

JUAN DE MAIRENA:
SAYINGS, WITTICISMS, NOTES AND MEMORIES
OF AN APOCRYPHAL PROFESSOR
(EXCERPTS)¹

(MAIRENA IN HIS CLASS OF RHETORIC AND POETRY)

“Mr. Perez, go to the black board and write: ‘The daily events that take place on the thoroughfare.’”

The student writes what he was told.

“Now, go ahead and put that in poetic language.”

After meditating for a moment, the student writes: “What happens in the street.”

Mairena: “That’s not bad.”

(p. 381)

(ON SKEPTICISM)

This devastating argument has been used against skeptics: “Whoever declares that the truth does not exist claims that this is a true statement, thus expressing an obvious contradiction.” Nevertheless, this logical argument has never convinced many skeptics. Because the truth about a skeptic is that arguments *never convince him*. Nor does he try to convince anyone else.

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“God exists or else He doesn’t exist. You can affirm it or deny it, but *you can never doubt it*.”

“That’s what *you* think.”

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“A God that exists,” said my teacher, “would be something terrible. May God protect us from Him.”

(pp, 384-385)

¹ These excerpts are translated from *Juan de Mairena: Sentencias, Donaires, Apuntes, y Recuerdos de un Profesor Apócrifo*: Antonio Machado, *Obras: Poesía y Prosa*, 2^a Edición, published by Losada, Buenos Aires, 1973. The page numbers correspond to this edition of his work.

(A BIG BLUNDER BY JUAN DE MAIRENA AND HIS TEACHER ABEL MARTIN)

“Gentlemen” as my teacher used to say, “Karl Marx was a German Jew who interpreted Hegel in a Judaic way, with his dialectical materialism and his usurious view of the future. *Justice for the innumerable herd of mankind; the whole world as a pasture!* With Marx, gentlemen, a barely Christianized Europe returns to the Old Testament. But then there is Russia, blessed Russia, whose spiritual roots are evangelical. Because what is unique about Russia is the way it interprets Christianity in the spirit of brotherhood. During a period of respite from the primitive Eros which only aspires to procreate endlessly from father to son, Christ proclaimed the brotherhood of man, free from the ties of blood and worldly benefits, a victory of fraternity over patriarchy. All of Russian literature is imbued with this Christian spirit. Gentlemen, I cannot imagine a Marxist Russia, because Russia only begins where Marxism ends. *Proletariats of the world, defend yourselves, because the only thing that matters is the grand herd of mankind!* The Biblical human race still utters this cry, but Russia does not hear it.”

(OPP, pp. 396-397)

(PROVERBS AND RECOMMENDATIONS OF MAIRENA)

Be modest. I recommend modesty; or even better, a modest pride that is both Spanish and Christian. Remember the Castilian proverb: “Nobody is better than anyone.” This shows how difficult it is to surpass everyone, because no matter how much a man is worth, he will never have a greater value than that of being a man.

This is what Mairena told his disciples. And he added: “Now you understand why we great men tend to be modest.”

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Try to avoid stages, pulpits, platforms and pedestals. Never lose contact with the ground because that is the only way you can measure your stature.

(OPP, p. 401)

(MAIRENA COMMENTS ON THE POETRY OF HIS TEACHER)

Mairena never recited poetry. He limited himself to reading in a neutral tone which was rather musical, without gesticulating. He put the emotional stress where he felt the poet himself would have put it. Since he was not a great orator, when he read poetry—or prose—he would not try to make people say: “how well this man reads!” but “what a great work this man is reading!” without caring when they added: “a pity he didn’t read it better!” It bothered him to read his own poems which for him were nothing more than ashes from the fire, or wood-shavings from a carpentry shop, which no longer held any interest for him. To hear them declaimed, sung, or shouted by elocutionists, especially by professional elocutionists, would have horrified him. On the other hand, he liked very much to hear his poems recited by young children in school.

I will write on your fan:
I love you so I can forget you;
I forget you so I can love you.

These lines of my teacher Abel Martin—Mairena once told his students—were found in the album of a lady (or she was in his day) from Chipiona. And these, that were written in a different album, seemed like a coda to the previous lines:

You will fan yourself
with a madrigal that says:
in love forgetfulness lends the spice.

And these that were published some years ago in *El Faro de Rota*:

I will send you my song:
“One sings of what one loses,”
with a green parrot
to say it on your balcony.

These are youthful verses of my teacher, perhaps not before the invention but before the use, and the abuse, of the phonograph, that marvelous mechanical lorikeet that today begins to tire our ears. In them he alludes to a song that I have searched for in vain, which perhaps he never got around to writing down, or at least, not with that title.

In his romantic years, or as in a popular saying of the time: “like a soul lost in the melon patch,” my teacher thought that love begins with a memory, and you would hardly be able to remember something, if it had not first been forgotten. This idea of my teacher is expressed very succinctly in these lines:

When I die I know you will cry,
so you can forget me and, then,
you can remember me with eyes
that are dry and gaze into time.
Beyond your tears and your
forgetfulness, in your memory,
I see myself going down a path
gravely saying: “Goodbye, Guiomar.”

My teacher exalted the poetic value of forgetfulness in a way that was faithful to his metaphysics. In his metaphysics—we must keep in mind—forgetfulness is one of the “seven inversions, aspects of nothingness, or forms of the Great Zero.” According to my teacher, thanks to forgetfulness the poet can pull up roots of his spirit that were buried in the soil of the anecdotic and trivial and sink them even more deeply into the subsoil, or living rock of feeling that is not evocative but—apparently at least—can still illuminate new forms. Because only a passionate creativity can triumph over forgetfulness:

...Only your figure
like a white flash
is written on my dark night!
And on the smooth
sand near the sea,

your rosy tan flesh,
suddenly, Guiomar.

On the gray of the wall,
both prison and lodging,
and on a future landscape with
only your voice and the wind.

On the cold mother-of-pearl
of your earring in my mouth,
Guiomar, and the shivering
of a dawn full of madness;
there on the shore
washed by the sea of a dream,
and under the arc of your frown
betrayed by my vigil,
only you, Guiomar, Guiomar.
I am punished because of you,
guilty of having created you,
I can no longer forget you.

Here his creation seems to take the form of an obsessive memory. In the end the poet tries to let go of memory, and he thinks it has all been imagined.

All love is fantasy:
it invents the year, the day,
the hour and the melody;
it invents the lover and, even,
the beloved. It proves nothing
contrary to love, that the beloved
has never existed...

(OPP, pp. 409-412)

(ABOUT POETIC TIME)

Poetry—says Mairena—is the dialogue of man, of a man with his time. This is what the poet tries to eternalize by removing it from time, a difficult task that takes a long time, almost all that is at the poet's disposal. The poet is a fisherman, not of dead fish, but of living ones; let's be clear: of fish that are still alive after they are caught.

(OPP, p. 414)

(MAIRENA FANTASIZES)

Imagine a world in which stones can choose the way they fall, and men who can never change their path are forced to travel around on rails. That would be the region of hell where Dante would have placed the determinists.

(OPP, p. 418)

(FRAGMENTS OF LESSONS)

El Greco is an explosion of Michael Angelo. All the dynamism found in the Baroque Period begins with Buonarrotti and ends with Domenico Theotocopuli. If there is anything else in the Baroque which is dynamic, it is the theater. Calderon represented that better than anyone.

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Descartes said: "*Cogito ergo sum.*" You say: "I exist therefore I am," no matter how idiotic that saying seems. And if you doubt your own existence, just shut up and continue on your way.

(OPP, pp. 423-424)

XIII

Pragmatists—said Juan de Mairena—think that in the final analysis we can accept as truth all that seems to be useful, all that would be convenient to believe because it helps us live. Of course the pragmatists are not as dumb as you might think based on this definition. They are really skeptical philosophers who do not believe in an absolute truth. Like Protagoras, they believe that man is the measure of all things, and like the nominalists they deny the existence of universals. In view of that, it no longer seems so unusual that we are asked to choose, from the values which affect the human individual, those which are least harmful and least damaging to his existence. However, the pragmatists do not realize that what they ask us to choose is a faith, a credo, and that the rationalism which they reject is now the result of the choice that they recommend, the best-known until now. It was not reason, but faith in reason, that killed faith in the gods of Greece. In fact, man has made this belief in reason the symbol of his species.

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Opposed to the skeptical pragmatists, there will always be a group of idealists who, for pragmatic reasons, attempt to revive Plato, when in reality they mistake him for Protagoras. The characteristic of our time is to live in a state of contradiction without realizing it, or worse, to hide it hypocritically. There is nothing more despicable than an unconscious skepticism, or an hidden sophism which, on the basis of a denial of metaphysics and a belief in agnosticism, tries to build a positivist philosophy. Bah! When man ceases to believe in the absolute, he no longer believes in anything. Because all belief is belief in the absolute. All the rest is called thinking.

(OOP, pp. 425-426)

(FROM A TALK BY JUAN DE MAIRENA)

Only in his most idle moments can the poet devote himself to the interpretation of dreams and look in them for something to be used in his poems. Until now the study of dreams has never produced anything important. The poems of our wakefulness, even the least successful, are more original and more beautiful and, at times, more nonsensical than those of our dreams. He who tells you this has spent much of his life thinking the opposite. But it is wisdom to change your mind.

You have to keep your eyes wide open to see things as they are; and even wider open to see them other than they are; and still wider open to see them better than they are. I recommend a wakeful vision, because our mission is to see and to imagine consciously, and to expect nothing but rest from sleep.

(OPP, p. 429)

(FROM ANOTHER TALK)

It is very possible that the ontological argument or proof of God's existence has never convinced anyone, not even Saint Anselm himself, who supposedly created this belief. With this I don't want you to think I believe the good Bishop of Canterbury was a non-believer, but that he was almost certainly not a man who needed proof in order to believe in God. Neither should you think that our time is more non-believing because this argument has been refuted which, even if that were true, would not be a sufficient reason to disbelieve something as important as the existence of God. All this is so taken for granted that even women—as a council member has said—can understand it. Naturally, this is not what I wanted to say, but to demonstrate to you that the famous argument or proof of the existence of God is not, as some professors of philosophy think, a triviality that can be refuted just by common sense. Even when Scholasticism, where the argument originated, had already refuted it, it resurfaced in Descartes, of all places. Descartes took possession of it and reinforced it with some ideas that were supposed to be proofs. Then Kant gave it, as the saying goes, the coup de grace; we might say that he cut it down with the Dialectic of his *Critique of Pure Reason*. Still, the famous argument has come down to us through eight centuries—if my calculations are correct—since we are still thinking of it, and not even in a class of Philosophy, but of Rhetoric.

Permit me, or better, pardon me for presenting it to you briefly. I say *pardon* me because today we can speak of the quality of cheese from La Mancha, but never of God without appearing to be pedantic. “God is the perfect being—*ens perfectissimum*—for whom nothing is lacking. Therefore, he must exist because if not, he would lack a perfection: his existence as God. So a non-existent God, or to avoid misunderstanding, a *non-existing* God, would be a God that is not really God. And not even a dumb-bunny would think of that.” That is an impressive argument. Nevertheless, it does not convince you; because you are thinking with common sense—let's be clear, with the common sense of our time—that “if God exists He would be the completely perfect being we think of as God; but that would not be the case if He doesn't exist.” For you, the existence of God still has not been demonstrated, because you think that nothing lets you infer it based on the definition or the nature of God.

Notice, however, that the only thing you are doing is to oppose one belief with another and that, in this case, arguments are not important. Let's set aside the belief in God, which is neither of the two that enter into this debate. The ontological argument has been created by a faith in reason which you do not possess, a belief in the magical power of reason to know what is real, the Platonic belief in Ideas, in the being of which we *think*. The famous argument is not a proof: it claims to be—as we see very clearly in Descartes—a certainty. Opposed to this is your agnostic faith, a lack of confidence in reason, a belief that reason is more or less blind with regard to the absolute. In all metaphysical matters, even though they are placed in the realm of logic, there is always a conflict of opposing beliefs. Because, friends, everything is based on belief, no matter whether it is a belief in favor, or against. Nothing that is important is refuted or proven, when you change from one belief to another. Plato believed that the things we sense are more or less fuzzy copies of Ideas, which are the true originals. You believe the opposite; for you what is fuzzy and indistinct are the ideas. For you, therefore, there is nothing more original than a ball of cheese, a rose, a bird, or an enema. But you would give us an example of philosophical incompetence if you were to think that Kant had proven anything against the existence of God, or even against the famous argument. What Kant demonstrated, and only in part, if we take into account the totality of his work, is that he did not believe in any intuition except the senses, and in any existence except the spatiotemporal. But just think of all the great philosophers there are, both before and after Kant, who still have sworn by intellectual perception, the reality of ideas, the truth of what we think?

“*Universalis sunt nomina.*”

“In fact, that's what you believe.”

(OPP, pp. 430-432)

(TWO GREAT INVENTIONS)

The Platonic faith in transcendental ideas saved Greece from the *solus ipse* in which its fallacies would have confined it. Human reason is universal thought. Whoever reasons becomes aware of the existence of the other, of the necessity of dialogue, of the possibility of mental communion between human beings. [...]

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Platonism was a great philosophy—Mairena continues—but it was not sufficient to cure man's solitude. The one who dialogues certainly affirms the reality of the other, his neighbor; all reasoning—truths or suppositions—implies an agreement between different subjects, a common vision of an ideal object. But reason, the invention of Socrates, is never enough to produce human communion: this requires a feeling of togetherness, a convergence of hearts around an object of love. This was the achievement of Christ, a Promethean task and, in some ways also, a Satanic one. For my teacher, Abel Martin, Christ was a disobedient angel, a child who rebelled against the rules of his Father. Or to put it another way: Christ was a man who became God in order to

expiate on the cross the great sin of the Divinity. My teacher thought that in this way the tragedy of Golgotha acquires a new meaning and increased importance.

Christ actually rebels against the law of the God of Israel, the god of the race whose mission is to endure for all time. This is the God of Genesis whose only law is to engender and then to prolong the human race. In the name of this God of the proletariat they crucified Jesus, in the Judaic sense a son of nobody, an incarnation of the divine spirit, with no sexual mission to fulfill. Who was this son of nobody who never engendered anyone? All the blood inherited, all the semen spent, was it only to arrive at this! For this the children of Israel, with proletarian anger, turned against the son of God, the son of Man. The word of Christ works against the patriarchal sense of history.

If we eliminate from the Gospels the Mosaic dregs of society, the teaching of Christ is clear: "There is one Father of all who is in heaven." Here is the transcendental erotic object, the loving idea that establishes the brotherhood of man for all time. Filial duties? There is only one: an unconditional love for the Father of all, whose somewhat obscure image we all carry within our soul. Beyond that, are only virtues and brotherly duties. By the mere fact of being born, Christ establishes a permanent connection with the biblical Jewish concept of fatherhood. Like Socrates triumphs over the fallacy of Protagoras lighting a path that leads to the Idea, Christ triumphs over the erotic fallacy which limits the souls of the pagan world, by discovering another type of universality: that of love. These are the two great masters of dialectic who know how to question and then, wait for a response. They are neither charlatans or pedants. Charlatans and pedants are those who speak, but do not listen to themselves. But the dialectic of Christ is very different from that of Socrates, much more subtle and more enlightening. We will speak of it on another day when we discuss "Woman as an invention of Christ."

(Fragment of a speech of Juan de Mairena, known by his followers by the name of "Sermon of Chipiona.")

(OPP, 434-435)

(IN CLASS)

"Mister Rodriguez, do you remember what we said about intuitions and concepts?"

R: "That concepts are empty without intuitions, and intuitions without concepts are blind. That is, that there is no way of completing a concept without an intuition, nor of putting your eyes on an intuition without fitting it into a concept. But when intuitions are linked to concepts we have knowledge: a cavity that is filled and, at the same time, a blindness that sees."

M: "And do you see clearly what you are saying?"

R: "Yes, teacher, with a perfectly obscure clarity."

(OPP, p. 443)

XXIII

We live in a world that is basically apocryphal, a cosmos or poem of our thinking, which is ordered or constructed, based on the undemonstrated suppositions or postulates of our reason. These are principles of logic which are reduced to principles of identity which sum up everything, constituting a magnificent supposition: one which affirms that, by the mere fact of being thought, it remains unchanging, that is to say, anchored in the river of Heraclitus. The apocryphal nature of our world is proved by the existence of logic, by the necessity to make our thinking agree with itself and force it to see only what has been considered, with the exclusion of everything else. And, we might say in passing: the fact that our world is based on a supposition which may be false is something terrible, or consoling, depending on how you see it. But we will talk about that on another day.

(OPP, p. 461)

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Epicurus said we should not be afraid of death, because *while we are, death is not, and when death is, we are not*. With this convincing reasoning—Mairena said—we feel like we can jump over death like a bullfighter with the graceful agility of our thoughts. Nevertheless—and Mairena's *nevertheless* is always the strongest point of his reflections—this business of avoiding death is not as easy as it seems, not even with the help of Epicurus. Because when we jump over death like a bullfighter, death jumps right along with us. And bullfighters know that better than anyone.

(OPP, p. 464)

XXIV

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Without time, which is an invention of Satan—or what my teacher called “the creation of Lucifer during his fall”—the world would lose the anguish of waiting and the consolation of hope. Then the devil would have nothing to do. And neither would poets.

(OPP, p. 466)

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The art of prophesying the past has sometimes been called the philosophy of history. Very often, when we think about the past in order to find what it contains, we see an accumulation of hopes that have neither been dashed nor fulfilled, in short, a future that was the result of prophesy. In any case, the art of prophesying the past is a counterpart of art that is no less paradoxical than rejecting something which is to come, which is what we do when we renounce something we hoped for, wisely thinking of it like Jorge Manrique, as something which has already passed. Seen from another point of view, the art of prophesying the past is exactly the same as science, the art of foreseeing the foreseeable, that is, what can be foreseen or experienced, as it were. No matter how many times you try, you cannot escape the need to predict the future, even though you

renounce—and I advise you to do just that—being pessimistic, as well as the usurious attempt to avoid being mistaken.

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But that doesn't mean that you should be a prophet with the usurious habits of the moneylenders who regard the future as something you can buy for less than it is worth.

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You should never praise God too highly in your prayers. An impartial God demands justice, but rejects flattery. That we are not living in the best of all possible worlds is proven by the fact that we feel there is almost nothing which could not be improved. This is one of the most inadmissible or unmistakable truths that I know of. Because even though, as many suppose, the mediocrity of the world may be the result of the limitations or the weakness of our thick skulls, these thick skulls are also part of the world, and they will always contain something that could be improved. An absolute optimism does not seem acceptable to me.

But neither do I recommend an extreme form of pessimism. That our world is not the worst of all possible worlds is demonstrated by the fact that there is almost nothing which could not be made worse. But the proof of that no longer seems so inadmissible to me. Nevertheless, keep in mind that our moderate pessimism is also part of the world and we would have to worsen it to make it fit in the worst of all possible worlds. So an absolute pessimism is also not absolutely necessary.

(MAIRENA BEGINS TO EXPLAIN THE POETICS OF HIS TEACHER ABEL MARTIN)

My teacher said it is evident—whenever my teacher said *it is evident*, either he was not sure of what he was saying, or he was sure that someone that someone would claim the opposite of what he was saying—that human reason works contrary to the rich variety of the world; that it is always searching for a unitary principle, a principle that, by explaining everything, would relieve us from the confusion of our uncertainties. And so, on the one hand, we have our rational faith in things that are never what they seem, a faith in something we can't see, call it being, essence, substance, basic matter, etc., or on the other hand, a grand receptacle for wastepaper where the world of appearances ends up, including the heart of man. And although the charm which explains the attraction of this rational faith is pure nothingness, and reason never produces a single truth that can be grasped, its power of annihilation and destruction are truly worthy of astonishment... It is amazing how the miraculous power of our thought is able to penetrate the dense jungle of the material world, as if there were no jungle, and as if our thinking were the hollow cavity that this jungle occupies. Because describing the impressive power of the human intellect like an axe that is able to cut through a forest tells us nothing of its miraculous power, since there *is* no axe and no cutting, and the forest remains intact right where we thought it was. The poet has to marvel at the enormous power of thought, the universal egg—sometimes full, sometimes empty—and all this in less time than it takes for the blink of an eye.

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But the poet must give way respectfully to the philosopher, to the man of pure reflection, who is charged with finding a methodical explanation for the fundamental problems of human thought. The poet has his own metaphysics, that is, the inevitable poem of his beliefs with all its causes and its wonders. Poetic being—*on poietikós*—is not a problem for him; it is either revealed or it is hidden, but where it appears, it *is*. But nothingness—*la nada*—*is* a problem. What is it? Who made it? How was it made? When was it made? Why was it made? And the number of questions grows with the years, and not only do they appear in his intellect—that of the poet—but also in his heart. Because nothingness, as it has been said, is the cause of anguish. But for the poet, above and beyond everything else, it is the cause of wonder and amazement.

(OPP, pp. 492-493)

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When I finally reach—whenever it comes—the day
when I go to sleep in the shadow of your hand...

In this way my teacher expressed his fear, which was certainly not a desire nor a hope, a fear of dying and of being permanently erased from the light by the hand of God. Because my poor teacher experienced a painful agony, difficult and uncertain—he must have gone through a great deal when finally reached the point to which Manrique referred—when he began to doubt his own poetry:

On the Day—the uncreated light that sees—
before it arrives, if it does arrive...

and he was perhaps more interested in the Buddhist state of nirvana than the paradise of the righteous. The truth is that he blasphemed a great deal. At any rate, he must have finally been saved, judging by his final gesture, which was that of a person who accepts death calmly without whining or bellyaching.

But before the Day either arrives or doesn't arrive, with or without a capital letter, one must realize that not only is the problematic aspect of being created by *nothingness*, but that it is also necessary to work and even create with it, since it has been introduced into our souls very early, and there is scarcely a memory that doesn't contain it.

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Over the fountain a black bumblebee
passes by, buzzing as it flies,
where the little girls sing in unison
in the gardens of the lemon grove.
The hoarse voice of the grandfather
is heard over the bright voices,
a superfluous note of a violoncello
in the gardens of the lemon grove.

My teacher surrenders to the charm of the childish verses and even repeats them following the popular style. What gardens are those?

Within the four white walls
when the balcony door was closed,
through the parlors of hide-and-seek,
his low note sounds its alarm.

On the roof the heavy note of anguish,
is muted, motionless—asleep?—
and on the fresh green morning
a dream of childhood goes flying by...

(OPP, pp. 494-495)

(*INTERLUDE*)

It is useless—Mairena was speaking with a conservative friend during a gathering in a provincial café—to look for Felipe II in the pantheon of the Escorial, because there, there is absolutely nothing. This cult of death is repugnant. The past can only be found in the present; the dusty past is today's mud, or today's clay, if you prefer. Felipe II has not died, my friend. I am Felipe II!!! Don't you recognize me?

This anecdote, reported by one of Mairena's followers, explains the reputation for being a madman and a spiritualist which he had acquired during the final years of his life.

(OPP, p. 499)

(*MAIRENA IN CLASS*)

An atheistic communism would always be a very superficial social phenomenon. Atheism is an essentially individualistic belief; it is that of a man who takes his own existence as the evidence on which he bases a realm of nothingness outside of the limits of his ego. This man either does not believe in God, or he believes himself to be God, which amounts to the same thing. This man also does not believe in his fellowman, in the absolute reality of his neighbor. In neither case has he seen any proof of the *other*; he has no intuition of *otherness* without which one cannot pass from the *I* to the *you*. One of the profound teachings of all superior religions is that it is the excessive love of oneself that separates man from God. That he is separated from his fellowman is also implicit in this affirmation. Still, there are vital moments in history when man only believes in his own existence, when he attributes being only to himself. In these moments it is very difficult to accept the existence of God, and also the existence—in an ontological sense—of the man in the street. For this *self-made-man*, there is never a connection to the other. With this auto-sufficient monad you can never speak of communion, or of community, nor of communism. With what, or with whom, could this man ever share anything?

But when he reaches, because he *will* reach—in his way my teacher was also a prophet who was almost never accurate with his predictions—the inevitable downfall of his *solus ipse*, because man believes in his fellowman, the self in the other, the eye that he

sees in the eye that sees him, then there can finally be communion, and even communism. And from that moment on, God will be at his door. Then God appears as an object of loving communion that makes possible the community of human brotherhood.

Some of us—Mairena adds—dare to disagree with our teacher: “It has always been said that God is revealed in the heart of man, of every man, and that from this point of view a belief in God is essentially individualistic.” My teacher answered: “This has been said, and not without reason. But it is never stated in what way God appears, or is revealed in the heart of man. This is the serious, and terrible, question. When you read my book, *On the Essential Heterogeneity of Being* (with 1,800 pages of dense prose) you will begin to see this problem clearly. What you should realize, for the moment, is that any revelation in the human spirit—if by that you mean the intellect—is a revelation of the other, of essential otherness. This is the unknown—let us call it the *x*—that no one has solved, not because it is inexhaustible, but because it cannot be reduced to the quality and the essence of what we know, not like infinity differs from the finite, but like the *other* is opposed to the *one*, like the inevitable meaning of heterogeneous terms for which there is no common denominator. God is the *transcendent otherness* which we all see.

“*The hidden creator of our nothingness*, a God who turned His back, as it were, in whom we all are one, not spiritually but intellectually, the Aristotelian God of whom we say that He thinks of Himself because, in fact, we do not know what he thinks. But God revealed in the heart of man...” These words—Mairena says—are too serious to be discussed in a class of Rhetoric. Nevertheless, let’s let my teacher finish, because he was never a rhetorician and there was nothing he hated more than rhetoric. “God revealed or unveiled in the heart of man is a very *other* otherness, an *immanent otherness* which is something terrible, like looking too closely at the face of God. Because it is there, in the heart of man, where we touch and we endure the divine otherness, where God shows Himself simply by revealing Himself to us as a *You of everyone*, the object of loving communion that can never be an *alter ego*—superfluity is not conceivable as a divine attribute—but as the *You* who is *He*.”

(OPP, pp. 501-503)

XXXIX

According to my teacher, the Christ advised the powerful to be humble. When he returns, he will advise the humble to be proud. It’s always wise to change your advice. Don’t worry. If the Christ returns, his words will be more or less the same as those you already know: “Remember that you are children of God; that because of God you *are* someone, children.” But if you doubt a divinity that changes its position and its actions, I will tell you that you are poisoned by logic and that you lack theological meaning. Because there is nothing more appropriate for the divinity than repentance. When we study the Holy History we must define it as a history of the greatest repentances, to distinguish it, not from a profane history, but from Nature itself which has no history, because it is not accustomed to be repentant for anything.

“Imagine—my teacher Martin said—a theology without Aristotle, that conceives of God as a great consciousness of which ours is part, or to which—let me put it so that you can understand it—all of ours is plugged in. In this theology we will find nothing more essential than time; not mathematical time, but psychic time which coincides with our impatience, our poorly understood impatience, that others call anguish, with which we begin to realize the great nostalgia for *non-being* which *the Supreme Being* must feel. Or, as my teacher would say, the great nostalgia for the Other which is felt by the One. In this way we would attribute to the divinity a never-ending task, that of ceasing to be, or to become the Other, which would explain his eternity and, on the other hand, would seem less trivial than being the prime mover... So what does the listener think?”

“This theology—observed the listener—is unacceptable to me. I agree that this God who gave us time and remained outside it, or to put it another way, who is immobile and amuses himself by moving the world, is unacceptable. Because, in fact, if the world does not move itself, the most natural and acceptable thing would be to let it go on being motionless, according to its own nature. If that is not the case, it is obvious that the world does not need a mover. Up to this point, we’re in agreement. However, as for the rest, dear professor, a god who is totally immersed in time and, like us, who is obliged to live minute by minute with the knowledge that the task is never-ending, would be the most unhappy of his creatures. He would be a god—let’s put it so that our poor minds can grasp it—who would have an extremely ill-tempered disposition, like someone who was condemned to the galleys for his entire life. I don’t know, dear Professor, if we have the right to think of things in that way.”

“It is true,” Mairena replied, rather annoyed, “that in every pantheistic conception of reality—and that of my teacher definitely was one—there is something monstrous and repellent, and it is right that the Church has always condemned them. I used to say to my teacher that for much less they used to be burned in the flames of the Holy Inquisition. Fortunately, today the Church doesn’t take very seriously any blasphemies against Aristotle. Nevertheless, I advise you to think seriously about the matter, so that it doesn’t catch you off-guard when you find a metaphysics that comes from somewhere and that borders on a theology, a theology that is basically secular. Then, if this happens, you will have something with which to oppose it, or something to approve in it, and you will not be like those eternal monkeys of the magic lantern in matters of transcendence.

(OPP, pp. 530-531)

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If we are doubtful about the appearance of the world and we regard it as the veil of Maya which hides the ultimate reality, it would be of little help if the veil were rent in order to show us that ultimate reality. Because, what is there to assure us that the newly uncovered reality is not another veil to be rent again and uncover another, and another?... To put it another way, the illusion of the world may always be with us within the most real of all the worlds. However, no one can keep us from believing something different; namely, that the veil of appearance even multiplied to an infinite degree, veils nothing,

that behind what is apparent nothing appears, and that therefore it is that, the appearance which is the only reality. In other words, we may have a belief in the reality of the world in the most illusory of worlds. The world as illusion, and the world as reality are equally improvable. It is not impossible, therefore, to think of a paradox where both the thesis and the antithesis can be proved and whose lack of agreement, in the final analysis, leaves us with the principle of contradiction. In this case the principle of logic does not apply; only that of doubt or misgiving. What is disturbing here is not to think one thing and then the opposite, thanks to the excessive use of reason, but the vacillation between two contradictory beliefs

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Those of us who maintain that a creation *ex nihilo* would be impossible both for theological as well as for metaphysical reasons, do not therefore refuse to accept a creative God who is capable of achieving that miracle. Because, just as great as it would be to make the world out of nothing, is the act which my teacher attributes to the divinity: that of making nothingness out of the world. Meditate on that topic, because we are approaching the end of the course, and it is now time to consider questions of certain importance as we prepare to spread our sails and navigate through the seas of thought.