown, accomplishes all psychological facts.
- 3 — The psychological fact itself, a sensation for example.

Mr Ribot has exaggerated the unity of the organism: this unity is far from perfect. The concerted action of the biological forces and organs that make up the body presents only a very relative unity, so that in its totality [it] cannot be the origin of this idea of the self that we spoke of in the first place. Even if we admit that the facts of consciousness considered in isolation can be explained by the organism, this would not explain how one of them can be, at the same time as itself, a memory of other facts of consciousness: the facts of consciousness considered as effects of physiological events would form a sporadic consciousness, whose different elements would remain foreign to each other.

The idea of the self, even if we regard it as illusory, cannot be explained in

---

26 — Théodule-Armand Ribot (Guingamp 1839 - Paris 1916), French philosopher and psychologist. Considered the founder of French 'scientific' psychology, he taught experimental and comparative psychology, first at the Sorbonne and then at the Collège de France. Founder of the *Revue Philosophique*, in the last years of his life he devoted himself to studying the role of affective and emotional factors in psychology.

this theory (27). We can even go further: the slightest state of consciousness can be considered a unit, when we find nothing of the sort in the organism, where the slightest movement, the existence of the slightest element is always indefinitely divisible in space and time; Finally, the slightest awareness of sensations is a phenomenon that exists on its own and is therefore without analogy to what is, hypothetically, any physical or physiological phenomenon in Mr Ribot's theory.

Such a theory, in seeking to take on a scientific appearance, only succeeds in creating confusion between psychology and physiology, without actually explaining anything.

Taine (28) has come to accept a theory according to which it is not necessary to seek to explain consciousness through movement, that is, through something that is not consciousness, but rather to consider consciousness on the one hand and the physical on the other as two opposite sides of the same reality, a reality that is dual in nature. The parallelism proposed by this theory is hardly confirmed by internal experience, and external experience makes it impossible to suppose such a parallelism. It is therefore futile to try to explain consciousness either by the organism or by the so-called psychological unconscious.

Consciousness can be regarded as a primitive and irreducible given, which must be taken as a starting point and used to explain other things, but which cannot be explained, at least when one wishes to adhere strictly to the psychological point of view.

From this point of view, we need not consider consciousness as anything other than the common form and necessary condition of all psychological phenomena, which obviously does not imply anything about the nature of consciousness itself, any more than the study of physical phenomena implies knowledge of the intrinsic nature of time and space, which are the containers and conditions of these phenomena.

The psychologist has no more need to explain consciousness than the physicist or even the mathematician has to explain space and time.

They do not even have to give a definition of it, because what is regarded as irreducible cannot be defined.

We can even consider all psychological phenomena as being, in a sense, merely modalities or modifications of consciousness (in the same way that physical phenomena are regarded as modalities of movement), without thereby attributing to this consciousness a separate existence, at least insofar as we consider it exclusively in its relationship to these

---

27 — Regarding the concept of the "self", see Guénon, *Les États multiples de l'Être*, Vêga, Paris, 1973, p. 34, n. 10: "One could therefore say that the 'self', with all its possible extensions, is incomparably less important than Western psychologists and philosophers attribute to it , while having infinitely greater possibilities than they believe and than they can even imagine."

28 — Hippolyte Taine (Vouziers, Ardennes, 1828 - Paris 1893), French historian, literary critic and philosopher. In his treatise *De l'intelligence* (1870), he not only critically examines contemporary psychological doctrines, but also attempts an original synthesis of Hegelian idealism with the phenomenism of John Stuart Mill and Spencer's evolutionary positivism.



phenomena, which is the role of psychology.

Psychology only has to consider what we might call phenomenal consciousness, without asking whether this phenomenal consciousness is or is not the expression of something of a different order, unrelated to phenomena and which, by definition, is no longer part of the psychological domain.

We must now speak briefly about consciousness: briefly because, as we shall see, whatever we study in psychology, we are ultimately obliged to explain it in terms of the properties of consciousness.

It is easy to understand why this is so, since all psychological phenomena can be considered as modalities of consciousness. But this clearly shows that psychology has the same relativity as all factual sciences.

According to Mr Egger (29), one of the fundamental laws of the mind is the law of fatigue or change, but in reality the necessity of change and the fact of fatigue, of which this necessity is a consequence, can only have a purely physiological origin.

On the other hand, the reappearance of past states of consciousness, which constitutes memory, and even the exercise of all our mental faculties, have more or less organic conditions, but there are functions in psychological activity that can only be attributed to consciousness itself.

Sensations as such are reactions specific to consciousness in response to external stimuli, and feelings and judgements are things that are completely different from their external causes or the phenomena that give rise to them.

The syntheses that consciousness performs at every moment are like creations that have no analogues in the syntheses studied by physicists and chemists.

In the external world, everything is subject to continual change and nothing ever remains the same as it was a moment before; on the contrary, through memory, consciousness preserves the past, bringing it into the present, so to speak, and the phenomenon of recognition in particular appears as an original synthesis that has no analogue elsewhere.

In short, consciousness, by its nature and functions, is something irreducible, and any study of it shows it to be an activity of a very special kind, which cannot be assimilated to any other.

---

29 — Victor Egger (19th century) French psychologist, author of *La Parole intérieure. Essai de psychologie descriptive* (1881).

## Chapter V

# Classification of Psychological Facts

### Faculties

When we speak of faculties in psychology, we do not mean the powers of the soul, which would explain mental facts.

The question of the actual existence of such powers and the study of their true nature would indeed go beyond the scope of psychology, the relative nature of which we must note here (30).

We use the term faculty solely to distinguish between sets of mental facts that cannot be reduced to one another, even though these sets are never completely separate.

It seems that there are only three faculties: intelligence, in its broadest sense, emotion or sensitivity, and will, which is the most generally accepted division.

To realise this, it suffices to compare the different mental facts that are known to us through consciousness.

There will always be certain connections, a certain commonality of nature between two ideas, however different they may be, and likewise between two feelings. On the other hand, ideas and feelings form two irreducible groups; facts relating to the will also appear to be irreducible to the former.

However, attempts have sometimes been made to reduce these different groups; it is therefore necessary to show in more detail that there are no fewer than three faculties, that is to say, that none of the three we have listed can be reduced to one of the other two.

Attempts have been made to combine intellectual and emotional facts into a single category, on the pretext that they are passive facts, whereas volitional facts are essentially active; but this distinction is very vague and even leads to real confusion. First, passivity is characterised by reaction, as opposed to spontaneous action, but reaction, which always has certain characteristics specific to the nature of the being, is still action.

On the other hand, one may wonder whether, even in the realm of volitional facts, there are many actions that are completely spontaneous, independent of any external influence, and not passive in some respects.

No doubt the will appears to be the most active part of us, while feeling is the most passive, although it sometimes also plays an active role.

---

30 — Giordano Bruno writes (*De magia. De vinculis in genere*, edited by Albano. Biondi, Biblioteca dell'Immagine, Pordenone, 1986, p. XV): "It clearly follows from experience that every soul or spirit has continuity with the spirit and soul of the universe and is not contained within the body, but rather it is the body that comprises the body"; "therefore, each soul is in the whole horizon, and receives the influx of the whole horizon and in turn exercises it on the whole horizon: and here the field opens up to magical operations which remain physical operations and yet the subject, at a great distance, by virtue of some kind of spiritual power, is able to impress affections and passions on a distant object".

For example, when it serves as a motive for our behaviour.

As for intelligence, it is certainly a mistake not to consider it active to a greater or lesser degree, even in the simplest functions of knowledge acquisition, such as perception, where the mind always contributes something of itself.

If we wish, we can distinguish between a more active and a more passive side to intelligence, but this is ultimately only a question of degree and not of nature, at least as long as we limit ourselves to the sole perspective from which we can consider intelligence in psychology.

To bring together intelligence and emotion, we point to the role played by belief, which is a feeling, in judgement, considered to be the most essential intellectual act, but we could just as easily point out, conversely, that will plays a part in the act of affirmation, which completes the judgement. This proves nothing more than the indisputable truth that different categories of psychological facts are more or less intermingled and react on each other, which is not a sufficient reason to want to confuse them.

In reality, thinking, feeling and willing are three forms of mental activity: this activity may vary in degree, but it is always activity, and what we call passive in the mind can become highly active in certain circumstances.

Let us now examine the value of attempts to reduce these three faculties to a single one. First of all, feeling and will cannot be reduced to intelligence: Descartes (31) and Leibniz saw feeling as confused thought, but it must be said that the word 'thought' seems to have had a broader meaning for them, especially for Descartes, than it usually does. In any case, feeling cannot be reduced to intelligence; it is undoubtedly possible that feelings, even those we call physical pleasure or pain, as well as all desires, can be explained by more or less recent subconscious judgements, some of which may have become almost organic habits, but in any case, the cause of feeling should not be taken for its essence. Similarly, some judgements always precede volition, but even if the judgement, which could be expressed as 'I will do as I please', were in fact to merge with the volitional act itself, there would still be two heterogeneous elements, and moreover this judgement does not completely resemble appreciative and affirmative judgements.

---

31 — René Descartes (La Haye, Touraine, 1596 - Stockholm 1650), French philosopher and scholar. One of the decisive moments in his education was his encounter with the Dutch mathematician Beeckman, who indirectly prompted him to abandon any residual curiosity about the esotericism of the Renaissance, of which he would henceforth become an implacable opponent: "Descartes had brought half of the world as he conceived it into the quantitative domain, and indeed, no doubt, the half that was most important to him, for, deep down, whatever appearances might suggest, he wanted above all to be a physicist; materialism, in turn, claimed to bring the whole world into it. " (René Guénon, *The Reign of Quantity and the Signs of the Times*, Gallimard, Paris, 1970, p. 136); " Once purely intellectual knowledge was denied or ignored, as it has been since Descartes, the logical conclusion was, on the one hand, positivism, agnosticism and all kinds of 'scientistic' aberrations and, on the other hand, all the contemporary theories which, not content with what reason can provide, seek something else, but seek it in the realm of feeling and instinct, that is, below reason and not above it, and end up, with William James for example, seeing the subconscious as the means by which man can communicate with the Divine. (René Guénon, *Symboles fondamentaux de la Science sacrée*, Gallimard, Paris, 1962, pp. 27-28)

Nor can intelligence and will be reduced to feeling. Those who have thought about this have done so mainly because it seemed that emotional life is where man begins; and there is no doubt that emotional life is more important in early childhood, but if we consider that from its earliest days, a child experiments and teaches itself to interpret these sensations, we see that it is already using its intelligence as much as it can.

It is to be feared that the proponents of the reduction we are discussing confuse feeling with sensation; in any case, how could we extract from feeling what cannot be extracted from sensation, which is already an intellectual thing, that is, all the properly rational ideas by means of which science is built?

Nor can the will be reduced to feeling, and it is not true that the will is merely a desire that ultimately prevails in us over several others.

Without going into the question of freedom here, which, if it exists, can only belong exclusively to the will, we will highlight the following points: desire can seek the impossible, but we only want the possible; we sometimes have conflicting desires, but the will always tends towards a single end; desire depends largely on the organism, whereas it is very difficult to explain the will physiologically; finally, desire is independent of reason, it is eminently impulsive, whereas there is no will without reflection. In short, feeling and will seem so different in every respect that one cannot think of reducing one to the other.

Finally, feeling and intelligence cannot be reduced to will: we can demonstrate the existence of tendencies that are like the more or less obscure desires of our nature, but which have nothing in common with that free will which alone is at stake and which, moreover, does not constitute feeling or intelligence as a whole.

Let us add that in order to demonstrate the theory of the three faculties, we must give up looking for a contradiction between the development of one of these three faculties and the other two.

There are no more than three faculties in the psychological sense of the word; what we call activity is not a special faculty, but a general characteristic of all faculties.

We need not examine the question of whether, as Aristotle believed (32), a separate faculty is required to explain how the soul can move the body, for this question does not fall within the scope of psychology.

Language does not require a faculty per se, as it can be explained by means of intelligence and will, combined with certain organic conditions.

Finally, instinct is not a faculty that is essentially distinct from intelligence [...] and we must refrain from opposing it to the latter; on the contrary, we must consider it as a special case, a species of intelligence.

---

32 — Aristotle (Stagira, Macedonia - Chalcis, Euboea 322 BC), tutor to Alexander the Great, wrote, among other works, *De Anima*, which is the first true treatise on psychology.

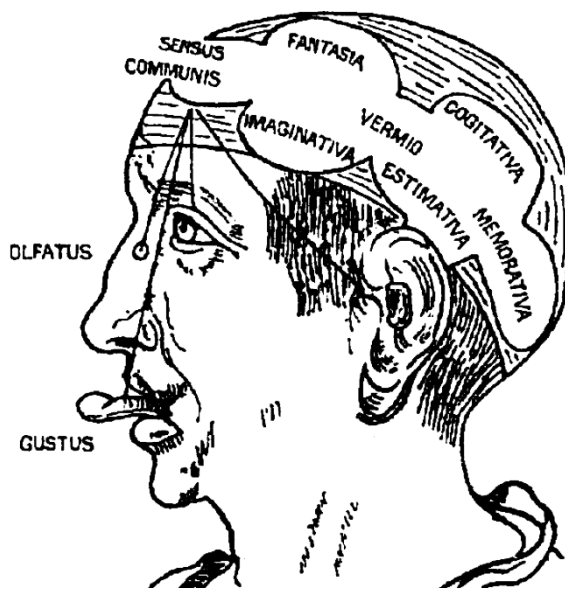


Fig. 2. Diagram of the psychology of faculties. Redrawn from a diagram in J. Romberch's *Congestorium artificiosae memoriae*, Venice 1533.

## Chapter VI

### Intellectual faculties

It is natural to begin with the study of intelligence, as it is relatively simpler and, above all, less obscure than emotionality and even the will. All intellectual faculties are essentially different forms of the same activity: that of consciousness.

This is true first and foremost for what are called the faculties of acquisition; sensation itself is an internal fact, although it relates to external causes, and what is called the inner sense is nothing other than consciousness itself, insofar as it directly knows its own operations.

Next come the faculties of conservation: memory consists, at least in part, in the association of ideas and images, and this association is explained by a connection between simultaneous or successive facts of consciousness. In all cases where memory can be explained by association, and these are the most numerous, we can therefore say that they are ultimately explained by the power of synthesis inherent in consciousness.

Imagination can be explained by memory.

The analysis or abstraction involved in combinatory imagination can be explained by attention, which is simply an intense form of consciousness.

Finally, we must consider the faculties of elaboration: judgement, which consists in the affirmation of realities and truths of various kinds, of types of beings or facts, of laws and relationships; and finally reasoning, which is a combination of judgements. [Judgement and reasoning] are, in short, nothing more than analyses and syntheses based on data provided by the senses and the inner sense, without [...] however, insofar as they require the intervention of a priori elements, more purely intellectual than anything else, which are called the guiding principles of consciousness; but as these are principles in the strict sense of the word, their study goes beyond the domain of psychology and belongs to metaphysics.

The dual power of analysis and synthesis that we find in all these faculties constitutes, in short, the whole of consciousness and also the whole of intelligence, or at least everything in intelligence that the psychologist can take as the object of his study.

The main agent of the development of intelligence is attention, which, by allowing analysis to be taken very far, provides the elements for new syntheses, and of which there is perhaps reason to consider another, higher mode, leading directly [to synthesis] without going through prior analysis. But attention, in all its forms, is essentially nothing more than consciousness raised to a degree of intensity.

## Chapter VII

### External stimuli and impressions

A careful distinction must be made between external stimuli, impressions, sensations and perceptions. External stimuli consist, for example, of a light source and the movements that occur in the surrounding environment, from that light source to the surface of our senses.

External stimuli belong entirely to the realm of physics, while impressions are entirely physiological phenomena: they include everything that happens in the organism from the moment it is subjected to the influence of an external object until the movements caused in it by the action of that object have ceased.

What must be considered first in the impression are the movements that occur between the periphery and the cerebral centres, then in these cerebral centres themselves, whose activation is the immediate condition of sensation; but we must also consider what happens next, that is, the movement that goes in the opposite direction to the first: from the cerebral centres to the periphery.

This second phase of the impression is also very important, because without it there is no precise and well-localised perception: if the sectioning of an afferent nerve element makes sensation impossible, the sectioning of an efferent element makes localisation impossible.

We should also mention the special motor effects of centrifugal movement, for example with regard to changes in respiratory and circulatory functions, which may follow sensation.

With subconscious or clearly conscious sensation begins the activity that is properly psychological: perception is also a psychological phenomenon, and indeed one of a higher order, for it is a judgement by which we affirm that the given sensation corresponds to an object outside ourselves possessing a certain quality, which is the cause of the sensation we experience.

American psychologists have called the combination of perception and sensation itself, together with the memories they evoke and which can modify them to a fairly large extent, 'percept'.

An impression is always necessary to produce a sensation, but when there is an impression, there has not always been an external stimulus: the minimum physiological condition required for sensation is cerebral activity. In cases such as hallucinations and dreams, there is nothing more than cerebral activity as the immediate antecedent of sensation.

If we consider the impression in detail in terms of the phenomena that compose it, it appears to be of the same nature as the external stimulus: on both sides, there are movements, physico-chemical changes, both in the phenomena that take place within our organism and in the external actions that

are exerted upon us. It is this identity of nature that has previously allowed us to consider physiological phenomena as merely a special case of physical phenomena.

It is not always necessary for a specific sensation to occur for the external stimulus that normally produces that sensation to come into play; thus, using the same electric current, visual sensations can be produced by acting on the optic nerve, and sounds on the acoustic nerve.

A violent blow to the head produces a sensation of light. This proves that, if not the cause, at least the immediate condition of the specificity of sensations is what happens in the brain; we say in the brain and not in the nerves, because any nerve, if it is sufficiently impressionable, can conduct any kind of movement from the periphery to the brain.

The identity of nature of all external phenomena, on the one hand, and all nervous phenomena, on the other, and finally of both in their details, all this proves that sensation is truly something original in relation to its external and internal conditions.

The elementary phenomenon of impression is the reflex: the reflex itself is the specific activity of the nervous system, but the irritability of living, non-nervous matter is analogous to the reflex, [...].

We can therefore say that the reflex, in the broadest sense of the term, is the act that is essentially characteristic of living matter: it presents itself as an appropriate response to stimulation and has characteristics that cannot be explained simply by reducing it to physical and chemical phenomena.

It is the phenomena into which the first part of the impression is broken down, between the periphery and the cerebral centres inclusively, which are not the cause but the immediate conditions for the production in consciousness of elementary sensations, which this same consciousness then synthesises to transform them into new sensations, no longer subconscious like the previous ones, but clearly conscious: the latter are what are more commonly called sensations.



## Chapter VIII

### Sensations

There are usually seven types of sensations: sight, hearing, smell, taste, touch, heat and cold.

In fact, the latter two are not provided by distinct senses, but by touch: there are therefore only five external senses.

Pleasure and pain, pleasant and unpleasant, must be immediately excluded from the number of sensations, as they are feelings: the affective and the representative must not be confused.

It is quite likely that every sensation is accompanied by an affective fact that is more or less clearly conscious; what leads us to admit this is the solidarity that clearly exists between all forms of psychic activity.

It is likely that every representation is accompanied by a disturbance capable of giving rise to an emotion, and at the same time having the effect [...] of reviving other representative states, ideas or images, but it would be a mistake to confuse or identify feeling and sensation.

Mr Lachelier (33) maintains that the representative and affective characteristics are inversely proportional to each other for each sensation; he regards the sensations of sight and touch as eminently representative, those of taste and smell as eminently affective, and those of hearing as intermediate. This theory has the very serious flaw of assuming that sensations are emotive in themselves and not simply accompanied by emotion.

The emotions or feelings that appear to be linked to the senses of sight and touch are mainly aesthetic in nature, but it is nonetheless true that these sensations, like others, affect our emotions; moreover, colour clashes, colours that are too violent or too bright, and the sensation of roughness are unpleasant, while harmonious shades, etc. are pleasant. On the other hand, sensations of taste and smell also have representative value; they provide information about external matters and indicate whether the objects that cause them are suitable or unsuitable for the organism. It would be difficult to argue that the sense of smell in animals, which is highly developed, is purely emotional in nature.

We can therefore say that all sensations have representative value, but it should be noted that they are all originally quite poor in information and that it is habit, together with the memory of past experiences, that makes them increasingly representative.

One may wonder whether there are really no more or fewer distinct types of sensations than those we listed at the beginning.

---

33 — Jules Lachelier (Fontainebleau 1832-1918), French philosopher. An important representative of the Renaissance of spiritualism in France. For Lachelier, the foundation of phenomena is indeed spiritual, and the mind is both intellect and will. Of particular importance is his essay entitled *Psychology and Metaphysics* (1883), which complements his previous essay *Du fondement de l'induction* (1871).

Those who admit this say that cold and heat cannot be regarded as one and the same sensation, although for physicists there is only heat at various degrees, cold being purely negative.

Certainly, the sensations that come to us from temperature, as defined and determined by physicists, are, as sensations, independent to a very large extent from that temperature itself, but this does not prevent us from considering heat and cold as different sensations provided by one and the same sense, the sense of temperature, and indeed each of the other senses also provides various data that can be as qualitatively different as these.

But we must go further: the sense of temperature is not really a distinct and special sense, and its organs are those of touch.

Certainly, the sensations of hot and cold are different from the sensations of touch proper, but if we refused to consider them as modes of touch for this reason, we might just as well claim that we must distinguish two senses within the sense of sight, because they give us, on the one hand, the sensation of light and colour and, on the other, that of the shape of objects, which constitute two very different orders of qualities.

We will therefore stick to the enumeration of the five external senses, the only one that all of antiquity has accepted and into which certain moderns, under the pretext of completing or perfecting it, have introduced nothing but unnecessary complications (34).

This does not mean that the different data [...] can be reduced to one another; even more so, not all sensations can be

---

34 — It is necessary to recall that, from a traditional point of view, this list corresponds directly to the cosmological theory of the five elements: "We recall that the five elements recognised by Hindu doctrine are as follows: *ākāsha*, ether; *vāyu*, air; *tējas*, fire; *ap*, water; *prithvī*, earth. (...)

On the other hand, each element corresponds to a perceptible quality that is regarded as its own quality, the one that essentially manifests its nature and through which it is known to us; and the correspondence thus established between the five elements and the five senses is as follows: ether corresponds to hearing (*shrotra*), air to touch (*twach*), fire to sight (*chakshus*), water to taste (*rasana*), and earth to smell (*ghrāna*) (Guenon, *Études sur l'Hindouisme*, Éditions Traditionnelles, Paris, 1973, pp. 47-48). But the theory of the five elements in turn derives from the doctrine of the five conditions of bodily existence: "The existence of individual beings in the physical world is in fact subject to a set of five conditions: space, time, matter, form and life, which can be corresponded to the five bodily senses, as well as to the five elements " (René Guénon, "Connais-toi toi-même" in *Mélanges*, Gallimard, Paris, 1976, p. 185, n. 13); " We will only say that the five *tanmātras* ["subtle elemental determinations", N. d'A. G.] are usually designated by the names of the sensible qualities: auditory or sonorous (*shabda*), tangible (*sparsha*), visible (*rūpa*), with the double meaning of form and colour), sapid (*rasa*), olfactory (*gandha*); but these qualities can only be considered here in a principled, as it were, and 'undeveloped' state, since it is only through the *bhūtas* [corporeal and perceptible elements, N. d'A. G.] that they will be effectively manifested in the perceptible order; (...) Between the *tanmātras* and the *bhūtas*, and constituting with the latter the group of "unproductive productions", there are eleven distinct, properly individual faculties, which proceed from *ahankāra*, and which, at the same time, all participate in the five *tanmātras*. Of the eleven faculties in question, ten are external: five of sensation and five of action; the eleventh, whose nature is related to both, is the internal sense or mental faculty (*manas*), and the latter is directly united with consciousness (*ahankāra*). " (René Guénon, *Man and His Becoming According to the Vedānta*, Paris, 1947, pp. 69-70). As we know, Guénon devoted a specific study to the five conditions of bodily existence, which unfortunately remained incomplete (René Guénon, "Connais-toi toi-même" in *Mélanges*, Gallimard, Paris, 1976, pp. 109-131).

He would have liked to write an entire book on this fundamental doctrine which, among other things, forms the theoretical basis for the various techniques used to awaken the subtle centres, and thus to realise the 'Lesser Mysteries'.

transformations of two or three fundamental sensations, and even less so of a single sensation.

For this to be the case, simple differences in quantity would have to give rise to differences in quality, which is incomprehensible, as it would mean that sensations can become different while remaining essentially the same.

Let us return to the irreducibility of sensations given by the same sense; in touch itself, leaving aside the sensations of hot and cold, we can first distinguish between external touch and internal touch.

In both, we can distinguish between kinesthetic sensations and other sensations that are more static or related to balance; we could even say that there are special sensations for the movements of each muscle and each joint: since we can distinguish between these sensations, they must be qualitatively different. There are also visceral sensations, which are generally vague, and those overall sensations known as coenesthetic sensations.

We can take the distinction even further among contact sensations themselves: sensations such as smooth, rough and coarse are qualitatively different from one another.

The eye gives us sensations of both light and form, and among the light sensations, those relating to the intensity of illumination must be distinguished from colour sensations; if we consider colours, although they are only different modalities of light, each of them nonetheless has a distinct quality for our sensation.

What makes us assimilate certain sensations to certain others and bring them together to oppose them to other groups of sensations is, first of all, that we associate these sensations, which we say belong to the same group, with the idea of the same sense, and also because they give us information of the same kind about the external world and frequently arouse similar ideas or feelings in us.

In short, we could distinguish a multitude of groups of sensations that cannot be reduced to one another, but this is all the more reason why, if we want to limit ourselves to a general classification, we should stop, as we have done, at the list of the five external senses, which can no longer be a disadvantage once we accept that each of these senses does not exclusively provide us with a single type of sensation forming a strictly defined and delimited category.

Sometimes, facts that are not really sensations have been counted among sensations: for example, there is no sensation of effort.

If we break down this supposed sensation, we find first of all the idea of a certain goal to be achieved and the will to achieve it, and secondly a muscular sensation, that is, an internal touch sensation that we subsequently interpret as a sensation of resistance, but which is initially just an internal state, like any other sensation. What gives us the illusion of feeling effort is that we know we have muscles and that we are able to interpret the actions and reactions of these muscles and other parts of our body as

impulses, shocks, resistance; but all this is acquired and cannot exist within us from the outset.

We must not confuse what experience and science teach us about sensation with sensation itself; on the other hand, through repeated effort, we end up always remembering, from the very beginning of the effort we are currently making, the muscular sensations we have already experienced in similar conditions, and so we believe that these two facts, namely the will to make the effort and the image of past muscular sensations, are one and the same, when in fact they are only contemporaneous. We believe we are feeling what we are actually only remembering.

Let us add that the will is followed by muscular movements that we may well not notice, and that the muscular sensations we experience come after the voluntary decision to perform a movement.

Moreover, proof that there is no sensation of effort is that for this to be the case, there would have to be nervous sensations, and there are none; what we believe to be nervous sensations are in fact muscular sensations.

The nerves inform the brain of what is happening in the muscles, but what is happening in the nerve itself, which controls the movement of the muscle, is not felt at all.

Some people speak of a vital sense, but what they call this is simply the general result of all the sensations we have at a given moment and all the emotional states that accompany them: it is therefore nothing more than caenesthesia.

We have not specifically discussed here the sensations of extension provided by sight and touch, since these involve, along with sensation, more complicated intellectual operations, and for the moment we need only consider pure and simple sensations: we will return to this subject later.

It should be noted that sensation, in the sense in which we use the term, is solely the operation of the external senses; we therefore do not need to consider what is often called *the sensorium commune*, also known as the inner sense or internal sense.

This internal sense is consciousness itself, insofar as it directly knows its own operations and also insofar as it centralises and coordinates the data from the external senses and all other particular faculties.

Although we have maintained the fundamental irreducibility of the various sensations that are generally regarded as being of the same kind, we do not deny that there are sensations that are more similar to each other than they are to other sensations.

We can therefore ask ourselves how to classify sensations within the same group of colours or sounds, for example, but classifying within the same group is just as artificial as distinguishing between completely separate groups. When we try to classify sounds according to intensity, pitch and timbre, i.e. according to the number of vibrations, their amplitude and their harmonics, we cannot say that we are classifying sound sensations, because this

classifying sensations according to their physical antecedents is not classifying the sensations themselves.

The same is true when we classify colours according to intensity, saturation and tonality, i.e. the amount of white light mixed with the colour, the purity of the colour and the number of vibrations; when we distinguish between aromatic, pungent and savoury smells by comparison, we are classifying sensations not according to their very nature, but simply in relation to the images associated with them.

When we classify flavours as salty, sweet, bitter and sour, we are simply noting the difference between them, rather than making a true classification.

Moreover, we should not believe that we could better classify sensations based on their physiological effects, because such a classification, no more than the one we have just discussed, would tell us nothing about the nature of the sensations themselves (35).

---

35 — From the point of view of realisation, the various initiatory paths of the "Lesser Mysteries" gradually lead to the restoration of the primordial Adamic state of the "true man" according to the Taoist definition, precisely through the control of the indefinite psychic potentialities related to what, on the purely physical level, are our five faculties of action and sensation, plus the mind. This results in what Tibetan *Dzogchen*, for example, calls the "rainbow body", consisting of five colours, namely the five elements, sublimated through the conscious transcendence of the five corresponding conditions of bodily existence. In reality, at this point, all that is needed is a final leap of consciousness to instantly attain the "diamond-lightning body" referred to in *Vajrayana* Buddhism, where the various "colourings" of formal existence merge definitively into the spiritual unity of primordial white light. This is the fulfilment of the "Great Mysteries" (on the Eurasian notion of the "body of light", see Grossato, *Le Livre des Symboles. Les métamorphoses de l'humain entre l'Orient et l'Occident*, Éditions du Rocher, Paris, 2000, p. 188).



Fig. 3. Emblematic image of Sight.  
 Reproduction taken from Horapollo's  
*Hieroglyphica*, Paris 1551.



Fig. 4. Emblematic image of Hearing.  
 Reproduction taken from Ori Apollinis  
 Niliaci, *De sacris Aegyptiorum notis*,  
 Parisiis 1574.



Fig. 5. Emblematic image of Touch.  
 Reproduction taken from Ori Apollinis  
 Niliaci, *De sacris Aegyptiorum notis*,  
 Parisiis 1574.

## Chapter IX

### Notions of psychophysics

One of the postulates of psychophysics is that sensation has intensity. The intensity of the external stimulus may have a fixity that the intensity of sensation, if it exists at all, does not have. Hence the very natural idea, once the postulate is accepted, of studying sensation in relation to stimulation.

Weber (36) accepted that the intensity of sensation should be studied in relation to that of the external stimulus: he first noted that the intensity of sensation is not proportional to that of the stimulus and that it does not vary continuously with it.

The sensation has what is called a threshold, meaning that a certain minimum amount of the external stimulus is required for it to occur.

And it also has a peak; above a certain intensity of the external stimulus, the sensation no longer exists, or a completely different one occurs.

In 1894, Weber posited the following law: "The amount that must be added to a sensation in order to produce a perceptible difference in that sensation is not an absolute amount, but a relative amount: the increase that must produce an appreciable change in a sensation is in constant proportion to the amount of the external stimulus to which it is added."

In 1860, Fechner (37) considered that minimal changes in sensation should all be equal, including the change from 0 sensation to the threshold sensation, which he represented by 1, and he posited the following law: "Sensation increases as the logarithm of excitation."

Fechner claimed that the intervals between all possible sensations starting from 0 were equal, so that by representing the sensations experienced when varying the external stimulus by 1, 2, 3, 4, these numbers should correspond to the intensity of these sensations: for example, the sensation represented by 5 should have an intensity equal to 5 times that of the first possible sensation, or threshold, which is represented by 1.

In reality, these numbers are nothing more than the order numbers of all possible sensations starting from 0.

Fechner's mistake is to believe that these numbers signify something other than the order of sensations and that they correspond to a true intensity.

---

36 — Max Weber (Erfurt 1864 - Munich 1920), German sociologist. In his most famous work, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (1904), he characterises/determines the essence of capitalism in the affirmation of rationality, at the expense of ideal values.

37 — Gustav Theodor Fechner (Gross Särchen, Prussia 1801 - Leipzig 1887), German philosopher and psychologist. His work marks the true methodological beginning of experimental psychology, which was added as a new discipline to philosophical psychology and psychological physiology. The theory to which Guénon refers to here is undoubtedly the one set out in *Elemente der Psychophysik* (1860). In the typewritten copy, his name is incorrectly cited all three times as "Feschner".

We have said that psychological phenomena are not measurable in themselves, from which it follows that there can be no intensity of sensations; in reality, there are only pure qualitative and not quantitative differences between sensations.

Without condemning psychophysics outright, we must therefore greatly restrict the scope of the experiments carried out by psychophysicists and not expect results that they are incapable of providing.

The same applies to psychophysiology, i.e. the study of the physiological effects of sensations in relation to those sensations; some have also sought to use these physiological effects to determine the intensity of sensations, but the results are no more conclusive than those of psychophysicists.

Efforts have also been made to measure the duration of certain psychological phenomena, particularly sensations, as well as the duration of physiological phenomena preceding or accompanying certain psychological acts.

None of these experiments should lead us to believe that psychology can be reduced to physiology and physics.

In reality, these are three distinctly separate sciences, although their objects are more or less interdependent and may, to a certain extent, react upon one another.



## Chapter X

# Perception

Any judgement that is immediately associated with sensation is generally referred to as perception. The meaning of this term can even be extended: we could talk about the perception of the difference between a sensation or between two arbitrary facts, or even simply the perception of a special quality [...] observed in something entirely internal, such as a feeling or a judgement. [...] perception could be associated with any psychological fact other than sensation: therefore, to be more precise, we will refer to perception that relates to sensation as external perception.

But ultimately, all the cases we have just mentioned are one and the same as external perception proper; they are not essentially different in nature, for thought always attributes an independent reality to what it thinks and regards it as distinct, at least by virtue of thinking it.

There are at least four more or less explicit judgements in our perceptions:

- 1 - we affirm the existence of an object independent of our sensation;
- 2 - the thinking subject places its own existence opposite that of the object;
- 3 - a quality is affirmed as being appropriate to the object, or inherent in it;
- 4 - A relationship is asserted between the subject as the knower and the object as the known.

It suffices to list these to analyse perception, for its judgements, that is, to account for how much the mind here goes beyond what is provided by raw experience: indeed, the fourth judgement is nothing other than the mind's affirmation of its very right to affirm; the third posits the individuality of objects, attributing to them a certain permanence, that is, a more or less absolute identity in time and also, where applicable, in space; the second posits that when we say 'I think', we mean by 'I' not only a grammatical and logical subject, but also what we might call an ontological subject, that is, a real "me"; finally, the first judgement posits the real existence of an object external to this subject.

All these judgements are only possible thanks to ideas of relationship, unity, multiplicity, totality, and also thanks to the attribution by thought [...] to the judgement it forms, such as necessity, generality, etc.

This shows how perception is a purely intellectual act and therefore cannot be explained by pure and simple sensation.

The phenomenon of perception is highly complicated, further complicated by elements that are added to raw sensation.

We have said that American psychologists call 'percept' the whole formed by what we might call, first, sensation and immediate perception and, second, the memories of sensations, judgements of ideas and feelings that this perception and immediate sensation awaken and which come

minge with them; they form such a considerable mass that Mr Bergson (38) was able to say: "in the end, perceiving is little more than an opportunity to remember!"

All these elements, simultaneously present in our consciousness, react to each other to such an extent that, curiously, we believe we are actually feeling what we are only remembering; and we even believe we are feeling what is simply the object of our judgement, because sensation is the dominant state in perception, the one whose character most influences the others.

Thus, we believe we feel not only the sensation itself, but also everything that coexists with it in the complex whole we have just mentioned: this is one of the main difficulties of scientific observation and true attention.

Given that perception is so complex, it is easy to understand why the same things can appear so different to children and adults, and so different depending on the individual and the circumstances: race, character, environment, moment.

---

38 — Henri Bergson (Paris 1859-1941), French philosopher. His thinking tended towards the fusion of science and religion, a subject he also discussed with Albert Einstein; this thinking greatly influenced the fields of literature and the arts, from Proust to Symbolism, from Hermeticism to Impressionism in painting. For Guénon, this singular figure spiritualist philosopher was a frequent "target". Moreover, in another passage from his letter from Sétif, quoted above in note 14, when speaking of mystics who "go far beyond the realm of psychology," he observes that "the expression 'inner life' has taken on a very unfortunate meaning among modernists, a meaning that is not unrelated to that of Bergsonian 'intuition' [...]". And further on, he writes to his correspondent that he has nevertheless found the time to read Bergson's *Creative Evolution*. (N. d. É.).

## Chapter XI

### Acquired perceptions

Among acquired perceptions, the most important group is formed by what are called localisations (not to be confused with the cerebral localisations sought by physiologists).

A newborn child has only sensations to begin with; its intellectual faculties must have reached a certain degree of development before it can distinguish its own body from other bodies and, even more so, its various organs from one another.

Localisation, whatever it is that we localise, is externalisation, objectification, but with a degree of precision that immediate perception does not have in itself.

This localisation consists in the perception of a space outside ourselves, of bodies located in this space juxtaposed with one another and formed of parts also juxtaposed with one another. It also consists in the idea that our body occupies a separate place among other bodies and, finally, in what could be called the topographical knowledge of our body.

What we localise in this way are, first, the things considered to be the causes of our sensations and, second, the organs considered to be the conditions for the action of things on us (things and organs present themselves to us as sets of sensations).

The first stage of localisation is still a very vague externalisation, because things first appear to us in the form of floating groups within our own consciousness; insofar as we distinguish consciousness itself from these groups, we do not yet distinguish a 'non-self' but a 'self' and 'mine'.

It is these groups that form the content of consciousness; moreover, the idea of 'mine' contains the seed of the idea of 'not-self', for it is the idea of something that, while being within us, is nevertheless not ourselves.

The changes that take place in the content of consciousness must bring about this distinction fairly quickly, for what changes must obviously seem less essential to our own being than what remains permanent; then the idea of causality, which quickly awakens in the mind, reinforces the idea of a real 'not-self' as well as that of a real 'self'.

Indeed, we perceive sensible qualities as exerting influence on one another and as exerting actions on us that we did not want, the cause of which we do not feel within ourselves: from there, it is only a short step to imagining, if we have not already done so, a reality outside ourselves to explain these facts.

The fact that sensations that have disappeared reappear afterwards should give us the idea of things that last, even when we do not feel them, that is, things whose existence is independent of our sensations. Thus

gradually the idea of "mine" becomes that of "not mine", but this transformation cannot be clear without the perception of three-dimensional space; it is only when we have acquired the perception of depth or distance that we objectify with precision and in a definitive manner.

We can therefore refer to the period when foreign bodies are perceived as three-dimensional objects, existing outside of us in distinct places, formed of parts that are juxtaposed and external to each other, as the second stage of localisation.

The idea of a third dimension of extension allows us to explain quite clearly a large number of peculiarities of sensory experience.

Two-dimensional extension is perceived by both sight and touch, and even the extension perceived by each of these two senses is considered identical to that perceived by the other because of the constant or nearly constant connection between these two extensions; as a result, when perceiving one of these two extensions, we believe we perceive the other, which is yet another acquired sensation. It must even be added that two-dimensional extension, as we perceive it at first, is not determined as a straight plane, for the very idea of a straight plane presupposes the idea of a third dimension, that of the direction perpendicular to this plane. We must not therefore say that, to begin with, we see all bodies at the same distance: in reality, we see them at no distance.

We must now seek to understand how the idea of a third dimension can arise. When, for example, a visual sensation that initially appears to the right of another then disappears and reappears to the left, we are naturally led to think that it has not been removed in the meantime, and therefore to suppose that it is possible for it to pass behind the first: this is the supposition of different planes parallel to each other.

The idea of the third dimension is the idea of perpendicular direction. Furthermore, after noticing the connection between the extent seen and the extent touched, then experiencing the need to have certain sensations in order to move from the sight alone of an object to the sight and touch combined of that same object, given that we have already perceived movements in the plane, we have everything we need to form the notion of distance or depth.

So far, the reasons for distinguishing our own body from other bodies have not yet been clarified: it is in the third stage of localisation that our own body is distinguished from foreign bodies, and it is mainly through exploratory touch that this distinction is made.

When we touch one of our hands with the other, we have a double sensation, which alerts us to the existence of a special link between the body we are touching and the consciousness that experiences both sensations at the same time.

Just as we localise our sensations themselves in the objects we regard as their external cause, so we localise the sensations we experience in the parts of our body where experience reveals to us that the conditions for the action of things on us are found.

If we have difficulty locating internal sensations, it is because neither exploratory touch nor sight, which is touch's most valuable aid, can help us

help us in this case.

As a result of accumulated experience, we are able to judge very quickly, that is, in short, to perceive distances of all kinds; and these are not our only acquired perceptions, for there is acquired perception wherever there are habitual associations between any sensation and other sensations.

A single sensation that is part of this group of sensations, which we perceive as a body, can give us the illusion of having the other sensations of the same group at the same time: thus we say that we hear a car driving by that we cannot see, when in fact we only hear a certain noise and the rest is a matter of memory and judgement.

On the other hand, we relate the phenomena of smell, taste and even sound to sensations of touch and sight, which we consider more essential than the others because they seem to us to have a fixed character that the others do not have.

In short, we can say in general terms that acquired perception is immediate perception plus associations of ideas and images.



Fig. 6. Emblematic image of Touch and Sight, here considered in their most essential and inseparable function of joint perception of *spatial form*. It should be noted, *in passing*, that the iconographic theme of the hand with an "eye" in the centre is equivalent, in Christian symbolism, to the stigmata radiating light from Christ and certain saints. Reproduction taken from G. C. Capaccio, *Delle Imprese*, Naples 1592, L. II, f. 146r.

## Chapter XII

### Extent and duration

In our previous study of sensations, we left aside those specifically related to extent and duration. It has been disputed whether these are sensations at all: in any case, they have a unique character of constancy that is not found in any other sensations, and in this respect they deserve to be studied separately.

On the one hand, any phenomenon judged to be internal or external is given in time, and is therefore inseparable from the idea of duration; on the other hand, only certain phenomena, among those judged to be external, are given in space, and are therefore inseparable from the idea of extension: these are visual and tactile sensations.

Other perceptible phenomena are indirectly related to space; as for phenomena considered internal, i.e. psychological phenomena, they are in no way related to space, either directly or indirectly.

We will leave aside here the question of the objectivity of space and time, which is not a psychological issue.

We will examine the various objections that have been raised to the theory that regards extension and duration as sensations.

1 — It should be noted that extent and duration are not accompanied by emotional facts as they are with other sensations, but only by purely intellectual reflections of a purely intellectual nature. This is undoubtedly true to a certain extent, although we must at least take into account the existence of certain aesthetic feelings, such as those of proportion and rhythm, which are obviously linked to extension and duration respectively.

It may be true that these feelings are produced by ideas associated with extension and duration, rather than by duration and extension themselves, and that the same is true of various feelings of a completely different order, such as agoraphobia, vertigo, and boredom (feelings that are partly conditioned by physiological state); but we can also admit the existence, at least at the origin, of an idea that may be more or less subconscious, as an intermediary between all sensations and the feelings they provoke.

Moreover, it should be noted that other sensations are unevenly linked to emotions and that all of them can suggest intellectual reflections.

2 — It is said that extension and duration, being the principles of mathematics, which is a science of pure ideas, can themselves only be pure ideas. First of all, a reservation should be made with regard to duration, which only comes into play in mechanics and not in mathematics proper.

Indeed, we cannot accept Kant's theory (39), according to which the consideration of duration is necessary for arithmetic, under the

---

39 — Immanuel Kant (Königsberg 1724-1804), philosopher, the greatest German representative of the Enlightenment. One of his most important works is the famous *Critique of Pure Reason* (1781).

pretext that we cannot think of all numbers at the same time. This is psychologically false: this theory is based solely on confusion, because the succession of numbers must be conceived as a purely logical succession and not as a chronological or temporal succession.

As for extension, we can say that it is as an idea that it is the principle of geometry, but [...] all science intellectualises the sensations that are most obviously such, transforming them in a way into ideas, in order to make them into theory from some point of view...

3 — Thirdly, it is also said that, on the one hand, extension resembles duration more than it does the various sensible qualities, such as colours and sounds, and that on the other hand, duration seems to be a pure idea, because we cannot see what sense would give it to us.

Those who raise this objection forget first of all to distinguish between the idea of duration, as it is considered in mechanics, and the starting point of such an idea in immediate experience. What we have just said about extension as the principle of geometry can also be applied here. Secondly, duration is certainly not a feeling, nor can it be said to be a notion; it is perceived as a quality of the same kind as the sensible qualities.

Extension is given by two senses: sight and touch. We can just as easily admit that duration is given by all the senses, if indeed it is true that it is not linked more particularly to a specific sense, a question we cannot examine here.

Only one difficulty remains: if duration is given by one or more senses, it seems that it should not be given with mental facts of the highest order, the least sensitive. But even if these facts were truly independent of duration in themselves, the same cannot be said of their physiological concomitants, and it suffices that they be accompanied by cerebral movements, as is likely, for them not to appear independent of duration.

To go further, we would have to ask ourselves whether there really are things that are not subject to duration, or even that are subject to modes of duration quite different from the temporal duration that is given to us in ordinary experience and which is the only one we have to concern ourselves with here.

All these questions lie entirely outside the realm of classical psychology.

4 — Fourthly, it is pointed out that space and time are constructs; we will not examine this question in depth for the moment, but if it were true, it would simply prove that there is reason to distinguish between space and time considered as constructs and extension and duration, which would then be the elements of these constructs, the data from which they are elaborated; and there is obviously nothing to prevent these data from being sensible qualities.

5 — We note with Kant that space and time are the conditions of all experience and that, consequently, they cannot be given in experience, which amounts to saying that they are not sensations.

But Kant is wrong to say that space and time, or extension and duration, are

necessary conditions for all possible experiences. Moreover, whatever role is attributed to extension and duration, in order for them to be as intimately connected to our sensations as they are, they must themselves be felt in some way. We cannot imagine what colour would be without extension, for example, or what any sensation would be without duration; and if we say that we never perceive extension and duration on their own, we can respond that we do not perceive colour on its own either, and yet no one would conclude from this that colour is not a sensation.

6 — Finally, it is said that if the third dimension of extension is constructed (and it is, at least in the sense that it constitutes an acquired perception), the same may be true

the same of the others. This is not the same thing, because we have seen that when we already possess two-dimensional extension, we have everything we need to construct the third dimension (which does not mean, incidentally, that it does not correspond to something as real and objective as the other two, but we do not need to consider the question from this point of view), but as for constructing two-dimensional space or constructing duration, we do not see how this would be any more possible than constructing colour, sound or any other perceptible quality.

None of these objections really proves that extension and duration are not sensations; we can admit that they are sensations that are more intellectual in nature than the others, even if this means that there is something in them that is *a priori*. This does not prevent them from being sensations, for to say sensation is not essentially to say something entirely empirical, entirely *a posteriori*; all sensations are translations of external reality, translations in which the mind obviously plays a part: therefore, in a certain sense, they are all *a priori*, that is to say, they all involve elements independent of experience. Moreover, if we shift our perspective from sensation to perception, it is clear that there are as many purely intellectual elements involved in terms of extent and duration as there are in terms of other sensory qualities. What we have said applies to all perception.

We will conclude with a brief overview of some theories that differ from those discussed above.

1 — The so-called intellectualist theory derives the idea or sensation of extent and that of duration from perception from an order of coexistence and an order of succession. If we speak of ideas, this is contrary to the theory we have accepted; if we speak of sensations, it is illogical to make sensation proceed from perception, unless we understand the latter word in a different sense from the one we have taken it in.

In reality, the thesis we are discussing is merely an erroneous transposition of Leibnitz's theory, according to which space itself is the order of coexistences and time is the order of successions; but, as this theory, thus restored to its true meaning, is no longer psychological in nature, it would be irrelevant to discuss it here.

2 — As for Kant's theory, we have already indicated its essential thesis, namely



namely that space and time are the necessary conditions of all experience: they are what Kant calls the a priori forms of sensibility, meaning by sensibility the faculty of feeling.

But to develop the reasons why we cannot accept this conception, we would have to move beyond the psychological point of view.

We need not seek here to determine what extension and time are.

3 — Among the most important empiricist theories are those of Bain (40) and Stuart Mill (41): according to these philosophers, time or duration are given with muscular sensations, and when movement is added to them, extension is imagined. The authors of this theory forget that the elements from which they start must already be seen or felt as spatial in order to be judged as anything other than simply temporal; moreover, if muscular sensations are given as temporal, so are the others.

Finally, when these philosophers speak of space, viewing it as synonymous with reversible time, they introduce an idea that is very unclear: either the expression "reversible time" means nothing, or the idea it expresses is identical to that of juxtaposition or simultaneity, which is what needs to be explained.

Our conclusion will be as follows: either extension and duration are sensations, because none of the objections made to this thesis are really convincing, or at least they are given immediately with sensations.

In any case, they are perceived by the sensory faculties.

It is not possible for us at this point to go further and resolve the alternative we have just stated, because we cannot do so without addressing the question of space and time outside of psychology.

---

40 — Alexander Bain (Aberdeen 1818-1903), Scottish philosopher and psychologist. A supporter of J.S. Mill's Associationism

, he founded the first journal of psychology and philosophy entitled *Mind*. 41 — John Stuart Mill (London 1806-Avignon 1873), English philosopher and economist.

## Chapter XIII

### The association of ideas and images

So far, we have studied the faculties of acquisition; we will now study memory, which is the faculty of conservation or restoration, and which includes reminiscence, recognition and localisation in the past. Imagination must be studied immediately after memory, because its inventions are nothing more than combinations of memories. As for the study of the association of ideas, it forms part of the study of memory, because it is through association that most memories are recalled.

From a psychological point of view, the association of ideas or images should be understood as nothing more than the fact that one idea or image recalls another in the consciousness; this follows from what we have said about faculties in general.

It would undoubtedly be appropriate to consider associations of feelings, but these can be explained in the same way as associations of ideas or images. There is also what is known as motor memory, which is a very complex organisation of movement memories and depends mainly on associations of ideas or images and perhaps also on associations of feelings.

Aristotle was the first to speak of the association of ideas: he distinguishes between associations by contiguity in space and time, by resemblance and by contrast. There has been a desire to reduce association by contiguity in space to association by contiguity in time, on the pretext that for two things contiguous in space to be associated, they must have been seen at the same moment or at two successive moments: but even if this is true, the distinction should be maintained because space cannot be reduced to time, nor can simultaneity, which is an order in space, be reduced to succession, which is an order in time.

Secondly, it has been claimed that contrast is only a special case of resemblance: undoubtedly, we can only speak of contrast between things that have a certain nature in common, but it is obviously not because of what they have in common that there can be contrast between them. Moreover, contrast necessarily implies dissimilarity, and it is contradictory to regard dissimilarity as a special case of similarity.

Hume (42) admits associations by resemblance, by contiguity in time and space, and by causality; we need only emphasise this last point, since the other cases were distinguished by Aristotle.

The idea of cause can only play a role in the association of ideas insofar as it has a psychological existence, but then it only reinforces an association by contiguity that already exists, for there is necessarily contiguity between cause and effect: there is therefore no real reason to distinguish the case of association.

---

42 David Hume (Edinburgh, 1711–1776), Scottish philosopher. Author of, among other works, *A Treatise of Human Nature* (1739-1740) and *Philosophical Essays on Human Understanding* (1748).

by causality.

The Scottish philosopher Reid (43) distinguishes between two kinds of causes of association, namely, first, fortuitous relationships such as contiguity in space and time, the relationship between signs and the things signified, etc., and second, logical relationships of cause and effect, of container and content, of principle and consequence: it is not clear what interest it can be, in explaining psychological facts, whether the relationships that exist between the primary causes of these facts are fortuitous or logical. This distinction can only be made from a point of view that has nothing to do with psychology; moreover, it is at least doubtful that purely fortuitous relationships exist: for example, the relationship between the sign and the thing signified, which Reid regards as such, may undoubtedly be the result of a convention, but there is no convention that is entirely arbitrary.

Many psychologists want to reduce association by resemblance itself to association by contiguity, pointing out that resemblance is a partial identity: A+C reminds us of A+B by association, because in our consciousness A, which is currently contiguous with C, was once contiguous with B. One may object to this that each of the sensations of which we are clearly conscious is simple and indivisible, although we may have several of them at once.

No doubt in our subconscious there is no fusion between the multiple elementary sensations that result in a single clear and distinct sensation, but we should not exaggerate the role that the subconscious can play in the phenomenon of association. Although there are certainly associations that are established outside the realm of clear and distinct consciousness, on the other hand, we could cite cases where two sensations that we consider to be similar to a certain extent are, in a way, double sensations, and others where similar emotional states are aroused by very different sensations, but which thus become partially identical, if not in themselves, at least in their effects.

But these are too specific cases to allow us to generalise, and we cannot legitimately conclude that the case of similarity is always reduced to the case of contiguity.

Resemblance, as we have said, is a partial identity, that is, an identity of certain elements of the two things that resemble each other; contrast also relates to elements inherent in both of the two things between which this contrast exists. It is therefore easy to understand the cause of the association.

Two contiguous things are still separate, but association must only be possible if there has been a connection, and connection always implies at least partial fusion or synthesis. Since this connection does not exist in things, it can only have been brought about by a certain power specific to consciousness; therefore, in

---

43 — Thomas Reid (Strachan, Kincardineshire, 1710 - Glasgow 1796), Scottish philosopher. A staunch opponent of empiricism, his thinking, which can be defined as "natural realism", stands in direct opposition to that of Hume and his predecessors. Through his writings, he was the founder of the important Scottish school of thought known as "common sense".

". In addition to his *An Inquiry Concerning Human Understanding According to the Principles of Common Sense* (1764), his main work, *Essays on the Intellectual Faculties of Man* (1785), is also worth mentioning here.

Ultimately, it is this synthetic function that we have already recognised in consciousness that explains the association of ideas and, consequently, memory, insofar as memory is an association of ideas.

Now, if the synthetic activity of consciousness explains the connection, which explains association and memory by association, it remains to be explained how this connection has a lasting effect.

Clear conscious memory can only be fully explained by appealing to subconscious memory, a reservoir of memory where all the connections made in the past by consciousness remain.

Moreover, it is difficult to see how anything could completely leave consciousness, or indeed how it could re-enter it; the phenomenon of recognition in particular would be incomprehensible if we did not accept the existence of subconscious memory.

It remains to be seen what role physiology plays in the association of ideas; at first glance, it seems that forgetting must be explained physiologically, and indeed it is explained by fatigue, which itself only makes sense in physiology. Let us note, moreover, that according to what we have just said, we can only be talking about relative forgetting, understood as a transition from clear and distinct consciousness to the subconscious. But the functions of the nervous system do not only explain forgetfulness; they can also contribute to a certain extent to explaining the association of ideas: there is no doubt that all simultaneous or contiguous excitations in time of the nervous system correspond to connections of movements whose subsequent reproduction will be facilitated by molecular changes in the nervous elements, so that if a certain cerebral state is partially reproduced under the influence of an external stimulus, or even of some internal cause, the rest of that state must also tend to regenerate itself. Similarly, any excitation of a state that is partially similar to another must tend to regenerate the other in its entirety.

We must therefore admit the existence of certain physiological conditions of association by contiguity and association by resemblance, but we must not forget that neither the first time nor subsequently can movements themselves generate a thought or any state of consciousness, and that the physiological can at most be an occasional cause of the psychic.

In short, the association of ideas must be explained simultaneously by two concurrent activities: on the one hand, that of consciousness, which synthesises and permanently stores memories in its more or less obscure part, which we call the subconscious, and on the other hand, cerebral activity in the form of the organisation of reflexes and what we might call organic memory, i.e. the persistence of molecular changes left by any excitation.

But it must be clearly understood that the activity of consciousness alone explains the psychological fact considered in itself; the physiological explanation only accounts for the organic conditions of this fact, and if it is more important here than it is in relation to other psychological facts, it is because memory is more dependent on the organism than intellectual facts of a higher order.

## Chapter XIV

### Memory

The study is usually divided into four parts:

1 — conservation, 2 — reminiscence, 3 — recognition, 4 — localisation in the past.

In discussing the association of ideas, we have already studied a considerable part of the cases of reminiscence; we now have to study recognition and localisation in the past and also, first of all, what is called spontaneous memory. Spontaneous memory refers to a memory that cannot be explained by association or by a sudden disturbance of the nervous system (violent blow, fever, delirium).

We can cite at least one very clear case of spontaneous memory: it is the case where the cause of a sensation ceases to act, but the sensation remains; whether under the impulse of the will or without this impulse, we believe we still have the sensation when in reality it is only a memory.

On the other hand, when we are very preoccupied with an event, it is not useful to explain the frequent reappearance of thoughts about that event by association. Finally, if we consider, on the one hand, that nothing can disappear entirely from consciousness and, on the other hand, that consciousness is nevertheless obliged to change state at every moment, we must conclude that consciousness must have a spontaneous tendency to revive, whenever possible, the events that have passed through it.

The study of spontaneous memory also sheds light on the study of associative memory: we have just seen in the states of consciousness, taken individually, a tendency that explains the possibility of their reappearance. Now, the connection between two or more states, which we discussed in the previous chapter, a connection that is made by consciousness, is part of the content of consciousness itself; it is itself a state of consciousness like the others and must have the same tendency to reappear as soon as circumstances permit. Therefore, in all cases, it is the permanence of consciousness and its determinations that explain the possibility of memory and even the tendency to remember, that is, to regenerate previous states of consciousness; intermittent memory is, in short, only a substitute for permanent and total memory, which physiological conditions make impossible. As for the role of physiology in explaining these phenomena, we will only point out that there must also be spontaneous physiological repetition, because living matter has a tendency to return to the state it once assumed under any influence; in other words, habit in the form of repetition is a law of living matter; thus, when fatigue has passed, that is, when nutrition provided by circulation has restored vigour to the nervous tissues, there is naturally a tendency in these tissues to reproduce the movements and by consequently to cause the same psychic psychic

corresponding.

This is further supported by the fact that good nutrition of the brain, facilitated by good circulation, is an important condition for memory; but, as we said in the previous chapter, we must never confuse the organic conditions of a psychological fact with the fact itself. Moreover, if memory can be explained in part by an organic habit, the properties of living matter itself, insofar as they are truly special and inexplicable by the laws of physics and chemistry, must ultimately have an origin that is already psychological.

The phenomenon of recognition, which consists in affirming that a present state of consciousness is like an image of another state of consciousness that one had in the past, because such an affirmation is necessary for the present state to be recognised as a memory, that is, as other than present, this phenomenon, we say, is in reality a judgement analogous to the simple reminiscence of what perception is in relation to sensation.

Strictly speaking, there can be no direct knowledge of the past; there is only knowledge of the present accompanied by the idea of the past, which could be called the idea of a present other than the actual present, because it was known as present.

This idea of the past responds psychologically to a difficulty, which is this: an image presents itself to us with greater force and vividness than images we consider to be simply the work of our imagination, and moreover, it is accompanied by an even stronger idea of that same image; but the force of an image is precisely the characteristic by which we generally recognise that it must correspond to an external reality. We are therefore led, in order to explain this fact, to declare that the image in question corresponded to an external reality in a present other than the current present.

The idea of the 'self' is first, in one sense at least, the work of the judgement of recognition, and therefore of memory, but then this idea itself completes and clarifies the judgement of recognition, in which the idea of a real external object also plays a role in most cases.

The judgement of recognition may be more or less vague, but when we locate something precisely in the past, whether or not reasoning is involved, it is always by means of the association of ideas.

Our clearly conscious memory is not complete, due to the physiological conditions that determine fatigue and, as a result, forgetfulness; to remedy this defect as much as possible, we associate events from our past with certain landmarks, which are the most important events in our existence, and we order these landmarks by associating them with the idea of certain dates, counted according to the natural order of the series of numbers.

Finally, it would be worth studying memory disorders, particularly cases of amnesia and hypermnnesia; these disorders, like all other pathological phenomena, must be explained primarily, if not exclusively, by physiological causes. On the other hand, most of the phenomena known as personality alterations, which are interpreted in very different ways, can be explained

We have explained memory, in the final analysis, by the properties of consciousness, but it must be added that consciousness would not go far without memory, because of the law of change, which is an inevitable consequence of fatigue.

Furthermore, we must not forget that simple consciousness, which gives rise to memory, must be distinguished from reflective consciousness, to which the idea of the 'self' has been added, which is posterior to it.

The latter is consciousness perfected by memory, but memory was first generated by consciousness (44).

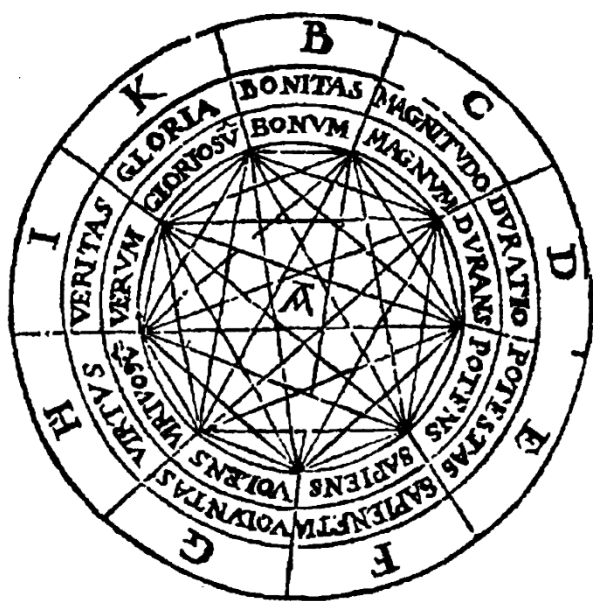


Fig. 7. *Rota combinatoria* illustrating the complex trinitarian relationships between the divine names within the *mens* of God, before their manifestation.

Reproduction taken from Raymond Lull's *Ars brevis*, in *Opera*, Argentinae 1617.

44 — Regarding memory from a higher perspective, that of Hinduism, see in particular Guénon, *Man and His Becoming According to the Vedanta*, Paris, 1947, pp. 20–21: "As for *Smṛiti*, the original meaning of its name is 'memory'; indeed, memory, being only a reflection of perception, can be taken to designate, by extension, anything that has the character of reflected or discursive, i.e. indirect, knowledge; and if knowledge is symbolised by light, as it most commonly is, pure intelligence and memory, or the intuitive faculty and the discursive faculty, may be represented respectively by the sun and the moon; this symbolism, which we cannot expand upon here, is moreover susceptible to multiple applications.

## Chapter XV

### Reproductive imagination

It should first be noted that the word imagination has two different meanings depending on whether it is used to refer to reproductive imagination or combinatory (creative!) imagination. The former is nothing more than the memory of images, while the latter, although related to memory, differs significantly from it: although the reproductive imagination is simply a province of memory, it may be interesting to examine it separately, as we know that some people have highly developed memories for ideas but not for images, and vice versa. There are people who are incapable of thinking except in words!

Those in whom the memory of images predominates are of several types: auditory, visual, and motor. Moreover, it should be noted that there is probably a motor memory in all other types of memory, and this must be the case if the regeneration of any mental state is accompanied, as is likely, by the regeneration, by the brain, of the corresponding system of molecular movements.

Memory can be divided almost indefinitely; for example, the memory of written words, heard words, read words, the memory of sound production, articulation in reading, the memory of the meaning of words, that is, their connection with ideas. These are all different types of memory, because in the case of amnesia, we see that one of them can be altered without the others being affected. Through hypnotism, we can achieve the same thing experimentally and isolate any kind of memory, as if it were a special memory.

People's special abilities depend, at least in part, on the type of memory that is most developed in them: we could therefore say that there are as many types of talent as there are types of memory, and even varieties of these types. Although memory is far from being everything in intelligence, it would be very difficult to succeed at anything without memory.

Moreover, it is really the strength of the original impression that explains the persistence of clearly conscious memory.

The role of images in the psychological life of the soul is very great; reason itself constantly presupposes not only the memory of ideas, but also that of facts, and psychologically, facts are images.

Ideas themselves are most often accompanied by verbal or felt images.

Finally, images seem, more than ideas, capable of arousing feelings and also action; thus feelings play a very considerable role in the imagination.



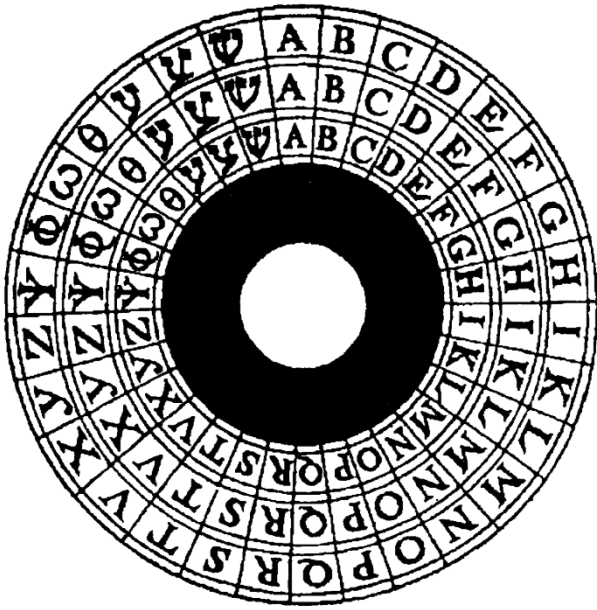


Fig. 8. As Guénon writes here, there is a "motor memory" in all the various types of memory.

Diagram of *Rota combinatoria*, derived from Lull, used by Giordano Bruno as a support for his *Ars Memoriae*: "Place, then, a stationary wheel between two other stationary wheels to obtain the elements appropriate to the two preceding ones: which are always referred to man: so that they are always able to present the nature of the letters wherever they are placed and whatever their arrangement. The fixed wheels that must be considered by the eye of the mind (*mens*) are of this kind. It is worth noting, in passing, the close resemblance between these mnemonic wheels, the diagram of the human eye, and certain rotating discs used for

induce hypnosis. Reproduced from Bruno, *Le ombre delle idee. Il canto di Circe. Il sigillo dei sigilli*, Rizzoli, Milan, 1997, pp. 162–163.

## Chapter XVI

### Combinatory imagination

The combinatory or creative imagination (45) is based on memory: the most novel and unexpected inventions are always combinations of things already known. If this were not the case, it would be difficult to explain to oneself and to others what one has discovered, since it would have no connection with things already known.

Not only do the elements of discovery pre-exist, but the laws of invention are also the same as those of memory and, above all, of the association of ideas. This is easy to understand if we note that all scientific ideas and aesthetic concepts consist, at their core, in the discovery of a certain harmony.

It is therefore based on an association by contiguity or even a spontaneous memory, but above all, in most cases, an association by resemblance: indeed, harmony and resemblance are partly synonymous terms, to such an extent that, even though the harmony in question is not directly suggested by the association by resemblance, it is nonetheless true that a judgement on the harmony of ideas or images or a judgement of resemblance ultimately plays a decisive role in discovery or invention.

In the case of simple daydreaming, it is spontaneous memory and association by contiguity that most often play the main role, which is why daydreaming rarely leads to interesting results.

Moreover, there are many kinds of harmony and resemblance, and even if inventions, whatever they may be, can all be explained in the same way, this does not prevent them from having very unequal values.

This difference between the various results of association by resemblance is partly due to the very difference in the elements of all kinds that are recalled by memory; we must not forget that it is the play of memory, as much as and even more than current sensations, that explains the appearance in consciousness, at the right moment, of elements whose fusion will have a more or less interesting result.

When theorising about invention, we forget:

- 1 — the fusion between various associated elements,
- 2 — the role that can be played in invention by *a priori* elements, by strictly rational ideas not derived from sensation,
- 3 — the influence of the association of ideas that intervene to modify these latter elements,
- 4 — Finally, the role played by judgement at the end of the series of mental phenomena, resulting in invention or discovery.

---

45 — As we know, the term "creative imagination" was used particularly by the philosopher and Islamist Henry Corbin in many of his writings.

It follows from the above that so-called creative imagination is not creative in the true sense of the word and that it is therefore better to call it combinative; it finds things that are new, but which are new only as a whole, which are different arrangements of pre-existing elements: no more than in chemical combinations can there be creation *ex nihilo*.

The elements of imagination are memories; the faculty of invention is closely dependent on memory. It is not a new and absolutely special faculty, and above all, it is not a faculty that belongs exclusively to a few people. Everyone makes discoveries to a greater or lesser extent, and even if they are of little interest, this does not change their nature; one could even say that understanding is always reinventing with the help of a teacher or a book. To make a complete study of imagination, it would be necessary to study imagination in animals and also in dreams (46).

The fertility of the imagination depends primarily on the ability to dissociate or associate, because this analysis allows us to discover subtle similarities that had previously escaped us; once the analysis has been carried out, the synthesis or fusion of the elements often takes place as if by itself, but this is not always the case, as there are very analytical minds that are not at all suited to synthesis.

It is obviously attention that makes the analysis and synthesis we are discussing here possible, and we have considered analysis and synthesis in general as the essential and constitutive powers of consciousness: attentive consciousness is consciousness doing better and more successfully what it was already doing naturally and spontaneously.

Let us clarify the differences between sensation, memory and imagination: sensation is a strong image; memory is a weaker image, but one whose parts are strongly linked together; imagination is a group of images that are at least as weak as the previous ones and, moreover, are only weakly linked together. When a memory image grows in strength and clarity, it tends to be mistaken for a sensation or, in other words, to become a hallucination; on the other hand, a very weak sensation tends to be mistaken for a memory or even an imagination. If the parts of a memory are weakly linked, the memory is difficult to recognise as such and may be mistaken for a simple imagination. Finally, people with a very vivid imagination sometimes tend to mistake what is merely a product of their imagination for a memory.

However, these errors or confusions are not inevitable in all cases; in particular, the phenomenon of recognition always occurs when the memory is strongly linked to an event that we know with certainty belongs to our

---

46 — Regarding the relationship between imagination and memory in relation to dreams, Guénon wrote: "Let us add that in certain cases, the subject may consider mental images to be memories when they are not really so, for a dream may contain memories as well as current expressions, without these two kinds of elements being anything other than pure mental creations of the present moment; these creations, like all those of the imagination, are, strictly speaking, only new combinations formed from other pre-existing elements." (René Guénon, *L'Erreur spirite*, Editions Traditionnelles, Paris, 1952, p. 271).

past (47).

As for the role of imagination in science, it is necessary to distinguish between two moments in invention or discovery:

1 — emergence of a new idea, 2 — verification through experience or reasoning, or more specifically through calculation or a combination of these methods.

In both of these moments, the role of the association of ideas [...] (48): it is always a question of explaining the unknown by the known; the thought of something not yet explained brings to mind, by association, something else that is known and capable of explaining it. Thus, the solution to a problem is only possible by analogy with another problem that has already been solved, with known theories.

As for the role of imagination in art, the association of ideas plays the same role, but in addition there are elements of a sentimental nature, which constitute what we call taste and which play a considerable role in artistic invention. It should also be noted that most great artists have a very vivid memory, at least in certain areas; the same phenomenon also exists in those who know how to admire, that is, who understand a certain form of art.

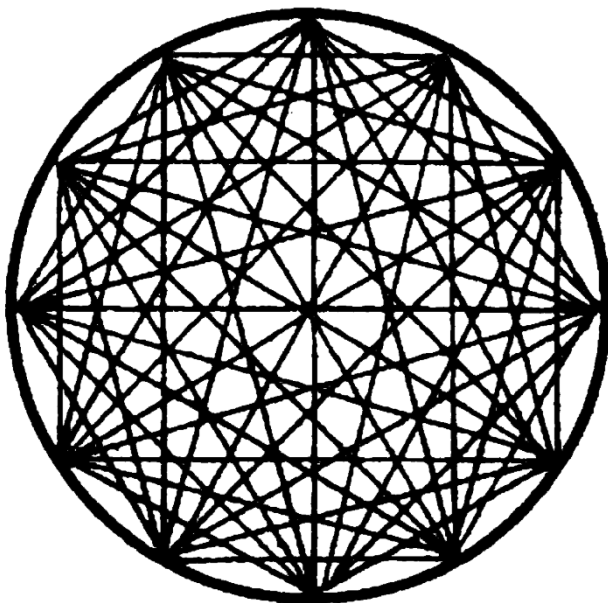


Fig. 9. Graphic diagram of Giordano Bruno's Seal of Seals (*Sigillo dei Sigilli*) (49).

For him, it was the complete and perfect model of the mind (*mens*), an authentic network of connective extensions in all directions between the human psychic totality and the Macrocosm. A network that could be further perfected through a more conscious exercise of its potentially indefinite combinatorial faculties. This very ancient hermetic diagram, which obviously derives from the astronomical diagram and calendars, applied for centuries in the West to the 'art of memory' and 'creative imagination', was inherited by Bruno from Raymond Lulle (1235-1315) and his successors, although he adapted it to his own particular views and requirements (50). It is easy to see that it surfaced, substantially

in the famous Archéomètre by Alexandre Saint-Yves d'Alveydre (1842-1909), so often used by Guénon, who defined it as "a synthetic instrument applicable to all manifestations of the Word", as well as "a cyclical protractor, a cosmogonic code of high religious, scientific and artistic studies" (Guénon / Palingenius in *La Gnose* No. 9, July-August 1910, p. 179).

---

47 — There are also several types of reminiscence, such as that called "ancestral memory," which go beyond individual limits, and which Guénon examines in particular in Chapter VIII of the second part of his *Erreur spirite*.

48 — Obviously, part of the sentence is missing here.

49 — In his short work entitled *Sigillus*, devoted to the magic of the mind (*mens*). According to Bruno, the essence of things insinuates itself into us as if by an order it gives to its own accidents. We express it in a non-exhaustive way, through symbols and signs, since words are still insufficient to say more.

## Chapter XVII

### Signs and language

In general, a sign is understood to be any sensory or purely mental image that is linked, either naturally or by virtue of a more or less explicit convention, to an idea or a thing that does not fall within the realm of the senses.

The study of signs from a psychological point of view is therefore closely related to that of association and imagination.

Psychological facts generally tend to be expressed externally through physical facts, which are like a perceptible translation of them: these physical facts can therefore be interpreted as signs of the psychological facts to which they correspond. It is usually said that there are two kinds of signs, natural and artificial: natural signs are mainly the external expression of emotional states, while artificial or conventional signs are more related to intellectual operations.

While we can accept this distinction to a certain extent, we should not exaggerate its importance, because, firstly, natural signs themselves cannot be understood independently of all experience, and a sign that began as purely natural can subsequently change and acquire a more or less conventional character; secondly, signs that are regarded as artificial must nevertheless have a natural basis, for there is no convention that is entirely arbitrary.

It is quite obvious that we would never make any convention if we had no reason to do so, and to make a particular convention rather than another! We cannot conceive of language, as Berkeley (51) did, as a set of purely arbitrary signs, nor can we say, as Reid did, that the relationship between the sign and the thing signified is a fortuitous one, which would imply chance.

It follows from all this that the differentiation between natural and artificial signs is only a difference of degree and not of nature, and therefore the transition from one to the other may be imperceptible.

Language is understood to be a set of more or less artificial or conventional signs that humans use to communicate facts.

(quoted in *Il Sigillo dei Sigilli e i diagrammi ermetici*, edited by Ubaldo Nicola, Mimesis, Milan, 1995, op. cit., p. 93).

50 — Which, from a traditional perspective — it is worth remembering — seem to be directly inspired by rather ~~obscure circles~~.

51 — George Berkeley (Dysert, 1685 - Oxford 1753), Irish philosopher. Author of *A Treatise Concerning the Principles of Human Knowledge* (1710). According to Berkeley, man possesses only particular ideas, to which he attributes common names. Guénon writes further on his theory of language: "The philosopher Berkeley was therefore not wrong when he said that the world is 'the language that the infinite Spirit speaks to finite minds'; but he was wrong to believe that this language is only a set of arbitrary signs, when in reality there is nothing arbitrary even in human language, since all meaning must have its origin in some natural convention or harmony between the sign and the thing signified. (René Guénon, *Symboles fondamentaux de la Science sacrée*, Gallimard, Paris, 1962, p. 36).

Psychological: a distinction must be made between oral language and written language, which is, in a sense, a fixation of speech.

To oral language must be added the language of gestures and attitudes, which is an important accompaniment and can even sometimes replace it, as for example in the case of deaf-mutes; this language of gestures can be simply mimetic, in which case it expresses actions or feelings, or it can be properly symbolic and express ideas as other modes of language do (52).

Speech consists of articulated sounds with a definite meaning, which are called words. The different forms of speech, i.e. languages, can be divided into three main types: monosyllabic languages, in which each syllable expresses an idea, with the various combinations and modifications of ideas being expressed by the order in which the words are juxtaposed; agglutinative languages, composed of roots, some of which express the main ideas and others the secondary ideas, the latter being added to each of the former to express modifications of the corresponding main idea, through one or more secondary ideas; inflected languages, composed of words, each of which expresses a main idea modified by an accessory idea, the ending of the word, which here corresponds to the accessory idea, varying to represent the various modifications to which the main idea is susceptible.

There are languages belonging to each of these three types, but as for the theory that these same types correspond to phases through which a single language might pass successively in the course of its development, this should be regarded as nothing more than a gratuitous hypothesis that is not supported by any historical facts and is even contradicted by all the observations we can make about the languages known to us.

Writing is initially symbolic or ideographic; each character directly represents the thing or idea it is meant to express. The only drawback of this mode of writing is its great complexity, as it requires a distinct sign for each word of the spoken language (53).

It was mainly the need for simplification that must have led to the general transformation of ideographic writing into phonetic writing, with each character representing only one sound of the spoken language. Phonetic writing can be syllabic or alphabetic; it should be noted, however, that there is something artificial about breaking down a syllable into simpler elements, since a syllable, being an articulation pronounced in a single vocal emission, is in reality an indivisible element of language.

---

52 — Guénon writes further on the symbolic meaning of language, of all language: "Fundamentally, every expression, every formulation, whatever it may be, is a symbol of the thought it externally translates; in this sense, language itself is nothing other than symbolism. There should therefore be no opposition between the use words and figurative symbols; these two modes of expression are rather complementary to each other (...)" (*Ibid.*, pp. 33-34).

53 — On written language, he further specifies: "it is quite obvious that a word, whatever it may be, can be nothing other than a symbol of the idea it is intended to express; thus, all language, both spoken and written, is truly a set of symbols, and this is precisely why language, despite all the "naturalist" theories that have been devised in modern times to try to explain it, cannot be a more or less artificial creation of man, nor a simple product of his individual faculties." (Guénon, *Aperçus sur l'initiation*, Vêga, Paris, 1973, p. 117).

We will not address here the question of the origin of language, which is not a matter for psychology; we will only point out, in passing, the inadequacy of theories according to which language began with interjections or onomatopoeia. Interjections are incapable of development: it would be impossible to derive other types of words from them. As for onomatopoeia and imitative harmony, although they may have provided a certain number of words in all languages, the cases in which they are possible are extremely limited.

The only valid perspective from which to consider the development of language and identify its general laws is one that is much more logical than historical: when viewed in this way, there is no need to make assumptions about the original origin of language, nor about the original unity or plurality of languages.

To conclude, we will say just a few words about the relationship between language and thought: it can be said that language is truly a product of thought, for it is thought alone that gives meaning to words, which without it would be nothing more than empty sounds. Moreover, the action of thought is not limited to vocabulary, which is the substance of languages, but also extends to syntax, which is their form and whose most general laws are essentially nothing more than an expression of the laws of logic themselves.

Without thought, language could obviously not exist and would have no reason to exist, since it can have no other role than to express thought, that is, to translate it into external and perceptible signs: it follows that thought must in itself be independent of language, contrary to what certain philosophers have claimed, according to whom we cannot think without words and for whom general ideas in particular are nothing more than the words that express them and have no real existence outside of those words themselves.

We will have occasion to return to this theory, known as nominalism, when discussing general ideas. But while maintaining the independence of thought, considered in its essence, from language, we must nevertheless recognise that language exerts an influence on the manifestations of thought that is far from negligible. Thought changes in some way to become expressible, and when it takes on its forms, which are words and sentences, it truly becomes incorporated into them.

Consequently, the conditions of formulated thought are different from those of pure thought, in much the same way that the body is part of the set of conditions to which a living being is subject.

We have just made a distinction between thought and idea: for greater precision, it would be better to reserve the name 'idea' for what is truly pure idea independent of any form, and to call 'thought' the idea clothed in a form, whether a word or any sensible symbol, or whether it is only a mental image. But we cannot insist too much on this distinction, which is hardly ever made in everyday usage and which, if we wanted to explore it further, would take us beyond the realm of psychology.

For revenir au langage, nous ajouterons qu'il ne s'agit pas seulement  
à

communicate or convey thought, although this is undoubtedly its most essential role. There is also an internal use of speech which has the effect of fixing thought, making it more determined and also clarifying it to a certain extent. But however great the services that language renders us, we must never lose sight of the fact that man does not think because he speaks, but rather speaks because he thinks.



## Chapter XVIII

### Abstraction

It is sometimes claimed that the study of abstraction marks the beginning of the study of human understanding in its specific form; this does not seem accurate, as it is very likely that children, before displaying a [...] properly human, and even animals, engage in abstraction to a certain extent. If we say that these are abstractions of a lower order, this is a difference of degree, not of nature.

In reality, the only thing that is absolutely special to human intelligence is that element called reason, in the proper sense of the word, and by which we precisely define the nature of man to distinguish him from other living beings. As for abstraction, we can say that it begins with perception and plays a constant role in voluntary memory, as well as in the strictly rational operations of generalisation, judgement and reasoning.

Perhaps the greatest difficulty in studying abstraction is that this term is not usually given a sufficiently precise meaning and is indiscriminately assigned several very different meanings; in everyday language, an abstract idea is even confused with the idea of something that cannot be perceived, which is completely absurd, given the etymological meaning of the word abstraction. Another confusion that needs to be cleared up is the following: psychologists usually indicate as the most basic degree of abstraction that which consists in distinguishing one thing from all the others with which it is given simultaneously, that is, either considering an object apart from the other objects we perceive at the same time, or considering a certain part of an object separately from the whole to which it belongs. In reality, there is no abstraction here, and a part of an object cannot be said to be any more abstract than the object itself, because the part and the whole to which it belongs are of the same order of reality. In this regard, it is necessary to distinguish between an extracted idea and an abstract idea: the idea of the part is not abstract but extracted from the idea of the whole.

For an idea to be truly abstract, it must not be of the same [...] as that from which it is drawn: abstraction proper consists in considering a quality of a thing independently of the thing to which it belongs and which is the subject of that quality.

Thus, we perceive white objects, and if we consider whiteness apart from these objects, we consider it abstractly, and the idea of whiteness is an abstract idea. We must therefore emphasise this essential point: abstraction consists in isolating in thought a quality from the object to which it belongs and not, as is sometimes said, in isolating a quality of an object from the other qualities of that same object.

These two definitions would only be equivalent if we assumed that an object

is nothing more than the sum or simple assembly of its qualities, but to show the inadequacy of such a conception we would have to address the metaphysical question of substances, which would be out of place here.

That being said, we can consider various degrees of abstraction: thus, instead of considering a quality such as whiteness in isolation, we can consider only one mode of that quality, such as the brightness of whiteness.

This is, in a sense, a second-degree abstraction, for a quality plays, in relation to these secondary modes, a role analogous to that played by an object in relation to its qualities: in both cases, this role is that of the logical subject in relation to its attributes.

Finally, we can consider a resemblance or a difference or any other relationship between two qualities or between two modes of the same quality, as we do between two objects.

Abstraction, at all levels, is essentially analysis, and in general, attention plays a very minor role in it; but a distinction must be made between spontaneous, involuntary abstraction, which may be very simple, and voluntary abstraction carried out with a view to subsequent synthesis.

## Chapter XIX

### Generalisation

In saying that voluntary abstraction is an analysis carried out with a view to subsequent synthesis, we wanted above all to indicate the starting point that this operation provides for generalisation. Indeed, the psychological formation of a general idea from the ideas of particular beings presupposes that we abstract from the differences between these beings in order to retain only their similarities.

We must therefore consider, apart from the beings in which they are given to us, certain characteristics that are common to them, and all of these characteristics will be included in the general idea. In other words, these common characteristics will be regarded as belonging to a genus, to which all beings that display these same characteristics will belong, the individual differences that exist between these beings being then considered accidental in relation to the generic characteristics.

If abstraction is essentially analysis, generalisation is essentially synthesis, since it allows us to understand an indefinite number of particular beings within the same idea. Let us add that if abstraction is the necessary starting point for generalisation, as a psychological operation, we should not conclude that a general idea is the same thing as an abstract idea, since, as we have said, the abstract idea is properly the idea of a quality considered in isolation from its subject, whereas the idea of the genus is in no way the idea of a quality: on the contrary, the genus is the subject of the qualities that are common to all beings that belong to that genus. Consequently, the transition from the consideration in question to that of the general subject is in reality an operation inverse to abstraction, the latter being in this case the preliminary transition from the consideration of particular beings to that of their common quality.

The inverse relationship that exists between these two successive operations is the same as that which exists in general between analysis and synthesis. This already shows the inadequacy of the definitions most commonly given of the general idea, but we must emphasise this point further in order to dispel any confusion that too often complicates the question of generalisation. To clarify our thinking in this regard, we will first say that the general idea must be conceived as truly an idea and not an image or a representation.

It must therefore be distinguished from what might be called a composite image, which is merely a more or less vague representation used as a substitute for an indefinite number of particular representations, to which it bears a more or less complete resemblance. In many cases, such a composite representation corresponds in the imagination to a general idea, but the latter, as an idea, remains essentially distinct; a fortiori, it cannot be confused with a word or a gesture which, for the imagination, can more or less completely replace this composite representation.

Some psychologists, notably Taine, distinguish between two kinds of general ideas, one of which are models, such as ideas of mathematical objects, while the other are simple copies, the latter category comprising all general ideas of natural things.

For mathematical objects, it is true that any geometric figure, for example, is constructed according to a certain general idea, which can therefore be considered as the model for that figure, even though it is not itself a figure. But as for other general ideas, it cannot be said that they are copies of particular things, for such copies can obviously only be images and not ideas: a similar conception therefore applies only to composite images, mistakenly confused with general ideas.

Many psychologists have thought that generalisation could be explained entirely by association, but this opinion is exaggerated; in reality, association by resemblance partly explains the formation of the composite image, but it does not allow us to go much further. Undoubtedly, the role of association is evident in the recall of a past representation by a new representation that is partially similar to it; in the recall by a new representation of the composite image already formed and, conversely, by the composite image of the various past representations that resemble it; in the evocation by a word or gesture of all these representations; and finally in the evocation by these representations of the thought of the word or gesture. But in the very formation of the composite image there is already more than a simple association; there is a phenomenon of fusion, that is, of synthesis, which requires a special kind of activity belonging properly to consciousness.

On the other hand, we must not lose sight of the fact that the composite image, like the word or gesture, is only a sign of the general idea, according to the definition of signs that we gave earlier. Now, association explains the addition of the sign to the idea, but nothing more, and in fact, it is the transition from idea to sign that alone originally has meaning, and not the reverse transition from sign to idea, for a sign without a pre-existing idea would mean nothing.

This question is essentially the same as that of the relationship between thought and language: the composite image is only a mental expression of the general idea, just as the word or gesture is a sensory expression of it, and these two different expressions also presuppose the general idea itself.

Thus, not only is the mental or verbal image not necessary to form the concept, as is often claimed, but it cannot in any way serve to form it, since if it has no other role than to be a sign of the concept, this presupposes that the concept already exists in consciousness.

This leads us to clarify another point: in human intelligence, the composite image has no reason to exist other than as a sign of the general idea; it is only a translation into the realm of the imagination or a more or less imperfect and inadequate expression, as is any expression, for that matter.

But it would be going too far to claim that in no case can a composite image be formed other than to serve as a sign for a general idea: thus, it

seems certain that composite images are formed in animals, but we cannot conclude that they generalise in the strict sense of the word, especially since it is quite possible that generalisation is a strictly rational operation, and therefore specific to humans.

If this is the case, then animals must not have the concept of gender, and the composite image must exist in their consciousness in a different way than it does in ours, without being constituted as a sign and without corresponding to any true general idea. This is an example that clearly shows how we must be wary of the hasty conclusions that could be drawn from the study of comparative psychology if, based on certain superficial similarities between humans and animals, we were to conclude that there are deeper similarities, which remain purely hypothetical.

These similarities may be very real when it comes to the sensory faculties, and by sensory faculties we mean not only sensation, but also memory and imagination; but these similarities become much more doubtful when it comes to other faculties.

As we have pointed out, animals must undoubtedly be recognised as having a certain capacity for abstraction; but if abstraction does not lead to the same results in animals as it does in humans, it is perhaps because they lack the capacity for generalisation, which can in many respects be regarded as complementary to abstraction.

Let us return to the general idea as it exists in human intelligence: generalisation is properly the acquisition of general ideas, and this operation psychologically presupposes prior abstractions. But these abstractions are only conditions for generalisation; they are not its foundation, because the acquisition of any general idea also obviously presupposes, on the other hand, the notion of this kind, which is of a completely different order, presenting a strictly rational character, and which cannot be the product of any abstraction.

When the general idea, based on this notion of genus and constituted by the psychological process based on abstractions that we have indicated, exists in consciousness, a composite image may be created expressly to serve as its sign, or, perhaps, in some cases, a composite image already formed independently in a somewhat vague way may be associated with it and thus become its sign. This presupposes in all cases the notion of the sign as such, and one may wonder whether this too is a notion of a strictly rational order; it is possible that animals have some idea of the sign, but this idea must be very different from ours, and what is certain, without going deeper into the question, is that humans make a very special use of this idea. The fact of language is sufficient proof of this rational use of the idea of a sign, whatever the nature of this idea itself may be.

Another important point to note is that the idea of a genus is not at all the idea of a collective: a collective is nothing more than a gathering of individuals; it is, in a way, the arithmetic sum of these individuals and therefore depends on their number and varies with it.

On the contrary, the genus is essentially independent of the number of individuals

in which its characteristics can be realised, because its notion is that of an indivisible nature that is not susceptible to more or less.

The genus is therefore something quite different from the simple gathering of individuals who possess certain characteristics in common; it is the very nature that is common to all these individuals and which is expressed in each of them by those generic characteristics that they all possess and to which are added, in order to differentiate them from one another, other characteristics that are properly individual; Moreover, we cannot fully address the question of the relationship between the individual and the general here, as this would require considerations that go beyond the realm of psychology.

Generalisation is initially spontaneous: children usually have a natural tendency to generalise, and even to generalise in a way that is not always justified. It should be noted that some minds are more inclined to generalise than others: these are minds whose tendency is mainly synthetic, while other minds have a tendency that is mainly analytical. Analysis and synthesis are, as we have said, two powers inherent in all consciousness, but different individual consciousnesses manifest these two symmetrical or rather complementary powers very unevenly.

Originally spontaneous, generalisation quickly becomes thoughtful, and thoughtfulness in turn becomes a habit in humans, acquiring a certain spontaneity: we can say that spontaneous generalisation is involuntary, while thoughtful generalisation is voluntary.

It is mainly attention that allows us to move from one to the other.

They are also sometimes referred to as passive generalisation and active generalisation, but these terms are too ambiguous to be recommended for use.

The question of the mode of existence of general ideas has given rise to much discussion since ancient times. This question [...] notably by Plato (54) and Aristotle, who resolved it in very different and even opposing ways to a certain extent; the same opposition manifested itself in various forms in the Middle Ages in what was called, rather improperly, the dispute over universals.

However, it is important to note that this question did not arise primarily in the psychological realm; it was originally of a purely metaphysical nature: the question was whether general ideas have real existence only within us or whether, on the contrary, they have an existence independent of our conception of them.

The first of these two opinions is that of nominalism (55) understood in its

---

54 — Plato (Athens 427–347 BC). Guéron, while expressing reservations about both Plato's and Aristotle's thinking, ultimately considered the latter's thinking to be more correct from a traditional point of view. This was due both to the ambiguities that can be found in Platonism in general, especially among Plato's followers, and because of the clearly anti-traditional role of Renaissance Neoplatonism. It should be added that, on the other hand, during the Middle Ages, the radical Aristotelianism of certain medieval thinkers obscured a doctrine that was purely metaphysical.

55 Nominalism is the philosophical doctrine, partly derived from Stoicism, according to which universals or general concepts do not exist as prior and independent realities either in things or outside things, and the form in which they present themselves to the human mind is that of names. In modern philosophy, nominalism was supported by Hobbes, Hume and, above all, Berkeley, who emphasised

the most general sense, the second is that of realism; the first of these two doctrines has been linked to Aristotle and the second to Plato, although Aristotle is not a nominalist in the narrower and more ordinary sense of the word and, on the other hand, not all realism is necessarily inspired by the Platonic theory of ideas.

We will not dwell on this aspect of the question here, since it has nothing to do with psychology, but even on this point there has been some confusion that it is worth clearing up.

It is usually said that the question of general ideas was resolved differently in the Middle Ages by three schools, each of which, moreover, includes subdivisions corresponding to more or less significant differences.

These three schools are said to be the realist school, the nominalist school and, finally, the conceptualist school, which took a position between the other two and attempted a kind of reconciliation between their opposing solutions. In reality, this confuses two entirely distinct issues that are not of the same order. On the metaphysical question we have indicated, there is only room to consider the opposition between realism and nominalism, but then, for the nominalists, the question moved to another terrain, giving rise to a new opposition, this time between the nominalists in the ordinary sense of the term and the conceptualists, who from a metaphysical point of view were also nominalists.

The opposition between nominalism and conceptualism only concerns the question considered from a psychological point of view: it is then only a matter of knowing what mode of existence general ideas have within us.

For conceptualists, a general idea is a concept developed by the mind, and as such has a real psychic existence independent of any expression; on the contrary, for nominalists, general ideas are nothing more than words, and only the name is general.

Nominalism thus became what it was destined to remain in modern philosophy, for example in Berkeley; moreover, we can link to nominalism those conceptions in which the general idea is confused with an image: even if it is a purely mental image, such as a composite image, we must see in nominalism only a genuine inability to distinguish the idea from its expression.

Everything we have said so far is sufficient to reject this doctrine and to justify conceptualism from a psychological point of view; as for the metaphysical aspect of the question, it must be clearly understood that its solution remains entirely outside the considerations we have set out here.

## Chapter XX

# Judgement

In general terms, judgement can be said to be the affirmation of a relationship between two ideas; in the proposition, which is the verbal expression of judgement, the two ideas in question are expressed by two terms that play the roles of subject and attribute respectively, and the copula, i.e. the element that joins the subject and the attribute and is generally the verb, is nothing other than the expression of the relationship itself. But we need not dwell here on the study of the proposition and its terms, for that aspect of the question belongs exclusively to the domain of logic.

For the moment, we must consider judgement from a purely psychological point of view; what matters in this respect is obviously not the proposition, but what the thought contains while the proposition is being stated: this is where we find what we might call the very essence of judgement, at least insofar as judgement is considered a psychological fact.

Judgement is an absolutely original mental fact, irreducible to other phenomena; it differs profoundly from sensation and is not only exercised on sensation or in relation to it, as we have seen in the study of perception, nor on images provided by memory, as in the case of recognition, but also on ideas of a completely different order from the sensible order. On the other hand, judgement cannot be reduced to the association of ideas, nor even explained by it: it may well be that the elements of judgement are presented to the mind through the association of ideas, but the simple juxtaposition of ideas is one thing, and perceiving and affirming a relationship between these ideas is another. Even if the idea of a relationship, which intervenes here as a third element, were itself recalled by association, this would not explain the fusion of the three elements: the association of ideas therefore plays a role in judgement, but it is only a secondary and, in a sense, preparatory role.

The judgement that is added to it and benefits from it consists essentially of a true synthesis, a phenomenon of fusion in which a strictly rational element plays a predominant role.

It is all the more natural to attribute judgement, as it occurs in human intelligence, to rational activity, since reason is often defined as the faculty of perceiving relationships: moreover, the word *ratio* also originally meant relationship.

In the foregoing, we have made rational activity proper begin with the formation of the general idea or concept, in the strictest sense of the term: however, judgement always presupposes, more or less explicitly, some general idea, although its elements are not always concepts but may also, in certain cases, be ideas of particular and individual things.

It has sometimes been wondered whether the idea of an individual being is not already the product



of a generalisation, in that it brings together the particular ideas of that being at various moments of its existence, but this is an ambiguity that implies a misunderstanding of the true nature of the general idea.

All we can say is that the idea of an individual being presupposes the idea of the permanence of that being through all the changes to which it is subjected and which are regarded as modifying it only in an entirely accidental way.

On the other hand, some psychologists and also some logicians have claimed that the concept is in some way a contracted and abbreviated judgement, on the pretext that it is already in a sense a connection of ideas; but it is certainly abusive to give the name of judgement to any connection of ideas whatsoever, and moreover, if we want the elements of a judgement to be given in other judgements, we may wonder what the elements of these other judgements are, and thus we will only postpone the difficulty indefinitely.

From what we have just said about the rational nature of judgement, we should not conclude that animals do not judge in some way, especially since we could not do so without denying them the faculty of perception itself, which would obviously be unjustified. But if they do judge, it must be in a way that is very different from ours, in a way that cannot be described as rational and that does not involve any true general ideas: we must therefore bear in mind that everything we say about judgement applies only to judgement as it exists in humans.

If we now analyse the psychological process of judgement, we can distinguish three different phases. The first phase is entirely intellectual: the presentation to consciousness of the ideas that will be the elements of judgement is the first moment, and the second moment consists of the fusion of the elements in question. Then comes a second phase, which is more emotional in nature and in which the belief we will discuss later occurs: there is something extra-intellectual here, which is like a kind of inclination of the mind. Finally, in the third phase, which leads to affirmation, what dominates is an element due to the action of the will, not precisely free and reflective, but rather that impersonal will, so to speak, which lies at the core of our being. The reflective will itself may also play a part in certain cases.

It is interesting to note this collaboration of all the faculties in judgement, and the reason why it is necessary to distinguish these three phases, as we have just done, is that they do not always occur together: they have a certain independence from each other, and even in the first phase, the first moment may occur without the second following.

Often the fusion between the ideas presented to the consciousness does not occur, or if it does occur, the mind does not go so far as to believe in the truth of the judgement it has sketched out; other times, on the contrary, belief remains in the reasons one had for believing, and the second phase occurs when there is no longer any trace of the first, at least in the field of clear and distinct consciousness. Sometimes, too, belief does not go as far as affirmation; let us add in this regard that one can have several kinds of rather contradictory beliefs at the same time, whereas affirmation on one point excludes any other affirmation that contradicts it.

This difference stems from the respective roles played by feeling and will.

in belief and affirmation, for we sometimes have contradictory feelings, but we can never have more than one will.

Finally, it also sometimes happens that the mind affirms without there being, strictly speaking, any belief: one may feel no inclination or sympathy whatsoever for truths that one nevertheless does not hesitate to affirm, and we might even say that belief, precisely because it is a feeling, does not come into play when it comes to the most purely intellectual truths.

In the latter case, one either understands these truths or one does not, and if one understands them, that should be enough to elicit the mind's full and complete adherence, and therefore affirmation, in conditions such that there is no longer any room for belief, but only for certainty.

## Chapter XXI

### Belief

Although belief is, as we have said previously, an emotional phenomenon, it is worth studying here because of the important role it plays in judgement, where it constitutes the second of the three phases we have distinguished.

We must therefore now study the transition from idea to belief in the truth of what the mind thinks. This study cannot be entirely separated from that of the third phase of judgement, i.e. affirmation, because the mind most often moves from belief to affirmation: this is always, of course, an inner affirmation, whether it is then expressed in words or not.

Belief can be defined as the mind's adherence to what it considers to be the truth, but it is important to note that this adherence differs from the full and complete adherence that certainty entails, for a distinction must be made between belief proper and certainty, as well as pure and simple doubt. The phenomenon of doubt occurs when there are equal reasons to believe and not to believe: the mind's adherence is then suspended and no assertion can result.

Belief encompasses all degrees of what the ancients called opinion, that is, all degrees between doubt and certainty: it occurs when there are stronger reasons to accept something than to reject it, but the reasons for accepting the opposite or something different may still be quite strong, and they may obviously be more or less so. While belief thus involves an indefinite range of degrees, from a state very close to doubt to a state very close to certainty, the latter is not subject to degrees: one is either certain of something or one is not; one cannot be more or less certain.

We can say that certainty exists when the reasons for believing definitively outweigh the reasons for not believing, or even when there are no reasons at all for not believing. It should also be noted that once certainty exists, there can no longer be any question of belief in the strict sense of the word, since we must make a fundamental distinction between certainty and belief.

We are not concerned here with the legitimacy of belief, nor with the logical foundations on which its justification can be based, but only with investigating the psychological conditions under which this phenomenon occurs.

Belief consists, in a way, of granting an idea a place in our mind, that is, among other ideas: the possibility of belief is therefore the possibility for a new idea to harmonise with what we already believe. However, it sometimes happens that a new idea expels certain old ideas

old ones, but for this new idea to be accepted, it must generally be consistent with other old ideas, and this can be explained by a kind of struggle between ideas, with victory going to the strongest. But where does the strength of ideas come from? For some, it comes from the fact that they are essential to the mind; for others, it comes from the fact that, through habit, they have become as if they were essential.

The first case is that of truly rational ideas, the second that of ideas imposed on us by experience. We should not conclude from this that belief is merely a mechanism; behind this mechanism, which may in fact play a part in establishing our beliefs, there is a logic: strength belongs to ideas that present themselves with a clarity and obviousness that lead to the mind's acceptance.

Even when it comes to a factual reality, the legitimacy of belief in the fact can be deduced from rational considerations: for example, when it comes to a psychological fact, its reality can be established through reasoning, and even if the fact is illusory, the existence of the illusion as such is still a reality.

When a psychological fact is asserted as a sign of an external reality, it is for the reasons that are developed when proving the necessity of such an external reality corresponding to that fact; moreover, we would have a very inaccurate idea of this force of ideas, of which we are speaking, if we understood it to mean something analogous to what is called the intensity of sensations. We are referring here to the power of an idea imposed by reason or under its control; the power of the connection between ideas can sometimes even make us abandon what we believe to be obvious evidence; it can destroy the most deeply rooted prejudices and the most ingrained inner habits.

If we speak of the power of an idea in this sense, there is no danger of confusing the cause of belief with blind impulse, and consequently there is no reason to conclude that scepticism is warranted. Of course, it is not only ideas that are powerful: there are ideas to which non-intellectual elements, especially feelings, give an intensity that is only a false clarity and can deceive us, but it remains true that the direct cause of belief is always the clarity with which the ideas we adhere to appear to us.

One might object to the thesis we have just presented on the grounds that it seems to imply the existence of a principle according to which the intensity of an idea is a sign of its truth. If this were the case, there would be no guarantee that an idea we currently accept would never be defeated by another, more intense idea, and then the mind would no longer have the right to believe that what it naturally judges to be true is true in itself.

There is something that is partly true in this, for, at least in theory, it is certainly impossible to show the equivalence of the intensity of an idea and its truth; but we must not forget that all this concerns belief and not certainty, and this distinction means that there is no disadvantage in conceding that an idea, the truth of which one believes, may be rejected later, because belief, always containing an element of doubt, is in a sense a provisional state in which the mind's adherence is never complete.

To be precise, we should say that an idea that is the object of belief

is regarded not as absolutely true, but only as probable.

This is not a sceptical attitude, even with regard to simple belief, for we must recognise at the same time that, in practice, the highest degrees of probability are almost equivalent to certainty, as is shown in particular by what the sciences of fact make it possible to obtain.

We will return to this point in logic, in relation to induction.

We will conclude this presentation with a brief overview of some theories relating to belief. Spinoza (56) attempts to explain belief by saying that all ideas tend to arm themselves: this assertion cannot be accepted without reservation, because intelligence has no tendency, strictly speaking, and any tendency must be attributed to emotion or will.

Moreover, this is more of an observation of the fact of belief than an explanation of it.

Taine says that belief accompanies any idea that is not contradicted, adding that when an idea is not accepted, it is because there is a contradiction between it and something we already believe; this is true in many cases, but it does not explain the fact that sometimes one idea expels another. Hume explains this latter fact by relating belief to the intensity of an idea, but he does not indicate the primary cause of belief, which is the logical value that the mind, rightly or wrongly, assigns to an idea, either directly or by comparing it to other ideas.

Descartes clearly saw in what he calls evidence this primary cause of belief, but for him there is an act of will in belief, whereas we have only admitted this intervention of the will in the act of affirmation. Descartes therefore seems not to have distinguished these two phases clearly enough; on the other hand, we must agree with him when he recognises that our feelings have a considerable influence on our beliefs.

Spencers (57), speaking of the impossibility of doubting, describes in a way a consequence of evidence: the impossibility of believing the opposite of a proposition is a sign of its evidence, and this constitutes its strength or intensity. We should add that it is not possible for us to discuss the Cartesian conception of evidence in full here, as this conception is linked to the question of *the criterion* of truth, which does not fall within the scope of psychology.

---

56 — Baruch Spinoza (Amsterdam 1632 - The Hague 1677).

57 — Herbert Spencer (Derby 1820 - Brighton 1903), English philosopher. A proponent of determinism, he wrote *Principles of Psychology* (1855), in which he examined mental and spiritual life from an evolutionary perspective.

## Chapter XXII

### Reasoning

It is sometimes said that reasoning is a device used by the mind to draw the unknown from the known. It is indeed a matter of arriving at the unknown, that is, at new or as yet unseen truths, starting from the known, whether that known consists of rational principles or truths already demonstrated or even facts verified by experience, but in reality there is no artifice involved.

Reasoning, as its name suggests, is nothing more than the functioning or exercise of reason itself. A distinction is usually made between reasoning proper and what are called immediate inferences; there would only be true reasoning when inferences are mediate, that is, when, starting from a judgement taken as a principle, a conclusion is drawn through a third judgement: such a mediate inference is expressed by a syllogism.

However, reasoning can be understood in a broader sense, simply defined as a combination, which allows both mediated and immediate inferences to be included.

Moreover, there has sometimes been doubt as to whether there really are, strictly speaking, immediate inferences, and attempts have been made to reduce them to mediate inferences in which the intermediate judgement would not be stated, but this is a question that falls within the purview of logic.

It can be said that reasoning, in its most general form, consists of perceiving and affirming a relationship that results immediately from two other relationships, each of which is the object of a judgement, as we said earlier: it is therefore a matter of finding an idea that allows us to unite two others, about which we wonder whether it is true that a relationship unites them. Let us consider this reasoning, which is often given as an example of a syllogism: 'All men are mortal, but Socrates (58) is a man, therefore Socrates is mortal'.

In this case, we propose to investigate whether there is a relationship that unites the two ideas of Socrates and mortal; to do this, we examine each of these two ideas to see if we can say of one, that of Socrates, something that, while being an attribute of Socrates, also has an attribute that is precisely the one we were wondering whether it applies to Socrates, and we thus see that the attribute mortal applies to Socrates, because mortal is an attribute of man, which is itself an attribute of Socrates.

We could take other examples of reasoning that are more or less different from this one, but this does not change the above, which can be applied to all cases.

---

58 — Socrates (Athens 470-169 - 399 BC). His work marks the transition from sacred and initiatory wisdom, of which he is still a prestigious representative, to philosophy proper, which, in his intentions and those of his first followers, was only meant to be an introduction to *the ancient sophia*.

What we have just said is enough to show the role played by the association of ideas, imagination and attention in the development of reasoning: it is obviously the association of ideas that allows us to think of 'man' in relation to both Socrates and mortals, and this association presupposes a prior dissociation, that is, the power of analysis that is proper to consciousness. On the other hand, it is easy to see that the essence of reasoning does not consist in the simple arrangement of three propositions, but rather in the discovery of the relationship that exists between two other relationships, a discovery that presupposes an imagination that is sometimes very powerful.

Those who have claimed that reasoning invents nothing have been wrong to consider reasoning once all its elements have been found; when we have reached this point, there is obviously no more reasoning to be done, but only the expression of the reasoning that has been done.

Reasoning, like judgement, can be seen as a fusion of several elements, and in this regard it is worth recalling what we have already said about judgement, that fusion is more than simple association.

From a psychological point of view, it is necessary to distinguish between analysis and synthesis in reasoning, but we cannot overemphasise the originality of reasoning and judgement in relation to the other psychological phenomena we have studied previously.

We will have to complete the study of reasoning in general in logic, and we will also have to consider more specifically the two main forms of reasoning, which are induction and deduction.

## Chapter XXIII

### Reason and the intellect

In the preceding chapters, we have indicated which functions belong specifically to the faculty known as reason. These functions consist first in the formation of concepts, meaning general ideas considered from a psychological point of view (i.e., leaving aside the question of what corresponds to these general ideas outside our conception), then in the development of judgement, at least in the form it takes specifically in human intelligence, and finally in reasoning: we must therefore always bring together what relates to concept, judgement and reasoning.

The study of reason is the end of the part of psychology that concerns intellectual faculties, but this does not mean, as is too often claimed, that reason constitutes the highest function of the intellect, which is all the more unjustified given that its very name, meaning etymologically 'relation', as we have said, clearly shows that it is a function that must be essentially relative.

However, this error is so widespread throughout modern philosophy that it is necessary to clarify a few points in this regard.

We will first recall that reason is the faculty by which man defines himself, that is, the faculty that marks not his superiority but more simply his difference from other beings.

This observation is important because it is only possible to compare different beings, and consequently to speak of their relative superiority or inferiority, from the point of view of what they have in common and not from the point of view of what belongs to some but not to others.

For a comparison to be valid, it cannot be based on differences in nature, but only on differences in degree within the same nature, common to the beings under consideration.

The fact that reason is properly a difference and not a superiority can still serve to show that it should not be the highest form of intelligence, but at the same time it indicates what may have given rise to this illusion, for it is quite natural, if not logical, to regard as a kind of privilege that which one possesses exclusively: only this is an argument of a sentimental nature which cannot be taken into account if it goes against the truth.

Reason, according to what we have said, allows us to rise from the knowledge of the particular, which is given to us solely by the senses, to that of the general, which constitutes the object of science in the proper sense of the word.

It is therefore through reason that we are aware of these general relationships, the expression of which constitutes scientific laws, and we can say that knowledge



is properly the domain of reason, while common knowledge, which is limited to the simple empirical observation of particular facts, belongs almost exclusively to the faculties of the sensory order.

But, as we have indicated in distinguishing the different degrees of knowledge, beyond scientific knowledge, which is of a rational order, there is metaphysical knowledge, whose object is no longer the general, but the universal. Now, reason, in the strictest sense, attains the general, not the universal.

Metaphysical knowledge can be said to be not irrational, but supra-rational, which presupposes that there is a faculty in the mind, other than reason, which is more properly called intellect and whose object is the immediate knowledge of first principles.

This knowledge operates through what can be called intellectual intuition, but on condition that it is clearly stated that this supra-rational intuition must be distinguished from intuition in the sense understood by certain modern philosophers, the latter being infra-rational and of a sentimental nature.

We have thus distinguished between reason and intellect in the most precise sense of these two terms, defining what constitutes their respective objects and domains.

The main point to remember is that reason applies to the consideration of genera, extending to what are called categories, which are the supreme, most general genera, while the universal transcends all genera, including categories. We will not dwell on these categories, which Aristotle listed; Kant wanted to establish a list of categories that differs in some respects from Aristotle's and which can be criticised for being somewhat arbitrary.

A detailed study of the categories is more a matter for logic than psychology, but one remark should be made: Kant links the categories to what he calls understanding and places reason above understanding, reversing the meaning of these two terms, which had always been the case before him, since understanding is more commonly synonymous with what is called pure intellect.

We have said that purely intellectual knowledge (first principles) is immediate knowledge: as such, it must not in itself be susceptible to error. Aristotle was able to say that nothing is truer than the intellect; error can only creep into the expression of intellectual truths, because in human understanding it occurs through rational mode, discursive knowledge, that is to say, mediated knowledge, translating into successive chains of reasoning what in first principles is the object of spontaneous perception. The study of language allows us to understand this mode of operation of reason.

One might now ask why we have said that the psychological study of intelligence stops at reason and why this study does not include the intellect itself.

This is because the intellect, due to its transcendent nature, cannot be understood within mental phenomena, which are by definition the objects of psychology: it escapes the phenomenal order as a result of its universality and, on the other hand, this universality means that pure intellect must exist in all beings, at least virtually, whereas reason is specific to humans. Between principles and facts there is the same opposition as between the universal and the individual.

The intellect and its operations belong to the order of principles, which are the exclusive object of metaphysics; therefore, it is with a view to metaphysics and also to the theory of knowledge that it is important to insist on the fundamental distinction between reason and intellect.

For the same reason, we will refer the study of the principles of knowledge to metaphysics and, in part, to logic.

Principles, insofar as they are principles, belong to the intellect and, far from depending on reason, they condition the exercise of this faculty.

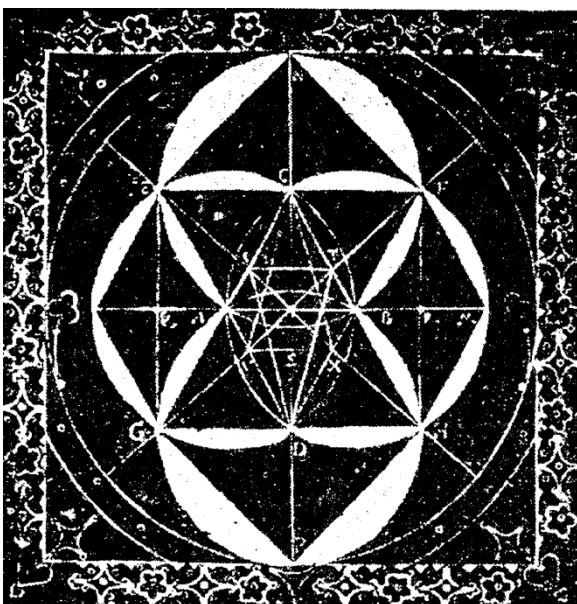


Fig. 10. *Figura Intellectus*, also known as *Atrium Apollinis*.

Note, in relation to fig. 1, representing the mind (*mens*), the "flowering" that has occurred from the sort of small inner lotus. This shows a striking resemblance to the Hindu graphic and conceptual symbolism of the *cakra*.

Reproduction taken from *Articuli centum et sexaginta adversus huius tempestatis mathematicos atque philosophos*, Prague 1588, by Giordano Bruno.

## Chapter XXIV

### Sensitivity I — Generalities

In discussing the distinction between psychological faculties, we have already indicated the irreducibility of the facts we are now going to study to intellectual facts on the one hand and volitional facts on the other; we will therefore not return to this point.

The term 'sensitivity' has the disadvantage of being ambiguous, because according to its derivation it can refer to sensations, which belong to the domain of intelligence, as well as to feelings, which constitute sensitivity in the sense in which we understand it here (59). It would therefore be more accurate to say 'sentimentality', if this word were not usually taken in a slightly different sense; it might therefore be even better to use the term 'emotionality', but on condition that it is clearly specified that this does not refer exclusively to pleasant or unpleasant emotions, or even to pleasure and pain.

Because of its extra-intellectual nature, emotion is more obscure and more difficult to study than facts that relate to intelligence, which is one of the reasons why we began psychology with the study of intellectual faculties. Furthermore, we must take into account the resulting complication of the undeniable link between feeling and the organism, and it is very difficult to determine the role that intelligence may play in the origin of feeling.

As a preliminary definition, we can say that sensitivity consists of facts such as pleasure and pain, desire and aversion, and all other facts that are more or less similar to these: this definition is sufficiently clear, but it has the disadvantage of being neither distinct nor explanatory. Sensitivity is often defined by pleasure and pain, from which all other affective facts are said to derive, but this view is highly debatable, because although in most cases pleasure and pain do indeed precede desire and aversion, we cannot generalise excessively, and sometimes desire and aversion seem, on the contrary, to precede pleasure and pain, which would then be the effect rather than the cause. One might then be tempted to define sensitivity as both pleasure and desire, pain and aversion, but this definition is incomplete; for example, surprise is certainly an affective fact, but it is neither pleasure nor pain, and, on the other hand, the feeling of anticipation is very different from desire and aversion.

Sensitivity must therefore be defined in such a way as to include facts of this kind.

---

59 — On this subject, Guénon writes: "The modern mind is almost exclusively turned towards the outside world, towards the realm of the senses; feeling seems to it to be internal, and it often wants to contrast it with sensation in this respect; but this is very relative, and the truth is that the psychologist's 'introspection' itself only grasps phenomena, that is to say that is to say, external and superficial changes in the being; only the higher part of the intellect is truly internal and profound." (Guénon, *Orient et Occident*, Vêga, Paris, 1983, pp. 79-80).

For this reason, we can say that emotionality is the sum of our tendencies, meaning all our primitive or acquired impulses, needs and inclinations, as well as our feelings proper. But we must also bear in mind that, in a different sense, we can also speak of tendencies of the will: all this shows how difficult it is to give a precise definition of emotionality.

Here, we will focus specifically on emotions that are feelings in the true sense of the word, passions and inclinations.

In the 17th century, the word passion was synonymous with emotion, but it is better to give this word its ordinary meaning, that is, to use it to refer specifically to very strong inclinations, overexcited for some reason, whether that reason be mental or simply physiological.

What we now call inclination is, in short, not something that exists separately in our mentality, but rather a certain direction of our emotional life, and we can have as many inclinations as we have desires and aversions.

The totality of all the emotions that can be related to a certain desire or aversion constitutes an inclination; passions are classified by inclinations, of which they are, in a way, only an intensified form.

To classify inclinations, we can consider the faculties within us and count as many inclinations as there are uses of these various faculties, then consider the world in which we live and distinguish between selfish, altruistic, moral and religious inclinations; but the point of view from which we then proceed is none other than that of human activity itself, and this classification has more of a practical utility than a genuine theoretical interest.

Emotions, according to what we have just said, form the real content of every inclination; we will now outline the main classifications that have been given.

Bossuet (60) distinguishes between what he calls irascible passions and concupiscent passions, but this distinction is not well founded, since anger may in reality be nothing more than the result of an unsatisfied desire. For him, on the other hand, all passions (understood in the sense of emotions) are based on love; however, love is only one form of emotion among others, and this opinion would perhaps have more truth if by passion he meant inclinations.

Finally, he distinguishes eleven primitive passions, ten of which are opposed in pairs: joy and sadness, desire and aversion, love and hate, hope and despair, fear and boldness, and finally anger.

Descartes counts only six passions – today we would say six emotions –: admiration or surprise, joy, sadness, love, hatred and desire.

Without going into a detailed critique of this classification, we would point out that it is rather strange not to include aversion, which is opposed to desire in the same way that hatred is opposed to love and sadness to joy.

We would also point out the role attributed by Descartes to admiration, which for him is what we would rather call astonishment.

---

60 — Jacques-Bénigne Bossuet (Dijon 1627 - Meaux 1704), French theologian and philosopher, tutor to the Dauphin. A reserved admirer of Descartes, he was an opponent of Spinoza's thinking. His most famous work, which is related to St Augustine's *De civitate Dei*, is *Discourse on Universal History* (1681).

For Spinoza, there are three fundamental passions: first, there is a tendency that he defines as the desire to persevere in our being and to increase it, and this tendency gives rise to two primitive emotions, which are joy and sadness. In this conception, joy is the feeling of passing from a lesser perfection to a greater perfection or of the increase of being; conversely, sadness is the feeling of passing from a greater perfection to a lesser perfection or of a diminution of being. Furthermore, it is worth noting the explanation of the whole of emotional life through the association of feelings, although Spinoza does not use this expression. If a fundamental desire explains the first pleasures and pains for him, all our subsequent desires are in turn explained by the pleasures and pains already experienced.

Some psychologists have sought to classify emotions as pleasant or unpleasant: this is a very superficial distinction that teaches us nothing about the nature of emotions themselves.

Others distinguish between exciting and depressing emotions, which implicitly assumes that the fundamental emotion is the desire for activity; but this activity must still be in accordance with our nature in order to be pleasant.

Without wishing to formulate a general theory on the nature of emotional facts here, we will simply point out, in conclusion, that we can distinguish between causes that are more intellectual in nature and others that are more biological.

Feelings whose origin can be explained by ideas are nonetheless clearly different from them in all their essential characteristics.

On the other hand, normal affective facts must be explained in part physiologically, and for everything that is abnormal or morbid, the explanation, there as elsewhere, is almost entirely physiological.

Finally, let us add that the most fundamental feelings can probably be regarded as primitive psychological phenomena, that is, irreducible to anything outside the emotional order: we should not allow ourselves to be led by an exaggerated need for simplification to reduce certain orders of phenomena entirely to others, which would be purely artificial.

From all this, it seems that there is no reason to try to classify emotions other than by showing how the most complicated ones arise from the simplest ones under the influence, on the one hand, of the interplay of ideas and, on the other hand, of impulses originating in our organism (61).

---

61 — According to Hinduism, there are nine *rasa* or 'emotions'. The *rasa*, according to terminology specific to rhetoric as well as poetic, musical and figurative art, are as follows: erotic (*srngâra*), comic (*hâsya*), compassionate (*karuna*), heroic (*viira*), terrifying (*raudra*), horrible (*bhayânaka*), disgusting (*bibhatsa*), astonishing (*adbhuta*), tranquil (*ganta*). These correspond to symmetrically consistent feelings in the viewer (*sthâyibhâva*), namely: love (*rati*), amusement (*hâsya*), affliction (*soka*), enthusiasm (*utsâha*), anger (*krodha*), fear (*bhaya*), disgust (*jugupsâ*), astonishment (*vismaya*), peace (*gama*).

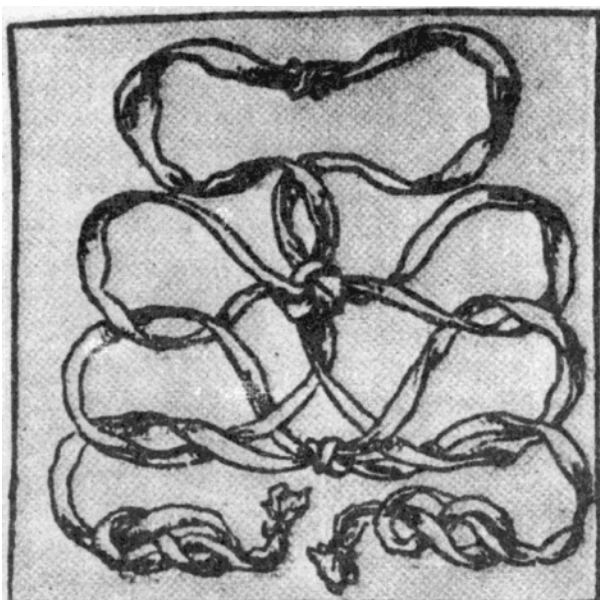


Fig. 11. "Hieroglyph" of Love. Reproduction taken from Ori Apollinis Niliaci, *De sacris Aegyptiorum notis*, Parisiis 1574, p. 55r.

Despite the apparent entanglement, in this beautiful hermetic image, the five knots clearly allude to the five elements, while the single band that rolls symmetrically, intertwining at only three vertically superimposed points, illustrates most clearly the universal pattern of the unfolding of subtle or psychic currents within the human being, in the hermetic-alchemical caduceus, as well as in Hindu *Hathayoga*. The knot is also traditionally the symbol of a specific mental faculty, memory (see chapters XIII-XIV above), and its particular mode of operation (62). It should also be remembered that Giordano

Bruno, speaking of the bond of Cupid in his *De vinculis in genere*, writes: "We have said in our reflections on natural magic how all bonds either reduce to the bond of love, or depend on it, or even consist of it." (Bruno, *De magia. De vinculis in genere*, edited by Albano Biondi, 1986, *op. cit.*, p. 177).

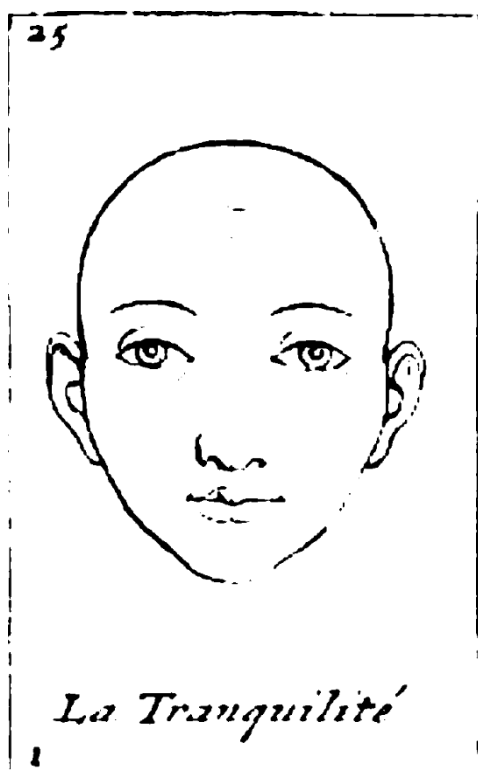


Fig. 12. The expression " " (physiognomic tranquillity) , from

"tranquillity", traditionally corresponding to the lymphatic temperament, childhood and the aquatic element. It is directly comparable to the impassivity imprinted on the faces of Hindu deities and the Buddha, which, in Indian art, expresses the central state of mind in relation to the "wheel" of the eight other opposing emotions. This is the *rasa* known as *ganta*, corresponding to *gama*, the feeling of "peace" (see note 61).

Reproduction taken from Le Brun 1992, p. 24.

62 — Synapses can be described as veritable 'knots' between neurons, which gradually form an indefinite "network" of memories. The "Knot of Love" as a symbol of the indissoluble union of the Spirit with oneself, and what is called the "magic of knots" as its practical application on the base psychic level, all that remains today in the West is — a pale superstition — the well-known popular expression "to tie a knot in one's handkerchief".

## Chapter XXV

### Sensitivity

#### II — Pleasure and pain

[...] (63) muscle contractions may occur, producing various movements leading to the emission of tears, etc.

II It may be that the feeling only occurs when this organic disturbance has reverberated in the brain; however, it would certainly be an exaggeration to say that we are sad because we cry, as this physiological disturbance caused by the idea can only be explained by a purely psychological onset of emotion and, moreover, logically, the content of the ideas that make us sad or happy is sufficient to explain our sadness or joy.

It would be absurd to say that nothing in the announcement of bad news explains the sadness that follows.

But what clearly proves that the physiological state also plays a part in the production of feelings is that when the body is disturbed by illness, the usual causes of joy leave us indifferent or even sad, and something similar happens with the usual causes...

Let us return to the psychological origin of emotion: there is undoubtedly a need for certain centres of the brain to be stimulated, but the same thing happens with thought itself, which is not brain activity at all, but which uses the brain to manifest itself, and it is not surprising that the same thing happens when this thought is accompanied by emotion.

To conclude on this first point, we can therefore say that psychic emotions are the dual product of thought and the organism.

Let us now consider so-called physical pleasures and pains: at their origin there is an organic change, but this is no more sufficient to explain them than the impression, also a physiological phenomenon, is sufficient to explain sensation. It should also be noted that these pleasures and pains are generally correlated with states that are favourable or unfavourable to the body, in whole or in part, or at least occur in cases analogous to these. We can assume that living beings have a tendency to use their sensations, more or less subconsciously, as signs of what to seek or avoid, and these signs are, as signs, creations of the intellect, which in this respect obeys what Spinoza calls the tendency to persevere in being and to increase it. Thus, at the origin of physical emotions there would be an intellectual element, at least subconsciously, the product of which, moreover, has become fixed and recorded in the organism through the effect of habit and heredity, so as to become something analogous to a kind of instinct.

---

63 — In the typed copy, at the beginning of this chapter, there is an entire line consisting solely of ellipsis points, indicating the omission of one or more paragraphs from the original text.

Thus, to explain these so-called physical emotions, it is necessary, as with purely psychological emotions, to take into account both the body and the mind: these two types of emotions are therefore not essentially different.

As for the role played by the organism in the production of emotions whose primary cause is psychological, it suffices to explain it by asking what is the effect of the physiological expression of the emotion. In joyful emotions, this effect is to increase the intensity of joy; in the case of pain, on the contrary, it is to relieve it, by partially substituting for conscious and reflective pain a kind of mechanical pain, similar to so-called physical pain. We can therefore see here something that is ultimately still explained originally by intelligence, which seeks in the organism an auxiliary to act and to fix the results of its action.

The theory that seeks to explain pleasure simply by activity is far too vague: it would be a mistake to regard it as equivalent to that of Aristotle, for whom pleasure comes from the fulfilment by a being of its own act, which is in reality a more metaphysical way of expressing the increase in being of which Spinoza speaks.

We will not attempt to classify pleasures and pains; there are as many of them as there are circumstances that can satisfy or thwart our various tendencies and the multiple combinations they form among themselves. It is interesting to note that pain and discomfort must be distinguished either in terms of psychological pain or physical pain.

There is no equivalent distinction for pleasure, as the distinction between happiness and pleasure cannot be considered truly useful from a psychological point of view.

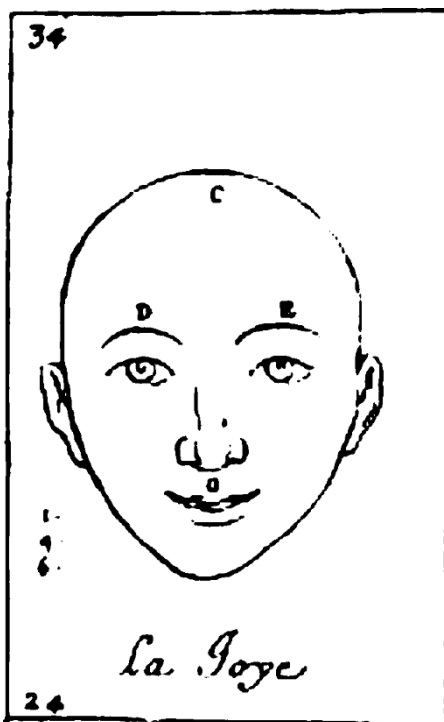


Fig. 13. Physiognomic expression of "joy".  
Reproduction taken from Le Brun 1992, p. 66.



## Chapter XXVI

### Sensitivity

### III — Inclinations

Inclinations can be regarded as various forms of desire and love. Although it is not usually done, one could also consider negative inclinations, which would be forms of aversion and hatred. There is a duality here in which attraction and repulsion always correspond, and we will have the opportunity to observe this elsewhere, particularly with regard to moral feelings.

This duality, which is found throughout the realm of feeling, has no equivalent in the realm of intelligence. In the psychic order, it is something analogous to certain laws of the physical world; consequently, it can be seen as a consequence of the closer dependence of emotion on the organism: physiology plays a much greater role in this than in the operations of the intellectual faculties, as we have indicated.

Inclinations are most often divided into four classes: personal, altruistic, religious and impersonal. We will examine each of these divisions in turn and at the same time see what this classification is worth.

#### Personal inclinations

These inclinations must be distinguished from needs and also from appetites, which arise from them and include, for example, the appetite for well-being and the appetite that drives us to eat: these are generally impulses of organic origin that have acquired an independent force within us.

Tendencies are based on appetites and are like inclinations of a lower order: at the root of the tendency to gluttony, in addition to the appetite that drives us to eat, there is also a work of the intellect that has, in a way, taken hold of the appetite and expends itself in satisfying it.

As for personal inclinations proper, we usually distinguish as many kinds as we have faculties. However, we may doubt that there really is an inclination that corresponds to the intellect: it is said that it corresponds to the love of truth, but this is a matter of loving truth in and of itself: this is an impersonal inclination, and we will return to it later.

According to Mr Rabier (64), the so-called love of truth, which we are discussing here, is in reality only the love of knowledge, and indeed, if it is a personal inclination, it must be the desire for an increase in our being; However, we may still ask whether it is possible to love knowledge for its own sake, because if we consider it in a purely intellectual way, there can be no

---

64 — Élie Rabier (19th century), French psychologist.

attach any sentimental interest to it.

Under these circumstances, it seems that we can only love knowledge for the extra-intellectual benefits it can bring us: this is a personal inclination that corresponds, if you will, to intelligence, but only indirectly.

Sensitivity corresponds to a desire to feel or experience emotions, while will corresponds to an inclination towards freedom and power. All forms of love stem from these primary inclinations: love of property, love of reputation... The love of reputation is more specifically linked to the love of power, and the same can be said of the love of property, which is also in part a form and extension of the love of freedom.

It may also be noted in this regard that those who do not want individual freedom are, at the same time, generally opposed to property.

### Altruistic inclinations

All of these inclinations can be summed up in the word sympathy: they consist mainly of the two feelings of benevolence and beneficence, the latter of which can be explained by the former. La Rochefoucauld (65) argued that the basis of all our inclinations was self-love, understood in the sense of love of oneself, that is, what we today call selfishness. Consequently, in this theory, altruistic inclinations would be nothing more than transformed personal inclinations: this is an exaggeration, because altruism, in at least one sense, is clearly opposed to selfishness and cannot be derived from it.

However, it must be recognised that we often risk mistaking for genuine altruism what is in reality only a kind of extension of selfishness or what could be called collective selfishness, i.e. a feeling of solidarity that is limited exclusively to the members of a certain natural or artificial group, which may be more or less extensive: family, city, nation, corporation or social class, association of any kind, etc.

As for altruistic feelings proper, what makes them possible is imitation: we willingly and, in a way, naturally put ourselves in the place of our fellow human beings. The result is a kind of contagion of feelings, which is precisely what sympathy is, in the etymological sense of the word. Sympathy can thus be explained as originating in the association of ideas and feelings, and it can then be reinforced by reflection, which allows us to find reasons to justify what was initially only an almost instinctive tendency.

We would add that there are as many kinds of altruistic inclinations as there are possible specifications of this tendency or this kind of instinct we have just mentioned. Altruistic inclinations include, in particular, love itself and friendship, as well as the moral feelings we will discuss later.

---

65 — François, Duke of La Rochefoucauld (Paris 1613 - 1680), French philosopher and moralist writer. His main work is *Réflexions ou Sentences et Maximes morales* (1665), in which he paints an unillusioned "portrait of the human heart" from a distinctly pessimistic perspective.

### Religious inclinations

To discuss religious inclinations in any detail, we would first have to try to define precisely what religion is, and that would take us too far afield.

We will therefore simply say that religion includes both intellectual and emotional elements. The former constitute the doctrinal side of religion, while the latter, which can be understood under the generic name of religious sentiment, constitute above all its social and moral side. It follows that religious sentiment can be linked to altruistic inclinations, precisely because of this social and moral character; while it cannot be reduced to this alone, the elements that escape this reduction can be nothing other than impersonal inclinations, and in any case, it is not necessary to make religious inclinations a separate category.

### Impersonal inclinations

The love of beauty, which is usually classified as an impersonal inclination, is in fact a personal inclination, because beauty is essentially that which gives us a certain special pleasure known as aesthetic pleasure, and the feeling that drives us to seek pleasure or happiness in any form cannot, whatever anyone may say, be regarded as a disinterested feeling.

The love of goodness is essentially a moral feeling; it is even one of the fundamental moral feelings, one from which all others derive, just as various moral ideas derive more or less directly from the idea of goodness. As such, it must be classified among altruistic inclinations and at the same time it is also partly related to personal inclinations, insofar as the idea of good coincides with that of happiness or with that of interest.

As for the love of truth, if by this we mean the love of knowledge, in the sense that we have specified above, it is, as we have said, a personal inclination.

If we wanted to talk about the love of truth in itself, it would indeed be an impersonal inclination, but it is highly doubtful that such an inclination could exist, for it is not clear how truth, which is essentially an object of pure understanding or intellect, could also be, in the same respect, the object of a feeling. There is a confusion here between two orders of facts which, even if they are never entirely separate in consciousness, must nevertheless remain clearly distinct.

There are therefore, strictly speaking, no impersonal inclinations; consequently, the four classes of inclinations we have listed can ultimately be reduced to two: personal inclinations and altruistic inclinations.

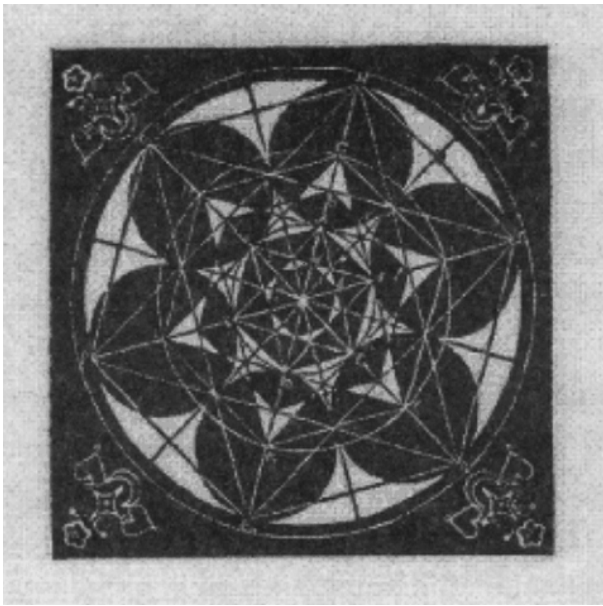


Fig. 14. *Figura Amoris*, also known as *Atrium Veneris*. The dynamic and not merely static position of this geometric representation undoubtedly alludes to the rotary motion of "L'Amor che move il Sole e l'altre stelle" ("The Love that moves the Sun and the other stars": Dante, *Paradiso*, XXXIII, 145).

Reproduction taken from *Articuli centum et sexaginta adversus huius tempestatis mathematicos atque philosophos*, Prague 1588, by Giordano Bruno.

## Chapter XXVII

### Concepts of aesthetics: beauty and art

Aesthetics is not, as has sometimes been claimed, a separate science; in reality, it forms only a part of psychology, and even then a fairly minor part. As its name suggests, it is essentially linked to the psychology of sensitivity, of which it is simply a special chapter: according to the most widely accepted division, it comprises two main theories, the theory of beauty and the theory of art (66).

We will limit ourselves here to a few very brief remarks on each of these two points.

It seems rather difficult to define beauty in itself, and perhaps there is no point in seeking such a definition, for its conception is eminently relative and variable. To ask what beauty is in itself is a question that ultimately seems meaningless: all we can say, in short, is that we call beautiful that which produces a certain special feeling, which we call the feeling of admiration and which, moreover, can take many forms.

But there is no point in talking, as some have done, about a so-called aesthetic sense, because in reality it is a feeling and not a sensation: this is an example of the confusion that can arise from the term 'sensitivity', which we mentioned earlier.

It is important to note that if we stick to the definition we have just given, nothing can be said to be beautiful in an absolute sense, because what produces the feeling of admiration in some people may not produce it in others, and even in the same person, this feeling may or may not occur depending on the circumstances. Thus, like all other emotional responses, this feeling will be subject, at least to some extent, to variations in physiological state; it will also be conditioned by age, temperament, character, aptitudes or natural tendencies, and finally by education, which seems to have a considerable influence here.

The concept of beauty, in its main features and leaving aside individual differences, may have a certain collective character; but then it varies not only according to race and people, but also for each

---

66 — These pages devoted to aesthetics will probably be the most surprising for many readers. René Guénon has accustomed us to always grasping only the symbolic component of the arts, to the exclusion of everything else. Here, however, he coherently addresses the theme of beauty and art within the precise limits he has set for himself

, managing both to distinguish with extreme clarity art in itself from its possible symbolic components and to define with precision the modalities of the relationship between the two. Thus, in fact, he outlines at least the principles of an unsuspected, as well as unprecedented, Guénonian aesthetics! On the other hand, it is worth adding that, as the studies of Ananda Kentish Coomaraswamy have shown, even aesthetics has its own symbolic dimension, always connected and never detached from the symbolic and iconographic contents of art, a dimension that seems especially evident in the East, where it has been the subject of a centuries-old and in-depth traditional literature. A symbolological approach to Western aesthetics has also been undertaken, only partially, by the Warburg School, and in particular by Erwin Panofsky.

people, depending on the era. Consequently, what is considered beautiful at one time will no longer be so at another.

It is important to note the role that imitation can play in such cases, a role that is found in most social phenomena and which also explains, at least in part, the influence of education to which we have alluded. We can therefore see that the factors involved in aesthetic feeling are extremely complex and varied, and we can also see that it is not possible to speak of a rule of beauty, at least if we understand it to mean a single, exclusive rule.

We can undoubtedly formulate rules that apply to certain types of beauty, but we can never claim that these types of beauty are the only ones possible. Even concepts such as order, symmetry and proportion, which have sometimes been used to define beauty, do not apply indiscriminately to everything that is capable of inspiring admiration.

Art can be defined as the expression or representation of beauty: its purpose is therefore to provide humans with a certain pleasure, which we might call aesthetic pleasure, and which always accompanies the feeling of admiration. For greater precision, the arts that pursue this goal are often referred to as the Fine Arts, in order to distinguish them from certain other arts that have different purposes, particularly utility; we have already indicated this distinction elsewhere, but more commonly, when we speak of art without an epithet, we mean it in the aesthetic sense that we have just defined.

Aesthetic feelings are mainly linked to sensations that come from sight and hearing. Thus, the fine arts are divided into two groups: the visual arts or plastic arts (architecture, sculpture, painting), which use shapes and colours, and the auditory arts or phonetic arts (music, poetry, literature), which use sounds, either musical sounds or the words of a language. Since art is the representation of beauty, it must necessarily vary with it

: each art form can therefore take entirely different forms depending on race, people and era, and it is very difficult to assign general characteristics to art. Most of the theories that have been formulated in this regard have the flaw of being too narrow and not applicable to all cases.

Thus, it has sometimes been asked whether art should aim to faithfully imitate nature: this imitation may undoubtedly be a source of aesthetic pleasure, but it is not a sufficient or even necessary condition for it, and moreover it is difficult to see how certain arts, such as music, could imitate nature, except in a few very special cases.

It has also been claimed that art consists essentially in the expression of certain feelings or ideas: as far as feelings are concerned, this is sometimes true, but not always. Art aims to provoke feelings, but these feelings may have causes that are not themselves sentimental in nature: we have seen, in particular, feelings that are associated with most sensations, and we must not forget that art is above all a representation of sensible things, which does not mean that these sensible things must necessarily be the same as those presented to us by nature.

As for the expression of ideas, it certainly exists in art at times, but it is doubtful whether it is an essential element or even whether it should be regarded as an integral part of art as such, since the aim is exclusively emotional and not intellectual.

Aesthetic pleasure is independent of the ideas that may be associated either with particular feelings or with the representation that gives rise to those feelings. Thus, if art is used to express ideas, it is because art is no longer considered for its own sake, but is seen only as a means to an end that is foreign to it, for art, as art, does not seek to instruct but only to please. In other words, art may have a symbolic character, but then symbolism will be an element added to art itself, superimposed on it in a way, while always remaining of a different order than art itself. This is clearly demonstrated by the fact is that the importance of this symbolic element is, one might say, inversely proportional to the interest accorded to pure art, for it can be seen as a sign of the preponderance of intellectuality over emotionality.

One point that must be emphasised, in order to dispel a confusion that arises all too often, is that the concept of beauty cannot be related to that of truth: this follows immediately from the relative nature that we have recognised in beauty, whereas it would be absurd to speak of such relativity in relation to truth. What is true must necessarily be so for all people and regardless of circumstances.

This explains the confusion we are talking about. is the mentality of certain peoples, notably the Greeks, who were primarily artists and in whom emotionality predominated over intellectuality, to the point of introducing aesthetic considerations even into scientific and philosophical speculation, whereas the reverse does not occur and Greek art is certainly one of the least symbolic that exists.

On the other hand, we can admit a certain analogy between the concept of good and that of beauty, for both are relative and variable, and both have an essentially sentimental basis.

Psychologically, the feelings of admiration and approval are two phenomena which, without being reducible to each other, nevertheless resemble each other more than they resemble any other phenomenon in the emotional realm.

But we are only pointing out these analogies here, to which we will return in the section on morality, where we will also find considerations that will complement what we have said about the psychology of feelings.

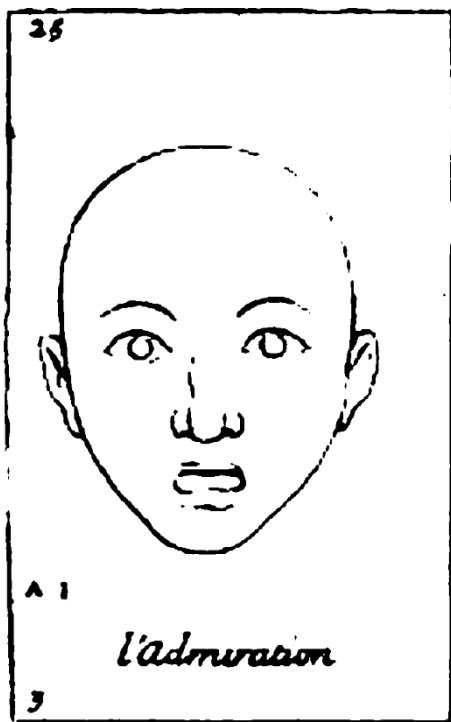


Fig. 15. Physiognomic expression of "admiration".  
Reproduction taken from Le Brun 1992, p. 27.



## Chapter XXVIII

### The Will

We have already pointed out the main differences between desire and will: one can desire the impossible, but one only wills the possible; one can have several different and even contradictory desires at the same time, but one only ever has one will; finally, desire is eminently impulsive, while the will is always more or less thoughtful.

All this proves sufficiently that there are indeed two essentially different things here and allows us to dismiss Condillac's theory (67), according to which the will is nothing more than a predominant desire. We would also point out that simple desire is not accompanied by the idea of responsibility, which is associated with the will: this idea does not in itself prove that freedom exists, but only that we believe in freedom, and if freedom is proven elsewhere, it will allow us to distinguish the will even more clearly from any other impulse.

However, while distinguishing the will from desire, we must recognise that there are often desires that solicit the will and that the will, in turn, can give rise to many desires that we did not have at first; But just because these two orders of facts usually go together, react on each other, and resemble each other to a certain extent, that does not mean that they should be confused. Even if one can desire to will and will to desire, this still proves that they are truly different.

It is hardly disputable that the will also exists in animals, but it is more difficult to distinguish from desire than it is in humans, and this seems to be mainly because feeling predominates over intelligence.

Indeed, there is a certain intellectual aspect to the voluntary act, as it occurs in humans, which is inseparable from it and which consists of a judgement that can be formulated as follows: "Such and such a thing will be!". It is indeed a judgement, since it is an assertion, but it is a judgement of a rather special nature: it is, in a way, a decree of existence.

Voluntary acts are usually divided into four phases: conception, deliberation, determination, and execution.

Apart from the fact that this division is rather artificial, there is no point in bringing in a theory of the conception of acts here, which must be referred entirely to the psychology of intelligence and feeling. As for the final phase, i.e. execution, there is no need to discuss it specifically either, since the execution of the act is not essentially different in cases where the act was intended and in those where it was merely desired. Moreover, it is the task of physiologists to seek to explain how voluntary acts are accomplished: they have not yet succeeded in doing so, any more than they have succeeded in determining the existence of a nerve centre specifically corresponding to the will.

---

67 — Étienne Bonnot de Condillac (Grenoble 1715 - Abbaye de Flux, Beaugency 1780), French philosopher. Famous for his *Treatise on Sensations* (1755).

We cannot even say, as has sometimes been done, that the beginning of execution is what distinguishes the will proper from mere inclination, because, first of all, execution can not only begin but also take place completely without there having been any will, if there is simply desire; secondly, one may have truly wanted something, but cease to want it before the act has begun to be carried out.

All that remains to be considered, therefore, are deliberation and determination, which are the two truly essential parts of the voluntary act. But it should also be noted that these two parts are quite difficult to distinguish: in any case, they can never be separated, because when one declares that something will be, which is properly determination, this judgement must be the immediate consequence of another judgement, namely that this thing is preferable.

In reality, therefore, determination is integral to deliberation: it is inseparable from it and could be said to be its final moment and conclusion. Let us note immediately that it follows from this that it is during deliberation that the intervention of freedom must take place, if it is to be admitted.

As far as deliberation is concerned, it is a question of knowing how one can hesitate, for example, between two different actions: each action has corresponding motives, i.e. ideas or reasons that militate in favour of one of the two actions and against the other, and motives, i.e. feelings or desires that push us towards one action and turn us away from the other. The same would be true if we were hesitating not between two actions, but between performing an action and not performing it.

At first, deliberation appears to be a struggle between motives and reasons, but it should be noted that there are not motives on one side and reasons on the other: on the contrary, there are generally both motives and reasons acting in each direction.

In most cases, deliberation begins as a struggle between desires, a struggle between desires, that is, motives play the main role, but then, through reflection, these motives become, in a way, reasons, or at least are replaced by corresponding reasons, because reflection leads us to discover ideas that justify our desires or reasons for desiring this or that thing, and this is what constitutes true deliberation. Finally, new motives join us, reinforcing the motives we conceive and compare with each other.

Deliberation thus appears to be above all a struggle of ideas, but ideas that are armed with feeling, and indeed it must be so, for, strictly speaking, there can be no struggle between pure ideas.

This is similar to what we said about belief, where there is also a struggle between ideas and which is also primarily an emotional phenomenon.

If we consider deliberation in this way, freedom, if it exists, must be conceived as a power exercised over this deliberation and intervening to bring it to its conclusion, which is properly speaking determination.

It is important to note that this power can be explained in ways other than by

desire, because it is independent in itself of the force of tendencies, and must be considered as essentially a power of inhibition, that is to say, it consists in fixing attention on an idea and preventing the flow of ideas in this or that direction.

Even though it is the very force of ideas that determines us, if we ourselves, because of this power, are the authors of their force, we can say that it is we ourselves who thus determine ourselves, and that is sufficient for us to be free.

Moreover, if we have this power over the ideas that intervene as motives in deliberation, we also have it, albeit perhaps less completely, over feelings, that is, over motives.

Undoubtedly, desires or aversions can facilitate inhibition in many cases, but inhibition itself is a fact that bears no resemblance to desire, and it is thanks to inhibition that will and freedom are psychologically possible.

However, it should be noted that what we find here is nothing more than an indication of the possibility of freedom and by no means proof of its existence.

This is clearly demonstrated by the fact that some determinists admit the existence of a will distinct from desire, basing their argument precisely on an analysis of inhibition similar to the one we have just outlined.

We have therefore simply seen that freedom is possible, and nothing more; as for the question of its actual existence, we will examine this in the following chapter.

## Chapter XXIX

### Freedom

When addressing the question of freedom, it is important to distinguish between the different meanings of the word and to specify that the freedom we are going to discuss, also known as free will, is essentially the power to will, that is, to determine oneself without the impulse of any force foreign to the will itself.

Free will, understood in this way, should not be confused with what might be called physical freedom, that is, the power to do what one wants, which is only the condition for the external exercise of free will and which can be suppressed without the power of determination itself being affected in any way.

Civil liberty is the power to do what one wants without being hindered by others, provided that it is not contrary to the interests of others: it is a form of physical liberty and can be said to be the use of free will guaranteed by the social constitution.

Political freedom is the power to influence, to a greater or lesser extent, the constitution of the society in which one lives: it is, at least in theory, the guarantee of civil liberty (68).

Finally, the term moral freedom is sometimes used to describe the state of a person who no longer has to struggle against their passions: this state was regarded by the Stoics (69) and also by Spinoza as constituting the true moral ideal.

Having established these preliminary distinctions, we will now examine in turn the main arguments for and against freedom, understood here exclusively in the sense of free will.

The first proofs in favour of freedom are those drawn from conscience: those who admit the existence of these proofs can claim the authority of Descartes and Leibniz, according to whom the human mind immediately grasps its own freedom. This argument is easily refutable, for unless one confuses the power to do what one wants with the power to want, it is obvious that psychological consciousness may well grasp the belief in freedom, but not freedom itself.

Moreover, for it to be otherwise, the human soul would have to have an immediate intuition of its own nature, which it does not have and which is, moreover, a

---

68 — Except in cases where "emotional impulses prevent reflection, and one of the most common skills in politics is that of taking advantage of this incompatibility." (René Guénon, *La Crise du monde moderne*, Gallimard, Paris, 1979, p. 121); "we could refer here to certain observations on 'collective psychology' could be made in this regard, and we could recall in particular the well-known fact that in a crowd, the set of mental reactions that occur between the individuals that compose it results in the formation of a kind of resultant that is not even at the level of the average, but at that of the lowest elements." (Ibid., p. 120).

69 — (3rd century BC – 3rd century AD) Stoics were those who belonged to the Hellenistic philosophical school founded in Athens by Zeno of Citium or Cition (the Portico), which had many followers for six centuries among numerous thinkers.

metaphysical impossibility. To remain in the psychological realm, we will simply add this: before the act, one cannot be aware that it will be free, because there is no awareness of the future as such; while it is being performed, awareness of freedom would be awareness of being able to do something other than what one is doing, and such awareness is impossible; finally, after the act, one can no longer be aware of having been able to do anything other than what one did. Moreover, if there is no awareness of freedom, there is no awareness of its opposite, i.e. necessity: before the act, there is no awareness that it will necessarily be accomplished; while it is being accomplished, if the desire that leads to its accomplishment is an object of consciousness, the inevitability of this desire cannot be; after the act, one observes and remembers that the desire ended up being very strong, but one has no proof that one is not oneself the author of its strength.

Consciousness is therefore incapable on its own of determining whether we should accept freedom or not.

Spinoza claims that our belief in freedom is an illusion that stems solely from our ignorance of the motives that drive us to act and by which we are determined: but as Mr Boutroux (70) points out, if we are ignorant of these motives, there is no reason to believe that knowing them would explain everything.

Bayle (71) reasons in much the same way as Spinoza when he imagines a weather vane that is always pushed by the wind precisely in the direction it wants to go and which concludes that it is free. Moreover, it is very clear here that he confuses the power to do what one wants with the power to want.

In short, if we cannot argue validly for or against freedom by invoking consciousness, we cannot do so either by using what consciousness lacks.

Mr Fouillée (72) believes he can prove freedom by saying that ideas are forces and that these forces act by attraction, in a completely different way from physical forces, whose action results in movements or collisions: but in reality, however different attraction and impulse may be, one can just as easily as the other fit into a deterministic doctrine, for determinism should not be confused with mechanism. Not all determinism is necessarily mechanistic; conversely, there may even be mechanistic theories that admit freedom, and we have one such theory.

---

70 Étienne-Émile-Marie Boutroux (Montrouge, Seine, 1845 – Paris, 1921), French philosopher. He was the theorist of what was called contingentism (*De la contingence des lois de la nature*, 1874), a position of thought that contributed to the critique of positivist mechanism. He translated into French (3 vols., Paris 1877-1884) the *Philosophy*

*of the Greeks in its Historical Development* by Eduard Zeller (1814-1908).

In his long letter, dated Sétif, 3 January 1918, already quoted above, Guénon says he read Boutroux's thesis on the *Contingency of the Laws of Nature*. A year and a half later, he would risk having this philosopher as president of the jury for his agrégation, which apparently would have pleased him. In fact, on 30 July 1919, when it came to

"taking the oral exam [for the agrégation]", he wrote from Paris: "We have Boutroux as president of the jury."

However, on the following 8 September, when informing his correspondent of the negative result, Guénon specified that Boutroux, "probably ill, was unfortunately unable to attend the oral exam." (N. d. É.)

71 — Pierre Bayle (Carlat, Ariège, 1647 - Rotterdam 1706), French critic and philosopher. According to this Calvinist, there is a natural morality that is equal for all men, based on the rational control of passions.

72 — Alfred-Jules-Émile Fouillée, (La Pouèze Maine-et-Loire, 1838 - Lyon 1912), French philosopher. His work, *L'Évolutionnisme des idées-forces* (1889), *Morale des idées-forces* (1907), is dictated by the need to reconcile positivism and idealism.

example in Epicureanism.

Mr Fouillée, while believing he excludes determinism, does not really exclude it, and it is certainly insufficient to say, as he still does, that belief in freedom, acting as a kind of suggestion, ultimately becomes equivalent to true freedom.

Another very weak argument is to point out that we are governed both by motives that are sentimental in nature and by motives that are intellectual in nature, and to say that motives and reasons are too different to compete directly, so that there would be room for a third agent, an intermediary deciding between one agent or the other, which would be freedom.

However heterogeneous motives and reasons may be in reality, they are nonetheless psychological facts, and there must be combinations between them.

The complexity of the phenomena is such that motives are never without some motives and vice versa; moreover, according to what we have said previously, if we consider deliberation to be above all a struggle between ideas, this itself implies that these ideas are accompanied by feelings; consequently, we can never consider motives and reasons as acting in a completely separate manner, except in a wholly artificial way.

As for the argument based on promises, threats, contracts, punishments and rewards, determinists say, for example, that if man binds himself by promises, it is because he does not trust his freedom, for the fact of having promised will compel him to fulfil what he has promised.

Libertarians, on the other hand, say that if we chain our freedom, it is proof that we believe in it. First of all, the question is not whether man believes in his freedom, but whether he actually possesses freedom; moreover, these are arguments that can be used in both directions, which sufficiently demonstrates their lack of value.

The same can be said of the argument based on statistics: determinists say that if the figures vary little, this proves that in the same circumstances people always do the same things, and therefore that these actions are determined by circumstances; libertarians, notably Renouvier (73), respond by invoking probability calculations, according to which the figures should, on the contrary, vary greatly if they were not kept more or less constant by the intervention of an unknown factor, which would be precisely freedom.

We would add that statistics are often virtually impossible to obtain or, at the very least, highly inaccurate, and that, in general, statistics do not prove much, despite the claims of economists and

---

73 — Charles Renouvier (Montpellier 1815 - Prades, Pyrénées Orientales, 1903), French philosopher. Founder of *L'Année philosophique* (1868) and leader of the French neo-critical school (return to Kantian criticism), "he formulated an idealistic relativism (or phenomenism) and made freedom the foundation of intellectual and moral life morality of the individual, a central notion in his system, which thus reconnects with Leibniz's monadism" (*Dictionnaire Robert*). (Main works: *Essais de critique générale* (1851-1864) and *La Science de la morale* (1869).

of most sociologists, who strive to derive more or less illusory laws from it.

All the arguments we have just presented are psychological in nature, and none of them allows us to conclude for or against freedom, which shows that, ultimately, this question of freedom is not a psychological one. At most, we have found in the phenomenon of inhibition an indication of a possibility in favour of freedom: the only thing we can say, from this point of view, is that if we encounter evidence of freedom elsewhere, there is nothing in the findings of psychology that prevents us from accepting it. But then again, if this evidence is genuine, it must be sufficient in itself, and if it contradicts certain conclusions of psychology or some other science, this would simply prove the falsity of those conclusions.

If we wanted to remain strictly within the realm of psychology, we would have to leave it at that, but in order to avoid having to return to this question of freedom elsewhere, we will now examine arguments of a different order, starting with arguments that are more strictly scientific, taking this word in its ordinary sense.

Determinists, claiming to speak in the name of reason, say that there can be no contingencies in nature, and therefore no freedom, because if there were, certain science would not be possible: undoubtedly, if freedom exists, science and the predictions it allows cannot be entirely certain, but there is no proof that they must be, and this is not the expression of a principle of reason, but only a completely gratuitous assertion.

It suffices that the field of factual sciences is eminently relative, as it indeed is, for there to be no question of absolute certainty; moreover, even if we accept determinism, prediction would not always be certain for that reason, because science can be flawed in many cases. On the other hand, if man is free, he can use his freedom to apply the laws of nature without changing those laws in any way, simply because he is using them freely.

Determinists also say that if we were free, freedom would act on the organism, disrupting physiological determinism and creating a new physical force, which would be contrary to the principle of conservation of energy.

According to some libertarians, this action could be exercised without creating a new force, as the mind acts only to change the direction of already existing forces.

Others point out that, just as there are certain indeterminate solutions in science, there must also be states of indifference, and that when several possible solutions present themselves, there is room for a determination coming from freedom.

Basically, all these discussions are rather futile; first, because the question of the action of the mind on matter arises in this way only in a conception more or less close to Cartesian dualism, which we are under no obligation to accept; and second, because the so-called principle of conservation of energy, which is invoked here, is not a principle of reason but only a law

, relative like all physical laws, and which can only be strictly true if its statement is generalised and if something other than physical forces is included under the name of energy. Let us note, moreover, that we would then no longer be in the scientific domain, for it is only from a metaphysical point of view that we can assert that nothing that exists can cease to be; but a transformation or change of state is not annihilation, and since the physical world as a whole represents only a certain state of existence, it must be possible to pass from this state to another, although this passage obviously escapes the limited means of investigation available to the experimental sciences, which are constituted solely for the purpose of studying a clearly defined and delimited domain.

This remark on the limits within which the physical sciences are valid brings us back to the question of freedom, for this question is also one of those which, by their very nature, go beyond the scope of these sciences and which they cannot resolve in any way.

We should therefore not be surprised that the arguments drawn from the physical sciences do not provide us with any conclusion one way or the other, and, as we have seen previously that the same is true of psychological arguments, we can now say in a very general way that the question of freedom does not fall within the remit of the factual sciences.

Before addressing the question in its proper context, we must first discuss a moral argument, which Kant was the first to formulate when he claimed to find in the idea of duty the element of a demonstration of freedom; Schiller (74) briefly summarised Kant's thinking on this point: "you must, therefore you can".

Undoubtedly, without freedom there can be no responsibility, and the idea of duty or obligation clearly implies that of responsibility.

We can therefore say that it postulates a belief in freedom, but nothing allows us to go further, and it may be that this belief is illusory.

If it were proven to be so, we would have to accept it, even if this proof were to render morality impossible.

Kant, who was primarily concerned with establishing morality, could not have accepted this, but if we step outside his particular concern and examine the matter impartially, his supposed moral proof of freedom appears to be nothing more than a purely sentimental argument, which proves nothing and, above all, cannot prevail against the truth.

With this last argument dismissed like the others, it seems that we can finally take the metaphysical point of view, the only one from which the question of freedom can be resolved; however, we still encounter arguments that are more theological than metaphysical against freedom, which has sometimes been denied in the name of God's omniscience, omnipotence and goodness.

---

74 — Ferdinand Canning Scott Schiller (Ottensen, near Altona, 1864 - Los Angeles 1937), English philosopher. Son of an Indian merchant of German origin. In his philosophy, which he described as humanism and which was close to the relativism of Protagoras ("man is the measure of all things"), he supported the psychological-emotional nature of knowledge.



Thus, it is said that we cannot do anything other than what God knows we will do: it is absurd to pose the question in this way and even to speak of divine prescience as we usually do, for it is not as future that God knows what is future for us! There is no future for Him, nor is there a past, since He is not subject to time, and those who raise the objection we have just mentioned simply prove that they have no concept of eternity.

As for omnipotence, it is a strange way of conceiving it to believe that it is God who does everything we do; moreover, it is obviously sufficient that the existence of free beings be a possibility for it to be understood within divine omnipotence.

As for the supposed opposition between our freedom and God's goodness, it is only a matter of morality and sentiment and has no metaphysical meaning. All these difficulties are, in short, the result of a confusion between the metaphysical and theological points of view, a confusion of which there are many other examples. More generally, all difficulties relating to freedom arise, as with many other questions, solely from the fact that these questions are poorly posed.

Metaphysically, the question is very simple. We must start from the idea of Being, which possesses the attributes of unity and simplicity; as the scholastics said: "*Esse et unum convertuntur*", where there is unity and simplicity, there is necessarily an absence of all constraint, for constraint can only arise from the presence of a multiplicity whose elements act upon one another. Now, the absence of constraint is precisely what defines freedom.

If we now consider beings, they are participations in Being, that is to say, each of them possesses to a certain extent and in a relative way the attributes that belong absolutely to Being.

Thus, all beings must participate in freedom, which belongs to Being, to the extent that they participate in its unity and simplicity, since freedom is a consequence of this.

This is the only valid proof of freedom, but this proof is entirely sufficient, and we can see that it applies to all beings; consequently, human freedom is included in it as a simple special case.

On the other hand, it is important to note that the freedom of beings is susceptible to an indefinite number of degrees, because for any given being there can only be relative freedom, as well as relative unity, since the multiplicity of beings requires that the freedom of each be limited by that of others. Absolute unity and freedom can only belong to the universal Being, the principle of all particular beings.

These remarks easily resolve all the difficulties that might be raised against this conception of freedom, but we cannot dwell further on this question here, which, we repeat, is of a metaphysical nature

metaphysical in nature (75).

We still have one last point to address briefly: should freedom in general, and human freedom in particular, be understood as freedom of indifference, as Descartes in particular wanted, or as free will proper?

Freedom of indifference would consist in acting without motive, and certain libertarians, particularly Reid, believe they can demonstrate this as follows: you have no reason to do one thing rather than another, but if you choose to do so, it is without motive, that is, freely.

This reasoning is flawed because the case it assumes cannot be realised; in fact, in order to be able to say that there is really no reason to do one thing rather than another, the two actions in question must be indistinguishable, or identical, which amounts to saying that they are one and the same action, and then there is no choice to be made. When two actions are truly distinct, there can always be a reason that determines our choice, even if we are not clearly aware of it. In some cases, this reason may be purely physiological, such as the fact that a certain movement is easier to perform than others and requires less effort.

On the other hand, we usually consider an act to be all the more free the more it is thought out: if a man acts, we will not say without any reason, but without a clearly conscious reason, we regard him as impulsive and we do not say that he is free as we should say if we accepted Reid's theory.

Thus, freedom of indifference is impossible, for if we truly had no reason to decide, we would never decide: this is an immediate application of what Leibniz called the principle of sufficient reason, according to which nothing happens without a cause and whose value, at least in this form, is not seriously contestable; and moreover, even if this freedom of indifference could exist, it would not be true freedom.

---

75 — This chapter, certainly one of the most interesting and accomplished in *Psychology*, has its exact counterpart in Chapter XVIII of *The Multiple States of Being*, entitled "Metaphysical Notion of Freedom". Moreover, it is most likely a very early draft, which was later revisited, albeit in a very different context. And this is undoubtedly one of the best proofs of the authenticity of *Psychology* and its reliable attribution to René Guénon.

## Chapter XXX

### Habit

Habit can be defined in general terms as the tendency of activity to reproduce the same acts with increasing ease as they are repeated more frequently.

However, it is necessary to distinguish between two forms of habit: firstly, habit in the form of assimilation, which is a disposition or a way of being in the sense of "*habitus*"; and secondly, habit in the form of repetition, in the sense of the Latin "*consuetudo*".

It is the first of these two forms that is, strictly speaking, the true habit, the one that Aristotle described as second nature.

Habit understood in this way arises with the first act; repetition does not produce it, it only develops it. Consequently, habit is not only proportional to the number and frequency of acts performed, it is also, and perhaps even more so, proportional to their energy and duration.

Habit makes actions easier and also makes them more necessary: first, the more the action is repeated, the less effort is required, and as a result, the action ends up being performed automatically, becoming faster, but at the same time more automatic and less and less clearly conscious. Secondly, the easier the act becomes, the more difficult it is to perform acts that are contrary or very different from it: it takes effort not to perform the act, but to refrain from performing it. We could say that habit, which is a true acquired inclination, starts with the will and ends with instinct, through an indefinite series of intermediate stages.

We usually distinguish between active habit, which is a disposition to repeat the same actions more and more, and passive habit, which is a disposition to feel the same states of sensitivity less and less, but this distinction, like almost all those in which the active and the passive are involved, is far from satisfactory.

In reality, the only type of habit that should be recognised is pure and simple habit, which always has the effect of making the act easier and more necessary, but also of diminishing consciousness.

When the opposite occurs, it is because habit is accompanied by attention, and it is then attention that corrects the depressing effect of habit: thus, what is called passive habit is nothing other than pure and simple habit, and what is called active habit is habit accompanied by attention (76).

The realm of habit is as vast as that of life itself: there are habits

---

76 — It is clear that this is particularly true of ritual, of ritual action in all its forms, whose repetition would be ineffective if it were not accompanied by that particular form of attention that is *intention*. More generally, it can be said that the life of traditional man, whether Hindu or Muslim, is based precisely all its aspects, even those inherent in simple daily life, on the repetition of the same meaningful acts, namely on the ritualisation of his entire existence.

Organic habits, because it can be said that the body becomes accustomed to certain changes and to performing certain actions; there are also psychological habits, feelings and inclinations have their habits, the laws of which are still rather unclear.

Intelligence is also subject to habit, and memory in particular can be considered as relating to habit in terms of conservation and reminiscence. Finally, the will also forms habits according to the way it is exercised and the motives by which it is determined.

The role of habit is therefore considerable in all areas and is a condition of the continuity of human life, of which it is a part, despite the succession of facts, a permanent and coherent whole.

The nature of habit has given rise to two main theories: one, dating back to Aristotle, sees habit as a law of activity by virtue of which all beings tend to maintain themselves integrally in all that they are; the other theory, that of Descartes, sees habit as a law of inertia, and therefore a law of matter, by virtue of which any change imposed on any body continues to exist.

The persistence of any change is better explained in Aristotle's theory, because any change in a being has become a state of itself, it is something that is part of its being (77).

Descartes' doctrine, according to which habit resides entirely in the organism, may explain some of the physical effects of habit (78), but it does not seem capable of accounting for its true nature.

---

77 — This is also the basis of the Hindu concept of *karma*, in all its complexity.

78 — One of these physical effects, studied by traditional physiognomy, is the relative persistence of a given emotional expression in the facial muscles of the human face, which unambiguously reveals the dominant psychological state, gradually modifying the initial situation.