

THE TECHNICS OF RATIONAL CIVILIZATION

The question whether western civilization as a whole constitutes a structured and coherent unit poses insoluble problems for any pure historiography. It is, however, a real problem for *history*, and in our day and age when this civilization is constantly in contact with the civilization of other continents, this question becomes daily more important. In what does the essential structure of the European universe reside? What, in relation to oriental civilization, are its specific characteristics? By producing an insurmountable disproportion between this problem, produced by history, and empirical historiography, this question leads necessarily to a philosophy of history.

But here other problems arise. If empirical methods show themselves to be radically unsuited to account for the presence of a structural element in history, philosophy runs the risk of setting itself up in a timeless space and falling into the pitfalls

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of dogmatism. Now, although it never appears—and cannot appear—as a unique phenomenon, the hidden dimension to which the comprehension of history testifies is never outside events. Inasmuch as it is the depth and structural factor of history, this dimension is historical throughout. With the pretext of preserving the universal, a philosophy manages to be indifferent to time and space and their historical forms; it is transformed into an ideology of appearances and cannot escape from being called the *Traumgeschichte* with which Marx—without doubt wrongly—reproached Hegel.

There seems to be only one issue to this aporia: that the historian becomes a philosopher or the philosopher a historian. In other words the empirical observation of historical particularities must be duplicated by a profound *interpretation* and this must be constantly verified, rectified, modified and confirmed by the singularity of the facts. When everything is already duly established, it must be regrasped, so that the meaning can appear. Between these two steps an endless dialectic is established, constituting a total historical comprehension and making it possible to grasp a structural and significant unity behind the mass of phenomena from which one is never free.

This is certainly an arduous and delicate task that befalls any historian who is concerned with the loftiest human problems. It is this long and winding path that Arnold Toynbee saw as the only possible one, although he did not follow it to its conclusion.

For Toynbee, in fact, there is no shadow of doubt that the history of a civilization is not made up of more or less isolated fragments, unless they are linked up by an essential thread. The great European historian reckons that, by a universal law, all the elements of a civilization are more or less systematically organized; he says that, by indubitable divergences, the history of the West shows a certain unity and coherence which, though not particularly obvious, is none the less real. In other words there is no opposition between a certain logic and history, when profoundly considered. In any case, this logic is in no way a rule *of* thought; as a form of history it is a rule *for* thought and in some ways constitutes the Apollonian element of the Dionysian process of becoming. In Kantian terms we could speak from now on of an *a priori* material which on the one hand is developed in history—and

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nowhere else—and which, on the other, is the universal transcendental condition of history.

Supposing that this thesis, which runs the risk of clashing with many historians who are attached to empirical methods alone, is exact, it must naturally present itself with sound credentials. For if it seems perfectly plausible and even indisputable from the viewpoint of the *Critique of historical reason*, it is not obvious in the eyes of historiographical practitioners. As Raymond Aron remarks, it is perfectly conceivable that western civilization is, like many other civilizations, not only a systematic unity, but a conglomeration of disorderly elements as well.¹

In the event the necessary proof consists in determining the central nucleus around which all this history gravitates and is organized. If it is true, as Toynbee says, that positive western knowledge and technics are directly linked to the Christian civilization, it is especially important to determine the nature of these links, particularly in this extremely illustrative case, which represents the most salient point of the problem in question.

REASON AND ITS LOGIC

Now, as we see it, this thesis in no way lacks justification. What is in fact manifested with undeniable insistence in every expression of western civilization, and especially in the natural global attitude of the mankind which is carrying it along, is the incontestable predominance of reason or, at the very least, the irresistible tendency to erect reason as the supreme value. Reason is the greatness and the disease of the West. Reason has created the philosophy, theology, religion, knowledge, technics, structure and organization of western society; reason provides the categories of our thoughts, dominates our judgements, texts and pretexts, paradoxically governs our feelings, experiences, pathos and our more or less arbitrary habits, and constructs our scales of values; in short it is the essence of the western genius in its specificity. If we witness reason in quite different, even opposed forms, this in no way stops a similar logic, with substantially equal tendencies, from

¹ R. Aron, "Unité et pluralité des civilisations," in *L'Histoire et ses interprétations* (Colloquium of Cérisy-la-Salle 1958), p. 44.

being institutionalized and materialized. This rationality is so slightly exclusive to certain irrational phenomena that, on the contrary, it gives rise to them, and these phenomena, far from eluding the universal law that rules them, present themselves rather as a pathetic counter-point, completely adjusted to logic and composing, with logic, a single, richly varied but perfectly coherent work. It would, in fact, be useless to make the objection that a great number of elements belonging to the history of the West cannot be reduced to rationality. If these phenomena, such as art, literature, religion, superstition, morals, ideologies, violence, love, war and all the others, without which the history of Europe is unthinkable and non-existent, belong to a more or less illogical order, they still do not modify the essential configuration of this history. On the contrary, indeed, it is the irrational that is inwardly affected and orientated when it becomes an element of rational civilization.² Art thus becomes something expert, a cultural highly perfected phenomenon accessible to a limited number of specialized aestheticians; religion takes an ecclesiastical form, creating a society with characteristics more or less identical to those of political and industrial society; and if wars are always mixed up with the most arbitrary violence, they benefit today from the use of refined technics which enable the adversary to be annihilated with scientific precision.

We are thus in no way claiming that the history of the West is identifiable with the history of logic, and still less that the irrational manifestations can be reduced to other manifestations considered as primordial, despite their apparent nature. The only affirmation that seems to us to be irrefutable is the following: reason gives formal unity and specific modality to a diversity of content, in such a way that it plays the role of universal coordinator; it traces the farthest horizon which embraces all phenomena and, according to Husserl's formula, fulfils the function of an "immanent teleology" of history. In this civilization the rational and irrational are constantly confronted and transformed by each other; the one is incomprehensible without the other; both are

² We shall explain ourselves more fully with regard to this in the particular case of religion. On the other hand we draw the reader's attention to the fact that this approach to a total comprehension of western civilization is made in successive stages, the consequent one always giving rise to a correction of the preceding.

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only comprehensible in the light of their antithetical unity; they make appeal to, oppose and complete each other, in the same way as, for example, Descartes and Pascal, Hegel and Kierkegaard, the elder and younger Schelling, idealism and existentialism, personalism and materialism, Christianity and atheism. We are from now on faced with a dialectical logic. It is the nature of the western genius to surround the data of nature and history with a specific form, capable of radical change and endowed with an eminent generative power.³ In fact, if reason is a universal form, its activity in no way stops at constructing an already given matter in a purely formal way. Rationality “also” generates a history which it surrounds with its own laws. It loses its way and exceeds itself, alienates, strengthens and conquers itself in order to become its own equal, and is eventually lost in the existing totality by being perfectly identified. Although this equalization is never completely achieved, the dynamism of reason aspires to a transformation of all empirical data in its own image, and to substitute its conquests for all other forms of truth. It is this dimorphism of reason that we see at work in philosophy, logic and theology; it is this that animates the science and technics as well as the essential structure of industrial societies. What it is important to point out from now on is the inner logic of rationality, as it acts in the diverse forms of culture. For if it is true that reason has an extremely varied history, in fact coextensive with the history of the West, and if its plasticity is practically unlimited, it remains for it so show basically identical characteristics in all its manifestations, and for the activity of this subterranean force to develop along an extremely rigorous plan. What is this subterranean force and along what plan does it act?

In all its manifestations rationality appears as that well defined language from which a meaning is established with reason as the starting-point, that is to say in relation to the basis of things. Logic states phenomena in the light of a basic principle which figures as the gauge, model and justification of what it says. The nature of rationality, whatever its historical form, is to project an ultimate being, capable of explaining, gauging and justifying

³ As Bergson remarks with reference to metaphysics: “They will depend on the theory of knowledge, as knowledge will have to depend on metaphysics” (*Creative Evolution*).

being in general. The activity of this language is essentially explicative and causal. Its truth cannot help taking the form of adequation, rectitude and equivalence. Its categories come from the axiomatic, and thus project a geometrical universe that obeys the laws of a *mathesis universalis*.

The primacy of reason creates a process of assimilation in the diversity of matter. For this common basis, the gauge and model of everything that exists, tries to suppress qualitative multiplicity and differentiation. Reason shows an indisputable tendency to homogenize the data of nature; it is fond of repetition, it causes identities and analogies and, in the words of Bergson, it imposes “a latent geometrism, in the form of natural logic, which gradually penetrates further into the intimacy of inert matter,” on the wild ambiguity of phenomena.⁴ Reason tends to schematize and resume in order to understand and anticipate; it arranges things and “congeals them into analogies”⁵ to gauge them according to the models and finally make use of them. Left to its own devices, it tries to comprehend the real in its totality and to be coextensive with all experience. It thus tends constantly to perpetuate itself, it aspires to a sort of infinity, and this is why philosophers such as Kant, Bergson, Nietzsche and Heidegger have tried to denounce the guile of its whole course.

That logic works these transformations means in the first place that it always has a metaphysical character, even in its most positivist versions. In fact, by setting up a fundamental being as a condition of all existence, by projecting a universal gauge serving as an absolute criterion for being and knowledge, by identifying truth with conformity with an ultimate being, whatever it may be, by replacing the revelation of nature by scientific precision, is not all this a step towards metaphysical order? And if the evolution of modern science shows a growing tendency to formalize knowledge, if contemporary knowledge can only utilise the contrived language of mathematical symbols to construct its concepts, the reason is that the ideal of something perfectly intelligible engenders, governs and finalizes knowledge. Modern scientificity implies a metaphysical conception of the real; it develops and specifies it—unwittingly—in compliance with the

⁴ Bergson, *Creative Evolution*.

⁵ Nietzsche, *Will to Power*.

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Cartesian image of the tree of knowledge.⁶ This metaphysical conception is without doubt concealed and not recognized; it is often even expressly denied and contested in every version of positivism; it is always a larval and heretical conception, especially with regard to the classical ideal of knowledge, the major lines of which are traced by Descartes' image. But this disguised metaphysical conception is no less active in all versions of rationality, which is already always a formal ontology. It appears therefore that the plan proposed by Auguste Comte, according to which the history of the West is divided into three clear phases, suffers from every abstraction. If it is true that scientific knowledge has long since lost its material unity, this unity remains unshakeable, as far as its form is concerned.⁷

This first characteristic leads at once to another, even more paradoxical but no less essential and universal. Rationality is always marked by a theological trait. If reason is in fact in search of the basis, if it judges all existence starting from something above all intelligible, providing it with universal rules of knowledge, if the type of knowledge thus constituted is explicative or justificative, it is in its nature to project an *ultimate* fundamental being, which, though the cause of the totality of the being, is itself caused by nothing. This determination is inseparable from logic: it accompanies it right into the most atheistic forms of rationalism. This character, which follows directly from the precedent, is even more concealed. The presence of the *theological*—and not of theology—in all forms of rationality is however undeniable. *The* theological precedes and engenders theology just as *the* metaphysical precedes and creates metaphysics, both determinations being rooted in logic, the essential dimensions of which they articulate. Having reduced the data of nature to a strong homogeneity, in such a way that the particularities are absorbed

⁶ Descartes, *Lettre à l'abbé Claude Picot* (Preface to the *Principes de la Philosophie*). The image proposed by Descartes underlines on the one hand that the mathematical character of physics comes from metaphysics and on the other that all sciences are essentially linked, knowledge as a whole being called "philosophy."

⁷ We have developed this as well as the following point in "Horizon élargi de la philosophie de l'art," *Revue de l'université de Bruxelles* (1966-1967), 19, No. 1-2, pp. 88-115. In addition we permit ourselves to make mention here of a work entitled *L'Art et la dialectique du sensible*, which will be published in the near future and which deals with this theme.

in a more or less rigid monism, and having thus shaped the phenomena to suit itself and by the laws of logic, reason brings them about on the basis of a certain Absolute, which encircles them in extension and constitutes them in depth. In fact this double movement of rationalization is only a single one, the *ratio sufficiens* being at once a major rule of logic and a basic dimension of things. Or more *exactly*, it is the logic which engenders the physical as well as the metaphysical structure of phenomena—which naturally presupposes the real—and this structure in turn commands rules of thought. Reason postulates the Absolute as the ultimate basis, which from now on figures as a universal principle of intelligibility.

It is thus no exaggeration to say that logic is the genesis of God: the fundamental needs a basis, all light needs a source, and reason needs a final justification. Whatever the way in which this *theos* is determined in other respects. That supreme reason is conceived in a spiritualistic or materialistic, supernatural or cosmological, theist or humanist sense, the basis is set up at any given moment as “the first, from which there is being, or the process of becoming, or knowledge.”⁸ Running through all these historical variations which constitute the “chronology” of reason is a certain identity of form, that is the equality of the real and the absolute, the assimilation of being and perfect being, the substitution of truth to the disclosure of nature, the identification of truth and the first or last truth, the equivalence of knowledge, justification and judgement. The theological defines not only theology but also philosophy, mathematics and the sciences as versions of logic. This is why Nietzsche can write at the end of *The Genealogy of Morals*: “Our faith in science still rests on a metaphysical belief. We thinkers of today, atheists and anti-metaphysicians, we too borrow our flame from a fire lit by thousands of years of belief, from this Christian faith which was also shared by Plato and which sees God as truth and truth as divine.”⁹ According to Nietzsche, knowledge is the fate of the

⁸ Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, 1, 1013 a.

⁹ *The Genealogy of Morals* trans. by Henri Albert, p. 265. The same text figures in the paragraph entitled “En quoi nous sommes, nous aussi, encore pieux” of *Le Gai Savoir* trans. by Vialatte, p. 286-289, which H. Birault has penetratingly commented on in the *Revue de Métaphysique et de Morale* (1962), 67, pp. 25-64.

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West; it proceeds with a vital instinct which is all the more active by being concealed and repressed. As we shall propose shortly, knowledge is not only the dazzling cultural fact, the objectivity and universal validity of which one is fond to exalt. It is also—and primarily—the general spirit that moves us all, scholars and fools alike; it traces a certain anthropology of western man and its origins are closely linked to the depths of collective psychological subjectivity. In Nietzschean language, the scientific mind is conditioned by a system of values that must be revealed if man is to see himself in the nudity of his lost illusions. On the other hand, this virulent language paradoxically reveals a certain Cartesianism in the author. There is in fact a remarkable resemblance between the Nietzschean presentation of knowledge, animated by theological instinct, and the Cartesian image of the deep-rootedness of knowledge in metaphysics. As far as its essence is concerned, knowledge refers to other things: considered by itself, it remains thoroughly incomprehensible, its origins escape it, it feeds on extra-scientific sources. Thus in both cases we are forced to think of the essence of logic from an occult basis, and for Nietzsche, in particular, there is no doubt that this basis is definitely beyond rationality. We now find ourselves faced with the famous paradox brought to light by Nietzschean thought: reason is based on unreason, rationality on the irrational, knowledge on belief.

What then is this unreasonable reason, and this basis with no justification? What is this deep-rootedness that is itself rootless?

THE TECHNICS

None of the questions we have so far posed have been answered; and until we have inquired into the real basis of rationality our approach to the subject will remain essentially incomplete.

Now, the antecedents of reason, though closely linked to it, are no longer logical. In fact when one proceeds, like Nietzsche, to a sort of psycho-analysis of knowledge, it appears that logic has its roots deep down in an immense desire of domination. What gives birth to rationality is not reason, but the will to master nature. In other words the deep intention of reason is political. This is why one can rightly talk of an *empire* of knowl-

edge: knowledge orders, commands, tyrannises; its language springs from military art. By giving itself a natural representation, and by reducing the universe to the state of an object to be explained, gauged, controlled, comprehended and grasped, rationality shows a thoroughly technical character, and it is, in the final analysis, to technics that one must attribute the characteristics revealed to us by logic. Thus the archaeology of western civilisation shows that the subjective determination and interested attitude of the conscious subject are rigorously correlative. This is why it is quite legitimate to speak here of a "semantic of desire,"¹⁰ thereby aiming at a dialectic of the word and the will, according to which knowledge is already prefigured in desire; this results from its own elucidation by being reflected in logic. This dialectic shows at the same time that "desire is surpassed by consciousness and that it is always insurpassable as an initial position, an original affirmation and an immediate expansion."¹¹ Thus by tracing the origin of rationality we discover the existence of an energetic that not only gave birth to western culture but also totally paralyzes it. It is in this meaning that Nietzsche speaks not so much of knowledge, but of the scientific mind as the European spirit. By giving the term a deep philosophical signification, such as Hegel gave it, we are apparently faced with the desire of consciousness to appropriate the world for itself, for man to affirm and belong to himself. Such is the postulate of knowledge, says Nietzsche, and he adds that this postulate is that of utility.

Technics show this humanist sense. They are the unlimited desire to humanize the universe by knowledge. They are not only at the origin of rationality, but they also animate the whole history of western humanism, spread today throughout the world and making astonishing improvements on a world-wide scale in the conditions of life. Logic presents itself first of all as a technic made to provide man with the information necessary to enable him to act. It is a logic for conquerors, not in the sense that it is transformed into something practical or that it serves as an ideology for action: it is in itself already action, it is a political and military action aimed at subjecting the objects, to which it is

¹⁰ The expression belongs to P. Ricœur who uses it frequently in his recent work *De l'Interprétation. Essai sur Freud*. Paris, 1965.

¹¹ *Op. cit.*, p. 454.

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applied, to its empire. In this sense all knowledge is “applied,” and “pure” knowledge does not escape this basic rule of logic. Western culture reveals a technical essence acting in each of its realizations, so that they are metaphysical, theological, scientific or really technological. It is technics which first traced the specific configuration of the human attitude; they propose a way of access to things, they fashion an image of man, construct a way of intersubjective behavior, define a truth in space and time, in short they are the way of eminently western revelation, according to which phenomena are only manifest by their *raison d'être*, their value, their efficiency, work, *Wirklichkeit*, which “also” constitute the system of morals. This latter finds its vigor in the desire of domination, and the compulsion with which it imposes its laws derives directly from the authority of omnipotent reason. This is why Heidegger can say that technics are a “reasoning-towards” (*Gestell*) and a “Provocation” (*Herausforderung*) of nature.¹² “Modern technics, this in André Tréau’s translation of the *Essais et Conférences*, reason towards nature, stop and inspect nature, and reason-towards, that is to say bring it to reason, by putting nature in the regime of reason which demands above all that nature explains herself and gives her reason.”¹³

As for contemporary technology, historians, philosophers and sociologists rightly say that it specifies our civilization; it draws the horizon of all our thoughts and constitutes, more and more, the natural environment of all our acts. Certainly! It is quite evident that industrial organization, productivity, scientific exploitation of energy and technical perfection of society place us in a new situation, never before seen in history, and that these phenomena produce hitherto unheard-of dialectical processes. Is it, however, legitimate to speak of an essentially new phase of history? Certainly not! If the technological structure of contemporary society contains, in several respects, hitherto unknown components, it must be underlined that its essential traits are prefigured in the basic determinations of global rationality, of which it is nothing more than the most recent version. It too, and above all, has a political nature. While presenting itself in

¹² Heidegger, *Die Frage nach der Technik, Vorträge und Aufsätze*, Pfullingen, 1954, pp. 13-44.

¹³ *Essais et Conférences*, p. 26, note.

extremely varied forms, which are, indeed, in some respects perfectly opposed, rationality shows nonetheless a homogeneity of structure, the dynamism of which comes from the identity of the opposites. We are here faced with a dialectical structure in which no moment is ever perfectly separate, and within which there could not be *absolutely* new transformations. It is always the same formal essence that is surrounded by cultural elements, no matter how different, thus defining the same fundamentally coherent history, whatever its apparent differences. That these differences are far from being absolute and that, on the other hand, the connections within western civilization are far from being straightforward, is the particularly striking result of the encounter between technics and the Christian religion.

This encounter, however paradoxical, is in no way gratuitous. It is the very structure of western society that makes it necessary and comprehensible. Far from shaking the regime of reason, Christianity in fact confirms it and reinforces it in the extreme by its theological character. For what characterizes the Christian religion is not religion, and still less its connection with the sacred, but theology, which is the rationalization of the religious universe. It consists in stripping nature of its sacred dimension and making it profane, to the advantage of the supreme Being conceived as the ultimate reason of the universe. This separation of nature from the sacred works in favor of logic, which is still a theology, which reveals its thoroughly irreligious character. All this is said without bad will, but with the freedom required by philosophical thought. A personalized God, a supreme and perfect being, creator and end of the universe, is already a dedivinization of the sacred. The real relation of man with the divine is obscured by this, and the seeds of atheism are sown.¹⁴ Consequently it is a fact that the Gods are effaced and the world is given up to profanity wherever Christianity is spread. And as this is the fate of the West and its inhabitants, the sense of the sacred is no less absent in believers than in unbelievers. It is the Promethean spirit, proper to technics,

¹⁴ We may note in passing a notable attempt to conceive the divine without God in the thought of Jean Nabert. By the simple slant of a reflective philosophy, Nabert defines the divine as the desire of consciousness to be its own equal: "The desire for God is the desire for what would effectively answer the demands of consciousness inscribed in its structure." (*Le Désir de Dieu*, Paris 1966, p. 23) (Posthumous).

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that animates them all; it paralyzes our whole civilization, and religion, far from opposing the flight of the Gods, precipitates the divorce between heaven and earth.

Christianity then reveals itself to be the religion suited to the West. In the place of the religious universe, where everything is divine and commensurable, it substitutes a certain vision of the world (*Weltanschauung*), a general conception of life and history as well as a scale of values which, starting from an unconditioned value, allow a judgement, gauge and control of the universe. It presents itself above all in the form of the Church, the ideal of which can only be that of a holy empire, whatever the adaptations one introduces may be. The religion of the West, conforming to the genius of its native ground, shows a thoroughly rational character from now on; it is thanks to reason that the Absolute, as a reification and personification of the religious dimension, erupts into the universe of the sacred. What such a religion consequently strives to establish is not the *homo religiosus*, but the *rational animal*, or the *Civitas Dei* which is not substantially different from Plato's *Kallipolis*. If it is incontestable that the Platonic city has become world-wide, as F. Châtelet writes,¹⁵ it is no less true that it is thanks to its Christian version that the Platonic dream has been fully realised.

Christian society is thus "also" the natural environment in which technics are developed. They are not adjoined to logic, metaphysics, theology, the sciences, and the Christian religion; on the contrary, they show the global and specific essence of western civilization. Christian religion, in particular, in as far as it is based on the dogma of the creation, and thus projects the ultimate principle of all truth, allows itself the privilege of appropriating, gauging and controlling the universe. Creation is what proceeds from the will of God: the idea of technics is perfectly realized in this divine *architecture*. God as universal architect: this is without doubt the highest conquest of the technical spirit. This truth dominates all others, particularly that of nature, which is subject to the imperatives of a timeless beyond, omnipresent and omnipotent. It is here that Christian religion likewise shows a thoroughly political character, not only in the sense that the structure of the Church hardly differs from that of

¹⁵ F. Châtelet, *Platon*, Paris, 1965, p. 245.

temporal societies, but, more deeply, because it is born from a political and military instinct, disguised by the promises of salvation. Now, not only does the problem of the “salvation of the soul” constitute a grave alteration and profanation of the sacred, because of its anthropocentric content; it exercises, besides, a radical constraint on the conscience by binding it to a religious authority, a mediator of redemption. From now on it is not the sense of the sacred that is ensured and promoted: on the contrary it is the precipitation of the religious universe into rationality and desacralization that is effected by the Christian fact. Similarly, the idea of contemporary technology is prefigured as the essence of Christian religion. The idea of the Absolute, understood in the meaning of theology, issues from the desire to dominate that we encountered in the origin of logic, and it is this unconditional mastery that technology holds up as its objective. This is why we are witnessing today an astonishing alliance between the Church and industrial society, the latter aiming at the support of the former, so that a total “Pax Romana” can be established, permitting the technocrats to proceed uncontested towards an arrangement of the universe, at the same time accelerating the end of Christianity. In this sense the Christian religion is never surpassed. Contrary to what is often thought, Christianity has no difficulty in making itself plain, and if this *aggiornamento* sometimes creates deep internal incoherences, it is perfectly faithful to the line of conduct that the Church has always set itself. From now on its perpetuity is that of the society in which we are all living, and even when all trace of religious belief has disappeared, we shall still persist in living in this Christianity, according to the laws of de-Christianized theology.¹⁶ Rational and technical society has thus created this religion to suit itself.

¹⁶ With regard to “Christianism” (*Christentum*) and “Christianity,” Heidegger observes in the *Holzwege*, pp. 202-203: “Christianism is for Nietzsche the historical, secular and political manifestation of the Church and of its appetite for power, in the frame of the formation of western mankind and modern civilization. Christianity in this sense and the Christian life of the evangelical faith are not the same thing. A non-Christian life can easily adhere to Christianity and use it as a factor of power, the same as, inversely, a Christian life does not necessarily need Christianity. This is why a basic discussion on Christianization is in no way, nor absolutely, a struggle against what is Christian, no more than a criticism of theology is at the same time a criticism of the faith that theology is supposed to interpret.”

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Inversely, Christianity confirms technics; it confirms and strengthens them even in the most irrational manifestations of belief. And far from harming, however little, the regime of logic, the interiorised religiosity of the modern age—that which projects God as the supreme value of religious experience and is based principally on the existential engagement of the member of the Church—strengthens, uniquely, the presence of the Absolute and the essence of technics, considered here as a regulatory and dominating power. Modern technics for their part, positive sciences and the positivisms of any obedience show, no less than classical metaphysics, an occult Christian character, from which no one can extract himself, so true is it that rationality is the natural course of western man.

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All this shows both the greatness and the limits of this civilization. Greatness, because rationality has enabled western man to free himself from a certain amount of servitude which shackled his human dignity; limits, because, in the end, logic, reason and technics are never the original hearth by which the life of man is nourished. With reference to this latter point, rationality must be constantly on the watch not to replace existence and thus turn into rationalism.

Is this civilization at present going through a period of crisis or is it becoming increasingly strong? One cannot answer this question, because history does not provide us with the criteria of a perfect civilization allowing us to judge our own. It is probable that there is, according to the universal law of historical ambiguities, progression and regression at the same time, which is the same as saying that these ideas cannot be utilized in human historiography. In any event, we were not out to condemn or absolve. We have not cast ourselves in the illusory role of judges of history. Our proposal, which has deliberately dismissed all spirit of inquiry, was to take hold of the historical reality out of which we are born and which will continue to give birth to us. On the other hand, it happens that this critique, which we intend here in the Kantian sense, has permitted us to proceed to certain necessary and salutary demystifications.

As for knowing in what way civilization is likely to develop henceforth, this, like any question about the future, has no meaning. One thing is certain however: as in the past, this history will be essentially defined by the dialectic of reason and unreason, the nature of which is not to fulfil every human expectation. Being and existence go beyond reason, even if it were absolute. Western man, no less than any other, cannot be satisfied by any humanism, nor by some ultimate deeply hidden meaning.¹⁷ He is consummated in his proximity to the Universal, which in no way rejects the particularities, but assumes them in order to give them their real concretion, and which is “something near: that is to say, the nearest, which we are constantly going beyond precisely because it is the nearest.”¹⁸

¹⁷ Heidegger, *Holzwege*, p. 218.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*