WHAT HUMANS ARE – WHAT WE ARE NOT

PhD(c) Cristian POPESCU[1]
University of Bucharest
cristian.popescu@sciencespo.fr.

ABSTRACT: What humans are – what we are not.
We live in times of trouble, like our ancestors, much of it novel, like them. The only continuity is change, change often brings challenge, challenge often brings trouble. Although our trouble seems double because it is *our* trouble, we should never lose hope. However, in the words of François Hartog, 'today, enlightenment has its source in the present, and the present alone'. So, are we willing indeed to learn any lessons from history? Moreover, inasmuch as our trouble *is* novel, history, one may say, has a heuristic instead of a pragmatic function: it helps us discover ourselves rather than plot our next course of action. So, are we able indeed to learn any lessons from history? My research hypothesis is that we still need history; if anything, now we need it more than ever before, and we need it for both heuristic and pragmatic reasons, at the very least. I will test this hypothesis, informed by Rita Sherma's 'hermeneutics of intersubjectivity', through a close reading of a specific characterisation of the human being from Psalm 8:6 ('Yet you have made him *little less than a god*, crowned him with glory and honor'), with the help of its main ancient textual witnesses. Translation is always a difficult task – and a delicate one when sacred texts are concerned. However, quite often, difficulties in the text can be more fully tackled thanks to background information located in the historical context, delineating the content of the relevant concepts. Noting that, in the words of Mark Smith, 'early Israel was populated with *'ĕlōhîm* of various sorts', I argue that in Psalm 8:6 the human being is little less than a numinous being, in the sense of Rudolf Otto. I further argue that this fundamental insight, when correlated with Sophocles' *Antigone*, 332-334, and with the *Laozi*'s chapter 29, discloses human beings as those beings able (and willing) to do

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both tremendous good and tremendous evil, the latter when they overstep the boundaries set by human nature. Much of the trouble, indeed most of it, that human beings face today in their relationship with God, the world, society, community, and with themselves can thus be traced back to the devastation brought about by *húbris*. However, should it enter consciousness, the possibility appears as well of a farewell to *húbris*, should we only sincerely wish this, and work hard on it. History gives us humans help and hope.

Keywords: divinity, *hubris***,** *humanity, love, Psalm 8.*

‘2 O Lord, our Lord,
how awesome is your name through all the earth!
I will sing of your majesty above the heavens
3 with the mouths of babes and infants.
You have established a bulwark against your foes,
to silence enemy and avenger.
4 When I see your heavens, the work of your fingers,
the moon and stars that you set in place –
5 What is man that you are mindful of him,
and a son of man that you care for him?
6 Yet you have made him little less than a god,
crowned him with glory and honor.
7 You have given him rule over the works of your hands,
put all things at his feet:
8 All sheep and oxen,
even the beasts of the field,
9 The birds of the air, the fish of the sea,
and whatever swims the paths of the seas.
10 O Lord, our Lord,
how awesome is your name through all the earth!’
(Psalm 8)[2].

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2 Biblical references are given according to the New American Bible Revised Edition, included together with a very full critical apparatus in Donald Senior / John J. Collins / Mary Ann Getty (eds), *The Catholic Study Bible. The New American Bible Revised Edition: Translated from the Ancient Languages with Critical Use of All the Ancient Sources*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2016[3]. Masoretic Text: יְהוָה אֲדֹנֵינוּ מָה־אַדִּיר שִׁמְךָ בְּכָל־הָאָרֶץ׃ אֲשֶׁר־תְּנָה הוֹדְךָ עַל־הַשָּׁמָיִם׃ מִפִּי עוֹלְלִים וְיוֹנְקִים יִסַּדְתָּ עֹז לְמַעַן צָרֶיךָ לְהַשְׁבִּית אוֹיֵב וּמִתְנַקֵּם׃ כִּי־אֶרְאֶה שָׁמֶיךָ מַעֲשֵׂי אֶצְבְּעֹתֶיךָ יָרֵחַ וְכוֹכָבִים אֲשֶׁר כּוֹנָנְתָּה׃ מָה־אֱנוֹשׁ כִּי־תִזְכְּרֶנּוּ וּבֶן־אָדָם כִּי תִפְקְדֶנּוּ׃ וַתְּחַסְּרֵהוּ מְעַט מֵאֱלֹהִים וְכָבוֹד וְהָדָר תְּעַטְּרֵהוּ׃ תַּמְשִׁילֵהוּ בְּמַעֲשֵׂי יָדֶיךָ כֹּל שַׁתָּה תַּחַת־רַגְלָיו׃ צֹאן וּבָקָר כֻּלָּם וְגַם בַּהֲמוֹת שָׂדָי׃ צִפּוֹר שָׁמַיִם וְדְגֵי הַיָּם עֹבֵר אָרְחוֹת יַמִּים׃ יְהוָה אֲדֹנֵינוּ מָה־אַדִּיר שִׁמְךָ בְּכָל־הָאָרֶץ׃

Introduction

Thus Eric Voegelin opens his *magnum opus*: 'God and man, world and society form a primordial community of being. The community with its quaternarian structure is, and is not, a datum of human experience. It is a datum of experience insofar as it is known to man by virtue of his participation in the mystery of its being. It is not a datum of experience insofar as it is not given in the manner of an object of the external world but is knowable only from the perspective of participation in it'[3].

אֱמֹ טַעֲמֵ וּהַרְסַחַתְוּ :וּנְדֻקְפָתְ יְכֵ סַלְאֵ־וְבָוּ וּנְרֻכְזְתְ־יְכֵ שׁוּנְאֵ־הַמֵ :הַתְּנֻוּכּ רֹשֵׁאֲ סִיבְכָוכֹ֫ן חַרְיֵ הִיתֶעֹבְּצְאֵ יִשֵׁעֲמֵ :יְדֵשֵׁ תּוֹמְהַבּ סַגֵּ סַלְּכֵ סִיפְלָאֵוּ הֵנָצֹ :וּילְגֵר־תַחַתְ הַתָּשֵׁ לֹכֵ הִיתֶיְ יִשֵׁעֲמַבּ וּהלִישְׁמַתְ :וּהַרְטָעַתְ רַדֶהָוְ דוּבְכֶוְ סִיהֵלֹ :'זְרַאָהֵ־לֹכְבֵ הָמְשֵׁ רִידֵא־הַמֵ וּנִיבֵּדֹאֵ הָוֵהְיְ :סִימֵ תּוֹרְאֵ רַבֵּעֹ סַיֶּהַ יִגְדּוּ סִימֵשֵׁ רוּפְצֵ (based on the Leningrad Codex B19A (L), and published in Karl Elliger et al. (eds), *Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia*, Stuttgart, Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 19975). The English translation is generally faithful to the Masoretic Text, with one exception: the addition of 'whatever' in verse 9 ('whatever swims the paths of the seas'). On the other hand, this 'whatever' is found in the Dead Sea Scrolls, who have a fragmentary text of Psalm 8, that generally agrees otherwise with the Masoretic Text: 'whatever travels along the paths of the sea' (Martin Abegg, Jr / Peter Flint / Eugene Ulrich (translated and with commentary by), *The Dead Sea Scrolls Bible. The Oldest Known Bible Translated for the First Time into English*, San Francisco, Harper, 1999; Hebrew original in 5_6hev1b (= 5/6HevNum^{b}), *Dead Sea Scrolls Electronic Library Biblical Texts*, available on https://scholarlyeditions.brill.com/dsbo/, consulted on 8 November 2023). The Septuagint agrees on this point with the Dead Sea Scrolls: 'the things that pass through paths of seas' (Albert Pietersma / Benjamin G. Wight (eds), *A New English Translation of the Septuagint and the Other Greek Translations Traditionally Included under That Title*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2007; original Greek: *Septuaginta. Vetus Testamentum Graecum Auctoritate Academiae Scientiarum Gottingensis editum* (20 vols), Göttingen, Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1931-.). However, the *Peshiṭta*, the *Vulgata* (in both versions of the Psalter, from Greek and from Hebrew), and the Sahidic Coptic Psalter agree on this point with the Masoretic Text rather than with the Dead Sea Scrolls and with the Septuagint – or with the New American Bible Revised Edition (George A. Kiraz / Andreas Juckel (eds), *The Antioch Bible. The Syriac Peshiṭta Bible with English Translation* (c. 35 vols), Piscataway, Gorgias Press, 2012-; Michael Fieger / Widu-Wolfgang Ehlers / Andreas Beriger (eds), *Biblia Sacra Vulgata. Lateinisch-deutsch* (5 vols), Sammlung Tusculum, Berlin, De Gruyter, 2018; and Peter Nagel (ed.), *Der sahidische Psalter Editio Minor. Nach den Handschriften Ms. Or. 5000 der British Library zu London, Ms. n° 815 der Chester Beatty Library zu Dublin, und Ms. n° 167 der University of Michigan Library zu Ann Arbor*, Texte und Studien zur Koptischen Bibel 3, Wiesbaden, Harrassowitz, 2022). There are a number of other textual differences among these ancient witnesses, and from the Masoretic Text. To list them all far exceeds the scope and purpose of this paper. However, there is also a fundamental difference among ancient witnesses in verse 6 – and this difference we will discuss in detail.

3 Eric Voegelin, *Order and History: Volume 1, Israel and Revelation*, edited with an introduction by Maurice P. Hogan, Collected Works 14, Columbia, University of Missouri Press, 2001[2, p. 39.]

In my experience, much as scarce, use of the phrase, 'is, and is not', connotes, more often than an author sporting a game of cat and mouse with a resourceful language, language that jars. And in the quote above, indeed, it is the content of the concept of 'experience' that raises irresistibly a white flag. As every now and then, here, human language fails to properly address the layered nuances both of the human mind and of reality. Professor Voegelin draws elsewhere, along the same lines, a further distinction in the content of the concept of 'consciousness'[4]. Along the same lines, Bernard Lonergan perceptively argues for a 'generalized empirical method' that would at last reconnect the inner and the outer world drifting apart across modernity, and from this dual source duly recover the varied contents both of consciousness and of experience[5].

My kind reader can find it by herself both in her inner world and in her outer world, and namely, in her consciousness and her experience: there is still one piece of the puzzle missing, perhaps misplaced, one fundamental piece. Indeed, I argue that not only God and man, world and society form a 'community of being', but also that community itself is an integral part of their ongoing dialogue. No need indeed to play with words: I

4 'The characteristic of what may be called the "modern conception of consciousness" is the construction of consciousness by the model of sense perceptions of objects in external reality. This restriction of the model of consciousness to objects of external reality becomes the more or less hidden trick in the construction of systems in the nineteenth century' (Eric Voegelin, *Autobiographical Reflections*, edited with an introduction by Ellis Sandoz, Collected Works 34, Columbia, University of Missouri Press, 2011[2, p. 123]).

5 'A final observation has to do with method. From the beginning we have been directing attention to an event that occurs within consciousness. Accordingly, our method has not been the method of empirical science, which draws its data from the field of sensible presentations. However, we have had occasion to speak of a generalized empirical method that stands to the data of consciousness as empirical method stands to the data of sense. In the present chapter, the nature of this generalized method has come to light. As applied solely to the data of consciousness, it consists in determining patterns of intelligible relations that unite the data explanatorily. Such are the biological, artistic, dramatic, and intellectual forms of experience; moreover, our previous studies of mathematical and of scientific thought would regard particular cases of the intellectual form of experience; and similar differentiations could be multiplied. However, generalized method has to be able to deal, at least comprehensively, not only with the data within a single consciousness but also with the relations between different conscious subjects, between conscious subjects and their milieu or environment, and between consciousness and its neural basis. From this viewpoint, dialectic stands to generalized method as the differential equation to classical physics, or the operator equation to the more recent physics' (Bernard J. F. Lonergan, SJ, *Insight: A Study of Human Understanding*, edited by Frederick E. Crowe, SJ, and Robert M. Doran, SJ, Collected Works of Bernard Lonergan 3, Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 1992[5, p. 268]).

use the concept of 'community' in the sociological sense of Ferdinand Tönnies[6], rather than Voegelin's formula of 'a primordial community of being'. In more detail, I argue that the manifold communities that human beings take part in (and, among other fundamental functions, that enable their socialisation) deserve to be considered in the same breath with God and man, world and society, as subject, not as predicate. For, after all, Marx was not only wrong, but twice wrong (and, indeed, thrice wrong) in his sixth thesis on Feuerbach and, yet, he was onto something: 'Feuerbach resolves the essence of religion into the essence of man. But the essence of man is not an abstraction inhering in isolated individuals. Rather, in its actuality, it is the ensemble of social relations'[7]. First, I believe that Feuerbach and Marx were both wrong on the topic of religion[8], but this need not detain

6 *Gemeinschaft und Gesellschaft*, herausgegeben von Bettina Clausen and Dieter Haselbach, Gesamtausgabe 2, Berlin, De Gruyter, 2019.

7 Karl Marx, 'On Feuerbach', *in* Karl Marx, *Early Political Writings*, edited and translated by Joseph O'Malley with Richard A. Davis, Cambridge Texts in the History of Political Thought, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1994, pp. 116-118, p. 117 (Original German: '*Feuerbach löst das religiöse Wesen in das menschliche Wesen auf. Aber das menschliche Wesen ist kein dem einzelnen Individuum inwohnendes Abstractum. In seiner Wirklichkeit ist es das ensemble der gesellschaftlichen Verhältnisse*', Karl Marx, 'Ad Feuerbach', *in* Internationalen Marx-Engels-Stiftung (ed.), *Marx/Engels Gesamtausgabe*, IV.3, Berlin, Akademie, 1998, pp. 19-21, pp. 20-21.)

8 'There is the assertion that the gods are nothing but glorified men and that man has fashioned God in his own image and likeness. Naturalistic exponents of religion are pleased to quote the saying of Xenophanes: "If oxen could paint, they would depict the gods as oxen". Xenophanes is perfectly right; such would be the procedure of an ox. But the processes of actual religion have been quite different. It has developed not from the homely and the familiar but from the uncanny, rising to the "wholly other", which is remote from everything human. This "wholly other" is the mysterious underlying framework to which all that is rational is but the superstructure; it permeates all that is "anthropomorphic", and the anthropomorphic element is not primary but an accretion. The true Pallas Athene is not the humanized Athenian noblewoman portrayed by Phidias, nor the charming girl of Myro, but rather that uncanny, owlish being which haunted the ancient Attic rampart, and to which Homer bears reluctant testimony when he speaks of his "glaukopian" goddess, the "owl-faced" Athene. And awful majesty is the attribute of the ancient βοῶπις, the cow-headed Hera, rather than of the matronly spouse of Zeus. When the goddesses and gods became elegant, charming, and human, belief in them was not at its prime, as it would be the case if the anthropomorphic view were correct, but was already in its decline, and they were being superseded by the foreign gods from Egypt and from the Far East for the very reason that these gods again were strange and "wholly other"' (Rudolf Otto, *Religious Essays. A Supplement to 'The Idea of the Holy'*, translated by Brian Lunn, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1931, pp. 78-79. In the original German: '*Die eine ist, daß die "Götter" nichts anderes seien als gesteigerte Menschen, und daß der Mensch den Gott geschaf-*

us here. More to the point, however, second, and as an *organising system of consciousness and of experience*, my fivefold rather than Voegelin's fourfold 'community of being', does, I argue, indeed include the individual and society among its referents. And third, it is not Marx's 'ensemble of social relations' that helps humans be humans, or indeed, that helps humans become humans, as much as the communities that they belong to: the agents of their primary and secondary socialisations, their interface with the society throughout their life. Marx is right insofar as human beings are, and indeed become[9], in interaction, not in isolation, but interaction mostly happens in

fen habe nach seinem Bild und Gleichnis. Die naturalistischen Religions-erklärer berufen sich dabei auf den alten Xenofanes, der gelegentlich sagt: "Wenn die Ochsen malen könnten, so malten sie sich die Götter als Ochsen". Xenofanes hat völlig recht. So verfährt man, wenn man ein Ochse ist. In der wirklichen Religionsgeschichte aber sind die Dinge ganz anders zugegangen. Nicht vom Bekannten, Vertrauten und Heimlichen sondern vom Unheimlichen ist hier die Entwicklung ausgegangen. Und dieses Unheimliche, zu allem Menschlichen Entgegengesetzte, dieses "Ganz andere" ist der geheimnisvolle Untergrund, auf dem erst alles Rationale sich aufträgt und der durch alles "Menschenähnliche" hindurchscheint. Nicht die Pallas, die Fidias als vornehme Athenerin, oder die Myron als reizendes Mädchen bildet, ist die echte Pallas, sondern jenes unheimliche, eulenhafte Wesen, das auf dem alten Burgfelsen von Attika spukte, und für das Homer mit seiner Glauköpis noch ein halb widerwilliges Zeugnis ablegt. Und nicht die allzu matronenhafte Hausfrau des Zeus, sondern die alte Boopis, die kuhköpfige Hera, hatte die wahre Majestät. Und als die Göttinnen und Götter allzu vornehm und allzu reizend und allzu menschenähnlich wurden, da war der Glaube an sie nicht auf seiner Höhe, wie man nach der naturalistischen Lehre annehmen müßte, sondern da war es mit ihm vorbei, und er machte Platz dem Glauben an jene ganz fremden und ganz fremdartigen Götter aus Ägypten, aus dem fernen Osten und wer weiß woher, die eben wieder weit her und "ganz anders" waren' (Rudolf Otto, *Aufsätze das Numinose betreffend*, Stuttgart, Perhes, 1923, pp. 16-17).

9 For the first six to seven years of life, *vd., e. g.*, Michael Tomasello, *Becoming Human. A Theory of Ontogeny*, Cambridge MA, Belknap, 2019. 'Overall, children of this age have become, from a cognitive point of view, mostly *reasonable* – beings with whom one may reason, and expect a reasonable response in return – and they have become, from a social point of view, mostly *responsible* – beings whom one may hold accountable, and expect to hold themselves accountable, for their beliefs and actions. The result is nascent "persons", who have taken a giant first step toward internalizing the culture's norms of rationality and morality, making them for the first time capable of and indeed responsible for normatively self-regulating their own beliefs and actions' (p. 6). *Cf.* Nietzsche's injunction in his *Gay Science*, 270: 'What does your conscience say? – "You should become who you are"' (Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Gay Science. With a Prelude in German Rhymes and an Appendix of Songs*, edited by Bernard Williams, translated by Josefine Nauckhoff, poems translated by Adrian del Caro, Cambridge Texts in the History of Philosophy, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2001, p. 152. In the original German: '*Was sagt dein Gewissen? – "Du sollst der werden, der du bist"*', Friedrich Nietzsche, *Morgenröte. Idyllen aus Messina. Die fröhliche Wissenschaft*, herausgegeben von Giorgio Colli und Mazzino Montinari, übersetzung des Nachworts von Ragni Maria Geschwend, Kritische Studien-

the communities that they belong to (family, school[10], Church[11], group of friends, workplace, professional network, virtual community, and so on and so forth) rather than in society at large.

This fivefold *organising system of consciousness and of experience* (that represents God, world, society, community, and human being) takes us to the heart of our times of trouble. I see this system in the sense of Mircea Eliade: 'It suffices to say that the "sacred" is an element in the structure of consciousness, not a stage in the history of consciousness'[12]. I argue that religion is not only experience of the sacred (following Professor Eliade[13]), or of the sacred and divine (following Wilhelm Dancă[14]), but rather, of the sacred, holy, and divine (by noting Émile Benveniste's distinction[15]).

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ausgabe, Berlin, De Gruyter, 1999[3], p. 519). This injunction can famously be traced back to Pindar's Pythian 2, 72: 'Learn what you are and be such' (Pindar, Odes, [translated by Richmond Lattimore,] Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1947. In the original Greek: 'γένοι᾽ οἷος ἐσσὶ μαθών' Pindar, Olympian Odes. Pythian Odes, edited and translated by William H. Race, The Loeb Classical Library 485, Cambridge MA, Harvard University Press, 1997). Cf. also Ars Brevis, 9.4: 'Homo est animal homificans' ('man is a manifying animal', Ramon Llull, 'Ars brevis', in id., Selected Works, vol. 1, edited and translated by Anthony Bonner, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1985, pp. 569-646, p. 609. Original Latin in Raimundus Lullus, Ars brevis. Ediție bilingvă, traducere, comentarii și referințe de Jana Balacciu Matei, studiu introductiv de Josep E. Rubio Albarracín, Biblioteca medievală, Iași, Polirom, 2015, p. 136). But vd. Jonathan Lear, 'To become human does not come that easily', in id., A Case for Irony. The Tanner Lectures on Human Values, with commentary by Cora Diamond, Christine M. Korsgaard, Richard Moran, Robert A. Paul, Cambridge MA, Harvard University Press, 2011, pp. 3-41.

10 Ioan-Gheorghe Rotaru, "Valences of Education", în *Proceedings of the 23th International RAIS Conference on Social Sciences and Humanities*, August 15-16, 2021, Princeton, NJ, United States of America, pp. 190-196.

11 Ioan-Gheorghe Rotaru, "Misiunea Bisericii în societate" [The mission of the Church in society], *Timotheus – Incursiuni Teologice Tematice* 4 (2), 2017, pp. 57-76.

12 Mircea Eliade, *The Quest. History and Meaning in Religion*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1969, p. v.

13 'It is unfortunate that we do not have at our disposal a more precise word than "religion" to denote the experience of the sacred. This term carries with it a long, although culturally rather limited, history. One wonders how it can be indiscriminately applied to the ancient Near East, to Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, or to Hinduism, Buddhism, and Confucianism as well as to the so-called primitive peoples. But perhaps it is too late to search for another word, and "religion" may still be a useful term provided we keep in mind that it does not necessarily imply belief in God, gods, or ghosts, but refers to the experience of the sacred, and, consequently, is related to the ideas of *being, meaning,* and *truth*' (*ibid*., p. v).

14 Wilhelm Dancă, *Mircea Eliade. Definitio sacri*, București, Spandugino, 2022[2].

15 Émile Benveniste, 'Le sacré', *in id*., *Le vocabulaire des institutions indo-européennes*, vol. 2, Paris, Minuit, 1969, pp. 179-207.

The sacred, holy, and divine (indeed, the numinous, a concept coined by Rudolf Otto[16]) together are one of the five 'conditions of possibility' hereby discussed (in Kant's terms)[17] both for consciousness and for experience, together with the other four 'conditions' of world, society, community, and human being. I further argue that being conditions of possibility for consciousness and for experience does not prejudge the issue of their ontological status. Indeed, Voegelin's concept of 'primordial community of being' may be misleading insofar as: 1. 'society', community, and 'individual' are 'reifying concepts' in the sense of Norbert Elias[18]; 2. we still lack a complete,

16 Rudolf Otto, *Das Heilige. Über das Irrationale in der Idee des Göttlichen und sein Verhältnis zum Rationalen*, mit einer Einführung zu Leben und Werk Rudolf Ottos von Jörg Lauster und Peter Schüz und einem Nachwort von Hans Joas, München, Beck, 2014[3].

17 'Space is a necessary representation, *a priori*, which is the ground of all outer intuitions. One can never represent that there is no space, although one can very well think that there are no objects to be encountered in it. It is therefore to be regarded as the condition of the possibility of appearances, not as a determination dependent on them, and is an *a priori* representation that necessarily grounds outer appearances' (Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, translated and edited by Paul Guyer and Allen W. Wood, The Cambridge Edition of the Works of Immanuel Kant, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1998, p. 158; A24/ B 39). In the original German: '*Der Raum ist eine notwendige Vorstellung a priori, die allen äußeren Anschauungen zum Grunde liegt. Man kann sich niemals eine Vorstellung davon machen, daß kein Raum sei, ob man sich gleich ganz wohl denken kann, daß keine Gegenstände darin angeltroffen werden. Er wird also als die Bedingung der Möglichkeit der Erscheinungen, und nicht als eine von ihnen abhängende Bestimmung angesehen, und ist eine Vorstellung apriori, die notwendigerweise äußeren Erscheinungen zum Grunde liegt*' (Immanuel Kant, *Kritik der reinen Vernunft*, Hamburg, 1956, p. 67).

18 'This diagram should help the reader to break through the brittle façade of reifying concepts which obscure and distort our understanding of our own life in society. Time and time again they encourage the impression that society is made up of structures external to oneself, the individual, and that the individual is at one and the same time surrounded by society yet cut off from it by some invisible barrier. As we shall see, these traditional ideas have to be replaced by a different, more realistic picture of people who, through their basic dispositions and inclinations, are directed towards and linked with each other in the most diverse ways. These people make up webs of interdependence or figurations of many kinds, characterized by power balances of many sorts, such as families, schools, towns, social strata, or states. Every one of these people is, as it is often put in a reifying manner, an ego or self. Among these people belongs also oneself' (Norbert Elias, *What Is Sociology?*, translated by Stephen Mennell and Grace Morrissey, European Perspectives, New York, Columbia University Press, 1978, p. 15. In the original German: '*Die Figur dient dazu, dem Leser zu helfen, in Gedanken die harte Fassade der verdinglichenden Begriffe zu durchbrechen, die den Menschen gegenwartig den Zugang zum klaren Verstandnis ihres eigenen gesellschaft-*

coherent, and convincing description of the world[19]; 3. numinous being differs from our own being; 4. therefore, 'community' also involves a difference irreducible; and 5. subjectively 'primordial', that is, primordial to human consciousness, is not objectively primordial, that is, which happened at the time of the Creation (or, of the Big Bang, in the terms of physical cosmology).

I argue that the trouble of our times can be construed in reference to the five 'conditions of possibility' for consciousness and for experience that I have listed in the paragraph above. I focus on the human being in her or his relationship to God (more broadly, to the numinous), the world, society, community, and to herself or to himself. And, 'what is man?', asks Psalm 8:5.

Egypt's First Intermediate Period (that separates, in the 22nd to the 21st centuries, the Old Kingdom from the Middle Kingdom) was, at the

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lichen Lebens weitgehend verstellen und die immer von neuem dem Eindruck Vorschub leisten, das die "Gesellschaft" aus Gebilden auserhalb des "Ich", des einzelnen Individuums bestehe und das das einzelne Individuum zugleich von der "Gesellschaft" umgeben und von ihr durch eine unsichtbare Wand getrennt sei. An die Stelle dieser herkommlichen Vorstellungen tritt, wie man sieht, das Bild vieler einzelner Menschen, die kraft ihrer elementaren Ausgerichtetheit, ihrer Angewiesenheit aufeinander und ihrer Abhangigkeit voneinander auf die verschiedenste Weise aneinander gebunden sind und demgemas miteinander Interdependenzgeflechte oder Figurationen mit mehr oder weniger labilen Machtbalancen verschiedenster Art bilden, z. B. Familien, Schulen, Stadte, Sozialschichten oder Staaten. Jeder dieser Menschen ist, wie man es objektivierend ausdruckt, ein "Ego" oder "Ich". Zu diesen Menschen gehort man auch selbst' (Norbert Elias, *Was ist Soziologie?*, bearbeitet von Annette Treibel, Gesammelte Schriften 5, Berlin, Suhrkamp, 2006, p. 15). This interindividual approach, defended in sociology by Professor Elias, was also defended in social psychology by Serge Moscovici, MOSCOVICI, Serge, 'Le domaine de la psychologie sociale', *in id*. (ed.), *Psychologie sociale*, Paris, Presses Universitaires de France, 1984[3], pp. 1-22 – and in clinical psychology by Harry Sullivan, SULLIVAN, Harry, The Interpersonal Theory of Psychiatry, New York, Norton, 1953; and SULLIVAN, Harry, Conceptions of Modern Psychiatry. The First William Allanson White Memorial Lectures, London, Tavistock, 19552.

19 'Quantum mechanics has been the core of our understanding of nature for nine decades. It is ubiquitous, but it is also deeply mysterious. Little of modern science would make sense without it. But experts have a hard time agreeing what it asserts about nature' (Lee Smolin, *Einstein's Unfinished Revolution. The Search for What Lies beyond the Quantum*, London, Penguin, 2020, p. 3). *Cf. id*., *The Trouble with Physics. The Rise of String Theory, the Fall of a Science, and What Comes Next*, Boston, Mariner Books, 2007 – and Peter Woit, *Not Even Wrong. The Failure of String Theory and the Continuing Challenge to Unify the Laws of Physics*, London, Cape, 2006.

time, depicted as *fin de siècle*, almost as *fin du monde*[20]. I offer this as a working hypothesis: since the dawn of civilisation, before writing itself, there was also the horror and terror of the dusk of civilisation, of order invaded and vanquished by chaos, and this horror, this terror were 'religious' (in the sense of Eliade[21] and Jan Assmann[22]). The same atmosphere of desolation and devastation haunted the memory of Mesopotamia's late 21st century BC, with the fall of the famous Third Dynasty of Ur[23]. My kind reader will certainly remember in this context the Book of Lamentations, from

20 'In their autobiographical inscriptions, the protagonists of the First Intermediate Period draw a very gloomy picture of their times, not least in order to present their own salutary actions in a period of general hardship in an all the more radiant light' (Jan Assmann, *The Mind of Egypt. History and Meaning in the Time of the Pharaohs*, translated by Andrew Jenkins, New York, Metropolitan Books, 2002, p. 93).

21 'It is unfortunate that we do not have at our disposal a more precise word than "religion" to denote the experience of the sacred. This term carries with it a long, although culturally rather limited, history. One wonders how it can be indiscriminately applied to the ancient Near East, to Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, or to Hinduism, Buddhism, and Confucianism as well as to the so-called primitive peoples. But perhaps it is too late to search for another word, and "religion" may still be a useful term provided we keep in mind that it does not necessarily imply belief in God, gods, or ghosts, but refers to the experience of the sacred, and, consequently, is related to the ideas of *being*, *meaning*, and *truth*' (Mircea Eliade, *The Quest*, p. v).

22 'Several years later I started writing a book on Egyptian religion. I consciously avoided the term "religion" because I felt very strongly that there was a major difference between the term "religion" as it was understood in the Western tradition, with all its biblical implications, and what I was about to describe with regard to the ancient Egyptian world. These differences seemed to me too decisive to be covered by one and the same term. If we call the biblical tradition and its derivatives – Judaism, Christianity, and Islam – "religions", we should substitute another term with respect to ancient Egypt and Mesopotamia. In fact, what we commonly understand by the term "religion" is as much an innovation brought into the world by biblical monotheism as the idea of the oneness of god itself. To speak of Egyptian, Mesopotamian, Greek, and Roman "religions" means to reconfigure – or even distort – the historical phenomena according to a perception of reality proper to monotheism but alien to "paganism". There were no "religions" in pagan societies, only "cults" and "cultures". "Religion", like "paganism", is an invention of monotheism' (Jan Assmann, *Of God and Gods. Egypt, Israel, and the Rise of Monotheism*, George L. Mosse Series in Modern European Cultural and Intellectual History, Madison, University of Wisconsin Press, 2008, p. 10).

23 The 'Lament for Sumer and Urim' includes, for instance, a forceful sentence that runs for no less than 55 lines (Jeremy Black *et al.* (translated and introduced by), *The Literature of Ancient Sumer*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2004, pp. 128-130).

the Bible. And to go further, not in time, but in space: the first anthology of Japanese poetry, dating from the 8th century, mentions in few words the ruins of the old capital and the consciousness of an everchanging world[24]. Closer to home, Walter of Châtillon's 12th century poem, '*Ecce torpet probitas*'[25], could largely have been written earlier this week.

We live in times of trouble, like our ancestors, much of it novel, like them. The only continuity is change, change often brings challenge, challenge often brings trouble. Although our trouble seems double because it is *our* trouble, we should never lose hope. However, in the words of François Hartog, 'today, enlightenment has its source in the present, and the present alone'[26]. So, are we willing indeed to learn any lessons from history? More-

24 *Manyōshū*, 6.1045: 'How truly now I understand/ The impermanence of this world,/ Seeing Nara, the Imperial City,/ Lie thus in ruins' (Nippon Gakujutsu Shinkōkai, *The Manyōshū. One Thousand Poems with the Texts in Romaji*, with a new foreword by Donald Keene, New York, Columbia University Press, 1965, p. 264).

25 *Carmina Burana*, 3 (Alfons Hilka / Otto Schumann (eds), *Carmina Burana: mit Benutzung der Vorarbeiten Wilhelm Meyers*, vol. 1, Heidelberg, Winter, 1930).

26 'Today, enlightenment has its source in the present, and the present alone. To this extent – and this extent only – there is neither past nor future nor historical time, if one accepts that modern historical time was set in motion by the tension between the space of experience and the horizon of expectation. Are we to conclude that experience and expectation have moved so far apart that the tension between them has reached breaking point, that we are at a point where the two categories have come apart? Whether this is a temporary or a permanent state, the fact remains that this present is a time of memory and debt, of daily amnesia, uncertainty, and simulation. As such, we can no longer adequately describe our present – this moment of crisis of time – in the terms we have been using and developing, inspired by Arendt's insights, as a "gap" between past and future. The present can no longer be understood, or only partially, as an "odd in-between period" in historical time, "during which one becomes aware of an interval in time which is altogether determined by things that are no longer and by things that are not yet". On the contrary, this presentist present seeks to be determined by nothing other than itself. Its features have been sketched above – and they are our own' (François Hartog, *Regimes of Historicity: Presentism and Experiences of Time*, translated by Saskia Brown, European Perspectives, New York, Columbia University Press, 2015) (*'Aujourd'hui, la lumière est produite par le présent lui-même, et lui seul. En ce sens (seulement), il n'y a plus ni passé ni futur, ni temps historique, s'il est vrai que le temps historique moderne s'est trouvé mis en mouvement par la tension créée entre champ d'expérience et horizon d'attente. Faut-il estimer que la distance entre l'expérience et l'attente s'est à ce point creusée qu'elle est allée jusqu'à la rupture ou que nous sommes, en tout cas, dans un moment où les deux catégories se trouvent comme désarticulées l'une par rapport à l'autre ? Qu'il s'agisse d'une situation transitoire ou d'un état durable, reste que ce présent est bien le temps de la mémoire et de la dette, de l'amnésie au quoti-*

over, inasmuch as our trouble *is* novel, history, one may say, has a heuristic instead of a pragmatic function: it helps us discover ourselves rather than plot our next course of action. So, are we able indeed to learn any lessons from history? My research hypothesis is that we still need history; if anything, now we need it more than ever before, and we need it for both heuristic and pragmatic reasons, at the very least. I will test this hypothesis, informed by Rita Sherma's 'hermeneutics of intersubjectivity'[27], through a close reading of a specific characterisation of the human being from Psalm

dien, de l'incertitude et des simulations. Dans ces conditions, décrire ce présent – ce moment de crise du temps –, en reprenant et prolongeant les suggestions de Hannah Arendt, comme une "brèche" entre le passé et le futur, ne convient plus. Notre présent ne se laisse pas ou mal saisir comme "cet étrange entre-deux" dans le temps, "où l'on prend conscience d'un intervalle qui est entièrement déterminé par des choses qui ne sont plus et par des choses qui ne sont pas encore". Il ne se voudrait déterminé que par lui-même. Tel serait donc le visage du présentisme de ce présent: le nôtre', François Hartog, *Régimes d'historicité: présentisme et expériences du temps*, La librairie du XXIe siècle, Paris, Seuil, 2003). In the words of Christopher Hitchens: 'We dwell in a present-tense culture that somehow, significantly, decided to employ the telling expression "You're history" as a choice reprobation or insult, and thus elected to speak forgotten volumes about itself' (Christopher Hitchens, 'Goodbye to all that: why Americans are not taught history', *Harper's Magazine*, 11/1998, pp. 37-47). In the (reported) words of Henry Ford, 'history is myth.' 'Mr Ford replied that he did not believe in history, that history was of the past and had no bearing upon the present, and that, there being nothing to be learned from it, history need not be studied nor considered. The American Revolution he refused to have touched upon, saying that the Revolution was "tradition", that he did not believe in tradition' (Henry A. Wise Wood, 'A Wild Mental Journey with Ford', *in New York Times*, 17 May 1916). 'History is more or less bunk. It is tradition. We don't want tradition. We want to live in the present and the only history that is worth a tinker's dam is the history we make today. That's the trouble with the world. We're living in books and history and tradition. We want to get away from that and take care of today. We've done too much looking back. What we want to do and do it quick is to make just history right now' (Charles N. Wheeler, 'Interview with Henry Ford', *in Chicago Tribune*, 26 May 1916). 'History is bunk. What difference does it make how many times the ancient Greeks flew their kites?' ('History is bunk, says Henry Ford', *in New York Times*, 29 October 1921, pp. 1-2, p. 1).

27 *Vd*. Rita D. Sherma, 'Critical Interreligious Interdisciplinary Theological Reflection. Methodological and Hermeneutical Considerations for Interreligious Studies', in Lucinda MOSHER (ed.), *The Georgetown Companion to Interreligious Studies*, Washington, Georgetown University Press, 2022, pp. 482-493 – and *Id*., 'Introduction: A Hermeneutics of Intersubjectivity', *in* Tracy PINTCHMAN – Rita D. SHERMA (eds), *Woman and Goddess in Hinduism. Reinterpretations and Re-envisionings*, New York, Palgrave-Macmillan, 2011, pp. 1-16.

8:6 ('Yet you have made him *little less than a god*, crowned him with glory and honor'), with the help of its main ancient textual witnesses. Translation is always a difficult task – and a delicate one when sacred texts are concerned. However, quite often, difficulties in the text can be more fully tackled thanks to background information located in the historical context, delineating the content of the relevant concepts. More broadly, 'it is the ancient past that fights for us', reads *The Teaching for King Merikare* in Middle Kingdom Egypt[28]. Indeed, our relation to our personal past, to the past of our culture, to the past of humanity, is more visceral than Cicero's world-famous *'historia magistra vitae'*[29] would have us, at first glance, believe[30]. Such is the case of early Israel[31].

28 'The Teaching for King Merikare', *in* R. B. Parkinson (translated with an introduction and notes by), *The Tale of Sinuhe, and Other Ancient Egyptian Poems, 1940-1640 BC*, Oxford World's Classics, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1998, pp. 212-234, p. 221. *Cf.* 'The Teaching of King Amenemhat': 'when one fights in the arena, forgetful of the past, the goodness of someone who ignores what should be known is of no avail' (*in* R. B. Parkinson (translated with an introduction and notes by), *The Tale of Sinuhe*, pp. 203-211, p. 206. Original Egyptian: Aksel Volten, 'Zwei altägyptische politische Schriften. Die Lehre für König Merikarê (Pap, Carsberg VI) und Die Lehre des Königs Amenemhet', *in* Consilium Instituti Aegyptologici Hafniensis (ed.), *Analecta Aegyptiaca*, vol. 4, København, Munksgaard, 1945).

29 Cicero, *De oratore*, 2.36: 'History, the witness of the ages, the illuminator of reality, the life force of memory, the teacher of our lives, and the messenger of times gone by' (Cicero, *On the Ideal Orator (De Oratore)*, translated, with introduction, notes, appendixes, glossary, and indexes, by James M. May and Jakob Wisse, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2001. Original Latin: '*Historia vero testis temporum, lux veritatem, vita memoriae, magistra vitae, nuntia vetustatis*' (Marcus Tullius Cicero, *Scripta quae mansuerunt omnia: Fasc. 3: De oratore*, edited by Kazimierz F. Kumaniecki, Bibliotheca scriptorum Graecorum et Romanorum Teubneriana 1171, Leipzig, Teubner, 1969).

30 'Men sometimes speak as if the study of the classics would at length make way for more modern and practical studies; but the adventurous student will always study classics, in whatever language they may be written and however ancient they may be. For what are the classics but the noblest recorded thoughts of man? They are the only oracles which are not decayed, and there are such answers to the most modern inquiry in them as Delphi and Dodona never gave. We might as well omit to study Nature because she is old. To read well, that is, to read true books in a true spirit, is a noble exercise, and one that will task the reader more than any exercise which the customs of the day esteem. It requires a training such as the athletes underwent, the steady intention almost of the whole life to this object. Books must be read as deliberately and reservedly as they were written' (Henry Thoreau, *Walden*, New Haven, Yale University Press, 2006, p. 108).

31 *Cf.* Mark S. Smith, *The Memoirs of God. History, Memory, and the Experience of the*

Psalm 8:6

One fundamental issue should be noted here. First, let me state the obvious: Psalm 8 is a magnificent hymn of praise to the Lord[32]. The first part of it is direct praise; the second part is indirect praise – the Lord is praised through His creation, human beings. The connection is logical in light of Genesis 1: '[26] Then God said, "Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness, so that they may rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky, over the livestock and all the wild animals, and over all the creatures that move along the ground".

[27] So God created mankind in his own image,
in the image of God he created them;
male and female he created them'[33].

Divine in Ancient Israel, Minneapolis, Fortress Press, 2004, p. 166: 'Ancient writings are not simply of antiquarian interest, but speak to the larger human condition across time. And for religious people for whom these writings are Holy Scripture, the Bible is more than a group of interesting texts from the past. It is a text – the text – that has inspired generations that include many, if not most, of its most brilliant interpreters'. *Cf*. also *id*., *God in Translation. Deities in Cross-Cultural Discourse in the Biblical World*, Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, 2010, p. x: 'As I hope this study shows, the ancient story anticipates aspects of the situation in the world today. It is my hope that by reflecting on the ancient situation, we might be able to understand our world and ourselves better. Otherwise, there is the risk of something of our humanity – and perhaps of our divinity – getting lost in translation'.

32 'Psalm 8 is the first hymn of praise readers of the Psalter encounter' (Walter Brueggemann / William H. Bellinger, Jr., *Psalms*, New Cambridge Bible Commentary, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2014, p. 58).

33 Donald Senior / John J. Collins / Mary Ann Getty (eds), *The Catholic Study Bible*. Masoretic Text: 'תְּמַעֲטֵהוּ מְּעַט מֵאֱלֹהִים וְכָבוֹד וְהָדָר תְּעַטְּרֵהוּ׃ תַּמְשִׁילֵהוּ בְּמַעֲשֵׂי יָדֶיךָ כֹּל שַׂמְתָּ תַּחַת רַגְלָיו׃ צֹאן וּבָקָר כֻּלָּם וְגַם בַּהֲמוֹת שָׂדָי׃ צִפּוֹר שָׁמַיִם וְדְגֵי הַיָּם עֹבֵר אָרְחוֹת יַמִּים׃ יְהוָה אֲדֹנֵינוּ מָה אַדִּיר שִׁמְךָ בְּכָל הָאָרֶץ׃' (Karl Elliger *et al*. (eds), *Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia*). Here as well, the English translation is generally faithful to the Masoretic Text, with one exception: the replacement in verse 26 of 'יַמִּים', 'the earth', with 'wild animals'. It is indeed the *Peshiṭta* that has in verse 26 'all the wild animals' (George A. Kiraz / Andreas Juckel (eds), *The Antioch Bible*. Original Syriac on facing page). On the other hand, the Septuagint and the *Vulgata* agree with the Masoretic Text (Albert Pietersma / Benjamin G. Wight (eds), *A New English Translation of the Septuagint*; original Greek: *Septuaginta. Vetus Testamentum Graecum Auctoritate Academiae Scientiarum Gottingensis editum*; and Michael Fieger / Widu-Wolfgang Ehlers / Andreas Beriger (eds), *Biblia Sacra Vulgata*). The text of the Dead Sea Scrolls is fragmentary in verse 26 (Martin Abegg, Jr / Peter Flint / Eugene Ulrich (eds), *The Dead Sea Scrolls Bible*). Another textual variation among ancient witnesses is noteworthy in the context of this paper. The Samaritan Pentateuch (Stefan Schorch (ed.),

One thing, however, needs explaining. The first part of the Psalm's verse 6 reads: 'Yet you have made him little less *than a god*'. Now, exactly what *god* can this be? Could this be God, the God of Genesis 1:26-27? This interpretation entails, I believe, far too good an opinion of human beings: for instance, in the light of Genesis 18:27[34], of Psalm 39:5-7[35], of Psalm 62:10[36], of Ecclesiastes 6:10-12[37], and of Jeremiah 10:23[38]. Could this be another god, one of the gods of the nations? This interpretation entails, I

The Samaritan Pentateuch: A Critical Editio Maior (6 vols), Berlin, De Gruyter, 2018-) has in verse 26 'according to likeness' ('ונתומדכו') instead of 'in *our* likeness' ('ונתומדכ'), as *per* the Masoretic Text. The Septuagint agrees with the Samaritan Pentateuch: 'according to likeness', 'καὶ καθ᾽ ὁμοίωσιν'. On the other hand, the *Peshiṭta* and the *Vulgata* both agree with the Masoretic Text. The *Peshiṭta*: 'according to our likeness'. The *Vulgata*: '*nach unserem Abbild und der Ahnlichkeit mit uns*', '*ad imaginem et similitudinem nostram*'.

34 'Abraham spoke up again: "See how I am presuming to speak to my Lord, though I am only dust and ashes!"' (Donald Senior / John J. Collins / Mary Ann Getty (eds), *The Catholic Study Bible*). Masoretic Text: 'רָפָ֑ע יֶ֝כְנָאֻ יָ֗נַדֲא־לֹ֤א וּ֭בַדְל יִ֣תְלַאוֹה אָנֹ֣־הִנֵּה רֵ֖מַאוֹ סָ֣הָרְבַא וַעֲנִ֑יו :'ר ֶפָאֻ' (Karl Elliger *et al*. (eds), *Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia*).

35 '5 Lord, let me know my end, the number of my days, that I may learn how frail I am. 6 To be sure, you establish the expanse of my days; indeed, my life is as nothing before you. Every man is but a breath. Selah 7 Man goes about as a mere phantom; they hurry about, although in vain; he heaps up stores without knowing for whom' (Donald Senior / John J. Collins / Mary Ann Getty (eds), The Catholic Study Bible). Masoretic Text: 'הָנֵּה֮ לֶ֤ב־לֹ֣ךְ ֭רָא֣ וְדֶ֣גֶנ :יָ֑נֵא לְדָ֥ח־הֻ֝מ הָ֗עֶלֵא אֵ֣יֵה־הֻ֭מ יָ֣מַי תַּ֣דְמּוּ יְצִ֑ק ו הָ֥וְהִי יַ֝עֲי֗דוֹה וְיָ֣אְכ יְדֶ֑לֶחְו יַ֣מַי הָ֭תָנָּ ו תוֹחָ֣פְט לֶ֣בֶה־לֹ֭כ ֶרָא֣ וְדֶ֣גֶנ :יָ֑נֵא לְדָ֥ח־הֻ֝מ הָ֗עֶלֵא אֵ֣יֵה־הֻ֭מ יָ֣מַי תַּ֣דְמּוּ יְצִ֑ק ו הָ֥וְהִי יַ֝עֲי֗דוֹה וְיָ֣אְכ יְדֶ֑לֶחְו יַ֣מַי הָ֭תָנָּ ו תוֹחָ֣פְט :אִ֥יהָ֝ךְ יִתְלַחוֹת֗ יָנֲדַא יִתְיִזְק־הֻ֣מ הָ֭תַעְו :הָ֑לֶס בָּ֣צֵנ סָ֣לָא־לֹ֖כ :' (Karl Elliger et al. (eds), Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia).

36 'Mortals are a mere breath, the sons of man but an illusion; On a balance they rise; together they weigh nothing' (Donald Senior / John J. Collins / Mary Ann Getty (eds), *The Catholic Study Bible*). Masoretic Text: 'בוּגֵי־יְכ ו לִיחַ֥ וּלְבֻחָ֑ת־לֹ֣א לֻ֭גְבוּ שָׁ֣שֹׁעֵב וּחְטִבַ֥ת־לֹ֗אְ :בֶל וּתִישָׁ֣ת־לֹ֖אְ :' (Karl Elliger *et al*. (eds), *Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia*).

37 '10 Whatever is, was long ago given its name, and human nature is known; mortals cannot contend in judgment with One who is stronger. 11 For the more words, the more vanity; what profit is there for anyone? 12 For who knows what is good for mortals in life, the limited days of their vain life, spent like a shadow? Because who can tell them what will come afterward under the sun?' (Donald Senior / John J. Collins / Mary Ann Getty (eds), The Catholic Study Bible). Masoretic Text: 'סָדֶא אוּהֹ־רֶשֶׁא עֻדוֹנָ֑ו וּ֝מְׁש אֲרָקִנ ׀רָבְכ וַהָנָּ֗שׁ־הֻמ :סיַ֣חְּב בָּ֭דָאֶל בוֹט־הֻ֣מ ֻעָדוֹי־יִמ יְכ וַהֲבְרָה סיְרָבְד־שֵׁי יְכ :וּפֵגְמ (ק חיקְוֹתָ֫שׁ) [כ חיקְוֹתָ֫שׁ] טַע וּיְלֵ֣ל לָכוּי־אֹלְוּ רַחֵ֣י־הֻמ לֶ֑בָה סיְבְרַמ :שֻׂעֻשֵׂה תַּחַ֥ת וְיָרֵ֗חַא הָיְהִי־הֻמ סָ֭דָאֶל דיְגִי־יִמ לְ֣שֶׁא לְצַ֣כ סֻׂעֲשֵׂיוּ וֹלְבֵ֣ה יְחִ־יֵמ֮ הָפְסַ֣מ :סָדֶ֑אָל :' (Karl Elliger et al. (eds), Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia).

38 'I know, Lord, that no one chooses their way, nor determines their course nor directs their own step' (Donald Senior / John J. Collins / Mary Ann Getty (eds), *The Catholic Study Bible*). Masoretic Text: 'וֹדֵעַ֣תֶּא וְיָכָ֗הוּ וֵ֭לֹה שִׁ֣יאֵל־אֹל֣ וְכֹ֑רְד סָדֶ֣אָל אֹל֣ יְכ הָ֭וְהִי יִתְעָ֑דְי :' (Karl Elliger *et al*. (eds), *Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia*).

believe, far too bad an opinion of human beings: for instance, in the light of Psalm 115:3-8[39], of Isaiah 41:21-24 and 29[40], of Isaiah 44:6-20[41], of

39 '3 Our God is in heaven and does whatever he wills. 4 Their idols are silver and gold, the work of human hands. 5 They have mouths but do not speak, eyes but do not see. 6 They have ears but do not hear, noses but do not smell. 7 They have hands but do not feel, feet but do not walk; they produce no sound from their throats. 8 Their makers will be like them, and anyone who trusts in them' (Donald Senior / John J. Collins / Mary Ann Getty (eds), The Catholic Study Bible). Masoretic Text: 'עֲצַ֣ב כֶּ֭סֶף וּזְהָ֑ב מַעֲשֵׂ֖ה יְדֵ֣י אָדָֽם׃ פֶּה־לָ֭הֶם וְלֹ֣א יְדַבֵּ֑רוּ עֵינַ֥יִם לָ֝הֶ֗ם וְלֹ֣א יִרְאֽוּ׃ אָזְנַ֥יִם לָהֶ֗ם וְלֹ֣א יִשְׁמָ֑עוּ אַ֥ף לָ֝הֶ֗ם וְלֹ֣א יְרִיחֽוּן׃ יְדֵיהֶ֣ם וְלֹ֣א יְמִישׁ֑וּן רַגְלֵיהֶ֥ם וְלֹ֣א יְהַלֵּ֑כוּ לֹֽא־הָגָ֥ה בִ֝גְרוֹנָ֗ם׃ כְּמוֹהֶ֥ם יִהְי֑וּ עֹ֝שֵׂיהֶ֗ם כֹּ֣ל אֲשֶׁר־בֹּטֵ֥חַ בָּהֶֽם׃'

40 '21 Present your case, says the Lord; bring forward your arguments, says the King of Jacob. 22 Let them draw near and foretell to us what it is that shall happen! What are the things of long ago? Tell us, that we may reflect on them and know their outcome; or declare to us the things to come, 23 tell what is to be in the future, that we may know that you are gods! Do something, good or evil, that will put us in awe and in fear. 24 Why, you are nothing and your work is nought; to choose you is an abomination!' and '29 Ah, all of them are nothing, their works are nought, their idols, empty wind!' (Donald Senior / John J. Collins / Mary Ann Getty (eds), The Catholic Study Bible). Masoretic Text: 'קָרְב֣וּ יַחְדָּ֔ו פְּלֵטֵ֖י הַגּוֹיִ֑ם לֹֽא־יָדְע֣וּ עֹ֤ד הַנֹּשְׂאִים֙ עֵ֣ץ פִּסְלָ֔ם וּמִתְפַּלְלִ֖ים אֶל־אֵ֥ל לֹ֥א יוֹשִֽׁיעַ׃ הַגִּ֣ידוּ וְקָרֵ֔בוּ אַ֥ף יִוָּֽעֲצ֖וּ יַחְדָּ֑ו מִ֣י הִשְׁמִ֤יעַ מִזֹּאת֙ מֵאָ֣ז מִקֶּ֔דֶם הֲלֹ֥א אֲנִ֖י יְהוָ֑ה וְאֵ֤ל עֹוד֙ מִבַּלְעָדַ֔י צַדִּ֥יק וּמוֹשִׁ֖יעַ אֵ֥ין זוּלָתִֽי׃ פְּנ֥וּ אֵלַ֖י וְהִוָּשְׁע֣וּ כָל־אַפְסֵי־אָ֑רֶץ כִּֽי־אֲנִ֥י אֵ֖ל וְאֵ֥ין עֽוֹד׃ בִּ֥י נִשְׁבָּ֖עְתִּי יָצָ֣א מִפִּ֑י צֶ֥דֶק דָּ֛בָר וְלֹ֥א יָשֽׁוּב׃ כִּֽי־לִ֥י תִכְרַ֖ע כָּל־בֶּ֑רֶךְ תִּשָּׁבַ֖ע כָּל־לָֽשׁוֹן׃ אַךְ־בַּיהוָ֥ה יֹאמַ֖ר לִ֣י צְדָק֑וֹת וָעֹ֔ז עָדָ֥יו יָבֹ֖אוּ וְיֵבֹ֣שׁוּ כָל־הַנֶּאֱנָפִ֥ים בֽוֹ׃ בַּיהוָ֥ה יִצְדַּ֛ק וְיִתְהַלְּל֖וּ כָּל־זֶ֥רַע יִשְׂרָאֵֽל׃' and 'כֹּ֣ה אָמַ֣ר יְהוָ֔ה מַלְכִּ֥י יִשְׂרָאֵ֖ל וְגֹאֲלֹ֑ו יְהוָ֣ה צְבָא֔וֹת אֲנִ֤י רִאשֹׁון֙ וַאֲנִ֣י אַחֲרֹנִ֔ים וּמִבַּלְעָדַ֖י אֵ֥ין אֱלֹהִֽים׃ וּמִ֤י כָמֹ֙נִי֙ יִקְרָ֣א וְיַגִּדֶ֔הָ וְיַעַרְכֶ֥הָ לִּ֖י מִשּׂ֣וּמִי עַ֣ם עֹולָ֑ם וְאֹתִיֹּ֥ות וְאֶת־אֲשֶׁ֖ר תָּבֹ֥אנָה יַגִּ֖ידוּ לָֽמֹו׃ אַל־תִּפְחֲד֥וּ וְאַל־תִּרְהָ֖בוּ הֲלֹ֣א מֵאָ֣ז הִשְׁמַעְתִּ֔יךָ וְהִגַּדְתִּ֑י וְאַתֶּ֥ם עֵדָ֖י הֲיֵ֥שׁ אֱלֹ֛הַּ מִבַּלְעָדַ֖י וְאֵ֣ין צ֔וּר בַּל־יָדָ֖עְתִּי׃ יֹצְרֵ֣י פֶ֔סֶל כֻּלָּ֖ם תֹּ֑הוּ וַחֲמֻדֵיהֶם֙ בַּל־יֹועִ֔ילוּ וְעֵדֵיהֶ֖ם הֵ֣ם לֹ֣א יִרְא֣וּ וְלֹ֣א יֵדָ֑עוּ לְמַ֖עַן יֵבֹֽשׁוּ׃ מִֽי־יָצַ֥ר אֵ֖ל וּפֶ֥סֶל נָסָ֖ךְ לְבִלְתִּ֥י הֵיָעִֽל׃ הֵ֣ן כָּל־חֲבֵרָ֣יו יֵבֹ֔שׁוּ וְחָרָשִׁ֖ים מֵאָדָ֣ם הֵ֑מָּה יִקָּבְצ֤וּ כֻלָּם֙ יַעַמְד֔וּ יֵחָ֥תּוּ יַבֹּ֖שׁוּ יָֽחַד׃ חָרָ֣שׁ בַּרְזֶ֔ל מַעֲצָדָ֖ה וּפָעַ֣ל בְּמַתְכֹּ֑ות וַיִּצְּרֵ֣הוּ בִּזְרֹעֹ֔ו גַּם־יִרְעַ֖ב וְאֵ֣ין כֹּ֑חַ לֹא־שָׁתָ֥ה מַ֖יִם וַיִּלָּֽעֵף׃ חָרָ֣שׁ עֵ֔ץ נָטָ֖ה קָ֑ו הִתְאִ֣ימֹו בַּשֶּׁ֔רֶד וּבַמְּחוּגָ֖ה יְתָאֳרֵ֑הוּ וַיַּעֲשֵׂ֙הוּ֙ כְּתֹ֣ר אִ֔ישׁ כִּתְפֶ֥ארֶת אָדָ֖ם לָשֶׁ֥בֶת בָּֽיִת׃ לִכְרֹת־לֹ֥ו אֲרָזִ֖ים וַיִּקַּ֣ח תִּרְזָ֑ה וַיְאַמֵּ֥ץ לֹ֛ו בְּעֹ֥ץ הַיָּ֖עַר נָטַ֣ע אֹ֔רֶן וְגֶ֖שֶׁם יְגַדֵּֽל׃ וְהָיָ֥ה לְאָדָ֖ם לִבְעֵרָ֑ה וַיִּקַּ֣ח מֵהֶ֔ם וַיָּ֖חָם אַף־יִסָּ֣ק וַיַּאֲפֶ֑ה אַף־פָּעַ֤ל אֵל֙ וַיִּשְׁתָּחוּ֔ו עָשָׂ֥הוּ פֶ֖סֶל וַיִּסְגָּד־לֹֽו׃ חֶצְיֹ֣ו שָׂרַ֔ף בָּאֵ֖שׁ עַל־חֶצְיֹ֑ו זָבַ֣ח בָּשָׂ֔ר יֹאכַ֖ל צָלָ֥ה צָלִ֛י וְיִשְׂבָּ֑ע אַף־יָחֹ֥ם וְיֹאמַ֖ר הֶאָח֣ מְחַמְתִּ֔י רָאִ֖יתִי אֽוּר׃ וְיֶתְרֹ֖ו לְאֵ֣ל עָשָׂ֑ה לְפִסְלֹ֗ו יִסְגֹּד֙ וַיִּשְׁתָּחוּ־לֹ֔ו וַיִּתְפַּלֵּל֙ אֵלָ֔יו וַיֹּ֖אמֶר הַצִּילֵ֣נִי כִּֽי־אֱלֹהַ֥י אָתָּֽה׃'

41 '6 Thus says the Lord, Israel's king, its redeemer, the Lord of hosts: I am the first, I am the last; there is no God but me. 7 Who is like me? Let him stand up and declare, make it evident, and confront me with it. Who of old announced future events? Let them foretell to us the things to come. 8 Do not fear or be troubled. Did I not announce it to you long ago? I declared it, and you are my witnesses. Is there any God but me? There is no other Rock, I know of none! 9 Those who fashion idols are all nothing; their precious works are of no avail. They are their witnesses: they see nothing, know nothing, and so they are put to shame. 10 Who would fashion a god or cast an idol, that is of no use? 11 Look, all its company will be shamed; they are artisans, mere human beings! They all assemble and stand there, only to cower in shame. 12 The ironsmith fashions a likeness, he works it over the coals, shaping it with hammers, working it with his strong arm. With hunger his strength wanes, without water, he grows faint. 13 The woodworker stretches a line, and marks out a shape with a stylus. He shapes it with scraping tools, with a compass measures it off, making it the copy of a man, human display, enthroned in a shrine. 14 He goes out to cut down cedars, takes a holm tree or an oak. He picks out for himself trees of the forest, plants a fir, and the rain makes it grow. 15 It is used for fuel: with some of the wood he warms himself, makes a fire and bakes bread. Yet he makes a god and worships it, turns it into an idol and adores it! 16 Half of it he burns in the fire, on its embers he roasts meat; he eats the roast and is full. He warms himself and says, "Ah! I am warm! I see the flames!" 17 The rest of it he makes into a god, an image to worship and adore. He prays to it and

Isaiah, 45:20-22[42], and of Jeremiah 10:1-15[43]. But, if 'little less than a god'

says, "Help me! You are my god!" 18 They do not know, do not understand; their eyes are too clouded to see, their minds, to perceive. 19 He does not think clearly; he lacks the wit and knowledge to say, "Half the wood I burned in the fire, on its embers I baked bread, I roasted meat and ate. Shall I turn the rest into an abomination? Shall I worship a block of wood?" 20 He is chasing ashes! A deluded mind has led him astray; he cannot save himself, does not say, "This thing in my right hand—is it not a fraud?"' (Donald Senior / John J. Collins / Mary Ann Getty (eds), The Catholic Study Bible). Masoretic Text: רַמְאָ־הֹכ׳ ׃ָהֵדיגִיו אָרְקִי יונֹמְכ־יִמּו ׃סיִהֹלֵא וְיֵא ַיֲעָלְבִמּו וּוֹחֵא ַיֵאָו ֶוּושאר ֵיָא תוֹאָבְצ ַהָוהְי וְלַאוּג לָאָרְשִי־ֶרֶלָמ ָהָוהְי ָרְיִתָעְמִשה ֲאָמ אֶלֵה וּפְרִית־לֹאַו·וְדַחפת־לֹא ׃וֹמֶל וּדיגי הָנאֹבָּת ֹרֶשֲאַו תוֶיְחֹאו ֶמָלוֹע־סַע ְימוּשׂם לֵ ָהֶכְרִעְיִן ָהָהיְדִעו וּלֵיעוֹי־לֹב ַהָהיְדוּמְחַו וּהֹת ַהָּלֵכ לֶסֶפ־יֵרְצִי ׃יִתְעָדֵי־לֹב רוּצ וְיֵאָו ַיַדְעִלְבִמ־הוֹלֶא שֵׁיָה יָדֵע ָהָתֵאו יִתְּבָגְהו ָהָמַה סִישָׁרְחו וּשׁבי וְיִרְבֵח־לֹכ ָוָה ׃לִיעוֹה יִתָלְבִל ָהָסָנ לֶסֶפו לֹא רַצֵי־יִמ ׃וּשׁבי ַוַעְמִל וְעֵדֵי־לֹבו וְאֵרִי־לֹב ָהָמָה ַעוֹרְזִב·וְהַלָעְפִיו וּהֵרְצִי תוֹבָקְמִבו ָהָחָפַב לַעָפו ָהָצֵעְמ לֶוֹרְחֵב שָׁרָח ׃דַחֵי וּשׁבי וְדַחְפִי וּדְמֵעי ָהָלֵכ וְצַבְקִתְי ָהָדְאָמ הָגוּחְמִבו תוֹעֲצְקַמֵב·וְהֵשָׁעי הֶלֵשָׁכ וּהֵרָאָתְי ָוָּנ ֹסיִצַע שָׁרָח ׃הָעֵיִו סיַמ הָתָּשׂ־אֹל־חֹכ וְיָאָו בֵיעָר־ַהּג וְחֹכ ־יֵצֵעב וֹלֹ־ֵעמַאֵיַו וּולֹאַו הָזְרִת תַקְזִו ס׳וֹרֶא וֹלֹ־תָרְכִל ׃תיִב הָבֵשֶׁל ַהָדֵא הָרָאָפְתִּב שׁיִא תינְבַתְּכ·וְהַשָׁעִיו וּהֵרָאָתְי וּחָתְשִיו לֹא־לֹעְפִי־ַהֵא ָהָחָל ַהָפָאַו קיָשִׁי־ַהֵא ָהָחָזִו ַהָמֹהַה תַקְזִו ַיַעְבֶל ָהָדֵאָל הָיָהְו ׃לְדַגִי ָהָשָׁגְו ָוָרֹא עָטָנ ַוַעֵי יָתוֹמַח ָהָאֵשׂ ָרַמאֹיַו ֹסחָי־ַהֵא עֲבָשִׁיו יָלָּצ ַהָלְצִי לֵכאֹי ַרָשָׂב וְיִצָח־לַע שֵׁאֹ־וֹמְב וְתָרָשׂ וְיִצָח ׃וֹמֶל־ַדְגִסַיו לֶסֶפ וּהָשָׂע יָלֹא יְכ יַנֵלִיצַה ַרָמאֹיַו וָלֹא לְלֶפְתִיו·וְחַתְשִיו (ק וֹלֹ־ַדְגִסי) [כ ־דוֹגִסי] וְלֶסְפֶל ַהָשָׂע לֵאָל וֹתיִרְאָשׁו ׃רוּא יִתְיָאָר ָהָנוּבת־אֹלוֹ תַעַד אֹלוֹ וּבֹל־לֹא בִישֵׁי־אֹלוֹ ׃ָהָתַבֹל לִיכְשׂהַמ ַהָהֵינֵיע תוֹאֹרְמ ַהָט יְכ וּינֵבֵי אֹלוֹ וּעְדֵי אֹל ׃ָהָתָא ָעָל לוּבֵל ַהָשָׁעָה ַהָבֵעוֹתְל וֹרְתִיו לֻכֹאו ַרָשָׂב ַהָלְצָא ַהָחָל וְיָלָחָּג־לַע יִתיָפָא ָוָּאֹנ שֵׁאֹ־וֹמְב יִתְפָרָשׂ וְיָּאֵה ָרְמאֵל ׃יִתְלוּז וְיַא־עֵישׁומו קיִדַצ־לֹא ַיַעְלַבמ סיִהֹלֵא דוֹעַ־וְיָאו ָהָוהְי יָנָא אוֹלֵה ָהָדיִגה ֲאָמ ַהָלֵקמ ׃דוֹעַ וְיָאו לֹא־יֵנָא יְכ ָעָרָא־ֶסַפֵא־לֹכ׳ (Karl Elliger et al. (eds), Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia).

42 '20 Come and assemble, gather together, you fugitives from among the nations! They are without knowledge who bear wooden idols and pray to gods that cannot save. 21 Come close and declare; let them take counsel together: Who announced this from the beginning, declared it from of old? Was it not I, the Lord, besides whom there is no other God? There is no just and saving God but me. 22 Turn to me and be safe, all you ends of the earth, for I am God; there is no other!' (Donald Senior / John J. Collins / Mary Ann Getty (eds), The Catholic Study Bible). Masoretic Text: ַיִוגה יְטיִלְפ ַהָחְתִי ׳ְשַׁגְנָתָה וּאְבָו וְצַבָקה׳ תאֹ ַעיִמְשׁה יְמ ָהָחְתִי וְצָעָוֹי ַהָא וּשׁיִוָּהו וּדיגה ַעיִשׁוֹי אֹל ָאֹל־ָלֵא סיִלְפַתְמו ָהָלְפַס ַעֹר־ָתָא סיִאְשַׁנָה וּעְדֵי אֹל וְעָשָׁוהו ָיֵלֹא־וּנפ ׃יִתָלוּז וְיַא־עֵישׁומו קיִדַצ־לֹא ַיַעְלַבמ סיִהֹלֵא דוֹעַ־וְיָאו ָהָוהְי יָנָא אוֹלֵה ָהָדיִגה ֲאָמ ַהָלֵקמ ׃דוֹעַ וְיָאו לֹא־יֵנָא יְכ ׳ָעָרָא־ֶסַפֵא־לֹכ׳ (Karl Elliger et al. (eds), Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia).

43 '1 Hear the word the Lord speaks to you, house of Israel. 2 Thus says the Lord: Do not learn the ways of the nations, and have no fear of the signs in the heavens, even though the nations fear them. 3 For the carvings of the nations are nonentities, wood cut from the forest, fashioned by artisans with the adze, adorned with silver and gold. With nails and hammers they are fastened, so they do not fall. 5 Like a scarecrow in a cucumber field are they, they cannot speak; They must be carried about, for they cannot walk. Do not fear them, they can do no harm, neither can they do good. 6 No one is like you, Lord, you are great, great and mighty is your name. 7 Who would not fear you, King of the nations, for it is your due! Among all the wisest of the nations, and in all their domains, there is none like you. 8 One and all they are stupid and senseless, the instruction from nonentities – only wood! 9 Silver plates brought from Tarshish, and gold from Ophir, the work of the

means neither God, nor another god – then, what god does it mean? One noteworthy fact has been noticed a long time ago: when a problem seems intractable, this is usually so because its enunciation is wrong. This fact is not only verbal, but also mental, not only explicit, but also implicit, not only heuristic but also pragmatic. Considering all this, we may take heart in knowing that we are dealing here with a comparatively simple problem. And yet, in the absence of relevant information, it might not look at first glance as very simple indeed. But why is this information not readily, or rather, not *spontaneously* available to us? Where did it go? What happened to us all?

History happened. Between Psalm 8 and us, there is a world of difference, a world of change. This is a world, *our world*, in which monotheism triumphed, and a long time ago[44]. Some facts (and information about

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artisan and the handiwork of the smelter, clothed with violet and purple – all of them the work of skilled workers. 10 The Lord is truly God, he is the living God, the eternal King, before whose anger the earth quakes, whose wrath the nations cannot endure. 11 Thus shall you say of them: The gods that did not make heaven and earth – let these perish from earth and from beneath heaven! 12 The one who made the earth by his power, established the world by his wisdom, and by his skill stretched out the heavens. 13 When he thunders, the waters in the heavens roar, and he brings up clouds from the end of the earth, makes lightning flash in the rain, and brings forth the wind from his storehouses. 14 Everyone is too stupid to know; every artisan is put to shame by his idol: he has molded a fraud, without breath of life. 15 They are nothing, objects of ridicule; they will perish in their time of punishment' (Donald Senior / John J. Collins / Mary Ann Getty (eds), The Catholic Study Bible). Masoretic Text: 'לְאָרְשִׁי תִּיב סַכִּילַע הָוֵוי הִבַּד הֹלֶשָׁא רָבָּדַה־תָא וְעִמְשׁ׃ תוֹקַח־יכ :הָמָהֵמ סיוֹגה וּתַחַי־יכ וּתַחַת־לֹא סיַמָּשַׁה תוֹאֹמּוּ וּיִמְלִּתִ־לֹא סיוֹגה רֶהֵד־לֶא הָוֹוִי רַמְאָ ו הֹכ סוּקַזוּחִ תוֹבָּקַמּבּוּ תוֹרְמִסַמּבּ וּוּקְפִי בַהָזְבּוּ וְסֶכָּב :רֶצַעמָּב שַׁרָח־יֵדִי וַשֶׁעמ וֹתָהְכ רַעִּימ עֵיכ אוּהָ לָבֶה סיַמָּעָה בִיטֵיזֵה־סַגּוּ וּעֹרָי אֹלִ־יכ סֶהֵמ וְאֶרִית־לֹא וּדָעְצִי אֹלִ יכ אוֹשֶׁנִי וּוּהֹבְדִי אֹלִוּ הָמָהֵ הָשִׁקמ רֶמֹתָּכ :קִיפֵּי אוֹלִוּ ־לָכֹב יכ הָתָאֵי ָרל יכ סיוֹגה ָרֶלָמ ָבֶאָרי אֹלִ יִמ :הָרוּבְגּב ָרָמָשׁ לוֹדָּגּ הָתָאַ הָוֹוִי ָרוֹמָכ וְיֵאָמ ס :סֶתוֹא וְיֵא שֹׁישַׁרַתמ עֵקָרמ וְסֶכָּ :אוּה עֵנ סיַלָבֶה רַסוּמ וּלָסְכִיוּ וְרֶעְבִי תַחַאֲבוּ ָדוֹמָכ וְיֵאָמ סָתוּכְלִמ־לָכְבוּ סיוֹגה יֵמָכָּ ־אוּה תֶמֶא סיהֹלֶא הָוֹהְיַ :סֶלֵּכ סיַמָּכָּ הָשָׁעמ סָשׁוּבְל נָמָגְרָאוּ תֶלְבָּת הָרוֹצ יִדיו שָׁרָח הָשָׁעמ וָפּוּאָמ בָהָזוּ אָבוּי אֵיַמְשׁ־יִד אָיַהֶלֵא סוֹהְל וְוּרְמֹאַת הָנָבִּכ ס :וּמְעַז סיוֹג וּילָכֵי־אֹלִוּ יִרָאָה שַׁעֲרִית וֹפְצִקמ סָלוֹע ָרֶלָמוּ סיֵיָה סיהֹלֶא עֲנִמְשׁ־יִד אָיַהֶלֵא סוֹהְל וְוּרְמֹאַת הָנָבִּכ ס :הָלֵא אֵיַמְשׁ תוֹחְּת־זמוּ אָעֲרָאמ וּדָבֵאי וּדָבֵע אֹלִ אָקָרָאוּ עֲטָנ וֹתָנוּבְתִבוּ וֹתָמְכָחְּב לֵבֶת וְיִכמ וֹחְּכּב יִרָא הָשׁע ס :הָלֵא אֵיַמְשׁ תוֹחְּת־זמוּ אָעֲרָאמ וּדָבֵאי וּדָבֵע אֹלִ אָקָרָאוּ אֲצוּיִו הָשָׁע ָרָטָמל סיִקָרְבּ (ק יִרָא) [כ יִרָא] הָצָקמ סיָאְשׁנ ָרֶלָעִיו סיַמָּשָׁבּ סיַמ וְוָמָה וּתַת לוֹקל :סיַמָּשׁ הָשָׁעמ הָמָה לָבֶה :סֶבֵּ־חוּר־אֹלִוּ וֹכְסנ רֶקָשׁ יכ לֶסָּפמ הָרוֹצ־לָכ שִׁיבֹה תַעֲדמ סָדָא־לָכ רַעְבנ :וּיִתְרְצֹאמ־חוּר וּדְבֵאי סָתָדְקפּ תַעֵב סיַעְתעַ׃' (Karl Elliger et al. (eds), Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia).

44 One actually might argue at this juncture that monotheism never triumphed, and that our Christian societies are Christian societies imperfectly paganised. And this may mean at least three things. First, the persistence of pre-Christian myths, rituals, and symbols as a strong undercurrent through millennia, especially outside the cities, in the

facts) got lost, may I say, in transition over the years, and the millennia. As Richard Friedman points, in a related context: 'By the end of the biblical period, monotheism had won. Monotheism had won so much so that on the whole we have forgotten what pagan religion was about. Most people could not tell you what the word "pagan" means'[45]. And he elaborates:

> 'Monotheism had won so much so that rabbis in antiquity turned to a new sort of explanation for why the Second Jerusalem Temple was destroyed. When the first Jerusalem Temple had been destroyed in the wake of the Babylonian conquest in 587 BCE, the biblical interpretation of that catastrophe was that the people had worshipped other gods. But when the second Jerusalem Temple fell to the Romans in 70 CE, the rabbis' interpretation of the catastrophe was moral rather than

countryside. Second, the officialised absorption by Christianity of some non-Christian behaviours and beliefs. And third, dechristianisation taken to the extent where some societies in Europe have by now become arguably post-Christian, since mostly indifferent to religion (Jon Elster argued persuasively, in a related context, that passive negation, that is, indifference, is more effective a phenomenon than active negation, that is, hostility, especially in matters of religion, *vd*. Jon Elster,'Active and passive negation: an essay in Ibanskian sociology', *in* Paul Watzlawick (edited and with commentary by), *The Invented Reality: How Do We Know What We Believe We Know? (Contributions to Constructivism)*, New York, Norton, 1984, pp. 175-205, pp. 183-184 and p. 187; French original: Jon Elster, 'Négation active et négation passive: essai de sociologie ivanienne', *in Archives européennes de sociologie*, 21:2/1980, pp. 329-349). He or she who would argue so would obviously be right on all three counts. Less obvious, perhaps, however, is the fundamental fact that Christianity still triumphed of the first and second stumbling blocks (the third one is a modern stumbling block, that is, long *after* Christianity had triumphed), despite entanglement and *through* entanglement. Christianity shaped the world in its image. Christianity is (also) a human phenomenon, that is, taking place in the midst of history, among women and men. It is not (only) a divine phenomenon. Here in this world of women and of men, in the societies, in the communities, and in the individuals where it made itself at home, to the extent that it could make itself at home, Christianity inherently helped build a system of reality where certain structural positions might enable or disable some strategic options. I offer that there also are an active and a passive affirmation, namely, acclaim vs acceptance, and, unsurprisingly perhaps, as with the passive and active negations, actually passive affirmation is more effective a phenomenon than active affirmation. And conversely, it is when Christianity is no longer accepted, that is, no longer *tacitly* accepted, that dechristianisation really gains momentum, and post-Christian societies loom large. Shifting the focus now of our discussion from the society onto the individual – all the above does not exclude, or otherwise preclude, the need for hard work on behalf of Christians.

45 Richard Elliott Friedman, *The Exodus. How It Happened and Why It Matters?*, New York, HarperOne, 2017.

worship of other gods. The people had accepted monotheism enough by that time that one could not trace the disaster to apostasy. So the rabbis taught that it was because of "pointless hatred" (Hebrew *śin'āt ḥinām*). Monotheism was no longer the issue.

The triumph of monotheism has changed everything, probably even the nature of atheism. Today more people than ever believe in God. And more people than ever don't. How different would this be if the difference were not between atheists and those who believe in God, but instead were between atheists and those who believe in *the gods and goddesses*? Would books like those of Richard Dawkins (*The God Delusion*) and Christopher Hitchens (*God Is Not Great*), for example, look different if they had had to frame the argument this way? Would the evidence on both sides be different? We shall never know. Monotheism won'[46].

Again, should we not 'check our privilege'? Indeed, we are tackling an issue that pertains to the religious history of Israel and of the Jewish nation rather than to other lands – such as, for instance, notably concerning Jews, not to their 'house of slavery'[47], not far from the 'Wadi of Egypt'[48], let alone

46 *Ibid*. In Mark Smith's words: 'Modern students of ancient Middle Eastern societies and religions stand of one side of an incalculable divide, while the subject they study stands on the other. Standing between the two is the Bible and the three "religions of the Book" that it influenced. Almost all, if not all, students of the Bible have been long exposed directly or indirectly to either Judaism, Christianity, or Islam, traditions that have anchored their identity in the belief in only a single deity, however differently these three religions may define this deity. This belief, labeled "monotheism" in the modern era, separates modern scholars from the "polytheistic" religions of the ancient Middle East that they study' (Mark S. Smith, *The Origins of Biblical Monotheism: Israel's Polytheistic Background and the Ugaritic Texts*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2001, p.10).

47 Exodus 20:2 (Donald Senior / John J. Collins / Mary Ann Getty (eds), *The Catholic Study Bible*). Masoretic Text: 'מִבֵּית עֲבָדִים' (Karl Elliger *et al*. (eds), *Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia*). The text is fragmentary in the Dead Sea Scrolls (Martin Abegg, Jr / Peter Flint / Eugene Ulrich (eds), *The Dead Sea Scrolls Bible*). The Septuagint, *Peshiṭta*, and *Vulgata* all agree with the Masoretic Text. Septuagint: 'out of a house of slavery,' 'ἐξ οἴκου δουλείας' (Albert Pietersma / Benjamin G. Wight (eds), *A New English Translation of the Septuagint*; *Septuaginta. Vetus Testamentum Graecum Auctoritate Academiae Scientiarum Gottingensis editum*). *Peshiṭta*: 'from the house of servitude' (George A. Kiraz / Andreas Juckel (eds), *The Antioch Bible*. Original Syriac on facing page). *Vulgata*: '*aus dem Haus der Sklaverei*,' '*de domo servitutis*' (Michael Fieger / Widu-Wolfgang Ehlers / Andreas Beriger (eds), *Biblia Sacra Vulgata*).

48 Genesis 15:18 (Donald Senior / John J. Collins / Mary Ann Getty (eds), *The Catho-*

to 'the land of their exile'[49], 'by the rivers of Babylon'[50]. As Thorkild Jacobsen aptly reminds us:

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lic Study Bible). Masoretic Text: 'מִנַּחַל הָעַרְבָה' (Karl Elliger *et al.* (eds), *Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia*). It should be noted that Hebrew 'הָעַרְבָה' means both 'from the wadi' and 'from the river'. Hence, the issue here is the interpretation rather than the translation of the Hebrew text (the New American Bible Revised Edition prefers indeed to leave both options open by giving the translation 'wadi' in the main text and the alternate translation 'river' in a footnote). The Samaritan Pentateuch agrees with the Masoretic Text (Stefan Schorch (ed.), *The Samaritan Pentateuch*). The whole chapter is missing from the Dead Sea Scrolls (Martin Abegg, Jr / Peter Flint / Eugene Ulrich (eds), *The Dead Sea Scrolls Bible*). The Septuagint, *Peshiṭta*, and *Vulgata* all read 'river'. Septuagint: 'from the river of Egypt', 'ἀπὸ τοῦ ποταμοῦ Αἰγύπτου' (Albert Pietersma / Benjamin G. Wight (eds), *A New English Translation of the Septuagint*; *Septuaginta. Vetus Testamentum Graecum Auctoritate Academiae Scientiarum Gottingensis editum*). *Peshiṭta*: 'from the river of Egypt' (George A. Kiraz / Andreas Juckel (eds), *The Antioch Bible*. Original Syriac on facing page). *Vulgata*: '*vom Fluss Ägyptens*', '*a fluvio Aegypti*' (Michael Fieger / Widu-Wolfgang Ehlers / Andreas Beriger (eds), *Biblia Sacra Vulgata*).

49 Jeremiah 46:27 (Donald Senior / John J. Collins / Mary Ann Getty (eds), *The Catholic Study Bible*). Masoretic Text: 'מֵאֶרֶץ שִׁבְיָם' (Karl Elliger *et al.* (eds), *Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia*). The text is fragmentary in the Dead Sea Scrolls (Martin Abegg, Jr / Peter Flint / Eugene Ulrich (eds), *The Dead Sea Scrolls Bible*). The Septuagint, *Peshiṭta*, and *Vulgata* all agree with the Masoretic Text. Septuagint: 'from the land of their captivity', 'ἐκ τῆς αἰχμαλωσίας αὐτῶν' (Albert Pietersma / Benjamin G. Wight (eds), *A New English Translation of the Septuagint*; *Septuaginta. Vetus Testamentum Graecum Auctoritate Academiae Scientiarum Gottingensis editum*). *Peshiṭta*: 'from the land of their captivity' (George A. Kiraz / Andreas Juckel (eds), *The Antioch Bible*. Original Syriac on facing page). *Vulgata*: '*aus dem Land seiner Gefangenschaft*', '*de terra captivitatis suae*' (Michael Fieger / Widu-Wolfgang Ehlers / Andreas Beriger (eds), *Biblia Sacra Vulgata*).

50 Psalm 137:1 (Donald Senior / John J. Collins / Mary Ann Getty (eds), *The Catholic Study Bible*). Masoretic Text: 'לְבָבֶל ו תוֹרֵהֵנּ לְעַ' (Karl Elliger *et al.* (eds), *Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia*). The Dead Sea Scrolls have 'by the rivers *in* Babylon' (Martin Abegg, Jr / Peter Flint / Eugene Ulrich (eds), *The Dead Sea Scrolls Bible*; Hebrew original in 11Q5 (= 11QPs[a]), *Dead Sea Scrolls Electronic Library Biblical Texts,* available on https://scholarlyeditions.brill.com/dsbo/, consulted on 8 November 2023). However, the Septuagint ('by the rivers of Babylon', Albert Pietersma / Benjamin G. Wight (eds), *A New English Translation of the Septuagint*; in the original Greek: 'ἐπὶ τῶν ποταμῶν Βαβυλῶνος', *Septuaginta. Vetus Testamentum Graecum Auctoritate Academiae Scientiarum Gottingensis editum*), the *Peshiṭta* ('by the rivers of Babylon', George A. Kiraz / Andreas Juckel (eds), *The Antioch Bible*. Original Syriac on facing page), the *Vulgata* (in both versions of the Psalter, from Greek and from Hebrew: '*an den Flüssen Babylons*', '*super flumina Babylonis*': Michael Fieger / Widu-Wolfgang Ehlers / Andreas Beriger (eds), *Biblia Sacra Vulgata*), and the Sahidic Coptic Psalter ('*an den Flüssen Babylons*,' ⲛⲓⲉⲣⲱⲟⲩ ⲛⲧⲃⲁⲃⲩⲗⲱⲛ·' – Peter Nagel (ed.), *Der sahidische Psalter* Editio Minor) all agree on this point with the Masoretic Text rather than with the Dead Sea Scrolls.

Considering first the absolute distance in time from the end of ancient Mesopotamian civilization shortly before the beginning of our era to the present, it may be noted that it is not only a distance but a clean break. No living cultural tradition connects us with our subject, spans the gap between the ancients and us. We are almost entirely dependent on such archeological and inscriptional data as have been recovered and upon our own contemporary attempts at interpreting them. These data are, unfortunately, incomplete and somewhat haphazard as sources for the total culture to which they testify; and the languages of the inscriptional materials are still far from being fully understood. The concepts denoted by their words and the interrelations of these concepts, moreover, are not infrequently incongruent with, or accented differently from, anything in our present-day culture and outlook, so that misunderstanding and even failure to comprehend altogether are constant stumbling blocks.

Formidable as our difficulties are, they are no cause for dismay or for ceasing our efforts to understand. If they were, then earlier generations of scholars, the generation of discoverers and decipherers above all, should have been the ones to give up, for they had far greater difficulties and far less help than we have. Actually, the very realization that difficulties exist often goes a long way toward overcoming them by forcing upon us the necessity of other ways of thinking and evaluating than those to which we are accustomed. We may become alert to the dangers of too easy generalization, may doubt accepted translations and search for more adequate meanings of a word[51].

51 Thorkild Jacobsen, *The Treasures of Darkness. A History of Mesopotamian Religion*, New Haven, Yale University Press, 1976, pp. 17-18. *Cf.* Daniel C. Snell, *Life in the Ancient Near East, 3100-332 BCE*, New Haven, Yale University Press, 1997, p. 6; Jeremy Black *et al.* (translated and introduced by), *The Literature of Ancient Sumer*, p. XIX; Mark S. Smith, *The Origins of Biblical Monotheism*, p. 18; and Jerrold S. Cooper, 'Divine Kingship in Mesopotamia, a Fleeting Phenomenon', *in* Nicole Brisch (ed.), *Religion and Power. Divine Kingship in the Ancient World and Beyond*, The University of Chicago Oriental Institute Seminars 4, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 2012, pp. 261-265, p. 263. Also, *cf.* William Hallo's exhortation, in his Presidential Address to the American Oriental Society: 'To return, then, to that other premise of Civil with which we began: yes, the textual documentation is limited. But the conclusion we draw from this premise is very different from his. We are not to limit the inferences we extract from the evidence, but to treat the evidence, precisely because it is limited, as a precious resource – none of it to be ignored, or squandered, but every fragmentary bit of it critically sifted, so that it fits into our reconstruction of the history of antiquity – much as the archaeologist must use

Michael Oakeshott left after his death, among the many papers in his cottage on the Dorset coast, a decades-old, untitled, unexpected book-length typescript, published posthumously as *The Politics of Faith and the Politics of Scepticism*[52]. The operative word in this title is the twice mentioned 'politics' rather than (religious) 'faith' – or, more precisely, it is *political* faith[53]. In various religions (including Christianity), faith in oneself and one's works can be meaningfully contrasted with faith in God and His grace, as the main means to salvation. Professor Oakeshott's book (a man whose sensibility had been shaped in depth by his interest in religion[54]) offers a secularised version of this tension, I argue, by his contrast between 'the politics of faith and the politics of scepticism, expressions which stand for the two poles or extremes between which, in modern times, our activity of governing and our understanding of what is proper to the office of government have fluctuated'[55]. Thus, he contrasts, in politics, the rationalistic[56] faith of ideologies trying to fit society to the Procrustean bed of a set template with the seasoned scepticism favouring flexible adjustment of policy over and against any one such master plan. In Oakeshott's own words:

> 'In the politics of faith, the activity of governing is understood to be in the service of the perfection of mankind. There is a doctrine of

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every surviving potsherd to reconstruct and restore a fragmentary vessel. The history so reconstructed – be it political or literary, linguistic or socio-economic, religious or Biblical – will then be true to its textual documentation. However limited that documentation may be, the only limits it imposes on us are to set reasonable limits to our own skepticism' (William W. Hallo, 'The Limits of Skepticism', *in Journal of the American Oriental Society*, 110:2/1990, pp. 187-199, p. 199).

52 For publication details, *vd*. Michael Oakeshott, *The Politics of Faith and the Politics of Scepticism*, edited by Timothy Fuller, New Haven, Yale University Press, 1996, p. viii-ix.

53 'The 'faith' in question is virtually the opposite of traditional religious faith. It is faith in the capacity of human beings to perfect themselves through their own efforts, made possible by the discovery of ways continually to increase the power of government as the essential instrumentality to control, design and perfect individuals and groups' (*ibid*., p. xi).

54 *Vd*. Elizabeth Campbell Corey, *Michael Oakeshott on Religion, Aesthetics, and Politics*, Eric Voegelin Institute Series in Political Philosophy: Studies in Religion and Politics, Columbia, University of Missouri Press, 2006.

55 Michael Oakeshott, *The Politics of Faith and the Politics of Scepticism*, p. 21.

56 I hardly need saying that 'rationalistic' does not necessarily mean 'rational'. Former (or current) citizens of totalitarian states, for instance, bear witness to how often how rationally their government really acted, or really acts.

cosmic optimism which, not from observation but as an inference from the perfection of its creator, attributes an unavoidable perfection to the universe. And there is, further, a doctrine in which human perfection appears as a providential gift, assured but not deserved. But the idea of human perfectibility characteristic of the politics of faith, so far from being derived from either of these doctrines, is hostile to them both. In the politics of faith, human perfection is sought precisely because it is not present; and further, it is believed that we need not, and should not, depend upon the working of divine providence for the salvation of mankind. Human perfection is to be achieved by human effort, and confidence in the evanescence of imperfection springs here from faith in human power and not from trust in divine providence. We may, perhaps, be permitted to encourage ourselves by believing that our efforts have the approval and even the support of providence, but we are to understand that the achievement of perfection depends upon our own unrelaxed efforts, and that if those efforts are unrelaxed, perfection will appear'[57].

57 Michael Oakeshott, *The Politics of Faith and the Politics of Scepticism*, p. 23. Oakeshott's distinction between 'the politics of faith' and the politics of scepticism' is deeply different from Max Weber's distinction between 'the ethic of conviction' and 'the ethic of responsibility'. 'We have to understand that ethically oriented activity can follow two fundamentally different, irreconcilably opposed maxims. It can follow the "ethic of principled conviction" (*Gesinnung*) or the "ethic of responsibility". It is not that the ethic of conviction is identical with irresponsibility, nor that the ethic of responsibility means the absence of principled conviction – there is of course no question of that. But there is a profound opposition between acting by the maxim of the ethic of conviction (putting it in religious terms: "The Christian does what is right and places the outcome in God's hands"), and acting by the maxim of the ethic of responsibility, which means that one must answer for the (foreseeable) *consequences* of one's actions' (Max Weber, 'The Profession and Vocation of Politics', *Political Writings*, edited by Peter Lassman and Ronald Speirs, Cambridge Texts in the History of Political Thought, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1994, p. 309-369, p. 359-360). In the original German: '*Wir müssen ims klarmachen, daß alles ethisch orientierte Handeln unter zwei voneinander grundverschiedenen, imaustragbar gegensätzlichen Maximen stehen kann: es kann »gesinnungsethisch« oder »veranwortungsethisch« orientiert sein. Nicht daß Gesinnungsethik mit Verantwortungslosigkeit und Verantwortungsethik mit Gesinnungslosigkeit identisch wäre. Davon ist natürlich keine Rede. Aber es ist ein abgrundtiefer Gegensatz, ob man unter der gesinnungsethischen Maxime handelt – religiös geredet: »Der Christ tut recht und stellt den Erfolg Gott anheim« –, oder unter der verantwortungsethischen: daß man für die (voraussehbaren) Folgen seines Handelns aufzukommen hat*' (Max Weber, 'Politik als Beruf', *Gesammelte politische Schriften*, edited by Johannes Winckelmann, Tübingen, Mohr (Siebeck), 1971[3], pp. 505-560, pp. 551-552). Further

In what conditions, then, could we extrapolate Oakeshott's conceptual distinction between the politics of faith and the politics of scepticism – and thus examine whether, how, and why a similar distinction should be drawn between a *scholarship of faith* and a *scholarship of scepticism*? Let us start from a basic observation, that is, of the two poles, it is scepticism that always revolves around faith rather than the opposite. The question then indeed becomes: what faith? Religious faith in God? Political faith in man[58]? Scholarly faith in – who, or what? There are few instances perhaps where Plato's need for definition[59] makes itself more acutely felt than here. Indeed, there is scholarship driven by religious faith and scholarship driven by scepticism about its claims. There is scholarship driven by political faith and scholarship driven by scepticism about its claims. And there is scholarship driven by faith in scholarship and scholarship driven by scepticism about its claims. So that Professor Jacobsen went on to write the leading history of Mesopotamian religion[60] while Professor Oppenheim would rather take the pains of explaining at length why 'a systematic presentation of Mesopotamian religion cannot and should not be written'[61].

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exploration, and explanation, of the exact relationship between Professors Oakeshott's and Weber's respective conceptual distinctions far exceeds the scope and purpose of this paper.

58 This man being, either explicitly or implicitly, almost always a male.

59 'If you wish to reach a good decision on any topic, my boy, there is only one way to begin: You must know what the decision is about, or else you are bound to miss your target altogether. Ordinary people cannot see that they do not know the true nature of a particular subject, so they proceed as if they did; and because they do not work out an agreement at the start of the inquiry, they wind up as you would expect – in conflict with themselves and each other' (Plato, *Phaedrus*, 237b-d). In the original Greek: Περὶ παντός, ὦ παῖ, μία ἀρχὴ τοῖς μέλλουσι καλῶς βουλεύσεσθαι: εἰδέναι δεῖ περὶ οὗ ἂν ᾖ ἡ βουλή, ἢ παντὸς ἁμαρτάνειν ἀνάγκη. Τοὺς δὲ πολλοὺς λέληθεν ὅτι οὐκ ἴσασι τὴν οὐσίαν ἑκάστου. Ὡς οὖν εἰδότες οὐ διομολογοῦνται ἐν ἀρχῇ τῆς σκέψεως, προελθόντες δὲ τὸ εἰκὸς ἀποδιδόασιν: οὔτε γὰρ ἑαυτοῖς οὔτε ἀλλήλοις ὁμολογοῦσιν'. 'And a definition is a formula which is one not by being connected together, like the *Iliad*, but by dealing with one object', notes Aristotle in his *Metaphysics* (1045a12-13. In the original Greek: 'ὁ δ' ὁρισμὸς λόγος ἐστὶν εἷς οὐ συνδέσμῳ καθάπερ ἡ Ἰλιὰς ἀλλὰ τῷ ἑνὸς εἶναι'). And again, in his *Topics*: 'a definition is a phrase signifying a thing's essence' (101b38. In the original Greek: 'ἔστι δ᾽ ὅρος μὴν λόγος ὁ τὸ τί ἦν εἶναι σημαίνον').

60 Thorkild Jacobsen, *The Treasures of Darkness*.

61 A. Leo Oppenheim, *Ancient Mesopotamia. Portrait of a Dead Civilization*, revised edition completed by Erica Reiner, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1977[2], pp. 171-183.

Scholarship, then, is in the eye of the beholder[62]? Such a conclusion would be quite unsettling as far as scholars are concerned, but we can, at this juncture, lay back breathing a deep sigh of relief. The problem is not scholarship. The problem, actually, is scholars. As conflicts of interpretation often do not involve problems with data, but rather with the hidden, deeply held, long-lasting attitudes toward the data[63]. This is a generic situation. In the specific subdiscipline of Hebrew Bible/ Old Testament studies, in Professor Friedman's words, 'it sometimes feels as if everyone has his or her own theory, and, worse, it seems that many scholars are not addressing one another's evidence, evidence that challenges their own theories'[64]. So, for instance, 'people date more and more of the Bible later and later'[65]. But:

62 The case of Egypt puts this saying in a new perspective, when one man's faith in his own scholarship alternately led to the best and worst results. 'Fantastic explanations of this type appealed all too readily to the medieval mind, and until the beginning of the nineteenth century the opinion persisted almost as an article of faith that the Egyptian hieroglyphs gave symbolic expression to recondite philosophical and religious doctrines. That erroneous opinion derived a new impetus from the learned speculations of the very man to whom the western world owes the revival of its interest in the Coptic language and literature. This was the Jesuit Athanasius Kircher, an accomplished Orientalist to whom was entrusted the translation of a Coptic-Arabic vocabulary brought home from Egypt by Pietro della Valle. Kircher's *Prodromus Coptus sive Aegyptiacus,* published in 1636, marks the beginning of a long sequence of books upon Coptic, a subject upon which no inconsiderable volume of information was available when at last scholars obtained the key to the decipherment of the hieroglyphs. For this, however, the time was not yet ripe; and the theories of Kircher as to the content of the hieroglyphic inscriptions exceed all bounds in their imaginative folly. The cartouche of the Pharaoh Apries, encountered on a Roman obelisk, signifies to Kircher that "the benefits of the divine Osiris are to be procured by means of sacred ceremonies and of the chain of the Genii, in order that the benefits of the Nile may be obtained'" (Sir Alan Gardiner, *Egyptian Grammar. Being an Introduction to the Study of Hieroglyphs*, Oxford, Griffith Institute, 1957[3], pp. 11-12). The 'cartouche' of a pharaoh contains his (or her) royal name, that is all. On 'Egyptomania', vd. Erik Hornung, Das esoterische Ägypten. Das geheime Wissen der Ägypter und sein Einfluß auf das Abendland, München, Beck, 1999; cf. Jan Assmann, Moses the Egyptian. The Memory of Egypt in Western Monotheism, Cambridge MA, Harvard University Press, 1997.

63 On the role of preconceptions in scholarship, *vd*. Max Weber, *Collected Methodological Writings*, edited by Hans Henrik Bruun and Sam Whimster, translated by Hans Henrik Bruun, London, Routledge, 2012.

64 Richard Elliott Friedman, *The Exodus*.

65 *Ibid*.

> 'Besides being poorly defended – actually *un*defended – these works as a whole paint a surreal history. Israel and Judah existed as nations in a land from at least 1205 BCE until 587 BCE. These works picture those nations producing almost nothing significant during the 618 years of their existence in their land. They picture the Jews producing practically everything important –monotheism, history-writing, nearly all of their literature – only after they were thrown out of their land. I recognize that crises can give birth to innovations and creativity in human history. But this attribution of so many texts to the centuries after the crisis, and so little to the centuries before it, is extreme by any standard. As Professor Hendel wrote in reviewing some of these works: "It seems arbitrary to define 'Israel' as a Persian period phenomenon and to leave the tenth–sixth centuries as a blank, with no memories or literate thinkers to be found". And, again, the evidence of the stage of the Hebrew language of the texts goes completely against it'[66].

We should remark at this juncture a fundamental fact. The Septuagint reads in verse 6 (5), translating 'מֵאֱלֹהִים', 'in comparison with angels' ('παρ᾽ ἀγγέλους') instead of 'than a god': 'You diminished him a little in comparison with angels'[67]. Among the main ancient witnesses, the *Peshiṭta*, the *Vulgata*, and the Sahidic Coptic Psalter agree with the Septuagint. The *Peshiṭta*: 'You made him a little less than the angels'[68]. The *Vulgata*: '*Du hast ihn wenig geringer gemacht als die Engel*'[69]. The Sahidic Coptic Psalter: '*Du hast ihn nur wenig niedriger gemacht denn die Engel*'[70]. One should also note that the Dead Sea Scrolls corroborate the Masoretic Text[71]. However, the difference between, on the one hand, the Septuagint, the *Peshiṭta*, the

66 *Ibid*.

67 Albert Pietersma / Benjamin G. Wight (eds), *A New English Translation of the Septuagint*. In the original Greek: 'ἠλάττωσας αὐτὸν βραχύ τι παρ᾽ ἀγγέλους' (*Septuaginta: Vetus Testamentum Graecum Auctoritate Academiae Scientiarum Gottingensis editum*).

68 George A. Kiraz / Andreas Juckel (eds), *The Antioch Bible*. Original Syriac on facing page.

69 Michael Fieger / Widu-Wolfgang Ehlers / Andreas Beriger (eds), *Biblia Sacra Vulgata*. In the original Latin: '*minuisti eum paulo minus ab angelis*'.

70 Peter Nagel (ed.), *Der sahidische Psalter* Editio Minor. In the original Coptic: '| ⲁⲕⲉⲡⲓⲧⲓⲙⲁ̂ ⲛⲛⲁⲉⲑⲛⲟⲥ ⲁⲩⲧⲁⲕⲟ ⲛⲇⲓ ⲡⲁⲥⲉⲃⲏⲥ·'.

71 *Dead Sea Scrolls Electronic Library Biblical Texts,* available on https://scholarlyeditions.brill.com/dsbo/ (consulted on 8 November 2023. 'Yet you have made them only slightly lower than God himself', Martin Abegg, Jr / Peter Flint / Eugene Ulrich (eds), *The Dead Sea Scrolls Bible*).

Vulgata, and the Coptic Psalter, and, on the other hand, (many) modern English translations does not necessarily mean that they translate from a different Hebrew text. A fundamental difference in the *interpretation* of the text is much more likely[72]. Indeed, Hebrew מֵאֱלֹהִים, from the Masoretic Text and the Dead Sea Scrolls, allows for both translations, 'than gods, than a god', and 'than angels, than an angel' (but not 'than God'[73]). Interestingly enough, King Alfred the Great also translates (in Old English)

72 'The Septuagint and the Targum translate *'ĕlōhîm* as "angels", undoubtedly to preserve the dignity and uniqueness of God' (Roland Meynet, *The Psalter*, vol. 1, translated by Bernard Witek, Rhetorica Biblica et Semitica 32, Leuven, Peeters, 2021, p. 85).

73 Cf. John Day's controversial contention: 'There are some clear parallels to Gen. 1.26ff., namely the theme of human lordship over the creatures on earth and the comparison of humans with the angels or gods, Yahweh's heavenly court. With regard to the latter, Ps. 8.5 declares that humanity is made "little less than the gods/angels" (not "than God"), while in Gen. 1.26ff. humanity is made in their image (this is the point of the phrase "Let *us* make man in *our* image")' (John Day, *Psalms*, Old Testament Guides, Sheffield, JSOT Press, 1990, p. 41). *Cf.* also John Eaton: 'Moreover, he has given (traditionally "made") man little less than the angels (*elohim*, strictly "gods, heavenly beings"; the sense "God" seems unlikely in an address to God), and has crowned him with royal honour, putting all the other creatures of the earth "under his feet" – under his dominion. The strong expression "under his feet" is an echo of the traditional near-eastern formulas of kingship, where kings would be commissioned by heaven to rule justly and compassionately, but have conquering power against evil. The kingship which the Lord has bestowed on man is intended as the mediation of God's own rule. There is to be but one kingdom, the just and saving reign of the Creator, and puny man, amazingly, is appointed as the royal steward, the one who is to represent and carry out the wishes of the Lord' (John Eaton, *The Psalms. A Historical and Spiritual Commentary with an Introduction and New Translation*, London, Continuum, 2005, p. 81). *Cf.* Walter Brueggemann / William H. Bellinger, Jr., *Psalms*, pp. 59-60, for a different position in the debate about the translation of *'ĕlōhim*': 'The term can mean God, gods, or divine beings. A number of scholars suggest that Psalm 8 is a poetic reflection on Genesis 1. The rendering in Genesis 1 is "God," and thus that rendering would be most appropriate in Psalm 8. The psalm further alludes to the Bible's opening creation account. Psalm 8 asks how God – creator of the amazing universe – cares about the insignificant creatures called humans. Genesis 1:26-31 suggests that God created women and men in the image and likeness of God, "crowned them with glory and honor". Just as Genesis 1 and Psalm 8 speak of God with royal overtones, Ps 8:5 describes humans with royal overtones. Humans are God's likeness, God's representatives in having dominion over the works of the divine fingers. Dominion here does not indicate permission to exhaust the creation's resources but suggests that God grants to humans the honor of representing God in caring for all of creation. Humans receive the gift of caring for the creation as the shepherd king cares for the kingdom'.

'þonne englas', 'than angels': 'Þu hine gedest lytle læssan þonne englas'[74]. But the Old English version, comparatively late, is not among the main ancient witnesses. More importantly, however, the Epistle to the Hebrews (2:7) reads 'ἠλάττωσας αὐτὸν βραχύ τι παρ᾽ ἀγγέλους', as in the Septuagint[75]. Philologically, I have no qualms with the claim that the author quoted directly from the Septuagint. Theologically, I think it still significant that he chose this possible translation from Hebrew.

What about history?

> 'Alan Cooper and Bernard Goldstein make the fundamental point that the protagonists in a number of narratives do not know what sort of *'ĕlōhîm* is involved. For they note that in early Israelite religion, an *'ĕlōhîm* embodied a certain ambiguity: it could be an ancestral spirit, a lower-level *'ĕlōhîm* serving in the divine council, or potentially even a demonic *'ĕlōhîm* (like the *mašḥît* of Exod 12:23 or the *mal'ăkê rā'îm*, deadly angels mentioned in Ps 78:49, and perhaps the divinity of Exod 4:24), or a clan deity, that is, the proverbial "God of the father". In short, early Israel was populated with *'ĕlōhîm* of various sorts'[76].

74 Patrick P. O'Neill (ed.), *King Alfred's Old English Prose Translation of the First Fifty Psalms*, Medieval Academy Books 104, The Medieval Academy of America, Cambridge MA, 2001. On translation authorship: 'In sum, there were weighty reasons, public and private, why Alfred would have undertaken the translation that has survived as the first fifty Prose Psalms in the Paris Psalter' (p. 96).

75 Critical text: Barbara Aland *et al*. (eds), *Novum Testamentum Graece*, based on the work of Eberhard and Erwin Nestle, Stuttgart, Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 2012[28]. The Majority Text agrees with the critical text (Maurice A. Robinson / William G. Pierpont (compiled and arranged by), The New Testament in the Original Greek. Byzantine Textform, Southborough, Chilton Book, 2005).

76 Mark S. Smith, 'Remembering God: collective memory in Israelite Religion', *The Catholic Biblical Quarterly*, 64:4/2002, pp. 631-651, p. 638, *cf.* pp. 636-645. *Cf. id*., *The Origins of Biblical Monotheism*, p. 6: 'Some years ago my friend and professorial colleague Victor Hurowitz posed a question that provided part of the impetus for this book. When he read a draft of my earlier book *The Early History of God*, he scribbled in the margin of one page, "what is an *ilu*?" (This is the Akkadian word for "god".) Professor Hurowitz was quite right; this question is absolutely central. *The Early History of God* discusses many different deities, but it does not address the more basic issue of what divinity is. To answer Victor's question might seem a relatively simple task. A basic approach to this question would be to take an inventory of figures called "divine" (Akkadian *ilu*, Ugaritic *'il*, B[iblical] H[ebrew] *'ēl*). Such a list in different Semitic languages would turn up not only major deities but also a wide variety of other phenomena: monstrous cosmic enemies; demons; some living kings; dead kings or the dead more generally; deities' images

Taking thus history into consideration, I argue that, in Psalm 8:6, the human being is little less than *numinous* (a concept coined by Rudolf Otto[77]). I hasten to clarify what I mean: my arguments are theological-

and standards as well as standing stones; and other cultic items and places. In addition to words for "divine", Akkadian uses a special sign (called a "determinative") to mark divinity. The special sign for divinity applies not only to deities but also to many other phenomena such as demons, stars, the images of monstrous creatures, the determined order (*šimtu*), and legendary human heroes of old, such as Gilgamesh and Enkidu. On the whole, such an inventory suggests that divinity was attributed not only to major and minor deities but to a whole host of associated phenomena. It is further evident that distinctions were recognized among the figures and phenomena called "divine". In this inventory one feature stands out: apart from cult objects and places, divinity seemed to betoken status or being significantly greater than that of human beings. In general, to be divine is not to be human.'

77 'For this purpose I adopt a word coined from the Latin *numen*. *Omen* has given us ominous, and there is no reason why from *numen* we should not similarly form a word "numinous". I shall speak then of a unique "numinous" category of value and of a definitely "numinous" state of mind, which is always found wherever the category is applied. This mental state is perfectly *sui generis* and irreducible to any other; and therefore, like every absolutely primary and elementary datum, while it admits of being discussed, it cannot be strictly defined. There is only one way to help another to an understanding of it. He must be guided and led on by consideration and discussion of the matter through the ways of his own mind, until he reach the point at which "the numinous" in him perforce begins to stir, to start into life and into consciousness. We can co-operate in this process by bringing before his notice all that can be found in other regions of the mind, already known and familiar, to resemble, or again to afford some special contrast to, the particular experience we wish to elucidate. Then we must add: "This *X* of ours is not precisely *this* experience, but akin to this one and the opposite of that other. Cannot you now realize for yourself what it is?" In other words our *X* cannot, strictly speaking, be taught, it can only be evoked, awakened in the mind; as everything that comes "of the spirit" must be awakened' (Rudolf Otto, *The Idea of the Holy. An Inquiry into the Non-Rational Factor in the Idea of the Divine and Its Relation to the Rational*, translated by John Harvey, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1958, pp. 6-7. In the original German: '*Ich bilde hierfür zunächst das Wort: das Numinöse, (wenn man von omen ominos bilden kann, dann auch von numen numinös), und rede von einer eigentümlichen numinosen Deutungs- und Bewertungs-kategorie und ebenso von einer numinosen Gemüts-gestimmtheit, die allemal da eintritt, wo jene angewandt, das heißt da wo ein Objekt als numinoses vermeint worden ist. Da diese Kategorie vollkommen sui generis ist so ist sie wie jedes ursprüngliche und Grund-datum nicht definibel im strengen Sinne sondern nur erörterbar. Man kann dem Hörer nur dadurch zu ihrem Verständnis helfen, daß man versucht, ihn durch Erörterung zu dem Punkte seines eigenen Gemütes zu leiten wo sie ihm dann selber sich regen entspringen und bewußt werden muß. Man kann dieses Verfahren unterstützen indem man ihr Ähnliches oder auch ihr charakteristisch Entgegengesetztes, das*

ly valueless; for this is not a paper in theology, but in religious studies[78]. Returning to Professor Otto's concept, the human being is little less than numinous, but *not* numinous, emphatically not. Indeed, the numinous, for Otto, is the 'wholly other'[79], *das ganz Andere*[80]. 'That humanity and divinity fall in two generally incommensurate categories represents only a beginning point for understanding either one'[81]. I see a triptych made of love: the Old Testament/ the Hebrew Bible – the New Testament – the Fathers of the Church. First, with the triumph of monotheism, 'the biblical God – and here I consciously am not suggesting that this is entirely the same as the Israelite God – perhaps seemed both more divine and more human compared with earlier versions of this God'[82]. Second, the Incarnation.

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in anderen bereits bekannten und vertrauten Gemütsbereichen vorkommt, angibt und dann hinzufügt: "Unser X ist dieses nicht, ist aber diesem verwandt, jenem entgegengesetzt. Wird es dir nun nicht selber einfallen?" Das heißt: unser X ist nicht im strengen Sinne lehrbar sondern nur anregbar, erweckbar – wie alles, was "aus dem Geiste" kommt', Rudolf Otto, *Das Heilige. Über das Irrationale in der Idee des Göttlichen und sein Verhältnis zum Rationalen*, mit einer Einführung zu Leben und Werk Rudolf Ottos von Jörg Lauster und Peter Schüz und einem Nachwort von Hans Joas, München, Beck, 2014[3, pp. 6-7].

78 Being Eastern Orthodox myself, I personally follow here, in matters of faith, the reading of the Septuagint.

79 Rudolf Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*, p. 26.

80 Rudolf Otto, *Das Heilige*, p. 31.

81 Mark S. Smith, *The Origins of Biblical Monotheism*, 7.

82 'In biblical monotheism, the "fluidity" across deities in divine representation "flows" to a single divinity, and in this sense monotheism reflects a process of differentiation or redefinition of prior norms for divinity. In the Israelite deity, whatever of these features and titles was available in the environment of ancient Israel became dimensions of this deity, even as these may also have been modified. As a result, the names of deity and all the roles properly identified for divinity in these biblical representations constitute a single reality of a single deity. The result was not simply a concentration of divine names, titles and powers in a single deity. There were also the other remaining divine entities ultimately understood as having reality thanks only to this divine entity. The important corollary of this situation was that the one divine entity had the range of character elsewhere spread across a number of deities; and no less importantly, this deity had the range within the divine self or person. In other words, this deity was not more divine only in encompassing various divine characteristics, but this deity was also represented as more human than before in encompassing the human personalities seen across the range of other deities. The biblical God – and here I consciously am not suggesting that this is entirely the same as the Israelite God – perhaps seemed both more divine and more human compared with earlier versions of this God. If one may speak of a revolution of ancient Israel's deity, it may

Third, *theosis*. Please, let me let the Fathers speak. Theophilus of Antioch: 'If he were to turn to the life of immortality by keeping the commandment of God [*cf.* Matt. 19: 17], he would win immortality as a reward from him and would become a god'[83]. Irenaeus of Lyons: 'and following the only sure and true Teacher, the Word of God, Jesus Christ our Lord, who because of his immeasurable love became what we are in order to make us what he is'[84]. Clement of Alexandria: 'yes, I say, the Word of God speaks, having become man, in order that such as you may learn from man how it is even possible for man to become a god'[85]. Hippolytus of Rome: 'You have become a god! The sufferings you endured as a human being, these he gave because you are human. But whatever belongs to God, this God has promised to give when you, made immortal, become a god'[86]. Athanasius of Alexandria: 'For he was incarnate that we might be made god'[87]. Basil of

involve the unity of not only the deity's roles and functions, but also the deity's personality in the full range of available divine and human roles' (Mark S. Smith, 'Monotheism and the redefinition of divinity in Ancient Israel', *in Journal of the Interdisciplinary Study of Monotheistic Religions*, 2013/9, pp. 3-19, p. 17). *Cf. id.*, *How Human Is God? Seven Questions about God and Humanity in the Bible*, Collegeville, Liturgical Press, 2014.

83 *Ad Autolycum*, 2.27 (Theophilus of Antioch, *Ad Autolycum*, text and translation by Robert M. Grant, Oxford Early Christian Texts, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1970. In the original Greek: ἵνα εἰ ῥέψῃ ἐπὶ τὰ τῆς ἀθανασίας τηρήσας τὴν ἐντολὴν τοῦ θεοῦ, μισθὸν κομίσηται παρ' αὐτοῦ τὴν ἀθανασίαν καὶ γένηται θεός', *ibid.*).

84 *Against Heresies*, 5, Preface (Robert M. Grant, *Irenaeus of Lyons*, Early Church Fathers, London, Routledge, 1997. In Latin (translated in turn from the original, now very fragmentary, Greek): '*solum autem firmum et verum magistrum sequens, Verbum Dei, Jesum Christum Dominum nostrum, quipropter immensam suam dilectionem factus est quod sumus nos, uti nos perficeret esse quod est ipse*', Irénée de Lyon, *Contre les hérésies: édition critique d'après les versions arménienne et latine : texte et traduction*, vol. 5.2, par Adelin Rousseau, Louis Doutreleau, S. J., et Charles Mercier, Source Chrétiennes 153, Paris, Cerf, 1969.

85 *Exhortation to the Greeks*, 1 (Clement of Alexandria, *The Exhortation To The Greeks. The Rich Man's Salvation. And the Fragment of an Address Entitled To the Newly Baptized*, translated by G. W. Butterworth, Loeb Classical Library, Cambridge MA, Harvard University Press, 1919. In the original Greek : 'ναί φημι ὁ λόγος ὁ τοῦ θεοῦ ἄνθρωπος γενόμενος, ἵνα δὴ καὶ σὺ παρὰ ἀνθρωπου μάθῃς, πῇ ποτε ἄρα ἄνθρωπος γένηται θεός', *ibid.*).

86 *Refutation of All Heresies*, 10.34.4 (M. David Litwa (translated with an introduction and notes by), *Refutation of All Heresies*, Writings from the Greco-Roman World 40, Atlanta, SBL Press, 2016. In the original Greek: 'γέγονας γὰρ θεός· ὅσα γὰρ ὑπέμεινας πάθη ἄνθρωπος ὤν, ταῦτα <ἐ>δίδου, ὅτι ἄνθρωπος εἶς· ὅσα δὲ παρακολουθεῖ θεῷ, ταῦτα παρέχειν ἐπήγγελται θεὸς ὅταν θεοποιηθῇς, ἀθάνατος γενηθείς', *ibid.*).

87 *On the Incarnation*, 54 (St Athanasius of Alexandria, *On the Incarnation. Greek Original and English Translation*, preface by C.S. Lewis, translation and introduction by John

Caesarea: 'the highest of all desires, becoming God'[88]. Gregory of Nazianzus: 'Man and God blended. They became a single whole, the stronger side predominating, in order that I might be made God to the same extent that he was made man'[89]. Gregory of Nyssa:

> Since, then, that God-receiving flesh also received this part for its own composition, and the God who was made manifest mingled himself with perishable nature for this: in order that humanity might be deified by communion with the divinity, because of this, by the economy of grace he sows himself in all the faithful through the flesh whose composition [derives] from wine and bread, mixing with the bodies of the faithful, so that, by union with the immortal, man might become a partaker of incorruption[90].

Augustine of Hippo:

> If we have been made children of God, we have been made into gods; but we are such by the grace of him who adopts us, not because we are of the same nature as the one who begets. Our Lord and Savior

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Behr, Popular Patristics Series 44a, Yonkers, St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2011. In the original Greek: 'Αυτὸς γὰρ ἐνηνθρώπησεν, ἵνα ἡμεῖς θεοποιηθῶμεν', *ibid*.).

88 *On the Holy Spirit*, 9.23 (St Basil the Great, *On the Holy Spirit*, Crestwood, St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1980. In the original Greek: 'τὸ ἀκρότατον τῶν ὀρεκτῶν, θεὸν γενέσθαι', Basile de Césarée, *Sur le Saint-Esprit*, introduction, texte, traduction et notes par Benoît Pruche, O. P., Sources Chrétiennes 17bis, Paris, Cerf, 1968[2)].

89 *Oration* 29.19 (St Gregory of Nazianzus, *On God and Christ. The Five Theological Orations and Two Letters to Cledonius*, translated by Frederick Williams and Lionel Wickham with introduction and notes by Lionel Wickham, Popular Patristics Series 23, Crestwood, St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2002. In the original Greek: 'ἐπειδὴ συνανεκράθη θεῷ, καὶ γέγονεν εἷς, τοῦ κρείττονος ἐκνικήσαντος, ἵνα γένωμαι τοσοῦτον θεός, ὅσον ἐκεῖνος ἄνθρωπος', Gregor von Nazianz, *Orationes Theologicae. Theologische Reden. Griechisch-Deutsch*, übersetzt und eingeleitet von Hermann Josef Sieben, Fontes Christiani 22, Freiburg, Herder, 1996).

90 *Catechetical Discourse*, 37.12 (St Gregory of Nyssa, *Catechetical Discourse. A Handbook for Catechists. Greek Original & English Translation*, introduction, translation, notes, glossary and bibliography by Ignatius Green, Popular Patristics Series 60, Yonkers, St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2019. In the original Greek: Ἔπειὶ οὖν καὶ τοῦτο τὸ μέρος ἡ θεοδόχος ἐκείνη σὰρξ πρὸς τὴν σύστασιν ἑαυτῆς παρεδέξατο, ὁ δὲ φανερωθεὶς Θεὸς διὰ τοῦτο κατέμιξεν ἑαυτὸν τῇ ἐπικήρῳ φύσει, ἵνα τῇ τῆς | θεότητος κοινωνίᾳ συναποθεωθῇ τὸ ἀν- | θρώπινον, τούτου χάριν πᾶσι τοῖς πεπιστευκόσι τῇ οἰκονομίᾳ τῆς χάριτος ἑαυτὸν ἐνσπείρει διὰ τῆς σαρκὸς ἧς ἡ σύστασις ἐξ οἴνου τε καὶ ἄρτου ἐστίν, τοῖς σώμασι τῶν πεπιστευκότων κατακιρνάμενος, ὡς ἂν τῇ πρὸς τὸ ἀθάνατον ἑνώσει καὶ ὁ ἄνθρωπος τῆς ἀφθαρσίας μέτοχος γένοιτο', *ibid*.).

> Jesus Christ is the unique Son of God; he is God, one God with the Father, the Word who was in the beginning, the Word who was with God, the Word who is God. Others, who become gods, become so by his grace. They are not born of God's very being in such a way that they are what he is; it is through a gracious gift that they come to him and become with Christ his coheirs[91].

In this triptych of love, exceptional in many ways, *theosis* is exceptional itself. Living a holy life leads to *theosis*, in presence of the grace of God. So does taking communion, by the grace of God. The grace of God is always freely given and, when this happens, the way to *theosis* is ours to walk. And anyway, we should put our best effort into it, and our faith, hope, and love in God. But human beings are not only spirit, we are also flesh. And so, for most of us, most of the time, we are little less than numinous, but *not* numinous, emphatically not. And there is more, much more, to this.

In the first stasimon of Sophocles' *Antigone*, the chorus sings:

> Awesome wonders are many,
> but none of them more awesome
> than the human race[92].

And one of the translator's endnotes reads: 'The word translated "awesome" (*deinos*) is ambiguous between "clever", "wonderful" and "dreadful". Where the last meaning predominates, it has been translated "awful"'[93].

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91 *Exposition of Psalm 49, 2* (Saint Augustine, *Expositions of the Psalms*, vol. 2, translation and notes by Maria Boulding, O. S. B., editor John E. Rotelle, O. S. A., The Works of Saint Augustine: A Translation for the 21st Century III/16, Hyde Park, New City Press, 2000. In the original Latin: 'Si filii Dei facti sumus, et dii facti sumus: sed hoc gratiae est adoptantis, non naturae generantis. Unicus enim Dei Filius Deus et cum Patre unus Deus, Dominus et Salvator noster Jesus Christus, in principio Verbum et Verbum apud Deum, Verbum Deus. Caeteri qui fiunt dii, gratia ipsius fiunt, non de substantia ejus nascuntur ut hoc sint quod ille, sed ut per beneficium perveniant ad eum, et sint cohaeredes Christi', Sanctus Aurelius Augustinus, Enarrationes in Psalmos, vol. 1, textum edendum curaverunt D. Eligius Dekkers, O. S. B., and Iohannes Fraipont, Corpus Christianorum Series Latina 38, Turnhout, Brepols, 1956, p. 576).

92 *Antigone*, 332-334 (Sophocles, *Antigone*, introduction, translation and essay by Ruby Blondell, Focus Classical Library, Indianapolis, Focus Publishing, 1998). In the original Greek: 'πολλὰ τὰ δεινὰ κοὐδὲν ἀν-/ θρώπου δεινότερον πέλει/ τοῦτο καὶ πολιοῦ πέραν' (Sophocles, *Antigone*, edited by Mark Griffith, Cambridge Greek and Latin Classics, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1999).

93 Sophocles, *Antigone*, introduction, translation and essay by Ruby Blondell, n. 74.

The human being can be both awesome and awful in the *Antigone* (may I remind my kind reader that 'awe' as a concept is connected with the numinous). In the following scene, Antigone addresses Creon, ruler of Thebes:

> It was not Zeus who made this proclamation;
> nor was it Justice dwelling with the gods below
> who set in place such laws as these for humankind;
> nor did I think your proclamations had such strength
> that, mortal as you are, you could outrun those laws
> that are the gods', unwritten and unshakable[94].

'The stasimon opens with a calculatedly ambiguous statement (332-333): πολλὰ τὰ δεινὰ κοὐδὲν ἀνθρώπου δεινότερον πέλει. Things that are δεινός are "fearful" or "terrible". To suffer or do things that are δεινά is a serious affair. But δεινός, when applied to people, is generally a positive term: in Homer, gods or heroes are δεινός when they inspire fear, and the phrase δεινός τ' αἰδοῖός τε signifies respectability. In the fifth century the adjective δεινός still designates a person to be reckoned with, but it also connotes a person especially clever. By comparing man to *things* which are δεινά Sophocles appeals to two generally distinct sides of the word, each of which makes its own contribution to the overall meaning' (Gregory Crane, 'Creon and the "Ode to Man" in Sophocles' Antigone', *in Harvard Studies in Classical Philology*, 92/1989, p. 103-116, pp. 104-105).

94 *Antigone*, 450-455 (Sophocles, *Antigone*, introduction, translation and essay by Ruby Blondell). In the original Greek: 'οὐ γάρ τί μοι Ζεὺς ἦν ὁ κηρύξας τάδε,/ οὐδ' ἡ ξύνοικος τῶν κάτω Θεῶν Δίκη/ τοιούσδ' ἐν ἀνθρώποισιν ὥρισεν νόμους/ οὐδὲ σθένειν τοσοῦτον ὠιόμην τά σά/ κηρύγματ' ὥστ' ἄγραπτα κἀσφαλῆ Θεῶν/ νόμιμα δύνασθαι θνητὸν ὄνθ' ὑπερδραμεῖν' (Sophocles, *Antigone*, edited by Mark Griffith). *Cf*. Victor Ehrenberg's remark concerning the 'unwritten laws': 'On these laws Antigone's world is founded. She mentions Zeus and Dike, and the latter is described as one of the deities of the realm of the dead. With the two gods she describes the whole extent of the world to which she belongs and the laws of which she obeys, the world reaching from Olympus to Hades. There is no place in the Universe where the unwritten laws are not valid' (Victor Ehrenberg, *Sophocles and Pericles*, Oxford, Blackwell, 1954, p. 32; *cf. ibid*., pp. 22-50, 167-72 – and Jacqueline de Romilly, *La loi dans la pensée grecque: des origines à Aristote*, Paris, Les Belles Lettres, 1971, pp. 29-38). 'On my reading, the tragedy places on the one side the polis, with all its positive connotations in the eyes of the Athenians of the late 440s, and on the other a woman, acting out of place and subverting the polis order in defence of the cause of a traitor and aspiring sacrileger – both being the offspring of the terrible incestuous union of a patricide with his mother, and the children of a doomed house. Despite all this, the play is saying, that cause was right, and the polis was in the wrong. Understanding the will of the gods is not easy' (Christiane Sourvinou-Inwood, 'Assumptions and the Creation of Meaning: Reading Sophocles' Antigone', *in Journal of Hellenic Studies*, 109/1989, pp. 134-148, p. 148). *Húbris* is already the central theme in Aeschylus' *Persians*, *vd*. lines 739-752 (Aeschylus, *Persians*, edited with an introduction, translation and commentary by Edith Hall, Wiltshire, Aris & Phillips, 1997).

The central theme of *Antigone* is *húbris*. In chapter 29 of the *Laozi* (also known as the *Dao de jing*), it says: 'Every attempt to seize the world and control it/ shows us that it simply cannot be done./ The world cannot be stopped./ The world is a numinous vessel/ beyond anyone's making, beyond anyone's control./ To control it is to wreck it./ To hold it is to lose it'[95]. The differences from Psalm 8:7 are obvious: 'You have given him rule over the works of your hands, put all things at his feet'. And yet, since in the *Laozi* there is no transcendent God, in the Bible it is God and no one else that made the world. Both in the *Laozi* and the Bible no human being in particular controls the world. God has 'put all things at his feet' (man's feet), but this is not ownership, this is stewardship on behalf of the Lord; it entails no discretionary destruction, but instead the care for the world and its keeping in order. This has been already noted before by distinguished commentators of Psalm 8[96]. How sad sound such words in the midst of the current frenzy of environmental destruction.

The world itself is *not* a numinous vessel in Judaism or in Christianity. And yet, the sense of wonder before the creation of the Lord is one thing that we badly miss these days. We should be in awe before the world, hints Psalm 8, precisely because we can see in it the work of the Lord. And we can see in the world the work of the Lord, may I add, precisely because we are little less than numinous beings. 'Once, the heavens are even called the "work of his fingers" (Ps 8:3). God must have engaged himself carefully and quite personally in a work of such surpassing grandeur'[97]. The discretion-

95 Laozi, *Daodejing*, translated by Brook Ziporyn, New York, Liveright, 2023 (In the original Chinese: 將欲取天下而為之，吾見其不得已。天下神器，不可為也，為者敗之，執者失之, Chinese Text Project, available on https://ctext.org/dao-de-jing, consulted on 8 November 2023). The word translated as 'numinous' is *shén*, 神.

96 'The conclusion resumes the opening words. Such use of a refrain here is not just for artistic effect, but brings home the absolutely essential point: through all the earth it is the Lord's name that is glorious; the kingdom, the power and the glory are his and his alone. Woe to man if he should imagine the glory is his own and come to abuse the creatures entrusted to his care!' (John Eaton, *The Psalms*, p. 81). On this care, *cf*. Othmar Keel, *Die Welt der altorientalischen Bildsymbolik und das Alte Testament. Am Beispiel der Psalmen*, Zürich, Benziger, 1972, pp. 49-50. *Cf*. also n. 71, *supra*, and n. 97, *infra*.

97 Othmar Keel, *The Symbolism of the Biblical World. Ancient Near Eastern Iconography and the Book of Psalms*, translated by Timothy J. Hallett, Winona Lake, Eisenbrauns, 1997, p. 205 (In the original German: *'Der Himmel wird sogar einmal das "Werk seiner Finger" (8,4) genannt. Mit einem Werk von so unbegreiflicher Hoheit muß sich Gott sorgfältig*

ary destruction of the environment that we pursue at full speed is, indeed, one more act of *húbris*. The human being is little less than a numinous being, in the sense of Rudolf Otto. I argue that this fundamental insight, when correlated with Sophocles' *Antigone*, 332-334, and with the *Laozi*'s chapter 29, discloses human beings as those beings able (and willing) to do both tremendous good and tremendous evil, the latter when they overstep the boundaries set by human nature.

Conclusions

I started this research from Voegelin's formula: 'God and man, world and society form a primordial community of being'. I reworked it thus: *God, world, society, community, and the human being are the conditions of possibility for, and the organising system of, consciousness and experience. Therefore, the trouble of our times can be usefully construed in reference to them*. I focused on the human being in her or his relationship to God (more broadly, to the numinous), the world, society, community, and to herself or to himself. My hypothesis was that we need history now more than ever before, precisely because the 'presentism' of our times urges us to neglect it. In order to test this hypothesis, I referred to Psalm 8:5-6: 'What is man that you are mindful of him, and a son of man that you care for him? Yet you have made him little less than a god, crowned him with glory and honor'. Hebrew מֵאֱלֹהִֽים allows for both translations, 'than gods, than a god', and 'than angels, than an angel'. While many modern English translations opt for the former, the main ancient witnesses, such as the Septuagint, the *Peshiṭta*, the *Vulgata*, and the Coptic Psalter, opt for the latter – and so does the Epistle to the Hebrews (2:7). What about history? In general, for Psalm 8, Professor Eaton suggests 'a connection with the chief festival of early times, the autumnal new year celebration of Yahweh as king and master of nature'[98]. In particular, for Psalm 8:6, Professor Smith quips: 'In short, early Israel was populated with *'ĕlōhîm* of various sorts'. Taking history into consideration, I argue that, in Psalm 8:6, *the human being is little less than numinous*, in the sense of Rudolf Otto. This fundamental insight, when correlated with Sophocles' *Antigone*, 332-334, and with the *Laozi*'s chapter 29, discloses

und ganz persönlich befaßt haben', Othmar Keel, *Die Welt der altorientalischen Bildsymbolik und das Alte Testament*, p. 184).

98 John Eaton, *The Psalms*, p. 80.

human beings as those beings able (and willing) to do both tremendous good and tremendous evil, the latter when they overstep the boundaries set by human nature. *Much of the trouble, indeed most of it, that human beings face today in their relationship with God, the world, society, community, and with themselves can thus be traced back to the devastation brought about by* húbris. However, should it enter consciousness, the possibility appears as well of a farewell to *húbris*, should we only sincerely wish this, and work hard on it. History gives us humans help and hope. Incidentally, it also corroborates my research hypothesis.

However, this research has only been exploratory. Further work is needed in order to advance our understanding of: 1. the relation of the human being to God, the world, society, community, and to herself or to himself in our times of trouble; 2. other relations, such as, for instance, of society to God, or to the world, and of community to God, or to the world, or to society; 3. what it means for human beings to be little less than numinous; 4. the devastation wrought by *húbris*; and 5. our restoration worked by love. Only through love can we emerge as better human beings from our current predicament, always through love[99].

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99 'My translation has kept the older, more literal style, and so a clearer connection with the tradition of the Beginning as seen in the New Testament. The psalm does indeed breathe a paradisal air; no mention is made of the failure of man, his treachery and cruelty, the sufferings of the creatures, the obscuring of God's glory throughout the earth. The moment of worship which it seems to reflect was touched with a vision; perfection both primal and ultimate is glimpsed by the eye of faith. The crowned figure in this vision is representative and head of our race, the ideal that the New Testament declared manifest in Christ (Heb. 2.6-8; 1 Cor. 15.20-8; Eph. 1.22). With the light of the resurrection and new creation, the vision is given again. Amidst all the failure of human responsibility come glimpses of what can and will be. Crowned with honour, close to the angels, the race made new will love those under their rule as they themselves are loved by God' (*ibid*., pp. 81-82).

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