

# All-possibility and demiurgic projection

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Courtesy Patrick Laude

This article was initially published in  
*Divine Play, Sacred Laughter and Spiritual Understanding*,  
Palgrave Macmillan, 2005

In his important chapter on the “Demiurge in North American Mythology”<sup>27</sup> Frithjof Schuon has suggested a profound correlation between the notion of *Mâyâ* and that of the Demiurge. According to Schuon the “key to this doctrine is basically that by definition Infinitude demands the dimension of the finite.”<sup>28</sup> *Mâyâ* can be considered as the extrinsic dimension of Infinitude. She is so inasmuch as she can be defined as the unfolding of the inexhaustible core of the infinite Reality. *Mâyâ* is like the projected mask of the faceless Infinite.<sup>29</sup> This unfolding results of necessity in the production of finite beings that may be considered as fragmented shells of the Divine Whole. This fragmentation and externalization is by the same token the very root of what we call evil. Evil has nothing absolute, or even fully real, about it; it is only the extreme consequence of the inversion and fragmentation of Reality as *Mâyâ*. Now the Demiurge can be precisely defined as the ambiguous principle of the unfolding of *Mâyâ* as it manifests itself in the onto-cosmogonic process. Frithjof Schuon has remarkably encapsulated the metaphysical foundation of the doctrine of the Demiurge while distinguishing the various levels of manifestation of the creative Word on the level of Being and Existence:

The creative Word can be understood at two levels, and it is this “fluctuation” that explains the all but general incomprehension, on the part of theologians, of the Platonic “demiurge.” In the first place, the Word is situated at the degree of the ontological Principle, Being, of which it is the active pole, the Vedantic *Purusha*; it is the Divine Intellect which conceives the possibilities of manifestation or the archetypes. Next, at the very center of Universal Manifestation, there is the operative reflection of *Purusha*,

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<sup>27</sup> *Logic and Transcendence*, London, 1975, p.152.

<sup>28</sup> p.154.

<sup>29</sup> The Infinite is faceless because it transcends and encompasses all faces: “And Allâh’s is the East and the West, therefore, whither you turn, thither is Allâh’s face; surely Allah is Amplegiving, Knowing.” (*Qur’ân* 2:115)

namely *Buddhi*, the manifested and acting Word; and this is the demiurge proper. This *Buddhi* is “the Spirit of God which moved upon the waters,” while the divine *Purusha* remains immutable, since It pertains to Pure Being; but as we have said, Being is mirrored at the center of Existence—as *Buddhi*, precisely—in order to become efficient.<sup>30</sup>

In order to attain to a full understanding of the above passage, one must be aware that traditional metaphysical doctrines tend to distinguish three planes of Reality that may be represented by the open sky, the sun, and the world as illumined by the latter. These are 1) Non-Being or Beyond Being, the *Nirguna Brahman* (Non-Qualified Absolute) of Advaita, Meister Eckhart’s Godhead, the *Ayin* (Nothing) of Kabbalah, and the *Ahadiyah* (Divine Unity) of Sufism, 2) Being or God as Creator, 3) Existence or Universal Manifestation. Inasmuch as the Divine Word is the Principle of Creation It does not explicitly appear on the level of Beyond-Being. This is why mystical theologies of the Essence, even in a monotheistic context, tend to transcend the level of God-as-Person in order to emphasize that the Divine Essence stands infinitely beyond any Creator as related to Creation, while the Creator is obviously “included” within this Divine Essence, and therefore not in any way “relative” in the sense in which a created reality is.

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Even though some cosmological terminologies might seem to collapse the notion of God and that of the Demiurge—such as in *Timaeus*, where Plato refers at times to “the divinity” (*ho theos*), and at other times to the “demiurge” (*ho dêmiourgos*)—, the Demiurge pertains, strictly speaking, to a lower level than that which is the purview of the Creator. The Demiurge does not create *ex nihilo*, but rather shapes the universe from disorderliness into order, from chaos into cosmos. As such, he may appear as a kind of subordinate “officer” working at the service of the Sovereign Good. This subordination is already implied by the fact that the Demiurge “makes” the world by gazing upon “patterns” (*paradeigmata*) that are transcendent in relation to him. The Demiurge does not draw creatures from his own non-manifested all-possibility, nor does he extract them from nothingness, but he is rather a divine “maker,” an artificer, or a “constructor” who works an amorphous, recalcitrant, and disorderly matter into an harmonious cosmos. This

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<sup>30</sup> *Survey of Metaphysics and Esoterism*, Bloomington, 1986, p.23.

matter is not only lacking in order and intelligibility, but it also tends to resist the informing influence of the Demiurge as he directs his gaze upon the paradigms in order to bring the world into conformity with them. This negative and subversive aspect, which is philosophically articulated in Aristotle's hylomorphic doctrine of matter (*hylê*), was highlighted by Philo of Alexandria, with whom it provided a philosophical argument in favor of Biblical theodicy.<sup>31</sup> In this context the matter upon which the demiurgic principle operates is the very source of evil, and God's goodness is thereby exempted from any responsibility for this evil. Accordingly, the demiurgic level, by including the source of evil within its fold, excludes the Biblical Creator from the realm of ambiguity: it works for the Sovereign Good while operating upon the principle of its negation, that is, "recalcitrant" matter. In keeping with the implications of the Demiurge's function as an agent of God and a "tamer" of matter, the Greek term *demiourgos* literally refers to the idea of a "public work," which in a way emphasizes both the laboring nature of the Demiurge and the relatively lower and external character of the realm within which he works for the sake of the whole. As such the Demiurge is the archetype of the craftsman or the artificer, and he is in fact often associated with the symbolism of the potter. He uses a pre-existing reality, whether it be potential, infra-formal, or chaotic that he shapes along the lines of his design, a design that is in fact a reflection, albeit "from a distance," of the patterns "situated" in the "ever and forever" (*aei*) of the Supreme. This is the picture of the Demiurge that Plato proposes in his *Timaeus*:

Wherefore also finding the whole visible sphere not at rest (*hesychia*), but moving in an irregular and disorderly fashion, out of disorder he brought order (*taxis*), considering that this was in every way better than the other. (30a)<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> "To the extent that the God of Genesis is all-powerful in His creation, matter is a passive substrate; to the extent, however, that He is not responsible for evil in the world, matter is a factor of recalcitrance, though its role is reduced to a minimum and it shares the function of recalcitrance with human souls, which can turn in their freedom of choice to corruption." Gretchen Reydams-Schils, *Demiurge and Providence, Stoic and Platonist Readings of Plato's Timaeus*, Turnhout, 1999, p.150.

<sup>32</sup> [*houtô d'ê pan hoson ên horaton paralabôn ouch hêsuchian agon alla kinoumenon plêmnelôs kai ataktôs, eis taxin auto êgagen ek tês ataxias, hêgêsamenos ekeino toutou pantôs ameion*]. Cf. The Perseus Digital Library, Gregory Crane, Editor-In-Chief, Tufts University, [www.perseus.tufts.edu](http://www.perseus.tufts.edu). Text based on the following books: Plato. Plato in Twelve Volumes, Vol. 4 translated by Harold North Fowler. Cambridge, MA; London, 1977. Plato. Plato in Twelve Volumes, Vol. 7 translated by R.G. Bury. Cambridge, MA; London, 1966. Plato. Plato in Twelve Volumes, Vol. 8 translated by W.R.M. Lamb. Cambridge, MA; London, 1955. Plato. Plato in Twelve Volumes, Vol. 9 translated by W.R.M. Lamb. Cambridge, MA; London, William Heinemann Ltd. 1925.

Plato's Demiurge orders and "pacifies," or "beautifies" the world, not only—as we have already mentioned—by referring his work to the models or the paradigms of the Good, a realm that transcends him and his work, but also out of a desire to make things in his own nature, as testified by Plato's indication that "He was good, and in him that is good no envy ariseth ever concerning anything; and being devoid of envy He desired that all should be, so far as possible, like unto Himself" (29e).<sup>33</sup> Whence the ambiguity of the Divine in Plato, a notion that may refer either to the efficient cause of the cosmos, or—on a higher level—to its "formal" cause, that is, to the intelligible Prototype of Reality. This difficulty—which betrays in its own manner the very complexity of the onto-cosmological process—may account for Plato's allusion to the "hard work" (*ergon*) of "discovering" the "Maker and Father" (*poiêtên kai patera*) of all things, and the impossibility (*adunaton*) of "telling it" to all men (*eis pantas legein*) (28c). In other words, this passage may be interpreted as a hint at the multi-layered structure of the Divine Reality and a correlative recognition of the esoteric nature of the teachings that can take into full account and make sense of this complexity.

Even though the order of exposition in the *Timaeus* begins with a description of the Demiurge's construction of the "Body of the World," which involves primarily a harmonic combination of the four cosmological elements (first fire and earth, and then air and water as "proportional" mediators) Plato instructs us that, chronologically and ontologically, the first work of the Demiurge was the production of the World Soul. It is only at a second stage that the Body is formed "within" the Soul and united to her "center to center" (*meson mesêi*) (36e). In a sense the Demiurge is separate from the World Soul since He "produces" and "informs" Her, in a way that is analogous to the process through which, in the Hindu Sâmkhya, *Purusha* "informs" *Prakrti*.<sup>34</sup> But in another sense the Potter and the Clay are indissociable, they are one and the same reality.<sup>35</sup> This "discrete unity" that defines the relationship between the Demiurge and the World Soul finds an extrinsic reflection in the very process through which the Demiurge "produces" the

<sup>33</sup> [agathos ên, agathôi de oudeis peri oudenos oudepote engignetai phthonos: toutou d' êktos ôn panta hoti malista eboulêthê genesthai paraplêsia heautôi].

<sup>34</sup> *Purusha* and *Prakrti* refer strictly speaking to the level of Being, thereby transcending the realm of the Demiurge, but what happens "above" is analogous to what happens "below." Moreover, as we will see, the Demiurge can sometimes be understood in the widest sense as a dimension of Being itself.

<sup>35</sup> "The Demiurge is no separate power or Independent Divinity, but merely a part or faculty of the World Soul, his apparent independence being due solely to the mythical form of the exposition." *Ibid.*, p.10.

World Soul. While the duality of the Demiurge and the World Soul implicitly unfolds from a single Principle, as a move from unity to duality, the “formation” of the World Soul proceeds from a duality that is mediated by a third term in order to be brought back to unity. So it is that, for Plato, the Demiurge makes use of three elements in order to shape the World Soul: Sameness, pertaining to the indivisible and changeless, Otherness, the principle of divisibility, change, and multiplication, and Being or Essence (*ousia*), which is conceived as a reality commonly proportional to both Sameness and Otherness. There is, everywhere in the manifested universe, Identity and Difference, while Being is the “middle way” uniting these two distinct principles. It is “with the Essence” or “with the aid of Being” (*meta tês ousias*) that the Same and the Other are united, the latter being “forced” into this unity by reason of its tendency to introduce “alterity.” This is a way of suggesting that when the Demiurge’s work is considered from the standpoint of the element of Sameness, it reflects the changelessness and simplicity of Being; when his work is envisaged from the vantage point of Otherness it expresses the realities of division and change together with all that these principles entail.

The complex Platonic combination of the Same, the Other, and Being amounts to nothing else, in Hindu parlance, than a symbolically circumstantiated recognition of the cosmogonic reflection of the interplay of *Âtman* and *Mâyâ*. Considering this interplay on the metaphysical and onto-cosmological levels, it could be said that the Creator is *Mâyâ* in *Âtman* and the Demiurge is *Âtman* in *Mâyâ*. The Demiurge can be considered either from the point of view of *Âtman*, whence its intelligibility and its character of “Higher *Mâyâ*,” or from the point of view of *Mâyâ*, in which case it is the lack of intelligibility that dominates, or “Lower *Mâyâ*.” The Demiurge is the principle of production, and as such, he is also the principle of inversion. Any production, or any manifestation, involves the passage from nothing to something, but since “nothing can come out of nothing” it must mean that something is already *in potentia* in “No-Thing.” Manifestation, being a kind of externalization, appears to be “nothing” when considered from the standpoint of the essences of manifested beings. Conversely, the essences seem to be “nothing” when they are envisaged from the vantage point of manifestation. One of the most suggestive expressions of this paradox is found in Chuang Tzu’s reference to the archetypal “holes” through which the wind of existentionation blows. Holes are empty and so in a

sense “nothing,” but without them the music of wind and moving air could not be heard, or manifested. Just as a tree reflected in a pool keeps its shape and is at the same time inverted, what is innermost *in principio* appears as outermost in manifestation. The Divine Treasure (the Infinite as “concealed”) becomes the Universe (Infinity being the principle of outward multiplicity). The “good” aspect of the demiurgic work is a reflection of the archetypes. This aspect appears most clearly in Plato’s Demiurge, since the latter shapes the world by imitating the Good, or the Ideas. As for the “bad” aspect, or let us say the ambiguous dimension, of the demiurgic principle, it results from the inversion that is involved in the process of manifestation, as it is expressed in Plato by the symbolic principle of Otherness. This principle of Otherness appears primarily on the level of Existence, since this level is the most obviously related to the aforementioned inversion. But it may also appear on the level of Being, as is testified, among numerous examples, by the ambiguous function of Shiva in the Hindu *Trimurti*.<sup>36</sup> Shiva is both one of three supreme gods and the ambiguous principle of cosmogonic manifestation, sometimes bordering on what Semitic monotheism would define as “satanic.”<sup>37</sup> This shows that demiurgic ambiguity is not only to be found at the Center of Existence, which is its primary domain of manifestation, but even somehow higher, on the level of Being.

The latter remark holds true also in the case of Semitic monotheism, as shown by the Quranic name of the “best of deceivers” (*Khayr al-Mâkirîn*) that is paradoxically attributed to God. The *Qur’ân* often refers to God’s works as tricks performed upon men, especially upon the unbelievers whose actions are “made (by God) to appear beautiful in their own eyes.” Two occurrences of the term *Khayr al-Mâkirîn* are to be found in the Arabic *Qur’ân*. The first appears in the *Surah* of “The Family of ‘Imrân” (3:54): “And (the unbelievers) plotted and planned, and Allâh too planned, and the best of planners is Allâh.” (Yusuf Ali trans.). The translation of *Khayr al-Mâkirîn* by “best of planners” alludes to the providential dimension of the demiurgic function of God, but it fails to render—probably by a kind of moralistic uneasiness with the concrete implications of the term—the element of cunning –and quasi-malevolence-- that is part and parcel of the

<sup>36</sup> “In (...) the demiurgic Shiva of the *Trimûrti* (...) it is not always easy to make a clear separation between principial necessity and demoniacal initiative; or between the wrath of Heaven and this or that malefic caprice of the *samsâra*.” Frithjof Schuon, *Having a Center*, Bloomington, 1990, p.67.

<sup>37</sup> The black and white checkered textile that is the emblem of Shiva in Bali, the uses of which stem from devotion to magic, is a direct expression of this ambiguity.

Arabic term.<sup>38</sup> Actually, from the standpoint of the demiurgic principle, which outwardly manifests the infinite Possibility of the Supreme, even errors must in fact be considered as “relative realities” since they proceed from the fragmentation which is necessarily entailed by the process of manifestation.<sup>39</sup> The Demiurge is the “prince of errors” inasmuch as errors proceed from the fragmentation that is part and parcel of Relativity. Considered from a “subjective” and epistemological point of view, it can even be said that the Demiurge is nothing but the projection or the superimposition of our own limited perspective upon reality, since “objectively” (or rather “subjectively” when considered for the standpoint of the only Subject) there is no absolute separation within Reality. This is why the Supreme Liberation from the realm of Relativity can also be considered as the only way to be liberated from “the Empire of the Demiurge.”<sup>40</sup>

Christ’s spiritual message of freedom from sin is, on a religious plane, an expression of that liberation from the demiurgic realm. And this fact explains why the Gospel’s reference to the “prince of this world” is replete with implications that identify Satan with the Demiurge. The “otherworldliness” of the Christic message is parallel to an emphasis upon a consideration of the world of Creation from the point of view of the Fall, or within the perspective of a “separation” from the Divine. In other words, the world is squarely identified with the demiurgic domain as Satan’s kingdom. Although this perspective may, as we will see, lend itself to seemingly dualistic tendencies in the Christian spiritual outlook, it is important to stress that, strictly speaking, the negative connotations of the “world” result in fact from a perversion inherent in the post-lapsarian way of envisaging reality—in a dualistic manner, precisely—rather than in the world as Creation. In the most profound sense, it is this perversion that “makes” the world an “empire” of the prince of darkness.

Still, it is also true that the corruption of the human perception of the world, being intimately connected to any apprehension of the latter, has tended to become objectified to the point of “contaminating” the world of nature *per se*. Genesis expresses this “contamination” symbolically when it describes the consequences of original sin not

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<sup>38</sup> Another passage of the *Qur’ân* states: “Remember how the unbelievers plotted against thee, to keep thee in bonds, or slay thee, or get thee out (of thy home). They plot and plan, and Allah too plans; but the best of planners is Allah” (8:30).

<sup>39</sup> Cf. René Guénon, “Le Démiurge,” *Mélanges*, Paris, 1976, p.13.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, p.25.

only in terms of human perception and destiny but also in terms of the terrestrial conditions of life and work following Adam's transgression: "(...) Cursed *is* the ground for thy sake, (...) thorns also and thistles shall it bring forth to thee" (Gen. 3:17-18).<sup>41</sup> On the one hand, the spiritual possibility expressed by works such as St. Francis' *Canticle of the Sun*, i.e. a vision of God in and through his creatures, precludes a radical ontological dualism in Christian orthodoxy; on the other hand, the world *is* a "valley of tears" for Christians. In this respect, one of the most strikingly symbolic manifestations of the negative Christian apprehension of the demiurgic realm is to be found in Christ's admonition against ambiguity: "Let your communication be, Yea, yea; Nay, nay: for whatever is more than these cometh of evil" (Matt. 5:37). This admonition is a symbolic allusion to the "schizomorphic" dimension of the perspective of Christ, a perspective that entails an emphasis upon the distinction between the world of grace and that of nature, and that cannot take into account the ambiguous status of the demiurgic field on the spiritual level.

Again, this unambiguous emphasis should not strictly speaking confine Christianity to an irreducible metaphysical duality, but there is little doubt that it lends itself to be so used, albeit abusively, as a foundation for radical dualism. Most of the key concepts of Gnostic and Manichean dualism are indeed to be found in the New Testament, especially in St. Paul's Epistles and in the Gospel of Saint John. These implications have been developed and amplified by Gnosticism, which has been in a sense incapable of making sense of both the positive and the negative points of view of the demiurgic process, and has therefore hardened the bi-polar aspect of the Demiurge into a dualistic ontology, thereby parting way from both orthodox Christianity and genuine gnosis. Losing sight of the unicity of the Essence and the grounding of all further determinations and manifestations in that Essence, Gnostic dualism tends to focus on the dimension of separation—as expressed *par excellence* in the realm of the Demiurge—in order to build its vision of two universal principles which would be at odds in the universe.

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<sup>41</sup> Moreover, the King James version illustrates the two aspects of the matter by specifying "for thy sake" and "to thee," thereby indicating that the "malefic" aspect of nature is not primordial but post-lapsarian in origin.



In order to try and bolster this “one-dimensional” form of metaphysics, traces of dualism have not only been unburied within the Gospels, but even in the Old Testament. It has been argued, for example, by Robert Ambelain,<sup>42</sup> that the distinction between a Creator and a Demiurge can be implied from the Book of Genesis, and that this distinction testifies to the Gnostic affinities of the latter. According to this thesis, and as is already plain upon a reading of the sacred text in its literality, Genesis clearly presents us with two different accounts of Creation. The first version runs from the first verse of chapter one (“In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth”) to the third verse of chapter two (“And God blessed the seventh day ...”); while the second begins with verse four in chapter two (“These are the generations of the heavens and of the earth ...”) and concludes with the end of the same chapter. These two narratives are moreover distinguished by the fact that God is referred to as *Elohim* (“God” in the King James version) in the first while being named *Yahweh Elohim* (“the Lord God” in the King James version) in the second.

The two stories of the creation of man are interesting to compare on account of those differences: The first story relates that on the sixth day, “God (*Elohim*) said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness.” The second narrative tells us that “the Lord God (*Yahweh Elohim*) formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and man became a living soul.” Whatever one may think of the relationship between these two accounts, they appear to refer respectively to two different levels of the creation of man. It is plausible that the first story describes creation on the level of Being, or from the point of view of the archetypes, whereas the second one would illustrate the creation of man on the level of his “entry” into Existence, or, which amounts to the same in this case, from the standpoint of the Demiurge. This interpretation can be supported by two main factors, one having to do with the content of the narrative concerning the creative act as such, the other related to the Hebrew divine onomatology that is involved in these passages. First, one cannot but be struck by the difference between God’s creation of man as a result of His Word (“And God said ...”) and His Will (“Let us make man ...”) on the one hand, and the shaping of man’s form “of the dust” that is then animated by the “breath of life.”

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<sup>42</sup> Robert Ambelain, *La Notion gnostique du D miurge*, Paris, 1959, pp.102-3.

If one is to read these two verses without even taking into account their respective contexts one may readily admit to their alluding to two different stages in the same process of creation. Man is first an “Idea” or an archetype in God, and it is as such that he is subsequently “willed.” On that level, he is in the “image” and “likeness” of God, which suggests a process of imaginal “ideation,” rather than an actual physical “making.” This stage, then, clearly corresponds to the ontological level of Being, the realm of archetypes. It is only at a second “stage” that man is shaped in his physical form and “animated.” The very notion of “forming” and the reference to the earth (“dust”) places us squarely in the domain of the demiurgic work.

In parallel to the two terms of this distinction, the two Hebrew names that preside respectively over these different aspects of the creation of man appear to reflect two different levels in the creative process. The term *Elohim* is a plural and may therefore allude to the distinctiveness of archetypes such as they are conceived in God’s intelligence. Furthermore, Jewish Kabbalah associates the Name *Elohim* with the three highest *Sefirot* that form the “Great Face” of God (*Arikh Anpin*), and it also more specifically refers to the third *Sefirah*, *Binah* or “Intelligence” as *Elohim*.<sup>43</sup> Now *Binah* has been defined as “the onto-cosmological ‘Intelligence’ (...) which determines the pure Quality, the particular divine Aspect, the proper Archetype.”<sup>44</sup> *Binah* refers to “Ideas” as they are differentiated and still unified in God’s Wisdom (*Hokhmah*). As for the name *Yahweh*, it implies by contrast the idea of a descending influx and appears, therefore, to correspond fittingly to the “formative” and efficient aspect of creation. Its final consonant, *H*, symbolizes the “receptive cosmological principle”<sup>45</sup> which is none other than the last *Sefirah*, *Malkhut*, the “Kingdom.” This last *Sefirah*, *Malkhut*, is a kind of reverse analogy of the Supreme Crown, the first *Sefirah*, *Kether*, the latter referring to the Divine Essence in its transcendent dimension, the former to the Substance as Divine Immanence. While *Binah* is the “Divine Mother” that corresponds to the ontological level, or Being, *Malkhut* is the “Divine Daughter” which, while still situated *in divinis*,

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<sup>43</sup> “Thus *bereshit bara Elohim* (usually ‘in the beginning God created’) is interpreted mystically to refer to the first three *Sefirot*: through the medium (the prefix *be*) of *Hokhmah* (called *reshit*), the first *Sefirah*—the force hidden within the third person singular of the word *bara*—produced by an act of emanation the third *Sefirah* (*Binah*), which is also called *Elohim*.” Gershom Scholem, *Kabbalah*, Dorset Press, 1974, p.110.

<sup>44</sup> Leo Schaya, *L’Homme et l’Absolu selon la Kabbale*, Paris, 1977, p.44.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, p.162.

refers more particularly to the cosmological level of Existence. In this connection, it is instructive to note that thirteenth-century Kabbalistic speculations consider that the Divine “I” appears only on the level of *Malkhut*, whereas *Binah (Elohim)* corresponds to the grammatical function of object or third person (“He”) and “Thou” to the “totality of the *Sefirot* in *Malkhut*.<sup>46</sup> In the Biblical narrative, the Divine “I” appears only in Genesis 1:29-30 and 2:18, but it is especially asserted at 3:15, where God curses the Serpent and chastises man and woman: “I will put enmity between thee and the woman, (...) I will greatly multiply thy sorrow and thy conception, (...) I commanded thee.” God in the third person (1:1) precedes God as addressing a second Person (1:22, 28) which in His turn comes prior to God in the first person (1:29). Moreover, the repeated assertion of the Divine “I” in chapter three coincides with a third stage in the process of creation, following that of “ontological conception” and “cosmological formation,” that is, the properly speaking “divisive” aspect of the demiurgic process. The two last stages correspond symbolically to *Malkhut*, the Principle of Divine Immanence that corresponds most closely to the Hindu *Mâyâ*. The first stage of those two coincides with *Malkhut* as synthesis of the other *Sefirot* while the second one manifests the final process of Divine manifestation. “Positively,” it refers to the highest dimension of the Demiurge as “lower stage” in creation (it is the level of the “Thou,” the shaping of man and breathing of a soul into his nostrils), while “negatively” it corresponds to the separation and chastisement that follows the transgression (the level of the “I”). What is clear, in both cases, is that *Malkhut* is only involved on levels that presuppose a duality as expressed by the relationship between an “I” and a “Thou.”<sup>47</sup>

A third factor that intimates such a distinction between the level of Being and that of the Demiurge, or Existence, is that of the sexual definition of man following his creation. In chapter one of Genesis man is created “male and female.” This passage strikes a very androgynic chord. There is no suggestion whatsoever of a sexual partition, but rather that of a human “completeness” that is after all also “in the image” of God, since God cannot exclude any qualitative perfection, and therefore includes both essential

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<sup>46</sup> Scholem, p.110.

<sup>47</sup> It goes without saying that this divine unfolding using the Kabbalistic symbolic distinction between grammatical persons refers to a totally different point of view than that which is involved in the Sufi interpretation of the *hadîth qudsî* that we used as an opening pointer.

masculinity and femininity within His nature. It bears stressing that this does not refer to a lesser “sexualization” as it were, but on the contrary points to a maximal integration of sexual polarity. Man is made “male and female” and not “neither male nor female.” By contrast, chapter two presents us with an explicit “separation” between the male and the female. Adam is created alone first, and there is a clear sense that he is “in need” or that he is incomplete in some way: “but for Adam there was not found an help meet for him” (2:20). As woman proceeds from the “separation” of one of Adam’s ribs, we are given to think that this stage in the creation of man corresponds to a lower step in the process that spans from God’s archetypes to manifested forms. Still, this fragmentation is not as much in the mode of a division as it expresses, positively, a differentiation. At a further stage though, which is expressed by the curses upon woman and man following the transgression, differentiation is turned into a clear sense of division, lack, suffering, and evil. The three stages correspond, in a sense, respectively to 1) man *qua* man (both male and female) as dwelling in the Spirit, beyond all dualities, 2) man as male or female and as such a symbol of totality in their own right, being complementary archetypes “included” in the higher human archetype and projected into Existence from the level of Being, and finally 3) man as male or female lacking totality by virtue of their separation from each other, a separation that manifests itself on the level of Existence exclusively, thereby only relatively and provisionally.

The preceding distinction between ontological and cosmogonic stages within the Biblical narrative is a scriptural symbol of the subtle metaphysical distinction, developed by Frithjof Schuon, between the “Principle-Person” and the ambiguous realm of the “Principle-Demiurge”:

To the Principle-Essence belongs Possibility as such, thus universal Possibility; the Principle-Person is not responsible for the latter, because it merely crystallizes the fundamental consequences thereof, namely the archetypes or the ‘ideas.’ The Principle-Demiurge, in its turn, does not bear the responsibility for the archetypes; it merely transfers them to the universal substance, whose center it occupies, and which obliges it to differentiate and particularize them, as well as to contrast them, in conformity with the characteristic structure of this substance.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> *To Have a Center*, Bloomington, Indiana, 1990, p.102

Let us note that the distinction between the level of Being and that of the Demiurge is not to be considered in an absolute manner when it is envisaged from the standpoint of the existentiating projection. In the process of creation, there is on the one hand an aspect of ontological necessity—the Creator’s will to create—and, on the other hand, an element of demiurgic initiative that appears more and more “arbitrary” as it gradually descends the various stages of existentiation. The unity of Being precludes a tight compartmentalization of these aspects, just as it forbids any exclusive perspective on their unfolding. This is illustrated by the aforementioned example from the Bible: The two narratives seem to refer to two different levels of the Divine work, and yet they cannot be construed as completely discrete without thereby compromising or jettisoning the unity of the Divine nature and purpose. The fact that the beginning of chapter two of Genesis does not fit with the actual articulation between the two narratives tends to indicate an intention to blur the distinction between the two depictions of creation. It may be that such is precisely the case so as to prevent a radically dualistic reading of the narrative. Given the exoteric and religious tendency to fix provisional concepts into all too rigid dogmas and to confuse levels of metaphysical consideration it may very well be that such an organization of the narrative has the merit of preserving and highlighting a clear sense of the Divine Unity above and beyond any subtle metaphysical distinction of ontological levels. This is all the more plausible when one considers how ancient Gnosticism tended to read this distinction into an anthropological dualism. Thus, Robert Ambelain’s reading of these passages in the wake of Gnostic speculations amounts to a radical distinction between “spiritual man” and “carnal man.” Such a radical anthropological distinction runs parallel to a clear-cut separation between God and the Demiurge. Now the crux of the matter is that this distinction might be conceived as a clear subordination of the Demiurge to God, but it may ultimately lead to a sort of Manichean dualism. Jewish speculations have sometimes highlighted the first possibility, as “the notion of a demiurge under the command of Yahweh was familiar to some Jewish sects of the Saadia period.”<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> “Cependant, nous savons que la notion d’un démiurge aux ordres de Iaweh était familière à certaines sectes juives de la période de Saadia, sectes dont les doctrines demeurèrent pendant fort longtemps à la

In this view of things, God is thought as having created by Himself but still through the intermediary work of a supreme demiurgic being sometimes identified as a supreme Angel. In Christian parlance, this being could also be considered as the Son or the Word. In Frithjof Schuon's view the latter perspective would amount to an understanding of the Trinity on the level of Existence, and therefore as comprised of the Essence of Existence (the Father), the "Personification of this Essence" (the Son) and, finally, "the Radiance of the Logos in the world and in the souls" (the Holy Spirit).<sup>50</sup> In conformity with this latter perspective, the historical mainstream of Christian theology has tended to identify Christ with a "Holy Demiurge" who is the Prototype of Creation. As a scriptural basis for such a conception, the prologue of St. John's Gospel testifies that "All things were made (*egeneto*: came into being) through the Word." Christ is in that sense the Logos that crystallizes the Essence at the center of Universal Existence, and who is at the same time, on the level of Being, the Prototype of Creation. From a slightly different standpoint, one can also see the Holy Spirit as participating in this supreme demiurgic function as a principle of radiating manifestation. This is, so to speak, the highest possible definition of the demiurgic domain *per se*.

On the other hand, several passages from the New Testament appear to indicate that the world is under the sway of another being whose function is primarily negative and subversive; and this being is also endowed with demiurgic characteristics. St. John's Gospel refers to the "prince of this world" (*o tou kosmou toutou archôn*) (14:30) as "having nothing in me (Christ)," and other passages strongly suggest that this *archôn* is none other than Satan having dominion over the world. Here the demiurgic aspect of Satan seems to be totally severed from the work of creation through the Word. The episode of the temptation in the desert constitutes a particularly striking illustration of this metaphysical severance. Christ's tempter (*diabolos*) took him to the top of a mountain, showed "him all the kingdoms of the world, and the glory of them; and saith unto him, All these things will I give thee, if thou wilt fall down and worship me" (Matt. 4:8). The devil is therefore not simply to be understood as a fallen angel who reigns over

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limite extrême du judaïsme rabbinique orthodoxe, et ce sont elles qui, certainement, inspirèrent les docteurs gnostiques non-juifs." *La notion gnostique*, p.43.

<sup>50</sup> *Roots of the Human Condition*, Bloomington, 2002, p.71.

hell, and who would come upon earth to bring destruction and disorder, but he is in fact also to be considered as “the symbol, the action, the law, of the Universe.”<sup>51</sup>

He is the “symbol” of the Universe because he epitomizes the “separation” from God that the Universe entails: the Greek word *diabolos* derives from the verb *diaballô*, “to throw away, or apart.” That the *diabolos* might at the same time be conceived as *symbolon* of the Universe points to his supremely enigmatic and paradoxical nature when one considers that the function of the *symbolon* is to “bring together” (*syballô*), a function that is directly antithetic to the *diabolos*. The latter is moreover the “action” of the Universe in the sense that he embodies a dynamic energy that “makes” the world as a constant moving away from the divine Center. The aspect of constant “negation” that is associated with the devil can be better understood when considered in light of this ever-fragmenting motion that he embodies and fosters.

As for Satan’s role as “law” it must be remembered that the law of the Universe expresses the rigorous aspect of Reality on the level of manifestation. This takes us to the outermost shores of Divine Rigor and judgment, as it were. In this connection, it might be helpful to recall that the Book of Revelation characterizes the Devil (*o satanâs*) as “the accuser of our brethren, which accused them before our God day and night.” (Rev. 12:10). This aspect of “accusation” appears to identify the function of the Devil with the lower strata of the dimension of Divine Justice. In this sense, several passages from the Old Testament could be conceived as bearing witness to Satan’s role in the economy of Providence, such as Psalm 109: “Set thou a wicked man over him: and let Satan stand at his right hand, (...) when he shall be judged, let him be condemned: and let his prayer become sin” (6-7). In point of fact, the distinction between God’s judgment and Satan’s work is far from being obvious in many Biblical and Quranic narratives. This relative lack of a clearly observable line of demarcation explains why the Demiurge is sometimes identified to the Logos, or Christ, or an Archangel, while he is at other times envisaged as Satan, and, following a third intermediary scenario, occasionally considered as a Logos-

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<sup>51</sup> “Quand nous trouvons chez Saint Jean l’expression ‘Prince du Monde’, ou plus exactement ‘Archonte du Monde’, nous entendons qu’il s’agit du Diable, et l’habitude nous cache la singularité de l’expression! C’est bien le Diable, en effet, mais non pas tel que nous le concevons, non pas un Esprit qui sortirait accidentellement de l’Enfer pour jouer sur terre quelque mauvais tour aux humains. C’est un diable qui est, avant tout, le Prince du Monde. Il est le symbole, l’action, la loi, de l’Univers. C’est, si l’on veut, le Dieu du Monde.” (Simone Pétrement, *Le Dualisme chez Platon, les gnostiques et les manichéens*, Paris, 1947, VI, 1)

Demiurge to whom Satan is subordinated as a kind of dark angel of Divine Wrath. In the latter case, which is perhaps the most satisfactory of the three metaphysical scenarios on account of its finer and more subtle “attunement” to the ambiguities of the demiurgic unfolding of Creation, Satan might be seen as a personification, on the psychic plane, of the negative and dispersing aspect of the Demiurge.

One may, in this respect, raise the question why traditional Christianity, among the various religions, is more disposed to considering the world as being entirely under the sway of the dark demiurgic legions of Satan. The most immediate answer to this question lies in the observation that Christianity represents and fosters a perspective that focuses—to the point of “disequilibrium” and “madness”—upon the chasm separating the Divine realm from the world of the “flesh,” or of Grace from nature. This chasm is “filled” by Christ and by Redemption without being any less real on its level and in its “temporary” triumph. Christianity cannot but harden the cleavage between the Divine realm and the demiurgic field since it is entirely predicated on the “incredible,” and “unheard of,” fact of Incarnation, the most dramatic and “unintelligible” sacrifice of God who accepts to descend into the realm of that which is most adverse to Him. The “folly” of Divine Redemption and the diabolic “darkening” of the world are in this sense intimately interrelated. In this perspective, there seems to be no middle ground between absorbing the whole of the demiurgic function in Christ, or of identifying it with the somber plotting of Satan. The intermediary perspective can only manifest itself incidentally, in an esoteric and precarious dimension, since it is much too subtle and paradoxical to be entrusted to a dogmatic theology for collective spiritual consumption. The recognition of an “irreducible dualism” on the level of Universal Relativity is unavoidable on the level upon which it must occur, that of Relativity precisely, which does not mean that it cannot be transcended on the level where *Mâyâ* dissolves into *Âtman*, the Non-Dual Self. While dualistic Gnosticism stops at the irreducibility of duality on the demiurgic level of *Mâyâ*, authentic gnosis steps beyond the latter to realize that there is none other than That which transcends and integrates both I and Thou.

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In the Abrahamic world, two characters can be read as interesting and instructive illustrations of the monotheistic way of integrating the demiurgic principle with the



religion of the One God. These are the Jewish Metatron and the Quranic al-Khidr. The ambivalent status of these two characters is a first striking fact. In Judaism, Metatron is introduced as an angel, but he is also identified with the prophet Enoch, while the Islamic Khidr, or Khadir, is rather envisaged as a prophet, sometimes Elias, while also being considered as a celestial being. The eminence of Metatron is such that he is considered to be one of the angels who contemplate the Divine Face, thereby deserving the title of “Prince of the Countenance.” He is, in fact, the Supreme Angel, who is like the divine Summit of Creation.<sup>52</sup> His “princely” status in relation to the Divine King already suggests that a sort of divine kinship is conferred upon him. There are additional factors that led some Jewish speculations to consider Metatron as a kind of “lesser God.” Gershom Scholem mentions the Talmudic account of Elisha ben Avuyah’s vision of a seated Metatron, a posture that suggests divine status.<sup>53</sup> Some rabbinical commentaries on Exodus 23:21-22 also suggest that Metatron is like a second Lord. Along these lines, the perplexing “Come up unto the Lord” (Exod. 24:1) uttered by God Himself has been interpreted as founded upon the fact that it is Metatron who is thus referred to by God Himself on account of his name being like His own. Exodus 23:21 already indicates, when referring to the Angel announced to Moses, that “my Name *is* in him.” Talmudic rabbis were aware of the dangers that such a spiritual exaltation of Metatron might pose to the faithful preservation of a strict monotheism, and such a concern expresses in a sense the whole monotheistic predicament when dealing with the Demiurge for the association of Metatron with God’s Name, it points both to his function in creation—since God creates through His Name, and also to his spiritual salvific power—God saving through His Name. The first of these aspects is involved in Metatron’s role in the creation of the Heavens. When referring to the formation of the Kingdom of Heavens, Leo Schaya mentions Metatron as the active irradiation of the divine immanence or *Shekhinah*, which he also defines as the immanence of *Hokhmah*, the divine Wisdom.<sup>54</sup> Metatron can be characterized, in this respect, as the Holy Spirit

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<sup>52</sup> Frithjof Schuon defines this “Supreme Angel” as “the projection of the Absolute in the relative,” by contrast with the “Personal God” who corresponds to the “prefiguration of the relative in the Absolute.” *Le jeu des masques*, Lausanne, 1992, p.12.

<sup>53</sup> Gershom Scholem, *Kabbalah*, New York, 1974, p.377. This vision induced Elisha ben Avuyah to postulate a form of dualism *in divinis*.

<sup>54</sup> *L’Homme et l’Absolu selon la Kabbale*, p.78.

reflected in creation. As such, Metatron is conceived as the prince of wisdom and the prince of understanding, and he appears as the primary intermediary between the divine and the human, having knowledge both of the celestial and terrestrial domains. This intermediary status is typical of demiurgic characters as it refers to the ambiguities of the dimension of divine immanence. Such ambiguities appear in full light when Jewish mysticism envisages Metatron as having two sides: a positive one that the *Zohar* equates to the *Sefirah Yesod*, the Foundation, from which proceeds the Kingdom (*Malkhuth*), or Divine Immanence, and a negative one that is envisaged as Lucifer, the angel of evil who carried the light (*Luci-fer*) before confiscating it for his own ambitious and rebellious purpose. While he is primarily a servant of the Supreme in the workings of Creation, Metatron becomes tenebrous when he is envisaged as isolated, or as severing himself, from his Divine Master. Lucifer is fallen precisely because he wanted to ascend and be like God: “How art thou fallen from heaven, O Lucifer, son of the morning! (...) For thou hast said in thine heart, I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God. (...) I will ascend above the heights of the clouds; I will be like the most High” (Isaiah 14:12-14).

Metatron’s double identity is reflected, in the *Zohar*, in the symbol of Moses’ rod which is a helper on the one hand, but is also, when changed into a snake, a figure of evil.<sup>55</sup> Let us note, moreover, that Metatron is sometimes designated by the name *na’ar*, or “youth.” This reference is probably not to be interpreted as a chronological allusion,<sup>56</sup> that is, to his posteriority, as has been occasionally suggested, but rather as an allusion both to his “lesser” being vis-à-vis God, and to his status of “servant” of God. More profoundly, this name may also refer to his higher identification with the Divine Intellect, the fountain of eternal youth. In that sense, Metatron may appear as the universal initiator who transmits the Divine Light to those he assists: one is “ever young in the Intellect,” in Meister Eckhart’s words.

The second aspect of Metatron, his prophetic and salvific identity, appears through his connection with the patriarch Enoch, with whom he is identified by some traditional data. This is related in the *Sefer Hekhalot*, also called *3 Enoch*, in which the

<sup>55</sup> David J. Halperin, “Sabbatai Zevi, Metatron, and Mehmed: Myth and History in Seventeenth-Century Judaism” in *The Seductiveness of Jewish Myth*, edited by S. Daniel Breslauer, Albany, p.282.

<sup>56</sup> David J. Halperin sees Metatron as “a Johnny-come-lately in the heavenly realms,” *Ibid.*, p.279.

patriarch declares that God called him “‘the lesser YHWH’ in the presence of his whole household in the height, as it is written, ‘My name is in him.’”<sup>57</sup> Enoch is one of the very few, together with Christ, the Virgin Mary, and Elias, that monotheistic traditions consider as having been taken directly to heaven, and having thereby reintegrated into their celestial prototype. More specifically, Enoch is said to have been transformed from a man into an angel. Thus, St. Paul teaches that “by faith Enoch was translated so that he should not see death, and was not found, because God had translated him; for before he was taken he had this testimony, that he pleased God” (Hebrews 11:5). Continuing this tradition, Islam refers to Enoch under the name of the prophet Idrîs, and the *Qur’ân* mentions him in several verses, including the following: “Verily! He (Enoch/Idrîs) was a man of truth (and) a prophet. We raised him to a high station” (19:56-57). His ascension to a celestial status is parallel to his appointment as “scribe” at the divine court, and his assigned duty of recording the good and bad actions of men.

By contrast, but not without analogy, some Jewish traditions present him as the angelic advocate of Israel in heaven’s court.<sup>58</sup> It is interesting to note that the latter function appears to be the counterpart of the role of “accuser” that *Revelations* assigns to Satan. These are, so to speak, the two sides of the “recording” function of the demiurgic principle as it is envisaged through the figure of Metatron. The various myths and interpretations of Metatron provide us, therefore, with a dual spiritual motion of “descent” and “ascent.” This dual aspect allows us to emphasize the intermediary, communicative, and also ambiguous, function of the demiurgic principle that is at work in the stories and views of Metatron. Gershom Scholem indicates that some Kabbalists reconciled these two aspects, the “human” and the “divine,” by introducing a distinction between a higher Metatron and a lower Metatron. This distinction was based on the fact that the name Metatron can be written in two different Hebrew forms, one comprised of seven letters, the other of six.<sup>59</sup> The first form, which is also the oldest, includes the letter *yod* as second letter of the word, whereas the second form does not. *Yod* is the first letter of the Divine Tetragrammaton (YHWH). Thus, the seven-lettered version of the name of Metatron refers to the “divine” or archangelic aspect which is the supreme and active

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<sup>57</sup> David J. Halperin, p.272.

<sup>58</sup> Cf. Scholem, p.379.

<sup>59</sup> Scholem, p.380.

manifestation of the *Shekhinah*, whereas the six-lettered form is understood to refer to the patriarch Enoch, who “possesses only some of the splendor and power of the primordial Metatron.” This distinction accounts, in its own symbolic way, for the intermediary and ambivalent status of the demiurgic principle, and its reflection at different levels of creation.

The Quranic account of the mysterious guide of Moses in the *Surah* “The Cave” (18:65-82) offers other important avenues of exploration into the demiurgic dimension. It is important, first of all, to note that the character introduced in the *Qur’ân* is never named. The *Qur’ân* refers to him as “one of Our slaves”: “Then found they one of Our slaves, unto whom We had given mercy from Us, and had taught him knowledge from Our presence” (18:65, Marmaduke Pickthall trans.). This servant of God has directly received from Him a knowledge that is defined as “*min ladunnî*,” or “coming from Us.” The translation “Our presence” is particularly justified since it points to a participatory, gnostic, or mystical type of knowledge that cannot be reduced to rational or juridical learning. Moses, the prophet of the Law *par excellence*, requests of this unexpected acquaintance that he instruct him in the knowledge of God’s ways. The only condition placed by the mysterious guide for accepting Moses’ request is that the latter should not ask him any questions before he is given an explanation of the meaning of what might happen.

Three episodes present Moses with appearances of impropriety and transgression on the part of al-Khidr. First, al-Khidr opens a breach in the hull of a boat; Moses cannot prevent himself from expressing the suspicion that al-Khidr did so to drown the people who were on board, and strongly voices his moral outrage. Next, al-Khidr kills a young man that they had encountered on their way; Moses blames his companion for this action. Finally, after having been denied hospitality by the inhabitants of a certain city, al-Khidr rebuilds a wall that was about to crumble without asking a salary for it, as Moses had suggested he do. Upon parting from his companion, al-Khidr provides Moses with the answers for which he has not been able to wait: The boat was damaged because it would otherwise have been appropriated by a king, thereby ruining the poor people who owned it; the young man was going to impose rebellion and unfaithfulness upon his parents; as for the wall, it belonged to two young boys: their father had buried a treasury underneath,

and al-Khidr did not want them to find it before they had become adults. As a conclusion to his explanation, al-Khidr unequivocally states that he has performed none of these seemingly bad actions “upon his own initiative” (*wa ma fa’altuhu ‘an amrî*), thereby alluding to his serving and executing God’s will. Upon each of al-Khidr’s actions, Moses expresses his shock and indignation, in conformity with the moral and legal perspective that he embodies.

The *Qur’ân* particularly emphasizes his lack of “patience,” and al-Khidr had actually prophesized from the outset that Moses would not be patient with him (*innaka lan tastatî’a ma’î sabran*, 18:67), founding this prediction on Moses’ lack of knowledge. Al-Khidr’s knowledge of God’s way is direct, or inspired, whereas Moses’ is indirect and legal; al-Khidr’s point of view is synthetic: he is able to situate actions and events within the “greater picture” of God’s Will, the All-Possibility that transcends purely moral apprehensions of the Divine, while Moses can only understand God’s Will on the level of His injunctions and proscriptions. Moses’ lack of patience is connected to his inability to consider reality beyond the level of phenomenal existence and literal meaning. Al-Khidr embodies the demiurgic unfolding of possibilities inasmuch as he actualizes these possibilities in conformity with the providential order, but on a level on which the truth and justice of these manifestations may not be understood *prima facie*. Al-Khidr represents the amoral perspective of metaphysics, a perspective that is not accessible *per se* from the strict point of view of the Law.

It is interesting to note that al-Khidr’s explanation of his own actions is expressed in three different grammatical ways, with three different subjects: in the first account, al-Khidr relates the intent of his action in the first person singular: “I wanted (*aradtu*) to damage (the boat)” (18:79); in the second instance, the subject of the verb is in the first person plural, “we wanted (*aradnâ*) that” (18:81); while in the third case, the subject is in the third person singular, “your Lord wanted” (*fa arâda rabbuka*) (18:82). This grammatical shift is highly illustrative of the various levels of Divine Will. The Divine Will is first considered from the standpoint of the “demiurge’s” apparent initiative; it is then envisaged in the perspective of a fusion of the demiurgic and Divine Will *stricto sensu*; while it is finally presented as God’s highest decree. This mobility of perspective, which takes place within the space of a few verses, is clearly indicative of a possible shift

in the level of understanding of the onto-cosmological unfolding. Let us note, however, that al-Khidr embodies an “enlightened” demiurgic perspective, in the sense that he remains fully aware of God’s will as it is manifested to him: he is a *servant* (*‘abd*) in a full and direct sense, and not only a passive and unconscious instrument of God’s will.

A few additional remarks are in order concerning the implications of the demiurgic process as illustrated in the *Surah* of the Cave. We should notice, first, that the narrative introduces Moses and his servant at the point where the former has just lost his fish at the meeting-place of the two seas. These two seas have been traditionally interpreted, in the context of Sufi metaphysics, as the Lower and Higher Waters: their confluence is the *barzakh*, or isthmus, that lies between the animic and spiritual realms, the soul and the Spirit-Intellect. It is in this *barzakh* that is situated the “inversion” which makes it possible to pass to the other side of the mirror, that is, to change perspective in the sense of not taking the soul any longer as point of reference and identifying with the Intellect as center of consciousness. In this context, the fish represents the spiritual symbol, the “sacramental” and transcendent means that allows one to “swim” from one sea into the other. Al-Khidr is himself “at home” in both domains, and one of his functions is actually to “join” the two worlds of light and darkness.

From another standpoint, which is the metaphysical complement to the aforementioned spiritual point of view, the fish may point to the unity of being (*wahdât al-wujûd*) since it bears witness to a continuity between the two oceans. Be that as it may, having lost his fish, a symbol of the Spirit, Moses cannot progress any further and he finds himself obliged to retrace his steps, and perhaps even gets lost (18:64). It is precisely at this moment that he meets the mysterious traveler who will henceforth serve as his spiritual guide. In the verses that follow, Moses and al-Khidr are described as wanderers, as if their lack of a clear and intended direction alluded to the “providence” of God’s will over their path. Let us note that, by contrast, Moses’ initial intent was particularly clear in terms of its goal: “And when Moses said unto his servant: I will not give up until I reach the point where the two rivers (seas) meet, though I march on for ages” (18:60, Pickthall trans.). On this mysterious and unsettling way, the patience demanded by al-Khidr of Moses is none other than the trust required from the soul on the spiritual path inasmuch, or as long as, it cannot reach the level of vision that is the

purview of the Intellect. The soul's relative "darkness" prevents man from being totally transparent to the Intellect, and this is the reason why the soul must "wait" before being revealed the "full picture" of Reality. Moreover, the "separation" (*hadhâ firâqu baynî wa baynika*) (18:68) that puts an end to the association of al-Khidr with Moses, marks, in a certain sense, the failure of the soul to be totally trusting in the Spirit. The Law, and the Revelation that vehicles it, and which Moses "embodies," is required precisely because of the incapacity of man, or of the overwhelming majority of men, to remain "connected" to the Intellect, and to be, so to speak, transparent to it. Let us note, in addition, that Moses displays an unconscious presumption, similar to Peter's towards Jesus, when he declares that he will disobey none of al-Khidr's orders (18:69). This presumption is the narrative and psychological mark of man's disconnection from Intellection, thereby pointing to an inner contradiction and to a profound spiritual powerlessness.

The ill-inspired "impatience" of Moses and its spiritual correlates find an echo in the story of Alexander's quest for the Fountain of Life in various literary sources such as the *Shâh Nâme*. Ananda Coomaraswamy mentions that some versions of Alexander's quest describe the King on his way to find the Fountain of Life, which he discovers by chance, but which he is later unable to locate when trying to return to it. The Fountain is located in the "Land of Shadows" beyond the West.<sup>60</sup> In the *Shâh Nâme*, Alexander is guided by al-Khidr until they come to a bifurcation and part company. Al-Khidr is the only one to find the Fountain. In Nizâmî's *Iskender Nâme*, Alexander's failure to reach the Fountain is due to his impatience, whereas al-Khidr finds the Fountain without having to look for it. These various versions of the myth share an emphasis on the failure of impatience and deliberate intent, while highlighting the apparent gratuitousness and "randomness" of spiritual discovery. In all cases, al-Khidr is associated with the unexpectedness and freedom of grace: this mysterious character conveys a sense of the suddenness and unconstrained mobility of the Holy Spirit. The individual initiative of the seeker—whether Moses or Alexander—is consistently stained with an element of impurity. This bears witness to a key of the way of knowledge: only God can know Himself, and any motion toward Him is fundamentally none other than a motion of

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<sup>60</sup> Cf. A.K. Coomaraswamy, "Kwâjâ Khadir et la Fontaine de Vie," *Etudes Traditionnelles*, Paris, août-septembre 1938, no.224-5, pp.310-1.

Himself toward Himself. Al-Khidr is the prophet of this Divine Knowledge, a knowledge that cannot be rigidly set in the language of formal prophecy. The reference of several sources to a “Land of Darkness” that lies beyond the West, where the Fountain is to be found, may refer to the realm of the Divine Essence that spreads beyond all terrestrial limitations. It is there that the secret of immortality can be found. This immortality is also characteristic of al-Khidr, whose green color and association with rainfalls is highlighted in many traditional sources. The *Iskender Nâme* associates the two symbols when mentioning that al-Khidr’s steps leading to the Fountain of Life trace a wake of falling rain and growing grass.<sup>61</sup>

The anonymity of al-Khidr in the *Qur’ân* suggests that the function he embodies and symbolizes cannot be exclusively assigned to a single character. And, in point of fact, it must be underlined that the *Khâdiryah* function appears in a whole constellation of characters within the monotheistic world. This constellation includes the prophet Enoch, or Idrîs, Hermes, the prophet Elias, or Ilyâs, and St. George, among others. The prophet Elias is sometimes identified with al-Khidr or associated with him. A famous Persian painting of the sixteenth-century, from the *Kham*sa of Nîzamî, represents the meeting of the two characters at the Fountain of Life. On this miniature, al-Khidr is depicted wearing a green garment, whereas Elias is clothed in a white garb. Whiteness plainly refers to the essence of all colors, a fact that may be interpreted as an allusion to the function of ultimate resolution and explication of theological differences that the Jewish tradition assigns to Elias. This function is in keeping with three major characteristics of Elias in the Jewish tradition: his tendency to reveal himself under various guises; his uncovering of divine and celestial secrets; and his eschatological role as the herald of the Messiah. As a scriptural example of Elias’ ability to metamorphose, the *Midrash* teaches that, in the *Book of Esther*, he took the form of the chamberlain Harbonah to inform King Ahasuerus of Haman’s intention to hang Mardocai (7:9-10). This ability clearly alludes to the spiritual affinity of Elias with the supra-formal dimension, an affinity that fosters the manifestation of the Spirit in many forms, colors, and through diverse human vehicles. Such a freedom from forms is undoubtedly connected to a privilege of direct inspiration.

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<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, p.311.



Elias is the prophet of charisma, by contrast with the prophets of divine institutions, such as Moses. A rabbinical tradition is highly instructive in this respect, illustrating the very particular role played by Elias in the tension between spiritual charisma and institutional tradition.<sup>62</sup> It tells us of a protracted argument between Rabbi Eliezer and Rabbi Yoshua, two Jewish sages who lived in the early Christian era and who represent respectively the Chamai and Hillel schools. In the course of the argument, Rabbi Eliezer, who often finds himself in disagreement with the other rabbis because of his strict interpretation of Scripture, calls successively for a tree, a canal, and walls as witnesses to the truth of his point. As a response, the tree moves, the water of the canal starts running upstream, and the walls begin to lean. The other rabbis do not accept these prodigies as evidence in favor of Eliezer's reasoning on the grounds that, notwithstanding their spectacular character, they remain irrelevant to the core of the argument. Finally, Rabbi Eliezer says: "If I am right, may Heavens prove it!" At this moment, a celestial voice confirms the truth of Eliezer's claim. This is interpreted as Elias' voice, the voice of direct celestial inspiration, the "Revelation of the Prophet Elias" that is the counterpart of the Revelation to Moses. It is interesting to note that this celestial inspiration is no more accepted as criterion of truth by Rabbi Yoshua than the leaning of the walls. Yoshua reproaches the walls for getting involved in a disputation concerning the Law, which is why, according to the rabbinical tradition, the walls did not fall in spite of their leaning. The Rabbi also objects to the authority of the celestial voice on the grounds of Deuteronomy 30:12: "It (the Law) *is* not in heaven, that thou shouldest say, Who shall go up for us to heaven, and bring it unto us, that we may hear it, and do it?" This opinion clearly illustrates the tension, and even the conflict, between the two perspectives, the Mosaic and the Eliatic, the former pertaining to the formal Law, the latter to the Law from above.

This celestial dimension of Elias is also bound to the third aspect of his function, that is, the eschatological mission. The coming of Elias is referred to as the prelude to the Messianic era. Its scriptural basis appears in the very final section of the Old Testament, the two verses of the Book of Malachi: "Behold, I will send you Elijah (Elias) the prophet

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<sup>62</sup> Cf. Albert Abecassis, "Le Prophète Elie dans la tradition juive," *Connaissance des Religions*, Vol. IV, numero 1-2, 1988, p.141.

before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord: And he shall turn the heart of the fathers to the children, and the heart of the children to their fathers, lest I come and smite the earth with a curse” (Mal.4: 5-6). Leo Schaya has commented profoundly upon this last verse of the Old Testament:

The “heart of the fathers” is the inward, central, essential aspect of the traditions,—their esoteric, spiritual, universal kernel—as well as the teachings, methods and influences that flow out from them. The “heart of the children” is their spiritual receptivity,—their inward acceptance and reception of what is given them by their “fathers” and their respective traditions.<sup>63</sup>

It must be noted that the “heart of the fathers” could be represented by the upper horizontal section of a semi-circle, open below and thereby providing its “rain” of grace, whereas the “heart of the children” would then be symbolized by the lower horizontal section of the circle, indicating the receptive emptiness of the heart open to vertical grace: the two “hearts” taken together therefore form a perfect circle which is a fitting image of the eschatological “completion” of the spiritual cycle. This eschatological coming into perfection, like the formal metamorphoses and the celestial unveilings of the prophet, is connected to Elias’ greater charisma and mission: his conciliation of divergent doctrines and interpretations of Scriptures. In the Jewish tradition, this is highlighted by the Talmudic use of the word *Teiqu* that is traditionally interpreted as referring to the four initials of *Tishbi Ietarets Qushioth Veyabaoth*, “the Tishbite (Elias) will solve the questions and difficulties.” To use a specifically Kabbalistic image illustrating the need for a spiritual *tikkun*,<sup>64</sup> the Eliatic function is akin to a recollection of the sparks of divine wisdom disseminated, because of the fragmenting multiplicity of existence, within the various traditions and perspectives. The spiritually “demiurgic” role of Elias at the end of history is therefore the perfect complement and closure, on the level of the Spirit, to the demiurgic function of the archangelic Metatron that took place at the “dawn” of

<sup>63</sup> Leo Schaya, “The Mission of Elias,” *Studies in Comparative Religion*, pp.159-167.

<sup>64</sup> The *Tikkun* refers, in Lurianic Kabbalah, to the spiritual work of man as he strives to remedy, on the level of Creation, the breaking of the Sephirothic vases which were to receive the emanation of Perfection. This symbolic metaphysical statement accounts, in its own suggestive way, for the “incomplete” and imperfect nature of *Mâyâ*.

manifestation, and on the level of existence. The perspective that is involved within these various transformations is fundamentally circular, as it befits a type of spiritual reality that could be defined as a re-occurring allusion to the Center from within the ambiguous realm of the periphery.