

# Outline of a Spiritual Anthropology

by

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*Editor's Note: This essay was included as a chapter in Frithjof Schuon's book From the Divine to the Human (World Wisdom, 1982). The version below is a new translation of the article, approved by the estate of Frithjof Schuon.*

At the summit of the ontological pyramid—or rather, beyond all hierarchy—we conceive of the Absolute, which comprises by definition both Infinitude and Perfection:

Infinitude which radiates intrinsically and extrinsically, that is, which on the one hand contains the potentialities of the Absolute, and on the other hand projects them; and Perfection which is identified with these potentialities and which, by the effect of projection into Relativity, gives rise to all possible qualities: in the divine Being, in the world and in ourselves. If the Absolute is pure Reality, the Infinite will be Possibility, whereas Perfection or the Good will be the totality of the contents of the Infinite.

Now the contents or modes of the divine Perfection pertain essentially to the orders of Knowledge, Love and Power, which evoke the human faculties of intelligence, sentiment and will. The substance of the divine Perfection is the divine Subject inasmuch as It knows and It loves, and in knowing and loving, It wills; on the one hand, Knowledge and Love cannot represent an irreducible duality, they cannot but be two modes of the same Subject, and on the other hand, both Love and Knowledge are prolonged by a single “energy,” that is, precisely, Power or Will. For Will is not an end in itself: one cannot will except by virtue either of a knowledge or of a love.

In God, Knowledge, Love and Power are absolute; but they are equally infinite and perfect, since God is Absoluteness, Infinitude and Perfection. Thus this ternary, which is only differentiated subsequent to ontological projection, is necessarily and supereminently found in the Absolute Itself, hence in the divine Essence, but in an undifferentiated manner, so much so that it can be affirmed that the Essence is Knowledge, or Love, or Power, but not that it contains these realities in distinctive mode as is the case on the level of ontological-cosmological projection.

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All “anthropology” depends on a “theology” in the sense that every science of man must prolong a science of God, for: “Let us make man in Our image, in likeness to Us.”<sup>1</sup> To speak of a “spiritual anthropology” is already a pleonasm—for man, by definition, entails spirit—but it is justified in a world which, having forgotten the divine, no longer can know what is human.

God is “pure Spirit”: which is to say, implicitly, that He is at once Knowledge, Love and Power. Power—or “Will”—is a function either of Knowledge or of Love; each of these two “Energies” or “Hypostases” is prolonged by a Power proper to it, then by an Activity deriving from this Power.

Similarly for man: being made of spirit, he is made of knowledge and love—or of intelligence and sentiment—then of will, the latter necessarily drawing its inspiration from one or the other of these two faculties. Knowledge and love proceed from the spirit as light and heat proceed from the sun; in the latter, these two energies or functions remain in a quasi-undifferentiated state, which is to say that they are indistinguishable in practice from the very substance of the sun.

In other words: there is in man—as in God, his Prototype—a single spirit, and this spirit is knowledge and love; and there is a will which prolongs each of these and which in turn is polarized into intention and activity, according to whether it is intrinsic and latent, or on the contrary extrinsic and efficient.

The reality of God and that of our final ends determine at one and the same time: our conviction; our happiness; our activity; our virtue. Conviction pertains to intelligence; happiness, to sentiment; activity, to the will inasmuch as it prolongs intelligence; virtue, to the will inasmuch as it prolongs sentiment. Intelligence, in discerning the real, establishes conviction or certitude; sentiment, in loving the good in all its forms, enjoys happiness; and the will, in their train, brings about both spiritual activity and virtue, or contemplative concentration and moral conformity. Which is to say that the reality of God and of our final ends determine all that we are.

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We have said that man is knowledge and love and that each of these elements is prolonged by the power that is adjoined to it; in other words, man is intelligence and sentiment and each of these elements determines a third element, the will. If in this perspective intelligence-knowledge has as its complement sentiment-love, it is because this complementarity is in their nature; it is the polarity of the masculine and the feminine. According to another perspective, equally possible, what has precedence is not contrasting

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<sup>1</sup> “Image”—taken in the sense of something “relatively absolute”—denotes that man, on account of his deformity, can in no way be a relative degree of animality; “likeness,” on the contrary, means that in another respect the analogy between God and man can only be relative, otherwise, precisely, God would not be the Absolute. It behooves us to add here that there are animal species which in their way are nobler than given human individuals, which is perfectly evident.

complementarity, but, on the contrary, affinity: we would say then that man is made of intelligence and will—the latter being the immediate secondary mode of the former—and that it is sentiment or the feeling soul, in short, the affective faculty, which prolongs both will and intelligence.

But one could equally place intelligence alone at the summit, and consider will and sentiment as its subordinate prolongations, the will appearing then as masculine, and sensibility as feminine; together they constitute our character, which in fact combines what we will and what we love; this is the domain of the virtues. This way of looking at things—inasmuch as it places intelligence at the summit—pertains, as does the preceding one, to the intellective perspective; in both cases, the driving force of the way is Truth, Idea, Intellection, and not some threat or seduction.<sup>2</sup>

The perspective of love, on the contrary, places love at the summit and views intelligence and will solely as functions in service of love; love participates in the divine Love and is called upon to melt in it; whence the sensualist epistemology proper to this perspective. Moreover, this perspective readily makes love coincide with will: where there is “loving,” there is “willing”; intelligence or “knowing” being more or less reduced to dogmatic speculation and to apologetic activity, or even simply to pious registering of the dogmas.

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Man, we have said, is made of intelligence, sentiment and will; now the notion of “sentiment” is no doubt ambiguous due to the fact that there is a pejorative prejudice attached to it: one generally distinguishes between reason and sentiment, attributing to the second a character of unrealistic subjectivity, hence of arbitrariness and passion, whereas reason is supposedly objective; and in so doing, one loses sight of the fact, on the one hand, that reason is objective only on condition of basing itself on exact data and of proceeding correctly, and on the other hand, that sentiment lacks objectivity only when it is excessive or misplaced, hence erroneous, not when it is justified by its object and is, by this fact, a kind of adequation; love of holy or noble things, even to the extent that it is only sentimental, is in conformity with reality, which is not at all the case with skeptical, agnostic or atheistic rationalism.

“God is Love”: divine Love is not identical with human sentiment, but the latter is analogous to the divine Love. Human sentiment reflects, in its essential function which is the faculty of loving, a hypostatic quality, and consequently it cannot have a merely privative character and be opposed in practice to the intelligence.

Intelligence, sentiment, will; or truth, virtue, freedom.

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<sup>2</sup> Starting from the axiom that integral spirituality comprises by definition a doctrine and a method, we would say that the first is linked, to some degree or other, to discriminative and contemplative intelligence—active and passive, if one will—whereas the second comprises operative will and stimulating and interiorizing sensibility. The initiatic qualification combines all these elements.

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In our heart, the elements knowledge, love and power—or intelligence, sentiment and will—are combined as so many dimensions of one and the same deiform subjectivity. Outside our heart, these faculties become dissociated in the sense that intelligence seems to reside in the brain or the mind, and sentiment or affectivity in the soul, the *psyche*; the will, and with it the capacity to act, is then combined with each of these regions—for we have need of will in order to think as well as to practice the virtues—but at the same time, its seat is the heart, which in this case assumes a particular, extrinsic role, independently of the heart’s intrinsic character of synthesis and root. In other words: although the substantial dimensions of the heart-intellect are knowledge, love and power—intelligence, sentiment, will—we can consider the heart as the region of the will alone if we attribute intelligence to the mind and sentiment to the soul, in which case our perspective is more exterior; and we can do so with all the more reason given that, in a certain respect, the will is identified with the subject, with the individual who “wills”; who “wills” because he “loves.”

However: as the heart is in itself the seat or the organ both of sentiment and intelligence, as well as of will, it must be said that a sentiment comes from the heart to the extent that it is profound, exactly as is the case with knowledge.<sup>3</sup> Certainly, thought pertains to the brain or to the mind, but intuitive knowledge, which is not the fruit of reasoning, pertains to the heart; similarly, ordinary sentiment, determined entirely by phenomena, comes from the soul or from the sensibility, but profound sentiment, which is nourished *ab intra* by the very essence of love—while most often having outward perceptions as its occasional cause—comes from the heart and not from the animic sensibility alone; for the heart by its nature is love as well as knowledge and power. It is therefore rootedness in the heart which characterizes, not the mere phenomenon of love to be sure, but the greatness of this sentiment; such is clearly the case with mystical love, which is inspired only secondarily or incidentally by external factors; but such is also the case with natural love to the extent that it is profound, or in other words, to the degree that its quality, in its depths, rejoins love as such.

From the heart-intellect come knowledge and love, but it is not with the heart that we are able to think and feel; by contrast, it is with the heart—with pure subjectivity—that we are able to concentrate our spirit, and that is why we say that the will in general and concentration in particular pertain to the heart, even though in its depths, it is not limited to this function and possesses equally and *a priori* knowledge and love. The mind receives its light from the heart, and its power is to comprehend, to discern, to think; and in so doing it opens the way to Intellection, which, however, it cannot produce. As for the soul, it can love the good, or things that are good; and loving them, it must practice them, otherwise it excludes itself from the happiness which good things confer; love in itself comprises beauty, goodness and beatitude. In a word: if the mind permits comprehension, and the heart in its turn

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<sup>3</sup> Thus, common opinion is far from being mistaken when it equates the heart with love; as for the intellectual character of the heart, it goes without saying that ordinary language cannot adequately express it.

concentration, the soul has the power of being virtuous, and consequently of being happy through its very nature.

There is no valid virtue without piety, and there is no authentic piety without virtue; which means that these two coincide, and also that the accent is on piety inasmuch as piety relates more directly to God. We could also say in consequence, that if intelligence brings about discernment, and will concentration, sentiment brings about piety, devotion, the sense of the sacred, then gratitude and generosity; these attitudes being linked to the qualities, both divine and cosmic, of Beauty, Goodness and Happiness.

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There are two ways of viewing the modes of human subjectivity: either we consider them in respect of their functions, in which case we distinguish intelligence, sentiment and will; or else we consider them as regions, in which case we distinguish between the world of the heart and that of the brain, the three faculties acting in both sectors or at both levels.

Normally and primordially, human intelligence realizes a perfect equilibrium between the intelligence of the brain and that of the heart: the first is the rational capacity with the diverse abilities attached thereto; the second is intellectual or spiritual intuition, or in other words, it is that eschatological realism which permits one to choose the saving truth even apart from any mental speculation. Cardiac intelligence, even when reduced to its minimum, is always right; it is from this that faith is derived whenever it is profound and unshakeable, and such is the intelligence of a great number of saints. Nevertheless, the absolute norm or the ideal is the plenitude—and not the sufficient minimum—of cardiac intelligence and the perfect expansion of dialectical intelligence.

The treasures of inner science must in fact be able to establish and communicate themselves: to establish themselves, for mental formulation contributes to the actualization and assimilation of the immanent lights of the heart, and there, moreover, lies the role of meditation; to communicate themselves, for cardiac intuition must be able to radiate as do all good things. On the one hand, the essential certitudes are everything; but on the other hand, man needs to exteriorize himself the better to be able to interiorize himself; synthesis requires analysis; man, who is as if suspended between two dimensions, cannot do without language. Without the heart, there would be neither message nor doctrine; yet the well-formulated idea is necessary for the awakening of immanent knowledge. To say that mental intelligence—when it is what it ought to be—is inspired by that of the heart-intellect, is another way of saying that the intelligence of the heart manifests itself in and by that of the mind.

The mind is the moon, and the heart is the sun: even though the brightness of the moon is nothing other than light, this light belongs to the sun and to no other source. In the heart, knowledge coincides with love; the heart delegates truth to the mind and virtue to the soul. This is to say that intelligence is pious to the extent that it is total.

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The fact that spiritual realism, or faith, pertains to the intelligence of the heart and not to that of the mind, permits one to understand that in spirituality, the moral qualification is more important than the intellectual qualification, and by far.

The refusal to understand a transcendent truth lies moreover less in the intelligence than in the temperament, the imagination, the will; which means that the obstacle lies, either simply in attachment to the world and to the ego, or on the contrary in an innocent and honorable limitation of the heart-intellect, but not necessarily of the heart-love; otherwise there would be no narrow-minded saints. In any case, a familiarity with transcendent concepts is far from a guarantee of the ability for realization; thus, spiritual realization can content itself with key notions, not very demanding intellectually but nonetheless anchored in the science of the heart and centered on a virtuality of Intellection.

The most extensive metaphysical science is subjectively superficial and can go astray if it is purely bookish, and similarly, the most efficacious social virtues are worth nothing from the spiritual point of view if they are not invested with the spirit of devotion and the sense of the sacred. As piety is “supernaturally natural” to man, a virtue without piety is tainted with pride, and for that reason loses all its value; and similarly, as Intellection also springs from our “natural supranature,” an idea which we grasp only from without and as a mental form is not a “knowledge” to which we can lay claim, although we have a certain right to it in proportion to our sincerity and also our piety, precisely. Everyone is compelled to truth, no one is compelled to gnosis.

There is nothing more contradictory than a cerebral intelligence opposing itself to cardiac intelligence, whether it be to deny the possibility of knowledge or to deny the ultimate Knower: how can one not feel instinctively, “viscerally,” existentially, that one cannot be intelligent, even very relatively so, without an Intelligence “in itself” and which is both transcendent and immanent, and not grasp that subjectivity by itself is an immediate and quasi-fulgurating proof of the Omniscient, a proof almost too blindingly evident to be able to be formulated in words?

The intelligence of the heart is *a priori* the one which, outside any mental workings, possesses the sense of the real, and thereby the sense of proportions as well; now to have the sense of the real, is also, and even essentially, to have the sense of the sacred.

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The intelligence comprises four functions: objectivity, subjectivity, activity, passivity; in the mind, these are reason, intuition, imagination and memory. By “objectivity” we mean that knowledge is inspired by data which are exterior to it, and this is so in the case of reason; by “subjectivity” on the contrary, it must be understood that the knowledge in question operates through existential analogy, this is to say that it is inspired by data which the subject bears within himself: thus, we have no need of reasoning in order to observe the natural mechanism of another subjectivity, and this is the faculty of intuition. In “activity,” the intelligence relives, recreates or combines the possibilities which are known to it, and this is the

imagination; in “passivity,” the intelligence registers and preserves the data which present themselves to it. Since these four functions pertain to intelligence in itself—independently of the mental faculties which we have enumerated—the intelligence communicates these functions to its so to speak feminine complement, sentiment, and to the will which prolongs both sentiment and intelligence.

In the macrocosm, “reason” is the order of things, whereas “intuition” is their symbolism and their providential intertwining; “imagination” is then the inexhaustible diversity of forms and destinies, and “memory,” the persistence of possibilities throughout the vicissitudes of time and space.

It might be well at this point, by way of parenthesis, to take into consideration the fundamental human phenomenon which is the hierarchy of mental types: the contemplative or sacerdotal, the combative or princely, the practical or industrious, the obedient or loyal;<sup>4</sup> these qualities or predispositions, while rigorously distinguishable, can always combine, and they do so even necessarily, in indefinitely varied proportions. In each of these models, or within each of their combinations, are additionally situated the four temperaments and the twelve astrological types;<sup>5</sup> but all this is of a much more contingent order than the fundamental constitution of man—that of man as such—which opens out onto the divine order and has no meaning outside of it.

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The spirit, we have said, is polarized into knowledge, love and power, which permits the following question to be asked: what is the spirit in itself? The answer is given by the very elements of this polarization: the spirit—or the subject—is knowledge, not inasmuch as it looks “outward” and perceives “objects,” but inasmuch as, bearing within itself its unique and total object, it looks “towards the Inward” and “extinguishes itself”—or on the contrary “realizes itself”—in the consciousness of its own one and indivisible substance. If we start from the idea that the object of knowledge is Truth or Reality; that the object of love is Beauty; and that the object of the will is the Good; then, starting from this idea or this fact, we could affirm that the spirit or the subject, which by definition knows, loves and wills, is in its essence Truth, Beauty and the Good.

The Absolute “radiates” by virtue of its intrinsic “dimension” of Infinitude, which brings about the “springing forth” of *Māyā*, the latter both containing and producing reflections, worlds, beings: it is thus that one must distinguish a fundamental separation within the human subject, namely the complementarity spirit and soul; the first element belonging to the universal order, and the second constituting the individuality, hence the *Māyā* of the microcosm.

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<sup>4</sup> This last definition means not that the superior types would be devoid of loyalty, quite obviously, but that the fourth type—scarcely capable of governing himself—has *grosso modo* this one quality only, which as it were constitutes his way; and this of course to the extent that the individual is limited to this typological possibility.

<sup>5</sup> All told, men are differentiated by sex, age, temperament, zodiacal type, caste and race.

It has been said, quite paradoxically, but not without reason, that the great mystery for the human spirit is Relativity rather than the Absolute; or *Māyā* rather than *Atmā*. But one could also say, and more profoundly, that the mystery of mysteries is the internal Radiation of the Absolute; ungraspable Cause of the first Cause, and Cause without entering into any causal chain.

(Original editorial inclusion that followed the essay:)

*(The Soul) knows that God will never forsake his own life which he hath quickened in it: he will never deny those ardent desires of a blissful fruition of himself, which the lively sense of his own goodness hath excited within it: those breathings and gaspings after an eternal participation of him are but the energy of his own breath within us; if he had had any mind to destroy it, he would never have shown it such things as he hath done; he would not raise it up to such mounts of vision, to show it all the glory of that heavenly Canaan flowing with eternal and unbounded-pleasures, and then precipitate it again into that deep and darkest abyss of death and non-entity. Divine goodness cannot, it will not, be so cruel to holy souls that are such ambitious suitors for his love.*

John Smith the Platonist.