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A faded, circular portrait of William Blake, showing his face and upper torso. He is wearing a dark coat and a white cravat. The portrait is centered on the page.

William Blake & The Perception of The Real

by

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*Master 1, Parcours « Recherche ».
Sous la direction de Denis Bonnecase*

*Piping down the valleys wild
Piping songs of pleasant glee
On a cloud I saw a child.
And he laughing said to me:*

*Pipe a song about a Lamb:
So I piped with merry cheer,
Piper pipe that song again-
So I piped, he wept to hear.*

*Drop thy pipe thy happy pipe
Sing thy songs of happy cheer,
So I sung the same again
While he wept with joy to hear.*

*Piper sit thee down and write
In a book that all may read-
So he vanish'd from my sight,
And I pluck'd a hollow reed.*

*And I made a rural pen,
And I stain'd the water clear,
And I wrote my happy songs,
Every child may joy to hear.*

William Blake

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Introduction

William Blake was an exceptional man. He was always radiant and profoundly grateful for being alive, for having the privilege of witnessing existence, he was accomplished in his every-day life with his wife, hard-working and uncomplaining he has *“done work enough for three men’s lives of strenuous talent and spirit”*¹. He died in August 1827 with a smile of satisfaction on his face, gladly leaving this material world for his deserved house of “Eternal Delight”. William Blake had always been sincerely and profoundly reverent before the benevolent nature of existence and was therefore naturally, divinely gifted for Art. He faithfully followed and explored his intuitive religious sensibility in his creations, considering Art as a path to salvation, as a divine mission, as a way of leading a virtuous life on Earth; *“To him, [...]all faith, all virtue, all moral duty or religious necessity, was not so much abrogated or superseded as summed up, included and involved, by the one matter of art. To him,[...] it seemed better to do this well and let all the rest drift than to do incomparably well in all other things and dispense with this one. For this was the thing he had to do; and this once well done, he had the assurance of a certain faith that other things could not be wrong with him.”*² In order to be in harmony with his soul, and to realize his spiritual inspirations and aspirations in his mortal life, he wrote poetry, engraved, painted, and even combined these arts in “illuminated books”. And to express his infinite creativity, he had to invent, he had to craft personal art-forms, capable of containing an echo of the divine songs he heard, a reflect of the sublime visions he saw. Creating was to him a divine duty, a holy mission, his absolute role as a mortal being. To Blake, Art was the way to allow the “Poetic Genius”³ - his individual creativity and *“spirit of prophecy”*⁴ - to freely and fully express itself through him. Considering the Bible in particular, and mythological writings in general, as “The Great Code of Art”, as men’s first historic attempts to represent sincerely and symbolically their inner

¹ Swinburne, *William Blake, A Critical Essay*. “Life & Designs”, p.80.

² Swinburne, *William Blake, A Critical Essay*. “Life & Designs”, p.86.

³ William Blake, *All Religions Are One*, “Principle 1st”:

“That the Poetic Genius is the true Man and that the body or outward form of Man is derived from the Poetic Genius. Likewise that the forms of all things are derived from their Genius, which by the Ancients was call’d an Angel & Spirit & Demon”

⁴ William Blake, *All Religions Are One*, “Principle 5”

religious feelings, their profound intuitions and inspirations, he professed that “All Religions Are One”, that any myth but derives from another as any myth derives from the imagination. Religions and myths are, for Blake, but a representation of the same innate and immanent (subconscious) source: the “Poetic Genius” of the Universe, expressing itself in the human mind through the faculty of imagination. *“The Religions of all Nations are derived from each Nations different reception of the Poetic Genius which is everywhere call'd the Spirit of Prophecy”*¹ With such a free approach of the religious spirit, of God, of the nature of myths, of Art and the “sacred texts”, he could freely develop his own mythologies: integrating, blending and extending Christian and Celtic ones (mostly) into his own inspired creations, according to the codes of his own Art-forms, which he claimed to be “divinely dictated”. Swinburne writes in his magnificent essay on Blake that myths are “clothes” to his mysticism, they are temporal and material bodies for his immaterial and immortal imagination. *“There are two points in the work of Blake which first claim notice and explanation; two points connected, but not inseparable: his mysticism and his mythology. This latter is in fact hardly more in its relation to the former, than the clothes to the body or the body to the soul.”*² Blake was a prophetic artist, a true mystic³, solidly grounded and continually evolving in his own imaginative knowledge, in his instinctive understanding of the Universe. He had indeed a really personal and intuitive sense of religion, of spirituality. He considered any “mysticism” or “spirituality” as an innate and instinctive approach of reality. God, to him, *is* accessible to the human consciousness through the faculty of imagination, through the intuitive capacity of artistic contemplation (which is profoundly alive in children). Art was the only way, for Blake, to realize and express fully this faculty of imagination, the spontaneous means to represent the “Poetic Genius” of the Universe. As we will see, this term, “Art”, has to be treated with care when dealing with the words and world of William Blake, for this notion appears to be both extremely wide and imprecise if we attempt to define it according to Blake’s mind, and absolutely simple in its raw conception, in itself. To Blake Art certainly cannot be boiled down to the traditional arts. It cannot be grasped by the rationalist’s mind, nor can it be explained in any empirical way by any sort of scientific or intellectual observation. Art, being to him any spontaneous expression of the “Poetic Genius” in the material world, extends therefore to most of Life’s spontaneous, intuitive or “inspired” deeds.

¹ William Blake, *All Religions Are One*. “Principle 5”

² C.A. Swinburne, *William Blake, A Critical Essay*. p.104.

³ Salvador Dali defines the mystic as « *celui qui, au détriment de tout ce qui l’entoure, systématise une seule et unique idée obsédante, l’idée de Dieu* » during his famous 1966 interview at the Meurice Hotel in Paris.

Art is the faculty of life-forms to adapt creatively to their milieu: any life-form harmoniously and ingeniously evolving, adapting to the events in the context of its Life, is acting “under the influence” or direct inspiration of the “Poetic Genius”, and is “artistic”, “beautiful”, “poetic” to Blake, because it expresses through this poetic, or divine inspiration, the spontaneous and permanent qualities of the Universe such as equilibrium, self-assurance, self-realization, autonomy, freedom, constancy, which are the very qualities of Beauty, and therefore the constituents and the subject-matter of Art. The “Poetic Genius” is the energy allowing and driving Life-forms to act artistically, that is to say, beautifully and beneficially in their relationship to the world. Thus Art, or the activity of the immaterial and permanent “Poetic Genius” in the material world, can be seen everywhere, in a tree ingeniously spreading its branches to reach sunlight, in a representation of it, in a flower blooming or in men’s talks and tunes, in any virtuous or beautiful deed, human, animal, mineral, vegetal, in any Christ or Buddha, any song or mantra.

Art, being to Blake the spontaneous realization of the immaterial genius of the Universe in the material world, contains in itself the values of Beauty. Human Art therefore, or “conscious Art”, must follow this model, it must not be speculative, or convincing, or defending any particular creed, it must be powerfully self-confident, self-containing, self-realizing, self-existent, selfless, independent and autonomous, Art has to embody its poetic soul for its *own* sake - the sake of the “Poetic Genius” - the form must be the subject of the substance, regardless of the cultural preferences. For Blake, artistic creations have to contain their substance, their soul, in themselves, by themselves, they must be but its body, and embody through their forms its values. The “subject” of a particular artistic creation must not appear through deduction or interpretation: it must not speak about beauty, ingeniousness, or compassion; it must be beautiful, ingenious and compassionate, it must not speak about God; it must be God’s word, directly whispering to the observer’s ears the sacred meaning of life. Art must not “speak about” the Universe, it must be the actual voice of the Universe, its genius channelled into an Art-form. So Blake’s artistic creations are built for their own glory, they exist for themselves, they contain their own values. Blake has breathed a soul into them and they have a life of their own, they live only to express this essence through their material form, through the bodies Blake carefully crafted for them to proudly stand as living manifestations of the “Poetic Genius”, as temporal representatives of its permanent qualities.

*“Re-engraved time after time,
Ever in their youthful prime;
My designs unchanged remain,
Time may rage but rage in vain.
For above Time’s troubled fountains,
On the great Atlantic mountains,
In my golden house on high,
There they shine eternally.”¹*

As we can clearly feel in the tone of this excerpt, the principle of “L’art pour l’art” – *Art for art’s sake* – later formulated by Teophile Gautier, was inherent in the Art of William Blake. It is therefore a necessary artistic aspect to grasp when dealing with his works. We have to realize and accept that his creations have their own energy, their own life, their own temporal decaying body like any mortal life-form, but, above all, they contain their own essence, their own permanent soul like any life-form, and this energy is their *raison de vivre*. They are not built to please or convince but built to be the best possible representation of their poetic soul, that is, the artist’s unique Imagination. So, to approach Blake’s mind one must accept his system of artistic representation: one must not question his symbols, make empirical parallels with what they represent in other’s men’s minds, but read “as children” would do, faithfully and credulously; accepting his words and hearing them rather than analyzing them, one must leave them free to speak for themselves. (We will eventually explore a bit further this artistic principle through the “vortex principle” of the American imagists like Ezra Pound or Williams Carlos Williams). Through Art, William Blake subtly melted his material experience of existence, his sensible life, with his immaterial experience of it, his imaginative life, and by this process deeply developed what could be referred to as “irrationalist knowledge”: he understood the ins and outs of existence (certainly more accurately and clearly than any scientist or cosmologist) through imagination rather than through reason; spontaneously rather than empirically. He saw in symbolic things literal truths, no relative (*rational*) truths, but actual and absolute qualities of the Universe. *“I must*

¹ William Blake, *A Vision Of The Last Judgement*

Create a System, or be enslav'd by another Man's. I will not Reason & Compare; my business is to Create."¹ And this creative and intuitive way to acquire knowledge, to understand the world through the immanent "Poetic Genius" structuring its material laws, this constant concern in consciously realizing the infinite fullness of reality in any instant, beyond the simple sensible perception of it, is the fulfillment and ultimate goal of the religious spirit. This is Blake's lifelong and heroic effort. This is the theme of this *mémoire*. I will attempt to explore, through the study of Blake's life, Art and faith, why a "cleansing of the doors of perception" needs to be achieved by man, individually, and how it can be done. We will try to understand Blake's unalterable faith in the awakening of "the true man", and analyze how man, according to him, can free himself from his contradictions and disorders, which haunt him since he falls down cyclically from his wild and innocent eden-like state, for probably more than 10.000 repetitive years. I will do my best to express how profoundly Blake believed that "undoing the Fall" was possible for man, how firmly he was persuaded that man could be the true man again, "the cosmic man"². To him, man ought to wake up from his repeated nightmare, he ought to clean up his conditioned mind and free the creative imagination, the innocent emotions from the cage built and languaged by experience in memory. We will discuss at length this spiritual strife between innocence and experience, between imagination and reason, and explore how man encloses himself in rationality, in the known, in the illusory sense of self. Through this work we will attempt to understand how the modern man is led to develop a fear of the unknown, of his death, that makes him blind to spiritual life, and why he is so utterly lost, so afraid to accept his mortality and comprehend the sense of his existence. Generation after generation man feels enclosed, enchained to his decaying body, blind to the inner lights of his unique sensibility, blind to his creative soul, because he is blinded by the veil of material things around him, blurred by his senses, his desires, and engaged by his memories in a dim mortality where all existence is reduced to matter, death and finiteness. Blake knew that man could liberate himself and wake up from this nightmare through an inner artistic revolution bringing about an unconditional psychological liberation, opening man's eyes to the "totality" of the Real, "as it is, infinite", beyond its material dimension, much like a child would faithfully and naturally look at the world.

¹ William Blake, *Jerusalem*

² William Blake, *Vala or The Four Zoas*

How does Blake succeed in building, through his Art, a coherent system of innocent and religious appreciation of the world, aiming at the absolute psychological liberation of man, that is opposed to any sort of cult, doctrine or ritual, against any moral or rational law? How can irrationality, innocent emotions, individual imagination and natural instincts tame our despotic intellectual minds, our experienced egos reasoning constantly, computing blindly? How can Art, according to Blake, save man from the chains of sensible illusion and allow him to realize the infinite goodness hiding behind the tiniest phenomenon of ordinary existence?

To answer these essential questions, I will avoid any classification of Blake's works according to any philosophy, teacher, religion, or branch of spiritual or artistic sensibility. I will speak in my own voice, as a sincere admirer of Blake, melting my simple feelings for his Art to my studies of Blake's scholars. Those I tried to list in the bibliography accompanying this work. To avoid taking any party but the one of Blake's spirit, I will do my best to present the views of Blake's scholars in their relationship to my personal approach of Blake's Art, rather than as substitutions of my own voice. I won't be absolutely neutral, and I don't pretend to any objectivity because I have, as anyone in contact with Blake's Art, a personal and subjective relationship with his works. I don't mean that I derive any personal or "speculative knowledge" from William Blake's Art, this would be *rationalizing* his works and breaking to pieces the unity of his Art. I will try not to alter his convictions. *"This it would be folly to expect of a biographer; [...]to branch off from the straight pathway of his teacher and strike into a small speculative track of his own. But a biographer must be capable of expounding the evangel of his hero, however far he may be from thinking it worth acceptance. [...] Consequently their critical remarks on such specimens of Blake's more speculative and subtle work as did find favour in their sight have but a narrow range and a limited value."*¹ I will try to present Blake's Art with respect, without altering its "poetic soul", but necessarily, I will have to highlight what "did find favour in my sight" to illustrate as clearly as possible the afore-mentioned questions and themes, even if it has "but a narrow range and a limited value."

¹ C.A. Swinburne, *William Blake, A Critical Essay*. p.106.

To understand Blake's approach of the perception of the Real, the ins and outs of our organs of perception, the trap of the senses, the possible liberation through the "Poetic Genius" and the Imagination, to show how Blake had a profound understanding on human psychology, how he precisely and dutifully analyzed all the antagonistic aspects, forms, and forces of existence, the deep-seated troubles of man, and his possible emergence through Art as the absolute imaginative man, as "the true man" or "cosmic man" permanently aware of the illusion of materiality, it will be essential to dedicate at first some time and some lines to the life and faith of William Blake. This topic has been extensively treated already, and I will not add anything new. I will simply highlight the aspects of his life that will help us to go into such questions as "the Real" and its "total" perception. The first part of this work will be dedicated to this biographical point. Then only, when we will know better about Blake's life and ideals, we will be able to go into the very question of the possible "cleansing" of our senses through Imagination: the access to a "true" perception of the Real. In this respect, I will attempt to explore how Art and imaginative life, according to Blake, can be considered as a path of liberation from the fetters of material life, as an intuitive way to embrace the totality of reality and realize its infinite beauty.



(William Blake, *Glad Day*)

William Blake: The Man

A Romantic Heart And A Mystic Mind

Physically today, most of what has been produced by the passage of William Blake on this earth is lost. It has been vastly worn and driven away by the winds of time. Most of his paintings, engravings and texts, can't be found anymore. It is so partly because of the misreception of Blake's genius in his lifetime. Unjustly, he was often considered a lunatic by the "moral men" and "social elites" of his time, and was generally seen as a heretic by the followers of the Roman Church. These apparently ignorant audiences could not accept his audacious and unconditional liberation from the oppressive fetters of material and moral law, he was too free for them, too self-confident in his faith, too exuberant, too exalted and happy to live to be a good and gloomy "moral Christian", to be a dim and grey "respectable Englishman", to become an obscure conformist and an obedient citizen as defined and celebrated by the old and "refined" 19th Century ruling men. His opposition to the industrialist, rationalist, materialist and moralist currents of his Time, Locke, Voltaire, Rousseau, and all those "enlightened" sects of science and reason they represented, played a major role in the literary and ideological boycott to which he was a victim. The light of William Blake's consciousness was too bright. It blurred the rational minds and made dim in comparison the lights of the *siècle des lumières*. The cultural and political elites of his time indeed, hound-dogs and watchdogs of the "Age of Reason", did not want him to be remembered by his time, they did not want to acknowledge his genius, nor his clear and pristine perception of Reality, nor his remarkable understanding of the dualistic strife of a mankind lost in mortality, in between spirit and matter, in between spiritual aspirations and material delusions. He was generally hated by the "intellectual fathers" of his time, by those rationalist tone-givers, because he threw himself into his Art, claiming that to see the world as it is, to be free from pre-conceived ideas and illusions, we all ought to denounce and renounce the false comforts and horrors of materiality, and to realize that this illusion is strengthened by the rationalist spirit, stone-after-stone built by the despotic Urizen (*your/reason*), which

represented to Blake the false god (of man's making) of material oppression compelling men to feel enclosed in their decaying body, to be constantly terrified by their imminent death, blind to the inner and infinite radiance of Life. Clearly to him, "*Science is the Tree of Death*" and "*Art is the Tree of Life*"¹. Such a faith was hard to maintain in a time when the rationalist, "urizenic" view of the world was widely celebrated, and overwhelmingly propagated. (It is still so today). He who ardently attacked this systematic and rational view of Life could not be but misreceived by the majority of intellectuals of his time. William Blake was too divinely inspired, too much an absolute free-thinker to be culturally accepted as a prophetic artist, as a profound benefactor and a clear-sighted humanitarian. There are also, sadly, other detestable facts, inevitably related to detestable individuals, which participated in the inestimable loss of his works. One noticeable event, highlighted by Yeats in his introduction to *The Poems of William Blake*, happened right after Blake's death. Catherine Blake who survived William for only two years, took care to leave her husband's unpublished manuscripts in "safe hands" so that they could have a chance to live a bit longer than her ageing body. But the hands into which she left this treasure proved to be less "safe" than she expected... It was indeed these very hands, the ones of Mr. Tatham, that put William Blake's entire literary remnants to the fire only two days after he received them. Even though such a terrible deed arouses anger and a profound feeling of injustice, we should not, as Yeats justly notes, express any regret: "*Blake himself would have felt little anger, for he had thought of burning his manuscripts himself, holding, perhaps as Boehme held, and Swendenborg also, that there were many great things best unuttered within earshot of the world.*"²

We do not know much about Blake's life & arts finally, few are the physical remnants from his genius that have not been eroded by Time and the stupidity of men, but nevertheless, we all can clearly feel his admirable temperament in any mark or spot of his presence, his constant integrity is obvious, absolute and unprecedented, in his works or in men's talks or texts about him, his faith, his self-assurance, his strength like thunder strikes, his energy like sunlight shines. His conviction that his works were the fulfillment of a divine mission elevates his "human Art" to the range of "immortal Art". Burnt or not, his "*designs unchanged remain*", their essence, Blake's poetic soul, is immaterially, immanently and permanently alive. So, as disciples or admirers or students of William Blake, seeing through the illusory

¹ William Blake, *Laocoön*

² W.B Yeats, *The Poems of William Blake*. "Introduction", p.xlix

veil of materiality, and knowing that “*over time’s troubled fountains*” his Art & energy “*shine eternally*” in their “*golden house on high*”, we should not regret the loss of his works as advised by Yeats, but rather should celebrate what is still accessible to us, for any remnant from him, the tiniest as well as the largest, any product of his genius, gives us access to the infinite fullness and liveliness of his spirit. Any work contains it in itself. Any poem, song or prophecy, is but an embodiment, an incarnation of Blake’s poetic soul, a mere “body to clothe the soul”. Any artistic creation of Blake contains in itself Blake’s entire soul, for it actually *is* a unique expression of the unique psychological values and physical skills that he possessed as a man. So we should not apprehend his Art through empirical comparison of his different works, or through systematic structuralization of his myths and mythological figures because, as Swinburne warns, we would risk to derive personal knowledge from his works, thus disrespecting the principle of “Art for art’s sake”. Blake’s works can be appreciated for what they are, but not as a personal guide to salvation. Again, Blake wants us to read as children would do. He wrote poetry so that “*every child may joy to hear*”, not that “every adult may strive to understand”. And through this fresh and innocent perception of his Art only, Blake’s spirit will remain entirely alive in the reader’s mind and speak plainly into his ear. His “spirit of prophecy” can only now be living in other men’s mind, in *our* minds, men of today. His works are the keys he graciously gives *us* to unlock in *ourselves* a door opening on his own immortal and poetic spirit. Blake mindfully gives us the keys allowing our individual minds, our individual consciousnesses, to be directly tuned to his own immortal spirit. His Art is the radio of his spirit, constantly and generously displaying itself into the minds of those “hearers” tuned to the right station. Thus, anyone “cleansing” his door and leaving it opened, with the help of Blake’s artistic keys or not, can merge with Blake’s entire spirit, he can clearly hear Blake singing his songs for him. “*Blake held there were listeners in other worlds than this. He knew, despite the neglect and scorn of his time, that fame even upon the earth would be granted to him, and that his work was done, for the Eternal Powers do not labour in vain.*”¹

Art was “not really of this world” for William Blake. He would rather consider it to be a gate or an access to non-measurable, non-rational realities. Art was to him the medium of

¹ Yeats, W.B, *The Poems of William Blake*. “Introduction”, p.xlix.
Interestingly, Allen Ginsberg claims to have heard William Blake reciting to him in plain voice “Ah! Sunflower”, “The Sick Rose”, and “The Little Girl Lost” in 1948, as he was contemplating at the sky through the window of his studio in Harlem.

expression, the “voice” of the subconscious and imaginative dimensions, of the transcendental entities, it was the voice of the Infinite, the hub of its genius, and the channel into which it could find expression in the physical world¹. Works of Art had to Blake a life of their own, they had their own soul: the “Poetic Genius” in them. His creations were not really *his*. What they contained, what they stood for was much larger and much more universal than his subjective life as a human being, they were expressions of the divine, marks of the infinite glory of God. He could not consider himself “master” of his works, he was rather their servant, the servant of Art, the knight of the “Poetic Genius”, the mortal messenger of the heavens, a courageous artisan making his best to build a stable bridge between a material Earth and an ethereal Paradise. He lived through his Art, and for his Art, he gave himself entirely to it, so that Art could live through him and nourish him. It is certainly because of this strength he held in faith and labour that he has finally been acknowledged by men. And probably because of his deep-seated mysticism too, because of his profound goodness and compassion, because of his unprecedented ideological and literary enthusiasm so solidly grounded in a sublime exuberance. Because of all these features he was later considered by generations and generations of Romantics an ideological and literary “father”, a precursor. The immense artistic creativity he showed to represent his vivid mystic Life influenced immeasurably the whole world of literature. “Romantics”, “Pre-Raphaelites”, “Beats”, “Modernists”, are but a tiny portion in the list of men’s minds in admiration for his Art or simply wondering at Blake’s frequent talks with transcendental entities, with God and his old friend Satan. Blake’s influence is immense, his positive impact on mankind is immeasurable. He has made up keys to open men’s door to their own imagination, he has given man, through the gift of his Art, the keys unlocking the door of psychological freedom in the wall of matter and mortality, the keys unlocking the door which opens on the divine nature of existence.

If Blake has finally been remembered and celebrated like a prophet after his death, it is because he obviously led an admirably virtuous Life, because he *is* a light in the darkness of human civilization, brightly shining its immense faith and love for Life. He had clearly a romantic heart, constantly trying to act divinely, rightly, to please God consciously, through the gift of his person, of his talent, of his precious time as a mortal. “[...]he commemorates the manner of his work ‘under the direction of messengers from heaven daily and nightly, not

¹ Art”, referring to a vast, non-rationally-understandable notion, will be written throughout this mémoire with a capital letter. I consider it to be a proper noun.

without trouble or care'; but he writes in private and by pure instinct; he speaks only by the impulse of confidence, in the ardour of faith. What he has to say is said with the simple and abstract rapture of apostles or prophets; not with the laborious impertinence and vain obtrusion of tortuous analysis. [...] 'I see the face of my Heavenly Father; He lays His hand upon my head, and gives blessing to all my work. Why should I be troubled? Why should my heart and flesh cry out? I will go on in the strength of the Lord; through hell will I sing forth His praises; that the dragons of the deep may praise Him, and that those who dwell in darkness and in the sea-coasts may be gathered into His kingdom.'"¹ Blake, obviously, had an absolute faith and assurance in his Art, in his genius; his works were, within himself, acknowledged by God as useful and inspired. Thus he gladly satisfied his soul's purposes in his Art, he completed his divine mission, and accomplished his transient life on earth by crafting Art forms. He could not therefore be afraid of death, he "was in Paradise" all day would say his faithful and admirable wife, complaining ironically about his tendency to be "away" from her all day, even if physically present. William Blake was so profoundly involved and immersed in his artistic and spiritual life, he was working so hard, giving so much of his time to artistically represent the glory of God, that he could not but be satisfied of his life on Earth, he could not "have done more", he pushed the limitations from his mortal body as far as he possibly could, to the brim, to be as industrious and creative as he possibly could. *"The great and sleepless soul which impelled him to work and to speak could take no taint and no rest in this world. Conscious as he was of the glory of his gift and capacity, he was apparently unconscious how noble a thing was his own life. It was natural to him not to cease from doing well or complain of faring ill, as it is natural to a soldier not to turn tail.[...] He did not ask for more of meat and drink, more of leisure or praise; he demanded only such recognition as might have enabled him to do more work and greater while strength and sight were left in him."*² Blake himself, often claiming that excesses of humbleness can only lead to lack of self-assurance and self-reliance, once said: *"I have written more than Voltaire or Rousseau,[...]six or seven epic poems as long as Homer, and twenty tragedies as long as "Mcbeth"... I write when commanded by the spirits, and the moment I have written, I see the words fly about the room in all directions. It is then published, and the spirits can read."*³ Blake in his quotidian artistic duties, these "missions ordered by spirits", instinctively followed his intuitions, his subconscious Inspiration, he channelled the "Poetic Genius" of the

¹ C.A. Swinburne, *William Blake, A Critical Essay*. "Life & Designs", p.45, 46.

² C.A. Swinburne, *William Blake, A Critical Essay*. "Life & Designs", p.64, 65.

³ W.B. Yeats, *The Poems of William Blake*. "Introduction", p.xl.

Universe through “spiritually-guided” poetic explorations based on his religious sensibility and his enormous artistic creativity. He devised and crafted ingenious processes to represent his extraordinarily-developed imaginative Realms. His prophetic Art had the capacity to plunge and immerse his readers into the vivid visions and high-pitched chants of the angelic children he continuously conversed with. He was passionate, sensitive, in Love with the world, with his wife, with the flowers and the wind, with any mark of the presence of the Creator.

“Swedenborg had said that the old world ended, and the new began, in the year 1757.”¹ Our clear-eyed and beloved prophetic artist William Blake coincidentally came into the world that very year, during a bright day of November. Not accidentally though, and throughout his Life, he never ceased to consider and perceive this world as an ever-new & fresh Mother, an always evolving reflection of a continuously inspired Father. *“[...]in his system Eden came again when the old theology passed away.”³* He had indeed, since he was but a little child, a profoundly intuitive and visionary³ faith in the actual nature of Life, an absolute and unconditional certitude about the profound benevolence of existence, an absolute and unconditional acceptance of the mysterious *“game of the actual pingpong of the abyss”²*, a total confidence in Life and Death inseparable and cyclical co-evolution, and in their fearful interdependence. Strengthened by this deep faith in the good nature of existence, rooted in an intuitive and imaginative approach of the world, he was truly a mystic in temperament: sincere and absorbed in his emotive and imaginative life, and therefore profoundly opened to the spirits of all life-forms. He was forever an innocent child in his heart, and in his mind a responsible man, not having “the vanity to speak of himself as the only wise”³, for he had the rare capacity to understand and accept his duties and limitations of mortal being. He indeed constantly made his best to allow his experience of life to be useful to him in the present, but not to harm him. To do so, he had to consciously be the master of his Reason (of his intellect and memory) rather than its slave, so that Urizen does not alter, direct and dissect his spontaneous, innocent, and imaginative experience of Life, he had to be the master of his

¹ W.B. Yeats, *The Poems of William Blake*. “Introduction”, p.xii:

“In later life he called the seeing of visions being in Eden; and in his system Eden came again when the old theology passed away.”

² Allen Ginsberg, *Collected Poems*. “Howl”, part. III

³ *“I have always found that angels have the vanity to speak of themselves as the only wise”* writes Blake in *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*. Plate.21.

nerves, of his emotions and of his instincts too, throughout his life. (We'll discuss more extensively in the second part Blake's principle of "The Four Zoas", the four mental forces in man). William Blake has always been "an imaginative boy". And thanks to his belief in the importance of imaginative Life, which he kept alive throughout adulthood, he was constantly steeped in the dimensions beyond the reality of the senses. Blake, through his "cleansed" perception of the Real, contemplated the essences into which all material-life spiritually bathe. William Butler Yeats in his introduction to *"The Poems of William Blake"* underlines interesting facts about Blake's childhood: " 'God put his forehead to the window'; and Blake, being but four years old, set up a scream. [...] he strayed later on into the fields at Peckham Rye, and passed a tree full of angels, their bright wings shining among the boughs. There is record, too, of his finding Ezekiel sitting one summer day in the open fields, and of his being beaten by his mother for bringing home so unlikely a story.'"¹ As we can clearly see here, Blake's interest in perceiving beyond the sensible experience of reality had been spontaneous in him from the early stages of his life. The power of Imagination has always been his privileged medium to transcend the dim reality of the senses, "a door" in the wall of matter, allowing him to experience Reality beyond its material side, beyond its perishable nature. It is natural, instinctive in him. And this intuitive "religious concern" in transfiguring the material realm, in realizing consciously " *the miracle, moment by moment, of naked existence*"² and experiencing the infinity, the holiness of every instant, beyond the illusory finiteness of things, is to me Blake's major source of artistic inspiration and emotional strife. He was inhabited and obsessed day and night by the metaphysical forces structuring the material world, Love, Hate, Attraction, Repulsion, Creation, Destruction; he saw in them the material world and saw them in material things. Physical forms were to Blake but the allegories, the temporal houses for these eternal energies to live and evolve in. His imaginative eyes were constantly transfiguring the material reality around him, beautifully and smoothly revealing its inner essence. What is celebrated in his artistic creations *is* what he saw as the true nature of reality: the spirits, the energies things contain in themselves, the permanent forces maintaining and driving existence.

¹ W.B. Yeats, *The Poems of William Blake*. "Introduction", p.xiii.

² Aldous Huxley, *The Doors of Perception*. p.7

A Free Thinker And An Artistic Genius

To keep his faith intact and instinctive and not to have his fresh perception of Life crooked and dried out by the institutionalized eye of Religion, Blake was extremely careful with his interaction with Christianity, the major human religion. He acknowledged the myths and mythical figures of the Bible as “inspired”, he highly respected them, and considered the “*Old & New Testaments*” to be “*The Great Code of Art*”¹. He would always acknowledge the Bible as an immense source of inspiration and knowledge, even considering himself a christian. But he was body and soul opposed to any sort of religious institution, fiercely refusing any cult, sect, priest, church, code or moral law. If Blake “considered himself a christian”, it was only because he felt that his personal experience and understanding of life fitted well with his **personal approach** of the figure of Jesus Christ in Biblical Art.

*“The Vision of Christ that thou dost see,
Is my vision’s greatest enemy.
Thine is the Friend of all Mankind,
Mine speaks Parables to the blind.
Thine loves the same world that mine hates,
Thy heaven-doors are my hell-gates.”*²

The common and generally-accepted approaches of Biblical myths in fact, and any institution based on moral or cultural interpretation of the Bible (Jewish, Christian, and most of their affiliated branches, churches, groups, sects), evidently did not fit with Blake’s unconditionally freed consciousness. He could not stand their moral laws. To him the divine powers were not “out there” judging mortal deeds, but rather “in there,” within the individual. The infinite power of God, to him (in the lineage of Renaissance artists like Michelangelo, Da Vinci or Raphael), *lies* within the individual, in his uniqueness (spiritual and physical). “God designs us to design reality”³. Free agency, the individual capacity to evolve rightly and to become a perfect living thing, is the power of God within us. Blake wrote “*God is Jesus*” in his

¹ William Blake, *Laocoön*

² William Blake, *The Everlasting Gospel*

³ Timothy Leary, « *How To Operate Your Brain* »

Laocoön. He saw in Christ the figure of the divinely accomplished man, the imaginative and creative man who realizes and embodies the genius of God, the “Poetic Genius” in his individual life, who acts and evolves through the harmony between his unique bodily talents and his unique soul’s values (spiritual identity). “Realizing Jesus Christ in our individual life” meant to Blake finding out and establishing, in the instant, the inner harmony between spiritual, subconscious predestination and material, conscious free-agency. Jesus Christ was to him the symbol of the man whose Four Zoas (Imagination, Reason, Emotions, Instincts) are in perfect harmony; he embodied total freedom of mind, total freedom from moral and mortal law, and an absolute openness to the holy spirit of God. *“I still (and shall to eternity) embrace Christianity, and adore Him who is the express image of God”*¹ said Blake. Jesus was to him the figure of the man who realizes, manifests, and expresses God’s genius spontaneously, artistically, in any action, in any instant. *“Christ was his symbolic name for the imagination, and the tomb of Christ could be no other than a shelter, where imagination might sleep in peace until the hour of God should awaken it.”*² God, to Blake, is not the theist’s “god of this world”, it exists outside all mental conceptualization, it is the absolute source of all Life, of all Inspiration, and it can’t be named, by nature. It is “not of this world”, it is not living or dying, but it *is*, a permanent and divine energy housing and maintaining Life, pushing minute manifestations of itself, individual and unique souls, to evolve temporarily through space in individual mortal bodies; it is “The Way of things”³. It *is* by itself, languages and symbols cannot designate it or approximate it rightly, it *is* beyond thought, beyond reason, it can’t be defined. This reality beyond thought, mysteriously and mistakenly called “God”, can only be realized and experimented through the faculty of Imagination according to Blake, when the human mind is absolutely silent, non-thinking, non-reasoning, when all the sensuous attaches to existence, spatial and temporal, have disappeared, and when consciousness is limited to pure awareness of its specific inclusion within the field of existence. To apprehend Reality beyond thought, one has to be ready to leave all that one knows, ready to leave his subjective

¹ C.A. Swinburne, *William Blake, A Critical Essay*. p 40

² W.B. Yeats, *The Poems of William Blake*. “Introduction”, p.xviii.

³ Lao Tzu, *Tao Te Ching*. London: Penguin Books, 1963, “Book One”, p. XXV:

*“There is a thing confusedly formed,
Born before heaven and earth.
Silent and void
It stands alone and does not change
Goes round and does not weary.
It is capable of being the mother of the world.
I know not its name
So I style it ‘the way’.”*

human life away, ready to die in any instant. “God” is the unknown, “and the unknown is Love”¹, it is all that is beyond the known. One should therefore be “*Free from The Known*”² by accepting that “God” is not knowledgeable, that it can’t be recollected by memory or language, which are but by-products of the intellectual dissection of reality by Urizen. Any word used to name or design this divine energy of Life, again, is by nature imprecise, because an impermanent and relative thing like a word cannot contain in itself a permanent and absolute reality like “God”. What the word “God” actually attempts to stand for is beyond all the conceptualizations included and displayed by this word. Language is imprecise but I’m using it, so I’ll deliberately use the word “God” in two different ways in the present work: a lower-case letter for the theists’ divinity, “god of man’s making”, and a capital one for “the One that can’t be named or spoken about”.

William Blake, because of his religious and ideological freedom, because of his opposition to any form of material or moral law, because of his exuberant way to proclaim and assert his relationship with God and his frequent talks with angels or other transcendental entities, was commonly considered as a heretic to the Christian moral, a rebel to any kind of Pharisaic law, a lunatic among the lunatics, “a partisan of the Devil”. As Swinburne notices in his essay on Blake, the prophetic poet was before all antitheist, against “*the god of this world*”³, against “the god of man’s making and worship”, “the god of man’s word”. The latter is a jealous god, made up of mental projections of fallen men’s disorders. Such a god is, to Blake, the product and the prison of men’s illusions and delusions, he is an invisible moral law-giver. And this god is propagated by most religious institutions.

*“The God of this world, louder rolled
[...] And in his hand the scourge shone bright:
[...] And thus with wrath he did subdue
The serpent bulk of Nature’s dross,
Till he had nailed it to the cross.
He took on sin in the Virgin’s womb,*

¹ Jiddu Krishnamurti, *On God*

² Jiddu Krishnamurti, *Freedom from the Known*

³ C.A. Swinburne, *William Blake, A Critical Essay*. p.22:

“*the God of this world is a thing of this world, but the Saviour or perfect man is of eternity, belonging to the spiritual life which was before birth and shall be after death.*”

*And put it off on the cross and tomb,
To be worshipped by the Church of Rome.”¹*

Blake in this excerpt of *The Everlasting Gospel* makes it clear that the fact of God, and the ideal of Jesus and “the perfect man”, should not be apprehended according to any religious institution or clerical interpretation of the “sacred texts”. The fact of God then becomes a despotic idea of Law, where “the creator” becomes in the mind of men “the moral ruler of this world” rather than “the divine benefactor”. God’s brightness through false faith becomes dim, and is mistakenly seen as enlightened again by the crooked and corrupted codes of Religion. *This* represents to Blake false faith, indoctrination and deviation from intuitive religious sensitivity. For Blake, one shouldn’t embrace religious teachings at all, their laws and morals, their definitions of good and evil, prophesized pharisaically, that is to say, self-proclaimed as true and absolute, for they divert the individual away from his instinctive and imaginative appreciation of “the divine powers”, and therefore from his absolute free-agency and liberty. Interpretations of the Bible deviate men away from their spontaneous reading of it. This concept is provocatively expressed in Blake’s “Proverbs of Hell” from *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*: “*The road of excess leads to the palace of wisdom; [...] The tigers of wrath are wiser than the horses of instruction; [...] Prudence is a rich ugly old maid courted by Incapacity[...] One law for the lion and ox is oppression.*” False faith, the worship of a culturally-accepted god or transcendental entity, is illusion. And this institutionalized illusion, in Blake’s days, was culturally and linguistically imposed in most systems of education in the western world. Religious institutions worked hand-in-hand with the rulers’ institutions. It is the same in our modern times, but on a lower-level I suppose. Worshipping, believing, brings only division in man. Division between man and God, division between man and nature, division between man and society, division between men. False faith brings forth all these external divisions because it creates an inner division in man; between his inner religious sensitivity and the outer culturally-accepted one. “*Under the shadow of this tree of mystery, rooted in artificial belief, all the meaner kind of devouring things take shelter and eat the fruit of its branches; the sweet poison of false faith, painted on its outer husk with the likeness of all things noble and desirable; and in the deepest implication of barren branch and deadly leaf, the bird of death, with priests for worshippers [...], finds house and resting place. Only in the ‘miscreative brain’ of fallen men can such a thing strike its tortuous root and bring*

¹ William Blake, *The Everlasting Gospel*

*forth its fatal flower; nowhere else in all nature can the tyrants of divided matter and moral law, 'Gods of the earth and sea', find soil that will bear such fruit.'*¹ The goal of any institutionalized religion is to force man to abandon his intuitive relationship with God and the world, to disconnect him from his intuitive understanding of the nature of existence, so as to create a codified relationship with reality, based on moral and physical regulation, referred to in Swinburne's essay on Blake as "*'the black cloud' of sickness, malady of spirit and body inflicted by the church-keeping 'angels of Providence' who have driven away the loving train of spirits that live by innate impulse*"². All the religious institutions in Blake's mind, are but a systematic, codified restriction of one's moral and physical liberty. They aim mainly at replacing men's instinctive moral structures by culturally-established ones. Swinburne again, speaking of a "*growth of error*" in man, denounces the illusions brought by false faith and presents them as strengthened by the moral laws of the religious institutions "*through soft sophistries of pity and faith, subtle humility of abstinence and fear, under which the pure simple nature lies corrupted and strangled; through selfish loves which prepare a way for cruelty, and cruelty that works by spiritual abasement and awe.*"³

To make God's Genius manifest in one's life, Blake understood that one has to cultivate his uniqueness, his individuality, one has shape powerfully his own opinions on the actual world, one ought to be a free-thinker, and Blake was one, uninfluenced culturally, uncorrupted morally, seeing the world through his personal interaction with God only, acting according to his view of Christ as being the perfect, imaginative man, and constantly trying to be this "true man" again by constantly perceiving the world through his imagination. If Jesus was the figure of the "perfect man" to Blake, it is because, as he repeatedly makes clear, he never hesitated to disobey the culturally and traditionally-accepted norms and codes of behaviour, because he dared to disobey the so-called "laws of god", the moral laws of religion, in order to intuitively follow the divine commands he heard within himself. He did not follow any god "of the earth and sea" but the voice of God within himself. William Blake, too, had this rare faculty of keeping his intuitive views on the world fresh and unaltered by the socio-cultural context. "*where others dealt by inductive rule and law, Blake dealt by assumptive preaching and intuition*"⁴ He had also, indeed, the capacity to firmly follow, and enthusiastically, exuberantly express his prophetic message in a world not really willing to listen to it. His views, as we have seen, were radically opposed to the main ideological currents of his time.

¹ C.A. Swinburne, *William Blake, A Critical Essay*. p.121

² C.A. Swinburne, *William Blake, A Critical Essay*. p.144

³ C.A. Swinburne, *William Blake, A Critical Essay*. p. 120

⁴ C.A. Swinburne, *William Blake, A Critical Essay*. p. 149

The rationalist, self-asserted “enlightened spirit” represented to him a dangerous foe to Imagination and the mystic comprehension and contemplation of Reality. He firmly stood against industrialism, skepticism, capitalism, science, prudence, and any other rational product of civilization, of the so-called “progress”.

To express this confidence he had that man *is* naturally free from the chains of moral and material law, “the chains of Urizen”, to express his faith in the possibility to be, body & soul, free from Tirzah, “*the mother of the perishing body and the daughter of the ‘religion’, which occupies itself with laying down laws for the flesh; which, while pretending (and that in all good faith) to despise the body and bring it into subjection as with control of bit and bridle, does implicitly overrate its power upon the soul for evil or good, and thus falls foul of fact on all sides by assuming that spirit and flesh are twain, and that things pleasant and good for the one can properly be loathsome or poisonous to the other*”, Blake had to find a way, to invent a form containing his message. He had to craft adequate “clothes” to fit the unsubstantial “body” of his understanding. And to succeed in this attempt he instinctively turned to Art, feeling that it was the only proper way to represent and express fully his spiritual creed. “*Poetry, Painting, and Music, the three powers in man of conversing with Paradise which the flood did not sweep away.*”¹, he said. It is clear to Blake, Art is the instinctive capacity in man to “converse” with spiritual entities, Art is the innate way to realize and express the genius of God in one’s Life, it is “the Tree of Life”. It is not a culturally-built fancy or faculty, Art is inherent in man; this “power which the flood did not sweep away” is not worn away or altered in any way by Time. Man, as long as we keep track of him, as early as in prehistoric, pre-civilizational times, has always been an artist. Man has always felt compelled to represent what he experienced and understood of Reality; in his Eden-like state, that is to say when he was a wild and “pre-historic” man, as well as in his Fallen condition, that is to say in his continuous “civilizational nightmare”, still today repeating itself cyclically. Man indeed has always attempted to express in his actions, through Art, his respect and his admiration for the benevolent “Poetic Genius” of the Universe. Blake understood this clearly, and he profoundly felt in his heart that “*nothing is pleasing to God except the glad invention of beautiful and exalted things.*”² So Blake worked body and soul for Art’s sake, not for men’s thirsts but for the glory of God. Such was his holy mission. And

¹ W.B. Yeats, *The Poems of William Blake*. ‘Introduction’, p.xxviii

² W.B. Yeats, *The Poems of William Blake*. ‘Introduction’, p. xxxiv.

to “please to God” as much as he could, he ingeniously devised his own “inspired” printing methods and developed an incredible personal craftsmanship, resulting in unique artistic creations, never realised or thought of before. His famous “illuminated books” are a good example of his unprecedented creativity and of his mystic Inspiration. They are certainly the best possible “clothes” he could craft to embody his immaterial and intuitive understanding of Existence. To make manifest his “spirit of prophecy” and realize his “divinely inspired” artforms, Blake had to constantly channel the immanent “Poetic Genius” in his mind by contemplating imaginatively ordinary phenomena.

*“O Autumn, laden with fruit, and stained
With the blood of the grape, pass not, but sit
Beneath my shady roof; there thou may’st rest,
And tune thy jolly voice to my fresh pipe.
[...]
Sing now the lusty song of the fruit and flowers.*

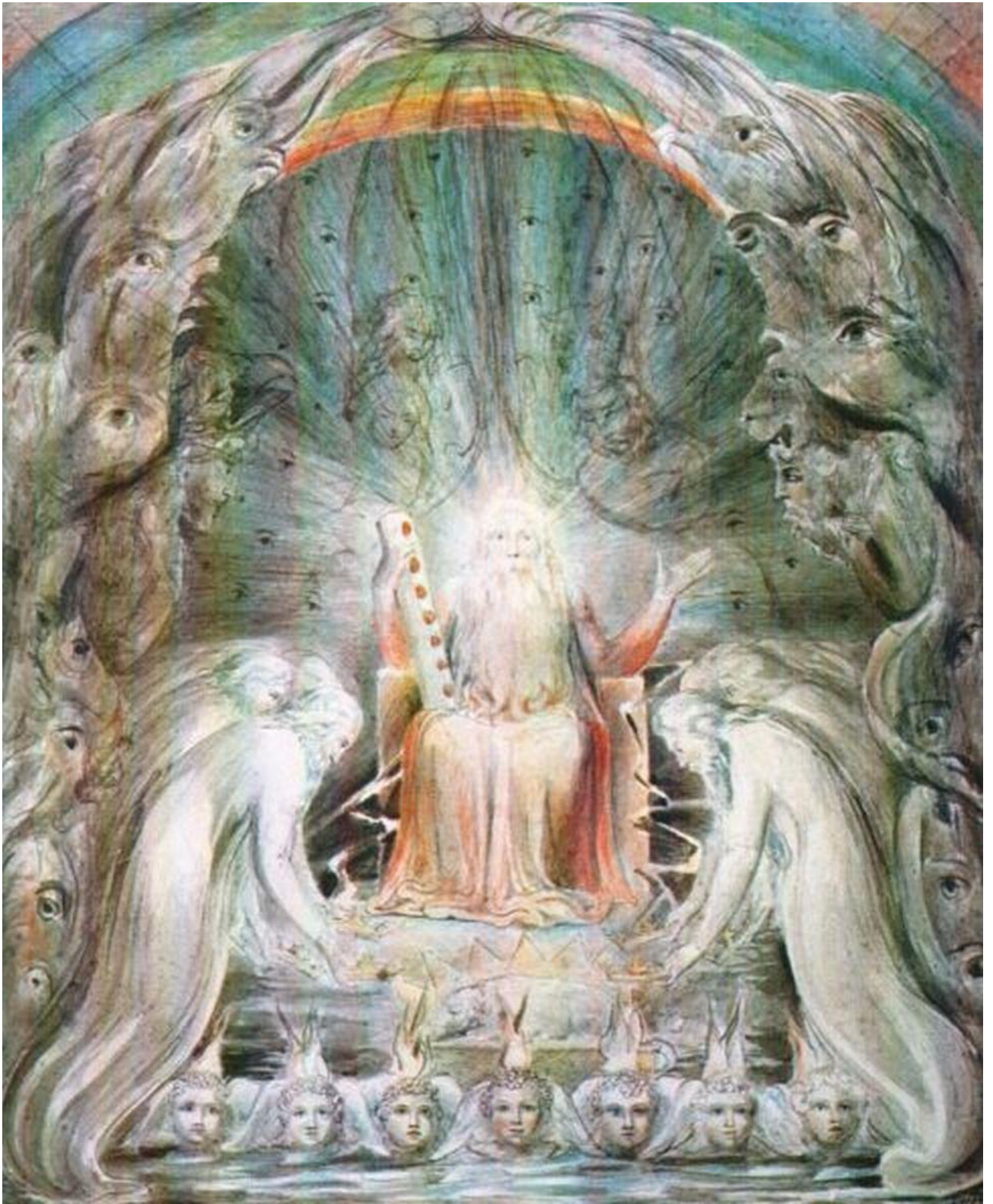
*‘The narrow bud opens her beauties to
The sun, and love runs in her thrilling veins;[...]’ ”*

In this poem it is not Blake who directly speaks but the “Poetic Genius”, that is, the **Autumn’s “voice”** who sings **through him**. This vision of Art can remind of Gautier’s doctrine of “l’art pour l’art”, into which any artform has to humble and defend itself, and does not need the artist’s voice. His artistic creations, as we have seen earlier, and as it is embodied in this poem, have a life of their own, they exist for their own glory, for the glory of the “Poetic Genius” living through them. Thus Blake’s artworks are containing in themselves the qualities of the “Poetic Genius”, they *are* a “spiritual vortex” taking the reader right into the realities of this Genius, making him merge with it. The perceptive experience of actually looking at his works *is*, “in action”, a performative mystic experience, for it attunes the observer’s soul to the energy, to the spirit contained in the work. It transcends the senses. This “vortex-principle” I am referring to is a concept of the Imagists, a branch of American Modernism best-embodied by the poems of Ezra Pound or Williams Carlos Williams, who in fact, connected the Western principle of “l’art pour l’art” to the Eastern philosophies and aesthetics, discovering in these schools an immense artistic and linguistic freedom. Daoist Art

and philosophy, Zen and Tibetan Buddhism represented to them guiding lights profoundly needed to satiate the western world's thirst for artistic and religious liberation. The Imagists indeed, and later on Beats such as Allen Ginsberg or Gary Snyder, celebrated the oriental schools' "horizon of representation"¹, into which Art was seen as a direct performative experience of the actual nature of Reality. They (especially Pound and Ginsberg) saw in the Art of Blake a similar attempt to refresh the use of western language and enlarge its "horizon of representation". They considered him as an artistic bridge to this eastern wisdom.

Whether Blake was aware of this possible affiliation or not is not the point. But the fact that his genius seems to match other mystics' voices seems to mean that even though "there is no path to Truth" as says Krishnamurti, wisdom *is* universal and great minds *are* converging. I profoundly think that to all the "great minds", to all those geniuses that come across the History of mankind, Art is considered as a religious medium, as a performative spiritual experience possessing the power to mirror Life's beauty and transcend the human senses and mind. They understood that Art could dissolve its spectators into a "pictorial vortex" driving out of the rational illusion of mortality and bringing back into the very essence of immortal Life.

¹ Wai Lim Yip, *Diffusion of Distances*



(William Blake, *The Seven Spirits of God*)

William Blake: The Soul

*“If the doors of perception were cleansed every thing would appear to man as it is, infinite.
For man has closed himself up, till he sees all things thro’ narrow chinks of his cavern”¹*

For William Blake, the “cleansing” of perception and the restoration of “true vision” is the result of an unconditional psychological liberation. Therefore, before going into the question of this “artistic salvation”, we will have to study closely Blake’s views on the nature of the human mind and comprehend fully the mechanisms of perception: what makes perception possible, who perceives, and what is to be perceived.

“The Human Form Divine”

Let us take the case of man. Each man has an individual body. This body is made of the very elements that compose the environment into which it is born, it is a portion of its material biosphere. Yet, man is not only a bunch of elements, he is not only made of flesh, and he is not entirely controlled by cells and tissues: there is in the human body “something” animating that body and living through it. This allows man to have a consciousness, an awareness. This immaterial energy animating the human body is the soul², and any living individual has a unique soul. Each soul is a unique miniature image of God, it possesses its whole characteristics (DNA for scientists), it is a reflection of the “Poetic Genius” of the Universe. *“As all men are alike in outward form, so (and with the same infinite variety) all are alike in the Poetic Genius.”³* What is commonly called a “body”, finally, is the material incarnation of a soul. *“Man has no Body distinct from his Soul for that call'd Body is a*

¹ William Blake, *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, plate 14.

² This is the word I will use all along this work to name this energy, regardless of the never-ending debates about the “true” significance of this word.

³ William Blake, *All Religions Are One*

portion of Soul discern'd by the five Senses, the chief inlets of Soul in this age."¹ The body of any life-form is a unique expression, a unique *embodiment* of the same one source of Life. Thus any living man, having a unique soul, has a unique body. And more than maintaining life and structuring the human body, this individual energy in the image of the "Poetic Genius", the soul, experiments through the body what is outside the body. It is sensitive to the material environment into which the body is born. What allows the soul to experiment life through the human body, as Blake writes, are the five senses. These senses are not only constituting a "screen" through which the soul can perceive sensible reality, but they also establish, in combination with the brain and the nervous-system, a "control panel" for the soul to articulate the body and select the information projected by the senses on this "screen". This "control panel" is the mind. The mind is the seat of the soul within the body. It is the soul's tool to regulate the flood of informations captured by the senses, it is the soul's tool to control the senses' focus. It is the body's operating-center. As a reaction to the overwhelming influx of information continually captured by the senses, the mind is designed to allow the soul to focus on specific practical information, like potential dangers. If a tiger, hidden in a bush behind you, is suddenly jumping at you, obviously considering your body as his lunch, it is necessary for you to be able to focus on this very situation in order to react and save your life, rather than contemplating the overall colours and listening to the sounds of the forest. The mind is a genetic product of the evolution of man, an essential means of survival that has been acquired through "natural selection". "[...]the function of the brain and nervous system and sense organs [the mind] is in the main eliminative and not productive. Each person is at each moment capable of remembering all that has ever happened to him and of perceiving everything that is happening everywhere in the universe. The function of the brain and nervous system is to protect us from being overwhelmed and confused by this mass of largely useless and irrelevant knowledge, by shutting out most of what we should otherwise perceive or remember at any moment, and leaving only that very small and special selection which is likely to be practically useful. According to such a theory, each one of us is potentially Mind at Large. But in so far as we are animals, our business is at all costs to survive. To make biological survival possible, Mind at Large has to be funnelled through the reducing valve of the brain and nervous system."² The mind is a "valve" reducing the "cosmic awareness" of the soul, of the "Mind at Large", to a "mortal awareness" of the practical information concerning the survival of the body. And to regulate the soul's awareness and reduce it to a

¹ William Blake, *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*

² Aldous Huxley, *The Doors of Perception*, p.10-11.

controllable sensuous perception of the outside world, the mind, our “control panel”, is structured by four mental forces, four axis of regulation of perception, four channels of the soul, that Blake names “the Four Zoas”: Imagination (“Los”, the mental capacity of creative treatment of the sensible information), Reason (“Urizen”, the mental capacity of comparison, of rationalization of those pieces of information), Instincts (“Tharmas”, the intuitive, practical treatment of the sensible information) and Emotions (“Luvah”, the soul’s degree of involvement in the treatment of those pieces of information).

To him, it is clear: man has progressively lost the equilibrium that naturally exists between his mental forces. The “true man”, as Blake names man in his original condition, has fallen into an altered state of consciousness, in which he is no more able to perceive the real “as it is, infinite”. Modern man’s use of the mind is not balanced, it is dominated by Reason, which reduces all perception to “*the ratio of known things*”. By allowing man to consider phenomena in their relationship to past experience, Reason also refrains him from appreciating them for what they are in the instant, innocently.

*He who bends to himself a joy
Does the winged life destroy;
But he who kisses the joy as it flies
Lives in eternity’s sunrise.*

*If you trap the moment before it’s ripe,
The tears of repentance you’ll certainly wipe;
But, if once you let the ripe moment go
You can never wipe off the tears of woe.¹*

An abusive use of Reason “traps the moment before it’s ripe” and locks man up in the sphere of the known, of the finite (in the past sensible experience of material life), it drives him to reject the unknown, the infinite (his spontaneous imaginative experience of spiritual life) and therefore to be blind to his divine nature (the soul in him), to feel enclosed in his body and mind, shrunk in his mortal form, “*till he sees all things thro’ narrow chinks of his cavern*”.

¹ William Blake, *Opportunity*, from ‘*Ideas of Good and Evil*’

To Blake, when one Zoa attains dominion over the other mental forces “Eternal Unity” is lost, the mental balance is disturbed and the human body loses its harmonious cohabitation with its soul; the soul cannot correctly carry on its “divine mission” within the body and the perception of the real becomes altered. Such is the “falling” condition of modern man. So before finding out how to “undo the fall” and regain this mental equilibrium - resulting in the restoration of “true vision” and in the regeneration of the divine nature of man – it will be necessary for us to analyze in details this “fall”, this misuse of the mind causing man’s soul to perceive reality through the prism of Reason. If we want to discover how to dismantle our mental cage and achieve mental freedom, we must first study closely how that cage is built.

As we have seen, Blake profoundly believed that man’s mind is originally balanced. The “true man”, in his words, is reasonably imaginative and emotionally instinctive. In this original state, the biblical “Eden”, the four Zoas are perfectly balanced: Reason balances Imagination, Instincts balance Emotions, and this harmonious mental dynamic allows a perfect adaptation of man to its milieu, for the mental “screen” is clean, and the soul can perceive rightly and fully through the senses. This perceptual and mental harmony enables the “true man” to have “*no notion of moral fitness*” and to be but “*a natural organ subject to Sense*”¹. In this state there is no good, no evil, but divine impulses. Man’s soul perceives rightly through the senses, and man sees things “as they are, infinite”, intuitively following God’s “Sense”. But as Blake underlines, man has “fallen” from this state because he has lost this mental harmony; the “control panel” has been messed up: the mind, perception’s reducing “valve”, is dominated by Reason and man is led to perceive a crooked image of the real, rational, utilitarian, materialist. “*Experience must do the work of innocence as soon as conscience begins to take the place of instinct, reflection of perception; but the moment experience begins upon this work, men raise against the conventional clamour of envy and stupidity. She [reason/experience] teaches how to entrap and retain such fugitive delights as children and animals enjoy without seeking to catch or cage them; but this teaching the world call sin, and the law of material religion condemns: the face of ‘Tirzah’ is set against it in the ‘shame and pride’ of sex. [...] And thus those who live in subjection to the senses would in turn bring the senses into subjection; unable to see beyond the body, they find it worth while to refuse the body its right to freedom.*”² As Swinburne powerfully writes here, the fallen

¹ William Blake, *There is No Natural Religion*

² C.A. Swinburne, *William Blake, A Critical Essay*

man, misusing his mind, loses the essential balance between experience and innocence, between Reason and Imagination, and begins to perceive things through their material and utilitarian side only, with the eyes of 'Tirzah' which can only see the mortal dimension of reality. This mechanical deconstruction of reality is, to Blake, the work of Urizen (*your-reason*). Reason, as we have seen, is the mental capacity to rationalize (from ratio: link) the perception of phenomena, it the capacity to compare those perceptions to the known, the capacity to observe through the prism of experience and determine what is "good and useful" or not for the individual's life. "[...]Reason, the root of Good and Evil"¹ enables man to cut the totality of a phenomenon into pieces, to take what is seen as good and reject what is seen as bad; this is the mental power of Urizen. Reason is both what allows man to have an extraordinary capacity of survival and adaptation, and what makes him look at the world through selfishness, "envy and stupidity".

So on the one hand , **when used in a situation of survival**, Reason can be highly useful and protectful, because man can connect a phenomenon he experiments spontaneously to a phenomenon he has experienced in the past, and therefore he can judge if it is a dangerous or a beneficial one. For instance if you find yourself in front of a tree bearing beautiful red fruits exhaling a delightful scent, you may innocently desire to eat those fruits (Luvah, your emotions, your passions, making you wonder about their taste, and Tharmas, your instincts, asking you to fill your empty stomach), but hopefully your experience of life (Reason, your intellect and memory) will remind you that your friend, last week, also ate this fruit, and was finally found dead, convulsing under a similar tree, and so you will finally decide not to eat that fruit and save your life.

On the other hand, **when Reason is not used in a situation involving survival**, it proves to be dangerous for the mental harmony of man, and even destructive when "working" on its own, when it becomes systematic. Indeed, as we have seen through the previous example, Reason is a powerful mental force able to "tame" the other Zoas when survival is challenged, capable of destroying the natural mental stillness in order to put innocence (Los's inspiration, Tharmas's intuition, and Luvah's sensibility) aside and allow experience (Urizen)

¹ William Blake, *Laocoön*

to dominate; so when the mind is constantly “reasoning” the four Zoas are not at peace with each other, it refrains the soul from operating rightly through the “control panel”, and therefore from perceiving the fullness of phenomena through the senses. By constantly comparing the phenomenon experienced in the present to the phenomenon experienced in the past, man gets disconnected from the instant; he cannot experiment the instant fully, he cannot perceive phenomena “as they are, infinite, unfinished and in constant progress”, but rather sees them “as they have been, finite and finished”. And man “[...] believes that the shape of the world is the same shape of his reason,[...] thinks everything can be known by way of dismantling it or dissecting it into all its parts, and studying separately each of these parts... I have a very strong feeling that the sum of the parts does not equal the whole.”¹ This constant deconstruction of reality by Urizen leads man to believe that life is a succession of finite instants rather than an “infinite work in progress”, it cuts the totality of phenomena into rational pieces, dividing matter from spirit, the known from the unknown, and enclosing man into these finite material pieces of reality. The soul is condemned by this use of the mind to perceive a crooked image of reality: modern “reasoning” man is bound to see but the material and dying nature of things.

*“This life’s five windows of the soul
Distort the heavens from pole to pole,
And lead you to believe a lie,
When you see **with** not **through** the eye
Which was born in a night to perish in a night,
When the soul slept in beams of light.
(“The Everlasting Gospel”, Ideas of Good and Evil)”*

The “falling” man, ensnared by Urizen and Tirzah’s claws, becomes blinded by Vala (the veil of material things in Blake’s mythology), he does not see anymore the “Eternal Body” of things, which is the actual nature of phenomenon: eternally progressing, evolving, infinite. This fall or growing mental disorder, as we have seen, is born of an abusive use of a natural capacity for survival: Reason. Man found that rationalizing systematically the world he perceived helped him master his environment; in this way he could plan and compute his survival, learning how to *react* to dangers (instead of *acting* instinctively), how to avoid

¹ Jean Dubuffet, *Anticultural Positions*

repeating the same errors, using more and more his memory, comparing more and more things, phenomena, to each other, studying their relation to himself. Man developed this *selfish* and prudent relationship to the world because the natural Way of things represented to him a constant risk of death, and he wanted to escape that condition, he wanted to protect himself from the outside world, he wanted to tame his environment in order to control his own fate. Instead of “playing the game of Nature” and transforming himself according to the demands of his milieu, he began to transform his milieu according to the demands of his Reason. This represents, to me, the passage from the nomadic way of life to the sedentary one (Neolithic), approximately 12.000 years ago. Generation after generation, “reasoning” man has crafted devices to live over the rules of nature, to dominate the environment that gives him life and escape the cycles of predation imposed on him: this is basically the goal of Civilization. And to ensure the reign of Reason among the human mind (and avoid “spiritual strife”) in order to separate mankind, in the long run, from the “cruel” rules of Nature, from “*The actual ping pong game of the Abyss*”¹, the fallen man has built those sedentary civilizations with a solid material able to perpetuate this rational reduced awareness: Language.

Any naming-system is the child and guardian of the reign of Urizen and Tirzah within the human mind. Aldous Huxley justly writes that any naming-system is built upon the very “urizenic” principle of systematic departicularization of reality, any language whatsoever cuts the whole experience of reality into pieces, it “traps the moment before it’s ripe”: “*To formulate and express the contents of this reduced awareness[sensible perceptions treated by Reason], man has invented and endlessly elaborated those symbol-systems and implicit philosophies which we call languages. Every individual is at once the beneficiary and the victim of the linguistic tradition into which he or she has been born – the beneficiary inasmuch as language gives access to the accumulated records of other people’s experience, the victim in so far as it confirms him in the belief that reduced awareness is the only awareness and as it bedevils his sense of reality, so that he is all too apt to take his concepts for data, his words for actual things.*”² The linguistic recapture of reality, a by-product of the abusive use of Reason throughout the generations of fallen men, is motivated by man’s instinct of survival. Through Language, as Huxley notes, man simply wants to transmit to the new generations important means of survival, he simply wants to teach them how not to

¹ Allen Ginsberg, *Howl*. ‘Section III’

² Aldous Huxley, *The Doors of Perception*, p.11.

reproduce the errors he has committed in his time, he simply wants to protect his species. But, even though Language seems to be born of a “good intention”, it sadly condemns the new generations to evolve in the very “urizenic” defly imposed by the past generations to the natural Way of things. Language culturally imposes on the mind of the new generations the spirit of Urizen, which distorts their perception of the real as soon as they acquire it. This rational spirit compels them to live through the same mental disorders than their ancestors, and therefore compels them too to transmit it culturally to the next generations again, after strengthening it through their use of Language. The fall of men into Civilization is a vicious circle, cyclically empowering itself through the cultural imposition of Language, which mentally conditions man to perceive his world through the prism of Reason. And this cultural imposition of the spirit of Urizen among the new generations is referred to as Moloch by Allen Ginsberg. *“Moloch! Moloch! Nightmare of Moloch! Moloch the loveless! Mental Moloch! Moloch the heavy judger of men! Moloch the incomprehensible prison! Moloch the crossbone soulless jailhouse and Congress of sorrows! Moloch whose buildings are judgement! [...] Moloch whose mind is pure machinery! [...] Moloch whose eyes are a thousand blind windows! Moloch whose skyscrapers stand in the long streets like endless Jehovahs! [...] Moloch whose poverty is the specter of genius! [...] Moloch whose name is the Mind! [...] Moloch in whom I sit lonely! [...] Moloch who entered my soul early! Moloch in whom I am a consciousness without a body! Moloch who frightened me out of my natural ecstasy!”*¹ In the biblical tradition, Moloch stands as *“the fiercest of Satan’s crew, the first to advocate immediate resumption of the war against the Lord of Heaven”*², and children were given in sacrifice to him. Blake too used the myth of Moloch to embody the sacrifice of the new generations operated by the process of Civilization. (Illustration on the next page)

¹ Allen Ginsberg, *Howl*. ‘Section II’

² David. L. Jeffrey, *A Dictionnary of Biblical Tradition in English Literature*. p. 516.



(William Blake, *The Flight of Moloch*)

Finally, even if “the human form is by nature divine”, even if man is inhabited by a soul in the image of God that drives him towards physical and mental perfection, even if “*God becomes as we are, that we may be as he is*”¹ man has lost the natural harmony that exists within him, he has lost this confidence he had in the benevolence of Existence, this “natural ecstasy”. Man has finally forgotten how to adapt instinctively to his milieu; approximately 12.000 years ago he turned his natural way of life into a “civilized” way of life, which enabled him to achieve mastery over his environment, over his own soul. He has mentally tamed his innocence with his experience, with his Reason, in order to escape his constant fear of death and “change the rules” of the game of Nature. Considering himself superior to the rest of the creation, man developed a utilitarian, rationalist point of view towards his environment, and every single form of life became to him, “his privileged meal”. This mental shift led him to an abuse of his faculty of Reason as we have seen, and it has unbalanced his use of the mind, which in turn has distorted his perception of the real, enclosing him in Tirzah’s world, blinded by Vala’s material veil. Repressing the soul in him, disconnected from God, enclosed in matter, blind to the spiritual nature of things, man still goes through life on Earth, constantly teaching the new generations how to maintain this civilized, “reasonable” way of life, telling them irresponsibly that it is “the way” to be protected from Nature’s laws. Cyclically, generation after generation, the souls of men are eaten by Moloch (the cultural conditionment of the mind), digested by Urizen (the abusive use of Reason) and thrown away into Tirzah’s world (the material, utilitarian, finite dimension).

*« Que sera demain matin? Le temps d’un homme est court, le temps des hommes n’aura peut-être pas de fin. Ils sont peut-être destinés à faire sauter la machine imparfaite. Mais peut-être au contraire à la perfectionner. D’ici un siècle, ils auront fait disparaître de la Terre toutes les espèces vivantes autres que la leur. Ils seront au moins cinquante milliards, ils occuperont toute la surface. Il n’y aura plus de place sur les continents ni sous les eaux pour une brebis, un brin d’herbe, une morue. [...] L’homme se trouve devant deux destins possibles: périr dans son berceau, de sa propre main, de son propre génie, de sa propre stupidité, ou s’élancer, pour l’éternité du temps, vers l’infini de l’espace, et y répandre la vie délivrée de la nécessité de l’assassinat. »*²

¹ William Blake, *There Is No Natural Religion*

² René Barjavel, *La faim du tigre*, Editions Denoël, Paris, 1966.

“The Emanation Of The Giant Albion”

*“He who respects the infant’s faith
Triumphs over hell and death”¹*

There is a Way out of this cultural determinism. The Fall’s vicious circles can be turned into Salvation’s virtuous ones. There is no material prison, no mental cage. Any man decides for himself how he uses his mind, how he uses his body, for any man’s soul is by nature free, unique, and perfect. Man can “undo the Fall” when he realizes that it is not the external world that conditions him to fall, but that it is his inner world that conditions the external one to fall. Even though we, men of the present hour, are mentally educated, conditioned to perpetuate and reproduce the violence and errors of the past generations, we are physically and spiritually products of God, “we are designed to design reality”². We are creative beings, and nothing in the world can refrain us from creating “*beautiful and exalted things*”³. So, no one but ourselves is to blame for the actual state of Society. We are all, individually, entirely responsible for all the violence that mankind imposes now to its environment. We are mankind. The past generations are dead. So we all ought to change individually now, in the present, if we want a general change of the future. “*The future is now, because the present, which is also the past, modifying itself now, becomes the future.*”⁴ A general external revolution will be the direct consequence of individual inner revolutions, by extension. This was the deepest certainty of William Blake and the backbone of his Art as a whole: “*The nature of my Work is Visionary or Imaginative; it is an Endeavour to Restore what the Ancients call’d the Golden Age.*”⁵ Some may say he was simply looking for radical political changes, but I would argue that such claims represented but a tiny and indirect implication of the prophet’s entire creed. The direct goal of William Blake’s Art is to motivate man to individually achieve mental freedom, and bring about an individual inner revolution allowing the regeneration of Albion, the “true man” in him. This “true man” is imaginative, creative, he reshapes the outer world according to his inner world, according to

¹ William Blake, *Proverbs from ‘Ideas of Good and Evil’*

² Timothy Leary, *How To Operate Your Brain* (video)

³ W.B. Yeats, *The Poems of William Blake*, ‘Introduction’ p xxxiv

⁴ Jiddu Krishnamurti’s 1984 talk to The United Nations.

⁵ William Blake, *A Vision Of The Last Judgement*

his Vision, not to his Reason, he fears not moral or mortal judgements in any way, but confidently follows the impulses from his soul. He is not afraid of dying. For Blake, Jesus Christ stands as the archetype of this man.

To awaken this “true man”, “true vision” has to be restored permanently so that “true action” (inspired and useful) becomes spontaneous. Only when one sees clearly, actually, what a situation is in itself, one can act usefully, beneficially and artistically in this situation. And to clearly see things, phenomena, for what they are, as they are, one must not consider them in their relationship to oneself, one must not “*ratio*-nalize”, establish links with one’s memory, one’s experience, one’s knowledge, one’s culture, one’s past and desires, but actually, one only has to be attentive to what they are in themselves, in the present. Therefore, the recovering of “true vision”, the “cleansing of perception” is not *a work*, it is, on the contrary, *a liberation* from the known, from the constant “rationalizing work” of the mind, and an opening onto the unknown (the things as they are, unique, in constant progress, infinite) resulting from the understanding of the mechanisms conditioning our perception. These mechanisms I tried to explore in the last part, and I concluded that man *is* conditioned by his use of the mind, by his abusive use of Reason which alters his awareness by enclosing him in a self-centred relationship to the world, in which experience rules over innocence, and existence is reduced to the ratio of known, named, and finite things. When we become conscious that this urizenic mental cage is enclosing us, the cage immediately disappears. When we understand, and actually feel that the mind is naturally balanced and in total harmony, and are conscious that it is not “working” as such, instantaneously, balance and harmony are restored, Reason loses its hold on the mind: memory’s reaction, the intellectual thinking-process, returns to a normal state of activity. In this harmonious and peaceful state of mind, man thinks only when he needs to think, that is, when memory has to be summoned, for survival as in the example of the attractive lethal fruits mentioned earlier, or simply, when man wants to go home. When Urizen has lost his hold on the mind, the thinking-process, “Daughter of Memory”, is totally controlled, it does not happen on its own, man becomes conscious of its activity, master of its flow. Only when he is conscious of the activity of his own mind and capable of regulating it can man perceive the world free from any conditioning. Mental freedom and equilibrium are requisited to recover “true vision” and awaken the “true man”. So before we explore the nature of “true vision”, we will have to define how this mental peace can be permanently established within the mind.

Inner harmony, mental freedom, is but a “treaty of peace” between the Four Zoas. We have seen earlier how Reason could be tamed by using Reason itself to understand its conditioning nature and make it return to its normal activity. In this respect we saw that once Reason has returned to its natural state of activity, the thinking-process can be entirely controlled by man. But what about Emotions, Instincts and Imagination, the three other mental forces ? When Reason comes back to its normal activity, it ceases from ruling and repressing unnecessarily the three other Zoas. They are liberated from Urizen’s dominion. Therefore, when no Zoa is dominating over the mind, “Eternal Unity” is regained: the three other mental forces are freed from Urizen’s cage and come back to their natural activity too, the peace is negotiated, the mental balance is established. The mind becomes calm and quiet. Indeed, when Reason works properly, memory, and ultimately the thinking-process, are employed rightly, fully, consciously, and man develops a strong intellectual efficiency, he discovers within himself an immense capacity for learning, for self-understanding, resulting in a capacity of “rational” self-control. He understands by himself that the mind is naturally in peace, and that whenever that peace is broken, whenever one Zoa has an excessive activity over the mind, Reason is here to moderate it. Reason, when controlled, becomes the mental force who settles disputes between the Zoas. For instance, if suddenly, once you have established this mental peace we are relentlessly speaking about, your mother, dad, sister, brother and fiancée die all together in a plane-crash, your emotions will certainly have an overwhelming impact on you: a profound sadness will alter your mental harmony. Hopefully, you have just become master of your Reason, and you can “think” when you decide to. So it is obviously time for you to use your Reason, your accumulated knowledge and experience, it is time to think and moderate this terrible sadness, it is time to realize that *everybody finally dies*, that *the death of your family won’t change the course of the Universe*, that *there is always someone in a worse condition than you*, and so on. Step-by-step, argument after argument, your Reason will intellectually manage this excess of Emotion, and you will find back your inner peace, realizing that being sad won’t help your terrible situation to change.

*“Joy and woe are woven fine,
A clothing for the soul divine;
[...]
Man was made for joy and woe;
And, when this we rightly know,*

Safely through the world we go."¹

As Blake makes clear in this excerpt, man has to "rightly know" the forces organizing his mind, he has to accept their psychological power over him. One should not feel over them, neither should one feel a prey to them. Their psychological power has to be accepted, their role and function understood, and one has to keep in mind that when one Zoa goes "too far", when one mental force exerts a too strong pressure (not only Emotions, but Instincts and Imagination too) one can always "tame" it with Reason and make it come back to its natural activity, in order to re-establish the natural mental balance between the four Zoas. Once man has realized the power he has over his own mind, the treaty of peace that has been signed between the Zoas becomes indestructible. Man becomes equally emotive, instinctive, imaginative and reasonable, none of these mental forces being allowed to dominate over the others; through their natural activity they harmonize each other. This becomes a continual state, for once man has attained this mental peace, the notion of "continuity" exists no more. There is no "before", no "after", but only "now". Indeed, "continuity" involves the notion of Time, and Time is a creation of thought, a reaction of memory. So, as the harmonious mind does not reason, does not think unless it is asked to, man has no notion of Time anymore, therefore, no notion of continuity. For the man that has achieved mental freedom, all becomes one never-ending instant of peace, love and tranquillity. The mind is permanently silent, free, and opened to all phenomenon. The individual is free from the known, open to the unknown...

*"To be enlightened is to be aware, always, of total reality in its immanent otherness – to be aware of it [Imagination] and yet to remain in a condition to survive as an animal [Instincts], to think and feel as a human being [Emotions], to resort whenever expedient to systematic reasoning [Reason]."*² Enlightenment, the awakening of the "true man", is the result of the very mental equilibrium that we have defined earlier. Only when one's Reason, Instincts and Emotions are controlled, balanced, only when one is "in a condition to survive as an animal, to think and feel as a human being, to resort whenever expedient to systematic reasoning" can one's Imagination function normally and allow man "to be aware, always, of total reality in its immanent otherness". This rejuvenation of the faculty of Imagination is central in the Art of Blake, it is what allows man to recover "true vision", which in turn gives

¹ William Blake, *Proverbs* from 'Ideas Of Good And Evil'

² Aldous Huxley, *The Doors of Perception*, p.49.

rise to the “true man”. Imagination is also called “Energy” in the Art of Blake, and to him “*Energy is Eternal Delight*”¹. The fallen man’s Imagination, his “true vision” of the permanent and infinite nature of reality, is blurred and altered by the prevalence of Reason within his mind as we have seen. “*[...] Reason is the bound or outward circumference of Energy.*”² So when “the fall is undone”, when the totalitarian hold of Urizen over the human mind is abolished, when the deconstruction of “total reality” operated by the thinking-process stops being systematic and becomes conscious and controlled, when no Zoa is dominating over the mind, “Energy” is freed, Imagination returns to a normal state of activity, and man regains his natural and innocent ecstasy, he returns to the state of “Eternal Delight”, to the “Eternal Body” into which he was born:

*“[...]the skin trembles
in happiness
and the soul comes
joyful to the eye--*

*yes, yes,
that's what
I wanted,
I always wanted,
I always wanted,
to return
to the body
where I was born.*”³

*“The Eternal Body of Man is The Imagination, that is, God himself, The Divine Body, Jesus: we are his Members.”*⁴ This return of man into his “Eternal Body”, this rebirth of the state of innocence, this rediscovery of the natural exaltation through “*free imagination and spontaneous joy*”⁵, although close to the infant’s state, is not a disconnection from experience, for it is reborn from experience. The “true man” has not destroyed his Reason, his experience, but he has tamed it, he has achieved mastery over it, and he makes use of it to understand his “fallen” condition, and to free himself from it. His thinking-process, the reaction of his memory (of his accumulated experience) is now only “working” when he consciously decides to think. And when he is not consciously thinking, it is “cut off”, there is no thought at all, the mind is totally silent and man becomes spontaneously Innocent, in “Eternal Delight”. In this

¹ William Blake, *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*

² William Blake, *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*

³ Allen Ginsberg, *Song from ‘The Green Automobile’*

⁴ William Blake, *Laocoön*

⁵ Samuel Foster Damon, *A Blake Dictionary*. ‘Innocence’, p. 197.

state, “the doors of perception are cleansed, and every thing appears to man as it is, infinite. For man has bailed himself out of his cavern till he sees all things through the enlightened door of his Imagination.” The true man’s free (non-thinking) and balanced mind allows perception not to be centred on the notion of self, of experience, and allows man to be immoderately attentive to the things as they are in themselves. He does not look at things for what they represent to him, to his knowledge, his memory, his expectations, but actually, for what they are, how they are in themselves. For instance if one man in this mental state looks at a bottle of beer on a wooden table, he does not *know* that it is “a bottle” on “a table”, or rather he does not *think* about it; he simply looks attentively at the shape and colour of this green, transparent, vasiform, polished thing, he does not associate this thing to any concept or word, but sees it fully, ecstatically, as if it was the first time he opened his eyes upon the world, as if this thing was the first thing he ever saw. He is so attentive to the actual qualities of the “bottle” that his whole awareness is centred on this thing; “self-awareness” disappears. In this example, the rational relationship of “I”, subject, perceiving “it”, object, usually imposed by the linguistic deconstruction of reality, has disappeared. The notion of “I” look at “this” vanishes, for the perceiver is so attentive to what he is looking at that there is not the center of “I”, no notion of self, he becomes the perceived object. The observer disengages from the “subject – object” relationship, he is in a perceptual middle-ground and the world appears to him “*in its barest, purest forms [...] uncontaminated*”¹ by his subjectivity. This can remind us of Lacan’s “oceanic stage”, when children, before they have acquired Language, consider themselves as a part of the world they are looking at, rather than as a separate entity as adults teach them to do. In this state of intense attention there is no perceiving subject, no perceived object, but one perceptual dynamic into which object and subject become an extension of each other, a unity. “*When your inside is out, the outside is in.*” John Lennon sings. This **dissolution** of the observer into his perceptions is wonderfully expressed in William Blake’s poem *To Mr. Butts*:

[...]
*Over sea, over land,
 My eyes did expand
 Into regions of air,
 Away from all care;
 Into regions of fire,
 Remote from desire;
 [...]*

¹ Wai-Lim Yip, *Diffusion of Distances*

*My eyes more and more,
 Like a sea without shore,
 Continue expanding,
 The heavens commanding,
 Till the jewels of light,
 Heavenly men beaming bright,
 Appeared as one man,
 Who complacent began
 My limbs to enfold
 In his beams of bright gold,
**Like dross purged away
 All my mire and my clay.
 Soft consumed in delight,
 In his bosom sun-bright
 I remained. [...]**"*

When Imagination returns to a normal state of activity, such selfless contemplation breaks through. Self-centred utilitarian observation is transcended. One can look “through not with the eye” and see beyond Vala, the material illusion of reality. *“In your own Bosom you bear your Heaven and Earth & all you behold; tho’ it appears Without, it is Within, in your Imagination, of which this World of Mortality is but a Shadow.”*¹ The mind being balanced, free from constant reasoning, non-thinking, it is “empty” and opened to be fully filled by the phenomena as they arise. Man looks at things equally, as they are, with the same immoderate attention. He sees the infinite, and enters the “Eternal Body” of all things. Recounting an intense moment of “cleansed perception” of the real, a Wordsworthian “spot of time” experimented under mescaline, Huxley writes: *“Visual impressions are greatly intensified and the eye recovers some of the perceptual innocence of childhood, when the sensum was not immediately and automatically subordinated to the concept. Interest in space is diminished and interest in time falls almost to zero.”* [...] *is revealed the glory, the infinite value and meaningfulness of naked existence, of the given, unconceptualized event. In the final stage of egolessness there is an ‘obscure knowledge’ that All is in all – that All is actually each. [...] a perpetual present made of one continually changing apocalypse. I was looking at my furniture, not as the utilitarian [...], but as the pure aesthete whose concern is only with forms and their relationship within the field of vision or picture space. [...] this purely aesthetic view [...] gave place to what I can only describe as the sacramental vision of reality. [...] everything shone with the Inner light, and was infinite in its significance. The legs, for example of that chair – how miraculous their tubularity, how supernatural their polished*

¹ William Blake, *Jerusalem*

smoothness! I spent several minutes – or was it several centuries? – not merely gazing at those bamboo legs but actually being them – or rather being myself in them; or, to be still more accurate (for ‘I’ was not involved in the case, nor in a certain sense were ‘they’) being my Not-self in the Not-self which was the chair.”¹

The “cleansed” perception of the real, the “true vision” of “total reality” is simply the natural imaginative vision of man (when the mind has found natural harmony). The so-called “religious”, “apocalyptic” transfiguration of the material realm, the “mystic” contemplation of existence is nothing more than the infant’s sight. This was constantly emphasized by Blake in his Art, as well as in his life: “*Little children always behold the Face of the Heavenly Father*”², “*‘That is Heaven’ said Blake to Palmer, indicating a group of children playing outside, ‘for such is the Kingdom of Heaven.’*”³ “Albion”, “Jesus Christ”, “Buddha”, “Mohammed”, whatever the word or symbol used to design the “true man” or “perfect man” or “natural man” or “son of God”, this man is but ourselves, when we have realized our alienation from our natural innocence, and when we have firmly decided to use our experience to make it end. This energy, this appetite for freedom and evolution, this renewed interest for life in its innocence is the “Poetic Genius’s spirit of prophecy” which within us restores “true vision” and drives us to accomplish “true action”. We have all been children. We have all lived in “Eternal Delight”. We were this “true man”, it was our natural state. But we have grown, and we have been taught that “life was duty, not beauty”⁴, we have been “frightened out of our natural ecstasy”. When a modern “civilized adult” observes a child, he feels that he has lost something. He sadly thinks to himself that some part of him has vanished, that he has been led to become a morose, grey and gloomy person. He feels doomed and thinks that his “innocence” has been stolen by the unavoidable responsibilities of his life. Most of “civilized” men have the feeling that their life has no sense, that they are going nowhere, that they are bound to die uselessly, forgotten, invisible. So they constantly desire to recover this lost innocence and become envious, jealous, they want to possess what they believe they lack: children’s innocence, the ruler’s wealth, youth’s happiness. They think, they desire, they hope, they never live. Only when man stops thinking and constantly

¹ Aldous Huxley, *The Doors of Perception*, p. 9, 10, 12, 13.

² William Blake, *Annotations to Bishop George Berkeley’s ‘Siris’*

³ Samuel Foster Damon *Blake Dictionary*. ‘Children’, p. 81

⁴ Nelson Algren, *A Walk On The Wild Side*:

“I slept and dreamt that life was Beauty. I woke up and found that life was Duty.”

comparing himself to the outside world, when he stops desiring what he has not, he can realize what he has, what he is, he can realize that it is not the outside world that conditions his life, but that it is himself, his inner world, that conditions the outside one. Only when man realizes that he has not “been led” to become what he is can he understand that he has led himself and the world he perceives to that point. Through this realization he understands that the innocent children he was *is* the experienced adult he is, and this motivates him to get out of his psychological disorders, to find again his natural mental harmony. And when this is achieved he can perceive again reality outside of his mental prison; as the child he was he sees that every living thing is an extension of himself, an expression of the same one energy of life. “True vision” comes back, the “true man” awakes: he understands that “the two contrary states of his soul”, innocence and experience, are not only conflicting but that they are also complementary. He finds that a balance can be established between them: his “adult responsibilities” can be carried on with “childish spontaneous joy”, he can combine his “true vision” of “total reality” with a “rational vision” of “material reality”. Knowing that each thing he sees is but a “nuanced extension” of himself, he understands his interconnection with all living thing, he does not see anymore what differentiates him from other beings, but what unites him to them, and so he realizes that he is designed to help other life-forms evolve as much as he can if he wants to evolve himself, by extension. As a consequence of this knowledge that we are all, living things, the product of the same one source of life, that we are all equally alive, all equally dying, his material jealousy and his rational envy are turned to compassion, he understands that to have what he wants, happiness, he has to give what others need, Love. Following this line, The Beatles sang “*And in the end the Love you take is equal to the Love you make.*” So in the end, this individual inner revolution, this harmony established between innocence and experience, this individual recovering of “true vision” generating “true action”, extends to the outer world through mutual compassion. As a consequence, the nature of society directly changes: peace and love, the metaphysical order of things, is reestablished. This “imaginative” shift in the human consciousness, to me, is the only hope for our civilization to turn its vicious cyclical downfall into a virtuous cyclical ascent.

Conclusion

In itself, this work cannot change anything about the actual state of mankind, neither can it change man in any way. Only man can make things change. Only man, if he changes in himself, individually, if he gets rid of his mental conditioning, of his disorders, of his desires, can society, which is made of individuals only, stop being destructive and violent. Through this *mémoire* I wanted to share this hope I have that man can be unconditionally free, in his mind and in his actions. This hope has been immensely strengthened by my discovery and by my exploration of the Art of William Blake, so I wanted to show how his powerful optimism and this unalterable faith he held in the possibility that any individual has to become a useful, peaceful and compassionate being, could profoundly help and motivate man to feel confident about the capacity of mankind as a whole to become respectful to itself and to its environment. I hope that through this work I respected the convictions of William Blake, and that I presented his Art in a way that perpetuates his creed. I also hope that the reader will realize that he can, individually, change the whole face of his “little world” by living life fully, freely, and that he too can die with a smile of satisfaction on his face.

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KEY-WORDS : William Blake, Poetry, Romanticism, Gnosticism, Phenomenology

ABSTRACT

This work is an attempt to express William Blake's "message" to mankind. The prophetic poet who "Present, Past & Future, sees" devoted his whole life to tell us, future generations of men, that the civilizations into which we are born and bred are alienating us from our true nature. He wanted to warn us about the dangers of the so-called "progress", about the risks of the cultural dominion of Reason and Science in our societies. He thought that modern men, east and west, north and south, were dangerously enclosing themselves in a materialist and utilitarian vision of reality, that they were being more and more separated from their innate joy and their natural innocence, from their "spiritual strife". This "fall" of men into materialist and destructive civilizations, into selfishness and stupidity, is not an historical fatality to him; it is the product of the way individuals lead their lives in the present. So in his Art, he relentlessly tried to speak to man in a fresh and creative way in order not to be considered as a moralist; he wanted the sincerity of his message to be heard, he wanted man to be free from his disorders and from his illusions. He wanted the human's "true nature" to re-awake. He declared that "*The Nature of my Work is Visionary or Imaginative; it is an Endeavor to Restore what the Ancients call'd the Golden Age.*" And to succeed in this "Endeavor", he powerfully painted, engraved and wrote, so as to enable man to understand that he can individually establish a mental peace, a psychological freedom that would open his eyes to the "total reality", to the things "as they are, infinite". This restoration of "true vision" within man, to him, is the result of a "cleansed" use of the mind; it is a restoration of the faculty of Imagination made possible by an absolute control of the faculty of Reason. Once this "true vision" is individually restored, according to Blake, the nature of society directly changes, because man is capable of "true action", that is, compassion, and through mutual compassion, this individual mental shift extends to the community of men. As this inner revolution becomes external, step by step, individual after individual, community after community, the vicious circles of the Fall are turned into virtuous ones. This faith of Blake in the potential of mankind to become a benevolent species, rather than a destructive one, as we now are, is what I wanted to express, before all, in this work.

MOTS-CLES: William Blake, Poésie, Romantisme, Gnosticisme, Phénoménologie

RESUME

Ce travail essaye d'exprimer le message que William Blake a adressé à l'humanité. Le poète-prophète qui « Present, Past & Future, sees » a dédié sa vie entière à essayer de nous faire comprendre, générations futures, que les civilisations dans lesquelles nous naissons et grandissons nous aliènent de notre vraie nature. Il voulait nous mettre en garde contre les dangers du progrès et de la domination culturelle de la raison et de la science. Pour Blake, l'homme moderne, en s'enfermant dans une vision matérialiste et utilitariste de la réalité, s'éloigne de sa joie et de son innocence naturelles, et abandonne la lutte spirituelle que la vie lui impose. Cet enfermement de l'homme dans des civilisations matérialistes, cette perte dans l'égoïsme et la stupidité, ne sont pas pour lui des fatalités historiques ; ce sont les conséquences directes de la manière avec laquelle les individus vivent leur vie dans le présent. Au travers de son art, il essaya sans relâche de parler à l'homme d'une manière fraîche et créative, afin de n'être pas vu comme un moralisateur. Il voulait que la sincérité de son message soit entendue à sa juste valeur. Il voulait que l'humanité soit libre de ses désordres et de ses illusions. Il voulait que la vraie nature de l'homme se réveille. Il déclara que « *The Nature of my Work is Visionary or Imaginative ; it is an Endeavor to Restore what the Ancients call'd the Golden Age.* » Pour réussir dans cette audacieuse tentative, il ne se limitait pas à écrire avec poigne, mais il peignait, il gravait, et il sculptait également. Il combina différents moyens d'expression artistique dans l'espoir que l'homme comprenne qu'il peut, individuellement, établir une paix mentale, une liberté psychologique qui ouvrirait ses yeux à la "réalité totale", aux choses "*as they are, infinite*". Cette restauration de la « vision authentique », pour lui, était le résultat d'une utilisation « nettoyée » de l'esprit. Plus précisément, c'était pour Blake une restauration de la faculté d'imagination, rendue possible par un contrôle total de la faculté de raison. Une fois que la « vision authentique » serait restaurée individuellement, selon Blake, la nature de la société changerait directement, car l'homme serait alors capable d'« actions authentiques », c'est-à-dire, guidées par la compassion. Et ce serait au travers de cette compassion mutuelle que cette révolution psychologique individuelle s'étendrait à la communauté humaine. La révolution interne deviendrait alors externe, petit à petit, individu après individu, communauté après communauté. Les cercles vicieux qui structurent la Chute deviendraient alors vertueux. Cette foi de Blake dans le potentiel de l'humanité à devenir une espèce bienveillante plutôt qu'une espèce destructive, tel qu'actuellement, est ce que je voulais exprimer, avant tout, dans ce mémoire.



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