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PRIMORDIAL MEDITATION  
•  
CONTEMPLATING THE REAL

WHAT IS PRIMORDIAL MEDITATION?

It is the quickening of the intelligence from within,  
from the Spirit · Just as fire returns to ether when  
it has nothing more to consume, so, too, the  
intelligence returns to the Spirit when it  
has consumed the world and itself ·

This consuming of the world  
is primordial meditation ·

Through it man be  
comes spiritual  
man.

Frithjof Schuon

PRIMORDIAL  
MEDITATION

Contemplating the Real

Urbedeutung

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*translated by*

Gillian Harris and Angela Schwartz



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For the Study of Comparative Religion

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## Contents

Introductory Note . . . . .	1
Preface to the Second German Edition (1989) . . . . .	5
First Collection . . . . .	7
Second Collection . . . . .	85
Third Collection . . . . .	109
Fourth Collection . . . . .	133
General Index . . . . .	147

## Introductory Note

*Primordial Meditation: Contemplating the Real* was originally published in German in 1935. Based upon personal notebooks compiled between the ages of 21 and 28, it is Frithjof Schuon's first formal exposition of his *Weltanschauung*.

The book will be of particular interest to those already conversant with Schuon's metaphysical principles and steeped in the spiritual climate radiating therefrom. The unprepared reader may initially find it daunting. In these early writings it is as if an immense energy were forcing a passage through a narrow channel, or a huge mass were being compressed to its utmost. The sheer scope and power of the content constantly threaten to burst the confines of the verbal receptacle.

For the purpose of understanding Schuon's metaphysics, we would now undoubtedly give priority to his later works. In them he made systematic use of the terminology of Advaita Vedanta and Sufism, as well as key concepts drawn from other traditions; these serve as familiar landmarks in a vast and often complex metaphysical landscape. This vocabulary is absent in *Primordial Meditation*. Indeed, Schuon deliberately avoided it, being at pains to emphasise that he stood entirely on his own metaphysical ground. As he wrote in a 1934 letter: "I have intentionally left aside

everything purely Vedantine or taken from Guénon.<sup>1</sup> My reflections are far too primordial to allow of being put in the shadow of a name.”

This highly significant independence is in a sense underlined by Schuon’s refusal to compromise the integrity and purity of his native German by using more than an indispensable minimum of words with Latin or Greek roots, even though by the 1920s such words had long since become standard usage. Consequently, *Primordial Meditation* is profoundly imbued with the existential, symbolical character of the German language, which, as he has said,<sup>2</sup> “recreates” and suggests qualities rather than defining concepts.

Why translate this formidable, “un-pedagogical” work? The author himself suggests the answer in his preface, when he describes his first book as “the diary of an unfolding”. *Primordial Meditation* affords us a fascinating insight into the prodigious spiritual genius of a young man whose ideas were not in any ordinary sense formed and developed over the course of his life, but issued directly and spontaneously from his very being, already complete and perfect *in potentia*, just as a seed already “contains” and prefigures a great tree. Like the great sages of the past, he “knew the water of all known and unknown oceans by knowing the nature of the water in one drop”.<sup>3</sup>

The crystalline geometry of Guénon’s writings is yet more impressively evident in the towering edifices of pure metaphysics in *Primordial Meditation*. But if Guénon’s writing may be characterised as “linear” and cerebral, Schuon’s is as it were “spherical” and “alchemical”. Its doctrinal rigour is complemented and counterbalanced by

<sup>1</sup> Schuon’s older contemporary, the French metaphysician and perennialist René Guénon (1886–1951).

<sup>2</sup> *Castes and Races*, chapter II.

<sup>3</sup> See below, First Collection.



passages of haunting imagery and lyricism. It powerfully engages our total intelligence, penetrating not only the thinking mind, but also the depths of the soul.

This alchemical or operative quality—bespeaking Schuon’s eminent spiritual stature and exceptional mastership—is a hallmark of *Primordial Meditation*: the writing already bears the unmistakable stamp of his spiritual personality. In its content, if not in its language, *Primordial Meditation* is necessarily of one substance with his later works. The nature of Reality, Truth, Knowledge and Love; the indwelling of the Absolute in the relative and the prefiguring of the relative in the Absolute; the merciful junction between Absolute and relative incarnated by the *avatars*; the nature of man; the theophany of created things and the interiorising, redeeming power of contemplative Beauty; the divine Feminine and the pre-eminence of the Virgin Mother; essential prayer: all these fundamental themes, addressed by Schuon throughout his life, are woven into the rich canvas of this, his first book.

*Primordial Meditation* reveals Schuon’s sacred vocation as vehicle of the *sophia perennis*—one situated, moreover, at a time in history that enabled him to cast his gaze back over the centuries and demonstrate, in a kind of summing up, the quintessential consonance of such great “kindred spirits” as Lao Tse, Plato, Plotinus, Shankara and Meister Eckhart. One is reminded of the Taoist “Immortals” conversing together in a sunlit grove amid mountain peaks.

We can learn much from tracing the “unfolding” in this diary of spiritual treasures; and as we do so, we marvel at the new glimpse we are given into Frithjof Schuon’s greatness.

Gillian Harris  
Basel, June 2007

## Preface to the Second German Edition (1989)

This early work, originally entitled *Guiding Themes for Primordial Meditation*, was published in 1935, that is, more than fifty years ago; now that I have written nineteen books on metaphysical subjects in French—books which, in the most thorough way, elucidate and elaborate on everything said in this youthful work—the obvious question arises, what message a new edition of that early work can bring. This may well be debatable, but it is the case that I have been asked repeatedly, by French readers as well, to make my first book accessible to a circle which has in the meantime grown much larger—more as the diary of an unfolding than as a doctrinal book of the same calibre as my later writings.

As in all early works, here, too, much is expressed too angularly or too sharply: certainly, principal Truth is incorruptible and hence changeless, but with time one becomes better acquainted with the multi-layered complexity of the Real, if one has the necessary keys at one's disposal; cosmic Reality is after all an interplay of inexorable geometry and unfathomable music. The profound nature of things is changeless; with regard to the one metaphysical Truth, this present book, too, is impersonal and timeless, despite having in places the characteristics of an early work.

This being said, I may perhaps take the liberty of adding that *Leitgedanken zur Urbesinnung* is my only book in German, apart from a very free translation I made of *De L'Unité Transcendante des Religions* myself; I adopted the French language very early on, because, through my collaboration with a periodical concerned with spiritual subjects, I quickly found a not inconsiderable readership in France. The fact that there is a value, for both spirit and soul, in the equilibrium between the Germanic and Latin natures—that is, between Germanic profundity of soul and Latin perspicacity of mind, without wanting to be restrictive or exclusive in this—is already shown by the example of a Meister Eckhart, the great master of German mysticism and Latin theology. Thus I consider myself justified in saying: it is no accident if in my life's work the German and French natures join hands.

To conclude: in an era when the neglect and destruction of the German language are the order of the day, the sense of the dignity, indeed the sacredness, of the language more than ever constitutes an essential value; and I would point out without false modesty that this concern—as it were on the periphery of the metaphysical content—forms part of the spiritual message of this book.

Frithjof Schuon

## FIRST COLLECTION

written *anno* 1928–1929 in Besançon\* and  
*anno* 1930–1932 in Paris

\*The French town, east of Dijon, where Frithjof Schuon was stationed on military service in the late 1920s.

REALITY MANIFESTS ITSELF in everything. However, Reality as such cannot manifest itself; for what is manifested must reveal itself through symbols, and since a manifestation is always distinct from its essence, only in Itself can pure Reality be pure Reality: only in Itself can It be what It is and what It signifies beyond Being. Therefore it can be said that there are two aspects of Reality: firstly the aspect which beholds Reality by means of its manifestations, thus, in the immeasurable web of the world; and secondly the essential aspect, which can however be named only as the cause of the first aspect, since in it, constituting as it does quintessential Reality as such, there is no longer any seeing or seen, knower or known; this duality signifies rather the principal departure point of the relative, fragmented aspect of Reality—the departure point which, by force of its creative duality, necessitates that fragmented aspect, so that the world arises from the interaction of an active and a passive principle; for fragmented Reality inevitably presupposes a knower and a known.

These relationships can be demonstrated using the symbolism inherent in the triangle: one vertex symbolizes pure Reality; the other two vertices, which are adjacent to one another and opposite the first, signify fragmented Reality in its double-facetedness of knower or inner, and known or outer. The world, however one considers it, or however it does or does not consider itself, can thus be described as a “self-comprehension”,\* whose dimensionless innermost point represents Reality as such, while what extends around this principal, purely spiritual point symbolizes fragmented Reality, thus, the world in the proper sense of the word. Whereas the dimensionless core of Reality is necessarily indivisible, the extended

\*i.e., as grasping or understanding itself [Translator’s note].

domain of Reality can, like everything that possesses spatial dimensions, be divided. Thus, around the point of pure Reality arise circles whose relativity increases as they distance themselves from their central point, without however ceasing to be symbols or reflections of this point; for otherwise they would no longer have any relationship with Reality, and nothing can have no relationship with Reality, because there can be nothing other than Reality—anything conceived of outside it would be pure nothingness.

The relation between fragmented or outer reality and pure or inner Reality is like the relation between substance and essence. If the essential transcends the substantial in the sense that the substantial is completely contained in the essential and cannot exist on its own, and if the essential on the other hand possesses all its reality beyond and independently of the substantial, then this relation, which is neither reciprocal nor reversible, is revealed even more clearly in the relation between undeterminable, infinite Reality and its fragmented reflections which all proceed from Being; Being is, in a manner of speaking—if a conceptually exact comparison is indeed permissible here—the pivot between pure Reality, which is above, outside and beyond Being, and fragmented Reality, which is below, within and on this side of Being. As active Principle, Being is God as Creator of the world; however, Being or God is what is expressed by these words only because fragmented knowledge does not go beyond this pivot; Being is as it were the veil behind which the highest Reality is hidden. The world is comparable to a stepped pyramid whose foundations symbolise the phenomenal world and whose summit signifies Being; beyond this extends infinite space, which the summit touches, whereas space as such has no relation to the summit, even though from it an inverted stepped pyramid, continuing into

the Infinite, is conceivable; boundless space is to the structure as the Ultimate, the purely Divine—boundless, all-surpassing, uniquely sovereign, all-dissolving—is to the world. The summit of the pyramid, like Being in the spiritual sense, can indeed be regarded as a pivot, a focal point, as it were, where the dimensions of space converge and are gathered up—as are rays of light through a magnifying glass—in order that these extensions or rays may again become infinite below, but in accordance with an infinitude which is merely an inverse image, limited by the focal point itself, of Infinity thus transposed. Therefore, Being is the highest determination of the Infinite.

The relationship that exists between pure Reality and fragmented reality, between the essential and the substantial, also exists between Principle and manifestation; the first member of this duality is on the one hand pure spiritual transcendence and sovereignty, and on the other hand the focal point of this transcendence and sovereignty, unifying and transposing in a particular way. From this focal point realisation, manifestation and development occur, each henceforth subject to a particular determination. This double aspect of the Principial is expressed in the broadest and deepest sense by saying that Being is the primordial determination which gathers up the pure undetermined Divine and radiates it, in accordance with this determination, as world, unto the latter's effect-less boundaries.\*

Now, this double-facetedness, whether within the Principial, or as Principle and manifestation, can be considered in yet another light: namely, that Reality can be understood as pure affirmation, lesser reality on the other hand

\*“Effect-less boundaries”: when a pebble is thrown into a lake it produces ripples that become progressively weaker as their distance from the centre increases. Eventually the energy will be exhausted and no more ripples produced [Tr.].

as relative affirmation. From the point of view of pure Reality, Being is the first form of negation; whereas from the point of view of fragmented reality, Being is the affirmation which connects the world with pure Infinity. Thus, from the standpoint of the world, Being is the inexhaustible nucleus of all affirmative determinations, whereas it is contained in ultimate, pure Reality merely as possibility, not as Being. Therefore the summit of the pyramid is indeed the affirmation from which the reality potentially contained in that summit unfolds; but seen from the perspective of space, the summit of the structure is a negation, because all the extensions which can be produced from the inexhaustible possibilities of space can only be negations by comparison with these possibilities; or ostensible, relative affirmations within a negation.

Thus, everything which is actualised can be considered in a double light: on the one hand insofar as it participates in pure Reality, and on the other, insofar as it negates pure Reality. A thing is real through its participation in its Principle, be it in the narrow or in the broadest, deepest and ultimate sense; it is unreal through the negation it signifies with regard to the Principial. It is real insofar as knowledge, whose object it is, is centred on Reality; unreal insofar as knowledge whose content is not pure Reality responds to fragmented reality.

\*

Just as it is impossible to observe the near and the distant simultaneously, so, too, it is impossible for a being to grasp fragmented and pure Reality simultaneously: to the extent that the one acts on the intelligence, the other remains inoperative—for which reason he whose intelligence is directed predominantly towards the diverse, the phenomenal, can know correspondingly less of the unified, the essential. In other words: he who restricts



himself to those modes of knowledge suited to perceiving the diverse, the apparent—namely, the senses and reason—cannot know what is knowable through the Intellect alone, it being one with the Intellect, as light is one with the eye.

That which is most distant from the eye is the sun; for even the stars are visible to the eye only by its light. And just as the sun is at the same time closest to the eye, because the eye is an image of the sun and is one with its light, so the highest principle of knowledge is furthest and nearest; and equally, by its light alone can beings perceive the diverse, the symbolical, without seeing the source of light. The stars are perceptible only because the sun has disappeared, and phenomena are perceptible only because the light which makes them visible is necessarily a diminished light, otherwise no phenomenon would be visible, only light itself. Colour corresponds to the respective substantiality, form to essence, light to the Spirit which comes from the Divine, distances to planes of reality; in order to see the essential, the real, in a phenomenon, the eye must be far from it; so that the particular, the accidental, in it does not obscure the general, namely, that which determines its nature.

Whatever knowledge enters man is also that which comes forth from him; he cannot react to anything other than the reality which satisfies his knowledge. To the extent that a man perceives earthly things, he acts; were he to perceive the earth from a great distance, no action would have any meaning for him; thus the actions of him who perceives the world from a great distance do not respond to worldly circumstances, in that his will, absorbed by divine Knowledge, is liberated from all symbols and far removed from them. Were the eye situated on the sun, it would be filled with light to such a degree that it would perceive nothing else; and so it is with knowledge, when it is filled with the Spirit and comprehends nothing other

than Spirit—that is, itself, in its pure Principiality. We see the sun as such only because we are distant from it, just as we can define God as such only because of our distance from Him. But if we are absorbed in the Divine we no longer know God as such, that is, in so far as He stands separate from the world and acts on it with His Will. It can be said that light enables us to see things only by means of the darkness which is still in them, since light is attenuated by the darkness. The same thing occurs on the spiritual plane, and thus we know God, too, by means of the darkness which obscures the all-encompassing Spirit without in any way touching It in Its Quintessence.

Knowledge drives inwards, Will drives outwards. Just as the breath, going in and out, sustains beings, likewise in- and out-going Knowledge is the basis of existence in fragmented reality.

But in ultimate Reality, which lies beyond essence and substance, there is no place for knowledge to go in or out, no place it could come or go.

\*

When a being has realised that his existence is a mere transposition of pure Reality, and a transposition through negation and into negation at that; and that everything positive contained in him and his surroundings lives immeasurably and indivisibly, integrally, in the Divine; and that what makes a being particular is only negation, diminution, limitation; thus that the being is one with the Divine through his intrinsic wisdom, power and beauty, and consequently no longer possesses any individual existence, while on the plane of appearances he can be distinguished from the Divine only through his ignorance, weakness and contradictoriness—when a being has realised both his oneness with the Divine and his nothingness in his separation from the Divine, the deeper his know-

ledge of this double aspect of himself is, the less he can insist on remaining enmeshed in this existence and asserting it in its manifold reflections within knowing and willing. Every form, be it determined from within or without, be it formally limited as the seer or the seen, is the expression of an ignorance, namely, that ignorance through which something exists besides the Divine; and when this ignorance is considered in its dual aspect, it splits into two opposing poles between which its ungrounded nothingness vacillates—namely, passivity or impotence, and discord or contradictoriness, conflict, ugliness. The root of the world is ignorance; and this ignorance consists of impotence and disintegration and produces nothing but bondage and contradictoriness.

Thus it can be said: that which issues from ignorance brings about ignorance and leads to ignorance; this also means that what issues from passivity or bondage brings about passivity or bondage and falls prey to them, and what issues from contradictoriness or ambivalence brings about ambivalence and is subject to the law of ambivalence. Thus, if a being recognizes his relation to pure Reality—because in truth he cannot subsist outside ultimate Reality or pure Understanding, and thence cannot be completely separated from It either, even in appearance—he sheds himself as one sheds a garment, he draws himself back like a veil before the sun of pure Understanding, and the rays of Knowledge effective in him work in such a way that his knowing and willing, and ultimately his “I” itself, are dissolved from within, as the dew reflecting the sun is absorbed by it.

Now, the “I” is knowledge in a certain sense; for there is no doubt that it knows; but it is also ignorance in another sense; for without doubt it does not know, not just what is beyond the factual knowledge allotted to it, or beyond its capabilities or amplest potentialities, but

also, in particular, what is within its own knowing; for this knowing is proper to it, belonging to it and to no other, precisely in that it is an ignorant kind of knowing. The “I”, like its archetypes ascending hierarchically to Being, is a focus of that which transcends it, namely the possibilities of all higher planes of reality, unto the highest Reality; and like its archetypes and its ultimate Archetype, Being, it effects the convergence and transposition of that which transcends its limits, in order to repeat this transcending reality within its own limits as inversion and disintegration. The “I” is a centre for diminution and negation; it produces its illusory world by means of higher reality, but can also, by means of this illusory world, return to higher reality, precisely because its illusory world is none other than a reflection of higher, and thus also of the highest, Reality.

The world, the “not I”, corresponds to the “I”, which is the inner standpoint of the human degree of reality, as an apparently outward prolongation of this standpoint; however, neither “I” nor world is an absolute determination; the distinction between them is relative, precisely because they exist only in relation to each other; for the absolute “I”, completely independent of the world—though to posit this is already a contradiction—would be Reality as such, whereas an absolute world, completely separated from the “I”, would correspond to no possibility whatever. Reality alone is absolute; therefore, nothingness cannot also be absolute; this explains why nothingness does not exist except as a mere conceptual possibility, a mental inference based on relative nothingness. Thus that which is within the “I”, namely the experienced world—the “I” is to the latter as essence is to substance—cannot transcend the determination inherent in the “I” and proceeding from it. Therefore, everything which lies within the “I” and is determined and differentiated by it signifies an inversion of that which cor-

responds archetypally to the "I" and lies beyond it, and a disintegration of what the differentiated thing merely reflects. Thus it becomes evident that human knowledge is a relative ignorance, just as the reality which corresponds to it is an unreality; that its power is an impotence, its freedom a servitude, its order a chaos; and that everything within the limits of the "I"—thus, in the world—is based upon a mere "more or less", for which reason every affirmation, insofar as it belongs to only one world, can be in accord only in a distant and comparative, but never in a real, manner with what lies beyond the "I"; for the relative in itself has no connection at all to the Absolute and can form no part of what is indivisible, yet it depends of necessity on the Absolute. The true home of affirmation cannot lie within negation; for this reason, in negation—that is, in the world—only the negative is in fact at home and continually victorious, whereas the affirmative reminds us merely in passing of a kingdom in which affirmation is at home and negation excluded. In the world, the main role of affirmation is to pave the way for negation; indeed it is only a particular aspect of negation; negation always has the last word here, though a relative but nonetheless constant affirmation must be operative in the structure of the world, in order that negation can exist there at all and negate. The world and all its events are, in one sense, affirmation constantly being eaten away by nothingness, yet invincible; and in another sense they are negation, ceaselessly replenished by Reality but never vanquished. But one can also consider this corrosive nothingness in a deeper and more legitimate sense, as the effect of the Divine, Which cannot tolerate anything else asserting itself beside It, even seemingly, and on Whose Reality apparent reality must be dashed; and the reality which replenishes but never vanquishes negation can be considered as illusion, effective

within its limits, which inflates itself in vain against the Boundless.

Thus the man who has understood and deliberated upon this will indeed recognise affirmation in phenomena and events, but will not mistake these facts for primordial affirmation, as the obtuse worldly man does; he will be able to infer the purely affirmative from the relatively affirmative, but turn away from the relatively affirmative of this world, that is, from its factual aspect, in order to pierce the two-faced illusion, "I-world", through the strait gate of spiritualisation. For, recognising that the knowing and willing activity of the "I" generated the world from its ignorance, both by inversion of the Reality received from above and by Its multiplication or splintering, the spiritual man will, by virtue of that which transcends the "I" and is not of the "I" and which eludes the negating operation of the "I"—that is, by virtue of pure Knowledge—accomplish spiritually the rectification through which the inverted is returned to its true position and the multiple to Unity.

There is a kingdom at which the affirmative in this world hints, without attaining it in any way. But this kingdom is not of this world; we can only have a presentiment of it from afar, through the darkness. We recognise the affirmative in this world as the reflected splendour of the infinite and eternal Affirmation, meditate by means of the former on the latter, without confusing them. According to the Scriptures: "Blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed."

He who affirms this world by merely seeing and experiencing it as such, denies the Kingdom; he who denies the world, affirms the Kingdom. This spiritual denial is poverty in the Spirit, through which man becomes like a child and enters the Kingdom through the strait gate.

On the other hand the Kingdom is denied by the world, which is nothing but the prolongation and the periphery of the "I" and its wealth or spouse, so to speak; hence the Scriptural saying: "There be eunuchs, which have made themselves eunuchs for the kingdom of heaven's sake. He that is able to receive it, let him receive it."

\*

Because man is neither all nor nothing, he has no sufficient *raison d'être* within himself and cannot suffice unto himself; since he is nothing but a transition, he must decide between Reality and illusion—in other words: between the divine Will and his own will.

\*

Every man would be free if he knew that he is free. If every man knew that he is in a state of bliss, then every man would be in a state of bliss.

Every man would be God if he knew that he is God. May he who has ears to hear, hear!

\*

There is a harmony with pure Being which proceeds from the standpoint that the world—as the sum of all worlds and always as seer and seen—participates in the Divine and therefore can indeed be called real. This is the harmony whose realisation proceeds from manifestation, from what is directly at our disposition, from the faculties of perception and their contents; the harmony which begins by taking created things and realising Unity by means of them, by penetrating their centres and thus connecting them with higher centres until they are dissolved in the highest spiritual Centre. Indeed the contemplation of the purely affirmative in things cancels out their oppositions and therewith their diversity and multiplicity—thus, it can-

cels out things as such; for they are differentiations only through the intervention of negation. This contemplation, starting from created things, leads beyond them, without opposing them, into primordial Affirmation, whose fragmented reflection they are; it dissolves on the one hand the opposition between the “I” and the world, on the other hand the opposition between the things contained within the world, and finally the opposition between all of this and the pure Divine. But only that which is conglomerated and solidified can be dissolved, and thus, contemplation proceeding from the affirmative entails—or presupposes—the knowledge that the becoming of the “I” amounts to a solidification and a hardening, an individualisation of an originally free spiritual state; and because this solidification, hardening and individualisation entail an inversion of the original relationships, a form-bound existence in a multiple, unstable, relative reflection had to arise from the primordial Abiding in a unique, indissoluble, absolute divine Beholding. The seer, which was not separated or differentiated from the seen, had to harden into multiple centres, as tumours are formed; and the seen, as opposed to the seer—like the exclusive, dimensionless, immutable and compelling spatial point as opposed to endless, free, immeasurable space—had, in accordance with the seer’s now-disintegrated perspective, to appear to participate in this disintegration, as if in response to the solidification and multiplication necessarily associated therewith; and had to conceal its unity behind phenomena, which then brought about the disintegration of the seer. Therefore, although in the Principle, that is, in the Divine, the seer and the seen are interwoven and intermingled, and inseparably interpenetrate each other—as do inexhaustible Infinitude, symbolically referring to dimension, and unfathomable Absoluteness, referring to dimensionlessness—on the plane of manifestation this principal relationship



is reversed, and the seer, diminished to a state of mere individual consciousness, is, as “I”, apparently unique and absolute; the seen, on the other hand, seems multiple, unstable and contingent.

\*

Every world—or every circle of reality—is real within itself; its reality is valid because of the interrelation of its component parts; hence its reality is relative and fragmented, not absolute and pure. With regard to a circle of reality, it can be said that pure Reality is its prototype; however, pure Reality cannot in Itself be a prototype, since there is nothing apart from It for which It could serve as a prototype. The transposition of pure Reality into fragmented reality is determined by the potentialities of the plane of realisation, the primordial substance, whose form-giving limitations are, as such, not directly and causally contained in pure Reality; for otherwise Reality would not be supra-worldly and sovereign, and would not transcend all circles of fragmented reality. Reality’s relationships are thus one-sided and not reversible; the circles of fragmented reality are completely and in every respect symbols of higher and highest Reality, but pure Reality is not in Itself the prototype of these likenesses, except in so far as our departure point is these likenesses, or in other words, ourselves.

Every world, every circle of reality, is definable as knowledge and known, the two are inseparable; “world” means knowledge and known; if one wanted to consider each of these elements purely in itself, the distinction between them would be dissolved and they would coincide in ultimate Non-Distinction. As soon as one speaks of knowledge, the corresponding known must also inevitably be spoken of, since one face of the coin is necessarily contingent upon the other, otherwise it could not exist, any

more than could the perception of darkness without that of light, or the concept of the limited without that of the Limitless. This mutual dependence of “knowledge-known” is the dual aspect of the world, in which knowledge and known repeat themselves in innumerable forms, and the basic conditions of their reality are developed and manifested *ad infinitum*. The Divine can be grasped by means of each world’s limitations, from which the aspect of the divine Qualities arises; these possess higher reality and power of manifestation with regard to that world, but are, as differentiations, nevertheless dissolved in the ultimate Divine; indeed the Divine stands All-Knowing and All-Powerful over the world, but without being All-Knowing and All-Powerful in Its ultimate Suchness. Thus the Divine acts even in what is most insignificant, ephemeral and accidental, with infinite Wisdom and Power, without this action signifying an opposition between agent and acted; for the Divine acts through Its Divinity alone, without addressing Itself to created things; since nothing possesses existence apart from It, and in the realm of ignorance, where things possess existence, the Divine, or pure Reality, is present only as effect, no longer in Itself. For were It present as Such, Its All-Reality would annihilate the world, as the sun extinguishes the stars. It manifests Itself everywhere, in all worlds, whereas the worlds are nothing in the face of Its pure Spirituality. Everything, the frailest and most negligible, as well as the greatest and most significant (these distinctions are quite relative and have no meaning in the face of Reality), has a relation with It; but the Divine stands in relation to nothing, because It encloses all possibilities in Its own Impossibility.\*

A circle of reality, a world, is nothing but an aspect, a state of consciousness, an experience of Reality, and thus

\*This could also be called “Non-Possibility” or “Beyond-Possibility” [Tr.].

four realities can be distinguished, of which the first, using the square as a symbol, corresponds to the number four and is the physical world, perceptible to the senses; the second corresponds to the number two and constitutes both the world of the soul in the narrower sense and the non-physical, supra-sensible world in the broader sense; whereas the third is equivalent to the number one and signifies pure Being. Lastly, let us speak of the number zero, which, in the numerical domain, is an image of ultimate, highest, pure Reality, of the completely undeterminable Divine, nameable only inadequately through negation. And just as from the number one a quantitative infinity is generated which is only an unfolding—fragmented, transposed and determined by unity—of the inexhaustibility contained in the number zero; and just as, from unity onwards, the infinite, the unattainable itself, stands in no comparable relationship to zero and can only symbolise its awesome void by unlimited quantity, without ever being able to fill it; and just as all existent things are no match for those which are non-existent, nor can the objects which are contained in space and develop space and actualise its possibilities, ever fill it or exhaust its possibilities; so also the worlds unfold in an inverse sense from Being, which is the first reality. And thus the worlds, with their immeasurability, cannot be weighed in the balance against the purely real, ultimate Divine, which is beyond Being. Thus, too, the supra-sensible and sensible worlds signify nothing but a transposition and inversion of the highest Non-Being, fragmented, determined and conditioned by Being. Whereas nothingness is merely a conceptual image, a phenomenon of the possibility of thinking, and, without existing in any other way, the ultimate formula of unreality—unreality which cannot stand in any equal relationship with Reality, precisely because, as a formula, it must necessarily participate in Reality, and, as nothing-

ness, can in no way exist; so that nothingness constitutes the only thought which does not correspond to any object, and is as it were self-sufficient (although of necessity it still needs objects, in order to be able to disregard them). And likewise, as occurs in the symbolism of numbers: if the increase of multiplicity—whose possibilities and limitations are determined by unity—is to a certain degree an attempt to realise the immeasurability of, and so to speak fill up in an inverse direction, the void which lies below unity (though in terms of gradation it lies above unity), so the development of worlds beginning with Being is a blossoming of Reality, but by introversion and negation. And if on the one hand there is a sense of having the divine Ultimateness, negated by Being, arise anew, there is on the other hand an opposite sense: that of escaping from the Ultimate, which, from the standpoint of what exists, is apparently negating.

It is impossible to understand ultimate, absolute, all-surpassing Reality, or rather, the completely sovereign Unnameable, as being One in the numeric or determinative sense, as world or even as standpoint; we know of It by knowing nothing, we name It because we must limit It in order to be able to grasp It intellectually; because comprehensibility and limitation are one and the same to human reason.

Man participates in Reality in four ways: firstly through his body and the world of the senses corresponding to it; secondly through his soul, which is not oriented to the perceptible world alone, but whose dimension is something most men are not conscious of, precisely because they inhabit only the one fragment of the soul which is receptive to repercussions from the perceptible world and is thereby connected to that world; this soul encompasses all capacities for knowledge and action as such on the perceptible plane, as well as their inward

point of departure: consciousness, in which are contained sentiment, imagination, memory and reason. Thirdly, man is connected through the Spirit with the Reality which corresponds to It, or rather, the Spirit distinguishes Itself completely from the two foregoing participations in Reality by actually being a presence of Reality or Being in man, by not being different from its object and actually representing the consciousness of Being in man—though this consciousness transcends man and does not belong to man as such. On the contrary, all beings are one in the Spirit, and one and the same being. Now if we say that, fourthly, man also participates in Reality insofar as pure Spirit is connected with ultimate divine Reality, this allusion to a participation—already, from the point of view of pure Spirit, only symbolically possible in a certain degree—is quite inappropriate here, and it is as if one were to say that death is a state of man. But, using the rectangle conceptually as a metaphor, we can nonetheless speak of man's fourfold participation in Reality, even if the relative falsification inherent in every representation is unavoidable.

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In his position with regard to the Divine, as towards earthly things, man cannot avoid being influenced by his human standpoint, and transferring his reactions to components of earthly reality onto the divine level; thus, he cannot avoid applying all the repercussions of his thinking, willing and feeling, in so far as they are positive, to the Divine, as soon as he has realised that everything which elicits devotion and love here below could not even exist, were it not a reflection of the Goodness and Beauty which are contained in the Divine in infinite measure. But he who is moved by the Reality of the Divine to recognise phenomena as reflections of Its primordial Reality, will not

show love or reverence towards phenomena in themselves, any more than a man would direct his feeling, willing and thinking towards the shadows of things instead of the things themselves. But on the other hand, just as the shadows, alluding to their respective causes, can elicit similar reactions as do the things themselves, similarly, phenomena elicit their respective reactions only through their dependence on the Divine; man should become so conscious of this relationship and this cause that he distinguishes phenomena according to their natures, but without these distinctions eliciting reactions in him; rather, to the extent that he contemplates them in depth, they point to the Divine, in whose Quintessence all distinct qualities are then dissolved. When man knows the Divine completely—through which he is however no longer man, since as man he cannot have this knowledge at all—then he is so much part of the Divine that he is one with the Knowledge the Divine has of Itself; and he is therefore completely one with the Divine and absorbed by It.

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It is as if the imagination produced lacunae around consciousness, causing it to become uncertain and ambivalent, so that it vacillates, doubts and errs; through sentiment, on the other hand, consciousness becomes shackled and dammed-up, so that its freedom of decision and movement is altogether compromised or unfocused. In the first case, consciousness is no longer commensurate with the One-fold; in the second case, it is no longer able to come to grips with the manifold.

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A being is all that befalls him.