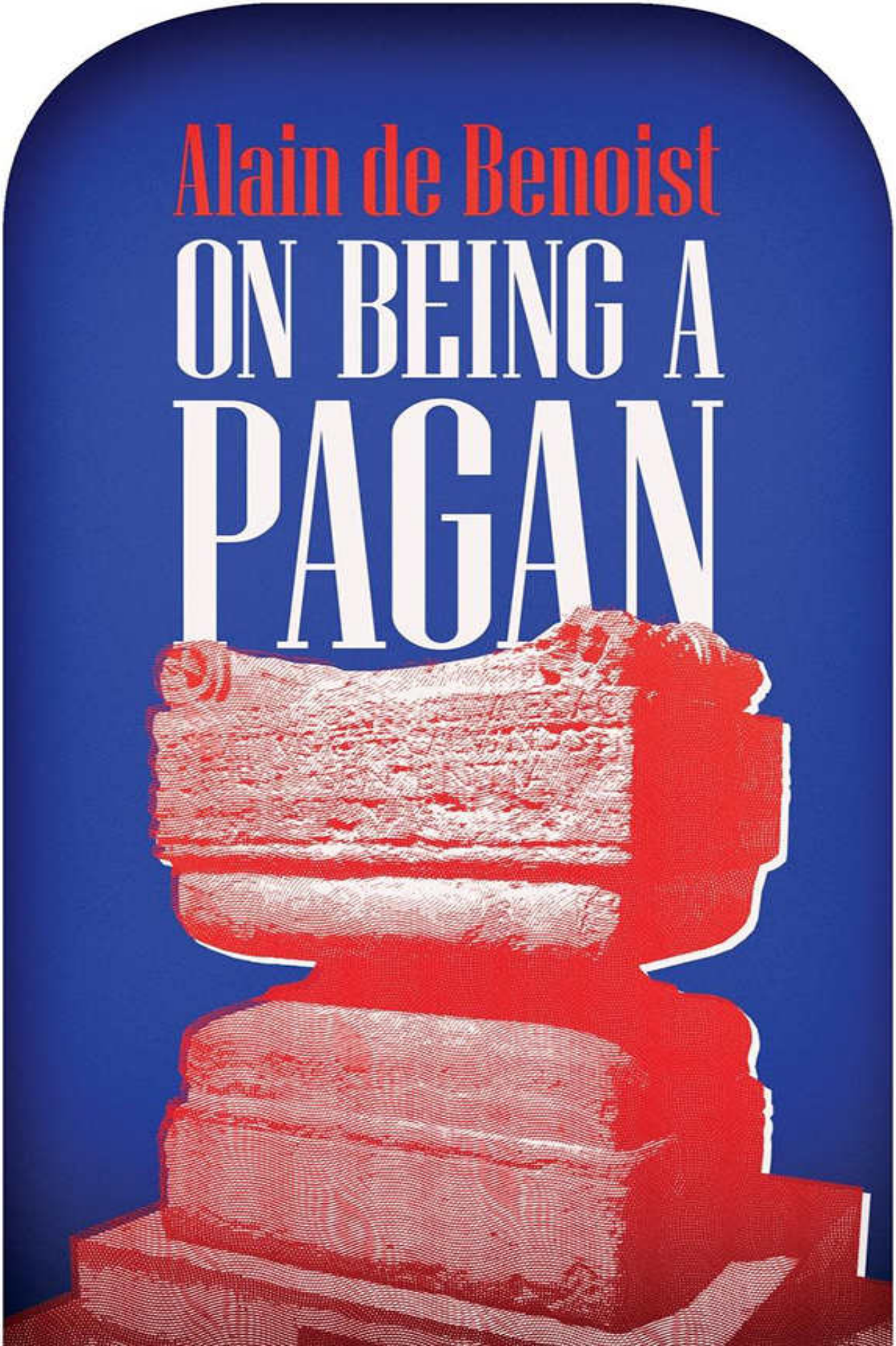
Alain de Benoist

ON BEING A PAGAN



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Alain de Benoist

Translated by Jon Graham
Edited by Michael Moynihan

Arcana Europa

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With that I have done and pronounce my judgment. I *condemn* Christianity, I bring against the Christian Church the most terrible charge any prosecutor has ever uttered. To me it is the extremest thinkable form of corruption, it has had the will to the ultimate corruption conceivably possible. The Christian Church has left nothing untouched by its depravity, it has made of every value a disvalue, of every truth a lie, of every kind of integrity a vileness of soul. . . . I call Christianity the *one* great curse, the *one* great intrinsic depravity, the *one* great instinct for revenge for which no expedient is sufficiently poisonous, secret, subterranean, *petty*—I call it the *one* immortal blemish of mankind . . .

Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Anti-Christ*

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Editor's Note

This book represents a thoroughly revised English edition of Alain de Benoist's *On Being a Pagan*, originally published by a leading French publishing house more than thirty-five years ago. In addition to the many minor corrections and changes that will be evident, all of the significant religious terminology (in Hebrew, Greek, etc., as well as in English) and specialized vocabulary from various secular disciplines (philosophy, psychology, political science, etc.) has been more accurately and consistently rendered. Unless otherwise noted, the translations of Old and New Testament biblical quotations are now from *The New English Bible* (Oxford and Cambridge: Oxford University Press, Cambridge University Press, 1970); occasionally, they have been slightly modified.

Benoist's polymathic approach makes nimble use of countless quotes from other authors, both ancient and modern, and these have been better traced to their sources (to the greatest degree possible) and brought into closer alignment with their original form. In the case of Heraclitus' fragments, for which no standard numbering system exists, the numbers given are those of the cited translator's edition. Notes and insertions from the editor or translator are clearly indicated with hard brackets. All other footnotes are those of the author, although the bibliographical information within these notes has in many cases been updated for English readers.

Nuances in wording have been clarified throughout in close comparison with the original text, as well as in consultation with both the author and the translator Jon Graham. We feel that the result is a much more readable, accurate, and forceful book—the definitive version of a seminal intellectual and spiritual inquiry, masterfully executed by a leading French thinker.

—Michael Moynihan, Ph.D.

Preface to the New Edition

In the autumn of 1980, the French magazine *Éléments* published an issue on the theme of paganism. In it, they featured a fairly lengthy article of mine about the ancient religious beliefs of Europe,[1] which had to have a good third of the text removed due to limitations of space. Such cuts are a common practice in journalism—I have often been the willing victim!—but I still regretted that I was not able to include everything I had to say on this subject in the magazine. I then decided to take the content of the article and develop it more fully into a book. This was the origin of *Comment peut-on être païen?* (On Being a Pagan),[2] a book that was accepted without any problem by the publisher Albin Michel and released in February of 1981.[3] It was dedicated to Louis Pauwels, who had dedicated one of his books, *President Faust*, to me several years earlier. At the time he was also overseeing the management of *Figaro-Magazine*, to which I was one of the main contributors.

Back then, what we call "one-track thinking" had not spread to the huge extent it has done since.[4] This probably explains why my book was well received and reviewed by a large number of newspapers. Louis Pauwels, who expressed ideas very similar to mine a short time later in his book *Comment devient-on ce que l'on est* (How To Become What You Are),[5] was one of the first to open the debate with a large article published in *Figaro-Magazine* on March 21: "Un grand débat: comment peut-on être païen?" Following in his footsteps over the next several weeks and months came assessments of the book by Claude Jannoud in *Le Figaro*, Max Gallo in *L'Express*, Frédéric Ferney and Michel Le Bris in *Le Nouvel Observateur*, Eric Roussel in *France catholique*, Pierre Daix in *Le Quotidien de Paris*, Jean-François Gautier in *Valeurs actuelles*, Lucien Guissard and Jean Vernette in *La Croix*, Christian Delacampagne in *Le Monde*, Arnold Mandel in *Information juive*, Étienne Borne in *France-Forum*, Georges Clémentin in *Le Canard enchaîné*, Georges Hourdin in *La Vie*, Thomas Molnar in

Contrepoint, Jacqueline Marchand in *Raison présente*, Georges Laffly in *Itinéraire*, Julien Ries and Hervé Pasqua in *La Libre Belgique*, Jean-François Six in *Études*, and André Dumas in *Concilium*. The book was also discussed by *Réforme*, *Le Nouvel journal*, *Paris Match*, the Reverend Raymond Léopold Bruckberger, Pol Vandromme, Armand Abécassis, Armin Mohler, Piet Tommissen, Michel Fromentoux, *La Repubblica*, *Il Giornale*, and so forth. Altogether, the book's publication was greeted by about one hundred reviews and comparative analyses in France and abroad.

When re-reading these reviews today, it becomes immediately apparent that not everyone truly grasped the book's message. Some reviewers thought I was trying to recreate a form of pagan worship with rites and a liturgy more or less of my own inspiration. Others accused me of trying to "wipe out with the stroke of a pen" two thousand years of Christianity. Conversely, some reviewers scolded me for adopting an approach that was "too intellectual" or not sufficiently "practical." Because the label "neo-pagan" lent itself so easily to every possible interpretation or manipulation, questions concerning my motives gathered a lot of steam.

Why did I really write this book? It was primarily to answer a simple question: what are the essential differences between paganism and Christianity? Countless historians before me have retraced the history of the clash between the religious systems of ancient Europe and the new religion of Christianity, which, especially from the fourth century on, gradually imposed itself upon the European continent. What were the real reasons for this clash? What were the specific aspects of their ways of believing, theologies, and worldviews which put them at odds with one another?

Over the course of the centuries, Christians have adopted fairly contrasting attitudes toward paganism. After directly attacking paganism, which was labeled diabolical "idolatry," the Church realized that it could more easily attain its goals by adopting a more flexible approach. It was at this point that the bishops and priests, in accordance with the instructions of the popes, began striving to apply various strategies: to "rehabilitate" places of traditional worship by assigning them with a new purpose; to ascribe legendary saints with the attributes or epic feats that had earlier been assigned to heroes or gods; to give pilgrimages, which had been performed since the dawn of time, a new meaning that was tied to the hope of salvation; and to graft a new kind of commemoration or solemn observance onto the old ceremonial calendar. The Christian attitude remains ambivalent

today. On the one hand, paganism is still occasionally denigrated and held in contempt. On the other hand, there is no shortage of those who provide well-meaning assurances that Christianity not only adopted "what was best" in paganism for its own use—but expressed it better. The assertion that European Christianity gradually became a "Pagan Christianity" is not entirely false (provided that a distinction is clearly understood between official theology and popular practices), but it only serves to maintain the ambiguity. *On Being a Pagan* was written to dispel that ambiguity.

More than a quarter-century has passed since then. Twenty-five years is nothing with respect to history in general, but it does represent a substantial length of time in the world of publishing. During this period *On Being a Pagan* has continued to be read and circulated, including abroad. A German translation appeared in 1982.[6] This was followed by an Italian translation in 1984 and a Dutch translation in 1985.[7] In 2004 there were Russian, Spanish, and English translations published, and finally, most recently, a Hungarian edition appeared in 2008.[8] In France, on the other hand, the book went out of print for a good many years, but has been republished in 2009.

With this newly revised and enhanced American edition, I hope *On Being a Pagan* will continue to be read and debated in the English-speaking world and beyond.

Alain de Benoist

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1. "La religion de l'Europe," *Éléments* 36 (Fall 1980), 5–20. This article was translated into Dutch in 1981, into Greek in 1982, and into Spanish in 1986.

2. [The original French title literally translates to "How Can One Be Pagan?" or, more loosely, "What Does It Mean To Be Pagan?" —*Trans.*]

3. [Éditions Albin Michel, established in 1901, is one of the leading French literary publishing houses; they also issue many educational and religious titles. —*Ed.*]

4. [*La pensée unique,* which I've translated as "one-track thinking," is a pejorative term coined by the French essayist and journalist Jean-François Kahn in 1992. It has been used by the opponents of neo-liberal ideologues to counter the contention of the latter that their ideology offers the only correct approach to structuring society. Margaret Thatcher's famous dictum "There is no alternative" has often been cited as a prime example of this attempt to create a monopoly on thought. This one-track thinking, or intellectual orthodoxy, also encompasses groupthink and political correctness, and can be seen at work in the growing movement to forbid the expression of any views that contradict it. It essentially reflects the belief that all mainstream discussion should be strictly monitored to exclude any heterodox or even heretical views that might threaten its hegemony. —*Trans.*]

5. Incidentally, Pauwels later withdrew his book from circulation when he returned to the fold of Christianity.

6. *Heide sein zu einem neuen Anfang*, trans. Patrick de Trevellert (Tübingen: Grabert, 1982).

7. *Como si puó essere pagani?*, trans. Antonio Anzaldi (Rome: Manilo/Basaia-Libri del Graal, 1984; 2nd edition, Genoa: Edizioni culturali internazionale, 1988); *Heiden zijn: vandaag de dag,* trans. Frans de Hoons (Monnickendam-Wijnegem: Deltapers, 1985; 2nd edition, 1997).

8. *Kak mojno byt' yazytchnikom*, trans. S. A. Petrov (Moscow: Russkaïa Pravda, 2004); *¿Cómo se puede ser pagano?*, trans. Jordi Garriga and José Luis Campos (Barcelona: Ediciones Nueva República, Molins de Rei, 2004); *On Being a Pagan*, trans. Jon Graham (Atlanta: Ultra, 2004); *Hogyan lehetünk pagányok?*, trans. István Gazdag (Budapest: Europa Authentica, 2008).

Foreword

Of what are those figures in the paintings of Botticelli and Caspar David Friedrich dreaming? What past-present continuum is drawing their gaze? What possible gods might these figures foresee passing through the world that surrounds and connects them to their own lack of fulfillment? What kind of transcendence will their presence trigger? These questions for me are directly linked to the key question, "What does it mean to be a pagan?" that I intend to try to answer here. Only yesterday "paganism" was still a pejorative term. It is now part of everyday speech. Just what does this term mean? What can its *intended* meaning be for the people of our time? What idea do we propose to make of it? Correspondingly, what is the basis for this paganism's criticism and refusal of the biblical thought that gave birth to Christianity? And finally, what will the two simultaneous phenomena—the collapse of the great revealed religions and the return in strength of the sacred—mean to those who inherit our culture?

These are not questions that can be regarded with indifference. They are questions of *history* and *destiny*. They in fact concern both our destiny and our destination: to know just what our destiny is, beginning with the discovery of whether or not we still desire to be destined for anything. These are the questions I ask myself in this essay, which is primarily a personal reflection—a reflection on a subject that is heartfelt and about which my feelings have evolved—and on which I hope they will continue to evolve.

It is primarily a problem of sensibility. There are no absolutes when it comes to criticism. There is no "correct point of view" about points of view. In any case I am not seeking to create such a perspective. I have only tried to reveal as clearly as possible two great spiritual visions, two great views of the world that are quite distinct from each other and that often confront one other even in the hearts of the same individuals. I wish to speak about why I spontaneously recognize myself in one and why the other contradicts

my inner being. And lastly how it is possible today to re-appropriate the most eternal values. I am therefore not trying to persuade my readers of my views as much as to portray a spiritual antagonism, to illustrate a conflict of sensibilities. One may or may not feel "pagan"; one may or may not feel at home in a "pagan" sensibility. The problem remains knowing just what this sensibility is. Everyone is then free to acknowledge and reinforce what seems most personally suitable. This basically amounts to saying that such a book, far from alarming the believers about their chosen faith, may also fortify their belief in it. The illusion can even be positive and can even hold and inspire a creative projective force. I am not aiming at suppressing or reducing faith, but at giving something back to it, perhaps on other levels. Of course not all beliefs are equal, but there is one thing worse than a vile belief and that is the total absence of faith. (Assuming such a state is possible and isn't, as I suspect it might be, a form of radical nonbelief.) In an earlier essay, I said that the means by which things are made is just as important as the things themselves. We will see that faith, as I view it, is of equal worth with its object. This is another area where I am at odds with most of my contemporaries.

Is demonstration of this contention starting from the roots of faith even a possibility? More than forty years ago, Raymond Aron said that the critique of historical reason determined the limits and not the foundations of historical objectivity. This amounts to saying that a critique can never allow itself to proceed in absence of a philosophical determination. "Fate, and certainly not 'science,' holds sway over these gods and their struggles," Max Weber writes. A sentiment is not refutable, yet it just so happens that sentiments determine systems as so many self-justifications. Max Weber provides the example of the Christian maxim: "Resist no evil." "And yet it is clear," he adds,

> in mundane perspective, that this is an ethic of undignified conduct; one has to choose between the religious dignity which this ethic confers and the dignity of manly conduct which preaches something quite different; "resist evil—lest you be co-responsible for an overpowering evil." According to our ultimate standpoint, the one is the devil and the other the God, and the individual has to decide which is God for him and which is the devil. And so it goes throughout all the orders of life.[1]

If one is bound to such a value, if one decides to shoulder such a heritage, then logically one must uphold such an opinion. But the initial decision remains a matter of choice—a choice that can never completely demonstrate the necessity of its own postulates. Nothing spares us from making this choice, in which our plans and personal ideas play a role, but which also involves shared identities, what we belong to, and what we have inherited. Every one of us will have to decide "which is god and which is the devil." It is in the full awareness of this calling that our human status resides. Subjectivity, therefore, does not have to hide away because it is subjective—in fact, this is precisely where it finds its strength.

I offer in this book a parallel *reading* of paganism—as the original religion of Europe and as an ever-central component of its present day—and Biblical and Christian thought. One may accept or reject this reading; it is a subject for debate. But to go even further, if one accepts my course of reasoning, one may even take a stand opposite that of my own, to wit, join Christianity and reject paganism exactly *for the same reasons* that prompted my attraction to the latter and withdrawal from the former. The discussion is thus posited from the outset not in the form of a dilemma but as a trilemma.

Finally, it is an approach that is based upon tolerance. This is a tolerance that does not eschew judgment or criticism, of course, but which only views its adversary as the *face* of a current problematic. Someone who denies the existence of worlds beyond, someone who denies any distinction between the individual and the world, who refuses to accept a conception of the Deity based on the notion of one truth and the devaluation of the Other that results, is ready, today as yesterday, to accept all the gods, even those who are most alien, even those he could never bring himself to worship, even those who have attempted to steal his soul. He is ready to defend the right of people to see themselves in the gods of their choice—on condition, of course, that this same right be extended to him.

I have written this book, as is my habit, for everyone and no one. Especially for those I will never know. A kind of nostalgia may be detectable here—a nostalgia for the future. The time of the interpretation of myth, alas, is also that of the effacement of the gods. This is an era that is *neo-primitive* by the very fact of its modernity, profoundly empty by virtue of its excess. This is an era where everything is simulacrum and foreclosed experience, where everything is spectacle but there are no eyes left to see. We live in a society where new forms of totalitarianism and exclusion are

being established. It is a society with a deafening clamor of rekindled hatreds matched only by the deafening clamor of the inauthentic and the inessential. It is a society where beauty is dying, a society at the end of history, a society of the Last Man where everything is collapsing in a Twilight of the West—an absolute, transatlantic West possessed of a once great history. In opposition to this time and this society, this book seeks to recall the possibility of a landscape and a spiritual *re-presentation* that would resonate with the beauty of a painting, a face, a harmony—with the face of a people uplifted by hope and the will to live another beginning.

This is, obviously, a book of desires, memories, doubts, and passions.

A. B.

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1. Max Weber, "Science as a Vocation," in *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology*, ed. H. H. Gerth and C. Wright Mills (London and New York: Routledge, 2009), 148.

Chapter One

Never Dying, Always Reviving

For those who share Nietzsche's belief that the conversion of Europe to Christianity, and the more-or-less complete integration of the European mind into the Christian mentality, was one of the most catastrophic events in world history—a catastrophe in the proper sense of the word—just what can the word "paganism" mean today? This question appears all the more fundamental since it still figures among the crucial problems of the day, as recent polemics testify—polemics that, furthermore, should be relocated within a larger and older *disputatio*. Despite the claims made by some commentators, it is not polytheism that is "old hat," but Judeo-Christian monotheism that now finds itself questioned and creaking all over while paganism is again manifesting its attraction, although it may appear in forms that are often clumsy and sometimes aberrant.[1]

In truth, paganism never died. From the attempts to restore solar worship under the Illyrian emperors—notably under Aurelius, thanks to the support of Plotinus—and from those undertaken later by the Emperor Julian, it has been a constant inspiration. At the end of the fourth century, a time when Christianity, which had become a state religion, would appear to have triumphed, we can even speak of a "pagan renaissance."[2] Pagan values are evident both in certain customary folk rituals (incorrectly labeled "folklore") and in the theology of certain great "Christian" heretics, as well as in the undertakings of countless literary and artistic *revivals*. From Ronsard and du Bellay, literature has never stopped finding a fertile source of inspiration in pre-Christian antiquity, whereas for fifteen centuries political deliberation has been nourished by a meditation on the purely pagan principle of the *imperium*, the bedrock of that prodigious enterprise, perhaps the most grandiose in all of history: the Roman Empire. In philosophy, finally, in opposition to the partisans of the exclusive primacy

of the *logos* over the *mythos*—from Descartes and Auguste Comte to Horkheimer and Adorno—are the partisans of the *mythos* from Vico to Heidegger.

At the end of the fifteenth century, the Renaissance—centered first in Florence before extending over the whole of Europe—was born out of the renewal of contact with the spirit of pagan antiquity. During the golden century of the Medicis, we see the renewed opposition of the "Platonists" (Pico della Mirandola and Marsilio Ficino) and the "Aristotelians" (Pietro Pomponazzi). Translations of and commentaries on Homer, Demosthenes, Plutarch, the tragedians, the annalists, and the philosophers appeared. The greatest artists, architects, painters, and sculptors drew inspiration from antiquity, not simply for the purposes of copying its works, but as a fertile soil in which new forms could take root. In France, the sister of Francis I, Marguerite de Navarre, experienced the discovery of Plato's thought as a revelation, according to Baldasarre Castiglione's *Book of the Courtier* (1537). "Through the reading of the works of Cicero or Plutarch," Erasmus declared, "I could feel myself becoming a better man." In this way, the old Greco-Latin gods found a new youth from which all of Europe profited, while in the North, the rediscovery of Germanic antiquity played a similar role in the process of the "national renaissance" that Germany experienced from the time of Conrad Celtes to that of Nicodemus Frischlin.[3]

At the beginning of the nineteenth century, it was especially the German Romantics who honored and revived the antique spirit. They regarded ancient Greece as the perfect model of a harmonious life. They saw in its exemplary past the image of what might be their own future, and by putting Faust and Prometheus on the same standing, they underlined the profound affinities of the Hellenic spirit with that of their own people. If the divine once existed, said Hölderlin in essence, then it would return because it is eternal. Novalis and Friedrich Schlegel expressed similar sentiments. For his part, Heinrich von Kleist celebrated the memory of Arminius (Hermann), who in 9 BCE created a federation of the Germanic peoples and defied the legions of Varus in the Teutoburg Forest.

Several decades later, France, with the help of linguistics and archaeology, witnessed a great vogue for pagan literature, something that affected Symbolists and Parnassians alike, and the Romantics as well as the Neoclassicists. While Victor Hugo, returning to pantheism, defined God as the Sum Total ("Fullness for him is infinity to the world," *Religions et*

religion), Théophile Gautier praised Hellenism as the "soul of our poetry." Leconte de Lisle published his *Poèmes antiques* (1842) and his *Poèmes barbares* (1862); Théodore de Banville, his *Cariatides* (1842); José-Maria de Heredia, his *Trophées*; Juliette Adam, a novel entitled *Païenne* (1883); and Pierre Louÿs, *Aphrodite* and the quite apocryphal *Chansons de Bilitis*. Anatole France wove crowns for Leuconoe and Loeta Acilia, and Louis Ménard sang the virtues of Hellenic mysticism. Hippolyte Taine lauded Athens as the "first country of the beautiful." Albert Samain, Jean Moréas, Henri de Régnier, Jules Laforgue, Paul Verlaine, Édouard Schuré, Sully Prudhomme, Édouard Dujardin, François Coppée, and Madame de Noailles should not be omitted from this list either. Not to mention Catulle Mendès, whose *L'homme tout nu* has recently been republished.[4]

Louis Ménard in 1848 regarded polytheism as the foundation of the republican ideal: a respect for pluralism and a critical attitude toward monarchy. This was also the viewpoint of Father J. Gaume, a fanatical adversary of paganism—which he identified with democracy and socialism—who had no qualms about writing:

> The Renaissance was the resurrection, the worship, the fanatic adoration of paganism with all its literary, artistic, philosophical, moral, and religious idols. The Renaissance gave birth to the Reformation. The Reformation gave birth to Voltairian impiety, and Voltairian impiety gave birth to the French Revolution. The French Revolution is the most dreadful moral catastrophe the world has ever seen.[5]

The Church waxed indignant at the prospect of the examples of Themistocles, Cato, Solon, Scipio, and Cincinnatus being offered to the young as sources of inspiration or subjects of study. In the opinion of the Church, neither Horace nor Titus Livy should be taught.

This identification of pagan values with those of the emerging "left" then responded to general opinion. However, there were other authors who sought to pull paganism in the opposite direction. "When I saw the Acropolis," Ernest Renan wrote, "I had a divine revelation."[6] Charles Maurras, in turn, traveled to Athens, and Maurice Barrès made the trip to Sparta. The young Maurras—whose "profoundly lived paganism" has been emphasized by Gustave Thibon, among others[7]—declares: "The Parthenon,

having existed, no longer needs anybody. It is we who need the Parthenon to develop our own lives." He goes on to vituperate "Judeo-Christian obscurantism" and the "venom of the *Magnificat*."[8] In France and elsewhere, there would be a constant stream of criticism from what is conveniently labeled the "right-wing" political mindset—figures such as Sorel and Proudhon, Hugues Rebell and Pierre Lasserre, D'Annunzio, Pareto, Spengler, Moeller van den Bruck and Jünger, to Pierre Drieu la Rochelle, Céline, and even Robert Brasillach (who extolled the "naïve paganism" of Joan of Arc).[9] The views of the foregoing authors anticipate those of Julius Evola, Louis Rougier, Armin Mohler, Louis Pauwels, and Jean Cau.

In modern literature, paganism bursts forth with D. H. Lawrence (see especially his *Apocalypse*[10]), Sidonie-Gabriella Colette, Jean Giono, Knut Hamsun, Stefan George, Rilke, and others. Henry de Montherlant, who made the ancient world a palestra where Hermes rules equally with Minerva, praises the virtue of "paganness" and ceaselessly stresses the importance played by the *res Romana* in his work. Opposing the Roman Tiber to the eastern Oronto, he leaves these instructions: "Whenever you experience mental vacillation, cast your mind back to the Greco-Roman mentality as it was before the second century."[11] Among more recent writers, I should cite Marguerite Yourcenar, Jean Markale, Yann Brekilien, J. R. R. Tolkien, Patrick Grainville, and so on.

From the time of the ideological blossoming of the "New Right" and the counter-offensive of Bernard-Henri Lévy[12] and his friends, the monotheism vs. polytheism debate—the "mono-poly" of Parisian literary circles—has become all the rage.[13] Anathematizing any and all Greek parts of our heritage, Lévy has spontaneously rediscovered the reactionary and anti-democratic argument developed by Father Gaume at the same time he was claiming as his watchword the well-known aphorism: "Cursed be the man who teaches his son the science of the Greeks."[14] Louis Pauwels declared the opposite, saying: "There is a secret Europe we must rediscover. I believe in a return to spiritual paganism."[15] The Mexican writer Octavio Paz, who calls himself both a "democrat and polytheist," describes monotheism as "one of the greatest catastrophes of humanity."[16] Bernard Oudin denounces monotheism as the very source of totalitarianism.[17]

Raymond Ruyer closes one of his last works with an invocation to Zeus.[18] Alain Daniélou saw the "monotheistic illusion" as an aberration from the viewpoint of the spiritual experience."[19] Philippe Sollers described Pier Paolo Pasolini as both "pagan" and "Judeo-Christian."[20] Folklorists and the historians of mental attitudes constantly collide—when it comes to questions of ordinary folk life—on the question of pagan survivals in the heart of what Carlo Ginzburg calls the "peasant religion."[21] This would include modern social phenomena that are highly questionable in the eyes of many, such as the rage for a certain sort of esotericism or the ecologist trend, which sometimes offer marginal instances of the resurgence of paganism (the return to nature interpreted as the "face of God," the questioning of Christianity from the perspective of spirituality or occultism, and so on). Such examples could easily be multiplied.

Finally, the contemporary trend toward *pluralism* and *honoring one's roots* itself contains, at least implicitly, a rejection of Christian equality and reductive universalism. It is also acceptable to share with Odo Marquard the belief that such a requirement goes necessarily hand in hand with the quest for a *polymyth*.[22] The crisis of what Gilbert Durand has called the "unique worship of a unidimensional meaning of history, aligned on the old thread of a totalitarian logic"; the collapse of optimistic certitudes connected to the idea of "progress"; the stagnation of the disruptionist ideologies of "contrarianism"; the subsiding of rationalism and positivism; the emergence of ideal types and archetypes as modalities of a necessarily plural collective unconscious (because it always consists of heterogeneous elements); the works that keep multiplying on the "imaginal" and the "primordial words"; the renaissance of myth both as the object and as a *mode* of understanding; and the rejection of quantitative, mercantile values and univocal theoretical orientations—all these features of society are leading to open, heterogeneous, "polytheistic" (in the proper sense of the word), synthetic, paradoxical "determinisms" governed by conflictual logics that correspond to the *normal* state of living systems.

In fact, with David Levy Miller[23] and James Hillman[24] an entire modern school of psychology preaches the renaissance of polytheism as the only spirituality that conforms to the state of a polyphonic, polysemous, and multivalent world. In a neighboring domain, a researcher like Gilbert Durand, for whom all society is "axiomatically polytheistic and more or

less quadrifunctional," argues for an "ethics of pluralism" (which would also be an ethics of "profundity"), based on a *desire* "which its own grandeur defines as plural, and the plurality of which can only be guaranteed by the hierarchical principle of difference,"[25] while Michel Maffesoli, also rallying to the cause of a "polytheism of values" evoked by Max Weber,[26] defines paganism as "that very thing which, by acknowledging reality's polytheistic nature, teaches one how not to bow down before the 'force of history' or its various avatars and substitutes."[27]

The contemporary relevance of paganism is, therefore, not a matter for debate. Neo-paganism—if it is in fact neo-paganism—is not part of the modern phenomenon of cults (as it is occasionally viewed even by those who are not its opponents), but may sometimes consist of well-intentioned groups and covens that can be described as often clumsy, sometimes unintentionally comical, and thoroughly marginal. Nor is this a form of "Christianity turned upside down" that adopts various Christian *forms*—whether drawn from the ritual system of Christianity or from its array of ritual objects—for its own ends in order to reconstruct an equivalent or a counterpart religion.

There is another thing that seems especially important to be wary of today. This is not so much the disappearance of paganism as its reemergence in primitive or puerile forms akin to the "second religiosity" that Spengler rightly described as one of the characteristic traits of cultures in decline. This is also what Julius Evola wrote about as signifying "in general, a phenomenon of escapism, alienation, and confused compensation that in no way impinges seriously upon reality . . . something promiscuous, fragmented, and subintellectual."[28] This is a topic that requires a certain amount of clarification.

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1. In an article entitled "Le malentendu du 'nouveau paganisme'" ["The Misunderstanding of the 'New Paganism'"] (reprinted in *La Torre* [March, 1979]; French translation, Centro Studi Evoliani, Brussels, 1979), Julius Evola contests the validity of the word "pagan," which he himself employed in his book *Imperialismo pagano* [Pagan Imperialism] (Todi and Rome: Atanor, 1928). He uses as his pretext that the word *paganus* was originally "a pejorative, sometimes even insulting term used in the polemics of the early Christian apologias." This opinion seems hardly convincing to me, not only because the term has been consecrated by usage and has gained over time another resonance, but also because movements that have transformed the scornful labels given them into titles of glory are hardly a historical anomaly (for example the Dutch *Gueux*). On the other hand, Nietzsche imagines a time when words like "Messiah," "Redeemer," or "Saint" could be used "as insults and for designating criminals"(*Twilight of the Idols* and *The Anti-Christ*, trans. R. J. Hollingdale [London:

Penguin, 1968], 162). Be that as it may, we are fully in agreement with many other passages in this text by Evola.

2. See Herbert Bloch, "La rinascita pagana in Occidente alla fine del secolo IV" ["The Pagan Renaissance in the West at the End of the Fourth Century"], in *Il conflitto tra paganesimo e cristianesimo nel secolo IV*, ed. Arnoldo Momigliano (Turin: Einaudi, 1968), 199–224.

3. For more on the properly pagan aspects of the Renaissance, see especially Edgar Wind, *Pagan Mysteries in the Renaissance* (New York: Norton, 1968), and Jean Seznec, *The Survival of the Pagan Gods: The Mythological Tradition and its Place in Renaissance Humanism and Art*, trans. Barbara F. Sessions (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1961). For more on the same evolution in Germany, see Jacques Ridé, *L'image de Germain dans la pensée et la littératures allemandes, de la redécouverte de Tacite à la fin du XVIe siècle: Contribution à l'étude de la genèse d'un mythe* [The Image of Germania in German Thought and Literature since the Rediscovery of Tacitus at the End of the Sixteenth Century: Contribution to the Study of the Genesis of a Myth] (Paris: Champion, 1977).

4. Catulle Mendès, *L'Homme tout nu* [Man Completely Naked] (Paris: Hallier, 1980).

5. J. Gaume, *Lettres à Monseigneur Dupanloup, évêque d'Orléans, sur le paganisme dans l'education* [Letters to Monseigneur Dupanloup, Bishop of Orleans, on Paganism in Education] (Gaume frères, 1852).

6. Ernst Renan, *Souvenirs d'enfance et de jeunesse* [Memories of Childhood and Youth] (Paris: Gallimard, 1983).

7. Gustave Thibon, "Maurras poète" ["Maurras, Poet"], in *Itinéraires* (April 1968), 145.

8. For more on the paganism of the younger Maurras, see Patrice Sicard, *Maurras ou Maurras* (Paris: GRECE, 1974).

9. Robert Brasillach, *Le Procès de Jeanne d'Arc* [The Trial of Joan of Arc] (Paris: Gallimard, 1951).

10. D. H. Lawrence, *Apocalypse* (New York: Viking, 1966).

11. Henry de Montherlant, *Va jouer avec cette poussière* [Go Play with this Dust] (Paris: Gallimard, 1966). For more on the place held by antiquity in the work and thought of Montherlant, see Pierre Duroisin, *Montherlant et l'Antiquité*, doctoral thesis, Liège University, 1979.

12. Bernard-Henri Lévy, *The Testament of God*, trans. George Holoch (New York: Harper and Row, 1980).

13. [One of the only English-language articles to offer some context on this debate in Parisian intellectual circles is Thomas Sheehan, "Paris: Moses and Polytheism," *The New York Review of Books*, 24 January 1980. —*Ed.*]

14. Talmud, Bava-Kamma treatise, folio 82–83; Sotah treatise, folio 49.

15. Louis Pauwels interviewed in Jean Biès, *J'ai dialogué avec des chercheurs de vérité* [Dialogues with Seekers of Truth] (Paris: Retz, 1979).

16. Octavio Paz in *Les Nouvelles littéraires*, 14 June 1979.

17. Bernard Oudin, *La Foi qui tue* [The Faith That Kills] (Paris: Laffont, 1980).

18. Raymond Ruyer, *Le Sceptique resolu* [The Resolute Sceptic] (Paris: Laffont, 1979).

19. Alain Daniélou, *Gods of Love and Ecstasy: The Traditions of Shiva and Dionysus* (Rochester, VT: Inner Traditions, 1984), 226.

20. Philippe Sollers, "Pasolini, Sade, saint Matthieu," in *Pasolini*, ed. Maria Antonietta Macciocchi (Paris: Grasset, 1980).

21. Carlo Ginzburg, *Night Battles: Witchcraft and Agrarian Cults in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries*, trans. Anne and John Tedeschi (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992).

22. Odo Marquard, “Lob des Polytheismus: Über Monomythie und Polymythie” [“Praise of Polytheism: On Monomyth and Polymyth”] in *Philosophie und Mythos: Ein Kolloquium*, ed. Hans Poser (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1979), 40–58.

23. David Levy Miller, *The New Polytheism* (New York: Harper Collins, 1974).

24. James Hillman, *Pan and the Nightmare* (London: Spring Publications, 2000).

25. Gilbert Durand, “La cité et les divisions du royaume” [“The City and the Divisions of the Kingdom”], *Eranos Jahrbuch 45* (1976): 165–219. See also his *Science de l’homme et tradition: Le nouvel esprit anthropologique* [Social Science and Tradition: The New Anthropological Spirit] (Paris: Berg International, 1979) and *Figures mythiques et visages de l’oeuvre* [Mythical Figures and Faces of Work] (Paris: Berg International, 1979).

26. Weber, “Science as a Vocation.”

27. Michel Maffesoli, *La Violence totalitaire* [Totalitarian Violence] (Paris: PUF, 1979), 68.

28. Julius Evola, *Ride the Tiger: A Survival Manual for the Aristocrats of the Soul*, trans. Joscelyn Godwin and Constance Fontana (Rochester, VT: Inner Traditions, 2003), 209, 210.

Chapter Two

Time and History

First of all, paganism is not a "return to the past." It does not consist of what could be called "one past versus another," contrary to what Alain-Gérard Slama wrote so casually.[1] It is not a manifestation of a desire to return to some sort of "lost paradise" (this is rather a Judeo-Christian theme) and even less, contrary to what Catherine Chalier declared so gratuitously, to a "pure origin."[2]

In a time where one never stops talking about "roots" and "collective memory," the condemnation for being overly attached to the past is self-refuting. Every person is "first born," an heir. There is no individual or collective identity that does not take into account one's connection to those who create us, the source from which we emerged. Just as yesterday we had the grotesque spectacle of Christian missionaries worshipping their own *gris-gris* while denouncing "pagan idols," it is somewhat comical today to witness the denunciation of the (European) "past" by those who ceaselessly boast of the Judeo-Christian continuity and are always presenting for our edification the "ever relevant" examples of Abraham, Jacob, Isaac, and other proto-historical Bedouins.

On the one hand, we must reach an understanding of just what this word "past" means. We refuse to give any credence whatsoever to the Judeo-Christian problematic that posits the past as a definitively passed *point* on a *line* that would necessarily conduct humanity from the Garden of Eden to the Messianic Age. We do not believe this has any historical meaning. For us, the past is a *dimension*, a *perspective* that is totally relevant to the present. There are no such things as "past" events until they insert themselves as such *in the present*. The perspective opened by how we represent these events to ourselves "transforms" our present in exactly the same fashion that the meaning we give them by *re-presenting* them

contributes to their own transformation. The "past" necessarily participates then with that characteristic of human consciousness known as *temporality*, which is neither the "quantity of (measurable) time" as is commonly assumed today nor the duration evoked by Bergson, which is the property of non-human nature—temporality belongs to man alone. Life as "worry" (*Sorge*) is *ex-tensive* of itself as Heidegger put it, therefore it does not fit into any pre-established temporal framework. Man is nothing but a *project*. His consciousness itself is a project. To exist is to *ex-sistere*, to pro-ject (to hurl oneself forward). It is this specific mobility of the extensiveness that Heidegger calls the "historizing"[3] (*Geschehen*) of human existence—a historizing that absolutely marks "the very structure of human life, which, as a transcendent and revelatory reality, makes possible the *historicality* of a world." Man's historicality stems from the fact that he combines "past," "present," and "future" *in the immediate present*, which thus form three dimensions that mutually feed and transform each other. From this perspective, the typically Judeo-Christian reproach of too great an attachment to the past is entirely devoid of any meaning.

This kind of attachment to the past can only exist in a *mono-linear* historical perspective, in fact, in a history where what has "passed" cannot *return* again. But this is not the perspective we take. We believe in the Eternal Return. In 1797, Friedrich Hölderlin wrote to his friend Johann Gottfried Ebel, "But there is no such thing as annihilation, and so the youth of the world must come back again, out of our decomposition."[4] In fact, it is not a question of "returning" to the past, but of *connecting with it*—and also, by that very fact, in a *spherical* conception of history, to connect to the eternal and cause it to surge back, to have consonance in life, and to disentangle itself from the tyranny of the *logos*, the terrible tyranny of the Law, so as to reestablish the school of the *mythos* and life. In ancient Greece, Jean-Pierre Vernant observes, "the effort to remember the primary purpose of everything is not the construction of the individual past of *a man who remembers*, the construction of his individual time, but conversely it is what allows him *to escape time*."[5] In the same way it is a question of referring to the "memory" of paganism not in a chronological way, so as to return to an "earlier time," but in a *mythological* way, to seek for that which, through time, surpasses time and still speaks to us today. It is a question of connecting to something that *cannot be surpassed* rather than to something that has been "surpassed."

The terms "beginning" and "end" therefore do not hold the same meaning for us that they do in the Judeo-Christian problematic. In the pagan perspective, the past is always future. "*Herkunft aber bleibt stets Zukunft*," writes Heidegger: "What existed in the beginning, remains always in the future, remains constantly under the control of what is in the future." In his *Introduction to Metaphysics*, Heidegger specifically examines the question of the "past."[6] A people, he says, can triumph over the "darkening of the world" and its decline only if its sights are permanently set upon its destiny. Now, a people "will be able to gain a fate from its vocation only when it creates *in itself* a resonance, a possibility of resonance for this vocation, and grasps its tradition creatively. All this implies that this people, as a historical people, must transpose itself—and with it the history of the West—from the center of their future happening into the originary realm of the powers of Being."[7] In other words, it is necessary "to *repeat and retrieve* the inception of our historical-spiritual being (*Dasein*), in order to transform it into the other inception."[8] And Heidegger adds, "But an inception is not repeated when one shrinks back to it as something that once was, something that by now is familiar and is simply to be imitated, but rather when the inception is begun again *more originally*, and with all the strangeness, darkness, insecurity that a genuine inception brings with it."[9] In fact, "the beginning *still is*. It does not lie *behind us*, as something that was long ago, but stands *before* us. . . . The beginning has invaded our future. There it awaits us, a distant command bidding us to catch up with its greatness."[10]

So it is not a *return* so much as a *recourse* to paganism. Or, if one prefers, it is not a return *to* paganism but a return *of* paganism, a return toward what Heidegger in this page of luminous importance called an "other inception."

"There is nothing anyone can do for or against one's genealogy, and a time always comes when each person will have to choose comprehension over resumption, and with it an illumination that does not include denial in order to make the solitary choice of embracing what connects him to or pushes him away from his origins," writes Blandine Barret-Kriegel, who declares herself to be "Judeo-Christian."[11] She adds: "When the undertakings of previous generations come to grief, the natural response is to start over on this side of the bifurcation, to loosen the duration, and expand the space."[12] This says exactly what is involved here: to start over

"on this side of the bifurcation" for another beginning. But undoubtedly such a scheme will appear blasphemous to the eyes of many. In Hebrew, the word "beginning" also carries the sense of "profanation." To *begin* something, as we will have the opportunity to see, is to compete with God. The truth of this observation is underlined by a passage in Genesis (4:26) that refers to Enoch, son of Seth, as the first to invoke the name of Yahweh,[13] which is interpreted in Jewish theology as meaning not the beginning of monotheism but the start of paganism ("*So one began.* This verb means to profane. One began giving to men and statues the name of Saint Blessed Be He and to call gods idols," is the Rachi commentary on Genesis 4:26). From the time of Shimon bar Yochai to the present, pagan culture has ceaselessly remained the target for criticisms and accusations.[14] This fact alone, not that it needs to be stated, is sufficient evidence that a certain "past" remains present in the very eyes of those who denounce it. "It is not by chance," writes Gabriel Matzneff, "that our fanatic, hateful, and doctrinaire twentieth century never missed a single occasion to paint a caricatured and slanderous image of the ancient Romans—it instinctively detests everything that is superior to it."[15]

The Renaissance of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries was precisely that: a *re-birth*. "What it involved," as Renan said, "was seeing antiquity face-to-face." This rebirth was no journey backward or a simple resurgence of the "past," but on the contrary the point of departure for a new spiritual adventure, a new adventure of the Faustian soul that was now triumphant because it had awakened to itself. Nor is neo-paganism today a regression either. On the contrary, it is the deliberate choice of a more authentic, harmonious, and powerful future—a choice that projects into the future, for new creations, the Eternal from which we come.

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1. *Lire*, April 1980.

2. *Les Nouveaux Cahiers*, Summer 1979.

3. [This translation of "*Geschehen*" follows the example of Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson (New York: Harper and Row, 1962), 427. —*Ed*.]

4. Friedrich Hölderlin, *Essays and Letters*, trans. Jeremy Adler and Charlie Louth (London: Penguin, 2009), 83.

5. Jean-Pierre Vernant, interviewed in *Le Nouvel Observateur*, 5 May 1980.

6. Martin Heidegger, *Introduction to Metaphysics*, trans. Gregory Fried and Richard Polt (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000).

7. Heidegger, *Introduction to Metaphysics*, 41.

8. Heidegger, *Introduction to Metaphysics*, 41.

9. Heidegger, *Introduction to Metaphysics*, 41.

10. Martin Heidegger, "The Self-Assertion of the German University" (1933), trans. Karsten Harries, in Heidegger, *Philosophical and Political Writings*, ed. Manfred Stassen (New York and London: Continuum, 2003), 5.

11. *Le Matin*, 10 September 1980.

12. *Le Matin*, 10 September 1980.

13. My citations are taken from *La Bible de Jérusalem* (Paris: Cerf-Desclée de Brouwer, 1973), which is generally regarded as possessing the greatest authority. I have also consulted the *Traduction Oecuménique de la Bible* (Paris: Cerf-Les Bergers et les Mages, 1971), André Chouraqui's translation (Paris: Desclée de Brouwer, 1974), and the Hebrew Bible sanctioned by the Rabbinate.

14. See François Fountaine, "Le complot contre Rome" ["The Plot against Rome"], *Le Figaro-Magazine*, 12 April 1980.

15. *Le Monde*, 26 April 1980.

Chapter Three

The Sacred

If one accepts the greatness of something, says Heidegger, "then the *beginning* of this great thing remains what is *greatest* about it."[1] Paganism today therefore clearly requires a certain familiarity with ancient Indo-European religions, their history, their theology, their cosmology, their symbolism, their myths, and the mythemes of which they are composed. A scholarly familiarity, but also a *spiritual* familiarity; an epistemological familiarity that is also an *intuitive* familiarity. This is not a matter of just accumulating knowledge about the beliefs of various European regions from the time predating Christianity (nor is it a matter of ignoring what may distinguish these sets of beliefs, sometimes profoundly, from each other), but primarily one of identifying within these beliefs the projection or transposition of a certain number of values, which belong to us and concern us directly as heirs to a culture. (This consequently leads to the reinterpretation of the history of the last two millennia as the story of a fundamental spiritual struggle.)

By itself this task is considerable. The ancient religions of Europe are not only equal to monotheism in terms of their spiritual richness and theological complexity, but it can even be claimed that they prove superior in this regard. Whether or not they are superior to monotheism is not the most important thing, however. What is important is that they *speak* to us—and for my part, I draw more lessons from the teaching of the symbolic opposition of Janus and Vesta, the morality of the Oresteia, or the story of Ymir's dismemberment than I do from the adventures of Joseph and his brothers or the aborted murder of Isaac. Beyond the myths themselves, it helps in the search for a certain concept of the deity and the sacred, a certain system of interpreting the world, a certain philosophy. Bernard-Henri Lévy refers to monotheism while declaring all the while that he does not believe in God. Our era remains profoundly Judeo-Christian in the way

it conceives of history and the essential values it assumes, even if the churches and the synagogues are emptying. Conversely, there is no need to "believe" in Jupiter or Wotan—something that is, however, no more ridiculous than believing in Yahweh—to be a pagan. Contemporary paganism does not necessarily entail erecting altars to Apollo or reviving the worship of Odin. Instead, it implies looking behind religion and, according to a now classic itinerary, seeking for the "mental equipment" that produced it, the *inner world* it reflects, and how the world it depicts is apprehended. In short, it consists of viewing the gods as "centers of values" (H. Richard Niebuhr) and the beliefs they generate as value systems: gods and beliefs may pass away, but the *values* remain.

This means that paganism, far from being something that can be characterized as a denial of spirituality or a rejection of the sacred, consists on the contrary in the choice (and *reappropriation*) of *another* spirituality, *another* form of the sacred. Far from being confused with atheism or agnosticism, it posits a fundamentally *religious* relationship between man and the world—and a spirituality that appears to us as much more intense, much more serious, and stronger than what Judeo-Christianity claims for itself. Far from desacralizing the world, it *sacralizes* it in the literal sense of the word; it regards the world as sacred—and this is precisely the core of paganism, as we shall see. For example, Jean Markale writes, "paganism is not the absence of God, absence of the sacred, or absence of ritual. Quite the contrary, it is the solemn affirmation of a transcendence, upon recognizing that the sacred no longer resides in Christianity. Europe is never more pagan than when it searches for its roots, which are not Judeo-Christian."[2]

The sense of the sacred, spirituality, faith, belief in the existence of God, religion as ideology, religion as a system and institution, are quite different notions that do not necessarily overlap. Nor are they unique. There are religions that have no God (Taoism, for example). To believe in God does not necessarily imply that it is a personal God. On the other hand, to imagine that all mankind's *religious* concerns could be dispensed with permanently is pure utopian thinking in my opinion. Faith is neither a "denial" nor is it an "illusion," and the best that reason can do is to recognize the fact that reason alone does not exhaust all of man's inner aspirations. "No beings, with the exception of man, feel surprised at their own existence," observes Schopenhauer, "but to to all of them all it is so

much a matter of course that they do not notice it. . . . [Man's] wonder is the more serious, as here for the first time it stands consciously face to face with *death*, and besides the finiteness of all existence, the vanity and fruitlessness of all effort force themselves on it more or less. Therefore with this reflection and astonishment arises the need for a *metaphysics* that is peculiar to man alone; accordingly, he is an *animal metaphysicum*."[3] The need for the sacred is a fundamental human need, in the same way as food or copulation (if there are those who prefer to do without either of the latter, then good for them). Mircea Eliade notes that "the experience of the sacred is a structure of consciousness," which one cannot hope to make do without.[4] The individual needs a belief or a religion—we distinguish here *religion* from *morality*—to serve him as ritual, as an action that provides unvarying assurance, as an important part of the patterns of habit with which he is constructed. In this regard, the recent appearance of a *true* disbelief forms part of one of those phenomena of decline that are dismantling in man's structure everything that specifically makes him human. (Is the man who has lost the ability or desire to believe still a man? One may at least raise the question.) "One can have a society without God," writes Régis Debray, "but there cannot be a society without religion."[5] He adds: "Those nations on the way to disbelief are on the path to abdication."[6] One can also cite Georges Bataille, according to whom, "religion, whose essence is the search for lost intimacy, comes down to the effort of clear consciousness which wants to be a complete self-consciousness."[7] This is sufficient to condemn Western liberalism. However, it would certainly be giving too much credit to Judeo-Christianity to reject all those concepts over which it claims to hold a monopoly, solely because it has claimed them. Nor is there any valid reason to reject the idea of God or the notion of the sacred just because of the *sickly* expression Christianity has given to them, any more than it is necessary to break with aristocratic principles on the pretext that they have been caricatured by the bourgeoisie.

It should be noted that in pre-Christian antiquity the word "atheism" was practically devoid of meaning. Ancient trials for "disbelief" or "impiety" generally dealt with something entirely different. When Ammianus Marcellinus said that there are some people "who deny that there are higher powers in heaven," he explicitly stated that they nevertheless believed in astrology and magic.[8] In Rome, it was Christians

who were accused of "atheism" because they showed no respect for the effigies of the gods or their places of worship. In Greece, rationalist thought simply reoriented mythic theogony and cosmology. This is why Claude Tresmontant, after his gratuitous conflation of pantheism with "atheism," is compelled to write that the latter is "eminently religious" and, moreover, "by far too religious as it unduly deifies the universe."[9] The fact is that in ancient Europe the sacred was not conceived as opposed to the profane, but rather it was believed to encompass the profane and give it meaning. There was no need for a Church to mediate between God and man; the entire city effected this mediation, and its religious institutions formed only a single aspect of it.[10] The opposite concept of the Latin *religio* should be sought in the Latin verb *negligere*.[11] To be religious is synonymous with responsibility, not neglect. To be responsible is to be free—to possess the concrete means of *exercising free action*. At the same time, to be free is also to be connected to others by a common spirituality.

When Bernard-Henri Lévy declares that "monotheism is not a form of sacrality, a form of spirituality," but "on the contrary, the hate of the sacred as such,"[12] his remark is only paradoxical on the surface. The sacred is the *unconditional* respect for something; monotheism literally places such respect outside the Law. For Heidegger, the sacred, *das Heilige*, is quite distinct from traditional metaphysics and from the very idea of God. We could say, to borrow an antinomy dear to the heart of Emmanuel Levinas, that the *sacred* invests itself as mystery in this world, that it is based on the *intimacy* shared by man and the world, in contrast to *holiness*, which is tied to the radical transcendence of an Absolute Other. Paganism *sacralizes* and thereby exalts this world, whereas Judeo-Christian monotheism *sanctifies* and thereby retreats from this world. Paganism is based on the idea of the sacred.

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1. Heidegger, "The Self-Assertion of the German University," 5.

2. Jean Markale, "Aujourd'hui, l'esprit païen?" ["The Pagan Spirit Today?"], in *L'Europe païenne*, ed. Marc de Smedt (Paris: Seghers, 1980), 16.

3. Arthur Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Representation*, trans. E. F. J. Payne (New York: Dover, 1966), II, 160.

4. Mircea Eliade, interview in *Le Monde-Dimanche*, 14 September 1980.

5. Régis Debray, *Le Scribe* [The Scribe] (Paris: Grasset, 1980).

6. Debray, *Le Scribe.*

7. Georges Bataille, *Theory of Religion*, trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Zone, 1992), 57.

8. Ammianus Marcellinus, *Res Gestae Divi Augustae*, XXVIII, 24, trans. John C. Rolfe from *The Surviving Books of the History of Ammianus Marcellinus* (Cambridge, MA.: Harvard University Press, 1939), vol. III.

9. Claude Tresmontant, *Problémes du christianisme* [Problems of Christianity] (Paris: Seuil, 1980), 55.

10. This does not make it a theocracy. The sovereign *political* function retains its autonomy. On the other hand, it is not the city of men that is governed according to the principles that supposedly govern the city of God, but rather the world of the gods that is imagined as the ideal projection of man's world.

11. [The Latin verb *negligere* means "to disregard, ignore, overlook, neglect." —*Ed.*]

12. *L'Express*, 21 April 1979.

Chapter Four

False Contrasts

So just what are the fundamental differences that separate European paganism from Judeo-Christianity? Before responding to this question, a certain discretion is called for. Independently of the fact that an opposition is never as clear-cut in reality as it is from the—necessary—viewpoint of analytical convenience, it seems important to first avoid any reflexive usage of the very notion of "Judeo-Christianity," which is a subject of controversy among both Christians and Jews and is not devoid of ambiguity. Strictly speaking, such usage only appears to be justifiable on two very specific planes. In the first place, on the historical plane: the Judeo-Christians are literally the first Christians of Jewish origin, members of the Palestinian communities of Nazareth who caused much discord between Judaism and Pauline Christianity. (We know that Paul's success brought an end to this historical Judeo-Christianity.[1]) Next is the "ideological" plane, which involves the characterization of what Judaism and Christianity may have in common from the philosophical and theological point of view. "Judaism and Christianity are the same fundamental theology," notes Claude Tresmontant.[2] This was also the opinion of Jean Daniélou, one of whose books is entitled *The Theology of Jewish Christianity*.[3] Christianity, in particular, has adopted all the universally applicable norms found in the Torah. "Judeo-Christianity" thereby designates purely and simply the monotheistic line of descent.

While that affiliation is established, there is often a serious underestimation of the differences that exist between Judaism and Christianity. In practice this frequently leads to the attribution to paganism of features that supposedly radically distinguish it from Judeo-Christianity, and which in fact distinguish it only from Judaism or—as is much more often the case—from Christianity. In certain cases, the oppositions are

partially illusory, or only involve how specific terms are expressed and not the terms themselves. It has often been maintained, for example, that Greek thought was dynamic, concrete, and synthesizing in contrast to an essentially static, abstract, and analytical Hebrew thought. In fact, the exact opposite was certainly the case, as shown by James Barr, who correctly contrasts "the divisive, distinction-forming, analytic type of Greek thought and the totality type of Hebrew thought."[4] Furthermore, Semitic languages spontaneously lead to synthesizing and to the concrete; partially lacking in syntax, they retain a vague nature that predisposes them to a multiplicity of interpretations.

Other features that have been ascribed to "Judeo-Christianity" are in fact specifically Christian: the theological importance of original sin, the idea of a finished creation, devaluation of sexuality, disdain for life, and so on. This does not include the intolerance that is characteristic of Judeo-Christian monotheism, which assumed truly dreadful proportions in Christianity, first by virtue of the grafting of the Christian faith onto the missionary spirit of the West, and because, of the three great Abrahamic religions, it is only Christianity that has set great store from the start in realizing its universalist vocation, wishing to be more than the religion of just one people or one culture.[5]

Nor can paganism be denied an aspiration to the "universal" by boiling it down to an enclosed, regressive subjectivity. But this aspiration to the universal—a point we will revisit later—is derived from the particular: from beings to Being, and not vice-versa. Powerfully manifested in Greek philosophy, among the Romans with the concept of the *imperium*, and by the Indo-Europeans with the idea of empire conceived as the body of the "god of light," the universal represents the crowning achievement of a social undertaking integrated with the being of the world, as well as the embodiment of its principle. It should not be confused with either philosophical or theological universalism, with their reduction of differences, or with ethnocentrism.

Finally, any consideration of the establishment of Christianity in the West cannot dispense with a study of not just the external, but also the *internal* causes for that establishment. (What is it *in the European mentality* that facilitated this conversion?) Nor should it be overlooked that Christianity itself has evolved considerably, and that from the historical and sociological point of view there is not one but *several* Christianities. For my

part, I will overlook nothing of the distinction between the egalitarian and subversive Christianity of the early centuries and the (relatively) constructive Christianity, strongly colored by pagan organicism, of the Middle Ages. Already by the fourth century, Christianity was clearly no longer the same religion that had provoked the fury of a Celsus.[6] Nor are we unaware that, as Heidegger puts it, "Christianity . . . and the Christian life of the evangelical faith are not the same thing."[7] Finally, I will not overlook the multiple meanings of the symbols upon which the hermeneutics is applied, or the inevitable variability of the body of scripture and of the theological systematizations.

When it comes to specifying the values that are particular to paganism, people have generally listed features such as these: an eminently aristocratic conception of the human individual; an ethics founded on honor (and thus on "shame" rather than "sin"); a heroic attitude toward life's challenges; the exaltation and sacralization of the world, beauty, the body, strength, and health; the refusal of any "worlds beyond"; the inseparability of morality and aesthetics; and so on. From this perspective, the highest value is undoubtedly not a form of "justice" whose purpose is essentially interpreted as a leveling of the social order in the name of equality, but rather everything that may allow a man to overcome himself. For paganism, it is indeed an utter absurdity to consider the implementation of what forms the very warp and weft of life as "unjust." In the pagan ethic of honor, the classic antitheses (noble vs. base, bold vs. cowardly, honorable vs. dishonorable, beautiful vs. deformed, sick vs. healthy, and so forth) replace the antitheses that are at work in a morality based on the concept of sin (good vs. evil, humble vs. vainglorious, submissive vs. proud, weak vs. arrogant, modest vs. boastful, and so on). However, while all this appears to be accurate, the fundamental feature in my opinion is something else entirely. It lies in the denial of *dualism*.

Expanding on what Martin Buber said about Judaism, it seems that Judeo-Christianity stands out less for its belief in a single God than for the nature of the relationships it suggests between man and God. In any case, it has been a long time since the conflict between monotheism and polytheism was reduced to a simple quarrel over the number of gods. "Polytheism is a qualitative and not quantitative concept," Paul Tillich observed.[8] "The

difference between pantheism and monotheism," Tresmontant acknowledges, "is a spatial question, not an ontological one."[9]

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1. For more on what has been dubbed the "Church of circumcision," see P. Gaultier Briand, *Nazareth judéo-chrétienne* [Judeo-Christian Nazareth] (Jerusalem: Franciscan Printing Press, 1971).

2. Claude Tresmontant, *Les Problèmes de l'athéisme* [The Problems of Atheism] (Paris: Seuil, 1972), 439.

3. Jean Daniélou, *The Theology of Jewish Christianity*, ed. and trans. John A. Baker (Chicago: Regnery, 1964). The original French title is *La théologie du judéo-christianisme.*

4. James Barr, *The Semantics of Biblical Language* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1961), 13.

5. "Election" in Christianity is purely individual. It is within each people (and not primarily between peoples) that Christian faith has established a fundamental *caesura* separating the most orthodox believers from the heretics or pagans. Marxism transposed this *caesura* onto the profane plane with the notion of "class."

6. See also Celsus, *Discours vrai contre les chrétiens* [True Discourse against the Christians] (Paris: Pauvert, 1965), and Louis Rougier, *Celse contre les chrétiens, La réaction païenne sous l'empire romain* [Celsus against the Christians, the Pagan Reaction under the Roman Empire] (Paris: Copernic, 1977). It should be noted that this distinction is not only diachronic. The two aspects have always coexisted, in obviously varying proportions, throughout the history of Christianity. To a certain extent they correspond to the dual face of Jesus in Pauline Christianity: suffering and humiliated, glorious and triumphant. See Louis Rougier, *La Genèse des dogmes chrétiens* [The Genesis of Christian Dogmas] (Paris: Michel, 1972), 281–86.

7. Cf. Martin Heidegger, *Off the Beaten Track*, trans. Julian Young and Kenneth Haynes (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 164.

8. Paul Tillich, *Systematic Theology* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1973), 222.

9. Tresmontant, *Les Problèmes de l'athéism*, 218.

Chapter Five

Dualism: For and Against

For Oswald Spengler, monotheism is the product of a particular psyche that—from about 300 BCE—led to a specifically "Magian"[1] concept of a world that has *another world* (that of the Deity) as its double, and which is ruled by the antagonism of an absolute good and evil (which on the symbolic plane corresponds to the confrontation of light and darkness). In this conception, the world is a dome or cavern—a theater where events transpire whose meaning and fundamental stakes are elsewhere. The earth forms a closed world, "magically" enveloped by the divine. This "Magian" consciousness is not an active awareness: it is the stage where the dark forces of evil and the luminous forces of good do battle. The ego submits to a deity of which it is simply an evanescent mode. Individual psychic activity shares a single divine *pneuma* through the intermediary of election or grace. The individual, like the world, is the site of a transubstantiation intended to transform darkness into light, evil into good, and a sinful nature into a redeemed one.

This term "Magian" must be understood in its specifically Spenglerian sense. Indeed, it is not devoid of ambiguity. From another perspective, as we shall see, the religion of the Bible should be considered as preeminently *anti-magical* [or *anti-Magian*], to the extent that it introduces a process of "disenchanting," of "de-ensorcelling" the world. This is the *Entzauberung* of which Max Weber speaks. In the Bible, where traces can be found of several ancient magical practices (among them, perhaps, is the prohibition made by the Decalogue of speaking the name—the *nomen* and thereby the *numen*—of Yahweh in vain), these practices are constantly denounced as "idolatrous."

It is an entirely different situation when it comes to the Indo-European religions. "Authentic" magic here aims at developing a psychological technique that is oriented toward a specific goal; it guides man into the

appropriate *form* for a given project; it constitutes the original "know-how" of human self-harnessing and the harnessing of the psyche by consciousness. The originally magical use of runic letters among the Germanic peoples seems today almost completely certain. Odin-Wotan is the preeminent magician god. During the "foundational" war between the Æsir and the Vanir (which symbolically reflected the conflict of lifestyles that emerged out the Neolithic Revolution between the great hunters and the agricultural producers), Odin "domesticated" the Vanir with his magic and assigned them a harmonious position in the organic tripartite society, where the "domestication of man by man" and the "domestication of nature" was completed. This myth signifies the transition from the *generic*, instinctive human subject to the *specific*, conscious human subject, who holds a magic power over other men, thereby engendering the conditions for the social stratification that is the distinguishing feature of every post-Neolithic society.[2]

In fact, for Spengler, what is "Magian" in Judeo-Christianity is precisely *dualism*. This is not the immanent duality of the world as is found in Iranian Mazdaism, which opposes a good God to an evil God, a God of light against a God of darkness. To the contrary, it is a dualism that results—since its inception—from a *radical* distinction between this world and God. It could be said that all of Judeo-Christian theology rests on the separation of the created being (the world) from the uncreated being (God). The Absolute is not the world. The first source of creation is entirely distinct from nature. The world is not divine. It is not the "body" of God. It is neither eternal, nor uncreated, nor ontologically self-sufficient. It is not a direct emanation or a modality of the divine substance. Nor is its nature or essence divine. There is but one Absolute, and this Absolute is God, which is uncreated, without genesis or becoming, and ontologically sufficient unto itself. Everything that is not God is the work of God. There is no middle term, middle stage, or intermediary state between "to create" and "to be created." Between God and the world, there is only nothingness—an abyss that God alone can fill. Completely alien to the world, God is the antithesis of all tangible reality. He is not an aspect, a sum, a level, a form, or a quality of the world. "In reality and in essence," God is "distinct from the world" he has created, the First Vatican Council of 1869–1870 reminds us.[3]

An absolutely transcendent Being, present everywhere yet nowhere in particular, God contains in himself the integrality of the world. By this he

also affirms the objective existence of the universe. In this way, Judeo-Christian monotheism broke from the onset with idealism. This is the origin of that "ideological phenomenon," to quote Foucault, formed by the separation of words and things in order to assert the primacy of things in themselves, independent of the subjects that see and speak of them, a separation that forms the basis of the *realist* doctrine developed by the Medieval scholastics.

Within Judeo-Christianity, the consequences of the dualist assertion have not everywhere received the same emphasis. Without, of course, going as far as Manichaeism—which the Church rejected as incompatible with its own philosophy—Christianity presents the most radical form of dualism. Christianity in fact borrowed for its own purposes a certain number of secondary antinomies—body vs. soul, mind vs. matter, being vs. becoming, invisible thought vs. visible reality, and so on—which are formulated as so many logical consequences of the original dualism. These antinomies did not come from the Hebrew heritage, but from ancient Greek philosophy, which always exhibited a great fondness for seeking out antagonisms and oppositions. But among the Greeks these latter were, on the one hand, generally resolved by means of the principle of the conciliation of opposites; while on the other hand, such oppositions were only advanced within a system that fundamentally affirmed an identity or unity between Being and the world.

Under the influence of this Hellenic theory of dualistic categories, which represents a *fully materialized* systematization of the tendency to construct myths in terms of binary oppositions, Christianity, by contrast, made these oppositions an extension of its dualistic vision of the world, thereby even further emphasizing an extreme process of *dissociation* from the real. (Moreover, this is the same tendency that would lead philosophers to conclude that ethics can be deduced from the nature of things and from human nature—a tendency that can paradoxically also be found in positivism with the implicit deduction of the imperative from the indicative.[4]) Judaism, for its part, has avoided most of these antinomies. Aside from the distinction made between created being and God's Being, Judaism has shown itself to be much more "unitarian" than classic Christianity. In its theology, the world "cannot be shared" precisely because there is only one creator. As a result, the teachings provided on life after

death, resurrection, and personal retribution in the beyond, are also more vague.[5]

From the Judeo-Christian perspective, dualism is connected to the theology of creation. "The idea of creation," writes Claude Tresmontant, "implies the radical distinction between the creator and the created, and the transcendence of the creator."[6] This is the assertion that constitutes the very opening of the Bible: "In the beginning God created heaven and earth" (Genesis 1:1). How was this creation made? It was created *ex nihilo*, out of nothing. God did not create the world out of a shapeless and unorganized matter, out of a chaos that existed before him and on which he would have worked—in which case he would simply be an organizing demiurge and there would be two non-created absolutes: God and matter. It cannot even be said that before God there was nothingness, because from the theological point of view, nothingness has neither reality nor attributes. "Before" the world there was only God. In the Kabbalistic tradition, the first chapter of Genesis is perceived as the unfolding of creation out of a preexisting divine universe.[7] God therefore pulled the universe *out of* himself.[8] And yet the world is not a "part" of God, because then it would be equally divine. Nor did God engender the world, for it is not consubstantial with him (only the Logos of God, engendered and not created, is consubstantial with God). He *created* it. By virtue of this fact, the relationship connecting God to man is both *causal* (God is the primal cause of all creatures) and *moral* (man must obey God because he is God's creature).

The relationship between God and this world is therefore truly a relationship of a unique kind of *causality*, which realizes all manners of being while realizing Being itself in the totality of what it is. This relationship is in no way one of identity or of direct emanation. The Bible rejects all ideas of immanence, emanation, all forms of pantheism, any idea of continuity between the first principle and the substances or beings that derive from it one after another. Finally, it is asserted that the world adds nothing to God, in no way increases his perfection, does not reduplicate him at all, and does not grow within his being. Without the world, God would still be equal to himself. If the world did not exist, God would not miss it nor would it be a loss of any kind to him. God was not "held" to making his creation. It did not give him "pleasure." Creation was a gratuitous act for him, or rather, to use the terminology of the theologians, an act of pure

liberality.[9] God creates out of "bounty." By the same stroke, he institutes himself as the sole absolute reality. In this way, as Nietzsche puts it, the "real world at last became a myth."[10]

A number of modern ideologies have borrowed this dualistic theory for their own purposes, and are content with simply providing an interiorized or profane version. Freud, for example, views the unconscious as evil. Civilization moves forward through the sublimation of its instincts. (There are only a certain number of his disciples, like Wilhelm Reich, who oriented psychoanalysis in the direction not of the sublimation but of the anarchic liberation of the instincts.) "Even with Freud, whose system often passes as having freed the psyche from a one-dimensional and linear itinerary," writes Gilbert Durand, "the famed subconscious is always suspected of being pathologically *beneath* and behind the healthy mind. This reveals how poorly suited duality is for modeling a plurality."[11] More often, however, dualism, when it is deflated, when it is revealed for what it is, transforms into its relative opposite—which is to say, into a pure *one-dimensionality*. We have then gone from one extreme to the other: the disease of the *profaned* Unique is a natural consequence of the malaise of the divided consciousness.

At the sources of pagan thought, by contrast, one finds that the world is *animated* and that the soul of the world is divine. All creation comes exclusively from nature and the world. The universe is the *sole being* and there cannot be any others. Its essence is not distinct from its existence. The world is non-created; it is eternal and imperishable. There has been no beginning, or rather, if there was one, it was the start of a (new) cycle. God only achieves and realizes himself by and in the world. "Theogony" is identical to "cosmogony." The soul is a piece of the divine substance. The substance or essence of God is the same as that of the world.[12] The divine is immanent in and consubstantial with the world.

These ideas were under constant development in early Greek philosophy. Xenophanes of Colophon (sixth century BCE) defined God as the soul of the world. "This world, which is the same for all, no one of gods or men has made," wrote Heraclitus, "but it was ever, is now and ever shall be an ever-living fire, with measures kindling and measures going out."[13] For Parmenides, who saw the world as an immobile perfect being, the world is for that reason non-engendered, imperishable, and non-created.

The Ionians made the principle of universal invariability—"nothing is created, nothing is lost"—the principle of the world's intelligibility. Similar opinions are found with Empedocles, Anaxagoras, Melissos, Anaximander, and others. Even later, as Louis Rougier notes, "in the majority of schools, Pythagoreans, Platonists, Peripatetics, Stoics, and Neoplatonists marveled at the eternal return of all events, which excludes an absolute origin of time, a first man, and a final eschatology that will not be followed by another beginning."[14] Aristotle himself taught in the fourth century BCE that the universe is divine: as God's intellect does contain the specific ideas of all things as exemplary causes, it follows that God is only self-aware and ignorant of creation. As for Plato, whose work combined with Christian dogma gave birth to Augustinianism, while he may appear to be teaching in *Timaeus* that the world was created and there was a beginning—what Saint Augustine in *City of God* called *natum et factum*—it is less the actual origin of the world than the possible relationship between the sensible and supra-sensible world he is striving to explain. In other words, he is led to envision the creation of the world to explain this relationship and not to deduce the latter proposition from the first. The results are quite different concepts of humanity: in the Bible, man realizes his destiny collectively by returning to the "state of innocence" that existed before sin, whereas with Plato, man must realize himself by assimilating as many of the eternal ideas as possible. For Plato, "eternity" is simply the form life takes in the world to which God also belongs.

Indian thinking on origins attests to a similar concept with its ideas of a cosmic Being, a universal soul (Atman), and a Conscious Infinity (Brahman). Here again, notes Alain Daniélou, "there is no irreducible dualism, or real opposition in the play of opposites that constitutes the field of our perceptions. Whether spirit and matter, consciousness and unconsciousness, inert and living, day and night, white and black, good and evil, or active and passive, it is merely a question of opposition between complementary and interdependent elements, which exist only in relation to each other."[15]

It is inconceivable in Judeo-Christian monotheism that God would reveal himself fully *through* the world and that the world could fully express his face. "The land promised to man will never be permissible to God," observes Mark Patrick Hederman.[16] Levinas reacts even more violently: "Here we have the eternal seduction of paganism, beyond the

infantilism of idolatry, which long ago was surpassed. *The sacred filtering into the world*—Judaism is perhaps no more than the negation of all that."[17]

From the pagan perspective, it is impossible to ever entirely dissociate God from the world. His connection to the world is not based on his being the absolute primal cause, and men are not contingent creatures to whom he gave birth *ex nihilo*. Paganism rejects the idea of an absolute first creation, which is a core component of Judeo-Christian monotheism.[18] Likewise it rejects all mechanistic epistemology, any idea of a global end to history—just as it tends, along with Spengler, to substitute the "idea of destiny" (*Schicksalsidee*) for the "principle of causality" (*Kausalitätsprinzip*). The idea of a creation, said Fichte, is the "absolutely fundamental error of all false metaphysics." Since that time, Heidegger has shown that the idea of a creation does not emerge from philosophy. The declaration of the uniqueness of Being and the world contains, from the perspective of human intelligence, the postulate of their eternal nature: Being cannot emerge from absolute nothing, and the world did not begin and will not end. Of the absolute being that exists in his whole, we say that he is *radically non-created*, the cause of himself, *causa sui*.[19]

The real world corresponds to the Greek *idiōtēs*: it is singular, one of a kind, without double or reflection, without a "mirror," without the added (pseudo) value of a world beyond. Taken on its own, beyond all apperception or any human representation, the universe is neutral, chaotic, and devoid of meaning. The world only hides one thing, says Clément Rosset, and that is that it has nothing to hide. It is sufficient unto itself for its own unveiling. *Meaning* only appears as the result of the representations and interpretations man may give it. There is a secret *of* the world but no secret *in* the world, a mystery *of* things but not a mystery *in* things. Nor is there any "universal key" to the universal, except for the "sense of history." And, as Rosset writes, it is very strange that so much energy is expended "seeking to shed light on the direction of becoming and the reason of history, in other words, the meaning of what is meaningless."[20] Nor is there any objective necessity at work in the universe. Furthermore, necessity is only another word for chance—the same thing seen from another angle. Everything that exists *necessarily* only exists by the simple fact that nothing can escape the necessity of being something—to be "somehow, anyhow" (Malcolm Lowry). This is not to say that the universe is doomed to

absurdity. There is no meaning *a priori*, but man can *create meaning* according to his will and representations. This power merges with his freedom, because the absence of any predetermined meaningful form for him amounts to having the possibility of *all* forms; the absence of an unequivocal configuration amounts to the possibility of *every* operation.

From the preceding argument it can be easily deduced that what most characterizes Judeo-Christian monotheism is not only the belief in a single unique God, but also and *especially* the adherence to a dualistic conception of the world. The example of Greek philosophy indeed shows that it is possible for a non-dualistic "monotheism" to exist—identifying the absolute being with the world—which, as we have seen, is not fundamentally at odds with polytheism, as the different gods can correspond to the various forms through which the Divinity manifests itself.

In this respect we cannot pass over in silence the contemporary movement in the sciences that largely stands opposed to the dualistic rending of the world, insofar as by reintegrating man back into the universe it rejects the concept of an intermediary man standing between a creator God and nature as a machine, and develops, as noted by Ilya Prigogine and Isabella Stengers, a "more unified concept of things."[21] An entire sector of modern science seems in fact to be orienting its efforts toward a refusal of the single law, to consider as relative the field of application of each explanatory model, to acknowledge the multiplicity of time and the diversity of objects, to define every living form as an open system that is far from an equilibrium, and so on. Prigogine notes that the dissipation of matter and energy, generally connected to the idea of an irreversible loss of efficiency, becomes itself—far from regaining balance—a source of a new order. Stéphane Lupasco demonstrates the reality of the contradictory antagonism built into each particle, which means that a *total separability* of beings is impossible (and is only realizable to a certain degree), just as, furthermore, a *total inseparability* is impossible: in the universe, every subject represents an actualization whose object represents the antagonistic potentialization. General systems theory, chaos theory, recent applications of cybernetics, the thermodynamics of dissipative structures, all these disciplines counter, on different levels, the "metaphysics of separation"—while making sure not to fall into the other extreme of the "metaphysics of flattening" and of the one-dimensional. Rejecting the mechanistic concept of linearity, like the false alternatives (body vs. mind, soul vs. matter, etc.)

born of dualistic thinking, they have become aware of a "neo-Gnostic" thought and developed a representation of the universe that is both more unitary and more complex, which emphasizes specific features without reducing them, and ceases to make man a stranger in his own world, without turning him into something he is not. "*In fact*," writes Marc Beigbeder, "we have arrived at paradigms—or suggestions of paradigms—in the sciences, particularly those of microphysics and neurophysiology, that are closer to the poetic imagination, to the Pre-Socratics and the Neoplatonists, mystical and Gnostic traditions, than those of the seventeenth- and eighteenth-century founders, and particularly the Positivists of the nineteenth century."[22]

"The opposition between Hebrew monotheism, Jewish and Christian, on the one hand, and atheism[23] on the other," observes Claude Tresmontant, "is not at all contrary, as some have tried to make us think, to the opposition between theology and science, between 'faith' and 'reason.' But it is fundamentally . . . a violent opposition, an inexpiable war, between two theologies. The Hebrew theology, on the one side, which professes that the being is distinct from the world, and the theology of nature, which is the most ancient Hellenic philosophy, on the other. This latter claims that it is nature which is divine."[24]

Paganism therefore implies the rejection of this *discontinuity*, this *rupture*, this fundamental *tear*—the "dualistic fiction" that, as Nietzsche wrote in *The Anti-Christ*, "degenerated God into the *contradiction of life*, instead of being its transfiguration and eternal *Yes!*"[25] Curing the world of its monotheistic rupture would be the restoration of Being to its unitary unfolding, the removal of the ontological abyss separating God from his "creatures," and the return to life of the contradictory diversity of its meanings. God did not create the world; it unfolds in him and through him. He is not limited to being "present everywhere" in the world as simply maintained by pantheism; he constitutes rather the dimension of the world, which, globally as well as locally, gives it meaning based on what we make of it. God is bound to the Being of the world, and to seek to approach him by the paths of reason is pure absurdity. "O the madman who exhausts himself day and night striving to imagine you" (Walther von der Vogelweide). And yet, to study the world is also to know God—knowing that this knowledge will never be total and will *never be completed*. Faith

and science thus find themselves reconciled, not in the way of the scholastic, who claims to prove the reality of his dogmatic propositions by means of universal reason, but by the affirmation of the general singularity of the real that has no double or reflection.

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1. [In the original French, Benoist uses the term *magique*, "magical," here. However, he is discussing a concept that is traditionally translated as "Magian" in English editions of Spengler's *The Decline of the West* (for example, the authorized translation by Charles Francis Atkinson published by Knopf in 1926–1928), and we have therefore chosen to mainly use the latter rendering. The words *magic* and *Magian* do, of course, share a common origin. —*Ed*.]

2. For more on this subject, see Giorgio Locchi, "Histoire et sociéties: Critique de Lévi-Strauss" ["History and Societies: Critique of Lévi-Strauss"], *Nouvelle École*, March–April 1972, 81–93.

3. Session 3, ch. 1, and canon I, 3–4.

4. There is a fairly clear tendency in contemporary Christian theology to sidestep these secondary antinomies. But this tendency in no way invalidates what was known in the past, of course.

5. It is significant, for example, that the question of whether or not a trace of a belief in the afterlife can be found in the Hebrew Scriptures is still fuel for debate. In this regard, compare the article "Eschatology" that appeared in the *Encyclopedia Judaica* (Jerusalem: Keter, 1974), vol. 6, 859–86, and Abraham Cohen, *Les Routes divergentes* [Divergent Roads] (Paris: Minuit, 1956), 34–39. In Judaism, these facts work hand in hand with a very positive judgment toward life. Life is viewed as the supreme value to such a degree that it is generally not seen as meritorious to sacrifice it in an act of heroism. Suicide is practically absent from the pages of the Bible. The closest allusion may be when Job was tempted to take this action through the intermediary of his wife ("Curse God and die!" Job 2:9), who then immediately takes it back. Asceticism is also viewed ambiguously. The call for penitence is interpreted as a proof of Yahweh's love, but Orthodox Judaism generally attests to a certain distrust of violent mortification practices. The positive nature of life also circumscribes the limits of forgiveness and justifies self-defense (and eventually even preventive measures). Therefore, life has value in and of itself—not for what one can make of it through its sublimation (a sublimation that can actually lead to losing it). We find this non-duality of the body and soul in the belief, specific to Judaism, which asserts that life only gradually withdraws from the body after death. In Christianity, by contrast, where earthly existence is more readily perceived as an "accident," there is an entirely different attitude toward life.

6. Claude Tresmontant, *Essai sur la pensée hébraïque* [Essay on Hebrew Thought] (Paris: Cerf, 1962).

7. See Z'ev ben Shimon Halevi, *La Cabbale: Tradition de la connaissance cachée* [Kabbalah: Tradition of Hidden Knowledge] (Paris: Seuil, 1980), 9–10.

8. Josy Eisenberg and Armand Abécassis, *À Bible ouverte* [With Open Bible] (Paris: Michel, 1978), 32. Note that the Hebrew verb *bara*, whose root can be found in *bereshit*, "beginning," is related to the adverb *bar*, "outside of."

9. See Robert Guelluy, *La Création* [Creation] (Tournai: Desclée, 1963), 51.

10. Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols and The Anti-Christ* (trans. Hollingdale), 50–51.

11. Gilbert Durand, *L'Âme tigrée* [The Striped Heart] (Paris: Denoël-Gonthier, 1980), 179.

12. A declaration that corresponds to canon I, 3 of the anathema issued by Vatican I.

13. Heraclitus, Fragment 30, trans. John Burnet, in Burnet, *Early Greek Philosophy* (London: Black, 1920).

14. Louis Rougier, *La Scolastique et la thomisme* [Scholasticism and Thomism] (Paris: Gauthier-Villars, 1925), 44.

15. Alain Daniélou, *Virtue, Success, Pleasure, and Liberation: The Four Aims of Life in the Tradition of Ancient India* (Rochester, VT: Inner Traditions, 1993), 63–64.

16. Mark Patrick Hederman, "De l'interdiction à l'écoute" ["On the Prohibition of Listening"], in *Heidegger et la question de Dieu*, ed. Richard Kearney and Joseph Stephen O'Leary (Paris: Grasset, 1980), 288.

17. Emmanuel Levinas, *Difficult Freedom: Essays on Judaism*, trans. Seán Hand (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1990), 232.

18. Jewish tradition dates events "based on a starting date of the creation of the world." This dating system originated in the Middle Ages and the figure obtained—the year 5741 corresponds to 1980–1981, for example—results from a study of Biblical chronology. Today, this dating is generally given a symbolic value. It testifies in any case to a desire to ensure that "the beginning of time" does not coincide with any specifically human event.

19. The thesis of Catholic exegesis, mainly developed by Tresmontant (see *Problémes du christianisme*, 47–49), is to consider as proven that the world was begun and as rational that it was created. The first thesis, which comes out of the hard sciences, today fuels speculations on the "Big Bang" origin of the universe some twelve or thirteen billion years ago. "Everything in the universe and in nature is on the genesis system," writes Tresmontant elsewhere (*France catholique–Ecclesia*, 21 March 1980). Such an opinion is highly debatable, as is any theory that forces faith to depend on reason or intends to "prove" eternal beliefs by scientific facts, which are by definition contingent and subject to revision. As Niels Bohr wrote, "the purpose of physics is not to say what nature is, but what we are able to say about nature." The "Big Bang" theory will no doubt go the way of all the rest and be replaced or supplemented by another. (It is precisely the virtue of its statutory incompleteness that makes it scientific.) Furthermore, it has already been challenged on the basis of new interpretations of the Hubble equation at the 1976 Congress of the International Astronomical Union in Paris. Presuming such a "beginning" actually could have occurred, there is nothing that warrants the assertion that it was an absolute beginning and not the start of a new cycle. A constantly changing universe is not necessarily a universe that had an absolute first cause. Furthermore, if we accept the "Big Bang" theory, which was first presented by the prelate Georges Lemaître in *L'Hypothese de l'atome primitive* [The Hypothesis of the Primitive Atom] (Neuchâtel: Le Griffon and Dunod, 1946), should we consider the universe to be in a state of ceaseless expansion (the open model) or the opposite viewpoint, that it will stop? Current trends favor the open model; see "The Fate of the Universe" in *New Scientist*, 27 November 1980, 582–84. Tresmontant's opinion, according to which "the multiple as such cannot provide itself information which it does not possess," is a sophistry, whose implicit postulates are based on an obligatorily incomplete knowledge. Science, by its very nature, will always remain mute on the question of ultimate causes.

20. Clément Rosset, *Le Réel et son double: Essai sur l'illusion* [The Real and Its Double: Essay on Illusion] (Paris: Gallimard, 1976). See also his *Le Réel: Traité de l'idiotie* [The Real: Treatise on Idiocy] (Paris: Minuit, 1977) and *L'Objet singulier* [The Singular Object] (Paris: Minuit, 1980).

21. Ilya Prigogine and Isabella Stengers, *La Nouvelle alliance* [The New Alliance] (Paris: Gallimard, 1979).

22. Marc Beigbeder, *La Bouteille à la mer* [The Message in a Bottle], December 1980.

23. Recall that Tresmontant finds it convenient to label paganism "atheism"—all the while acknowledging that the term is here at least "ill-suited." It will be noted that Judaism makes no practical distinction between someone who denies the existence of God and someone who denies that God plays any real role in this world, despite accepting the possibility of his existence. See Hayim

Halevy Donin, *To Be a Jew: A Guide to Jewish Observance in Contemporary Life* (New York: Basic Books, 1972), 24–27.

24. Tresmontant, *Les Problèmes de l'athéisme*, 437.

25. Nietzsche, *The Anti-Christ* (trans. Hollingdale), §18.

Chapter Six

God: Creator and Father

Christian authors did not fail to emphasize that in Yahweh's eyes the created world was "good." Claude Tresmontant, for example, was of the opinion that biblical tradition "categorically declared the excellence of the real, the tangible world and its creatures."[1] This does not negate the fact that this "excellence" is awarded by virtue of it being the consequence and reflection of a creative act of God. When it is said that on the sixth day "God saw all that he had made, and it was very good" (Genesis 1:31), it primarily means that God felt a positive appreciation for his own action. Given that the world was created by God, it cannot lay claim to the same perfection as God's. The Bible declares that "the earth and the heavens" wear out "like a cloak" (Psalms 102:26). God does not "wear out." This is because the world does not have its own being, but only an existence that comes from God. It is only a "lesser being"—and as "good" as that being may be, it is essentially devalued as a result. Furthermore, it is upon this *devaluation* that an entire school of Christian philosophy bases its belief that the world is nothing but a "vale of tears."

The disdain (if not rejection) of the world in Christianity derives in large part from Paul. The Christian attitude, according to the very words of Saint Paul (Saul), consists of considering "everything sheer loss, because all is far outweighed by the gain of knowing Christ Jesus . . . . I count it so much garbage, for the sake of gaining Christ and finding myself incorporate in him" (Philippians 3:8). It was from thinking specifically of the "ascetic" morality that emerged out of the Pauline reformation that Nietzsche fundamentally interpreted Christianity as "saying no" to life, a *saying no* produced by its inability to face difference, to affirm the dreadful otherness, to face the abyss. All of which would lead him to provide this definition of

paganism: “pagans are all who say Yes to life, to whom ‘God’ is the word for the great Yes to all things.”[2]

Tertullian’s maxim is well known: *Nobis curiositate opus non est post Christum Iesum*, “We have no need of curiosity going beyond Christ Jesus.”[3] Contempt of the world in fact entails contempt of the knowledge that it brings us. During Tertullian’s time this was a widespread attitude among the Christians (hence the reproaches of Latin authors, who accused Christianity of addressing only the illiterate). Origen himself admitted that the great majority of the Christians of his time “were vulgar and illiterate folk.”[4] While it is true that contempt for the world was fairly characteristic of all tendencies of second-century thought, it was most prominent among the Christians—and also, of course, the Gnostics. (“The whole godless world lies in the power of the evil one,” wrote the author of the First Letter of John [5:19].) Origen, moreover, retained many of the features of Gnosticism. He considered birth such an evil that in his opinion men should “not only refrain from celebrating their birthdays, but should curse this day.”[5] He even went so far as to attribute the creation to the activity of certain “physical intelligences,” who, weary of contemplating God, would have “turned toward the inferior.”[6] For Origen, writes A. H. Armstrong, “The whole material creation is thus a direct result of sin, its purpose is to serve as a purgatory, and it would have been much better if there had never been any need for it.”[7] For a long time Christians avoided going head to head with pagans on the field of philosophical thought; it was only at a later date that they dared add to the *pistis* (the most elementary and often the basest form of faith: simple gullibility) the *logismos*, which is conviction founded on more elaborated reasoning. Saint Augustine would again declare that “this life is nothing but the comedy of the human race.”[8] The resurgence of such opinions can be seen today in quasi-Manichean forms: “The world bends under the law of Evil, and Evil, in return, is the other name of the world.”[9] (Compare also the words of Marek Halter: “No one emerges unscathed from this world where everything leads to oppression and death, and madness is hope!”)

Pagan thought, to the contrary, regards human consciousness as being part of the world and as such it is not radically dissociable from God. Facing Destiny (*Moira*), man is the law of the world (*anthropos o nomos tou kosmou*) and the measure of all things; he simultaneously expresses the

totality of the world and the very face of God. This intuition that connects man's consciousness and mind to the world has, incidentally, found numerous extensions in philosophy and modern epistemology, ranging from the monads of Leibniz to Teilhard's particles.[10] Because paganism does not view the world as something apart from God, both are equal in perfection. God is as "imperfect" as the world. One of the great lessons from the *Iliad* is that the gods fight with men *and within them*.

On Olympus, says Heraclitus, "Mortals, immortals; immortals, mortals: the one living the other's death and dying the other's life."[11] There could be no better way to express that while there is a difference of level between gods and men, there is no radical difference of nature. Gods are made in the image of men, for whom they offer a sublimated *re-presentation*. Men, by pushing beyond themselves, can at least partially share in the nature of the gods. In antiquity, the exemplary figure of the hero constituted the intermediary between the two levels. The hero is a *demigod*—an idea that seemed completely natural to the Ancients, whereas in the Bible it is obligatorily blasphemous. Among the Greeks and Romans, when an individual was heroized, they found that proper and good. But in the Bible, when the "serpent" suggests to Eve that she "become as a god" (Genesis 3:5), it is an "abomination." More recently, Erich Fromm has shown how the figures of the hero and the Christian martyr are antithetical: "The martyr is the exact opposite of the pagan hero personified in the Greek and Germanic heroes. . . . For the pagan hero, a man's worth lay in his prowess in attaining and holding onto power, and he gladly died on the battlefield in the moment of victory."[12] Any idea of an "intermediary" state between man and God, of a *man-god* or a god taking human shape, is foreign to the original Bible. (And in that regard, the Christian interpretation of Jesus as "a true God and true man" already attests to a certain compromise with the pagan spirit. Not only does Judaism not recognize Jesus as the Messiah promised in the Scriptures, but, furthermore, it is impossible for Judaism to accept Jesus' consubstantiality with Yahweh.)

"Unlike the majority of divinities, Yahweh does not reflect the human situation," observes Mircea Eliade; "he does not have a family, but only a celestial court: Yahweh is alone."[13] Yahweh's solitude derives from his specific nature. Yahweh has no genesis; he is not the result of an evolution, a process, or a becoming. He is all eternity and beyond all denominations.

He only says, “I am that I am” (*’ehyeh ’ăšher ’ehyeh*). The Bible provides no explanation to justify this declaration, nor does it demonstrate any train of reasoning or philosophical explication. It simply says: he who is has always been and will always be. The essence of God is in this way relegated to a deeper and deeper ontological abyss, increasingly separated from the world. This is attested by the very disappearance of his name, which is gradually replaced by the personal pronoun “him” (*hu*), before becoming totally unpronounceable—even *unimaginable* (at least in a conventional way)—by the sound of the voice.

Yahweh is absolutely the sole *I* of the universe; all others are mere *egos*. From the onset, Yahweh reveals himself as *radical otherness* (and, of course, *exemplary* for those who worship him). He is not only the Other, but the Completely Other, the “*ganz Andere*” mentioned by Rudolf Otto. The human being is proportionately devalued. Certainly, he can be “chosen” or receive grace. He is also posed with the alternative of finding his salvation by uniting individually with Yahweh, or being condemned to eternal damnation. But this alternative resides only in *subjection*. Nothing has the power to make man Yahweh’s “equal.”

It goes without saying that Yahweh has no physical characteristics. Yahweh is unqualifiable, ineffable, and indescribable.[14] The frequent allusions that the Bible makes to his “face,” his “throne,” his “hand,” his “eye,” and so forth, have a purely symbolic value. They result from the fact that, according to the well-known phrase, the Bible “speaks in the tongues of men.” Expressions like “God the Father” or “the children of God” are also just anthropomorphic renderings that should not be taken literally. Yahweh did not procreate human descendants. The very word “goddess,” writes Renan, would be “in Hebrew the most horrible barbarism.”[15] There is no man who could be literally Yahweh’s son. (Even in the Christian view, while Jesus is “consubstantial” with the Father, Yahweh is only father to himself.)

This anthropomorphic treatment of the father-son relationship should give us pause, however. It is actually emphasized in the context of the Covenant. Yahweh, even before he is a god of causality, is a *god of the Covenant*. He speaks to man; he gives him his commandments; he lets man know what he wills. He choses his people: “I will walk to and fro among you; I will become your God and you shall become my people” (Leviticus 26:12). This is the classic phrase of the Covenant: “I will adopt you as my

people, and I will become your God. You shall know that I, the Lord, am your God" (Exodus 6:7). This covenant with Yahweh, the *berith-Yahweh*, has been repeatedly interpreted as a "contract with the father"—a form of relationship whose profane transpositions can be found in Rousseau or Freud (in contrast to, for example, Machiavelli, Montesquieu, Tocqueville, or Nietzsche). Now, as noted by Levinas, "the separated and created being is thereby not simply issued forth from the father, but is *absolutely other* than him."[16] As "father," let me repeat, Yahweh does not engender. Consequently, it is impossible that his children will one day *succeed* him in the same way a son succeeds his father—sometimes with difficulty, but in any event naturally. In monotheism, Levinas adds: "Filiality itself can not appear as essential to the destiny of the I unless man retains this memory of the creation *ex nihilo*, without which the son is not a true other."[17] Lacan said in 1964 that no aware being is "father except as father." Gérard Huber adds that the "self-constitution of the son as father would constitute the father as father," and that "God emerged from an elaboration of the concept of the conscious father, but this—monotheist—elaboration belongs to the scale of unconscious ideas."[18]

We therefore have license to believe that the relationship established between man and God by Judeo-Christian monotheism exacerbates the bond of father and son into a neurotic form. Not only, in fact, does this place the father on a level that is *radically inaccessible* to the son, not only does this mean that the son knows in advance that he can never "take the place of the father" and thereby identify with him, but this even means, oddly enough, that the father ceaselessly—and we will come back to this point—exhibits an attitude of constant defiance toward the "prideful" claims of his children, and toward the "risk" involved in trying to "succeed" him, namely in any attempts to compete with him. All the elements are present for enacting what the theoreticians of transactional analysis call the "dramatic triangle" formed by the savior, the victim, and the persecutor. In Freudian terms, what we have here is the situation of a repressed love-hate relationship, retroactively overcompensated for by the assertion of an inaccessibility. The fear inspired in the son by the father, and, coming full circle, inspired in the father by the son, thus appears to me as one of the *frames of reference* for biblical thought. On the mythic plane, this obviously brings to mind the precept pronounced by Yahweh, "You are to surrender to the Lord the first birth of every womb; and of all firstborn offspring of your

cattle, the males belong to the Lord" (Exodus 13:12). This also recalls the massacre of all the Egyptian firstborn (Exodus 12:29–30), as well as the aborted sacrifice of Isaac by his father Abraham. (We will later see that in this perpetually recurring biblical "family tale," a constant disqualification of the *eldest* son to the benefit of his *youngest* brother can also be found.) The ritual sacrifice of the son is the price demanded by Yahweh as symbolic proof of his "children's" submission to him, but this sacrifice is kept within "appropriate limits" by a God predisposed to accept its ritual equivalent, upon which he can base his Covenant. Monotheism could thereby be interpreted, as Armando Verdiglione puts it, as "castration theology."[19] The fear that man should exhibit before Yahweh, a *necessary* fear, is one whose mark he should bear in his flesh. This fear, for which circumcision constitutes a symbolic simulacrum, would be the fear of a more fundamental "castration" intended to prevent the son from inheriting the powers of his father. Hence the compensation fantasy of the father's murder at the hands of a gathering of sons who would share his power on an egalitarian basis, a fantasy that will emerge into full *consciousness* within the very discourse of Freud. In fact, the only way to "succeed" a father whose place cannot be taken, is to kill him. But at the same time, such a murder is forbidden by the system. The recollection of a creation *ex nihilo*, while it ruptures the normal father-son relationship, "implies the formation of a repressed unconscious and the level of that repression."[20] The unconscious is thus forced to oscillate perpetually between the identifying submission to the father and the ceaselessly repressed desire for an act of liberating parricide. (This is an oscillation that may not be foreign to the development of *Selbsthass*—self-hatred.) The *berith-Yahweh*, the toned-down embodiment of ritual castration, is a repetition of birth: in other words, no one is really born without a father whom one can succeed, except within the Covenant. Freud perceived the reality of this complex ensemble, but then tried to shift attention away from it. The brothers have not killed the father—but they have never ceased desiring to kill him, and it is this desire, which is only expressed in the depths of their unconscious, that is the cause for their feelings of *guilt*. The theory of the "Oedipus complex" probably has its true origins in the Bible—origins which were intentionally concealed by Freud, who shifted attention toward a Greek source that was more rewarding in relation to his projects.

In her book *Psycholanalyzing Psychoanalysis,* Marie Balmary—while analyzing the matter from a strictly orthodox Freudian perspective—provides a convincing argument that Oedipal theory can be interpreted as the result of the son's "repression" of a transgression *committed by the father*.[21] The mechanism involved is one of transference: Oedipal theory puts the blame solely on the son in order to better exonerate the father. In his review of Balmary's book, Clément Rosset notes that Freud, in his study of the Greek myth, significantly *reached a complete dead end* concerning the transgression of Laius, the father of Oedipus (a transgression that was the direct cause of the latter's fate). He goes on to write:

> What Freud and psychoanalysis mean by *repression* is not the work of the child, withdrawing from circulation a reality he or she experienced in such a way that it has become too intolerable to retain in memory, but that of the parent now outside the conscious grasp of the child . . . . The father hides but knows, and the son has nothing to hide, for what he would be allegedly repressing is precisely what has already been hidden from him and physically repressed by the father . . . . The invention of the Oedipus complex would therefore be a denial of the true history of Oedipus, a manner of *repressing* it in the Freudian sense of the term. The legacy of the father's transgression is thus both assumed (because the son takes possession of the sin as his own) and denied (because the heir thereby relieves his ancestor of precisely the thing he inherits).[22]

As a result, the *discourse* on the transgression responds to the transgression itself, in the sense that the counter-neurosis "responds" to the neurosis—as a neurotic defense against the neurosis itself—which would also explain its "hereditary" transmission. Regarding the matter that concerns us here, we may similarly ask whether Adam's transgression doesn't trace back to Yahweh's "transgression," that is to say, whether the *story* of Genesis would not *also* be the repression of the true feelings Yahweh inspired. It is then easy to see how this problematic is modified in Christianity by the idea of a son who is *consubstantial* with the father, and who takes upon himself, by virtue of the Incarnation, the original sin in order to save humanity.

One immediate consequence of the reference to a single father is that the fraternity of the sons becomes universal: "*all*" men are "brothers."[23] But precisely as a result of this, such a fraternity becomes impractical. Human societies create true fraternity on the basis of a founding myth of common ancestry. However, this ancestry needs to be *demarcated* in such a way that a specific distinction can be made between those who belong to one "family" and those who belong to another. Relatively speaking, at least, fraternity is only possible with an *alter ego*: members of the same city, the same nation, the same people, or the same culture. If *all* men are brothers outside of any specifically human paradigm, then *no one* can truly be a brother. The institution of a symbolically universal "paternity" obliterates the possibility of an actual fraternity, by proclaiming itself in absolute terms as the very thing that it destroys.

The "choice" of the father over the mother also represents a break with a *past* that is identified with the *earth*. "In Judaism," writes the psychoanalyst Gérard Mendel, "the faithful remain alone with the father, thereby renouncing with the mother a certain form of carnal relationship with nature and with life."[24] From an ethnological perspective, the principle of maternity is of greater age than that of paternity.[25] Furthermore, the mother is identical to the earth-mother and represents a telluric and "primitive" understanding of fertility. At first glance, however, such a choice is not only unique to the Bible: Indo-European societies were also patriarchal societies. But the difference is that in the former we are dealing with a father whose nature is entirely distinct from that of his sons, whereas in the latter it purely and simply involves the sublimated projection of human paternity. In the Biblical context, the *severance* of the bond with the mother—"nature"—remains telling. This is apparently where the Bible locates the origin of the prohibition against incest, in conjunction with this idea that love between a man and woman is only possible when they have gotten beyond all "incestuous" fixations. Now these "incestuous fixations" are precisely what Erich Fromm sees as ties to the world, "to blood and soil," and "shackles that bind man to the past."[26] To the repressed desire of murdering the father, which Freud interpreted as the realization signaling the birth of civilization (parricide prompting the transition from the "horde" to the society) is thereby added the "idolatrous" temptation of a "return to the mother," the mother-earth, a temptation the Bible ritualizes by

relocating it in a "holy" perspective, with episodes such as those where Jacob, with the complicity of his mother Rebecca, deceives his father Isaac for "the good of the cause" (Genesis 27:5–17).

This may also be the basis upon which we need to reinterpret the conjugal symbolism frequently employed in the Bible when speaking of Israel. This symbolism describes Israel as the wife or "promised" bride of Yahweh. Now a conjugal sexuality can only be properly assumed when all ties to parental sexuality have been outstripped and annulled. "Man only becomes capable of truly connecting to his wife and becoming one with her in flesh, in a successfully blossoming sexuality, when he can psychically and geographically leave the location of the primal event."[27] Furthermore, this is the sense in which Jewish tradition tends to interpret the verse of Genesis that appears directly after the creation of Eve: "That is why a man leaves his father and mother and is united to his wife, and the two become one flesh" (2:24). Such symbolism—which, incidentally, Mircea Eliade claims "paradoxically draws upon the Canaanite fertility cult"[28]—comes down to replacing the repressed *natural* mother with an abstract mother who has no ties with the tangible world. This only serves to emphasize the "naturalistic" character of what the Bible condemns as "idolatry" and logically interprets in terms of "adultery": "Plead my cause with your mother; is she not my wife and I her husband? Plead with her to forswear those wanton looks, to banish the lovers from her bosom" (Hosea 2:4).

Obviously, this is a problematic that is completely absent in paganism. Man is seen both as the father of the gods and the son of the gods, and there is no natural rift between them—only differences in intensity and a mutual, incessant conversion of one into the other. By the same token, there is no "castrational" repression or parricidal desire. Generations of men and gods "succeed" each other without running into any radical opposition. Between Being in its entirety and each state of being, between Being and each being, there still exists a relationship comparable to that of the normal father and son. In Indo-European theology, no representations can be found of the beginnings of society from a single father; to the contrary, there are always eternal re-beginnings from numerous different fathers, characterized by their functions, and whose complementary relational arrangement already denotes the *organic* nature of the societies they are called upon to engender.

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1. Tresmontant, *Essai sur la pensée hébraique*.

2. Nietzsche, *The Anti-Christ* (trans. Hollingdale), §55.

3. Tertullian, *De praesciptione haereticorum* [On the Proscription of Heretics], chap. 7.

4. Origen, *Contre Celsum* [Against Celsus], I, 27.

5. Origen, *Homily on Leviticus,* VIII, 3.

6. Origen, *On First Principles*, II, 8, 3.

7. A. H. Armstrong, *An Introduction to Ancient Philosophy* (London: Methuen, 1947), 173.

8. Augustine, *Expositions on the Psalms*, 127.

9. Bernard-Henri Lévy, *Le Testament de Dieu* (Paris: Grasset, 1979), 238.

10. In addition to the studies mentioned above, see the hypotheses of the contemporary "neo-Gnostics": Raymond Ruyer, *La Gnose de Princeton: Des savants* à *la recherche d'une religion* [The Gnosticism of Princeton: Scientists in Search of a Religion] (Paris: Fayard, 1974); those of Jean Charron on "psycho-matter" or "sentient matter," that corresponds with electrons in *Le Monde éternal des éons* [The Eternal World of Aeons] (Paris: Stock, 1980); as well as the Córdoba colloquia, *Science et conscience* [Science and Conscience] (Paris: Seuil, 1980).

11. Heraclitus, Fragment 62 (trans. Burnet).

12. Erich Fromm, *To Have or to Be?* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2013), 122.

13. Mircea Eliade, *A History of Religious Ideas*, vol. 1: *From the Stone Age to the Eleusinian Mysteries*, trans. Willard R. Trask (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978), 181.

14. For more on this notion of indescribability, see Henri Frankfort, *Kingship and Gods* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1948), 342–44.

15. Ernest Renan, *Histoire générale et système comparé des langues sémitiques* [General History and Comparative System of the Semitic Languages] (Paris: Lévy Frères, 1863).

16. Emmanuel Levinas, *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Dudrecht: Kluwer, 1991), 63. Emphasis added.

17. Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 64.

18. Gérard Huber, "Moïse et la question de l'extériorité" ["Moses and the Question of Exteriority"], *Cahiers Confrontation*, Spring 1980.

19. Armando Verdiglione, *La Dissidence freudienne* [Freudian Dissidence] (Paris: Grasset, 1978).

20. Huber, "Moïse et la question de l'extériorité."

21. Marie Ned Balmary, *Psycholanalyzing Psychoanalysis: Freud and the Hidden Fault of the Father*, trans. Ned Lukacher (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1982).

22. Clément Rosset, "La faute originaire" ["The Original Sin"], *La Nouvelle revue française*, 1 January 1981, 85–94.

23. See Franklin Rausky, "L'homme et l'autre dans la tradition hébraïque" ["Man and the Other in the Hebraic Tradition"], in *Ni Juif ni Grec: Entretiens sur le racisme*, ed. Léon Poliakov (The Hague: Mouton, 1978), 35–46.

24. Gérard Mendel, *La Révolte contre le père* [The Revolt Against the Father] (Paris: Payot, 1968), 255.

25. See Edgar Morin, *La Méthode,* vol. 2: *La Vie de la vie* [The Method, vol. 2: The Life of Life] (Paris, Seuil, 1980), 439–40.

26. Erich Fromm, *You shall be as gods* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1966), 70.

27. Josy Eisenberg and Armand Abécassis, *Et Dieu créa Eve* [And God Created Eve], *À Bible ouverte* II (Paris: Michel, 1979), 161.

28. Eliade, *A History of Religious Ideas*, vol. 1, 347, n. 25.

Chapter Seven

Human Nature and Freedom

In the first chapter of Genesis, Yahweh declares: "Let us make man in our image and likeness" (1:26).[1] This phrase has inspired much commentary. What, in fact, is meant by these words "image" (*tselem*) and "likeness" (*demuth*)? Does the expression *tselem elohim* [God's image] have a physical or spiritual meaning? Does it tell us something about what Yahweh looks like, or simply inform us of the way he appeared to man? Paul Humbert gives concrete meaning to both these terms, but it is clear that we cannot confine ourselves to an anthropomorphic comparison here.[2] There is also a subtle difference between the two words: *tselem* means a "copy" that is quite close to reality, whereas *demuth* implies an idea of analogy, more of an approximate similarity. The notion of "image" that is presented first—in exactly the inverse order of what Genesis says regarding Adam and his own son: "Adam was one hundred and thirty years old when he begot a son in his likeness and image, and named him Seth" (5:3)—is thereby immediately toned down by that of "likeness." Furthermore, the oft-heard comparison to the feeling a father may have when recognizing his "image" in his son, is not much help. We know Yahweh was not the father of men in any genetic sense. The "similarity," according to other authors, stems from the fact that man was created to "dominate" the physical world, just as man is "dominated" by Yahweh. Often cited in this regard is a passage from the Book of Ecclesiasticus (Sirach) where it states that Yahweh gave man power "over all things that are upon the earth," "He clothed him with strength, according to himself" (17:3 and 17:2). But this appears to contradict the tale of Genesis, which makes the "rule" of man over animals the result of a secondary blessing.

In fact, this allusion to Yahweh's "image" that is re-created in man simply emphasizes humanity's *mirror-like* nature. It helps recall that man

remains a *created object* whose only positive value is to emerge from the hands of his creator and also, as Pope John Paul II said, "that man resembles God more than nature."[3] Likewise, in the dualistic concept of the world, the physical universe is only ever perceived as a *mirror*, and man, insofar as he reflects the "image" of God, confirms his existence by that very fact. In other words, man is not challenged as subject except in the name of a Supreme, Unique Subject. Here we can follow the argument of Louis Althusser, who states in regard to all ideology, that it is *centered*:

> the absolute Subject occupies the central place, and challenges around it the infinity of individuals in such way that the subjects are *subjugated* to the Subject, while giving them, in the Subject where every subject can contemplate his own image (present and future), the *guarantee* that it is truly them and truly he that are involved, and that while doing without a family, God *recognizes* them as his own. In other words, those who have recognized God and who will recognize themselves in him, are those who will be saved.[4]

No longer participating in the *intimacy* of the world, the man of Judeo-Christian monotheism finds himself in a position of a *secondary* subject, the derived subject, which, with respect to the Absolute Subject who is Yahweh, makes man forever an object. In paganism he participates, according to his rank and specific modalities, in the entirety of all that exists. Here in monotheistic thought, as a *separate being*, he is henceforth an object. (And in return, as Bataille has noted, the things to which he will henceforth turn his thought will appear to him as partially incomprehensible and unassimilable. The monotheistic break establishes the conditions for the non-communication of man and the world.)

Man is an *ambiguous* being. His double nature is derived from this ambiguity. Man is an animal, but he is not only an animal. He is a physical being, but a part of him is metaphysical. And his *specificity* does not derive from biology or "nature," but from what in him cannot be found in any other living being. Contemporary philosophical anthropology deals with this problematic by proceeding from an examination of relations between *nature* and *culture*. This is actually where the heart of the matter lies. In paganism it is resolved in terms of continuity—a continuity which should not be taken in the sense of a homogenous expanse that lacks hierarchies or

differences of rank, degree, and dimension, and which can even be understood as dialectical. From this perspective, culture does not represent an *absolute* break with nature, nor can culture be exclusively reduced to being just nature. Culture is nothing else than the nature man has given himself by instituting it as such, in the act of humanization, in order to "pursue" his biological nature in a self-conscious manner. This is, in short, what Edgar Morin observes when he writes that culture, as "a properly meta-biological development," acts retroactively upon man (who is moreover "entirely biological") in such a way that "the human being is human because he is fully and totally alive by being fully and totally cultural," and "it could even be said [the human being] is all the more irremediably biological, as it is at the same time irreducibly cultural."[5]

This human ambiguity is also perceived in Judeo-Christian monotheism. Proof of this can be seen in the fact that in Genesis, man is created on the same "day" as the other terrestrial animals, although at a "later time." The interpretation made of this is nevertheless quite different. On the one hand, it institutes a much more radical break between man and "nature" due to the privileged intervention on humanity's behalf made by this Completely Other who is Yahweh. On the other hand, at the very instant Yahweh acknowledges man's specificity, he reacts violently against the autonomy it entails—against the *freedom* that derives from the self-consciousness by which man sets himself up as a cultural being—by caging him within the *limits* implied by the affirmation of a unique creator god who is radically distinct from the world.

With respect to the first point, things are quite clear. The lesson Christianity drew from this was taken to its most extreme conclusions. The *break* between man and "nature" is extended to everything that, even *within* man, is viewed as stemming from "nature": the body with respect to the soul, physiology, sexuality, instinctive drives, and so on. Hence the hostility Christianity has displayed for so long against women, who, by this token, find themselves endowed with a greater share of "animality" than men. They are said to be more enslaved by the "senses" and the "passions," in other words, by the drives that are directly connected to manifestations of *physis*. Hence also, during the Middle Ages, the condemnation of the *libido sciendi* and the persecutions directed against those suspected of being more interested in the *harmonia mundi*, the "natural" workings of the world, than in the transcendence of the *logos* of God. (Even Christian philosophers like

Albertus Magnus and Roger Bacon did not escape these accusations.) Hence, finally, the subsequent fact that Christian authors have struggled as relentlessly against "biologism" as have the Marxists.[6] Even in Judaism, although it is far behind Christianity in this area, one can see a fairly similar tendency to identify the part in man which "ties" him to "nature" and the part which "frees" him from it with a duality between the human with a penchant toward evil and the human with a penchant for good. Yahweh then becomes the antithesis of "natural" drives—and it is undoubtedly no accident that the same sequence of letters in Hebrew which designate "inclination" (*yetzer*) also designate God as "formative" (*yotzer*), as Eisenberg and Abécassis point out.[7]

In this regard, however, the debate between polytheism and monotheism is not the "old opposition between the intellectual and the tangible," contrary to what Michel Le Bris writes.[8] It is not a question of *choosing* the tangible over the intellectual, any more than it is of choosing nature over history or culture. Nor is it a question of invoking any kind of "feminine" security or womb of the earth-mother against the father of the "celestial" worlds beyond. The paganism I am speaking of is situated within an entirely different problematic. It is not the choice that is *inverse* to the Judeo-Christian choice. It *rejects the choice*. It does so in such a way that it brings to light the opposition between a system that posits in principle the *inseparability* (but not the identity) of nature and culture, of intellect and the senses, and a system—the Judeo-Christian system—that posits their *separability* in principle (considered by Le Bris as a "major catastrophe of thought") and builds itself upon this duality.

The second proposition is the result of man's position with respect to God in the theology of creation. In fact, when man is in the presence of Yahweh, he is only a *creature*; his condition of being is utterly dependent upon the one that made it possible for him to exist. As only God has an absolute value, everything that is not God can have only relative value. To be created means that one's being is not due to one's self but to something other than one's self. This creates a perpetual sense of self-loss within its own state of unfulfillment. It means that one is not self-sufficient but a *dependent* being—one's state of existence is caged from the start inside that dependency. Creation therefore does not posit man's autonomy. It *circumscribes* it, and therefore, in my opinion, invalidates it.

Indeed, man has no right to enjoy this world except on condition of acknowledging that he is not its true owner, but at best its steward. Yahweh alone is owner of the world: "the land is mine, and you are coming into it as aliens and settlers" (Leviticus 25:23). The power man holds over the world is a power *by proxy*, a power entrusted to him that he can only use on the condition he not use it *fully*. "Man does not have the right to profit from the fertility of existence unless he acknowledges he is not absolute master."[9] Man may *act*, but he cannot *create*: the world of "creation" (*olam ha-beriyah*) belongs to Yahweh; only the world of "action" (*olam ha-asiyah*) devolves to man. In principle man *may* covet everything, but there are things he *should* not desire—which amounts to saying he can have *everything* he wants, so long as he does not want *everything*. In the Bible, man is only free to submit or be damned. His one freedom is the renunciation of that freedom. He finds his "salvation" by freely accepting his subjugation. The Christian ideal, says Saint Paul, is to be freely "bound to the service of God" (Romans 6:22).

The hypothesis I am maintaining here is that the essential effect—if not the express intent—of the religion of the Bible was the obstruction of man's capability of putting into full operation the powers of freedom and creative autonomy that arise out of humanization itself—powers that were "reinforced" on the historic plane by the Neolithic Revolution and the appearance of the great cultures. Alone of all the animals, man's actions are not predicated by his membership in a species. In the spirit of Judeo-Christian monotheism, it is thus necessary that he may have "acted" differently. In short, Yahweh would have preferred that man had not emerged from "nature." This is the meaning of the story told in the first chapters of Genesis. As long as the "first men" were only *natural beings*, as long as their humanization had not truly been achieved, they could not fully display their creative powers. They could not set themselves up as *rivals* of Yahweh. But for man to set himself up as man means the adoption of a *super-nature*, a superior nature that is nothing other than *culture*, whose effect is the emancipation of reflective consciousness from the repetitious constraints of the species. What this means in particular is that man is given the possibility to go beyond himself and transform himself, in other words, to ensure that each "super-nature" obtained is simply a step toward another "super-nature." Now this project is the equivalent of making man a kind of god—allowing him to participate in the Divine—a perspective the Bible

depicts as an "abomination." Accordingly, the monotheistic assertion is, first and foremost, a solemn prohibition against man establishing himself as a god. The reason for this is that when man has gone beyond his original status (the episode of "original sin") to one that is fully autonomous, he thereby takes on a super-humanity that confirms him as the cause of himself.

This is the reason why the biblical discourse constantly takes place and does so on two levels. On the one hand, nature is initially *idealized*—this is the myth of the "Garden of Eden"—insofar as it integrates and realizes man's being, before being *devalued* and condemned when human beings asserted their humanity and adopted a culture that could not be reduced to this nature (however, the fact remains that this failed to make man radically dissimilar from nature). On the other hand, the super-nature that man-as-man has given himself is *compensated* for and invalidated by the declaration of an even stronger "super-nature"—one that is *supernatural* in the proper sense of the term, and inaccessible because it is absolute and belongs only to Yahweh, the unique creator of all tangible reality. Man, in other words, is installed by God as the "king of creation" (Genesis 1:26), but it is only to the extent that he is dependent upon another king who is immeasurably more powerful than he is. Yahweh accepts that man has a history, but he strives to *neutralize* it by giving it a purpose, which is precisely the return to the pre-historical state of paradisiacal "innocence." (Yahweh only accepts history in order to assign it an *end*.) Finally, if I may say so, monotheism *functions* as if Yahweh reasoned along the following lines: now that man is separated from nature, let's make sure that he is separated *completely*; as he no longer acts in accordance with nature, then let's compel him to act in accordance with us, lest he realize that it is only if he acts truly in accordance with himself that he can establish himself as creator and as *causa sui*. As man has managed to turn himself into a *player of the world*, the sole thing that can now prevent him from using all his possibilities of playing, is to make him believe that he did not invent the rules of the game. Judeo-Christian monotheism, with its myth of creation *ex nihilo*, its prohibitions manifested by an inaccessible and strictly irreplaceable "father," and his representation of a dualistic universe that is the double of this one in another absolute sphere, responds precisely to this function.

Henceforth, the sin of sins, the sin *par excellence*, will be "pride"—the lack of *humility* (or, to put in another way using a related word, the intention of not being *humiliated*). This sin, writes René Coste, "is fundamentally the desire for absolute human autonomy (individually and collectively)."[10] Along with this "desire for autonomy" are also condemned all forms of mastery, the will to power, the non-dissociation of happiness and of creative power, and the expansion of the self. This condemnation is made by means of an absolute *swindle*. The man who would choose the "ephemeral" pleasures of power will damn himself for all eternity. By being *faithful to himself*, man can only be "unfaithful" to God. By honoring himself and the creative energy to which he gives dimension, man would be "idolatrous." The sin of "pride" finds its archetype in the *non serviam* of Lucifer, the rebel angel who is also the "light bearer." From this point forward, Prometheus and especially Faust will be eternally in the defendant's chair. To enclose man within his lack of autonomy, in the *unspokenness* of his repressed freedom, Yahweh set himself up as the center of a system in which the capacities of man—insofar as he is a *creature*—are necessarily limited. One of the names attributed to him in the Bible, *Shaddai*, often translated as "the Almighty," is interpreted in Judaism as "He who said 'enough' to His world" (*she'Amar Dai L'olamo*). In fact, Yahweh is none other than the God who said "enough." The Law he issues is meant as *limitation*. The Covenant he concludes symbolically seals this castration.

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1. This plural ("Let us make man . . .") has intrigued many. It does not seem to be the royal *we*. Some commentators believe that Yahweh was addressing celestial beings here, primarily angels.

2. Paul Humbert, *Etudes sur le récit du paradis et la chute dans la Genèse* [Studies on the Story of Paradise and the Fall in Genesis] (Neuchâtel: Université de Neuchâtel, 1940).

3. General audience of 6 December 1978.

4. Louis Althusser, *Positions, 1964–1975* (Paris: Editions Sociales, 1976), 119–20.

5. Morin, *La Méthode*, vol. 2, 418–19.

6. Compare, for example, Pierre P. Grassé, *L'Homme en accusation* [Indictment of Man] (Paris: Michel, 1980), and Ashley Montagu, *The Nature of Human Aggression* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1976).

7. Eisenberg and Abécassis, *À Bible ouverte*, 227.

8. *La Nouvel Observateur*, 25 September 1980.

9. Eisenberg and Abécassis, *À Bible ouverte*, 128.

10. René Coste, *Le Devenir de l'homme: Projet marxiste, projet chrétien* [The Creation of Man: Marxist Project, Christian Project] (Paris: Ouvrières, 1979), 152.

Chapter Eight

Fall or Rise?

At the same time the Bible makes a radical distinction between man and other living beings, it interprets his humanization as a *fall*. Here we find the "double discourse" that I alluded to in the previous chapter. In order to surmount this apparent contradiction, Judeo-Christian monotheism is led to depict original man, man before sin, as a man who has nothing left of the real. The man who existed before the Fall is not man as we know him. He is a being who is both *pure spirit*, who dwells in the intimacy of absolute being represented by God, but who is at the same time *pure nature*, who lives in total harmony with creation, at peace with the animals, and so forth. This idealization of man goes hand in hand with the idealization of "nature." Adam, symbolically representing the first humans, corresponds to the prehistoric *natural man*, whose *humanization* has not yet truly come about, who is not yet a creature of culture. Not yet detached from the earth (*adamah*), he remains one whose activity is essentially dictated by his membership in his species. Eighteenth-century philosophers would resuscitate this vision with the myth of the "noble savage."

After his creation of Adam, God gave birth to Eve. We know that in this regard a certain contradiction exists between the two creation stories contained in Genesis (1:27 and 2:18–25). That is not what is important. It may be noted, however, that the transition from the androgynous Adam —"male and female he created them" (Genesis 1:27)—to the Adam to whom God offered a companion, already emphasizes just how immeasurable is the distance between man and God. As long as he was alone, Adam was *unique*. From the moment Eve enters the scene, this uniqueness is undone. Necessarily appearing with her are the notions of otherness, complementarity, as well as of *insufficiency*. Eve's presence shows Adam, retrospectively, the reality of what he is lacking. This obviously sets him at odds with Yahweh, who by definition can never lack

for anything. Jewish tradition, incidentally, reads the passage from Genesis that immediately precedes the appearance of the first woman, "Then the Lord God said, 'It is not good for the man to be alone'" (2:18), as "It is not good *for God* that the man be alone."[1] Alone, and immortal to boot, man is free to imagine that he lacks for nothing and there is nothing to distinguish him from God. He could believe himself *equal to God* and not merely made in his "likeness." This is precisely what he must be prevented from believing.

In the Garden of Eden, Adam and Eve are given the choice of living eternally in the bliss of Yahweh, sheltered from the assaults of history, the real world, and time; or to become true human beings, in other words, to begin to travel, according to their desire, the historical path that will establish them as what they are. We all know what happened. Adam and Eve surrendered to the temptation offered by the "serpent."[2] Now, what did this serpent say? He told Eve: "You will be like gods knowing both good and evil" (Genesis 3:4). In fact, the serpent has no trouble demonstrating that a freedom one cannot truly exercise is not really a freedom; that the beginning of the prohibition contained within itself the logical possibility of other prohibitions; and that the very fact of the *prohibition* is at odds with the freedom God claimed to have granted them (Genesis 3:1). In this case, the exception does not prove the rule but contradicts it. We may also note, incidentally, that this serpent is polytheistic: indeed, the statement "You will be like gods" immediately leads to the conclusion that there could be more than one.

Adam and Eve, placed in the Garden of Eden, find themselves forbidden to eat of "the tree of the knowledge of good and evil" (Genesis 2:17). Catholic theologians believe this "knowledge" forbidden by Elohim-Yahweh is neither omniscience nor moral discernment, but the ability to *decide* what is good or evil. Jewish theology is more subtle. The "tree" of knowledge is interpreted as the representation of a *world* where good and evil "are in a combined state," where there is no absolute Good and Evil.[3] In other words, the "tree" is a foreshadowing of the real world we live in, a world where nothing is *absolutely* defined, where moral imperatives are tied to human values, and where everything of any greatness and importance always takes place beyond good and evil. Furthermore, in the Hebrew tradition, "to eat" means "to assimilate." To eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil is therefore to personally enter this real world where

human initiative "combines" good and evil. Accordingly, Adam's transgression, from which all the others are derived, is clearly "that of *autonomy*,"[4] as Eisenberg and Abécassis emphasize. This would be "the desire to conduct his own history alone according to his own desire and his own word or law."[5]

Confronted with man's desire for autonomy, Yahweh displays a kind of fear, which is manifested by his establishment of a new compensatory prohibition: "The man has become like one of us, knowing good and evil; what if he now reaches out his hand and takes fruit from the tree of life also, eats it and lives forever?" (Genesis 3:22). What is now involved, from an obviously symbolic point of view, is to prevent man—who, by transgressing the initial prohibition, has "successfully" achieved his humanization—from attaining "immortality." As long as Adam had not transgressed, the "tree of life" was not forbidden to him to the very extent he did not need it—for, as the Bible says, it was only his transgression that rendered him mortal (Genesis 2:17). But now man shall be ephemeral. He becomes "liable to death."

Expelled from the Garden of Eden, Adam and Eve become "the first pagans of history."[6] Translation: they have become *accomplished* individuals, human beings in the full sense of the word. This humanization goes hand in hand with a true individuation. It is only after he has sinned that Adam is *personally* challenged by God (Genesis 3:9). The generic history of humanity begins with the expulsion from the Garden of Eden. Civilization is also now able to start. Work appears. Human intelligence gives birth to syntactic language. These facts are regarded negatively in the Bible. According to the theological schools, original sin may be interpreted in rather dramatic fashion; yet the fact remains that if Adam and Eve had obeyed God, history would never have begun and humanity never would have been.

The following episode introduces Abel (Hevel) and Cain to the scene:

> The day came when Cain brought some of the produce of the soil as a gift to the Lord; and Abel brought some of the firstborn of his flock, the fat portions of them. The Lord received Abel and his gift with favour; but Cain and his gift he did not receive. Cain was very angry and his face fell. . . . Cain said to his brother Abel, "Let us go

into the open country." While they were there, Cain attacked his brother and murdered him (Genesis 4:3–8).

The initially obscure reasons for Yahweh's choice of Abel become clearer when the offerings from each brother are examined. Abel's murder by Cain in fact involves a clash of two different lifestyles: Abel is a nomadic shepherd, whereas Cain is a farmer (Genesis 4:2). The first, Abel, carries on with a typically pre-Neolithic lifestyle in the new society that was spawned by the Neolithic Revolution; in continued loyalty to desert tradition, he has formed no attachment to any particular land. The second, Cain, is the man of the Neolithic Revolution, the revolution that allows man to more clearly assert his mastery over the world, to subjugate the world more fully as an object. As a farmer, he is by that very status rooted and attached to the soil that Yahweh has cursed because of Adam (Genesis 3:17). To borrow an expression I used earlier, he is displaying an "incestuous" attachment toward the earth. He has chosen, as Emmanuel Levinas puts it, *Totality* as opposed to *Infinity*; the "pagan" conquest of space against the Hebrew possession of time as eternity. For this attachment to a given soil, this rootedness, bears within itself the warning signs of everything the Bible stigmatizes as idolatry: unique cities, patriotism, the state and reasons of state, the boundary that distinguishes the citizen from the foreigner, the profession of arms, politics, and so forth. Whereas Abel by his sacrifice shows that he keeps his spirit totally open for Yahweh, Cain's sacrifice asks God to sanctify the kind of existence that has earned God's disapproval because it is a manifestation of the increased autonomy man is seeking.[7] Just like Adam, Cain reveals his pride, and this is why he is condemned. In fact, the principal cause of Cain's condemnation is not Abel's murder, but Cain's refusal to humble himself by repenting. Questioned by Yahweh ("Where is your brother Abel?"), Cain *returns the accusation* "Am I my brother's keeper?" (Genesis 4:9). The underlying message is that it was Yahweh's responsibility to safeguard Abel. Cain, the farmer, is condemned to wander. He is *exiled to a nomadic existence*—expelled back to "nature" for having sought to give himself a *super-nature*. Adam had been similarly condemned for having placed himself above the Law. What is involved in each incident is a pejoratively *un-idealized* nature. Adam's transformation into a true human is accompanied by the transformation of nature into a "jungle." In the case of Cain, nomadism is

transformed into *exile*. Cain then declares: "My punishment is heavier than I can bear" (Genesis 4:13). But all he means is that the condemnation he has been given is overly harsh. "Pride" again.

Cain is, in fact, the preeminent civilizing hero. If we are the "children of Cain"—a rather exaggerated formula, since Adam and Eve also engendered Seth—it is as people of culture and civilization. After his condemnation, Cain indeed founded the first city, to which he gave his son's name Enoch (Genesis 4:17). By this same act, he doubled his transgression: first, because from all evidence he was seeking to make a name for himself; second, because biblical tradition condemns "vanity," by virtue of which he named a city after a person. This name "Enoch" is itself significant, as it is built on a root that means "inauguration, beginning," as well as "man." In other words, Cain was seeking to substitute a strictly human *beginning* for the absolute beginning represented by the Creation. He set up his own beginning in opposition to Yahweh's and thereby *profaned* the notion. Cain did not restrict himself to engendering urban civilization, the one where history is made, but he also constitutes the first link in a long chain of inventors of civilization. One of his descendants, Jubal, was the first musician. Another, Tubal-Cain, is the ancestor of smiths, and to him we owe the discovery of metallurgy. In this regard, he is considered the first specialist in the art of war, a fact that of course earns him God's personal disapproval.

It is another descendant of Cain, Nimrod the "hunter" (in other words, the conqueror), son of Kush, to whom Genesis symbolically attributes the construction of Babylon, Nineveh, Accad, Rehoboth, Calah, Resen, and so forth (10:8–12). This is certainly not by chance. In an insightful book, Jacques Ellul has moreover found that the Bible lays a veritable curse on the city, as it represents the place where man is most apt to assert his sovereign destiny.[8]

"The city," Ellul notes, "is a direct consequence of Cain's murderous act and of his refusal to accept God's protection. . . . Just as history begins with the murder of Abel—since before death there is no way for us to learn man's history, and the death that resulted in the Fall first manifested itself as murder—so civilization begins with the city and all that it represents."[9] Again, what the city stands for is roots, territory, boundary, power—everything that allows a man to make a name for himself. And also, of course, it stands for "idolatry" because every city seeks its own protective

deity; the result is a multiplicity of gods. “The curse,” Ellul goes on to say, “was pronounced from the beginning. It is part of the city’s very being, it is woven into the fabric of her history. The city is a cursed place—by its origin, its structure, its selfish withdrawal, and its search for other gods. As it develops, every city must receive and bear the curse on its own account; it is one of its basic elements.”[10] The large city is itself a manifestation of “pride.” Nineveh declared itself as “without equal!” (Zephaniah 2:15). Babylon did the same (Isaiah 47:8). In Egypt, the people of Israel had already been toiling to build the cities of Pithom and Ramses (Exodus 1:11). They later suffered exile in Babylon, which explains the particular execration that this city is destined to receive. Of Babylon, writes Jacques Ellul:

> all the cities of the world are brought together in her, she is the synthesis of them all. She is the head of, and the standard for, the other cities. When the wrath of God is loosed, she is struck first. The blame laid on her shoulders is applicable to every city. . . . Everything said about Babylon is in fact to be understood for the cities as a whole. As all the other cities, Babylon (representative of all the others) is at the hub of civilization. Business operates for the city, industry is developed in the city; ships ply the seas for the city; luxury and beauty blossom forth in the city; power rises and becomes great . . . .[11]

The Apocalypse transformed Babylon into the “great whore” (Revelation 17:1) and the “mother of whores and of every obscenity on earth” (17:5). An angel makes the announcement that this city will be consumed by flames: “Fallen, fallen is Babylon the great!” (14:8 and 18:2). Yahweh also condemned Nineveh, Tyre, Damascus, and Gaza (Amos 1:3–10). Jericho was destroyed in “miraculous” fashion. The sinful cities of Sodom and Gomorrah were razed in the most appalling manner. The Apocalypse denounces Rome as the “beast out of the sea”; upon its “seven heads” (the seven hills) it wears “blasphemous names” (Revelation, 13:1–2). It utters “proud words.” Those who worship it will be subject to the torment of “sulphurous flames” and the smoke from this torment will rise aloft “forever and ever” (14:10–11).

In Numbers (21:2) it is considered a good and salutary work to condemn the cities as forbidden places. In Hebrew, the masculine substantive meaning "city" also means "enemy" in the spiritual sense. This enemy would be the omnipotence of mankind; on every occasion the defeat of the cities represents the humiliation of the great and the degradation of the powerful. "The prophets . . . scan the entire horizon and attack every city with unbelievable perseverence and singleness of purpose," Jacques Ellul writes. He continues:

> The texts are numerous, and whether the city is friend or foe, the judgment is the same. If there is a formal unity in the prophecies it is here! But the judgement is from God. Which means that it is an affair between God and the city. . . . In order to understand the history of the city and the situation as it now exists, we must take into account not only its beginning as a human enterprise, but also the curse placed on it from its creation, a curse which must be seen as part of its make-up. . . . It is the curse expressed from one end of the scriptures to the other by, "I will destroy, says the Lord."[12]

Only Jerusalem is an exception to this rule. That is because it is to other cities what the land of Israel is to other lands: their proportional antithesis. Jerusalem is not a *sacred* city but a *holy* city. It is a *unique* city, of a kind seen nowhere else. It is the city that will one day absorb all the rest. It is, in some way, the anti-city.

This makes man God's *golem*. This is an old tale—Frankenstein!—of the creature who rebels against his creator. At the end of the first part of Genesis, Yahweh's trepidation with respect to the way man used his freedom, and his anger and jealousy, were so strong that he purely and simply decided to commit genocide against humanity: "When the Lord saw that man had done much evil on earth and that his thoughts and inclinations were always evil, he was sorry that he had made man on earth, and he was grieved at heart. He said, 'This race of men whom I have created, I will wipe them off the face of the earth.'" (Genesis 6:6–7). This is the episode of the Deluge, from which only Noah and his family, out of all humanity, escaped. This episode led into a new beginning where Yahweh established his covenant with Noah.

But unfortunately for Yahweh, humanity was not always disposed to submit to his will. One more step forward in the establishment of civilization was made with the construction of the Tower of Babel. Having moved east, mankind exclaimed: "Come, let us build ourselves a city and a tower with its top in the heavens, and make a name for ourselves; or we shall be dispersed all over the earth." (Genesis 11:4). At this new display of "pride," Yahweh immediately expressed his wrath. "Henceforward nothing they have a mind to do will be beyond their reach. Come, let us go down and confuse their speech so that they will not understand what they say to one another" (Genesis 11:6–7).

The nature of the "sin" committed by the builders of the tower is obvious. Furthermore, it is always the same one. "It is the autonomy of man, his creative and Promethean power, that God senses in some way in the Babel undertaking," writes André Neher.[13] The idea at work behind this enterprise, Ernst Bloch notes, "the thought of building like God, connects immediately with the counsel of the serpent in Paradise: the counsel to become and to be like God."[14] Other authors have also incorporated the Tower of Babel into the historic model of the West. What is interesting, moreover, is that the diversification of humanity into peoples possessing different languages and cultures is presented here as Yahweh's "riposte" to human audacity. The fundamental good of cultural variety is therefore allegedly derived from a "sin," just as the entrance into history was the result of Adam's sin. "It is tacitly understood that idolatry appears simultaneously with the formation of nations," remarks Nahum M. Sarna.[15] The Tower of Babel should therefore be considered as the first of these "idols," and the story of its construction as the "sequel to the anti-pagan polemics contained within the earlier stories of the Creation and the Deluge."[16]

"The Jehovist has a kind of hatred for civilization," Ernest Renan wrote. "Every step forward on the path of what we call progress is a crime in his eyes, to be swiftly followed by a punishment. Civilization's punishment is work and the division of humanity. The attempt of the worldly, profane, monumental, artistic culture of Babel is the preeminent crime."[17] From the biblical perspective, everything transpires as if each effort by man to grow has the consequence of diminishing Yahweh. Man, as we have seen, has the right to *make* but he does not have the right to *create*: "Every stage of

human creation is a profanation. The cost of its victory is retreat from God."[18] In comparison to Abel, Abraham, Jacob, Adam, Cain, Enoch, Nimrod, Esau, and so on, stand out as civilizers. Now, Yahweh has nothing but hatred for "brick-makers," for a humanity that is ever inclined to say: "Let us make for ourselves a name!" (*na 'aseh lanu shem*).

In order to express this hatred and put it to work in a concrete way, Judeo-Christian monotheism instituted it into a system. The "historic" role of Abraham, the nomad exiled from the city of Ur, was to challenge—from the very *interior* of the world—this civilization spawned by the Neolithic Revolution through a series of revolts against Yahweh.

"The first act which made Abraham the progenitor of a nation" notes Hegel, "is a diseverance which snaps the bonds of communal life and love. The entirety of the relationships in which he had hitherto lived with men and nature, these beautiful relationships of his youth, he spurned."[19] In this sense, Abraham's solemn "yes" to Yahweh (Genesis 22:2 and 11) is first a "no" to human autonomy, a "no" to history—a "no" that is destined to become the "*ewige Nein*" of which Goethe speaks. The breach symbolized by Abraham is a breach with the historic becoming of a humanity that is spontaneously inclined toward a super-humanity; it evinces the notion that at the end of time, all peoples and nations will share his refusal and renounce their own destinies. After Abraham, Moses *redoubles* this commitment. Just as the people of Israel were able to escape captivity in Egypt, the whole of humanity is called upon to escape from the "captivity" of history. The Law of Yahweh, formulated on the Sinai, is presented as the means of canceling out the sin of Adam and Eve once and for all. This is the role of Judeo-Christian monotheism: to definitively forbid man any present that is pregnant with a future which did not depend on this monotheism, *ad infinitum*.

Nietzsche believed he could identify in monotheism's origins the trace of an old "personality change," the imprint of a *compensation for a feeling of inferiority*. So as not to lose face, someone who *cannot* do something claims that he does not want to do it—or that to want to do it is *evil*. The same is true in Judeo-Christianity; "in so far as everything great and strong in man has been conceived as superhuman and external, man has belittled himself—he has separated the two sides of himself, one very paltry and weak, the other strong and astonishing, into two spheres, and called the former 'man,' the latter 'God.'"[20] The ideal is always perceived, but it is

perceived as inaccessible, and from that point on it is transferred to an equally unattainable God. The invention of an absolute superiority will tend to justify a relative inferiority. "Everything the believer places under the idea of God is in fact pilfered from man himself, as if through a series of communicating vessels. . . . Everything then takes place as if God's greatness was only the repression of neurotic man."[21] At this point, the system and its discourse begin to obey their own logic. The man who becomes alienated from his own freedom because he is incapable of engaging with it fully, and who then places it—out of an urge for compensation—in the power of a single and remote God, has already accepted the very principle of his mutilation. It is because he feels subjugated that he transforms this submission into voluntary servitude, through the angle of a *covenant* with a master who holds the omnipotence he does not. By so doing, he condemns himself to eternal suffering, but he makes this suffering the very justification of his existence—and of his *critical* attitude toward the world. (A similar arrangement can be found in Marx's concept of social alienation that will itself produce the realization which will end it. In both cases, "liberation" is tied to man's capacity for suffering and reinterpreting his own suffering.) Finally, he dissimulates, not unskillfully, the subjective nature of his approach behind the assertion that seems as objective as could possibly be—the assertion of an absolute being who created the world. Nietzsche would be the first to raise the essential questions: Who is talking? What are his true intentions? And what is the outcome of this discourse?

In paganism, of course, no one asks the gods to trade the slavery of some for a guarantee of the slavery of all. This is because the gods of paganism do not consider men to be their *rivals*. The great deeds of human beings not only aggrandize humans but also aggrandize the gods. Human undertakings are not an assault against divine qualities; to the contrary, they bear witness to those qualities. Far from men being forbidden to make a name for themselves, that is the very thing that justifies their existence and earns them a piece of eternity. This is what is declared in one of the more famous maxims from the *Edda*: "Cattle die, kinsmen die, oneself dies the same. But words of glory never die for the one who gets a good name."[22] Whereas the Bible shows its intention of limiting human sovereignty through a series of prohibitions (which prefigures the modern theory of "counter-powers"), the religions of ancient Europe heroized the man who

exceeded his abilities and thereby shared in the Divine. Where the Scriptures look at life with a blend of distrust and trepidation, paganism hypostatizes in its beliefs all the ardor, intensity, and pulsation of life.

Instead of pushing man to exceed himself, the monotheism of the Bible consumes his vitality. He must "impoverish and annihilate himself to give consistency to God. The deity becomes a kind of hemorrhaging of human nature. And God manipulates the transfusion of all man's creative energies."[23] Power, in the best of cases, is merely a temporary expedient. The world as we know it is only a temporary expedient. History is a temporary expedient. Man himself is a temporary expedient. From his own perspective, it would have been better if he never existed. According to the Talmud, "for the space of three years the school of Hillel and the school of Shammai debated to learn what was better for mankind: to have been created or not. A vote was taken and the result was: it would have been better if he had not been created. But now that he is here, he should scrupulously examine his actions."[24] The *negative* character of monotheism appears again, in an extreme form, in the theory of *tzimtzum* ("contraction") introduced in the sixteenth century by the Kabbalist Isaac Luria, according to whom the world emerged in the absolute void when God withdrew from himself in order to make a place for it. The reason for existence would then be that "God wished to see God." Withdrawn from a place, the contracted Absolute Everything would have allowed the appearance of a void, in which the mirror of existence would have manifested. The whole of objectified creation, separated from the World of Emanation, would have thus been born from a "conception" of the negative. (The Transcendent God is then called *Ayin*, "No Thing.") Pushed to extremes, this kind of *re-presentation* culminates in the opinion of Bernard-Henri Lévy, according to whom the history of God's people "was an eternal naysaying stubbornness."[25] We may also note that all but two of the Ten Commandments are expressed in the negative. Conversely, Meister Eckhart interprets the phrase from Exodus, "I am that I am," as "the purity of the affirmation, as all negation is excluded from God himself." Nietzsche even writes:

> The Christian conception of God is one of the most corrupt conceptions of God arrived at on earth; perhaps it even represents the low-water mark in the descending development of the God type.

> God degenerated to the *contradiction of life*, instead of being its transfiguration and eternal *Yes*! In God a declaration of hostility towards life, nature, the will to life! God the formula for every calumny of "this world," for every lie about "the next world"![26]

Judeo-Christian monotheism developed a *negative* anthropology because it is a *negative* religion. An anti-religion.

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1. See Eisenberg and Abécassis, *Et Dieu créa Eve*, 134.

2. The presence of the serpent inside the "Garden of Eden" raises on its own a certain number of problems and difficulties of a theological nature. Genesis describes the serpent as "more crafty than any wild creature that the Lord God had made" (3:1). This is not a true serpent though, because it is only later that is he condemned to crawl on his belly (Genesis 3:14). Some theologians interpret the serpent to simply represent the "evil inclination" that dwells in the heart of man.

3. Eisenberg and Abécassis, *Et Dieu créa Eve*, 71.

4. Eisenberg and Abécassis, *Et Dieu créa Eve*, 315.

5. Eisenberg and Abécassis, *Et Dieu créa Eve*, 355.

6. Eisenberg and Abécassis, *Et Dieu créa Eve*, 278.

7. The modalities of the murder committed by Cain have given rise to numerous speculations, which we will not go into here. On this, see especially Josy Eisenberg and Armand Abécassis, *Moi, le gardien de mon frère?* [Am I My Brother's Keeper?], *À Bible ouverte* III (Paris: Michel, 1980), 133–75.

8. Jacques Ellul, *The Meaning of the City*, trans. Dennis Pardee (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1970).

9. Ellul, *The Meaning of the City*, 5–6.

10. Ellul, *The Meaning of the City*, 60.

11. Ellul, *The Meaning of the City*, 20–21.

12. Ellul, *The Meaning of the City*, 48. In modern times it would fall upon Karl Marx to declare that the urban space was the preeminent site of "social alienation" and, for that reason, the most favorable location for the liberation of humanity. This was in fact the place, Engels would specifically state in 1845, "that the opposition between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat first manifested."

13. André Neher, *L'Exil et la parole* [Exile and Speech] (Paris: Seuil, 1970), 116.

14. Ernst Bloch, *Atheism in Christianity*, trans. J. T. Swann (New York: Verso, 2009), 75.

15. Nahum M. Sarna, *Understanding Genesis: The Heritage of Biblical Israel* (New York: Shocken, 1970), 68.

16. Sarna, *Understanding Genesis*, 76.

17. Ernest Renan, *Histoire du people d'Israël* [History of the People of Israel], vol. 1 (Paris: Calmann-Lévy, 1886).

18. Neher, *L'Exil et la parole*, 117.

19. G. W. F. Hegel, "The Spirit of Christianity and Its Fate" (1798), §i, in Hegel, *Early Theological Writings*, trans. T. M. Knox (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1971).

20. Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Random House, 1968), 86–87.

21. Yves Leduire, “Nietzsche contre l’humilité” [“Nietzsche against Humility”], *Christus*, October 1979.

22. “Hávamál,” st. 77, in *The Elder Edda: A Book of Viking Lore,* trans. Andy Orchard (London: Penguin, 2011), 25.

23. Leduire, “Nietzsche contre l’humilité.”

24. Quoted in Eisenberg and Abécassis, *À Bible ouverte*, 97.

25. Lévy, *Le Testament de Dieu*, 206.

26. Nietzsche, *The Anti-Christ* (trans. Hollingdale), §18.

Chapter Nine

The Primacy of Mankind

What is most striking when studying the Indo-European cosmogonic myth is the solemn affirmation, found everywhere, of man's primacy. The gods, who gave form and organization to the world, were visualized on the model of men, who made them their mythical ancestors and ideal models. Among the Greeks, "the gods are not supersensible and otherworldly. They inhabit the world, lend themselves to many theophanies, and exist on familiar terms with human beings, whose interests they espouse."[1] Among the Celts and Germans, men and gods both originated from the same source. Indo-European cosmogony places a "cosmic *man*" at the "beginning" of the current cycle of the world. In the Indian world, the *Rigveda* gives him the name of Purusha; in the Norse *Edda*, his name is Ymir. For the Vedic Indians, Purusha is the One by whom the universe (re-)commences. He is "all that yet hath been and all that is to be."[2] In a similar fashion, Ymir is the *undivided* One and it is by him that the world is first organized. His own birth results from the contact of fire and ice: "And when the rime and the blowing of the warmth met so that it thawed and dripped, there was a quickening from these flowing drops due to the power of the source of the heat, and it became the form of a man, and he was given the name Ymir."[3] Before Ymir there was naught but a "gaping bottomless abyss" (*Ginnungagap*) that had existed for all time. This stands in contrast to the biblical "abyss" mentioned at the beginning of Genesis [1:1], which was already a product of Yahweh's labor. And whereas Yahweh created *ex nihilo*, Ymir gave birth to the world himself, through his own dismemberment: "From Ymir's flesh the earth was formed, and from his blood the sea; rocks from bones, trees from hair, and from his skull the sky."[4]

It is a similar story in the *Rigveda*, where the division of the cosmic man provides for the creation of the world. “The Moon was gendered from his mind, and from his eye the Sun had birth; Indra and Agni from his mouth were born, and Vāyu [wind] from his breath. Forth from his navel came mid-air; the sky was fashioned from his head; Earth from his feet, and from his ear the regions. Thus they formed the worlds.”[5] Purusha is thereby the “master of all creatures,” Prajapati. It is his dismemberment that sacrifice, which plays a fundamental role in Vedic worship, recalls and commemorates.[6] The universe does not derive its status of existence from something that is not part of it. It proceeds from the being of the cosmic man, his body, his gaze, his speech, and his consciousness. There is no opposition between two worlds, between a created being and a non-created being, but to the contrary, incessant conversion and consubstantiality between beings and things, between heaven and earth, between men and gods.

Contrary to Yahweh, who is only Being (“I am that I am”), cosmic man is both Being and non-Being. He is the place where all the relative oppositions meet, merge, and exceed themselves. He is the preeminent place where all opposites are reconciled. When the organization of the world took place, all the “complementary opposites” emerged from him, in the same fashion that opposing mythemes emanate from a single foundational myth. To start, cosmic man gives birth to the sexual principles. The name Ymir is akin to the Sanskrit *yama*, and means “twin, hermaphrodite.” It is from Ymir that are derived the two giants, Burr and Bestla, who formed the original couple. Burr and Bestla then had three sons —Odin, Vili, and Vé—who were the first Æsir, or sovereign gods. They, in turn, gave birth to the first humans or civilizing heroes, Ask and Embla —“and from them were produced the mankind to whom the dwelling-place under Midgard was given.”[7] In the *Rigveda*, Purusha also engendered the representatives of the functional classes: “The Brahman was his mouth, of both his arms was the *Rājanya* [warrior class] made. His thighs became the *Vaisya* [the class of farmers and artisans], from his feet the *Śūdra* [class of laborers] was produced.”[8] Régis Boyer points out: “The idea that earth and heaven derived from the body parts of a primitive giant, a kind of fabulous archetype, is of ancient Indo-European origin. The same is true for the

chronological progression: the existence of an original being, the creation of the giants, the gods, and finally men."[9]

Through a series of legendary or symbolic representations, Indo-European myth ceaselessly celebrates the limitless creative potential of humanity. When it describes the gods as the authors of their own existence, it is not to oppose them to human beings, but to suggest them as ideal models that people should strive to equal. It is within himself that man—individually or collectively—can, like the gods, find the means to become more than he is. The world is self-sufficient, the great cultures are self-sufficient—which does not justify any exclusion or forbid any exchange. In the Vedic texts, Purusha dismembers himself; in the *Edda*, it is the *Æsir*, sons of Burr, who place Ymir in the center of Ginnungagap and create the different parts of the universe with his body. In the Germanic religion, Odin-Wotan, creator of a *new* world, *sacrifices himself to himself* in order to acquire "magic" and learning: "I know that I hung on the windy tree,[10] . . . wounded by a spear, and sacrificed to Odin, myself to myself."[11] In the Sanskrit poem by Kālidāsa entitled the *Kumārasambhava*, it is said: "With your own self, you will know your own being. You create yourself." And later:

> May you be adored, O God of the three forms, you who were once absolute unity before the creation was finished. . . . You alone are the principle of creation of this world and also the cause of what yet exists and will eventually collapse. Of you, who have divided your own body in order to engender, come man and woman as part of yourself. . . . You are the father of the gods, the god of the gods. You are the sacrificial offering and also the lord of the sacrifice. You are the sacrifice but also the sacrificer.

In the *Devī Māhātmya* (Celebration of the Great Goddess), the goddess Nidra, the universal sovereign, is praised in these terms:

> At [the world's] emanation, you have the form of creation; in (its) protection (you have) the form of steadiness; Likewise at the end of this world (you have) the form of destruction, O you who consist of the world! You are the great knowledge, the great illusion, the great insight, the great memory; And the great delusion, the great

> Goddess, the great demoness. You are the primordial material of everything . . .[12]

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1. Louis Rougier, *La Scolastique et le thomisme* [Scholasticism and Thomism], 45.

2. *Rigveda*, bk. X, hymn 90, st. 2, in *The Hymns of the Rigveda*, trans. Ralph T. H. Griffith, 2nd ed. (Benares: Lazarus, 1896–1897), vol. 2, 517.

3. "Gylfaginning," in Snorri Sturluson, *Edda*, trans. Anthony Faulkes (London: Dent, 1995), 10.

4. "Grímnismál," st. 40, in *The Elder Edda* (trans. Orchard), 57.

5. *Rigveda*, bk. X, hymn 90, st. 13–14, in *The Hymns of the Rigveda* (trans. Griffith), vol. 2, 519.

6. For more on this, see Giorgio Locchi, "Le mythe cosmogonique indo-européen" ["The Indo-European Cosmogonic Myth"], *Nouvelle École*, July/August 1972, 87–95.

7. "Gylfaginning," in Snorri Sturluson, *Edda* (trans. Faulkes), 13.

8. *Rigveda*, bk. X, hymn 90, st. 12, in *The Hymns of the Rigveda* (trans. Griffith), vol. 2, 519.

9. Régis Boyer, *Les Religions de l'Europe du Nord: Eddas, sagas, hymnes chamaniques* (Paris: Fayard/Denoël, 1974), 370.

10. This is the great tree Yggdrasil, axis and support of the world, whose roots sink into the realms of the gods, the giants, and men. It is in the "ash Yggdrasil [where] the gods must hold their courts each day" ("Gylfaginning," 17). The Well of Mimir, which reveals wisdom and knowledge, is beneath one of these roots.

11. "Hávamál," st. 138, in *The Elder Edda* (trans. Orchard).

12. *Devī Māhātmya*, 1.57–1.59, in Thomas B. Coburn, *Encountering the Goddess: A Translation of the* Devī Māhātmya *and a Study of Its Interpretation* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1991), 37.

Chapter Ten

Beneath and Beyond Good and Evil

The "grammar" of Judeo-Christian monotheism is not primarily religious; it is *moral*. The Bible is above all a *moral* book, at the same time as it is a book that expresses a certain morality, a book that characterizes the hyper-morality denounced by Arnold Gehlen.[1] Judeo-Christianity sees everything through the lens of morality; in the final analysis, every sphere of human activity is brought back to morality. Aesthetics and politics, to name only two, lose all autonomy. In the order of human affairs, the Bible establishes the conditions necessary for *nomocracy* to appear. The primacy of morality makes it so that Yahweh is first a *judge*, a distributor of punishments, "the judge of all the earth" (Genesis 18:25). In Biblical language, furthermore, the moral prescription is inseparable from the realization of a divine plan. "There is no imperative in the strict sense in the Hebrew language; it is the future that is used as a general rule to express it."[2] The best way of saying this is that in the Bible the "you should" is confused with the "this will be." What should happen will happen; what man should submit to will be realized. There is no longer any place for the chance result of human actions; in the long term, history will necessarily culminate with the victory of morality. "Christianity," says Nietzsche, is "the most extravagant elaboration of the moral theme that humanity has ever heard."[3]

Biblical morality is not, of course, deduced from a vision of the tangible world or from concrete experience as lived by human beings. It comes exclusively from the will of Yahweh and the prohibitions he has pronounced. The transgression of Adam and Eve, as we have seen, consists of wishing to determine for themselves the criteria of good and evil. Now only Yahweh possesses this right. It is given that he alone defines what is good and what is evil and constitutes them into absolutes, and furthermore

he is also the one who rewards or punishes. What befalls man does so necessarily with respect to the moral value of his actions. Such a system imprisons man within a problematic of unhealthy *explanation*: if there are (concretely) evil events, it is because there are (morally) evil actions. This is the source for guilt feelings and bad conscience. Far from abasing themselves and crucifying themselves by means of their beliefs, the Greeks, writes Nietzsche, "to the contrary used their gods to protect them against any vague urge of *guilty conscience*, to have the right to play in peace with their freedom of soul." There is none of this in Judeo-Christian monotheism, which uses pain as one of the surest means to perpetuate its morality. "Only that which never ceases to cause suffering remains in memory," observes Nietzsche again. The best way for Yahweh to never be "forgotten" is for him to inscribe himself in the human heart as a sign of unfulfillment, as suffering produced by "sin." The priest explains suffering, illness, poverty, and captivity by *transgression*; he suggests the ways it can be "expiated." For him, pain is "the most powerful aid to memory." The Bible gives pain a "poisonous" explanation; if one is suffering, it is because one deserves to; it is because one has *sinned*. Pain is not only painful, it is also guilty. Accepting the principles of this guilt-inducing condition comes down to understanding the reasons suffering exists, an understanding that mitigates suffering somewhat—because it also lays out the hopeful principle of the sinner's "redemption," of a radical *compensation* for his suffering in this world—but this also renders it *interminable*, by virtue of its inclusion within the most intrinsically perfect system for its reproduction.

Why would Biblical morality constitute, in Nietzsche's words, "the most terrible sickness that has ever raged in man"?[4] Because of the dualistic vision that supports it. Because it functions according to abstract categories without the slightest fundamental relation to the world. Because it imposes upon the world a code whose sources are outside of the world; because it renders life foreign to itself and prevents it from realizing itself; because it ruptures vital ardor and creative energy by imposing eternal limitations upon them:

> This overly exclusive reading of the human condition, for good and evil must obviously coexist, bursts the coherence and unity of life. Life finds itself divided piecemeal and split apart, in other words, incapable of realizing itself. In this way morality defines life

> according to criteria that are not its own and are not determinative of its specific effectiveness. Such a problematic imposed on life from without prevents it from achieving its virtual qualities. Life no longer stems from its own creativity. By arbitrarily dictating laws that do not spring from its own legitimacy—that of its sensibility—morality forbids it from being itself.[5]

In Judeo-Christian monotheism, life is not valued according to its own problematic, but subjected to another. No longer will man be judged according to his law and his measure, but according to those of a Something Entirely Other. This is why the progression of Christian morality in history can also be read as a decline in energy.

Christian morality is burdened by *ressentiment*.[6] The believer accepts his own debasement in exchange for the hope that others may also be debased. He adheres to a morality that suppresses diversity in the name of "equality," that diminishes in the name of "justice," that blurs all distinctions in the name of "love." Such a morality is a system for dissolving energies, eroding health, and destroying potency. It culminates, when all is said and done, with meltdown and confusion, with entropy and death. It reveals itself, once *identified*, to be pure negation—like the death instinct. (Here *Eros* is merely the mask of *Thanatos*.) "For in the face of morality (particularly Christian, unconditional morality), life *must* constantly and inevitably be in the wrong," writes Nietzsche, "because life is something essentially amoral—in the end, crushed beneath the weight of contempt and eternal denial, life *must* then be felt to be undesirable, valueless in itself. Morality itself—might morality not be 'a will to the denial of life,' a secret instinct of annihilation, a principle of decay, trivialization, slander, the beginning of the end?"[7]

In paganism, the human being is by nature *innocent*. Certainly, over the course of his life he will have responsibilities to assume. One or another of his actions, by implicating him in a situation or a conformation of given facts, may cause a feeling of fault to arise within him. But this feeling always results from voluntary choices he has made. Man does not *inherit* at birth any guilt, any imperfection bound to his very condition (other than those of his psychic or physiological limitations, which are exempt from moral implications). He is at the onset pure innocence—*innocence incarnate*. And it is this innocence which he puts into action like the

seriousness a child puts into play. He transforms *action* into a *game*. Because only the game is truly serious: the game of man, the game of being, the game of the world. The game is fundamentally innocent, beyond good and evil. When he describes the Trojans' assault on the wall the Achaeans erected to protect their camp, Homer himself compares the actions of the god Apollo to a children's game.[8] Montherlant said that the game "is the sole form of activity that should be taken seriously."[9] Lastly, Schiller declares: "Man is not fully man except when he plays." This is why it is the child who is the closest of all people to the overman. The world of the overman, to paraphrase Montherlant, is a world whose prince is a child. It is a world instituted beyond good and evil, a world where the moral sense of action is a matter of indifference with respect to the action itself. "To desire indifferently," Montherlant says, "is the very essence of play." *Aedificabo et destruam.*[10]

Morality in the Bible always has the significance of an ontological foundation. In Judaism it is the *Law*, the Torah, which is given a central role. This is the means by which original sin can be "corrected" and with it the "evil inclination" that caused it.[11] From the moment there were two worlds, that of the created being and that of the non-created being, the problem of their articulation was raised. This problem is resolved in the Old Testament by the Covenant and by the fact of the Law. Genesis (1:26–32) says that man was created on the sixth "day" at the end of a series of five, which Rabbinical tradition generally identifies with the five books that make up the Torah.[12] The sixth "day" would then symbolize man's acceptance of the Torah as a meaningful prelude to the "day" of Yahweh's *sabbath*. Moreover, several commentators observe that in this Genesis story, only the sixth "day" is designated with an article: "*the* sixth day" (with regard to the others, it says "day one," "day two," etc.). It so happens that the numerical value of the article in Hebrew is "5." According to Rachi, this means that it is on condition of Israel accepting the five books of the Torah that it is able to have a sixth day. A Midrash commentary even proclaims that "in the beginning, God read the Torah and created the world."[13] The question of whether the essence of the monotheistic revelation resides in the idea of the Law or that of creation, is still, incidentally, a matter of debate. Against the Judaism of the later Kabbalistic schools, rabbinical teachings are more prone to hold to the former solution. The phrase "here are the

laws" (*ve'eleh hamishpatim*) would thus denote the true beginning of time. The fact is that when Yahweh presents himself to Adam for the first time, he does not introduce himself as the creator of the world but as the author of morality. When he speaks, he is not making theological pronouncements; he is delivering speech with a moral value, a commandment. When he addresses Adam for the first time (Genesis 2:16–17), it is to formulate a prohibition. Likewise, in Exodus, when the Lord declares to Moses that he is his God (20:2–3), it is to pronounce the ten phrases that make up the Ten Commandments. This gives the impression that the story of the creation is only provided in order to force the acceptance of moral speech. It *was necessary* for Yahweh to be the author of the world, in order for the whole world to submit to him. By this same stroke, *truth* finds itself separated from *justice*. The assertion of a self-evident truth is only the means for realizing a certain kind of "justice."

The Law's ultimate finality is in imitation of Yahweh: "You shall be holy, because I, Yahweh your God, am holy" (Leviticus 19:2). "We love the Torah more than God," Emmanuel Levinas goes so far as to write, and then adds: "the essence of Judaism is the destruction of man's natural religious tendencies and the development of an ethical approach to reality."[14]

Contrary to paganism, which is more apt to deduce ethics as well as religion from a sublimation of human activities, the Bible seems to deduce religion from morality, and even infers the existence of Yahweh from the fact that the Torah exists. There is a kind of equivalence between Yahweh and the Torah: "If you honor the Words, it is as if you honor God; if you scorn them, it is as if you are scorning God."[15] By virtue of this, the practice takes on the appearance of an *imitatio Dei*, which ultimately and paradoxically could render God superfluous. This line of reasoning is taken to an absurd extreme by Bernard-Henri Lévy, according to whom "the radical non-existence of God is the supreme meaning of Jewish existence"! The judgment delivered by certain Christian theologians on Judaism is not all that far off from this opinion. It has also been pointed out that classic Hebrew has no precise equivalent for the terms "religion" and "religious." Erich Fromm, for his part, elaborates upon the opposition that exists between the "*moral* man" and the "*religious* man," or even upon the distinction between "authoritarian ethics," which are still colored by the "worship of idols," and the "humanistic ethics" that determine in the very absence of God a type of distinct Judeo-Christian consciousness.[16]

Here again we find the opposition between *holiness* and *the sacred*. The first is on the side of morality; the second is on the side of religion. Some contemporary neo-Marxists have merely gone a step further by dissociating not only morality from religion but also morality from a belief in a personal God. Let's not be misled: by raising the figure of Dionysos in opposition to the Crucified One, Nietzsche—whom Heidegger described as "the last German philosopher to passionately seek God"—is not opposing religion with religion's absence. He is opposing a true religion, a true sense of the sacred, to the degradation of religion under the exclusive form of morality.

We know that the notion of the Law is viewed differently in Christianity. The most fundamental distinction between the teachings of Jesus (at least as presented in the Gospels) and those of traditional Judaism, regarding the emphasis on the affairs of this world and the "kingdom of heaven," is the relative separation of morality and the Law. Without impugning the spirit of the Law, Jesus did challenge the letter of the Law and declared that individual conscience by itself could serve as a guide for achieving truth. This is the meaning of the phrase "The Sabbath was made for the sake of man and not man for the Sabbath: therefore the Son of Man is sovereign even over the Sabbath" (Mark 2:27–28).

Clearly opposing grace to Law (which the Old Testament viewed as combined; see Psalms 119:29), Saint Paul declared that the Law only represented a temporary system, a transitional system, from which the coming of Christ, the Messiah, had freed humanity. "Do not suppose that I have come to abolish the Law and the prophets," Jesus said, "I did not come to abolish, but to complete" (Matthew 5:17). With Paul, this "fulfillment" is taken in the sense of the Greek *telos*, which combines the ideas of "completion" and "finality." The Law, Paul said, was not literally valid until Jesus, who, by "completing" it, rendered it unnecessary. (Karl Marx later developed a similar kind of analysis of the bourgeois revolution of 1789, presenting it as a positive and useful stage, but one communism claims to have surpassed, and it even attacks those who wish to remain at that stage.) Henceforth, Christ's Law simply replaces the Law, which is now fossilized. Grace carries the ancient Law to a higher dimension; baptism replaces circumcision as *sphragis*,[17] the mark of belonging. Paul will even go so far as to define Christianity as an anti-Law: "When you seek to be justified by way of law, your relation with Christ is completely severed: you have fallen out of the domain of God's grace" (Galatians 5:4). Although Paul's doctrine

on this subject could often be contradictory, these are the most critical aspects retained by the Church during the greatest part of its history, to conform to its own vision of the Law. And it was not until recently that it began revising this domain as it has also revised others.[18]

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1. Arnold Gehlen, *Moral und Hypermoral: Eine pluralistische Ethik* [Moral and Hypermoral: A Pluralistic Ethic] (Frankfurt: Athenäum, 1969).

2. Eisenberg and Abécassis, *Moi le gardien de mon frère?* 130.

3. Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy*, trans. Shaun Whiteside (London: Penguin, 2003), §5.

4. Friedrich Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals* (trans. Kaufmann and Hollingdale), II, §22, in *On the Genealogy of Morals* and *Ecce Homo*, ed. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Vintage, 1989).

5. Ledure, "Nietzche contre l'humilité."

6. [That is to say, "resentment." The original French term was often used by Nietzsche in his critique of Christianity. —*Ed*.]

7. Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy* (trans. Whiteside), §5.

8. Homer, *Iliad*, bk. 15, ll. 360–66.

9. Henry de Montherlant, *Paysages des Olympiques* [Olympian Landscapes] (Paris: Grasset, 1940); see also *Va jouer avec cetter pussière*, 193.

10. ["I will build and I will destroy." This nihilistic Latin formula derives from Montherlant, who wrote in the preface to his essay collection *Service inutile* (1935): "*Aedificabo et destruam*, I will build and then I will destroy what I have built. An epigraph for this book, an epigraph for my life." —*Ed.*]

11. Talmud, Kiddushin 30b.

12. The first five books of the Bible, the so-called Mosaic books (Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy) make up the Pentateuch or Torah. They would have been compiled in their present form circa 400 BC—around the time of Ezra. See Pierre-Marie Beaude, *Tendences nouvelles de l'exégèse* [New Trends in Exegesis] (Paris: Centurion, 1979). In Judaism, the Written Torah (*Torah Shebichtav*) indicates the books themselves, whereas their content, which Yahweh allegedly delivered to Moses on Mount Sinai, forms the oral Torah (*Torah Sheba'al Peh*). In a larger sense the term Torah refers to the entire set of traditional Jewish teachings and literature. In addition to the Pentateuch, the Hebrew Bible includes the Prophets (*Nevi'im*) and the sacred Texts (*Ketuvim*), known also as Scriptures or Hagiographies. The Christians added the New Testament, meaning the Four Gospels, the Acts of the Apostles, the Epistles, and the Apocalypse. The term *halakha*, properly meaning "walk" or "step," refers to the juridical sections of the Talmud and concerns the specific application of the commandments (*mitzvot*) of biblical or rabbinical origin to a given situation, in opposition to the *aggadah*, the name given the sections especially concerning anecdotes, maxims, or homiletic accounts. We should recall that in Judaism, the text of the Bible is not separable from the commentary given by the rabbis, and that its reading can be literal, symbolic, allusive, or numerological.

13. The *Midrash* in Judaism is a method of interpreting the Scriptures that most often seeks support from legends or homilies.

14. Emmanuel Lévinas, *Difficile liberté* (Paris: Michel, 1963), 137; cf. Levinas, *Difficult Freedom*, 142.

15. Rabbi Simeon bar Yochai, Tanhuma, Commentary on Genesis 46:26.

16. See Erich Fromm, *Man for Himself: An Inquiry into the Psychology of Ethics* (New York: Holt, 1990), chap. 4.

17. [The term *sphragis* refers to the sacramental "seal" conferred at baptism, confirmation, etc., by the Church upon a congregant. —*Ed*.]

18. On this, see Jacques Goldstain's book *Les Valeurs de la Loi: La Thora, lumière sur la route* [The Values of the Law: The Torah, Light of the Way] (Paris: Beauchesne, 1980), which examines the way in which contemporary Christianity may be inspired by the Law. See also the *Orientations pastorales* [Pastoral Guidelines] that were promulgated during Easter 1973 by the French Episcopal Committee for Relations with Judaism: "The first Covenant was not rendered invalid by the new one. It is its root and its source, its foundation and its promise."

Chapter Eleven

The Shapes of History

There are two great conceptions of history that are found in paganism. The first is cyclical: "There is nothing new under the sun." The other sees history as potentially having a beginning, but no foreseeable or obligatory ending. In both cases, historical becoming is not governed by any necessity outside of itself. There is no *meaning* to history. There is no history supposedly unfolding in one given direction that does not, over the long term, owe something to human will, which is the only determining factor here. Nor does any one people occupy a central or *chosen* place in the ever-plural becoming of humanity. Just as there is not one God, one Truth, or one humanity, nor is there any kind of predestination for all in a single direction. "The idea of a history directed from a beginning to an end, or of an indefinite movement oriented to one consistent meaning, is foreign to antiquity and non-Christian civilizations," emphasizes Emmanuel Mounier.[1] History is, in fact, the very mirror of life: it reflects an eternal series of unstable equilibria and of conflicts limited in time. It is an eternal *tension* governed by the heterogeneous and antagonistic nature of the different forces in play.

In paganism, the *innocence of historical becoming* thus responds to the *innocence of man*. When Nietzsche speaks of the "innocence of becoming" against what Judeo-Christian history labels as *guilty*, he is creating a metaphor for a concept of time which, in the first place, opposes that of irreversible time. As a result, it inevitably posits *another* relationship of time to eternity, a relationship that is not so much "ahistorical" (as maintained by Pierre Boudot) but, because it is superhistorical, "ultrahistorical"—in the sense that the overman or superman also represents a surpassing of the human.[2] Time for Nietzsche is also foreign to the world of classical mechanics, which intersects with and even extends the mono-

linear conception of Judeo-Christianity. Eternity is not the cancellation of time, but on the contrary, its infinite hammering out in the form of becoming and Return within becoming. And, as Boudot says, this "genealogy of Eternity" is "only realizable by the will *toward* power, capable of restoring the innocence in man as if he were already in eternity."

In the Judeo-Christian vision, history has an absolute beginning, whose story is provided by Genesis. It also has an end that is imaginable, foreseeable, and necessary. Not only does it say that time will be compelled to end just as it was compelled to begin, but it is indicated in advance what meaning that end will assume. The monotheistic conception of time is *linear* (or vectorial): time is *oriented*; it has a direction at the same time that it has a meaning. Furthermore, this history is only an episode, an *interlude*, in the existence of humanity. Humanity's true being is external to history; only the *end of history* will in fact restore it to its fullness (such as it would have been if Adam had never "sinned") and this time in absolute and definitive fashion. When this *end* has been attained, humanity will have reached its *goal*—the goal to which Yahweh assigned it from the beginning. Having been "achieved"—both in the sense of being attained as well as of being completed—history will no longer continue, nor will it recur. The true human eternity is not in becoming, but in Being.

The world has begun. It is with this word, *bereshit*, "beginning"—for which there are some seven hundred different interpretations—that the Bible opens. This idea of beginning, the equivalent of an absolute rupture, is itself implied by dualism: "To say that there is a beginning is to say that there is, on the one hand, the world of God, and, on the other, the world of men."[3] Before the world there was only God; before the *beth*, the second letter of the Hebrew alphabet and the first letter of *bereshit*, there was only the world of unity, the world of the *aleph*, the first letter of the alphabet, which corresponds to Yahweh. Because history unfolds within the world created by Yahweh, history too is subject to his will. It has but one direction, and this direction will witness the realization of Yahweh's plan, despite the avatars and delays born from the "ambition" and "pride" of men. The sense of history is the messianic fulfillment or, for Christians, the mystery of Christ. Beyond the history of the people of Israel, which represents in some way a concentrated mystique, it is the entire history of humanity that should be interpreted as *Heilsgeschichte*, the "history of salvation" or, more precisely, the "history of holiness." In Judaism, as

Raphael Patai makes clear, “ethnohistory was almost entirely confined to religious history as presented in the Bible.”[4] This “ethnohistory” in fact foreshadows the one Yahweh had in mind for the whole of humanity.

From this perspective, the end is deduced from the beginning. Not only will the world end because it had a beginning, but it is also said that this end will be tantamount to a return to the beginning. *It will restore the beginning.* It will restore the initial state that was stripped from humanity by original “sin.” History as we know it is only a long parenthesis that opened at the moment of the “Fall” and will be compelled to close again, thanks to Yahweh’s “bounty,” when the necessary conditions have come about for nullifying this Fall. In other words, history consists of a gradual evolution of humanity toward the finalization and complete unveiling of the divine plan. It is a *moral trial* that should culminate with the establishment of the kingdom. The re-absorption of history that was born of man’s power will coincide with the fullness of Yahweh’s reign. According to the Kabbalah, the very name of Adam encapsulates this vision of times past and times yet to be: A is “Adam,” D is “David,” and M is the “Messiah” (*mashiach*). History runs from Adam to the Messianic Age via the intermediary of David and his lineage. Yahweh is at work in history; he *works* it and guides it toward fulfillment. Generally speaking, nothing can prevent his design from being realized. In the long term, everything is played out. The rest is only dust and vanity. The history of men in the Bible is not autonomous. It cannot be either its own cause or its own “revelation.” It is only the “*middle*” *phase* in a process that includes two other phases—both of which are more important than what lies between them, and which are *better*, and which determine the meaning of history. Just as man is determined by something that is other than himself, history has only the meaning and direction provided by something apart from it. History is nocturnal; it unfolds between the light of the Creation and the light of the end of time, between the “Garden of Eden” and the Last Judgment.

The history of humanity, as something that has been fully and historically humanized, begins with Adam’s expulsion from the pure *naturalness* of the “Garden of Eden.” This episode, recapitulated in Cain’s murder of Abel, corresponds to a fundamental psycho-social rift, primarily consisting of the domestication of the physical world by man, rather than to man’s own self-domestication. This “moment” corresponds, within the profane transpositions of the Judeo- Christian linear outline of history, to

Marx's end of "primitive communism," Freud's "murder of the father," and even to Lévi-Strauss' separation of Nature and Culture.[5] By entering history, man is able to fully experience the rupture between the world as object and himself as subject, as the very condition of surpassing and surmounting himself. Having already been given one super-nature, he puts himself in a position to provide himself with another. But this is where Yahweh steps in. Because man has entered history with the purpose of being "God's likeness," this history must be disarmed from within. Yahweh can no longer prevent history from occurring, but he can arrange it to no longer be the place where man can become his rival. The only requirement is that man be "capped" with an absolute signifier intended to respectively illuminate the meaning and form of the essential track from which man would be obliged not to stray. This track is what the institution of monotheism "revealed" to humanity. The announcement of the "Messianic Age" forms, as it were, the riposte of Yahweh to historicization.

The end of time is generally envisioned in two ways. There are those who see it as resulting from a quasi-apocalyptic breach, in harsh discontinuity with all that came before it. Others imagine a gradual evolution, consisting of the progressive organization of the world around biblical values and the establishment of equality, justice, and universal peace. Transposed to the plane of contemporary politics, this distinction tallies with the revolutionary path and that of reformism, with all the ambiguities and contradictions specific to each. ("Rupturalism," for example, implies a stronger historicity in the short term, although it claims to bring it to a quicker ending.) It also confirms, to a certain extent, the difference between "royal" messianism, connected to Nathan's prophecy concerning David (2 Samuel 7:1–29) and the specifically eschatological messianism that is so widely discussed elsewhere. It can still be envisioned in a diachronic fashion, the "flowering" of history that precedes its proper end . The first phase would then correspond to the specifically Messianic period and be comparable to the ancient "Garden of Eden"; whereas the second phase, corresponding to the "future world" (*olam habah*), would restore "Eden" itself—in such a way that any repetition of the original sin would become impossible.[6] This fulfillment would arrive on the day after what rabbinical texts refer to as the "birth pangs of the Messiah" (the "final struggle" in Marxist terminology). History, having reached *its end*, will "give birth" in the pain of its own negation. And perhaps it is not by chance

that the Bible so frequently employs the metaphor of "giving birth"—after all, it is only starting from the time that Adam and Eve entered history that woman began, as it says in Genesis (3:16), to give birth in pain and suffering.

Christian theologians in the past never skimped on detail when describing the horrors of hell. When it came to the nature of the joys reserved for the Elect after the Last Judgment, they were always more discreet. Karl Marx, too, was always more prolix when it came to stigmatizing the evils of capitalism than in describing the specific aspects of the "classless society." To get a sense of just what the "Messianic Age" will consist of, one must resort to conjecture. Such a "moment" can only be described in opposition to the reality of the world we know. It is clear that from the biblical perspective the advent of the end of time is connected to the coming of a more fundamentally egalitarian society, one that is more homogenous and more "peaceful." As history rests on conflict, there will no longer be any conflict—and therefore no more *diversity* that is susceptible to "degenerating" into confrontations. Mastery will no longer have any reason to exist; all forms of "alienation" will disappear. The world will be transfigured into the world's *opposite*. The great cities devastated by Yahweh will remain deserted "through all the ages" (Isaiah 13:19–20); they will be like Babylon: "unpeopled through the wrath of the Lord, nothing but a desolate waste" (Jeremiah 50:13). People, no longer possessed of any inherent characteristics, will no longer display any will to power. Peace—the peace of the cemetery—will reign forevermore, as none shall "ever again be trained for war" (Michah 4:3). Any possibility of being "similar to God" will have been annihilated. The powerful will have been "humbled"—or will have given up power. The first will have become the last. The master will adopt the manner and behavior of the slave. "Then the wolf shall live with the sheep, and the leopard lie down with the kid; the calf and the young lion shall grow up together, and a little child shall lead them" (Isaiah 11:6). The wild beasts will feed on salad, and man himself will become an herbivore.[7] Thanks to the Messiah, the "taint of the serpent" will be erased.[8] There will no longer be day or night, sorrow or joy, "neither merit nor liability."[9] There will no longer be anything.

This end of history will retrospectively give meaning to all that has occurred since the beginning of time, in the same way that the seventh "day" of Creation simultaneously denoted the *cessation* of the "act" of

creating and the completeness of the work produced. Now it is to this seventh "day," during which God "ceased from all his work" (Genesis 2:2), that the Bible explicitly connects the institution of the *Sabbath* (Exodus 20:8–11 and 31:12–17). Thus, the Messianic Era is to be compared to the Sabbath. Because the Sabbath manifests a kind of circumcision of time each week,[10] it constitutes within the very core of the real world, within the very heart of humanity's historic becoming, both the *recollection* of the seventh "day" when God, having completed his creation, blessed and sanctified it (Genesis 2:3), and the *announcement* of the time when—the parenthetical duration of history having been closed—the world will have become perfectly complete. The Talmud calls the Sabbath the "Anticipation of the Messianic Age," and the Messianic Age the "Eternal Sabbath." The Sabbath thereby constitutes, inside historical becoming, the recollection of the prehistoric and the premonition of the post-historic. Symbolically separating normal time, the time in which man is *active*—in which he acts upon the world and establishes himself as its master—from the time when all the laws of the world are suspended, it represents the very *sign* of the ideal of the pause, the ideal of the limitation and of the *stop*. The Sabbath is in no way a day of "rest." It is a day of *cessation*. It marks the moment in which the believer displays his ideal and his faith by ceasing to make history, by suspending all subject-object relations, all relationships of mastery or subservience toward beings and things. "Freedom" thereby becomes one and the same with *detachment*. During the Sabbath, man makes no use of his power. He is neither the master nor creator of anything; he is implicated in nothing; he forswears all "pride" and all "claims." He is emancipated from the very chains of time. "Instead of a Sabbath on which man bows down to the Lord of Time," writes Erich Fromm, "the biblical Sabbath symbolizes man's victory over time. Time is suspended; Saturn is dethroned on his very day, Saturn's-day."[11] The Sabbath is the regular and periodic reminder given to man of his servitude and dependence on the Completely Other.

It is not so surprising, then, that some Freudian Marxists have interpreted the perpetual Sabbath that "society" will become after the end of time, as a convincing symbol of a realizable utopia. "The Sabbath appears as the foreshadowing of a time when the class struggle will no longer exist," write Eisenberg and Abécassis.[12] Fromm, for his part, goes so far as to suggest reestablishing the Sabbath "as a universal day of harmony and

peace, as the human day that anticipates the human future."[13] The Sabbath is then perceived as the mark of what is impossible to realize today, but which will necessarily occur "one day": a world where there is no longer any "injustice," conflicts, determinations, and causalities. The Sabbath represents the part of the future imperative in the very core of our present indicative.

"The rejection of history," admits Pierre Chaunu, "is a temptation for civilizations that have emerged from the Judeo-Christian tradition."[14] Furthermore, there is no word in Hebrew to designate "history." The most frequently used term for history, *toledot*, rather means "descendants, generations"; it evokes an essentially repetitive chronology.[15] In the Bible, history is *re-production* in the dual sense of the word; it ignores any radical innovation and is only a long preparation for the "delivery" that will herald its end. The only "*decisive* events" it houses are those tied to the establishment of monotheism or the realization of God's plan: Adam, Abraham, Moses, David, and the Messiah introduce such breaks. But when you come down to it, the only truly great rift is *anterior* to history.

In comparing biblical thought and pagan thought, we can thus recognize two distinct "readings" of history, which determine two different "graphs": in the Bible, we find history conceived as repetition following the fundamental *caesura* due to Yahweh's intervention; whereas in paganism, we find a specifically human history, crediting the greatest part to all the innovations of human creativity, but at the same time maintaining a clear continuity of heritage, which finds its modern expression in Nietzsche's phrase: "Zarathustra wishes to *lose* nothing of humanity's past; he seeks to throw everything into the crucible." Accordingly, Judeo-Christian monotheism does not conceptualize or conceptually isolate the notion of history (which the Ancients realized concretely, although not with full awareness), except to imprison it within boundaries that *destine* it for an end. Yahweh only tolerates history as a story that he brings to an end. He only accepts human history in the sense that it leads to the annulment of humanity. He only posits the idea to better arrange for its destruction.

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1. Emmanuel Mounier, *La Petite peur du XXe siècle* [The Little Fear of the Twentieth Century] (Paris: Seuil, 1948).

2. Emmanuel Mounier, "Une rencontre possible/impossible de la pensée de Nietzche et la pensée mystique" [A Possible/Impossible Meeting of Nietzsche's Thought and Mystical Thought], paper

from the 5th Colloquium of the International Association of Studies and Research on Nietzsche, Palermo, 19 December 1980.

3. Eisenberg and Abécassis, *À Bible ouverte*, 23.

4. Patai, *The Jewish Mind*, 48.

5. We will not devote any further study here to the manner in which the liberal bourgeois ideologies, and later the ideologies born of socialism and Marxism, have transposed the Judeo-Christian conception of history by substituting *this side* (the future) for the *hereafter*.

6. In Jewish tradition, there is a distinction made between the "Garden of Eden" and Eden proper. Man would have been placed in the garden with an eye to leading him to Eden, but was prevented by his transgression of the deity's prohibition.

7. It is only following the Flood, when Noah offers a sacrifice to Yahweh (Genesis 8:20), that the Bible makes any mention of meat as food. In the Garden of Eden, Adam seems to have been a vegetarian. At the end of time "the lion shall eat straw like cattle" (Isaiah 11:7). "When the Messiah comes," add Eisenberg and Abécassis, "animal and man alike will only eat plant products: violence will vanish from the world, even on the plane of food requirements" (*À Bible ouverte*, 135). According to these same authors, the kosher food prohibitions given by the Torah to the people of Israel represented, as consumption limits (mainly concerning meat), the recollection of this ideal.

8. The *gematria* (numerological) value of the Hebrew name for "serpent" is identical to that of the word "messiah."

9. Talmud, Shabbat, 151b.

10. "Every six days we circumcise time by cutting it into two pieces" (Eisenberg and Abécassis, *Moi le gardien de mon frère?* 291).

11. Erich Fromm, *The Forgotten Language: An Introduction to the Understanding of Dreams, Fairy Tales and Myths* (New York: Rinehart, 1951), 249.

12. Eisenberg and Abécassis, *À Bible ouverte*, 188.

13. Fromm, *To Have or to Be?* 44.

14. Pierre Chaunu, *Histoire et foi: deux mille ans de plaidoyer pour la foi* [History and Faith: Two Thousand Years of Defending the Faith] (Paris: France-Empire, 1980).

15. This word itself only appears twice in the Bible in its full form: to evoke the creation ("This is the history of heaven and earth when they were created," Genesis 2:4) and when the Book of Ruth brings up the ancestry of David, the ancestor of the Messiah.

Chapter Twelve

Messianism and Utopianism

Messiah is derived from the Hebrew word *mashiach*, meaning "to anoint." This is the word translated by the Greek *chrīstós*, "anointed," which then becomes connected with the figure of Jesus—resulting in a shift of meaning for the Greek word (originally a historical term and not a proper name or theological term). From the perspective of the Bible, the Messiah is generally a figure whose "coming" should mark the beginning of the Messianic Age. Sometimes, however, this quality is attributed collectively to the people of Israel. The latter conception traditionally prevails over the former when it involves denouncing the messianic quality of an "imposter" (Jesus, for example, from the Judaic point of view).[1] Orthodox Judaism, on the other hand, strongly leans toward systematically interpreting the Messianic Era as being connected to the advent of a personal messiah, whereas reformed Judaism instead places the emphasis on the Messianic Age itself.

Christianity's diligent efforts to make use of messianic prophecies in order to demonstrate how they relate to Jesus are well known. The Church Fathers showed particular zeal in this task—one that was also later pursued by Thomas Aquinas and Jacques-Bénigne Bossuet. "The greatest of the proofs of Jesus Christ," says Pascal, "are the prophecies." (This exercise was taken up with renewed vigor in the nineteenth century in response to rationalism and German idealism.) At the end of his Gospel, John specifies that he wrote his text so that others "may come to believe that Jesus is the Christ" (20:31)—in other words, the Messiah. However, when referring directly to the Gospels themselves, it will be noted that, with the exception of one passage in the most recent of them (specifically John 4:25–26), Jesus practically never claims to be Christ or the Messiah. "Not only so;" C. H. Dodd notes, "he seems to have discouraged attempts on the part of others to

give him the title."[2] The only two episodes in which he appears to accept this title—a conversation with his disciples (Mark 8:27–30) and the interrogation during his trial (Matthew 26:63–64)—remain quite ambiguous.

In the Old Testament, the messianic problematic is directly connected to the notion of being "chosen." This is in no way a *superiority*, but a *particularity*. Dating from Exodus, Israel formed a separate, *chosen* people. Moses, by invoking the power of Yahweh, founded both the religion and "nationality" of the Hebrews, with which he united the tribes under the worship of a single deity.[3] In this way Israel derives its identity from Yahweh. Yahweh is not merely satisfied by "choosing" his people; with his Covenant he *constitutes them as a people*. This boils down to saying that Israel will exist as a people for only as long as it recognizes Yahweh as its God. What is true for the people is also true of the land, for it is only in Eretz Israel (the Land of Israel) that the Torah can be perfectly fulfilled—and conversely, Eretz Israel only has "meaning" as long as the Torah is observed there. Hence the *particularity* of the land as of its people. Hence also, as shown by Alexandre Safran, the fact that the four fundamental aspects of Judaism—Yahweh, the Torah, Eretz Israel, and the people of Israel—can be dialectically visualized as interchangeable.[4]

With his "unction" and the Covenant, Yahweh "chose" a certain number of men. He assigned them a messianic mission to engage in history in order to bring it to a close from within, the sole means of "gradually" eliminating "from men . . . the human transgression."[5] Subsequently, "the people carrying these men would find themselves charged with a responsibility with regard to the world. They feel the effect, they experience, they live as if they were themselves *messiah for the world*, in other words, an anointed people, a people set apart, destined to establish the order of God upon the earth."[6] The Lord declared, "You shall be my kingdom of priests, my holy nation" (Exodus 19:6). If the people of Israel accept being considered as a "pariah nation,"[7] and accept being established in accordance with God's will as "hiero-ethnic," it is to "preserve their election to the rank of a sacerdotal people."[8]

In the millenarian *Shema*, the declaration "Hear O Israel, the Lord is our God" is accompanied by the monotheistic affirmation that "the Lord is one."[9] This provides Hebrew nationalism with an absolute guarantee. But

this nationalism is unlike other forms of nationalism. It even stands opposed to all others because it is not of the same nature. "Christian nationalism," writes Valentin Nikiprowetzky,

> is a contingent reality, a phenomenon based on fact not law, a *negative* deviation in the sense that it contradicts Christian doctrine and principally reflects a certain human weakness. To the contrary, Jewish nationalism, from the perspective of the religion of Israel, is a *positive* and fundamental given. It is a fulfillment that none of the prophets, even those who regarded Israel most harshly or pessimistically, ever really renounced. A unique creator God, father of all men, master of empires, unique source of all good and evil, nevertheless Yahweh remains the God of a single nation.[10]

The same tendency leads to making Jerusalem an *omphalos* that is not only spatial, but primarily temporal: "Jerusalem is both the center and culmination of Jewish and human history."[11] The Temple of Solomon thereby becomes the center of the land of Israel, which is itself the center (of the history) of the world.[12]

Marxism, which as we all know only eradicated religion in order to take its place, has borrowed this messianic conception for its own benefit. Referring to Hermann Cohen and Ernst Bloch, Erich Fromm, in the footsteps of many others, describes socialism as the "secular expression of prophetic Messianism."[13] Bloch himself sees in messianism "the burning mystery of all revolutionary, all fulfilled enlightenment."[14] On the one hand, in Marxism the proletariat finds itself established, in its capacity as the "elect" *class*, as the custodian of a universal emancipation tied to its own emancipation.[15] On the other hand, as noted by Fromm, "the Hegelian-Marxian concept of alienation makes its first appearance—although not in these words—in the biblical concept of idolatry"[16]—which moreover leads Fromm to declare that today's idols are called "honor, flag, state, mother, family, fame, production, consumption, and many other names."[17] It is through messianism that certain neo-Marxists have created a confluence of the Bible and Marx toward what Bloch calls the "ontology of Not-yet-being." The *expectation* is therefore made secular; the Bible, "an oppressed

text," still has a future insofar as it is through this future it can "transcend without transcendence."

In contrast to Christianity, Judaism "presents itself as a temporal doctrine that tends to realize, *hic et nunc*, the ideal society described in the Scriptures."[18] The justification for this ideal stems in part from the fact that in Judaism there prevails a rather loose conception of original sin, a conception according to which neither the substance or nature of man was fundamentally corrupted by Adam's sin. Therefore, the establishment of a "heaven on earth," through humanity's gradual evolution in a more moral direction, is not a complete impossibility. By the same stroke, this theology of the *hic et nunc* also explains why Judaism has never shared the negative judgment often carried by Christianity about this world, nor accepted the relative indifference of Christian authorities toward problems—mainly social—connected to a potential transformation of the immediate physical world.[19] It also explains how Marxism, by using the messianic source as its starting point, did not have much trouble detouring this *expectation* toward the future—with the substitution of this side for the beyond.

Moreover, the Church seems determined to make up for lost time on this plane. Paul Valadier speaks of "helping politics (responsible violence management) get a grasp of its role in the tension created by the end of history."[20] "We now see the Christians in the process of regaining their memory and rediscovering their Hebrew and Jewish origins; they are gradually rediscovering a more Pharisaic reading of the Gospels."[21]

Since, from the Biblical perspective, evil belongs to the *historical* condition of humanity, many have concluded that classical politics and even a "revolution" are incapable of wiping it out. The sole remedy is then a *utopian idea*: a perpetual assertion, as a critical (and thereby *limitative*) expectation, of a radical Other capable of manifestation in the world. This is an assertion that has no need of being realized, is sometimes not even accompanied by any belief in its possible realization, and which counts as a *hope* insofar as it inspires and prompts behaviors and actions that are deemed to be wholesome. It is a *negative* attitude that finds its own justification within itself, and should not be confused with the pagan sense of a duty to be fulfilled; rather, it represents a subtle form of the spirit of resentment showing, as Philippe Nemo has written, that they alone are masters who revolt against the mastery of the world.[22] A certain new

theology has rallied to this point of view in declaring that "when God is transformed into the guardian of order, atheism becomes the condition for social change."[23] After all, the utopian idea itself is also a profane theology, founded on exile and absence.

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1. Cf., in particular, the views of Emmanuel Levinas.

2. C. H. Dodd, *The Founder of Christianity* (New York: Macmillan, 1970).

3. It is known that historical data concerning Moses as well as the captivity in Egypt and the Exodus are largely absent, even—which is most surprising—in the Egyptian annals; see Roland Guérin de Vaux, O.P., *Histoire ancienne d'Israël* [Ancient History of Israel] (Paris: Gabalda, 1971–1973). The tale of Moses abandoned as a child on the Nile then miraculously "saved from the waters," is itself even more suspect as it seems built on a mythological framework for which we have other examples (notably the legend of the Chaldean king Sargon). There is also the well-known—and frequently criticized—theory that Freud advances in *Moses and Monotheism* (New York: Random House, 1967). In this later work, in which he applies the principles of *Totem and Taboo* to the history of Israel, the father of psychoanalysis depicts Moses as a noble Egyptian from the entourage of Akhnaton, the "monotheistic" pharaoh of the eighteenth dynasty, who would have been assassinated by Jews in Shittim. By challenging Moses' identity, Freud seems to have been chiefly contesting his own, while emphasizing the guilt-inducing nature of his approach, which, for all that, lacks conviction and is ultimately a *failed endeavor*. With this Freud admits just what kind of psychoanalysis he comes under. Arnold Mandel viewed *Moses and Monotheism* as "one of the most anti-Jewish spiritual works that ever existed" ("Autour d'un fratracide" ["Author of a Fratricide"], in *L'Arche*, August 1980). For more on this matter, one may also consult the interesting work by Emile Gillabert, *Moïse et le monothéisme judéo-chrétien* [Moses and Judeo-Christian Monotheism] (Montelimar: Métanoïa, 1976).

4. Alexandre Safran, *Israël dans le temps and dans l'espace* [*Israel in Time and in Space*] (Paris: Payot, 1980).

5. Eisenberg and Abécasssis, *Moi le gardien demon frère?* 255.

6. Jacques Ellul, "Messie et messianisme" ["Messiah and Messianism"], *Sens*, January 1979.

7. Max Weber, "Die Enstehung des jüdischen Pariavolkes" ["The Origin of the Jewish Pariah Nation"], in *Gesammelte Aufsätze zur Religionssoziolgie*, vol. 3, 370–400; and *Le Judaïsme antique* [Ancient Judaism] (Paris: Plon, 1970).

8. Léon Rosen in *Les Nouveaux Cahiers*, Spring 1979.

9. [More formally referred to as the *Shema Yisrael*, this is the daily Jewish prayer, the first verse of which corresponds to Deuteronomy 6:4. —*Ed*.]

10. Valentin Nikiprowetzky, "Le monothéisme éthique et la spécificité d'Israël" ["Ethical Monotheism and the Particularity of Israel"] in *De l'antijudaïsme antique à l'antisémitisme contemporain,* ed. V. Nikiprowetzky (Villeneuve-d'Ascq: Presses Universitaires de Lille, 1979), 45.

11. *Jewish Telegraph Agency Bulletin*, 9–10 December 1978.

12. This, however, concerns a faraway perspective and it is not necessarily a good thing to precipitate it. A scholar like Gershom Scholem, who has written a number of important works on Jewish mysticism, feels that the messianic attraction has almost always proven itself "fatal" for the Jewish people: "Whenever messianism is introduced into politics, it becomes a very dangerous business. It can only lead to disaster" (David Biale, "The Threat of Messianism: An Interview with Gershom Scholem," *The New York Review of Books*, 14 August 1980, 22). Scholem gives as an example of

contemporary messianism the ideology of the Israeli group Gush Emunim, which he compares to the movement of the seventeenth century.

13. Fromm, *To Have or to Be?* 133.

14. Bloch, *Atheism in Christianity*, 225.

15. Certain authors, like P. Dognin (*Initiation à Karl Marx* [Initiation with Karl Marx] [Paris: Cerf, 1970], 44–46), instead interpret the role bestowed by Marx upon the proletariat as an instance of the Promethean myth. Although the evidence may show that Marx was influenced by the figure of Prometheus, I cannot share this opinion. Furthermore, the Promethean myth remains to a large degree quite ambiguous. With his opposition to the world of Olympus, the sublimated depiction of Hellenic society, Prometheus embodies the "social" unrest of a non-Greek segment of the population (probably the artisan class). We should also take note of his declaration of faith: "I hate all the gods." It is only with Goethe's Prometheus that "man, rising to Titanic stature, fights for his own culture and compels allegiance from the gods, because in his very own wisdom he has their existence and their limitations under his command" (Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy* [trans. Whiteside], §47).

16. Fromm, *You shall be as gods*, 44.

17. Fromm, *You shall be as gods*, 47–48.

18. Francine Kaufmann, "Les Juifs et le Royaume" ["The Jews and the Kingdom"], *Sillages* (Jerusalem), September 1979.

19. It should be clearly noted as well that this relative indifference was also what allowed Christianity to spread, by gradually combining with specifically European conceptions of political sovereignty and social structure.

20. Paul Valadier, *Jésus-Christ ou Dionysos: La foi chrétienne en confrontation avec Nietzsche* [Jesus Christ or Dionysos: Christian Faith in Confrontation with Nietzsche] (Paris: Desclée, 1979), 162.

21. Eisenberg and Abécassis, *Et Dieu créa Eve*, 80.

22. Philippe Nemo, *Job et l'excès de mal* [Job and the Excess of Evil] (Paris: Grasset, 1978), 218.

23. Vincent Cosmao, *Changer le monde* [To Change the World] (Paris: Cerf, 1979).

Chapter Thirteen

Space and Time

From the creationist perspective, the main emphasis is placed on *time* and not on *space*: the account of Genesis transpires only in time and stages a "history," which the Greeks, for example, would have instead interpreted spatially. Similarly, if the biblical doctrine of personal rewards is unclear, it is because its "paradise" is confused with an *absolute before* (the Garden of Eden) or an *absolute after* (the Messianic Era), whereas in classic pagan tradition, "paradise" is primarily a *place* (Valhalla, the Elysian Fields, or even Atlantis or the Land of Cockaigne)—and, what's more, not a place that is radically distinguished from the real world. This is the reason why time is generally considered—as Ernst von Dobschütz stressed in 1902—to play the role of the *exemplary container* in Hebrew thought. By contrast, in ancient European thought that function was served by space. Thus, while the Greeks paid special attention to the particularity of the *elements* of the tangible world, the Hebrews paid special attention to the *events* that transpired there. This makes it so that in the Bible, *time ends by being identified with its content*, whereas in paganism, it is space which forms the world that tends to become identified with all the beings it contains.

"Hebrew man," declares André Chouraqui, "lives in a verbal world where the notion of time trumps that of space, in which the duality between time and eternity . . . does not exist."[1] We are, in fact, in the presence here of a very distinctive conception of time, which is directly connected to the conception of *history*. Time in the Bible is not time by human standards. Time belongs only to Yahweh. Moreover, the word for time in Hebrew, *olam*, is no different from the word for eternity. (The Septuagint first translated *olam* as "eternity," thereby creating an opposition between time and eternity that does not exist in Hebrew; Chouraqui's French translation uses the word *pérennité*, "perenniality," which more closely renders the Hebrew.) On the other hand, ancient Hebrew has no present tense and verbs

only have two basic tense-forms: perfect and imperfect. In the Pentateuch the word *qadosh*, "holy," appears first as a description of the "seventh day," which God chose as his day; and in the Ten Commandments the only two positive commandments are related to time: "Remember to keep the sabbath day holy" (which corresponds to the rhythm of the week) and "Honor your mother and your father, that you may live long in the land which the Lord your God is giving you" (which corresponds to the rhythm of the generations). Holiness in time thus takes precedence over all other forms of holiness; holiness in space appears only at the moment when the Hebrews are commanded to build a Tabernacle, which will be consecrated by Moses (Numbers 7:1).

In the classical European tradition, by contrast, space is such a primordial assumption that we often conceive of time spatially.[2] For example, we speak about a "space of time." In the Bible, the Hebrew expression generally translated as the "kingdom of God" ("the time has come; the kingdom of God is upon you," Mark 1:15), an expression with spatial resonance, in fact means to say "reign of God," an expression with temporal resonance. We also tend to ascribe spatial proportions to our conception of eternity, imagining it as something "infinitely *vast*." And let us not forget the desire for the *conquest of space*, which—from the time of the great explorers to that of *Star Wars*—has never ceased to move us! It is this tendency to "spatialize" time that has led Europe, after its conversion to Christianity, to reinterpret the notion of linear duration into a form that makes a clear-cut, almost palpable distinction between the present, the past, and the future; whereas the Hebrew verb, which distinguishes only between completion and incompletion, consistently tends (if we accept Max Müller's contention that language is a crystallized philosophy) to qualify time—not from the human perspective, but from that of God, which his "nature" necessarily places above historic time.

Judeo-Christianity therefore entirely reverses the pagan problematic: paganism tends to believe that the world is eternal, while gods, like men, are not; Judeo-Christian monotheism asserts that God is eternal, but that the world began and will end. These differences of sensibility are explicable in terms of their background. As Gilbert Durand notes in his commentary on Spengler, "far from being an *a priori* form of sensibility on the same plane as space, time is *an antimony of space*. The true intuition of time is that of a direction, a meaning."[3] By contrast, in space nothing is predetermined in

advance about the forms that will be created there. Everything is much more directly dependent upon man. Asserting the primacy of space is, let me repeat, indirectly exalting man's power. Also, in the wake of the opposition of time and space, there emerges another opposition that is equally fundamental: between the time-eternity governed by Yahweh, and human time, which is a specifically *historical* time. This opposition is the classic one from antiquity between *intensity* and *duration*. Unable to master time by the very reason of his own finite existence, pagan man masters it through the intensity of his actions—and by the resulting "intensity" of the constructions specific to it. This seems to be what Nietzsche was alluding to in a famous passage from *The Anti-Christ* in which he recalls what Christianity, the "vampire" of the *Imperium Romanum*, had contributed to the undoing of the Romans' magnificent creation: "the tremendous deed of the Romans in clearing the ground for a great culture *which could take its time* was undone overnight by Christianity."[4] The desire for *creation* flows logically out of this desire for intensity, as do the desire for *form* and the desire for *style*. By all evidence, the Bible's choice is duration; furthermore, the intensity of human actions try, in the strict sense, the "patience" of Yahweh.

We find here the confrontation between a purely linear conception of time and a cyclical or "spherical" conception, which accepts, among other things, the Eternal Return of the Same. There is no possibility of return in Judeo-Christian monotheism: history cannot turn back on itself; it is *going* somewhere—toward a never-seen event that will be its culmination and its end. Or rather, if there is a "return," it is on a whole different level: the end of history will be the equivalent of a return to the state that existed before history, but this "return" will be an *absolute* return. It will not be one return among others, an eternal dialectical movement of always starting over, but the radical affirmation, the *sign* of an absolute end of time, the re-absorption of human history called upon to close itself like a parenthetical expression.

On the other hand, there is no spatial or geographical return either. Emmanuel Levinas hit the nail on the head when he wrote: "To the myth of Ulysses returning to Ithaca, we would like to oppose the story of Abraham leaving his country for ever to go to a still unknown land and forbidding his servant to take even his son back to this point of departure."[5] In the Bible, one must never *go back*; one must *leave*. One should leave the cities—Ur, Pithom, Babylon—which are human undertakings and places of perdition

(but also, later, places of redemption—it was in the cities that the newly born Christianity made its most spectacular progress) and go toward the Promised Land. "The Jewish destiny," declares Shmuel Trigano, "is to always be leaving Ur in Chaldea for Eretz Israel."[6] In fact, the point of *arrival* is all that matters—a point determined (in the same way as the arrival point of history) by the "promise" of the Covenant and not the point of *origin*. Eretz Israel is not a land of origin; it is not where the men of the Bible were begotten. Before being conquered, Eretz Israel was a gift land, attributed and *promised* by Yahweh. Pagan man feels the *place* of his birth through its relation to his *ancestral lineage*. He has a "motherland." In biblical monotheism, by contrast, there is no *native* land; there is only a *final* land, the land of destination that does not derive from any founding myth but clearly from a finality. Singularly enough, this finality is more temporal than spatial, as its appropriation constitutes a prerequisite for the advent of the Messianic Age. The land of Israel was promised twice: first to Moses by Yahweh (Exodus 6:8; 23:20–33) when it still belonged to the Hittites, Amorites, and Canaanites, and then during the time of the prophets. ("I am gathering up the Israelites from their places of exile among the nations; I will assemble them from every quarter and restore them to their own soil. I will make them one single nation in the land, on the mountains of Israel," Ezekiel 37:21–22.) It is still promised much in the same way a fiancée was once "promised" to a man. In fact, Eretz Israel constitutes the fiancée, the future wife of the Hebrews. The Bible develops this nuptial symbolism at length. The Law of the Sinai constitutes the *ketubah*, the marriage contract.[7] The people of Israel are not children of a land; they are the sons of Yahweh, in a filial relationship whose ambiguous nature I have attempted to describe earlier. It is not on the land of Israel, by birth and heritage, that this people was formed, but in Egypt and in the desert, through a moral and religious act. Eretz Israel is a fiancée, a wife, but she cannot become a mother—one of those *earth-mothers* worshipped by the "idolatrous." It is a land that was made natal only through contractual proxy; it is a "native land owing nothing to birth."[8] Out of this comes the entire theology of exile and "return" (within the parameters I have indicated), partnered with that of silence and the word. And perhaps this is also the source for what turns up later, more distantly, in the Freudian Oedipal theory, which views repression of an "unresolved" attachment to

the mother as the source of neurosis—just as the prophets made persistent attachment to the earth-mother a source of "idolatry."

In Genesis, one of the characteristic traits of Cain is his desire for *boundaries*. He wished to materialize his ownership. According to one Midrash commentary, when Cain killed Abel, it was because the latter did not want to respect a division of property that the two had agreed upon. Under the terms of this division, Cain had obtained this world, and Abel the "future world." But Abel then argued that he had rights over this world too, because, strictly speaking, as the world had only one creator, it could not truly be divided. (In my opinion, this makes Cain's wrath quite understandable!) Condemned to exile and having settled in the "land of Nod" (Genesis 4:16), Cain then makes the distinctly "pagan" choice of intensity over duration, space over time-eternity. By constructing a city, as we have seen, he was visibly seeking to lay the foundations for a kingdom or an empire—and this is where his "pride" resided. He transformed, as Eisenberg and Abécassis correctly put it, "his temporal issue into a spatial one."[9]

The attitude developed by the Bible with respect to "setting down roots" is therefore extremely ambivalent. A sedentary lifestyle, as opposed to a nomadic one, is assigned a negative value. Eisenberg and Abécassis go so far as to read in this a condemnation of patriotism as a "pagan sentiment based on man's physical relationship to the earth, identical to the filial relationship in which the child is determined genetically."[10] "Freedom with regard to the sedentary forms of existence is, perhaps, the human way to be in this world," Levinas declares[11]—which is only a half-truth, because the "specifically human" freedom that exists with respect to *a* fixed dwelling cannot be construed as legitimizing the principle of rejecting *all* fixed dwellings. It is also curious to see how the Sukkot festival, which began as a typically agrarian feast (see Deuteronomy 16:13–16), subsequently became a nomadic one. Even after the formation of the royal house of Israel and the settlement upon the Promised Land, the nomadic vocation continued to be embodied by the *gerim*, whose life is a long pilgrimage (*magor*). It was from among them that were recruited, around 900 BCE, the first sectarian Rekabites, when nomadism was regarded not as a simple lifestyle but as an effective means of saving the Covenant's principles. It was also among the *gerim* that the Levites were found—a caste who, upon their return to Canaan, defined themselves as the "landless tribe" and

continued to pursue an ideal that appears to have triumphed in the wake of the destruction of the second Temple. “By refusing the land,” states André Neher,

> the Levites also refused Canaanite civilization, which was essentially sedentary. The economic life of Canaan was based on agriculture and commerce. . . . Now the Levites would not *Canaanize* themselves at all. Alone among the Hebrews, they did not devote themselves to farming, as did other Hebrews upon entering Canaan, or to commerce, as other Hebrews did later, when the richest parts of the land had fallen under their control.[12]

The universe is thus conceived in the Bible as a world with no spatial boundaries but limited in time, whereas in paganism it is considered as limitless in time but a place where man has the duty to draw spatial boundaries. Borders that are set down in space establish man as the master of the space he occupies. Boundaries in time, absolute *caesuras*, only show what distinguishes man from God. In the one case, there are established roots and specificity; in the other case, there is the vocation for universalism and deterritorialization. “One’s implementation in a landscape, one’s attachment to *Place*, without which the universe would become insignificant and would scarcely exist,” writes Levinas, “is the very splitting of humanity into natives and strangers.”[13] In principle, however, this “splitting” does not imply rejection or contempt. Instead, it forms the primary condition for the maintenance of, and respect toward, collective differences. It is less certain that the same holds true for the ideal of the abolition of borders—an ideal which, in Thorleif Boman’s view, is the normal state, if not the final destination, of the world according to the Bible.[14] This is an ideal that in any event closely resembles the very contemporary apologia of the “man with the soles of wind,” the Deleuzian and Guattarian concept of the “rhizome” (as opposed to the “root”), and of universal nomadism, in a world where the non-place of *desert* anonymity tends to be replaced by the non-place of *urban* anonymity—whereas the “world” cities are no longer the places where history works toward its fulfillment, but rather the site of its *simulacrum* and annihilation.

André Chouraqui speaks of a “verbal world.” It is the *activity* (of man) that produces *intensity*, but it is the *word* (of Yahweh) that acts upon

duration. In the Bible, the word is the decisive reality of the world of lived experience. In the extreme case, the world is commingled with the word that created it: in Hebrew, the same word, *davar*, can mean either "object" or "word." In paganism, the decisive reality of the world of lived experience is the result of action. Goethe's phrase "In the beginning was the deed" is a response to the phrase in the Scriptures, "In the beginning was the word." Against the symphony that reigns in pagan religions, the Bible therefore poses silence as the metaphysical form of the cosmos (André Neher), silence where only the *logos*—the word of Yahweh—resonates, although in the final instance, the Being of that particular being can also only be identical with silence.

The Judeo-Christian world is a world that has been issued from the word. This is why the *name* of Yahweh, an unspeakable name, is declared all-powerful (see Psalms 8). It is the word that creates the bond between created being and non-created being. One reads in Genesis: "God said, 'Let there be Light'" (1:3). One enters the dynamic phase of the creation through the intermediary of the *logos*. In the Bible, "to do" is linked with "to say," with what is expressed and heard, with what is uttered and understood from the onset. Spoken or written, the word is Revelation: a sublimation of verbal-motor behavior. When the Lord "took" Adam to place him in the Garden of Eden (Genesis 2:15), it is by means of the word that this *taking* is executed. It is also the failure of Cain's "words" to Abel (Genesis 4:8) that provoked the fratricide. And likewise, finally, there is the fact that the world was created through ten words (in the rabbinical tradition, the phrase "In the beginning" is considered as one word, the tenth, which is added to the other nine) and it is through ten "words," ten "commandments," that God gave Moses his Law on Mount Sinai.

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1. Interview in *Question de*, November–December 1980.

2. Cf. Henri Bergson, *Time and Free Will: Essay on the Immediate Data of Consciousness*, trans. F. L. Pogson (New York: Harper and Row, 1960).

3. Gilbert Durand, *Science de l'homme et tradition: Le nouvel esprit anthropologique* [Social Science and Tradition: The New Anthropological Spirit] (Paris: Berg International, 1979), 179.

4. Nietzsche, *The Anti-Christ* (trans. Hollingdale), §58.

5. Emmanuel Lévinas, *En découverant l'existence avec Husserl et Heidegger*. Translation here by Colin Davis, *An Introduction to Levinas* (Cambridge, UK: Polity, 2013), 33.

6. Interview in *Sillages* (Jerusalem), October 1980.

7. Jacques Goldstain also asserts that, in a certain way, circumcision makes the child the fiancé of Yahweh. "The original commonality of the Arab words *hatana*, 'circumcize,' and *hitan*,

‘circumcision,’ and the Hebrew terms *haten*, ‘father-in-law,’ and *hatan*, ‘offspring,’” he writes, “is sufficient indication of a relationship between circumcision and marriage” (*Les valeurs de la Loi*, 135). This comparison can nevertheless be interpreted in different ways.

8. Emmanuel Levinas, *Proper Names*, trans. Michael B. Smith (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996), 45.

9. Eisenberg and Abécassis, *Moi, le gardien de mon frère?* 303.

10. Eisenberg and Abécassis, *Moi, le gardien de mon frère?* 172.

11. Levinas, *Difficult Freedom*, 23.

12. André Neher, *Prophètes et prophéties: L’essence du prophétisme* [The Essence of Prophecy] (Paris: Payot et Rivages, 1995), 157–58.

13. Levinas, *Difficult Freedom*, 232.

14. See Thorleif Boman, *Hebrew Thought Compared with Greek*, trans. Jules L. Moreau (New York: Norton, 1970).

Chapter Fourteen
Iconoclasm and Beauty

What time-eternity is cannot be seen; only what exists in space can be *seen*. "In the beginning was the Word" also means: in the beginning was what could be heard and not seen. Yahweh, by "nature," is *unrepresentable.* As a super-ego, he should not have an image, for he is the super-ego of *all* "egos." He is beyond all the images and forms that arise from this world. The absolute, by definition, is not confinable within the limits that all representations necessarily possess. Representing God is tantamount to *restraining* and reducing him to merely one of the forms he has created. In biblical monotheism, it is not only that the things of this world can no longer be seen as divine, but God himself can no longer be regarded as an *object*. Yahweh cannot be re-presented, in the strict sense of the word, because he has presented himself once and for all; he is present for all eternity. To see him is to die. Moses himself did not see the Lord on Mount Sinai, he *heard* him. The seraphim of whom Isaiah speaks (6:2) hide their faces before the Eternal One. Moses does the same before the "burning bush": "Moses covered his face, for he was afraid to gaze on God" (Exodus 3:6). When Yahweh accompanied the Hebrews in the desert, a cloud hid him from their sight. The Ark of the Covenant itself is only an empty throne. And contrary to what is often assumed, the sin of the worshippers of the Golden Calf was not so much the desire to change gods, but the desire to render the invisible visible. (This precisely explains the attitude of Aaron, who built an altar before the statue of the Golden Calf and said: "Tomorrow, there is to be a pilgrim-feast to the Lord" Exodus 32:5.) We know the importance of the desert in biblical symbolism, the desert that erases all representations and dismisses them on behalf of the invisible and the uniform. Yahweh's believer must consent to transforming the imagination into a desert, which implies a ban on all representation.

Outside the claim of his existence, therefore, one has no recourse to *any positive attribute* to designate or characterize Yahweh. Those attributes which the Bible provides are anthropomorphic and obviously should not be taken literally. They derive, as we noted earlier, from the need for the Bible to "speak in the tongues of men." This will lead Maimonides to say: "The negative attributes, however, are those which are necessary to direct the mind to the truths which we must believe concerning God."[1] This doctrine of negative attributes is a foreshadowing of the "critical theory" of the Frankfurt School.

It is not only depictions of Yahweh that are forbidden, but images of all worldly things as well—starting of course with man, since he was created in God's "image." These are the instructions concerning *iconoclasm* first expressed in Exodus: "You shall not make a carved image for yourself nor the likeness of anything in the heavens above, or on the earth below, or in the waters under the earth" (20:4); and then in Deuteronomy: "So take good care not to fall into the degrading practice of making figures carved in relief, in the form of a man or a woman, or of any animal on earth or bird that flies in the air, or of any reptile on the ground or fish in the waters under the earth" (4:16–18).

It is difficult to know just how far back in time these prohibitions were made. It seems they were first specifically aimed at representations of the Deity and were later extended to all imagistic representations. Over the centuries, they were received and interpreted in a more or less strict manner. The Talmudic discussion deals mainly with the term "representation."[2] It is generally felt today that only a complete representation—in other words, for example, a three-dimensional representation of the entire human body—is covered by this ban. Standing statuary is prohibited, while, by contrast, busts, portraits, and photographs are not.[3] Certain authors, especially mystics, held a much more radical view. Whatever the case may be, it is easy to see a clear *anti-aesthetic bias* in biblical iconoclasm. In Genesis, Naamah, the sister of Tubal-cain the smith, moreover bears a name that means "beauty." In traditional Judaism, art essentially remains in the liturgical domain; the emphasis is placed not on God but on his interventions in history. "The great men of the Old Testament religion," writes Thorleif Boman, "are depicted not because of their piety or their

heroism, but because God has acted in them or has spoken to them by acting, or like Ezra because he is reading God's word."[4]

Christian art, which is responsible for so many admirable works in this regard, began as a heresy. "Transported to an art-loving people, Christianity became a religion that was more artistic than it would have been, had it remained in the hands of the Judeo-Christians."[5] However, this only came about as the result of a long, slow evolution. In the Christianity of the first centuries, iconoclasm was the rule; the Mosaic prohibition against imagistic representations was widely observed. The idea of Jesus' great ugliness was equally widespread (cf. Tertullian, Origen, and Clement of Alexandria). Eusebius of Caesarea, in his letter to Empress Constantia, rejected as utterly impious the desire to provide portraits of Christ. Early Christianity crystallized its rejection of images in its disdain for "pagan" idols. The first Christians could only speak sarcastically when they mentioned the statues of the gods. To the question: "Should we make statues and images of God?" they all responded in the negative.[6] It was only in the wake of the Constantinian compromise, when the Church began to become more pagan, that the birth and development of a Christian iconography was seen—an iconography destined to blossom in extraordinary fashion starting in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. However, traces of iconoclasm can still be found in Byzantine ritual and even in Protestantism. The Eastern churches long remained enveloped in hieratic and impersonal imagery.

Iconoclasm is likewise present in Islam, where the rare Arabic Muslim thinkers who concerned themselves with aesthetics essentially just envisioned art in its abstract form[7]—the *iconographic* aspiration, as Henry Corbin has shown, was most often transferred to the "imaginal." It was in the *hadiths* especially that the anti-figurative attitude was expressed, generally in the form of curses: the "image-makers" would be punished on the last day by the judgment of God, who would impose upon them the impossible task of bringing their works to life! According to the ninety-nine names of Allah (Al Asma ul-Husna) in Islam, only God is *Al-Musawwir*, meaning the "Fashioner of Forms." Here again it is a case of not competing against God in his personal domain. Jean-Paul Charnay rightly describes Islam as an "abstract religion which, by refusing idolatry, represses even simply aesthetic anthropomorphic and zoomorphic symbols and representations."[8]

The biblical denial of the image can be read on several levels. Its primary role is tied to the fight against "idolatry." In its strict sense, the "idol" (Greek *eidōlon*) is what can be seen—that which acquires a status of existence through its created visual representation. To represent God by means of a form—any form—is to necessarily represent him as *that* very form. Yet God, who has created all forms, cannot be reduced to *one* particular form. Restricting him to a given form amounts to reducing the *universal* to a *particular*, to treating *the Being* as if he were no more than *a being*—an inconceivable and blasphemous attitude from the biblical perspective. Between figurative art and abstract art, only the second is truly in conformance with the instructions of Moses, which creates a certain underdevelopment of the meaning of form.[9] Yaacov Agam goes so far as to say: "Not only is it impossible for figurative art to be Jewish, it is preeminently anti-Jewish, and forbidden by the Bible."[10] Chaim Potok's novel *My Name is Asher Lev* is centered upon a child who transgresses the biblical law concerning the non-representation of the image.[11]

The expulsion of human representation, on the other hand, goes hand in hand with the abandonment of human particularity and diversity—the expulsion of *human norms* as they express this particularity and diversity, *for they are themselves images*. Furthermore, it is sufficient to look at the role they play in Christian art. The artists naturally represented God with features familiar to them. They gave him the ideal physical appearance *implied* by their own heritage and ethnic group, as it was unthinkable to them that God could have the appearance of something Completely Other. Every representation refers to a particularity and *reflects* a particularity; every representation forms a mirror in and through which a *type* exalts itself and becomes sublime. Only non-representation can "reflect" the invisible and unnameable. Only nothingness can echo nothingness. This is why, from the biblical perspective—which interprets this nothingness, this absolute *void*, to be absolute *plenitude*—only the *absence of form* can express the *presence of all forms*, in the same way that only man's silence can express the words of God. This is the ideal of the empty temple. It is an ideal that prefigures the Messianic Age, when specific differences will be abolished, when all men will be "equals" among equals, when nothing will any longer be compared to anything. "The messianic world," explains the Zohar, "will be a world without images, in which there will no longer be any comparison

possible between the image and what it represents."[12] Non-figuration thereby brings us back to *flat rationality*. Reality is no longer perceived, sensed, and represented as such. It is no longer drawn from sensibility and aesthetics, but from pure intellect and pure morality—from an intellect that is itself functioning on the basis of an abstraction in which signs no longer exchange against the real but are limited to exchange among themselves. Reality should not be *seen* and *constructed* based on the perception we have of it; it must be *understood*.

Commentators have often sought to discover continuities, or contemporary points of comparison, that relate to the Mosaic ban on representation, for example, with regard to abstract art, the birth and development of which coincide, so to speak, with those of structural linguistics, and with the internationalist ideal of the removal of borders, as experienced in real life. In his essay on "The Iconoclasts," Jean-Joseph Goux raises the question: "Wouldn't it be the ancestral proximity to the *iconoclastic imperative* that puts Marx and Freud, two faithless but indubitable sons of Judaism, in the position of perceiving all representation as imaginary and everything imaginary as ignorance?"

"It is here," he adds, "that the Jewishness of Marx and Freud, which has only been taken into account anecdotally until now, will no doubt find its true basis." He then concludes: "So this would not be by chance, but through the effect of digging into a common ground . . . that we would encounter today—whether through abstract art, utopia, fetishism, standards, the differences between the sexes—the question of the temple with no images."[13] Certain ideological phenomena such as abstract painting, Freudianism, or Marxism could thus be interpreted as *resurgences* of a very ancient process that is perpetually moving from the universal to the particular, from the unity of the Law to the diversity of signs: "There is a profound resonance," Goux writes, "between the old iconoclastic imperative that formed the basis for a bifurcation in antiquity and an important aspect of Western modernity. Hence thinkers of Judaic descent have been at the cutting edge of this modernity, blazing the trails not so much in opposition to it as in advance of it."[14]

"To be Jewish," Josy Eisenberg believes, "is to have a series of discourses by God and about God readily available, in order to know the invisible, incorporeal, intangible God. It is to search for God through a

language for which the entire history of Israel is only a sonorous echo."[15] And again: "One can easily define the Jewish faith in the same terms used by Lacan to describe the unconscious, and say that it is structured like a language. This language is furthermore not without a relationship to the unconscious, since all Jewish exegesis consists of seeking, beyond what has been said, for what the biblical discourse leaves unsaid."[16] This opinion seems to closely echo the words of Jean-Joseph Goux. When the depicted representation is entirely replaced by the *logos* that absolutely predated it, it is clearly no longer a commentary but a substitute. It should come as no surprise, then, to see flourishing, in the field of contemporary ideological discourse—at the same time as Judeo-Christian values are depositing themselves into secular forms like *sediment*—a whole theme of non-representation and the search for that which is *unsaid*. This latter impulse has given rise to various epiphenomena including structural linguistics, historical studies that are not purely descriptive, abstract art, and a thousand and one theories of the unconscious. In each case, it is a question of *describing* without *depicting*, of considering the world to be somehow a coded complex whose *key* lies *beyond visible appearances*. This world is not a place in which forms can be created, but rather a mystery to be interpreted, a puzzle to be put back together, a place in which man—who is viewed not as a *creator* but as an *intermediary*—has the task of "discovering" a *hidden meaning*, a necessarily *unique* meaning that predates his very existence. The idea of the world-as-cryptogram, and that of an absolute signifier allowing it to be deciphered (who might be Yahweh, but could just as well be the Unconscious or the Class Struggle), then functions like diastole and systole. If the world is, in fact, something *other than what it is*, there necessarily must be a universal key, inescapable and unsurpassable, which makes it possible to know what in the world partakes of the Being that is not the being. Man no longer acts; he is *enacted* as the "decipherer of hieroglyphics." "For just as Freud took it upon himself to find meaning in dreams, which he compares, as is commonly known, to hieroglyphics, Marx for his part undertook to decipher, in his own terms, the hieroglyph of value."[17] And this is why Freud interpreted dreams by precisely following Joseph's example with the pharaoh (Genesis 41:1–43), or even that of Daniel with Nebuchadnezzar (Daniel 4:16–24).

By pronouncing a general, universal law located beyond particular *events* or forms of *behavior*, Freud and Marx emerged from the Egypt of

hieroglyphics—hieroglyphics of dreams or hieroglyphics of production—and left the foreign, specifically pagan land of particular meanings and, with a unique operating sign, reduced them and brought them back to an equally unique signifier. Freud's aesthetic conceptions, studied by Jean-Joseph Goux, are remarkable in this regard:

> Freud begins by saying that he is drawn to a work of art for its subject matter rather than for its formal or technical qualities. What causes him to respond is the artist's intention; he feels only what he understands. He attempts to translate the artist's intention into words; he takes pleasure not in the medium but in the message, not in the material but in the meaning. He responds only if his intelligence remains in full control. It is for this reason he does not like music. . . . Far from confining himself to what is specific about the work of art and taking its perceptual enigma seriously, he sees in it simply the opportunity to interpret a meaning, to grasp a message that the artist communicates by means of his work. All that interests him are the ideas transmitted, the intentions signified.[18]

This is a remarkable passage that expresses many of the oppositions that we ourselves have formulated: between what is felt and what is understood, soul and mind, form and foundation, image and concept, style and meaning.

We know the sort of attraction the figure of Moses exerted on Freud. Yet it was precisely Moses who brought down from Mount Sinai the tablets of the Law and, with them, the iconoclastic prohibition. In *Moses and Monotheism*, Freud himself said that the ban on representation implies the relegation of sensorial perception into the background with respect to the abstract idea, a triumph of the intellect over the senses and the renunciation of the passions. Likewise, with Lévi-Strauss, the thesis of the prohibition against incest as a universal given characteristic of the human species—a thesis directly associated with the Freudian Oedipal theory, for which it is a kind of ethnographical and rationalizing reinterpretation—comes on the one hand from a renewed search for a general law that exists beyond all the particulars, while on the other hand it particularly interprets this general law as a rupture with the natural world, to the extent that the ban on incest, which most often means a prohibition on incest *with the mother*, overlaps with the old anti-"idolatrous" prohibition directed against the familial

relationship between man and the earth-mother. (According to a biblical theme, "idolatry" is fornication, and more specifically *incestuous* fornication, because in paganism man was *engendered* by the being who is the world, whereas in the Bible man was *created* by Yahweh.) This is why, considering this set of premises, Jean-Joseph Goux concludes: "It appears then that the prohibition against figuring the deity is a radical form—the Judaic form—of the incest prohibition and that the formidable rage loosed upon the idolaters by Moses signifies the threat of castration attendant upon forbidden love for the mother."[19]

Can a connection be made between the *secular* ascent of biblical values in today's world and the depreciation of beauty that characterizes it on so many levels? Beauty today is often depreciated as "monotonous" or denounced as a "restrictive" *norm*, when it is not more simply reduced to a pure *spectacle*, while there is, at the same time, a rehabilitation or even exaltation of deformity and ugliness. The degeneration of beauty and the promotion of ugliness, tied to the growth of intellectualism and problematization, could certainly be part of the *Umwertung* stigmatized by Nietzsche.[20]

The contrast with paganism is striking. In the Bible, the beautiful is not necessarily good and the ugly is not necessarily evil. It can even happen—and this is what the *Umwertung* consists of—that good may be good precisely because of its ugliness (just as "haughtiness" is feeble in proportion to its power), and that evil is beautiful precisely because it is evil. Lucifer, as everyone knows, is an angel glowing with light. The devil often adorns himself with all the lures of seduction, whereas the servant of Yahweh, says Isaiah, has grown "like a young plant whose roots are in parched ground; he had no beauty, no majesty to draw our eyes" (53:2). In paganism, by contrast, good cannot be separated from beauty—and this is quite normal, since what is good are the most accomplished forms of this world. Consequently, art cannot be separated from religion. Art is *sacred*. Not only can the gods be represented, but art is how they can be represented, and insofar as men perpetually assure them of *re-presentation*, they have a full status of existence. All European spirituality is based on representation as *mediation* between the visible and the invisible, on representation by means of depicted figures and signs exchanged against a meaning intimately tied to the real, the very *guarantee* of this incessant and mutual conversion of the sign and of meaning. Beauty is the *visible* sign of

what is good; ugliness the *visible* sign of not only what is deformed or spoiled, but bad.[21] For the ancient Greeks, as Carl Kerényi has shown, solemnity is inseparable from a visual, tangible representation.[22] It is through the fusion of the aesthetic and the sacred that the religious sentiment reaches its peak. "In the case of the Greeks," says Hegel too, "art was the highest form in which the people represented the gods to themselves and gave themselves some awareness of truth."[23] All beings, men and gods, reveal themselves in a tangible way through their actions. Plato himself does not describe the empire of Atlantis or the ideal city of the Republic in terms that are any different from those used by Homer to depict Ulysses' court in Ithaca or the walls of Troy.

Like Wagner, Nietzsche assigned the highest value to aesthetics: "The dramatic art work is likely to replace religion."[24] He adds, "we can indeed assume for our own part that we are images and aesthetic projections of the true creator of that world, and that our highest dignity lies in the meaning of works of art—for it is only as *an aesthetic phenomenon* that existence and the world are eternally *justified*."[25] It is upon this criterion, moreover, that Nietzsche, interpreting Christian art as an unconscious heresy within Christianity itself, condemns "the Christian doctrine, which is *only* moral and seeks only to be moral, with its absolute standards: the truth of God, for example, which relegates art, *all* art, to the realm of *falsehood*—it denies, condemns and damns it. In this system of ideas and values, which must be hostile to art if it is to be in any way consistent with its principles," he adds, "I had always sensed a *hostility to life*, a furious, vindictive distaste for life itself."[26]

Walter F. Otto labels myth as the "true word," meaning the word that echoes the truth-of-the-world. Henry Corbin defines it as "imaginal language," for the *imagination* constructs itself from *images*. In paganism, the foundational myth, the archetype, quite naturally sits in opposition to the Law. *Mythos* against *logos.* From the start, the pagan sacred is connected to visible, tangible reality, even and especially when it *idealizes* the latter. A tree, a hill, a waterway can be sacred; they *are* the sacred. Myth is not a byproduct of a linear history that is represented, through moralism, as a concrete reality. *Myth makes history*; it is what, writes Gilbert Durand, "goes before history, attests to it and legitimizes it," so that "without mythical structures, no historical intelligence is possible."[27] This is why

modern theoreticians of depth psychology, namely Jung and his successors, when they focus on "primordial images" and "archetypes"—all notions deemed repugnant by Will Herberg and described by him as akin to the "pagan abominations of Canaan"[28]—are also working as *historians*. They are teaching us about the roots of our own history as inseparable from a certain number of forms created by man. Paganism leads us into the marvels of sacred art; with biblical monotheism, we are given an empty temple.

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1. Moses Maimonides, *The Guide for the Perplexed*, trans. M. Friedländer (New York: Dutton, 1910), vol. 1, chap. 58.

2. Shulchan Aruch, Rosh Hashanah, 24 a–b; Yoreh Deah 141, 7.

3. *The Jewish Chronicle*, 2 September 1977.

4. Boman, *Hebrew Thought Compared with Greek*, 113.

5. Ernest Renan, *Marc-Aurèle et la fin du monde antique* [Marcus Aurelius and the End of the Ancient World] (Paris: Calmann-Lévy, 1882).

6. See the chapter "Le culte des images et les premiers chrétiens" ["The Worship of Images and the First Christians"] in Louis Rougier, *Le Conflit du christianisme primitif et de la civilisation antique* [The Conflict between Primitive Christianity and Antique Civilization] (Paris: Copernic, 1977), 90–102.

7. Mohamed Aziza, *L'Islam et l'image* (Paris: Michel, 1978).

8. Jean-Paul Charnay, *Sociologie religieuse de l'Islam* [The Religious Sociology of Islam] (Paris: Sindbad, 1977–1978), 19.

9. Patai, *The Jewish Mind*, 358.

10. Interview with Yaacov Agam in *L'Arche*, September–October 1978.

11. Chaim Potok, *My Name is Asher Lev* (New York: Knopf, 1972).

12. [The Zohar, a mystical commentary on the Pentateuch, is a foundational text in the Jewish tradition of Kabbalah. —*Ed*.]

13. Jean-Joseph Goux, *Les Iconoclastes* [The Iconoclasts] (Paris: Seuil, 1978). Selected portions in Goux, *Symbolic Economies: After Marx and Freud*, trans. Jennifer Curtiss Gage (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1990).

14. Goux, *Symbolic Economies*, 122.

15. *Le Monde*, 9 December 1978.

16. *Le Monde*, 9 December 1978.

17. Goux, *Symbolic Economies*, 139.

18. Goux, *Symbolic Economies*, 135.

19. Goux, *Symbolic Economies*, 137.

20. [*Umwertung* is the Nietzschean concept of "transvaluation" or the "revaluation of values." —*Ed*.]

21. The German word for "ugly" is *hässlich*, a word that derives from the same root as *Hass*, "hate." It can be concluded from this that the ugly deserves to be hated. The French word meaning "ugly," *laid*, is itself derived from the Germanic root *laiþ*-, "deplorable, repulsive" (cf. modern German *Leid*, "harm," *Leiden*, "suffering").

22. Karl Kerényi, *Die antike Religion* [Ancient Religion] (Amsterdam: Pantheon, 1940).

23. G. W. F. Hegel, *Aesthetics: Lectures on Fine Art*, trans. T. M. Knox (Oxford: Clarendon, 1975), vol. 1, 102.

24. Friedrich Nietzsche, *La Naissance de la tragédie* (Paris: Gallimard, 1949), 187.

25. Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy* (trans. Whiteside), §5.

26. Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy* (trans. Whiteside), "Attempt at a Self-Criticism," §5.

27. Gilbert Durant, *Figures mythiques et visages de l'oeuvre* [Mythical Figures and Faces of Work] (Paris: Berg International, 1979), 31.

28. Will Herberg, *Judaism and Modern Man: An Interpretation of Jewish Religion* (New York: Atheneum, 1977), 82.

Chapter Fifteen

The Universal and the Particular

As we have just seen, iconoclasm finds its justification through a conception of the world in which the absolute is necessarily superior and provides the *determining* factor for specific representations. This is because the biblical approach, generally speaking, posits a relationship of the universal to the particular in a unique sense which is opposite to that of paganism: it goes from the universal to the particular; it *deduces* what we *can* know of the particular from what we *should* know of the absolute. In Greek thought, by contrast, although the universal also plays an important role, the approach is the opposite: the conceptualization of the universal is based on the abstraction and successive generalization of a plurality of concrete particulars. In the Bible, what is first provided are totalities, categories, and *classes*, for which individual things or people are only manifestations. In his essay on biblical thought and Greek thought, Thorleif Boman writes:

> The concepts of the Israelites are not abstractions drawn from concrete individual things or individual appearances, but they are real *totalities* which include within them the individual things. The *universal* concept rules the Israelite's thinking. When, for example, he thinks of a Moabite, he is not thinking of an individual person who has among other qualities that of stemming from Moab . . . . The characteristic Moabite qualities trained up a peculiar type, the sum of Moabite traits. The type is called *mo'ab* and the individual Moabite, *mo'abhi*, is the embodiment of it.[1]

Biblical thought is an all-encompassing, totalizing thought that proceeds from the general to the particular, based on *deduction* from a *revealed absolute* and not by *induction* based on *lived experience*. In this system, the

particular is not at all the basis from which a general concept is inferred; it is the projection of the *idea* of generality. Individuals and things are then themselves only projections, "realizations" of universal essences and ideas. Whereas in the discourse of paganism the particular can attain the universal by virtue of its very particularity—Goethe is universal by first being German; Cervantes is universal by being primarily Spanish—in the discourse of the Bible, it is a universal that provides a statutory basis for every particular. In the first case, the general defines itself through the particular; in the second, it is the particular that is defined by the general.

It is clear that, due to its own dynamic, the universalizing approach of the Bible leans (or risks leaning) toward reducing diversity, whereas the opposite approach makes diversity the foundation of all knowledge. Max Weber also recognizes, following in others' footsteps, that "if one proceeds from pure experience, one arrives at polytheism."[2] Moreover, the approach that goes from the general to the particular is the equivalent of *discovering* a meaning in things that is postulated in advance, whereas the approach that goes from the particular to the general is the equivalent of *bestowing* meaning. It is therefore only through this latter approach that man can truly establish himself as one who gives meaning. Hence Nietzsche's remark that "like a human being, a people has value only in so far as it can give its experience the stamp of eternity."[3]

The Hebrew language, which does not always make a very clearcut distinction between word classes, reflects this tendency in its abundance of "collective" words. For example, *'adham* means "man" as well as "humanity"; *'ish* is "a man" as well as "men;" and *rekhebh* "a chariot" as well as "several chariots." The root *mlk*, implying the idea of kingship, can also mean "king," "kingdom," and "act as a king." Furthermore, writes Thorleif Boman, "*'ets* designates not the concept 'wood,' but rather the Platonic Idea of wood, everything real which has the properties of wood . . . *'ets* is the given and the real, and wooden things are only concretizations of it."[4] The abstract notions naturally present themselves as absolutes. And it is probably because things have an intrinsic meaning that the Bible, appealing to "natural" symbols that are immediately comprehensible to everyone, speaks so often in metaphor—and even with metaphors that contradict one another ("He rode on a cherub, he flew through the air; he swooped on the wings of the wind," Psalms 18:11).

The notion of humanity is one of these "collective" words that can be envisioned in two different ways. So when humanity is taken from the particular toward the general, it becomes the entirety of every individual member of the species *Homo*, of all the particular people existing on the face of the earth at a given moment. Therefore, to take humanity from the general to the particular makes it an *idea* (in the Platonic sense of the word) and the essential characteristic of all men is that they share in that idea which *specifies* them. Just as every Moabite represents an incarnation of the "Moabite," every human is an embodiment of "humanity." (Every theory that formulates an abstract sense of man, "man in and of himself," as its central concern—for example, today's ideology of the rights of man—is based on this latter premise.)

The same holds true for the biblical conception of the Law. The Torah distinguishes itself by its intangible nature. It is, in its unvarying character, the always identical reflection of the will of a unique God, the sole master of time-eternity. In this sense, it is always radically opposed to the *law* that paganism proposes, which is always contingent. The Latin *lex*, the Greek *nomos*, "which are of human workmanship throughout, are open to revisions and cancellation,"[5] and they are also, by nature, reconcilable with the idea of a plurality of norms. The word *nomos*, practically absent in Homer—who, when speaking about justice, resorted to *themis* or *dikē* instead—originally meant "to share in lots," and subsequently "to receive what one deserves." In the classical sense, the *nomos* refers to the mores and rules specific to a city—precisely those which *distinguish* it from other cities. "The proclamations of the Torah," writes Jean-Louis Tristani, "imply a proclaimer who escapes man's grasp and this state of affairs forbids him from envisioning any possible gap between the wording and the enunciation of the Torah. It is the enunciation of the *true* law. *Lex* or *nomos*, on the other hand, always have a point of reference with the actual conditions of their enunciation. This concept of the law results from another theology, Indo-European theology."[6]

The way in which biblical thought operates has some equivalents in the West. One of the first of these is Socratic or Platonic thought: the Platonic Idea also starts from a general basis to arrive at the particular. The same approach can be found today in Marxist thought, which is governed by abstract entities, mainly *classes*, from which the particular characteristics are deduced. With Marx, it is not the quality of men that defines the class,

but the class that defines the quality of the men. Individual identity is based on one's class and the class acts through the individual. (Here again, man is acted through by an outside agency.) "At the basis of Marxism," writes François George, "there is the idea that the proletariat exists outside the proletarians, and in sum beyond them, as an essence."[7] Things work quite differently in traditional European thought, however. This is one of the reasons why, within Christianity, the worship of saints, with its characteristic imitation of polytheism, has enjoyed such popularity. Referring to the relatively later age when the Scandinavian sagas were set down in writing, Régis Boyer writes: "The idea of an abstract and impersonal God could only be alien to a people so strongly concerned with interpersonal relationships."[8]

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1. Boman, *Hebrew Thought Compared with Greek*, 70. Emphasis added.
2. Weber, "Science as a Vocation," 147.
3. Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy* (trans. Whiteside), §23.
4. Boman, *Hebrew Thought Compared with Greek*, 70, and cf. 71.
5. Jean-Louis Tristani, *Le Stade du respir* [The Stage of Rest] (Paris: Minuit, 1978), 119.
6. Tristani, *Le Stade du respir,* 119.
7. Francois George, *Souvenirs de la maison Marx* [Memories of the House of Marx] (Paris: Bourgeois, 1980), 343.
8. Régis Boyer, *Les Sagas islandaises* [The Icelandic Sagas] (Paris: Payot, 1978), 216.

Chapter Sixteen

Monotheism and Polytheism

Biblical monotheism was born of a schism: it was engendered around 1800 BCE by the separation and rejection of the predominant civilization in Ur by a group of nomadic tribes which (according to oral tradition) were under Abraham's leadership. From this separation, from this dissidence, the beginning of a new creed would be fashioned, characterized by a radical *break*: the *assertion of dualistic monotheism*. And it is this creed, it seems, that distinguishes Israel from all other peoples of the world. As evidenced by the ceaseless war waged against Canaanite and Moabite forms of worship, dualist monotheism was the specific property of the Hebrews. Contrary to Renan's claim that "Arabia has always been the boulevard of monotheism," the Near East during the second millennium before Christ in no way displayed any general tendency toward monotheism. No trace of monotheism is to be found among the Sumerians, the Assyrians, the Canaanites, the pre-Islamic Arabs, or the Syrians. Even the religion of Aten, the Egyptian sun disk, which has prompted so many well-known commentaries (notably that of Freud), is not a dualistic monotheism, but rather the end result of a process begun during the reign of Thutmose IV, which allowed the pharaoh to free himself from the authority of the Theban priesthood.

Jewish tradition postulates an original monotheism that gradually disappeared because of man's sins. (It is this idea of an earlier monotheism that provides the basis for the Bible's prohibition of "idolatry" for the entire human race.) Scholars in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries argued extensively about whether this theory had some basis in reality: had the gods of paganism arisen from some sort of decadence and a decline in religious feeling—or, conversely, had humanity gradually evolved from polytheism to monotheism? This discussion, somewhat irrelevant today, in fact presents two equally false theories, to the extent that both postulate a

gradual, unilinear evolution for all humanity.[1] In reality, the relationship between polytheism and monotheism is not diachronic or chronological, but instead is a relationship of two different *mentalities*. Yahweh is neither the fallen father nor the culmination or survivor of "mythic gods." Moreover, the term "God"—which has its origins in European paganism—is an imperfect label: it was the Septuagint that gave YHWH (Yahweh) Elohim, the deity of Sinai, the name *theos* (which, in turn, corresponded to Latin *deus*) in order to make itself understandable to Greeks and Hellenized Jews. Strictly speaking, these terms had, until that point, only designated pagan gods.

Although perfectly original, biblical monotheism was not created in a day. Loisy said: "Yahweh is, if you will, only the God of Israel since the Exodus."[2] Biblical monotheism does not actually constitute a finished system until the prophecies at the time of the Exodus. It is a long way off from displaying this quality during the time of the patriarchs and Moses. The first literary collections of the Bible only date from 1000 BCE, in other words, from the time of the establishment of kingship among the Hebrews. The "Jahwist" document of Judean origin would have been written toward the end of the tenth century BCE under Solomon; the "Elohist" (or "sacerdotal") document would have been written around 800–750 BCE. The fusion of the two narratives would have taken place during the time of the reforms of Ezra and Nehemiah.

Contrary to what Renan believed, the Hebrews had a mythology, which it seems they could only shed with great difficulty. These polytheistic remnants are especially visible in the Jahwist narrative: Genesis itself opens with a plural term, *Elohim*, and many of its elements appear to have been borrowed from the mythologies and cosmogonies of the Near East (the Mesopotamian *Epic of Gilgamesh*; Babylonian, Sumerian, and Akkadian tales; and so on). One might see traces of ancient deities in the "cherubim" (*kerūbīm*, a word derived from the Akkadian *kāribu*, "intercessor") and the "seraphim," who the Bible says guarded the Garden of Eden and held up the Lord's throne in Ezekiel's vision, among other things. The origins of these deities may have lain in the beliefs of surrounding peoples. Left to their own devices, the Hebrews depicted the deity in the form of a calf (Exodus 32:4; 1 Kings 12:28), no doubt under the influence of certain fertility cults.

The fundamental monotheistic assertion is contained in Exodus when Yahweh tells Moses:

> You shall not prostrate yourselves to any other god, for the Lord's name is the Jealous God, and a jealous god he is. Be careful not to make a covenant with the natives of that land, or, when they go wantonly after their gods and sacrifice to them, you may be invited, any one of you to partake of sacrifices, and marry your sons to their daughters, and when their daughters go wantonly after their gods, they may lead your sons astray too" (34:14–16).

(With respect to Yahweh's "jealousy," Nietzsche observed: "[People] believe one becomes selfless in love because one desires the advantage of another human being, often against one's own advantage. But in return for that they want to *possess* the other person.—Even God does not constitute an exception at this point . . . he becomes terrible when one does not love him in return."[3]) However, while this passage attests to the *unique* nature of Yahweh, it does not assert the *non-existence* of other gods. This is the reason why many authors, when referring to Moses, prefer to speak of "affective monotheism" or "monolatry." Yahwism before the conquest of Canaan, writes Raphael Patai, is "a kind of monolatry, inclining toward an ethnic monotheism."[4] The famous verse from Deuteronomy: "Hear O Israel, the Lord is our God, one Lord" (6:4), which today constitutes the opening of the Jewish daily prayer the *Shema*, is interpreted by some to mean "Hear O Israel: Yahweh is our God, Yahweh alone." This formulation, in other words, "does not radically deny the existence of other gods. It is satisfied with simply proscribing their worship. It does not go beyond the measure of the First Commandment. It is not advocating monotheism but monolatry."[5] Loisy also supports this hypothesis, and even sees "monolatry" as a step backwards in relation to polytheism, a retreat connected to the hypertrophy of a "feeling of national pride and religious fanaticism."[6] The legislation from Mount Sinai does not appear to be intended for all peoples; it remains only the charter of the Covenant contracted between Yahweh and his people. Yahweh himself does not deny the existence of other gods but is content to speak ill of them. How, in any case, could one be "jealous" of something that does not exist? Wouldn't his jealousy be the very proof of the existence of other gods? Deuteronomy

proclaims: “Yahweh your God is God of gods and Lord of lords” (10:17). Similar formulations can be found in later parts of the Bible: “our God is greater than all gods” (2 Chronicles 2:5); Yahweh is “a great God, a great king over all gods” (Psalms 95:3); Yahweh is “more to be feared than all gods” (Psalms 96:4); he is “most high over all the earth” (Psalms 97:9); he “will reduce to beggary all the gods of the earth” (Zephaniah 2:11), and so forth. Rather than a genuine monotheism at the time of Moses, it would be more appropriate to speak of a monolatry or a *henotheism*, meaning a system in which one believes that only the god one invokes is all-powerful.

It is in the Second Isaiah, or Deutero-Isaiah (i.e., Isaiah 40–55), that Judeo-Christian monotheism achieves fulfillment. Only Yahweh is God: “Before me there was no god fashioned nor ever shall be after me. I am the Lord, I myself and none but I can deliver” (43:10–11). “There is none but I; I am the Lord, there is no other” (45:6). The other deities are but pure nothingness: “You are sprung from nothing, your works are rotten; whoever chooses you is as vile as you are” (41:24); “See what empty things they are! Nothing they do has any worth, their effigies are wind, mere nothings” (41:29). Yahweh is the *unique* god (rather than the *One* god—the One is a finite form and Yahweh can only be infinite). The process has not attained completion, and perhaps this *total* affirmation on its own was enough to guide the writers of the Bible to retrospectively remake their history in the direction of the *unique*. “To be honest,” writes Jean-Louis Tristani:

> this history in fact conformed too closely to the requirements of a monotheistic saga. Whether it is Abraham’s exodus from Ur in Chaldea, or the Exodus of the Jewish slaves under Moses’ leadership, these tales are woven with the thread of one ingenuous monotheistic darkness: one sole father of the human race, Adam (*monogenicism*); then Noah; one lone father of the Hebrew people, Abraham; one sole legislator, Moses; one sole God, Yahweh.[7]

After the death of Ezra, Judea was subjected to a century of Persian domination. We then see a certain evolution of the Hebraic religion under the influence of Zoroastrian dualism and a multitude of new deities. The Bible’s dualism was clearly intensified by this situation. On the one hand, it was the time in which the problem of evil was posed with the greatest acuity. The Book of Job, which was probably set down in writing between

300 and 250 BCE, attempted to deal with this problem. On the other hand, the idea that demons and evil spirits existed was spreading. Hebraic angelology and demonology became more precisely formulated. These themes can be found in the pre-Rabbinic literature and then later in the Aggadah.[8] In the Targum, the Aramaic translation of the Bible, the words "goat" and "satyr" are rendered as *shedim*, "demons." In the *Pirkei Avot*, a morality treatise incorporated into the Mishnah, among the ten objects created on the eve of the first Sabbath, there is mention of the *mazikin*, "harmful spirits." (The dualistic tendency, as is well known, will be accentuated significantly in Christianity, which, however, will preserve a piety that was relatively rooted in local forms of worship.)

Yahweh's *unique* nature excludes any comparison, any competition, at the same time as it pulls in every aspect of human life by means of tropisms. Recognition of this unique nature is to acknowledge that nothing can be compared to or incorporated into Yahweh, and therefore no worship can be offered to anything else. From the outset, Judeo-Christianity has established itself as *mythless religion*, in other words, as a religion shorn of what had, until that time, always *characterized* religion. (Hence, perhaps, the accusation of atheism the Romans leveled against the Jews.) Myths reflect the world; they make the world sacred. Now the world, according to the Bible, must be made *non-sacred*. Nature should no longer be "animated" on earth; the gods should cease dwelling there and providing man a transfigured image of himself. What is most opposed to Judeo-Christian monotheism is veiled cosmic religiosity, the hidden religiosity of the universe. This is why the Bible so vehemently condemns "natural" *magic*. This is the magic that Odin, as we have already seen, made use of in the final stages of the foundational war in Norse mythology, the magic whose resurgence Judeo-Christianity would ceaselessly denounce, right up through the time of the witch trials, as so many diabolical manifestations.[9] "Judaism has not sublimated idols," writes Emmanuel Levinas, "on the contrary, it has demanded that they be destroyed"; it "decharmed the world."[10] The transition from *mythos*—the myth that has no need to *know* itself to be myth—to *logos*, notes Jean-Pierre Sironneau, already constitutes "a primary degradation of myth to the extent it includes its rationalization as well as its historicization. . . . This is when myth is lived as fiction, a beautiful story no doubt, but false history nonetheless. It is no longer a way

of knowing, but an object of knowledge."[11] This sets off a process of desacralization, of *de-ensorcelling* the world, an *Entzauberung* that, in the space of a few centuries, following the secularization of religious ideologies, fueled a pure rationalism, a conception of the world as pure *object*, pure machine, pure matter, lacking gods and soul, which "intrepid" researchers gradually *put to death* with analyses that were so many reductions and dissociations. For the process of *Entzauberung* was not halted midstream. In this regard, the rationalism of the "Enlightenment," far from constituting the antithesis of biblical monotheism, represents rather its profane transposition and ineluctable culmination. As noted by Theodor W. Adorno, an entire area—the most extensive one—of the social sciences has followed the European *Aufklärung* (Enlightenment) down the same path.[12] And now it is the turn of modern theologians, deliberately breaking with the Christian miracles of the Middle Ages—miracles inspired in large part by paganism—to provide their own *Entmythologisierung*—this "de-mythologization" which Jean Brun described as merely "literal fetishes that claim to prompt the pure spirit to spring from the text."[13]

The rigid nature of biblical law is in fact the direct effect of an intentional rupture with that religiosity springing from the world specific to paganism. The relationship to the world has not been emptied of meaning but *transformed* by means of an immutable ritual, allowing the reconciliation of terrestrial existence with the refusal of the seductions of "mythology." "The Hebrews," observe Adorno and Horkheimer, "did not eliminate adaptation to nature, but converted it into a series of duties in the form of ritual. They have retained the aspect of expiation, but have avoided the reversion to mythology which symbolism implies."[14] The *site* of the sin has been thereby conserved, but the sin itself has been eliminated.

Concomitantly, the scribes of the Bible were encouraged bit by bit to formulate their doctrine of sacrifice. An important evolution is also evident here. The Bible is the scene of countless sacrifices. But there can be no question of viewing these the way the Ancients viewed sacrifice: as an essentially joyful occasion of offering objects to the gods—objects which, having been taken out of the profane realm for this occasion, had become *sacra*, "sacred." During the first century CE, Sallustius wrote: "the happiness of every object is its own perfection; and perfection for each is communion with its own cause. For this reason we pray for communion

with the Gods. . . . That is why men sacrifice."[15] In the Bible, sacrifice most often smacks of atonement; there is the sacrifice for sin (*hatta't*) or the sacrifice of reparation (*'asam*). (After the destruction of the Temple, expiatory sacrifices would be eliminated and replaced by repentance in return for "pardon.") Furthermore, Yahweh obviously does not take part in sacrifices. It is inconceivable that he would seat himself, even symbolically, at the tables of mortals, as did the pagan gods who visited altars and in whose honor knife and fork were lifted. Also, the idea was gradually put forth that Yahweh despised "natural" feasts and ceremonies. He was horrified by cosmic religiosity, because it carries with it the idea that life never dies, that it renews ceaselessly, that history itself can regenerate, that there is an eternal dialectical solidarity between life and death, beginning and end, man and gods. Yahweh prefers the exaltation of abstract universal notions like "peace," "justice," and "law" over the sacrifice of things. Criticism of sacrifices is developed specifically by the prophets who confronted pagan reality directly. "Your countless sacrifices, what are they to me? says the Lord. I am sated with whole-offerings of rams and and the fat of buffaloes" (Isaiah 1:11); "loyalty is my desire, not sacrifice, not whole-offerings but the knowledge of God" (Hosea 6:6); "I hate, I spurn your pilgrim-feasts; I will not delight in your sacred ceremonies. When you present your sacrifices and offerings I will not accept them, nor look on the buffaloes of your shared-offerings. Spare me the sound of your songs, I cannot endure the music of your lutes" (Amos 5:21–23). For this reason, the worship of the unique God embodied by Yahweh brings about the negation of the worship that humans would be tempted to render unto themselves through their own gods.

All the prophets fulminated with vehemence and even extraordinary rage against the pagan cults. In every form of the world's religiosity they denounced "idolatry." There are no words strong enough to stigmatize the "impurity" of foreign mores, and especially that kind of "mixed marriage" on the religious plane: syncretism. Just as the Covenant between Yahweh and his people emerged from the symbolism of marriage, religious infidelity and compromises with external forms of belief are incessantly likened to "adultery" and "wantonness." We read in Exodus that the foreign peoples "go wantonly after their gods" (34:15). "You have defiled the land with your fornication and your wickedness," screams Jeremiah (3:2). Jerusalem itself, the "faithful city," becomes a "whore" according to Isaiah

(1:21). The formulation reoccurs with Hosea as a metaphor about the "offspring of wantonness" (2:4), as well as in Ezekiel. This vocabulary is not employed by chance. If we adopt the arrangement suggested by Rachi that consists of placing the Ten Commandments in five opposing pairs, it will be noted that the First Commandment, "You shall have no other god to set against me," is paired with the Sixth: "You shall not commit adultery."

The object of the ritual prescriptions in the Pentateuch, in their great number and great detail, is to *keep* Yahweh's faithful protected from "Canaanite" influences, to establish a *discrimination*, a separation between them and the pagans. Just as the religion must not be contaminated by surrounding cults, those who gather in its name should avoid outside contamination. The *confinement within the Law* results from this preoccupation. According to the words of Blandine Barret-Kriegel, the Hebrew people "only attain their identity through submitting to the yoke of the law."[16] By the same stroke, this also blocks assimilation and prevents what would later be called *chukat hagoy*, the imitation of the Gentiles (*goyim*).

The Bible shows a particular horror for mixtures. To be holy is to be separate; the mixture is "impure" (see Nehemiah 13:30). It is forbidden to yoke together beasts of different species, to mix seeds at the time of sowing, to weave wool and linen blends, to switch the garb of men and women. Many of the food prohibitions seem to be based upon the same concern. It is about respecting what Yahweh has separated; above all, it is about man not combining and surpassing relative oppositions, not assigning to himself the powers of *overfulfillment* and unification that belong solely to Yahweh. For this reason, all hybrids are condemned. Mixed marriages, too, are most vehemently condemned. These are subject to legal action by what Léon Poliakov calls "the rigorous directives decreed by the law of Moses against hybridization or crossbreeding."[17] In fact, mixed marriage also represents a compromise and a synergy, and for this reason is "adulterous," or in any case an *adulteration*, meaning an act of "prostitution." In Genesis, it is in response to the transgression of such a prohibition—the union of the "sons of gods" with the "daughters of men" (6:1–4)—that Yahweh "repents" his decision to create humanity and decides to drown them with the Deluge. This law against crossbreeding will be bent on numerous occasions, and the infringements are hardly minor (Moses, "immigrant in foreign lands," weds the daughter of a priest of Midian; David is descended from Ruth, a

Moabite), but it will nevertheless be constantly reasserted. The prophets appointed themselves its most ruthless defenders. Malachi sees the source of Yahweh's wrath in the "abomination" of mixed marriages (2:10–12). During the reforms of Ezra, mixed marriage became practically a crime, a "betrayal" of Yahweh and the names of the "guilty" were made public (Ezra 10:18–44) and their unions dissolved (Ezra 9:1–12). The first part of the historical books of the Bible ends with a description by Nehemiah of these sorry combinations:

> "In those days also I saw that some Jews had married women from Ashdod, Ammon, and Moab. Half their children spoke the language of Ashdod or of the other peoples and could not speak the language of the Jews. I argued with them and reviled them, I beat them and tore out their hair; and I made them swear in the name of God: 'We will not marry our daughters to their sons, or take any of their daughters in marriage for our sons or for ourselves.' 'Was it not for such women,' I said, 'that King Solomon of Israel sinned? . . . Are we then to follow your example and commit this grave offense, breaking faith with our God by marrying foreign women?'"(13:23–27).

Thus, the struggle against "idolatry" forms one of the main tenets of biblical thought. From the Pentateuch to the time of Isaiah and Jeremiah, it may represent the most oft-repeated theme. Idolatry is the very *source* of all evil and all morally indefensible behavior.[18] This is why the tradition places its interdiction as high as—and, at times, seemingly even higher than—the worship devoted to Yahweh himself. So just what is idolatry? It is the fact of rendering unto someone else, man or god, the worship that should be exclusively given to Yahweh. In other words, it is taking for an absolute what the Bible declares is only relative, or vice versa—which amounts to saying that the preeminent form of idolatry for man consists of declaring himself the sole bestower of meaning, free to construct himself, autonomous with respect to everything that is other than him. Hence the incessant denunciations of human "vanities," the anathema against human "pride"—and the appeals for "humility" that Christianity will propagate. Man should occupy the whole of his place, but *nothing but his place*. He is forbidden to go beyond himself. Under such conditions, idolatry is

everywhere; the "idols" are legion. When Paul entered Athens to attempt to sway people from his own ancestral convictions, he described the city as "full of idols" (Acts 17:16); among these "idols" there were statues of the gods (17:29) but also "Epicurean and Stoic philosophers" (17:18). This did not prevent Paul from declaring: "Men of Athens, I see that in everything that concerns religion you are uncommonly scrupulous" (17:22).[19]

What is most remarkable about the biblical conception of "idolatry" is that is it expressly forbidden even to those who do not believe in Yahweh's existence. In fact, the prohibition of idolatry figures highly among the seven "Noahide" precepts that are supposedly valid for all humanity.[20] Going to the opposite extreme, tradition also maintains that Yahweh cannot be truly worshipped until every trace of idolatry has been eradicated. "One who is an apostate in respect of idolatry," says the Talmud, "is regarded as opposed to the whole Torah."[21] So it is clearly idolatry, *not* atheism, that is condemned. For the biblical mentality, it is better to claim that God does not exist than to worship a "false god." Yahweh is more ruthless against those who excite his jealousy than against those who deny his existence. A whole negative theology has developed out of this idea, according to which the observance of the "no" prevails in certain respects over that of the "yes." This theology is a generalized rendering to the attitude of the Noahides; for want of respecting the positive principles, at least one should heed the negative commandments. In the extreme case, it is even maintained that the former were created in order to ensure that observance of the latter was respected. Most significantly, certain neo-Marxist authors have borrowed the same idea, from the perspective of a strict transfer of biblical values to the *here and now*. "Mankind, for its salvation, does not need to worship God," writes Erich Fromm. "All it needs is *not* to blaspheme God and *not* to worship idols."[22] A similar opinion can be found in the writings of Ernst Bloch and some of the more recent proponents of a "Judeo-Christianity without God." When "idolatry" finally disappears—something that will not please the gods!—Yahweh's declaration will in fact become superfluous. The objective will have been attained. Humanity will live without God but in accordance with the principles of Yahweh. By all evidence this is the contemporary meaning of the fight against "idolatry." Afflict man with a *critical incapacity* and impotence when confronted by the diffusion of biblical values; *neutralize* those who cannot be won over—transform them

into “objective allies.” The ban on idolatry is nothing other than an *incapacitating myth*.

One of the designations for the Sinai is Horeb, a word whose root elicits the idea of destruction (of paganism). In fact, it seems that any and all means are good when it involves the destruction of idolatry: “You shall demolish all the sanctuaries where the nations whose place you are taking worship their gods, on mountain-tops and hills and under every spreading tree. You shall pull down their altars and break their sacred pillars, burn their sacred poles and hack down the idols of their gods and thus blot out the name of them from that place” (Deuteronomy 12:2–3). During this ancient time, the fight against idolatry authorized murder: “If your brother, your father’s son or your mother’s son, or your son or daughter, or the wife of your bosom or your dearest friend should entice you secretly to go and worship other gods—gods whom neither you nor your fathers have known . . . you shall put him to death; your own hand shall be the first to be raised against him and then all the people shall follow” (Deuteronomy 13:6–10). If it concerns an entire city that remains faithful to its gods, then mass slaughter becomes a pious duty: “If, after diligent examination, the report proves to be true and it is shown that this abominable thing has been done among you, you shall put the inhabitants of that city to the sword; you shall lay the city under solemn ban together with everything in it. . . . It shall remain a mound of ruins, never to be rebuilt” (Deuteronomy 13:14–16). For this reason, Yahweh ordered the extermination of the Hittites, Amorites, Canaanites, Perizzites, Hivites, and Jebusites (Deuteronomy 20:17). Christianity, as we know, zealously continued to pursue this program against a perpetually resurgent European paganism—because the “people who have become Christian” can always succumb to the “pagan temptations they carry within themselves,” as Monsignor Jean-Marie Lustiger wrote with quite unintended humor.[23]

Why this rabid behavior? Is it because of Yahweh’s “jealousy?” Undoubtedly. But this jealousy is itself only a *sign*. As said earlier, Yahweh is not simply unique because he is alone. It is also because he is *radically other*. A pagan who worshipped only a single “idol” would nevertheless remain an “idolater.” In fact, Yahweh does not forgive “idols” for being intermediaries between man and the world, for abolishing the distance between man and the being of the world, or, at the very least, for proclaiming that the distance is not unbridgeable. The bond Yahweh seeks

to break is the bond that unites man to God within a Being in which both are beings—a bond by which man may rise out of who he is, in complete freedom, toward what is more than he is.

Certainly, condemnation of "idolatry" can appear justified in an era when man is overly prone to considering as absolutes those things that do not deserve it. But it is not because they are taken as absolutes that these things should be condemned. Rather, the main reason is that they are not worthy of being emulated. I would be the first to condemn an "idolatry" that *diminishes* a person, by which he dismantles and defeats himself. But I exalt, on the other hand, the "idolatry"—by which I mean the real *faith*—that enables a person to grow, with which he elevates himself above his present condition by establishing himself fully as the measure of all things. "In worshiping the idol, man worships himself," says Erich Fromm.[24] The formulation is correct, but it is somewhat ambiguous. More straightforwardly, we can say that by honoring his gods, man honors his ability to live in symbiosis with them; that he honors his own capacity, by means of a free will to power, to become equal to the models he has chosen.

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1. The idea of an earlier monotheism continues to receive support today from certain adepts of "Traditionalism." For more on this, see Occhiali, "Monotheisme et 'paganisme,'" *Totalité*, November–December 1979, 12–19.

2. Alfred Loisy, *La Religion d'Israël* [The Religion of Israel] (Ceffonds: Loisy, 1908), 49.

3. Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Case of Wagner*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Vintage, 1967), §2.

4. Patai, *The Jewish Mind*, 48.

5. Nikiprowetzky, "Le monothéisme ethique et la spécificité d'Israël," 31.

6. Loisy, *La Religion d'Israël*.

7. Tristani, *Le Stade du respir*, 101.

8. See Daniel Goldstein, *Jewish Folklore and Legend* (London: Hamlyn, 1980).

9. Numerous texts can be found in Jewish literature devoted to the ways one can distinguish what springs from the religion and what belongs to magic (see José Faut, "Magic and Monotheism," in *Midstream*, August–September 1980, 54–57). We also know that certain texts in the Talmud (Sanhedrin 43b) contest the messianic role of Jesus by turning him into a "magician." This theory has been given further impetus recently with the arguments—incidentally, quite interesting ones—presented in Morton Smith, *Jesus the Magician* (New York: Harper and Row, 1978).

10. Levinas, *Difficult Freedom*, 234, 14.

11. Jean-Pierre Sironneau, "Retour du mythe et imaginaire sociopolitique" ["Return of Myth and the Socio-Political Imaginary"], in *Le Retour du mythe*, ed. J. P. Sirroneau, F. Bonardel, P. G. Sansonettit, et al. (Grenoble: Presses Universitaires de Grenoble, 1980), 28.

12. Theodor W. Adorno, "Sur la logique des sciences sociales" ["On the Logic of the Social Sciences"], in *De Vienne à Francfort: La querelle allemande des sciences sociales*, ed. T. W. Adorno, Karl R. Popper, Rolf Dahrendorf, et al. (Brussells: Complexe, 1979), 105.

13. Jean Brun, “Les nouveaux paganismes” [“The New Paganisms”], *Communio*, July–August 1980.

14. Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, trans. John Cumming (London: Verso, 1979), 186.

15. Sallustius, *On the Gods and the World*, chap. XVI, in Gilbert Murray, *Four Stages of Greek Religion* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1912), 208.

16. Blandine Barret-Kriegel, *L’État et les esclaves: Reflexions pour l’historie des États* [The State and the Slaves: Reflections on the History of the State] (Paris: Calmann-Lévy, 1979), 85.

17. Léon Poliakov, “De la Bible à l’éthologie” [“From the Bible to Ethnology”], *Critique*, August–September 1978.

18. See also H. A. Wolfson, *Philo* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1947), vol. 1, 16.

19. In some ultra-orthodox Jewish circles, a non-Jewish guest does not have the right to open a bottle of wine at a get-together. This custom (for which there is no corresponding ritual prohibition) is explained by the fact that, in antiquity, it was pagan custom to offer the gods libations of wine. Because of this and to avoid any hint of “impurity,” the ingestion of wine handled by a pagan was proscribed (see *The Jewish Chronicle*, 15 August 1980).

20. Talmud, Sanhedrin 56a.

21. Talmud, Chullin 5a.

22. Fromm, *You shall be as gods*, 43.

23. *Le Nouvel Observateur*, 20 October 1980. [Benoist’s small aside here makes a play on the monsignor’s last name, Lustiger, which contains *lustig*, the German word for “funny.” —*Ed*.]

24. Fromm, *You shall be as gods*, 51.

Chapter Seventeen

Tolerance and Intolerance

Gilbert Durand declares: "I believe that the human world is polytheist when it tolerates the Other, when it does not fall back upon a single book. If this is forgotten, knowledge is blocked. Polytheism always leads to the creation of a comparative literature."[1] It is generally acknowledged that paganism contains a constituent principle of *tolerance*. A system that allows for a limitless number of gods not only allows for the plurality of the forms of worship that address them, but also, and especially, for the plurality of mores, social and political systems, and conceptions of the world for which these gods are so many sublimated expressions. We know that the Ancients believed that the best proof that all the gods did or could exist was that the people worshipping them also existed.[2] In Athens there was even an altar to the unknown god!

This "freedom of thought resulting from the absence of all religious dogma"[3] was quite naturally transposed onto the political plane. For centuries, the Roman Empire respected the customs and institutions of all the peoples it conquered; it multiplied the number of provincial cities and organized their freedoms; it knew how to federate people without subjugating them. Pagan tolerance—which subsequently played into the hands of Christian propaganda in some instances—is expressed in these words of Symmachus: "for everyone has his own customs, everyone his own rites. The divine Mind has distributed different guardians and different cults to different cities."[4]

Paganism is tolerant by nature, not only because it is (potentially) polytheistic, and polytheism is already a sublimated form of *pluralism*, but also because paganism is not dualistic. Rather than a fundamental *discontinuity* between God and the world, paganism proposes the *dialectical continuity* of everything—men, gods, "nature"—which forms

and embodies the single being that is the world, and it postulates that a god who is not of this world is precisely incapable of being a god. This is because it is an either/or situation: either God is unique and distinct from the world, or the world is unique and it contains both men and gods. The assertion of the non-god par excellence, "My kingdom does not belong to this world" (John 18:36), find its opposition in the divine assertion par excellence: "The abode of men is the abode of the gods" (Heraclitus).[5] Likewise, from the standpoint of a *non-dualistic* monotheism, the assertion of the *uniqueness* of God is not opposed to the uniqueness of the world; to the contrary, it makes it sacred. This kind of God also remains tolerant, because he is made from all the diverse elements of the world. It could be said that he even represents the *unique diversity* of a being who has not excluded any otherness, any difference, because he exalts and reconciles all differences.

J. B. S. Haldane lists fanaticism and totalitarian intolerance among the "inventions" made between 3000 and 1400 BCE, and ascribes their paternity to Judeo-Christian monotheism. "The intolerance and fanaticism that are characteristic of the prophets and missionaries of the three monotheisms," writes Mircea Eliade, "have their model and their justification in Yahweh's example."[6] These opinions should not be cause for surprise. The unique god of the Bible is the sole possessor, the sole *author* of an equally unique truth. He represents absolute good. How could he not oppose evil? If there is a unique, universal truth; if truth is entirely independent of the events and circumstances that occur in the world; if evil is no longer *id quod malus est* [that which is evil], what peoples declare to be bad, but has its source in the flawed usage that the human being has made of its "freedom"; then the individual cannot be *both* in truth and in error, and the individual certainly cannot act beyond good and evil. With the idea of a unique truth comes the principle of an absolute identity and its corollary: *the excluded middle*. Henceforth, one lives in error or truth, in evil or good. There can neither be relative truths, nor several conflicting truths. It will be "either-or." The struggle against "error" then becomes not just a right but a duty as well—whether this duty is exercised effectively or not.

The fact that absolutism, more than relativism and pluralism, leads to intolerance and that it, more than paganism, brings about the disappearance of *sōphrosunē*,[7] would seem to be self-evident. What characterizes the Law

in the Bible, Jacques Goldstain emphasizes, "is its savage theocentricism and absolute totalitarianism regarding reference to God."[8] But absolutism is not the only thing implicated here. What intrinsically connects Judeo-Christian monotheism to intolerance, as we have seen, is not just the fact that this unique God is conceived as radically distinct from the world in his nature. Fundamentally, the gods of paganism are *non-others*. The God of Judeo-Christian monotheism is the preeminent example of Otherness. He is the *Completely Other*. Now, the very fact of erecting a Completely Other necessarily tends to promote the lesser significance of the Other. This biblical rupture in some way eradicates the Other to the benefit of the Completely Other. By devaluing the very concept of alterity, the Bible forbids the Same from *harmonizing* with the Other. Whereas paganism preserves all freedoms, tolerates all recognitions, and legitimizes all *interpretations* to the very degree that the gods do not represent the negation or stifling of some gods by others, Judeo-Christian monotheism, in its smothering, imprisoning aspect, can only reject everything which it is not. In his capacity as not just the solitary but also the incomparable *one*, Yahweh can only assert the falsity of what *others* venerate and thereby assert the falsity of the lifestyles and worldviews which this veneration expresses. From Yahweh's point of view, the differences between men and between peoples are transitory, secondary, and, in a word, superficial: "All nations dwindle to nothing before him, he reckons them mere nothings, less than nought" (Isaiah 40:17). Yahweh is the *god who refuses the Other*, the god who began by establishing himself as superior to the other gods, and then later declared that he regarded them as *non-existent*. For the other god does not exist. He is depicted as only an "idol," a likeness of a god, *a god lacking the value of a god*. Transposed onto the secular plane, this reasoning would appear to legitimize all forms of fear of otherness, all forms of racism, all exclusions. From the notion of the god without the value of a god, we move on to that of the *man without the value of a man*, of *life without the value of life*. Man acts toward his fellow men the way Yahweh acts toward other gods. In biblical monotheism, hell—in the proper sense—is other people. It can be seen from this that a privileged, entirely logical relationship exists between totalitarian intolerance, the refusal of the Other, the assertion of a unique God and a unique truth, and the anthropology of the Same induced by Judeo-Christian monotheism. And the process goes both ways. Just as the refusal of the Other logically leads to envisioning the

latter's suppression, this refusal also erodes the identity of the one expressing it. We can, in fact, only become fully aware of our own identity through confrontation with general variation. One only posits oneself by being opposed to another; we also have need of the Other to understand how we differ from it. The rejection or the devaluation of the Other is therefore at the same time a rejection of the dialectical movement that allows self-construction and self-transformation through positive confrontation with the Other. "Based on a sufficient degree of *ignorance about others*," notes Jules Monnerot, "my God is certainly the only god." This is perhaps why all forms of universalism, religious and profane, while bringing about the negation of others' identities, also require the abnormally enlarged ignorance or unawareness of their own identity by those who assert or proclaim them. Whereas the consciousness of the self is immediately transparent to itself, the Other is first perceived as an "object" that consciousness interprets or—more precisely—instrumentalizes based on the consistently subjective data it receives. The temptation is therefore quite great in such a system to interpret the other-in-this-world as a simple projection of the self, which can then lead to the desire to eliminate everything in it that is *different* and does not conform to this projection. This is precisely the case with racist xenophobia, which carries with it an interpretation of a *reductive*, "monotheist" nature, and consists of instituting, whether explicitly or not, a unitarian, *one-dimensional* hierarchy connected to allegedly objective criteria, which are in fact pure projections of individual values. But this is also the case, and even more so perhaps, for the racism of *identity denial* or the racism of *assimilation* (as opposed to the racism of *exclusion*), that consists of reducing the Other to the Same and proclaiming that there are only men and peoples who are all "like the others." Subsequently, this implicitly legitimizes the destruction of the *unique way of life* of a populace, the disintegration and absorption of its institutions and beliefs; of its characteristic moral, social, and cultural values; and the loss of its personality, its destiny, and its soul.[9] By asserting the primacy of the Completely Other, biblical monotheism creates the secular conditions for the devaluation of the Other. But by the same stroke they also dialectically create the conditions for a denial of the relative Same. Indeed, if the Other is devalued, then the Others tend to amount to Sames. Humanity is no longer composed of relative Others and relative Sames; instead, it is made up of the appearance of Others, of Almost-

Sames, of Others-with-the-vocation-of-Sames, in the face of the sole absolute of the Completely Other. This is why the biblical resistance to the "domination" by the Other can also caricature itself in resistance to "domination" by the Same—whose counterpart is an acceptance of domination by the Completely Other.

Undoubtedly, Nietzsche is one of those who best perceived this division. Evoking paganism, he writes in an aphorism from *The Gay Science* entitled "The Greatest Advantage of Polytheism":

> There was only one norm, *man*; and every people thought that it possessed this one ultimate norm. But above and outside, in some distant overworld, one was permitted to behold a *plurality of norms*; one god was not considered a denial of another god, nor blasphemy against him. It was here that the luxury of individuals was first permitted; it was here that one first honored the rights of individuals. The invention of gods, heroes, and overmen of all kinds, as well as near-men and undermen, dwarfs, fairies, centaurs, satyrs, demons, and devils was the inestimable preliminary exercise for the justification of the egoism and sovereignty of the individual: the freedom that one conceded to a god in his relation to other gods—one eventually also granted to oneself in relation to laws, customs, and neighbors.
>
> Monotheism, on the other hand, this rigid consequence of the doctrine of one normal human type—the faith in one normal god beside whom there are only pseudo-gods—was perhaps the greatest danger that has yet confronted humanity.[10]

Yahweh is not only a "jealous" god. He also feels hatred: "I love Jacob, but I hate Esau" (Malachi 1:3). He recommends this hate to those who invoke him, "How I hate them O Lord, that hate thee! I am cut to the quick when they oppose thee; I hate them with undying hatred; I hold them all my enemies" (Psalms 139:21–22); "O Lord, if only thou wouldst slay the wicked!" (Psalms 139:19). Jeremiah cries out: "Pay them back for their deeds, O Lord, pay them back what they deserve. . . . Pursue them in anger and exterminate them from beneath thy heavens" (Lamentations 3:64–66). The book of Jeremiah is itself only a long series of curses and anathema against peoples and nations, in which the enumeration of future

punishments fills the narrator with dark pleasure: “May my persecutors be foiled, not I; Bring on them the day of disaster; destroy them, destroy them utterly” (17:18); “Therefore give their sons over to famine, leave them at the mercy of the sword. Let their women be childless and widowed, let death carry off their men” (18–21), and on and on it goes.

We have seen that the fight against “idolatry” is justifiable because idolatry is likened to evil: “you shall rid yourselves of this wickedness” (Deuteronomy 17:7). Yahweh therefore promises the Hebrews his support in any wars they undertake: “When the Lord your God exterminates, as you advance, the nations whose country you are entering to occupy, you shall take their place and settle in their land” (Deuteronomy 12:29). “In the cities of these nations whose land the Lord your God is giving you as a patrimony, you shall not leave any creature alive” (Deuteronomy 20:16). Yahweh himself provided a fine example of genocide by unleashing the Deluge against a humanity that had displeased him. During the time he resided with the Philistine King Achish, David also practiced genocide (1 Samuel 27:9). Moses organized the extermination of the Midianite people (Numbers 31:7). Joshua massacred the inhabitants of Hazor and the Anakim: “They killed every living thing in it and wiped them all out; they spared nothing that drew breath, and Hazor itself they destroyed by fire” (Joshua 11:10–11; see also 11:20–21). The messianic king extolled by Solomon will carry out a similar reign of terror, that he “may purify Jerusalem from the Gentiles who trample her down to destruction, so as to destroy the wicked from my inheritance . . . to destroy the sinful Gentiles with the word of his mouth.”[11] Hatred against the pagans also explodes out of the books of Esther and Judith, and so on.

“Not one ancient religion, except that of the Hebrew people, displayed this degree of intolerance,” notes Emile Gillabert.[12] This was something that Renan, too, asserted earlier: “The intolerance of the Semitic people is an inevitable consequence of their monotheism. The Indo-European peoples, before their conversion to Semitic ideas, never regarded their religion as an absolute truth. Rather, they viewed it as a kind of family or caste heritage, and for this reason intolerance and proselytizing remained foreign to them. This is why we find among these peoples a freedom of thought, a spirit of critical inquiry and of individual research.”[13] Admittedly, the situation cannot be painted in such black-and-white terms, nor is it a matter of contrasting one shaky truth with another. There have

been massacres and exterminations everywhere and at all times. But one will seek in vain in the sacred or profane texts of paganism for an equivalent of what repeatedly turns up throughout the Bible: the idea that such massacres can be *morally justified*, the idea that they can be expressly authorized and desired by a god—"Joshua captured these kings and their cities and put them to the sword, destroying them all, as Moses, the servant of the Lord, had commanded" (Joshua 11:12)—so that for these authors a *good conscience* continues to reign, not in spite of these massacres but purely and simply *because of them*.

In its initial period of development, Christianity essentially took over this tradition of intolerance with renewed energy. The message of Jesus recorded by Luke—"If anyone comes to me and does not hate his father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, even his own life, he cannot be a disciple of mine" (14:26)—has been the source of considerable commentary. Some interpret this word "hate" as a Hebrew idiom and claim that it should simply be taken to mean that Jesus wished to be preferred absolutely over all other beings. Others see a trace of Gnostic contamination in this phrase, connected to renunciation, the voluntary despoliation of worldly goods, and the refusal to procreate. In this context, this obligation to "hate" one's parents would be a corollary of not wanting children. Obviously, these interpretations remain entirely speculative. What we do know for certain is that Christian intolerance made its appearance at a very early stage. Over the centuries, it was employed against "infidels" as well as against pagans, Jews, and heretics. It began with the extermination of ancient culture: the murders of Julian and of Hypatia, the ban on pagan cults, the destruction of temples and statues, the suppression of the Olympic Games, and the destruction of the Serapeum in Alexandria instigated by that city's bishop, Theophilus, in 389 (which brought about the pillaging of the immense library of 700,000 volumes collected by the Ptolemies).[14] This was followed by forced conversion (*compelle intrare*), the extinction of positivist science, persecution, and burnings. Ammianus Marcellinus had said earlier: "No wild beasts are such enemies to man, as the greater part of Christians are deadly to one another."[15] And Sulpitius Severus: "And now all things were seen to be disturbed and confused by the discord, especially of the bishops, while everything was corrupted by them through their hatred, partiality, fear, faithlessness, envy, factiousness, lust, avarice, pride, sleepiness, and inactivity."[16]

Theocracy, in the proper sense of the word, arises in tandem with the reduction of the human political order to the moral prescriptions that govern the "city of God." It, too, is a return to the singular. Renan already noted that in the monotheism of the Bible, "the government of the universe" became "an absolute monarchy." Georges Nataf defined the "theocratic ideal" with this formula: "anarchy plus God."[17] This ideal, based on the illusion of a "natural order," resumes and considerably transforms the opposition between an immutable law (Torah) and the laws men give themselves (*lex*/*nomos*). "One could pose as a hypothesis," writes Jean-Louis Tristani, "that the Torah-*nomos* pair provides the opposition that allows, initially, for the ordering of different cultures along an axis that goes from servitude to liberty. Mosaic Law would constitute in some way the degree zero of freedom, whereas the Greek *nomos* prompts the conditions for the formation of such a system [based in liberty]."[18]

From that point on, all forms of exclusion bear the trace of the *odium theologicum*. The pagan could "err," but could not persist in doing so: *perseverare diabolicum*—in desiring to persist in his ways he will thus become "diabolical."[19] Fidelity (to the ancestral faith) will be condemned, whereas its denial, called "conversion," will serve as an example. This conversion, when it is not the result of conviction or self-interest, can be forced—as the Saxons, the Stedingers, and the Cathars knew quite well. By legitimizing the massacre *ad majorem Dei gloriam*, Christianity continues to encourage for the perpetrators the phenomenon of a *good conscience*. Over the course of the centuries, the will to suppress the Other would ceaselessly be renewed, in wider and wider circles, by the revelation—as opposed to the *Revelation*—of the existence of an Other, confident in his own completeness. This is the reason why there was "during the early days of colonization," notes Jean Baudrillard, "a moment of disbelief and stupefaction before this very possibility of escaping from the universal law of the Gospel. This created a dilemma: either one accepted that this law was not universal, or one exterminated the Indians to erase the evidence. Generally, converting them, or even just discovering them, was enough to ensure their slow extermination."[20]

The Jews were the first to suffer from the monotheism of others. Christian anti-Semitism, which finds its earliest "justification" in the fourth Gospel, perhaps under the influence of Gnosticism, and to which numerous

studies have been devoted, has never stopped developing over time.[21] Clearly, the current tendency of Christian churches to *return* to their origins and reclaim what André Chouraqui calls the "Hebrew roots that support them" only proves one thing: the conversion has worked in rather the opposite direction than intended. This alters nothing of a past that has *re-presented* itself for so long.

What appears to me as the best explanation for the cause of Christian anti-Semitism is the very *proximity* of the Jewish faith to the Christian faith. As Jacques Solé wrote: "One always persecutes one's neighbors."[22] It is only a "small cleft" that separates Christians and Jews, but by the same token, as Nietzsche pointed out, "the smallest cleft is the hardest to bridge."[23] More precisely, during the first centuries of the Christian era, anti-Semitism was born *from the Christian claim to have superseded Judaism*, to have "fulfilled" it and given it its "true" meaning. For the Christians, "It is from the Jews that salvation comes" (John 4:22) but it is this Christianity that is the *verus Israel*. (Hence the expression "*perfidi*," used until recently by the Church in Good Friday services in reference to the Jews, an expression that does not have the modern sense of "perfidious," but the original meaning of "faithless.") It was Saint Paul who first expressed this claim more forcefully. At the same time he substituted grace for Law, Paul distinguished the "Israel of God" from the "Israel of the flesh" (1 Corinthians 10:18), which led him to oppose the circumcision of the spirit to the circumcision of the flesh: "The true Jew is not he who is such in externals, neither is the true circumcision the external mark in the flesh. The true Jew is he who is such inwardly, and the true circumcision is of the heart, directed not by written precepts but by the spirit; such a man receives his commendation not from men but from God" (Romans 2:28–29). Conclusion: "we are the circumcised" (Philippians 3:3). From the Christian viewpoint, this reasoning has a certain coherence. As Claude Tresmontant said, if the last of the *nabis* of Israel, the rabbi Yeshua of Nazareth (namely Jesus), is truly the Messiah, then Israel's vocation to become the "light of nations" must be fully achieved and the universalism implied by this vocation must be put completely into operation. Just as the Law, having reached its *end* (in both senses of the word) with the Christ, has become meaningless, the distinction between Israel and the other nations has become moot: "there is no such thing as Jew and Greek"

(Galatians 3:28). And it is clearly universal Christianity that is the *verus Israel*.

This process, triggered by Pauline reform, has had a twofold result. On the one hand, it led to the persecution of the Jews, portrayed as the worst enemies of Christianity, by very reason of their "genealogical" proximity and their refusal to "convert," that is to say, to recognize Christianity as the "true Israel." On the other hand, as Shmuel Trigano notes, "by setting itself up as the *new Israel*, the West has recognized a de facto jurisdiction, if not a legal one, over itself by Judaism."[24] This amounts to saying that the West has become "Israelite" to the same degree that it has forbidden Jews from asserting their true identity. The result is that the very notion of "Judeo-Christianity" is a dual incarceration, imprisoning both the "Christian West" (which, by its own doing, is subject to a "jurisdiction" that is not its own and which puts it in the position, in order to assume it, of denying this jurisdiction to its legitimate holders) and the Jews themselves (who find themselves unduly nailed to the alleged *site* of their "fulfillment" by a religion other than their own). In fact, Trigano goes on to write, "if Judeo-Christianity founded the West, then the place of Israel is also the West."[25] As a result, the requirement of "Westernization" becomes a requirement for assimilation and "normalization," and the denial of identity. "The crisis of Jewish normality is the crisis of the westernization of Judaism. . . . Therefore, for the Jews, to leave the West means to turn their backs on their 'normality' and open themselves to their *otherness*."[26] In the final analysis, this may be why Jewish communities today can no longer criticize the "Western model" unless they adopt a semi-amnesiac and semi-critical attitude toward their own specific history.[27]

Christian anti-Semitism can therefore be correctly described as a *neurosis*. For this reason, writes Jean Blot, it is because of a "constituent alienation" that the West should "never attain itself, never find itself,"[28] and it from this that the anti-Semitic neurosis stems: "Anti-Semitism permits the anti-Semite to project his neurosis onto the Jew. He will call him foreign, because that is how he feels; a thief, powerful, an upstart, because that is what he is; in a word, he calls him a Jew because he is this Jew, in the very depths of his soul, definitively devious, constitutively alienated, foreign to his own religion, to his God, who embodied him."[29] By exchanging his foundational myth for that of biblical monotheism, the West has

transformed Hebraism into its super-ego. From that point he can only turn against the Jewish people, whom he accuses not only of having failed to follow, by their "conversion," the "logical" evolution leading from Mount Sinai to Christianity, but even attempting, through an alleged "deicide," to prevent this evolution. The *conversion* of the West goes hand in hand with the accusations of *non-conversion* made against the Jewish people. Returning to a proposition I put forth earlier, it could be said that the West became anti-Semitic to the very degree it attempted to become "Israelite." It will stop being anti-Semitic by leaving this neurosis, by returning to its foundational myth, and ceasing to wish to be something it is not in a way that allows the Other to continue to be what it is.

Even today, many believe that if Jews were to renounce their distinct identity, the "Jewish problem" would vanish. This is a naïve proposition at best, but in the worst case it often conceals a conscious or unconscious form of anti-Semitism. This proposal, which evolves directly out of the racism of assimilation and identity-denial I mentioned earlier, is only the *flipside* of the racism of persecution and exclusion. In the West, Shmuel Trigano reminds us, Jews, when they were not being persecuted, were only "recognized as Jews on condition they were no longer Jews."[30] In other words, to be *accepted*, they had first *to reject themselves*; they had to renounce their own Other in a way that allowed them to be *reduced* to the Same. In the second form of racism, Jews are recognized but denied; in the first, they are accepted but not recognized. The Church has served the Jews notice that they must choose between exclusion (or physical death) and renunciation (historical and spiritual death); by converting, they became "Christians like everybody else." The French Revolution freed the Jews individually but condemned them to disappear as a "nation." Here again, they were compelled to become "citizens like everybody else." Marxism, too, claimed to ensure the "liberation" of the Jews by imposing a *class-based* division, from which their destruction as a people would necessarily result. Just as the end of anti-Semitism will occur through the renunciation by the West of its claim to be the *verus Israel*, the—positive—resolution of the "Jewish question" will take place through the recognition of the Jewish people's identity and its right to live out its difference without allowing itself to be reduced to either a radical state of Otherness or to the Same.

When one examines the great modern totalitarian systems, it is not hard to find there, in secular form, the same radical causes of intolerance whose

religious roots we have just examined, notably a structure of *reduction* of all diversity, of every relative Other, to a *unique* Absolute, sometimes identified with class, race, the State, a leader, or a party, and so on. Modern forms of totalitarianism have only secularized and transformed into a profane theodicy, the system of the unique truth and unilateral model to which all diversity must be reduced. Simultaneously, the *organization* of these totalitarian systems is modeled on that of the Church and similarly exploits the themes of the "masses," themes that are distinctive features of contemporary democracy. This secularization of the system has made totalitarianism all the more formidable—independent of the fact that religious intolerance has, *in return*, often provoked an equally destructive revolutionary intolerance, an *enantiodromia*, to borrow the term employed by Jung. "Totalitarianism," writes Gilbert Durand, "is further strengthened when the powers of monotheistic theology—which left the game of transcendence intact—have been transferred to a human institution, to a Grand Inquisitor."[31]

The same holds true for the many versions of utopian thought that also led to the creation of totalitarian systems. Leszek Kolakowski has shown that utopian thought includes three fundamental features:

> The belief that the future, in some mysterious way, is already upon us and we are in the process of seizing it (and not only vaguely foreseeing it). Next is the idea that we have at our disposal a sure method of thinking and acting capable of leading us to a society free of flaws, conflicts, and dissatisfaction. [And finally,] the belief that we know what man truly and *really* is, as opposed to what he is empirically and believes himself to be.[32]

It is not hard to find in these three components of utopia simple transpositions of the concept of mono-linear and irreversible time, the explicatory reductivism specific to the theory of the Unique, and the *categorical* anthropology, based on an abstract universal.

To think that the true nature of totalitarianism is based on its use of particularly crushing means of coercion as its method of choice seems to me, consequently, to be a grave error. Historical experience has shown—and continues to show—that there can be a "clean" totalitarianism that "through tenderness" yields the same results as classic forms of

totalitarianism. The "happy robots" of *1984* or *Brave New World* do not enjoy a condition preferable to that of the slaves and prisoners of the concentration camps. Nor does totalitarianism essentially arise from Saint-Just, Stalin, Hegel, or Fichte. Totalitarianism appears when a "flexible form of plural, polytheistic, and naturally contradictory totality that is inherent in organic interdependency" is replaced by a rigid, "monotheistic" system that is based on an explicative uniqueness and a fatally reductive unilateralism.[33] Totalitarianism is born from a desire to achieve social or human unity by reducing individual and popular diversity to a single model. It is in this sense that it is legitimate to advocate, together with Michel Maffesoli (but also with Gilbert Durand, Max Weber, James Hillman, David Miller, and others), a "polytheistic social system that refers to multiple and complementary gods," as opposed to a monotheistic politics "founded on the illusion of unity."[34] Once the polytheism of values "can no longer function, we face totalitarianism."[35]

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1. *Le Monde*, 15 June 1980.

2. This opinion is curiously similar to the sentiment, arrived at by way of a poorly conjured idealism, expressed by the young Karl Marx: "'that which I conceive for myself in a real way (*realiter*), is a real concept for me,' something that works on me. In this sense *all gods,* the pagan as well as the Christian ones, have possessed a real existence" (Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *Collected Works,* vol. 1 [New York: International Publishers, 1975], 104). Similar observations can also be found in Renan's writings.

3. Louis Rougier, *Le Génie de l'Occident* [The Genius of the West] (Paris: Laffont-Bourgine, 1969), 60.

4. Memorial of Symmachus, §8, in *A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church*, ed. Philip Schaff and Henry Wace, 2nd series, vol. X (Oxford: Parker, 1896).

5. [Here Benoist is following Heidegger's interpretation of Heraclitus' fragment 119 as meaning "The human being dwells, in so far as he is a human being, in the nearness of god" (trans. Frank Capuzzi); cf. Martin Heidegger, "Letter on 'Humanism,'" in *Pathmarks*, ed. William McNeill (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 269–70. —*Ed*.]

6. Eliade, *A History of Religious Ideas*, vol. 1, 181.

7. [The ancient Greek virtue of self-control. —*Ed*.]

8. Goldstain, *Les Valeurs de la Loi*, 123.

9. We know how in more modern times, namely in the United States, Noah's curse against Canaan, the heir of Ham, who was the representative of the black race, was used: "Cursed be Canaan, slave of slaves shall he be to his brothers. . . . Bless O Lord, the tents of Shem; and may Canaan be his slave. May God extend Japheth's bounds, let him dwell in the tents of Shem, may Canaan be their slave" (Genesis 9:25–27). For more on this topic, see my earlier essays "Contre le racisme" ["Against Racism"], in *Les Idées à l'endroit* (Paris: Hallier, 1979), 145–56; and "Le totalitarisme raciste" ["Racist Totalitarianism"], *Éléments*, February–March 1980, 13–20.

10. Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Random House, 1974), bk. 3, §143.

11. Translation from James Rendel Harris, *The Odes and Psalms of Solomon*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1911), 155.

12. Gillabert, *Moïse et le phénomène judéo-chrétien*, 59.

13. Renan, *Histoire générale et système composé des langues sémitiques*.

14. See my Preface to Rougier, *Le Conflit du christianisme primitif*, 7–35. See also August Bouché-Leclercq, *L'Intolérance religieuse et la politique* [Religious Intolerance and Politics] (Paris: Flammarion, 1911); Henri F. Secrétan, *La Propagande chrétienne et le persécutions* [Christian Propaganda and Persecutions] (Paris: Payot, 1915); and Charles Guignebert, *Le Christianisme antique* [Ancient Christianity] (Paris: Flammarion, 1921).

15. *Historia*, XXII, 5, 4.

16. *Historia sacra*, II, 51, (trans. Alexander Roberts) in *A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church*, 2nd series, vol. XI: *Sulpitius Severus, Vincent of Lerins, John Cassian* (New York: Christian Literature Co., 1890–1900), 122.

17. Georges Nataf, *Encyclopédie de la mystique juive* [Encyclopedia of Jewish Mysticism] (Paris: Berg International, 1978).

18. Tristani, *La Stade du respir*, 152–53.

19. [Benoist is alluding here to a Latin maxim attributed to Seneca: *Errare humanum est, sed perseverare diabolicum*, "To err is human, but to persist (in the mistake) is diabolical." —*Ed.*]

20. Jean Baudrillard, "La Fin de la Modernité ou l'Ère de la Simulation" ["The End of Modernity or the Age of the Simulacrum"], in *Encyclopaedia Universalis*, 1980 supplement, 11–12.

21. See mainly Jules Isaac, *Genèse de l'antisémitisme* [The Genesis of Anti-Semitism] (Paris: Calmann-Lévy, 1956); Charles Y. Glock and Rodney Stark, *Christian Beliefs and Anti-Semitism* (New York: Harper and Row, 1969); *L'Antisémitisme chrétien* [Christian Anti-Semitism], ed. F. Losvky (Paris: Cerf, 1970); and Rosemary Ruether, *Faith and Fratricide: The Theological Roots of Anti-Semitism* (New York: Seabury, 1974).

22. Jacques Solé, *Les Mythes chrétiens, de la Renaissance aux Lumières* [Christian Myths from the Renaissance to the Enlightenment] (Paris: Michel), 35.

23. Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra,* III, 13 ("The Convalescent"), §2, trans. Walter Kaufmann in *The Portable Nietzsche* (New York: Penguin, 1976).

24. Shmuel Trigano, *La Nouvelle question juive: L'avenir d'un espoir* [The New Jewish Question: The Future of a Hope] (Paris: Gallimard, 1979), 63.

25. Trigano, *La Nouvelle question juive*, 64.

26. Trigano, *La Nouvelle question juive*, 57–71.

27. One will already note, however, an increasingly widespread tendency for Bible commentators to refuse to systematically orient their views "in the direction of the convergence of the famous 'permanent values' of Judaism with a universal morality of Western humanism, with the exception of several outmoded spiritual advisers from an Israel diluted in the nineteenth century" (Arnold Mandel, "Autour d'un fratricide," *L'Arche*, August 1980).

28. *L'Arche*, December 1979.

29. *L'Arche*, December 1979.

30. Trigano, *La Nouvelle question juive*.

31. Durand, *L'Âme tigrée*, 180. See also the book by Lucien Sfez, *L'Enfer et le paradis* [Hell and Paradise] (Paris: PUF, 1978), which is an indictment, often excessive and naïve, of "political

theology" (in other words, the "armoring" of politics by a theological Manichaeism) and which focuses primarily upon the way in which the metaphysical opposition between good and evil can be secularized.

32. Leszek Kolakowski, *L'Esprit revolutionnaire* [The Revolutionary Spirit], followed by *Utopie et anti-utopie* [Utopia and Anti-Utopia] (Brussels: Complexe, 1978). Kolakowski responds in this book to those who, following on the heels of Martin Buber, believe it possible to rally to a "socialism of the will," which would be free of the defects of the "socialism of necessity." For more on the relationship between religion and utopia, see also Henri Desroches, *Les Dieux rêvés: Théisme et athéisme en utopie* [Dreamed Gods: Theism and Atheism in Utopia] (Paris: Desclée, 1972); Thomas Molnar, *Utopia, the Perennial Heresy* (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1967); Jean Lyn, *Les Utopies et le Royaume* [The Utopias and the Kingdom] (Paris: Centurion, 1973); and Gabriel Vahanian, *Dieu et l'utopie* [God and Utopia] (Paris: Cerf, 1977).

33. Michel Maffesoli, *La Violence totalitaire* [Totalitarian Violence] (Paris: PUF, 1979).

34. Michel Maffesoli, *La Conquête du present: Pour une sociologie de la vie quotidienne* [The Conquest of the Present: For a Sociology of Everyday Life] (Paris: PUF, 1979), 29.

35. Maffesoli, *La Violence totalitaire*, 252.

Chapter Eighteen
Universalism and Particularism

Pagan thought, which is fundamentally attached to roots and to *place* as the preferred center around which identity can crystallize, can only reject all religious and philosophical forms of universalism. Universalism, by contrast, finds its basis in Judeo-Christian monotheism. "The ideal of man is biblical," declares Blandine Barret-Kriegel.[1] The Bible is in fact the first to put on the stage, at the beginning of time, a unique man (or humanity) created by an equally unique God. Universalism finds its primary foundation in the story of Genesis, which makes the myth of Adam an archetype of the unity of the human race, which holds both moral and "historical" value. Although contemporary Christian theologians (such as Pierre Grelot or Karl Rahner) have at times tried to reconcile the doctrine of original sin and the predisposition of all human beings to sin with a moderate polygenism, it is clear that this tale suggests or tends to justify a strict *monogenism*.[2] The covenant Yahweh establishes with Noah then aggravates the symptom. We are confronted here with a bias toward unity, which, according to biblical ethnology, makes all the people of the world the descendants of Noah, and makes the world the field of operations for this large family. We know, in addition, how much trouble modern thought had freeing itself from the fable of the *ex oriente lux* and the conviction that the history of the most ancient humanity was written exclusively in Hebrew.[3]

This universalist assertion of the *unity* of man-as-man is apparently devoid of any foundation. For the Ancients, "man" did not exist. There were only *men*: Greeks, Romans, barbarians, Syrians, and so forth. In the seventeenth century, Joseph de Maistre repeated this idea, nominalist in nature, when he wrote: "There is no such thing as *man* in the world. In my life I have seen Frenchmen, Italians, Russians, and so on. I even know,

thanks to Montesquieu, that one can be Persian: but when it comes to *man*, I declare that I have never in my life actually met one."[4] Of course one can always speak of "man"—in the singular—in common parlance. But this is only a convenience of language, nothing but an abstraction that in the final analysis is based on the perception of a certain number of individual men. *Generic* man, "universal" abstract man, does not exist. For a generic man to exist, there needs to be a common and *specifically human* referent capable of qualifying all men in a paradigmatic way. Such a referent would be necessarily cultural, as what distinguishes man in the world, as we know it, is his capacity as man to create cultures. Now, there is no such thing as a unique human culture; there are only *cultures*. The diversity of cultures stems precisely from the diversity of men. What does exist on the other hand is a *zoological* unity of the human species; strictly speaking, "humanity" is the human *species*. But such a notion is of a purely biological order. To contend that it is implicitly demonstrated that "not only all men, taken individually, are members of a unique, universally predominant animal species, *Homo sapiens*, but that this biological fact includes moral implications,"[5] simply amounts to reducing *culture* to *nature* and reducing history to biology. Paradoxically, this is what the biblical myth appears to do: at the very moment it casts a ban on any sympathy between man and the rest of the world, and most specifically the living world, it sacralizes a unity of man, which, strictly speaking, has only a purely biological scope.

In reality, this is not, of course, the perspective within which the Bible situates the problem of human uniqueness. It is not posed on the level of *naturalness*; it is not reduced to the lower end of the scale, but rather it is posed at the level of the creative act of God and reduced to the higher end of the scale. In this sense, the uniqueness of generic man echoes that of Yahweh. Our *excursus* from the side of "biological" humanity has not been unhelpful, though. It allows for a thorough understanding of how Yahweh takes up a fact that normally emerges from pure naturalness and, by making it sublime, turns it to his own benefit; how the cancellation of differences by a Completely Other is the equivalent—merely occurring at a different *level*—to their cancellation "by the lower"; and finally, how the *radical* excelling of human differentiation by Yahweh *overcompensates* for the very fact of this differentiation by which man established himself as man, by raising himself up, in obviously relative fashion, above pure naturalness. Whether man's uniqueness is envisioned from the *natural* or the *theological*

level, the result is the same in both cases. It is the distinctively human level —the one where man defines himself not in terms of *unity* but *plurality*, the one in which he constructs himself, in consistently diverse ways, and declares himself self-created—that is denied. Radically exceeding this human level is tantamount to returning to man's earlier state, a pre-human state—the state that was precisely that of Adam and Eve at the time of their "creation." Assigning to man the task of *realizing* this unity attributed to him, is again compelling him to abolish his own history—a history that is essentially perceived as a negative parenthesis between an absolute anterior time and an absolute messianic future.

The idea of a generic man, an abstract "universal" man, has also not been spared secularization at the hands of modern ideologies. As we have noted earlier, it constitutes the heart of the ideology of the rights of man.[6] It is also present in Marx, who in a famous passage defined communism as the "real appropriation of human nature through and for man." One also senses that it is this spontaneous adherence by Marx to the approach comprising the systematic deduction of the particular from out of the general, which led him, throughout all his work, to minimize the importance of human differences. This is already noticeable in his approach —which is ambiguous, to say the least—to the national question, as well as in his polemics against the anarchists and certain revolutionary syndicalists. Classless society in Marxist futurology will be perfectly homogenous and uniform. Generic man will be *realized* completely there. Against Bakunin, Marx "challenges the difference that is for him synonymous with distance. He ignores, or chooses to ignore, the notion of pluralism. In his republic he abolishes all stratification and differentiation and replaces it with coordination and subordination."[7] But the idea of generic man can also be found in the works of Engels, Morgan, Lévi-Strauss, or Freud.

The tension between the particularist element and the universalist element in biblical thought has given rise to countless commentaries. It first establishes itself as a means of reconciling the refusal to proselytize (which characterized Judaism for the greater part of its history, although there have been some notable exceptions to this) with the messianic conviction (which implies the final unification of the world, the end of universal history, and the salvation of all the righteous). "The essence of Jewish particularism is to be a universalism," writes Blandine Barret-Kriegel.[8] Election is in fact not in contradiction with universalism. This election, "which is not composed

of privileges but of responsibilities" (Levinas), is primarily a moral assumption. As such, it connotes a particularism destined to one day abolish itself, a particularism representing an exemplary foreshadowing and the necessary condition for universality. It is by means of the Law he entrusted to his people that Yahweh intends to determine the fate of all humanity. The Hebrews form a kingdom of priests (Exodus 19:6). "Israel will thereby be the priest for whom the rest of humanity is the laity," notes Jacques Goldstain.[9] Election, in this sense, is only the *sign* of the duty of all: "The one is the sign of all, insofar as all have a duty to recognize themselves in the one," according to Paul Valadier's formulation.[10]

The assertion of biblical universalism really bursts forth in 2 Isaiah, at the same time that Yahweh declares his *unique* existence more forcefully. The mission of Israel is then made completely explicit: "It is too slight a task for you, as my servant, to restore the tribes of Jacob, to bring back the descendant of Israel. I will make you a light to the nations, to be my salvation to earth's farthest bounds" (Isaiah 49:6). Henceforth, the righteous from around the world will have a place in the future world: "and Zion shall be called a mother in whom men of every race are born" (Psalms 87:5). On the "day of the Lord," it is all peoples who will be *judged* "on behalf of Israel" (Joel 3). In these Messianic Times, human unity will be realized: "In days to come the mountain of the Lord's house shall be set over all other mountains, lifted high above the hills. Peoples shall come streaming to it, and many nations shall come and say, 'Come, let us climb up on the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob, that he may teach us his ways and we may walk in his paths.' For instruction issues from Zion, and out of Jerusalem comes the word of the Lord" (Micah 4:1–2). "Yahweh became the focus of spiritual unity for the just of all nations" (Ernst Bloch)[11]—these righteous people whom Karl Marx would identify as the suffering proletariat, soon to be their own self-redeemers: "Workers of the world, unite!"

From Christianity, universalism will receive a new and decisive emphasis. Originally, however, Jesus' preaching seemed directed at the Jewish community: "Do not take the road to gentile lands," said Jesus to his disciples, "and do not enter any Samaritan town; but go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel" (Matthew 10:5). The universalization of Christ's teachings is particularly the result of the Pauline reform: it is God's will "that all men should find salvation and come to know the truth. For

there is one God, and also one mediator between God and men, Christ Jesus" (1 Timothy 2:4–5). This does away with people's right to arrange their lives—with regard to belief as well as to values—by following their own paths. The nations should only form one "humanity" in Christ, and the Church of Christ should become the universal Church. "The religion taught by God to men is the same in all times and all places, because it cannot be mistaken or deceive us, whereas that religion of which man is the author, not only is it false, but it is not the same anywhere," is the pleasant observation recorded by the author of *Mythologie*, which forms part of the complete studies course used by religious schools that was issued in 1860 by the Briday publishing firm in Lyon.

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1. Barret-Kriegel, *L'État et les esclaves*, 52.

2. Until relatively recently, the Church, clinging to "fundamentalism," refused to interpret the story of Adam allegorically or symbolically (see abbé Meignan, "Les prophéties messianiques de l'Ancien Testament" ["Messianic Prophecies of the Old Testament"], *Annales de philosophie chrétienne* 85 [1857], 292–308). Such an interpretation also ruins Saint Paul's notion when he compares Adam to Jesus Christ, "It was through one man that sin entered the world, and through sin death [entered the world] . . . . For if the wrongdoing of that one man brought death upon so many, its effect is vastly exceeded by the grace of God and the gift that came to so many by the grace of the one man, Jesus Christ" (Romans 5:12–1). The Talmud more realistically writes: "It was for this reason that man was first created as one person [Adam], to teach you that . . . whoever saves a life, it is as if he has saved an entire world" (Sanhedrin 4, 5).

3. See Jacques Solé, "Le Mythe de l'unité de l'humanité" ["The Myth of the Unity of Humanity"], in his *Les Mythes chrétiens, de la Renaissance aux Lumières* (Paris: Michel, 1979), 115–73.

4. Joseph de Maistre, *Considérations sur la France* [Considerations on France] (1791), chap. 6.

5. Edmund Leach, *L'Unité de l'homme et autres essais* [The Unity of Man and Other Essays] (Paris: Gallimard, 1980), 364.

6. For a critique of the presuppositions and foundations of this ideology, see Alain de Benoist and Guillaume Faye, "La religion des droits de l'homme" ["The Religion of Human Rights"], *Éléments*, January–March 1981, 5–22.

7. André Rezler, "Marx et la pensée prospective" ["Marx and Prospective Thought"] in *Karl Marx devant le tribunal revolutionnaire*, special issue of *Cahiers du fédéralisme*, September 1978.

8. *Le Matin*, 10 September 1980.

9. Goldstain, *Les Valeurs de la Loi*, 80.

10. Valadier, *Jésus-Christ ou Dionysos*, 137.

11. Bloch, *Atheism in Christianity*, 89.

Chapter Nineteen
Politics and Anti-Politics

The fact that man comes from a unique source in the biblical story of creation does more than just lay the foundation for philosophical universalism. It also represents a deliberately *egalitarian* option. "The Hebrews, in their reflection on the first moments of humanity's existence," write Eisenberg and Abécassis, "spontaneously elect a single ancestor to serve its origin. Why? Because, on the plane of the spiritual values that haunt them, they are seeking to forcefully emphasize man's equality and to trace it back to the original unity. . . . Unity of man but also the unity of the human race. Our rabbis say: 'This is why God created humanity from a single ancestor, it is so no one can say, my ancestor came before yours.'"[1] They add, "All men are equal because they are created by the same unique God. . . . If God created just one man, it is so no one would think there could be several gods."[2] In other words, all men are equal before Yahweh because they all share the same origin. It is because Yahweh is the only God that all men come from the same source and, conversely, it is because they all come from the one same source that there are not several gods. The differences between men are secondary with respect to their common identity vis-à-vis Yahweh—they are of little account in comparison to him, just as the Other is of little value when compared to the Completely Other. All men are *essentially* equal; all men are placed at an *equal distance* from Yahweh. The anthropological foundation of the biblical theory of politics is perfectly clear.

The Bible does not acknowledge any specific form of politics. In the perspective it establishes, politics is continually referred back to morality, and sovereignty is referred back to the Law. The sovereign political power exercised by men cannot possess the slightest tinge of divine nature; Yahweh alone is *sovereign*. Therefore, justice is entirely distinct from

power. It is what will provide happiness: men will be "happy" when the justice of Yahweh reigns.

It is the *judges* and the sages, not the *kings*, who represent the political ideal of the Bible. "It is not the state that conditions society's possibility of existing," say Eisenberg and Abécassis. "The sole indispensable power is judiciary power."[3] The constitution of judges immediately precedes the revelation from Sinai in the Pentateuch. The whole ideology of the Mosaic Code sanctifies the primacy of the judge over the king, and of moral and juridical affairs over political and military ones. On arrival in Canaan, the country is divided into a confederation where each tribe is subject to judicial authority. The Elder delivers justice in his tribe, whereas the judge exercises supreme authority in times of war and directs the executive branch during peacetime. Later on, the judge will even earn the title of "Elohim" (Psalms 82:6). After the institution of kingship is established, the king will remain strictly answerable to the Law. Among the Hebrews, the king is obliged to study the Torah and apply it. Once he has assumed the throne, he must keep the Scriptures close at hand and consult them regularly. Civil authority is independent of sacerdotal authority, but must remain strictly dependent upon the Law. The great king is neither a builder nor a conqueror. He is one who governs according to the Bible and strives to realize the moral ideals of the Torah. His glory lies in "doing good in the eyes of the Eternal One." This is how the biblical "model" has inspired the principle of the "limitation of powers," the principle of the submission of politics to the judiciary, the idea that political problems are fundamentally of a "moral" nature and can be completely resolved by *juridical* means. In modern times, this system has found its basically logical extension in American *nomocracy*, the republic of judges founded upon the spirit of the Bible and in which the Supreme Court plays a privileged role. "One cannot help but be struck by the dialectical kinship of American constitutional law and the Mosaic Code," writes Pol Castel, who adds: "It is not by chance that the American democracy displays so many similarities with the first government of the Hebrews, because the Founding Fathers were very knowledgeable about the world of the Bible, so thoroughly in fact that several of them knew Hebrew well enough to read in its scriptures."[4]

It is only begrudgingly, one could say, that Yahweh responds to the Hebrews' desire to give themselves a king. Kingship—like marriage for Saint Paul—is merely a *second-best solution*: "When you come into the

land which the Lord your God is giving you, and occupy it and settle in it, and you then say, 'Let us appoint over us a king, as all the surrounding nations do,' you shall appoint as king the man whom the Lord your God will choose" (Deuteronomy 17:14–15). This desire exhibited by the Hebrews forms part of their propensity to sin; it is a *temptation*.[5] Moreover, Judaic tradition explicitly connects the idea of kingship and royal power to the serpent that "tempts" Eve in the garden of Eden.[6] In one of the two versions of the First Book of Samuel, the appearance of the monarchy is depicted as blasphemous. Samuel reports to Yahweh about the desire of the Hebrew people and Yahweh responds, "It is I whom they have rejected, I whom they will not have to be their king" (1 Samuel 8:7). (This passage apparently represents a correction to the monarchist version found in 1 Samuel 9:1–16). "The royal function in Israel is itself contaminated and discredited," writes Alex Egète; "Does it not superimpose (or oppose) another authority over the absolute kingship of God?"[7] Clearly, this is the real reason for biblical hostility to royal power: this power is a *human power*, it is an instance in which man declares his autonomy and sovereignty. If kingship is criticized in the Bible, it is because it represents, or tends to represent, a rejection of nomocracy. Moreover, it is quite remarkable that, for diverse reasons, all the kings of Israel will be led to transgress the Law, starting with Solomon. The sole exception is Joseph, who, after being named vizier of Egypt, had practically complete authority over this country and obtained the title of *tzadik*, "the Just," precisely because he dispensed "justice" before sovereignty. The history of the kingdom will later bear out the darkest predictions. After the exile and the rebuilding of the Temple, during the reforms of Ezra, the Hebrews returned to a strict nomocracy, and it was determined that neglect and transgression of the Law were the root cause of all their misfortune.

A mentality grounded exclusively in the Bible can therefore not have any kind of political autonomy insofar as it is inherently compelled to reduce every human undertaking to one of morality. Shmuel Trigano even goes so far as to say that while there may be a "Jewish theory of politics," there cannot be "a Jewish *political theory* that aims at establishing Jewishness in politics, since the very essence of politics is the negation of Jewishness."[8]

If political autonomy is rejected, it is because it is one of the favored forms of a greater autonomy: the autonomy of man in general. Now, one of the fundamental *relations* implied by the essence of politics is the relation of *authority*. In this regard, there is a logical relationship between contesting man's authority over man, and the assertion of Yahweh's authority over mankind. Man's "mastery" over his fellow man is impugned, while an abstract mastery over mankind is granted to God in exponential proportions. "God is master; man, his servant—with all that this implies," notes Will Herberg.[9] One can read in Leviticus (25:55): "For it is to me that the Israelites are slaves, my slaves whom I brought out of Egypt." The Talmud adds: "Jews are servants of God, but not servants of other servants."[10] The man of the Bible has greater justification for his refusal to fully recognize the sovereignty of a human authority because as his first priority he owes *total* obedience to the Completely Other, the faceless face of the absolute master. "Obedience to God—hence not to man," observes Erich Fromm.[11] A similar argument can be found in Blandine Barret-Kriegel's assertion that a human law is only legitimate as long as it remains subjected, subordinated, and secondary—as long "as it does not work on the tabula rasa, a clean slate, a white page, as long as it *does not compete with God*."[12] Such a law does not necessarily entail "slavery," provided that it is promulgated by the slaves themselves: "Since it has no power over the property of others, since it is limited by the rights of man, *it is not a form of servitude*."[13] The refusal of "mastery" therefore pushes *as far as possible* the refusal of the *normal* situation in which the social human substance is dichotomized—in a way that is always plural, always subject to challenge, never unilateral and never frozen—between "objects" and "subjects." It is, in short, the refusal of any situation that would mean more power for man and expansion for the self. It always involves representing happiness and "justice" as antagonists of power, and the "kingdom of freedom" as incompatible with the "kingdom of necessity"—with this kingdom itself as a *place* in which an ever-*relative* human mastery will only be abolished in order to place it beneath the *absolute* supervision of Yahweh.

It is in the Bible, writes Ernst Bloch, that we find "the most impassioned reaction against those on high and against worshipping them; only the Bible contains an appeal to revolt against them."[14] This appeal to "social revolution" finds its most enthusiastic forms in the books of the prophets,

whose tragic fate stems from the fact that, in the face of the "powerful," there was a ceaseless development of a perpetually *critical* ideology. Gérard Walter writes: "This is the social ideal of Jewish prophecy: a sort of general leveling that will cause the disappearance of every class distinction and lead to the creation of a uniform society in which privileges of any kind will be banned. This egalitarian sentiment goes hand in hand with an irreducible animosity toward the rich and powerful, who will be denied entry into the future kingdom."[15] On countless occasions the Bible condemns imperial undertakings, and powerful cities and nations, as intrinsically evil. It multiplies the anathemas against the "haughty," who are, by the same token, also the "cursed" (Psalms 119:21). It calls for the toppling of beauty, power, and "pride." Against the pluralism of civilizations and their achievements, born from the creative will of men, it advances the dispossession of the monotheist assertion, the desert of the absolute, the equality in the non-created being. It legitimizes weakness and delegitimizes strength. A day will come when the weak who are the "just" will triumph, when the powerful are cast down from their thrones, and when human "pretensions" will crumble before Yahweh. "For the Lord of Hosts has a day of doom waiting for all that is proud and lofty, for all that is lifted up" (Isaiah 2:12); "Then man's pride shall be brought low, and the loftiness of man shall be humbled, and the Lord alone shall be exalted" (2:17). For Yahweh knows how to bring low "those whose conduct is arrogant" (Daniel 4:37). This conception of social justice, based on a spirit of revenge and resentment, anticipates all forms of socialism. In the Bible, the relationship with God "coincides with social justice."[16] But this assertion is only a means of contesting *human* authority *in principle*—not in one or another of its applications. It is for this reason that the prophets, by mounting a full-frontal opposition to the princes of *this* world, can appear as the fathers of the socialism of "liberation," the first theoreticians of the "resistance" to mastery, or, as Roger Garaudy puts it, the "pioneers of the struggle against alienation." "Yahweh," writes Jean Lacroix in his commentary on Ernst Bloch, is "he who directs the subversive preaching of social apocalypse."[17] He contests human "alienation," but only to replace it with another form—against which there is no recourse.

It is in this spirit, it seems to me, that we must interpret the constant preference shown in the "family stories" of the Bible for *younger* brothers, in other words, for those who come *second*. In Genesis, Abel is the younger

brother of Cain. Moses is also the younger brother of Aaron. Isaac, the second son of Abraham, is preferred over Ishmael, his elder half-brother. This opposition is particularly explicit in the case of the twins Esau and Jacob. Esau was the first to be born (Genesis 25:25) and the Bible explicitly states that he fought with his brother before birth in Rebecca's belly because he wanted to come out first. But Jacob and Esau correspond to *symbolic types* that are very comparable to those of Cain and Abel. Esau is a redhead (*adom*) and hairy (*sair*); he is also a *hunter*. He will wed Hittite women (Genesis 26:34) and have as a descendant Edom, also called Seir, who will become the enemy of Israel.[18] Jacob, by contrast, continued the nomadic lifestyle; he "led a simple life and stayed among the tents" (Genesis 25:27). In Judaic tradition, Esau refused to be circumcised, whereas Jacob was circumcised at birth.[19] The parallel with Cain and Abel is striking, but it is an *inverted* parallel, because where Cain killed Abel, Jacob "killed" Esau *as the firstborn* by buying the elder son's birthright (Genesis 25:29–34). Then, by deceiving his father as to his true identity, he obtained the "blessing" of Isaac (Genesis 27:6–29). Now, what would be the right of the elder if not the fact of *naturally* coming first, according to the order of things in this world? To this *natural hierarchy*, the Bible opposes another: the *hierarchy according to Yahweh*, which represents an *inversion*. The preference given the younger versus the elder brother is only a metaphor for the preference given to the second (to the last) as opposed to the first, to the "weak" against the "powerful," to he who is "humble" (therefore blessed by Yahweh) against he who is "proud" (therefore pagan). The biblical narrative itself further shows the general range of this metaphor, when Yahweh tells Rebecca, pregnant with Jacob and Esau: "Two nations in your womb, two peoples, going their own ways from birth! One shall be stronger than the other; the older shall be servant to the younger." (Genesis 25:23). The choice has already been announced.

There would be nothing more to be say about this if Yahweh claimed to be correcting a particularly inequitable situation, if he claimed to be reacting against the ever-present possibility of an abuse of authority. But this is not what is involved here. It is not the *abuse* of power that Yahweh condemns; it is power itself. From the biblical perspective, human power established as sovereign is *intrinsically* evil; it is evil in its very essence. The "just" are not just in one respect and weak in another. They are just *because they are weak*, by the very virtue of this weakness, just as the

powerful are evil by the very virtue of their power. It is not the weak who are exalted by the Bible, then, as much as it is weakness itself. Let us read Psalm 119. Its author establishes a *logical* parallel between the status of being one of the just, one who respects the word of Yahweh, and the fact of being a "stranger" down here (verse 19), the status of being persecuted, humiliated, and scorned. The condition to which this author has been reduced constitutes his own grace. *Otherwise, it would be inexplicable.* God *cannot* be wrong, but on the other hand, weakness *cannot* be an evil. So it must be that the powerful are only triumphing in appearance. And what better appearance could they have than that of power itself? Here we find the whole apparatus of a general reversal of cause and effect that characterizes this literature. It is because he feels like a stranger, and feels humiliated and persecuted, that the psalmist transforms his disgrace into grace by using the only means at his disposal, namely by viewing it as the effect of the superior will of Yahweh. And just as the evil fortune that strikes him is the surest sign of his election, the "triumph" of the powerful is the no less certain sign of their wickedness and the proclamation of their punishment. This interpretation even operates in a retrospective fashion. Moses, having been chosen by Yahweh to receive the Revelation of Sinai, could only be greatly humble and ascetic, "the most humble man on earth" (Numbers 12:3)—and it is by very reason of this humility that mankind has remembered him. In Yahweh's order, the last are always the first. In this sense, Yahweh is clearly a god of *vengeance*. He will realize in the absolute of history what his people were *incapable of doing* in the relative order of their own history (see the Book of Jeremiah). The metaphysics of revenge, the ideology of resentment as source of the reversal of all values, as source of the substitution of the negative for the positive, finds its most profound basis in this system. The spirit of vengeance produces the necessary condition for a bad conscience, which itself implies the idea of sin. The instillation of guilt is only the means, the sole means at the disposal of one who feels victimized by an "unjust" domination for convincing himself of the absolute compensation that his condition will prompt, and, by the same stroke, for attempting to *incapacitate* the powerful man by arousing in him the condition of doubt about the sources of his own power.

It was not a smooth transition to shift from the idea running through the Bible—according to which it is *just*, intrinsically just, that the first shall be last and the last shall be first—to an emphasis on the notion of "love," a

love that still finds itself limited by the intolerance that constitutes its relative antithesis. A contemporary profane transposition of this can be seen in the prominent saying about the freedom that is appropriately denied to the "enemies of freedom." In Christianity, the culmination of this idea will be the discourse of the beatitudes (Matthew 5:3–12, Luke 6:20–26), a veritable program for the reversal of all values, and especially the reversal of the classic equation of paganism: "good = noble = powerful = beautiful = happy = beloved of God."[20] Nietzsche also observes that in Christianity:

> The wretched alone are the good; the poor, impotent, lowly alone are the good; the suffering, deprived, sick, ugly alone are pious, alone are blessed by God, blessedness is for them alone—and you the powerful and noble, are on the contrary evil, the cruel, the lustful, the insatiable, the godless to all eternity; and you shall be eternally the unblessed, accursed, and damned![21]

Like Nietzsche, Max Weber could discern in the Sermon on the Mount the outline of a slave revolt. The New Testament subtly develops related themes on the curse of "wealth," the immorality of material possession, and so on. To his disciples, Jesus declared: "You know that in the world the recognized rulers lord it over their subjects, and their great men make them feel the weight of authority. That is not the way with you; among you, whoever wants to be great must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be the willing slave of all" (Mark 10:42–44). This theme comes up several times, notably in Matthew (20:25–27). We can even find the echo of this social morality in the Fathers of the Church—and in the theory of value enunciated by Saint Thomas Aquinas, which was an early foreshadowing of David Ricardo and Karl Marx. Christianity, as we know, started out by directing its appeals to the classless and ignorant. "In the second century and even in the third, the Christian Church was still largely (though with many exceptions) an army of the disinherited."[22] This fact, moreover, contributed to its success, as it allowed it to benefit from the aspiration toward social revolution. "Christianity held out to the disinherited the conditional promise of a better inheritance in another world. So did several of its pagan rivals. But Christianity wielded both a bigger stick and a juicier carrot."[23] Christianity, finally, did not fail to develop the idea of the just suffering and triumphing, by leaning on the example of

Jesus himself, who would only return to glory after having consented in advance to his degradation on the cross, a degradation intended to redeem humanity. ("*God on the Cross*—is the fearful hidden meaning behind this symbol still understood?—Everything that suffers, everything that hangs on the Cross, is *divine*. . . . We all hang on the Cross, consequently *we* are divine."[24]) The dialectic of the weakness that is not a weakness and the strength that is not a strength—in other words, the appearance of weakness and the appearance of strength—can also be seen in Saint Paul, whose poetics Claude Tresmontant unhesitatingly compares to those of a Chaplinesque anti-hero.[25] It is Paul who said that since wisdom was folly and power was weakness, he must glorify his weaknesses: "I shall therefore prefer to find my joy and pride in the very things that are my weakness; and then the power of Christ will come and rest upon me. Hence I am well content, for Christ's sake, with weakness, contempt, persecution, hardship, and frustration; for when I am weak, then I am strong" (2 Corinthians 12:9–10).

Logically enough, in the political domain, Christianity did not begin to take on more pagan features until after its accession to power. It is in the European-Christian synthesis that the biblical problematic reverses itself, and it is asserted that man must obey the king in the same way the king obeys God, that temporal authority is itself the expression of divine will, and so forth. The *institution* of Christianity could only survive at the price of a compromise between its constituent principles and an elementary political realism of primarily Roman origin. As Julius Evola writes:

> In theory, the Western world accepted Christianity but for all practical purposes it remained pagan. . . . Thus, the outcome was some sort of hybridism. Even in its attenuated and Romanized Catholic version, the Christian faith represented an obstacle that deprived Western man of the possibility of integrating his authentic and irrepressible way of being through a concept and in a relationship with the Sacred that was most congenial to him. In turn, this way of being prevented Christianity from definitely shaping the West into a tradition of the opposite kind, that is, into a priestly and religious one conformed to the ideals of the *ecclesia* of the origins, the evangelical *pathos*, and the symbol of the mystical body of Christ.[26]

Over the course of the centuries, this hybrid model has never freed itself of its ambiguities, which have affected every form and ideal of a "Christian State" or a "Christian politics." In Evola's words:

> We should not try to dissimulate the antithesis existing between, on the one hand, the pure Christian morality of love, submission, humility, mystical humanism and, on the other hand, ethical-political values such as justice, honor, difference, and a spirituality that is not the opposite of power, but of which power is a normal attribute. The Christian precept of returning good for evil is opposed by the principle of striking the unjust, of forgiving and generosity, but only to a vanquished foe, and not to an enemy who still stands strong in his injustice. In a virile institution, as is contemplated in the ideal of the true State, there is little or no room for love (conceived as the need to communicate, to embrace others, to lower oneself, and to take care of those who may not even ask for it or be worthy of it). Again, in such an institution there can be relationships among equals, but without a communitarian-social and brotherly tint, established on the basis of loyalty, mutual acknowledgement and respect, as everyone retains his own dignity and a healthy love for distance. I will not discuss here what consequences would ensue on the political plane if we were to take literally the evangelical parables concerning the lilies of the field and the birds of the air, as well as all the other nihilist teachings that are built on the overthrow of earthly values and on the idea of the imminent advent of the *Regnum*.[27]

Under such conditions it is completely natural that Christianity, which is today undertaking a critical analysis of its own history, would adopt some distance with regard to the principles that allowed it to establish itself as a power. The much touted "return to the Gospels," the emphasis on the pastoral over the dogmatic, is thus bringing an end to an ambiguous situation that has gone on for too long (and this is something I endorse wholeheartedly). Faustian energy and the Christian spirit are in the midst of a divorce at the end of a union that was never truly consummated, and the notion of "Christian politics," even within the Church, is increasingly a subject of contention. Furthermore, the very notion of politics is being

indicted in the same spirit as it was in the original biblical mentality. Jacques Ellul did not hesitate to write: "If evil has piled up upon evil, if the tide of danger is rising, the reason lies in politics and nowhere else. Politics is the contemporary image of absolute evil. It is satanic, diabolical, the home base of the demonic."[28] The idea that underlies such condemnations is always the same: "politics tries to pass itself off as the whole of reality, dethroning God in the process."[29]

How could it be a cause for surprise that such an accusation is now being leveled from all sides? Insofar as the majority of contemporary ideologies are merely crystallizations of Judeo-Christian values in secular form, it was inevitable that the ideal of the nomocracy, the devaluation of the very idea of power, the delegitimization of politics, would again become theoretical watchwords. In *Barbarism with a Human Face*, Bernard-Henri Lévy declares that it is power that is evil.[30] In *Le Testament de Dieu* he declares his wish "to restrict politics in order to make room for ethics" and "to reduce politics to its simplest expression." He adds: "My ideal State is the State with no ideal."[31] Michel le Bris exclaims: "I have come up with the plan to write the end of politics." Shmuel Trigano takes a position for "going beyond the master relationship, the invention of a man who is neither slave nor master."[32] There is no need to multiply such examples; it is a veritable symphony. The common denominator of all these opinions is that politics is the criterion of man's power over man, and that "mastery" is born from the fact that all human power inherently tends to exceed itself through a "rise to extremes" analogous to what was described by Clausewitz. Incidentally, we may note the kinship of this hypothesis with Marxist theory, which, by the way, views politics as deriving from (economic) alienation. Nor is this hypothesis a stranger to a certain liberal and mainly American mode of thought based on the primacy of economics and juridical morality.[33] From Saint Augustine, who saw the history of Rome as that of a "band of robbers," to Erich Fromm, who denounces European heroics as a "history of conquest, pride, and greed," the tendency remains the same: it always involves pitting a Completely Other that inhibits self-overcoming, and the immobility of "universal peace," against the surging flow of vital antagonisms. It involves pitting the limitations of egalitarianism—a "pretext for the *rancune*"[34]—against the limitless energy of free wills.

This aspiration to nullify politics is obviously utopian—and represents a particularly dangerous utopia. Man lives within a society and there is no society that can live without politics. As an activity that is variable in terms of its *forms* but invariable in *essence*, and which is in service to the practical organization and cohesion of society, politics is derived from humanity's elementary sociability. "Politics," writes Julien Freund:

> does not obey the desires and fantasies of man. He cannot act in any way other than who he is, or adopt a role that is not his. He cannot suppress politics or else he is suppressing himself. . . . Politics *is* an essence, in the double sense, where, on the one hand, it is one of the fundamental, constant, and ineradicable categories of nature and human existence, and, on the other hand, it is a reality that remains identical to itself despite the variations on the face of the earth. In other words, man did not invent politics, nor did society, and furthermore, politics remains what it has always been throughout time.[35]

The essence of politics includes three presuppositions: the relationship of command and obedience, which determines order; the relationship of public and private, which determines opinion; and the relationship of friend and enemy, which determines the struggle. It is in the way that it *mobilizes* these presuppositions, especially the first and the third, that the essence of politics arouses the radical hostility of those who refuse to accept that the relationships of authority—which are not necessarily despotic!—derive inevitably from human diversity. Moreover, this is true to the point that acts of resistance and refusal can only have meaning with regard to the factual givens of obedience and command. A society without politics would be a society without order (this would be anarchy, the prelude to the *overcompensation* provided by dictatorship), without opinion (this would be the most total absence of liberty imaginable), and without struggle (this would be death). Hence the now classic definition provided by Julien Freund: politics is the "social activity that proposes to guarantee by force, generally based on law, the external security and internal harmony of a particular political unit by ensuring order in the midst of all the struggles that are born from the diversity and divergence of opinions and self-interests."[36]

The normal political authority is the State.[37] Its two essential roles consist of an external one, *designating the enemy* (actual or potential), and an internal one, preventing private conflicts from degenerating into civil war. Machiavelli primarily conceived of the State as the most appropriate means for putting an end to the private wars between Italian princes. The State therefore has a completely natural recourse to that specifically political method known as force.[38] It is within this perspective that we should situate the problem of the reason of State, which has persistently vexed sociological political analysis since the seventeenth century. The reason of State is exercised in the name of the collective good; it has the character of "public safety." It is *not* the right of the State to take action in the name of the collective interest and to do what it pleases under the pretext that, as upholder and guarantor of sovereign authority, it is not subject to its own rules. Rather, it results from the principle of anti-reductionism: the nation as a whole has prerogatives that each of its constituents cannot possess separately, and these prerogatives are exercised by the State. Thus, the principle of the reason of State is:

> conceptually inseparable from the political conduct of a State. Not only could a State not be constituted without this principle, but it would be incapable of surviving, insofar as the political question, even with respect to morality, is less one of denying or abolishing it than it is of finding the conditions of justice capable of attenuating the rigor of its application. . . . Without a doubt, the reason of State constantly runs the risk of degrading into a simple instrument for political ruses or of serving as justification for a tyrannical politics, but this does not invalidate the fact that by nature it is reasonable, measured and wise, in other words, that it consists of finding the most effective solution that reduces individual and collective prejudices to a minimum with an eye to the general economy of society. . . . In short, to believe that abolishing the reason of State is possible, is to imagine that there could never be any exceptional situations; it is also to reject the transcendence of the State and to reduce it to one particular association out of all other associations.[39]

As for the old debate, instituted by the Bible, concerning the antagonism between force and law, this is rendered moot with the realization that no

law is viable unless the means exist to apply it. Now, law cannot achieve its application on its own; constraint is not one of its inherent qualities. As Julien Freund writes, law "is normative and prescriptive, but it does not possess within itself the force of imposing or compelling respect for what it prescribes. Constraint comes from an external source: it is political or hierarchical, depending upon the case."[40] It is force that is *a priori* excluded by the law; it is violence. "In the lawful State where the law reigns exclusively," adds Freund, "not only would law be impotent but politics would be paralyzed. . . . Peace is primordially a political and not a juridical matter. It is when politics are powerful enough to counter violence both internally and externally that it can impose solutions by law."[41] Law is not an original criterion. It presupposes politics as the very condition for its existence and perpetuation. To simultaneously desire the rule of law and "the least politics possible" is a contradiction in terms. Law cannot be reduced to force, but a show of force is still required to establish it. To replace the political with the juridical would necessarily lead to impotence, anarchy, and an overall state of injustice. It is the extinction of politics, and not the assertion of its primacy, that brings about a return to the law of the jungle.

In the "ideology" of Indo-European paganism, not only is the biblical antagonism between morality or law and political sovereignty nonexistent, but these two notions, to the contrary, are closely connected. This connection is vigorously expressed through the theology of the "first function," to which Georges Dumézil has devoted several books.[42] Among the Indo-Europeans, law and sovereignty are embodied by gods representing the two fundamental and *inseparable* aspects of this "first function": Dius Fidius and Jupiter for the Romans, Mitra and Varuna for the Vedic Indians, and Tyr and Odin-Wotan for the Germans. This religious fact presents a very clear teaching that is more relevant than ever.

The idea claiming that the use of force necessarily leads to its pathological escalation is contradicted by historic experience, which shows us the most contradictory formulations in this domain. All power does not "rise" to extremes. As for the idea that law should substitute itself for force —this is purely utopian, as I have shown, since the situations that are *exceptions* cannot be governed by the juridical angle. Force will always remain necessary to counter those who do not respect the law. The balance of force and law under the strict control of political sovereignty is the

characteristic of every organic society, and it is only the disappearance of one or the other that will lead either to despotism or anarchy. In antiquity, the refusal of tyranny, the resistance to a power gone mad, and to an order that has become nothing more than established disorder, is symbolized by Antigone rising up against Creon—by Antigone, who, with the choir, was seen by all Greece as being in the right (contrary to what Bernard-Henri Lévy declares, against all the evidence). The assertion of the primacy of politics is therefore a far cry from the legitimization of despotism; in fact, it is the exact opposite. Clearly, it is rather the negation of politics that seems to denote a disturbing mental disposition, a subjectivity so pathological that it is spontaneously compelled to transform every object into an "idol," a subjectivity so materialistic that it can only escape its own tendencies by submitting to the absolute decrees of a Completely Other, a subjectivity that, through its protest against hierarchies, is in fact aiming at their *inversion*. Dare we say it: the interpretation of all power as an evil, of every recourse to force as "unjust," does not just arise out of propaganda that may or may not be effective—it also reveals a profound incapacity to grasp these notions in any different context that presents itself for consideration. It essentially reveals what our preachers of "justice" and universal peace would make of power *themselves* if the opportunity arose for them to claim it.

Likewise, freedom is not the state that results from the suppression of all human constraints. It is not a *natural state* of man, which society, power, the social order, and so on would have alienated, a *formless* freedom corresponding to the very nature of man according to Rousseau, a freedom inherent to the subject of law based on a sovereign conception of individual will (as sharing in an absolute sovereignty that predates the society), a freedom that power must recognize as axiomatic—as *license*, as emancipation from all necessity. Freedom is a *political* notion and not a *moral* one; as such, it cannot escape the presupposition of politics. Freedom must be *conquered*. There are no "spontaneous beneficiaries" of it, but *founders* and *guarantors*. Freedom results exclusively from the action taken to install it or take possession of it, whether this action is taken by individuals or groups. It therefore assumes, by nature, a *full sovereignty*. People and nations, like individuals, are only as free as they are sovereign. "The free man is a *warrior*," declares Nietzsche; and this formulation is made explicit by the definition he provides: freedom consists of possessing

"the will to self-responsibility, that one preserves the distance which divides us."[43] Therefore, it is not so much an absence of constraint as it is the free will to impose upon oneself the constraint that encourages a state of power and full mastery of one's abilities, the foremost condition of their being put into operation, the free ability to keep the promises that one has made to oneself. To eliminate politics in the name of freedom amounts to creating the conditions for freedom's own elimination. As Carl Schmitt wrote in a famous passage: "If a people no longer has the energy or the will to maintain itself in the sphere of politics, the latter will not thereby vanish from the world. Only a weak people will disappear."[44]

As an ideal at the end of history, the Bible aspires to "universal peace." These words of Isaiah are inscribed in enormous letters on the front wall of the United Nations building in New York: "And they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more" (2:4; see also Micha 4:3). The coming of the rule of the One God entails the abolition of the conflicts born out of the diversity of the real world.[45] The same notion occurs in the thought of Karl Marx, with the realization of the classless society: "History, like existence, is eluded by (an) initial solution that guarantees the final solution, the state of non-contradiction, the end of the secular theodicy, the homogenous and conflictless society. In this sense, Marx falls under the criticism of Nietzsche, denouncing the metaphysical illusion in his own way: 'This world is full of contradiction, *consequently* there is a world free of contradiction' (*The Will to Power*)."[46] This ideal of "universal peace" is an ideal of *non-contradiction*, which logically implies the disappearance of differences—and, until that disappearance, their theoretical devaluation, because it is differences that generate the contradictory. Contradiction is the very motor of life; the desire to make it vanish is a death wish.

It is entirely different in paganism, where the conflict of opposites and its resolution in and through the being of the world sacralizes struggle as a positive, fundamental reality. Struggle is not the foundation of an *order*, but forms the *framework* of the universe. Implying both conservation and transformation, contradiction, which is not mechanistic and fixed but clearly dialectical, ensures its own overtaking (*Aufhebung*). At the empirical and pre-conceptual stage, we can find the clearest perception of it from the

time of high antiquity, notably by Heraclitus: "We must know that war is common to all and strife is justice, and that all things come into being and pass away through strife."[47] Regarding Heraclitus, Nietzsche writes:

> The strife of the opposites gives birth to all that comes-to-be; the definite qualities that look permanent to us express but the momentary ascendancy of one partner. But this by no means signifies the end of the war; the contest endures in all eternity. Everything that happens, happens in accordance with this strife, and it is just in this strife that eternal justice is revealed. It is a wonderful idea, welling up from the purest strings of Hellenism, the idea that strife embodies the everlasting sovereignty of strict justice, bound to everlasting laws. . . . It is Hesiod's good *Eris* transformed into the cosmic principle; it is the contest-idea of the Greek individual and the Greek state taken from the gymnasium and the *palestra*, from the artist's *agon*, from the contest between political parties and cities —all transformed into universal application so that now the wheels of the cosmos turn on it.[48]

Throughout European history, this implicit philosophy will constitute the profound justification of an exaltation of the values of struggle. Saxo Grammaticus has Bjarki saying: "Who whirl the shafts in flight but the scions of kings? The aristocracy initiates war; celebrated progeny execute battle, a business which peasants never achieve, but only their leaders will hazard."[49] And it is also this idea, not of a universal peace but a universal *struggle*, that is expressed in the beautiful engraving by the mysterious Master of Petrarch depicting "The Fight of All Creatures" (1520). Whereas Judeo-Christian monotheism, as the vehicle of an obsession with the unique and homogeneous, demands (or believes itself justified in demanding) the extinction of conflicts, without realizing that the conflictual structure is the selfsame as that of living, and its extinction implies entropy and death. European paganism rests on an *antagonistic pluralism of values*. In its most immediate manifestations, polytheism is the expression of this antagonism, which never terminates in irreversible oppositions or a radical dualism, but which naturally resolves itself in a harmonious whole. The pagan gods fight amongst themselves, and yet this struggle never provides a challenge to the tripartite structure that emerged from the foundational war.[50] In agreement

with Jean-Louis Tristani, Michel Maffesoli emphasizes that "the tripartite division ascribed by Georges Dumézil to the Indo-Europeans tends to make prominent their recognition of social plurality; there are various roles that are assumed, which perhaps construct, oppose, and fight each other, but are recognized for what they are, and if there is a hegemony of a given type, it is momentary, precarious, and always subject to challenge."[51]

This is because, as Max Weber says, "the gods who fight other gods like themselves" are also fighting and confronting, in a perpetual *re-presentation* of the foundational myth, an ever diverse array of antagonistic forces, none of which are absolutely dishonored in advance.[52] In the spirit of paganism, even the public enemy (*hostis*, as opposed to *inimicus*) cannot represent evil in and of itself. It always remains a *relative* adversary. Furthermore, the confrontation may engender a mutual respect. Far from necessitating the dishonoring of the enemy in order to fight him (an inevitable obligation in a "pacifist" system), an opponent can be acknowledged as a peer for standing up and fighting well. Hence the fundamentally pagan appeal to the "fraternal adversary"—an appeal rarely heard today, I should note—which is strictly the opposite of the "forgiveness for offenses" and the left cheek that is extended after the right cheek has been smited. Hence, too, the very ancient practice of the *duel*, which is the very concretization of this mentality (and we all know how it has endured through time, even regardless of the technological development of the means of destruction).[53] In paganism, the war of religion (a war between categories of belief) is ruled out, and likewise the class struggle (a war of social categories), by very reason of their irreducible character. "The enemy, the other, is not perceived as a criminal, but as a *figure* of an issue of the moment; the existence of the other and alterity is not denied, but is the measure of a social existence that finds itself in confrontation."[54]

The motif of enemy brothers, which in Indo-European tradition seems to have been marginally grafted onto the theme of divine twins, clearly illustrates the way in which pagan thought situates conflict and confrontation far beyond good and evil.[55] In this regard, it is enough to compare, on the one hand, the opposition of a Cain and Abel or a Jacob and Esau to, on the other hand, that of an Eteocles and Polynices or an Epimetheus and Prometheus (or, even more precisely, a Romulus and Remus), in order to perceive the difference. It is no less remarkable,

moreover, to see how the Faustian soul, mainly during the *Sturm-und-Drang* era, with Schiller (*Die Braut von Messina*) and Goethe (*Pandora*), has transformed the biblical myth of Cain and Abel. Either there is a reduced preference for the "Abel"-type or a more overt liking for the "Cain"-type, or both types are viewed, beyond the conflict that opposes them, as strictly complementary. These two types then become metaphors of *sapientia* and *fortitudo*: where would wisdom be without strength? And it is through the *reunion* of these two types that harmony is created. This is the basis of the Wagnerian conception of the *Wiedervereinigung der Gegensätze* (Reconciliation of Opposites). In political sociology, this philosophy fully intersects with Carl Schmitt's *Freund-Feind* theory, whose introduction in France is due to Julien Freund and Raymond Aron. In *The Concept of the Political*, a work that since its publication has been one of the intellectual poles of German political theory, Carl Schmitt shows that the distinction between friend and enemy, the *relationship* (and, consequently, the conjunction as well) of the friend (*Freund*) and the enemy (*Feind*), is the *distinguishing* relationship and the very criterion of politics: the criterion of politics is the possibility that any form of opposition may develop into conflict.

Carl Schmitt also shows that the replacement of politics by morality, far from leading to the extinction of conflicts, instead leads to their *aggravation*. In fact, from the moment the conflict falls under a moral interpretation—and a morality that poses good and evil as absolutes—it becomes *inextinguishable*. The enemy is not suppressed but transformed from a temporary, relative adversary, into an *absolute enemy*. The enemy in fact can only represent evil. It is the evil he embodies that one is fighting, and for this task all means are good or capable of being good. The enemy is *guilty*; he must be *punished*. This assignation of guilt to the adversary is a necessary condition for the entire system. When one is an adherent of "universal peace," how can one wage war unless it is in the name of a self-evident good? "Under the pretext of suppressing the political enemy in the name of an allegedly more human conception," notes Julien Freund, one "deforms enmity and makes it crueler, as its main concern is discovering the guilty."[56] The entire development of contemporary international law, based largely on the values of the Bible, actually aims at making the enemy the *guilty party* from the moral-juridical viewpoint. Step by step, we have arrived at the idea that the enemy *should not exist*, and if the enemy does

exist, then he does so outside of human laws—*outside of humanity*. We then reach the paradox

> that it would be permissible to exterminate a group or social class in the name of humanity, since one is not slaying an enemy but killing the guilty. Finally—and we have already come across indications of this evolution—the soldier will no longer have a military role but the role of policeman and executioner. This is the logic: a society without enemies that desires to see peace reign through justice, namely through law and morals, would be transformed into a kingdom of judges and culprits. Far from justice replacing politics, one would witness a parody of justice and politics.[57]

The wars waged in the name of an abstract universal morality—yesterday it was religious morality with its wars of religion, today it is ideological morality—have always been the most atrocious. Adding the *radical devaluation* of some people and the *good conscience* of others to traditional conflicts abolishes the classic distinctions between civilian and military, the state of war and the state of peace. Such wars imply the *destruction* of the adversary, eventually replaced by his "conversion" or "reeducation," because it is deemed impossible (and unthinkable) to *come to terms* with what the adversary represents. It is not just the more perfected technological means of destruction that have rendered modern wars atrocious; it is the conjunction of these means with the general diffusion of a biblical ideology of "universal peace," which, when confronted by the *reality* of alterity and the relative enmities that flow out of it, can *only* confront it by situating the enemy *outside humanity*.[58] To accept, on the contrary, the specificity of politics—and by the same stroke, the entire autonomy of man of which it is the *mark*—is not necessarily the same as considering the enemy as a culprit. It is to acknowledge him as still qualified to be of equal dignity. If conflicts do not *intrinsically* fall under a moral interpretation, then the adversary does not represent "evil"; he is only the *figure* of a given problematic, and one can still respect the *individual* man who is within it. If my relationship to him is beyond good and evil, the Other can be both my enemy and my brother.

As a result of its universalism, biblical thought rejects politics. Politics "is essentially a particularist and non-universalist vocation. . . . Also, insofar

as the clergy and intellectuals claim to be the servants of the universal, they can only be hostile to the political."[59] To be specific, Yahweh will not shift his eyes from the absolute of humanity except to the individual absolute. In the face of this *gaze*, individual nations, empires, and cultures are at best only contingent events, transitory outgrowths of human history and at worst merely manifestations of an undying "pride." To the pagan principle of a totality connected to the world that encompasses all collective specificities, the Bible opposes a twofold and non-contradictory *dissociation* of a uniform humanity, and the individual disenfranchised from everything to which he would belong. "For the idea of totality, in which ontological philosophy veritably reunites—or comprehends—the multiple," writes Levinas, "must be substituted the idea of a separation resistant to synthesis."[60]

Paganism naturally legitimizes politics, to the statutory extent in which it gives its blessing to the pluralism of collective identities—in which it even encourages, between *humanity* and the *individual*, the *intermediary* dimension of the specific culture with which man constructs and transforms himself. "The one God," writes Julien Freund again, "is not a political being. Only polytheism is a political view of the beyond. For the same reason, the global human society, fully reconciled with itself, such as Marxism announces, cannot be political either."[61] From the political standpoint, the universal state is a contradiction in terms. "The political world is a pluriverse, not a universe. In this sense every theory of state is pluralistic."[62] Politics is only made in conjunction with the Other; alterity is the very condition of politics. This is why the negation or devaluation of the Other to the profit of the Completely Other goes hand in hand with the negation or devaluation of politics. In the etymological sense, politics remains the activity of the *polis*, of the city, and it so happens that only paganism can accept that different cities have different gods.

All sickly types aspire to form a herd. Quantity compensates them—at least they think it does—for what they lack in quality: if several suffer together, they believe their suffering is reduced. Those who boast of Judeo-Christian values sometimes attribute to the "powerful" the feelings they would have or be tempted to have if they were there in their place. They do not see that true power is an end in itself and does not aim (assuming it is tranquil) at any *utility*—that "the will to will absolutely denies every goal

and only admits goals as means to outwit itself willfully and to make room for this game."[63]

In paganism, happiness is never the antagonist of power. But nor is it an antagonist of *equity*. By condemning the exaltation of weakness, paganism is not in any way aiming at justifying the crushing of the weak by the strong, nor forming the "ideological alibi" of any sort of established disorder. To the contrary, it claims to contribute to the formation of the spiritual framework that allows every individual, whatever his rank, assuming only that he has the will, to cultivate what would *strengthen* him and not what would *defeat* him. Paganism does not reproach Christianity for defending the weak who are unjustly oppressed. Paganism reproaches Christianity for exalting them in their weakness and viewing it as the sign of their election and their title to glory; it reproaches Christianity for not helping them to become strong. So it is not a question of opposing the strong versus the weak—today, in any event, it is paganism that is weak and Judeo-Christian monotheism that is strong—but purely and simply of opposing a system of *remaining weak* with a system of *becoming strong*. It is also a question of making a world that is not a vale of tears, nor a theater of shadows, nor a stage where man—with unequal happiness—*acts out his salvation*. It is instead the natural field for the self-expansion of man—a man capable of asserting his autonomy and establishing himself as his own *project*.

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1. Eisenberg and Abécassis, *À Bible ouverte*, 110.

2. Eisenberg and Abécassis, *À Bible ouverte*, 112–13.

3. Eisenberg and Abécassis, *Et Dieu Créa Eve*, 108.

4. *Le Monde*, 4 July 1979. For more on this subject, see the important essay by Milton R. Konvitz, *Judaism and the American Idea* (New York: Schocken, 1980), especially chap. 2, "The Rule of Law: Torah and Constitution," 53–68.

5. See Francine Kaufmann, "Les Juifs et le Royaume" ["The Jews and the Kingdom"], *Sillages*, September 1979.

6. Eisenberg and Abécassis, *Et Dieu créa Eve*, 205–07.

7. Alex Egéte, "Contre la raison d'État" ["Against the Reason of State"], *Tribune Juive*, 12 December 1980.

8. Trigano, *La Nouvelle question juive*, 19. We know that for some ultra-orthodox Jews, the creation of an Israeli state in a non-messianic time is already "idolatrous." "Idolatry, pure and simple" is how Isaiah Leibowitz describes it ("The World and the Jews," *Forum*, Spring 1959, 83–90). See also Dan V. Segre, *A Crisis of Identity: Israel and Zionism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1980), 51–73.

9. Will Herberg, *Judaism and Modern Man: An Interpretation of Jewish Religion* (New York: Athenaeum, 1977), 65.

10. Talmud, Bava Kamma, 116b.

11. Fromm, *You shall be as gods*, 74.

12. Barret-Kriegel, *L'État et les esclaves*, 100.

13. Barret-Kriegel, *L'État et les esclaves*, 100.

14. Bloch, *Atheism in Christianity*, 13.

15. Gérard Walter, *Les Origines du communisme* [The Origins of Communism] (Paris: Payot, 1931).

16. Levinas, *Difficult Freedom*, 19.

17. *Le Monde*, 3 April 1979.

18. The name Edom was subsequently symbolically attributed to the Roman Empire, then to the Christian Church following the Constantinian compromise (see Goldstein, *Jewish Folklore and Legend*, 72–73).

19. Hadar Zenikim on Genesis 25:25.

20. Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals* (trans. Kaufmann), 34.

21. Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals* (trans. Kaufmann), 34.

22. E. R. Dodds, *Pagan and Christian in an Age of Anxiety: Some Aspects of Religious Experience from Marcus Aurelius to Constantine* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1965), 134.

23. Dodds, *Pagan and Christian in an Age of Anxiety*, 135.

24. Nietzsche, *The Anti-Christ* (trans. Hollingdale), §51.

25. Claude Tresmontant, *Saint Paul et le mystère du Christ* [Saint Paul and the Mystery of Christ] (Paris: Seuil, 1956), 166.

26. Julius Evola, *Revolt Against the Modern World*, trans. Guido Stucco (Rochester, VT: Inner Traditions, 1995), 287.

27. Julius Evola, *Men among the Ruins: Post-War Reflections of a Radical Traditionalist*, trans. Guido Stucco, ed. Michael Moynihan (Rochester, VT: Inner Traditions, 2002), 212–13.

28. Jacques Ellul, *Living Faith: Belief and Doubt in a Perilous World*, trans. Peter Heinegg (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2012), 234.

29. Ellul, *Living Faith*, 243.

30. Bernard-Henry Lévy, *Barbarism with a Human Face* (New York: Harper Collins, 1979).

31. Lévy, *Le Testament de Dieu*, 49. It is purely out of decorum that I am forcing myself to take seriously here an author for whom "radical cosmopolitanism" is to be "reinvented against all communitarian illusions" (p. 162); who insistently calls for "the fundamental right of everyone . . . to betray," by unjustifiably assimilating resistance, refusal to belong, and treason; who attributes to the "genius of Judaism" the idea of God "doing Evil" (p. 237), a "failed" God, a God "who has botched his work, and botched it for all time" (p. 247); a God who has no hesitation at turning Exile, which all of Jewish tradition viewed as a punishment, a trial in the strict sense of the word, into the most exemplary model of every condition, and so on. It is true, paper can withstand anything.

32. Trigano, *La Nouvelle question juive*, 77.

33. "In a very systematic fashion," writes Carl Schmitt, "liberal thought evades or ignores state and politics and moves instead in a typical always recurring polarity of two heterogeneous spheres, namely ethics and economics, the intellect and trade . . . . These dissolutions aim with great precision at subjugating state and politics, partially into an individualist domain of private law and morality, partially into economic notions. In doing so they deprive state and politics of their specific meaning" (*The Concept of the Political*, trans. George Schwab [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007], 70, 72.)

34. Nietzsche, *The Anti-Christ* (trans. Hollingdale), §62. [Nietzsche here uses the French *rancune* to mean "the rancorous," in other words, those possessed of resentment toward anything superior to them. —*Ed*.]

35. Julien Freund, *L'Essence du politique* [The Essence of Politics] (Paris: Sirey, 1965), 44–45.

36. Freund, *L'Essence du politique*, 751.

37. If the State is prevented from insuring (or does not wish to insure) its normal political role of authority, other sources of authority will be found. If so, it could be said that politics "has invaded everything." To a large extent this is what is happening today.

38. See Freund, *L'Essence du politique*, chap. 10, "Le moyen spécifique du politique," 704–51.

39. Freund, *L'Essence du politique*, 564.

40. Julien Freund, *Le Droit d'aujourd'hui* [The Law of Today] (Paris: PUF, 1972), 9.

41. Freund, *Le Droit d'aujourd'hui*, 10.

42. Georges Dumézil, *Mitra-Varuna: An Essay on Two Indo-European Representations of Sovereignty* (New York: Zone Books, 1988); *Les Dieux souverains des Indo-Européens* [Sovereign Gods of the Indo-Europeans] (Paris: Gallimard, 1948).

43. Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols* (trans. Hollingdale), §38.

44. Schmitt, *The Concept of the Political*, 53.

45. Saint Augustine says that "*audacia* separates the soul from God" (*De moribus*, 1, 20). This word *audacia* here translates the Greek *tolma*, the name the Pythagoreans gave to the Dyad, that is, the principle of conflict as opposed to the One.

46. François George, *Souvenirs de la maison Marx*, 303.

47. Heraclitus, Fragment 80 (trans. John Burnet).

48. Friedrich Nietzsche, *Philosophy in the Tragic Age of the Greeks*, trans. Marianne Cowan (Washington, D.C.: Regnery, 1998), 55.

49. Saxo Grammaticus, *The History of the Danes, Books I–IX*, ed. Hilda Ellis Davidson, trans. Peter Fisher (Woodbridge, UK: Brewer, 1996), II, 65 (p. 62).

50. On the notions of "tripartite structure" and "war of foundation," I refer the reader to the various works of Georges Dumézil. See also, for a synthesis of these works, *Georges Dumézil à la découverte des Indo-Européens* [Georges Dumézil: The Discovery of the Indo-Europeans], ed. Jean-Claude Rivière (Paris: Copernic, 1979). [English readers may consult C. Scott Littleton, *The New Comparative Mythology: An Anthropological Assessment of the Theories of Georges Dumézil*, 3rd ed. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982). —*Ed.*]

51. Maffesoli, *La Violence totalitaire*, 184.

52. Weber, "Science as a Vocation," 333.

53. It is this typically agonistic practice that Goliath, the Philistine, proposes in the Bible: "Choose your man to meet me. If he can kill me in fair fight, we will become your slaves; but if I prove too strong for him and kill him, you shall be our slaves and serve us. Here I now defy the ranks of Israel. Give me a man, . . . and we will fight it out" (1 Samuel 17:8–10). This proposal, as we know, was rejected. David killed Goliath by treachery, without approaching him in the conditions required by the duel: "So David proved the victor with his sling and stone; he struck Goliath down and gave a mortal wound, though he had no sword" (1 Samuel 17:50).

54. Maffesoli, *La Violence totalitaire*, 61–62.

55. Among the Indo-Europeans, twins, as a symbol of duplication—whether it involves the Ashvins of Vedic India, Castor and Pollux (the Dioscuri) in Greece, and probably Njörd and Frey for the Germans—spring from the "third function," in other words, the productive caste. For more on this

theme, see Donald Ward, "The Divine Twins: An Indo-European Mythological Theme in Germanic Tradition," in *Indo-European and Indo-Europeans*, ed. George Cardona, Henry M. Hoenigswald, and Alfred Senn (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1970), 405–20.

56. Freund, *L'Essence du politique*, 499.

57. Freund, *L'Essence du politique*, 506.

58. Bernard-Henri Lévy does not elude this rule. "For Christianity," he writes, "the other man is amicable simply because he is a man; for Judaism, because he is truly a man and ceaselessly proves it by repeating his allegiance to the Law" (*Le Testament de Dieu*, 253). This amounts to saying that someone who does not pledge allegiance to the Law of the Bible cannot "demonstrate" he is a man, that he is not truly a human being, but a subhuman. I am given to understand that in his book *L'Idéologie française* [The French Ideology] (Paris: Grasset, 1981), the same author called for a "rehabilitation of sectarianism" (pp. 252–53).

59. Freund, *L'Essence du politique*, 478.

60. Emmanuel Levinas, *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1969), 293.

61. Freund, *L'Essence du politique*, 478.

62. Schmitt, *The Concept of the Political*, 53.

63. Martin Heidegger, *The End of Philosophy*, trans. Joan Stambaugh (New York: Harper & Row, 1973), §23.

Chapter Twenty

Man's Place in Nature

The desert is monotheist. This is the well-known formula that Ernest Renan added to the review of a manuscript, a formula that has become famous today. It figures in his *General History and Comparative System of the Semitic Languages*: "Nature holds little place in the Semitic religions; the desert is monotheist; sublime in its immense uniformity, it first revealed the idea of infinity to man, but not the feeling of an incessantly creative life that a more fertile nature inspired in other races."[1] This sentiment is seldom repeated today—independently of the fact that the desert is not as monotonous and foreign to alterity as one might think. It is nonetheless possible that it holds a kernel of truth. Erich Fromm, for example, without regarding the desert as the source of monotheism, accepts the possibility of the influence of one's life environment on one's general conception of the world. Evoking its significance as the "symbol of the unfettered, nonpropertied life," he considers the desert as the "key symbol" of the exodus from Egypt: "The desert is no home: it has no cities; it has no riches."[2] Was it not then necessary that the Torah was given to man in the desert, in this landscape that frees the mind of all visible things and plunges it into the abyss of its own night? "Pastoral life, solitude, and pure time facilitate the revelation that, as we know, is produced in the desert," write Eisenberg and Abécassis. "God has chosen a people of nomads and not a sedentary people, and forged it in the desert before giving it the Promised Land, so that it would not become tied down there and would remain faithful to its vocation."[3] A similar idea was displayed in the sixteenth century by the Maharal of Prague: "Because the Torah is divine, because it is absolute intellect and not a collection of proprieties, it was given in the desert, because the desert presents an affinity with what is derived from God and intellect."[4] Mircea Eliade observes, finally: "The preeminently

clean and holy region is the desert alone, for it is there that Israel remained faithful to its God."[5]

Renan also writes: "There are monotheist races just as there are polytheist races, and this difference stems from an original diversity in the way they envision nature."[6] It is a somewhat extreme opinion to be sure, but one that has the advantage of emphasizing this much-debated notion of "nature." If being is the world, there would in fact necessarily be kinship, filiation, and consubstantiality of beings and ways of being (and the ways of being between them), a consubstantiality, consequently, of man and "nature" like that of man and God. This bond of man to "nature," let us say right off, should not be interpreted as mere *naturalism*—the "return to Nature" dear to Rousseau's disciples, ecologists, and *völkisch* sects—but as an active participation of man in all that exists, based on his clear awareness of what exists. In this perspective, God can be in all things, not in the sense of a *logos* that contrives tangible reality from within, but as a *dimension* of this reality: the dimension of *depth*. The mist on the mountain, the song of a bird, the flittering path of an insect can bear its mark. God can spread out toward man in the movement of the waves, the seeding grass, the blossoming flower. (Cf. the Christian paganism of Saint Francis of Assisi, who praises "our sister the moon," "our brother the wind," "our mother the earth, our mother who bears and nurtures us," and "especially my lord our brother the sun.")

In the Indo-European religions, as I have stated earlier, man is the measure of God. The society of the gods is modeled on that of men, whose perpetuation and duration it safeguards by providing it with an ideal representation. Man is the sole *creator of the gods*, because he is the sole giver of meaning. In Olympus or Valhalla, the gods exercise a functional social role in accordance with the model of the tripartite ideology, which has its equivalent in the city of men, either concretely or "ideologically" (in the Dumézilian sense of the word). Far from being its opposite, the pantheon provides the human world with its most intense and solid justification. It constitutes its *exaltation*. The gods themselves display the characteristics of humans and testify to the same variety of aspirations. In the *Iliad*, when Zeus envisions rescuing Hector from the spear of Achilles, the goddess Athena tells him: "Do as you please, but do not expect the rest of us immortals to approve."[7] Likewise, when Brynhildr (Brunhild) disobeys Odin—an episode alluded to in the *Edda*, in the final verse of

"Fáfnismál"—it is only reluctantly that her father imprisons her inside the circle of fire as punishment. She will eventually be freed by Sigurðr (Siegfried). This is because Zeus and Odin are sovereigns, not despots. And religion here forms the natural cement for these collective structures, which the religions of individual salvation—especially in their profane forms—will often have the effect of shattering. The gods, finally, are mortal. At the end of the cycle, they disappear.

Among the Indo-Europeans, Jean Varenne observes: "there is a *continuity* between the most humble of creatures and the highest of the gods. This in no way implies that all these beings are commingled or equal; quite the contrary, they form clearly separate and hierarchical groups. . . . The norm is for each living being to fully assume his personal condition or, as it is expressed in the Vedas, his *dharma*: both his 'status' and his 'position,' that is to say, his place in the hierarchical scale of things."[8]

This continuity that connects the divine sphere and the sphere of men, and simultaneously the sacred and the profane, opposite to the dualism inherent to the world of the Bible, is one of the most characteristic features of paganism. In pre-Christian antiquity, there was no distinction between religion and civic life; this was not to subjugate civic life and deprive it of its own norms, but on the contrary, to *sacralize* it. Among the Romans, *pietas* is primarily a social virtue. Religion in Rome sacralized the organic collectivities, from family to fatherland—hence the importance of the domestic cults and, on the other hand, the civic cult, which was later expanded to the imperial cult. It refers especially to respect for social norms and natural relations between individuals. It expands common discipline and extends the hierarchy. In this sense, it rests less on "morality," or more exactly belief, than on participation in the rituals. To "practice" a cult is to be a good citizen and to affirm one's solidarity with the destiny of the city. Among the Germans, the cult is the foundation of the sacred, which is the foundation of law. Religion is inseparable from the *heiðinn siðr*, the "heathen custom." "This detail is illuminating," says Régis Boyer emphatically, "because it provides sufficient grounds for concluding that the Germanic religion only existed in the framework of cultural practices as a whole. . . . It is in the practice of the rituals as participant or spectator that the German enters religion."[9] The same could be said about the Iranians, the Vedic Indians, and the Celts. In contrast to what has been often asserted, Judeo-Christian monotheism created less the conditions for respect of the

individual, than those that would lead to its deformation under the form of *individualism*—the ideology, which (once transposed to profane life), justifies in the name of an abstract universal truth the rupture of the individual's solidarity with the city. The relationship to the divine then becomes a purely individual matter: one makes one's own salvation. (This feature, as we have seen, is given special emphasis in Christianity; Judaism largely offsets it through the idea of the "election" of an entire *people*.) In paganism, religion tends to primarily govern situations of collective interest; it gives a large role to the *person* (rather than the *individual*), but while taking into consideration those *memberships* the person belongs to which are indispensable toward the apprehension of his or her identity. "It is not as an individual," notes Jean-Pierre Vernant, "that the Greek man respects or fears a god, but *as the head of the family*, the member of a *genos*, a *phratry*, a *demos*, a *city*." This communitarian bond is so strong that in numerous ancient European societies, outlawry is considered an exemplary punishment on its own. (The idea according to which the outlaw, by being removed from the community, endures a kind of sacred curse, remained vital right into the Middle Ages.)

Subsequently, in paganism, the person is inseparable from his lineage. In ancient Scandinavian spirituality, the family constitutes one of the foundations of existence, along with honor and destiny. A number of important decisions and actions are based solely on familial membership—and it was not considered "prideful" to wish to equal one's father, but, to the contrary, it was a dishonor if one demonstrated less worth than him. Immortality itself is connected to the world, as a memory that is left behind and transmitted as a living model. In this example, any *shame* or transgression of honor is a denial of the sacred. "Physical" and "spiritual" eternity combine. The majority of Indo-European peoples believed in some sort of "beyond" (in Sanskrit *paradesha*, in Avestan *pairidaēza*, from which comes the word *paradise*), but this was still a *trans-position* of this world. Far from representing the antithesis of real life, far from even suppressing the conflict that forms the contextual framework of the world, it carries them to a higher level. "In Valhalla, there is still fighting. And the casualties arise anew, unharmed, at the evening of every day, by their mortal wounds."[10] Before even the appearance of the theme of Valhalla, which some scholars regard as a relatively late creation, Nordic devotion toward the souls of the dead was all the greater as those souls did not truly leave

this world; the dead were believed to find shelter in some part of the earth or sky, and they "inhabited" a given *site* in the vicinity of their former hearth, and so on. All commentators are in agreement with the view that belief in the *landvœttir*, the souls of the dead, for example, was an essential feature of Icelandic paganism. (These souls sometimes became elves, which Christianity transformed into demons.) Among the Greeks, the Elysian Fields were also only a sublime projection of this world. Among the Celts, the *sid*, located "beyond the seas," at the bottom of lakes, in the hills, or beneath the mounds, is "a world parallel to our own that, while it is different or remote, is superimposed over this world or suffuses it."[11] As we understand it, this Celtic "paradise" has "almost nothing in common with the Christian paradise, and is very conceptually close to the Germanic Valhalla and Islamic heavens. Its occupants lead a life of pleasure and delight; there they are loved by women of extraordinary beauty and high social rank. Sin (a Christian notion) and transgression (a pre-Christian notion) are unknown there."[12] The Swedish scholar Stig Wikander has established, for his part, that the theme of the "kingdom of heaven" was of Indo-European origin.[13] This brings to mind the words that Nietzsche had Zarathustra exclaim: "I love those who do not first seek behind the stars for a reason to go under or be a sacrifice, but who sacrifice themselves for the earth, that the earth may some day become the overman's."[14]

This fundamental idea of a *continuity* between the human being and the world being can, however, only be fully grasped on the condition, let me repeat, that it is not interpreted from the standpoint of naturalism. In my opinion, there has been far too much depiction of paganism as a "nature religion," that disregards all transcendence and is limited in some sense to only sacralizing natural determinisms. Some of its aspects, namely in folk and rural paganism, whose more or less distorted "survivals" have been numerous, have given that interpretation a foothold. Furthermore, this interpretation was systematized by Christian propaganda in order to have an easy means of opposing with the prerogative of the "spirit," on which this new faith claims to have a monopoly, the naturalistic naïveté of those "who worshipped stones and imaginary things." This image is essentially false, and to cling to it is a grave error.

In fact, *nature* is only one aspect of the world; it is not to be mistaken for it. Asserting the existence of a continuity between man and the world is

not tantamount to reintegrating man among things—both animate and inanimate—and is even less a case of reducing him to his own "nature" (to the biological, the animal inside him) or stripping him of his specific character. Not only must continuity be viewed in a plural and even dialectical way (the laws of human consciousness cannot be reduced to the biological any more than the biological can be reduced to the micro-physical), but it should be recognized that it works in two opposing directions, "upstream" and "downstream," man going toward *nature* and man going toward *divinity*. This gives us reason to share Julius Evola's opinion, according to which "what characterizes the pre-Christian world, at least in its higher forms, has nothing in common with the superstitious divination of nature; rather it involves a symbolic comprehension of it through which all phenomena and all exterior actions appear as the tangible manifestation of a world beyond the tangible."[15]

We find here all the ambiguity of "good nature." It is true that "nature," as a representation of an aspect of the world, is fundamentally "good." It is not so much that it determines us fully—so that, to a certain extent, we draw our meaning from it. On the contrary, it is far more a case of man who, by shaping it according to his will, determines nature and gives it meaning. In a certain school of neo-paganism—the very same one that Evola criticized—there is an entire theme of the "golden age," of "primitive pagan innocence," which appears highly dubious to me, as are the doctrines that are often attached to it (neo-Rousseauism with its ultra-federalist resonance, *völkisch* ecologism, anarcho-primitivism, and so on). This thematic implies a deterministic and "biologistic" conception of man that does not correspond to reality, and which, paradoxically, intersects with the Judeo-Christian myth of Adamic innocence (which probably influenced it to some degree).

The theology of paganism is not a theology of *nature* but a theology of the *world*. Nature displays the face of being, but does not constitute its ultimate determination. And just as the continuity between all the states of being, notably between men and gods, does not imply that these beings are blended together or spontaneously equal, the protest the European spirit has ceaselessly expressed against the separation of heaven and earth, man and God, body and soul, does not imply that all these terms are placed on the same level. Body and soul are extensions of each other; they are both consubstantial to the world, yet it is the soul that "rules." With regard to the

body, it is what one could call an *emergent* quality. This is why paganism poses as a postulate the primacy of the *idea*—an idea that should not, however, be confused with the Platonic *logos*. This is also why I reject all primarily naturalistic interpretations of the Indo-European religions, to seek out the "core," not in a deification of the "natural elements," nor even in a series of historic events transfigured by myth, but purely and simply in an *ideological system*, a particular *view of the world*, which immediately gives meaning to all its components. From this perspective, we could say that man "creates" the world through the way he looks at it, that the soul "forms itself" a body, that a collective view of the world "forms" a society by *in-forming* it, and so on. We find ourselves in a place that is the exact opposite of naturalism.

As the "creator" of nature, man is also the creator of the gods. He shares in God every time he surpasses himself, every time he attains the boundaries of his best and strongest aspects. This idea will be repeated by Nietzsche, at least from a certain perspective, with the theme—so often poorly understood—of the overman. It finds in modern "philosophical anthropology" (Gehlen, Portmann, Plessner) its epistemological justifications with the theme of man the builder, constructor of himself. Finally, it will be developed by Heidegger—and Levinas is right to see in Heidegger's "piety devoted to mythic gods" an idea that is completely alien to him: an "offensive return of these forms of human elevation."[16]

Paganism takes natural determinisms into consideration, but it does not make man subject to them. It always opposes the *inevitable* with human freedom and heroic will. In pre-Christian antiquity, whether in Germanic sagas, the Roman representation of *fatum*, or Greek tragedy, we constantly come across the idea that the impossible *must* be attempted, even and especially when it is *truly* impossible. The notion of *destiny* is different from that of *predestination*. It is an embodiment in every man of the sacred, which, as such, is associated with a process of *becoming*. Man does not suffer his fate; he can freely fulfill it, take charge of it or attempt to oppose it if he has a different *idea* of what it should be. Among the ancient Germanic peoples, Régis Boyer points out, the concept of destiny "undergoes a kind of assimilation," in which it becomes equated with the spirit of struggle (*víghugr*): "Man creates an idea of himself that is the translation of his destiny, he will seek to manifest it through his actions his entire life; his objective will have been attained if this idea is acknowledged

by his contemporaries in common accord. Society is the enclosed field where a man's reputation is made, where the shape of his destiny proves itself."[17] For the ancient Scandinavians, destiny or fate was not a harmful, hostile power. It is rather the entire set of authentic states that experience allows one to undergo. When we read the texts of the sagas, notes Peter Hallberg, "it is primarily not fate, immutable and dark, which holds the attention of the reader, but rather the heroic attitude of the characters toward this fate—not defeat, but victory."[18] It is the importance of the notion of destiny that determines that of the notion of honor and not the other way around. It is because of the fact that one has a destiny, that it is dishonorable to avoid facing it: "In a world where, after one has explored one's capabilities, one decides to go all the way to the end, honor is to not betray the idea that one has of oneself."[19] (In this sense, dishonor is also mediocrity.) In a more general fashion, explains Jean Varenne, "it appears the Indo-Europeans professed that destiny is in fact the expression of the necessary progression of our actions (law of causality). For this reason, my free will (or that of a god intervening in the course of events) appears as a 'materialization' of my destiny. I can be a hero if that is what I wish; and if I become one (if my will is strong enough, if the gods are not against me), one will be able to rightfully say this was my destiny."[20] In paganism, destiny is a *principle of life.*

The notion of *fatum* does not entail "obedience," submission, or renunciation. To the contrary, it stimulates the desire to take action and upholds the *tragic* sentiment of life. As stressed by Schopenhauer, the tragic is connected to the clear awareness man has of his weakness, the ephemeral nature of his life—and *at the same time*, his ceaselessly reasserted desire to compensate for this weakness with a creative *intensity*. In other words, the tragic implies a will to measure oneself against time, without ever finding the slightest pretext for renouncing it, despite the certainty of its final outcome: death. It upholds this "pessimism of strength" that Heidegger opposed to the "pessimism of weakness" and which "demands awareness of the conditions and powers which, in spite of everything, secure the mastery of our historical situation."[21] Heroism thus consists of struggling against what will eventually triumph—but a "natural" triumph, to which it is always possible to oppose another specifically human triumph. It is because there is a destiny that man, by attempting to fulfill or oppose it, can be

heroic, surpassing himself and partaking of divine status. *Amor fati*: the sole means of submitting without submitting, exaltation carried to the deepest depths of an *agonal* temperament which makes struggle—starting with the struggle against oneself—the very essence of life.

Among the Stoics we also find the idea that free will, the condition of individual worth, is not ruled out by predestination. This view was one that Chrysippus developed at length. Cicero, in *De Fato*, and Alexander of Aphrodisias, in his *Treatise On Fate*, distinguish "antecedent causes," about which we can do nothing, from "immanent causes" that depend solely on us. Fate rules human affairs, said Seneca, but man's inner freedom is never afflicted by adversity; man can always freely determine the meaning of his actions. Later, within the very heart of Christianity, a current of "heretical" thought would fight against the determinism of hereditary sin, while theologians confronted each other on *predestination* and *grace* to arrive at the conclusion that man is still free to act within what has been "given" him in advance. Hölderlin, a fervent admirer of ancient Greece, declared that it is by realizing oneself in what is most removed from one's "nature"—namely, in that which compels the greatest self-constraint—that a people can give the best of themselves. This conception of freedom is closely tied to a certain conception of history: "nature," the innate, and the past each *condition* man's future but do not *determine* it. It is within this semantic space, between "conditioning" and "determining," that our freedom lies: *man can only work with what he has; but it is with what he has, that he is able to be and do as he wills.*

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1. Renan, *Histoire générale et système comparé des langues sémitiques*, 6.

2. Fromm, *To Have or to Be*, 42.

3. Eisenberg and Abécassis, *Moi, le gardien de mon frère?* 75.

4. See Theodore Dreyfus, *Dieu parle aux hommes* [God Speaks to Men] (Paris: Klincksieck, 1969), 138–41.

5. Eliade, *A History of Religious Ideas*, vol. 1, 354.

6. Ernest Renan, *Etudes d'histoire religieuse* [Studies in Religious History] (Paris: Lévy, 1857).

7. Homer, *Iliad*, XXII, 180.

8. Jean Varenne, "Les Indo-Européens," in *Dictionnaire des mythologies* (Paris: Flammarion, 1980), 45.

9. Régis Boyer and Éveline Lot-Falck, *Les Religions de l'Europe du Nord* [The Religions of Northern Europe] (Paris: Fayard, 1974), 43–45.

10. Boyer and Lot-Falck, *Les Religions de l'Europe du Nord*, 32.

11. Françoise Le Roux and Christian J. Guyonvarc'h, *La Civilisation celtique* [Celtic Civilization] (Rennes: Ogam, 1979), 122.

12. Le Roux and Guyonvarc'h, *La Civilisation celtique*, 123. Belief in reincarnation, attested mainly among the Indians, seems to also correspond with the idea that immortality does not imply a radical break with tangible reality. Caesar, for his part, wrote: "What (the Druids) mainly strive to persuade us to believe, is that souls do not die, but pass after the death of one body into another" (*De bello gallico* [The Gallic Wars], 6, 14). Lucan, Strabo, and Diodorus Siculus made similar observations. Contemporary research, however, shows that belief in metempsychosis in the strict sense is practically absent from the Celtic world; see Françoise Le Roux and Christian J. Guyonvarc'h, *Les Druides* [The Druids] (Rennes: Ogam, 1978).

13. Stig Wikander, "Histoire des Ouranides" ["History of the Ouranides"], *Cahiers du Sud* 36 (1952), 8–17.

14. *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* (trans. Kaufmann), bk. I, Prologue, §4.

15. Evola, "Le malentendu du 'nouveau paganisme.'"

16. Levinas, *Difficult Freedom*, 14.

17. Boyer and Lot-Falck, *Les religions de l'Europe du Nord*, 19. In the ancient Germanic world, the notion of fate was rendered by words such as Old Norse *ørlög*, which through the intermediary of the prefix *or-* (*ur-* in German) echoes the "original laws," or by Old English *wyrd*, a feminine noun formed from the past tense form of the verb *weorðan*, "to become" (cf. German *werden*).

18. Peter Hallberg, *The Icelandic Saga*, trans. Paul Schach (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1962), 96.

19. Régis Boyer, *La vie religieuse en Islande, 1116–1124* [Religious Life in Iceland, 1116–1124] (Paris: Singer-Polignac Foundation, 1979), 336.

20. Varenne, *Les Indo-Européens*, 45.

21. Martin Heidegger, *Off the Beaten Track*, ed. and trans. by Julian Young and Kenneth Haynes (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 168.

Chapter Twenty-One
Sex and the Body

The distance separating all forms of naturalism from the conception of the world proposed and examined here also allows us to reject the reduction of paganism to a sort of "Gallic" or Rabelaisian *sensualism*, let alone one that is libertine or donjuanesque. To believe some people, to live in the "pagan" style consists of unbridling the senses, uprooting any idea of fault or any examination of conscience: to eat well, drink well, copulate well—in opposition to the morality of the "men in black," who preach asceticism, abstinence, and poverty. Accordingly, an entire strain of "paganism-lite" has developed, based on Casanova-style libertinism when it isn't "sexual esotericism" or a Hollywood-inspired *pagan sensationalism*.[1] This primarily Latin "interpretation,"[2] which reeks of inverted Catholicism—the Catholicism of the *carnival* and the "festival of fools"—obviously finds its principal justification in the Christian attitudes that led to the devaluation of woman, the body, sexual desire, and made "carnal lust" one of the seven deadly sins. Nonetheless, it still comes across to me as highly dubious.

European antiquity provides us with—and is at same the proof of—the vision of a freely assumed "natural" sexuality in which the taboos and prohibitions that were much later borne by Christianity are largely non-existent. This fact has been pointed out hundreds of times, and for convincing proof we need only refer back to the testimonies of ancient authors or to modern scholarship (see, for example, Paul Veyne's studies on Roman sexual life[3]). This does not mean that paganism can be summed up as sexual freedom. Nor does it mean that it is appropriate to imagine a pre-Christian Europe that disregards modesty and chastity and honors a pan-sexuality in which "anything goes." Such a picture corresponds too closely to Christian propaganda to be taken seriously—and those who fall for it are

satisfied to make a positive out of what Christians deem a negative, and are indirectly playing into the latter's hands. While the sexual ethics of early Europe is generally free, and devoid of any idea of sin, it is not free of standards. Sacred prostitution, pansexuality, unbridled passions, and the Eastern orgy are foreign to it, for the most part, and it is only during periods of decline that all norms of sexuality are abandoned. History has recorded the terrible way in which the Roman Senate repressed the worship of Dionysus after the Bacchanalia scandals of 186 BCE. Homer applauded the amorous jousts of his heroes as much as he sang of their virtue. Stoicism expresses with exceptional vigor a great distrust toward certain forms of unbridled sexual passion. We can also be assured that in archaic Greece, under the Roman Republic, or among the ancient Germans, a master of sexual deviations like Gilles de Rais would not have lived to enjoy a ripe old age! Wasn't it Georges Sorel who, in *The Illusions of Progress*, maintained that the decline of aristocratic values went hand in hand with that of ascetic morality?[4] Casual sexuality—again not to be confused with a serenely assumed sexual freedom—is essentially indistinguishable from other forms of personality destruction.

Moreover, in Christianity, the devaluation of the body and of sexuality, just like its scorn of women, derives in part from the waning of Hellenic society. Without fully subscribing—far from it—to the opinions of a Claude Tresmontant or a Pierre Chaunu on this point,[5] it is certain that Christian theology clearly accentuated features that only existed in more moderate form in ancient Judaism. This hatred of the body, as Nietzsche observed, contributed in no small way to the creation of a feeling of guilt that Christian moralists exploited constantly. For Catholic theologians, the "shame" associated with "physical lust" is the direct fruit of original sin.[6] Without going to the extremes of Gnosticism, early Christian philosophy was influenced by Plato, who depicted the body as a prison for the soul and death as liberation, as well as a doctrine of the Fall, which views physical existence as the cause of human woe. During the first centuries after Christ, even the theory of the resurrection of the physical body could not easily divert Christians from their scorn of the physical world, as well as from certain deluded negative ascetic practices (which would eventually be banned by canon law).[7] "Miserable creature that I am," exclaimed Paul, "who is there to rescue me out of this body doomed to death?" (Romans

7:24). Marriage itself, whose result would be the "Christian hearth," is only a second-best solution over which celibacy should always be preferable. In 1563 the Council of Trent would reassert against the Reformers: "If any one saith, that the marriage state is to be placed above the state of virginity, or of celibacy, and that it is not better and more blessed to remain in virginity, or in celibacy, than to be united in matrimony; let him be anathema."[8] The Alexandrian writer known as Philo Judaeus, whose philosophy had a marked influence on Christian thought, wrote: "God has no reason for his hatred of pleasure." Saint Anthony claimed to blush every time he ate or performed a bodily function. Saint Jerome would go so far as to say that "the purity of the body and its garments means the impurity of the soul."[9] Saint Birgitta exclaimed: "God cannot inhabit a wholesome body." Early Christianity heaped praise on filthiness; the Church killed the bath.[10]

This tendency is not to be found in Judaism. The Jewish tradition generally provides a much less misogynistic reading of the story of Eve's "seduction" by the serpent (Genesis 3:1–7). In the opinion of a number of rabbis, if the serpent did not address Adam, it is not because as a male he would have been harder to seduce, but simply because he was "busy elsewhere."[11] Likewise, for a whole school of Judaism, sexuality is not a consequence of original sin; Cain and Abel would have been produced before this event occurred. (This is notably the view of Rashi, in opposition to Ibn Ezra's interpretation.) The first of all the *mitzvoth* is the stipulation to found a home; furthermore, it is the importance of this precept that explains such practices as the levirate marriage. The bachelor is considered to be an "incomplete" man; he is not eligible to preside over the day of Yom Kippur. As for physical health and cleanliness, the Talmud specifically says that "it is forbidden to live in a town that does not have public baths,"[12] and adds that the delights of which Ecclesiastes speaks are "pools and baths."[13]

What really needs to be grasped here is that the *taboo*, just like the *transgression of the taboo*, is part and parcel of the same world—and it is this very world that paganism surpasses. Excesses function in pairs and provide mutual justification: the priest needs the sinner, just as the sinner allegedly needs the priest. The modern incitement to achieve sexual fulfillment "for reasons of health" has the same *sense* as the ancient admonitions for abstinence or the Christian imperative to procreate. Certain "revolutionary" sexologies define themselves according to the same values

as “bourgeois” sexology. From Hippocrates and Galen to Wilhelm Reich, we remain within the same *ideology of the effusion* (of humors or inclinations). Georges Bataille, a theoretician of Dionysian intoxication and pantheist akin to a surrealist mystic (whose theory of eroticism reveals the strong influence of Hegel and Nietzsche), writes: “What one calls the *pleasures of the flesh* . . . pollutes not only my body and my thoughts, but also . . . the great starry universe.” There could be nothing more Christian, in short, than the carnivals and other *grotesque* excesses where natures overflow, under a form of intentionally emphasized lunacy, to sponge up the overflow of constraints and permit the dogma, once the Chinese lanterns have been extinguished, to reassert its rights. There is nothing more Christian than this pornography whose only attraction is that it is *forbidden*, nothing more Christian than these “lewd” songs, with which the deflective ritual of *diversion* expresses itself. (And it is perhaps no accident that the negative asceticism was especially preached by two Africans of excessive sensuality, namely Augustine and Tertullian, following their conversion to Christianity.)

I am definitely on the same side as those who exalt the strength and beauty of the physical body against those who try to devalue it in the name of the primacy of universal reason identified with the Judeo-Christian *logos* —like Nicolas Malebranche when he rails against man with the “free and jaunty air,” master of the “figures that flatter the senses and excite the passions.” But I also reject “liberating” pansexuality, and do so for two specific theoretical reasons. First, because man is not pure *naturality*; he cannot be reduced to biology, instinct, and impulse. Second, because what gives him specificity is based on his ability to *construct* himself—not by refusing to accept constraints, but by those constraints he imposes upon himself. These two assertions are obviously connected; because man is not fully controlled by nature, he is *compelled* to form himself. Now, if we accept that man is not merely an animal, if we accept that he constructs himself through the mastery and channeling of his impulses, then it is impossible to accept the subsequent reduction of paganism to “libertinism.” Even better, if man does construct himself, if the object and content of his impulses are not predetermined, if the mind shapes the body by exercising constraint upon it, then all anarchic unleashing of the instincts equates to the very annihilation of the personality. The “liberation” of all the impulses is not paganism but sub-Freudianism. In no way does paganism consist of

thinking oneself free of all obligation and constraint, the avoidance of all examination of conscience, the deliverance from all existential anguish, and even all idea of fault. In many respects, it is exactly the opposite.

Nietzsche himself said that the normal rule of life is not complete casualness but the constraint exercised upon the self: the grand style means "to become master of the chaos one is; to compel one's chaos to become form."[14] As was clearly stressed by Paul Valadier—one of the best current experts on Nietzsche—the opposition established by the author of *Zarathustra* between Dionysos and the Crucified One is *not* the opposition between a surging vital energy, content with itself, and a morbid taste for suffering, but is in fact the opposition between a *tragic* way of living though suffering, and the *Christian* way of tolerating it. There is a link between the truth of the Eternal Return of the Same and the renewal of the sufferings we endure. Nietzsche knew full well that the idea of suffering disappearing was in no way a "superhuman" desire, but—on the contrary—a desire expressed by the *Last Man*, attached as he is to the quest for comfort, individual well-being, and security at any price. "Only great pain is the ultimate liberator of the spirit."[15] This is the *tragic* value of suffering, which assigns a value to being *as sacred enough* to again justify an immensity of suffering.[16]

The original experience of Faustian man is the experience of *free will*. Nature not being a fundamental determinant for him, man makes himself a man by fully assuming his historicity. Henceforth entirely *responsible*, he finds himself prey to an inevitable—and fertile—existential anguish. This anguish, the new form of the tragic sentiment, is conducive to burning up the individual's freedom to transform him into a creator—in order, still, to compensate for his lack of *duration* with *intensity*—which leads him continuously to make *choices* in conformance with his *projects*. Hence the introspection, the examination of conscience, the unease about meaning, and indeed too about guilt. To *negative* asceticism, which is a flight from the real and a negation of vital energy, paganism thereby opposes a *positive* asceticism, which results from the constraint one exercises upon oneself to construct oneself in conformity with the idea one holds of oneself. In the second case, it involves giving form to impulses; in the first, extinguishing them. Therein lies the true antilogy.

This does not mean we must necessarily reject the world of *aesthetic* and *literary* paganism, infatuated with myrtle and laurel, the splendid body and serene sensuality, which for many centuries has inspired a host of

painters, writers, and sculptors. Devotion to the Greece of white marble, the fragrant scents of Olympus, the Alexandrian graces—all of these have their charm, and even something more. And it is also true that for the French literati of the nineteenth century, antiquity primarily represented a life more boldly sensual, more beautiful, and more hedonistic, a life at the opposite extreme to the dark and guilt-inducing melancholies maintained by a Christian dogma that only seemed to disappear to make way for the ugliness of the present day. Nietzsche also extolled the "great health" of the pagan in comparison to the "sickly contemplations" of the Christian mind. Nevertheless, this overly academic paganism, petrified into the inherently static state of "Apollonian" finitude, this paganism with a base of laurels and cypress, shapely women and chaste naiads, sun and cicadas, this sweet, rural sensuality, this luminous and aromatic world, is quite often essentially reduced to a vibrant, exalting description of nature, its maternal warmth and hidden voluptuousness. This description implies and inspires an obvious sympathy for the pagan world. But by itself, it can in no way sum up its spirit. Paganism is not simply a matter of polished marble and acanthus, no more than the organization of Platonic symposiums is enough to give one any basis to talk of real-life paganism. (And this is why this form of literary "paganism," of Greco-Latin inspiration, which puts emphasis on *beauty* but almost none on *faith*, has been "recuperated" so often by the Church or been lost in the quicksand of university academicism.)

Let us note, to bring the discussion on this point to a close, that it can in no way be a question of reducing paganism to isolated and fragmentary *survivals* in the form of folk beliefs or rural traditions. Of course, this is not an entirely insignificant area. We know that after 370 CE or thereabouts the word *paganus* had the dual meaning of "peasant" and "pagan." To Christians, remaining loyal to the ancestral faith, as the majority of rural dwellers did, was to serve the devil![17] The problem of pagan survivals in the calendar feasts or the "cradle to grave" cycle of customs therefore forms a core subject for consideration. I need only cite the works of Arnold Van Gennep, P. Saintyves (Émile Nourry), and Paul Sébillot in this regard. Countless authors have shown how the Church, after fiercely combating "pagan" folk customs, subsequently did its best to "baptize" these customs by giving them a more or less superficial Christian veneer, and how these practices have been maintained, sometimes powerfully, into the present. It is obvious that the reactivation of these traditions, intended to give rhythm

to work and to the days of the year, and whose utility was evident for maintaining the organic cohesion of families, cities, and clans, today appears a great necessity in the much more general task of reestablishing community roots. We must nevertheless realize that these festivals and customs probably only offer us a fairly distorted echo of what they once were—and, most importantly, in the best of cases they only reflect the lower forms of belief and worship. In fact, this folk paganism is only, to borrow a term from Georges Dumézil, a paganism *of the "third function*," which would explain its almost exclusively rural character. During the Christianization period, the "great gods" received the greatest hostility of the preachers. The "lesser gods," considered less dangerous, were more easily given "amnesty." Baptized in a more or less skillful way, they became local saints or figures of folklore. The paganism of the "first function," the *sovereign* paganism, is therefore also the least well preserved for the very reason that it was quite often the established "elites" who betrayed it the most quickly and most deeply. This sovereign paganism nonetheless remains, even today, the most fundamental. At a time when rural living seems to be a reality for fewer and fewer people, it would be paradoxical, to say the least, if a *recourse* to ancient Indo-European religions confined itself to the resumption of a "rural rhythmic" scheme. This is another reason to keep one's distance from naturalistic tendencies.

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1. An example of this would be Tinto Brass' film *Caligula* (1977).

2. It seems this may be a Latin phenomenon of encouraging the sensual aspect of naturalism, where Anglo-Saxons have instead favored the utilitarian aspect and continental Germans the ecological aspect. Taking into account the ethno-cultural division of historical Christian Europe by the ancient Roman *limes*, we can discern a "southern ex-Catholic paganism" with a more "Gallic" tone, as opposed to a "Nordic ex-Protestant paganism" of a more mystical inspiration.

3. [E.g., A *History of Private Life: From Pagan Rome to Byzantium*, vol. 1 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1987), *Roman Erotic Elegy: Love, Poetry, and the West*, trans. David Pellauer (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988), along with his numerous French works that remain untranslated. —*Ed*.]

4. Georges Sorel, *The Illusions of Progress*, trans. John and Charlotte Stanley (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1969).

5. "Distrust of sexuality does not form part of the Judeo-Christian tradition. While it may have eventually entered the latter, it was an addition. It stemmed, in part, from contact with the Hellenic world and Hellenic tradition" (Pierre Chaunu, *Histoire et foi* [History and Faith] [Paris: France-Empire, 1980], 141). See also Claude Tresmontant, *Les Idées maîtresses de la métaphysique chrétienne* [The Chief Ideas of Christian Metaphysics] (Paris: Seuil, 1962), 64–65, and *Les Problèmes d'athéisme*, 333ff. These assertions need to be qualified by taking into account the general background of Christian attacks against pagan "debauchery."

6. See Pope John Paul II's pronouncement of 4 June 1980, in *L'Osservatore romano*, French edition, 10 June 1980.

7. Pagan asceticism displays a different character during that same period. E. R. Dodds notes in this regard: "The asceticism of the pagan aphorisms is moderate, not to say banal: self-control is the foundation of piety. . . . the Christian redactor takes a much grimmer view: marriage, if ventured at all, should be 'a competition in continence', and self-castration is preferable than impurity" (*Pagan and Christian in an Age of Anxiety*, 32).

8. Session XXIV, Canon X.

9. Quoted in Havelock Ellis, *Sexual Selection in Man* (Philadelphia: Davis, 1905), 31.

10. Ellis, *Sexual Selection*, 31.

11. Eisenberg and Abécassis, *Et Dieu créa Eve*, 227–35. The fact remains that the serpent made his appearance immediately after the creation of Eve—this serpent is sometimes identified as the "evil inclination," and was explicitly said by Rashi to desire the company of Adam (commentary on Genesis 3:1). On the other hand, from the reading of the Bible itself, woman's situation in the ancient Middle East appears hardly enviable, especially when compared to that of women in Greco-Roman or Celto-Germanic antiquity. Women are most often relegated among the incompetent; they can neither go to court nor assume any liturgical role. "Women, slaves, and children—one cannot convene with them" (Berakhot 7:2). Without being condemned in principle, sexuality is challenged when it is reduced to an exclusively profane practice (see the limitations the Torah imposes on sexual activity; Leviticus 15:16–28). Even fifteen or twenty years ago, it was still considered unthinkable to teach the Torah to girls in orthodox communities. One cited the expression *nashim datan kalot*, "women are light-headed," and this passage from the Torah: "Anyone who teaches his daughter Torah is teaching her promiscuity" (Sotah 20a; Rabbi Eliezer). This prohibition, which was mainly upheld by Maimonides, tends to be reinterpreted today in the sense of a non-obligation to teach. The subject continues to be debated; see the dossier "Peut-on enseigner aux femmes la Bible, la Michna et le Talmud? ["Can One Teach the Women the Bible, Mishna, and Talmud?"]" in *Hamoré*, July 1980. At the end of a rapid assessment, Lilly Scherr concluded that in Judaism, "alterity most often translates into separation and being pushed aside" ("La femme juive comme 'autre'" ["The Jewish Woman as 'Other'"], in *Ni Juif ni Grec*, ed. Léon Poliakov, 149–60). For an overall assessment of the dossier, see also Jean-Claude Bardet, "La condition féminine dans l'Antiquité et au Moyen Age" ["The Condition of Women in Antiquity and the Middle Ages"], in *Nouvelle École*, January–February 1970, 17–49; and "Le judaïsme est-il antiféministe?' ["Judaism: Is it Anti-feminist?"], *Information juive*, November 1979.

12. y. Qid 4.

13. Gittin 68a.

14. Nietzsche, *The Will to Power* (trans. Kaufmann), §842.

15. Nietzsche, *The Gay Science* (trans. Kaufmann), Preface, §3.

16. For more on this matter, see Valadier, *Jésus-Christ ou Dionysos*, 229–36.

17. "For to burn candles at stones and trees and springs, and where three roads meet, what is it but the worship of the Devil? . . . For women to invoke Minerva in their weaving, to keep weddings for the "day" of Venus [Friday], and to consider which day one should set out on a journey, what is it but the worship of the Devil? To mutter spells over herbs and invoke the names of demons in incantations, what is it but the worship of the Devil?" (Martin of Braga, *On the Castigation of Rustics* [ca. 574], §16; in ed. *Christianity and Paganism, 350–750*, ed. J. N. Hillgarth [Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1986], 62).

Chapter Twenty-Two
Early Christianity and Late Paganism

At the time of Constantine, when Christianity became the religion of an empire, a practically unique event in the annals of history occurred: "An empire, for its own survival, changed its foundation (a foundation on which the Christian West would later expand) and adopted a foreign religion—or, more precisely (although this qualification changes nothing), a heresy of a foreign religion."[1] Christianity is interpreted here in the standard way as a gradually "Westernized" dissident form of Judaism. Others have viewed it, in a more original vein, as a form of Gnosticism, namely an anti-Judaic faith that gradually became more Judaic.[2] Whatever the case may be, the fact remains that Christianization triggered a whole process of European *pseudo-morphosis*, which caused a certain number of interactions that ultimately led to the creation of a *hybrid* religious category. Once Europe had become Christianized, neither Europe nor Christianity conformed any longer to their origins or their own "natures." To a certain extent, Christianity has, at least for the time being, changed European man, but, as noted by Spengler in *The Decline of the West*, European man has changed Christianity too (also perhaps only for the time being). This was also noted by Nietzsche: "It seems hardly possible to graft an alien myth on to a native tree with any lasting success, without damaging the tree beyond repair."[3]

Europe gave its allegiance to a Christianity which it had already influenced to such a degree, that it bore little resemblance to what it had originally been. Absolute monotheism, in its dualistic form, was profoundly foreign to the European mind. Christianity represented the composite, intermediary form necessary for its acclimatization. As Alfred Loisy rightly noted, "it was, on the one hand, by tempering monotheism with the gnosis of the trinitarian dogma, and on the other, by identifying Jesus with God,

that Christianity made the doctrine of the one God acceptable to the pagan world."[4] The one god was only accepted in Europe because he became one "God in three persons," by integrating the old trinity that the Vedic Indians called Trimurti. It also required that this God be *embodied*, that he be endowed with a *human* face and that, subsequently, the father of this God made man, could also be *represented* in human form. This process was certainly a reversal of the one familiar to the pagan world: it was not a man who ascended to the status of a god, but a god who made himself into a man. But at least the appearance was there. So while one can read in the Bible "I am God and not a man" (Hosea 11:9), Christianity proposed the apparently familiar face of a Son who was *embodied* and at the same time consubstantial with the Eternal Father. Thus, certain conditions for *acclimatization* were made possible. "European peasants," says Mircea Eliade, "could only eventually find communion with Christian theology by transforming Christ into a bearded god who lived and worked like them."[5]

This observation has been made on numerous occasions, both for the sake of rejoicing and bemoaning it. "As for paganism," writes Maurice Bellet, "it is not at all so sure that Christianity simply succeeded it. In certain cases, the latter is only the Christian coating over an old religious storehouse that has in fact remained unchanged, with its myths and superstitions."[6] It is by basing their argument on this observation that a number of authors have been able to claim that Europe has never been truly Christian, although it was, here and there at certain times, permeated by a faith that officially claimed to be Christianity; or inversely, that today when churches are emptying and religious vocations are drying up, Judeo-Christian *values* are much more deeply established in hearts and minds (we will return to this point again later). The conversion of Europe to Christianity was therefore "largely a sham," as Erich Fromm has written.[7] This is, in fact, a perfectly valid opinion to maintain, provided that this "sham" is located at the level of a collective unconscious, which is gradually but lucidly *admitting* its desire to either emancipate itself from the Christian heritage or, contrariwise, in complete awareness, to join it with even greater force.

This syncretism took place, and nothing could have prevented it from taking place. It is very hard for Christianity today to eradicate its own history—whatever the desire may be of some of its representatives in this

regard. Conversely, even if paganism could have been the "naturalist" religion—an opinion I do not share—depicted by Christianity (and which certain neo-pagans have naively attempted to reactivate), its rebirth and reappropriation would exclude this kind of integral resumption in the form of *repetition*.

Post-Christianity cannot be an *ad integrum* return; it cannot be the simple "restoration" of what once was. In evoking, with Heidegger, the perspective of "another beginning," I have already defined what I mean by "another." A new paganism must be truly *new*. *To surpass* Christianity demands both the reactualization of its "before" and the appropriation of its "after." It is, negatively, not by "grace" but "on the occasion" of their conversion to Christianity, that Europeans were able to acquire a clear awareness that they did not *specifically* belong to "nature"—that they possessed a constitutive "super-nature," and could acquire another by making the transition from human to superhuman. It was through this "circumstance" that they were able to fully feel like *historical* beings. But this was also the "circumstance" that let them interpret Judeo-Christian monotheism as a radical attempt *to develop a negative anthropology by means of a negative theology*—like a "desperate," radical attempt to prevent man from bestowing upon himself a "super-nature," by pairing the world with an anti-world, "nature" with an "anti-nature," and by asserting the existence of an absolute mastery that renders all human masteries futile and by which all human freedom will eventually be subjugated. This attempt cannot be *abolished*—because as part of our past it is also part of our present—but it can be *surpassed*. The way in which Judeo-Christian monotheism has posed the question of man's relationship with his own history (and his own historicity) demands, on its own, that one actually moves on beyond this problematic. The "return to before" is *unworkable*. Just as it needs to leave behind all naturalism, to cease to identify with standards and "averages," and to rethink the articulation of ethics between what is and what should be according to a given plan, neo-paganism must take into account history, whose notion has been conceptualized by Judeo-Christian monotheism, not to this time assign it with a sole direction and an end, but to make it the ever-plural result of a will that is ceaselessly reoriented in new directions. For the same reason, neo-paganism must also *re-present* the pagan system of values in a form *that is not simply the antithesis* of Judeo-Christian monotheism. Goethe's emphasis on the

primacy of action resulted from his confrontation with the idea that God is at work in history. The paganism of the future will be a Faustian paganism.

Furthermore, pagan thought under Christianity had already begun to evolve before it seemingly died. Fourth-century paganism had three fulcrums: the first was the ancient aristocracy that was pagan by tradition (*mos majorum*, the ancestral custom) and patriotism ("Rome will live as long as its gods"). The second fulcrum consisted of the high officials who protested against the Easternization of the empire and the despotism of the imperial regime (see, for example, the matter of the Altar of Victory, whose return was demanded by Symmachus under Valentinian II). The third fulcrum, finally, was the schools, as demonstrated by the education of Julian, the importance of Libanius to Nicomedia, then to Antioch, and so on. This paganism could be sometimes devout, sometimes quite intellectualized and philosophical. The other constituent elements of the "new religiosity" were the rise of the imperial cult, the progress of Christianity, and the influx of Oriental cults. Now what is interesting here is that, when confronted with this new situation, the partisans of paganism seemed to "rethink" their system and offer a new formulation.

Contrary, in fact, to what is all too often asserted, the "one god" who was generally claimed by the last phase of Greco-Roman paganism is in no way comparable to the god of Judeo-Christian monotheism. Far from being radically distinct from the gods of the traditional pantheon, it represents their common principle. Far from forming an absolute that is entirely separate from the world, it is identical to the world's very being. Stoicism, whose religious foundations are essential,[8] constitutes a significant case in this regard. The Stoic's God is the "soul of the world." The cosmos is a "living being full of wisdom." The *logos* that furnishes it with its information is entirely consubstantial to it: it is incorporated into the itinerary and even the substance of the cosmos. There is no *Hinterwelt*, no "world beyond." The universe is not dependent upon another being and it is in this world that man must realize his ideal. When the Stoics speak of the world's "duality," in resuming, for example, the Pythagorean opposition between the celestial world, which is the perfect world of the stars to which souls belong, and the terrestrial, sublunary world, it only involves a substantial opposition within a unitarian world. Wisdom and virtue consist of living according to the "order" of this universe. Even better, the cosmos,

insofar as it contains the totality of beings, is absolutely perfect; therefore, nothing can remain outside of it.

This "last" paganism remained faithful to the principle of tolerance. For cultivated pagans, it was precisely because they represented the different faces of the same Deity that all the gods are equally respectable—whereas the Christians, who never stopped regarding the gods of pagans as "idols," "demons," and even—as Martin of Braga wrote of ancient deified figures—as "extremely evil men and miscreants." Paradoxically, E. R. Dodds reminds us that in Origen's polemic against Celsus, it was believed that Celsus was "a stricter monotheist than Origen," for the reason that "he judged the Christians blasphemous in setting another on the same level as the supreme God."[9] If all the gods are only in fact emanations of one unique God, how could they compete with him? The Stoics, when they supported the idea of a unique God, also accepted the existence and anthropomorphic representation of minor gods and confined themselves to giving them allegorical or symbolic interpretations. For example, they explained Zeus as a representation of the eternal principle by which all things exist and become, and they made the other gods particular attributes of this principle. Julian the Apostate himself, when he restored solar worship, took pains to point out that beyond the physical sun, it was the Sun of divine intellect, for which the star was only an epiphany, that he worshipped. Diogenes Laertius wrote: "God is one and the same with Reason, Fate, and Zeus; he is also called by many other names."[10] Maximus of Tyre asserted, for his part, that the Greeks simultaneously supported two truths: the first is that "there is only one sole God, King and Father of all"; the second is that "there are numerous gods, children of God, who share his power."[11] Perhaps this is also how we should retrospectively interpret the belief of Heraclitus that "it is the law, too, to obey the counsel of one"[12] and that "the wise is one only; it is unwilling and willing to be called by the name of Zeus."[13]

Just when the world of antiquity was sinking, paganism was therefore evolving considerably. If it referred at times to a unique God, it was not in the sense of Judeo-Christianity. More than a *stricto sensu* monotheism, it was a *unitarian pantheism*, professing that the Deity was the soul of the world (in the sense that Plato speaks of a "tangible god"), or, if you prefer, a henotheistic syncretism, making a pantheistic god from a supreme principle, for whom the other gods are hypostases. This paganism is characterized on

the "ideological" plane by the interpenetration of specifically religious and philosophical elements. It was not given time to establish itself and was condemned to gradually disappear. Left to its own devices and spared Christian infection, perhaps the whole of European paganism may have evolved in this direction.[14] It is in this sense that we may concur with Loisy's opinion: "Greco-Roman paganism has undergone many changes and alterations during the course of its existence, but to the end it remained a polytheistic religion. It ceded its place to Christian monotheism—being incapable of either absorbing it or transforming it, or even incorporating it, at least directly—by transforming itself."[15]

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1. Jean Blot, in *L'Arche*, December 1979.

2. See Jean Magne, *Origines chrétiennes* [Christian Origins] (Paris: Magne, 1975).

3. Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy* (trans. Whiteside), §23.

4. Loisy, *La Religion d'Israël*, 284.

5. Interviewed in *Le Monde-Dimanche*, 14 September 1980.

6. Maurice Bellet, "Le mouvement de l'universal" ["The Movement of the Universal"], in *Christus*, October 1980, 409.

7. Fromm, *To Have or to Be?* 120.

8. Louis Gernet and André Boulanger note, "No philosophical system has ever given greater place to religious matters. It could be said that the entire Stoic conception of the universe, of nature, and man's destinies depends on his theology, and that his ideal of wisdom and his moral practice, individual as well as social, have a theological foundation" (*Le Génie grec dans la religion* [The Greek Genius in Religion] [Paris: Michel, 1970]).

9. Dodds, *Pagan and Christian in an Age of Anxiety*, 117; cf. Origen, *Contra Celsum*, VIII, 12, 14.

10. Diogenes Laertius, *Lives of Eminent Philosophers*, trans. Robert Drew (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1925), VII, 134.

11. Maximus of Tyre, *The Philosophical Orations*, 17, 5.

12. Heraclitus, Fragment 33 (trans. Burnet).

13. Heraclitus, Fragment 32 (trans. Burnet). Let me note, incidentally, that the attempt by Amenhotep IV (Akhnaten) to combine the Egyptian gods into a "unique God," an attempt often presented (wrongly, in my opinion) as being the origin of Hebrew monotheism, is much more akin to this non-dualistic conception of the "unique God."

14. The same tendency can be found, in any event, among the Indo-European religions at different points. Françoise Le Roux and Christian J. Guyonvarc'h, for example, point out "the Celtic religion's monotheist tendency" (*La Civilisation celtique*, 140).

15. Loisy, *La Religion d'Israël*, 66.

Chapter Twenty-Three

Divine Immanence, Human Transcendence

Following the Christianization of Europe, paganism survived its demise in several forms: first, in the collective unconscious, which will mainly find release in music;[1] then, on the level of beliefs and folk traditions; and finally, within or at the margins of official religion, through "heretical" trends that have extended even into the present. In spite of the interest it presents, this last area is perhaps the one that has received the most superficial examination. Yet it is in the work of some of the great "heretics" where we must search for some of the fundamental principles of a neo-Faustian paganism, truly the rudiments of what could have been a pagan theology of modern times. Sigrid Hunke, one of the rare authors to have tackled this subject systematically,[2] has shown that large convergences exist between the "great protests" that manifested from the encounter with the dominant ideology constituted by the official faith over the centuries. She reads a *spiritual continuity* in these convergences, which expressed the lines of force of "another European religion"—the *true* religion of Europe—a religion that appeared at the end of the fourth century with Pelagius, reappeared in the ninth century with John Scottus Eriugena, and continued after the fourteenth century with Meister Eckhart and his disciples (Henry Suso, Johannes Tauler, Sebastian Franck of Donauwörth), Jacob Böhme, Paracelsus, Joachim of Fiore, Lucilio Vanini, Almaric of Bena, David of Dinant, and so on, and whose heirs, in various ways, are also Erasmus and Leonardo Da Vinci, too, as well as Henry More, Lord Shaftesbury, Valentin Weigel, Johann Heinrich Pestalozzi, the key figures of the German Romantic and idealist movement (Goethe, Kant, Fichte, Schelling, Schleiermacher, and Herder), the Russians Theophan the Recluse and

Nikolai Berdyaev, the Frenchmen Pierre Teilhard de Chardin and Antoine de Saint-Exupéry, and so forth.

Among most of these authors, we find certain fundamental themes of pagan thought, as I have attempted to define it thus far, taken to the highest level. In the first place is the transcendental unity of the cosmos, the continuity between God (or the gods) and the world—a world whose being is "perfect" but not static, and which is the site of a permanent *becoming* in every direction; a God who renders the finite infinite, who encourages time and space to be thought of as infinite.

John Scottus Eriugena, excommunicated by the Church after his death, wrote in the eleventh century: "Everything is in God and God is in everything; nothing can come elsewhere but Him, because everything is born in Him, through Him, and in Him." "To look at things," he adds, "is to contemplate the Word." He does not mean by this that things are limited to echoing the *logos* of God that created them, but he lets it be understood that there is an identification or at least a consubstantiality between things and the Word of God. Nicholas of Cusa (Nicolaus Cusanus), who was not a heretic but whose views nevertheless overlap with certain heresies, came up with this formulation: "What is God if not the invisibility of the visible?" which corresponds to the same idea. Then there is Giordano Bruno, who taught "the infinity of the universe and the action of the divine power in its infinity." And Dante will write: "All things whatsoever observe a mutual order; and this is the form that maketh the universe like unto God . . . wherefore they move to diverse ports o'er the great sea of being."[3]

For the entire Romantic tradition, God and the universe are only different aspects and different names for one and the same thing. This is the reason for the rebirth of this silent "religiosity of the world," which Eduard Spranger defined as the very foundation of the pagan spirit and whose modern source he located with Goethe and then Schleiermacher.[4] "To discuss God apart from Nature," wrote Goethe in 1770, "is both difficult and perilous; it is as if we separated the soul from the body. We know the soul only through the body, and God only through Nature."[5]

"How could a nature outside of us be possible?" wondered Schelling.[6] According to Herder, "Everywhere organic forces alone can be active, and every one of them makes attributes of an infinite God known to us."[7] Hegel declares: "To love God is to feel one's self in the 'all,' with no restrictions,

in the infinite."[8] This is the way paganism seals a covenant—not with an absolute that is distinct from the world, but with the world itself: "To arrive at thinking God and the earth in one single idea" (Rainer Maria Rilke).

According to Heidegger, all beings flow out of the world's being: the *sky* like the *earth*, *men* like the *gods*; and this is why Jean-Luc Marion accuses him of "idolatry."[9] D. H. Lawrence declares: "There is an eternal vital correspondence between our blood and the sun. . . . We and the cosmos are one. The cosmos is a vast living body, of which we are still parts. The sun is a great heart whose tremors run through our smallest veins."[10] For Antoine de Saint-Exupéry, who celebrated the way in which the earth, "through the tree, wed the honey of the sky": "I am telling you that there is no divine grace that excuses you from *becoming*. You would like to be. You will only attain being in God. He will gather you in when you have slowly *become*, when you have been shaped by his actions."[11] Certain "materialists," like Karl Ludwig von Knebel (1744–1834), strove, for their part, to attribute to the laws of matter an intrinsically finalizing orientation, to arrive at a new idea of God. Even before Jean Charon, Raymond Ruyer, or Olivier Costa de Beauregard, we can find an echo of this concern in Teilhard de Chardin, when he celebrates the "being of the universe" and seeks a "reconciliation" of God and the world: "we can reconcile . . . the love of God and the healthy love of the world."[12] "There is neither spirit nor matter in the world;" Teilhard would also say, "the 'stuff of the universe' is *spirit-matter*."[13]

It is thereby in the world and *through the world* that God attains his highest status of existence. God is not separate from the world. And yet he is not commingled with it. God is *the depth of the world*: he is over everything, but beyond nothing. This assertion is naturally a decisive one. Whereas in Judeo-Christian monotheism, the soul "is ontologically distinct from the absolute, created by it and not emanated from it; it is not part of the divine substance,"[14] in the "religion of Europe" the soul is of divine essence. By virtue of this fact, man and God maintain a relationship of *reciprocity*. The union of man with God, the embodiment of God in man, the elevation of man to the level of divine substance is possible in this world. Oswald Spengler described the "Faustian" religion as a religion in which human will deals with divine will as an equal. Heidegger, repeating the saying of Heraclitus, "the abode of men is the abode of the gods," said

that the Deity is united to mortals, and palpitates in the place where they are combined. Insofar as they are tied to the uninterrupted unfolding of the world, the gods can engender themselves in "creatures." The existence of the gods is as dependent upon men as men's existence is upon the gods. To the question: "Is there a God?" the answer is that God *can be*. This is an idea developed by Heidegger with the notion of "possibilization"—the opposite of the "actualization" of classical metaphysics—but which appeared as early as Jacob Böhme's notion of "potentiality," and even with Nicholas of Cusa's *possest*.[15]

Scottus Eriugena declared: "We ought not to understand God and the creature as two things distinct from one another, but as one and the same (*unum et id ipsum*). For the creature is subsisting in God, and God, manifesting Himself, in a marvelous and ineffable manner is created in the creature. . . . creating all things He created in all things, and making all things is made in all things . . . and he becomes all things in all things."[16] In *Aurora*, Jacob Böhme writes: "For you need not to ask, Where is God? Listen, blind man; you live in God, and God is in you; and if you live holily, then therein you yourself are God. For wheresoever you look, there is God."[17] The same idea is expressed by Paracelsus: "There is nothing in heaven or in earth that is not also in man. . . . For God, who is in heaven, is in man. Where else can heaven be if not in man?"[18] Again, with Angelus Silesius: "Heaven is within you; if you are seeking God elsewhere, you will always miss him."[19] Giordano Bruno said that it was by "descending more intimately within the self" that the "mind aspires to raise itself," because: "God is near, that each one has Him with him and within himself more than he himself can be within himself, for God is the soul of souls, the life of all lives, the essence of essences."[20] This conception of the relationship between man and God is fairly close to that encountered among some of the great mystics. It is also sometimes reminiscent of the doctrine of *homoiôsis*, the "assimilation with God" that Plato established and which was later resumed by Plotinus, which has its origin in the human soul's latent identity with its divine foundation—so close that an element of *reciprocity* can be added: the union is "desired" by both man and God as necessary to their mutual fulfillment.

Meister Eckhart also reacted against the biblical idea of a remote God that was inaccessible to man. He is one of the first, with Böhme and

Silesius, to place God in the heart of hearts instead. Seeking to set his sights beyond the soul, beyond the powers of the soul—and even the powers superior to the soul—he believed that God must be "humbled," in other words brought *closer* to man. He would write: "I am the origin of the fact that God is God. And if I did not exist, God would not be God."[21] In a very beautiful passage from *Fragments*, he adds: "That I am a man is something other men share with me; that I see and hear and eat and drink, that is the same as with cattle; but that *I* am, that belongs to no man but myself, not to a man, not to an angel, not even to God except in so far as I am one with Him."[22] The soul and God can therefore lead a common life; the soul can be *engendered as God*. In other words, *God is born in the soul of man*; present in the world, he is also *engendered* in and by the human soul. God comes to man to be born, to "become" within his very soul. This idea of an irregularly occurring consubstantiality of God and man goes so far that, for Eckhart, man should not even "make a place" for God in himself, for "to reserve a place would be to (still) maintain a distinction." And Eckhart adds: "I therefore pray to God for the power to free me from God"; only a man "freed" from a God who would only occupy a *place* in him could fully and totally belong to God.

At the same time, Eckhart protests against a search for the divine that would entail a retreat from the world. He denounces "running away from things, turning solitary and going apart from the world" and preaches the cultivation of "an inner solitude" that allows him to "to penetrate things and find God there, to get a strong impression of God firmly fixed on his mind."[23] Eckhart's notion of "being" is therefore essentially dynamic and vital. It is a pure outpouring. Being is not a withdrawal, nor is it a limitation of and by itself. Being is active. Activity to it means to "emerge from itself." The man who manifests his being *emerges from himself*. It is something that gushes into and out of the self. It "runs continually," says Eckhart, "and it is this constant running that makes it ascend to the divine."

Luther, however, clung to the idea of a God that was inaccessible to man. Furthermore, he absolutely denied free will.[24] Nevertheless he established the problematic of man's unity in God, which led him to reintroduce the idea of a *Deus absconditus* [hidden God] and to distinguish a dual divine will: the will of God as "preached, revealed, offered, and worshipped," and that of "God not preached, not revealed, not offered or

worshipped." This allusion to a non-revealed, unknown and unknowable God, *Deus absconditus in majestate*, indirectly opposes two antagonistic conceptions of God: the God that is in the Word, in the *logos*, and the God that is in the world. Furthermore, this Lutheran theory has been compared to the nominalist doctrine with its distinction of two "orders of truth."[25] On the other hand, in a fairly paradoxical fashion concurrent with his declaration of their infinite separation, Luther does, however, permit man to approach God by initiating the suppression of intermediaries—institutions, the Church, celestial hierarchies, and so forth—that had been multiplied by Catholicism. "The intermediate person of the priest, which had formerly stood between [man] and the Infinite, was removed" (Spengler).[26] This agrees with the pagan idea that man has the possibility of entering into contact with the infinite and communicating directly with God. Finally, the Reformation emphasized more than ever before the primordial role of *faith*. (This is the theme of justification by faith, as opposed to justification by works.[27]) Here again we note a contradiction: for Luther, it is because our destiny is fixed in advance that man must first be a *believer*. But intensely lived faith will also lead man to surpass himself, and, in the pagan perspective, make him then equal or akin to God.

Whereas Goethe defined man as "God's dialogue with himself," Hölderlin asserts that it is man's *divine* portion that senses the divine in nature. Novalis' intention was to anchor himself "in the immutable and in the divine within us." Schleiermacher said that it is *impiety* "to seek the infinite outside of the finite." Like his friends of youth, Schelling and Hölderlin, Hegel declared war on dualism and viewed the radical opposition of man and God as the basic error of traditional metaphysics. "The being of the soul is divine," writes Schelling, who adds: "For he whose soul is seized by God, God is not something outside of the self, nor a future located in an infinite remoteness; God is in him, he is in God." Much later, in his *Book of Hours*, Rilke will pose the eternal question, "What will you do, God, when I die? . . . Losing me, you lose your meaning."

If man is akin and partner to God, he is not himself an object placed in the world but is himself a related party with the world. Man is like the universe; the microcosm like the macrocosm. Man, says Paracelus, comes from silt, *limus terrae*, and this is why the entire universe can be found within him. Man, extracted from all creatures, "contains" all creatures. So it is not a question in paganism of *putting man "in God's place."* This would

be setting up an idol, this time in the true sense of the word. It is not a question of ensuring "that mastery over Being passes from God to man," as Heidegger says. (He goes on to say: "Those who share this opinion spare little thought for the divinity of God. Man can never put himself in God's place, because the essence of man will never attain the domain of the essence of God.") Man is not God. But he can share in God, just as God can share in him. Man should not have the ambition to become God, but to become *like the gods*. Already, in the Eddas, man is presented not as a fallen angel but as a being related to the gods, and who can rejoin them. Man does not represent a *minus* with respect to what preceded him. He represents a *plus*: a cord extended between the "giants" and the "gods."[28] Man, if he was created, should surpass his creator, in the same way a son should "surpass" his father. And just as nature, practically identified with the father by Paracelsus, is surpassed by "super-nature," man surpasses everything from which he issues. He *sublimates* the world. He does not deify it, in the basic meaning of this term, but makes it a place where the deity can emerge. In the same perspective, Paracelsus said that the apostles "surpassed" Christ; the created surpassed the creator.

Man only fully realizes himself by being more than himself, in other words, by going beyond himself. "Man is only fully himself by leaving the self," writes Raymond Abellio, who spontaneously discovers here the same words used by Eckhart.[29] The ontological dimension of the human being is the "Open," Heidegger emphasizes—and this definition repeats that of philosophical anthropology (the *Weltoffenheit*, the "opening-to-the-world," of which Arnold Gehlen speaks), at the same time as that of modern ethnology, according to which man is only acted upon by his membership in the species insofar as the latter is the basis for pure potentialities. This opening to the world is both a gift of Being and a perpetual re-creation of man. Only man can rise to the implicit grasp of Being as such; only he can attempt to unveil it as such, in a transcendental and not merely "natural" way. Opening to the world does not dissolve us in its totality but, on the contrary, gives us specificity:

> [It] establishes the enclosed field of the unveiling of Being as such, and it could even be said that it withdraws us from the world by preventing us from ever being a "natural" being, one being among beings, like the tree of the forest is only one tree among others, or

> the sheep of the flock is only one sheep among hundreds of sheep. More profoundly, this is what, by its relative exclusion from the order of things, allows the totality of beings to form a world *for us* and *by us* without itself being a being.[30]

This doctrine of the partially and potentially divine character of human nature is, in fact, the basis for all of man's existential meaning. In paganism, man *elevates the deity by elevating himself*; he devalues it by considering it like an Eastern despot whose "commandments" should be followed on penalty of punishment. Meister Eckhart speaks of the "spark in the soul" (*scintilla in anima*), by which man can attain the divine. After Paracelsus, Valentin Weigel developed the idea that man finds in himself and by himself knowledge of God, without any intervention. The same conception was developed by Lord Shaftesbury. Johann Heinrich Pestalozzi declared: "The will of God and the best I can attain are simply one and the same thing." Here again, the idea is reaffirmed that man touches the divine when he surpasses himself. This has a profound, and specifically pagan, logic. Man should not be merely himself and conform to his own "nature." He should still seek to give himself a "super-nature," to acquire a *superhumanity*—that superhumanity that Judeo-Christian monotheism's vocation, if not object, is to prevent him from acquiring. In antiquity, the idea that a human being could, after death, become similar to a god was widespread, as is attested by a large number of tombstone inscriptions from the Hellenic and Roman eras. Paganism today proposes to man, during the very course of his life, to exceed himself and thereby share in the substance of God.

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1. See Giorgio Locchi, "La 'perspective wagnérienne' sur la musique européenne" [The 'Wagnerian Perspective' on European Music], *Nouvelle École*, Fall/Winter 1978, 12–28.

2. See Sigrid Hunke, *Europas andere Religion: Die Uberwindung der religiösen Krise* [Europe's Other Religion: The Overcoming of the Religious Crisis] (Dusseldorf: Econ, 1969); and also *Glauben und wissen: Die Einheit europäischer Religion und Naturwissenschaft* [Faith and Knowledge: The Unity of European Religion and Natural Science] (Dusseldorf: Econ, 1979).

3. Dante, *The Divine Comedy, Paradiso*, Canto I (trans. Philip Wicksteed in *The Divine Comedy of Dante Alighieri* [New York: Modern Library, 1950]).

4. Eduard Spranger, *Weltfrömmigkeit* [World Piety] (Leipzig: Klotz, 1942).

5. Translation from George Henry Lewes, *Life of J. W. von Goethe* (Boston: Wyman-Fogg, 1902), 101.

6. See F. W. J. Schelling, *First Outline of a System of the Philosophy of Nature*, trans. Keith R. Peterson (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2004).

7. Johann Gottfried von Herder, *God: Some Conversations*, trans. Frederick H. Burkhardt (Berkeley: Veritas, 1940), 104.

8. G. W. F. Hegel, *Early Theological Writings*, trans. T. M. Knox (Chicago: University of Chicago Press), 1948), 247.

9. Jean-Luc Marion, "La double idolätrie: Remarques sur la différence ontologique et la pensée de Dieu" [The Double Idolatry: Remarks on the Ontological Difference and Thinking of God], in *Heidegger et la question de Dieu*, ed. Richard Kearney and Joseph Stephen O'Leary, 46–74.

10. D. H. Lawrence, *Apocalypse* (New York: Viking Press, 1966), 44–45.

11. Antoine de Saint-Exupéry, *Citadelle* (Paris: Gallimard, 1948).

12. Teilhard de Chardin, *The Divine Milieu: An Essay on the Interior Life*, ed. Bernard Wall (New York: Harper and Row, 1960), 53.

13. Teilhard de Chardin, *Human Energy*, trans. J. M. Cohen (New York: Harcourt, 1965), 57–58.

14. Tresmontant, *Les Idées maîtresses de la métaphysique chrétienne*, 83.

15. [Cusa refers to the Creator as the *Possest* (a combination of Latin *posse-est,* the "possible-actual"), based on the idea that God is possible, therefore actual. —*Ed*.]

16. Eriugena, *Periphyseon*, III, 678d. Translation from John Manoussakis, *God after Metaphysics* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2007), 33.

17. Jacob Böhme, *Aurora oder Morgenröte im Aufgang* [Aurora, or Dawn Ascending] (1612), XXII, §42.

18. *Opus Parmirum*, §6.33 (from *Paracelsus: Essential Readings*, trans. Nicholas Goodrick-Clarke [Berkeley: North Atlantic, 1999], 95).

19. Angelus Silesius, *Cherubinischer Wandersmann* [The Cherubinic Pilgrim], ed. Wilhelm Bölsche (Jena: Diederichs, 1905), I, §82.

20. Giordano Bruno, *De Gli Eroici Furori*, II, 1, iv. Translation from *Giordano Bruno's 'The Heroic Frenzies'*, trans. and ed. Paulo Eugen Memmo, Jr. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1964).

21. Meister Eckhart, Sermon 52: *Beati pauperes spiritu*. Translation in *A Companion to Meister Eckhart,* ed. Jeremiah M. Hackett, 177, n. 152.

22. Meister Eckhart, *German Sermons and Treatises*, vol. 1, ed. and trans. M. O'C. Walshe (London: Watkins, 1979), 143.

23. Meister Eckhart, "Talks of Instruction," no. 6, in *Meister Eckhart*, trans. Raymond B. Blakney (New York: Harper, 1941).

24. See Luther's treatise *De servo arbitrio* [*On the Bondage of the Will*], written in 1525 in response to Erasmus.

25. In addition to Saint Augustine, Luther, as we know, was strongly influenced by William of Occam and his disciples (Jean Buridan, Pierre d'Ailly, Jean Gerson). At times, he appears to adhere to that *via moderna* which reveals the inconsistency of the "universals," i.e., general concepts that abstractly represent the "absolute" common element of all the elements of a single category. The nominalist theory of the two "orders of truth" would also influence a number of German theologians, such as Gabriel Biel, who died in 1495.

26. Spengler, *The Decline of the West*, vol. 2, 298.

27. It is because of the importance it accords faith that the Reformation sometimes appears to me as being similar to Islam. Louis Massignon said, "Israel is hope, Christianity charity, and Islam faith."

28. For more on this, see Sigurður Nordal's classic commentary on the "Völuspá" (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1980), 145–54: "Ihr werdet sein wie Götter" ["You will become like Gods"].

29. Raymond Abellio, *La Structure absolue: Essai de phénoménologie génétique* [The Absolute Structure: Essay in Genetic Phenomenology] (Paris: Gallimard, 1965), 179.

30. Abellio, *La Structure absolue*, 180.

Chapter Twenty-Four

The Coincidence of Opposites and the Problem of Freedom

Pagan thought does not overlook any antinomies, but surpasses each of them within a "unitarian" conception of the world and the Deity. The *birth of opposites in divine unity* comes at the end of dualism. Here again, paganism conforms to the general rules of life, insofar as life's very nature and criterion is to combine opposites. "The world is not a whole divided into clearly demarcated compartments," says Renan, "but a painting whose colors all vary by intangibly subtle degrees."[1] As Nietzsche clearly saw, to contrast opposites absolutely amounts to opposing life. The counter approach, which leads to anti-reductionism on the epistemological plane,[2] is developed around three fundamental axes. These are the principle of the union of opposites and the definition of God as that union, the unfolding of God within this world and the subsequent unfolding of the contradiction of the opposites whose necessary confrontation is recognized as one of the manifestations of the Deity, and finally, the structuring of the human mind on the same model. "God, as the unity of opposites," writes Sigrid Hunke:

> also determines the structure of the human mind, which, based on the divine model, possesses the structure of the *coincidentia oppositorum* as the cognitive form for holistic thinking. . . . [A]lthough the separative and divisive intellect, for its part, dissects the interfolding thought of reason—as the world does the unity of God—it is also nevertheless intent on finding unity and coherence in all divisions and distinctions, comparisons and oppositions.[3]

The great modern theoretician of the coincidence of opposites is Nicholas of Cusa (1401–1464), who anticipated certain works of

Copernicus and was claimed by Giordano Bruno as his main inspiration. The coincidence of opposites, he said, is still the least imperfect definition we may give of God. God is the "non-other" (*De non aliud*). He is "above all opposites," and he combines them together in him. He is harmony, *concordantia*. For Scottus Eriugena, God "encompasses even what we view as being opposite to him and combines the similar and dissimilar, being himself the resemblance of the similar, the non-resemblance of the dissimilar, the antagonism of antagonistic elements, and the opposition of the opposites."[4] We find here the *harmony* extolled by the ancient Greeks, which was based on alternation, excelling, and an antagonistic complementarity: "Opposition brings concord; out of discord comes the fairest harmony"; "Everything is born of struggle."[5] (And it is no accident that Dionysos rules over the oracle at Delphi once a year while Apollo is away in the land of the Hyperboreans.) One of the principles of Shivaite philosophy incorporated into Indo-Aryan Hinduism similarly defines the divine as that "in which the opposites co-exist."

This theme also responds to the alchemical principle of *solve et coagula*, which combines separation and dissolution on the one hand, and reunion and "coagulation" on the other—just as *myth*, at its birth, frees contradictory mythemes that are destined, when all is said and done, to be reabsorbed within a rediscovered unity. In the modern era, it is probably Carl Gustav Jung who has most skillfully analyzed how alchemy strives to combine opposing factors within the same "conjunction."[6] Citing Nicholas of Cusa, Jung himself writes that "the real opposites are not of incommensurable sizes, otherwise they could not combine; despite all their opposition, they always display a tendency to do this." The formula of the *coincidentia oppositorum* here echoes the attestations of depth psychology and likewise those of depth sociology,[7] and even, in microphysics, the propositions of Stéphane Lupasco on the balancing structures of three matters and the logic of contradictory elements. "By opposing paths, we follow on our palms the lines of force of the same game. In you alone, Lord, are they found again" (Saint-Exupéry).[8]

As a unity of opposites, God necessarily dwells beyond good and evil. This is a point of view that is of course thoroughly ruled out by Judeo-Christian monotheism. If God is all-powerful and infinitely good, why does he tolerate evil and how is evil possible? Catholic theology, when it is not

hiding before the "mystery," generally answers this question by appealing to the notion of free will and by asserting that man must deserve his salvation (a claim which actually just evades the issue). The responsible party, in any case, could not be anyone but man. Evil, in point of fact, either comes from God or from man. Since God is absolute perfection, however, nothing imperfect or evil could come from him. Following the death of Abel, when Cain is being questioned by Yahweh on the fate of his brother, Cain vainly tries to push the fault back on his interrogator. ("Cain retorted: 'True, I slew him, but You created the evil inclination within me.'"[9]) Everything evil that occurs in the Judeo-Christian creation story is the result of human failings. The original sin caused man's transition from a naturally good state to a fallen state. The fact that God sees man's inclinations as already potentially evil "from his youth upwards"[10] has shown how the *moralization* of God implies the *guilt* of the creature to explain the birth of evil. The embodiment of absolute good by a unique God leaves no other way out: man must be responsible. In the words of Blaise Pascal: "We must be born guilty; if not, God must be unjust."[11] (And, as I said earlier, it is precisely insofar as the guilt of the creature excuses the creator—whom it *exculpates*—that one can ask if, in fact, it does not serve to mask the "fault" of the creator.) The guilt of the creature, in turn, necessitates the economy of salvation and redemption. In Judeo-Christianity, evil comes from sin, like a byproduct of its own making. The misfortune coming from evil is then taken as a sign calling for its expiation—so that, in turn, misfortune will disappear.

The result, as we have seen, is the *moralization of history*. If the people of Israel experienced exile, it was because of their "sins." If history produced a Syrian assault on Palestine, it was a sign of Yahweh's vengeance against the religious infidelity of Israel. The infidelity of a people cannot entail the infidelity of God. "God is not man who regrets," says the Torah. All the misfortunes of ancient Israel—with the exception perhaps of certain persecutions, such as those of the Hasmonean era—are thereby interpreted as so many negative theophanies, which is logical, after all, when history is conceived as the epiphany of God. Catastrophes are necessarily "punishments." If all goes wrong, it is because Yahweh is obliged to act ruthlessly. And why is he acting so harshly? "[F]or we are sunk in our iniquities, and our guilt is so great that it reaches high heaven. From the

days of our fathers down to this present day our guilt has been great" (Ezra 9:6–7).

Accordingly, as Renan observed in the preface to his *Ecclesiastes*, the messianic perspective is necessarily absolute in this system, because it compensates for, and thereby justifies, the presence of evil. The "day of Yahweh," says Renan, "is the focal point of the crumpled consciousness of Israel." God is One, and he is infinitely good. He is just, infinitely just. A day will come when Yahweh establishes his kingdom, and the virtues of the just will be recognized. (In Christianity, it is thanks to the mediation of Jesus, the God-turned-man, that redemption is possible.) If history was not *moralized*, it would become *morally incomprehensible*.

The eternal question still remains: "Why do the wicked prosper?" (Jeremiah 12:1). Why does virtue sometimes appear to be punished and vice sometimes rewarded? This question provides the subtext for the Book of Job; "temptation" is what emerges out of this dilemma. Job vainly protests against the "excess of adversity" that strikes him; it is the impossibility of understanding his guilt that forms the basis of his lamentations. Man can never be right and God wrong, even when appearances are in man's favor (Job 9:2). Job knows he is not in the wrong and proclaims his innocence, but at the same time declares that Jehovah cannot deceive himself. Although creator of all, Yahweh cannot accept being blamed as the source of evil. Job performs an act of submission, regrets his earlier claims of innocence, takes back his words, and repents. Only then does Yahweh restore him to his previous condition. The lesson of the story is that man should renounce any attempts to grasp the profound reasons behind the mystery. Logic should not inspire him with any doubt because this logic is a minor thing in comparison to Yahweh's "logic." "The suffering of the just and the triumph of the wicked are only temporary. A time of retribution must surely come when each receives their just desserts."[12] By refusing to condemn God's silence, whose "demonic" dimension he has nevertheless perceived—Renan labeled the Book of Job as "sublime blasphemy"—Job is the declared *exemplary* figure as opposed to Cain. He accepts his fate without understanding, whereas Cain, who was equally non-comprehending, revolted against Yahweh's "apparent" injustice. It is a characteristic apologia for servitude and yet another condemnation of human "pride."[13]

Christianity has taken up the same theme and transfigured it. This transfiguration is not only motivated by the Christian theology of original sin (according to which all humans born in this world, through no fault other than the fact of being born, must pay for the "sin" of Adam), it is also based on the belief that Jesus, innocent by nature, did not hesitate to incarnate and suffer for the sins of the world, which he obviously did not commit—and thus, as Joseph de Maistre writes, "Christianity rests entirely on this dogma . . . of innocents paying for the guilty."[14]

It is obvious that a completely different situation prevailed in pre-Christian European antiquity. The god here is not Completely Other. He is a partner, and one whom man has the right to expect to keep his commitments. In any case, his failings do not necessarily echo man's imperfection or guilt. In paganism, man had *confidence* in his gods, but this confidence could be shaken. Among the ancient Greeks as well as the Germanic peoples, a god who did not fulfill the protector role that was rightfully expected of him could be repudiated. (This same conception was extended into the political domain: the sovereign should be respected, but if he does not behave as expected of a sovereign, he can be legitimately overthrown.) With regard to the gods honored by the ancient Icelanders, Sigurður Nordal writes: "Men had dealings with the gods and quarreled with them if the gods failed them. Men sought to be on equal terms with the gods as with other men and expected their reward from the gods to be commensurate with their own sacrifices."[15] In the Icelandic sagas we even read of certain "godless men," who preferred to place their trust in their "own might and main" (*á mátt sinn ok megin*) rather than any particular deity.

Heraclitus, too, asked the same question posed by Jeremiah, but came up with a different answer. Let us hear what Nietzsche has to say in this regard: "Do guilt, injustice, contradiction, and suffering exist in this world? They do, proclaims Heraclitus, but only for the limited human mind which sees things apart but not connected, not for the *con-tuitive* god. For him all contradictions run into harmony, invisible to the common human eye, yet understandable to one who, like Heraclitus, is related to the contemplative god."[16]

In Christian theology, no evil exists naturally. Evil is neither a being nor a substance. Nor is it a non-created principle coeternal with God, as the Manicheans believed. Evil is only the destruction of being. It comes

exclusively from man and the poor application of his freedom. Subsequently, evil is everything that works in opposition to the teleological perspective of creation, everything that opposes the "direction of history" intended by Yahweh. "In Hebraic thought, and later in Christian thought, the cause of evil is to be found in *human history*; it is a created freedom that is the cause of evil and which is responsible for its existence."[17] In other words, man makes a "deficient" use of his freedom when he utilizes it differently from the way desired by Yahweh. ("I offer you the choice life or death, blessing or curse. Choose life and then you and your descendants will live; loving the Lord your God, obey him and hold fast to him" [Deuteronomy 30:19–20].) But then what is the value of a freedom that one *must* use in only one way? More importantly, what is the value of a freedom that, if used, produces evil? Furthermore, it is not even by using his freedom that man can ensure his salvation. Salvation is a gift from God; only God is the cause of salvation. Man can only make a *negative choice*: he is only *free to go astray*. "The ontological action of man is to choose death."[18] In addition, if it is man's poor use of his freedom that is the cause of evil, then the first cause of evil clearly resides in God for granting man such freedom. From whichever angle it is approached, the problem remains incomprehensible. In the final analysis, the Babylonian myth concerning the existence of evil is much more convincing. It blames man's ability to commit evil acts on the fact that, at the time of man's creation, the gods blended the blood of an evil god who had been executed with the matter from which the first men were created. In Judeo-Christianity, and in Christianity especially, it is uniquely man who is saddled with the responsibility for evil. Man is the *guilty* party. The abject, if we may employ the language of Julia Kristeva,[19] is radically *internalized*. And this is taken to the point of neurosis. Addressing God, Saint Augustine says: "What is good in me is by your work and your grace; what is evil in me is by my fault and your judgment."[20]

In paganism, there is no objective definition of evil. Evil is not inscribed within matter (as is claimed by, among others, the Neoplatonists), nor is it rooted in human nature (as in the Pauline conception). Evil does not pose a particular problem, because it is not viewed as an absolute value. It does not spring from Being, but from beings. It varies according to the values and ethical rules that individuals and peoples give themselves. More precisely,

from the perspective I am taking, evil is what prevents us from measuring up to the idea we have of ourselves—it is what makes us fall short, rather than exceeding our limitations, and is ultimately degrading. "What is good?" Nietzsche asks; "All that *heightens* the feeling of power, the will to power, power itself in man. What is bad?—All that proceeds from weakness. What is happiness?—The feeling that power increases, that a resistance is overcome."[21]

Taking human diversity, individual as well as collective, into consideration, how could evil be the same thing for everyone? There are no absolutes; there are only relative truths from given times and places. This by no means implies that "all is permitted." (As Husserl shows, the essence grasped in appearances is not contradicted from one *ego* to the next within the same culture, which is the basis of intersubjectivity.) Nor does it mean that ethics should be utilitarian, but simply that a system of ethics inevitably connected to a conception of the world that carries and roots it within a collective substratum. Evil is not a matter of "sin" or *a priori* guilt. Its determination is dependent on what we belong to and on the choices we make. Ethics is a fundamental given in paganism, but there is no universal moralization. This amounts to saying that there are no values in the world other than those resulting from our initiatives and interpretations. As Nietzsche says, "There are no moral phenomena at all, but only a moral interpretation of phenomena."[22]

Just as life and death transform each other incessantly and are necessary to each other, the same holds true for good and evil—and only imbeciles will find this an excuse to believe that what is good is no better than what is bad, or that both are of equal value. "Good and evil are one and the same," said Heraclitus,[23] and yet they are not equivalent. Good and evil are *a* same thing, but they are not *the* same thing. They are a same thing because they arise from the same source. "One is born from the other," asserts Jacob Böhme. "What we call evil is only another aspect of good," writes Goethe. Good may become evil and vice versa, just as "cold things become warm, and what is warm cools; what is wet dries, and the parched is moistened."[24] There is nevertheless a difference between hot and cold—but one constitutes the *becoming* of the other. It is because evil exists that there can be good. Every notion in fact requires its opposite. "The darkness is the greatest enemy of the light, yet it is the means by which the light is

revealed," observes Böhme; "If there were no black, then the white would not be revealed; and if there were no suffering, so also joy would not be revealed."[25] Good as well as evil are necessary for man to experience himself and construct himself. "This is why," Paracelsus says, "God has ordained a limit to good and evil so that neither ascends too high."[26] "Were evil to disappear," writes Sigrid Hunke, "the good would grow beyond its rightful measure and become more evil than an evil that had remained in its rightful measure. It would overthrow order and annihilate being! . . . The one cannot exist without the other . . . this is why there is nothing in nature that is entirely good or entirely evil."[27] Paracelsus would even go so far as to say that evil could be found in the highest echelon of creation. It existed before the fall of the angels, which only made it manifest. Since the beginning, good and evil have met in heaven, and even God himself has been affected.

This is also the reason why agonistic practices forbid one from going to extremes. "Goethe and Attila," writes Henry de Montherlant, "emanate from the same single source of universal energy. As natural phenomena, they are interdependent. The beauty and greatness of the universe are made as much of what you call evil as they are of what you call good, and Attila would agree with this as much as Goethe. Let us fight Attila, but fight knowing his higher utility; let us fight him with a profound kindness, and to be honest, fight him while loving him."[28]

By presenting good and evil as absolutes, that is, by replacing the real world with a "theoretical" world, Christianity, like Plato and Socrates, presented itself as an antagonist of the Dionysian vitality that compels the human soul to assert itself as a "*yeasayer*" to life. Morality is neither the grammar nor the truth of a life, which would be external and subject to it; morality corresponds, in the best of cases, to the description and qualification of a life. In paganism, the gods do not represent absolute good. They are both good and evil, insofar as they represent sublimated forms of the good and evil that coexist, as antagonists, within life itself. They are simultaneously *great* within each other. They are what inspired Pericles to exclaim: "we have forced every sea and land to be the highway of our daring, and everywhere, whether for evil or for good, have left imperishable monuments behind us!"[29]

Paganism never stopped tasting what the Bible calls the fruits of the tree of good and evil. It has never ceased to assert the conjunction of opposites, which Judeo-Christian monotheism describes with horror as confusion and chaotic *helter skelter*. And the worst "confusion" concerns absolute good and evil, which leads to their own surpassing. "Shame on you! You who call evil good and good evil!" declares Isaiah (5:20). The *non-distinction* of absolutes, the human "claim" to establish itself as the *founder of values*, is what the Bible condemns most fundamentally. It is the assertion of this "neutral zone" that Heidegger, himself condemned by Levinas,[30] makes one of the characteristics of Being. "I see and I know the totality of being in good and evil, and how one gives birth to the other," writes Jacob Böhme.[31] The "revelation"—if there is one—would be the non-existence of the opposites engendered by dualistic thought, the non-existence of the irreducible opposites that are born out of the affirmation of the Completely Other. Directly or indirectly, this is what Europe has been repeating ceaselessly for millennia. This is what it has been compelled to constantly hurl into the faceless face of Yahweh.

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1. Ernest Renan, *Cahiers de jeunesse, 1845–1846* [Early Works] (Paris: Calmann Lévy, 1906), 200.

2. One of the basic principles of anti-reductionism is that a whole can never be simply reduced to the sum of its parts. This principle has been applied to political sociology by Gustave Le Bon (*Psychologie des foules* [translated into English as *The Crowd*], 1895), to musicology by von Ehrenfels (*Über Gestaltqualitäten* [On Gestalt Qualities], 1890), to psychology by the *Gestalttheorie*, to biology by Ludwig von Bertalanffy, to physics by Ernest Mach, to history by Wilhelm Dilthey, and so on.

3. Sigrid Hunke, *Europas eigene Religion: Die Überwindung der religiösen Krise* [reissue of *Europas andere Religion*] (Tübingen: Grabert, 1997), 301–2.

4. Quoted in Hunke, *Europas eigene Religion,* 302.

5. Heraclitus, Fragment 8. [In the original French edition, Benoist seems to have combined thoughts from two Heraclitean fragments here; cf. Fragments 10, 80, etc. We have separated them by quotations marks; the translation of the first quote is from Philip Wheelright, *Heraclitus* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1959), 90. — *Ed.*]. Montherlant, for whom contradiction is the "foundation of the life of the mind" (*Un Voyageur solitaire est un diable* [A Solitary Traveler Is a Devil] [Paris: Gallimard, 1961], 204), has spoken of the major influence of Heraclitus on him: "[Heraclitus is] the first of my fathers," he wrote in *Tous feux éteints* [All Extinguished Fires] (Paris: Gallimard, 1975), 103. We may also quote Pierre Drieu La Rochelle: "If it is contradictory, so what? Contradiction is resolved in the unity of the real world" (*La Comédie de Charleroi* [The Comedy of Charleroi] [Gallimard, 1934], 170).

6. See C. G. Jung, *Mysterium Coniunctionis*, trans. R. F. C. Hull (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1963).

7. Cf. the works of Gilbert Durand on the principle of logical non-duality, already foreshadowed by the notion of *tertium datum*, the "intermediary" matter allowing for the union within a single

phenomenon of the antagonisms and contradictions revealed by analysis.

8. Saint-Exupéry, *Citadelle*.

9. *Midrash Tanhuma-Yelammedenu*, trans. Samuel A. Berman (Hoboken, N.J.: KTAV, 1996), 29 (chap. 1, §1).

10. Genesis 8:21. See Louis Rougier, *Du paradis à l'utopie* [From Paradise to Utopia] (Paris: Copernic, 1979), 41–48.

11. Blaise Pascal, *Pensées*, ed. Léon Brunschvicq (Paris: Hachette, 1904), vol. II, 392.

12. Cohen, *Les Routes divergentes*, 30.

13. Philippe Nemo declares in *Job ou l'excèss de mal* that the "excess of adversity" will be compensated by an "excess of gifts." He goes on to say that everything that exceeds the world is equal to God, an excess of adversity or an excess of good, and that it is this adversity that "proves" God. This interpretation will only satisfy those who truly want it to. One should rather reread C. G. Jung's *Answer to Job* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1973), namely on the way in which the God of Abrahamic monotheism, taken as "the highest and strongest" value, pluralizes and diversifies himself in order to manifest to man.

14. Maistre, *Considérations sur la France*, chap. 3.

15. Sigurður Nordal, *Icelandic Culture*, trans. Vilhjálmur T. Bjarnar (Ithaca: Cornell University Library, 1990), 118.

16. Nietzsche, *Philosophy in the Tragic Age of the Greeks* (trans. Cowan), 61–62.

17. Tresmontant, *Problèmes du christianisme*, 163.

18. Pierre Chaunu, *Eglise, culture et société* [Church, Culture, and Society] (Paris: SEDES, 1981), 194.

19. See Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, trans. Leon S. Roudiez (New York: Columbia University Press, 1992).

20. At least Judaism accepts that man can never totally destroy the "evil inclination" inside him. The righteous one (*tzadik*) is not someone who does only good, but someone who does more good than evil.

21. Nietzsche, *The Anti-Christ* (trans. Hollingdale), §2.

22. Friedrich Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil: Prelude to a Philosophy of the Future*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Random House, 1966), IV, §108. For more on the relationship between morality, culture, and value theory, see Arnold Gehlen, *Moral und Hypermoral*, and Helmut Kron, *Ethos und Ethik: Der Pluralismus der Kulturen und das Problem des ethischen Relativismus* [Ethos and Ethic: The Pluralism of Cultures and the Problem of Ethical Relativism] (Frankfurt: Athenäum, 1960).

23. Heraclitus, Fragment 58.

24. Heraclitus, Fragment 126 (trans. Burnet).

25. Jacob Böhme, *Mysterium Magnum*, VII: 45, chap. 8, §27; translation from Craig Koslofsky, *Evening's Empire: A History of the Night in Early Modern Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 64.

26. Paracelsus, *Practica*, 11; cited in Hunke, *Europas eigene Religion*, 312.

27. Hunke, *Europas eigene Religion*, 312.

28. Henry de Montherlant, *Aux fontaines du désir* [From the Fountains of Desire] (Paris: Grasset, 1927), 29.

29. Pericles' Funeral Oration in *Thucydides' Peloponnesian War,* trans. Richard Crawley (London: Dent, 1910), II, 41.

30. Cf. Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*.

31. Böhme, *Letter to Caspar Lindner*, 12, 8; cited in Hunke, *Europas eigene Religion*, 323.

Chapter Twenty-Five

Tolerance and Inner Freedom

Gabriel Matzneff notes ironically that "One of the most *scandalous* allures of pagan Rome is this tolerance, this respect for others . . ."[1] I have already mentioned the issue of pagan *tolerance*, showing that it was born, as a principle, from both recognition of human diversity and a denial of dualism, which entails the acknowledgement of the variety of faces of God within one unitarian affirmation of the divine. But tolerance, as we have clearly seen, also arises from a lucid awareness of the coincidence of opposites in God. If there is no irreducible alterity between concepts, no impossible reconciliation, then nothing and no one could embody absolute evil, which is why tolerance is called for. We know the words of Symmachus: "What difference does it make by what pains each seeks the truth? We cannot attain to so great a secret by one road."[2] This means that one summit can be attained by various routes, that the Deity speaks to each people according to the "tongue" it understands—that the language of this being that is the world is spoken in a multitude of inner worlds, forever inspiring new forms of fulfillment and self-overcoming.

It is not by chance that the majority of representatives of the "religion of Europe" also made themselves the defenders of freedom and a positive tolerance that is not to be confused with either "liberalism" or the absence of opinions, nor with indifference with respect to values. Nicholas of Cusa, although a cardinal, defended the merits of paganism. Erasmus protested forcefully against religious intolerance. Giovanni Pico della Mirandola developed the idea of a *pax philosophica*. Marguerite de Navarre argued for the same thing, as did Sebastian Franck. Luther himself reestablished the right of interpretation and free examination.

Paganism can only react against the Christian theme of "man's corruption by original sin," and against the idea of man's *a priori* guilt, that

certain modern ideologues have not failed to borrow and exploit for their own purposes in the sense of an intentional amnesia, self-abnegation, or internalized self-racism. We know how Christianity revealed itself to be more radical in this domain than Judaism, mainly due to the influence of Pauline theology, and how Augustinian theology and Protestantism would later exacerbate its radical nature. In Judaism, Adam's failing is not, properly speaking, a hereditary fault, but rather a "blemish." It is a defect situated in time and does not necessarily flow back out onto all men, as the gift of the Ten Commandments through the revelation from Sinai has essentially eliminated it. Catholic theology is more willingly based on the commentary of Saint Paul (Romans 5:12–21) than on the text of Genesis (3:1–24): "It was through one man that sin entered the world, and through sin death, and thus death pervaded the whole human race, inasmuch as all men have sinned" (Romans 5:12). However, original sin did not ontologically alter human nature in its substance; it merely polluted the relationship between man and God. Man retains the ability to do good and to refrain from doing evil. Luther, by contrast, adopted a theology that was not only inspired by Saint Augustine, but which also betrays a certain Gnostic contamination. This led him to declare that, since the sin committed by Adam and Eve, man's nature and essence were "totally corrupted" and disfigured. Human nature is "subject to the power of the devil and delivered into his control." Man is intrinsically evil: "The truth therefore is that man, made from a bad tree, can do nothing but want and do evil." In 1516, Luther made the negation of man's fundamental freedom the starting point of his doctrine of justification. In 1525, in his response to Erasmus, he again declared that fallen human nature was incapable of any good.

In opposition to this theology of original sin, paganism asserts that man, by constructing himself and leading a life in conformance with the principles he gives it, can confer a meaning on life. Paganism declares that there is no need for man to be cleansed of a hereditary "original sin" by the intermediary of a "redeemer," nor is there any need for him to work toward the advent of a "messianic" age. In short, in his thoughts and deeds, his choices and his works, man was sufficient unto himself. Augustine's great adversary, Pelagius, arguing in favor of the prerogatives of free will, declared that man could live without sin and this was what God desired. To the Augustinian conception of grace—a grace due to biblical *election* through the intermediary of a "redeemer"—he opposed a grace of *creation*,

grace of the perpetual immanence of divine nature in human nature, which allows man to act entirely according to his own will. For Augustine, there is a conflict between grace and freedom; for Pelagius, there is a fusion of both qualities in the same reality. For Meister Eckhart as well, the union of human will and divine will can only be a completely consensual act. It is not "original sin" that separates man from God, but his self-indulgence, his inability to become sovereign over himself and to attain an active impersonality, an Olympian detachment (*Gelassenheit*), which would be the equivalent of full self-mastery. Through the voice of his Prometheus, Goethe exclaims: "Did you not accomplish all this by yourself, my fiery sacred heart?"[3]—whereas Doctor Faust, after defying Mephistopheles, eventually triumphs, thus justifying all the confidence God has placed in him. For Kant, the foundation of morals does not rest in any law external to man, but clearly within man, "in the depths of his heart," in the *categorical imperative*—this "moral imperative in the form of morality," which Spengler will describe in *The Decline of the West* as "Faustian and uniquely Faustian"—in the very roots of the internal consciousness, and that it is the respect for this imperative which reveals to man the dignity of his own being and allows him to take part in the "eternal order." Religion is therefore the "recognition of all our duties as divine commands"—which no longer amounts to deducing ethical regulations from the existence of God. Later, in the extreme case, it is the deduction of God's existence from the presence of a morality inherent to the human spirit. Finally, Nicolas Berdyaev also offers a defense for the human creative act, in which he saw the "essential theme" of life. Speaking only of Christ as a symbol of the encounter between man and the divine that takes place inside each of us, he wrote: "God sets no limits on human freedom. . . . God expects of man that he takes part in the work of creation, in the pursuit of the creation of this world."[4]

Man, according to pagan thought, must also recognize the possibility of a perfectly consubstantial relationship with the divine. This union with the divine signifies nothing other than man's appropriation of his own inner freedom. In the final analysis, man is fundamentally free in his inner core, free to grow or to shrink, free to gain or to lose self-esteem (and the self-esteem of those who share his values). Freedom in paganism is neither "the destruction of all disciplines,"[5] nor the "free" acceptance of submission to Yahweh's desires. It represents a reintegration into man's inner self, a freely

desired reintegration, for it alone is capable of *getting us in the desired shape* of our own specific nature, free of the coercion that Judeo-Christian monotheism invests in a being who is radically distinct from the world. Pico della Mirandola has God address man in these terms: "Thou shalt have the power to degenerate into the lower forms of life, which are brutish. Thou shalt have the power, out of thy soul's judgment, to be reborn into the higher forms, which are divine."[6]

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1. *Le Monde*, 26 April 1980.

2. Memorial of Symmachus, §10. Translation from *A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, ed. Schaff and Wace, vol. 10.

3. [*Hast du nicht alles selbst vollendet, /Heilig glühend Herz?*]

4. Nicola Berdyaev, *Essai d'autobiographie sprituelle* [Essay on a Spiritual Autobiography] (Paris: Buchet-Chastel, 1980).

5. Barret-Kriegel, *L'État et les esclaves*, 67.

6. Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, *Oration on the Dignity of Man*, trans. A. Robert Caponigri (Chicago: Regnery, 1956), introduction, xv.

Chapter Twenty-Six

The Return of the Gods

Although a comparison of the histories of Indo-European religions reveals so many functional similarities and "ideologies" among them, the titular gods of the same function almost never bear the same name. In Greece, with the sole definite exception of Zeus—which is not the name of a god, but the word "god," deriving from **dyēus* or **deiwos* (as in *Zeus pater*, the "God-Father")[1]—the names of the Olympians do not even appear to be Hellenic. (The cases of Poseidon, Hera, and Dionysos are still debatable.) The theoretical probability that the name of a major god would be "forgotten" seems quite low. It is as if, owing to the *structure* of an inherited common base, the widest variety of divine names could be given. In the "Gylfaginning," Hár (Odin) declares: "to put it in a word, most names [for a god] have been given as a result of the fact that with all the branches of languages in the world, each nation finds it necessary to adapt the name to their language for invocations and prayers for themselves."[2] The important thing is not so much the name itself, but the fact that man can *call a god into existence by naming him*.

"God only appears when all creatures invoke him," declares Meister Eckhart.[3] He also says, "When he becomes aware of himself, God recognizes himself in himself"—and this phrase is somewhat reminiscent of how Odin hung on a tree, having "given himself to himself."[4] Hölderlin upholds the idea that the gods remained in some way imperfect so long as men have not *re-presented* them. It is only in and through man that the gods can become truly aware and fulfill themselves. The role—innocent and terrible—of the poet therefore involves sensing the yearning of gods who are as yet not awakened to awareness, calling them into existence by naming them, and in engaging in a foundational dialogue with them, upon which all future dialogues will be created.

"What rendered the oracle of Delphi mute," notes Jean-Luc Marion, "was not the eventual discovery of some sort of deception (Fontenelle), but the disappearance of the Greeks."[5] The creation of new values, the re-appropriation of certain values, is tied to the creation or re-appropriation of a *point of view*. Did not Heidegger define a value as a "center of perspective for a view with an aim in mind"? To rediscover the spirit of Delphi—in order for the Oracle to again begin to "speak"—it is therefore completely natural to turn toward the sources of Greek thought, to the very origin of this Greek people whom Hölderlin, in an elegy to the Archipelago, called *das innige Volk*.[6] It is necessary for the Greeks to be "reborn" in order for new gods to appear—these gods who represent "another beginning." For this clearly involves making the gods *re-appear*. When interviewed by the magazine *Der Spiegel*, Heidegger declared, in a text published in 1977: "Only a god can save us (*nur noch ein Gott kann uns retten*). The sole possibility that is left for us is to prepare a sort of readiness, through thinking and poetizing, for the appearance of the god or for the absence of the god in the time of foundering."[7] This idea that "the gods are close" is also mentioned by Ernst Jünger, whose connections to Heideggerian thought are well known: "Man's solitude increases, the desert extends around us, but perhaps it is in the desert that the gods will come."[8]

In his autobiography, C. G. Jung tells of a "moment of unusual clarity," during which he had a strange dialogue with something inside him:

> In what myth does man live nowadays? In the Christian myth, the answer might be. "Do *you* live in it?" I asked myself. To be honest, the answer was no. "For me, it is not what I live by." "Then do we no longer have any myth?" "No, evidently we no longer have any myth." "But then what is your myth—the myth in which you do live?" At this point the dialogue with myself became uncomfortable, and I stopped thinking. I had reached a dead end.[9]

This is precisely the dead end that we too have reached. How are we to get beyond it?

In *The Will to Power,* Nietzsche wrote: "does morality make impossible this pantheistic affirmation of all things, too? At bottom, it is only the moral God that has been overcome. Does it make sense to conceive a God

'beyond good and evil'?"[10] The answer to this question appears more clearly with each passing day. The death of the "moral God" now leaves—at the end of "European nihilism"—a place free for the arrival of "new gods" whose "affirmative role supports this world, which is the only one."[11] The dead god of whom Nietzsche speaks is but one corpse among many, and there is nothing divine about the cadaver: this "God" was transformed a little too quickly into the god of the philosophers! The claim that paganism was already moribund when Christianity imposed itself is partly true: clearly, without the relative decline of the ancestral faith, no new religion would have been able to establish itself. But what is often overlooked is that, with the same stroke, Christianity concealed from Europe the truth of the gaping abyss left by the departure of the old gods, and the possibility of their return. And today this abyss is being unmasked: as Michel Maffesoli writes, to speak of the "death of God" is to also "leave to the gods their chances."[12] The abyss is unmasked and, in being exposed, creates the hour of the greatest distress—a distress that is inherently necessary, for it is required by "European nihilism." "The myth is always present and rises back to the surface when its hour has come, like a treasure," writes Jünger:[13]

> But this heterogeneous principle will only emerge at the perfect moment, when it has reached its highest potency. Now the mechanism is just stirring in this regard, a birth cry. One does not travel back in time to reconquer myth; one meets it again when the times tremble to their very foundations, beneath the empire of extreme danger.[14]

It is really a deadline that we are confronted with: to know whether the gods will bind their destiny to ours—as they did before.

Being (*Sein*), for Heidegger, is inseparable from man as being-in-the-world (*Dasein*). This Being, which "is found in history" so as to be "temporal to the depths of its being," is a "Being" not to be confused with the sum or succession of other beings, a "Being" truly in itself. This Being possesses a determinateness marked out by four divisions: in contradistinction to becoming, it is *enduring*; in contradistinction to seeming, it is the *always identical*; in contradistinction to thinking, it is the *present-at-hand*; in contradistinction to the ought, the project, it is what *lies*

at hand and *has not yet been actualized*, or *already has been actualized*. "Endurance, perpetual identity, presence at hand, lying at hand—all at bottom say the same: *constant presence*."[15] But Heideggerian Being is no more God—who would then be the Supreme "Being"—than it is a simple sum of beings. It is that Being which cannot do without man, just as man cannot do without it. In fact, let me repeat, only man can question himself about Being; he alone is the subject of lived experience that attains its truth by understanding the truth of Being. This is why the question of Being is truly the fundamental question, the necessary question for "the reawakening of the spirit," a spirit that is threatened ceaselessly by "nervous anxiety" and "incomprehension." The thought of Being is born from its own questioning —from the question "Why is there something rather than nothing?"— whereas such a question is "unthinkable" from the standpoint of Christian faith, because God precisely constitutes the *a priori* response: it is a "response" which, in retrospect, prevents the question from even being raised. To ponder what the nature of Being consists of, is at the same time to ponder what our being-there [*Dasein*] in history consists of. Therefore, it is also to ponder the nature and identity of man. Ontology, metaphysics, and anthropology are linked. Hence the following remark by Heidegger: "Only from the truth of Being can the essence of the holy be thought. Only from the essence of the holy can the essence of divinity be thought. Only in the light of the essence of divinity can it be thought or said what the word 'God' is to signify."[16]

God was not assassinated by surprise. He deliberately set himself up to be killed. Christianity itself represents his own failure. Nihilism is hardly the antithesis of Christianity; to the contrary, it is the logical outcome of Christianity. The death of God, as Nietzsche has demonstrated perfectly, is the inevitable consequence of the *death of the real*—a death for which the Judeo-Christian discourse is responsible. ("To no longer speak the real, but to repeat conditioned concepts, mutilates the interrogation of being, removes being from the place where *power* solicits the *will*," declares Pierre Boudot.) Nihilism results from the gradual *unveiling* of a doctrine that places life's center of gravity outside of *real* life, and which is gradually and precisely unmasked as such: "If one shifts the center of gravity of life out of life into the 'Beyond'—into *nothingness*—one has deprived life as such of its center of gravity."[17] Just as the logical analysis of language, pushed to its limits, leads to abandoning language in all its forms, similarly, as Nietzsche

says, “the faith in the categories of reason is the cause of nihilism.”[18] The process took place in two stages. In the first stage, Judeo-Christian monotheism began to “demythologize” and *desacralize* the world; and in the second stage, it consequently became the victim of the very desacralization process that it had itself unleashed. A world that has been emptied of the notion of the sacred can no longer provide support for any kind of faith. The collapse of Christianity as a collective, lived faith is a self-collapse made inevitable by a reversal of values, which appears today in broad daylight. The history of “Western” metaphysics is only the history of the slow unmasking of a Christian aspiration to nothingness.

Thus, we can better understand that contemporary decadence is not the result of a distancing from the Christian religion, but rather of the latter’s *profanation* in the proper sense of the word, that is, of its generalized diffusion in profane forms—of its generalized infection. And it is in this sense that one can say, without cultivating paradox, that the world has never been as Judeo-Christian as it is today. The moral God is dead, but the values he has bequeathed are more present than ever, even though their impotency is a generally noted fact, and even though they merely constitute the *décor* of the impasse that our contemporaries crash into time and time again, like a fly against a windowpane. God is dead, but the modern world continues to claim him as its authority, precisely because it cannot and does not *want* to rid itself of his carcass. All Western “humanism,” according to Levinas’ formulation, is passing through a “secularization of Judeo-Christianity”—and is it no coincidence that today we are witnessing such phenomena as: the resurgence of a fundamental criticism of Heidegger’s thought in tandem with the adulation of a Judeo-Christian monotheism that nobody *believes* in anymore, but to which everyone lays claim; the exaltation of Freud against Jung; the accusations against “mastery” and all forms of authority; the depiction of power as an “evil”; the indictment of the State; *vengeance* exacted against the world based on a recourse to the Law; hypercritical pessimism and individualist immediacy; the apologias for *exile* and *rupture*; advocacy for the “rhizome” against the “root”; and so on. Our era is ceaselessly marked by the very thing it thinks it has broken with, and for which it only restores the most one-dimensional of transpositions.

To break with this secularization of Judeo-Christian discourse is to assert, once and for all, man as his own creator. Of course, as I said earlier, man cannot be put in the place of God. He will never attain the plenitude

and finitude of his being. Every horizon he manages to reach will only reveal another. Man only surpasses himself to find other means of surpassing himself again. He is, according to the beautiful phrase of Meister Eckhart, akin to "a vase that grows larger as one fills it and which will never be full." What is man's role? It is to master forces in order to create forms from them, and to master forms to create forces. It is to have recourse to that inner world which allows the individual to attain what is greater and other than himself: the "transcendent *ego*" that Husserl opposes to the "everyday self," synonymous with the impersonal "one" (*das Man*) and with the inauthenticity whose heavy dictatorship over the contemporary world is denounced by Heidegger. This is what Nietzsche expresses when he writes: "Our very essence is to create a higher being than ourselves. We must create beyond ourselves. That is the instinct of procreation, that is the instinct of action and of work.—Just as all willing presupposes a purpose, so does mankind presuppose a creature which is not yet formed but which provides the aim of life. This is the freedom of all will."[19]

This is an assertion that is neither purely "vital" nor one-dimensionally "Promethean." The overman is neither a super-species, nor a super-brain, nor a man stripped of all *humanitas*. He is "the one who rises above the man of yesterday and today, uniquely to bring this man, in the very first instance, to his being, which is always suffering, and establish him there."[20] He is the "third stage" of man as described by Paracelsus; one who will master both the visible human animal and the invisible human consciousness; and he will be attained through a second birth. He is the one who accepts and desires the Eternal Return of the Same, which is to say, the infinite duration of the being of Being; he is the "name given to the being of the man that corresponds to the being of Being" (Heidegger). Finally, he is the one whose essence is "desired by the will to power," namely, the will to live, the will to *grow*, and the will of Will stemming from the being of Being, which is also self-will initiated by the self. For there is a mandatory connection—a "circle," says Heidegger—between the notions of the will to power, super-humanity, and the Eternal Return, as well as the notion of taking mastery over the earth:

> It is difficult but for future thinking unavoidable to attain the high responsibility out of which Nietzsche reflected on the essence of that humanity destined (in the destiny of being as the will to power)

> to undertake mastery over the earth. The essence of the overman is not a warrant for a fit of capricious frenzy. It is the law, grounded in being itself, of a long chain of the highest self-overcomings, which alone will make man ripe for beings which as beings are part of being. This being as the will to power brings to light its essence as the will to power and through this disclosure is epoch making, that is, it makes the last epoch of metaphysics.[21]

The world is consubstantial and coextensive with man, and that is why it is itself in the first place subject to the desire for power that man manifests in this regard. The goal of this desire oriented toward power is not the childish satisfaction of a yearning for "control" or "domination" that would merely be the sign of a feeble mind in search of justificatory compensation for its own weakness, but rather the *inscription* into the world of a project conforming to our own referential values—a project that goes beyond our unavoidable finitude and at the same time forces us, within the space of this finitude, to go beyond ourselves. It is in this sense that the world is our property and the *Arbeitsmaterial* [22] for our undertakings. But if it is fundamentally our property, it is also primarily not the property of an Other, a Completely Other. As Philippe Nemo writes—although he does not subscribe to it himself—"the world is will to power because man himself *is* will to power. Man and world resonate in the will to power."[23]

Wisdom in the Bible is equated with withdrawal and humility, a clear perception of the *limits* beyond which "pride" begins. For Nietzsche, by contrast, *wisdom* and *pride* are closely associated. Their point in common is the cold, sure gaze, which in both cases knows how to assess. (Pride and wisdom are symbolized in the Nietzschean discourse by the two animals of Zarathustra: the eagle and the serpent—the same serpent that Genesis equates with the "evil inclination.")[24] It is through the association of wisdom and pride that man can *rediscover the world* and break the screen that is interposed between him and the world, the screen which *objectifies* the matter of his freedom and imposes upon him the ability to recognize only objects.

Rediscovering the world is again to have done with the spirit of *vengeance*. To have done with a system in which pain calls for punishment, guilt, and resentment. To have done with this "resentment against time" that Heidegger says consists of posing *supra-temporal ideals* as absolutes "so

that, when measured against them, the temporal can only lower itself to being strictly a non-being": "Freeing oneself from vengeance is to pass from resentment against time to the will that represents being in the Eternal Return of the Same, and becomes itself an advocate of the Circle."[25] Zarathustra himself exclaims: "For *that man be freed from revenge*, that is for me the bridge to the highest hope and a rainbow after long storms!"[26] So there is no other recourse than the *jubilant* approval of existence in its entirety, and primarily as the very condition for its transformation—an approach that intersects with the one proposed by Clément Rosset,[27] an approval to which he gives the name "elation," consisting of the secret "grace" represented by love of the real. A love of the real that is neither love of life alone, nor love of others, nor self-love, nor the love of God himself, but which is, above all, the love of existence in its entirety as it holds all antagonistic opposites, all potentialities—a love of the real without any *corrective* for subjugating it, adding to it, or duplicating it. Love, says Rosset, of a "world where nothing is foreseen and nothing is acted, where nothing is necessary, but where everything is possible. An approach, finally, that proclaims that one can do nothing *in* the world and *in* life unless one first declares oneself *for* them."

With the implantation of Christianity in Europe, there began a slow process of disassociation and shattering of the orders of sociality. This process eventually crystallized in the form of a veritable neurosis, of which the one-dimensional society denounced by Marcuse is only the inverse and the contradictory relative, at the same time as it is the derisory corrective. The essential cause of this movement—which is today nearing its end—has been the coexistence in the European mentality of two antagonistic spiritualities. The death of the "moral God" *signals* the failure of this coexistence. It also tolls the bell for a European history determined by traditional metaphysics; it "gives the destiny of two millennia of Western history."[28] What matters now is to push this process to its conclusion, to reach its dialectical reversal and to go beyond it. The realization of *all* the consequences of the death of the "moral God" is nothing other than the "nihilism" spoken of by Nietzsche, which he assigns us the task of emerging from after having assumed and crossed through it. "European nihilism" is thus in no way the "rule of *nothing*." It is the obligatory transition to another beginning; it is, says Heidegger, a "historical

movement," the "fundamental movement of the history of the West."[29] It is both end and beginning, closing and opening, the destruction of values and the new creation of values.

It involves the abandonment of a metaphysics wherein God has created the world *ex nihilo*, wherein God is the *primus* from which heaven and earth, and men and gods arise, for a metaphysics wherein man can bring into existence at any time a God who awaits his call in order to attain full self-awareness—a metaphysics that subordinates God to a being within a unified fourfold (Heidegger's *das Geviert*), that similarly consists of earth, sky, man, and God, without any one of these four elements absent from the center, but on the contrary, in such a way that it is only on the basis of this ensemble that it is possible for each to exist. It involves no longer seeking an objective "truth" outside the world, but intentionally creating one out of a new system of values. It involves the founding of a neo-paganism that allows the realization of "an authentic lifestyle"—in other words, the responsible engagement of the "resolved decision that anticipates" and which creates in man, a being "made to die," the conditions for a "system of spiritual power" that permanently encourages self-uplifting and self-overcoming. Finally, it involves giving birth again to a metaphysics that excludes any critical approach which has not first posited the approval of the world; a metaphysics that excludes all mental approaches based on exile or negativity; a metaphysics that excludes the eternal *no* of dualistic monotheism—in other words, a metaphysics in which setting down roots, staying in one place, dwelling there and thinking there, go hand in hand and are perceived as one.

Man is preeminently a *giver of meaning*. In paganism, meaning is not nonexistent; it is tied to man's will, and therefore necessarily plurivocal. Man does not "discover" what was there before him. He founds and creates the world through the meaning he gives to things, through the plurality of meaning he assigns to the entire ensemble of beings. And because this *foundation* results from constantly renewed actions and choices, the world is not static; it *becomes*—it is not created once and for all; it is constantly founded by new bestowals of meaning (*Sinnverleihungen*). As the pre-Socratics felt, long before Schopenhauer, the world is only *will* and *representation*. Man, alone, organizes an external reality that, without him, is only a kind of chaos—in the extreme case, a kind of non-being. All human life is inseparable from the meaning man gives it. Everything even

takes on *a* meaning by the way man regards it, even before his action transforms it, thereby forcing it to attain its true status of existence. Going even further than Kant, Schopenhauer declares: "Space, time, and causality can be found and fully known, starting from the subject, even without the knowledge of the object itself."[30]

Today, the greatest bestowal of meaning that can possibly be imagined is the one which announces and anticipates the *renaissance of the gods*. But nothing, of course, is written in advance. Nietzsche was the first to "physiognomically" sense this historic moment when man prepares to ascend to total domination of the earth, and it is from this perspective that he demands, as a prerequisite, the transition to a new state of humanity. (Which amounts to saying that man can only fully dominate the earth provided he can fully dominate himself.) But Nietzsche also clearly felt that this moment was the one in which Judeo-Christian discourse would reach its maximal point of *diffusion* and of *dilution*, and that never before had the negative values of man's autonomy, of his ability to establish himself as more than himself, been as present as in this age, which require their overcoming. But what else should one do in the night, if not assert the possibility of the dawn? And begin striving to break the *language* of twenty centuries of Judeo-Christian egalitarianism, this language which is only the *locus* of a "universal incarceration" (Pierre Boudot). What do we want? We want, through a new beginning, to realize the "appropriation" (*Ereignis*), which is the reciprocal implication of Being and Time. We wish to realize the triumphal synthesis announced by Joachim of Fiore. We wish to oppose Faith against Law; *mythos* against *logos*; the innocence of becoming against the guilt of the creature; the legitimacy of the will to(ward) power against the exaltation of servitude and humility; and man's autonomy against his dependency. We value desire over pure reason; life over its problematic; the image over the concept; a sense of place over exile; the desire for history over the end of history; and the will that transforms and "*yeasays*" the world over negativity and refusal. "People of these hard times," writes Robert Sabatier, "you must relearn the language of the sun—you must decimate the demons of the night."[31] And for that, you must project into the world the essential questioning. "That which remains," Hölderlin said, "the poets have founded."

Cannes, May 1980–Avoriaz, January 1981.

1. [The Proto-Indo-European words **dyēus* and **deiwos*, which themselves share a common origin, underlie various divine names in the descendant Indo-European languages (Greek *Zeus*, Latin, *deus*, Sanskrit, *deva*, Old Norse *Týr*, etc.), but originally designated a "god (of the diurnal sky)." The asterisks serve to indicate that the words are hypothetical reconstructions based on the science of historical linguistics. —*Ed*.]

2. "Gylfaginning," in Snorri Sturluson, in *Edda* (trans. Faulkes), 22.

3. Eckhart, Sermon: *Nolite timere eos qui corpus occident*.

4. [Cf. strophe 138 in the poem "Hávamál" (*Poetic Edda*); the word "given" should be understood here as meaning "sacrificed." —*Ed.*]

5. Marion, "La double idolâtrie," 49.

6. [Hölderlin's phrase can be translated as "the intimate people," but Benoist certainly makes reference to it with a Heideggerian interpretation of the German phrase in mind; cf. Martin Heidegger, *Hölderlin's Hymns "Germania" and "The Rhine,"* trans. William McNeill and Julia Ireland (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2014), 106–7. —*Ed.*]

7. "Only a God Can Save Us: *Der Spiegel*'s Interview with Martin Heidegger," trans. Maria P. Alter and John D. Caputo, in *The Heidegger Controversy,* ed. Richard Wolin, *The Heidegger Controversy* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press), 91–116, here at 107.

8. Interview with Gilles Lapouge, *La Quinzaine littéraire*, 16 February 1980.

9. Jung, *Memories, Dreams, Reflections* (New York: Random House: 1965), 171.

10. Nietzsche, *The Will to Power* (trans. Kaufmann and Hollingdale), §55. We should keep in mind that in the original German, Nietzsche's formulation *Wille zur Macht* (traditionally translated as "will to power") evokes a will that tends *toward* power. This is a nuance of some significance.

11. Marion, "La double idolâtrie."

12. Maffesoli, *La Violence totalitaire*, 128.

13. Here Jünger is taking up an old mythological theme, according to which buried treasures periodically rise back to the surface in times of distress. It is also in such times that dead emperors, who "sleep" with their armies in the sides of mountains, reemerge to save their people. Treasures can then be collected, in the way Mephistopheles did in Part One of Goethe's *Faust*.

14. Ernst Jünger, *Sur l'homme et le temps* [On Man and Time] (Monaco: Le Rocher, 1957), 55–56.

15. Heidegger, "The Restriction of Being," in *Introduction to Metaphysics*, 216. [The wording of Benoist's preceding sentence here has been modified to reflect the terminology used in this English translation of Heidegger's text. —*Ed*.]

16. Martin Heidegger, "Letter on Humanism," trans. Frank A. Capuzzi and J. Glenn Gray, in *Basic Writings*, ed. David Farrell Krell (New York: Harper and Row, 1977), 230.

17. Nietzsche, *The Anti-Christ* (trans. Hollingdale), §43.

18. Nietzsche, *The Will to Power* (trans. Kaufmann and Hollingdale), §12.

19. Friedrich Nietzsche, "Notes on 'Thus Spake Zarathustra,'" §45, trans. Anthony M. Ludovici, in *The Complete Works of Friedrich Nietzsche*, ed. Oscar Levy (New York: Macmillan, 1911), vol. 16.

20. Heidegger, *Essais et conférences* (Paris: Gallimard, 1980), 122.

21. Heidegger, *Off the Beaten Track*, 189.

22. ["working material" —*Ed*.]

23. Nemo, *Job et l'excès de mal*, 123.

24. [Cf. “Zarathustra’s Prologue,” §10, in Nietzsche’s *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, and also the commentary on “Zarathustra’s Animals” in Martin Heidegger, *Nietzsche (Volumes 1 and 2)*, trans. David Farrell Krell (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1991), 45–48. —*Ed*.]

25. Heidegger, *Essais et conférences*, 136.

26. Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* (trans. Kaufmann), “On the Tarantulas.”

27. Rosset, *Le Réel et son double*.

28. Heidegger, *Off the Beaten Track*, 160.

29. Heidegger, *Off the Beaten Track*, 163.

30. Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Representation* (trans. Payne), §2.

31. Robert Sabatier, *Les Fêtes solaires* [Solar Festivals] (Paris: Michel, 1955).

Afterword:
An Interview with Alain de Benoist[1]

Neo-paganism burst onto the French intellectual scene with the appearance of *On Being a Pagan* fifteen years ago. Looking back now, what do you think of this manifesto? And, basically, why go that way?

You have to begin with simple things. For several millennia, the peoples of Europe practiced religions that are usually called "pagan," an old name which was pejorative from the start. These religions formed a system of representations, values, and specific figures. They were the spiritual support and framework for a great many cultures and large civilizations to which we are directly or indirectly, but not exclusively, the heirs. The pagan religions were then challenged by Christianity, which had another system of representation and conceptualized the religious event in an entirely different way. Comparative study of these two systems allows us to understand why they clashed, but at the same time, encourages us to define ourselves in relation to them. Taking a stand for paganism does not mean endeavoring to design the world, but rather to *see* the world according to the guidelines of the system of representation that is inherent to it.

There are many paths to paganism. You could approach it by way of aesthetic sentiment or instinctive rejection of the Christian worldview. It could be the desire to connect with a tradition or with sources intimately associated with it. It could also be—and this would be the case for me—through the conviction that the pathologies of the modern world are the illegitimate but obvious offspring of Christian theology. It would be an entirely natural move, then, to take a sympathetic look at this other religion, paganism, which put up such a resistance to Christianization for as long as it did. Of course, ultimately, there is never an absolutely pressing reason for belonging to one system over another. If there were one, it would justify this system being offered to or imposed on the entire world, something I would not allow myself to do. At most, we can observe that one of these systems corresponds better to our sensibilities, that in the past it had

produced effects we considered to be better, that it is the proper extension of a tradition to which we want to belong—really that it just corresponds better than another to what we believe to be the truth.

Paganism is an all-encompassing system. It was this system I tried to describe in *On Being a Pagan* by systematically shedding light on those areas where it seems to stand in implacable opposition to the Christian concept of man and the world. Some considered this approach "too intellectual." Indeed it is, but I don't see any other way of doing it. Studying paganism offers not only the pleasure of knowing that you are getting something out of it, but also an alternative that is both intellectual and spiritual. It allows us to see how our most distant ancestors perceived the relationship between man and the world and the relationship of human beings to one another, what ethical attitudes they favored, what place they accorded the social bond, their idea of temporality, what their concept of the sacred was. The learning we derive from this exercise will be valid for all time, but first and foremost for our own time, setting us guidelines for conduct and assisting us in the work of thinking. When the myth tells us that in marrying Themis, goddess of order and justice, Zeus begets the Seasons and the Fates, for example, we learn something that far exceeds the account itself. Likewise, the myth of Gullveig warns us against "gold lust." The fate reserved for Prometheus teaches us about technological hubris and the consequences of allowing it to run unbridled. And the Delphic precept "nothing in excess" helps us understand the perverse nature of the modern principle of "more, more, more."

Neo-paganism currently assumes a number of identifiable forms. I can see three main categories, myself: community or "sectarian" neo-paganism, based on imitation of ancient rites or revival of regional popular traditions; literary neo-paganism (see, for example, the interview with Christian Laborde recently published in *Éléments*), based mainly on intuition and poetic inspiration; and finally, intellectual neo-paganism, wherein myth, the imagination, the archetype, or the "polytheism of values" are the elements actively used to interpret and comprehend the world. Do you think there is a unity between them or are the categories more disparate?

The pagan tradition (or, in a more general sense, reference to antiquity) has always inspired writers and artists to varying degrees. Most of the German Romantics, beginning with Friedrich Schelling, Joseph von Görres, or Novalis, pitted against what they considered to be a soulless modern world the memory of an ancient world where, as Schiller said, "everything was the vestige of a god." In the nineteenth century, ancient times were also a major source of inspiration both for the neoclassicists and for the Symbolists or Parnassians. But, in fact, there are entire sections of contemporary literature we would have to cite if we wanted to make a complete inventory of this "paganism." Just to mention a few, there are: Charles Marie René Leconte de Lisle, José-Maria de Hérédia, Théodore de Banville, Louis Ménard, Jean Moréas, Pierre Louÿs, Édouard Schuré, Hugues Rebell, Édouard Dujardin, Gabriele D'Annunzio, D. H. Lawrence, Jean Giono, Knut Hamsun, Henry de Montherlant, Marguerite Yourcenar, John Steinbeck, and Henry Miller—not to forget Fernando Pessoa, who wrote in *The Return of the Gods*: "The gods are not dead; only our perception of the gods is dead. They have not left: we have only stopped seeing them . . . but they are still there, and live as they have always existed, in the same perfection and the same serenity."

Of course, the "pagan" inspiration in the authors I have just cited takes different forms. In some, this reference might be a formal one, using only the aesthetics of the images and the words. In others, it could be a nostalgic reaction against the disenchantment caused by the ideology of progress. Others more clearly sought to establish, through paganism, another type of relationship to the world. But in all cases these ongoing attempts to reach back, this spontaneous desire to link to a perceived past, more or less consciously, as a remedy for the ills of the present, should be considered a symptom.

Community or "sectarian" neo-paganism is obviously something different entirely, and I would have more reservations on this point. I already wrote in *On Being a Pagan* that what "seems especially important for us to be on the lookout for today . . . is not so much the disappearance of paganism as its reemergence in primitive or puerile forms akin to the 'second religiosity' that Spengler rightly described as one of the characteristic traits of cultures in decline." The flowering of neo-pagan groups, which we have witnessed for fifteen years now, has only reinforced my opinion on this. The very fact of the extreme diversity of these groups is

enough to give one pause. For some, “paganism” is essentially reduced to happy get-togethers, pleasant evenings where people celebrate with a few appropriate rituals their community life and the pleasures of existence. Others gather in actual “churches” or religious communities, the ceremonies of which are internalized in more of a Protestant or neo-Pietist way. Still others drag “paganism” in the direction of pure transgression, ranging from “sexual magic” to the black mass. The entire thing is invariably accompanied by complicated rituals, grandiloquent invocations, and pompous titles. This means that “pagan ceremonies” can resemble boozy community festivals or austere meditation, and they can have the trappings of fringe masonry, a sexual orgy, or a costume ball. By all evidence, a great many of these movements do not actually have anything to do with paganism, despite their use of the word. As for groups with a more strictly religious vocation, their modus operandi often makes them more like sects. While condemning the anti-cult hysteria we are witnessing today—a hysteria that only adds to the confusion due to the fact that all of these groups are lumped in together—I should say that I myself feel pretty foreign to all of that. I see a lot of pastiche in it, a lot of parody, but very little paganism!

The confusion reaches its peak with the neo-pagan groups, mostly Anglos who are part of the New Age movement. More or less the result of the hippie movement and the Californian protests of the 1960s, the main characteristic of this sphere of influence is its syncretic and composite nature: “anything goes.” Its main themes are eco-feminism, Aquarian millenarianism, an irresistible attraction to any form of occultism and the paranormal, and an aspiration toward personal transformation allowing the individual to vibrate in unison with the “world soul.” Its touchstones are eclectic: the “Northern Path” and “runic astrology” mix happily with Sufism, the Kabbalah, Eastern spirituality, spiritualism (now called “channeling”), Theosophy, or “astral travel.” The central idea is that we are entering the Age of Aquarius, characterized by fluidity in human relations and the emergence of a planetary consciousness. The many neo-pagan groups developing in this milieu rarely escape this syncretism, which is in fact a patchwork of beliefs and themes of all sorts, where the Tarot rubs shoulders with karmic “charms,” interpretation of dreams and invocations to the Great Goddess, the Egyptian Hermetic traditions and the *Upanishads*, Carlos Castaneda and King Arthur, Frithjof Schuon and Jungian

psychology, Thor's hammer and the I-Ching, "Thelemic magic" and yoga, the Tree of Life and "shamanic trances," and so on.

Obviously we shouldn't reject everything from out of this jumble, starting with themes such as eco-feminism, the holistic view of things, non-dualism, etc. But these subjects are routinely thrown into the indiscriminate hodgepodge, based on the implicit postulation of compatibility, or even convertibility, of all beliefs, all wisdom, and all practices. Added to this is a profusion of well-meaning sentiments, which often turn into the naïve optimism so typical of Americans, especially this naïve belief that individual experience is the only criterion by which the inner path can be judged, and that one can pull ready-made spirituality down from the shelf as if it were one of any number of recipes for happiness and "bliss." Ultimately, with all of its successive trends and infatuations (Hildegard of Bingen, runic divination, "guardian angels"), the New Age is a subculture which can't seem to help but draw on the composite types of belief that cropped up in Rome in the latter days of antiquity at the fringes of the official rites, and which haphazardly combined Egyptian or Chaldean speculations, fragments of Oriental cults, astral theories, superstitious practices, "gnoses" of Iranian or Babylonian origin, oracles from anywhere and everywhere.

Of course, not all the current neo-pagan groups fall within this sphere of influence, but rarely is the boundary that separates them an impermeable one. One trait they all have in common, for example, is their propensity for esoteric or "magical" speculation. I will not take a position here on esotericism in general, but it only too evidently serves as a support for all their delusions. And in fact, a number of the neo-pagan groups make up for their lack of knowledge, or more particularly the fact that they have no criteria allowing them to assess the value of what they know, with an overactive imagination: personal interpretations flung up as authoritative arguments, baseless assertions, whimsical extrapolations, and so on.

You are judging them rather harshly. Don't these neo-pagan groups, sprouting up in almost all the Western countries, even in Eastern Europe, at least have the merit of returning a long-forgotten subject to good standing?

It was just a general assessment. If we examined each of these groups separately, which would be difficult to do here, I would be the first person to make corrections and add nuances. Obviously certain neo-pagan communities have more substance and are more serious-minded than others. Among their leaders, whose sincerity and good intentions are not being called into question, there are those who have a genuine knowledge of ancient pagan religions and who are always working diligently to learn more. Their publications are sometimes well done, and I would not make the mistake of believing that these groups appeal only to gentle dreamers or monomaniacs, or even to individuals who have a sense of failure and who hope to relieve their frustrations and personal problems by joining groups where they hope to find a place that real life has refused them. Nevertheless, it remains that, taken as a whole, this sphere of influence is very much a part of the current "spirituality supermarket" where anyone, based on a sort of DIY spirituality, can come as he pleases to shop from among different possible religions and "wisdoms." This "market," where a number of fringe spiritualities vacillate between the attempt at fusion represented by the sects and a desire to "heal the soul" using à la carte recipes, is one of the most obvious symptoms of the spiritual crisis of our age.

The entire question is, in fact, whether one can or cannot breathe life back into ancient cults without straying into sectarianism or sham, that is, without ultimately falling back into this nihilism which any true paganism would, to the contrary, have to be doing all it could to surmount. I do think that the attempts made in this area seem to be running up against serious obstacles.

First, there is the problem of filiation. There is, of course, no continuity between ancient paganism and modern neo-pagan groups, regardless of what they might say. This does not, however, prevent them from asserting that they are transmitting an inherited knowledge which came from the depths of the ages, in spite of the fact that this knowledge is often just the product of their imaginations or a compilation of speculations advanced by others before them. The truth is that, although we know a lot of things about the ancient European religions, there is still a lot more to know. I will offer a simple example. A number of neo-Druidic or "Druidist" groups claim to be developing a "Druidic education." But, although it is quite certain that the ancient Druids did teach *something* (a fact to which witnesses from that

era attest), we do not actually know anything about what, exactly, this teaching was. The classical texts, whether Greek or Latin, say nothing on this point. The medieval texts, essentially accounts from medieval Ireland, are compilations of pre-Christian oral accounts, often well preserved, but lacking any commentary that is Druidic per se. The rituals adopted by most of the modern Druidist groups were actually fabricated out of whole cloth in the eighteenth century by the Welsh scholar Iolo Morganwg (Edward Williams). Added to this were borrowings from Scottish freemasonry, and from certain Welsh tales such as the *Mabinogi*. All this is very interesting, but it tells us nothing at all about the "Druidic tradition." Since no Druidic filiation has survived Christianity, any Druidic resurgence can only be parody or folklore. The same goes for "runic astrology" or "Nordic magic." We know that the runes were used in the past for divination, and that there is a good chance that they had a "religious" or "cosmic" origin. We also know that more or less all the ancient cultures made use of magic. Finally, we know that certain popular traditions, preserved mainly in rural areas, carried on longer with their ancient beliefs. But we know nothing more than that. Everything written on the subject is therefore, again, just contemporary speculation or a compilation of previous speculations.

Of course, we cannot exclude the fact that intuition, combined with an in-depth knowledge of what we know for certain about pagan religions, can come to restore part of our lost knowledge. An approach such as this one is still arbitrary, however, and to a large extent subjective.

Some of these groups, moreover, seem to fall back on Christianity. We know about these circles where the Edda texts have replaced the Bible, but also where they have retained the same system of patronage and apparently continue to expect out of paganism the same thing that Christians expect out of Christianity: moral norms and recipes for salvation. These groups seem to me to have adopted two traits that Walter F. Otto describes, not without reason, as being specifically Christian: the "virus of interiority," that is, the idea "that religion is inseparable from a personal relationship with God, that the only commerce with the divinity is established through the individual person," and the idea "that religious feeling is born of a need for salvation which goes hand in hand with transcendence." But in paganism, not only is there no salvation angle, but God does not arise from within the individual's heart of hearts; rather, the individual encounters God through earthly things.

More generally, it should be said that the current "neo-pagan" literature often points to a rather impoverished level of thought. The "holistic" approach frequently serves as a pretext for a sort of cosmic egalitarianism in which whatever is specific to man disappears completely. In-depth reflection is replaced by an agreed-upon rhetoric based on references to the "awakening," "cosmic energy," "identifying with the one world" or with the "great all." The very notion of paganism as an apologia for "life," by way of example, can usually be traced back to a popular Nietzscheanism (the God of the Bible being the expression of a resentment toward life) or a muddled vitalism (health, robustness, vitality, fighting spirit) going hand in hand with a vaguely biological "super-humanism" that is itself also naïve. To do this is to forget that almost all religions assign a positive value to life—although none of them, perhaps, give it anywhere near the value that Judaism does, which goes so far as to challenge martyrdom and make survival a value in and of itself. Christianity, for its part, also considers that every human life has an absolute value, while paganism does not profess this idea, and moreover, pagans have always considered that there are things worse than death, that is, things for which it would be justifiable to give one's life, or without which one would choose to die.

The definition of paganism as a "nature religion," a recurring theme in neo-pagan literature, is no less problematic. We forget that this originated with the Christians, who saw an intrinsic limitation in "nature" compared with "super-nature." This sentiment was so strong that in spite of Saint Augustine's eulogy to creation in his *City of God*, it would not be until the early thirteenth century that it began to fade. But after the work of Eliade and Dumézil, ancient pagan religions could no longer be reduced to simple nature cults. Paganism has never represented pure naturalism even though "natural" and cosmic elements do play a central role in it. Nor can it be reduced to pantheism, as Giordano Bruno or Spinoza implied, for the notion of pantheism is not very compatible with the distinction between the sacred and the profane. Among some neo-pagans, pantheism is moreover nothing other than a pretext to replace God with man, in the best modern tradition! Finally, we have to recognize that the word "nature" is one of the most ambiguous words in the history of Western thought. Nor can we pretend that Christian theology has never existed, that is, not without taking a stand on the problems it has raised. What can we say, exactly, when we speak of "returning to harmony with nature" or "reviving natural law"? Doesn't the

very fact that a "natural law" could be violated throw doubt on its "naturalness"? Philosophy has brought nature into association (or opposition) with culture, artifice, history, or liberty. Christian theology has complicated matters even further by bringing nature into association with grace (human nature is the prerequisite to grace, that is, a man capable of finding God), which goes back to defining nature, according to the philosophers, in terms of its correspondence to anti-nature, that is, to freedom. We also know that translating the Greek concept *physis* into Latin *natura* resulted in the term actually being "denatured." So it is from the idea of *physis* that we should reconceive the idea of "nature." If we consider the nature of things on the basis of their origin proper, of *physis* specifically, and not *ktisis* (or *creatura*), we understand that paganism could not render God as a flat-out synonym for nature, but rather would make Being the dimension which allows all beings to exist, without, however, being the cause for their coming into existence.

But there is yet another problem, a more fundamental one, perhaps. In paganism, there is no sense to our being in this world except for paganism to be the general atmosphere in which we dwell. If, in paganism, the city is defined above all as a "religious association," to borrow the words of Numa Denis Fustel de Coulanges, religion is defined conversely as the soul of the city or of the collectivity. By setting himself apart as self-sufficient, the modern individual brings to earth for his own benefit the idea of one God sufficient unto himself. But in paganism, the gods themselves formed a sort of society: even if you could "be like them," it would never be to find yourself alone again. Society is personhood extended: personhood, society condensed. The question arises, then, whether paganism could perhaps be, per the example of so many current beliefs, an opinion expressed in private by a few people. Some would even have it that there could be a "paganism of the catacombs" similar to what used to be the "Christianity of the catacombs." But this does not at all appear to be the case, because Christianity rests on the bedrock of individualism, which does not exist in paganism, the former being less strictly dependent on external circumstances. Living as a pagan in a non-pagan world is therefore not anywhere near as straightforward. Of course, a person can individually attempt to tap into myth, or seek to awaken meditative thought. But it has to be remembered that this sort of approach implies mentally withdrawing from the world, that is, doing exactly the opposite of what paganism extols:

active participation in, and unreserved belonging to, the world. Of course, there is nothing in common between today's world and the world of antiquity. Today's world is a world that has been changed, remodeled, by those who first found things in it to denigrate. And that is exactly where the problem lies. Because, and I will say it again, we cannot pretend we have not had two millennia of non-pagan history behind us: these years are not just a drop in the bucket. One cannot pretend that this history did not take place in an attempt to revive, without further ado, an interrupted tradition. This history shapes us profoundly in spite of ourselves. It informs our way of looking at the world, even when we disagree with it. It renders us incapable of seeing in paganism what the Ancients saw in it, that is, the very reflection of all that was real, a founding "discourse" organizing all of our perceptions. In another time, paganism was life itself. Today it can only be one conviction among others, professed in private by a handful of people. So, then, is paganism still a contender? This is the reason I doubt sincerely that our modern neo-pagans belong to their gods in the same way that their distant ancestors could have done. Not that they could even if they wanted to: today's world prevents them from doing so by its very existence. We can go commune with Delphi and take a lesson from the myth of Apollo, but Apollo cannot be to us what he once was for the Greek who went to consult the Pythia. And just as faith cannot be decreed, the risk is great that we will fall, yet again, into delusional historical re-enactments.

Outside of the groups that officially declare themselves neo-pagan, is there a milieu today that one could consider more receptive than others to pagan themes? Ecologists are the first thing that comes to mind.

Ecology is obviously very close to paganism, due to its global approach to environmental problems, the importance it assigns to the relationship between man and the world, and surely also due to its critique of the devastation of the earth under the effect of the productivist obsession, the ideology of progress, and the technical yardstick we use to assess value. This proximity is especially dramatic in radical ecology, sometimes called "deep ecology," even if, in my opinion, the latter commits the error, diametrically opposed to that of Cartesian humanism, of destroying in a reductionist fashion the idea that humans are unique in the living world.

Adversaries of deep ecology have also notoriously accused it of reviving old pagan cults.

But ecology is where it's at. Certain neo-feminist circles, mainly in the United States, but also elsewhere, are becoming singularly receptive to pagan ideas. That this receptivity often falls within the framework of a New Age–type ideology does not prevent it from being just another symptom. In *Noa Noa*, Gauguin says: "Perhaps the men, more directly affected by our conquest or beguiled by our civilization, have forgotten the old gods, but in the memory of the women they have kept a place of refuge for themselves."[2] I, too, believe that there is a fundamentally feminine element in paganism. For one thing, because the witches were sometimes considered wise women who would have had to preserve ancient beliefs (the truth is that we do not know a great deal about that). For another, the paganism we have inherited is also the pre-Indo-European paganism that, as we know, accorded an essential place to feminine divinities: behind the Christian cult of Mary we can easily find the Mother Goddess of the pre-Indo-European Neolithic civilizations. And finally, too, because the pagan traditions carried down in their purest form are those which fell under the "third function," in Dumézil's sense of the term, and that this function, given greatest priority in rural areas where these traditions were preserved, corresponds in particular to the area of production and reproduction. (The survival of paganism owes much more to the common people, the peasants, and women, than to the elites, city dwellers, and men. And it is within the "third function" that most of the beliefs rooted in a pre-Indo-European foundation were incorporated.) But also, very simply, because paganism, like any cosmic and traditional religion, has numerous characteristics that symbolically link it to nature and the feminine universe.

The fact that Indo-European society was essentially patriarchal, and that its pantheon was most often organized around a Father God, that its universe assigned an important place to masculine and warrior values, should not be cause for confusion here. Comparison with the biblical universe, itself a masculine one, is revealing. In fact, the primacy of law (over mores), hearing (over seeing), *logos* (over *physis*), concept (over image), abstract (over concrete), history (over myth) is typically masculine. Also masculine is the linear concept of history, a rectilinear concept as opposed to the cyclic or spherical outlook, which perceives the universe to be a large organism subject for all eternity to the law of cycles. Conversely,

feminine thought, in terms of what is specific to it, is directly linked to pagan thought to the extent that both are characterized by a more global (holistic) approach to things, a more concrete approach (but at the same time giving more space to the imaginary) than one which is strictly analytic or conceptual; a greater proximity to things of the body, corporeal realities, to nature conceived as a whole and perceived through the visible; and so forth. This aspect, which I believe to be fundamental, has often been overlooked.

One sometimes has the impression that God is absent from neo-paganism. We speak willingly of myth or the sacred, but only rarely of the divine. Our critiques of Christian inspiration also might lead one to believe that paganism equates with atheism. Isn't this absence of God (or gods) simply the result of a change in terminology, with the sacred being in fact equivalent to the divine? Or does this, on the other hand, mean that paganism does not recognize transcendence? Finally, to summarize this question, does paganism presuppose a faith or a belief?

First, a quick comment: the word "god" (Indo-European **deiwos*) is a strictly pagan word, which originates in the Indo-European designation of the "diurnal sky" (**dyēu*-). The Bible never mentions "God." It speaks of Yahweh, Adonai, Elohim, the Eternal, Father, Christ, the Messiah—when it does mention "God," it is employing a term of pagan origin!

I've explained many times that what Christianity and other biblically derived religions set forth is not monotheism at all (and anyway this was originally only *monolatry*), but rather its dualist ontology, which means that a distinction is made between the created being and the uncreated being. The core of Christian belief cannot be summed up in the first words of the creed, "*credo in unum Deum,*" but rather in those which follow it: "*Patrem omnipotentem, factorem caeli et terrae*." This distinctive trait radically separates the Abrahamic religions, which are "historic" religions, from all the other religions of the world, which are "cosmic" religions. The Christian dualism is expressed to perfection in this formula from the Fourth Lateran Council: "because between Creator and creature no similitude can be expressed without implying an even greater dissimilitude." In presenting the world as the result of a chance creation that, by definition, adds nothing to the perfection of its creator, this dualism affects the world of a lesser

being, and thus devalues it: “Do not set your hearts on the godless world or anything in it,” reads the First Letter of John (2:15). In Christianity, this imperative forms the negative foundation of the love of God and love of others, standing in opposition to any solidarity with an “inferior Nature.” Being desacralized, profaned in the true sense of the word (that is, consigned to the profane side), the world then finds itself transformed into an object. Authors as disparate as Étienne Gilson, Alexandre Koyré, and Martin Heidegger have all shown that the world is at that point no longer a part of the cosmos, forming a harmonious whole where men and the gods coexist in the visible and invisible, but rather just an object that can rightfully become the prey of the technical assessors. And thus the path is opened to secularization and therefore atheism.

The accusation of atheism that Christians launch against paganism is therefore completely stripped of meaning. Because both atheism and Christianity turn out to have this very same form of inherent denial. The new status that Christianity confers upon man is also one that disallows man from opposing it. Atheism therefore still puts God in opposition to the world. It no longer explains one by the other, but brings them into competition with one another, awarding to the second all those things it methodically undertakes to remove from the first. It tries to show that God does not exist, in exactly the same way as Christians strive to prove that he does, but the entire idea of God is not one that can be expressed in terms of proof. Atheism is well and truly a modern phenomenon that opposes Christian theism as its antithesis, without which it could not exist. In paganism, though, it is different. The pagan peoples did not know atheism, at least in the sense that we mean it. I believe therefore that paganism is incompatible with atheism, if we define the latter as the radical denial of any form of the divine or the absolute that cannot be boiled down to man. And I would add that paganism is not “Promethean”: to the contrary, it implies a rejection of this Titan’s hubris which led him to rob the gods of their duties in the vain hope of taking them on himself.

That said, to believe that pagans venerated their gods in the same way as the Christians adore theirs would be a mistake. Simultaneously immanent and transcendent, the god of the Christians exists only self referentially, in absolute self-sufficiency, a reality with no conditions placed on it, a perfect freedom. In paganism, there is no revelation, just *monstration*, unveiling, epiphany, and the world is transparent to the divine in its totality. While in

Christianity the relationship between man and god is primarily hierarchical ("I must obey God"), in paganism the relationship of man to the gods is based primarily on the order of gift and counter-gift: the gods give to me, I give to the gods. Sacrifice is not evidence of obeisance but rather a way of maintaining and contributing to the order of the cosmos.

The gods, one could say, are not the last word in paganism, precisely because paganism exempts the gods from being judged by the criterion of Being. Remember the wise words of Heraclitus: "This world, which is the same for all, no one of gods or men has made; but it was ever, is now and ever shall be an ever-living fire, with measures kindling and measures going out" (Fragment 30, trans. Burnet). It allows us to understand why myths place Fate above the gods. And also why paganism places so much importance on reasoning by analogy, which Plato saw as the most beautiful of all associations, because it is based on the idea of cosmos.

As to whether paganism could be considered a faith or a religion, we have to begin by asking ourselves: isn't it semantically facile to indiscriminately use the word "religion" today to designate any form of belief attested to in the world? It has, above all, the advantage of allowing our contemporaries to expound on the assumed convergence of these religions, whether in an ecumenical perspective or in an imaginary "primordial Tradition." In northern Europe, in any case, the word "religion" is an imported, foreign term. I would be tempted, for my part, to say that a pagan does not *believe*, but rather that he *belongs*. And that this membership, which cannot be dissociated from a collective belonging, also involves *pietas*, which is a clear awareness that its purpose is felt as a common reality.

For some time now, we've been seeing a rather frenzied offensive aimed at linking paganism with morbid practices such as grave desecration or Satanism professed in certain "hard" music circles mostly associated with the extreme right. What do you think of this parallel? More generally, is paganism necessarily anti-Christian? And conversely, has Christianity always been anti-pagan?

There's no doubt that Satanism is just the flipside of Christianity. To endorse Satan is to worship the fallen angel, that is, the double-negative of the biblical god. The contradiction of any Satanic path is that it cannot

escape the god it tries to oppose, because if this god did not exist, the transgressions would make no sense. What good does it do to blaspheme against God if you are convinced that he does not exist? What sense does profaning a host make if it's just a wafer of unleavened bread? It could be asserted that from this point of view Satanism contributes—from the dark side—to perpetuating Christianity, while at the same time feeding yellow journalists with sensational copy well in keeping with the spirit of the times.

As far as the circles to which you are referring, there's not much to say. You find mostly adolescents there who are into upstaging one another through provocation, and who navigate between ephemeral fanzines and aggressive musical creations of the heavy metal style or the gothic style. Some of these are just plain psychopaths, inexorably attracted to brutality, cemeteries, black masses, or even necrophilia. Most of them luckily have been influenced by nothing worse than comic books and science fiction! Their "paganism" consists mainly in dreaming about heroes with huge biceps and jawbones of concrete or espousing the very antithesis of paganism: pure violence and chaos. You would have to call it *Conan the Barbarian*–style or *Dungeons and Dragons*–style paganism.

The relations between Christianity and paganism are a more complex question, and the truth requires that we state that they have often been bloody. While in the Roman Empire Christians were only ever bothered for political reasons, the Church for over 1,000 years persecuted pagans for religious reasons. Paganism was prohibited in the Roman Empire in the year 392, and finally in 435 was made punishable by death. The era of the morally justified—even recommended—massacre began historically with the wholesale slaughters ordered by Yahweh (Deuteronomy 7:16; 20:16). The epoch of religious wars, and of heresies (a term which simply has no meaning in paganism), began with Christianity. In late antiquity and the early Middle Ages, evangelization led to the eradication of paganism by any means. Beginning in the eleventh and twelfth century, as Robert Moore demonstrated effectively, Western society became, under the impetus of princes and Christian prelates, a structurally persecutory society. A segment of this society that was believed to incarnate "evil"—whether it was pagans, heretics, Jews, "lepers," "sodomites," or "witches"—had to be cast out and sometimes even eradicated. Christian intolerance, based on the imperative of conversion and on belief in an absolute good and evil, thus resulted in segregation. Its transposition in the secular world resulted in all the standard

practices of exclusion, relegation, and the shutting-away of "non-conformists" studied by Michel Foucault. This would tend to shed doubt on the opinion of René Girard, who asserts that Christianity is the only religion not to resort to the practice of scapegoating, that is, the only one not to make persecution and the use of legal censure a means of social cohesion.

The Christians first denounced paganism as a cult given over to "idolatry" or demon-worship. Then, failing in their attempt to root out popular beliefs, they appropriated everything they could "recoup" from the pagan tradition without detrimentally affecting the essential foundations of their own faith. Western Christianity thus became a mixed phenomenon, which finally, as André-Jean Festugière said, turned out to be the "consummation of what many pagans had already thought." In reality, it should be understood that this sort of heritage was accepted only after having been rendered inoffensive. In the Middle Ages, the author of the life of Saint Eligius (*Vita Eligii*) railed against pagan letters with a revelatory invective inspired by Saint Jerome: "What do Pythagoras, Socrates, and Aristotle advise us to do, in their philosophy? What benefit do we derive from reading these criminal poets called Homer, Virgil, and Menander? Of what use to Christian society are Sallust, Herodotus, Livy, recounters of pagan history? How can the speeches of Lysias, Gracchus, Demosthenes, and Cicero, exclusively concerned as they are with the art of oratory, compare with the pure and beautiful doctrines of Christ?"

When discussing relations between paganism and Christianity, then, we have to take two fundamental givens into account. On the one hand, in terms of doctrine, there is no possible conciliation between Christian theology and pagan ontology. On the other hand, from the historical and sociological perspectives, it is obvious that Christianity is a hybrid phenomenon, which led it, for example, to develop a sort of unacknowledged polytheism through the cult of Mary and the cult of the saints. Fernando Pessoa, once again, seems to me to have his finger on it when he writes: "What the pagan accepts most willingly in Christianity is the popular devotion to the saints, the rites, the processions . . . the pagan willingly accepts a procession, but turns his back on Saint Theresa and the child Jesus. The Christian interpretation of the world takes his heart from him, but a church festival with its lights, its flowers, its chants . . . he accepts all those things as good things, even if they come from a bad thing, because these are truly human things and they are the pagan manifestation

of Christianity." Incidentally, I should mention that it is to this "pagan manifestation of Christianity" that traditionalist Christians are often most attached, while the more modern variety, on the other hand, would rather see it eliminated.

In his biography of Martin Heidegger, Rüdiger Safranski relates an anecdote that runs along the same lines. Whenever he entered a chapel or a church, Heidegger always dipped his finger in the holy water basin and genuflected. This surprised Max Müller, who, according to Safranski, "on one occasion . . . asked him if this was not inconsistent, since he had distanced himself from the dogma of the Church," and Heidegger responded: "One must think historically historically. And where there has been so much praying, there the divine is present in a very special way."[3] What a nice answer.

All this is to say that if paganism is defined only in terms of its opposition to Christian dogma, it would condemn itself by that very fact in that it would have no identity other than one which referred back to this dogma. It would just be Christianity all over again (in the sense that Joseph de Maistre had in mind when he made a distinction between a counter-revolution and a "revolution in the opposite direction"). This is the reason why, while obviously being critical of Christianity, I personally define myself not as anti-Christian, but rather as a-Christian.

And since paganism wishes to be hospitable about differences, it considers the idea of a "war between the religions" as simply nonsensical. So it does not find the existence of Christianity any more bothersome than it does the existence of Judaism or Islam. It is even ready to go to bat for them if their religious freedom is threatened. The problem begins when the proselytizing starts. From the pagan point of view, any wish to convert others—that is, ultimately, to *change* them—is in fact an aberration. Judaism, in this regard, poses no problem, because it is first and foremost the religion of a single people. Islam is more problematic, because its mission is to grow beyond the civilization that gave birth to it. But it is Christianity especially which, with its universalism, condemns itself to an inability to accommodate paganism, which will always in its eyes be an insult to the true faith and an obstacle to the kingdom of Christ. I believe that there is a powerful link between this Christian desire to convert the world, which is above all the desire to produce and reproduce others through its own discourse, and the Christian concept of "love." Philippe

Forget shed some light on it in an article on the "Catholic virtues," which appeared in the magazine *Panoramiques*. "The Catholic aspires to love," he writes, "but he always encounters others through a feeling of incompleteness. He wants completion. Thus he never welcomes anyone in his singular otherness, his fundamental 'strangeness.' He tries to put meaning into others, his own meaning. So he is not actually acknowledging the other person's reality, and cannot let that person grow and excel in his own unique identity. The other person is always lacking in some way. He has to be shown the truth. . . . Thomas Aquinas defined love as covetousness: Catholic love is an incessant hermeneutic covetousness, which aims to immerse the sense of others. Here, Catholicism, exposed in its originality, shows itself to be the matrix of the West, wherein lies an insatiable will, which—by defining and standardizing the existence of others—incarnates in a planet of homogeneity. The Other as oneself: that is the purpose (*telos*) of this will which has its origins in Catholicity, this will of which the Greek, radical enemy of excess (hubris), the Jew, or Hindu is ignorant."

In the past, religions have always been normative. They were not just grand morality tales, but also imposed a certain number of rules that were to be obeyed. This holds true of course for Christianity, but also for pre-Christian religions. After all, the apostles of "pagan tolerance" should not forget that Socrates was sentenced to drink hemlock for the crime of atheism, or that the refusal to recognize the divine nature of imperial Roman power was sometimes severely punished! Does neo-paganism aspire to be normative? Could the sacred that it so singlemindedly ferrets out and exposes in turn define prohibitions and therefore laws? In other words, is neo-paganism neutral or does it structure values? Does it have an imperative discourse on good and evil?

The question is ill-phrased, to my way of thinking. By putting it like that, you are presupposing that religion is necessarily the source of morality, which is not an assumption you can automatically make. Christianity is surely a moral religion, since its raison d'être is to offer the possibility of "salvation." The absence of morality is therefore confused with sin, that is, failure to obey the commandments of God. Conversely, "if God does not

exist, anything is permitted." But this is not the equation in paganism. The gods of paganism do not exist to sanction lapses in compliance with mores, and even less so to devote themselves to making lists of naughty or nice actions. Their own actions can even seem "immoral" to us. Does this mean that pagans are released from the obligation to respect any ethical norms? Obviously not. All it means is that for them religion is not the foundation of morality, which nevertheless still does not prevent it from being normative in another sense (any rite is normative, without necessarily having a moral aspect). When Titus, Pythagoras, or Publius Syrus earnestly recommend that we practice charity, when Seneca or Marcus Aurelius preach goodwill and generosity, they have no need to base their exhortations on a decree of the gods. Plato asserts of course that there can be no morality without belief in retribution in the afterlife. However, Aristotle wrote *The Nicomachean Ethics* while explicitly denying the personal immortality of the soul. The fact is that pagan morality is not a morality of retribution: morally, man does not need to be "saved," but rather helped to build himself.

Humanity had developed moral concerns long before Christianity came along. Societies that could not distinguish between the morally good and morally bad, could not even actually exist. You have to laugh, from this point of view, when you read in certain neo-pagan publications that good and evil do not exist for a pagan (or even that "pagan morality" can be summarized by the liberal hedonistic viewpoint: "do what you will, but harm none!"). However, Kantian idealism is itself quite capable of defining the foundation for moral exigency (that is, according to Kant, the source of aspiration to a pure and formally autonomous will). Aristotle sees it even more clearly when he says that morality is an "inherited virtue" (*Politics*, 4.9). The fundamental source of morality is in fact human flexibility. Man is not entirely determined by his instincts, and his instincts are not entirely programmed in their object. The result of this is that he is always in a position to construct himself or tear himself down, to diminish himself or increase himself, and that the realization of his desires could just as easily lead to his destruction. Not being integrally influenced by his nature, being —as Heraclitus says—just as capable of the best as he is of the worst, he can only build himself from presuppositions of his nature if he avails himself of a moral code that lends sense to these words: the best and the worst. It is in this sense that one could say that morality, even before it is

inculcated and learned, is first and foremost based on a disposition (*hexeis*), in the Aristotelian sense of the word.

Speaking of morality, I also believe that this consists of three different levels. First, there are elementary moral rules, which are indispensable to any life in a society. These rules are more or less universal, which would tend to suggest that they have been acquired over the course of the evolution of the species. They are transformed into laws which define behavior in such a way that the latter will comply with moral requirements even if it is not actually inspired by a sense of morality (for example, by fear of sanction).

Secondly, there are ethical values (or value systems) that are crystallized within different cultures, and which may vary considerably from one culture to another. These values also have a social content, but the law does not always sanction the transgression of these values. In paganism, the dominant value system is the honor system, which places the strongest accent on gifts, generosity, and pride—on giving one's word. Jean-Pierre Vernant, following E. R. Dodds and many others, very rightly described the Greece of antiquity as a culture of shame and honor, as contrasted with cultures of sin and duty. "When a Greek has behaved poorly," he writes, "he does not have the feeling that he is guilty of a sin, which would be like an internal affliction, but would feel unworthy of what he himself and others expect out of him, of having lost face. When he behaves well, it is not because he has conformed to an obligation that is imposed on him, a rule of duty decreed by God or the categorical imperative of universal reason. It is because he has succumbed to the attraction of values, both aesthetic and moral, the Good and the Beautiful. Ethics are not about complying with a constraint, they are about the individual's intimate agreement with the order and beauty of the world" (between myth and politics).

Finally, the third level corresponds to the ethic of virtues, that is, the personal efforts we force ourselves to make in order to attain a private excellence through the practice of virtues. The term is obviously to be understood in its original sense of a "good natural quality." This ethic of virtues has a more obvious personal dimension, but this dimension is no less independent of the system of values in which it operates. The word "ethic" goes back to the Greek *ethos*, "custom or habit," just as the word "moral" goes back to the Latin *mores*. Aristotle says that virtues do not arise within humans by nature or against nature but that we are by nature capable

of acquiring them and attaining to excellence of virtue by habit, that is to say, by an ongoing desire to build the self.

The difference between pagans and Christians is therefore not at all a "moral" difference, in the sense that one group behaves morally better than the other. It has more to do with the foundation and motivations underlying the moral act, and the values to which they respectively choose to give preference. Vladimir Soloviev, for example, maintained that only pity can serve as an internal foundation for a moral relationship with others. This idea is foreign to paganism, in which there are ways of recognizing the value of others that do not involve demonstrating pity for them. Likewise, the question is not whether morality is necessary or superfluous, because it is obviously necessary, but rather whether the very sense of our presence in the world—and this world itself—needs to be morally judged at all. I myself obviously believe that it doesn't. Paganism does not morally judge the world. There is only one Being for a pagan, and no good greater than this Being.

As for Socrates' trial, which is an exceptional case, one can only understand it by situating it in its political context. I will note only that the disciples of Socrates were never persecuted and that the most famous among them, Plato, was able to teach without hindrance in his academy. But I should also bring up the fact that Socrates's trial at least was important in that it showed, contrary to what some have rather too hastily stated, that the Ancients believed in their myths. Had they not, they would have found a better way of getting rid of Socrates than to accuse him of "atheism"! André Newton writes, "The absolute faith of the larger pagan masses for several millennia is unquestionable." Had this not been the case, it would not have been necessary to persecute pagans for centuries in order to make them renounce a faith they had already lost.

The tone of *On Being a Pagan* was rather Nietzschean. But since then, your writings on the sacred—I'm thinking of *L'eclipse du sacre* (The Eclipse of the Sacred) and also *L'empire intérieur* (The Empire Within)—appear to be inspired more by Heidegger. How has the Master of Freiburg influenced your thinking? Do you think the major Heideggerian themes define a pagan ontology?

I think actually that by resolving the antinomy of Being and Becoming, and by radically separating metaphysics and ontology, Heidegger fully restores what is deepest in pagan concepts of Being. Being comes into being. Being is not the world, but it cannot "be" without it. Heidegger's essential criticism of Western metaphysics is that it has prospered at the expense of Being, and has created the conditions for this neglect to continue to worsen. Western metaphysics does not consider Being as the necessary reason but simply as the first cause of a being. This approach finally resulted in modern subjectivity, which is none other than realized metaphysics. For Heidegger, the beginning of any work of thought does not consist in speculating on the raison d'être of a being, but rather in focusing on the fact that there is something, and not nothing. So I think that paganism finds its own source in a sense of wonder, in the wondering gaze cast upon the world and pondering the fundamental question: how is it that there is something, instead of nothing?

Heidegger believes that the "dawning" moment of thought occurred in ancient Greece. But unlike those before him, he does not want to limit himself to reading Aristotle or Plato, because he believes that Greek philosophy of the classical era already had an unsuitable foundation vis-à-vis the essence of truth. The true origin of thought for him lies with the pre-Socratics. They are the ones who represent the absolute original origin. For Heidegger, the Greek origin points at a "not yet," in the sense that it contains even more than what to date has been able to be determined of the origin, that is, a "disposition" allowing Being to be grasped in terms of history as a spiritual destiny, in such a way as to create the conditions by which the beginning can be begun again in a more authentic and original way. That is why the dialogue with the Greek thinkers of origin "has not yet begun."

Here, the "origin" does refer back to a "primordial" event, nor even to a certain place. It means rather *that which is*, when a thing begins to *be what it is*—namely, the provenance of its essence. In paganism, that is the only place you can go toward or come from, to the first giving, where Being blends with the inaugural gift wherein Man is brought into harmony with the entire world, without diminishing anything inherent to him. This attachment to the foundation does not exclude any other influence. He does not seek to emancipate an element that is "purer" than the others, but rather limits himself to recognizing the determining role of what he is based on.

The “past” orders the spiritual experience, very simply because memory is the ground in which the sacred takes root. Any spiritual consciousness is the consciousness of a foundation that is linked to the origin without, for all that, being antagonistic to history. History is open to the most diverse influences. Consciousness of the origin puts them in perspective by stimulating the faculty of memory. Recourse to memory is now running into direct confrontation with a dominant ideology that belongs only in the instantaneous (the perpetual present) and in the operative. It constitutes a vital counterweight to the omnipotence of processes aimed at dominating the real that operate only in the ledger of immediacy and efficacy.

Certain critics of neo-paganism, experts in the practice of “*reductio ad Hitlerum*” once denounced by Leo Strauss, freely assert that Nazism can be interpreted as a large pagan movement of the twentieth century (thereby making neo-pagans by the same stroke neo-Nazis!). What exactly was the relationship between Nazism and religion?

The fable of “Nazi paganism” has been kept perpetually alive by certain people, for obvious propaganda purposes. The exaltation of the “ancient Germanics” during the Third Reich appears to be what they are basing their assertions on, in spite of the fact that it had a purely nationalistic character with no more pagan significance than the exaltation of Vercingetorix in the Vichy regime. Add to this the frenzied speculations about “Nazi black magic” or “Nazi occultism” which have been attracting the attention of weaker minds since the era of *The Morning of the Magicians*.

Nazism is, first off, a pure product of modernity. In historical terms, as Denis de Rougement wisely remarked, the National Socialist revolution of 1933 is akin to the French Revolution of 1789 and the Russian Revolution of 1917. All three, despite their indisputable doctrinal differences, were characterized by the institution of a single party, the rule of public health, centralization, mobilization of the masses, deliberate use of terror, the conviction that a “new era” was being born, producing a “new humanity,” and so forth. In practice, Nazism was a brown Jacobinism, just as bolshevism was a red Jacobinism. Its motto “*Ein Volk, ein Reich, ein Führer,*” with the insistence on “one,” is clearly political “monotheism.” Born in Bavaria, Catholic turf par excellence, the Nazi party, although less monolithic than one might think (the *Führerstaat* was in many regards a

polycracy), also secularized the Catholic concept of the institution. It comes off as a church led by an infallible pope (the *Führer*) with its clergy (the party officials), its elite group of Jesuits (the SS), its dogmatic truths, its excommunications, and its persecution of "heretics."

The twenty-fourth item on the official program of the NSDAP, adopted in Munich on 24 February 1920, stipulates "the Party as such stands for Positive Christianity, but does not commit itself to any particular denomination." By "positive Christianity" (*positives Christentum*), they meant, ideologically speaking, a Christianity that was as de-judaized as possible, and, in particular, politically speaking, a Christianity that refrained from any opposition to the regime. In January 1933, moreover, it was with the support of the Catholic party, the Zentrum (at that time directed by Franz von Papen), that Hitler came to power. It was also with Zentrum votes that the Enabling Act of 23 March 1933 (the *Ermächtigungsgesetz*) was instituted by the Reich and the Vatican, thanks to the efforts of Franz von Papen and Monsignor Ludwig Kaas. It required the bishops to take an oath of loyalty to the Reich. This signature removed immediate opposition in the anti-Christian circles. Von Papen was later appointed the Reich's ambassador to Turkey, before being raised to the title of Chamberlain to the Pope after the war by Pius XII.

In *Mein Kampf*, Hitler asserted his express willingness not to become involved in religious disputes, writing: "For it was by the Will of God that men were made of a certain bodily shape, were given their essence, natures and their abilities. Whoever destroys His work wages war against God's Creation and God's Will. Therefore everyone should endeavor, each in his own denomination of course, and should consider it as his first and most solemn duty to hinder any and everyone whose conduct tends, either by word or deed, to go outside his own religious body and pick a quarrel with those of another denomination."[4] He added, "I have no hesitation in saying that in those men who seek today to embroil the patriotic movement in religious quarrels I see worse enemies of my country than the international communists are. . . It will be always one of the first duties of those who are directing the National Socialist Movement to oppose unconditionally any attempt to place the National Socialist Movement at the service of such a conflict. And anybody who conducts propaganda with that end in view must be expelled forthwith from its ranks."

Hitler was actually thinking in terms of what was politically expedient. He knew that his supporters were Catholic or Protestant in their majority, and greatly mistrusted the *völkisch* or neo-pagan groups that appeared at the beginning of the century, and which were intending to openly fight Christianity. “These professors and mystery-men who want to found Nordic religions merely get in my way,” he said.[5] At the same time, like any dictator, he disagreed with the churches’ right “to get involved in earthly affairs,” that is, to interfere with his policies. His official objective was “the de-confessionalization of public life.” Religious life was therefore pushed back to the private sphere, in the best tradition of laicism. After 1928, he had Artur Dinter thrown out of the party, accusing him of wanting to found a Christian Church where Catholics would have been placed in a subordinate position. As for Hitler himself, moreover, to his death he continued to pay his dues to the Catholic Church. Convinced that “the state should remain the absolute master,” what he really wanted was a national Church entirely detached from Rome. “Against a Church that identifies itself with the State, as in England, I have nothing to say.”[6] he stated on 13 December 1941. This is the reason why he encouraged the movement of “German Christians” (*Deutsche Christen*) organized in 1925 within the Deutschchristliche Arbeitsgemeinschaft, which, under the Third Reich, defined itself as the “intra-ecclesiastical branch of the National Socialist movement.”

Paganism was tolerated in the Third Reich only to the extent that it remained confined to the private domain and did not conflict with official policy. The pagan groups were in fact gradually brought to heel over time, as were the churches, especially following the publication of the encyclical *Mit brennender Sorge* in 1937. Erich and Mathilde Ludendorff’s Tannenbergbund was banned in 1933, and the Bund für deutsche Götterkenntnis (League for the Recognition of the German Gods), which succeeded it in 1937, was also placed under surveillance. In March 1936, Indologist and Sanskrit scholar Jakob Wilhelm Hauer had to step down as president of the Deutsche Glaubensbewegung (German Faith Movement). “German Faith and the Jews are pulling the same strings!” proclaimed the anti-Semitic journal *Der Stürmer* in 1938! Friedrich Bernhard Marby, who founded the Bund der Runenforscher (League of Runic Researchers) and published the *Marby-Runen-Bücherei*, had all of his publishing activity prohibited after 1935. Arrested in March 1937 and sentenced to life in

prison, he spent close to nine years in concentration camps, specifically Dachau and Flossenburg, before being freed in April 1945 by the Allied troops. H. A. Weishaar (Kurt Paehlke), founder of the Bund der Goten (League of the Goths) in 1918, was himself also interned until the end of the war in the Bergen-Belsen camp. The *völkisch* writer and dramatist Ernst Wachler, founder in 1903 of the Harz Bergtheater near Thale, was persecuted for "racial" reasons and died in September 1944 in the Theresienstadt camp. Wilhelm Kusserow, founder in 1935 of the Nordische Glaubensgemeinschaft (Nordic Faith Community), was denounced as a British agent. By 1941, almost all the pagan groups had been banned.

Far from being a form of "paganism," Nazism was a secularized theology with a number of Christian features (ecclesiastic organization of power, obsession with being unique, rejection of diversity) and modern features (scientism, rationalism, progressivism). Most of the neo-pagan groups were consequently shoved aside, and even prohibited or persecuted.

In private, Hitler revealed himself to be much more radical toward the churches. But the critique that he launched at them had nothing "pagan" about it. It had much more to do with straight-out rationalism and scientism. The edition of *Hitler's Table Talk* that Flammarion published in 1952 was illuminating in this regard. As for the Catholic Church, whose skill in combining spiritual and earthly power he nevertheless admired, Hitler criticized it mainly for "exploiting human stupidity." For him, religion was just "obscurantism" and "superstition," against which, as opposing lights, stood the "scientific spirit" and prerogatives of "reason." "But there will never be any possibility of National Socialism's setting out to ape religion by establishing a form of worship. Its one ambition must be scientifically to construct a doctrine that is nothing more than a homage to reason."[7] And on 14 October 1941, in the presence of Himmler: "Being weighed down by a superstitious past, men are afraid of things that can't, or can't yet, be explained—that is to say, of the unknown. If anyone has needs of a metaphysical nature, I can't satisfy them with the Party's program. Time will go by until the moment when science can answer all the questions. . . . Gradually the myths crumble. All that's left is to prove that in nature there is no frontier between the organic and the inorganic. When understanding of the universe has become widespread . . . then Christian doctrine will be convicted of absurdity. . . . Science has already impregnated humanity. Consequently, the more Christianity clings to its dogmas, the quicker it will

decline. . . . It seems to me that nothing would be more foolish than to re-establish the worship of Wotan. Our old mythology had ceased to be viable when Christianity implanted itself. . . . A movement like ours mustn't let itself be drawn into metaphysical digressions. It must stick to the spirit of exact science."[8]

As many who have seriously studied Nazi ideology have concluded, National Socialism, when all is said and done, appears to be a millenarian religion of salvation. It is a secular religion, of course, but nevertheless one that is perfectly recognizable, aspiring with its spellbinding mass liturgy, spectacularly staging the hopes and fears of every man, but also through a cult of the leader presented as a heaven-sent savior to fulfill a promise of collective salvation based on a total transformation of life, absolute domination of the earth, and the establishment of a thousand-year reign.

As in all secular religions of this type, the agents of evil and corruption had to be eliminated in order to usher in the new age, and this was the function of Hitlerian anti-Semitism, which—while based on a social Darwinist philosophy ("the ends justify the means")—also reinterprets history in terms of absolute Good (Aryan) and absolute Evil (Jew), one of which must disappear so that the other can survive. "The Jew," writes Hitler in *Mein Kampf*, "follows his destined road until he is opposed by a force superior to him. And then a desparate struggle takes place to send back to Lucifer him who would assault the heavens!" With the "master race," being by all evidence only a caricature of the idea of the Elect, it would not be exaggerating to speak of mimetic Messianism. Jean-Joseph Goux, in his book *Les Iconoclastes*, said it very well: the "practical theology" of Nazism was controlled in its entirety by a Judeo-phobic obsession which pushed Hitler to fashion the German people into a "Chosen people" to rival the Jews, that is, to try to move his own people in the direction of the "religious hallucination of the Covenant." Hitler also stated to Hermann Rauschning: "There cannot be two Chosen People. We are God's People. Does not that fully answer the question?"[9] A delusion like this is obviously entirely foreign to paganism, a delusion that, in my opinion, would allow men and women to be persecuted merely for belonging to a people. "As with the jealous gods of Christian and Muslim monotheism, the racist delusion was a totalitarian one," wrote François Perrin: "Paganism was not" (*Franc parler*). That was also what Christopher Gérard said recently in *Antaios*: "The ultimate blame lies in what the Greeks, our masters, called hubris,

overbearing presumption. . . . The most terrible examples of contemporary hubris are those instances of modern totalitarianism which have attempted to ‘change Man’—only to ultimately debase him.”

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1. This interview was originally conducted by Charles Champetier and appeared in the July 1997 issue of *Éléments*. This English translation by Elizabeth Griffin was first published in a slightly different version in *TYR* 2 (2004–2005).

2. Paul Gauguin, *Noa Noa*, trans. O. F. Theis (New York: Brown, 1920), 92.

3. Rüdiger Safranski, *Martin Heidegger: Between Good and Evil*, trans. Ewald Osers (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998), 432–33.

4. *Mein Kampf* quotes are from the translation by James Murphy (London: Hurst and Blackett, 1939). —*Ed*.

5. Hermann Rauschning, *Hitler Speaks* (London: Eyre & Spottiswode, 1939), 59.

6. *Hitler’s Table Talk, 1941–1945,* trans. Norman Cameron and R. H. Stevens (New York: Enigma, 2000), 143.

7. *Hitler’s Table Talk,* 39.

8. *Hitler’s Table Talk*, 59–61.

9. Rauschning, *Hitler Speaks*, 238.

To the Unknown God

Once more, before I move on
and set my sights ahead,
in loneliness I lift my hands up to you,
you to whom I flee,
to whom I, in the deepmost depth of my heart,
solemnly consecrated altars
so that ever
your voice may summon me again.

Deeply graved into those altars
glows the phrase: TO THE UNKNOWN GOD.
I am his, although I have, until now,
also lingered amid the unholy mob;
I am his—and I feel the snares
that pull me down in the struggle and,
if I would flee,
compel me yet into his service.

I want to know you, Unknown One,
Who reaches deep into my soul,
Who roams through my life like a storm—
You Unfathomable One, akin to me!
I want to know you, even serve you.

—Friedrich Nietzsche, 1864

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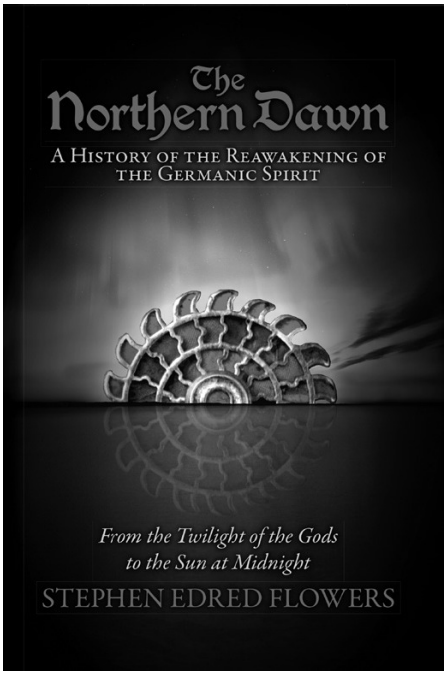

The Northern Dawn: A History of the Reawakening of the Germanic Spirit

Stephen Edred Flowers

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"In the northern sky, the realm of the pole, there shines a mysterious light. It is the aurora borealis—the northern dawn—which bathes the land of Thule with its darkly glowing luminescence. There is no more fitting symbol than this for the subject of this book: the reawakening of the Germanic spirit through the ages." —from the Introduction

Throughout the United States and Europe, a revival of interest in all things Germanic is taking place. This can be seen in the growth of pre-Christian religious movements, and in the much wider popularity of movies, novels, and television shows about the Viking Age. Just as other ethnicities show a healthy desire to reconnect with their indigenous past, the revival of Germanic culture appeals to people of European descent who feel cut off from their deepest ancestral roots.

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Stephen E. Flowers (who also writes as Edred Thorsson) received his Ph.D. in Germanic Languages and Medieval Studies in 1984. He is the world's foremost expert on esoteric, or radical, runology, and the founder of the Rune-Gild. His recent books include *ALU: An Advanced Guide to Operative Runology* (Weiser, 2012) and *Icelandic Magic: Practical Secrets of the Northern Grimoires* (Inner Traditions, 2016). He lives outside Austin, Texas with his wife, Crystal.

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