

THE MYTHICAL PORTRAYAL OF EVIL
AND OF THE FALL OF MAN

In one of his admirable letters to Princess Elizabeth, Descartes asserts that the best way to overcome the annoyances of life is to “divert one’s imagination and one’s senses away from them as much as possible and to make use merely of one’s understanding in dealing with them.” This advice is not easy to follow, and one of the devil’s principal tricks is to identify himself so profoundly with our intimate concerns that, in disowning him, we come to believe that we disown ourselves. It sometimes seems that man cares more for his misery than for his pleasure.

But whether easy or not to follow, the advice is good. To convert the evil which oppresses you, insofar as possible, into a knot to untie, a safety lock to take apart, a problem to resolve, is to detach it from yourself; it is no longer me, it is mine. I can censure it and perhaps even pin it down. When one can state the evil, then what remains is only half-evil.

“My sorrow, give me your hand, come here,” says Baudelaire, and Nietzsche, Baudelaire’s brother in misfortune: “I have given a name to my suffering and I call it ‘dog.’ . . . And I can apostrophize it and vent my ill-humour upon it. . . .” In modern language and in accordance with the same defensive reflex, this dog has become “the blues.”

Translated by Elaine P. Halperin.

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We see that if man is essentially vulnerable to evil, for he endures it not only in the present, like the animals, but also in the past, through remembrance or remorse, and in the future through fear, nonetheless he possesses a means of defense of which the animal doubtless has no knowledge; it consists of putting himself at a distance from evil and in judging it. To do this Descartes employs only understanding, whereas Baudelaire and Nietzsche rely on the imagination. From a practical standpoint all that matters is the result. But it is true that imagination is the elder of the two. Humanity did not begin by posing the problem of evil; it began by projecting it in images, and launched on this path it did not veer away, but answered the enemy's attacks in the noble repartée of myths, epics, and tragedies. What does European literature begin with? It begins by speaking of human anger, the effect of a divine anger, which will deliver courageous men over to the ravages of dogs and vultures; it begins by speaking of a charnel house. But once they have experienced this charnel house, men will sing of it; after the Trojan War there is the *Iliad*. And not only is the poet happy to sing, but the hero who suffers and dies knows one joy: he knows his praises will be sung. As Helen says to Hector: “. . . on whom Zeus hath brought an evil doom, that even in days to come we may be a song for men that are yet to be” (*Iliad*, VI, 357–58). Thus, at the dawn of our culture, an initial solution of the problem of evil is advanced, a solution through beauty: men's misfortunes fertilize the poet's inspiration.

Misfortune only fertilizes evil, the soft, deep voice of Buddha was to answer beneath a different sky. Evil exists in fertilization itself. Cease wanting to sing, to act, to live, to will, and evil will disappear through extinction. “Where there is nothing, where there is no attachment, the unique isle is to be found: it is this that I call Nirvana.” What is this nothing which is everything? The end of an everything that was nothing, the annulment of a me that was illusion and of an existence that was a mirage, a total and definite deliverance.

There is only one answer to evil and misfortune, Job was to proclaim loudly: the infinite liberty of God. God does not need to render accounts to anyone, he is not a partner with whom one argues, nor a judge who must weigh justice. Man's salvation, which is nothing, is to accept God, who is everything; it is the extinction of human will in the Will of God.

Evil is not to love, finally says the Gospel. “A man had two sons. . . .” We know what follows. The youngest goes away out of indifference, the elder remains out of habit; neither one remains close to the Father out of

love. This lack of love is the root fault and the sole source of evil. "If I have not charity, it profiteth me nothing" (I Cor. 13:3).

One consequence emerges from these diverse experiences: hoping, in the name of anguish, worry, dereliction or nausea, to discover certain essential components of our condition, modern thought merely recovered a truth of which poetry and religion had never ceased to remind it: the roots of the problem are metaphysical. The sense of evil is complementary to the sense of the *divine*, as, after Otto, Caillois, van der Leeuw, Eliade and others have demonstrated. The non-civilized man must see in this a kind of numinous misfortune, a malevolent conspiracy of the Powers, requiring of him an expiatory or conciliatory reaction. This distress appears today, in attenuated but recognizable form, in a sense of the hostility of things and in a diminution of the self. "I don't know what's the matter with me today," says the tennis player who keeps missing the ball. For an instant he becomes again the anxious primitive who has lost his *mana*. And if "this" lasts and occurs more generally, he consults the illustrated magazine's weekly horoscope. Of course, he doesn't believe in it. And yet this is quite a different thing from soliciting practical advice. It is a question of regaining the harmony between the self and divine society. Everything occurs in a mysterious dimension. "There is probably no more dangerous illusion than that of imagining that some readjustment of social or institutional arrangements could suffice of itself to appease a contemporary sense of disquiet which rises from the very depths of man's being," writes Gabriel Marcel.¹

Let us return to Greece. We will allow several generations after Homer to go by and then we turn to another poet who is both an inspired soul and the first theologian of our history, the honest and rugged Hesiod, the songster of origins. We will see how evil took possession of the world. But in order to understand this we must first know how the world itself was formed. For evil is nothing more than destruction, and the meaning of destruction depends upon the nature of what has been constructed.

Let us forget the Biblical portrayal in Genesis which shows us God creating the universe out of nothing. According to Hesiod, what existed in the beginning was not a creative God, not even a God, but amorphous matter, gloomy, animated by obscure life. Two principles are discernible from this: vague Emptiness and crude Plenitude, Chaos and Gaea. These principles engender by themselves, without copulation, realities shapeless like themselves—night, the land, the mountains. And this protoplasmic

1. *Men Against Humanity* (London, Harvill Press, 1952), p. 27.

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and undifferentiated procreation would doubtless follow its course indefinitely if Love did not intervene. With Love everything changes. Love is the first of the intermediaries, or rather of the go-betweens; it unites opposites into couples and the result of such marriages are structures. Progress ensues. Thus gods are born from the union of Gaea (Earth) and Uranus (Heaven). We expect this impulse to continue and the world to be built from generation to generation. Unfortunately, at each stage the power in control appears jealous of its rights and attempts to preserve its hegemony by circumventing the arrival of a successor. And so we see Uranus thrusting his children as soon as they are born into their mother's breast, in order not to be dethroned by them. Thus, just as life is about to be born it is driven back to its point of departure. It is the powerlessness of the fountain to surpass itself indefinitely. Evil is a return of that which is structured to formlessness.

Fortunately, each time the structural impulse finds an outlet which permits it to rise higher; and each time it is thanks to an act of trickery or of intelligence that this occurs. Thus, Cronus, Uranus' son, is finally able to fool his father and to take his place. But, jealous in turn of his sovereignty, he devours his children as soon as they are born. And once again the function of life is blocked. Nonetheless there is progress; life is not destroyed in the maternal breast; it does not return to itself; it goes from the female to the male and there is an end to self-destruction.

But the impulse has not yet achieved its end. It must rise still higher, creating more perfect structures. Cronus, in turn, must be surpassed. This too occurs through trickery; in the place of a child that he would devour, he is presented with a swaddled stone which he gulps down. The child thus rescued grows, reduces his father to impotence and establishes himself upon the central axis of life: he is Zeus. Once again the future is opened up. In this way, through the virtue of Love, the world is built upon the ruins of the formless. What is progressively taking shape beneath our eyes is a *cosmos*, that is to say, a work of art. But once this work is completed, the impulse will inevitably have to stop. An artist who improved his creation indefinitely could not fail to go beyond the limits of the beautiful and return to the formless. Balzac reminds us of this truth in *An Unknown Masterpiece*. Beyond the beautiful and the good one does not find improvement, merely excess, hubris—in other words a return to evil and ugliness.

It was during the reign of Zeus that the constructive impulse was to achieve its culminating point. Let us examine more closely what happened. Like that of his predecessors, Zeus's lineage was threatened. Fate decreed

that he would give birth to a son stronger than himself and to a daughter who would be his equal. How could he conspire against the menace of invincible law?

Zeus had married Metis, wisdom, “and she was wisest among gods and mortal men” (*Theogony*, 887). Would he, through her, have access to universal knowledge? To the extent that a husband can dispose of his wife’s will, and this extent is a relative one, Zeus had domesticated wisdom; he had not assimilated it; she was his, she was not he. Then an extraordinary event took place. Metis was pregnant with Athena and was about to give birth. Zeus, without a moment’s hesitation, swallowed Metis, “put her in his own belly.” Hesiod recounts that there were two advantages for Zeus in this act. For one thing, Metis’ knowledge would truly be his. He would, himself, and no longer through his wife, understand more things than all the gods and all the mortals knew. For another, Metis would no longer be able to give birth to the male child whom the oracle had announced and who was to have dethroned his father. In other words, Zeus could no longer be excelled by anyone except himself. By devouring the mother with the child, he incorporated within himself any possible surplus of power, he made himself the source of his own transcendence, just as Descartes did by the *tour de force* of his *cogito*. This act reminds us of Uranus’ and Cronus’ act of devouring, but far from blocking life at its point of departure, it ends life at its point of arrival, after it has run all the risks and before it is drawn further and excessively into the cosmos.

The goddess Athena was born immediately thereafter. The poet does not say that she came out of Zeus, but this is taken for granted since Metis could only have given birth inside of Zeus. We know through other legends that Athena was born, fully helmeted, from her father’s head. This paternity is without danger to Zeus. The daughter cannot surpass her father, doubtless because her inferiority as a woman neutralizes her superiority as an heir. Athena was to be Zeus’s equal and his most faithful mandatory among mortals. Her birth, therefore, marks the terminal point of the ascension, the moment when the line, rising, bends back upon itself before curving down again. Actually, subsequent events were to be entirely declining ones. From then on Zeus was to shine over creatures inferior to him: he was destined to people the universe by his relations with both goddesses and mortals.

Such is the epic that celebrates the construction of the universe. It follows an ascending path: at the bottom and in the beginning, chaos; at the very summit and at the end, cosmos.

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Is everything that is achieved in the edifice perfect? In the beginning, it seems, the cosmos knew only order and harmony: in the heavens, Zeus and the gods reigned supreme; on earth men lived in obedience and in strict dependence; under the earth, finally, the subjugated Titans lay. An anvil thrown by Zeus took nine days and nine nights to fall to the earth, Hesiod tells us, and just as long to reach the bottom of Tartarus. It sank into more and more chaotic regions and finally encountered absolute darkness; for the imperfect and the dark subsisted, the best of worlds could only be a mixture of light and shadow, of order and disorder. The essential thing was for each element to be in its place, for the chaotic to be subservient to the cosmic so that perfect hierarchy would reign from the summit to the base.

Evil therefore did not exist in an inequality of conditions, for this contributes to the excellence of the whole. Zeus, contemplating the levels of reality that descended in stages beneath him, could say like the God in Genesis: "And behold, all is very good."² The moral evil was not there yet. But we had nothing to lose by waiting for it.

Curiously enough, Hesiod approaches the problem of evil in a rustic poem and even more thoroughly in an agricultural treatise. What sort of relationship exists between the construction of the universe by divine intelligence and the good luck and misfortunes of the peasant? A direct relationship, despite appearances. To know how to tie a sheaf, to shape a shaft of hard wood, to examine the flight of cranes or the seasonal ascents of the snail—all this is inscribed in the perspective of spiritual salvation, in the perspective of a fallen world. If, in his strong, moving voice, Hesiod introduces us to the relentless toil of the land, it is because in it he sees our last chance. "Happy and fortunate is he who, knowing all that relates to days, consulting the heavens and avoiding all sin, does his work without offending the Immortals."

What is he saying but that into this harmonious and ordered universe which we have been contemplating, evil has insinuated itself, there has been sin and transgression. Between the end of the *Theogony* and the first verses of the *Works and Days* something terrible must have happened, and this can only be the partial destruction of the cosmos by man, since it now demands of man a reconstruction of the cosmos by work and by justice. This fall is movingly recounted to us by the poet.

2. This goodness is not the same here and there: it is formal in the case of the Greek cosmos in which a non-created matter, relatively opaque in regard to divine light, subsists; it is constitutive in the Judeo-Christian universe, created *ex nihilo*, both form and matter, by God.

A long time ago men and gods lived side by side like brothers. The gods watched over mankind the way shepherds watch over their flock. It was then that a Titan, Prometheus, intervened: he wanted to avenge some violence that Zeus had practiced upon him. He taught men to defraud the gods of their share of the sacrifices by burning the bones and reserving the meat for themselves. Indignant, Zeus deprived men of beneficent fire, which until then he had bestowed upon them; he thus condemned mortals either to live under primitive conditions or to perish. Prometheus' reaction to this was to steal the celestial fire and to conceal it in a rod which he implanted in the earth. In so doing, he wrested men from death, and what is even more important, he communicated to them a sense of their own autonomy. No longer did men receive fire, they possessed it, they had achieved what was later to be termed autarchy. And so there were two fires, the fire of the gods which remained in heaven and that of men which was on earth. A dialectical situation composed of two hearths succeeded the original state of dependence.

Zeus, who either could not or did not want to deprive men forever of the good that they had stolen, responded by neutralizing this good with an opposing evil. "Directly," the poet says, "he created, in the place of fire, an evil destined for humans." What was this "profound snare without remedy"? It was "the cursed breed of women, a terrible scourge insinuated into mortal men's midst."

If one remembers that fire represents a portion of divine essence and that the conquest of it bestows upon man a relative transcendence, one must then conclude that woman pulls man down. The mortals appropriated an element that raised them above their condition, that deified them, and Zeus quickly dispatched a creature who debased them, who made them bestial. Woman therefore has a precise metaphysical meaning: she is the anti-fire, the anti-divine. The terrible thing about women, Hesiod adds with cynical humor, is that one can neither do without them nor find contentment with them. Nothing is sadder than a bachelor's old age, nothing more dismal than marriage. When the wife is an excellent one, then "the bad and the good strike a balance." If she is a madwoman, the calamity is without remedy.

Evil therefore resides less in woman than in the conditions created by her arrival: she puts man in a constant dilemma and leaves him with no hope of ever clearly understanding his condition. All misfortune, it seems, must stem from this. Hesiod recounts the legend of Pandora in this connection. The first woman Zeus sent, Pandora, carried with her, or found on

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her arrival, a box whose lid she opened. The misfortunes contained in the box escaped. Only hope stayed within. The following is the most credible interpretation of this rather obscure myth: hope is, if not an evil, at least the inevitable companion of evil. To declare that misfortune spreads over the earth is to say that man will become enveloped by it and defenseless against it. Misfortune then hovers about men and assails them. Only hope, which remained inside the box, is held by man. But hope is a fallacious good, it is a snare, it is still an evil because it prolongs man's agony by an illusion of release without ever freeing him of misfortune. Without hope humanity would soon succumb, which perhaps would be better. Hope is the doctor who aids the hangman, prolonging the torture and delaying the final blow.

One can readily see that a myth of human failure would immediately follow this initial fall of man. By the use of new images, this myth expresses the growing split between heaven and earth. What occurs is no longer the construction of the cosmos but its destruction and a return to chaos.

In the beginning men lived "like gods." After a life devoid of cares, labor and misery, they died as one would fall asleep. Zeus formed some benevolent geniuses among them and then the gods created a new race; it was not a race of gold this time but of silver. These new men grew for one hundred years and died in the flush of youth. Endowed with turbulent spirits, they refused to render homage to the gods and Zeus caused them, in turn, to disappear. The men of bronze, who came next, understood only brute strength. They killed each other off and went down ingloriously to subterranean abodes. Then came a race of heroes, which constituted a kind of happy parenthesis which we need not dwell upon. Finally, the iron race sprang up, the race of today. "Why do I have to live among those of this fifth race?" the poet wails, "and why did I not die earlier or why was I not born later?" The iron men knew only weariness during the day and anguish at night, intermingled with rare and fugitive satisfactions. And soon the end will come: the worst violences will be unleashed, the son will insult the father, the brother will offend his brother and the stranger his host. Justice will desert a land consumed by envy.

"Then, hiding their beautiful bodies beneath white veils, Conscience and Shame will depart from the great highways of the earth and regain Olympus. They will abandon men and arise to the Eternals. Sad suffering alone will remain among the mortals: there will no longer be any recourse against evil."

Zeus was to wait a little longer and when men “were born with white temples,” he was to annihilate them.

The story of this fall includes temporal and spatial images. On the one hand, the interval that separated heaven and earth grew progressively longer until the split, and, without the palliative of the stolen fire, men would soon have been plunged into total darkness. On the other hand, as men drew further away from the gods, duration intervened, with its servitude: the gods knew eternal youth; the men of the golden age knew a period of pure youth interrupted by death; those of the silver age reached youth only after a long term of growth; the two succeeding ages, with the three normal stages of life as we know them, brought us childhood, adulthood and old age; men were born old, “with white temples,” and knew only the senile period of life.

Thus we see death progressively reabsorbing life—eternal youth among the gods, mortal youth during the golden age, mortal youth belatedly achieved during the silver age; then youth becomes merely an intermediary stage between childhood and old age; finally, all of life leans toward death. Men only enjoy one final instant of existence. This final stage, in which men are born old, constitutes the symmetrical counterpart of the first stage of the cosmos, in which the sons of gods died as soon as they were born, either being plunged into the maternal breast or devoured by their father. One group is born dying, in the other men die as soon as they are born. Neither of them ever knows the full flowering of an entire life, which is structured eternity in the form of adult youth. To be born too late or to die too soon is not to live at all.

Is everything, therefore, lost for mankind? No. The gods we have offended are not implacable. The annihilation of humanity by Zeus, far from being inevitable, is merely the theoretical end of a possible decline: ultimate redress is not impossible. Let us learn how to put the gods on our side by respecting their laws, the first of which is the law of justice and of work. Man’s salvation, in other words the reconstruction of the earthly cosmos, depends upon one sole condition: acceptance of the correct effort. For there exists a destructive effort that we must avoid at all cost. The poet says: “So, after all, there was not one kind of Strife alone, but all over the earth there are two. As for the one, a man would praise her when he came to understand her; but the other is blameworthy: and they are wholly different in nature. For one fosters evil war and battle, being cruel: her no man loves; . . . the other is the elder . . . and the son of Cronos who sits above and dwells in the aether, set her in the roots of the earth: and she is

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far kinder to men. She stirs up even the shiftless to toil; for a man grows eager to work when he considers his neighbour, a rich man who hastens to plough and plant and put his house in good order; and neighbour vies with his neighbour as he hurries after wealth. This Strife is wholesome for men. And potter is angry with potter, and craftsman with craftsman, and beggar is jealous of beggar, and minstrel of minstrel" (v. 11–26).

All our chances for salvation are contained in these few verses. They portray man endowed by nature with an aggressive will; he can either follow the path of discord or that of competition. The first belongs to the category of chaos; it creates a conflict between two terms that cancel each other out: man kills man, life quells life. Cronus, when he devoured his own children, was obeying this kind of will. This category is a self-destructive one; it cancels the effects of Love, it destroys the structures. The other is constructive. It incites the potter to surpass the potter. It induces the man who is outstripped to excel, in turn. It does not block life, it opens up its possibilities. It was thanks to this kind of competition that Zeus took his father's place and built the cosmos. Competition does not contrast two opposites horizontally, it unifies them in a common effort of vertical excellence. It is ascensional. Humanity's destiny will depend upon the choice that it makes between these two forms of struggle.

Works and Days is therefore something other and more than a mere agricultural treatise. It is, if you will, a *Discourse on the method of doing one's work well in the sight of God*.

Between Hesiod and Plato, such thinkers as Pythagoras, Heraclitus and Empedocles would be of great interest to us, to say nothing of the vast and profound tragic current represented by Aeschylus, Sophocles and Euripides. But one must know how to limit oneself. Let us be satisfied with a brief comment.

We have just seen the world constructed beneath our eyes, beginning with undifferentiated matter. This constructive process was good, there is no doubt about it. Evil was the opposite tendency; inertia, a return to chaos. But, however good, this constructive process involves a danger, because it forms and liberates distinct individualities while demanding of them that they be harmoniously integrated into the whole. And individuals are tempted to become emancipated, to separate themselves from the whole. Thus, an internal dissonance is introduced into the cosmos, going beyond the structure, in the direction of anarchy; afterwards there is a return to chaos attributable not to sin but to excess.

Is the cosmos destined inevitably to commit this sin? Only divine aid, it seems, can prevent it. It appears almost inevitable that one day the parts of the universe, forgetting their common origins, will attempt to achieve singularization and that internal conflicts will result. After that, the cosmos no longer is deserving of the name, it no longer deserves to exist. It becomes acosmic and fundamental indeterminacy will reabsorb it. All of history can be said to consist of four stages: original chaos, cosmos, anarchy, return to chaos. According to Anaximander, the second of the philosophers in chronology: "It is from the indeterminate that beings spring up and it is in it, too, that they are dissipated; for they pay and expiate their injustice toward one another, according to the order of the times."

According to Heraclitus, any individuality that refuses to participate in the supreme law is destined to destruction. "The rising fire will judge and condemn all things." The sin, therefore, consists in forgetting, in favor of a relative and legitimate autonomy, the imperious prerogatives of the whole.

This same concept inspires Empedocles with a striking vision of universal fate. In the beginning the world is in a state of chaos: everything is confusion, absolute disorder, total undifferentiation. This is the reign of Hatred. But Love reacts to this. Situated in the center of the universe, it glows and chases Hatred to the outer edge. Then combinations, amalgamations, vague structures begin to occur, followed by viable organisms that are isolated at first: limbs that seek bodies, eyes in search of a face, human heads that go astray and lodge themselves on oxen. And afterward everything becomes orderly and we have the cosmic state in all its splendor.

Now, from the outer edge, Hatred bursts forth in turn: "All the limbs of god are trembling, one after the other," says Empedocles. Love protects itself as best it can, but Hatred shoves it back to the center of the world and all the formed structures disintegrate. We find ourselves back in the age of chaos. But, recovering quickly, Love already is preparing its revenge.

What does Hatred represent in this mythical vision except an excess of individual distinctiveness which, in crumbling apart, leads to a dissolution of the whole? The reign of Love will endure only if individuals accept, along with their relative autonomy, the universal demands of association, of fraternity which dominates the whole. The ideal state, Empedocles tells us, is one which admits neither murder nor bloody sacrifices nor wild beasts—in a word, one which would exclude dissidence. A world in which the "flame of good will sheds its light on everything."

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There is one notion which, in the course of the development of ideas, recurs endlessly and which dominated all of Antiquity until Plato, and that is *hubris*, or excess. It never recognized its limit. In the beginning it concerned one particular transgression—against a god, but soon it came to denote any prideful act or infatuation. To ridicule someone weaker than oneself, for example, was to commit the sin—that is, to forget that another's infirmity might tomorrow become one's own, and that any man, as such, is subject to the same destiny: *κοινή ἡ τύχη*.

Nothing is more dangerous, nothing more insane, than to believe oneself immune to the blows of fate. To do so is to think that one is god. Hell is peopled with such miserable creatures, who have a name: Tantalus, Sisyphus, Ixion. Tragedy and history never cease to produce them: Creon, Ajax, Aegisthus, Xerxes. But it is never *hubris* that has the last word. All one has to do is to wait. "Great Zeus . . . hath long been bending his bow against Alexander so that his bolt should neither fall short of the mark nor . . . be launched in vain" (Aeschylus, *Agamemnon*, 363–66). Heraclitus, the philosopher of universal change, felt very strongly that beyond the inextricable confusion of things, universal order existed: "The sun will not exceed its limits, unless the Erinys, the followers of Zeus, know how to find it." "It is better to smother excess than a fire."

Running parallel to these proceedings, which tend to impregnate current religion with an increasingly rigid moralism and rationalism, another form of piety was introduced in Greece. Its origins are obscure, but it seems to have come from the north, perhaps from Thrace. Certain inhabitants of this country, Herodotus tell us (V, 4), had a strange custom: they greeted their new-born infants with tears and joyously took leave of their dead. The reversal of values that Orphic and Dionysian piety established is precisely this: the roles of life and death are interchanged. The body, which formerly was the ornament and domicile of the soul, becomes its tomb. On the day of his birth man does not emerge from darkness into light, he falls from the clear light of heaven into terrestrial gloom. "Who knows whether to live is not to die and whether to die is not to live" (Euripides).

This new concept introduces us to a god who is the master of life and death, for he himself is dead and resurrected. Thus, god, Dionysius or Zagreus, one day was attacked, torn to pieces and devoured by impure monsters, the Titans. Only the heart was rescued by Zeus, who caused a new Dionysius to be born from it. The Titans, who had just swallowed the sacred flesh, were struck by lightning and the men born from their ashes

thus united a heavenly element, the soul, with a Titanesque and impure one, the body. And so man appears as a twofold being, no longer accompanied by a god, like Ulysses, but inhabited by one. His duty is to save his soul, buried in matter. The resurrection of his god offers him a guarantee of his own liberation. Asceticism, ecstasy and purification play a role in the effectuation of this deliverance. A religion of redemption and of salvation, Orphism, claims to bestow upon its initiated the promise of blissful eternity. The realities of the beyond now appear in the foreground: it is not death that is feared and that is kept at a distance, but life. For the life of the body is the death of the soul.

Traditional piety and mystical piety seem incompatible. This was not at all true in reality, but the introduction of the Dionysian legend in Greece encountered opposition; Euripides preserved the memory of this in his *Bacchae*. It was Plato who was to assume the task of reconciling the two outlooks in a most original manner.

At first glance it appears that there was no place in Plato's thinking for evil because:

1. God is good. The idea of the Good is the supreme reality and the supreme transcendence.

2. Every man desires the good. There is no will that is intrinsically bad.

And yet evil is there. No philosopher has ever felt this tragic evidence more strongly: there is more evil than good in the world. We live in an evil world. If, according to the fact of the primacy of the Supreme Idea, there is more good than evil in the totality of the universe, among us, on earth, it is evil that predominates. Where does it come from?

In reading the *Timaeus*, let us go back to the beginning of time, before original sin and the fall of man, to the formation of the world by God. We immediately note that God intervenes here from the very outset. We are not witnessing, as in the *Theogony*, his birth, growth and establishment. This God has not become, he is. And he is good, not with the goodness of a love that expends itself infinitely, as in the Christian view, but with a generous goodness which radiates, abounds and is finite.

Thus God disposes of a matter which, it seems, he has not created. He has to work with a crude notion. His goodness, therefore, will not consist in creating something out of nothing, but in shaping a harmonious whole from an amorphous one. Inversely, it goes without saying that if, one day, God's action were to be annulled, the world would not return from being to nothingness, as in the Christian view, but from order to disorder. Even after the disappearance of God, something would remain.

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Therefore, through his generous goodness, God decides to create the world. “Let us now state the Cause wherefor He that constructed it constructed Becoming and the All. He was good, and in him that is good no envy ariseth ever concerning anything; and being devoid of envy He desired that all should be, so far as possible, like unto Himself. This principle, then, we shall be wholly right in accepting from men of wisdom as being above all the supreme originating principle of Becoming and the Cosmos. For God desired that, so far as possible, all things should be good and nothing evil; wherefore, when He took over all that was visible, seeing that it was not in a state of rest but in a state of discordant and disorderly motion, He brought it into order out of disorder, deeming that the former state is in all ways better than the latter” (*Timaeus*, 29E–30A).

God therefore works upon resistant matter, which is relatively blind to his radiance, in order to impregnate it as much as possible with the goodness which is in him—in other words, to impose order and structure upon it. One might conclude from this that one of the great difficulties of Christian metaphysics is isolated from the start: the responsibility of God in relation to the imperfections of the universe. From the Christian point of view, God being a universal creator, the problem consists in understanding how a world entirely divine in its origins and its being—and not merely in its form—how this world created out of nothing, by an all-powerful and infinitely good God, can be partially bad. Could God have failed in his creation? No, since he remarks on the sixth day that all is very well. The solution of this insoluble mystery is to admit that God, doubtless wishing to receive the homage of free subjects and not of slaves, allowed his creatures a certain independence, that they made bad use of it, and that this sin vitiated everything, obliging God to perform an act of redemption which bears, like original creation, the mark of the absolute.

According to Plato, the demiurge of the *Timaeus*, this generous God created a world which is not good, but which is the best possible one, which is a compromise between good and evil, or rather between the Self and the Other, a “mixture.” Everything occurs “for ends both necessary and most good,” *ἐνεκα τῶν ἀναγκαίων καὶ τῶν ἀριστῶν* (*Timaeus*, 75D). The *Timaeus* is the history of this divine mixture. We see the Demiurge resorting to marvels of ingenuity in order to obtain the best, while making allowance for the necessary, the Other. It is thus that the human soul will contain, inevitably, a little more of the Other than of the Self and will be destined, by its nature, to debase itself gradually, save for the corrective intervention of God. Man, therefore, is naturally in an unstable state of equilibrium, equiv-

ocal toward himself. His fall is inevitable if he relies upon his own strength; it will be miraculously avoided if he leans upon God, who, in turn, never fails to look after him and to lend him, at the right moment, the additional strength which he lacks.

Once souls are created, God lodges each one in an “organ of time,” that is to say, in a star, and notifies them of the laws of Destiny: “. . . namely, how that the first birth should be one and the same ordained for all, in order that none might be slighted by Him; and how it was needful that they, when shown each into his own proper organ of time, should grow into the most god-fearing of living creatures; and that, since human nature is two fold, the superior sex is that which hereafter should be designated ‘man.’ And when, by virtue of Necessity, they should be implanted in bodies, and their bodies are subject to influx and efflux, these results would necessarily follow—firstly, sensation that is innate and common to all proceeding from violent affections; secondly, desire mingled with pleasure and pain; and besides these, fear and anger and all such emotions as are naturally allied thereto, and all such as are of a different and opposite character. And if they shall master these they will live justly, but if they are mastered, unjustly. And he that has lived his appointed time well shall return again to his abode in his native star, and shall gain a life that is blessed and congenial; but whoso has failed therein shall be changed into woman’s nature at the second birth; and if, in that shape, he still refraineth not from wickedness he shall be changed every time, according to the nature of his wickedness, into some bestial form after the similitude of his own nature; nor in his changings shall he cease from woes until he yields himself to the revolution of the Same and Similar that is within him, and dominating by force of reason that burdensome mass which afterwards adhered to him of fire and water and earth and air, a mass tumultuous and irrational, returns again to the semblance of his first and best state.

“When He had fully declared unto them all these ordinances, to the end that He might be blameless in respect of the future wickedness of any one of them, He proceeded to sow them, some in Earth, some in the Moon, others in the rest of the organs of Time” (*Timaueus*, 41E–42D).

Therefore:

1. The first birth is identical for all. There is no original injustice. No one has the right to reproach God or destiny for being what he is. We all have had the same chance at the start; the first earthly existence is imposed equally upon everyone, with preference shown to none.

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2. The soul that triumphs over this initial trial returns to the star that it occupied and lives a happy life there.

3. The soul that fails is born again under less favorable conditions, those of a woman; further failures will plunge it into the body of an animal; it will be clothed in diverse forms, "resembling its vice." Thus, Plato tells us in another part of the *Timaeus*, those men who are devoid of evil, but frivolous and inconsistent, will become birds; brutal and idle men will become quadrupeds and their heads will incline toward the earth; those who are even more stupid will become reptiles or marine animals. Such are the laws promulgated by God "in order to remain innocent of the future malice of each being."

What emerges from these laws is divine irresponsibility and human responsibility in regard to evil. God does all he can. If man is merely a subordinate creature, if he is not god, that is not an evil; it is a necessary and legitimate limitation of power, because the world must have a hierarchized structure. Intrinsic evil, we know this already and we will understand it better later on, results from a poor choice between the divine, which is on high, and animalism, which is on earth. The evil, it appears, is not inevitable. Man is not the victim of God because he will be tested at the level of his strength and may well emerge victorious. At the origin of sin there is nothing more than poor use of liberty.

God's action is therefore not that of an infinite being upon nothingness, but that of a finite being upon external matter. The universe is the consequence of two antagonistic forces, a divine action which is good and inert resistance which opposes it.

This composition of forces is remarkably illustrated in a beautiful myth, that of the *Statesman*. Divine generosity is manifested here, no longer by a spatial image like a luminous radiance, but in a temporal perspective, like a moving impulse opposed to an immobility that brakes and delays it.

The world was an immobile and disordered mass in the beginning. With one fillip God made it revolve upon itself. Under the effect of this divine rotation the world gradually became organized, and so it achieved a harmonious and perfect cosmos. For humanity this was paradise: since everything was placed under the direct dependence of God, there were no constitutions, nor marriages, nor work; men were born of the earth, ate the fruit of the trees that were offered in profusion, lived in a wholesome and quiet atmosphere. God governed them "in person" *ἐνεμεν αὐτοὺς αὐτὸς ἐπιστατῶν* (271E).

But the given impulse, little by little, exhausts itself. Plato seems here to conceive of the world as a ball suspended from a string and which God revolves by a push of the thumb. The string becomes twisted and soon, after a pause, it becomes untwisted and the universe spins in a contrary rotation. Notice that the antagonistic force does not stem from a wicked divinity opposed to god: it is inherent in matter; it is an inertia. At the very start, Plato draws away from any Manichean solution.

In the beginning all goes well, because the *memory* of a previous system still persists. But little by little *forgetfulness* permeates the world, the necessary takes back its rights over the better, and the Other over the Self. The age of iron follows the golden age. If the rotation continued in this way the universe would return to the chaos whence it sprung. Fortunately, God is watching. Will he intervene directly by pushing once again with his thumb? No. His reaction is indirect. It provides men with a way of watching over themselves: it gives them the arts and fire. In other words, he grants them spontaneously what Prometheus, in Hesiod's myth, had denied them. The consequence is the same in both instances: man now depends upon himself. He goes from a state of direct dependence (a kind of innocent condition) to a state of indirect dependence. Plato then poses a serious problem: which of these two states is the better one? And he answers, the first, if it is accompanied by philosophy; if not, the second.

In other words, the paradisiacal situation implying man's passive submission to God is inferior to a situation of rupture, corrected by the philosophical aspiration of man toward God. What is more important than anything else is man's impulse to love, this impulse that dialectic will attempt to discipline in order to shape it into a rigorous method. This Platonic conception, a truly extraordinary one, was to find astonishing similarities in Christian theology. The text of a Roman missal evoking Adam's sin, which ruined the state of man's direct dependence upon God, says: *Felix culpa, quae talem et tantum meruit Redemptorem*. Therefore the situation of a split is preferable to the state of innocence when it permits, on the one hand, the Redemption emanating from God, and on the other, faith springing from the heart of man and mounting toward God. The parable of the Prodigal Son suggests an analogous statement. The youngest son, who had left his father and then came back to him, obliging the father to run to meet him, is better than the eldest son who remained faithfully at home, because here habit took the place of love. Now, to become accustomed to God is to have lost him. Better a repentant sinner than an upright man without the impulse to repent, says the Gospel. Plato had already said

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it in his own way: better a dialectical situation implying a mutual effort of reconciliation than a state of blissful passivity.

But what would happen to a world separated from God if philosophical aspiration should disappear from it? We would then see it progressively return, through forgetfulness of God, to primitive chaos. All is lost, it seems. No, because God, on his part, does not forget the world. His faithfulness endures even after that of men has disappeared. In a fresh fillip administered *in extremis* he will set the world turning in a beneficent gyration toward a new cosmic era. And the alternations of action and reaction will follow each other in this way until the end of time.

This myth clarifies and confirms that of the *Timaeus*. The world again appears as the consequence of two compounded forces: a force of divine impulse and a resistance of material inertia. Without God the world would have remained in a state of chaos or would soon have returned to it. It is therefore by decree, not by nature, that the universe subsists; divine action maintains it beyond its potentialities, in a state of structure that it would be incapable of assuming by itself. The same is true of the human soul: destined by nature to disintegrate, it receives from God the supplement of being which it lacks, and it remains imperishable without being immortal: ἀνώλεθρον . . . ἀλλ' οὐκ αἰώνιον (*Laws*, 904A).

In all these cases, we see that God does not save a world or a lost man out of graciousness, as the Christians believe. He helps a threatened creature out of generosity. Therefore, to survive in its being, it is enough for this creature to consent to divine help. All of wisdom lies in knowing how to accept one's dependence in regard to God. The metaphysical evil consists, not in the inequality of conditions, because this adds to the harmony of the whole, but in a revolt of the inferior, in an act of violence, *hubris*. What remains for us to study is the mechanism of this revolt and the fall that results from it.

We have seen that in the beginning all souls undergo an identical trial. This trial is recounted to us in the *Phaedrus* in the form of a deservedly famous myth. The trial consists of a circular voyage that comprises three stages: ascent, contemplative pause, descent. Each soul is depicted as a team of horses whose coachman holds the reins. In the most favorable case, that of the gods, the itinerary is made without accident: the teams, harmoniously composed, climb to the heavens, arrive at the summit of the cupola, cross it, settle "on the back of the arch," and, during a cosmic revolution, each soul contemplates the ideal realities. This vision impregnates them with eternity, truth, divinity, like beneficent nourishment. Then, once the

heavenly revolution is over, the horses begin to snort again, the teams plunge back into the depths of the world and return to their point of departure.

Such, for the soul, is the "trial and the supreme strife." For by no means do all souls solve their problem so easily. Most of them effectuate a disordered ascent and stop on this side of the heavenly arch. Incapable of perceiving pure truths, they remain the prisoners of matter and "are reduced to feast upon conjectures." While their victorious sisters will know the joy of spirituality for ten thousand years, the fallen souls will endure the humiliating lot of incarnation during the same period.

It is therefore necessary to go beyond the heavenly cupola and perceive the Essences. Evil is nothing more than inaptitude for transcendence. The soul's mission is to surpass itself. The downfall consists in remaining on this side of the ideal threshold. Those souls that failed will therefore experience successive reincarnations and, at the end of each one, a judgment will be rendered that will call for either reward or punishment, in accordance with the kind of carnal life they have lived: some souls will fall into bodies that grow increasingly crude, others, on the contrary, will rise in the hierarchy, invested with ever more noble offices, those of a poet, of a statesman, of a philosopher.

Such is the lifetime itinerary which is our destiny. But the internal mechanism of man's fall still eludes us. What exactly occurs in the case of those unfortunate teams of horses that know failure? We can foresee that a hubristic situation occurs, one where the inferior masters the superior. But it is worth our while to study this more closely.

The soul's chariot is harnessed to two horses which in all likelihood represent will and desire; the coachman symbolizes the soul's faculty to reason. Now, the two harnessed horses do not love the same object. Therein lies the entire drama. One, which is white, adroit, a thoroughbred, and docile, seeks glory, beauty, truth; he is placed at the right. The other, which is black, bent, of poor constitution, sanguine, deaf, and recalcitrant, seeks self-glorification and violence. He is placed at the left. These two compounded forces are responsible for the chariot's course. Now, and this is an essential point, it is the black horse that takes the lead, pulling the team to the left, toward the conquest of a sensory object. His greed overrides his will and his reason.

But suddenly a *coup de théâtre* takes place. At the very moment when the black horse is about to reach his object, the coachman experiences a kind of illumination: the vision of the sensory object evokes in his soul the memory

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of the corresponding intelligible object; this is the flash of insight of reminiscence. Filled with intense love for the intelligible object, for the Idea, and seized with disgust for the sensory object, the coachman falls back, pulls on the reins and the horses rear. The white horse soon calms down—for the will, Plato tells us, comes naturally to the aid of reason—but the black horse, the incarnation of desire, yields only with great difficulty and on the explicit understanding that after the Idea is conquered, they will return to the sensory object. And so the team proceeds toward the Idea and pauses there a long time. But soon the black horse reminds the coachman of his promise, which the latter seems to have forgotten, and once again the chariot veers to the left. Will they take possession of the desired object this time? No, because in the coachman's soul another flash of insight in regard to reminiscence occurs and the team once again veers to the right. Finally, after lengthy struggles, the black horse admits defeat. He agrees "to follow, his back lowered, the coachman's considered decision."

Such is the journey; it proceeds in zig-zags—an image of the soul's destiny. Our souls always tend toward the sensory only to fall back once again on the intelligible and finally to return, purified, to the sensory, which by then is no longer dangerous to them because they situate it in its true place and attribute to it its true value. The sensory is therefore merely for us a point of departure and a point of arrival. The danger consists in being satisfied with it.

It is in these terms that the notion of evil becomes more exact. Man is a being composed of spirit and of flesh, of the Self and of the Other. His fall is the consequence of an excessive attachment to one alone of these two terms. This seduction is not bad in itself. The black horse is not a bad horse of which it might be necessary to rid oneself. He fulfills a necessary function. Pleasure and desire connected with sensory things are in no sense reprehensible. But they do not come first, and since the senses have an extraordinary power over man, they are dangerous. Yet the opposite excess—total absorption in the intelligible—is equally wrong. That is why the black horse reminds the coachman of his promise. We know, thanks to another myth, that the prisoner must go back down into the cave after having contemplated the sun, that is to say, the Idea of the Good. A man is only a man. Uncorrupted situations are not for him; he can only sustain them for moments "as fishes lift their heads out of water" (*Phaedo*, 109E). Contrary to what is frequently maintained, the temptation of angelhood is not a Platonic temptation.

We have just seen the coachman fall back in his seat, pull on the reins and control the black horse. Plato adds an interesting detail: the coachman pulls with such force that he causes the horse's mouth to bleed and it suffers cruelly. After several efforts of this nature the refractory beast finally quiets down and becomes docile. To clarify this problem, let us consult another and final myth, that of the Er of Pamphylia which ends the *Republic*.

Abandoned on the battlefield as dead, a courageous warrior named Er regains consciousness twelve days later, at the very moment when his body, laid out on the funeral pyre, is about to be burned. Meanwhile his soul has visited the beyond. The following is an account of this adventure.

Er's soul, accompanied by a numerous troop of other souls, both good and bad, enters a marvelous meadow where the judges of the infernal regions are seated. An irrevocable verdict sends the virtuous souls to heaven, where they receive their reward, and the unjust are sent below the earth, where they are punished. Retribution, which accords with the deed done, is in the proportion of ten to one. Er's soul naturally escapes judgment and remains in the meadow for ten days, questioning other souls, those that redescend from heaven in full glory, and those that ascend again from the earth, bruised but purified by their punishment. At one moment a scene of extreme violence takes place. A tyrant from Pamphylia named Ardiaeus, charged with horrible crimes, wanted to return one day before the appointed time. He was about to cross the threshold when the opening itself, a kind of infernal mouth, cried out in a terrible roar. Then wild men of fiery aspect came running, carried Ardiaeus back to the interior of hell, dragging him on a litter of thorny brambles, and threw him into Tartarus. We do not know whether he ever got out of it.

Then Er goes off with a troop of souls. After four days of walking, they come to an open space where a splendid column stands, extending through the whole of heaven and of earth: this is the axis of the world. Meridians of light fall from it and envelop the universe. The whole rotates under the impulsion of the spindle of Necessity, and a marvelous musical harmony can be heard. We are at the heart of the cosmos, at the source of all motion, at the origin of all history.

A certain prophet gathers the souls around him and, mounting upon a high pulpit, he solemnly proclaims: "Souls that live for a day, now is the beginning of another cycle of mortal generation where birth is the beacon of death. No divinity shall cast lots for you, but you shall choose your own deity. Let him to whom falls the first lot first select a life to which he shall

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cleave of necessity. But virtue has no master over her, and each shall have more or less of her as he honours her or does her despite. The blame is his who chooses: God is blameless" (617D-E).

At these words, he takes from the lap of Necessity numbers of lots and samples of lives. He scatters the lots indifferently and each soul, with the exception of Er, picks up the one that falls at his feet. Then he scatters the samples of lives, and they greatly outnumber the souls present. Every human and animal condition is represented: wealth, poverty, tyranny, beauty, nobility, disease, etc., and all the combinations that these kinds of lives can form by being intermingled. Then the souls are asked to make their choice, according to the way the lots fall. The first to approach perceives great tyranny in the heap and he seizes it, the fool! Then all the souls take their turn. Nothing could be more pathetic, Er recounts, than the spectacle of these souls contracting their own destiny. For most of them, instead of being guided by the reality of the Good, decide according to the habits of their previous life. They take as their norm for what must be, not what is, but what was, not the eternal but the past. Most curious, those souls which made the poorest choice were the ones that had returned from heaven "inasmuch as they were unexercised in suffering. But the most of those who came up from earth, since they had themselves suffered and seen the suffering of others, did not make their choice precipitately" (619D).

Soon all the souls are provided for. Then each receives a divinity that corresponds to his chosen condition, "to serve as his guardian during his lifetime and to see that his destiny is accomplished." All pass beneath the throne of Necessity, which consecrates the choice irrevocably, and then in a scorching heat they proceed to the plain of Lethe. After a day of walking they are parched and stop on the banks of the river of Forgetfulness; they are commanded to drink only a stipulated amount of water, all save Er. Some of them, carried away by their thirst, drink more than they should. Gorged with oblivion, they become unable to remember anything.

Then everyone falls asleep. In the middle of the night there is a thunderstorm and an earthquake and the souls are projected into the heavens like shooting stars; they fall in diverse places where they are to become incarnate. Er recovers to find himself on the funeral pyre.

All of this, though strange, is of an incredible richness in human experience, if we look at it closely. At first glance, man seems to be trapped by the chains of a rigorous fatality and determinism: he receives his lot, chooses his life among the samples that are offered to him and then finds

himself bound, chained to it both by Necessity and by the divinity assigned to him as the guardian of his destiny.

And yet, not only is the idea of human responsibility evident in almost every line of this myth, but the statement made by the prophet is explicit: "Virtue has no master." In other words, whatever condition the soul falls heir to, it remains free in regard to virtue. If I choose the fate of a carpenter, a doctor or a poet, I will have to be a carpenter, doctor or poet. But within this fixed framework, I can have more or less virtue, more or less worth. It is true that some conditions are more dangerous than others. It is terribly difficult, for example, to be a virtuous tyrant, more difficult for a woman to be virtuous than for a man, but tyranny does not, *a priori*, exclude virtue any more than does femininity.

Thus the choice that I make in heaven determines the pattern of my life, not its spiritual value, which is open to examination every day. For virtue has no master. As each man honors or dishonors it he will have more or less of it. Therefore I am always free and morally responsible for what I am. The divinity, this kind of guardian angel that I receive, is merely the executor of the fatalities of my condition, of what one calls today my situation or my state of life. But within these limits, I am and remain the executor of my salvation or of my perdition. Everything depends upon the use, virtuous or not, that I make of my situation.

But what is the basis of this virtue, which in the end is the only necessity? What can one do to be virtuous? We have just seen some souls making a poor choice by taking as their criterion, not the good in itself, but the experiences of a previous life. We have seen others, carried away by their thirst, drinking the waters of Lethe in greater quantity than they should. A double sin, since the soul becomes attached to the temporal and to the sensory. But it would not become attached to these if it were not previously detached from the eternal, from the spiritual, from the Good. The first condition of salvation is therefore attachment to a supreme Value, it is the philosophy, the love that appeared indispensable to us in the myth of the *Statesman* and in Hesiod's *Theogony*. At the root of all sin there is an absence of love, in other words, an unfaithfulness. Juridically, I am guilty at the moment when I commit the crime, the theft, the lie. Metaphysically, I was already guilty beforehand, at the instant when I had turned so far away from the Good that an inferior seduction could possess me. Let us take a modern example: a driver who falls asleep at the wheel is not responsible for the accident that he causes, since he was asleep. But he is

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guilty of being asleep. And, if he is asleep, then he has not taken seriously enough the moral obligation to be vigilant.

The true sin therefore exists prior to the temptation. It resides in a spiritual weakening that renders the soul vulnerable. In one sense, once we are tempted, it is already too late. On this point Plato agrees with certain fundamental Christian insights. "Lead us not into temptation," reads the Sunday prayer. It does not say: "If we are tempted, give us the strength to resist." And Oscar Wilde's phrase: "One resists everything but temptation," contains a truth of which its author doubtless had no forebodings. We are surrounded by temptation just as we are surrounded by microbes. Both temptation and microbes wait for one moment of weakness to insinuate themselves into us. It is in this weakness that the real fault lies. Evil has no strength other than the strengths that we have previously lost. The parable of the Prodigal Son is significant in this respect and it is strikingly similar to the Platonic concept. The youngest son did not begin by yielding to the temptations of a big city; he began by forsaking his father. And it was then that the temptations of the big city seduced him.

And so, if there is a point in common between the Gospel and the *Dialogues*, it is this: the origin of man's downfall is a split between the soul and God. If man falls into evil ways it is because he first forsakes the good; if he yields to Satan it is because he first abandons God. The basic sin, beyond which it is impossible to push one's analysis, can be defined therefore as an absence of love. All the other sins derive from this.

Nonetheless, a basic contradiction subsists between the Platonic and Christian doctrines. Sin is an error in the one case, a disobedience in the other. In the one case it has to do with intelligence, in the other it concerns the will. However grave man's fall, in Plato it resembles the error of an absent-minded student whom the master must correct. In the Gospel, it is the revolt of the child against the father. And the father must punish.

On the whole, the solution that Plato brings to the problem of evil seems an admirable one because of the spirit of justice, compassion and humanity, the feeling for human failure and the certainty of possible rehabilitation that animate it. Man must and can rise again with God's help.

But his rehabilitation is linked with philosophy. And one is justified in wondering if the masses, who have no talent for culture because they lack the necessary leisure, would not be left without hope. Given over to manual work, which ruins the souls of those who are absorbed by it—such was Socrates' opinion—the great majority of men will achieve, it seems, neither happiness on this earth nor salvation in the hereafter.

Plato has already answered this criticism. No situation is hopeless except that of the great sinners who are perhaps forever immersed in Tartarus. Thanks to metempsychosis, the most miserable man possesses the means to rise from his condition to a better one and to thus accomplish his salvation by stages, by steps. If he is not a philosopher he will become one and will finally experience the liberation of his soul.

On the terrestrial level, the situation of the little people is not hopeless either. To save the “proletariat,” it would be enough to modify economic conditions in the manner indicated by the *Republic* and *Laws*. What does this consist of? To establish some channel that links the opinions of the masses with the philosophical intuition, to combine the true with the probable, to organize the classes into a hierarchy that allows the truth to be transmitted unerringly from the top to the bottom. Some strange regulations result, specifically in the *Republic*: the communization of women and children and the banishment of poets. Heading the state, a few philosophers make the laws. These laws function through the intervention of an executive council or of a young tyrant blessed with a fine character. And the entire political structure is so constituted as to prevent the emancipation of the inferior. Thus philosophy penetrates the human world just as the light of the Good penetrated the cosmic universe thanks to the action of God the creator. No one escapes the truth. Some know it in itself and through a direct line of vision; others, indirectly, by docile obedience to the first group; they are good by proxy, which is after all not such a bad thing.

To make the greatest number of men happy by spreading the light of philosophy throughout all the social strata—this was the task to which Plato dedicated the greater part of his life. This was his dream.

Is it possible to fulfill this dream? Plato himself seems to have had some doubts about it. Several times he presents his legislative work as though it were a dream or as a scarcely attainable model. He admits that many concessions would have to be made in order to translate the ideal into fact. But he firmly believes that it is by raising his sights toward this ideal that the legislator will accomplish the best and the most lasting reforms.

The Buddhist seeks and finds his joy in waiting for “the unique isle where nothing exists”; by nothing he means everything for whoever is able to understand.

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Job places his faith in the absolute infinite of a pure Will which is justified by nothing outside of itself and which has no accounting to give to anyone.

The Prodigal Son returns to his father and throws himself into his arms.

The first Greek thinkers strike a note whose sound is distinctive without being discordant. The intensity of their religious feeling is compounded with an imperious need for reason. It is not enough for them to bow down, to adore and to love; they want to understand. They believe that they render the highest homage to the gods by portraying them in a manner most befitting to them: in accordance with the light of intelligence. The reasonings of the dialectician join with the myths of the poet to "always picture God as he is" (Plato, *Republic*, 379A), that is to say, as good, true, just, and immutable. "If gods do evil, they are not gods," Euripides asserts.

Thus evil appears as a cosmic necessity forcing upon gods and men a constant effort of self-correction. On the moral level it is defined as an error of negligence or of forgetfulness through which the soul draws away from its origins and is false to itself. Evil therefore has a metaphysical source for the Greek as well as for the Oriental or the Christian; it can be fought only by an appeal to the divine Absolute. But to believe in the Absolute is not to drown or be lost in it. It is to compound the Absolute with the exigencies of the relative in which we are situated; it is to achieve a harmonious structure. In the last analysis, what the Greeks give us is a lesson in humanism.