

THE INTELLECTUAL BEING

By Athos

Our modern civilization is very proud of itself. Most members of this civilization sincerely believe that we are reaching “paradisiacal” times, following uninterrupted progress and evolution. The humankind became hypnotized by humanity and humanitarianism, and the modern people think with arrogance that the only reason why the human being appeared on Earth is to be exclusively human. Therefore, the “civilized” people play gods, imposing their individual desires, ideas and originality, unaware that, in fact, they are puppets and God, the supreme Principle, is the Master Puppeteer.

The main difference between our modern civilization and the traditional ones is that we are profoundly profane, having lost the sacred essence of our world and being. The modern world has cut its ties with the Principle; on the contrary, God was close to the members of traditional civilizations, and they knew that individuality is nothing compared to the One-and-only, just a puppet on a string. In a traditional society, the whole life was a reflection of God. The myths were real, the beliefs were certitudes, and the rites were not superstitions, but spiritual instruments. In a traditional society, every gesture, every activity was a sacred one, imitating what the gods did *in illo tempore*, at the beginning of the world.¹ Eating, working, hunting, dancing, singing, playing, each one represented a sacred rite, an organized activity (Sanskrit *rita* = “order”), following a divine model and having a spiritual meaning. A traditional person knew that humankind, at the same time with its birth, was blessed with a holy lore, the Tradition descended from Heaven. For the modern person this descent is just another legend.

In a traditional civilization, the day-to-day activities sheltered a multitude of sacred symbols, each symbol allowing a multitude of points of view, all valid, like the indefinite number of solar rays; for that reason, the Hindu doctrines are called *darsanas* – “points of view.” *Kabbalah*, the Hebraic tradition, selects three as fundamental meanings of the symbols: the Cosmos, the Year and the Man (Sepher Yetsirah III.2), and they can be traced in any orthodox doctrine of any traditional society. Moreover, any rite has as kernel this triple significance.

The Man of the kabbalistic triad has to be understood as an Intellectual, image of Hindu Manu, the “Lord of the World,” and not as any man. In a common sense, man represents a “human mental being” (Sanskrit *mânava*), male or female. The English word *man*, as the Sanskrit *mânava*, is strong related to *mind* (Sanskrit *manas*), stressing that we, human beings, as Aristotle also stated, are “mental beings” equipped with reason and judgment. At the same time, *mind* is connected to the word *moon* (and *month*),² and likewise the moon, which appears to shine by itself during the night, the mind is the light of our being that dispels the ignorance. But everybody knows that, in fact, the moon reflects the solar light,

¹ Mircea Eliade, *Le mythe de l'éternel retour*, Gallimard, 1979, p. 34.

² René Guénon, *Symboles fondamentaux de la Science sacrée*, Gallimard, 1980, p. 419.

which is the real luminous source. Similarly, the human mind reflects the intellectual light coming from the spiritual Sun, and the Hindu tradition specifies the existence of “the Greater” (*Mahat*), or the Intellect (*Buddhi*), which is the higher part of our being and connects us to the supreme Principle.³

In the modern civilization, the Intellect is confounded with the rational mind. A scholar, or an erudite and educated person, is called an intellectual. Yet from a traditional perspective, the modern intellectual is only a rational, which uses mainly the reason, imagination and memory, all elements belonging exclusively to our human individuality, in comparison to the Intellect, which in various traditions is considered to be a principle of super-individual nature, that is, of super-human or divine nature. *Buddhi*, as its name indicates, is described in Hindu tradition as a solar luminous ray of pure spiritual essence, which comes down and pierces the top of our head, giving us reality, and pointing out the way to Liberation.

The chimney is a corporeal symbol of *Buddhi*. The legend says that the stork brings the newborn to the parents descending the baby through the chimney. The stork is an emblem of the supreme Principle. When this bird flies it looks like a flying snake. The “Feathered Serpent” unifies the bird and the serpent, Heaven and Earth, illustrating the Principle, One without a second. The chimney is a representation of the *Axis Mundi*; it is the spiritual way of the fire to ascend to Heavens. The “elected” neophyte will learn the “fire route” to accomplish the spiritual realization, obtaining Liberation. The Divine Presence uses the same route to come down in our world as *avatâra*. The Intellect as solar ray is such a divine presence, which coming down in our being illuminates the mind, and the mind will shine reflecting this intellectual light.

There are many symbols in our world suggesting the Intellect as a unique luminous ray. This ray is called in Hindu tradition the “one foot” of the Principle (Sun). *Ekapâda* means in Sanskrit “one-footed” and represents the *Axis Mundi* as celestial ray of the spiritual Sun. The solar Ray, producing the Existence, multiplies itself in “one thousand feet” (Sanskrit *sahashrapâda*),⁴ i. e., a multiplicity of solar rays, reflecting the unique Ray. Various traditions state, on the other hand, an upside-down *Fiat Lux* to describe the cosmogony. The light of the super-luminous Principle (or Sun) is so strong – a pure burning fire, that no world can exist. The gods had to cripple the Sun, which appears as one-footed. The “one-foot” that generates the Cosmos is just a shadow of the divine super-light, and so is the Intellect in comparison with the supreme Principle; otherwise, the human mind wouldn’t have been able to stand the immense brightness of the Absolute.

In any case, the Intellect appears as the “one foot” of the spiritual Sun, and *ekapâda* is its emblem. Sacred characters like Ulysses, Oedipus, Jacob, Hephaestus and many others are described as cripples; the stork, image of the Principle, stands one-footed in non-action (Chinese *wu-wei*); Shiva as *Natarâjâ* and Ganesha as *Nrtya Ganapati* (“dancing Ganapati”) are *ekapâda*. They all illustrate the Intellectual. At the same time, the neophyte embarked on the spiritual path and following the luminous ray of the Intellect, has as symbolic goal the holy wedding with *Madonna Intelligenza*, the intellectual maiden called Beatrice by Dante or Helen of Troy by Homer.

³ René Guénon, *L’homme et son devenir selon le Vêdânta*, Édition Traditionnelles, 1991, p. 71.

⁴ Ananda K. Coomaraswamy, *Selected Papers: Metaphysics*, Princeton Univ. Press, 1977, p. 391. See also Ananda K. Coomaraswamy, *La doctrine du sacrifice*, Dervy-Livres, 1978, p. 47.

The Intellectual is therefore, in a traditional society, a human being that has surpassed the individual conditions, having access to the super-human order of reality, that is, to the super-rational domain. Plato highly praises this super-rational of which he talks in *Phaedo*, a super-rational confounded by common people with “madness” or “drunkenness.”

In fact, the intellectual being cannot belong to a modern and profane civilization, but only to a traditional one, i. e., to a human collectivity that has its social life based on tradition. Etymologically, tradition is “what was transmitted,” and more precise, the uninterrupted transmission of the divine principles, lore and sacred sciences, through a golden chain, anchored to the supreme Principle. Only for the profane people tradition would represent, for example, the habit to go grocery shopping every Saturday.

The Tradition could be compared with a treasure concealed into a locked trunk, the Intellect being the trunk’s key. The rational mind makes it possible to analyze the trunk, to weigh it, to state different judgments about its content, even to count the precious stones using the probability theory. Yet only the Intellectuals have access to the treasure and are capable to embrace it synthetically, and moreover, to identify themselves with the treasure. To understand the fundamental difference between an Intellectual and a rational, we bring as example the well-known disputed question: who came first, the chicken or the egg? The answer to this question paradigmatically illustrates the essential distinction between the Intellect and rational mind. For the rational, the egg has priority; for the Intellectual, at the beginning there was the hen, yet, of course, not any hen, but the divine Hen, which, like Hindu Hamsa, or Greek Leda, has produced the World Egg.

The Intellectual, assimilating the Tradition, becomes a spiritual master and has the qualification to transmit the sacred knowledge to the disciples, using three ways: silence, the oral word and the written word. The highest way is the silence, often used by one of the greatest masters, Ramana Maharshi, a perfect Intellectual. The second way is the oral transmission, *ab ore ad aurem*, which escapes the chronological estimations of the scholars. The third way is represented by the scriptures, this being for the modern people almost the only possible method to find out what the Intellectual meant in a traditional society.

In our modern world, the Intellectuals don’t exist anymore, or, at least, they are no longer visible. In the same way the genuine Rosicrucians disappeared from Europe in the seventeenth century, so the Intellectuals vanished from the modern public life; and those known as intellectuals, are just rational individuals, who will “see and see again, but not perceive. For the heart of this nation has grown course” (Matthew 13:14-15).

The traditional wisdom locates symbolically the Intellect within the heart, considering the heart as center of our total being. To be an Intellectual, we have to see with the Eye of the Heart. Only this Intellectual Eye has access to the celestial domain. “But you are not able to see Me with your (corporeal) eyes. I give you a divine eye” (Bhagavad-Gîtâ XI.8). The “divine eye” is not different from God’s Eye, because, as stated in different traditions, only God knows God, and only God sees God, which is an illustration of the Supreme Identity, taught in Sufism, or of Hindu *Aham Brahâmami* (“I am Brahma”). God’s Eye is the Intellectual Eye, and seeing with the Eye of the Heart means God seeing God with God (as Intellectual Eye).⁵

⁵ As Ibn ‘Arabi affirms, “someone else than Himself can not see Him; therefore, with His essential Eye I see Him” (Muhyiddin Ibn ‘Arabî, *L’Arbre du Monde, Les Deux Océans*, 1982, p. 157). It is the same with saying that “if you do not make yourself equal to God, you cannot apprehend God; for like is known by like. Leap clear of all that is corporeal, and make yourself grow to a like expanse with that greatness which is beyond all

The Eye of the Heart is a universal symbol. In Sufism, *Ayn el-Qalb*, the Eye of the Heart, sees the Face of God, which is its eternal vision.⁶ In Hindu tradition, it is called the “eye of knowledge” (*jnana caksus*) (Bhagavad-Gîtâ XV.10), representing the “intellectual intuition,” the only instrument that has direct and immediate (not mediated) access to absolute Knowledge and the celestial levels.⁷ “It is not possible to see the Principle with the corporeal eyes. Those who know him with the heart, as dwelling within the heart, become immortals” (Svetâsvatara Up. IV.20).

Ignorance, from a traditional point of view, means to be blind and heartless, which refers to the Eye of the Heart, and not to our corporeal eyes and heart. For most of the modern intellectuals the Eye of the Heart is asleep. They use wonderful devices to see better the planets and the micro particles, to see faster what happens all around the globe, yet they are condemned to be less and less intellectual.

In our modern world, the rational mind and the emotional heart are fully in control, or they think they are. Yet the Intellectual Being is still hiding within us, waiting to be woken up.

measure; rise above all time, and become eternal; then you will apprehend God” (Hermetica, Shambhala, 1993, tr. by Walter Scott, p. 221).

⁶ About *Ayn el-Qalb* see Frithjof Schuon, *L’Oeil du Coeur*, Dervy-Livres, 1974, p. 13-19. The heart is the residence of the Intellect (*Spiritus*), but for the majority (the ignorant) the Eye of the Heart is blind: “It is not the eyes that are blind but the hearts,” Qor’ân XXII.46 (Martin Lings, *What is Sufism?*, Univ. of California Press, 1977, p. 48).

⁷ The “eye of knowledge” corresponds to Nicholas of Cusa’s “the eyes of my mind and understanding” (Nicholaus of Cusa, *The Vision of God*, The Book Tree, 1999, p. 23) and to the “intellectual eyes” of Hermeticism (the heart being the traditional seat of the Intellect).