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IMMANENCE, STOIC AND CHRISTIAN

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DEDHAM, ESSEX, ENGLAND

As an effective philosophic concept, applicable to all forms of being, Immanence takes its start from Stoicism. It was a growth, rather than a first principle or formula. It did not start as a scientific hypothesis, but rather as an attractive figure or guess, which gradually grew into a theory, and was elaborated into a body of doctrine. The assumption out of which it sprang was that the world was an ordered unity, as Pythagoras had declared — a *Kosmos*. Whence came the Order of the Unity, and how imposed?

Νοῦς διεκόσμησε πάντα — Mind (or A Mind) ordered all things — had been the formula propounded by Anaxagoras; and Socrates at first hearing gave enthusiastic welcome to the idea, but turned from it in disappointment when he found in it no more than a rational analysis and classification of efficient causes, without any attempt to account for their genesis, their method, or their goal. To the Stoics, on the other hand, the term seemed too precise and personal. Νοῦς connoted or implied an external mind directing or at least designing the universe, a deistic assumption to which they could not subscribe. Instinctively, deliberately, or evasively, by no means foreseeing the results and eventual consequences of the choice, they preferred the more oracular dicta of Heraclitus regarding the directive λόγος. In his pregnant and poetic way, the 'dark' Sage of Ephesus had spoken of the ever-existent Word or Reason as the sovereign ordinance by which the Universe pursues its course. Not dogmatically, but in a series of pregnant metaphors, he indicates its modes of action. On the rational side it declares itself as design, intelligence, an ordered purpose running through nature, 'the mind of Zeus,' imparting to it

coherence and unity; at other times it is regarded as constructive energy or force, 'the plastic fire' in which being has its source, or as the authoritative fiat 'the thunderbolt which steers all things'; the changes and processes of nature are the kindling and combustion of the ever-burning fire 'kindled in due measure and extinguished in due measure.' And with this Logos men were in constant, though often unconscious, communion, 'unconscious of what they do when awake, just as oblivious when they sleep.' Often they are at variance with this Logos, though it is none the less their constant companion and the pilot of their destinies. Thus figuratively or even mythologically rather than scientifically, Heraclitus conceived or clothed the Logos with attributes in part material, in part intellectual and spiritual, without any attempt to define the relation or interaction between the two. It could be thought of as the quintessential source of being, the life-energy in all phenomena; or again as the cause and *reason* of their being what they were, the counterpart of reason and consciousness in man; or again as the directive power of the Zeus, the fate, the destiny, which ruled and determined the process due to its instigation and impact. The word itself favored and covered such ambiguities. *Logos* could mean reason acting from within, or thought finding articulate expression in speech, or the authoritative mandate of direction from without, or even more vaguely the principle of relation and proportion, which maintained the balance, the equipoise of being and action between thing and thing.

To this conception, so elastic and undefined in its extent, Zeno gave ready welcome. And already in the Hymn to Zeus, practically the earliest authentic document of Stoicism which has survived, Cleanthes treats it as the vehicle of that cosmic pantheism which the Stoic thought of immanence evolved.

Zeus, King of Kings,

Chaos to thee is order; in thine eyes
The unloved is lovely, who did'st harmonise
Things evil with things good, that there should be
One Word through all things everlastingly.
One Word — whose voice, alas! the wicked spurn.

The quotation is characteristic of the Stoic position. It affirms the unity, but allows the contradictions. In the universe at large it believes in the existence of a higher constraining power or providence, which constitutes a higher harmony, and reconciles seeming evil with higher good. The evil is but apparent, and in reality contributory to the good; it is either non-existent, an illusion in the mind of the observer, or misinterpreted owing to defects of insight. But the most formidable difficulty arises from the nature and the mind of Man, in his estrangement, his conflict with the Order of the Universe. Now the relation of Man to the Kosmos was vital to the Stoic scheme of thought. The Kosmos was in a sense invented and affirmed in his behalf. The Kosmos of the Universe must be in correspondence with the Kosmos of Man; each must be a true Kosmos, possessed of inner unity and of stability, and the two must be reconcilable, must agree together.

This could only be if there existed some link, some interaction, inner correspondence, or identity between the two. By a bold venture or guess, availing themselves of the figurative ambiguities of the Logos idea, the Stoics interpreted the world upon the basis and analogy of man; and the analogy was elaborated with remarkable acumen and completeness. In detail and in mass the Kosmos is the counterpart of the individual man. The Universe is a living whole — *ἐν ᾧ* — a single live organism, a coherent rational order, as shown by the complete interdependence of all its activities and parts. “*Spiritus intus alit.*” Pervading spirit animates the frame; manifesting itself in various phases, it may be called by a variety of names, according to the various functions in which it is engaged — breath, life, mind, will, nature, necessity, law, God, currents of heat, and many more. Each is a partial aspect of one inherent energy. God, if that name be used, is not transcendent, imposing orders from without, but inherent, immanent, acting from within, and therefore circumscribed by the organism in and through which he acts. From Cleanthes onwards, *Pneuma*, a more material category than *Logos*, becomes the favorite term for this life-power, and passes into Latin *Anima Mundi*. Physically it takes effect as breath, expanding and contracting

the lungs, maintaining the respiratory activities of life; physiologically it acts as currents of heat and force, coursing along the arteries and nerves, beating in the heart, producing the co-ordinated reactions of the organs of nutrition, digestion, and the several senses, which make up the life of the organism; emotionally it operates as desire, anger, shame, and all the various impulses, which have their well-known physical concomitants; once more, it manifests itself as reason, conscience, will, directing the operations of the subordinate parts and the self-conscious whole. Spirit is matter; matter is spirit. Matter only exists by virtue of the inherence of spirit.

In this monistic theory of Spirit, Matter, and Being, the Stoics made little serious attempt to grapple with the difficulties created by the vast variety and multiplicity of the phases of phenomena. Dialectically they did not face the unsolved problems of the One and Many, of plurality of being as the expression of a single source and energy of life. Only as difficulties arose were theories devised to countervail or parry them.

The most ingenious was the theory of *Tonos*, tension or strain. The *Pneuma*, it was held, underwent varieties of self-embodiment. Hence arose different states of matter — solid, liquid, gaseous — inorganic or organic — and the varieties of being which phenomena exhibit. The lower grade of tension produces inanimate solids — earth, stone, pulp, the mineral kingdom, characterised by the property of *ἔξις* — ‘hold,’ cohesion, weight. A higher tension produces organic potentialities of vegetable life, evinced in *φύσις* — growth; a yet higher, the animal world, with its more sensitive machinery of tissues, nerves, sensation, etc.; a higher still, consciousness, mind, the attributes of man, which evince the highest products of the world-spirit, rising to those of ‘the plastic fire’ which is the vital force at its highest development.

Projected as a speculation, with little attempt at observational or scientific proof, the hypothesis seemed fantastic, and utterly inadequate to account for the multiplicity of forms and forces, the differentiation of kinds, the fixity of the reactions of the various phases and metamorphoses. But strangely enough it has found a remarkable analogy — Stoics might justly say,

corroboration — in the properties and functions assigned by modern physicists to Ether. That, too, belongs to the material order, yet has strange affinities or interactions with the spiritual. As luminiferous ether it is omnipresent to the furthest confines of the known (or sensible) Universe. Called “void” — but in reality a *plenum* — it is all-pervasive, and seems to lie at the base of all material existence. If all matter is composed of atoms, the atom itself is now conceived as a system of electrons, and the electron itself as an electrical unit, deriving its attributes from Ether. Thus, in terms of Ether it has become possible at last to think the contradictions and the metamorphoses of the Stoic *Pneuma*. On the material side it offers an attractive, if elusive, key to the problem of the cosmic unity. Yet Ether, it is all-important to observe, operates wholly in the domain and along the lines of the external and material order, in absolute obedience to natural and causal law. There is no valid indication that Ether can pass into thought or consciousness, or that it shares any of the attributes and freedoms of Soul. There is nothing in consciousness or thought, little even by way of analogy to suggest, still less to warrant, that thought can thus change into an existence, external to itself, which it is then able to utilize, direct, and control, and which is subject to laws, processes, limitations, ways of behavior, entirely foreign to itself.

It is easy — and in much modern theology, preaching, and poetry, it is common — to fall into the wiles of the *Logos* doctrine and become the victim of its ambiguities. The ancients were beguiled by the term ‘Word’; we more often by such substitutes as ‘expression,’ ‘utterance,’ and the like. Things, it is said, are an ‘utterance’ of the will or thought of God; God, or the Creator spirit, ‘expresses’ himself in such and such forms or aspects of matter. But when thought *expresses itself* in a word (spoken or written), or in a melody (whether through the medium of instruments or written notes), or in a work of art (be it picture or building), it does not mean that thought *brings into existence*, creates, or becomes, the *media* employed, but only that it is able to use materials at its disposal — vocal organs, ear-drums, optical nerves, pen and ink, bricks and

mortar, or whatever other medium is employed — to further and fulfil its own ends, and to convey the fact of its existence and the interpretations of its experience to other minds trained to understanding of the symbols and materials employed. Thought does not create, call into existence, these things, it utilizes and employs them; it *moves matter*, utilizes and co-ordinates it — it does not create. Wide and profound as the distinction is, it may easily escape us under cover of a term.

Again, when *Pneuma* is thought of as admitting all the various metamorphoses which are exhibited in the multiplicity of phenomena, its unitive function evaporates and tends to disappear. The individual man, for instance, comprises *Pneuma* in every variety of phase, and it is hard to say by what right the *Hegemonic Pneuma* controls or unifies the rest, which make up his totality of being. The claim made, psychologically, is independence, not control or subordination of the inferior types. The world-soul is in proportionately worse case; it becomes the directive principle of a pluralist universe, of an infinite number of embodiments of the *Logos*. In what sense can it be held to direct or control? What relation has it to the individual embodiments?

Pantheism identifies the universe with God, and in so doing circumscribes him to the universe, which he is. God is everything, because everything is God. This means that God is just as much decay and disease as conservation and health, as much excretion as nutrition, as much death and extinction as birth and reproduction, as much paralysis as function, as much moral evil as moral good. What are we to say of bad men, the base, the vile, the liar, the murderer? Are these also in God and of God? "Yes," answers Spinoza, "they are." But more and more, as it developed, Stoicism shrank from that rigor of inference. It seemed the *reductio ad absurdum* of the ethical demand which it had adopted its doctrine of immanence to establish. The theory of immanence helps little to account for the unitary order and correspondences of the Kosmos and all its parts.

But to pass to the psychological aspects of the case.

The object of the Stoics was to supply a basis for the *αὐτάρκεια*, the moral independence, of the soul, and to show that such moral independence accorded with the constitution of the world, that it was indeed *κατὰ φύσιν*, 'in accordance with nature,' and part of the cosmic harmony. The world-soul was the analogy of man's. But the world-soul on examination revealed itself as a rational order, a system of processes and laws conforming to a general scheme, which showed no trace of emotion or of passion, of impulse or desires, but was an ordered scheme of providential design. *Logos* was 'the pilot of the universe.' The one element in man's nature — in keeping with the term *Logos* — which conformed to this type, was reason, the rational and moral will; and this the Stoics affirmed to be the seminal, directive, hegemonic faculty in man. They definitely separated it off from the other faculties, and claimed for it a sovereign place. Man is master of his will; ethically that is the centre of the system. The appetites, the sensations, the impulses, the emotions are rigorously subordinated and ruled out. "Efface impression; stay impulse; quench inclination; be master of the directive will." There, in short, was the creed.

But what an arbitrary, untenable line of cleavage this introduces! The vital distinction is drawn not at self-consciousness, but at the exercise of a particular faculty or set of faculties that belong to the soul. If there is one conclusion more than another in which all modern schemes of psychology agree, it is the assertion of the unity of soul. From the same source, whatever that *ἀρχή* may be, proceed sensation, emotion, consciousness, thought, will, and the other activities of the soul, the Ego. Historically we may discuss Plato's tripartite division of the soul, or Paul's distinction between *ψυχή* and *πνεῦμα*, or Stoic classifications of the various soul-faculties; they are useful for analysis, for study of human faculty, and of the nature of 'Soul' itself; but they do not represent an actual cleavage or contain the promise of a differentia showing the true relation of the Ego to the universal life.

At this point Stoicism develops its inferences in a new and — at bottom — unfounded and illogical direction. Having first discerned in the material constitution of the universe an

analogue to the physical organism of man, and having then isolated in man a particular element or activity of soul, which seems most in accordance with the directive genius of the universe, it next proceeds to endow the world-spirit with the companion attributes which belong to human personality. And so we pass to the strange and inconsistent paradox of personal and emotional Pantheism, which became the chief legacy of Stoicism to Christian and to modern thought. In the hands of the later Stoics — of Seneca, of Epictetus, of Marcus Aurelius — the accent of emotion everywhere intrudes. Nature is God's familiar; the Reason of the Universe becomes once more Father of gods and men, the god within the breast, the ever-present deity, the protector of the struggling and oppressed, the inward monitor of all who are to seek, the stay of the despised, the companion of the sorrowful, the comforter of the bereaved. And Stoicism holds out the hand of fellowship to rival philosophies and cults, becomes the revivalist of pagan rites and liturgies, the hierophant and worshipper at mysteries, the patron of the diviner and the thaumaturgist. This is the version of Immanence which appeals to the eclectic, undogmatic, questioning spirit of today. The doctrine lays hold as a poetry of Nature, which imputes to material things the emotions of which we are conscious in our own soul. They express and answer to

A sense sublime
Of something far more deeply interfused,
Whose dwelling is the light of setting suns,
And the round ocean, and the living air,
And the blue sky, and in the mind of man;
A motion and a spirit, that impels
All thinking things, all objects of all thoughts,
And rolls through all things.

It is superfluous to quote the trite passages from Pope, Wordsworth, Byron, Shelley, E. Brontë, and the rest. They form the kernel and the charm of current beliefs in Immanence.

Theology has fastened on them, and modern thought upon the Incarnation has done much to confirm belief in immanence. It seems to bridge the gulf between God and man. All creation is but partial, incomplete incarnation, and is for that reason

sacramental. Into humanity in particular God has ever been coming; striving, longing to enfold it in the embrace of love; at last, in Jesus, he completes the confluence of love with the object of desire. But a true doctrine of immanence must rest upon a valid and coherent psychology.

What is *Soul* — the most baffling problem in philosophy. Theologically, the two main doctrines of the origin of soul are the Creationist and the Traducian. The Creationist, adopted by Augustine and the Schoolmen, and by Origen with the characteristic addition of pre-existence, assumes the separate creation of each individual soul. The idea of creation out of nothing baffles thought, and is to our intelligence meaningless — though that does not disprove its possibility. Pre-existence of soul can only be said to postpone the difficulty and shift it a stage further back. But independently of this ultimate difficulty, the objections which beset the Creationist theory are very serious. It gives no account of heredity or of the reproductive machinery of life. Yet moral and spiritual qualities of soul are unmistakably in some sense inherited, transmitted. Does God, by some ‘pre-arranged harmony,’ create the soul in accord with the physical organ for which he designs it? What fatal arbitrariness and inconsequence attend the idea! Theologically put, Creationism excludes the theory of Original Sin or of hereditary taint, and throws upon God, with all the difficulties of hard Calvinistic predestinarianism, the responsibility of continuously creating imperfect, blighted, vicious, and infructuous souls. It may accord well enough with a theory of immanence, but on other grounds seems unsatisfying and inadmissible. Partly for these reasons Reformed theology turned towards the Traducian hypothesis, *viz.*, that soul is transmitted and inherited as part of the physical organism with which it is associated.

The Traducian theory — in biological terms, the protoplasmic — is that of the modern biologist. It affirms the transmission of the soul by way of natural reproduction from parent to offspring. It has behind it the whole cumulative evidence of the reproductive machinery and of the observed facts of hered-

ity, but it fails to give any just account of the self-centred independence of the soul. It leaves no room for immanence of the divine, unless by way of supplementary intrusion or addition.

A far more helpful and attractive speculation is to regard soul, not as an entity, either created or transmitted, but rather as a centre or nucleus of potential capacities, forming itself within a vast and continuous stream of universal life. Soul may be compared with the atom, ultimately resolved into units susceptible of electric charges, positive and negative. This may be best apprehended in the form of illustration. Conceive a universal stream of energy and being. Within this stream a vortex forms, a self-centred nucleus of will-to-live, will-to-bear, will-to-respond. It gathers into its individual swirl elements of which it is itself composed. It has independent existence, and yet it moves within and as a part of the great current in which it is immersed, and is sensitive to the various movements and reactions of all the neighbor vortices with which it is in contact. Its very existence depends upon reaction and response, and yet it unifies all that comes within its private range and circumference. This is the interpenetration of souls, the influence of soul on soul, which (however inexplicable) is a fact of daily and undeniable experience. Thus it takes its place as a self-determined whole, yet deriving all its capabilities from, and subject to, over-mastering restrictions from without. This meets and explains the seeming contradictions of determinism and free-will. Soul lives by response, a self-determined whole, within the universal life, or thought, of God. *Will* is its own motion, *emotion* its relation and its reaction, partly to the illimitable whole, partly to the self-centred vortices among which it moves. The will-to-live and the will-to-love are its guarantees of continued existence. It is a nucleus of power in the sense that it gathers into itself and into its own motion elements or influences from without, and makes them part of its own being. By such assimilative action we win our souls, we enlarge their action and circumference.

So far from conflicting with the demands of heredity and transmission, this confirms and interprets them. Reproduction

involves only the detachment, by fission, of a germ, a tiny cell possessing the capacities (the motions and reactions) of the organism of which it formed a part. The evolutionary life-process has been the machinery for preserving and transmitting the ever-accumulating store of sensitiveness to reactions derived from the immemorial past. Countless numbers of such germs continually detach themselves — the soft roe and the hard — of each several organism. Only by inter-union is new and independent life attained, a combination of allied potentialities. The new self-centred vortex starts with the union of two responsive, complementary germs; that is indispensable for the origination of a fresh independent vortex-motion; that is to say, accompanying the will-to-live there must exist also the will-to-love. Only so does the new life and being realize itself, and at once *create* and *pass on* the ἀρχή of a new life unit. Creationism and Traducianism each find their true interpretation.

Immanence upon this showing is no longer an intrusion of some force from without, an interference with individuality and an invasion of the soul's prerogative, but represents the soul's own sensitiveness and completeness of reaction and response to the primal life-power, the being — or the product — of the omnipresent life-giving and self-moving God. The measure of the soul's activity lies in its capacity and sensitiveness of response; and the pledge and condition of its survival is the everlastingness of the perennial and overflowing life-stream in which it is immersed. All the soul-experiences which the Stoics devised immanence to satisfy are at least as well accounted for by capacity of response to a transcendent being, as by indwelling of a derived and partial and immanent energy similar in kind. In terms of Old Testament thought, "Thou hast *beset me behind and before*, and laid thy hand upon me," may be taken as the typical text. And this is the preponderating note in the New Testament, even in the writers who have most felt the impact of Stoicism. In the speech at Athens (Acts 17, 28), steeped as it is in Stoic coloring, "In Him we live and move and have our being" is the formula adopted, just as in Rom. 11, 36 we read, "Of Him, and through Him, and unto Him are all

things." Ἐν χριστῷ is the typical phrase, denoting the union of the believer with Christ, and the admissible "Christ in me" (Gal. 2, 20; Rom. 8, 10, etc.), connotes a transcendental transformation of the inner life. The definition of Christian belief as compared with pagan, in 1 Cor. 8, 6, runs, "To us there is one God, the Father, of whom are all things and we unto him; and one Lord Jesus Christ, through whom are all things, and we through him." We are in God rather than God in us.

In the external world, where we discern nothing but absolute and undeviating adherence to law, God *may* act by immanence. What creation is, or by what means it takes effect, lies beyond our grasp. Indeed, in what sense or degree the personal self creates, transcends, or indwells its bodily organ we cannot say. Continuous creation may be a mode, a function, or a fiat, of the divine being. And in created things perfection of response is indistinguishable from passive and inert obedience. Thus in the cosmic process God may operate by immanence, though there is nothing to prove and not much that is valid to countenance it. The very distinction between immanence and transcendence eludes our grasp. But when we come to finite centres of self-conscious life, the idea of immanence lands us in insoluble contradictions. It violates the self-determining prerogative of soul. For immanence presupposes an intruded element of divine spirit, somehow coördinated and acting side by side with the individual personality. How are the two related? How do they interact? We are brought face to face in every individual with the tangled difficulties that beset the doctrine of the two natures in the theology of the Incarnation. There the difficulty was turned by assuming perfect reciprocity of wills and mutual interchange (*communicatio idiomatum*), in fact perfection of response. But in the case of human personalities that is not so; there is a balance of forces, and antagonism as well as reciprocity of wills. The position cannot be saved by the assumption which preserves a unity of personality in the incarnate God-man. And if the spiritual consciousness is a sort of tug-of-war between the rival wills, it is hard to think of the divine will as constantly over-ruled and set at nought by the human will, and only fitfully and partially asserting its pre-

dominance. One would expect rather that the divine will would inevitably and by its nature prevail; that it would assert itself, in theological terms, as irresistible grace. But with that assumption, free-will is at an end, as Calvinism consistently taught.

Again — and this goes far deeper than Calvinist interpretations of the relation of the soul to God — assuming there is an element of immanence in the obdurate soul which refuses to hear the voice of the charmer or to yield up its independence, what shall we say? That it detaches itself or somehow emanates from the soul, in which it failed to establish its footing? or, on the other hand, that it continues to share its destinies? that we may postulate an immanence of the Divine even in permanently recalcitrant souls? Ineffectual immanence cuts at the root of divine power and holiness.

Finally, let us apply the argument to the belief in personal survival. For the Stoic, accepting re-absorption into the universal life, there was no difficulty; personality was but a temporary phase of immanent life; but for the believer in immortality no such way of escape is open. The consistent evolutionist is faced by corresponding difficulties about the genesis of immortality. In the process of development there are various points — the apparent chasm between the inorganic and the organic, between the automatic and the self-conscious — where it seems hard to reconstruct a gradual process and avoid a sudden catastrophic leap; but the gaps are being steadily reduced and bid fair at last to close up into a continuum. Few are more perplexing, at first sight more unbridgeable, than the transition from extinction into immortality. If soul is an entity, created imperishable, there seems no solution except in the will or fiat of the Creator; immortality is withheld or conferred or withdrawn *per saltum*, from without. If, on the other hand, soul is a unit of life, which through accumulating heritages from the past at last attained potentialities which fit it for a self-centred motion of its own, initiated by combination with another unit of like kind, then it may well be that soul after soul trembled upon the very verge of success yet failed to attain; that there have been countless relapses from attainment

achieved but forfeited; that many do not even make their start. Immortality is but the realization of potential survival-values. By defiant, self-willed refusal to accept the flow of the main current, or by incessant failure of reaction to the companion nuclei or vortices among which it moves, the title and capacity for independent movement on the axis of the personal and individual self may dwindle and die out. That is to fail to win our souls, to forfeit all survival rights, to lapse from that immortality which our source of being and our environment, if used aright, offered and guaranteed to us; we gain no lasting place in the world-order. But there is neither re-absorption nor diminution nor extinction of the larger life in which we lived and moved and had our being.