

A.K. COOMARASWAMY: A CALL FOR *METANOIA*

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Abstract

After writing and commenting extensively on oriental and medieval art, Coomaraswamy shifted himself to the understanding and explication of Vedic exegesis and traditional metaphysics, especially those of classical India and pre-Renaissance Europe. Coomaraswamy remarked in one of his letters that 'my indoctrination with the *Philosophia Perennis* is primarily Oriental, secondarily Medieval, and thirdly classic'. His later work is densely textured with references to Plato and Plotinus, Augustine and Aquinas, Eckhart and the Rhinish mystics, to Shankara and Lao-Tse and Nagarjuna. He also immersed himself in folklore and mythology since these too carried profound teachings. The vintage Coomaraswamy of the later years is to be found in his masterly works on Vedanta and on the Catholic scholastics and mystics. It is often laden with a mass of technical detail and with linguistic and philosophical subtleties which test the patience of some readers. Of his own methodology as an exponent of metaphysics Coomaraswamy wrote, 'We write from a strictly orthodox point of view...endeavouring to speak with mathematical precision, but never employing words of our own, or making any affirmation for which authority could not be cited by chapter and verse; in this way making our technique characteristically Indian.'

Keywords: *Philosophia Perennis*, metaphysics, orthodox, traditional

Ananda Kentish Coomaraswamy (1877-1947) was a profound thinker and prolific writer of the early twentieth century. By the end of his life, Coomaraswamy was thoroughly versed in the scriptures, mythology,

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doctrines and arts of many different cultures and traditions. He was an astonishingly erudite scholar, a recondite thinker and a distinguished linguist. He left an intellectual legacy that enriched a variety of disciplines like geological studies, history and theory of art, linguistics and philology, social theory, psychology, mythology, folklore, religion and metaphysics. An arch critic of modernism, Coomaraswamy was a versatile genius and a seminal influence. He felt an indelible imprint on his age and an oeuvre that will enlighten successive generations. His writings reaffirm and renew the faith of those who, in their different ways, are attempting to uphold what is sacred. Meyer Schapiro observes his significance in these words:

He was one of the luminaries of scholarship from whom we have all learned. And by the immense range of his studies and his persistent questioning of the accepted values, he gave us an example of intellectual seriousness, rare among scholars today.¹

We can recognise three aspects in Coomaraswamy's life and work which shaped his ideas and writings: a concern with socio-political issues connected with the conditions of daily life and work, and with the problematic relationship of the present to the past and of the 'East' to the 'West'; a fascination with traditional arts and crafts which impelled an immense and ambitious scholarly enterprise; and thirdly, an emerging preoccupation with religious and metaphysical questions which was resolved in a 'unique balance of metaphysical conviction and scholarly erudition'.² In simple words, we can recognise three roles in Coomaraswamy's intellectual life: social commentator and Indologist, historian of Indian art, perennial philosopher. Each of these roles was dominant during a certain period in his life; 1900 to 1917, 1917 to 1932, and 1932 to 1947 respectively. The three strands eventually became interwoven in Coomaraswamy's life and his work.

Ananda was born in Colombo on August 22, 1877 to Sir Mutu Coomaraswamy and Elizabeth Clay Beeby, an English lady of good standing. After his father's death barely two years later, Ananda was brought up and educated at Wycliffe College and at London University in England where he studied Botany and Geology. He graduated with First Class Honours and earned D.Sc. from London University in 1906. As part of his doctoral work Coomaraswamy carried out a scientific survey of the Mineralogy of Ceylon. He became the first director of the newly formed Mineralogical Survey of Ceylon. Distressed to note the state of decay in social and cultural life of his countrymen and their indifference to native arts and crafts,

he founded the Ceylon Social Reform Society with an inspiring manifesto. From here his interests took another turn. He became absorbed in a study of the traditional arts and crafts of Ceylon and of the social conditions under which they had been produced.

During 1909-1913 he travelled extensively in India, a time of political and social unrest that accelerated the tempo of the nationalist movement, leading to non-violent resistance eventually culminating in self-rule. Coomaraswamy wished to stay on in India and offered his valuable collection on condition that a Museum of Indian Art be created; but he did not find a haven in his home country. This was largely due to the outbreak of war (1914), the reluctance of the influential class to associate with a known proponent of *Swadeshi* and the indifference and inability of the nationalists to appreciate the value of the treasure.

In England he found his own social ideas anticipated and given forceful expression in the work of William Blake, John Ruskin and William Morris, three of the foremost representatives of a fiercely eloquent and morally impassioned current of anti-industrialism. These writers and others like Thomas Carlyle, Charles Dickens and Matthew Arnold, had protested vehemently against the conditions in which many were forced to carry out their daily work and living. Coomaraswamy picked up a catch-phrase of Ruskin's which he was to mobilise again and again in his own writings: 'industry without art is brutality'.³ This was more than a facile slogan and signals one of the key themes in Coomaraswamy's work. For many years he was to remain preoccupied with questions about the reciprocal relationships between the conditions of daily life and work, the art of a period, and the social and spiritual values which governed the civilization in question.

Coomaraswamy always remained deeply concerned about the social and educational questions. However later in life Coomaraswamy turned less often to explicitly social and political questions. By then he had become aware that 'politics and economics, although they cannot be ignored, are the most external and least part of our problem'. But, he never surrendered the conviction that an urbanised and highly industrialized society controlled by materialistic values was profoundly inimical to human development. Coomaraswamy's work on social theory has, as yet, received scant attention. It has been overshadowed by his work as an art historian and as a metaphysician. This is right and proper but it should be remembered that Coomaraswamy was profoundly concerned with social questions throughout his life. A close inquiry into his fully

developed ideas about education, literacy, social organization and government would make a fascinating study. In this respect, we can say that he anticipates some of the more percipient of present day social critics who realise that our most fundamental problems derive from a progressive etiolation of authentic moral and spiritual values.⁴

As far as his role as an art historian is concerned, for him the most humble folk art and the loftiest religious creations alike were an outward expression not only of the sensibilities of those who created them but of the whole civilisation in which they were nurtured. His interest in traditional arts and crafts, from a humble pot to a medieval cathedral, was always governed by the conviction that something immeasurably precious and vitally important was disappearing under the onslaught of modernism in its many different guises.

After spending some time in England, he settled down in America where he joined the Boston Museum as Curator of Indian Art in 1917 and later as Research Fellow in Indian, Persian and Mohammedan Art. Until his death in 1947 he immersed himself in painstaking scholarship there (the appellation 'Boston Brahmin' gained circulation). As a Curator at the Boston Museum, Coomaraswamy performed a mighty labour in classifying, cataloguing and explaining thousands of items of oriental art. Through his professional work, his writings, lectures and personal associations, Coomaraswamy left an indelible imprint on the works of many American galleries and museums and influenced a wide range of curators, art historians, orientalist and critics.

Traditional art, in Coomaraswamy's view, was always directed towards a twin purpose: a daily utility, towards what he was fond of calling 'the satisfaction of present needs', and towards the preservation and transmission of moral values and spiritual teachings derived from the tradition in which it appeared. Traditional art does not deal in the private vision of the artist but in a symbolic language.⁵ Modern art, which from a traditionalist perspective includes Renaissance and all post-Renaissance art, is by contrast, divorced from higher values, tyrannised by the mania for 'originality', controlled by 'aesthetic' (sentimental) considerations, and drawn from the subjective resources of the individual artist rather than from the well-springs of tradition.

After writing and commenting extensively on oriental and medieval art, his focus shifted to Vedic exegesis and traditional metaphysics. He became more austere in personal lifestyle, partially withdrew from the academic and social worlds in which he had moved freely over the last decade, and addressed himself to the

understanding and explication of traditional metaphysics, especially those of classical India and pre-Renaissance Europe. Coomaraswamy remarked in one of his letters that ‘my indoctrination with the *Philosophia Perennis* is primarily Oriental, secondarily Medieval, and thirdly classic’.⁶ His later work is densely textured with references to Plato and Plotinus, Augustine and Aquinas, Eckhart and the Rhinish mystics, to Shankara and Lao-Tse and Nagarjuna. He also immersed himself in folklore and mythology since these too carried profound teachings.⁷ The vintage Coomaraswamy of the later years is to be found in his masterly works on Vedanta and on the Catholic scholastics and mystics. It is often laden with a mass of technical detail and with linguistic and philosophical subtleties which test the patience of some readers. Of his own methodology as an exponent of metaphysics Coomaraswamy wrote,

We write from a strictly orthodox point of view...endeavouring to speak with mathematical precision, but never employing words of our own, or making any affirmation for which authority could not be cited by chapter and verse; in this way making our technique characteristically Indian.⁸

It is true that there is no finer exegesis of traditional Indian metaphysics than is to be found in Coomaraswamy’s later works.

His influence radiated out in many directions; his compelling impact on traditional studies was decisive. Even a severely attenuated list of some of the well-known figures on whom he exercised a significant influence testifies to his impact: Eric Gill, the English designer and writer; the judge, Christmas Humphreys, early populariser of Buddhism in England; the influential Indologist Heinrich Zimmer; Joseph Campbell, the Jungian student of the world’s mythologies; René Guénon himself; Joseph Epes Brown who has helped to bring to light some of the esoteric traditions of the American Indians; the comparative religionist Mircea Eliade; and, of course, other traditionalists, including Titus Burckhardt, Marco Pallis and Whitall Perry.⁹

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Ananda Coomaraswamy explores the issue of Indian socio-political tradition in his unique all-comprehensive style and crystal clarity. He observes that in Plato’s thought there is a cosmic city of the world, the city state, and an individual body politic, all of which are communities (Gr. *Koinonia*, Skr. *gana*). ‘The same castes (Gr. *genos*, Skr. *jāti*), equal in number are to be found in the city and in the soul (or self) of

each of us',¹⁰ the principle of justice is the same throughout, viz. that each member of the community should perform the tasks for which he is fitted by nature; and the establishment of justice and well-being of the whole in each case depends upon the answer to the question, which shall rule, the better or the worse, a single Reason and Common Law or the multitude of moneyed men in the outer city and of desires in the individual (*Republic*, 441, etc.)?

Who fills, or populates, these cities? Whose are these cities, 'ours' or 'God's'? What is the meaning of 'self-government'? Philo says that 'As for lordship (kyrios), God is the only citizen' (*monos polites*), and this is almost identical with the words of the *Upanishad*, 'This man (*purusha*) is the citizen (*purushaya*) in every city', (*sarvasu purshu, Brihadāranyaka Upanishad*, II.5.18), and must not be thought of as in any way contradicted by Philo's other statement, that 'Adam' (not 'this man', but the true Man) is the 'only citizen of the world' (*monos kosmopolites*). Again, 'This city (*pur*) is these worlds, the Person (*purusha*) is the Spirit (yo'yam pavate = *Vāyu*), who because he inhabits (*sete*) this city is called the "Citizen" (*puru-sha*)', *Shatapatha Brāhmana*, XIII.6.2.1 — as in *Atharva-Veda*, X.2.30, where 'He who knoweth Brahma's city, whence the Person (*puru-sha*) is so-called, him neither sight nor the breath of life desert ere old age', but now the 'city' is that of this body, and the 'citizens' its God-given powers'.

These macrocosmic and microcosmic points of view are interdependent; for the 'acropolis', as Plato calls it, of the city is within you and literally at the 'heart' of the city. 'What is within this City of God (*brahmapura*, this man) is a shrine and what therein is Sky and Earth, Fire and the Gale, Sun and Moon, whatever is possess or unpossess; everything here is within it.' That is the 'true City of God'; That is our Self, unaging and immortal, unaffected by 'hunger and thirst' (*Chhāndogya Upanishad*, VIII.1.1-5), 'That art thou' (*Ibid.*, VI.8.7); and 'Verily, he who sees That, contemplates That, discriminates That, he whose game and sport, dalliance and beatitude are in and with that Self (*ātman*), he is autonomous (*sva-rāj*, self-governing), he moveth at will in every world; but those whose knowing is of what is other-than-That are heteronomous (*anyarāj*, subject), they move not at will in any world' (*Ibid.*, VII.25.2).

Thus at the heart of this City of God inhabits the omniscient, immortal Self, 'this self's immortal Self and Duke', as the Lord of all, the Protector of all, the Ruler of all beings and the inward-Controller of all the powers of the soul by which he is surrounded, as by subjects, and 'to Him (*Brahma*), thus proceeding in Person (*purusha*), as he lies there extended, and enthroned, the powers of the soul (*devatā*,

prāna), voice, mind, sight, hearing, scent, bring tribute' (*Jaiminiya Upanishad Brāhmana*, IV.23.7-23.10).

Not only are these worlds a city, or am 'I' a city, but these are populated cities, and not waste lands, because He fills them, being 'one as he is in himself there, and many in his children here' (*Shatapatha Brāhmana*, X.5.2.16). 'That dividing itself, unmeasured times, fills (*purayati*= causative of *pr*, the root in *pur* and so 'populates' or even 'civilises'.) these worlds ... from It continually proceed all animate beings' (*Maitri Upanishad*, V. 26). Or with specific reference to the powers of the soul within the individual city, 'He, dividing himself fivefold, is concealed in the cave (of the heart). ... Thence, having broken forth the doors of the sensitive powers. He proceeds to the fruition of experience. ... And so this body is set up in the possession of consciousness, He is its driver' (*Ibid.*, II.6.d).¹¹ This 'division', however, is only as it were, for He remains 'undivided in divided beings' (*Bhagavad Gitā*, XIII.16, XVII.20), 'uninterrupted' (*anantaram*) and thus is to be understood as an undivided and total presence.

The 'division', in other words, is not a segmentation, but an extension, as of radii from a centre or rays of light from a luminous source with which they are con-tinuous (Hence *viraj*, literally 'distributive shining' = 'ruling power'). Con-tinuity and intensity (*samtati*, *syntonia*) are, indeed, a necessary quality in whatever can be tensed and extended but, like the immanent Spirit, 'cannot be severed' (*achchhedyā*, *Bhagavad Gitā*, II.23) — 'no part of that which is divine cuts itself off and becomes separated, but only extends itself' (Philo, Det. 90). It is then, the same thing to say that the Person 'fills' these worlds as to say that *Indra* saw this Person 'as the most widely extended (*tatamam*) *Brahma*' (*Aitareya Āranyaka*, II.4.3). In this way all the powers of the soul, projected by the mind towards their objects, are 'extensions' of an invisible principle (*Republic*, 462E), and it is this 'tonic power' by which it is enabled to perceive them. Our 'constitution' is a habitation that the Spirit makes for itself 'just as a goldsmith draws-out-for-himself from the gold another shape' (*Bṛihadāranyaka Upanishad*, IV.4.4).

This is an essential aspect of the 'thread-spirit' (*suṭrātman*) doctrine, and as such the intelligible basis of that of the divine omniscience and providence, to which our partial knowledge and foresight are analogous. The spiritual Sun (not that 'sun whom all men see' but that 'whom few know with the mind', *Atharva-Veda*, X.8.14; 'Sun of the sun', *Mahābhārata*, V.46.3; 'Light of lights', *Bhagavad Gitā*, X.2.17) is the Self of the whole universe, (*Rig-Veda*, I. 11.5.1) and is connected

to all things in it by the 'thread' of his luminous pneumatic rays, on which the 'tissue' of the universe is woven — 'all this universe is strung on Me, like rows of gems on a thread' (*Bhagavad Gītā*, VII.7); of which thread, running through our intellect, the ultimate strands are its sensitive powers. So, just as the noonday sun 'sees' all things under the sun at once, the 'Person in the Sun', the Light of lights, from the exalted point and centre wherein everywhere and everywhen is focussed is simultaneously present to every experience, here or there, past or future, and 'not a sparrow falls to the ground' or ever has or ever will without his present knowledge. He is, in fact, the only seer, thinker, etc., in us (*Bṛihadāraṇyaka Upanishad*, III.8.23), and whoever sees or thinks, etc., it is by *His* 'ray' that he does so.

Thus, in the human *City of God* which we are considering as a political pattern, the sensitive and discriminating powers form, so to speak, a body of guardsmen by which the Royal Reason is conducted to the perception of sense objects, and the heart is the guardroom where they take their orders (Plato, *Timaeus*, 70B). These powers — however referred to as Gods, Angels, Aeons, Maruts, Rishis, Breaths, Daimons etc. — are the people (*visha*) of the heavenly kingdom, and related to their Chief (*vishpati*) as are thanes to an Earl or ministers to a King; they are a troop of the 'King's Own' (*svā*), by which he is surrounded as if by a crown of glory — 'upon whose head the Aeons are a crown of glory darting forth rays' and 'by "thy glory" I understand the powers that form the bodyguard' (Philo). The whole relationship is one of feudal loyalty, the subjects bringing tribute and receiving largesse — 'Thou art ours and we are thine' (*Rig-Veda*, VIII.92.32), 'Thine may we be for thee to give us treasure' (*Ibid.*, V. 85.8).

What must never be forgotten is that all 'our' powers are not our 'own', but *delegated* powers and ministries through which the royal Power is 'exercised'; the powers of the soul 'are only the names of His acts' (*Bṛihadāraṇyaka Upanishad*, I.4.7, I.5.21). It is not for them to serve their own or one another's self-interests — of which the only result will be the tyranny of the majority, and a city divided against itself, man against man and class against class — but to serve Him whose sole interest is that of the common body politic. Actually, in the numerous accounts we have of a contest for precedence amongst the powers of the soul, it is always found that none of the members or powers is indispensable to the life of the bodily city, except only their Head, the Breath and immanent Spirit.

The right and natural life of the powers of the soul is then, precisely, their function of bringing tribute to their fountain-head,

the controlling Mind and very Self, as man brings sacrificial offerings to an altar, keeping for themselves only what remains. It is the task of each to perform the functions from which it is fitted by nature, the eye seeing, the ear hearing, all of which functions are necessary to the well-being of the community of the whole man but must be co-ordinated by a disinterested power that cares for all. For unless this community can act unanimously, as one man, it will be working at all sorts of cross purposes. The concept is that of a corporation in which the several members of a community work together, each in its own way; and such a vocational society is an organism, not an aggregate of competing interests and consequently unstable 'balance of power'.

Thus the human City of God contains within itself the pattern of all other societies and of a true civilization. The man will be a 'just' man when each of his members performs its own appropriate task and is subject to the ruling Reason that exercises forethought on behalf of the whole man; and in the same way the public city will be just when there is agreement as to which shall rule, and there is no confusion of functions but every occupation is a vocational responsibility. Not, then, where there are no 'classes' or 'castes' but where everyone is a responsible agent in some special field.¹² A city can no more be called a 'good' city if it lacks this 'justice' than it could be were it wanting wisdom, sobriety or courage; and these four are the great civic virtues.¹³

Coomaraswamy says that the Indian philosophy of work is identical. "Know that action arises from *Brahma*. He who on earth doth not follow in his turn the wheel thus revolving liveth in vain; therefore, without attachment to its rewards, ever be doing what should be done, for, verily, thus man wins the Ultimate. There is nothing I needs must do, or anything attainable that is not already mine; and yet I mingle in action. Act thou, accordingly, with a view to the welfare of the world. Better is one's own norm¹⁴, however deficient, than that of another well done; better to die at one's own post, that of another is full of fear. ... Vocations are determined by one's own nature. Man attains perfection through devotion to his own work. How? By praising Him in his own work, from whom is the unfolding of all beings and by whom this whole universe is extended."¹⁵

After giving an intermingled framework of city, vocation and justice, Coomaraswamy puts forth the idea of traditional polity and its universalistic content. He supports that 'the city can never otherwise be happy unless it is designed by those painters who follow a divine original';¹⁶ 'The crafts such as building and carpentry ... take their principles from that realm and from the thinking there';¹⁷ 'Lo, make

all things in accordance with the pattern that was shown thee upon the Mount';¹⁸ 'It is in imitation (*anukriti*) of the divine forms that any human form (*shilpa*) is invented here';¹⁹ 'There is this divine harp, to be sure; this human harp comes into being in its likeness (*tad anukriti*)';²⁰ 'We must do what the Gods did first.'²¹ This is the 'imitation of Nature in her manner of operation', and like the first creation the imitation of an intelligible, not a perceptible model.

But such an imitation of the divine principles is only possible if we have known them 'as they are', for if we have not ourselves seen them, our mimetic iconography, based upon opinion, will be a fault; we cannot know the reflection of anything unless we know itself.²² And seeing that God alone is truly beautiful, and all other beauty is by participation, it is only a work of art that has been wrought, in its kind and its significance, after an eternal model that can be called beautiful. And since the eternal and intelligible models are supersensual and invisible, it is evidently not by observation but in contemplation that they must be known. Two acts, then, one of contemplation and one of operation, are necessary to the production of any work of art.²³ In other words, the necessities to be served by art may appear to be material *or* spiritual, but it is one and the same art, or a combination of both arts, practical and philosophical, that must serve both body and soul if it is to be admitted in the ideal city.²⁴

Therefore, as Coomaraswamy puts, to reform what has been de-formed means that we must take account of an original 'form'. Forms are by definition invisible to sense. The form of our *City of God* is one 'that exists only in words, and nowhere on earth, but is, it seems, laid up in heaven for whomsoever will to contemplate, and as he does so, to inhabit; it can be seen only by the true philosophers who bend their energies towards those studies that nourish rather soul than body and never allow themselves to be carried away by the congratulations of the mob or without measure to increase their wealth, the source of measureless evils,²⁵ but rather fix their eyes upon their own interior politics, never aiming to be politicians in the city of their birth' (*Republic*, 591E,F).²⁶

Coomaraswamy opines that the *Vedic* doctrine is neither pantheistic nor polytheistic, nor a worship of the powers of Nature except in the sense that *Natura naturans est Deus* and all her powers but the names of God's acts; that *karma* is not "fate" except in the orthodox sense of the character and destiny that inhere in created things themselves, and rightly understood, determines their vocation; that *māyā* is not "illusion", but rather the material measure and means essential to the manifestation of a quantitative, and in this sense "material",

world of appearances, by which we may be either enlightened or deluded according to the degree of our own maturity; that the notion of a “reincarnation” in the popular sense represents only a misunderstanding of the doctrines of heredity, transmigration and regeneration; and that the six *darshanas* of the later Sanskrit “philosophy” are not so many mutually exclusive “systems” but, as their name implies, so many “points of view” which are no more mutually contradictory than are, let us say, botany and mathematics. We shall also deny in Hinduism the existence of anything unique and peculiar to itself, apart from the local coloring and social adaptations that must be expected under the sun where nothing can be known except in the mode of the knower. The Indian tradition is one of the forms of the *Philosophia Perennis*, and as such, embodies those universal truths to which no one people or age can make exclusive claim. The Hindu is therefore perfectly willing to have his own scriptures made use of by others as “extrinsic and probable proofs” of the truth as *they* also know it. The Hindu would argue, moreover, that it is upon these heights alone that any true agreement of differing cultures can be effected.²⁷

What is God? Answering this question Coomaraswamy says that whether we call him Person, or *Sacerdotium*, or Magna Mater, or by any other grammatically masculine, feminine or neuter names, “That” (*tat, tad ekam*) of which our powers are measures (*tanmātrā*) is a syzygy of conjoint principles, without composition or duality. ... And since this finite totality can be only logically and not really divided from its infinite source, “That One” can also be called an “integral Multiplicity”²⁸ and “Omniform Light”.²⁹

Considered apart, the “halves” of the originally undivided Unity can be distinguished in various ways according to our point of view; politically, for example, as *Sacerdotium* and *Regnum* (*brahmakshatrau*) and psychologically as Self and Not-self, Inner Man and Outer Individuality, Male and Female. These pairs are disparate; and even when the subordinate has been separated from the superior with a view to productive cooperation, it still remains in the latter, more eminently. The *Sacerdotium*, for example, is “both the *Sacerdotium* and the *Regnum*” — a condition found in the *mixta persona* of the priest-king *Mitrāvarunau* or *Indrāgni* — but the *Regnum* as a separated function is nothing but itself, relatively feminine, and subordinated to the *Sacerdotium*, its Director (*netri*). The functional distinction in terms of sex defines the hierarchy. God himself is male to all, but just as *Mitra* is male to *Varuna* and *Varuna* in turn male to Earth (*Prithivi*), so the Priest is male to the King, and the King male to his

realm. In the same way the man is subject to the joint government of Church and State; but in authority with respect to his wife, who in turn administers his estate. Throughout the series it the noetic principle that sanctions or enjoins what the aesthetic performs or avoids; disorder arising only when the latter is distracted from her rational allegiance by her own ruling passions and identifies this submission with “liberty”.

The most pertinent application of all this is to the individual, whether man or woman: the outer and active individuality of “this man *or* woman, So-and so” being naturally feminine and subject to its own inner and contemplative Self. On the one hand, the submission of the Outer to the Inner Man is all that is meant by the words “self-control” and “autonomy”, and the opposite of what is meant by “self-assertion”: and on the other, this is the basis of the interpretation of the return to God in terms of an erotic symbolism, “As one embraced by a darling bride known naught of ‘I’ and ‘thou’, so self-embraced by the foreknowing (solar) Self known naught of a ‘myself’ within or a ‘thyself’ without”; because, as Shankara remarks, of “unity”.³⁰

Coomaraswamy’s preoccupation with the interdependence of the sacred and the profane, the transcendental and the mundane, the spiritual and the temporal, however, is not new. He draws attention to the relation of the authorizing mind or the reason to the efficient power — that of the inner to the outer man as enunciated in the earliest text of the Indian tradition, the *Rig-Veda*. We must premise that *Mitrāvarunau*, and likewise *Indrāgni* or *Indra-brihaspati*, are syzygies or progenitive pairs (*mithun’ni*). The juxtaposition of *Mitra*, *Agni* and *Brihaspati* as Divine archetypes of spiritual authority (*Sacerdotium*) and *Varuna* and *Indra* of the temporal (*Regnum*) as also the analogy of the marriage of the *Purohita* to the king unfolds the implicit as also explicit relationship of spiritual authority and temporal power. The Indian theory of government is expounded on the basis of the textual sources, mainly of the *Brāhmanas* and the *Rig-Veda*. We shall for the most part, make use of the *Brāhmanas*, but it must not be overlooked that the institutions therein more fully described and explained are often referred to in the *Rig-Veda*. The *mantra* in the *Aitareya Brāhmana*, VIII.27 by which the Priest addresses the King, spells out the relationship between the spiritual authority and the temporal power. To contemporary scholars of political theory the very first sentence of his book *Spiritual Authority and Temporal Power in the Indian Theory of Government*, namely, ‘the whole of Indian political theory is implied and subsumed in the words of the marriage formula, “I am That, thou art This, I am Sky, thou art Earth”’ would

come as a thunderbolt and yet, as the reader peruses the closely argued, densely written text, richly supported with references from primary material, Coomaraswamy's assertion becomes a revelation. This 'marriage formula' has its analogous applications in the cosmic, political, family and individual spheres of operation, in each by the conjunction of complementary agencies.³¹

The welfare of the community in each case depends upon a succession of obediences and loyalties; that of the subjects to the dual control of king and Priest, that of the king to the Priest, and that of all to the principle of an External Law (*Dharma*) as King of Kings. The King is such by Divine Right, but by no means an absolute monarch. He may do only what is correct under the Law. Self-control is the *sine qua non* for the successful government of others; the primary victory is that of the Inner Man.

With sharpness, Coomaraswamy identified the series of correspondences between the *Sacerdotium* and the *Regnum*. The *Sacerdotium* corresponds to the *Ashabda* Brahman and the *Regnum* to the *Shabda* Brahman. As is well known, the role of *Vac* (speech) is primary and fundamental in the early Indian speculative thought: primacy is given to the silent and silence; the articulated *Sound* is secondary (silence is golden, speech is silver) (See *Jaiminiya Upanishad Brāhmana*, II.9.6 and I.43.3). *Anahat* and *hata* sound are the musical counterparts. In this context, king is the voice that gives effect to the purpose of silent, inarticulated spiritual authority. Logically, the royal voice or what is done vocally, is almost the Will of God.³²

As one reads and reflects on the deep insight of Coomaraswamy, it is clear that what is extracted out of these texts are essentials of a theory of governance, which transcends historical time and locale. Pertinently, he points out that the King is not a constitutional ruler whose actions merely reflect the wishes of a majority of the subjects or those of secular Minister; nor is he the king by virtue of social contract but a ruler by Divine Right. However, (as told earlier) this does not imply that he is an 'absolute ruler'. On the contrary, the King himself is the subject of another King (we may add, 'a higher King'). This is law (*Dharma*), the very principle of royalty and justice.³³ This notion differs from the theory of divine right of Kingship or of the King representing or replicating God. Pertinently through a circuitous argument, Coomaraswamy returns to the original marriage-hymns. He reminds us of the Sky and the Earth, the universal parents upon whose harmonious cooperation the prosperity and the fertility of the universe depends; they are to be taken to be the norms and archetype of all marriages. Thus, the

analogy of marriage between the *Purohit* and the King becomes clear, for the *Purohit* here represents *Sacerdotium* and the King, the *Regnum*. The Priest and the *Agni* are representatives of the Sky and the King of the Earth and their marriage is an insurance against privation and death of the Kingdom. The two are complementary and interdependent and not one representing the other. Coomaraswamy underpins the perennial questions of an outer social order and an inner psychical order or 'He' or those empowered to govern. Through a series of analogies of ritual marriage of the Priest and the King and the dimensions of the *Sacerdotium* and the *Regnum*, we are reminded that a temporal order can be sustained only if the centre of authority has its centre in a sacred-moral order.³⁴

The *Regnum* is not its own principle, but is controlled by another, the Eternal Law, the Truth (*dharma, satyam*), the 'Kingship of the Kingship' (*kshatrasya kshatram, Brihadāranyaka Upanishad, I.4.14*). This, incidentally, provides the sanction for the well-known Cambodian doctrine of the *Dharmarāja*, as the Real and persistent Royalty, to be clearly distinguished from the King's own temporal personality. Even a righteous emperor is not without an over-lord; and 'Who is this King above the King? The Eternal Law' a Law that equally rules the Sage, and as is the King to his vassals, so are these to their own followers, so is the patron to the artist and the man to the wife, each in turn a servant and a master in a feudal hierarchy stemming from the King of Kings. That the King is feminine to the Priest but male to his own Realm is thus nothing strange, but only a special case of Order. In any Hierarchy, the individual is necessarily related in one way to what is above him, and in another to his own domain.³⁵

We have so far discussed only the cosmic (*adhi-daivatam*) and political (*adhirājyam*) aspects of the science of government and with reference to the individual as a subject. But this doctrine has also a self-referent (*adhyātmam*) application; the question is not only one of a universal and a national or civic order, but also one of an internal economy. In the last analysis the man himself is the 'City of God'³⁶ and it can as well be said of him as of any other city that 'The city can never otherwise be happy unless it is drawn by those painters who copy a divine original' (Plato: *Republic*, 500E, cf. *Katha Upanishad*, V.1). Here also, there must exist a government in which the factors of disorder must be ruled by a principle of order, if the goals of well-being in this world and the other are to be reached. That man has two selves in a universal doctrine; these are respectively natural and supernatural, the one outer and active, the subject of passions, the

other inner, contemplative and serene. The problem of the internal economy by which the man's ends (*purushārtha*) can all be attained is one of the relationship of the psycho-physical Ego to the spiritual Person, the Outer King to the Priest within you:³⁷ for as Plato so often puts it, the welfare of 'the entire soul and body' depends upon the unanimity of the mortal and immortal selves within you as to which shall rule.³⁸ That the *Purohita* is the instigator and the King the agent, reflects the individual constitution in which the Inner Person is the *kārayitri* and the elemental self (the Outer Man) the *kartr* (*Maitri Upanishad*, III.3; *Kaushitaki Upanishad*, III.8; *Bhagavad Gītā*, XVIII.16).

What, then, is meant by 'autonomy'? In the case of a King, to rule and not to be ruled by the multitude of those who should be vassals and subjects; at home, to rule and not to be ruled by one's family; and within you, to rule and not to be ruled by one's desires. 'He whose pleasure is in the (spiritual) Self, whose love-sports are with the Self, he whose bride-groom is the Self, and whose bliss is in the Self (*ātmaratir ātma-krida ātmamithuna ātmānandah*) becomes autonomous (*svarāj*) and a mover-at-will (*kāmāchārin*) in every world: but those whose knowledge is heteronomous become heteronomous (*anyarāj*), and do not become movers-at-will in any world' (*Chhāndogya Upanishad*, VII.25.2)³⁹ : for 'Here on earth the children of man dwell in subjection to command, since whatever it be that they desire, whether a kingdom or field (i.e. whether it be a King or any other man), it is on that very thing that they base their life' (*Chhāndogya Upanishad*, VIII.1.5), and 'why then', as St. Augustine exclaims, 'should men venture to pride themselves on their freewill before they are set free? For by whom a man is overcome, to him he is assigned in slavery' (*De Spir. et. Lit.*, 52; cf. *Maitri Upanishad*, II. 1-2). When this mystical union (*ātmamithunam*) of the inner and the outer man has been consummated, when the two fires that hated one another (*Taittiriya Samhitā*, V. 2.4.1-2) have been made one (*ekam bhavanti*), in this affectionate, unanimous, and cooperative marriage, then it can be said that 'This self offers itself' (*ātmānam samprayachchhati*) to that Self, and that Self to this self. They unite with one another. By this (earthly, feminine) form, he (the aforesaid Comprehensor of Indra as Overlord) unites with yonder world and by the form with this world (*Aitareya Āranyaka*, II.3.7); thus both worlds are gained for both selves, this world without and that other within you.⁴⁰

The only royal road to power is to become one's own master; the mastery of whatever else follows. This is the traditional 'secret of

government', Chinese and Platonic as much as it is Indian.⁴¹

Thus from the standpoint of Indian sociological theory and that of all traditional politics, an individual tyranny, whether that of a despot, that of an emancipated artist, or that of the self-expressive man or self-sufficient woman, effects in the long run only what is ineffectual (*akritani*, 'misdeeds'): all self-importance leads to the disintegration and finally the death of the body politic, collective or individual. The essence of the traditional politics amounts to this, that 'Self-government' (*svarāj*) depends upon self-control (*ātmasamyama*), Rule on ruliness.

The King is such by Divine Right and Appointment, and by the same token the Executive of a higher than his own will; or if he rules only by might and does his own will, he is a Tyrant and must be disciplined. The same applied to the individual who, if only concerned with the good of the work to be done and not with himself, and if he thinks of 'himself' only as an instrument governed by his art, is worthy of all honour, but if he asserts and seeks to express himself, worthy of all dishonour and shame.

The Kingship envisaged by the Indian and traditional doctrine is thus as far removed as could be from what we mean when we speak of an 'Absolute Monarchy' or of 'individualism'. Whatever sovereign, even one whose dominion extends to the ends of the earth, is of perverted disposition and ungoverned senses (*viruddhir vrittir avāsyendriyah*)⁴² must quickly perish. The Whole of this Science has to do with a Victory Over the Powers of Perception and Action.

The application is to the 'king', 'the man of action' and 'artist' in any domain whatever; there is nothing that can be truly and well done or made except by the man in whom the marriage of the *Sacerdotium* and the *Regnum* has been consummated, nor can any peace be made except by those who have made their peace with themselves.⁴³

There are frequent references, need not to re-mention, in the *Vedas* where it is emphasized that the king is the king only in so far as he acts within the paramount principles of *Dharma*. The *Brihadāranyaka Upanishad* (I.4.14) speaks of the *Dharma* as the '*kshatrasya kshatram*'; which idea has been elaborated in *Manusmriti* by pointing out that the good of all people depends upon the *Dharma*. That is why, *Arthashastra* has its supra-human origin; Lord Shiva (*Vishālāksha*) being the original preceptor of politics and morals. Amongst the greatest of the names of Shiva is *Natarāja*, Lord of Dancers or King of Actors. The cosmos is this theatre; there are many different steps in His repertory. He Himself is actor and audience:

When the Actor beateth the drum,
 Everybody cometh to see the show;
 When the Actor collecteth the stage properties,
 He abideth alone in His happiness.

How many various dances of Shiva are known to His worshippers, cannot be said. No doubt the root idea behind all of these dances is more or less one and the same, the manifestation of primal rhythmic energy.⁴⁴

* * * *

Though it has been dealt efficiently, the question of *Varnāshrama* has been made crucial in contemporary India. But one should not forget that a traditional social order, like that of India, is not a haphazard development but imitative of a theory or body of principles or values that are understood to have been revealed and of which the truth is taken for granted. Institutions represent an application of metaphysical doctrines to contingent circumstances, and take on a local colour accordingly, changing with the times but maintaining throughout a high degree of stability, comparable to that of a living organism in which, by the repeated process of death and rebirth that we call “becoming” or “life”, an existing order preserves a recognizable identity and produces order from order. In the traditional society one respects established institutions, and if anything goes wrong one does not assume that it can be put right by institutional revolutions, but only by a change of mind, repentance, leaving the order itself unchanged; “reformation” can only imply, what the word itself imports, a *return* to some form from which a deviation has taken place.⁴⁵

Institutions may be defined as means to the perfectibility of the individual. They are to be judged accordingly by the standard of whatever are held to be the immediate and ultimate ends of life; as good if they conduce to their realization, or otherwise evil. By Hindus, the purpose of life, “man’s end” (*purushārtha*), is defined in a fourfold way and at the same time as regards the active and contemplative lives respectively. These immediate and final ends are listed in the order of their hierarchy, but should not be thought of as independent of or fundamentally opposed to one another. The last end of liberation is, nevertheless, in a manner contrasted with the three categories of purpose proper to the active life; and this contrast is reflected in the fact that it is recognized both that a man has binding social responsibilities (often thought of as a debt to

be repaid to his ancestors) and that he can have done with these responsibilities once and for all. Provision is made accordingly both for the life of the householder who practises a trade (whether sacerdotal, royal, pastoral or mechanic), and for the life of poverty, that of the mendicant *Sannyāsi* who “gives up” at the same time all social rites and duties and, having no possessions whatever, lives on “charity”, in the purest sense of the word, that of the love of his fellow men, for whom it is a privilege to feed him.

These two ways of life, in the world and apart from it, have been aptly called the “ordinary” and the “extraordinary” norms of the cultural pattern; and it is with a view to the fulfilment of both lives that the institution of the “Four āshramas” developed.⁴⁶

In that (Hindu) life all are but coordinate parts of one undivided and undivisible whole, wherein the provision and respect due to every individual are enforced, under the highest religious sanctions, and every office and calling perpetuated from father to son by those cardinal obligations of caste on which the whole hierarchy of Hinduism hinges. We trace there the bright outlines of a self-contained, self-dependent, symmetrical and perfectly harmonious industrial economy, deeply rooted in the popular conviction of its divine character, and protected, through every political and commercial vicissitude,⁴⁷ by the absolute power and marvellous wisdom and tact of the *Bṛāhmanical* priesthood. Such an ideal order we should have held impossible of realisation, but that it continues to exist, and to afford us, in the yet living results of its daily operation in India, a proof of the superiority, in so many unsuspected ways, of the hieratic civilization of antiquity over the secular, joyless, inane, and self-destructive, modern civilization of the West.⁴⁸ Hereditary service has been painted in such dark colours only because it is incompatible with the existing industrial system.⁴⁹

To do away with caste, to reduce all men to the condition of the modern proletarians who have no vocations but only “jobs”, would not be a solution, but much rather a dissolution.⁵⁰

Indeed, concepts of *Dharma* and *Sva-Dharma* are the basis of the forms of Indian society. The one is the universal pattern and law of all order under the Sun; the other is that share of this Law for which every man is made responsible by his physical and mental constitution. It will serve to illustrate the “massive agreement” of the common tradition that has been all men’s heritage if we point out that it is in the same way that in Scholastic philosophy the distinction is made of Eternal from Natural Law. In the words of St. Thomas Aquinas, “all things under Providence are regulated and measured

by the Eternal Law, but those of the individual, who participates in this Law, by the Natural Law: not that these two are different Laws, but only the universal and the particular aspect of one and the same Law.” In either sense, the participation determines the part that the creature “ought” to play in the world; and it is only one example of this that the craftsman is “naturally inclined by justice to do his work faithfully” (St. Thomas Aquinas: *Summa Theologica* II-i.92.2, etc. It should be noted especially that the Natural Law is that share of the Eternal Law which directs each creature to its own proper activities and ends.).⁵¹

In the more unified life of India it is not only in special rites that the meaning of life has been focussed; this life itself has been treated as a significant ritual, and so sanctified.⁵²

On the other hand, where all work is economically determined and leisure is devoted to the hectic pursuit of the pleasure that was not found in the work, the common functions of life and thought are profaned, and only some things and some times — if any — are held sacred; and that double or half-life is the outward symptom of our modern schizophrenia and amnesia.⁵³

The Buddha himself was following an ancient Way. Coomaraswamy quotes:

The idea of *Dhamma* as the interpreted order of the World ... *that* which the Buddha preached, the *Dhamma* was the order of law of the universe, immanent, eternal, uncreated, not as interpreted by him only, much less invented or decreed by him, but intelligible to a mind of his range, and by him made so to mankind. ... The Buddha (like every other great philosopher and other Buddhas ...) is a discoverer of this order of the *Dhamma*, this universal logic, philosophy, or righteousness in which the rational and ethical elements are fused into one (Pali Text Society's Dictionary).⁵⁴

This Justice (*Dhamma*) is, explicitly, the King of kings.⁵⁵ It is both timeless (*akālika*) and present (*samditthika*).⁵⁶ The just man is *dhammattha* (as in Sanskrit, *dharma-sthita*); whatever takes place naturally and normally is *dhammata*, whatever takes place properly is *dhammena*. That the Law of life is both timeless and secular corresponds to the distinction of the absolute *Dharma* that is the ruling power of God himself from the immanent Law that is, within us, our own standard of truth and conduct. And this is also the distinction of *Dharma* from *Svadharmā*. This doctrine about the (perfection in) active life is best and most fully developed in the *Bhagavad Gītā*, where the division of castes is from God, and made

according to men's natural (*svabhāva-ja*) diversity of qualities and corresponding functions.⁵⁷

Herein, of course, "perfection" or "success" does not mean the accumulation of a fortune; we have already seen that in old age a man looks forward, not to an economic independence, but to a being independent of economics. It should be noted, moreover, that what is meant by a devotion to one's work is what is meant by "diligence", the opposite of "negligence"; "diligence": implying a being fond of, and a caring for one's work, is by no means the same as to be merely "industrious"; all this is not, in fact, a matter of working hard, but rather one of working easily, and naturally (*sahajam*), or, in the Platonic sense, a working at leisure.⁵⁸

The "sanctification of craftsmanship" has been called "the most significant contribution of the Middle Ages to the world"; it might better have been said, significant heritage of a world-wide past that has been sold for a mess of pottage, and has no longer any meaning in one world of "impoverished reality". From the Hindu point of view, the castes are literally "born of the Sacrifice": that is to say from the "breaking of bread", the primordial Sacrifice of the One whom Gods and men made many; and therefore also from the ritual that re-enacts the original Sacrifice and that corresponds to the Christian Mass. The deity who is and at the same time makes the first Sacrifice, "dividing himself to fill these worlds" with his total and omnipresence, is called, in his capacity as the Demiurge through whom all things were made, the "All-worker", *Vishvakarmā*: and he, indeed, performs all those diverse works, *vishva karmani*, that the Sacrifice, the Mass, itself requires, if it is to be correctly celebrated,⁵⁹ for example, those of music, architecture, carpentry, husbandry and that of warfare to protect the operation.

Where there is agreement as to the nature of man's last end, and that the Way by which the present and the paramount ends of life can be realised is that of sacrificial operation; it is evident that the form of society will be determined by the requirements of the Sacrifice; and that order (*yathārthatā*) and impartiality (*samdrishṭi*) will mean that everyman shall be enabled to become, and by no misdirection prevented from becoming, what he has it in him to become. It is to those who maintain the Sacrifice that the promise is made that they shall flourish. The politics of the heavenly, social and individual communities are governed by one and the same law. The pattern of the heavenly politics is revealed in scripture and reflected in the constitution of the autonomous state and that of the man who governs himself.

In this man, in whom the sacramental life is complete, there is a hierarchy of sacerdotal, royal, and administrative powers, and a fourth class consisting of the physical organs of sense and action, that handle the raw material or “food” to be prepared for all; and it is clear that if the organism is to flourish, it is impossible if divided against itself. It is in precisely the same way that the functional hierarchy of the realm is determined by the requirements of the Sacrifice on which its prosperity depends. In the sacramental order there is a need and a place for all men’s work: and there is no more significant consequence of the principle, Work is Sacrifice, than the fact that under these conditions, and remote as this may be from our secular ways of thinking, every function, from that of the priest and the king down to that of the potter and scavenger, is literally a priesthood and every operation a rite. In each of these spheres, moreover, we meet with “professional ethics”. The caste system differs from the industrial “division of labour”, with its “fractioning of human faculty”, in that it presupposes differences in kinds of responsibility but not in degrees of responsibility; and it is just because an organization of functions such as this, with its mutual loyalties and duties, is absolutely incompatible with our competitive industrialism, that the monarchic, feudal and caste system is always pointed in such dark colors by the sociologist, whose thinking is determined more by his actual environment than it is a deduction from first principles.⁶⁰

Agni, “Fire”, appears in the *Vedic* liturgies as the preferred designation of the First-manifested Principle, on the one hand because of the fiery nature of the Supernal-Sun, and on the other because of the primary importance of fire in the sacrificial ritual. *Agni*, as the Son of God, is commonly called *Vishvānara*, “Universal”, with reference to his manifestation in the terrestrial, intermediate, and celestial regions; and is pre-eminently “First-born” and “Youngest” because perpetually brought to birth in the sacrificial fire at the dawn of every temporal cycle and the dawn of every day. In any case, it is an elemental fiery Energy (*tejas*) that underlies and typifies all other manifestation.⁶¹

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It is said that in recent years there has been a return of the Grand Theory and it sounds strange that thinkers as diverse in views and outlook as John Rawls and Jacques Derrida, Jurgen Habermas and Michel Foucault, Hans-Georg Gadamer and Louis Althusser

have all been brought together to reveal this scenario. Derrida's deconstructionism and Foucault's genealogical analysis cannot in any case be examples of grand theorization, except indirectly so by provoking further reflection on our existential predicament by exposing the grand pretensions of scientific rationality and the idea of human progress.⁶² The return of the Grand Theory would require a revival of the perennial philosophy and of the concept of the Great Chain of Being implying the notions of universality, eternity, hierarchy, continuity and plenitude. This is possible only if there is a radical transformation of our noetic consciousness, a *metanoia*, which means 'a transformation of our whole being from human thinking to divine understanding'.⁶³ In other words, it requires a true and re-formed understanding about 'tradition' which is a compendious term representing an integral and consistent view of the world (*weltanschauung*), intrinsic to the deepest nature and meaningfulness of man's life. It signifies a total outlook, concerning man's place and purpose in the order and nature of things. However, under the reign of Quantity and Modernity, 'the very idea of tradition has been destroyed to such an extent that those who aspire to recover it no longer know which way to turn' (René Guénon).

Etymologically, 'tradition' simply means 'that which is transmitted', virtually covering the entire gamut of socio-cultural and politico-economic fabric. The origin and ground of this transmission, universally understood in all traditions, presupposes a trans-human origin, regardless of modality, and is treated as 'Eternity breaking into Time'. The hallmark of tradition is a belief in and dependence upon First Principles (simple axiomatic Truths that cannot be proved or disproved), divine Truths revealed 'at the dawn of time' (The *Bhagavad Gītā*). Tradition is primordial and universal, coeval with Time (Timeless, ever contemporaneous): it has been variously called, *Akālika Dhamma*, *Hagia Sophia*, *Lex Aeterna*, *Din al-Haqq*, *Tao*, *Philosophia Perennis*, *Sophia Perennis*, *Theosophia Perennis*, better known in India as *Sanātana Dharma*.

Tradition has diverse forms: it is sustained by constant renewal; otherwise, it is likely to decay. A complete tradition 'will entail the presence of four things, namely: a source of inspiration or, to use a more concrete term, Revelation; a current of influence or Grace issuing forth from that source and transmitted without interruption through a variety of channels; a way of "verification" which, when faithfully followed, will lead the human subject to successive positions where he is able to "actualize" the truths that Revelation communicates; finally there is the formal embodiment of tradition

in the doctrines, arts, sciences and other elements that together go to determine the character of a normal civilization' (Marco Pallis).

In this sense tradition becomes synonymous with a perennial philosophy which is eternal, universal and immutable.⁶⁴ 'Tradition' in its most pristine sense is this primordial truth and as such takes on the status of a first cause, a cosmic datum or a kind of principial reality woven into the very fabric of the universe. As such it is not amenable to 'proof'. It is self-evident, self-validating principle in the face of which it is possible only to understand or not understand.⁶⁵ As Ananda K. Coomaraswamy points out, 'a first cause, being itself uncaused, is not probable but axiomatic'.⁶⁶

By "uncaused" Coomaraswamy here means unconditioned, outside the realm of phenomenal contingencies. Thus the Primordial Tradition or *sophia perennis* is of supra-human origin and is in no sense a product or evolute of human thought: it is 'the birth-right of humanity'.⁶⁷ Perennial Philosophy may be explicated as the metaphysic that considers a divine Reality underlying all manifestation; the psychology that recognizes a spark of Divinity in every organism; and the ethic that places man's final end in the knowledge of the immanent and transcendent Ground of all being. Therefore, as Ananda Coomaraswamy rightly observes, "to re-form what has been de-formed is to take account of an original 'form'".⁶⁸

As Coomaraswamy remarks, the philosophy, or metaphysics, provided the vision, and religion the way to its effective verification and actualization in direct experience.⁶⁹ Metaphysics, therefore, is immutable and inexorable, and the 'infallible standard by which not only religions, but still more "philosophies" and "sciences" must be "corrected" and interpreted'.⁷⁰ In this sense, the *Vedānta* is not a 'philosophy' in the current sense of the word, but only as the word is used in the phrase *Philosophia Perennis*. Modern philosophies are closed systems, employing the method of dialectics, and taking for granted that opposites are mutually exclusive. In modern philosophy things are either so or not so; in eternal philosophy this depends upon our point of view. Metaphysics is not a system, but consistent doctrine; it is not merely concerned with conditioned and quantitative experience but with universal possibility.⁷¹ In other words, there is nothing of the 'art for art's sake' type of thinking about the pursuit of metaphysics: it engages the whole person or it is as nothing.⁷² Symbolism is a language and a precise form of thought; a hieratic and a metaphysical language and not a language determined by somatic or psychological categories. Its foundation is in analogical correspondences. Symbolism is a calculus in the

same sense that an adequate analogy is a proof.⁷³ Thus, there is the intimate nexus between the ideas of truth, goodness and beauty. The harmony of truth, beauty and virtue will find its richest expression in explicitly sacred art. As Aquinas affirmed, beauty relates to the cognitive faculty and is thus connected with wisdom.⁷⁴ In other words, religion and culture are normally indivisible and where everyone thinks for himself, there is no society (*sāhitya*) but only an aggregate.⁷⁵ It has never been supposed by Oriental artists that the object of art is reproduction of the external forms of nature. Such a conception, in modern Europe, is the natural product of a life divorced from beauty. It is for the artist to portray the ideal world of true reality, the world of imagination, and not the phenomenal world perceived by the senses.⁷⁶ Coomaraswamy calls for a *metanoia* with a mighty indomitable force of the conviction:

‘...whether or not a battle of religion against industrialism and world-trade can ever be won is no question for us to consider, our concern is with the task and not with its reward, our business is to be sure that in any conflict we are on the side of justice.’⁷⁷

About this ‘warrior for *dharma*’, Eric Gill rightly observed,

...there was one person...to whose influence I am deeply grateful; I mean the philosopher and theologian, Ananda Coomaraswamy. Others have written the truth about life and religion and man’s work. Other have written good clear English. Others have had the gift of witty exposition. Others have understood the metaphysics of Christianity and others have understood the metaphysics of Hinduism and Buddhism. Others have understood the true significance of erotic drawings and sculptures. Others have seen the relationships of the true and the good and the beautiful. Other have had apparently unlimited learning. Others have loved; others have been kind and generous. But I know of no one else in whom all these gifts and all these powers have been combined...I believe that no other living writer has written the truth in matters of art and life and religion and piety with such wisdom and understanding.⁷⁸

Notes

1. Letter to Dona Luisa Coomaraswamy, September 12, 1947, quoted in Roger Lipsey: *Coomaraswamy: His Life and Work*, Bollingen Series, Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1977, p. 246.
2. From Roger Lipsey: *op. cit.*, quoted in Whitall Perry: ‘The Bollingen Coomaraswamy Papers and Biography’, *Studies in Comparative Religion XI*, iv, 1977, p. 206.
3. Roger Lipsey: *op. cit.*, p.114.
4. Kenneth Oldmeadow: *Traditionalism: Religion in the Light of the Perennial Philosophy*, Sri Lanka Institute of Traditional Studies, Colombo, 2000, pp. 30-31.

5. See A.K. Coomaraswamy: *Christian and Oriental Philosophy of Art*, Dover, New York, 1956.
6. Letter to Artemus Packard, May, 1941 in Rama P. Coomaraswamy and Alvin Moore, Jr. (ed.): *Selected Letters of Ananda Coomaraswamy*, Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts, New Delhi, 1988, p. 299.
7. Kenneth Oldmeadow: *op. cit.*, p.33.
8. Quoted in V.S. Naravane: 'Ananda Coomaraswamy: A Critical Appreciation' in S.D.R. Singam (ed.): *Ananda Coomaraswamy: Remembering and Remembering Again and Again*, Privately Published, Kuala Lumpur, 1974, p. 206.
9. Kenneth Oldmeadow: *op. cit.*, p. 35.
10. Plato's Immortal Soul (Self), and two parts of the mortal soul (self), together with the body itself, make up the normal number of 'four castes' that must cooperate for the benefit of the whole community. See Ananda K. Coomaraswamy: *What is Civilisation?*, Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts, New Delhi and Oxford University Press, Delhi-Bombay-Calcutta-Madras, 1989, p. 1 (See also p. 9, note 2).
11. Ananda K. Coomaraswamy: *op. cit.*, pp. 9-10, note 11.
12. *Ibid.*: p. 11, note 20.
13. *Ibid.*: pp. 1-6.
14. *Ibid.*: p. 11, note 22.
15. *Ibid.*: p. 7. See also Ananda K. Coomaraswamy: *Art and Swadeshi*, Munshiram Manoharlal Publishers Pvt. Ltd., New Delhi, 1994, pp. 3-9; Ananda K. Coomaraswamy: *Essays in National Idealism*, Munshiram Manoharlal Publishers Pvt. Ltd., New Delhi, 1981, originally published in 1909, p. ii, p. 206; and Ananda K. Coomaraswamy: *What is Civilisation?*, *op. cit.*, p. 8.
16. *Republic*, 500E.
17. Plotinus: *Enneads*, V.9.11, like Plato: *Timaeus*, 28A.B.
18. *Exodus*, XXV.40.
19. *Aitareya Brāhmana*, VI.27.
20. *Shāṅkhāyana Āraṇyaka*, VIII.9.
21. *Shatapatha Brāhmana*. VII.2.1.4 etc. Also see Ananda K. Coomaraswamy: *Figures of Speech or Figures of Thought*, Munshiram Manoharlal Publishers Pvt. Ltd., New Delhi, 1981, p. 15.
22. *Republic*, 377, 402; *Laws*, 667, 668; *Timaeus*, 28A, B; *Phaedrus*, 243A, B; *Republic*, 328C; *Republic*, 601.
23. The contemplative *actus primus* (Skr. *dhi*, *dhyāna*) and operative *actus secundus* (Skr. *karma*) of the Scholastic philosophers.
24. Ananda K. Coomaraswamy: *Figures of Speech or Figures of Thought*, *op. cit.*, p. 12.
25. Ananda K. Coomaraswamy: *What is Civilisation?*, *op. cit.*, p. 12, note 32.
26. Ananda K. Coomaraswamy: *What is Civilisation?*, *op. cit.*, pp. 8-9.
27. Ananda K. Coomaraswamy: *Hinduism and Buddhism*, Munshiram Manoharlal Publishers Pvt. Ltd., New Delhi, 1986, pp. 3-4.
28. *Rig-Veda*, III.54.8, *vishvam ekam*.
29. *Vājasaneyi Samhitā*, V. 35, *jyotir asi vishvarupam*.
30. Ananda K. Coomaraswamy: *Hinduism and Buddhism*, *op. cit.*, pp. 12-13.
31. See Ananda K. Coomaraswamy: *Spiritual Authority and Temporal Power in the Indian Theory of Government*, Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts, New Delhi and Oxford University Press, Delhi, Bombay, Calcutta, Madras, 1993, pp. 1-2, p. 19.
32. *Ibid.*: see editorial notes by K.N. Iengar and Rama P. Coomaraswamy and Foreword by Kapila Vatsyayan.

33. *Ibid.*: see text on pp. 7-8.
34. *Ibid.*: pp. vi-vii.
35. *Ibid.*: pp. 17-18.
36. *Atharvaveda Samhitā*, X.2.30 — *Puram yo brahmano veda yasyah purusha uchyate*, He who knows the fullness of *Brahma*, from which (fullness) He is called *purusha*; *Brihadāranyaka Upanishad*, II.5.18 — *Sa vaa ayam purushah sarvamsu purshu purishayah*. He on account of his dwelling in all bodies is called the *Purusha*.
37. Ananda K. Coomaraswamy: *Spiritual Authority and Temporal Power in the Indian Theory of Government*, *op. cit.*, p. 24 and pp. 117-118, note 82.
38. *Ibid.*: p. 24 and p. 118, note 83.)
39. Cf. *Mundaka Upanishad*, III. 1.1.
 द्वा सुपर्णा सयुजा सखाया समानं वृक्षं परिजस्वजाते ।
 तयोरन्यः पिप्पलं स्वाद्वत्त्यनष्टनक्तन्यो अधिचाकङ्क्षीति ॥
 That, man has two selves, is a universal doctrine; these are respectively, natural and supernatural, the one actor and active, the subject of passions, the other inner, contemplative and serene.
- Thus, the language is equally applicable to the political economy of *Regnum* and *Sacerdotium*, and to the individual economy of the 'two selves', Outer King and Inner Sage.
40. Ananda K. Coomaraswamy: *Spiritual Authority and Temporal Power in the Indian Theory of Government*, *op. cit.*, pp. 28-29. See also pp. 122-123, notes 89-94.
41. *Ibid.*: p. 33.
42. *Ibid.*: p.125, note 106.
43. *Ibid.*: pp. 36-37 and pp. 125-126, note 108.
44. Ananda K. Coomaraswamy: *The Dance of Shiva*, Munshiram Manoharlal Publishers Pvt. Ltd., New Delhi, 1991, p. 83.
45. Ananda K. Coomaraswamy: *East and West and Other Essays*, Ola Books Ltd., Colombo, 1940, p. 13.
46. *Ibid.*: pp. 17-18.
47. *Ibid.*: p. 5.
48. Quoted from *Ibid.*: p.16.
49. *Ibid.*
50. *Ibid.*: p.41, pp. 31-32 and pp. 37-38.
51. *Ibid.*: pp. 41-42.
52. *Ibid.*: p. 43.
53. *Ibid.*
54. *Ibid.*: p. 27.
55. *Anguttara Nikāya*: I.109.
56. *Sutta Nipāta*: 1139.
57. Ananda K. Coomaraswamy: *East and West and Other Essays*, *op. cit.*, p. 28.
58. *Ibid.*: pp. 29-30.
59. *Ibid.*: p. 35.
60. Ananda K. Coomaraswamy: *Hinduism and Buddhism*, *op. cit.*, New Delhi, 1986, pp. 26-27.
61. Ananda K. Coomaraswamy: *A New Approach to the Vedas*, Munshiram Manoharlal Publishers Pvt. Ltd., New Delhi, 1994, pp. 10-11. (Originally published in 1933 by Luzac & Co., London.)
62. Raghuveer Singh: 'Methodology and Meaning in Social Sciences' in Abha Awasthi (ed.): *Social and Cultural Diversities (D.P. Mukherji in Memoriam)*, Rawat Publications, Jaipur and New Delhi, 1999, pp. 118-119.

63. Ananda K. Coomaraswamy: 'On Being in One's Right Mind' in *What is Civilisation?*, *op. cit.*, p. 35.
64. See Ananda K. Coomaraswamy: 'Vedanta and Western Tradition' in Ananda K. Coomaraswamy: *Coomaraswamy 2: Selected Papers, Metaphysics* ed. by Roger Lipsey, Bollingen Series, Princeton University Press, 1977, p. 7. See also Seyyed Hossein Nasr: *Knowledge and the Sacred*, Crossroad, New York, 1981, p. 74.
65. Kenneth Oldmeadow: *op. cit.*, p. 60.
66. Ananda K. Coomaraswamy: *Time and Eternity*, Artibus Asiae, Ascona, 1947, p. 42 fn.
67. Ananda K. Coomaraswamy in a letter to Vasudeva Sharan Agrawala, March 1939 in Rama P. Coomaraswamy and Alvin Moore, Jr. (ed.): *Selected Letters of Ananda Coomaraswamy*, *op. cit.*, p. 168.
68. Ananda K. Coomaraswamy: *What is Civilisation?*, *op. cit.*, p. 8.
69. See Ananda K. Coomaraswamy: 'Vedanta and Western Tradition' in Ananda K. Coomaraswamy: *Coomaraswamy 2: Selected Papers, Metaphysics* ed. by Roger Lipsey, *op. cit.*, p. 6.
70. Ananda K. Coomaraswamy in a letter to J.H. Muirhead, August 1935 in Rama P. Coomaraswamy and Alvin Moore, Jr. (ed.): *Selected Letters of Ananda Coomaraswamy*, *op. cit.*, p. 37.
71. See Ananda K. Coomaraswamy: 'Vedanta and Western Tradition' in Ananda K. Coomaraswamy: *Coomaraswamy 2: Selected Papers, Metaphysics* ed. by Roger Lipsey, *op. cit.*, p. 6.
72. *Ibid.*: p. 9.
73. See Ananda K. Coomaraswamy: 'The Nature of Buddhist Art' in *Ibid.*, pp. 174-175.
74. See Ananda K. Coomaraswamy: 'The Medieval Theory of Beauty' in Ananda K. Coomaraswamy: *Coomaraswamy 1: Selected Papers, Traditional Art and Symbolism* ed. by Roger Lipsey, Bollingen Series, Princeton University Press, Princeton (NJ), 1977, pp. 211-220.
75. *Ibid.*: p. 249.
76. Ananda K. Coomaraswamy: *Essays in National Idealism*, *op. cit.*, pp. 23-24.
77. Ananda K. Coomaraswamy: *What is Civilisation?*, *op. cit.*, p. 8.
78. Eric Gill: *Autobiography*, London, 1940, p. 174.