

Judaism, an anti-paganism.

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One who, like the present writer, is in an ambivalent position towards Judaism, being attached to it by destiny and detached from it by experience, can attempt an unbiased view of it. To be sure, this is difficult to attain. We are "engaged" in Judaism, not only those of Jewish descent, but all of us Occidentals. But detachment is a desirable position always, if we are to reach "objective knowledge".

Seen thus, "sine ira et studio", Judaism offers two unusual aspects: its mythic origin, and its persistent continuity. I shall limit my considerations to the first aspect. Judaism emerged "in illo tempore", in the course of a series of violent contacts between man and the "I am Who I am". It is a series of irruptions of the wholly different ("des ganz anderen") on humans (Abraham, Jacob, Moses, the Prophets). The totality of the myths that spring from these encounters, and the later ritualization of these myths, forms the powerful stream of Judaism. This stream flows into the ocean of Western civilization, without, paradoxically, losing its individuality in that ocean. Through these myths, the "I am Who I am" ("Reality") reveals in symbolic language one of His aspects. We occidentals are coerced to accept this revelation. We have no authentic freedom to reject it. Our minds have been projected by this revelation and are realizations of a project contained within the myths which originated Judaism. With or against our will, as Occidentals we are Jews. We may attempt, like Nietzsche, to rip out our Jewish roots in order to destroy them, re-evaluate our values and proclaim to the four winds that "God is dead!" But this transvaluation by itself implies the Jewish project that we are. The penetrating analysis by Heidegger of Nietzsche leaves no margin for error as to this.

What is the aspect of reality revealed through the myths that constitute Judaism? What is the Epiphany of Judaism? To characterize it, let us compare it with epiphanies foreign to it, like the olympic, the egyptian, the hindu, in short the pagan. Paganism is the revelation of the Divine in nature. Each animal, each tree, each spring,

each hill reveals a god, if devoured and absorbed by the initiate. Nature is full of Divine presence. In the course of the pagan festival this presence reveals itself to the one who orgiastically dissolves in nature. Everything in nature shows a different aspect of the omnipresent Divine. Earth is the fertile womb from which we emerged and into which we shall return, it is the omnipresent Great Mother. Sky is the paternal fructifying power that generated us and that will destroy us, it is the omnipresent Jovis Pater. Ocean is the primordeal element, "Hydor men ariston", from which we emerge and from which Aphrodite emerges, She who is born of sea foam (Anandiomane), the Beauty who embraces all. Each thing reveals everything. Each thing embraces everything. Man, when he submits humbly to things, when he adors them, when he is superstitious in the classical sense of the term, communes with the Whole, with the One of Parmenides. Paganism is basically monotheism. It searches Being (tò on) in the beings (tà onta).

The revelation that constitutes the foundation of Judaism, and by this of the Occident, is diametrically opposed to such a vision of things. Our experience of nature is totally different from pagan orgy. We oppose a supernatural order on nature. Nature, far from being Divine presence, is Divine creation. It was created and it will be surpassed in the "fullness of time". Nature is temporal, in fact ephemeral. It has "history". The Divine is not temporal, it is the "Eternal". The supernatural order, non-temporal order is the true reality, in opposition to nature which is only a work. To imagine the Divine in the things of nature is therefore "sin", a blasphemy forbidden by the Ten Commandments. It is necessary to overcome nature, it is necessary to "govern" it. The supernatural order which is true reality is spiritual, it is "thought". It is necessary to govern nature by thought, The Divine creates through thought; Man, as a thinking being, participates in supernatural reality. In fact, thought being the same as language, the Divine must not be imagined, only heard. God speaks (omar Adonai). Man listens and obeys (shema Israel). God is a word, a Name (hashem

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hakadosh, logos). To govern nature means to submit it to the supernatural order of thought, to the order of language. It means to work within nature in obedience to the Divine Commandment (mitzvot, opera). It means to conserve fidelity to the supernatural order within nature (emunah, fides). By governing nature man governs part of himself (adamah, caro) through his truly divine part (nefesh, anima). In this work man is inspired by the Divine spiritual breath (ruach, pneuma, spiritus sanctus). This is why he can reckon in this work with Divine succour (tefilah, gratia). This is man's true mission in nature. Augustine defines it excellently: "Deum atque animam cognoscere cupisco, Nihilne plus? Nihil." (God and the soul I ardently desire to know. Nothing more? Nothing.)

Accordingly, this is the fundamental revelation of Judaism: the opposition of the order of the spiritual to the order of nature. Nature is the object of the spirit. Spirit is the subject. The spiritual order is the order of language, it is logic, it is "davar, verbum". "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God". The human praxis, (the sum of all "mitzvot"), is the articulation of nature in accord with the Divine Word. Human praxis is the incarnation of the Divine Word in nature. The incarnate Word is the goal of Judaism. It is the total submission, and therefore the total redemption, of nature. This praxis resulted in Western civilisation. It resulted in Christianity, in humanism, in science, in industrialisation, in the transformation of nature into mechanism, and of the things of nature into instruments. The instrument is the thing humiliated and profaned, submitted to the supernatural order of thought, and articulated in accord with the Divine Word. The instrument is the contrary of the pagan idol. The instrument is paganism conquered, it is Judaism triumphant. The transformation of things into instruments is the realisation of Judaism. The history of the Occident is the progressive profanation of nature and sanctification of thought. The cartesian "cogito" is the triumph of thought over the "res extensa", of Judaism over Paganism. It is the victory of the word.

There have been revolts against that victory. There have been attempts to resurrect paganism. But they failed, as they had to fail. Schopenhauer's revolt ended in pessimism. Nietzsche's ended in madness, and

his signature became "Christus Imperator". Bergson's ended in baptism. It is not possible, for us Occidentals, to abandon this revelation of Judaism. It is not possible to betray the spirit and reconquer the sacrament of things. For us the sacred is definitely the spirit, the word. We are dignified as men because we are thinking beings. As such we are irrevocably opposed to nature, alienated from nature, we transcend nature. As thinking beings we are opposed to that which Schopenhauer calls "will", Bergson calls "élan vital", and the existentialists call "Dasein". Thought, supernatural in the judaic sense is the enemy of "life" in the pagan sense of the term. Thought is a manipulator of things. Thought is the profanation of things. Thought is the supreme "mitzvah". Thought is a Divine Service.

Although thought is a humiliator of things, it is also a self-humiliation of man in the face of the "Who am Who I am". By thought man adores the supernatural reality. Thought is an enormous prayer. It is an answer (teshuvah) to the provocation (shema) of the Name (hashem). Thought is a just (Tzadik) not because it is adequate to the thing (adaequatio intellectus ad rem), but because it is adequate to the Name. Thought is therefore a prayer, an answer and a justice (tefilah, teshuvah, tzedekah). Thought is our dignity and our honesty (in the Camusian sense).

The orgiastic exuberance of pagan life is closed to us. We have in compensation the adventure of thought. By thought we overcome the temporality of nature and also death.

"Was in schwankender Erscheinung schwebt, befestiget mit dauernden Gedanken" (Faust) "What floats in fluctuating apparition, consolidate with enduring thought".

Thought participating in the supernatural order is eternal. It overcomes death. Thought is an organisation of words. It is a sentence. By participating in conversation we overcome death. By participating in conversation we overcome our "natural" condition of mortals. Conversation is human condition overcome. It is therefore absurd. Thought is an absurd attempt of man to overcome his own condition and participate in Eternity. Language is the absurd attempt of man to utter the unutterable. It is an absurd answer to the provocation of the Divine. In this absurdity is human dignity.

The fundamental revelation of Judaism, opposing man to nature and making him participate in the supernatural order, is absurd. This is why it is an authentic revelation. The absurd, the paradox, is the sign of its authenticity. It is in the absurd, in the paradox, that the "wholly different" appears. Judaism is an authentic religion because it is absurd. It must be accepted with faith. To transform Judaism into a "reasonable religion" is a hopeless attempt. Judaism is a religion of reason in the sense that it opposes reason to nature. But Judaism is irrational in the sense that it concedes ontological primacy to reason as opposed to nature. Judaism is irrational and absurd in its belief in reason. Any attempt to rationalize this belief is an inauthentication of Judaism.

As occidentals we all participate in this faith. We irrevocably accept the myth from which it emerged. We may not participate in the rites and feasts through which these myths are enacted. We may participate in other rites and other feasts that enact the same myths (Christianity, socialism) or we may refuse to participate in any rites. But we cannot flee from these myths. We cannot flee from Judaism, or we shall be excluded from occidental conversation.-