



Center and Circumference

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The foregoing by no means implies that space can be regarded as 'a sphere which has its center everywhere and its circumference nowhere,' to use the oft-quoted formula of Pascal, who indeed may not have been the first to use it. In any event, there is no need to discuss here what meaning Pascal himself attached to the phrase, which may have been wrongly interpreted, for it is clear that the author of the all-too-famous observations about the 'two infinities', despite his undeniable merits in other respects, did not possess any knowledge of a metaphysical order.

In the spatial representation of the total being, it is undoubtedly true that before any determination has been made, each point is potentially the center of the being who is represented by the extension in which that point is situated; but it is only potentially and virtually so, until the real center has been actually determined. This determination implies that the center is to be identified with the very nature of the principal point, which, in itself, is not properly speaking anywhere, since it is not subject to the spatial condition, and this allows it to contain all the possibilities of that condition. What are everywhere, then, in the spatial sense, are only the principal point's manifestations, which in fact fill space in its entirety, but are no more than mere modalities, so that 'ubiquity' is really no more than a sensible substitute for true 'omnipresence'. Furthermore, if the center of space endows as it were with its own nature all other points by the vibration it imparts to them, this is true only insofar as it makes them participate in the same indivisibility and freedom from conditions that it enjoys itself, and this participation, to the extent that it is effective, thereby frees these points from the spatial condition.

It is always desirable to bear in mind the general elementary law that between the fact or sensible object (ultimately the same thing) which is taken as a symbol, and the idea or rather metaphysical principle which it is desired to symbolize as far as that is possible, the analogy is inverse, which is moreover always the case of true analogy. Thus, in space considered in its existing reality, and not as a symbol of the total being, no point is or can be the center; all points equally belong to the domain of manifestation, by the very fact of belonging to space. Space is one of the possibilities whose realization falls within that domain, which, in its entirety, constitutes no more than the circumference of the 'wheel of things', or what might be called the outwardness of universal Existence. Again, of course, to speak here of 'inward' and 'outward', of center and circumference, is to use symbolical language, the language of spatial symbolism; but the impossibility of doing without such symbols proves no more than the inevitable imperfection of our means of expression. If it is possible, up to

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a certain point, to communicate our ideas to others, in the manifested and formal world, it can obviously only be done through representations that manifest these ideas in certain forms, that is, by correspondence and analogies. This is the principle and final cause of all symbolism; and every expression, whatever its mode, is in reality nothing but a symbol. Only 'let us beware of confusing the thing (or idea) with the deteriorated form under which alone we can depict it, and perhaps even understand it (*quo* human individuals); for the worst metaphysical (or rather, anti-metaphysical) errors have arisen from inadequate comprehension and wrong interpretation of symbols. And let us always remember the god Janus who is depicted with two faces, yet has only one, which is not either of those that we can touch or see.' This image of Janus might be applied with exactitude to the distinction between 'inward' and 'outward', as well as to the consideration of the past and the future; and the single countenance, which no relative and contingent being can behold without first emerging from its limited condition, can correspond exactly to the third eye of *Shiva*, which sees all things in the 'eternal present'.

Under these conditions, if our expression is to conform to the normal relationship of all analogies (which might well be described, in geometrical language, as a relationship of inverse homothesis), the formula of Pascal quoted above should, and indeed must, be reversed. It will then correspond to the Taoist text already quoted: 'The point which is the pivot of the norm is the motionless center of a circumference on the rim of which all contingencies, distinctions, and individualities revolve'.

At first sight, it might almost be thought that the two images are comparable, but in reality they are the exact reverse of each other. Evidently Pascal let himself be carried away by his geometrician's imagination, which led him to reverse the true relationships as they should be envisaged from a metaphysical standpoint. It is the center that is properly speaking nowhere, because, as has been said, it is essentially 'non-localized': it is not to be found anywhere in manifestation, since it is absolutely transcendent in respect thereof, while being at the center of all things. It is beyond all that lies within the scope of the senses or any faculty proceeding from the sensible order: 'The Principle cannot be attained by the eye nor the ear.... The Principle cannot be heard; what is heard is not It. The Principle cannot be seen; what is seen is not It. The Principle cannot be stated; what is stated is not It... The Principle, being unimaginable, cannot be described either.

All that can be seen, heard, imagined, stated, or described, necessarily belongs to manifestation, and even to formal manifestation; it is therefore really the circumference that is everywhere, since all places in space, or more generally, all manifested things (space being here only a symbol of universal manifestation), 'all contingencies, distinctions, and individualities', are only elements in the 'current of forms', points on the circumference of the 'cosmic wheel'.

Accordingly, to sum up in a few words, it can be said that, not only in space, but in all that is manifested, what is everywhere is the exterior or the circumference, whereas the center is nowhere; since it is unmanifested; but (and here the expression 'inverse sense' takes on the full force of its meaning) the manifested would be absolutely nothing without that essential point, which in itself is not manifested at all, and which, precisely by reason of its non-manifestation, contains in principle all possible manifestations, being the 'unmoved mover' of all things, the immutable origin of all differentiation and modification. This point produces the whole of space (as well as all other manifestations) by as it were issuing from itself and by

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unfolding its virtualities in an indefinite multitude of modalities, with which it fills space in its entirety; but when we say that it issues from itself to effect this development, such a very imperfect expression must not be taken literally. In reality, since the principal point is never subject to space, which it brings into existence, and since the relationship of dependence (or causal relationship) is obviously not reversible, this point remains 'unaffected' by the conditions of any of its modalities and consequently never ceases to be identical with itself. When it has realized its total possibility, it is only to come back (though the idea of 'returning' or 'beginning again' is in no way applicable here) to the 'end which is identical with the beginning', that is, to the primal Unity which contains everything in principle, a Unity which, being Itself (considered as the 'Self'), can in no wise become other than Itself (for that would imply a duality), and from which, therefore, when considered in Itself, It had never departed. Further, so long as one is dealing with the being as such, and even with universal Being, all one can speak of is Unity, as we have been doing; but if it were sought to transcend the bounds of Being itself and to envisage absolute Perfection, then it would be necessary at the same time to pass beyond that Unity to metaphysical Zero, which cannot be represented by any symbolism, or named by any name.