

AL-GOUWANIYA
OR
THE PHILOSOPHY OF INWARDNESS

Introduction :

How unjustly have people treated philosophy in our time! Some have rejected it in the name of religion, on the pretext that there is nothing outside the traditional revealed truths. Others have dismissed it in the name of science, presuming that there is nothing beyond quantitative values and experimental data. Moreover, pseudo-philosophical doctrines have been mistaken for genuine philosophy.

Philosophy worthy of the name is both reason and feeling; it rests equally on science and on faith. But this does not mean that it admits everything without first making a minute examination, or that it rejects every belief that cannot be proved rationally.

Philosophy holds a middle position between the two opposed attitudes. As Maine de Biran said, 'Between the two extremes stands true philosophy, which takes the human spirit such as it is, wholly and without mutilation. Philosophy, or the science of wisdom, fixes the limits of reason and does justice to belief.'

Philosophy cannot go beyond human consciousness. Consciousness is a sort of light, an interior revelation. It exists at various levels. It is at the same time intellectual, religious and moral. Hence the great philosophers, from Plato to those of the present day, naturally agree on the three great truths: the existence of God, the spirituality of the soul, and the innateness of the moral law. In human consciousness, there are many levels of existence and degrees of perfection. While the empiricists only

consider the lower degrees, that is, the senses, the rationalists only consider those higher degrees which are in the realm of ideas.

Old Manner of Thinking :

On previous occasions, I sketched the essential traits of what I have called "*Gouwaniya*," or Philosophy of Inwardness. For more than ten years I have continued to publish, in Arabic, several studies dealing with different aspects of this philosophy, not counting a whole work in which *al-Gouwaniya* embraces the domains of language, literature, religion, ethics and art. Here I should like to attempt to present, in few lines in English, the main points of this new doctrine.

This expression I have chosen to designate a manner of thinking which seems to me to remain constant, from the moralists of ancient Egypt, through the writers of the sacred books of India (notably the *Bhagavadgita*), the works of Plato and of the Stoics, up to the Gospels and the *Qur'an*. As for the name *Gouwaniya*, I have borrowed it from a tradition of our Prophet, which says, literally: 'Every human being has a *gouwani* and a *Barrani*—that is, an inward (being) and an outward (being); God perfects the outward being of him who strives to perfect his inward being, and God corrupts the outward being of him who corrupts his inward being.'

Gouwaniya is a philosophy which tries to see people and things from a spiritual angle. In other words, it tries to see the invisible world, by not being limited to the visible. It seeks the inward being, not stopping at the outward; it penetrates the interior after having observed the exterior. Briefly, it always fixes its attention on the state of the soul, on value, essence and spirit—in a word, on what is beyond the appearance of things, words, senses, phenomena and accidents.

Beyond Appearance :

Certainly I shall be expected to explain this abstract terminology. Let me leave that aside for the moment, in order to present two anecdotes,

borrowed from an Arab authority, which will, I hope, give an idea of what I mean by inward vision. It is said that Socrates, seeing one day a corpulent and important-looking man, said to him: 'You who are before me, speak to me so that I may see you!' Socrates undoubtedly meant. . 'Speak so that I may see whether you have reason and taste.' But otherwise, his question is taken to mean: 'Have you a personality, or does your reality not go beyond this mass that I see before me, that eats, that drinks, that amuses itself, that looks on men from above, then dies and becomes the dust we trample on? Is it on this level only that you evolve? Or have you, besides that, a soul which has faith in God, a reason provided with experience and wisdom, all the things which make you worthy of being a man in the full sense of the word ?'

The other anecdote is about an Arab Caliph, who going to a pleasure-party with some of his ministers, took with him a game of chess. While the players were leaning over the chess-board, moving the chessmen, they saw a man of magnificent presence coming towards them. The Caliph at once abandoned the chess-board and took care to seat himself as became a Caliph. The stranger joined the group, and the Caliph began to ask him questions with intention of finding out the extent of his knowledge, but he could get nothing out of him. He then asked him questions touching on the Qur'an, and the history, manners and customs of the Arabs, but still he got nothing out of him. Then, with a rapid gesture, the Caliph returned to the chess board and addressing his ministers, said with a smile, 'Gentlemen, continue the game now, for there is nobody with us!'

It is clear from these anecdotes that both the Greek sage and the Arab Caliph had the habit of seeing people through an inward (gouwani) vision; that for them the value of a man resided, not in his appearance but in his essence, not in his material possessions and his handsome physical aspect, but in 'his heart and his tongue'. The Qur'an well expresses this profound meaning in the verse: 'It is not at all the flesh and blood of your offering which lead to God, but your piety.' (22:37). Again: 'The hypocrites (among the Arabs) said: 'We have faith.' say to them: 'You have not

faith, but you have simply embraced Islam, while faith has not yet entered into your hearts?' Many traditions, attributed to the Prophet emphasise this opposition between the inward and the outward vision. For example : 'God does not look at your faces and your wealth, but he looks at your hearts and your actions.'

Consciousness and Automatism :

I now go back to the philosophical explanation of Al-Gouwaniya. In this respect Maine de Biran is of great help. He says that there is much difference between knowing a truth through our intelligence and having it always present in our soul. By this the philosopher meant to distinguish a truth we have learnt from one which we have lived and which has filled our hearts, in the same way as we ourselves distinguish a prayer consisting of words and gestures produced mechanically, from a prayer which is an invocation to God and which protects us from all evil, and as we distinguish fasting as abstinence from doing harm to other, whether by words or by deeds. The same applies to things we say or do without being conscious of them: they differ greatly from the things into which we put all our hearts. Thus for me, Gouwaniya is a synonym for consciousness, while barraniya is a synonym for automatism.

Gouwaniya also implies a sort of metaphysic that we may call the metaphysic of conscious vision. It is evident that this vision is not sensible physiological vision; but it is an inward psychological vision, or what Plato called 'vision with the eyes of the spirit'. In this conscious human vision is shown our wisdom, our experience and our reflective thinking, as the artist Hamid Said has well shown in his theory 'on seeing a natural object.'

In wanting to obtain a really metaphysical consciousness of persons and things, that is, to know them in the light of interior principles, and by a sort of intuitive synthesis, the philosophy of Gouwaniya adopts the distinction made by Bergson between two very different ways of knowledge: the one being the way of the inward vision, penetration by the spirit, by

intellectual sympathy; the other being the way of exterior vision, effected by using the testimony of the senses or by applying logical analysis alone. To take an example from Bergson: consider the difference between the knowledge that one could have of a town from a multitude of photos taken from all possible positions, and the knowledge one would have of the same town if one lived in it, loved it, and enjoyed roaming about it. Photography from certain positions always remains imperfect, and never gives the inward sense of the original.

Metaphysical thought is essentially a reflecting consciousness of the relation between mind and existence. It is incontestable that the aim of metaphysics is to lead to knowledge. But an effort of meditation must be made in a sort of spiritual solitude. The first step in metaphysical thought, therefore, consists in going beyond appearance. If metaphysical speculation stopped at simple observing and registering, it would abandon its original task. True metaphysical speculation, must have as its end the realization of a vision of things, penetrating beyond the phase of phenomena and reaching their inward essence. Contrary to the procedure of logical analysis, inward metaphysical speculation brings us closer to the human world. For, existence is not a datum, or something imposed, but is made concrete for us by the assent we bestow on it and the value we attribute to it. And it acquires the characteristics of consistency and inwardness by this same bestowal and evaluation.

That is why for me Gouwaniya is also a synonym for freedom. For, freedom must not be sought in the possession of objects like wealths, honours and comfort. If we really wish to find it, it is in our soul and in our spirit that we must look for it, that is, in something absolute and autonomous, namely consciousness accompanied by comprehension, the faculty of judging according to clear and distinct reasoning, and sometimes even the power of suspending all judgment—such is the meaning of the freedom which I have found in the stoic philosophy.

Gouwaniya and Freedom :

I have found this same inward freedom in the Cartesian ethics, which aims at establishing the mastery of the soul over the passions. The tranquil, thinking self rises above the perplexed and changing temperament and remains firm in the face of misfortune and adversity; sure of itself, self-sufficient, and proud in feeling that, by its inwardness, it is in an impregnable fortress. However, the Cartesian sage does not live in an ivory tower, or in a cell far removed from mankind; he is a 'generous man', and as such, after having unveiled the mysteries of nature, he tries to master it. Once he has developed his consciousness, he deepens his knowledge of his relations with the universe. Having recognised the true value of things, and having detached himself from all that is exterior and vain, nothing prevents him from plunging into the world, to enjoy it legitimately, and to be able to offer aid and affection to his fellow-men.

The Moral Law :

I have also found this freedom well represented in Kant's idea of the moral law. For him, the moral law is wholly inward and a *priori*, that is to say, preceding and conditioning all experience, not being derived from the exterior world. Our will, when it acts morally, is not driven by an exterior motive such as pleasure, interest or sentiment. Being autonomous, it is, itself, the source of its own sovereignty and independence. Kant's political philosophy establishes this inward freedom in international relations, in a manner which has no parallel in the history of political thought. It affirms the right of all peoples to shape their own destiny; it opposes all attempts to impose tutelage on them: for the state is not a thing to be appropriated, or a merchandise to be bought or sold; it is a free human community, by the very fact of its humanity, consequently, no one has the right to impose his authority on it.

The Task of Gouwaniya :

Everyone is aware that the crisis of the modern world arises from the supremacy of outward tendencies over inward aspirations. And we may

say that the immediate causes of this painful situation reside in the fact that, 'the muscles of politicians have become stronger than their hearts'. During the last world war the world was profoundly shaken. Then, hardly had humanity begun to breathe, and to hope for some relief after the years of agony, than she found herself compelled to seek the means to avoid a new universal catastrophe. I believe that the real refuge for the suffering humanity is to think and act in a way that goes beyond the temporal, to attach itself to the eternal. Here lies the prime task of Gouwaniya, which does not lose sight of the duty which Plato assigned to the *Philosophia perennis*, namely to be the 'Guardian of the City.' Hoping to win to itself all men of goodwill, Gouwaniya tries to bring back to our atomic age—the age of historical materialism and of logical positivism—the ideal that men have lost at the moment when it is most necessary for them; viz., faith in God and attachment to the dignity of man.

