



Creation and Manifestation (II)

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Moreover, it is proper to point out the very meaning of the idea of creation, for this also seems to give rise to certain misunderstandings. If “to create” is synonymous with “to make from nothing,” according to the unanimously admitted though perhaps insufficiently explicit definition, it is assuredly necessary to understand thereby, above all, a nothing that is exterior to the Principle; in other words, in order to be a “creator,” the Principle must be sufficient unto itself and not need to resort to some sort of “substance” situated outside of itself and having a more or less independent existence — which, to tell the truth, is inconceivable in any case. One sees immediately that the first purpose of such a formulation is to affirm expressly that the Principle is not in the least a mere “Demiurge” (and here is not the place to distinguish whether this is a question of the supreme Principle or of Being, for it is equally true in both cases); however this does not necessarily mean that every “demiurgic” conception is basically false, but rather that in any case its place is on a much lower level and corresponds to a much more restricted point of view, which, located only at some secondary phase of the cosmogonic process, no longer involves the Principle in any way. Now, if one is content to speak of a “making from nothing” without any further clarification, as is usually the case, there is another danger to be avoided, which is to consider this “nothing” as a sort of principle, no doubt negative, but out of which manifested existence might effectively be drawn nonetheless. This would lead back to practically the same error as that which we rightly wanted to prevent by attributing to “nothing” itself a certain “substantiality”; and in one sense this later error would be still more serious than the earlier, for it embraces a formal contradiction consisting of giving a certain reality to “nothing,” which, ultimately, is to say, to nothingness. If, to escape this contradiction, one claims that the “nothing” in question is not nothingness pure and simple, but only such in relation to the Principle, one would commit a double error. On one hand, it would suppose that this time there was something truly real outside of the Principle, and then there would no longer be any real difference from the “demiurgic” concept itself; on the other hand, it would fail to recognize that in no way can beings be drawn from this relative “nothing” by manifestation, as the finite never ceases to be strictly null vis-à-vis the Infinite.

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Something completely essential is lacking in the way manifestation is being considered, both in what has just been said as well as in what could be added concerning the idea of creation, and this is the notion of possibility. However, and note this well, this by no means constitutes a ground for complaint, and such a view, however incomplete, is no less legitimate, for in truth the notion of possibility intervenes only when one places oneself at the metaphysical point of view, and as we have already said, it is not from this point of view that manifestation is envisaged as creation. Metaphysically, manifestation necessarily presupposes certain possibilities capable of being manifested; but if it proceeds thus from possibility, one cannot say that it comes from “nothing,” for it is obvious that possibility is not “nothing.” But perhaps one may object that this is then precisely contrary to the idea of creation. The answer is easy: all possibilities are contained in total Possibility, which is but one with the Principle itself; it is thus ultimately in this latter that the possibilities are really contained in a permanent state and for all eternity; and, besides, if it were otherwise they would truly be “nothing,” and there could no longer even be a question of possibilities. Thus, if manifestation proceeds from these possibilities or from some of them (here we recall that besides the possibilities of manifestation there are also possibilities of non-manifestation to consider, at least in the supreme Principle, although this is no longer so when we limit ourselves to Being), it comes from nothing that is outside of the Principle; and this is exactly the meaning we have attached to the idea of creation understood correctly, so that fundamentally the two points of view are not only reconcilable, but even in perfect agreement. The difference consists in that the point of view related to the idea of creation considers nothing beyond manifestation, or at least only considers the Principle without probing further, because it is still only a relative point of view, whereas from the metaphysical point of view, on the contrary, it is what is inside the Principle, that is to say possibility, that is really what is essential and matters much more than manifestation itself.

On the whole, one could say that these are two different expressions of the same truth, on condition, of course, that we add that these expressions correspond to two aspects or two points of view which themselves are truly different; but then one could ask whether the one that is the more complete and the more profound would not be fully sufficient, and what purpose the other serves. It is first of all and in a general way the same purpose as that of any exoteric point of view, insofar as it is a formulation of traditional truths limited to what is both indispensable and accessible to all men without distinction. On the other hand, regarding the special case in question, there may be motives of “opportunities” as it were, particular to certain traditional forms by reason of the contingent circumstances to which they must be adapted and which require a formal safeguard against a conception of the origin of manifestation in a “demiurgic” mode, whereas such a precaution would be completely useless elsewhere. However, when one observes that the idea of creation is strictly bound up with the properly religious point of view, one is perhaps led to think that there must be something more in it than this; and this is what we must now examine, even if it is not possible to enter into all the developments to which this side of the question might give rise.

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Whether it is a question of manifestation considered metaphysically, or of creation, the complete dependence of manifested beings in all that they really are with respect to the Principle is affirmed quite as clearly and expressly in the one case as in the other; only when this dependence is envisaged in a more precise way does the characteristic difference appear, corresponding very strictly to the difference between the two points of view. From the metaphysical point of view, this dependence is at the same time a “participation”: since all reality lies in the Principle, beings participate in this Principle to the extent that they bear reality within themselves; moreover, it is no less true that these beings, insofar as they are contingent and limited — as is all manifestation of which they are a part — are null with respect to the Principle, as we said above; but in this participation there is a sort of link with the Principle, and therefore a link between the manifested and the non-manifested, which enables beings to pass beyond the relative condition inherent in manifestation. The religious point of view, by contrast, insists more on the nullity proper to manifested beings, because by its very nature it does not have to take them beyond that condition; and it implies the consideration of dependence under an aspect which corresponds practically to the attitude of *al-ubudiyah*, to use the Arabic term which the ordinary sense of “servitude” no doubt renders somewhat imperfectly in this specifically religious sense, but sufficiently enough, nonetheless, to serve better than would the word “adoration” (which, moreover, corresponds rather to another [Arabic] term with the same root, *al-ibadah*); now the state of *'abd*, thus envisaged, is properly that of the “creature” vis-à-vis the “Creator.”

Since we have borrowed a term from the language of the Islamic tradition, we should add that no one would dare contest the fact that Islam, considered in its religious or exoteric aspect, is any less “creationist” than Christianity; however, this in no way prevents its esoteric aspect from having a certain level beyond which the idea of creation disappears. Thus there is an aphorism according to which “the Sufi [and it should indeed be noted here that it is not a question here of the mere *mutasawwuf*] is not created” (*as-Sufi lam yukhlaq*); this amounts to saying that his state is beyond the condition of “creature,” and indeed, insofar as he has realized the “Supreme Identity” and so is actually identified with the Principle or the Uncreated, he himself necessarily can only be uncreated. Here, the religious point of view is no less necessarily surpassed, giving way to the purely metaphysical point of view; but if both can thus coexist in the same tradition, each in the rank proper to it and in its proper domain, this obviously proves quite clearly that they are not opposed or contradictory to each other in any way.

We know that there cannot be any real contradiction, whether within a tradition or between it and other traditions, since within them all there can only be diverse expressions of the one Truth. If someone believes that he sees apparent contradictions, should we not simply conclude that there is something that he understands amiss or incompletely, rather than impute to the traditional doctrines themselves flaws which, in reality, only exist because of his own intellectual insufficiency?