

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA  
SANTA CRUZ

**TOWARDS A REPUBLICAN ETHICS OF *FRATERNITÉ*: CHARLES  
PÉGUY'S MYSTICAL REFASHIONING OF CIVIC VIRTUE**

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction  
of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

in

LITERATURE

by

**Matthew Steven Gervase**

June 2018

The Dissertation of Matthew Steven Gervase is  
approved:

---

Professor Tyrus Miller, Chair

---

Professor Richard Terdiman

---

Professor Dorian Bell

---

Tyrus Miller  
Vice Provost and Dean of Graduate Studies

Copyright © by

Matthew Gervase

2018

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Critical Introduction to Péguy's Life and Work	1
Bibliography	185
The Duration of a People	199

**(ABSTRACT) TOWARDS A REPUBLICAN ETHICS OF *FRATERNITÉ*:  
CHARLES PÉGUY'S MYSTICAL REFASHIONING OF CIVIC VIRTUE—**

**MATTHEW STEVEN GERVASE**

Socialist and Catholic, poet and soldier, mystic and political thinker, Charles Péguy remains a figure of both critical and popular fascination in France well over a century after his death. Despite his importance in Continental thought, both he and his work remain largely unknown in American academe. This dissertation addresses the reasons for this ignorance, providing both a practical and theoretical intervention in the long and complicated history of Péguy's reception. The practical component takes the form of a translation of Péguy's final essay *Note conjointe sur M. Descartes et la philosophie cartésienne*, previously unavailable in English, which offers the most complete summation of Péguy's mystico-political vision for an imperiled French identity in the lead-up to the First World War. Péguy's highly spiritual vision of French identity, stained by the appropriation of his work by Vichy ideologues, has been rediscovered in recent decades in France. This dissertation joins and complements this vibrant conversation by arguing for Péguy's continued relevance as a thinker of political and spiritual community in the contemporary world.

Born in rural France, educated at the École Normale Supérieure, Péguy sought a way to incorporate the plebeian good sense and communal spirit of the people with a more cosmopolitan practice of literary and historical understanding made possible by education. Out of this dynamic fusion, he looked to engender a new model of civic engagement in response to the changing conditions of modern life. This model

encouraged proximity, fraternity, and more creative forms of political praxis drawing upon the full range of members of a given community. Against the modern tendency towards hierarchy, specialization, and technological expertise, Péguy gave voice to a more egalitarian, agonistic, and communally rooted form of political self-understanding. This heterodox form of mystico-political thought has largely resisted literary and cultural forms of translation into the Anglo-American world. Yet, Péguy's work offers us a compelling vision of political community within France's Third Republic, one geared toward the formation of a new sense of individual and political identity capable of responding to the complexities of a global world without renouncing the commitment to a shared common good.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I have many people I would like to thank. First and foremost are the members of my dissertation committee: Tyrus Miller, Richard Terdiman, and Dorian Bell. Their guidance and support allowed me to negotiate my own dialectic of freedom and necessity in the execution of this project. The dedication and attention they have shown to my work is a testament to their talents not only as great scholars but as outstanding mentors as well.

I would also like to thank my pedagogical advisors, in particular Bryan Donaldson and Micah Perks. Through their thoughtful and consistent feedback, I have been able to deepen my appreciation of teaching as an empathic, transformative practice. This, more than any other factor, has given me the perspective to pursue my research with joy and creativity.

I thank those specific individuals who helped me as a first-generation college student on each step of the way to earning my doctorate: Barbara Jensen, Paul “Bo” Aiello, Graham Thomas, Donald Weinstock, Aparna Nayak, and Najib Redouane. Without the love and support of my parents and family, none of this would have been possible. Their model of faith and hard work has allowed me to become the person I am today.

Thank you Sarah Papazoglakis, Lennet Daigle, Tsering Wangmo, and Yuki Obayashi for being largely sane and thoroughly pleasant fellow travelers these last six years. I would also like to mention former students and now friends David Vivian and

Payam Gregory Etemadzadeh. Their conversation and enthusiasm for learning have enriched my own experience as a teacher and learner.

My final word of thanks is to my partner Ruth whose mirth and passion for life make each day a blessing. If I have been able to glean any wisdom at all, it has been through following her example.

## CRITICAL INTRODUCTION TO PÉGUY'S LIFE AND WORK

In beginning a critical introduction to this translation of Charles Péguy's *Note conjointe sur M. Descartes et la philosophie cartésienne* I am acutely aware of the irony inherent in the very form of its presentation, a model that has become almost *de rigueur* for any new critical edition of a literary work. What could seem more natural and appropriate to both the serious and casual reader coming to this relatively little-known essay of Péguy, previously unavailable in English, than a rigorously critical and informative contextual situation of the work within the largely forgotten nexus of cultural and political events of its time? Yet, however well-intentioned and ostensibly complementary this introduction might appear to readers, one cannot escape the fact that both its form and the relationship it posits to Péguy's original work are diametrically opposed to the overall trajectory of his oeuvre and the thought that informed it.

For Péguy's thinking and literary output was in a fundamental sense driven by a profound antipathy towards what he saw as the specialized and deadening reading practices and forms of textual analysis of university intellectuals of his time. Péguy instead conceived of an ideal reader who would approach the text as directly and intuitively as possible, intent on reanimating the unique histories, experiences, and creative impulses contained within the true work of art, which Péguy viewed as an organic, living reality rather than mere historical artifact. For such a reader, this meant above all eschewing the superfluous and potentially misleading extra-textual apparatus of critical introduction and historical contextualization, all of which pointed

in the direction of a scientific and critical determinism Péguy regarded as anathema to the truly dynamic, participatory, and indeed creative vision he had in mind for the act of reading.

The historicist-inspired readings Péguy most despised sought instead to understand the work by means of an exhaustive resituation within its literary, historical, and political context, a scientific endeavor aimed at uncovering within the potentially limitless mass of historical data a chain of cause and event serving to engender the work in question. Péguy would ruthlessly attack this model of literary analysis as well as the historicist and positivist values operative in the methodology and practice of the scientific-minded historians, sociologists, and pedagogues driving the makeover of the French university system at this time in the name of an increasingly hegemonic faith in historical progress. This newly empowered “Republic of Professors,” in Albert Thibaudet’s phrase, would produce in the first decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century a school of thought that would emanate across the whole of France’s Third Republic. In contradistinction to this positivist historicism and the modes of literary analysis it served to institutionalize via the educational reforms of the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, Péguy offered a very different model of reading and historical understanding, which he sought to ground in a type of “creative remembrance” of one’s historical and cultural heritage through the shared processes of memory and intuition (Roe 205). As we will see, it is a model Péguy thought capable of checking the scientific and historicist thrust of intellectual thought and

practice gaining ground throughout France during this time of heightened intellectual and political volatility.

A chief target of Péguy's anger and of the numerous polemical attacks he would make over the course of his lifetime was the ensemble of former Dreyfusard intellectuals alongside whom he had initially fought in defense of Alfred Dreyfus, a previously unknown Jewish army captain scandalously convicted of treason in 1894. The nearly decade-long political crisis that ensued would prove enormously divisive for France, pitting defenders of French republicanism against a host of detractors on the political right clustered in support of a renewed *raison d'état* and an overt antisemitism. Emerging largely victorious from this conflict, the newly empowered Dreyfusard leadership would in turn become the bearers of a certain 19<sup>th</sup>-century faith in scientific and historical progress promising the ultimate perfectibility of humanity through the expansion and application of the positive and social sciences to all domains of human inquiry. It was an intellectual and political vision that would horrify Péguy and lead to a rapid political and intellectual estrangement on his part—one that would only increase over the next decade of his life. This new bureaucratic and political elite that had risen to power in the fallout of the Dreyfus Affair was for Péguy guilty of nothing less than the spiritual betrayal of an entire classical, humanist tradition, from which French culture drew its most vital resources and upon which Dreyfusard intellectuals were, in the name of a shallowly conceived republican modernity, unconscionably turning their back. Behind this naive faith in scientific progress, Péguy saw the self-interest and political opportunism of an ascendant *esprit*

*bureaucratique*, which was readily sacrificing a time-honored legacy of disinterested, humanistic scholarship in exchange for a culture of intellectual specialization and bureaucratic administration dictated by a newly dominant “Intellectual Party,” as Péguy would pejoratively label it.

This critique of the fundamental tenets of a self-serving intellectualism took as its target the methodological practices of a new generation of specialized, professional intellectuals indoctrinated in the positivist historicism of the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. Péguy would reserve particular scorn for the historical and literary approaches of Hippolyte Taine and Ernest Renan, who in the name of scientific rigor and critical objectivity had outlined a discursive approach to texts that aimed at an exhaustive detailing of the various historical and empirical conditions under which the work in question was created. Approaches of the sort found in Taine’s *La Fontaine et ses fables* could for Péguy never do more than amass a pile of ancillary cultural and historical debris serving to occlude a more direct and vital experience of reading predicated upon what he conceived as a faithful and collaborative participation with the text, thus imagined as a transtemporal monument to a people and their way of being in the world both culturally and spiritually. Rejecting what he viewed as the typically modern movement away from the object at hand in favor of a systematic documentation of the conditions surrounding its creation, Péguy favored a more intuitive approach of experiential and sympathetic comprehension that would owe a great deal to Henri Bergson’s thought at this time.

For these reasons, Péguy's model of literary reception would make every effort to avoid the scientific and critical determinism of Taine's discursive method, even going so far as to preach a deliberate avoidance of any critical apparatus lest it cloud one's capacity for a more direct, ahistorical, and participatory experience with the text in question. In his essay *Clio, Dialogue de l'histoire et de l'âme païenne*, Péguy explains his preference for a French translation of Homer's works that is entirely free of any critical contextualization or introduction (III 1005). Péguy's penchant here and elsewhere for seeking out popular rather than critical editions of the classics recalls his larger hermeneutic approach with its strict avoidance of any extra-textual material threatening to block a more direct access to the text itself. Yet, by far an even greater danger in Péguy's eyes than the superfluous and misleading framing of a true work of art was the danger of it not being read at all. The disappearance or absence of a faithful and well-inclined readership represented for Péguy the worst possible fate to befall an artist, entailing the passing out of existence of the organic, living reality expressed within an artistic work as it settles into the dead, inorganic realm of historical artifact (III 1014). It is not surprising then that Péguy defined the act of reading as among the most "lofty, supreme, and singular, disconcerting responsibility[ies]" that fall to us as spiritual beings living in the modern world, for the faithful reader possesses a truly awesome power and duty associated with preserving for posterity great works of art, effectively preventing their passing out of our lived cultural experience (III 1008).

With all that in mind, this introduction seeks to make the case for a writer and body of work that has for too long suffered critical and artistic neglect in the English-speaking world. This introduction, however contrary to the spirit of Péguy's thought, might instead be conceived as an invitation to English-language readers, reminding them that there is still so much to discover beyond the far-flung linguistic horizons they enjoy as speakers of the world's predominant *lingua franca*. For all those who make this effort to go beyond these horizons and to acquaint themselves with this exciting, probing, and beautiful text, a powerful new critical perspective awaits them. For Péguy's oeuvre has much to offer our own fragile times, particularly in its passionate exploration and call to a renewed form of ethical duty and civic engagement arising out of this radical new practice of reading. Conceiving of tradition as an ever-fertile source of creative renewal capable and indeed needing to be continually "mise-en-oeuvre" within the unfolding space of the present, Péguy would develop a hermeneutic approach that sought to render account of the past while retaining a steadfast openness to the newly engendered political, cultural, and artistic conditions of his era. Fundamental to this new practice of interpretation would be a type of radical repurposing of art as a means for developing the type of ideal readers, and in turn citizens, of which Péguy felt the modern world so sorely in need.

Through this cultivation of a new literary and civic sensibility Péguy aimed to bring about a profound refashioning of political identity and collective action within the democratic institutions of his time, which he felt to be increasingly given over to the corrupting influences of oligarchy and demagoguery. Neither reactionary nor

hermetic, the mystical form of civic engagement that he proposed would contain a distinctly political valence, yet one that has resisted easy forms of categorization. Perhaps because of this, Péguy's work has been taken up at a number of points across the French political landscape of the past century. It has, as we shall see, also known its fair share of controversy. Yet, interest in his oeuvre has grown in recent years as contemporary France struggles to define its own political and cultural future in a post-Brexit world. The binary political division between right and left, inaugurated in the physical layout of the National Assembly during the French Revolution, rather than stimulating democratic debate and civic participation now seems largely oriented towards a form of demagogic pandering to a frustrated and increasingly disaffected electorate. Might other forms of thought, like Péguy's call to a reanimated form of civic virtue grounded in a republican ethics, be capable of offering a new foundation for the formulation of what Chantal Mouffe has called an agonistic democracy and a radical politics? I believe they can, and this introduction will ultimately seek to lay the grounds for just how Péguy's oeuvre might help us to go about framing such a political project. For his work anticipates so many of the current debates on community, in regards to its feasibility and desirability within a world in which community has and continues to be used as an exclusionary principle. Similar to Mouffe, Jean-Luc Nancy, and Alasdair Macintyre, Péguy offers a host of ideas for helping us rethink our concepts of community, politics, and identity within the modern age.

In this struggle to formulate a new we-the-people, Péguy's stubborn mix of spiritual and political will has a good deal to offer us all. But before discussing any of these larger claims this introduction will start with Péguy himself, both the man and the polemicist, focusing upon the political alliances and friendships that marked his relatively short life. It is against this biographical backdrop that we can then begin to examine the textual history of *Note conjointe* itself before in turn moving on to the long and complicated history surrounding the reception of Péguy's work over the last century. The question of Péguy's unique style will return throughout this study. For Buffon's claim that "the style is the man himself" was perhaps never so apt as in the case of Péguy. As we will see, Péguy was, for all his religious fervor, a candid observer and avid chronicler of this world, intent on bending our attention to the ever-renewing moment and space of the present, layered over as it was with the textual surfeit of modern print technologies. It was this mystical present that would serve as the generative grounds for ethical action, as well as for all political engagement, in Péguy's system of thought.

Out of this dynamic *locus communis* of the present, Péguy would seek to give voice to his own recurrent experience of grace as the mystical renewal of the very conditions and possibility for freedom within the modern world. For Péguy, this "mutual exigency" of freedom and grace remained inescapably bound up with the pursuit of the spiritual and political ideal of *fraternité*—an ideal that remained a constant throughout the whole of his work and which would serve as the foundation for his new model of literary and political sensibility. Grace thus becomes something

of the quintessential experience of modernity for Péguy, not yet in any democratic or widespread sense but in the timeless, mystical impulse, entirely Bergsonian in nature, that presses increasingly in upon him in the gloomy and pessimistic conditions on the eve of World War I. Ultimately, it is out of this *locus* of grace commingled with pessimism that Péguy's appeal to a renewed form of civic engagement, geared towards the pursuit of a common good, will achieve its strongest formulation.

Yet, as I will argue, the specifically political valence of Péguy's thought has, for English-language readers in particular, too often been obscured by the more mystical and religious components of his work. As such it has, within the larger context of his oeuvre, tended to remain largely virtual, to borrow Bergson's term. Now available for the first time in English, it awaits a more comprehensive actualization within our own historical moment, an actualization, which as Deleuze suggests, would not be a throwback or revival of a past meaning, but something new in the emerging present today (*Bergsonism* 70-1). For such a novel undertaking as this, it is a work that will require all the readers it can find. For Péguy's thought and oeuvre provide an invaluable framework, I believe, for helping us think through our own theorizations of identity, agency, and sovereignty within the contemporary world. Yet, in order to do so, one must, as Péguy himself would counsel, avoid disavowing the specific aesthetic and political commitments that inform one's readings. This introduction thus seeks to lay out the case for an experientially-thick, affective, and embodied understanding of identity and collective belonging as modalities for a more politically just and democratic world.

## Péguy and His Intellectual Milieu

There are challenges unique to any and all translation projects, and in Péguy's case among the foremost difficulties would seem to be, as Pierre Manent has noted, how to "give an idea of his greatness when nearly everything he wrote is buried deep in French history, when everything he wrote seems to be essentially linked to an explicitly French perspective" (Foreword ix). Indeed, Péguy's thought and writing offer a number of peculiar configurations that make for an entirely singular version of literary modernism caught midway, particularly in *Note conjointe*, between an anti-modernist rejection of the political and scientific thrust of France's Third Republic and an enthusiastic championing of Henri Bergson's philosophical method as a means for recuperating the deeper, spiritual values in danger of disappearing under the advance of a progress-minded modernity. Anti-positivist as both these attitudes were, in Péguy's poetics they were balanced out by a thoroughly modernist attention to the intrinsic qualities of the text-in-itself as a focalizing instance for what the American New Critics would later call the aesthetic truths of reality. Péguy's poetics of repetition and progressive nuance produce a defamiliarizing, yet rhetorically hypnotic effect geared towards a transcendence of habit and ultimate repurposing of art that likewise shared a good deal with the thought of Russian formalists like Viktor Shklovsky.

This peculiar confluence of factors, both formal and thematic, may explain in part the relatively limited reach of Péguy's thought beyond its original Continental context, especially when compared to the work of contemporary figures like Bergson,

Émile Durkheim, and Marcel Mauss. Yet if we are to translate Péguy's thinking and importance into a context closer to our own we might begin not by glossing over the explicitly French perspective Manent foregrounds but rather by unfolding Péguy's unique theopolitical and literary vision to read it within a larger nexus of modernist thinkers similarly interested in the conjunction of theology, politics, and a type of radical refunctioning of art at this time. This approach can in turn offer some guidance as to how to respond to the larger issue of the current relevance of Péguy's work in the contemporary world. An initial question to consider here are the ways in which Péguy's poetics and thought attempt to formulate a response to the sustained ambivalence towards secular European modernity and the potential limits of its political philosophy that has continued, as for instance in Étienne Balibar's recent work, up to our own day and age.

Let us begin then with a few points about Péguy's biography. Born in 1873 into a poor, rural family in central France, he was raised by his mother and grandmother following his father's death. The household survived on the modest income his mother was able to generate mending and caning chairs, an occupation Péguy helped with throughout his youth. Attending grammar school in Orleans, he captured the attention of the school's director, who helped him attain a scholarship to continue his studies beyond the primary school level. It was thanks to this scholarship that Péguy would eventually enter the École Normale Supérieure in Paris and study under the tutelage of Henri Bergson. After graduating in 1897, Péguy would begin work on a doctoral dissertation, which he would abandon shortly thereafter. From

1900 until his death in 1914 Péguy would serve as chief editor of the literary magazine *Cahiers de la Quinzaine*, in which he published his own work along with the work of writers such as Georges Sorel, Jean Jaurès, and Julien Benda, among so many others. A staunch socialist in his youth and throughout the period of the Dreyfus Affair, Péguy would slowly distance himself from so many of his former allies, eventually adopting a uniquely heterodox Catholic form of faith in the final years of his life. It was during this period that he also produced the great poetic works by which he is mostly known among English-speaking readers. Serving as a lieutenant in the French army, Péguy was killed in the initial skirmishes prior to the Battle of the Marne. He was 41 years old.

Péguy was by all accounts an unusual and highly unorthodox thinker, creating a body of poetic and critical work that avoids easy categorization. His early death served in many ways to draw over his work a veil of silence that has never fully lifted in the English-speaking world. Yet, if we juxtapose this obscurity in the Anglo-American context with the continued relevance he has enjoyed within a more properly Continental framework, the true measure of Péguy's thought and work comes into more marked relief. Beginning in Péguy's native France, we discover a number of salient features recommending his oeuvre for a more in-depth consideration. First and foremost is the role that Péguy's work played in the decades following his death in the development of a uniquely French fascist form of thought, particularly in figures such as Robert Brasillach and Pierre Drieu la Rochelle, writers who would soon become associated with fascist and collaborationist tendencies. The

history behind an anti-intellectual and uniquely revalued form conservatism of the nature of Péguy's tends to be complex, producing a legacy of thought and action that is highly inconsistent and often contradictory when measured against traditional political categories. Péguy's political legacy in France has proven no exception to this trend, and many critics have sought to push back against the highly selective use made of his oeuvre by his Vichy apologists.

However, one must ask, as many have done in recent years, to what extent can or should we consider his work as proto-fascist in its appeal to a certain mystical, utopian, socialist political vision that would subsequently serve as both a source of inspiration and a figural building block for so many actual fascists? Péguy maintained a lifelong opposition to the rampant antisemitism of his time, was a militant Dreyfusard and staunch defender of the Republic, and was thus consistently opposed during his lifetime to self-proclaimed fascist figures or sympathizers like Charles Maurras and Maurice Barrès. None of this, of course, saves him from being actively taken up by a new generation of French fascists who would find much to appropriate and make use of in the literary and cultural foundations underpinning Péguy's Catholic, socialist, political vision. Like Maurras and Barrès, Péguy would for this generation to come be considered by many on the right as one of the founding fathers of French fascism.

The debate in France over the uses and abuses of Péguy and his oeuvre continues to rage, as his life and work remain widely read and discussed, often in quite diametrically opposed ways. Péguy's thought concerned itself with seeking out

and laying bare the unique history and traditions of a French people, which he considered to be a long-standing yet only recently defined collectivity. His work was thus profoundly engaged with questions of literacy and orality in relation to the mystical, utopian, socialist horizon he envisioned as an antidote to the shortcomings of his political and cultural milieu. A self-proclaimed republican, Péguy combined a strong admiration for ancient France with a markedly anti-academic, anti-positivist hatred for a modernity he characterized as a demystified, dechristianized shell of the heroic republicanism of the past. For Péguy, the evils of parliamentary politics, widespread class division, and an institutionalized loss of faith in the sacred were to blame for destroying the spiritual foundations and authentic popular culture of the French people. Despite being politically opposed during his lifetime to antisemitic figures like Maurras and Barrès, Péguy shared in a very real sense much of their admiration for a vision of premodern, collective identity rooted in certain linguistic and cultural formalist ideals that combined to constitute a uniquely French people. Read in this way, Péguy's association with the history of French fascism appears far less surprising, especially given the potentially problematic stance he would take as a critic of the liberal, democratic political institutions of his time.

Yet, the interest and influence of Péguy's work extends far beyond his subsequent appropriation by fascist ideologues during the interwar period. If we examine both the reception and reputation his oeuvre enjoyed in the decades following his death, we find a situation entirely different from that of our own—one in which Péguy was considered by many as one of the leading figures of European

thought. The German literary scholar Ernst R. Curtius, writing in 1950, grouped Péguy with the likes of Gide, Proust, Valéry, Ortega, Joyce, and Eliot, as representative of the very best of European literature of the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century (xxvii). Lamenting Péguy's death in World War I, Eliot himself had in 1916 described him as the very "incarnation of the rejuvenated French spirit... a peasant genius educated but unspoilt" (19-20). Antonio Gramsci, whose humble Sardinian background bears some resemblance to Péguy's, likewise read him with considerable interest, claiming to have become drunk on the "mystical religious sense of socialism and justice" that he discovered in *Notre Jeunesse* (118). Mary Duclaux, commenting upon Péguy's unique poetic vision and style, had suggested in 1919 that Péguy might be thought of as a type of Walt Whitman of France (146). And despite the almost total silence accorded him by American academe, Péguy has figured as a prominent point of influence or appreciation in the work of thinkers as diverse as Michel Foucault, Gilles Deleuze, and Walter Benjamin (Deleuze, "Foucault" 262). Given the popularity and the extent to which each of these Continental philosophers and literary critics has passed into American academe, it seems appropriate to ask why Péguy has failed to achieve even a modicum of recognition or interest in the Anglo-American academic world?

Comparing Péguy's intellectual trajectory with that of Walter Benjamin, we find a number of points of overlap, beginning perhaps most notably with a shared extra-institutional perspective that helped to shape for both men the overall development of their thought. In the immediate fallout of the Dreyfus Affair, Péguy

found himself caught between the Sorbonne's largely Dreyfusard, yet predominantly sociological, scientific, and historicist orientation, and the Académie Française's literary, humanistic, and conservative grounding, which was paired though with a staunch anti-Dreyfusard politics. Given the general impossibility of finding an intellectual and political home within this institutional framework, Péguy would effectively renounce his academic aspirations after 1910, abandoning over three years of research and writing directed towards a potential doctoral thesis to retreat into a type of artistic and spiritual hiatus that would see him reemerge as a poet and Catholic in the final years of his life. Benjamin's intellectual development would be similarly eclectic, as he too found himself often ill-suited for the more programmatic political and academic modes of thought holding sway in Germany at that time. Like Péguy, Benjamin was actively interested in recovering a mystical heritage, both Jewish and heterodox Christian, which he sought to match up against a uniquely refigured reading of Western rationality. The unorthodox, broadly socialist visions that both Péguy and Benjamin maintained to varying degrees at different points in their lives remained for both men relatively inchoate in regards to a more systematic development. Add to this the decidedly extra-institutional quality of thought resulting from both Péguy's and Benjamin's exclusion from their relative university systems, and the economic and personal security this type of teaching position would have entailed for both men, and you find a number of shared intellectual preoccupations.

Benjamin, born some nineteen years after Péguy, and ever the astute follower of French culture and letters, had more than just a passing knowledge of Péguy's

thought and work. Both shared a passionate concern for understanding the role of the modern intellectual within the larger social order of their time. To this end, Benjamin's 1934 essay "The Present Social Situation of the French Writer" frames Péguy's life and work as "still important today, thanks to the lucidity and energy with which he sought to define the role of the intellectual" (750). This is no small compliment coming from Benjamin, whose "The Author as Producer" essay dates from the same year, marking a period of particularly heightened interest in situating the role of intellectual and artistic production within a living social context, a field of struggle that refused conventional bourgeois hierarchies serving to delineate mental and manual labor. Although Péguy and Benjamin would have certainly differed in regards to questions of technique as well as in their prescriptions for a desired makeover of society, each sought to unseat the bourgeois intellectuals' privileged position of production within what they conceived as a flawed social order.

Benjamin would express similar appreciation for what he claimed were Péguy's numerous "attempts to breathe life into [the] notion of the 'spirit'" (750), a rather interesting commentary if we consider that at the same historical moment of Benjamin's article writers like Brasillach and Drieu la Rochelle were actively taking up Péguy's work to breath new fascist life into their very own notion of spirit. Benjamin, for his part, adds that "no one has striven more fervently to give [spirit] flesh and bones than Charles Péguy, who appealed to the forces of the soil and of faith to assign intellectuals a place in the life of the nation and of history, although—

unlike Barrès—he does not renounce the libertarian and anarchic elements they drew from the traditions of the French Revolution” (750).

Péguy’s willingness to blend a certain libertarian, anarchic faith in the tradition and lives of the people with a rigorous practice of intellection seems to appeal to Benjamin at this moment of his own intellectual and political development, signaling a type of begrudging fascination with Péguy’s efforts to forge a “type of revolutionary intellectual” from a bevy of forces of “prerevolutionary origin” (750). Despite this apparent attraction to certain aspects of Péguy’s thought, Benjamin would ultimately diagnose it, along with the work of writers like Benda, as naively ignorant of the economic realities of modern intellectual activity and thus prone to a type of “Romantic sectarianism” (748). However, references to Péguy occur at key points elsewhere in Benjamin’s work, including *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*, submitted (and subsequently rejected) in 1924 to the University of Frankfurt as Benjamin’s habilitation thesis before eventually being published in 1928. In this work, Benjamin identifies in Péguy a modern example of the 17<sup>th</sup>-century type of melancholic attitude he traced to an earlier baroque world haunted by the irrecoverable values of antiquity, whose lost power nonetheless persists into this day and age (157). Once more this type of willful, melancholic fixation upon past values and social forces that might somehow return to inform and even redeem in some way our own fallen contemporary world appears to attract Benjamin to Péguy’s own unique form of thought. Benjamin’s commitment to multi-temporal constellations

will similarly seek to highlight the potential political resonances capable of being mobilized within the present.

If I have paused at length to draw comparisons with Benjamin, regarded to this day as an exemplar of both critical rigor and anti-fascist resistance, it is precisely to point out the complex history surrounding the reception of Péguy's work—one that continues up to the present. And while I shall return to the more recent debates surrounding Péguy and the fascist legacy he would come to develop in large part as a result of his appropriation by Vichy ideologues, it is important to keep in mind the appreciation reserved for Péguy's thought and work by figures like Benjamin and Gershom Scholem, both of whom might have preferred a far different reading of Péguy's oeuvre. Scholem, in particular, would claim Péguy achieved "an insight into the Jewish condition rarely attained, let alone surpassed, by non-Jews" (82). That Scholem and Benjamin found ample reasons to praise Péguy's work does not of course remove or dismiss the complex and at times problematic nature of the thought behind it. Rather, it adds to the complexity, offering ever greater incentive to explore Péguy's oeuvre in greater detail, all the more so given the long-neglected history it has endured.

Yet, whatever the list of reasons laid out in support of a new consideration or rereading of Péguy, there are numerous challenges that the contemporary reader must address in first coming to his work. Chief among these difficulties is perhaps that of his style, with its digressive, polemical, hyperbolic perambulations that have served to unsettle their fair share of readers. Add to this a penchant for repetition and a

thorough unpacking via a slow nuancing of a particular theme or train of thought and you have a style that seems to invite reaction, both positive and negative, on the part of readers. There is the oft-cited anecdote related to François Mauriac, who upon hearing of Julien Green's new translation of Péguy's poem *Le Mystère de la Charité de Jeanne d'Arc* into English lamented: "Ah, but someone really should translate him into French!" (Green 294).

André Gide was perhaps less dismissive in his description of Péguy's prose, qualifying it as "similar to that of very ancient litanies...[and] the monotonous chants of the heath and the moor; it is comparable to the desert; a desert of esparto, of sand, and of stone." Gide seemed to intend this, however, as a compliment, as the latter part of his quote would suggest: "Péguy's style is similar to the pebbles of the desert, which follow and resemble one another, each like the other but still a tiny bit different; with a difference that corrects and takes hold again of itself, repeats and seems to repeat itself, accentuates itself, and always more clearly" (213). Yet, Péguy's work, while demanding, also contains a good deal of humor, wit, and aphoristic concision. In short, it promises more than enough reward for the efforts required on the part of readers.

### **Mystique vs. Politique—Péguy's Unique Spiritual Lexicon**

Given Péguy's consistent warnings against the categorical nature of modern thought in general, it is ironic that so much of the debate surrounding his work, this essay included, seeks to do just this—to definitively categorize his enormous oeuvre according to the specific critical framework brought to bear upon it. If theory is to

aspire to something more than an academic mandarism it is therefore important, I believe, that we avoid at all costs disavowing the specific aesthetic and political commitments that inform our readings. Indeed, Péguy's work provides an invaluable framework for helping us think through our own theorizations of identity, agency, and sovereignty within the contemporary world. This stems in large part from the protean nature of his thought, which has been and continues to be taken up politically on both the left and right, as well as from the powerfully productive, dialectical tension Péguy establishes between *la mystique et la politique*. In this regard, his work continues to have much to offer our own day and age.

However, many past readings of his oeuvre have inevitably sought to arbitrate between what are often taken to be the primary thematic orientations in his work—the battle between the spiritual and the political, the ancient and the modern. As such, the image we tend to retain of Péguy, to the extent that we retain any at all, is that of religious mystic and enemy of modernity. This is perhaps even more so the case in the English-speaking world, whose familiarity with that part of Péguy's oeuvre available in translation extends only so far as works such as *The Mystery of the Charity of Joan of Arc*, *The Portal of the Mystery of Hope*, and *The Holy Innocents*. Needless to say, these titles, whether one has read the works or not, hardly encourage a very diverse or nuanced reading of Péguy's thematic interests. It must also be remembered that Péguy's poetic production, which constitutes the vast majority of his translated work into English, essentially dates from the final five years of his life and

after his return to a Catholic, albeit extremely heterodox, frame of reference for his thought.

Yet, in examining the unique lexicon he employs within his prose writings one quickly discovers that for Péguy the paradoxical experience of modernity can never be grasped by means of a simple, binary opposition between what he termed *la politique et la mystique*. Instead, Péguy made every effort to remind readers of the fundamentally dynamic tension that exists between the mystical and political aspects of being. For Péguy, this tension must ultimately remain unresolved, serving as the generative grounds for a continued formulation of those necessary, new forms of identification and collective action called for in each historical moment. Only by taking this tension into account could one hope to interpret the modern world in a way that escaped more categorical forms of thought and instead remained responsive to the constantly changing conditions brought about by the vast nexus of political and spiritual forms of existence. This larger hermeneutic approach was modeled upon Péguy's own aggregative, oracular writing style, which consistently called attention to the yet-to-be-resolved quality of his thought, poised as it was between its mystical and political aspirations. And for this reason, Péguy the polemicist repeatedly sought to install himself at the very heart of the political and spiritual crises of his time. For it was there, Péguy believed, that the tension between the mystical and political was to be most intensely felt and in turn communicated to his readers.

Jacques Julliard has similarly called attention to the dynamically generative and open nature of Péguy's treatment of *la mystique* and *la politique*. Julliard finds in

Péguy's dialectical approach here the influence not of Hegel but rather that of Pascal. For it was Pascal who had likewise insisted upon the irreducible complexity of the real even within his theoretical distinction of the three orders of body, mind, and charity. For Julliard, the Pascalian dialectic was one that proposed a very different account of historical progress, one that remained open to the immediate temporal world as a necessary counterpoint to the eternal or supernatural strivings of mankind:

Contrary to the Hegelian dialectic, which is closed, and where the passage between the for and the against supposes the abolition (*Aufhebung*) of the inferior degree, the Pascalian dialectic is open; it takes into account the irreducible complexity of the real, that is, the coexistence within the world of opposing elements. It is vain to think one could arrive at a complete form of truth within this world. There is progression, and even progress, "according to the light one has," and this movement of ascension makes Pascal one of the first and most paradoxical thinkers of progress. However, it is vain to image any possible, harmonious surpassing of opposites other than in the form of coercion and violence. (281)

Péguy's numerous attacks against the modern world took aim at the falsely harmonious account of historical progress it relied upon to paper over the more enduring and productive play of contrary forces or elements that he believed constituted the historical becoming of a people. Similar to Tocqueville, Péguy refused to see any radical break between the *ancien régime* and the modern Republic, instead

claiming that a more subtle coalition of intellectual, moral, and economic forces had gradually come to substitute themselves as the new “potentates of truth, the rulers of justice, the tyrants of liberty, the kings of the republic” (II 510). This increasingly hegemonic belief in the absolute truth or vision of historical progress espoused by the newly victorious Intellectual Party belied the continued lack of widespread civic participation within the political institutions of the modern Republic. It was this fundamental lack of civic engagement, which Tocqueville similarly denounced in his study of American democracy, that Péguy sought to remedy by recourse to his notion of a radically productive tension between the twin poles of *la mystique* and *la politique*.

Péguy’s insistence here upon the dynamic tension between the mystical and political aspects of being should be understood as the guiding principle in his efforts to refashion the literary and civic sensibilities of his readers. The all-too-frequent tendency to read in Péguy a categorical dismissal of the political as a horizon for individual and collective action misses his very own history of political engagement, most notably during the Dreyfus Affair, as well as the important place that a form of political journalism occupied within the *Cahiers de la Quinzaine*. During its fourteen years of publication it featured pieces by Péguy and others on a variety of political subjects, including the Kishinev pogrom, the Russian Revolution of 1905, and the brutality of French missionaries in Indochina. In addition, one cannot discount the role of the *Cahiers* in providing for its readership a certain education in civic virtue. Patrick Charlot for instance reads *Notre Jeunesse* as not just a simple rehashing of

Dreyfusard politics a decade removed from the Affair but rather as a renewed “appeal to civic responsibility” in modern life (207). Charlot places the accent here upon Péguy’s role as both civic educator and political watchdog against the abuses of power. He thus argues that “Péguy has the merit of being one of the first, along with Ostrogorski, to diagnose the evils that inevitably eat away at all political parties: the drift towards oligarchy along with the search for personal glory for many politicians” (204).

Eric Thiers similarly deconstructs the notion of a discrete and radical incompatibility between Péguy’s conceptions of *la mystique* and of *la politique*. Thiers instead brings to light what he reads as Péguy’s ultimate embrace of “democratic imperfection” as a necessary principle for negotiating the complex state of political affairs within a pluralistic society (741). Péguy’s steadfast refusal to reject democratic suffrage, despite his recognition of the deeply flawed nature of its actual practice, is but one of the numerous examples of his begrudging support for a political system he fought fiercely to overhaul, to improve upon, and to radicalize throughout the course of his life (741). Thiers thus sees in Péguy, somewhat surprisingly, one of the most enduringly important thinkers of democratic theory and practice:

Because of his extreme violence, Péguy is not the ideal figure of a democrat. Nevertheless, his foundational opposition between the mystical and political makes him a great thinker of democracy, perhaps against his will. In first reading *Notre Jeunesse*, although one

must come back to it at various times, one wonders what to do, within our own society, with this seemingly rigid distinction. For it appears a dead end, whereas democracy, and life in general, are a constant negotiation with others. If one views it not as a sterile opposition but as a dynamic one, then one can make a personal exigency of it, that of a citizen who accepts life in society and its compromises yet refuses its empty rhetoric. One who refuses to be duped into accepting the violation of conscience by our political, intellectual, and news authorities. (742)

Thiers reads Péguy's dialectical handling of the relationship between the mystical and political as neither sterile nor tending towards any form of sublation but rather as dynamically productive and ultimately geared towards a pluralistic cohabitation of individuals struggling, however imperfectly, towards a common good. Péguy's paradoxical democratic vision returns, in Thiers account, to "a personal exigency" that insists upon the exercise of civic virtue as a means for ensuring a vigorous form of democratic political practice. In response to the parliamentary demagogy and oligarchic tendencies of actual democratic practice, Péguy would seek to reanimate the generative tension he located at the nexus of the mystical and political aspirations of the individual and ultimately of society at large.

While Péguy's oeuvre lays the grounds for a radical new model of literary and civic sensibility, his work can also be situated within a certain vein of thought that goes back at least to Pascal, and that seeks, if not to counter, then at least to

complicate the unchecked spread of Enlightenment rationalism taking place within modernity at the expense of many older spiritual and humanist values. By calling attention to the necessary role of the spiritual being of man within an increasingly rational social order, Péguy developed his very own version of a dialectic of Enlightenment reason, foreshadowing in many ways the model that would be developed in much greater detail by Adorno and Horkheimer. Key to Péguy's dialectical account was the capacity to understand the modern world in all of its complexity and continued relation to the vast cultural and historical heritage that it was unwittingly displacing—to see in it what remained less tangibly apparent within more categorical accounts of this world—and in this sense Péguy's metaphysical project would owe much to Bergson's own philosophical system. One of the many ways Péguy went about framing this general project was through the unique form of dialectical relation he would posit between the two poles of *la mystique* and *la politique*.

Péguy's use of the terms *mystique* and *politique*, while recurrent throughout the vast majority of his work, are never, as so many critics have pointed out, thoroughly or systematically defined. Like many of Péguy's key concepts and ideas, they are the object of a meticulous, deliberate unfolding and creative nuancing that slowly, if somewhat frustratingly serve to bring them into view for the reader. To pose the question as to their meaning is to hit upon the uniquely characteristic way in which form and meaning are intertwined, co-constitutive, and ultimately inseparable in Péguy's oeuvre. Both in Péguy's poetry and in his prose, we find the hallmark

signs of his unique form of thought and style of writing: the repetition, the constant starting-again, the slow differentiation of theme, figure, and image. Among his supporters, it is a style that serves to complicate and ultimately undo any tendency towards a more facile form of racialized, ethnic nationalism, to which Péguy is often accused of giving rise. For his detractors, it is this exclusive focus on style that obscures the more troubling thematic appeal that Péguy's work has had to those less indulgent or rigorous in their consideration of how the articulation of form and content in his work serves to largely undo any sense of categorical certainty.

Perhaps the most well-known, and direct treatment of the terms *mystique* and *politique* occurs in *Notre Jeunesse*, written more than a decade after the height of hostilities of the Dreyfus Affair. As the expression of a more general frustration with victorious Dreyfusard policies, in particular the aggressive anti-clericalism of the Combes government, these two terms serve to mark out what Péguy viewed as the unfortunate trajectory of his former coalition on their path from heroic resisters to institutional bureaucrats. In this essay, Péguy famously declares that:

Everything begins as a *mystique* and ends as a *politique*. Everything begins with *la mystique*, in mysticism, with its own *mystique*, and everything ends in politics, in *la politique*, in a policy. The important point is not that such and such a *politique* should triumph over another such, and that one should succeed. The whole point (what matters), the essential thing, is that *in each order, in each system, THE MYSTIQUE*

SHOULD NOT BE DEVoured BY THE POLITIQUE TO WHICH  
IT GAVE BIRTH. (*Temporal* 31)

Within this essay, Péguy enumerates various forms of Christian, Jewish, revolutionary, republican, and Dreyfusard *mystiques*, to cite only a handful. And while this seemingly serves only to complicate matters regarding any clear delineation between *mystique* and *politique*, the essay itself does offer something of a template for conceiving of the stakes that Péguy associated with each of these terms. As we shall see, *mystique* is fundamentally linked to the capacity for selfless, lucid forms of action in the present, especially when experienced as the locus of historical crisis, whereas *politique* is consistently associated with a type of blind adherence to a party line and to a form of self-interest geared towards a temporal futurity that necessarily sacrifices a more immediate and dynamic attention to the present. The numerous political parties jostling for power thus require, for their continued vitality, this mystical link to the lived experiences, actions, and passions of the specific individuals constituting the diverse social body from which these parties arise. Here it is the mystical that gives birth to and seemingly sustains the political as a form of collective action within the world of men.

Yet for Péguy, the mystical was bound up with an even deeper sense of practical action, despite the tendency to represent it as alien to all forms of praxis. In devouring its mystical origins, the modern parliamentary political order had effectively lost contact with this profound, practical source of action rooted in a more direct contact with the world. It was this betrayal of the mystical foundations of

political action by figures like Jaurès that most infuriated Péguy, amounting to a deep falsification of the political and mystical as such, yet one entirely consistent with the trajectory of modern categorical forms of thought:

Because the politicians make good, or believe they make good by saying that they at least are practical and that we are not. Even here they are wrong. We will not even grant them that. It is the mystics themselves who are practical and the politicians who are not. It is us who are practical, *who do something*, and it is them who are not, *and who do nothing*. It is us who stock up and it is them who despoil. It is us who build up, it is us who create, and it is them who destroy. It is us who provide for, and it is them who leech off. It is us who make works and men, peoples and races. And it is them who bring ruin. (III 45)

In order to counter what he viewed as a deeply flawed representation of the mystical and political, Péguy would foreground the specifically action-oriented component of *la mystique*. For Péguy, it was not speculative contemplation but rather a specific form of action that served to mediate between the mystical and political aspects of being. In his handling of these two terms, Péguy continued to focus upon the necessity of cultivating an entirely new mode of seeing and reading the modern world, one that would avoid the pitfalls of more categorical forms of thought and instead remain open and engaged in the construction of a new, more fluid sense of political becoming.

## Péguy's Experiential Hermeneutics

In the dialectical relation he established between the mystical and political, Péguy insisted upon what Gadamer will characterize as the hermeneutic tension existing between the familiar and the strange, between tradition and the present moment, in which difference, as we shall see, becomes the occasion for a radical new form of understanding. Rejecting what Thomas Nagel would later describe as the positivist and scientific “view from nowhere,” Péguy instead recalls readers again and again to the immediately perceived world-at-hand, with its specific horizon of embodied, situated knowledge—the practical know-how Gadamer describes as “Sichverstehen: knowing one’s way around” (*Truth* 251). It is this direct mode of experiencing and coming to know the world that he foregrounds as an interpretive foundation for in turn negotiating the new and unfamiliar textual forms that obviate any direct apprehension of their specific lifeworlds beyond our immediate experience. As we have already seen, the ideal reader that Péguy hoped to encourage and develop was one capable of inhabiting this “in-between” (*Truth* 295) of disembodied textual past and lived, creative experience of the present, which he conceived of as the timeless space of literature. As we will see, the model of reading that Péguy would develop must have taken into account the changing demographics within France, with its vast portions of society relatively new to the phenomenon of literacy. The specific thematic focus within *Note conjointe* upon non-literate, orally structured societies, along with the aggregative, repetitive, textually stylized form of orality Péguy

employed throughout his prose writings, point to the heightened awareness he maintained in regards to his own social origins.

With the proliferation of print technologies taking place at this time, coupled with rapidly expanding literacy rates across French society, Péguy no doubt sensed these changing social demographics would necessitate a new model for articulating the relationship between the textually-mediated worlds made possible by literacy and the revolutionary forms of political action he hoped to inspire. Péguy's new interpretive model, what Roe calls an "experiential hermeneutics" (221), sought to mobilize a new generation of ideal readers towards his ultimate goal of refashioning political identity and collective action to bring them back into accord with their mystical origins. As we will see, this radical model of civic engagement, replete with its mystical foundations, was one he hoped capable of pushing us beyond the realm of habit, to the very limits of our cognitive experience of the world. For Péguy, practical action must remain dialectically bound to a mystical form of self-monitoring if it is to avoid becoming mere *politique* in the pejorative sense of the term. The danger is always that the mystical lose itself in a type of blind adherence to the categorical dictates of the party line. In rendering explicit this connection of *mystique* to action and *politique* to blindness, Péguy states:

If our first rule of action, of conduct will be to not continue blindly beyond a point of discernment any action begun in the mystical and that finishes in the political, just the same, and parallelly, our first rule of understanding, of judgment, of *lading*, will be to not continue

blindly beyond a certain point of discernment any judgment, any lading regarding an action begun in the mystical and that finishes in the political. One must, first and foremost, and in all things, distrust oneself, beware of oneself, of one's own judgment, of one's own lading. (III 35)

Here action is closely aligned with a clarity of vision that enables one to avoid slipping into the realm of mere *politique* through habit, egoic self-interest, and metaphysical blindness. Clarity of vision likewise implies a more capacious mode of perceiving the world, as flux and duration, thus encouraging us, in the same manner as Bergson's metaphysics, to avoid falling prey to a static, representational objectification of this world. Action finds its correlative here in the experience of hesitation before its inherent tendency towards a purely instrumental, habit-based maintenance of the *status quo*. Péguy's use of the term "lading" [*connaissance*] highlights this potential on the part of action to become oriented towards a mere delivery of freight, thereby losing its capacity for reflection and self-awareness. This fundamental disposition of action towards simply ensuring the proper circulation and delivery of a whole host of ready-made entities—be they material goods or intellectual concepts—seems to approximate much of what Péguy intends by the term *politique* as the expression of a non-dialectical form of action that remains bound up with the juridico-political apparatus of the modern state.

Péguy was not alone in this attention to action as the locus for the expression of spiritual being. Maurice Blondel's attempts to formulate a philosophy of action

fully taking into account the post-Kantian divide between faith and reason serves as an important counterpoint here to Péguy's own conception of a practical yet still mystically-inclined model of faith. Yet, despite Péguy's seeming interest in formulating his own idiosyncratic theopolitical vision in opposition to official Church doctrine, he makes no mention of Blondel's work, which is surprising given that *L'Action* appeared in 1893 and presented an in-depth exploration of the numerous ways, both speculative and practical, in which religious faith could be understood to articulate with human action in the modern world. Péguy's attentions were perhaps drawn elsewhere in the chaotic final decades of his life. Blondel's theoretical reliance upon Aristotle, whom Péguy considered to be a forerunner of scientific, positivist modes of thought, may have likewise soured any potential appreciation of Blondel's work. Yet, there is certainly more research to be done here in exploring the potential affinities that seem to exist in Péguy's and Blondel's thought. Péguy's conception of grace as a Bergsonian expression of intuition and creative freedom calling us to a fuller attention and engagement with the world at hand seems intent on covering similar ground as Blondel.

Yet, for all of Péguy's insistence upon action, grace remained inextricably linked to how he conceived of a more mystico-political form of engagement with the immediate world. Péguy's work thus presents a compelling ecumenical reformulation of the relationship of faith to action, doing so in a way that creates an entirely new theological discourse upon the nature of the sacred within the modern secular world. Much of his critique of Kant, as we will see shortly, will focus upon what Péguy

viewed as the overly pragmatic, and grace-deficient account of moral duty. For Péguy, this moral philosophy had given rise to an overly mechanistic and formalist account of modern subjectivity with little regard for the local, affective, embodied experience of life. Péguy saw in the experience of grace a means of piercing the hardened shell of habit of the modern subject, allowing one to go beyond the moral and intellectual sterility characteristic of the reigning *esprit bureaucratique* and gain access to the mystical origins of a more intuitive and creative form of being. *Note conjointe* overflows with vivid descriptions of grace bursting forth with refreshing, disruptive vigor within a parched modern world. In the final pages of Péguy's immense oeuvre, grace would become a preferred model for the mystical freshness, freedom, and openness to the world that he hoped to encourage in his readers. For it was a grace *se faisant*, to use Bergson's terminology, a grace that was participatory and eternally in the making as much as one that was passively received by a discrete and coherent subject.

For Péguy, the workings of grace were far more complex than modern consciousness, with its facile distinctions between temporal and eternal, active and passive, subject and object would lead us to believe. As he argues throughout his oeuvre, one cannot escape the deep need for grace (and of *mystique* itself) by a flight into the new metaphysics of the modern, secular state. Early on in *Note conjointe*, he discusses the necessity of making oneself available to grace's entry:

“Respectable people” do not bath in God's grace [...] It is a question of molecular and globular physics. What we call the moral is a coating

that renders man impermeable to grace. This is why grace acts upon the most extreme criminals and lifts up the most miserable of sinners. By beginning to penetrate them, by being able to penetrate and enter them. And that is why those dearest to us, if covered unfortunately with a moral coating, remain unassailable to grace, impregnable. In contacting them, grace cannot penetrate them. This epidermal covering. (III 1311-2)

Grace as the expression of mystical freshness, freedom, and openness to the world would thus entail something of the fractured subject Deleuze will draw upon with his own notion of a differential theory of faculties as an encounter that does violence to the sacrosanct, traditional image of thought. So too for Péguy, man must present a point of entry for the workings of grace, which he represents here as a breaking open of the hardened shell of the punctilious, moral subject of the modern world. It was through the violence of such an encounter that man gains access to the mystical origins of being, which Péguy portrayed as the experience of being bathed in creation's continually unfolding richness.

As with Péguy's use of the term *mystique*, grace here functions not as an exclusively Christian experience but rather as reminder of the sterility of modern categorical forms of thought with their incapacity for registering those deeper spiritual realities capable of breaking us open and pushing us to the limits of our conceptual and representational understanding of the world. For Péguy, these mystical realities were forever occurring in the present, and in the present alone. To

see in the present its virtual potential, to see in it the grace it continually offered one, to see in it the one locus immune to the rigid, mechanistic framework of modern scientific and historicist worldviews, all of this suggests something of what Péguy intended to bring about in his readers as a type of grounds for a renewed form of mystical and political action. It was this more subtle, nuanced network of flows, gradients, and intensities that Péguy sought to animate through a renewed form of republican mysticism. This was nothing less than the expression of a collective form of social being that would remain steadfastly in the making and in which each and ever member of the community played a part. For it was out of this experience of openness and shared participation with the mystical origins of life that a new form of collective belonging would ultimately take shape. Rather than any discrete form of political identity *tout fait*, it was for Péguy “[g]race [that] makes us a family and a race” (III 1313).

Within Péguy’s mystical political model, *grace* evoked not just a Christian conception of divine favor but also a whole host of related etymological connotations, including the gracious, the graceful, the free. These combined to produce a powerful antidote to the deterministic tendencies of modern, categorical forms of thought, identity, and habitual action. For Péguy, it was precisely within Bergson’s philosophy of intuition and duration that we again encounter “this profound bond existing between grace and freedom, between the gracious and the free, the irrevocable mutual exigency of grace and freedom” (III 1325). Bergson would thus become for Péguy something of a prophet for the modern world, albeit one outside the Church,

announcing the renewal of the very conditions and possibility for freedom and ethical being within the modern world. It was this prophetic vision that for Péguy opened the way to a reconciliation between his political and spiritual aspirations and lifelong commitment to *fraternité*. For in the debate over the nature of faith versus action, similarly at the heart of Luther's and Kant's own moral philosophies, Péguy will present a new, more tensive account of political and religious sensibility for the modern age.

In *Notre Jeunesse*, Péguy sums up in many ways what he regarded as the essential challenge inherent to all forms of social and political action: "One must always tell what one sees. Even more, and this is more difficult, one must always see what one sees" (III 139). Much of the current critical fascination with Péguy centers upon this capacity not only to speak those difficult truths but more importantly to resist the process of habituation and blindness to a world continually in flux and in need of clear vision that appropriate action may be taken. The nexus of thought and action at work in Péguy's oeuvre, despite charges of being limited by his Catholic mode of reference, remained rich with a sensorially dynamic engagement with the gritty realities of modern existence. To see, read, and come to understand this world was to go beyond the textually-bound perspective of the modern intellectual (always a pejorative term for Péguy), and instead tap into the hermeneutic tension existing between the written text and a more diffuse sense of existential being incarnate in the fluid circulation of life forms that undergird a particular individual's relationship to the community and world he inhabits.

Péguy's emphasis on the oral, situational, and embodied qualities of thought and discourse recalled a whole set of cultural practices that previously served to establish both meaning and a sense of collective belonging in traditional communities. With the decline of this old world of oral transmission a radical, new form of reading and interpreting the modern world had to arise that would be capable of articulating this necessary link between the existential domain of lived experience and the textually fixed and disembodied world of modern print. For Péguy, only an interpretive practice of this scope could hope to bridge the gap between the political and mystical realms, which he saw as dialectically linked throughout the entire history and long development of civilization as the catalyzing forces for shaping human action and all collective forms of identification.

### **Péguy's Mystico-Political Horizon**

Ultimately, for Péguy, *la mystique* becomes a self-monitoring, endlessly creative principle of engagement with the world, similar in ways to Bergson's concept of intuition and Deleuze's Bergsonian notion of the virtual, both of which are associated with a certain disinterested state of being and temporal flux that nonetheless serve as the grounds for practical action within the actual world-at-hand. The heroic action initially incarnate in the defense of Alfred Dreyfus was Péguy's consistent point of reference for a potent form of practical action that would eventually succumb to a mystical hollowing-out as the victorious Dreyfusard leadership took on the rigid model of identity characteristic of political parties. The relationship of identity to political action thus figured prominently in Péguy's larger

hermeneutic strategy for encouraging a new model of civic engagement within the immediate world-at-hand. For action to retain its correct, mystical orientation it must remain attentive to the present moment as the unique locus for what Deleuze would later come to describe as the political fabulation of a people that does not yet exist but remains to come (*Negotiations* 174).

Alexandre de Vitry, for one, has noted that contrary to many of the assumptions surrounding Péguy's oeuvre today, the mystical orientation Péguy insisted upon did not foreclose but rather insisted upon a renewed sense of political becoming for his own age. For Vitry, "Péguy's mysticism does not consist of a reduction of the political sphere, but rather of an expansion—of a movement towards the "eternal," as he would say" (22). For Vitry, Péguy's work remains open, unresolved, and paradoxical in a specifically political sense:

Péguy cannot bring himself to choose between the supremacy of the individual and that of the collective. He is caught between the individual and the social, between solitude and engagement, between the primacy of freedom and the elevated sense of community, so many aspirations that even a century later we still cannot articulate them clearly. With Péguy, each of these principles complements the other as needed, while simultaneously opposing the other, and undercutting the other, preventing any form of doctrinal stability. (23)

Rather than reading this unresolved tension as a handicap, Vitry sees in it a fruitful potentiality for responding to our own political climate, which has witnessed an

increased blurring and breakdown of traditional political parties in recent years as well as a disaffection regarding the participation of many voters in this system. Viewed in this light, Péguy's willingness to embrace a pluralistic model of philosophical and political exchange, all the while maintaining an intense personalist attention to the individual's own spiritual becoming, seems particularly appropriate for tackling today's complex political and moral landscape. Indeed, it was this heterodox model of spiritual and political engagement, which refused the ideological trappings of both a socialist collectivism and a materialist individualism, that would prove so influential to subsequent generations of French intellectuals.

The form of thought and social regard that Péguy developed in his *Cahiers de la Quinzaine*, which served as a model for Emmanuel Mounier's own journal *Esprit* as well as for the unique form of personalism he would develop, has continued to inspire robust and varied forms of debate regarding the nature of political and spiritual life in modern times. Despite his penchant for polemics, Péguy remained committed to a capacious practice of mystical and political exploration of the primary social institutions of his time. His hatred of parliamentary politics did not result in an abandonment of the political as a horizon for collective action, nor did his turn to a Catholic frame of thought allow the mystical quality of his thought to cancel out the more pronounced socialism of his youth. For Péguy remained an irascible defender of Republican principles while at the same time attempting to animate them with a new form of action grounded in a renewed attention to the people. Péguy would indeed claim that a shared principle or virtue was responsible for both his youthful socialism

as well as his turn to a Catholic mode of reference at the end of his life: *la charité* (III 84).

### **In Search of a Forgotten People**

In *Un Nouveau Théologien: M. Fernand Laudet*, Péguy would explore this common principle of charity as the source of both his spiritual and political engagements throughout his life. Building upon his earlier reading in *Notre Jeunesse* of a uniquely Dreyfusard mystique, Péguy claimed that “our socialism was a mystical socialism and a deep socialism, with deep ties to Christianity, a new trunk sprung up from the old roots, entirely already (or still) a religion of the poor” (III 528). Péguy further characterized this relationship between his earlier socialist form of engagement and his subsequent Catholicism as one of a deepening of this prior, heartfelt form of collectively oriented action:

It was by a constant deepening of our hearts along this same path, and in no way by evolution, and in no way by turning back, that we found our way to Christianity. We did not find it in turning back. We found it at the very end of our journey. It is for that reason, I want to make it clear to all on both sides, it was for that reason that *we will never renounce a single atom of our past.* (III 550)

Within this lineage of ministry to the poor, Péguy reaffirms his own political and spiritual itinerary as neither a conversion nor an evolution but rather a stubborn willingness to pursue his own youthful political will to its natural spiritual ends.

Critics like Alain Finkielkraut have, upon the basis of such statements, insisted upon a fundamental coherence throughout the whole of Péguy's diverse oeuvre (*Mécontemporain* 33-4). It is a coherence that highlights the deeply spiritual affinities at the heart of the political defense of Dreyfus, while at the same time bringing to bear the profound socialist orientation within Péguy's heterodox form of Catholic practice and belief. In this socialist "religion of the poor," Péguy established the grounds for "a mystical *discipline*" (III 550) that would only be deepened over the course of his life through its continued insistence on the anti-bourgeois, plebeian foundations underpinning his political and spiritual ideal of *fraternité*. To pursue such a form of mystical practice or discipline was neither to evolve nor to turn back in search of a lost experience of organic unity. Rather it was to deepen one's engagement with the present moment as the sole locus for a mystical refashioning of civic virtue. Péguy's projet of political and spiritual becoming, premised as it was upon a deeper sense of *fraternité*, would come to occupy itself increasingly with the forgotten masses. For it was within this fundamentally egalitarian habitus of the poor and downtrodden that Péguy hoped to recover the bases for a more diffuse sense of spiritual and political community.

If Péguy's political affinities were fluid, his spiritual sympathies were likewise anything but orthodox. Given the intricate relationship of the political and spiritual within Péguy's thought, we might pause for a moment to consider what we know of his religious becoming. For Péguy's own heterodox spiritual journey, and the unique sense of religious identity he arrives at, bear further spelling out. To begin,

Péguy had scant regard for the specifically Catholic forms of political thought and policy existing during his lifetime and maintained little affiliation with any of the groups or positions occupying the charged political and theological space of late 19<sup>th</sup>- and early 20<sup>th</sup>-century France. These included the Neo-Scholastic or Neo-Thomist traditionalists predominantly of ultramontane orientation, the liberal-minded Modernists of various social and democratic affinities, and the monarchist supporters of Charles Maurras with their own brand of Integral Nationalism. At the center of their theological and political debates was the desirability for some, feasibility for others, of reconciling or at least addressing the vast political and cultural divide separating the two very different institutional faces of conservative-leaning modern France, symbolized on one hand by the Catholic Church and on the other by the bourgeois, Republican government of the Third Republic. Despite their enormous differences and a history of reciprocal hostility, Republicans and Catholics had over the course of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and particularly during the Second Empire, found frequent cause for collaboration in the face of the growing threat represented by working-class organization and revolt. All of this would of course change with the Dreyfus Affair, which shattered any enduring hope for reconciliation and further strengthened anticlerical sentiment within the Republican ranks.

The renewed political tension between Catholics and Republicans in the wake of the Affair would become an enduring preoccupation for Péguy, who, due to the unaccommodating and polemical nature of his thought, found himself increasingly adrift and isolated from the various political and theological coalitions jostling for

power at the turn of the century. The Dreyfus Affair likewise put an end to Leo XIII's policy of *ralliement*, which had called upon Catholics to abandon their monarchist sympathies and adopt a more cooperative rather than intransigent attitude towards the French republican regime. For Péguy, however, both Catholics and Republicans had over the course of the 19<sup>th</sup> century been guilty of catering almost exclusively to the political interests of a wealthy, ascendant bourgeoisie.

In turning their backs on the people, Catholics and Republicans alike had lost touch with the mystical, plebeian realm of the masses, who thus remained largely invisible within the parliamentary and religious institutions of the time. Similar to Péguy, Maurras was quick to seize upon this popular estrangement, exploiting the charged political environment post-Dreyfus to formulate a platform of antidemocratic, authoritarian nationalism that would seek its own form a *rapprochement* with the urban proletariat through the unifying principle of antisemitism. Péguy's stance, although politically opposed to that of Maurras, shared a similar mystical regard vis-à-vis the people, with whom Péguy identified and struggled to maintain contact over the course of his career in Paris. Issuing from a peasant family himself, Péguy would increasingly look to this lost plebeian milieu of his youth as a touchstone for his poetics as well as for the content of his political and religious thought.

Fond neither of conservative nor progressive Catholic political policies, Péguy's manipulation of terms of like *la mystique* and *la politique* aimed to give rise to a form of religious faith and political action that he hoped would escape the

spiritual degradation he viewed as characteristic of modernity in general. While admiring to a degree Maurras' own brand of royalist mysticism, Péguy could in no way bring himself to accept the politicized, monarchist version of Catholicism epitomized in *L'Action française*. Nor, despite his past socialism, was he tempted to endorse Catholic social movements like *Le Sillon*, for both were complicit in a parliamentary political system that Péguy abhorred and identified as a primary cause of degradation of *la mystique*. What he sought to outline in essays like *Notre Jeunesse* was a way of resuscitating that vital, mystical link between Church, State, and a people, which Péguy so often associated with a type of pre-revolutionary French Catholic republicanism predicated upon the lived experience of a joyful, laborious collectivity united in "a true cult of work...a religion of work well done" (III 8). Péguy's rejection of *la politique* as a facile category of political will was thus a rejection of the Republic as a political "thesis" to be defended or refuted rather than lived and practiced in a type of spiritual communion with others. This experience of lived tension between *la mystique* and *la politique* is thus crucial to any effort at understanding Péguy's political affinities over the course of his life.

In *Clio I*, for instance, Péguy specifically attacked the clergy for their role in betraying this timeless, pre-political realm of *la mystique* in preference for the cult of practical activity, resulting in a political and legalistic model of the Church having little to do with the lived, daily experience of the people themselves. Coming from a provincial milieu and ever wary of the intellectualization of spiritual and political life in general, Péguy was quick to condemn all those who failed to measure up to the

spiritualized, organic ideal of Christian *mystique* he championed as an antidote to the ready-made forms of thought and experience characteristic of both Catholic and Republican policy at this time. What was needed was precisely a revolution in sentiment or thought rather than, or just as much as, any in politics *per se*, and this is precisely what Péguy sought to engender by means of the numerous polemical attacks he issued from the pages of his *Cahiers de la Quinzaine* on the various Republican and Catholic institutions of this period.

This revolution in sentiment was one Péguy instantiated in each subtle iteration of his prose. For as we will see, Péguy's oracular, repetitive style, along with the experiential hermeneutics he would develop for refashioning political identity and collective action would work to orient his own artistic production towards specifically political ends. Operating out of his small boutique opposite the Sorbonne, Péguy's journal sought quite directly to counter the dominant institutional rhetoric issuing from an academic elite populated by so many of his former Dreyfusard allies. It was this newly hegemonic vision of an arid bourgeois intellectualism that Péguy saw as threatening the mystical, experiential underpinnings of a more capacious French collectivity. His critique of the ideological foundations of this scientific worldview sought not just to counter its premises on rational grounds but more importantly to produce a powerful new mode for mobilizing the passions of his readers, calling them to a new form of spiritual and political identification rooted in a participatory ethics of creative becoming. Following Mouffe's lead here, we can begin to see how Péguy's counter-hegemonic artistic practice worked to "disarticulat[e] the framework

in which the dominant process of identification takes place” (*Agonistics* 93). As we will see, Péguy’s textually stylized model of orality would figure prominently in this process of disarticulation and reformulation of a new principle of identification based not upon the abstract principles of the Republic but upon the popular dispositions, character, and patterns of speech drawn from the rural, Catholic social milieu of Péguy’s youth.

Péguy’s prose writing can thus be interpreted in a very fundamental sense as geared towards generating new forms of political and spiritual identification among the readers of his bi-monthly *Cahiers*. It was this lost world of republican *mystique* that Péguy would seek to translate, by means of his own aesthetic practice, into a contemporary frame of reference for his readers. Similar to Michel de Certeau, Péguy would gradually come to associate orality with a lost “voice of the people” prior to its entry or capture within the scriptural economy of modern print culture (Certeau 131-64). As mentioned prior, from *Notre Jeunesse* onwards Péguy’s rhetorical approach orients itself increasingly towards the recovery and transmission of this lost voice of the people—a voice that will be refigured along forward-looking lines.

### **La Mystique as National Habitus**

Péguy’s poetics thus sought to tap into the plebeian linguistic habitus of his youth as the grounds for his mystical refashioning of collective identity. Within the development of Péguy’s thought over his lifetime, the Bergsonian insistence upon the qualitative multiplicity of lived experience had slowly been translated into a more deeply intuitive, embodied conception of French national identity, in sharp contrast to

the internationalist socialism of his youth. His mystical notion of a more affectively constituted form of French collectivity shares a good deal with Norbert Elias' own theorization of a "national habitus," which he develops in his meditation on the gradual civilizing and acculturating processes undergone by various European peoples or nations with the advent of modernity (2). Marie-Pierre Le Hir has made similarly use of the concept of a national habitus within her study of the gradual nationalization, over the course of the 19th century, of a whole host of habits, thoughts, and emotions that eventually come to be experienced as the particular "ways of feeling French" (2). Both of these approaches present a very different understanding of national identity, which they conceive of neither along the lines of race nor ethnicity but rather as the acquisition of certain dispositions, sentiments, and ways of being that serve to constitute a communal bond between individuals and a nation.

Péguy's own conception of national identity, along with his unorthodox use of the term *race*, can perhaps be better understood along these same lines—as a type of national habitus whose acquisition he would seek to cultivate and encourage in his readers as a means of combating the corrupting influences of an increasingly hegemonic bourgeois modernity. What I have described as Péguy's efforts to cultivate a unique literary and civic sensibility within a new generation of readers, and indeed citizens, can be seen as a sort of microcosm of the various civilizing processes that in Elias' work occur over the *longue durée* and obviously in a less immediately intentional way. Yet, this focus on a more embodied form of national

habitus allows one to recognize the affectively intense nature of hegemonic association that Mouffe points out as the necessary grounds for any enduringly collective form of identification, in contradistinction to the more deliberative and rational models of liberal democratic theory. As I have argued above, the generative tension Péguy establishes between *la mystique* and *la politique* functions along the lines of a similarly impassioned mode of sociopolitical being and praxis, which he sought to establish in express opposition to the flawed parliamentary politics of this time.

Péguy's political ideals, especially near the end of his life, were thus increasingly informed by a turn to a populist frame of reference as a desperate hope for refiguring political identity and civic engagement within a more capaciously conceived French polity—one combining progressive and conservative aspirations within a dynamic attention to the present. To this end, Péguy's unique prose style would seek to promote a radical new model of identification premised upon a form of popular poetics shot through with a whole variety of literary and metaphysical aspirations. It was a style that combined accessibility with a certain classical flair—one seemingly destined as much for the newly literate clerk as for the bookish bourgeois aesthete. By means of this radical new style, along with its underlying model of identification, Péguy aimed to prepare the grounds for the entry into literature and politics of a whole new, previously unrepresented portion of French society, upon which he placed his hopes for a renewal of republican *mystique* and the

ultimate attainment of his ideal of *fraternité*. This, as I will argue, accounts for the curious and dazzling collision of styles and registers found in Péguy's prose writing.

As I will maintain throughout this introduction, Péguy's mystical model of collective identification should be understood not as a form of hermetic retreat from the modern world but rather as eminently political in its aspirations at forging a new counter-hegemonic project of political and spiritual becoming. Péguy's rejection of Republican *politique* in favor of a more mystical form of collective identity has often been read in concert with Barrès' own concept of deracination, which was structured upon a similar critique of Kantian universal law. Barrès' 1897 novel *Les Déracinés* traced the nefarious influence of Kantian thought, introduced here by a charismatic high school teacher, upon a group of pupils uprooted from the local traditions and communal structures of their native Lorraine. Yet, while Barrès' nationalist vision was built upon avowedly antisemitic and xenophobic grounds, Péguy's own political vision remained committed to a fundamentally pluralist model of collective becoming. His critique of the dominant forms of republican rhetoric existing at this time sought to call attention to the political opportunism and latent class interest of the newly entrenched political elite. In doing so, Péguy hoped to combat the profound insincerity and culture of political stasis he claimed was being initiated by his former Dreyfusard allies.

As a counter-hegemonic practice Péguy's alternative model would instead draw upon his stubborn belief in the fundamental sincerity and fraternal goodwill existing within the common man. It was precisely these qualities he hoped to direct

towards new political ends. Pauline Bruley thus points out how within Péguy's rhetorical frame of thought, "[the] restoration of the alliance between reason and passion is precisely what allows one to speak sincerely" (292). This was the cultural stuff, to borrow Fredrik Barth's term (15), that Péguy hoped to draw upon for his alternative model of collective identification—one that would combine plebeian sincerity with a robust new practice of intellection, thus serving to mark it off, in Barthian fashion, from the arid bourgeois intellectualism it sought to oppose. Péguy believed that within this combination of mystical forces lay the capacity for a radical renewal of civic virtue grounded in a republican ethics of fraternal sincerity. As we will see, Péguy's mystico-political vision was a good deal more invested in the ethical than Mouffe's, yet what both approaches share is a fundamental commitment to the importance of forging new models of collective identification as a means for radicalizing the democratic practices and institutions within modern political life. For Péguy, the *Cahiers* would become the necessary platform for cultivating this new mystical form of civic sensibility.

From the beginning, Péguy's efforts to forge a new literary and political sensibility within his readers would prove difficult to achieve. In summoning into being a *people to come*, Péguy's *Cahiers* would need to pursue "two goals that are usually difficult to reconcile: first, to reach as large a readership as possible, and second, to model an approach similar to the detailed work of secondary studies with its rigorous study of primary documents and deep understanding of their context" (Bruley 183). This revolutionary vision for a new model of textual study and critical

reception sought nothing less than to “forge a new audience, one friendly to deep truths and true beauty, a popular audience that was neither bourgeois nor common, neither spoiled nor brutish” (I 922). The critical approach Péguy sought to employ was, surprisingly enough, one entirely in line with very the literary practices encouraged in today’s academy. It aimed to recover from amidst the deep textual sedimentation of a victorious bourgeois modernity the lost voices of the forgotten, the ignored, and the dispersed masses.

Recalling Benjamin’s own injunction in his essay “Theses on the Philosophy of History,” we might describe Péguy’s task as similarly one of brushing “history against the grain” (257). For Péguy made every effort to seek out the gaps, the silences, and the erasures within the official discourses of modernity, as these alone held out any hope for recovering something of the lost voice of the people still extant within these records. Bruley likewise calls attention to Péguy’s frequent use of non-traditional historical documents in his efforts to reveal a more expansive, underlying level of popular history absent, or perhaps immanent, within the dominant accounts: “The opening pages of *Notre Jeunesse* are illuminating in regards to Péguy’s distrust of history as ‘representation’ and his belief that testimonies, chronicles, and similar documents allow one insight into ‘the histology’ of the real social fabric” (182). Péguy’s model for a new literary and political sensibility thus sought to uncover this underlying social tissue of mystical communal belonging buried deep within the official historical documentation.

The tendency on the part of so many critics to read Péguy merely as a figure of antimodern nostalgia, anxious to turn back the clock on historical progress, is possible only to the extent that one ignores both his conception of historical becoming as well as the unique formal qualities of his writing, which call the reader to a more active engagement and identification with his texts. The specific form of Péguy's writing remained inextricably bound up with a larger concern for the recall and renewal of an experience of French republican *mystique* within the modern world, an experience he located within a people now rendered largely invisible, disaggregated by the institutional workings of modernity. Repetition, differentiation, and a slow unfolding of theme are integral components of Péguy's prose style, gesturing to a textually stylized model of plebeian orality that shares a great deal with the modernist innovations of a figure like Gertrude Stein, as well as, in a very different sense, with the experimental poetics of Hugo Ball.

Both Ball and Stein share a similar trajectory from avant-garde modernists to increasingly conservative social critics. Stein's lifelong interest in saints as exemplary, creative geniuses and Ball's late adoption of a form of austere Catholicism are indeed interesting counterpoints to Péguy's own aesthetic and political commitments. Each of their respective oeuvres can be said to give rise to a form of oral prosody in which meaning is bound up with a highly embodied, external voicing of linguistic representation. In Péguy's case, the intimate accord he would establish between form and content must be read in tandem with the mystico-political sensibility he hoped to bring into being through his writing. The highly prosodic,

repetitive phrasing of Péguy's prose, off-putting as it is to so many readers, might be gesturing to something more fulsome than his critics give him credit. Perhaps we might borrow a line from Stein to help us set the stage for considering Péguy's style in more depth: "Always repeating is all of living, everything that is being is always repeating, more and more listening to repeating gives to me completed understanding" (Stein "Americans" 300).

### **Orality and the Voice of the People**

Reading Péguy as a type of modernist innovator *malgré lui* we begin to understand more deeply the unique type of literary modernism his thought and writing represent, traversed as they were by a variety of conservative and forward-looking political and literary preoccupations. As an orally-based stylistic model of representation, Péguy's work would inscribe itself, if somewhat unwittingly, within a spirit of modernist formal innovation that problematized and ultimately called into question his era's dominant historicist and realist modes of portraying the external world and one's relationship to it. For Péguy, the radical repurposing of art as a practice for forging collective forms of identification could only occur if it succeeded in taking into account the new conditions of daily, lived experience brought about by the systemic encroachment of modernity across the near entirety of French society.

Plucked from *l'ancienne France* of his youth by an educational system that made a *normalien* out of semi-literate peasant stock, Péguy understood that the intergenerational communication of memories, traditions, and a collective sense of belonging across time and space would need to be increasingly effectuated within a

textually-bound model of transmission and reception rather than a purely oral one. Péguy's prose writing bears the classic hallmarks of oral forms of thought and communication. However, even the most cursory glance at his prose reveals a form of writing overflowing with the types of literary, philosophical, and political allusions that could never figure in a community functioning on a model of primary orality (Ong 77). Bruley describes "this language that Péguy forges for the people" as a veritable admixture of "peasant references and humanist culture" (305). As such, it achieves a curious synthesis of premodern and modern forms of thought, geared towards engendering a form of collective identity predicated upon a radical, new practice of reading.

In her extensive study of the rhetorical and stylistic effects of Péguy's prose, Bruley documents his early commitment to a "simple style, bound up with an essentialist vision of what it means to be a French speaker" (88). Despite Péguy's avowed commitment to simplicity, anyone who has read his work knows this stylistic principle is only ever partially achieved in practice. Bruley thus describes his prose writing as uniting a variety of rhetorical and stylistic tendencies, thereby allowing him to "defuse the oratorical eloquence by eruptions of humanistic and organic counter-eloquence" (177). Within this mix of compositional elements, Bruley sees a deep preoccupation on Péguy's part with establishing a specific form of rhetorical relationship to his audience. Commenting upon Bruley's work, Gilles Philippe adds that Péguy's style "has as its primary aim to develop a certain voice and to construct a specific *ethos*: that of a journalist who speaks bluntly and directly to his readers yet is

careful to remain at their level and not to dominate them. It is important for Péguy that his prose not betray what he always wanted to be and to appear as: a representative of the people” (“Rhétorique” par. 8). Péguy’s hopes of bringing about a new form of civic engagement in his readership, in which popular sentiment is refigured within a new form of literary sensibility, prefigures the more profound reformulation of political and spiritual identification that he hoped to achieve in French society at large.

This attention to the role that orality plays within Péguy’s larger political vision has too often been obscured by a more facile reading of his Catholic mysticism. Yet, a renewed attention to the stylistic and thematic components in Péguy’s oeuvre allows for a far more comprehensive account of his overall thought. Henri Meschonnic for one has called attention to the role of orality within Péguy’s work: “To understand and hear Péguy as orality and rhythm can be no longer to make the same old distinction between form and content, between the duality of the sign. It is to attempt, by new means, to think, through his writing, the force, the activity, the inseparable link between language, poem, ethics and politics, specifically” (439). While Meschonnic highlights this profound link between orality and politics, the specific implications of this relation remain to be drawn out in regards to the mystically conceived form of French national identity Péguy hoped to encourage within his readers. Here it is important to return for a moment to Péguy’s sustained critique of the dominant historicist forms of literary analysis institutionalized in the pedagogical practices of this time.

Péguy's interest in a textually-bound, creative refiguring of collective identity can be understood in a very important sense as a response to the Jules Ferry Laws of 1881-82 establishing free, compulsory, secular education up to the age of thirteen for both girls and boys. Not only did these reforms wrest control of primary education away from Catholic religious institutions, it also put in place a framework for rapidly expanding literacy rates across the many previously unlettered portions of French society. Backed by Sorbonne literary historian Gustave Lanson, these reforms were expanded further in 1902 to include the secondary school system in an effort to modernize literary studies by bringing them into a more strict alignment with the reigning scientific spirit of the times. As ever-greater portions of the French population acquired literacy, Péguy must have understood the urgent need to develop a new sense of collective identification that was not simply a rehashing of the republican values espoused by his former Dreyfusard allies.

In his classic work *Peasants Into Frenchmen: The Modernization of Rural France, 1870-1914*, Eugen Weber documents the relatively late process of social transformation taking place across the French countryside during the initial decades of the Third Republic. This transformation had a profound linguistic component linked to the fact that outside most of the major metropolitan centers little of the surrounding populace could speak, much less read, French. Despite numerous efforts following the Revolution to forge a shared Republican identity rooted in a common language, Weber notes that the "Third Republic found a France in which French was a foreign language for half the citizens" (70). And while the educational reforms of

the 1880s did much to substitute French for the numerous regional patois as the language of everyday speech, it was not until the First World War that the most rural, remote members of French society were at last compelled to adopt French as conscripts thrown together with other young men from throughout France (73).

This gradual Frenchification was achieved through a number of means, economic, religious, and military, to name but a few. Yet, as Weber points out, it was a slow process that pointed to the localized, premodern, and largely oral social structure of rural French society prior to the radical upheavals that divorced members from their local communities and the cosmological worldview associated with them, transforming them slowly from peasants into Frenchmen. The transition from patois or dialect to French carried with it a process of deracination that was all too often conceptual before being literally enacted in the departure from one's village or region. Those forced to take up this new French language, whether in the classroom, the army barracks, or the factory, found themselves suddenly bereft of the "simple, concise ideas full of images, specific and based on local experience," which constituted their rural patois (92). In its place, they were forced to adopt a new linguistic worldview that valued abstraction over concreteness and that attributed "less importance to the what of things, acts, or events and more importance to the why" (94). This conceptual revolution was mirrored at the level of sound:

Modern French falls lightly on the ear. Popular speech is harsher, more abrupt, more perceptibly rhythmic. French, meant to be spoken in a relaxed manner with a relaxed body, has more open vowels and fewer

diphthongs. The phonetic evolution from a wealth of rude diphthongs to more delicate sounds is clearly related to changing social conditions; or, at least, to the triumph of values related to such conditions. (92)

Viewed in this light, Péguy's curious style reveals a whole new level of meaning in the cultural associations bound up with the recent pre-literate and pre-French worldview that continued to linger amidst the conditions of residual orality of much of French society of his own time. The repetitive, polemical, aggressively sonic qualities of his prose must have served in some sense as a bridge for many of his readers to the newly literate social conditions of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. We see this collision of styles at the very opening of *Note conjointe*, in which Péguy begins the essay with a long quote from Descartes' *Discours de la méthode*, immediately following it with: "And I say: so what" (III 1278). This blunt interpellation of Descartes' text sets up a palpable tension in regards to tone—a tension that will play out throughout the essay as Péguy effectively modulates between the different registers of language that are constantly running up against one another as he moves from one idea to another.

As Walter Ong has pointed out, orality as a cultural phenomenon can be conceived along a spectrum ranging from what he labels the "primary orality" constituted of groups with no knowledge at all of writing, to groups with a tiny literate minority of elites living apart from an illiterate majority, to a condition of residual orality in which a majority of a given social unit now make use of writing yet without having entirely interiorized a literate mode of thought or expression (11, 113-

4). At the end of the spectrum lies a condition of fully interiorized literacy making possible, both for the individual and for society at large, advanced forms of analytic thought, scientific inquiry, and self-reflection. In his work, Ong provides a list of characteristics that he argues are typical both of thought and expression in a primary oral culture versus one of fully interiorized literacy: additive vs. subordinative, aggregative vs. analytic, participatory vs. objectively distanced, and situational vs. abstract. Ong's portrait of oral forms of thought and speech similarly brings to light a host of related qualities that tend to disappear with the advent of print as a widespread cultural phenomenon: redundant or copious, conservative or traditionalist, close to the human lifeworld, agonistic in tone (37-49). Such a list of qualifiers, it is no surprise, could easily serve as a description of Péguy's own style of writing.

Ong's work thus throws light upon the enormously different psychodynamics that necessarily arise within literate versus non-literate cultures and peoples, arguing that it is extremely difficult to put oneself in the mindset of a non-literate cultural perspective. Obvious as this point may seem, Ong argues that it has been largely overlooked in more contemporary studies of narrative and literary style (28-30). Yet, this critical lens has proved crucial, for example, in the understanding of the formulaic nature of oral composition in Homeric epic and other classical texts. An analysis of Péguy's style would seem to call out for this very type of critical framework, particularly in relation to the unique form of literary sensibility that I argue Péguy sought to cultivate through the pages of his *Cahiers*. For it is a sensibility seemingly designed to trouble readers' expectations, as well as traditional

forms of literary reception in general, through its mimicry of more orally specific modes of thought and expression, with their attendant relation to the physical world lying just beyond the literary text.

Readers of all types have repeatedly called attention to the off-putting nature of Péguy's style and thought when measured against our more modern conception of appropriate literary style. As mentioned prior, Mauriac quipped Péguy's oeuvre would benefit from a translation not just into English but into French as well. Deleuze, as we will see, saw in Péguy's style a type of crucible for forging or bringing into being a paradoxical experience of the new out of those constantly returning elements of the immediate world at hand. To do so it had to break with a long tradition of literary and philosophical representation that remained bound up with the sanctity of identity in opposition to all forms of difference. Bruno Latour similarly points out that much of the difficulty of reading Péguy stems from the internalized expectations of modern literacy: "[O]ne understands how a reader placed before these relentless digressions, these monstrous paragraphs, these brutal accelerations, will declare, quite annoyed, that Péguy is unreadable. AND IT IS TRUE. Péguy is unreadable because he refuses readers the habitual criteria of legibility" ("Répétitif" 79). For Latour, this refusal creates a new relationship to temporality that specifically aims to frustrate our modern perception of historical time ("Time" 57).

Cognizant no doubt of the residual orality that constituted French society at the turn of the century, Péguy formulated a personal style that must be understood in

reference to the unique demographics characteristic of French society at this time. It was a style that took into account the fact many people at this time had only recently been brought into a more immediate contact with French as they left the countryside, either on short-term excursions or to move permanently to urban areas in search of work, schooling, and other new opportunities made possible with the advent of railroads and other means of more efficient travel. Péguy himself represented a living link to *la France profonde* now caught up in this sudden shift in the cultural makeup of French society as it transitioned from a heavily rural and agricultural social model to a more urban and industrial one. At the same time, Péguy would contribute enormously to the explosion in print culture taking place at this time by means of his fourteen years of unceasing publication at the head of the bi-monthly *Cahiers*. Viewing this combination of factors in tandem, we can now begin to understand how Péguy's entire oeuvre and style of writing, with its curious model of a type of textually stylized orality, represented a veritable collision point between Ong's condition of near primary orality and one of full-on print culture in which a residual orality must have figured prominently. Any study of Péguy's poetics must necessarily take into account these demographic shifts that traversed and informed his work on both thematic and stylistic levels.

By employing orality as a rhetorical model for addressing newly literate portions of the French population, Péguy's oeuvre worked to forge a new form of collective identification among his dispersed readership. It is a model of identification that took fully into account the unique psychodynamics associated with a residually

oral worldview while at the same time refusing to cultivate a purely nostalgic perspective regarding the past. Péguy sensed firsthand the complex social transformations taking place at this time and knew that to refuse to meet these changes head-on would only hasten one's demise. The challenge was to articulate a new conceptual practice of *la politique* that would not simply devour its mystical origins. This was precisely what Péguy sought to model for his readers. Bruley argues that it is not a purely popular poetics employed by Péguy but rather an ambitious combination of the language of popular activism refracted through a prism of classical thought: "We find [in the *Cahiers*] the idea not of a popular style but of a harmonious one, simultaneously integrating the high style of the man of letters and the vibrant language of political activism" (304). What Péguy's oeuvre thus proposed was a radical new model of identification and conceptual reformulation of the grounds upon which one is able to negotiate the new while maintaining what is most fruitfully generative in regards to the past.

Drawing upon the insights of Bergson, Péguy sought the stylistic means to enact a new mystical political identity that would remain attuned to the space of the present as the unique locus for his melding of conservative and progressive social aspirations. And while Péguy's *Cahiers* never achieved anything more than an extremely limited readership during his lifetime (Leroy 84), this historical reality must be measured against the powerful and enduring impact Péguy's oeuvre has continued to exercise within France over the course of the 100 years following his death. Given that Péguy's mystico-political vision continues to shape so many current

debates within France on the nature of the political and aesthetic, it is of the utmost importance that English-speaking scholars of French culture begin to familiarize themselves with his work. *Note conjointe*, the final essay in Péguy's vast oeuvre, is a fitting place to start. Let us turn then to a closer examination of this work.

### ***Note Conjointe*—The Summation of Péguy's Thought**

Now that we have some idea of Péguy's place within his intellectual and cultural milieu, we can move on to *Note conjointe* itself and its relative position within his oeuvre as a whole. While Péguy's *Notre Jeunesse*, an earlier work mapping his movement from Dreyfusard socialist to Catholic poet, is regarded by many as his most important work, it reads in numerous ways as a somewhat dated and overly exhaustive rehashing of the events surrounding the Dreyfus Affair, replete with a political settling of scores highlighting Péguy at his most vindictive and polemical. In addition, abbreviated, edited sections of *Notre Jeunesse* along with *Clio I* are available in Alexandre Dru's 1958 English translation *Temporal and Eternal*. In comparison, *Note conjointe* displays all of the major themes of Péguy's earlier work: the assorted polemical attacks on modernity, the reimagined spiritual and national community founded upon the reanimation of what he conceived of as a certain classical, premodern French republicanism, as well as the notion of an ideal reader who much like Benjamin's angel of history remains faithfully attuned to a past desperately in need of a textual and spiritual revivification lest it slip forever into silence ("Theses" 257). Added to this, though, is a new facet of Péguy's thinking in the distinction he elaborates between literacy and orality as two fundamentally

divergent modes of reading and knowing the world. *Note conjointe* thus presents what can be regarded as the fullest summation of Péguy's thought in its most recent and indeed final state of becoming. Yet, as we will see, it also presents many elements apt for a subsequent recuperation by the following generation of right-wing French nationalist writers intent on mobilizing Péguy's mystical, socialist, collective vision towards decidedly fascist ends.

Published for the first time in its entirety in 1924, *Note conjointe* was initially intended as the second part to a more prefatory initial essay entitled *Note sur M. Bergson et la philosophie bergsonienne*, which appeared in Péguy's journal *Cahiers de la Quinzaine* in late April 1914, slightly more than four months before his death at the Battle of the Marne. This final spasm of revolt on the part of an increasingly isolated writer would serve in many ways as a sort of testament to a lifetime spent in defense of the spiritual and political ideals Péguy felt were being imperiled by the spread of modern, categorical forms of thought and feeling. The two essays would likewise serve as a final opportunity for Péguy the polemicist to air his grievances against that coalition of modern forces and institutions he felt responsible for the degradation of mystique within the crassly political and bureaucratic modern world.

Both *Note sur M. Bergson* and *Note conjointe* would take as their point of departure the heated philosophical and political debates revolving around Péguy's old friend Henri Bergson at this time. Péguy himself had only recently renewed contact with Bergson after a break some four years prior due to the latter's reticence to write an introduction for Péguy's *Oeuvres choisies* due to the highly polemical nature of its

attacks on the French university system. Despite this falling out, Péguy remained a fervent disciple of Bergsonism in the following years, a support that he felt once again compelled to defend publicly in the wake of the antisemitic attacks on the philosopher emanating from the *Action Française* group of intellectuals linked to Charles Maurras and Pierre Lasserre.

During the height of the Bergson Boom in France (1910-1914), the philosopher of intuition, multiplicity, and duration found himself the figure of both extreme adulation and equally virulent forms of critique. Proponents of Bergsonism, including Péguy, saw in his approach support for their resistance to the arid positivist rationality dominating the social sciences at this time at the expense of more time-honored, humanistic, and non-empirical modes of inquiry. By side-stepping ready-made categories of thought and experience in favor of an appeal to an immediate subjective apprehension of reality grounded in intuition, Bergson hoped to move beyond the modern tendency towards the multiplication of discrete, specialized categories of scientific knowledge to explore instead what he felt should be the true goal of philosophy: the fundamental interrelatedness of all forms of human understanding.

Only in this way might one hope to tap into a deeper, more dynamic connection to a spiritual realm characterized by participation in the ever-changing and renewing mobility of life experienced in duration. Critics like Benda and Bertrand Russell, however, categorically refuted the existence of a rigorous, philosophical method undergirding the metaphoric and literary language Bergson often employed in

his writings. Rationalist critiques of this nature, including those of Neo-Thomists like Jacques Maritain, which were in large part responsible for Bergson's writings being placed on the Vatican's Index of heretical works, deplored not only the disregard for any philosophical systematicity on Bergson's part but also what they feared was a dangerous philosophical and moral relativism lurking at the heart of his philosophy (Roe 192).

For Péguy, in comparison, Bergsonism represented nothing less than a revolutionary methodology for living and negotiating the complex state of modern affairs, both political and artistic, which constantly substituted a whole host of ready-made categories of feeling, thought, and experience for what might otherwise be an experientially rich and creative engagement with life in the true multiplicity of its forms. Similar to Descartes' own philosophical revolution some three centuries prior, Bergsonism represented for Péguy a stroke of artistic genius and critical intervention within humanity's ongoing creative evolution. Freed from the chains of doubt and metaphysical disorder of its era, the Cartesian subject's revolutionary quality stemmed precisely from its capacity to transcend the climate of superstition, fear, and intellectual constraint borne out of the Scholastic Aristotelianism of the Middle Ages and enforced by the Inquisition. Rather than any rigorous systematic approach or infallible methodology, it was the revolutionary and courageous nature of its ambition that Péguy valued most in Descartes' philosophy and which he likened to similar qualities in Bergson's own approach. *Note sur M. Bergson* thus sought to

outline a shared revolutionary and liberatory impulse at work in what Péguy saw as the two most important philosophies of the modern era.

Bergson's insistence on the lived experience of duration through intuition was for Péguy every bit as revolutionary and freeing for the modern individual as Descartes *cogito* was for the intellectual and creative milieu of the 17th century. This fundamental capacity to go beyond the ready-made and to experience life in-the-making heralded for Péguy a radical potential for unseating the scientific positivism and categorical thinking institutionalized across France's Third Republic as the dominant metaphysical perspective of the time. The reliance upon ready-made categories of thought and analysis was, as we have seen, no less prevalent in the field of literary studies, with Péguy's virulence here directed in particular at his former professor and eventual director of the *École Normale Supérieure*, Gustave Lanson. Combining source criticism with an exhaustive search for contextual data, Lanson fashioned his own brand of literary historicism founded upon the twin values of objectivity and neutrality and aimed at situating the literary work within a deterministic chain of causality. Through his reform efforts in the French university system, Lanson's new form of textual analysis sought to modernize literary studies by bringing them into more strict alignment with the reigning scientific spirit. In doing so, Lanson also helped to anchor them more firmly within the bureaucratic mechanisms of state-sponsored scholarship.

Replacing traditional modes of literary study based on classical rhetoric with methods of inquiry and analysis drawn from the social sciences, Lanson effected a

radical and in many ways necessary shift away from the aristocratic model and educational theories still extant from the *ancien régime*. Lost in the massive reform campaigns of this era was for Péguy a more direct and spiritually salutary interaction with the text-in-itself. While Lanson's form of literary historicism could add valuable information that might aid in the reader's appreciation and experience of the text, it could never fully account for the genius and creative artistry of truly great works of art, which for Péguy always existed outside a deterministic chain of events and functioned thus as a transhistorical testament to the creative impulse of humanity in its continued moral and political becoming.

Throughout his massive oeuvre Péguy thus sought to explore a more personalist, mystical vision of social being for the modern era. His dream of a Bergsonian *dépassement* of the false problems and binaries of ready-made forms of thought would look to literature as an ideal milieu for articulating a more collective form of identity and action. Adapting Bergson's insights into time and memory, Péguy would develop his own notion of literature as a modern humanistic space for reading, creating, and participating in the great timeless, redemptive works of humanity as it struggles for ever-greater levels of justice and fraternity. To what extent this dream would remain viable or even desirable in the future would depend to a large extent upon both the value and model educational reformers would seek to assign to literary and textual studies. Classical as his intellectual formation was, Péguy retained a profound distrust of modern intellectualism, preferring instead a more plebeian mode of metaphysical pursuit. It was this broadly social, humanist

lens, permitting a deeper understanding of the world, that Péguy felt was central to all forms of intellectual and spiritual inquiry. His 1904 essay *Pour la rentrée* dove headlong into what he describes as the crisis of education within modern society:

There has never been any crisis of education; crises of education are not crises of education; they are crises of life [...] When a society cannot educate others, it is a society that cannot educate itself; it is a society that is ashamed, a society that is afraid to educate itself; for all humans, to educate is essential to educate oneself; a society that does not educate itself does not love itself, and does not respect itself, and this is precisely the case with modern society. (I 1390)

For Péguy, the deep crisis inaugurated by the advent of the modern world was the severed relationship of the individual to the larger material and social worlds. His efforts to engender a new collective sense of becoming, both political and moral, was thus founded upon a renewed form of mystical understanding or relationship to world and past. In doing so, it took as its chief enemy, the category of the *intellectuel*, as both a form of individual identity and a collective way of being in the world. To say that we have lost this aspect of Péguy's critique is a gross understatement. In the niggling inquiry into the exact nature of *la mystique* we continue to miss the more radical denunciation of bourgeois intellectualism that traverses Péguy's oeuvre from start to finish.

Maurice Blanchot's own critique of intellectuals would similarly take aim at the disembodied, abstract, and specialized tendencies of modern intellectual

discourse. Blanchot would instead call for a form of general vigilance that refused the trappings of power while maintaining a close watch over the abuse of this power—an intellectualism that “knows [its] limits” and therefore is courageous and obstinate without being “credulous” (“Intellectuals” 57). Blanchot’s own reading of Péguy focused upon the latter’s efforts to refigure intellection as a more communally rooted practice—an activity oriented towards the slow production of meaning specific to the unique lifeworld of a community. Produced in the solitude of his journey towards an understanding that was forever in the making, Péguy exemplified a type of political and ethical exploration that remained radically open despite its refusal of the current, actualized forms of social life:

At a certain moment, when faced with public events, we know that we must refuse. Refusal is absolute, categorical. It does not discuss or voice its reasons. This is how it remains silent and solitary, even when it affirms itself, as it should, in broad daylight. Those who refuse and who are bound by the force of refusal know that they are not yet together. The time of common affirmation is precisely what has been taken away from them. What they are left with is the irreducible refusal, the friendship of this sure, unshakable, rigorous No that unites them and determines their solidarity. (Blanchot, *Political* 7)

This silent, singular, embodied act of refusal is what Péguy sought to link up with a larger form of social affirmation. This, he believed, was the most important spiritual task that had befallen us as citizens of the modern world. As we will see, it was

literature that Péguy hoped would provide the means for articulating a new, mystico-political form of solidarity, thus bridging the gap between stubborn refusal and collective affirmation.

Péguy's notion of a literature *se faisant* would require a very different type of reader than what the modern university was seeking to develop. Within the pages of his *Cahiers*, Péguy thus sought to generate not only new forms of debate but also a new type of reader—one endowed with the necessary literary and civic sensibilities to help bring about a new experience of solidarity and fraternity. The ideal reader for Péguy was one who approached the text not as scientific artifact but rather as a living, organic work of art, desiring to enter and experience it from within as the complex unfolding of life in duration. Keenly alert to the prospect of rescuing and reincarnating that moment of timeless, ahistorical poesis to which the great work of art necessarily bears witness, Péguy's ideal reader was motivated far more by a spirit of intuitive creativity than passive receptivity. For only through such a form of empathic identification might one hope to gain access to the eternal realm of Bergsonian duration predicated on the fluid movement of past, present, and future—a thick time experienced not as a chronological progression of events but rather as a living continuum in which the reader is continually invited to intercede.

As would be the case with Proust, memory for Péguy becomes infused with a type of transtemporal and creative vitality, akin to genius in many regards and capable of drawing together the seemingly disparate moments of existence into a meaningful whole that exists nonetheless outside of any mechanistic process of

determination. As the foundation for Péguy's conception of literature and reading, memory will likewise serve as a key element within the form of civic and spiritual resistance he hoped to encourage within his own readers in order to counteract what he saw as the violence that scientific modernity was inflicting upon centuries of humanistic learning. Bergsonism thus represented for Péguy a capacious, revolutionary form of philosophical being in the world, a type of model for what he viewed as a metaphysical pluralism capable of transcending the numerous false and damaging binary forms of modern thought by recourse to a creative and participatory ethos of life grounded in an experience of multiplicity and duration.

*Note conjointe* functions as equal parts polemic against Péguy's intellectual adversaries, namely the anti-Bergsonist rationalists (including the particularly antisemitic forms of critique coming from the *Action Française* critics), and defense of the mystic, premodern legacy Péguy associated both with the Val de Loire region of his youth and the predominantly illiterate, Catholic, peasant milieu of his family origins. Employing his standard dialogic model of argumentation, Péguy posits as his interlocutor in the text his longtime friend and in many ways intellectual opposite Julien Benda, thus framing his essay as a type of model for philosophical exchange between two equally impassioned but sincere participants eschewing all forms of institutional and political enmity in order to engage directly with the pressing intellectual and moral issues of their time. The choice of Benda, as Jewish intellectual and rationalist critic of Bergson, allows Péguy to avoid a more direct confrontation with Catholic intellectuals and the community at large, with whom he was already on

shaky ground due to his Bergsonist principles and support, while at the same time addressing head-on what he felt was the misguided and erroneous tendency of supporters of Cartesian rationalism to frame Bergsonism as fundamentally opposed to human reason and intelligence. For Péguy, Bergson's intuitive approach could more usefully be understood as a profound renewal and deepening of knowledge across the numerous potentially interrelated domains of inquiry as opposed to a mere toppling of rationalist principles. In its capacity to transcend ready-made forms of categorical knowledge, which Bergson traced largely back to Kant, Bergsonian intuition strikes at the heart of what Péguy saw as modern intellectualism's penchant for trafficking spiritual mystique in exchange for political gain.

Against this backdrop of a complementarily conceived form of philosophical pluralism, Péguy unwinds his thought in typically meandering, digressive style, with the essay figurally premised upon the model of a meditative *flânerie* of the two friends and philosophical adversaries about the city of Paris. The point of departure is fittingly enough Péguy's small boutique opposite the Sorbonne, home to the bi-monthly *Cahiers de la Quinzaine* journal Péguy edited and published for over fourteen years, allowing him an unmediated vehicle of expression for his work as well as the opportunity to engage with writers like Benda, Barrès, Sorel, Jaurès, Anatole France, Daniel Halévy, Romain Rolland, and André Suares, among others. Arising directly out of the intellectual and political ferment taking place at this time, Péguy's essay begins on a note of melancholic uncertainty regarding the state of affairs in Europe in the final weeks prior to France's official entry into the First

World War. Developing this theme with typically slow exactitude, Péguy seems to prefigure the impending war as the culmination of a larger crisis of cultural values linked to modernity's unresolved ambivalence towards those constitutive spiritual and non-empirical components of its premodern development.

In what he appears to intend as a complementary and pluralistic form of critique, Péguy sketches out a comparative typology of Benda's and his own cultural and collective histories, which will in turn provide the basis for his analysis and critique of modernity and the intellectual's place and role in modern life. Within this genealogical frame of thought, Péguy inscribes his own Catholic, peasant origins in what he identifies as a tradition of revolutionary indignation, against which he juxtaposes Benda's Jewish, bourgeois origins. Here though Péguy will locate Benda's own cultural and collective past within a lineage characterized neither by revolt nor indignation but rather by a fatalistic resignation borne out of centuries of hardship and persecution. This description of a culturally inherited fatalism and resigned stance vis-à-vis the world at large thus accords for Péguy with the more general incapacity to fully grasp the revolutionary and intellectually liberatory components at work in Bergson's philosophy of intuition. For as Péguy will claim, it is precisely the compromised model of cultural transmission linked to a particular form of reading and existential being that discourages Benda, in this instance, from a more revolutionary, active form of creative engagement and resistance to a world increasingly imperiled by an overly-rationalized and scientific desacralization.

As David Carroll has pointed out, nowhere is Péguy's thought and expression more typologically dangerous and in this sense open to a subsequent fascist recuperation within an explicitly antisemitic framework than in this particular essay (64). And while Péguy never took such a step there would be a whole generation of subsequent French writers who would prove only too willing to adapt Péguy's mystical, nationalist vision and comparative typology to their own political ends. In *Note conjointe*, Péguy's genealogical frame of comparison thus arises out of a profound interrogation of the political and cultural effects of literacy, specifically as it relates to the older, mystical forms of orality engaged with a more direct apprehension of the world. It is a model of thought firmly inscribed in the long metaphysical debate, extending back at least to Plato's *Phaedrus*, concerning memory, wisdom, and their relationship to the written word.

Similar to what will be Jacques Derrida's own treatment of Plato's *pharmakon* (99), writing is for Péguy both remedy and poison, greatly expanding and enabling a general process of remembering but all too often at the expense of a living, experientially situated form of memory, which for Plato remained inextricably bound up with the authentic wisdom acquired through dialectic thought and conversation. In Péguy's case, two things seem to rescue his own voluminous practice of writing from the poisonous qualities he believed it inherently to contain: first, the Bergsonian model of creative intercession on the part of the writer within the mobility and duration of historical experience as it is related and passed on in a specifically textual form; second, the fortuitous proximity to the unlettered lineage of his ancestors,

enabling a certain wariness as to the potentially deleterious effects of literacy and the written word. Within this frame of reference, Benda's long familiarity and engagement with the written word, due to both his bourgeois and Jewish lineage, effectively cancels out this vital quality of freshness and perspective that Péguy sees as necessary for transcending the ready-made habits of thought and experience blocking the modern individual from a deep, sustaining relationship to the world and one's past.

If "the letter kills," as Péguy claims (III 1305), then it is only by recourse to the Catholic, peasant, illiterate heritage of his ancestors that he might hope to avoid the deadening fate of so many of his former Dreyfusard allies who had, he felt, sacrificed the disinterested and eternal pursuit of truth for mere worldly advancement. Here we see the plebeian foundations of a fundamentally populist form of collective identity, which Péguy will develop through his vision of a radical, new form of literary and political sensibility. For in following St. Paul, Péguy regarded the spirit of a living, breathing people as the one, true means for combating and giving life to the deadening technologies of textual inscription. As we have seen, Péguy's poetics, from at least *Notre Jeunesse* onward, concerns itself increasingly with the recovery and transmission of a lost voice of the people, which he hoped to animate in the form of a mystical political renewal. In a fractured, desacralized, modern France on the verge of World War I, Péguy's *Note conjointe* lays the grounds for a refashioned conception of literature as a space and practice of living communion with those vital, embodied forms of cultural wisdom and practical know-how preserved throughout the course of

one's collective history. Against the historicist models of literary analysis, Péguy grounds his own model of reading in the lived experience of the present, but of a present pregnant with the full potential of all that has come before and might once again be mobilized in going forward. For it is within this dynamic locus of the present that Péguy hoped to effect a renewal of civic virtue as a principle for reanimating the collective will of a broadly conceived French polity in its continued historical becoming.

Benda's own account of this period in *The Treason of the Intellectuals* (1927) would, interestingly enough, include his former friend and intellectual sparring partner on the list of those he in turn felt had abdicated their scholarly and intellectual duties in preference for the pursuit of mere political ends. Péguy did not of course live to see this final act of retribution on the part of Benda, and in seemingly fitting fashion his *Note conjointe* would remain ultimately unfinished, broken off mid-sentence by news of the French call to mobilization on August 1, 1914. Péguy would be killed slightly more than a month later. Yet, long prior to his death, the looming prospect of war was already a central concern for Péguy. His mystico-political vision of French national becoming would, over the final years of his life, come to be centered upon an agonistic conception of both political and moral community. Long overlooked by critics, the agonistic quality of Péguy's thought becomes readily apparent once we make the effort to historicize his late thought and work.

## Péguy and the State of Exception

Péguy's model of collective identity would seek to enact a dynamic balance between the mystical and political that would allow for a continued, necessary incorporation of the new without having to relinquish wholesale the older traditions and life forms that continued to undergird and sustain this new collectivity. This mystical process of constructing a new model of civic engagement out of the ravaged political landscape of his time should be understood as both forward-looking and thoroughly practical in nature rather than tied to some lost experience of organic unity. One of the ways Péguy explores this model is through his reading of Pierre Corneille's *Polyeuctus*, which presents a dramatic rendering of the historical confrontation between the Roman Empire and the moral community of the early Church. It is through his reading of Corneille's play that Péguy will seek to give form to his own vision of mystico-political community for the modern world.

In Péguy's detailed treatment of Corneille's *Polyeuctus*, the continued political and moral development of a community is imagined in the form of a direct, agonistic confrontation with the new, the unknown, and the foreign. Péguy's reading focuses in particular upon the adversarial relationship between Polyeuctus and Severus, Roman army officers and friends who will be set at odds by the former's adoption of Christianity. In the evolution of their former friendship, Péguy highlights the profoundly affective changes brought about in both men as they struggle to negotiate their own sense of honor and moral duty. We see traces of this agonistic model of friendship in Péguy's own life as well as throughout *Note conjointe*. Very

early in the essay, Péguy finds his model of intellectual confrontation and debate with Benda not upon purely rational grounds but rather upon a deeply impassioned and adversarial model of direct contact. In these scenes with Benda, both men are described as animated by “this specific taste that is at the same time a gourmandise and a deep passion, like no other. A passion for a certain taste, proper and unique, that nothing can deceive. A passion that, like a vice, brings together, from the farthest reaches, seemingly the most incongruous individuals, and the most heterodox” (III 1284). The pluralistic model of association that Péguy unfolds here arises out of a shared passion for this form of agonistic encounter between adversarial equals.

The adversary thus becomes the fundamental agent of all philosophical, political, and spiritual exchange for Péguy, eschewing the ready-made alliances of party affiliation for a more naked and direct form of engagement. Yet the affective bond that draws both men into proximity is more one of friendly rivalry than any sense of bellicose contrarianism:

A secret taste brings them together or, if you like, assembles them from the most secret corners and preferably from the most contrary of parties. I do not say only the most contrary of political parties. I say also the most contrary of intellectual parties, of spiritual parties. They appreciate good sports. They prefer partners to partisans. They recognize each other before exchanging a word. They have a secret taste for the adversary. They have a secret contempt for the partisan. (III 1284)

This shared taste for a form of metaphysical joust of wit taps into what Péguy viewed as the rich heritage of classical French thought premised upon the chivalric duel of honor (III 1344). In this model of direct agonistic exchange, Péguy sought to overcome the various divisions he viewed as arising under the conditions of modern intellectual, political, and spiritual life, effectively isolating the individual from more robust and salutary forms of contact. Bergson's own philosophical model promised a similar approach for negotiating the deadening terrain of modern intellectual life replete with its categorical forms of thought that do little to challenge our continued sense of political and spiritual becoming.

Péguy's agonistic, adversarial model is not, however, without its moments of excessively belligerent political rhetoric. As Todorov will point out, Péguy's bellicose valorization of a form of heroic action rooted in the chivalrous code of honor is in ample evidence in essays like *L'Argent* and *L'Argent suite*. *Note conjointe* strikes a similarly agonistic tone in its comparisons of noble adversarial encounter, which Péguy viewed as characteristic of French civilization in general, with German technical brutality and militaristic might. Here the agonistic conception of political exchange as grounded in a pluralistically-conceived duel of honor lapses headlong into the more facile distinction of friend and enemy as merely standing in for French and German. This revanchist attitude, characteristic of so much of Péguy's generation at large, is pointed out not only by his critics but also by supporters such as Finkielkraut:

This transformation of war, of heroism, and of barbarity, which Jünger will analyze in 1930 in *Le travailleur*, Péguy, was, in his own time, the best positioned to see approaching. He did not do so because his patriotic euphoria overwhelmed his ability to see clearly. Confronted with German might, France escaped, as if magically, from the modern domination of technocratic boorishness and brutality [*la panmuflerie*], and—honor versus domination, chivalry versus empire—the French style of waging war was decorated with the most august and noble virtues. (*Mécontemporain* 110)

Such is the tension that animates so much of Péguy's oeuvre, a tension that draws into accord, however imperfect at times, Mouffe's notion of the political as the realm of potential, ever-present antagonism and her idea of politics as the attempt to establish durable forms of human existence in the face of this antagonism. There is real debate to be had in regards to what extent Péguy adequately distinguishes, especially in his late writings, between what we might call a Schmittian state of exception existing prior to the war and his earlier support for a radicalized form of democratic civic engagement and participation within the existing social institutions. Does the former negate the latter? If not, just what effect does the growing threat of German military aggression have upon Péguy's republican ideals?

It is the almost total absence of any academic debate of this kind, at least in the Anglo-American academy, to which this essay seeks, in part, to respond. Therefore, rather than disqualifying Péguy's thought based upon selected moments of

rhetorical or polemical oversimplification, we might instead see it for the wealth of potentialities it displays for envisioning a new form of agonistic politics for our own times. One should not forget that it was a similar form of scholarly intervention, on Mouffe's part, in regards Carl Schmitt's work that renewed critical debate on the left over the lessons to be gleaned from a closer evaluation of his thought, tainted as it was by his Nazi ideals and participation in the party ("Paradox" 38). I believe that Péguy's oeuvre, with its own disconcertingly agonistic political orientation, is ripe for a similar rediscovery in today's academy. In this sense, the question becomes less *why* to read Péguy than *how* to take up his work today, and for what ends?

Similar to Schmitt, Péguy's work goes straight to the heart of what constitutes a people in modern, pluralistic society. Péguy's insistence upon the specific virtues that he believed define a nation has, as we have seen, had two distinct political valences. The first, explored by Brasillach for example, tends inevitably, but especially in times of crisis, towards the closed military community of Schmitt's state of exception. The second, explored through Péguy's own actions during the Dreyfus Affair, draws one into the specific bond or practice of "'friendship' which defines the 'us' in a democracy" (Mouffe, "Paradox" 47). Péguy uses, at different moments, the terms *peuple*, *race*, and *république* to describe this mystical bond, which, as Mouffe similarly reads it, constitutes the more politically fruitful side of Schmitt's friend-enemy distinction. This more immediate, engaging, and spiritualized account of national identity would find further expression after Péguy's death, and not merely among his fascist sympathizers. Consider Hannah Arendt's own comments, during

the Eichmann trial, on the challenges of determining territorial jurisdiction in a world of competing legal and political frameworks. Speaking in regards to Israel, she defines “territory” as both a political and legal concept that goes far beyond its geographical form:

[Territory] relates not so much, and not primarily, to a piece of land as to the space between individuals in a group whose members are bound to, and at the same time separated and protected from, each other by all kinds of relationships, based on a common language, religion, a common history, customs, and laws. Such relationships became spatially manifest insofar as they themselves constitute the space wherein the different members of a group relate to and have intercourse with each other. (262-3)

It is not surprising, given her account of political identity and belonging here, that Arendt would also bemoan the decline and disappearance of this comity of nations that, prior to the war, had allowed for the establishment of a certain pluralistic order and respect within Europe for the different customs, laws, and traditions of various peoples.

Reading Péguy through this lens can help to lessen some of the potential resistance to the sense of national identity that figures so prominently throughout his work, and for which he has been largely condemned. For it is predominantly a heterodox form of national identification that aims at a larger form of pluralistic cohabitation, although one rooted in a passionate, mystical form of civic participation

in the enactment of a new political will. As we have already seen, the mystical sense of national identity of which Péguy was in favor arose out of a sense of radical renewal, versus one of complete rejection, of the existing democratic republican institutions of his time, a fact forgotten or rendered invisible in the all-too-facile treatment of Péguy's political thought by many critics. Even Carroll's focus upon the more belligerently militaristic tone of Péguy's thought in *L'Argent* for example refuses or is incapable, due to the largely dehistoricized nature of his reading, of acknowledging the deep state of exception Péguy believed to exist at that time in regards to the very real prospects of German aggression resulting from the Tangiers Crisis of 1905 and the shock it delivered to European consciousness. Whether or not we wish to follow Péguy in foregrounding the nation as the privileged unit of a more affectively rich sense of collective identity, his refusal to embrace any abstract form of political cosmopolitanism must be read within the context of social, religious, and intellectual crisis that he and many others believed to exist prior to the war.

The sense of military crisis Péguy warned of after 1905 was matched by one of metaphysical crisis, which he felt to be equally noxious to France's spiritual wellbeing. Péguy's call for a renewed form of political bond, centered upon his notion of a uniquely French race, had arisen out of his Bergsonian refusal to default to formal Kantian categories in the constitution of a common political subjectivity based upon a universal form of moral obligation. In his critique of Kant throughout *Note conjointe*, Péguy specifically calls into question the suitability of formal logical principles for understanding his more embodied, precognitive account of political

*fraternité*. He instead places the accent upon the Bergsonian concept of duration as a more capacious form of being that overflows the mechanistic accounts of modern egoic consciousness, returning one instead to the particularities of one's lived experience. Péguy's polemical reading of Kant within *Note conjointe* thus focuses upon what he styles as his shared rejection of Kantian principles with his philosophical interlocutor Benda:

They have this idea that Kant did very well but that precisely the great things of this world were not well-made things. That perfect systems of machinery were never smiled upon by fortune. That unforgettable achievements were not the result of impeccable ironmongery. That when it is as well made as that, that it never succeeds, that it never attains that free and graceful crowning of great fortune. That when it is as well made as that, that it is lacking, exactly from not lacking anything, that certain who knows just what, that opening left to destiny, that sense of play, that opening left to grace, that surrender of self, that abandonment to the current's flow, that opening left to the forsaking of a great fortune, that lack of surveillance, that perfect intelligence deep down, that perfect knowledge that one is nothing, that surrender and that abdication that is at the core of every truly great man. That surrender into the hands of another, that *letting oneself go*, that *stop occupying ourselves with it* that is at the heart of the greatest fortunes. Kant occupied himself with it at all times. With Kantianism.

That is not the way to succeed in the world. The most beautiful verses are not those one occupied oneself with constantly. They are those that arrived all by themselves. That is to say, in the end, those that were abandoned. To fortune. (III 1286)

Both Benda and Péguy, for all their various points of disagreement, find a sense of accord in their common rejection of Kantian rationalism and its *a priori* conceptual categories as a model for helping make sense of a more agonistic world in which politics and morality would need to be negotiated differently. For Péguy, this perfect apparatus of “impeccable ironmongery” constituting Kantian thought could never hope to comprehend those ineffable qualities that he associated with a freely offered experience of grace and openness required of every great man to this indefinable quality bestowed upon one in these moments of subjective abdication. Unlike Descartes, Kant represented to Péguy and to so many others of his generation, a categorical formalism completely at odds with the Bergsonian insistence upon qualitative multiplicities as a model for both subjective and collective forms of creative becoming. In Péguy’s description, it is a formalism devoid of aesthetic grace as well, which similarly arises out of the poetic sense of abandonment to the flow and experience of life *se faisant* versus *tout fait*.

In rejecting Kantian formalism as in no way amenable to the conditions of political and metaphysical crisis in the lead-up to the war, Péguy instead foregrounds the importance of an experiential, embodied mode of philosophical, religious, and political exchange. *Note conjointe* stages this very form of exchange in a highly

rhetorical manner, selecting Benda as an ideal adversary with whom to work out, in dialectical fashion, the numerous questions surrounding Bergson's work and thought at this historical moment. This model of impassioned, agonistic exchange recalls Mouffe's own conception of politics. For it is not a shared political or religious platform that brings the two men, Péguy and Benda, together for their long bouts of discursive *flânerie*. Instead, their form of exchange is likened to a fencing match between two intellectual adversaries: "What could be sweeter for the adversary in thought than to feel the presence of the adversary? A stroke such as this, in this perfect swordsmanship, could only be *demonstrated* by him" (III 1283-4). Only such a proximate, agonistic form of give-and-take can render the type of stroke or blow capable of piercing the intellectual armature of one's adversary. One suspects that Péguy's appreciation of Descartes, "this French cavalier who set off so daring and so well" (III 1280), must have stemmed in some part from the latter's legendary swordsmanship.

Péguy will explore this model of direct metaphysical encounter more fully in his lengthy treatment of Corneille's *Polycteus*. As we have seen, for Péguy, politics and mysticism were intimately linked in a dynamic form of popular collective becoming. Similar to what will be Simone Weil's own reading of Hellenic force and virtue, Péguy develops his agonistic model of political and spiritual confrontation through a meditation upon the collision of violence and grace within the history of the early Church. It was this agonistic form of embodied encounter that he would increasingly foreground as a means for bridging the temporal and eternal—the

political and spiritual—components of man’s existence. In developing his notion of a republican mystique, Péguy sought to show how this individualized, adversarial model of encounter opened onto a more diffuse form of collective social agency that avoided the compromises of Durkheimian religious sociality, Jauresian parliamentary socialism, and the bourgeois interests of the modern Church. By tapping into a still extant duration of the people, Péguy hoped to demonstrate the ever-present possibility of a social being that precedes all forms of subjective individuation. This would represent the final stage in Péguy’s development as both a spiritual and political thinker, in which his understanding of community will receive its fullest and most detailed treatment. Ironically, this mature stage of his thought was the result of a more serious engagement with Durkheimian sociology, the longtime *bête noire* standing in the way of Péguy’s humanistic aspirations. It is thus to Durkheim’s model of religious sociality that I now turn.

### **Contra Durkheimian Religious Sociality**

By examining Péguy’s treatment of the figure of Polyeuctus, Cornelian hero and religious martyr, we are able to trace the ways in which Péguy sought to establish a critical distance between his own thought and that of Durkheimian sociology. At stake for Péguy was a more localized and charismatic account of political and moral community, which he believed capable of upsetting the modern tendency towards bulky institutional hierarchies. Durkheim had controversially framed religion as the pre-individuated grounds for the subsequent emergence of all rational and political superstructural forms of thought and social life. Despite Péguy’s reservations about

the social sciences and his lifelong refusal to “worship at the church of sociology” (III 317) he was compelled to take seriously Durkheim’s assertions regarding the origins of human sociality within religious ritual precisely because they departed from similar ground as Péguy, especially in regards to his notion of *la mystique*.

Appearing in 1912, Durkheim’s *Les Formes élémentaires de la vie religieuse* would present a considerable challenge to Péguy’s anti-sociological frame of thought, one that would occupy him through the final years of his life. This challenge, which consisted in accounting for the genesis of a social, lived experience of the sacred or divine within the temporal world, would offer Péguy the opportunity to thematize his own process of spiritual evolution, from the atheist socialism of his youth to the heterodox Catholicism he would adopt late in his life, as a model for helping to negotiate the spiritual challenges of the modern age. Péguy’s notion of dialogic encounter between “history and the carnal soul of man” (III 595) would function as a key figure in this thematization of a more fleshy, embodied experience or incarnation of divine grace arising entirely within and indeed as a type of historical fulfillment of the temporal nobility of man. Péguy’s reading of the figure of Polyuctus, complete with his nimbus of individualized charisma, would look to strike back at Durkheim’s far more systematic and influential account of religious social identity. But before looking at his reading of Polyuctus, we would do well to trace the ways in which Péguy sought to position himself in relation to Durkheim’s larger sociology of religion.

Péguy, like so many other humanistic thinkers of his generation, had consistently critiqued sociology's methodological pretensions as a naive and opportunistic. While setting itself up as a new human science, an institution Durkheim claimed to be both rigorous and moral in nature, the new discipline of sociology struggled to achieve either the experimental precision of the natural sciences or the deep insight into human morality of which it claimed itself capable. What it had was an energetic and charismatic leader in the person of Durkheim. As professor of sociology at the Sorbonne, Durkheim would help head the pedagogical makeover of university and secondary school education throughout France. One of the key principles driving these reform efforts was Durkheim's theory of the division of labor, which he believed provided the basis for a bureaucratic makeover of all academic labor in the hopes of increasing organic solidarity in an increasingly independent and individualistic society. By multiplying the fields of discrete, specialized knowledge, Durkheim hoped to thereby counter the long-standing rhetorical and classical orientation of French learning. In this way, he hoped to bring French universities and *lycées* more in line with the scientific spirit of the times. Durkheim's sociology thus took aim at an entire classical and humanistic tradition of learning, which it regarded as outdated and a hindrance to further cultural, moral, and military development, especially in relation to the increasingly powerful German state.

This new "state metaphysics" (II 550), as Péguy called it, also looked to counter what it viewed as the impressionistic and overly subjective claims of

Bergsonian philosophy, which had achieved a widespread cultural influence at this time. Similar to Bergson, Durkheim's theory of knowledge sought an intermediary position between the predominant empiricist and apriorist traditions of thought. Durkheim's approach proposed to demonstrate the fundamentally social origin of what *a priorist* thinkers considered to be the universal, human "categories of understanding" (*Forms* 17). For Durkheim, society itself was governed by certain universal laws that could be uncovered through the appropriate examination of historical and social data. It was this belief in the fundamental objectivity of social facts that underpinned the scientific claims of sociology as an academic discipline. Contrary to Bergson, however, Durkheim aimed not to unharness human liberty and individual agency but rather to explain them within the framework a new, totalizing moral science. Following the publication of *Les Formes élémentaires de la religion*, sociology of a Durkheimian bent would come to concern itself not just with descriptive detail but also with a type of prescriptive counsel for the continued moral development of society.

In his work, Durkheim's notion of a new moral individualism became the basis for what he saw as a new secular religiosity at work within the modern world ("Intellectuals" 46). While distancing himself from a certain vein of Comtean thought calling for a new cadre of social scientists that would constitute the high priests of a more perfectly examined, understood, and administered society, Durkheim nevertheless saw in sociology the capacity "to open a new way to the science of man" (*Forms* 342-3). Within Durkheim's capacious, new understanding of religion, modern

social institutions, especially scientific ones, acquired the very same type of religious character and standing that in former times a Church or tribal unit possessed. For Durkheim, the religious was precisely that which served to shape collective values, and with it individual identity, through the passionate participation of individuals in the meaning-giving norms, rituals, and mores of a continually evolving human morality (*Forms* 46).

Durkheim's new sociology of knowledge did not look to simply interpret religion as a functional social principle, necessary for the continued coherence of collective belonging. As the *sine qua non* of all social organization, whether in the form of religious sacrament, scientific doctrine, or moral codes of conduct, religion would now allow for an objective understanding of just what it was that made society more than a simple, collection of atomized individuals. The new discipline of sociology, which alone could aspire to such objective and rigorous forms of study and understanding, thus stood endowed with the power to help chart a more harmonious collective future according to Durkheim:

[A]s soon as we recognize that above the individual there is society, and that society is a system of active forces—not a nominal or rationally created being—a new way of explaining man becomes possible...Of course, we cannot say at this juncture how widely these explanations can be applied and whether they are capable of solving all problems. But it is equally impossible to set limits in advance on how far they can go. (*Forms* 342-3)

While more modest in his rhetoric than Comte, Durkheim now possessed both the platform and the means, particularly following his appointment in 1902 to the new chair of Science of Education at the Sorbonne, to adapt this new science of man towards specific pedagogical ends. The air of intellectual and political hubris surrounding this new discipline would be subject to its fair share of criticism. Similar to Péguy, Benda warned against the political dangers inherent to the scientific and moral claims of sociology. Looking back on this era, Benda pointed out how “the dogma that history is obedient to scientific laws is preached especially by partisans of arbitrary authority [which] is quite natural, since it eliminates the two realities they most hate, i.e. human liberty and the historical action of the individual” (234). For Péguy, it was precisely through a Bergsonian approach to human liberty and the creative historical becoming of man that he would look to counter this naive and dangerous conflation of scientific method and moral prescriptive power.

Yet, to do so he would have to take seriously the sociological lens Durkheim had developed in relation to religion as a social phenomenon born of the experience of men. Péguy’s notion of *la mystique* had appealed to a similarly direct experience of the sacred rooted in the affective, non-individuated sociality of premodern forms of collectivity. Following his return to an explicitly Catholic mode of thought, Péguy sought to distance himself from both the bourgeois conservatism of the Church as social institution as well as from a type of fervent, unquestioning belief he felt entirely incompatible with the deeply rational nature of man. Yet, any purely *a posteriori* conceptualization of the divine was, for Péguy, bound to end up complicit

with the political and materialist compromises he saw as characteristic of Durkheimian sociology and, to a lesser degree, the Natural Theology of Church doctrine of this time. Remember that *Note conjointe* was conceived explicitly as rebuttal to a Thomistic Church grown hostile to Bergsonian thought to the point of placing it on the Index. Yet, it was Bergson who, better than any other, represented a new path beyond both the metaphysical skepticism of Kant and the naïve scientism of Thomist and Durkheimian approaches to the continued existence and relevance of the sacred within the rational, modern world.

It was thus between these two poles of Durkheimian sociology and neo-Scholastic Thomism that Péguy sought to chart his course. From the former, he hoped to draw out and mobilize the rigorous attention to the immediate physical and social world with its limitless, untapped reservoirs of freedom and grace. While from beneath the bulky edifice of Church doctrine, he sought to uncover and actualize the mystical generative principle that had given rise to the new moral community of Christianity within the temporal world of antiquity. Not only was a similar irruption of the sacred within the modern world entirely possible for Péguy, it was actively being prepared through Bergson's radical new account of the interpenetration of historical memory within the immediate physical data of consciousness. Taking what he saw to be most fruitful within Durkheim's approach, all the while eschewing its facile objectivity, Péguy sought to recover from the social sciences the very terrain for a new incarnation of the divine within the material world of the present. For Péguy, this incarnation could only take place via a renewed form of contact with the

material and social worlds, an event that would likewise herald the advent of a new moral community capable of bringing about a true *fraternité* of mankind.

Similar to what would be Durkheim's position in *Les Formes élémentaires* two years later, Péguy had departed from the collective foundations of an effervescent participation in the rituals and seasonal rites of passage traced back to a profoundly earthy, peasant milieu. *Notre Jeunesse* would abound with exuberant descriptions of labor, harvest, and communion within the context of a joyful collectivity:

[H]ow these people who liked work worked, people who were not only hard-working, but worked hard, who enjoyed work, working together as a whole, bourgeois and people, happily and healthily; who had a veritable cult for work; a cult, a religion of work well done. Of work completed. And how a whole people, a whole race, friends and enemies alike, all adversaries, and yet all friends, were bursting with sap and health and joy, that is what will be found in these archives, or to speak more modestly, in the papers of this republican family.

*(Temporal 20-1)*

Durkheim would base his conception of the religious upon this same sense of ritualistic collectivity that through force of repetition had taken hold as a binding form of sociality. In *Les Formes élémentaires*, all of human society could thus be understood as an immense conceptual edifice whose foundations lay in the collective, yet largely unconscious, valorization of certain sacred principles. While initially drawn to a similar frame of thought, Péguy would ultimately come to judge this

vision of a diffuse social religiosity as profoundly reductive and little more than tautological in its reading of contemporary science and politics as scaled up versions of premodern, sacred forms of collective effervescence.

In their vastly different readings of the Dreyfus Affair, we see the gulf that separates Durkheim's religious thinking from Péguy's own notion of *mystique*. Not surprisingly, Durkheim's experience and participation alongside his fellow Dreyfusards would figure prominently in his equation of modern forms of collective solidarity with premodern religious sentiment (*Forms* 157-8). While Durkheim drew from the Affair a renewed belief in the effervescent qualities of modern political and social life, Péguy decried the moral self-assuredness and political opportunism of his former Dreyfusard allies as indeed indicative of the modern sacrifice of *la mystique* to *la politique*. Contrary to Durkheim, Péguy had little interest in simply inscribing human freedom and sociality within some novel, yet already existent, moral framework—be it that of the Church or of modern science. Rather, Péguy's notion of *la mystique* represented a breaking-open, through the complementary advent of grace, of the hardened shell of moral self-certainty that continually threatened to imprison the subject in habitual forms of action and thought. It was precisely in this manner that the Durkheimian effervescence of political solidarity, incarnate as it was for Péguy in the early heroism of Dreyfusard sociality, would eventually come to take on the rigid, hardened structure of the *tout fait* characteristic of all modern life.

As a whole Durkheim's sociology represented, for Péguy, little more than an abundantly footnoted apology for this newly hegemonic secular metaphysics. With its

audacious moral and methodological claims, the new discipline of sociology represented, perhaps better than any other institution, the twin evils of modern life. While professing to explore the entirety of the collective life of a people, its methodology assumed a social facticity that left little if any room for freedom on the part of the individual. Whether conceived in the form of a material thing or as an ensemble of unconscious collective norms, social facts were, in Durkheim's definition, endowed with an independent, coercive power over every one of the individuals comprising a particular society (*Rules* 59). This form of social realism could accord no role to the psychic and experiential life of the individual in regards to the continued evolution of a given moral community. Here Durkheim differed notably from Max Weber's roughly contemporaneous notion of charismatic authority as a driving force in radical social change (53). Durkheim's rejection of methodological individualism instead looked to the statistical as its starting point for understanding the social. For Péguy, Durkheim's sociology of knowledge could not help but reify the fluid, dynamic processes of human perception, divorcing them from the durational lifeworld in which, following Bergson, matter and memory would instead be understood to commingle, free of the rigid object-subject relation of Durkheim's taxonomy.

### **Towards a Bergsonian Sociology of Intellectual Sympathy**

Rejecting what he viewed as Durkheim's deterministic and impoverished account of modern social life, Péguy aimed to reorient his sociological perspective on religion towards more dynamic and ultimately creative ends. Pursuing his own form

of Bergsonian sociology, he would seek a rigorous yet less punctilious means of exploring the possibilities for an entirely new form of political and moral community within the modern world. Péguy thus countered the scientist claims of Durkheimian sociology with what he saw as the no-less-rigorous, yet infinitely more insightful methodology of intuition. Following Bergson, Péguy would posit this new method of intuition as the means for introducing greater precision and indeed action into the realm of an otherwise speculative metaphysics. Deleuze would similarly insist upon the methodological character of Bergsonian intuition, which thus allowed one to overcome the numerous false problems of traditional metaphysics as well as to more perceptively analyze a whole host of diversely-constituted composites (*Bergsonism* 14).

Péguy likewise saw in Bergson's approach a practical and accessible means for negotiating the numerous challenges of modern life, with its categorical insistence upon ready-made forms of thought and feeling. If intuition, as Bergson claimed, opens the path to a non-conceptual and non-habitual relation to the world, it does so through an experience of "intellectual sympathy by which one places oneself within an object in order to coincide with what is unique in it and consequently inexpressible" (*Metaphysics* 7). Through the expansion of our own limited frame of consciousness, we are thereby introduced into "life's own domain, which is reciprocal interpenetration, endlessly continued creation" (*Evolution* 195). Bergson had posited this notion of intuitive sympathy as the foundation for a new relation, on the part of the individual, to the otherness of both the material and social worlds. In Péguy's

hands, it would become the basis for his own theory of reading as a form of creative participation in the continued, moral development of the human community.

As impressed as he was by Bergson's metaphysical insights, Péguy had no intention of simply playing the role of faithful disciple. Instead, he sought a means to employ Bergson's method of intuition as a mode of direct, creative intervention within the specific political and social debates of his time. As we will see, Péguy would develop Bergson's notion of intellectual sympathy along two very distinct lines of flight—the first largely sociological and historical and the second more directly artistic and literary. The more explicitly political nature of Péguy's early thought and writing was reflected in his efforts to bring about a new civic sensibility in his readers—one capable of engendering a revolutionary new way of being in the world both spiritually and politically. And while Péguy never renounced his hopes of effecting lasting social change, his turn late in life to a more poetic mode of expression would herald a very different deployment of this method of Bergsonian intellectual sympathy as a form of mystical intervention in the modern world. In each phase, it was Bergson's concepts of intuition, duration, and mobility that Péguy hoped to develop into an experiential hermeneutics for understanding and negotiating the challenges of modern life.

From the beginning, Péguy stressed that Bergson's specific psychological insights, in regards to individual perception and memory, had political and sociological valences that remained to be developed. It was this task that he set himself early on in his career. In response to the moral individualism Durkheim

interpreted as the grounds for a new civil religion, Péguy opposed Bergson's concept of a "sympathetic communication which [intuition] establishes between us and the rest of the living" (*Evolution* 187). For Bergson, "[a] truly intuitive philosophy would realize the much-desired union of science and metaphysics...lead[ing] the positive sciences...to become conscious of their true scope, [which is] often far greater than they imagine" (*Metaphysics* 74). It was this more intuitive approach to social life that Péguy foregrounded as method for understanding the continued political and moral evolution of mankind.

As early as 1904, in a series of lectures given at the *École des hautes études sociales*, entitled "On Political Anarchism: An Attempt to Establish a Methodological Approach for the Social Sciences," Péguy would begin to sketch out the foundations of what a truly Bergsonian sociology might entail. Here he called upon Bergson's critique of language and representation in order to attack the flawed, modern understanding of the nature and development of political life throughout history (I 1798). Péguy had specifically in mind the deeply misleading equation of a modern democracy, shot through with civic indifference and a general ignorance on the part of so many of its citizens, with a democratic antiquity premised upon the civic virtues of shared competence and a commitment to the common good (I 1822-3). For Péguy, the "grotesque falsification" (II 967) of modern democracy represented much more than the triumph of *la politique* over *la mystique*. It was symbolic of a larger metaphysics of the modern world, which tended to elide the difference between

categorical equivalence and deeper relations of equality in its social and historical thinking.

Péguy's Bergsonian approach to sociological analysis thus departed from "a study of the intellectual constraints inherent to language" (I 1799) in order to bring to light the conceptual shortcomings inherent to all positivist forms of knowledge. Tracing this general degradation of democracy in the modern world, Péguy warned against any naïve form of equivalence between a democratic antiquity founded upon the pursuit of civic virtue and a modern democracy given over to the corrupting influence of oligarchy and demagoguery. In response, Péguy would call for the reanimation of an anarchic principle of resistance as a means for reclaiming the space for a new form of collective becoming and popular self-determination. Through his study of the distillation of power within certain linguistic forms (*-acry* vs. *-archy*), Péguy would explore a more intuitive notion of the collective, political becoming of a people—one based upon freedom from all imposed forms of command (I 1820). In the type of boldly synthetic move he would often practice to excess, Péguy sketched out an alternative trajectory of the moral and political development of mankind, running from Greco-Roman antiquity, through medieval Christendom, into early modern philosophy, and which remained to be actualized in a new form of essentially anarchist socialism (II 938-9).

Here we can already see a desire to repurpose and expand upon an individualized notion of intellectual sympathy as means for gaining a broader understanding of the diffuse processes of social development and collective becoming

throughout history. Many had welcomed Bergson's insights into the psychology of individual perception and memory as offering a more harmonious account of the relationship of subjective consciousness to external world. Yet, more importantly for Péguy, these insights represented a necessary complement to the epistemological limitations of the dominant historicist and sociological methodologies of this time, geared as they were towards a social facticity that accorded little role to the individual's part in social and historical evolution. Bergson had described his own philosophical project as seeking to introduce "more science into metaphysics, and more metaphysics into science" (*Metaphysics* 74). Péguy's form of social and historical inquiry can similarly be conceived as bridging the gap between embodied experience and scientific inquiry, both of which were bound up in the French term *expérience* and the Latin *experientia*. The admiration that Péguy professed for early modern thinkers like Pascal and Descartes can be traced to the way in which scientific and metaphysical inquiry remained closely linked within a more comprehensive mode of study.

Péguy championed Bergson's own philosophical approach as similarly radical in its potential application to the full range of human experience, from the level of the individual subject to that of the social totality. He began his 1904 series of lectures precisely on this note: "I have no choice...but to refer to Bergson's theories before going on, as it is necessary that a rigorous sociology must, before all else, look to familiarize itself with the psychological sciences" (I 1798). If, as Péguy would warn, his listeners came across "constant references" to Bergson's thought it was hardly by

chance, for Bergson's theories on individual perception and its relationship to memory would be at the core of Péguy's propositions for a new methodology for the social sciences. Péguy thus described his intuitive, sympathetic treatment of society and history as arising out of a more nuanced and complementary approach:

What interests me is rather to explore how the historian and sociologist can collaborate [...] For me, the sociologist would be someone looking to study societies by penetrating deeply, going further down, so to speak, and the historian would be someone looking to see where a particular society came into being. Rather than being adversaries, they must collaborate with each other; and in all truth, no historian is worthy of this name if he is not at heart also a sociologist and no one can be a sociologist without also being a historian. (I 1826)

Péguy's conciliatory tone here towards the increasingly institutionalized domains of history and sociology, surprising given much of his later rhetoric, testified to his lifelong hope for a more classical and humanistic form of scholastic inquiry.

Departing, once again, from Durkheim's notion of the division of academic labor, Péguy would put forth a more harmonious vision of social inquiry—one attentive to both psychological depth and historical breadth. It was through this lens, with its distinctively Bergsonian qualities of contraction and dilation, that Péguy proposed to treat the complex nature of modern social life in its continued moral and political evolution.

In the final years of his life, Péguy would nuance this earlier notion of a Bergsonian sociology, expanding upon the temporal nature of this inquiry as a means of further contesting Durkheim's equation of modern religiosity with the existent bourgeois social institutions. In his unpublished 1913 essay *Clio*, Péguy would take up the notion of duration as not simply the individualized, embodied experience of time but also as bound up with a broadly popular and thus specifically social experience of temporality:

[A]ll time does not pass at the same speed and according to the same rhythm [...] Not only individual time, not just personal time. This has been known since Bergson, and it is in this that his discovery of duration consists. But even public time, the time of an entire people, the time of a world, this raises the question of whether public time itself does not encompass, does not measure, does not imply a specific duration, a public duration, a duration of a people, a duration of the world. This could be the basis of an entire sociology, if only sociologists were capable of finding in it a point of interest. (III 1204)

In bringing attention to the unique, temporal experience of the people, Péguy again framed his reading of Bergsonian duration within the type of broadly sociological account he seemed to feel necessary for a more collective understanding of religious sociality. Yet, in this reintroduction of an implicit class analysis into his thinking on time, Péguy seemed to gesture to the incapacity of Durkheimian sociology to think beyond the categories of its own latent, political self-interest. Ever since *Notre*

*Jeunesse*, Péguy had foregrounded the notion of a mystical, popular temporality as the sole, possible locus for a resurgence of the sacred within an otherwise dechristianized modern world. It was this mystical form of duration, enabling the continued influence of the past within the present, that Péguy would return to in his search for a new understanding of society, history, and the role of the sacred in modern life. In comparison, the atheistic, bourgeois scientism of the Durkheimian school, with its moral individualism and its spatialized, abstract conception of linear temporality, stood doubly incapable, both in its metaphysics and its methodology, of attending to this mystical sacrality dwelling within a certain habitus of social life.

Contrary to Durkheim, Péguy believed the past remained open as a source of mystical inspiration for the present. It was this necessary openness to the interpenetration of past within the present that Péguy saw as most lacking in the progress-oriented accounts of modern science. Turning away from the more explicitly sociological and political quality of his earlier thought, Péguy would orient his attention toward the domain of literature as a more capacious milieu or arena for staging those agonistic forms of encounter he envisioned between self and other, present and past. Far more so than sociology or history, which Péguy felt bound up with the closed political structures of the modern world, literature presented the space for a type of experimentation with the nature of time and experience, society and the individual, the sacred and the human. To this non-spatialized, fluid experience of time that Péguy described as characteristic of the people he hoped to introduce the sympathetic and intuitive form of social and historical understanding made possible

by literacy. It was thus through the mediation of literature, and a specific practice of reading, that Péguy would seek to encourage this openness to the past as a vital condition for the renewed actualization or advent of the sacred within the modern world.

### **The Work of Art as Event**

Péguy's turn towards literature can be understood as a desire for a more satisfying form of mediation between the temporal, social world of man and the eternal, sacred world of the divine. Refusing the sacralizing tendencies of Durkheimian sociology towards the modern individual and society, Péguy instead looked to literature as a place for exploring the hermeneutic tension at the heart of these more diffuse forms of dialectical encounter. In the evolution of his thought, Péguy would come to propose a very different model of creative intervention arising out of this Bergsonian method of intellectual sympathy. Here aesthetic experience would slowly come to rival and complement those other forms of knowledge made possible through sociological and historical inquiry. In this turn toward literature, Péguy's thinking on the nature of time, experience, and the sacred would take an entirely new direction—one centered upon a radical, new conception of the event. Péguy would conceive the event as a transhistorical form of experience capable of being actualized at any moment through an act of creative remembrance. As point of encounter between the temporal and the eternal, the human and the divine, the event would thus become the locus for the form of mystical being Péguy hoped to encourage within the modern world.

If bourgeois morality closed the individual to the event, Péguy looked to rend him open to a more graceful and diffuse form of becoming. For Péguy, it was those moments of mystical confrontation, preserved through the medium of literature, that retained the capacity for doing violence to existent forms of political and moral identity, thus opening individuals up to new lines of flight in their social, collective becoming. The Dreyfus Affair, as the central political and spiritual event in Péguy's life, and one that he would document throughout the course of his long oeuvre, represented one of these privileged moments of encounter—a “chosen event” that “would never finish” but instead remain open as a type of deep historical “mystery” or “problem” (III 38-40). In his reading of *Polyeuctus*, Péguy looked to the foundational experience of the new moral and political community of the early Church as another chosen event that remained open to us as it came down through history.

In the period between *Notre Jeunesse* (1910) and *Note conjointe* (1914), Péguy would explore an entire series of such events, which he held up as invitations or points of entry for a new actualization or insertion of sacred being within the modern world. Through his intuitive, sympathetic readings of the works of Corneille and Hugo, as well as through the practice of his own poetry, Péguy would come to understand the event as both the incarnation of the eternal world of the divine as well as the crowning achievement of the temporal, social becoming of man:

The Incarnation, viewed from this side, the insertion, this cardinal insertion, thus appears as a receiving, a welcoming, as a recollection of

the Eternal within the flesh, as the achievement of a long carnal series, as the crowning of a carnal race, and not simply as the flesh and earth subjected to this story, but as the crowing, as the fruition of a story that happened in the flesh and upon the earth. (III 236)

As will be the case in the confrontation between Polyeuctus and Severus, the cardinal virtues of Stoic antiquity are neither transcended nor superseded but instead crowned with the new theological virtues of the early Church. For Péguy, the Incarnation should thus be understood as co-participatory in nature, implying a necessary openness, welcoming, and grace on the part of humans towards the advent of the divine within the temporal world of man. It was this pre-Christian, pagan, mystical form of openness, in the figure of Severus, that Péguy would explore as a more dynamic model for faith and for a renewed advent of the sacred within the modern world. In framing a specific image of historical confrontation between the pagan and Christian worlds, Péguy hoped to encourage a similar actualization or creative remembrance of this event within his own era. It was towards this vision of agonistic, mystical becoming opening onto a new moral community that Péguy's sociohistorical and subsequent literary perspectives would ultimately lead.

In his thinking on the nature of the event within the work of literature, Péguy thus proposed a radical new conception of aesthetic experience. This represented a departure from the Kantian focus upon the beautiful and the sublime and instead looked to uncover a more profound, experiential relationship to the past. For Péguy, this new form of aesthetic understanding was in no way inferior to that of science and

indeed provided a bridge to our lived experience of the world. Similar to what will be Gadamer's own hermeneutics, the work of literature becomes a means of entering into contact with a very different experience of the world across time and space—one that disrupts the culturally specific experience of one's own life in order to open one to the new, the unknown, and the other. Gadamer, writing nearly a half-century after Péguy's death, would foreground the eventual nature of the work of art as both inherently communal and directly dialogical in its address to the reader. The work of art is one capable of reaching across different cultures and historical moments to take hold of us and disrupt our familiar notions and ways of being in the world: "When a work of art truly takes hold of us, it is not an object that stands opposite us which we look at in hope of seeing through it to an intended conceptual meaning. Just the reverse. The work is an *Ereignis*—an *event* that 'appropriates us' into itself. It jolts us, it knocks us over, and sets up a world of its own, into which we are drawn" (*Conversation* 71). As was the case with Péguy, the work of art, for Gadamer, would be conceived as both disruptive interpellation *and* communal grounding within a world radically different than our own.

This reading differed notably from Durkheim's hasty and dismissive reading of art as essentially amoral in nature—a superfluous, ornamental luxury, in no way necessary and indeed inferior to the objective forms of knowledge made possible by the sciences (*Division* 13). Péguy's critique of Durkheimian sociology turned in a fundamental sense on the role of the individual within the larger context of social change. In his turn towards literature, Péguy made clear the need for a more dynamic

account of cultural transmission and individual agency in explaining the continued evolution of a given moral community of individuals. In his radical account of aesthetic experience, Péguy sought to address this inherent tension between received tradition and continued openness to a non-teleological form of collective becoming. Gadamer would frame the stakes of this debate in similar terms within his own treatment of aesthetic experience:

Is there to be no knowledge in art? Does not the experience of art contain a claim to truth which is certainly different from that of science, but just as certainly is not inferior to it? And is not the task of aesthetics precisely to ground the fact that the experience (*Erfahrung*) of art is a mode of knowledge of a unique kind...certainly different from all moral rational knowledge, and indeed from all conceptual knowledge—but still knowledge, i.e., conveying truth? (*Truth* 84)

It was very much this task that Péguy set himself in his turn to literature as a medium for encounter with those enduringly relevant events that span time and space.

Gadamer's own thinking on the event would echo and complement the radically new conception of aesthetic experience developed by Péguy within his ideal form of literacy. For Gadamer, this form of approach to aesthetic experience “involves a far-reaching hermeneutical consequence, for *all encounter with the language of art is an encounter with an unfinished event and is itself part of this event*” (*Truth* 85).

As we have seen, Péguy's treatment of the event as dynamic form of encounter opening onto new political and spiritual horizons was premised upon

Bergson's notion of intellectual sympathy. It was this form of sympathy that he hoped would allow for a more complementary accord between the increasingly specialized and estranged domains of metaphysics and modern science. Gadamer would similarly posit literature as indeed "the place where art and science merge" (*Truth* 156). For the unique challenges of the written text made it an ideal locus for understanding the almost magical quality of literacy as a mode for entering into contact with the vast, enduring series of lifeworlds that constituted the ontological domain of the past. Within Gadamer's experiential hermeneutics, the specific mode of being of the text thus became a fundamental point of focus:

The mode of being of a text has something unique and incomparable about it. It presents a specific problem of translation to the understanding. Nothing is so strange, and at the same time so demanding, as the written word...The written word and what partakes of it—literature—is the intelligibility of mind transferred to the most alien medium...In deciphering and interpreting it, a miracle takes place: the transformation of something alien and dead into total contemporaneity and familiarity. This is like nothing else that comes down to us from the past...[A] written tradition, once deciphered and read, is to such an extent pure mind that it speaks to us as if in the present. That is why the capacity to read, to understand what is written, is like a secret art, even a magic that frees and binds us. In it time and space seem to be superseded. People who can read what has

been handed down in writing produce and achieve the sheer presence of the past. (*Truth* 156)

Péguy's own treatment of the event would explore the similarly mystical quality of literature as a medium for achieving a more vital relation to the past. Rather than mere representation or a self-same form of repetition, this relation was one of differential encounter opening onto new lines of flight. Péguy's mystical reading of the event could thus be understood as something of a Gadamerian fusion of horizons in which the continued development of a moral community was enacted in the tension between tradition and newness, past and present, the known and the unknown.

Here Péguy would anticipate in many ways Bergson's much later text *Les Deux sources de la morale et de la religion*, which in turn would bear the mark of Péguy's own thought in the importance it will give to mystical being as one of the chief conditions for the new form of open moral community Bergson envisioned for the future of humanity. As we will see, this final work of Bergson can be understood as perhaps the clearest and most succinct comparison of what we might call, in following Péguy, a Durkheimian versus a Bergsonian sociological account of the sacred. At stake for Péguy in this image of encounter was not just a deterministic versus a creative vision of human sociality and religious community; it was also the very nature of aesthetic experience itself in relation to an experiential hermeneutics grounded in an ideal form of reading. As we have seen, Péguy's ideal reader would be one capable of reanimating those unique moments of mystical insight allowing for the continued, evolution of a specific moral community as it tends towards an

ultimate form of *fraternité*. In the final years of his life, Péguy would seek to transpose this same intuitive sympathy of Bergson's metaphysics into the space of literature. It would thus become the basis for the new literary, but also moral and political, sensibility that he hoped to encourage in his readers. In the final years of his life, the mystical impulse of Péguy's thought would increasingly seek actualization via the transhistorical medium of literature.

### **An Image for A New Moral Community**

One of the ways Bergson will describe the actualization of a new, open form of moral community is through the example of heroes and saints. Péguy would similarly represent the advent of divinity within the temporal world in the form of a few individual exemplars come down to us through history. For Péguy, Polyuctus was one such example, and it will be through his reading of Corneille's tragic hero that Péguy will explore his Bergsonian reading of the image within the space of literature. For Péguy, the image was not simply a means for understanding the cohabitation of past and present within our immediate perception of the world. It also represented the ever-present possibility of incarnation, through the force of memory, of the eternal world of duration within the temporal realm of the present. As we have seen, Péguy had departed from a Bergsonian account of duration to explore a more open, fluid space of encounter between self and other, present and past. Abandoning his earlier sociological frame of reference, Péguy would instead see in literature the locus for a creative remembrance of certain sacred images of the past. Literature would thus become the space of encounter par excellence. For it offered the means of

linking up these memory images across the seemingly disparate moments of time and space, thereby encouraging their renewed actualization within the space of the present.

Departing from Bergson's concept of the image, Péguy would look to establish a more creative and dynamic vision of the moral and political community he imagined for the future of man. In his treatment of the figure of Polyeuctus, Péguy would present the foundation of the Christian community as an event that remained open in its continued relevance to the modern world. It was this image of encounter between pagan antiquity and Christian grace that Péguy hoped to mobilize as a continued model for individual and collective becoming within the modern world. Deleuze, himself the quintessential Bergsonian, would claim that Péguy's discussion in *Clio* of the question of history and of the event surpassed even Bergson's treatment in *Les Deux sources (Philosophes 419)*. As we have seen, Péguy's notion of the event refused all forms of historical closure, proposing instead an open locus of creative becoming in which the reader was called to participate. Deleuze's reading of Péguy will draw attention to these two very different approaches to the nature of historical events:

In a major philosophical work, *Clio*, Péguy explained that there are two ways of considering events, one being to follow the course of the event, gathering how it comes about historically, how it's prepared and then decomposes in history, while the other way is to go back into the event, to take one's place in it as in a becoming, to grow both young

and old in it at once, going through all its components or singularities. Becoming isn't part of history; history amounts only to the set of preconditions, however recent, that one leaves behind in order to 'become,' that is, to create something new. (*Negotiations* 170-1)

Péguy's notion of the image, in relation to his broader conception of the event, could thus be understood in a general sense as encapsulating the various "components or singularities" that allow one to reenter and take one's place within the event as a renewed form of becoming. In *Matter and Memory*, Bergson had described the workings of the "memory-image" in just this manner: "[T]he truth is that we shall never reach the past unless we frankly place ourselves within it. Essentially virtual, it cannot be known as something past unless we follow and adopt the movement by which it expands into a present image, thus emerging from obscurity into the light of day. In vain do we seek its trace in anything actual" (173). For Péguy, the image would similarly become a point of entry into the deeper workings of the event.

Deleuze's explication of Péguy's historical thought highlighted the profound contrast between this fluid notion of trans-historical becoming, made possible by the event, and the closed temporal account of positivist historicism. As we have seen, Durkheim's sociology of religion had relied upon a linear historical account to explain the progressive evolution of the sacred within a variety of institutions within the modern world. While, for Durkheim, science promised access to an unparalleled, epistemological breadth of social facts and universal laws, Péguy instead saw literature as the means for encouraging a new type of relationship to time, memory,

and the event—one premised on depth and the continued coexistence and experience of the past within each moment of the present. In *Clio*, Péguy would contrast these two entirely different forms of temporal understanding: “History is essentially longitudinal, memory is essentially vertical. History essentially consists in *passing alongside* the event. Memory, already being within the event, essentially consists of not getting out of it, of staying within it, and of going back and recovering it from within. Memory and history form a right angle. History is parallel to the event, memory is central and axial to it” (III 1177).

Deleuze would describe this sense of vertical temporality, and its relation to the image, in greater detail within the context of his own meditation upon the cinema. In the gradual process of its technical and artistic development over the course of the twentieth century, the cinema would come to present a radical, new way of seeing and understanding the world. It would be one that, for Deleuze, worked in a manner entirely similar to Péguy’s own poetics. In his reading of post-World-War-II directors like Federico Fellini and Alain Renais, Deleuze would highlight the capacity of these films to engender a new “bursting forth of life, of time, in its dividing in two or differentiation” (*Cinema* 91). Here the slow, temporal progression towards death was balanced out by a very different experience—one in which the timeless space of memory and creative freedom rises up to complicate and challenge the inexorable march of time:

It is in fact like in Péguy, where the horizontal succession of presents which pass outlines a route to death, whilst for every present there

corresponds a vertical line which unites it at a deep level with its own past, as well as to the past of the other presents, constituting between them all one and the same coexistence, one and the same contemporaneity, the ‘in-ternal’ [*internel*] rather than the eternal. (*Cinema* 91).

For Deleuze, it was the cinematic art form that reminded us, via its temporal slicing or imaging of the world, of the continued possibilities of departure from the standard, linear conception of time, bound up as it was with the world of necessity, repetition, and habitual action. This departure represented the chance to see the world à la Péguy—that is, through an entirely new perspective of vertical depth and the contemporaneous existence of past and present. What Deleuze described as the “Time-Image,” in which the relation of cinematic image to any direct form of action remained ambiguous or undefined, encouraged a very different orientation of perception away from immediate action and towards both the recollective qualities of memory as well as the creative potential for fabulating or fantasizing entirely new worlds (*Cinema* 274-5). In teaching us to again see and experience the world in a new way, modern cinema addressed the profound need for belief as a necessary counterpoint to our rational being. Deleuze thus made clear that “whether...Christians or atheists, in our universal schizophrenia, *we need reasons to believe in this world*” (*Cinema* 172).

Péguy’s image-rich notion of the event sought to develop a similar belief in the mystical potentialities of this world, rather than those promised in the Christian

afterlife or in secular accounts of human progress, as a space for continued, creative becoming. Through his reading of Corneille's account of the life of Saint Polyeuctus, Péguy hoped to recover the experience of an event that had given rise to the new moral community of the early Church. The image that Péguy looked to convey was the specific moment of confrontation, a type of spiritual duel, in which the creative freedom of grace encountered and slowly took hold within the stoic nobility of man in his historical becoming. Rather than a simple relation of transcendence, this experience of incarnation represented, for Péguy, a deepening of the temporal world of antiquity, an insertion that would serve to bring about the conditions for the emergence of an entirely new moral community. For it was in Christianity, as Bergson himself would claim, that a truly universal account of human equality was for the first time introduced into the moral universe of man (*Sources* 78).

In *Note conjointe*, Péguy would look to flesh out the full metaphysical implications of Bergson's thinking regarding the image. He would thus offer a two-fold account of the role of the image in relation to both immediate perception and to a more diffuse form of historical memory. In regards to the former, Péguy conceived of the image as something entirely other than representation. In his radical, new account of the image, complete with its nimbus of intuitive sympathetic shimmer, Bergson sought to ground the act of perception within the material world in a way that called into question the conceptual tendencies of the perceiving subject. Bergson's conception of the image would seek problematize the categorical nature of human perception in its continued drive to carve out stable forms of meaning from the larger,

interrelated world of images. In their shared reliance upon the image, perception and memory were, for Péguy, similarly capable of drawing past and present, self and other, into a more dynamic and agonistic form of relationship. For it was here in the immediate proximity of encounter with an objectively alien, material and social world, that the mystical quality of life retained its fullest sense of expression and capacity for affect in relation to the perceiving subject.

For Péguy, Bergson's notion of the image carried the potential to move the perceiver in new and unforeseen ways in accord with the changing conditions of both natural and social life. In shunting the perceiving subject away from the passive world of speculation, the image instead returned one to a more fully embodied experience of the present moment as a space for the full expression of human liberty and creative action. Of course, liberty here should be understood as the full engagement of the political and moral resources of the individual subject, an enterprise Nietzsche had shown, through his reading of slave morality, to be largely foreign if not entirely unwelcome within the modern age (21). In Péguy's hands, the image would similarly become a deeply embodied form of encounter, however, one that frustrated any immediate, direct expression of the will. In pushing the subject to its conceptual limits, the image compelled new forms of relation to the otherness of the material and social worlds. Early in *Note conjointe*, Péguy would refer to Bergson's concept of the image in just this manner. This occurs in one of the lengthy passages Péguy consecrates to Corneille's *Polyeuctus*, which portrays the life of Saint Polyeuctus, a former Armenian nobleman whose embrace of Christianity and subsequent

martyrdom would go on to inspire the conversions of his wife and father-in-law.

Péguy's specific focus would be the relationship of Polyeuctus to fellow nobleman and soldier Severus:

It is not enough that Polyeuctus' very being prevail in itself and before itself and before God. It is necessary that Polyeuctus' *image* prevail within the mind of Severus. Severus cannot know Polyeuctus himself. He cannot know Polyeuctus' being. Otherwise, he would himself be Christian. Because to know in this sense is to know in communion. He can only know a certain image of Polyeuctus. That which he has. And this is a pagan image. Polyeuctus is extremely careful that this (pagan) image of him be a noble image and an image of grandeur and an image of honor, and that it be, both for and within Severus, the image of he who overcame him in honor and even in a pagan honor. It is at Severus' very own game that Polyeuctus must prevail. Because Severus understands nothing of the other game. And in order for him to indeed realize that Polyeuctus wins and that Polyeuctus prevails, it must be within Severus' system of play that Polyeuctus wins and that Polyeuctus prevails [...] It is the system and it is the very theory of the image. No security of conscience, however complete, will suffice for Polyeuctus. (III 1379-80)

Throughout his work, Péguy represented the Christian and pagan worlds as deeply interrelated—linked together throughout the course of history in a continued form of

complementary influence. In this image of direct, spiritual encounter between Severus and Polyuctus, Péguy would give representation to the same form of moral confrontation that Nietzsche had explored in his own account of the genealogy of morality. Yet, this contrast between the aristocratic nobility of antiquity and the sympathetic humility of Judeo-Christian moral codes would give rise to a very different horizon of expectation in Péguy's work. For he would envision this agonistic form of encounter as a type of necessary, generative impulse for the continued moral evolution of the human community.

In *Note conjointe*, Péguy's horizon of moral and communal becoming would be one in which the cardinal virtues of antiquity meet up with and are complemented by the new theological virtues of the early Church. Here Péguy would develop his own account of political and moral virtue, similar in many ways to the Aquinas-inspired Scholastic account of the fundamental complementarity and ultimate unity of all forms of human virtue. However, Péguy's account would embrace the notion of agonistic encounter, characteristic of both pre-Platonic, Homeric antiquity as well as of Corneille's depiction of Roman Stoicism, as salutary and entirely necessary for a more robust form of moral debate and political becoming within the modern world (III 1341-4). Breaking from an Aristotelian moral teleology of clearly defined human ends, Péguy explored a far more open account of the human condition and its relationship to any potential form of moral community. In framing this image of encounter between the cardinal virtues of antiquity and the theological virtues of the early Church, Péguy looked to the foundational virtues of a pagan antiquity, which he

characterized as “a temple of purity” (III 1370), in order to show how this pagan purity of mind and soul provided the necessary conditions for an incarnation of the eternal world of the divine within the temporal world of man. In this striking image of confrontation between stoic grandeur and Christian grace, Péguy juxtaposed two contrasting visions of political and moral virtue in their unique moment of historical encounter. For it was within this “pagan image” of pre-Christian antiquity that Péguy hoped to rescue and reanimate a more vital experience of faith for the modern world.

### **A Theology of the Image**

Similar to his own metaphysical joust with Benda, Péguy represented the encounter between Polyuctus and Severus as a confrontation between exemplary individuals, both of whom embodied the cardinal virtues of prudence, justice, fortitude, and temperance. For Péguy, Severus represented the pinnacle of classical virtue against which Polyuctus will in turn measure his own sense of moral excellence: “He is one of the most beautiful Romans we have ever seen portrayed. For he too is presented in his exactitude and in his complete fullness. Serious, honest, and honorable, grave and accomplished, cultivated, in no way lacking, humane and consummately skilled, good, disabused, noble, fearless, and of an incurable melancholy” (III 1370). As it was for Pascal, the Stoic world of antiquity would, in Péguy’s reading, become a “a temporal prefiguration of the City of God” (III 1371). The passage between the two worlds will be represented by the complementary addition of the theological virtues of faith, hope, and charity. In this image of confrontation between Severus and Polyuctus, we see the self-measuring of two

systems of virtue—the similarities and differences within their competing visions for representing and acting upon the world: “Polyeuctus measures Severus. As his own sanctity is founded upon a going beyond rather than an ignorance of the heroism of Antiquity. And his proper martyrdom is founded upon a going beyond rather than an ignorance of the martyrdom of Antiquity. And his God is founded upon a going beyond rather than an ignorance of and a certain scorn for the world” (III 1373).

To complicate matters Severus is in love with Polyeuctus’ wife Pauline, and Polyeuctus knows she will be better off under Severus’ protection once he is gone. Yet, Pauline will in turn renounce her own place within the Roman world, as will her father Felix, whose conversion from Roman senator and governor of Armenia to Christian neophyte will involve tremendous political consequences. For Péguy, Corneille’s genius was to summon forth a vision of the intimate relations existing between the spiritual and political worlds of third century Armenia and thus the far-reaching consequences engendered by this confrontation between Stoic, Roman grandeur and Christian grace: “Thus, here they are, he and Severus. Not merely as two rivals, in the vulgar sense of the word. Not even as two emulators, in the sense of modern competition. But as two great combatants” (III 1374). Péguy’s own reading of this event would similarly foreground the common chivalric code of honor existing prior to or below the level of representational identity that divides the world into pagan and Christian.

It was the Stoicism of Corneille’s Severus, as well as of figures like Marcus Aurelius (I 1428), that would be fundamental to Péguy’s vision of a more

complementary relation between the spiritual and political virtues necessary for a vital form of existence within the modern world. We will see their trace throughout *Note conjointe*, particularly in Péguy's appreciation of militaristic hero-saints like Louis IX and Joan of Arc (III 1381-2). With the menace of German aggression lingering on the horizon, Péguy would increasingly look to the civil religion of Roman Stoicism as a model for the combination of force and reflection required to ensure the political and moral continuity of Western civilization. Denouncing what he viewed as the naive, pacifist internationalism of figures like Jaurès and Lucien Herr (III 892), Péguy developed his own agonistic account of political and spiritual resistance, grounded in the continued synthesis of cardinal and theological virtues and geared towards the defense of the nation as both a spiritual and political community. Within this dialectic of cardinal virtue and theological grace, Péguy sought to develop his notion of "mystical discipline" as an embodied practice of metaphysical becoming. This practice drew its force from the Stoic commitment to live attuned to the immediate conditions of the present, existing world. It was this blindness to the real danger of German aggression, along with the political and spiritual consequences this would entail for the French people, which Péguy will decry within his former socialist allies.

Here Péguy would have most surely agreed with the German Catholic Carl Schmitt's reading of the friend-enemy distinction as indeed constituting the essence of the political: "An enemy exists only when, at least potentially, one fighting collectivity of people confronts a similar collectivity" (29). For Schmitt, the ability

“to treat, distinguish, and comprehend the friend-enemy antithesis independently of other antitheses” was vital for understanding the nature of the political in the modern world (28). Similarly, for Péguy, it was this form of understanding that allowed one to reconcile one’s Christian duty to love one’s enemy with the political duty to love and defend one’s country. Schmitt parses this distinction at the level of etymology: “The enemy is *hostis*, not *inimicus* in the broader sense [...] As German and other languages do not distinguish between the private and public enemy, many misconceptions and falsifications are possible. The oft-quoted ‘Love your enemies’ (Matt. 5:44; Luke 6:27) reads ‘*diligite inimicos vestros*,’ [...] and not *diligite hostes vestros*. No mention is made of the political enemy” (28-9). Péguy’s own thinking at this moment sought to warn against the misconceptions and falsifications he believed prevalent within the pacificism of his former Socialist allies. He thus turned his energies to warning against the immediate political dangers of this world.

Against this Stoic commitment to the present world, Péguy hoped to add the new experience of Christian grace as a necessary counterbalance to the Roman severity of the ancient world. Sure as Polyeuctus thus is of his own salvation, he knows his commitment to the cardinal virtues demands of him not that he renounce his connection to this world but rather that he act in such a way as to impress upon Severus the image of this nobility, and of this superior nobility as measured by the standards of Severus’ own particular moral code. It is the materiality of this image, rather than the sureness of his own unique conscience, that Polyeuctus would seek to convey as the expression of his faith. For it is this image alone, we could say, that has

the potential to wound Severus and thereby to push him to the limits of this moral code—to push him towards the potential conversion that Pauline and her father will indeed undergo following Polyeuctus's martyrdom:

[Polyeuctus] again wants, and it is again necessary, that he prevail (in honor) over Severus, before Severus himself, and within Severus' very own system. It is necessary that Severus carry with him this wound in his side, it is necessary that he be marked by this disquiet and retain this point in memory, this intrusion of the inhabital and this point of scandal arising from Polyeuctus becoming a Christian and from the fact he has been defeated in honor by a Christian. (III 1377-8).

In this agonistic encounter of competing moral visions, the image becomes the weapon by which Polyeuctus hopes to pierce the spiritual armor of Severus' habitual Stoic conception of the world, thereby rendering him vulnerable to the penetration of Christian grace.

At the same time we must not forget that in this image of confrontation between Roman force and Christian humility was contained the entire history of imperial conquest, subjugation, and violence. The image of Polyeuctus' body thus confronts Severus with a similar choice between the direct exercise of force and a more troubling, and open-ended form of moral reflection. It was this contrast that Weil outlined as fundamental to the moral universe of the *Iliad* and to Greek culture at large:

Perhaps all men, by the very act of being born, are destined to suffer violence; yet this is a truth to which circumstance shuts men's eyes. The strong are, as a matter of fact, never absolutely strong, nor are the weak absolutely weak, but neither is aware of this. They have in common a refusal to believe that they both belong to the same species: the weak see no relation between themselves and the strong, and vice versa. The man who is the possessor of force seems to walk through a non-resistant element; in the human substance that surrounds him nothing has the power to interpose, between the impulse and the act, the tiny interval that is reflection. Where there is no room for reflection, there is none either for justice or prudence. ("Force" 13)

In Weil's reading of the contrast between force and reflection we see a profound deepening of the Nietzschean categories of slave and master. For Péguy, too, it was precisely within this interval, in what Bergson called the "zone of indetermination" that constitutes the body (*Matter* 23), that the moral becoming of man was continually enacted. Péguy's image of spiritual confrontation between Polyuctus and Severus would similarly be one in which the agonistic tension between reactionary violence and mystical reflection was eternally played out. Péguy's new horizon of moral becoming would result from the realization that only the latter choice presented any path forward for a particular human community, that is away from an increasingly closed and militaristic vision of human sociality.

Péguy's representation of the advent of the new moral community of Christianity was thus a firmly embodied and agonistic one. In Severus' encounter with Polyuctus, the Stoic grandeur of pagan antiquity would be put to trial in a way that rends it open to a new horizon of both moral and political becoming. As we seen in the numerous types of spiritual trial undergone throughout Corneille's play, this mystical encounter with a new form of moral being is a profoundly destabilizing one, frustrating the habitual means of knowing and acting upon the world. Instead, it would open the subject to dynamic new ways of being acted upon and moved in turn. Péguy held out hopes that this affect-rich, embodied, agonistic form of encounter might engender a similarly radical experience of revolution, both spiritual and political, within the modern world.

In his reading of the spiritual duel between Polyuctus and Severus, Péguy would develop, in the manner of Augustine and other early Church fathers, his own, unique "theology of the image" (Chantre 30)—one which he would ground in a mystical, embodied, and visionary form of perception attuned to the full durational flux of both the material and social worlds. Through this Bergsonian-inspired meditation upon the image, Péguy would explore the relation of individual perception to the human representation and imaging of the divine, thus developing an experiential hermeneutic approach as a means for accessing the sacred potential within modern life. Within the image, sacred and carnal commingle in the intimate production of a whole host of political, spiritual, and aesthetic forms. Pie Duployé similarly reads Péguy's heterodox, religious project as committed to reestablishing

“the organic link that must exist within any authentic Christian system, as well as within a well-balanced anthropology, between the flesh and the spirit, the temporal and the eternal, the earth and heaven, the body and soul, the image and the idea” (xiii). Similar to modern theological accounts of the *imago Dei*, Péguy emphasized the both the relational and the dominional—that is the moral and political qualities—inherent to any understanding of the divine within our modern world. Contrary to many thinkers, however, Péguy would continue to insist upon the deeply carnal, bodily participation of man within this imaging of the divine (III 1406-7).

The mystical quality of life was, for Péguy, intimately bound up with the ability to see more deeply into the material conditions of the immediate world. In his Bergsonian conception of the image, Péguy had sought a direct means of refuting the naive scientism and mechanistic account of modern subjectivity at the heart of Durkheim’s epistemology. For Péguy, to know the world one must come to see it in a more intuitive and comprehensive way than was possible within the empirical, positivist framework of modern science. The model of vision Péguy would instead look to develop was a far more affective and embodied one capable of doing real violence to the neatly categorical and teleological accounts of subjective agency. Here the “spiritual automaton is in the psychic situation of the seer, who sees better and further than he can react, that is, think” (Deleuze, *Cinema* 170). Péguy’s mystical form of vision was thus invested in a far different account of the relation between thinking substance and corporeal or extended substance.

Bergson would represent this notion of mystical vision in similar terms within *Les Deux sources*. For Bergson, vision is both attention to the immediate material world of embodied action and potential for tapping into the more mystical realm of intellectual sympathy available at the limits or fringe of our perception:

[O]ur brain is intended neither to create our mental images nor to treasure them up; it merely limits them, so as to make them effective. It is the organ of attention to life. But this means that there must have been provided, either in the body or in the consciousness limited by the body, some contrivance expressly designed to screen from man's perception objects which by their nature are beyond the reach of man's action. If these mechanisms get out of order, the door which they kept shut opens a little way: there enters in something of a "without" which may be a "beyond." (315)

For Péguy, this without or beyond could only take shape through an intense dialogical encounter with a form of otherness that pushed one beyond one's own conceptual or cognitive limits. Through his literary mobilization of certain sacred images of encounter, Péguy hoped to confront readers with those forms of mystical, visionary otherness that would encourage humanity's continued intersubjective—that is to say, political and moral—becoming. To become would thus be to see and experience the world in a more fully embodied way—one that ultimately serves to complicate the individuated, psychic foundations of the modern subject. In the various theological

implications that that he drew from this notion of embodied vision, Péguy would develop his own mystical and experiential hermeneutics to its final, fullest form.

His reading of the incarnation would similarly depart from the deep mystery of embodied existence in its capacity for welcoming an incarnation of divine being. For Péguy, the body would thus become, as it had been for Spinoza and would be for Deleuze, a veritable fulcrum for unsettling and ultimately dislodging an entire worldview that remained blind to the deeper mysteries of life. Yet, it was a body freed from the mechanistic explanations of modern science with its psychological insistence upon subjective individuation. One must not forget that it was at the very heart of matter itself that Bergson had located and developed his own account of free will. He would later hint at this relation between the mystical and the mechanical within a cryptic passage from *Les Deux sources*: “Man will rise above earthly things only if a powerful enough equipment supplies him with the requisite fulcrum. He must use matter as a support if he wants to get away from matter. In other words, the mystical summons up the mechanical” (399). For Péguy, it was through this embodied, imagistic encounter with the material world that he would seek to return our attention to the immense, untapped reservoirs of freedom and grace within the immediate conditions of the present.

Péguy’s new theology of the image thus looked to incorporate a sense Bergsonian intellectual sympathy within a new form of historical memory. It was at the heart of this dynamic tension between matter and memory, that Bergson had posited the grounds for a new, non-mechanistic account of human potential and moral

freedom. In doing so, he sought to introduce a necessary counterbalance to the scientific pretensions of his own era. Through his appeal to intuition, Bergson presented a more comprehensive model for understanding the full range of possibilities within our subjective relationship to the material world. It was the fluid interplay of intuition and analysis that he hoped to encourage as a new model for metaphysical and scientific inquiry. Throughout his long oeuvre, he would seek to remind us again and again, “To *picture* is not to *remember*” (*Matter* 173). To picture was to represent the present, material world of images as a locus for action and participation within the dynamic nature of life in-the-making. However, it was the memory-image that would give us access to a past full of potential experiences capable of informing and helping to shape our action in the present moment of embodied relation to the world. These memory-images, once actualized, allow us to again inhabit this past within the moment of the present—but on its own ontological grounds.

### **An Experiential Hermeneutics of the Encounter**

Péguy was aware that in order to avoid the trappings of a God *tout fait*, and likewise of a Church *tout fait*, which for him were modern institutions almost entirely given over to *la politique*, he would need to approach the sacred in a manner similar to Durkheim’s point of departure in *Les Formes élémentaires*, that is from the side of the temporal rather than that of the eternal. Through his readings of Corneille and Hugo, Péguy sought to understand the historical advent of the Christian community as an event capable of being reactualized in a dynamic, new way within the modern

world. To do so would be to enter again, in the manner of Bergson's experience of duration, the long historical process of "fructification" that had produced the incarnation of the divine within the carnal world of man. To repeat this faithfully, in a way that avoided the automatism of habit, would be to prepare once again the "occurrence" of the sacred, of the new experience of God within the modern world. Only the faithful repetition of this long "carnal series," played out across the historical becoming of man, could produce the differential experience of the sacred within the modern world (III 235-6).

Similar to Bergson's efforts to introduce greater precision into philosophy through a more intuitive engagement with the immediate world of sensory perception, Péguy sought to revitalize the capacity for belief within the modern world through a more direct experience of those sacred possibilities lying outside the closed, institutional structure of bourgeois society—most notably the Church. Hans Urs von Balthasar has read Péguy's relationship to the Church in a very similar manner: "[Péguy] is the Church in *partibus infidelium*, the Church in those places where the Church will be one day, and he is so thanks to the fact that he is rooted in the depths where world and Church, world and grace, meet together and interpenetrate to point of indistinguishability" (404). His new experiential account of religious faith would be one closely associated with the ultimate pursuit of the political and spiritual practice of *égalité*. As such, it could only ever take shape as a form of "mystical discipline," to which others were invited to participate as a type of collective project of moral becoming.

Bergson's notion of memory in relation to the image thus became for Péguy a concrete way of recalling our perception to the immediate conditions of possibility for an irruption of the sacred within the modern world. As such, the relationship implied by Péguy's "pagan image" was not so much the self-same image of effervescent social communion and belonging but rather that of radical otherness as a form of deeply embodied encounter with the foreign that renders one vulnerable and open to the continued production of the new as a locus of spiritual *fraternité* within the modern world. Péguy's notion of the image as a form of spiritual encounter recalls Spinoza's concept of affect as the wholly embodied ability to both affect and to be affected by another body. Weil would speak of the affective quality of embodied human proximity in a similar sense: "Anybody who is in our vicinity exercises a certain power over us by his very presence, and a power that belongs to him alone, that is, the power of halting, repressing, modifying each movement that our body sketches out" ("Force" 9). As Weil makes evident, this power, by the very nature of its workings, opens onto an entire world of ethical and moral considerations. We see certain echoes of this same idea as well in Merleau-Ponty's own embodied account of perception and historical consciousness (157, 167-9, 526-30). Deleuze and Guattari would likewise develop, within their own account of the affects, numerous, further implications of what I have described here as Péguy's experiential hermeneutics of encounter.

Contrary to Durkheim, the elementary form of religious experience for the modern world would come in this image of spiritual duel between Severus and

Polyeuctus. Rather than being merely the result of a collective sedimentation of ritual actions throughout history, religion as the dual exigence of grace and freedom within the human world aims precisely at a breaking opening of the self-sure categories of subjective individuation. Religion as a more visionary and embodied experience of the sacred thus returns necessarily to the image as a continual point of encounter with the material and social worlds, which rise up to jostle and challenge the neat psychic and affective boundaries of the subject. Péguy's meditation upon the nature of this encounter would open onto a more capacious form of religious experience premised upon the attention to the immense freedom and creative potential within the immediate world at hand. Throughout his immense oeuvre, he would repeatedly recall readers to "the absolute respect for this world, for its mysteries, the godliness, the religious respect for the supreme and sovereign, absolute reality, for the real world, as it is given to us, for the event, as it happens" (II 604).

In these passages, Péguy presents an open vision of creative becoming in which all are invited to participate. It is here that Péguy is at his most Spinozist, in his descriptions of "the sole sacred reality...which in us and for us has remained the greatest religion, the supreme religion and the starting point and the mother religion" (II 604). Bergson would similarly represent the divine as a type of pan-universal force in *Les Deux sources*:

Men do not sufficiently realize that their future is in their own hands. Theirs is the task of determining first of all whether they want to go on living or not. Theirs the responsibility, then, for deciding if they want

merely to live, or intend to make just the extra effort required for fulfilling, even on their refractory planet, the essential function of the universe, which is a machine for the making of gods. (317)

At the same time, Péguy's preference was clearly for an agonistic and embodied form of encounter as the catalyst for the moral and political development of humanity. His notion of incarnation arose out of a specific reading and meditation upon the limits of the closed moral community of democratic antiquity. In the image of spiritual duel between Severus and Polyuctus, Péguy would take exception with the Platonic and Aristotelian rejection of the Homeric agon as a productive metaphysical and political model for negotiating the political and moral future of the *polis*. As such, Péguy's thinking would remain bereft of any clearly defined or categorical *telos* in regards to the essential political and moral nature of man.

Classical as so much of Péguy's worldview was, especially his appreciation of the civic virtues of antiquity, it remained committed to dynamic and radically open view of human nature. In this account, the Stoic nobility of classical Rome would, through the force of its agonistic conflict with the new moral community of Christianity, open onto a new form of political and moral becoming. It remained for the modern world to actualize its own creative remembrance of this event. In doing so, Péguy felt, it would quite naturally and joyfully go about its Nietzschean task of remaking the gods. But even more than the gods, man had need of a renewed faith in the immense possibilities of the immediate world at hand. We have already seen how central Péguy's thought was to the development of Deleuze's own thinking on

repetition and the event as the advent of the new. Deleuze, more than any other thinker, would take up Péguy's challenge of instituting a more robust form of faith and vision for a disenchanted modern world. It is to Deleuze's specifically aesthetic reading of Péguy that I now turn.

### **Deleuze, Vision, and Faith in the Modern World**

Deleuze, who played a crucial role in reviving interest in Bergson's thought in the 1960s, was similarly drawn to the work of Péguy and particularly to his use of paradox as a generative principle in his handling of certain key pairs of terms like *mystique* and *politique*, temporal and eternal. While crediting Bergson with the revolutionary insight into the role that philosophy would come to play in the modern world, Deleuze sees Péguy as the one able to most fully translate these insights into a specific aesthetic practice. Deleuze thus notes:

Bergson introduces a mutation into philosophical thought. He says: the question is no longer that of the eternal but of the new. And Péguy, despite or perhaps because of his conversion, incarnates through his style this new. In other words, the production of something new is repetition, but repetition oriented towards the future, repetition of that which "is not yet." ("Style")

For Deleuze, it is Péguy that essentially uncovers a way to give a sense of virtual solidity to Bergson's experience of intuition, who saw in repetition the manner for bringing about a paradoxical experience of the new within thought and language itself.

In *Différence et Répétition* Deleuze unfolds his conception of both difference and repetition as prior to any notion of essence or identity. Deleuze's quest for a differential genetic principle to help us think beyond our traditional understanding of the world in terms of identity and judgment employs a notion of "repetition for itself" (70) that is neither static nor conceptual in nature but rather a form of "pure dynamism which creates a...space" for the advent of the new (21). Similarly affirmative in nature, Deleuze's notion of "difference in itself" seeks to "rescue difference from its maledictory state," from the subordinate position difference has long occupied in relation to reason and representation within traditional metaphysics (28-9). Ultimately, the differential theory of faculties that Deleuze develops aims to give rise to a "fractured I" (86) bereft of empirical or logical categories of judgment and finally compelled to think "difference in itself" out of the intensity of the encounter with what he calls the *sentiendum* (139-41). It is a trajectory or line of flight that extends well beyond *Différence et Répétition*, all the way to Deleuze's later books on cinema, which he sees as similarly capable of staging those types of encounters forcing one to think and see the world in a new way. Deleuze describes this process as one able to restore our faith in the modern world, to push us "[t]o believe, not in a different world, but in a link between man and the world, in love or life, to believe in this as in the impossible, the unthinkable, which none the less cannot but be thought" (*Cinema* 170). Deleuze's unique pedagogy of the image, which he explores by means of his meditation upon the cinematic medium, is founded upon a necessary renewal of faith in a modern world that we have forgotten how to

see, hear, and understand. For Deleuze, “[o]nly belief in the world can reconnect man to what he sees and hears” (172).

Péguy’s own aesthetic practice, with its repetitive poetics based upon a slow development and differentiation of theme and image, can be understood to function in a manner similar to how Deleuze will subsequently describe the workings of the cinematic image. Not only does he adopt, like so many other modernist innovators of this time, a defamiliarizing lens for rendering the world in a strange new light, it likewise engenders a new experience of this world’s temporal and ontological horizons, returning us once again to the mystical and virtual origins of a world that science had long ago desacralized by dint of its withering gaze. In doing so it accomplishes a radical renewal of the fundamental conditions for seeing, acting, and ultimately coming to believe again in this world. That it would be Péguy, the heterodox Catholic and eternally embattled polemicist, who would accomplish this feat is perhaps less surprising than the way in which he pulls it off. For it was precisely by means of this aggregative, meandering, maddening style that Péguy ultimately hoped to construct and coax into being his creative and participatory ideal of a revolutionary, new French polity engaged in the mystical process of self-construction. Against all expectation, it was Péguy’s stubborn commitment to repetition that would ultimately open up a path for the advent of the new.

Deleuze’s reading of Péguy, Kierkegaard, and Nietzsche similarly places the accent upon this paradoxical capacity of repetition to produce new forms of thought, perception, and being through an experience of eternal return that works to unsettle

any fixed conception of identity or essence. Viewed through this lens, Péguy's consistent use of terms like *race* and *peuple* should be understood as rooted in a politically generative mysticism rather than a biologically determined naturalism, negating any racial essentialism through its focus on the continued production of difference through repetition, and thus aiming to bring about an experience of Bergsonian duration as a renewed belief in the creative potential of this world. For Péguy, it is the immediate world-at-hand, complete with its immense reservoirs of untapped creative freedom, from which we have become politically and mystically estranged under the conditions of modern thought. His concept of *race*, which functions as a type of generative *force* or *puissance* (in Deleuzian terms), thus marks the deeply mystical capacity for acting and for being acted upon by others within the shared space of the political community. Following Deleuze, we might read Péguy's notion of *race* as the intensely affective process of communal belonging and social being that serves to guard against the instrumental rationality at the heart of modern thought.

Within Péguy's radical new vision, *mystique* and *politique*, action and hesitation, commingle to produce a diffuse, capacious form of consciousness in which a "fractured I" no longer stands as the fixed, radiating point of origin, perception, and identity but is instead pushed beyond the very limits of thought and perception themselves. Anyone who has ever undertaken to make their way at length through Péguy's dense, repetitive prose knows just how defamiliarizing and entirely peculiar an experience this can be. For Deleuze, it is precisely through the experience of

eternal return that difference as a fundamentally alienating principle finally begins to break down and that “univocal being is not only thought and even affirmed, but effectively realized” (Difference 41-2). So too for Péguy, repetition is charged with the continued creative renewal of a *mystique* forever faced with the danger of being devoured by the *politique* to which it gave birth. *Mystique* as an ungrounding, generative, visionary experience of belonging, faith, and commitment to the modern world of the present, as opposed to a Christian afterlife or a secular futurity, become central components of Péguy’s thought in *Note conjointe*.

As Deleuze has noted, Péguy’s great insight was to instantiate an experience of the new through a practice of repetition and incremental difference within language itself. Such a practice serves to deterritorialize language for Deleuze, moving it away from mere representation and unlocking its virtual, revolutionary potential to bring about new forms of thought under the gaze of what already exists. It was this practice that should be understood as central to Péguy’s efforts to encourage a new literary and in turn civic sensibility within his readers. Language, for Péguy, remains intimately bound up with the need to cultivate a whole new manner of seeing and reading the larger world, as is evident in the following passage:

Thus, we see within economics that which we could just as well see in morality, and in psychology, and in metaphysics, if only we had better eyes. Yet it is far more magnified in economic matters: namely that this tranquility, which is the ultimate goal of all intellectuals, and that to which all modern individuals pledge allegiance, is fundamentally a

principle of infertility. It is always the race that pays the price. In order to have peace and quiet tomorrow, we have no children today. But this image of the abdication and destruction of a race, when projected onto a scale much larger, and one much less polished, when magnified at the level of economic and civic life, is merely the image of the shared moral, intellectual, psychological, and metaphysical life of a nation. In order to have peace and quiet tomorrow, today we take on good sense, foresight, and barrenness. In order to have peace and quiet the moment just after, we turn the present into a time of good sense, of foresight, of infertility, a dead and funeral time, a time past. (III 1419)

Here Péguy juxtaposes the large-scale destruction of a people with the banal, daily accumulation of acts, thoughts, and discourses that comprise a shared mentality of forward-thinking preparation that continually abandons the present as a space for action. Through the repeated refrain of the quest for a little peace and quiet, Péguy lays bare this common underlying principle echoed across a whole range of moral, intellectual, psychological, economic, and metaphysical domains. By doing so, Péguy thus insists upon the numerous instances of our blindness to the modern world's programmatic negation of the present as a potential locus of creative renewal, whether in the form of civic engagement or of mystical self-inquiry, in preference for a sterile flight into the imagined tranquility and stability of the future moment. The various domains of metaphysics, psychology, economics, and morality all come to function as so many repetitions of a ubiquitous world-view premised upon an

underlying sterility. For Péguy, it was ultimately *la race* that would pay the price in the complete and utter destruction and loss of a *mystique* that serves as a generative, endlessly creative principle of political and collective self-renewal.

Much like Deleuze's argument for the cinema as a means for renewing our capacity to see and understand the larger world, Péguy's unique prose style works to destabilize representation so as to open up a space for radical new forms of thought and action on the part of his readers. This destabilization is ultimately premised upon the need for a more radical form of sensorial perception enabling one to avoid the representational pitfalls of an increasingly hegemonic worldview that neglects the virtual possibilities of the present for an imagined future prosperity. The repetitive, slow-developing form of Péguy's writing shares a good deal with the purely optical and sound situations that Deleuze reads as characteristic of much of cinema following the Second World War. Both contain within their form a certain unbearable quality, an excess of experience and perception, that render conventional types of response more difficult, and that thus push one to the very limits of habitual modes of thought and action.

As we have already seen, past and present meet up for Péguy within the image-rich, experiential encounter with the literary text. Developing the aesthetic implications of Bergson's thought, Péguy creates a repetitive, aggregative accumulation of linguistic and imagistic experience that aims at a breaking open of the individual's subjective lifeworld, complete with its neat categories of intellectual and affective, self and other, past and present. As we saw with Latour, this form of

reading frustrates all expectation in regards to both narrative structure and temporal consciousness. It is a thoroughly defamiliarizing experience premised upon Bergson's own insights into the nature of durational time. Similar to Péguy, Deleuze would draw attention to the radical new ontological appreciation of the past inaugurated by Bergson. For Deleuze, Bergson's great success was to introduce a type of ontological consciousness over and above the psychological one, in which past and present could be understood to commingle in a form of durational tension (*Bergsonism* 56-7). As Péguy reminds us, this tension was at the very heart of Bergson's account of memory in relation to perception. In his claim that "there is no perception which is not full of memories" (*Matter* 24), Bergson foregrounded not just the continued preservation of the past within the present moment of action, but also of the difference in kind between perception and memory.

It was this distinction that allowed for a form of mediation between world and mind that exploded the language of containment, in which memories could be understood to be stocked away within the physical space of the brain, to be recalled or represented at some later point. In this commingling of past and present, virtual and actual, memory would be conceived not as a form of imagistic containment but rather as an affective force serving to ensure the continued creation of meaning in life. We might just as well say that through this recollection-rich experience of individual perception the deeper mystical aspects of life become available in a way entirely independent of any need for a subjective form of safeguarding. For as Bergson made

clear, the self-survival of images was perhaps the primary feature of duration itself (*Matter* 193).

Bergson's psychological account of perception thus remained bound up with a larger dialectic of memory and forgetting. In an interesting twist on Péguy, Ricoeur would explore the interplay of memory and forgetting in his own unique reading of Plato's *Phaedrus*. Here Ricoeur posits the origins of writing as essentially giving rise to the new discipline of history, in which a new temporal account of man was first made possible. Ricoeur's description of the "uncanniness of our history" (500) hints at a similarly disturbing, yet intimate relation of memory to official historical facticity. His account of Bergson's "survival of images" frames forgetting in terms very similar to Péguy. For Ricoeur, forgetting becomes not simply effacement but rather a type of unconscious reserve of memory, an "immemorial resource" (442) freed from "the vigilance of consciousness" (440). This type of immemorial reserve stands ready for actualization whenever a sufficient need for action might arise. As Ricoeur states: "[d]eep memory and habit-memory then coincide with one another in the encompassing figure of availability (*disponibilité*). The capable human being draws from this thesaurus and relies on the security, the assurance that it provides" (441). Péguy's image-laden notion of the event relied upon a similar appeal to the availability of certain sacred images of the past at the moment of historical crisis he believed himself to be living through. This of course echoed Bergson's own thought on the role of memory in regards to action: "In a general way, or by right, the past

only reappears to consciousness in the measure in which it can aid us to understand the present and to foresee the future. It is the forerunner of action” (*Matter* 175).

It is perhaps this that Péguy had in mind for his concept of a “pagan image” capable of returning modern perception to the latent memories, actions, and possibilities of a material world still full of unrealized sacred potential dwelling beneath the ready-made ways of seeing and perceiving this world. Hence, Péguy’s continued insistence on sight as a privileged mode of access to the mystical. Indeed, Péguy’s “pagan image” presents a pedagogy of sight focused upon the memory-image as a locus of durational continuity of the sacred within the desacralized modern world. Image for Péguy is both duel and cohabitation with the pagan, Stoic foundations that prepared the carnal world for the insertion of the sacred within the history of man, an incarnation that would serve to give birth to the entirely new moral community of Christianity. The moral community Péguy had in mind for his own time was an actualization, within the new conditions of modern life, of a whole host of spiritual and civic virtues associated with this older moral community. As such it represented both a contraction and expansion of this past image within the creative action of the present. Following Deleuze, we might say that it is this specifically Péguyan form of the image that pushes readers towards a renewed experience of faithful action in the immediate world at hand.

### **Péguy’s Reception in Recent Decades**

While Deleuze’s philosophical recuperation of Péguy served to rescue his oeuvre from postwar indifference and scorn to which it was subject for so many

years, there were plenty who remained skeptical of the appropriateness of Péguy's work for contemporary thought. As we shall see, these critics sought to counter the more optimistic reading of Deleuze and others by warning against the equally troublesome qualities of Péguy's thought and work. At the same time, the ranks of those who have sought, à la Deleuze, to make positive use of Péguy's oeuvre have continued to swell. To speak of Péguy's reception in recent years is really to point out the enormously different nature of this reception in the Francophone and Anglophone worlds. While interest in Péguy's work within the Anglo-American academy has grown over the past few decades, it still lags far behind the level within France in particular. One need only mention Emmanuel Macron's frequent mention of Péguy, starting during his campaign for the French presidency, to get some idea of Péguy's visibility within contemporary French culture ("Greetings" par. 99). Macron has gone so far as to remind French voters that even in today's day and age one must not forget that essentially "[l]a politique, c'est mystique" ("Confidences" par. 2).

One of the fascinating points regarding Péguy's massive oeuvre is that while his poetry has long been available in English, the vast collection of his prose writing appearing in the *Cahiers* remains almost entirely untranslated. In addition, most of the commentary surrounding this portion of his oeuvre has tended to cluster around more high-profile essays such as *Notre Jeunesse*, and his more aggressively polemical works such as *L'Argent*. This latter work and its follow-up essay *L'Argent suite* have frequently served as the point of attack for critics of Péguy, and understandably so. Given their bellicose and at times excessively militaristic rhetoric, they have I believe

rightly developed the reputation as highlighting what is most polemical and potentially dangerous in Péguy's thought and work. Tzvetan Todorov's *Nous et les autres* is a notable example of a critique that reads Péguy's idealized, mystical nationalism as a thinly-veiled *revanchist* apology, in the lead up to the First World War, of a certain will to force, which Todorov vehemently condemns through a close reading of key passages of *L'Argent suite*. In Todorov's account, Péguy proposes "a scale of values in which justice is worth less than life, in which heroism, war, and ecstasy no longer need to be concerned with what is good or what is right. Péguy's writing mirrors this choice: it is passionate, febrile, vibrant—and contradictory, biased, unjust. In life as in death, he opted for intensity over reason" (246). The spirit of moderation that Todorov proposes instead is, of all Péguy's works, likely least in evidence in these two essays.

David Carroll's reading of these same works similarly draws out the underlying affinities in much of Péguy's thought between a spiritualistic and aestheticist form of Christian nationalism and a more aggressively militaristic championing of Christian force in helping to bring about the ideal city here on Earth. Carroll's close-reading of the archetype of the soldier within Péguy's writing, including his lifelong fondness for figures like Joan of Arc as well as the theme of the Crusades, works to make evident a form of thought that for Carroll can in no way be read as "antithetical to fascism" and that indeed should be understood as anticipating many of its chief lines of development (69). Hence too its appeal to the Vichy

ideologues who would more rigorously and systematically develop its implications through the careful curation of what they found readily of use within Péguy's oeuvre.

Like Carroll, many other critics continue to ask, especially in recent years as Péguy's work has become more visibly championed by philosophers like Pierre Manent and Alain Finkielkraut, political figures like François Bayrou, and artists like Yann Moix (*Le Guay* 349-52), whether or not one should consider Péguy's thought as inevitably fascistic in its consistent appeal to a mystical, utopian, socialist political vision that would prove enormously influential to so many subsequent fascists following Péguy's death. The immense amount of writing Péguy produced over his lifetime only serves to complicate efforts to settle upon any one definitive answer to this question, providing a seemingly endless source of new material by which to reconsider one's case for or against Péguy. We have already noted the critical reputation Péguy enjoyed in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. In the decades following the Second World War, as the shock of fascism was registered and slowly replaced with efforts to disavow or explain away its origins, the legacy of Péguy's Vichy apologists weighed heavily against his continued consideration as a thinker and writer of repute within the French literary canon. The lengthy silence that surrounded his work during these years has only recently come to be broken and not without a good deal of debate within cultural and academic circles.

Alain Finkielkraut, among the most prominent of Péguy's contemporary supporters, has in his work *Le Mécontemporain* and elsewhere pleaded for a renewed consideration and reading of Péguy's thought and oeuvre. Finkielkraut's intervention

lent a helping hand to Deleuze's earlier efforts to rescue Péguy from the oblivion and disrepute resulting from his fascist Vichy legacy. The 1980s witnessed further arguments by Bernard Henri-Lévy regarding a uniquely French form of fascist ideology, to which he claimed Péguy helped give form. Finkielkraut, most notably, has sought to distinguish between the genealogical and the more properly biological and exclusionary use of terms like *peuple* and *pureté* potentially at work within Péguy's oeuvre. He thus points out:

These words, like that of race, cost Péguy dearly. They earned him a place, within the ideological hell of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, next to the most terrible of monsters [...] When Péguy speaks of race, he is not referring to a physical category or the hereditary traits of a collective group. He is affirming the intimate bond linking a people to an idea [...] For race is not, as the racist would declare, the *impossibility of doing things differently*, it is defined by the doubly paradoxical fact of *being born with a word of honor* and being able to renege on it at any moment. Nothing is ever guaranteed or given. What Péguy designates by the word purity, a term today so dirty and offensive, is the moral vigilance of those who refuse to renege and not the ethnic vigilance of those wanting everyone to remain where they are and who erect barriers to avoid falling, along with others like them, into a "vile mix."  
*(Mécontemporain 94-5)*

Finkelkraut deliberately minimizes the historical consequences of *these words* by reading them against the larger backdrop of Péguy's work and his seeming intentions as a writer and cultural critic. To read Péguy exclusively through the post-Vichy and post-Holocaust lens of contemporary theorists is to miss out on all of the subtlety and nuance that Finkelkraut claims is at the heart of Péguy's handling and use of these terms. Critics like Carroll, however, have taken such readings to task for what they see as the selectively ahistorical nature of their interpretation. Ultimately, Péguy's use of terms like *race* and *peuple*, and the variety of afterlives or interpretations these terms have experienced, remain consistent points of debate.

The battle, so to speak, for Péguy's soul, or at least for his contemporary relevance thus continues to rage some one hundred years now after his death. Manent, another of Péguy's chief defenders, has for instance used his work as a model of thought for helping us come to terms with many of the dead ends of what he calls "radical secularism," or the quest for a complete and total erasure of religion from European society. For Manent, Péguy's example can help us not only to overcome many of these dead ends but also to arrive at a more robust, genuinely pluralistic, and less spiritually arid form of modern civilization capable of responding to the "practical and political" challenges now being posed by Islam (*Radical* 12). In Péguy, Manent sees "one of the most penetrating critics of the historical and sociological points of view which dominate modern consciousness" and which currently hinder new modes of thought and political action from taking shape in contemporary Europe in particular (*Discontents* 93).

Finkielkraut and Manent have thus made an appeal for Péguy's unique pertinence today, seeing in his work a rigorously humanist model of thought capable of negotiating the inherent tensions existing in modern civilization between certain Enlightenment claims to universality and the increasingly complex set of particulars brought about by the continued growth of cultural diversity and technological development in the past two centuries. Jean-Michel Rey, in his work *Colère de Péguy*, similarly draws attention to Péguy's tendency to cultivate paradox rather than resolution in his handling and juggling of terms like *la politique* and *la mystique*, modern and premodern (or *ancien regime*), Jewish and Christian, temporal and eternal. For Rey, anger against the modern world and its ready-made categories of thought and experience drives Péguy's unique version of faith in a continual process of negotiation and engagement with a world whose facile categories this faith eschews in favor of a more impassioned form of spiritual contestation.

In his work *L'Inchrétien*, Jean Bastaire describes Péguy's curiously heterodox version of faith and his path to Catholicism by the term *inchrétien*, highlighting Péguy's avoidance of a more purely binary dialectic of belief and reason/non-belief. Bastaire thus foregrounds what he sees as the stubborn willingness on Péguy's part to wait for faith's arrival, which would come near the very end of his life through a type of immanent unveiling within the conditions of thought and experience in Third Republic France after the fallout of the Dreyfus Affair. It is a model that Bastaire sees as particularly apt for negotiating today's complex political and spiritual landscapes.

## Recuperating Péguy from his Recuperators

Yet, the question remains: why read Péguy today? Those who have sought to make use of his work for a critical intervention in contemporary affairs have often been subject to accusations of their own political reactionism. Finkielkraut's reputation, for instance, as an apologist for Gallic exceptionalism, well-earned in the eyes of so many social commentators in contemporary France, has certainly not done Péguy any favors in recommending his work for a new generation of readers seeking their political orientation less among the pronouncements of *les immortels* and more within the renewed spirit of social protest that has taken shape in French society in recent years, especially since the *Nuit Debout* protests of 2016. Manent's praise of Péguy's oeuvre likewise can be viewed as anything but innocuous given his pronounced stance in regards to what he views as Europe's essentially Christian mark or stamp (*Radical* 19). Similar to Finkielkraut, Manent has adhered to what many view as a thinly-veiled, fundamentally essentialist model of religious and ethnic identity. These models have inevitably tended to be read as targeting the Muslim communities within France, recycling yet again the standard narrative of assimilation to a fixed ethnic identity. Given Péguy's problematic historical association with fascism, neither of these assimilatory positions is likely to encourage a wider audience for his work in an increasingly pluralistic French society, nor in the majority of Western societies at large.

Yet, if we hope to avoid what appear to be the reactionary pitfalls of philosophers like Finkielkraut and Manent, where might we begin our search for a

different political model, one capable of translating Péguy's work and thought into the present? In response to this question, I now turn to the work of several recent political theorists whose work may indeed be of use in helping us think through the notion of community in more recent times. One of the most promising potentialities for applying Péguy's work to our own time lies in the aesthetic qualities his work embodies as a model for inspiring counter-hegemonic political projects grounded in alternative forms of identification. Within her own model of political agonism, Mouffe calls attention to the vital role of affect in forging new forms of political identification. Refusing to distinguish between art and politics as two discretely constituted fields, she instead points out how within a hegemonically-conceived political framework "artistic practices play a role in the constitution and maintenance of a given symbolic order, or in its challenging, and... necessarily have a political dimension" (*Agonistics* 91). We have seen how Péguy's oracular style, along with the experiential hermeneutics he developed for refashioning political identity and collective action, can be understood to work in just this manner, orienting his own artistic production towards specifically political ends.

Through his voluminous production within the pages of his *Cahiers*, Péguy hoped to bring about a new literary and political sensibility—one geared towards a more immediate, agonistic form of civic engagement. It is this more affective, embodied, and agonistic form of political sensibility that I have foregrounded as a model for making sense of our own cosmopolitan social and political context. For there are important questions to be raised concerning the ways in which the

micropolitical, everyday, banal actions of individuals coalesce into more diffuse, affective forms of collective identity. It is here, I believe, that Péguy's work continues to offer a valuable frame of reference for the present, particularly in regards to communalist and municipalist approaches to more immediate forms of political action. Rather than walling themselves off from a global network of relations, many of these communities seek a more federated relationship to other municipalities both small and large. But before pursuing these reflections further, I would like to consider the agonistic foundations I am claiming are at the root of Péguy's mystico-political vision. For this will help link up the very different social and political realities separating Péguy's era from our own.

### **Agonistics, Affect, and the Establishment of Collective Identity**

My focus in the following pages will be to explore a handful of specifically political formulations, drawn from a contemporary context, which can be brought into conversation with Péguy's work. Like Vitry, I would like to explore in what ways and to what extent one can draw out a political valence immanent within Péguy's late thought as articulated in *Note conjointe*. If the political is not to remain an entirely negative category *tout fait*, to be resisted for the sake of a more dynamic but diffuse mystical form of being, then can it be conceived rather as a form of politics *se faisant* in the Bergsonian sense, as a politics alive to the incorporation of the new within a political body that nevertheless retains a vital connection to its past? How might these politics achieve that dynamic tension Péguy aspired to between the spiritual and the political, between the individual and the collective body, remaining supple and

responsive to the pluralistic conditions of modern social life while at the same time working to catalyze political and creative will towards specific, collectively identified goals? Indeed, Péguy's work provides an invaluable framework for helping us think through our own theorizations of collective identity and agency within the contemporary world along with the specific political commitments that inform our theoretical efforts.

Chantal Mouffe, for one, has proposed a theoretical framework for thinking the world politically through an agonistic frame of reference that insists upon the importance of developing passionate new forms of subjective and collective identification as a means for mobilizing political will. Pluralistic in nature, it is a model that holds fast to what she terms "the dimension of radical negativity" that is forever present and fundamentally unavoidable within any and all political articulations of community. This dimension of radical negativity is thus tied to a profound rejection of the very possibility of a harmonious, organically conceived social order free of divisions at the level of power (*Agonistics* 1). For Mouffe, the "political" is defined precisely by this ever-present potential for antagonism inherent in the nexus of power relations that constitute all social orders. "Politics" in turn strives to "establish a certain order and to organize human coexistence in conditions which are always potentially conflicting, since they are affected by the dimension of 'the political'" (*Agonistics* 2-3).

Politics, in seeking to define durably collective forms of identification, can only ever do so through a process of articulation serving to draw together various

social actors in the quest for a common goal. Mouffe thus insists that “every identity is relational and that the affirmation of a difference is a precondition for the existence of any identity... [and so] the constitution of a ‘we’ requires as its very condition of possibility the demarcation of a ‘they’” (*Agonistics* 5). In contradistinction to the political, politics is precisely that ensemble of relational practices charged with continually ensuring this hegemonic relation of difference does not lapse into an excessively antagonistic relation of the nature of the friend/enemy distinction that Carl Schmitt defined. Any sense of identity must be understood as discursively defined and called into existence through hegemonic practices of articulating a shared, common goal that can be struggled for against a political adversary, an other, who does not subscribe to this goal. This notion of an agonistic form of democratic conflict, rooted in the passions, is central to what Mouffe believes is a more robust, radical model for political identification and action.

I believe Mouffe’s agonistic political model might be brought to bear upon Péguy’s own work, in order to draw out what I have suggested is an implicit political valence appropriate and indeed fruitful for our own historical moment. My reading will draw upon Mouffe’s conception of politics as inherently bound up with the affectively charged, hegemonic process of defining a people by simultaneously defining an other that is excluded from this political formation. Indeed, one of Mouffe’s central claims is that it is “impossible to understand democratic politics without acknowledging ‘passions’ as the driving force in the political field” (*Agonistics* 6). Distancing herself from both rationalist and deliberative models of

political discourse and exchange, Mouffe instead foregrounds the vital importance of a passionate, agonistic form of conflict and debate within the democratic struggle for power. She thus notes that “[c]onflict in liberal democratic societies cannot and should not be eradicated, since the specificity of pluralist democracy is precisely the recognition and the legitimation of conflict” (*Agonistics* 7).

This notion of a fundamentally productive form of democratic conflict should be understood as the necessary correlate to any attempt at articulating hegemonic forms of power aimed at enacting a political will. Resisting any formulation of the people as an organic harmony or unified multiplicity, Mouffe instead focuses upon the importance of acknowledging social division as both unavoidable and indeed healthy for a more robust form of radical democracy (*Agonistics* 15). She is thus wary of tendencies to conceive the political primarily in ethical terms, as she claims Alain Badiou has for instance. Badiou’s focus on the individual subject’s unconditional fidelity to the event as an ever-potential disruption of the real remains deliberately unmoored in terms of the conditional, constituted forms of reality that confront one with the potential menace of antagonism between social agents. To act within these specifically political conditions is to be faced with that moment of decision in which a frontier must be drawn between a “we” and a “they.” This moment of closure, for Mouffe, constitutes the very grounds for the establishment of political order out of an underlying, ever-present danger of direct antagonism. However, one must not forget that “the type of order which is established through a given hegemonic configuration [...] should be recognized as contingent and open to contestation” (*Agonistics* 17).

There are three key factors within Mouffe's work here that support my reading of Péguy as a resource for contemporary political thought and action. The first is the emphasis on a pluralistic form of agonism that recognizes the political importance of establishing certain frontiers within a diverse social body as a means for generating more robust forms of political confrontation among competing hegemonic projects. I have argued that Péguy's polemical style of engagement can read in a very similar vein. Second, Mouffe's discursive model of hegemonic articulation, which refuses to fall back upon a rationally-conceived model of intersubjective agreement, instead remaining committed to the passions as a catalyst for political will, recalls Péguy's own notion of "mystical discipline," which he establishes in contradistinction to both the parliamentary socialism of figures like Jaurès as well as Durkheim's own model of religious sociality. And finally, as we will see, Mouffe retains a profound hope for the role of artistic production within the process of generating counter-hegemonic political projects through the "agonistic production of new subjectivities" and alternative forms of identification (*Agonistics* 90). Péguy's unique repurposing of artistic production, specifically within the context of his writing for the *Cahiers*, likewise aims at generating a radical, new form of political identification among his readers.

Following Mouffe, I have argued that Péguy's thought lends itself to an agonistic conceptualization of political subjectivity, one that he hoped to mobilize towards an imperfectly defined, yet steadfastly revolutionary ideal of *fraternité*. Despite his Catholic mode of reference, Péguy remained committed to a pluralistic

conception of modern society, yet one that recognized the need for certain frontiers and distinctions serving to encourage a more direct confrontation between the divergent forms of political will operant within the larger social body. My reading of Péguy's work seeks to draw attention to an immanent, but pronounced, political valence within his thought, one that has been largely obscured by more rigidly dialectical readings of his oeuvre that tend to see in it an exclusive affirmation of the mystical over the political. Instead, we might read the tension Péguy sought to cultivate between these two relative poles as geared towards a deliberate undoing of support for the existent political *and* religious institutions of his time, both of which Péguy abhorred. Denying neither the spiritual nor the political impulses of modern man, Péguy staged what can be understood as a counter-hegemonic artistic practice, to use Mouffe's terminology, aimed at a profound reformulation of political and spiritual identification within his readership and ultimately, he hoped, within society at large.

Before going on, I would like to unpack the affective component of Mouffe's political thought here in more detail. As we have seen, the agonistic conception of politics that she develops foregrounds the passions as the necessary, driving force for a proper conception of both collective identity and political agency. In rejecting more deliberative models like those of John Rawls and Jürgen Habermas, Mouffe refuses to admit any strictly rational viewpoint as adequate grounds for approaching the political. Theories of the nature of Habermas' communicative rationality are judged insufficient precisely because they fail to grasp this vital affective dimension that

Mouffe sees as foundational in the establishment of any and all forms of collective identity. Echoing Freud, Mouffe thus maintains that “[a] collective identity, a ‘we,’ is the result of a passionate affective investment that creates a strong identification among the members of a community.” It is this fundamental importance of the role of libidinal drives, what Freud described as Eros and Thanatos, that Mouffe claims has too often been overlooked by political theorists in their accounts of group psychology (*Agonistics* 46).

Drawing upon the insights of Freud, in *Civilization and Its Discontents*, Mouffe recalls how civilization has historically managed to check instinctual forms of human aggressiveness by recourse to communal bonds premised upon a shared form of identification. Whether tribal, regional, or national, these forms of identification are the result, in Freud’s account, of powerfully libidinal instincts that serve to bind individuals together in a loving community of shared collective identity. Yet, as Mouffe points out, these collective forms of identity have necessarily relied upon a ‘they’ who remain excluded from this communal bond of love, destined to receive instead the expression of the community’s aggressiveness (*Agonistics* 47). This has important lessons, Mouffe maintains, in regards to national identity in our own day and age. That is why, in regards to contemporary Europe for instance, she claims it is naive and perhaps even dangerous to believe it possible “to construct a homogeneous, post-national ‘we’ through which the diversity of national ‘we’ would be overcome” (*Agonistics* 49). She traces the difficulties within the European Union’s attempts at forging a continent-wide sense of shared political identity precisely to this

fundamental inability to summon the type of “passionate affective investment” capable of overcoming and displacing these more immediate and enduring national forms of identity.

Given this difficulty, Mouffe proposes we instead embrace the challenge of an agonistic Europe, conceived along federalist lines of association, in which the potential for outright hostility and antagonism is contained within an agonistic configuration that continues to acknowledge the importance of the lived experience of national identity. Indeed, the entire project of the European Union provides a striking example of the challenges associated with developing a stable pluralistic model of political cooperation capable of “combining unity and diversity...[and of] creating a form of commonality that leaves room for heterogeneity” (*Agonistics* 49). For Mouffe, one cannot underestimate the vital role the passions play in helping to maintain this necessary political balance between commonality and heterogeneity. Rather than seeking to jettison the passions from the public sphere of rational debate and egalitarian exchange, she proposes we instead seek “ways to mobilize them towards democratic designs” (*Agonistics* 55). Chief among these is the possibility of instituting a political project that could stand as an alternative to the hegemonic neoliberal models of globalization that currently hold sway. To do so would be to reorient identity away from an EU composed of individual consumers and back to one made up of political citizens (*Agonistics* 59).

Manent has similarly questioned the ultimate feasibility of constructing a post-national sense of political identity built upon any type of abstract universalism, be it

in the form of economic cooperation or a secular liberalism devoid of any underlying commitment to a common good (*Discontents* 185). For Manent, there are important reasons why the nation has historically proven to be the largest political unit capable of linking individuals together through a shared sense of identity and collective belonging. For this has stemmed in no small part from the specifically theopolitical model upon which the modern European nation state was built, with its conception of political life as inescapably bound up with the pursuit of a higher moral good. It is precisely this lack of commitment to any sense of a common good that Manent sees as one of the primary enervating factors within the evolution of liberal democracy in recent years (*Discontents* 155).

As I have argued, Péguy's oeuvre addresses these concerns for a common political project arising out a more embodied, affective, and agonistic form of political identity. As in Péguy's time, the challenge today remains one of articulating durable forms of political engagement that are robust enough to resist slipping into a narrow sectarianism governed exclusively by self-interest. One might describe this as the pre-eminent challenge for our current political context as it wrestles with a resurgence of explicitly xenophobic populism within Western democratic society. The recent, burgeoning interest in radical forms of municipalism, following Murray Bookchin's work for example, testifies to the continued interest in a more immediate, local conception of the *polis* as a powerful and necessary antidote to the political disaffection borne of the largely empty, and often self-serving rhetoric of an abstract, elitist cosmopolitan subjectivity. This focus on local, affective, popular forms of

democratic assembly seems more than ever necessary to head off the populist backlash and anger we have witnessed at the ballot box in recent years. Rather than dismissing this anger as a deplorable anomaly on the march to greater forms of economic and social progress, we might take it for the symptom of a more profound democratic malaise that we ignore at our own peril.

### **Politics and Place**

Throughout this introduction, I have argued, through the lens of Péguy's thought, for a more robust form of debate regarding the nature of political and spiritual association in modern life. Far from being alone in this appeal, I have sought to provide a critical genealogy of similar efforts to challenge certain overly confident assumptions regarding the liberal democratic social order. Chief among these efforts is Mouffe's agonistic form of political thought, which is fitting given her role, in conjunction with Ernesto Laclau, in helping to dismantle what they viewed as similarly tired orthodoxies in Marxist theory. Their co-authored *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy*, with its influential critique of economic determinism as well as certain essentializing tendencies in regards to class, was foundational in opening up new forms of debate in regards to socialist thought and community. The new model of social analysis they helped to inaugurate, grounded in the same hegemonic focus that will be the subject of Mouffe's later work, would steer clear of any organic, essentialized notion of either political subjectivity or community. Yet, the real work of instituting a new network of political and social alliances, in lieu of any organic link, remained to be explored. In her subsequent model of passionate affective

investment, Mouffe would seek to understand the intimate ties that bind individuals to a place and to each other.

Within this critical genealogy, we might identify others who have explored this same affective relationship of the individual to place and others. Here it is important to consider Simone Weil's own critique of the alienating tendencies of modern social life and the subsequent need for a continued form of national and spiritual rootedness. Like Péguy, Weil remained something of an outsider to the Church, refusing its sacramental comforts all the while seeking to direct its spiritual resources towards a profound makeover of the French people following the initial devastations of WWII. She maintained a similar fascination for certain national and spiritual collective ideals, which she viewed as necessary components for achieving meaning amidst the modern, secular world. Her moral viewpoint was likewise shaped by a strong recognition of the nature of conflict and violence in human affairs. In her meditation upon force within the *Iliad*, she contrasted the terrible, dehumanizing nature of unchecked force with the universal quest and need for love, sympathy, and compassion. For Weil, this was the great lesson of the *Iliad* and of Greek civilization at large—namely, that the abuse of force carries with it a “retribution, which has a geometrical rigor, which operates automatically to penalize” anyone who refuses the profound need for charity and love (“Force” 14). It was this eternal rule that comprised “the soul of the epic” (14). Weil in turn would bemoan the loss within the modern world of any deep understanding of force and its relation to a whole host of

spiritual virtues, which had served to encourage a more balanced relation to force and violence:

The Occident, however, has lost [this understanding], and no longer even has a word to express it in any of its languages: conceptions of limit, measure, equilibrium, which ought to determine the conduct of life are, in the West, restricted to a servile function in the vocabulary of technics. We are only geometricians of matter; the Greeks were, first of all, geometricians in their apprenticeship to virtue. (15)

Weil's study of force within Greek epic opened onto a much larger and fundamentally agonistic understanding of the nature of Hellenic virtue. Her reading of the close relationship between force and virtue sought to bring to light not just the ethical consequences for individuals and for different communities. It aimed also to show, in a way that recalls both Péguy and Bergson, the deeply problematic nature of an almost exclusively technological relationship to the material world at large.

Weil would instead seek, in her late work, a "method for breathing inspiration into a people" through a new form of spiritual and political rootedness (*Roots* 187). For Weil, rootedness could be achieved only through the active participation of the full human community as it strives to translate what is most useful and enriching in its past towards a more compassionate and inclusive vision of human community:

To be rooted is perhaps the most important and least recognized need of the human soul. It is one of the hardest to define. A human being has roots by virtue of his real, active, and natural participation in the

life of a community, which preserves in living shape certain particular treasures of the past and certain particular expectations for the future.

(43)

Benoît Chantre, in his reading of the mystical qualities at work within Péguy's and Weil's oeuvres, points out this shared critique of the modern world and its naive faith in technological progress—a critique that opens onto an intense desire to bridge the temporal and spiritual worlds of man through a new form of collective, mystical identity. For Chantre, Weil and Péguy thus “represent two unique attempts within the 20<sup>th</sup> century to refound French identity by giving the mystical a certain direction and meaning” (“Mystique” 53).

Weil, despite her reservations about the chauvinistic nature of nationalist identity would, following the defeat of 1940, call for a mystical reformulation of national rootedness in a way that opened it up to a radical new process of spiritual becoming. Weil's mystical vision was one in which the nation itself rediscovered its commitment to the deeper spiritual values that animate the collective existence of man. Similar to Péguy, Weil would seek recourse to literature as a means of recalling certain fundamental truths necessary for harmonious forms of coexistence between different nations and peoples. And just like Péguy, her most moving work was written during a time of intense national and spiritual crisis in which the future of the French nation stood in doubt. Her appeal to the forgotten truths of a more agonistically conceived sense of Hellenic virtue can be read as a striking example of Péguy's own notion of mystico-political intervention in the historical duration of a people. The

highly spiritualized notion of work that she develops shares much in common with Péguy's own idea of "mystical discipline" as a collective form of practice oriented towards the continued moral and political survival of a people.

Gellner, in his work *Nations and Nationalism*, has conceived of the modern nation as constituted in a fundamental sense through a common literate high-culture, which works to ensure ease of communication across a variety of domains and contexts as well as a commitment to a shared technocratic vision of human progress. In Gellner's account, this form of national development inevitably calls for the subordination of all social relations to the dictates of a minority intelligentsia charged with ensuring the technological and economic progress necessary for the continued survival of a particular nation state. It was this vision of an increasingly homogenous, scientific, and atomized form of human sociality that was attacked by Weil and Péguy as deeply unsatisfying and ultimately self-defeating when it leaves no place for embodied, popular, and immediately present forms of social engagement. This is not to say that either was naïve regarding the importance of technological expertise in the development of the modern nation state. Despite their disdain for political and intellectual hierarchies, both thinkers were all too aware of the need for scientific and military might in a hostile world.

Yet, what Weil describes as the needs of the soul were just as fundamental for the spiritual survival of a people. Her insistence upon the localized, affective, and embodied forms of practical and spiritual duty towards fellow citizens and the community outweighed any abstract consideration of individual human rights. It was

the numerous immediate obligations to place and community that Weil focused upon in her recommendations for a renewed form of political and spiritual community. There are numerous differences in their respective oeuvres—Weil had no love for Roman civilization while Péguy saw in it the necessary Stoic foundations that would give rise to the early Church. Yet, the mystical form of national community they imagined for the future was a firmly agonistic and embodied one calling upon the active participation of all members of society in its continued spiritual and political development. For the mystical to achieve form it must find action in the numerous daily, local, and embodied forms of civic engagement that constitute the life of the community.

### **A People in the Making**

Another fundamental element for understanding the affectively charged relationship of individuals to place and to their neighbors is language. Following Mouffe, I have argued that Péguy's popularly conceived form of poetics worked to produce a powerful new mode for mobilizing the passions of his readers, calling them to a new form of spiritual and political identification rooted in a participatory ethics of creative becoming. His theopolitical vision was by all means a minority one, in the sense that Deleuze might describe it—one that sought to translate what Péguy viewed as an underlying poetic sentiment of the people as it struggled to retain and adapt its sense of community and popular solidarity within the increasingly industrialized landscape of modernity. Through his bi-monthly practice of textual and political intervention within the cultural milieux of his time, Péguy sought to give rise to a new

model of political identification founded upon an affective, popularly conceived poetics. To what extent Péguy succeeded in altering the political and spiritual landscape, for better or for worse, will continue to be argued for some time. But the relation he sought to establish between a uniquely fashioned popular aesthetic sensibility and a certain theopolitical vision he hoped capable of disrupting any facile adhesion to modern secular liberalism remains a powerful model to this day.

Péguy's aesthetic refashioning of the political and religious sentiments of his readers would have important consequences for his conception of the individual community and its relation to the cosmopolitan forces of modern life. Péguy was keenly aware of the tension existing between a classical humanism premised upon a disembodied form of universalism and the danger of falling into a narrow particularism incompatible with both the political and spiritual conditions of modern life. His unique model of mystico-political identity would attract numerous readers from a variety of backgrounds, including a young Léopold Sédar Senghor. Responding both to Péguy's philosophical mysticism as well as his unique style, Senghor would come to see in Péguy's work a model for his own nascent political and aesthetic thought. Writing in 1973, Senghor discussed this early influence of Péguy and Claudel upon his own work as well as upon that of his fellow Négritude co-founders:

Reading them attentively, with the eyes of the soul, and the ears open, we had realized that their style was rhapsodic (re-peating, not re-stating). But also that, with Claudel and Péguy, there was, behind their

style, a philosophy and mystique of intuition, similar to the black African ontology and mystique. That at last, with Péguy, this socialism, tempted by anarchy and wary of all party machinery, this socialism, attuned to the heart but attendant to the good sense of the common man, responded to our own concerns. (Durand 15)

Senghor's emphasis upon the mystical, intuitive quality of Péguy's thought, along with the unique form of socialism it articulates, highlights the powerfully heterodox forms of identification Péguy's work was capable of eliciting in his readers. Notice as well the specific mode of reception—a practice of reading attuned both to the unique aural qualities appealing to the ear as well as to a certain visionary quality grasped, in Senghor's description, by the eyes of the soul. One would be hard pressed to find a more ideal type of reader according to Péguy's own standards. It is no surprise that Senghor's own biography combined poetic craft, with a heightened attention to the transformative power of the word, along with political leadership at the head of a newly fostered political community. And much like Péguy, questions concerning the essentialist aspects of his thought have figured prominently in discussions of his own legacy, specifically in regards to many of the founding principles of Negritude. However, both writers shared a powerful sense of the affective power of the word as a type of quasi-oracular utterance capable of engendering or calling into being new modes of identification within the atomized or diasporic conditions of modern social life.

Deleuze has suggested a similar process at work within Bergson's concept of "fabulation," which he describes as the act of legending or calling into being a people that does not yet exist: "To catch someone in the act of legending is to catch the movement of constitution of a people" (*Negotiations* 125-6). Similar to Mouffe, Deleuze establishes a strong interplay between art and politics as the creative grounds for the fabulation of this missing sense of collective identification necessary for the constitution of a new people: "When a people's created, it's through its own resources, but in a way that links up with something in art [...] or links up art to what is lacked. Utopia isn't the right concept: it's more a question of 'fabulation' in which a people and art both share. We ought to take up Bergson's notion of fabulation and give it a political meaning" (*Negotiations* 174). As Deleuze and Guattari argue elsewhere, this should be conceived of as a process of minority becoming, which by definition must necessarily stand in paradoxical relation to the actualized conditions encoded in existing democratic institutions: "For the race summoned forth by art or philosophy is not the one that claims to be pure but rather an oppressed, bastard, inferior, anarchical, nomadic, and irremediably minor race—those that Kant excluded from the paths of the new Critique" (*Philosophy* 109). Deleuze's use of *race*, it must be noted, would seem to work in similar fashion to Péguy's mystical conception of a refashioned form of French collectivity melding ethical commitment with creative becoming.

This notion of what Deleuze and Guattari have called a "people to come" (*Philosophy* 109) is helpful for conceiving of Péguy's own mystical project as the

calling into being of a new form of collectivity—a people—for his own era. And lest anyone think Péguy's valorization of the mystical potentiality incarnate in *le peuple* applied to the actual populace of his time, we need only look at his diagnosis of modern society in *L'Argent* for instance:

Today, when one says the people, it's nothing but fine words, and even some of the worst, straight out of the pages of an electoral, political, parliamentary literature. There's no longer any people. Everyone is bourgeois. [...] As for the workers they no longer have but one idea, that's to become bourgeois. It is even what they call becoming socialist. (III 787)

For Péguy, especially in the final years of his life, the hope for a renewal of French republican mystique would necessarily be enacted within a *peuple à venir*.

Jean-Luc Nancy's notion of inoperative community can be read as a more recent formulation of this notion of a people who remain without any sense of fixed essence—a people that is always still to come. For Nancy:

Community therefore is neither an abstract or immaterial relationship, nor a common substance. It is not a common *being*; it is to be *in* common, or to be *with* each other, or to be together [...] To be together, or to be *in* common, therefore, is the proper mode of being of existence as such, which is the mode where being as such is put into play, where being as such is risked or exposed. ("Finite" 154-5)

Nancy's notion of community places the accent upon the performative nature of social being—the need for proximity with the other as a mode of continual negotiation of both personal and communal senses of identity. Nancy thus calls attention to the daily moments of a non-reflective cohabitation, the fleeting moments of embodied *côtoiment* with those shared social actors playing out the drama of modern life.

It is this intimate sense of proximity and being that Nancy sees as the glue of modern urban social life:

Whether one wants it or not, the city mingles and mixes at the same time as it separates and dissolves. One rubs shoulders, one passes close to others, one touches and moves apart: it is one and the same pace and look [*une même allure*] [...] One is packed in, body to body in the subway or on the escalator, car against car, and window to window in the evening as well, one side of the road to the other [...] Everyone meets up and stays away, crosses paths and steers clear. Eyes barely meet, linger furtively on others, bodies take heed, delicate territories take shape endlessly, unstable borders, shifting, moveable and porous, a mix of permeable and water-tight. Mishmash of physical laws — attraction and repulsion —, chemical laws — assimilation, decomposition —, cosmological laws — expansion and implosion, warping of space-time —, moral laws — order and disorder, love and hate. (“Pays” 56)

Nancy's description of the modern city is framed in very agonistic terms, yet ones which open continually onto the possibility of a new moral, communal sense of order and lived social being. It is this agonistic focus that I have insisted upon in my reading of Péguy's own vision of mystico-political becoming within the modern world. And although Péguy could not have envisioned the complexity of our current global world, the agonistic, affectively rich sense of localized, shared social being remains a valuable tool for thinking through the grey areas of modern social theory. These include the space and role of civic society in regards to legalistic and rights-based discourses, especially those more universal in nature. Péguy's notion of "mystical discipline" sought a direct means for translating the abstract nature of speculative thought into specific forms of embodied, moral and political practice. For Péguy believed that the reanimation of civic virtue directed towards a common good was the continual and most pressing challenge standing before modern society.

Alasdair Macintyre, in his work *After Virtue*, has attempted a similar recovery of the classical virtues of antiquity as a means for escaping the moral relativism he deems characteristic of modernity. By doing so, he hopes to reinstitute a notion of politics as a lived practice geared towards a pursuit of what he calls "internal goods" and opening onto a veritable education in virtue (187-9). He thus seeks to historicize Aristotle's thought in order to open it up to a more dynamic form of historical evolution beyond the limited scope of the closed city-state of classical antiquity. In this absence of any already existent form of political *telos*, he instead proposes that "it is through conflict and sometimes only through conflict that we learn what our ends

and purposes are” (164). This is a fitting summation of Péguy’s own notion of “mystical discipline” as a project of agonistic, collective becoming rooted in a deeply embodied and affect-rich understanding of self and the world. Spinoza had similarly inquired into the limits of just what a body is and can do (III 2). Deleuze and Guattari would seek to respond to this question: “We know nothing about a body until we know what it can do, in other words, what its affects are, how they can or cannot enter into composition with other affects, with the affects of another body, either to destroy that body or to be destroyed by it, either to exchange actions and passions with it or to join with it in composing a more powerful body” (*Plateaus* 257). Péguy’s own response, while less developed, was no less forceful. In the image of encounter—between Polyuctus and Severus, Descartes and Bergson, himself and Benda—Péguy offers us a practical model for the understanding the continued moral and political development of mankind.

### **Organic Community and Political Becoming**

In her work *The Figural Jew*, Sarah Hammerschlag examines how in modern French discourse Jewishness has long been mobilized as a mythic symbol, and later tropological figure, for rootlessness, particularism, and outsidership (7). This she claims tends to hold true both in the antisemitic racial theories of German and French fascism as well as in the philosemitism that has largely characterized French thought since World War II (18). To revalorize Jewishness as a type of exemplary model for all of humanity is in no way to escape its dangerous essentializing tendencies when it remains bound up with a political figuration of identity. Hammerschlag instead

proposes that “it is by way of figural modes of expression introducing comparison, performance, and irony into political speech that we can begin to destabilize the politics of identity without resorting to the nostalgia of universalizing humanism” (23). Drawing upon Levinas and Derrida in particular, she thus shows how a more self-consciously figurative deployment of the notion of the Jew ultimately “comes to function as a reminder of its own deception” (11).

In her chapter on fin-de-siècle France, Hammerschlag distinguishes between the genealogical conception of race employed by Péguy and the biological one espoused by figures like Barrès and Edouard Drumont (61). Despite this she claims that Péguy’s deployment of race is ultimately deterministic in that it seeks to tie Jewish identity to a specific cultural heritage that blocks the individual’s capacity for more creative forms of becoming (55). For Hammerschlag, Péguy’s philosemitism participates in a dangerous, mythological valorization of Jewishness as a laudable form of archetypal difference—one that sets the stage for the subsequent antisemitic reversal of this valorization (62). It is a critique echoed, in slightly different terms as we have seen, in Carroll’s own work on the origins of what he styles as French literary fascism.

In their readings of Péguy’s genealogical figuration of Jewishness, both Hammerschlag and Carroll highlight the seemingly essentialist typologies amply in evidence throughout Péguy’s oeuvre. These typologies figure prominently within the three, distinct genealogical accounts of Jewish, Christian, and Republican *mystiques*, which together Péguy considered as foundational to the creation of a unique,

transhistorical form of *durée française*. Péguy, in following Bergson's lead in many ways, often employed biological concepts and figures as a means for describing his larger metaphysical approach. Early in *Notre Jeunesse* Péguy describes his approach as one of undertaking an "ethnic histology":

What we want to know, and what we cannot invent, what we want to know more about, are not the principal roles, the leading stars, the grand drama, the stage, the spectacle; what we want to know is what went on behind, below, beneath the surface, what the people of France were like; in fact, what we want to know is the *tissue* of the people in that heroic age, the texture of the republican party. What we want to do is an ethnic *histology*. What we want to know is of what tissue this people was woven, this people and this party, how an *ordinary* republican family lived, an average one you could say, obscure, chosen at random, taken from this common tissue [...] What we want to know is the texture, the very tissue of the bourgeoisie, of the Republic, of the people, when the bourgeoisie was great, when the people was great, when the republicans were heroic, and the Republic had clean hands. [...] What we want is not a dressed-up Sunday version of history, but the history of every day of the week, a people in the ordinary texture of its daily; working and earning, working for its daily bread, *panem quotidianum*, a race in its reality, displayed in all its depth. (*Temporal* 20, translation modified)

Péguy's histological terminology here returns us once more to his radical new practice of reading, which sought beneath the dressed-up accounts of official history the more quotidian, binding social fabric serving to ensure the affective continuity of a capaciously conceived French *race*. Through these biological tropes, Péguy was able to give a figural representation to the mystical substratum he hoped to recover and collectively mobilize in a renewed form of political action. Similar to Bergson, Péguy's ethnic histology insists upon an intuitive approach to uncovering a common French collectivity that remained largely invisible to the workings of intellect. It is an approach instantiated in his textual commitment to brushing history against the grain—that is of seeking out and transmitting a lost voice of the people through his radical, new practice of literacy. Certeau figures orality in very similar terms in relation to the scriptural economy that seeks to determine and ultimately comprehend it: “[o]rality insinuates itself, like one of the threads of which it is composed, into the network—an endless tapestry—of a scriptural economy” (132). The biological trope of histology, like that of genealogy, thus testifies to a specific rhetorical approach within Péguy's poetics.

Matthew W. Macguire argues that the uniqueness of Péguy's approach stems from the deeply complementary historical account he provided of the Dreyfus Affair as the locus of three highly unique, distinctly different forms of mystical action: Jewish, Christian, and secular. Macguire's conception of Péguy's “contrapuntal mysticisms” (113) thus allows for a richer genealogical account to emerge of the

continued nuancing, development, and interpenetration of these three traditions in their relation to the quantitative particulars of historical time:

Péguy's alternative [account] allows us to see the Dreyfus Affair—an archetypal event of justice and right in late modern culture and politics—as a fascinating, consequential and complicated coproduction of secularism, Christianity and Judaism [...] Even if we must limit ourselves to genealogies of modernity and its pluralisms, in which the relation between religions—and between religion and non-religion—figure so prominently, Péguy's thinking affords his readers an opportunity to make them truly genealogical. That is, true genealogical history should include the rich epistatic relations of genetic development, of dormant and recessive possibilities renewed after the dominance of some other phenotype, always open to surprising reappearances that are never a mere repetition, themselves open to faithfully creative growth in the future. (113)

For Macguire, Péguy institutes a profound, new relationship between origins and originality, one conceived not as transgression but rather as a faithful, nuanced iteration of a cultural heritage in its continued relation to a changing environment (124). He thus provides the framework for thinking the political and spiritual through a more creative form of interdependence that refuses an exclusive prioritization of either term as the preferred ontological modality for collective belonging and concerted action. A more textured understanding of genealogy arises from this

reading. For genealogy implies not a facile, biological determinism but rather a whole host of empirically verifiable potentialities. These include everything from latent genetic predispositions, that may remain entirely unexpressed, to a whole range of phenotypic possibilities arising from the dynamic interaction between genes and environment. Genetics itself as a figure is, upon closer inspection, not so straightforwardly deterministic as we may think.

As I have maintained throughout this essay, Péguy's work provides an invaluable framework for helping us think through our own theorizations of collective identity and agency within the contemporary world, as well as the specific political commitments that inform our theoretical efforts. I believe that Péguy's focus on histology should thus not be understood as an organically conceived essentialism but rather as a specific political commitment to understanding collectivity as something more than the self-reflexive deployment of tropes or as simply "performing vulnerable bodies together" (Wark 164). It takes into account the role of habitus and group psychology in the continued expression of individual subjectivity in relation to the diffuse, formative pressures of cultural construction. Similar to Bergson, it foregrounds the embodied and psychic tension that exists between our experience of a world *tout fait* versus one *se faisant*. And ultimately, in the mystical call to a renewed form of civic engagement, Péguy sought to direct this Bergsonian methodology towards the creative and participatory ideal of a new polity that would remain eternally in the making.

In its counter-hegemonic opposition to the Radical-Socialist policies of his time, Péguy's genealogical account of the Dreyfus Affair offered a powerful new reading—one that recast the Affair as an agonistic space for the continued production of what today we might call various “alternative modernities” (Gaonkar 1). His artistic refashioning of political identity, rooted in the slogan of *mystique* before *politique*, can be understood as a strategic appeal to the broadest possible collectivity of those dissatisfied with the hegemonic political policies of the era, with their artificial division between the secular and the religious. And while Péguy's libertarian vision of a renewed form of civism never articulated a more collaborative relationship with representational political structures, he never closed the door on this possibility (III 19). What is certain is that he was absolutely clear in his identification of political adversaries and in his commitment to rhetorically challenging their political dominance through the formation of counter-hegemonic political subjectivities. This, as Chantal Mouffe has argued, remains the fundamental gesture for a radical form of agonistic politics to take shape. It is not by consensus but rather by opposition that Péguy sought to radicalize the existent political institutions and practices of his time. His genealogical account of the modern world, evident in the extensive reading of the Dreyfus Affair he developed throughout his oeuvre, opened the door for conceiving of this archetypal event as a model for the continued production of a whole new range of political phenotypes, that is of a democratic polity informed by the passionate participation of each and every citizen.

## Bibliography

- Arendt, Hannah. *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil*. New York: Viking P, 1963.
- Apter, Emily. *The Translation Zone: A New Comparative Literature*. Princeton: PUP, 2006.
- Althusser, Louis. *Journal de captivité: Stalag XA, 1940-1945: carnets, correspondances, textes*. Paris: Stock-IMEC, 1992.
- Aquinas, Thomas. *Thomas Aquinas: Selected Writings*. Trans. and Ed. Ralph McInerny. New York: Penguin, 1998.
- Aristotle. *Nicomachean Ethics*. Trans. and Ed. Roger Crisp. Cambridge: CUP, 2014.
- Aronowicz, Annette. *Jews and Christians on Time and Eternity*. Palo Alto: SUP, 1998.
- Badiou, Alain. *Ethics*. New York: Verso, 2001.
- Balibar, Etienne. *Race, Nation, Class: Ambiguous Identities*. New York: Verso, 2011.
- Balibar, Étienne. *Violence et civilité: Wellek Library Lectures et autres essais de philosophie politique*. Paris: Galilée, 2010.
- Ball, Hugo. "Carl Schmitt's Political Theology," Trans. Matthew Vollgraff. *OCTOBER* 146, (Fall 2013), 65-92.
- Barrès, Maurice. *Les Déracinés*. Paris: Plon, 1961.
- Barth, Fredrik, et. al. *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries: The Social Organization of Culture Difference*. Ed. Fredrik Barth. Long Grove: Waveland, 1998.
- Barth, Karl. *Kirchliche Dogmatik*. Frankfurt: Fischer, 1957.

- Bastaire, Jean. *Péguy l'inchrétien*. Paris: Desclée, 1991.
- Benda, Julien. *The Treason of the Intellectuals*. Trans. Richard Aldington. New Brunswick: Transaction, 2009.
- Benjamin, Walter. "Author as Producer," *Walter Benjamin: Selected Writings, Volume 2, Part 2, 1931-1934*. Trans. Rodney Livingstone. Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1999. 768-82.
- . "The Present Social Situation of the French Writer," *Walter Benjamin: Selected Writings, Volume 2, Part 2, 1931-1934*. Trans. Rodney Livingstone. Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1999. 744-67.
- . *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*. Trans. John Osborne. New York: Verso, 1985.
- . "Theses on the Philosophy of History," *Illuminations*. Trans. Harry Zohn. New York: Schocken Books, 1968. 253-64.
- Bergson, Henri. *Creative Evolution*. Trans. Arthur Mitchell. New York: Random, 1944.
- . *An Introduction to Metaphysics*. Trans. T.E. Hulme. New York: Putnam, 1912.
- . *Matter and Memory*. Trans. Nancy Margaret Paul and W. Scott Palmer. New York: Macmillan, 1950.
- . *The Two Sources of Morality and Religion*. Trans. R. Ashley Audra and Cloudesley Brereton. Notre Dame: NDP, 1977.
- Blanchot, Maurice. "Intellectuals Under Scrutiny, An Outline for Thought," *Jean-*

- François Lyotard: Critical Evaluations in Cultural Theory*. Ed. Victor E. Taylor and Gregg Lambert, Trans. Michael Holland. New York: Routledge, 2006. 55-74.
- . "La Solitude de Péguy," *Faux pas*. Paris: Gallimard, 1975.
- . *Maurice Blanchot, Political Writings 1953-1993*. Trans. and Ed. Zakir Paul. New York: Fordham UP, 2010.
- Blondel, Maurice. *Oeuvres complètes*. Paris: PU de France, 1995.
- Boersma, Gerald. *Augustine's Early Theology of Image: A Study in the Development of Pro-Nicene Theology*. New York: Oxford UP, 2016.
- Bookchin, Murray and Janet Biehl. *The Politics of Social Ecology: Libertarian Municipalism*. New York: Black Rose, 1998.
- Brasillach, Robert. *Pierre Corneille*. Paris: A. Fayard, 1938.
- Bruley, Pauline. *Rhétorique et style dans la prose de Charles Péguy*. Paris: Honoré Champion, 2010.
- Buffon, Georges-Louis Leclerc, comte de. *Discours sur le style*. Hull: UHP, 1978.
- Carroll, David. *French Literary Fascism: Nationalism, Anti-Semitism, and the Ideology of Culture*. Princeton: U of PP, 1995.
- Certeau, Michel de. *The Practice of Everyday Life*. Trans. Steven Rendall. Berkeley: UCP, 2011.
- Césaire, Aimé. *Letter to Maurice Thorez*. Trans. X. Paris: Présence africaine, 1957.
- Charlot, Patrick. "Le/la politique selon Charles Péguy," *Charles Péguy, l'écrivain et le politique*. Ed. Romain Vaissermann. Paris: Rue d'Ulm, 2004. 199-210.

- Chantre, Benoît. "La mystique républicaine de Charles Péguy et Simone Weil,"  
*Esprit*. 257:10 (October 1999) 53-70.
- . "Une histoire arrive à la chair," *Pensée de Péguy*. Paris: Desclée de Brouwer,  
 2015. 17-35.
- Corneille, Pierre. *Polyeucte*. Paris: Larousse, 1948.
- Curtius, Ernst Robert. *Essays on European Literature*. Princeton: PUP, 2015.
- Deleuze, Gilles. *Bergsonism*. Trans. Hugh Tomlinson. Cambridge: MIT P, 1988.
- . "Le Bergsonisme," *Les Philosophes célèbres*. Ed. Maurice Merleau-Ponty. Paris:  
 Editions d'Art, 1956. 418-9.
- . *Cinema 2: The Time Image*. Trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Robert Galeta.  
 Minneapolis: UMP, 1989.
- . *Difference and Repetition*. Trans. Paul Patton. New York: Columbia UP, 1994.
- . "Foucault et les prisons," *Deux régimes de fous: textes et entretiens, 1975-1995*.  
 Paris: Minuit, 2003. 254-62.
- . *Negotiations, 1972-1990*. Trans. Martin Joughin. New York: CUP, 1995.
- . "Style," *L'Abécédaire de Gilles Deleuze*. Produced by Pierre-André Boutang,  
 Directed by Michel Pamart, Interview with Claire Parnet. Arte. 1995.
- Deleuze, Gilles and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and  
 Schizophrenia*, Trans. Brian Massumi. Minneapolis: UMP, 1987.
- . *What is Philosophy?* Trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Graham Burchell. New York:  
 CUP, 1994.
- Derrida, Jacques. *Dissemination*. Trans. Barbara Johnson. Chicago: UCP, 1981.

- Drieu la Rochelle, Pierre. *Sur les écrivains*. Paris: Gallimard, 1982.
- Duclaux, Mary. *Twentieth Century French Writers: Reviews and Reminiscences*.  
London: Forgotten Books, 2013.
- Duployé, Pie. *La Religion de Péguy*. Geneva: Slatkine, 1978.
- Durand, Jean-François, et al. *Péguy-Senghor: La Parole et le monde*. Paris:  
Harmattan, 1996.
- Durkheim, Émile. *The Division of Labour in Society*. Trans. W.D. Halls. London:  
Macmillan, 1984.
- . *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*. New York: Oxford UP, 2001.
- . "Individualism and Intellectuals," *Émile Durkheim on Morality and Society*.  
Trans. Mark Traugott. Ed. Robert N. Bellah. Chicago: UCP, 1973. 43-57.
- . *The Rules of Sociological Method*. Trans. W.D. Halls. New York: Free Press,  
1982.
- Elias, Norbert. *The Germans: Power Struggles and the Development of Habitus in the  
Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries*. Ed. Michael Schröter. Trans. Eric  
Dunning and Stephen Mennell. New York: Columbia UP, 1996.
- Eliot, T.S. "Charles Péguy." *The New Statesman*. 8:183 (7 October 1916): 19-20.
- Finkelkraut, Alain. *L'identité malheureuse*. Paris: Stock, 2013.
- . *Le Mécontemporain: Péguy, lecteur du monde moderne*. Paris: Gallimard, 1991.
- France, Anatole. *Vie de Jeanne d'Arc*. Paris: Calmann-Lévy, 1908.
- Freud, Sigmund. *Civilization and Its Discontents*. Trans. David McLintock. London:  
Penguin, 2002.

- Gadamer, Hans-Georg. *Gadamer in Conversation: Reflections and Commentary*.  
 Trans. Richard E. Palmer. Binghamton: Vail-Ballou P, 2001.
- . *Truth and Method*. 2<sup>nd</sup> Ed. Trans. Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshall.  
 New York: Continuum, 2004.
- Gaonkar, Dilip Parameshwar et al., *Alternative Modernities*. Ed. Dilip Parameshwar  
 Gaonkar. London: Duke UP, 2001.
- Gellner, Ernest. *Nations and Nationalism*. 2<sup>nd</sup> Ed. Ithaca: CUP, 2008.
- Gide, André. *Nouveaux Pretextes: Réflexions sur quelques points de littérature et de  
 morale*. Paris: Mercure de France, 1918.
- Giddens, Anthony. *The Constitution of Society: Outline of the Theory of  
 Structuration*. Berkeley: UCP, 1984.
- Gramsci, Antonio. "I Moventi e Coppoletto," *Sotto la Mole*. Turin: Einaudi, 1972.
- Green, Julien. *Journal, Tome 5: 1946-1950*. Paris: Plon, 1951.
- Griffiths, Richard. *The Reactionary Revolution: The Catholic Revival in French  
 Literature, 1870-1914*. New York: F. Ungar, 1965.
- Habermas, Jürgen, *The Inclusion of the Other: Studies in Political Theory*.  
 Cambridge: MIT, 1998.
- Halbwachs, Maurice. *La Mémoire collective*. Paris: Michel, 1997.
- Halévy, Daniel. *Péguy et les Cahiers de la Quinzaine*. Paris: Grasset, 1979.
- Hammerschlag, Sarah. *The Figural Jew*. Chicago: UCP, 2010.
- Hardt, Michael and Antonio Negri. *Multitude: War and Democracy in the Age of  
 Empire*. New York: Penguin, 2004.

- Herr, Lucien. *Choix d'écrits*. Paris: Rieder, 1932.
- Hill, Geoffrey. *The Mystery of the Charity of Charles Péguy*. Oxford: OUP, 1985.
- Jaurès, Jean. *Études socialistes*. Paris: Slatkine, 1979.
- Julliard, Jacques. "Contre le gros animal: d'un certain jansénisme en politique," *Pensée de Péguy*. Ed. Benoît Chantre, et. al. Paris: Desclée de Brouwer, 2015. 275-294.
- Laclau, Ernesto and Chantal Mouffe. *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy: Towards a Radical Democratic Politics*. New York: Verso, 2001.
- Lanson, Gustave. *Histoire de la littérature française*. Paris: Hachette, 1964.
- Lasserre, Pierre. *Le Romantisme français : essai sur la révolution dans les sentiments et dans les idées au XIXe siècle*. Paris: Garnier, 1919.
- Latour, Bruno. "Charles Péguy: Time, Space, and le Monde Moderne," Trans. Tim Howles. *New Literary History*. 46.1. Winter 2015. 41-62.
- . "Les raisons profondes du style répétitif de Péguy," *Péguy Ecrivain: Colloque du centenaire de la naissance de Charles Péguy*. Paris: Klincksieck, 1977. 78-102.
- Lefebvre, Henri. *The Production of Space*. Trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith. Oxford: Blackwell, 1991.
- Le Guay, Damien. *Les héritiers Péguy*. Montrouge: Bayard, 2014.
- Le Hir, Marie-Pierre. *The National Habitus: Ways of Feeling French, 1798-1870*. Berlin: de Gruyter. 2014.
- Leroy, Gerd. "Les Cahiers de la Quinzaine," *Cahiers Georges Sorel*. 5.1 1987. 77-

88.

Lévy, Bernard-Henri. *L'Idéologie française*. Paris: Grasset, 1991.

MacIntyre, Alasdair. *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory*. 2<sup>nd</sup> Ed. Notre Dame: NDP, 1984.

MacGuire, Matthew W. "Judaism, Christianity, and Modernity: Charles Péguy and the Mysticism of the Dreyfus Affair," *Understanding Religious Pluralism: Perspectives from Religious Studies and Theology*. Ed. Peter C. Phan and Jonathan Ray. Eugene: Pickwick P, 2014. 119-34.

Macron, Emmanuël. "Macron, confidences sacrées." *Le Journal du Dimanche*, 12 Feb. 2017, [www.lejdd.fr/Politique/Emmanuel-Macron-confidences-sacrees-846746](http://www.lejdd.fr/Politique/Emmanuel-Macron-confidences-sacrees-846746). Accessed 5 April 2018.

---. "New Year greetings by M. Emmanuel Macron, President of the Republic, to the diplomatic corps." *France Diplomatie*, 4 Jan. 2018, [www.diplomatie.gouv.fr/en/the-ministry-and-its-network/events/2017/article/president-emmanuel-macron-new-year-greetings-to-the-diplomatic-corps-04-01-18#](http://www.diplomatie.gouv.fr/en/the-ministry-and-its-network/events/2017/article/president-emmanuel-macron-new-year-greetings-to-the-diplomatic-corps-04-01-18#). Accessed 5 April 2018.

Manent, Pierre. *Beyond Radical Secularism: How France and the Christian West Should Respond to the Islamic Challenge*. Trans. Robert C. Hancock. South Bend: St. Augustine, 2016.

---. Foreword. *Temporal and Eternal*. By Charles Péguy. Trans. Alexandre Dru. London: Harvill, 1958.

---. *Modern Liberty and Its Discontents*. Trans. Daniel J. Mahoney and Paul Seaton.

- New York: Rowman and Littlefield, 1998.
- Maritain, Jacques. *La Philosophie bergsonienne*. Paris: Rivière, 1914.
- Maurras, Charles. *L'Avenir de l'intelligence*. Paris: Flammarion, 1927.
- Mauss, Marcel. *The Gift: The Form and Reason for Exchange in Archaic Societies*.  
 Trans. W.D. Halls. New York: Norton, 2000.
- Merleau-Ponty, Maurice. *Phenomenology of Perception*. 2<sup>nd</sup> Ed. Trans. Colin Smith.  
 New York: Routledge, 2002.
- Meschonnic, Henri. "Péguy oralité et rythme," *L'Amitié Charles Péguy*. no. 100,  
 Oct.-Dec. 2002, 437-49.
- Müller, Jan-Werner. *What Is Populism?* Philadelphia: U of PP, 2016.
- Mouffe, Chantal. *Agonistics: Thinking the World Politically*. New York: Verso, 2013.
- . "Carl Schmitt and the Paradox of Liberal Democracy," *The Challenge of Carl  
 Schmitt*. Ed. Chantal Mouffe. New York: Verso, 1999. 38-53.
- Mounier, Emmanuel et al. *La pensée de Charles Péguy*. Paris: Plon, 1931.
- Nagel, Thomas. *The View From Nowhere*. New York: Oxford UP, 1986.
- Nancy, Jean-Luc. *Being Singular Plural*. Trans. Robert D. Richardson and Anne E.  
 O'Byrne. Stanford: SUP, 2000.
- . *La Communauté désœuvrée*. 3<sup>rd</sup> Ed. Christian Bourgois: Paris. 1999.
- . "Finite History," *The Birth to Presence*. Trans. Brian Holmes. Stanford: SUP,  
 1993. 143-166.
- . "Le pays où on n'arrive jamais." *Vacarme*, no. 8, Spring 1999. pp. 55-6.
- . *The Disavowed Community*. Trans. Philip Armstrong. New York: Fordham UP,

2016.

Nietzsche, Friedrich. *On the Genealogy of Morals*. Trans. Douglas Smith. New York:

Oxford UP, 1996.

Nora, Pierre et. al. *Realms of Memory: Rethinking the French Past, Vol. 1: Conflicts*

*and Divisions*. Ed. Pierre Nora. Trans. Arthur Goldhammer. New York: CUP,

1996.

Ong, Walter J. *Orality and Literacy*. New York: Routledge, 2002.

Ory, Pascal and Jean-François Sirinelli. *Les Intellectuels en France: De l'affaire*

*Dreyfus à nos jours*. Paris: Perrin, 2004.

Pedley, Alan. *As Mighty as the Sword: A Study of the Writings of Charles de Gaulle*.

Exeter: Elm Bank, 1996.

Péguy, Charles. *Basic Verities: Prose and Poetry*. Trans. Julien Green. New York:

Pantheon. 1943.

---. *Cartesio e la filosofia cartesiana*. Trans. Cristiana Lardo. Roma: Edizioni

Studium, 2014.

---. *God Speaks: Religious Poetry*. Trans. Julien Green. New York: Pantheon, 1945.

---. *Men and Saints: Prose and Poetry*. Trans. Julien Green. New York: Pantheon.

1944.

---. *Oeuvres en prose complètes*. Vol. I. Paris: Gallimard, 1987.

---. *Oeuvres en prose complètes*. Vol. II. Paris: Gallimard, 1987.

---. *Oeuvres en prose complètes*. Vol. III. Paris: Gallimard, 1992.

---. *Oeuvres poétiques et dramatiques*. Paris: Gallimard, 2014.

- . *Temporal and Eternal*. Trans. Alexandre Dru. London: Harvill P, 1958.
- . *The Mystery of the Charity of Joan of Arc*. Trans. Julian Green. New York: Pantheon, 1950.
- . *The Mystery of the Holy Innocents, and Other Poems*. Trans. Pansy Pakenham. New York: Harper, 1956.
- . *The Portal of the Mystery of Hope*. Trans. David Louis Schindler, Jr. Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans P, 1996.
- Philippe, Gilles. "La rhétorique sans la rhétorique: le style de Péguy," *Acta fabula*, vol. 11, n° 9, Oct 2010.
- Pilkington, A.E. *Bergson and His Influence: A Reassessment*. Cambridge: CUP, 1976.
- Plato. *Phaedrus*. Trans. Christopher Rowe. New York: Penguin, 2005.
- Proust, Marcel. *A la recherche du temps perdu*. Paris: Gallimard, 1987.
- Rawls, John. *Political Liberalism*. New York: CUP, 1996.
- Renan, Ernest. *La Réforme intellectuelle et morale*. Cambridge: CUP, 1950.
- Rey, Jean-Michel. *Colère de Péguy*. Paris: Hachette, 1987.
- Ricoeur, Paul. *Memory, History, Forgetting*. Trans. Kathleen Blamey and David Pellauer. Chicago: UCP, 2004.
- Robinson, Dominic. *Understanding the "Imago Dei": The Thought of Barth, von Balthasar and Moltmann*. New York: Routledge, 2011.
- Roe, Glenn H. *The Passion of Charles Péguy: Literature, Modernity, and the Crisis of Historicism*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2014.

- Rolland, Romain. *Péguy*. Paris: A. Michel, 1945.
- Royal, Robert. *A Deeper Vision: The Catholic Intellectual Tradition in the Twentieth Century*. San Francisco: Ignatius P, 2015.
- Russell, Bertrand and Herbert Wildon Carr. *The Philosophy of Bergson*. Cambridge: Bowes and Bowes, 1914.
- Schmitt, Carl. *The Concept of the Political*. Trans. George Schwab. Chicago: UCP, 2007.
- Scholem, Gershom, *On Jews and Judaism in Crisis: Selected Essays*. Trans. Werner J. Dannhauser. New York: Schocken, 1976.
- Schultenover, David G. *The Reception of Pragmatism in France and the Rise of Roman Catholic Modernism, 1890-1914*. Washington: Catholic UA Press, 2009.
- Shklovsky, Viktor. *Theory of Prose*. Trans. Benjamin Sher. Champaign: Dalkey AP, 1991.
- Sinclair, Mark. "Heidegger on 'Possibility.'" *The Actual and the Possible: Modality and Metaphysics in Modern Philosophy*. Ed. Mark Sinclair. Oxford: OUP, 2017. 186-216.
- Spinoza, Benedict de. *The Ethics*. Trans. and Ed. Edwin Curley. New York: Penguin, 2005.
- Stein, Gertrude. "The Gradual Making of *The Making of Americans*." *Gertrude Stein: Writings and Lectures 1909–1945*. Ed. Patricia Meyerowitz. Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1967.

- Stein, Gertrude and Virgil Thomson. *Four Saints in Three Acts: An Opera*. New York: G. Schirmer, 1948.
- Sternhell, Zeev. *Neither Right nor Left: Fascist Ideology in France*. Trans. David Maisel. Princeton: PUP, 1995.
- Sorel, Georges. *Les Illusions du progrès*. Paris: M. Rivière, 1947.
- Sorel, Georges. *Réflexions sur la violence*. Paris: M. Rivière, 1950.
- Suarès, André. *Péguy*. Paris: Émile-Paul, 1915.
- Taine, Hippolyte. *La Fontaine et ses fables*. Paris: Hachette, 1861.
- Terdiman, Richard. *Present Past: Modernity and the Memory Crisis*. Ithaca: CUP, 1993.
- Thibaudet, Albert. *La République des professeurs*. Paris: Grasset, 1927.
- Thiers, Eric. “Péguy ou l'imperfection démocratique: *Notre Jeunesse* a cent ans,” *Commentaire*, 131 (Automne 2010) 737-42.
- Todorov, Tzvetan. *On Human Diversity: Nationalism, Racism, and Exoticism in French Thought*. Trans. Catherine Porter. Cambridge: HUP, 1993.
- Von Balthasar, Hans Urs. *The Glory of the Lord: A Theological Aesthetics*. v. III. Trans. Erasmo Leiva-Merikakis. Ed. Joseph Fessio and John Riches. San Francisco: Ignatius, 1983.
- Vitry, Alexandre de. “La mystique de Charles Péguy et notre politique,” *Commentaire*. 153.1 (2016): 21-28.
- Wark, McKenzie. *General Intellectuals: Twenty-One Thinkers for the Twenty-First Century*. New York: Verso, 2017.

- Wampole, Christy. *Rootedness: The Ramifications of a Metaphor*. Chicago: UCP, 2016.
- Weber, Eugen. *Peasants Into Frenchmen: The Modernization of Rural France, 1870-1914*. Palo Alto: SUP, 1976.
- Weber, Max. *On Charisma and Institution Building*. Trans. A.R. Henderson and Talcott Parsons. Ed. S.N. Eisenstadt. Chicago: UCP, 1968.
- Weil, Simone. "The *Iliad*, or the Poem of Force," Trans. Mary McCarthy. *Chicago Review*. 18:2 (1965) 5-30.
- . *The Need for Roots: Prelude to a Declaration of Duties Toward Mankind*. Trans. Arthur Wills. New York: Putnam, 1952.

## The Duration of a People: Descartes, Bergson, and Modern Philosophy

### (Note conjointe sur M. Descartes et la philosophie cartésienne)

*But in this I have adopted the following order... We will see later just what this order was. We have plenty of time to see it. What matters, what left its mark on the world, was this determination to adopt an order. And to have announced it in such terms... First, I have essayed to find in general\*<sup>1</sup> the principles, or first causes of all that is or can be in the world, without taking into consideration for this end anything but God himself who has created it, and without educing them from any other source than from certain germs of truths naturally existing in our minds. In the second place, I examined what were the first and most ordinary effects that could be deduced from these causes; and it appears to me that, in this way, I have found heavens...<sup>2</sup> (49)*

And I say: so what. We know very well that he did not find them—the heavens. Others had found them before him. Or rather they had been found on their own. Creation had need of its Creator, in order to be. To become itself, to be born, to

---

<sup>1</sup> Péguy's asterisk here refers readers to a brief footnote (reproduced here): "I need hardly say that I am citing this text of Descartes from the least scholarly edition I could find. One does not need an old typesetter like me to explain what a scholarly edition is." All following footnotes are mine or translations of those found in the Pléiade edition of Péguy's text.

<sup>2</sup> Following Péguy's text, the passage from Descartes' *Discours de la méthode* is in italics, with Péguy's commentary interpolated in plain text. The English translation comes from the following edition: Descartes, Rene. *Discourse on the Method and the Meditations*. Trans. John Veitch. New York: Cosimo, 2008. I have also followed the Pléiade edition of Péguy's essay regarding the arrangement of text on the page, including the spacing between paragraphs.

be made. It had no need of man, neither to be, nor even to be known. The heavens found themselves quite on their own. And they never lost themselves. And they have no need of us to find themselves perpetually in their paths of orbit.

Others had found them before him. Themselves, they had been found before him. I say: so what. The daring alone interests me. The daring alone is great. Was there ever a daring so beautiful, and so nobly and modestly cavalier, and so fitting and so decorated; was there ever so great a daring and attainment of fortune, was there ever a movement of thought comparable to that of this Frenchman who *found* the heavens. And he not only found the heavens. He found *stars, an earth*. I do not know if you are like me. I find it tremendous that he *found an earth*. After all, if he hadn't found it. And not only an earth, but *even on the earth, water, air, fire, minerals, and some other things of this kind, which of all others are the most common and simple, and hence the easiest to know. Afterwards, when I wished to descend to the more particular...* (49), well, except that then he could no longer find them and he needed the discrimination of experience to come to the fore. Previously, (he says), (he believes), he had no need of it. He followed the royal road, which leads not astray. It is only in arriving in this forest at Fontainebleau that he hesitated at the Croix du Grand-Veneur.<sup>3</sup>

One is allowed to wonder, (we have done so ourselves), if this discrimination of experience had not taken the lead and if he had not needed it to take the lead much

---

<sup>3</sup> This cross is found at a crossroads roughly four kilometers from Fontainebleau, on the road to Paris, and not far from the Fontaine de Sanguinède (*Pléiade* fn.).

earlier. What does it matter. He believes, he wants to have deduced all that, and from God himself, barely passing through the principles or first causes, barely making use of innate ideas, of these *certain germs of truth naturally existing in our minds*, and which themselves are deduced, or essentially, from principles and from God. We know very well that he would not have found the heavens and the stars and an earth if he had not heard talk of them. I will say more. We know very well that he would not have found the principles themselves or first causes *of all that is or can be in the world* and that he would not have found the innate ideas, these *certain germs of truth naturally existing in our minds* if he had not also heard talk of them, that is to say if he had not had, as every man, a certain *experience* of the operations of thought, I will even say a certain experience of the *result* of the operations of thought. I will say more. We know very well that he would not have found God even if he had not heard of him and had not heard him speak, if he had not had that is, as every true metaphysician, as every man born with a metaphysical sense, (and it must be said, as every man born Christian and French), a certain experience of God. I will even venture: a certain experience of the *result* of God. Experience did not take the lead only at the beginning of the more particular. It came to the lead at the very beginning of beginnings. What does it matter. Descartes, in the history of thought, will be always this French cavalier who set off so daring and so well.

These great philosophies are immense and serendipitous and profound explorations. The foolish believe that these philosophies contradict one another. The

foolish are right. They do contradict one another. The foolish believe that, amongst and within themselves as philosophies, they often contradict one another. The foolish are right. Often these philosophies, within themselves, contradict one another. Some say the elephant is an enormous animal, others that the elephant is a little less enormous of an animal. Yes, my friend, because some speak of the African elephant, and others of the Asian elephant.

These great philosophers are explorers. Those who are great are those who discovered continents. Those who are not great are those who thought only of getting a solemn reception at the Sorbonne.<sup>4</sup>

There is a distinct world, a universe of thought. On the face of this world, one can make out geographies. Deep inside of this world geologies deepen and engrave themselves. The public so to speak always believes and philosophers almost always believe that they are quarreling over the same lands. Neither side sees that they are digging into different continents.

It is already a lot to have discovered America. It is a lot to have penetrated to the heart of Africa. Let he who discovered America thus be called American. And let he who penetrated to the heart of Africa be greeted with the title of second, or fifth or sixth African.<sup>5</sup> *Sextus aut septimus ille Africanus*. Whereas if we want one and the

---

<sup>4</sup> The Sorbonne had, by this point in time, twice refused Bergson's candidacy for professor, in 1894 and 1898 (*Pléiade* fn.).

<sup>5</sup> Scipio the African had defeated Hannibal at the Battle of Zama in 202 BC. Scipio Aemilianus, who destroyed Carthage in 146 BC, was known (in French) as the Second African (*Pléiade* fn.).

other and each of them to have all discovered “the earth,” obviously we will risk smashing up the American upon Africa, and upon America, the African.

There is a certain temporal and spiritual eternity in philosophies that results from this. It is necessary that one day history get in line with geography, as geography did with geology. One can tear away from you the temporal that you have. One can maybe tear away from you the spiritual that you have. One cannot tear away from you *to have had* neither the temporal nor the spiritual that you have had. One can abdicate the temporal and maybe the spiritual that one has. One cannot abdicate *to have had* neither the temporal nor the spiritual that one has had. There can be no withdrawal here. Nothing can take away from Christopher Columbus to have discovered America. It is the same story with this poor boy who talked of giving his resignation as a *former* student of the Polytechnic School.

That is what one likes generally to call the justice of history. I do not at all believe in history. I believe little in temporal justice. And I have always thought that the best reparation was to not be defeated. It would be better to speak of a sort of break-down that is as it were foolproof so that in the end the hull is made up of hull and the oat is made of up oat:

*To you, troop so fleet,  
That with winged wandering feet,  
Through the wide world pass,  
And with soft murmuring*

*Toss the green shades of spring*

*In woods and grass*<sup>6</sup>

Rustic Games: “Hymn to the Winds.” It is by such rustic games, ultimately, that the great philosophies come down to the great philosophers.

As the continents, as the great explorations came down to the great explorers.

There are huge areas of thought, there are climates of thought. There is a world, a universe of thought and inside there are races of thought. A great philosophy can be recognized in this way, and is not without a distinct system.

Two friends take a walk. Two and not three, because with three one no longer knows what one is saying. With three one is an orator, one is serious, one is sententious, one is eloquent, one is prudent (all the vices). With three one is wary or one is reckless. (Which amounts to the same thing.) One is fearful or confrontational. (It is the same sentiment.) One plays at being moral, or immoral. (It is the same thing.) Three is the beginning of parliamentarianism.

Two friends come out of this little shop.<sup>7</sup> They are going for a walk. The overwhelming troubles of life in Paris, nothing but toil, leave them time for little relief. They have three quarters of an hour, fifty minutes before them. With three, one

---

<sup>6</sup> The English translation comes from the following edition: Du Bellay, Joachim. “Vœu d’un vanneur de blé, aux vents,” *Ballads and Lyrics of Old France: With Other Poems*. Trans. Andrew Lang. London: Longmans, 1913, pp. 16-7.

<sup>7</sup> Benda would later describe their meetings during the four years prior to the war as occurring “almost daily.” Their walks would inevitably lead them to the cafes of the boulevard Saint-Michel, and they would later dine at the Closerie des Lilas (*Pléiade* fn.).

is compelled to talk. But with two, one can chat. And as the temptation of philosophy is most prominent in those who have already acquired a taste, they will talk half-heartedly about a few recent lowly happenings, and then they will be compelled to talk about philosophy.

Whether they are or whether they are not of the same temperament of thought has no importance. Obviously, it would be better if they were in their temperaments adversaries. The conversation would perhaps in this case be more vigorous. But (in philosophy) one manages to get on well enough even with one's friends, and even with one's allies.

Here are our two men before this honorable shop. Neither the one nor the other takes part in the amassing of temporal power. Neither the one nor the other takes part in the amassing of spiritual power. Neither the one nor the other exercises any judicial authority. They are nothing but what they are. They are worth nothing but what they are worth. Neither the one nor the other takes part in the amassing of intellectual power. The Sorbonne bestowed upon them a teaching degree that they make use of as best they can. Little. But they never resigned themselves to going and getting themselves made PhDs.

Here they are now in the street. An inevitable slope leads them down the Boulevard Saint-Germain. What could they speak of that would be more pressing than the problem of being. The one is the lone adversary of Bergson who knows what he is talking about here. The other is, after Bergson, and I would almost dare say with

Bergson, the only Bergsonian who also knows what he is talking about here.<sup>8</sup> He was a student, and more than a student, of Bergson at the *École Normale*. He has maintained a filial loyalty to Bergson.

We will suppose them equally of good faith. Not by virtue, but by good faith. They thus begin by lumping together in the same pile the Bergsonians and the anti-Bergsonians.<sup>9</sup> It is not a pile based on values, believe me. This accomplished, finding themselves together, they find out what they are. The one is (in philosophy) a fierce critic of a severity that is absolute. The other is a good Christian. He is even a better Christian than he would like to be. I mean that it costs him more than he would like, to be a good Christian. The one who is not Christian is much stronger in mathematics. The one who is Christian has unfortunately become very strong in a lot of things that have nothing to do with *-ics*. The one who is not Christian is animated by a truly personal and inexhaustible animosity against Bergson. The other tries in vain to cure him of it. And without consolation. The other, (the Bergsonian), constantly has the impression, and says so to the other, (to the anti-Bergsonian), who knows it, and who says it, that one man is missing from their meeting, that what they need is someone to join them as a third party, and that this man is precisely Bergson. He alone presides in thought at their meeting. He alone would know how to measure the game. (This serious game.) He alone would know how to evaluate, he alone would know how to

---

<sup>8</sup> The first figure referred to is Benda, and the second is Péguy (*Pléiade* fn.).

<sup>9</sup> Péguy is thinking here of the disciples of Bergson as well as of his opponents (Jacques Maritain, Julien Benda, etc.), a distinction he makes elsewhere (“L’Eve de Péguy” 222) between “nos intellectualistes et nos intuitionnistes” (*Pléiade* fn.).

savor, he alone would know how to appreciate. He alone would know how to take delight in such an unbinding, to step into such a view, to penetrate to such depths. He is not there, and they will speak solely of him.

They would rather like him to be the field judge. Who would? The one; and perhaps even more the other. In a pinch, the partisan can do without the presence of the captain. What could be sweeter for the adversary in thought than to feel the presence of the adversary? A stroke such as this, in this perfect swordsmanship, could only be *demonstrated* by him.

We will assume them to be in their forties, (our two men), that is to say from another world, from another universe, from another creation than if they were not. Because at forty-one has known for a good five years what one is. We will assume them to be stripped of everything, having completely forgotten school, without a care for glory, naturally, without any idea of shining, without thought even for appearances. They only follow their slope. They love philosophizing like a vice. It is the only way to really love something.

We will assume them to be animated by this certain feeling that makes them equally and profoundly and so to speak mutually respectful of thought. They will have this certain taste specifically for a thought that nothing can put off track and that divides men into either barbarians or cultivated. They will have this specific taste that is at the same time a gourmandise and a deep passion, like no other. A passion for a certain taste, proper and unique, that nothing can deceive. A passion that, like a vice, brings together, from the farthest reaches, seemingly the most incongruous

individuals, and the most heterodox. Yet they understand one another by certain signs. And they hear one another before speaking. And they find one another before seeking.<sup>10</sup>

A secret taste brings them together or, if you like, assembles them from the most secret corners and preferably from the most contrary of parties. I do not say only the most contrary of political parties. I say also the most contrary of intellectual parties, of spiritual parties. They appreciate good sports. They prefer partners to partisans. They recognize each other before exchanging a word. They have a secret taste for the adversary. They have a secret contempt for the partisan. The adversary is not only useful. He is not only the point of support and the indispensable foil. He is not only the inevitable partner. He is infinitely more and infinitely better. He is not only the amateur. The partisans are amateurs. But the adversary is the professional. He is the one who knows of what one speaks. He loves what one knows so well (the opposing argument, always present). And he knows so well what one loves—the dear argument, infinitely more profound than what one can actually see of it, infinitely more protected and affectionately built up than what one can let others see of it. And he knows so well the borders of bad faith, and that to love is to give reason to the beloved who is in error.

And that it is to defend what one knows so well that is indeed indefensible.

We will assume them both enlightened by this mutual regard, in agreement from this mutual understanding, animated by this mutual respect. Both of them, and

---

<sup>10</sup> Echo of a passage from Pascal (*Pléiade* fn.).

each towards the other, are mutually complicit in this: they understand the incomparable dignity of thought, that over and against everyone else, that over and against all the barbarians, they know that nothing is as grave and serious as thought.

They will thus not be bothered by the potentially laughable or seemingly detached nature of their remarks. Both of them classic (how could one not be classic?<sup>11</sup>), they know that nothing is as grave and as serious as the comical, and that nothing runs as parallel and is as related to the tragic. And further, a long experience with difficulty and fidelity has taught them what painful and jealous attachments lie beneath these circumstantial detachments. And that this is not sophistication and a mannered nicety but a secret decency and the greatest purity.

They are mutually respectful yet again in a double and a triple sense. Respectful of thought in itself, as of an unmatched dignity and an incomparable value. Respectful of thought as a type of work and a sculpting process one must guard, as if it were a crime, against sullyng. Respectful of thought as of the most beautiful and dearest and most secret creation. Saluting it everywhere it is found. Not only as in a fencing salute, but also in salvation and in unique appreciation.<sup>12</sup>

Being respectful of thought, they are naturally respectful of people. They would be willingly Kantian on this point, yet they do not like Kant. Or rather they would like Kant. But it is he who will not allow himself to be liked. And Koenigsberg

---

<sup>11</sup> Echo of passage from Montesquieu (*Pléiade* fn.)

<sup>12</sup> In French, the term *salut* can mean both a salute (as in fencing protocol) and salvation in a religious sense.

is quite far away. *Regis mons*.<sup>13</sup> And Koenigsberg is quite harsh. If only he were born at Weimar.<sup>14</sup>

They have as well this idea that Kant did not know. That of course he applied himself well. But all the same, in a necessary sense he was far too lacking in a certain temporal quality, in a life, and in that fortune and that grace that consists in being unhappy in a certain irredeemable way.

They have this idea that Kant did very well but that precisely the great things of this world were not well-made things. That perfect systems of machinery were never smiled upon by fortune. That unforgettable achievements were not the result of impeccable ironmongery. That when it is as well made as that, that it never succeeds, that it never attains that free and graceful crowning of great fortune. That when it is as well made as that, that it is lacking, exactly from not lacking anything, that certain who knows just what, that opening left to destiny, that sense of play, that opening left to grace, that surrender of self, that abandonment to the current's flow, that opening left to the forsaking of a great fortune, that lack of surveillance, that perfect intelligence deep down, that perfect knowledge that one is nothing, that surrender and that abdication that is at the core of every truly great man. That surrender into the hands of another, that *letting oneself go*, that *stop occupying ourselves with it* that is at the heart of the greatest fortunes. Kant occupied himself with it at all times. With Kantianism. That is not the way to succeed in the world. The most beautiful verses

---

<sup>13</sup> The king's mountain (Latin translation of the German town name) [*Pléiade* fn.].

<sup>14</sup> Madame de Stael called Weimar the "Athens of Germany." Goethe, Schiller, and Nietzsche all lived there at some point (*Pléiade* fn.).

are not those one occupied oneself with constantly. They are those that arrived all by themselves. That is to say, in the end, those that were abandoned. To fortune.

Respectful and in love with thought, respectful of people, both men carefully and jealously avoid hurting the other. Each would perhaps prefer not to commit himself completely to the idea he holds most dear, to conceal it until another time, to put it off until later, rather than to hurt the other. They guard against this with scrupulous attention, with meticulous cunning, and with a tender and melancholic, a sly and unerring ability. They are forty years old. They know that a wound never fully heals. And that the least perceptible slight is also the one which cannot be forgiven. Moreover, they know that friendship is of a unique value, that it is infinitely rare, that nothing replaces it. That it is infinitely sensitive.

Respectful of thought, respectful of people, through this they have come to respect their own person. Not in the Kantian sense of course. It has indeed to do with Kant. In their eyes, Kant was merely a public official, an unfortunate, watchful professor. It has indeed to do with that. In the same way, each has an obsessive fear of hurting the other, each man has the same obsessive fear of hurting himself. A lengthy experience with pain, an uncontrollable fever, an inability to scab over, the forever-present contusion from a lasting bruise have taught them that the wound inflicted on oneself is the most incurable of all. That of all wounds it is the one most perfectly placed, the only well placed. *By need of placing us at the center of misery. And*

*indeed, of placing us at the axis of distress.*<sup>15</sup> They know that the wound inflicted on oneself is the only truly adroit and truly sure one. And that it stings. And that it stings to be hurt. *Overcome oneself*, say the guidebooks. To overcome oneself they know is the only foolproof way of being defeated. The only masterful one. The only perfect one. The only one hermetically sealed, without a break, without a joint, without a way out. The only one truly awful and, truth be told, truly authentic.

The one who is Christian took seriously everything in the catechism. When he was little. This took him far. He did not make use of its rules to rail against others. And to examine the conscience of others. He made use of them to bring himself a lot of pain. And to constantly maintain his own examination of conscience. All he can do perhaps is to not regret it.

To overcome oneself, the only defeat that is true and the only that is also complete. The only definitive way to be defeated. When one is defeated by others, they can get it wrong (they are men). They do not know where to do the damage. When one overcomes oneself, one knows with terrible precision just where to cause pain.

To overcome oneself: to be defeated irreparably; the worst defeat; the only defeat that truly counts, and also the only one from which one never recovers.

---

<sup>15</sup> This passage comes from Péguy's *La Tapisserie de Notre Dame*, from a section entitled "The Prayer of Confidence" (*Pléiade* fn.).

Both of our two men are melancholic. How could they not be? Did I mention they have passed the forty-year mark? The one by a year and a few months, the other by a couple of years. What does it matter. When one has gone past and is on the downslope, when one is on that descent that leads to a single point, who cares whether one has passed by a few months or by a few years the ridge line, the dividing line of our days.

How could they not be melancholic? Everything that they love is dangerously under threat. Often, they ask the question, not to each other, but each to himself, if all is not lost. They see the French people under threat from all sides, betrayed by all parties, betraying themselves. And yet they know that there have only ever been two real success stories in the world, and that in antiquity it was the Greek people, and that in the modern world it is the French people. With the understanding that the Jewish people are and were and always will be a long-lasting race and the race even of non-success and that the Roman people were destined to become the arch spanning an immense rotunda.

How could they not be melancholic? They know that nothing is as fragile, that nothing is as precarious as successes like these. They see that out of all this one success emerged. And it was Greece. They see that another emerged. And it is France. They wonder from just where another could ever come? And they know that never again from anywhere could another emerge.

These two successes, the only two to have ever emerged in the history of the world, are for them of inestimable value. An anxious tenderness, masked and

seemingly resigned for the Jew (resigned to a dispersion), inexpiable and seemingly fanatical for the Christian, groups them together around this ancient and this French culture as if around a surviving legacy more dangerously menaced each day. Here is where the internal<sup>16</sup> difference between their two races explodes into view. Every Jew proceeds from a certain fatalism. Oriental. Every Christian (today's Frenchman) proceeds from a certain revolt. Occidental. Contrary to what is believed, contrary as well to the most false and the most specious of appearances, Jews, when you know them well, always believe that it is still well enough as is, that at least it is something, that one is happy enough to have at least had this, and that it is astonishing really even to have had it. The Christian, forever disconsolate, never has enough. A God died for him. He looks around and indeed always finds that one is miserable.

They are both tired, did I not say. Not so much from work as from an incurable worry. An incurable worry that has hollowed out the Israeli people, deep inside and all along the hollow length of this long-standing race. And through Jesus, this incurable graft of worry onto the more vigorous trunk of French strength. Thus, was born the greatest and most sorrowful race to ever come into the world. And here is the rare success amid these few successes. To reach a melancholy of an incurable depth like this, as hollow and as fatally inscribed as this, one needed this graft and this wild stock, one needed this race and one needed this other race, one needed this

---

<sup>16</sup> Péguy's antiquated French term (*internelle*) here recalls the third part ("La Consolation internelle") of Thomas à Kempis' fifteenth-century text, *The Imitation of Christ*. A favorite of Péguy, it counseled love in preference to science, as the former placed the soul in direct relation with Jesus without need of theologians. Péguy uses this term at several points elsewhere in his oeuvre (*Pléiade* fn.).

soul and one needed this other soul and this mortal body, one needed a virus this old introduced into a body this young and healthy and, it must be said, without defense. One needed a virus this caustic and this sacred, steeped in the one race from the Orient that was created against the Orient, concentrated by a reconcentration of thirty or forty centuries within the secrecy of this race, abruptly inserted into a new race, into such innocence and such purity, into such grace and such disarmament, into this marrow and into this tenderness, into such novelty, into such sap and such lifeblood, into such a beautiful temporal body, into such a beautiful material strength, into such daring and also such innocent spirit, one needed all this, one needed the intervention of this unique graft so that the unique Jewish disquiet might become the unique Christian disquiet, and so that the regal wisdom and the regal sadness of King Solomon might become the tragic and more than regal distress of a Pascal. One needed all this, this ancient steeping, thirty and forty times over, within the hollow of a race gradually inoculated, this abrupt bursting out within a young and healthy race, and that least expected it.

What, all of this? (people will say) for these two unhappy men coming down this street and who have only one mania, that of philosophizing. Watch them as they descend, with their knowing airs. Watch them as they go along this street leading to the Sorbonne, where they soon find themselves shoulder-to-shoulder with strangers.

Why, you ask, so much bother for these unfortunate men, *philosophi philosophantes*,<sup>17</sup> men of the most ordinary type?

Yes, all this for the one, and all this for the other. For the most common of Jews, Moses brought back the Tables of the Law. And for the most ordinary of Christians, Jesus died. There are only two types of Jews: those who are devoured by Jewish worry and who play at so many sad games in order to deny it (and to deny it to themselves), and those who are devoured by Jewish worry and who do not even think of denying it. And there are only two types of Christians: those who are devoured by Christian worry and who play at so many sad games in order to deny it (and to deny it to themselves), and those who are devoured by Christian worry and who do not even think of denying it. Neither the one nor the other of these two faiths, neither the Jewish faith nor the Christian faith, are of the type of equipment reserved for extraordinary human beings. They are in a sense, and Pascal said it all too well, entirely common.<sup>18</sup> The same eternal debate and the same crucial debate plays itself out in everyday life, and in the everyday man. Everyday, Moses is for the Jew. Everyday, Jesus is for the Christian.

Bearing along such elevated destinies our philosophers descend. Here again the difference and the conflict between their two races bursts into view. The Jew finds

---

<sup>17</sup> Latin: philosophers philosophize.

<sup>18</sup> Péguy is perhaps thinking here of Pascal's phrase: "Nothing is more common than good things." (*Pléiade* fn.).

it natural to be sick. Son and, so to speak, cellular unit and elementary fiber of a race that has suffered for centuries upon centuries and that will overcome the universe by means of having been sick longer than any other, he says, and he know that spiritual work is payed for by a kind of irredeemable fatigue. He even finds this just. He even finds that it is yet well enough like this. He counts the days in which he is doing well. He marvels at them. He finds that one is even lucky. (Deep down, he does not say it, but he is an old Jew, and he finds the Lord to be quite good yet, to be thus, to not be worse.) He counts the days in which he could work. All in all, there are a lot of them.

Sly, rebellious, child of the earth, the Christian lives in a constant revolt, in perpetual rebellion. Raised in a household in which his mother worked for forty, for fifty years, seventeen hours a day at recaning chairs, he never accepted, he never *acknowledged* that this part of the body called the brain might not behave and not be subject to command like that part of the body called the fingers of the hand. As his ancestors (now) (long-ago and now) (far-off and now) worked in the vineyards and the harvests for sixteen, eighteen hours a day, in the full days of summer, during the long days of July, of August, and of September, from the first light of dawn, which is at nearly two o'clock in the morning, into the final twilight, which is past nearly nine o'clock at night, in this same way he would like to continue, he would like to do as much, he also would like to make a show of force. From this came the mishaps. He would like to make a scene and to blend in, to create dialogues and *essays* like one recanes chairs, and for line after line to come and for verse after verse, just as seam after seam used to come for his ancestors. The fool. He would like to create, on his

worktable, on the seventy square decimeters covered with coarse green linen, what his ancestors had produced on the immense plains of the Val de Loire and on the hillsides of Saint-Jean-de-Braye: days without number and days without limit. Days without, so to speak, growing old. Days with no limitation apart the very limitation of the sun. Days where it was the vintner who tired out the vine, where the backbone wore out the vine stock, where the harvester exhausted the harvest. I will say more: where the harvester wore out the harvest. Days where man wore out the earth. Where man wore out age itself, and everything eternal. This is what he would like to create, the fool. He refuses to accept his decline. He knows, but he *does not want* to know that in the pen dwells a virus that is absent from the shepherd's crook and the hoe. He knows, he does not want to know, he lies to himself (he knows it), he does not want to know that in the pen dwells a poison, an enigma, a damnation, an exhaustion that is absent from the harrow and the plow. Like his ancestors, he would like to be king, and an absolute king. As they commanded as leaders the head and the individual parts called muscles, so he would like to command his brain and the individual parts called nerves. In this he locates the difference. They struggled not to break their backs, he struggles against his own liver. Here he locates the difference. He is the first of his race forced to toe the line. He is the first of his race whose body no longer obeys him. He is the first of his race to be defeated.

The Jew has been defeated for seventy, for ninety centuries: from this comes his eternal strength. And also, his eternal victory. The Jew has been unhappy ever

since Eve and since Adam, and through the expulsion he came to stand for dispersion: from this comes his eternal patience and a sort of happiness. The Jew has been forced to toe the line for centuries upon centuries: from this comes the eternal stiffening of their necks.<sup>19</sup> Thus, as the two of them go along, the Jew tries to calm the Christian, to yet again bring all of this to the Christian's attention, that it is still well enough as is, that it is necessary somehow to get used to it. (And the Jew says this to the Christian, but he knows very well that here he is speaking a language foreign to the Christian and that the Christian does not at all understand it.) (But he continues all the same, because it is necessary, because it is just as well, to speak, to say this, to speak thus.) The Christian looks at the days in which he is doing well: there are none. He looks at the days in which he works: what a meager collection. (When he would have so much to say, when he would feel full of works that will never be guided into the procession, onto the lines of paper.) He does not look at the days of happiness: there would not be any; they would not even be these nails that seemed so many in number running along the wall and that are no longer anything in the palm of your hand. By an obscure need for compensation that lies deep within all morals and in maybe more than just morals, by a type of raging and sneaky obstinacy consisting of an eye-for-an-eye against oneself and aimed directly at the appeasing of the gods, he never stopped secretly hoping that in sacrificing happiness he would at least have work. But deep down he knows that one has neither the one nor the other.

---

<sup>19</sup> Exodus 32:9 "I have seen these people," the Lord said to Moses, "and they are a stiff-necked people. See also Exodus 33:3 and 34:9 for further biblical references to a "stiff-necked people" (*Pléiade* fn.).

Because that would be too good.

Jesus was able to graft Jewish disquiet onto the Christian body. This was necessary so that the devouring nature of this disquiet, diminished within a diminished race, blunted within an ancient race, familiarized within a familiar race, might achieve within a new race, and almost instantly, an incurable profoundness at last. And Jesus could not (or did not want to), graft Jewish patience onto the Christian body. This also was necessary, this was doubly necessary so that a Pascal might be produced, so that one might obtain this well of distress, this desert of sand, this chasm of melancholy.

And the Jew and the Christian know very well that when it comes to patience, or rather when it comes to the master of patience, the Jew is yet more Christian than the Christian. The Jew's worries have become made up patience. They are partnered, they set up home with patience, they are joined with patience. The Christian is devoured by a gnawing sense of revolt, by a foot-dragging reluctance of the country-dweller, by a sly rebelliousness of the peasant. He is the peasant who watches the hail storm ravage his harvest and destroy his wheat. He willing watches it. He wants the hail to fall. (Above all because he has no other choice.) Next year he will replant the wheat. Even if there is hail every year, he will sow wheat every next year, every following year. His only wish is to not be content:

*We are those soldiers who walked the world over*

*And who grumbled everyday but never folded.*<sup>20</sup>

Really, you could wonder whether this constant revolt, this sly peasant rebelliousness, is not more within a Christian order than a certain category of patience. How many forms of patience are really only ways of not suffering. *Patientiae NON patiendi.*<sup>21</sup> The patience to suffer, *patientiae patiendi,*<sup>22</sup> patience fought against, patience struggled against, patience quarrelled with, are these not, do these all not enter infinitely more deeply into a Christian order than so many forms of patience that are perhaps only anesthetic and that should no doubt be placed in the category of laziness.

I do not say this for the forms of Jewish patience. They are completely different. They are too much made up of worry, they are too tied to worry to ever enter into the category of laziness. Besides, Jews never enter into the category of sin. If they were to enter into the category of sin, they would not be Jewish, they would be Christian. They would not be of the older law, they would be of the newer. The only thing they can do is to enter into the category of disobedience to Moses' law.

I could not say the same for the new law. I could not say the same for some Christians. How many forms of patience (secretly proud to be forms of patience), (and to have overcome patience), (and to have overcome anger), are really only a turning of the shoulder to avoid getting hit. How many types of patience are only

---

<sup>20</sup> Echo of a couplet from Péguy's work *La Tapisserie de Notre Dame (Pléiade fn.)*.

<sup>21</sup> Latin: Patience is NOT passive.

<sup>22</sup> Latin: Patient suffering.

merely the most cunning, the most perfect cheating of pain, in other words of hardship, in other words of salvation, just as there is another type of patience (the same), consisting of the most clever and the most remorseless cheating of one's race.

How many forms of patience are only merely anesthetic inventions, safeguards held up unflinchingly against pain, against hardship, against salvation, against God. Dismal and sneaky abdications of the very condition of being human. Calculated platitudes so that fate passes overhead, nowhere able to grab hold of its catch. A dismal and dull and sneaky leveling leaving even God himself hung out to dry.

An egalitarian flattening out, a democratic knocking down of everything, so that nothing stands out in anyone, and it is the same for chance, and the same for pain, and the same for hardship, and the same for salvation, and the same for God, such that he can play no role.

Such are the profanations resulting from all these forms of patience. Such is the impiety resulting from all this caution. Or rather such is the main form of impiety. And I do not believe that there is a bigger one. Such are their wisdoms. Dismal and wretched, sneaky and dull wisdoms. It is a patience of not waiting patiently. Because to wait is to suffer, and to wait patiently nonetheless. To wait is to *endure*. To not suffer, to refuse everything to do with suffering, to deny suffering these points of alignment that it exercises upon us is not only to cheat, it is not only to cheat one of one's own nature, it is not only to disgrace oneself: it is to refuse to wait patiently. --  
*Do you think I am going to put with up that?* the old women used to to tell me when I

was little. (This could be anything, whatever was not going well, everything that bothered them, whether the neighbor woman had said a rude word to them, or their offspring (they had many) had been disrespectful towards them (this happened)). They were firmly within the healthy French tradition and let me further say within the healthy tradition of the local French parish.

They had no desire to put up with things. As good French women, they understood perfectly well what it means to endure. *Tolerare, pati, tolerare tamen.*<sup>23</sup>

In Latin, in Greek, and even as far as in German, to tolerate is to carry, to hold up, to raise, to support, to pick up a burden of pain and hardship. *Tolerare, tollere, tulisse; tuli, (t)latum;* and there are, as Bréal says,<sup>24</sup> *numerous traces of a verb \*tulo. The root corresponding in Greek to ταλ or τηλ, from which comes τάλας, “he who tolerates,” τλῆναι “to tolerate,” τέτληκα “I tolerated,” πολύ-τλας “he who tolerates much.” -- ... --Tolero does not come directly from tollo, but from a lost substantive \*tolus, \*toleris. --Gothic thulan “to tolerate,” from which comes the German Ge-dul-d “patience” (for more on the German consonants, see decem).*

Τάλαινα, is she who tolerates. Τάλαινα, *unfortunate woman*, the ancient chorus tirelessly repeats. In French, to endure is to find that it is brutally hard. But in French especially, it is to not put up with. (I mean that it is to endure because one cannot do otherwise and inside, as these old women used to say, *to not go on like this*, and again as they use to say: *to worry oneself sick.*)

---

<sup>23</sup> Latin: To tolerate, to suffer, to endure nonetheless.

<sup>24</sup> Péguy refers here to *Leçons de mots*, a dictionary of Latin etymology published in 1906 (*Pléiade* fn.).

To endure is not to be without teeth. It is to have them and to endure them being pulled out. And what is more, it is not to have never had them. It is to have had them and to have endured them being pulled out. The martyr down in the arena is not he who has no limbs. It was he who had them and who endured them being torn from him. And we who had nothing to give, or rather nothing to allow them to take, but our wretched days, to endure was not to be without these wretched days, it is to endure that even this is taken from you.

Thus similar, thus different; thus enemies, but thus friends; thus separate, thus interpenetrated; thus intertwined; thus allied and thus faithful; thus contrary and thus partnered, our two philosophers, these two accomplices, make their way down this street. Another difference, a deep one, walks along between them but without dividing them. It is a difference between the two that goes far back, yet another, more subtle difference of race, a split or cleavage that is perhaps even more divisive. The Jew knows how to read. The Christian, the Catholic does not know how to read.

In the social category to which they belong, the Jew can go back from generation to generation and he can go back for centuries: he will always find someone who can read. If he were to trace his way back to some cattle merchant of the *pulta* plains or to some horse trader of the vast steppes of *tchernosioum*,<sup>25</sup> if he were to go back to some match seller of the late Empire or of Alexandria or

---

<sup>25</sup> Péguy's references here are to the plains of Hungary and to the steppes of Russia (*Pléiade* fn.).

Byzantium or to some bedouin in the desert, the Jew is from a race in which one always finds someone who can read. And not only that, but reading for them is not to read just a book. It is to read the Book. It is to read the Book and the Law. To read is to read the word of God. The very inscriptions of God on the tablets and in the book. In all of this immense sacred apparatus, the most ancient of all, reading is the sacred activity as it is the ancient activity. All Jews are readers, all Jews are reciters. It is for this reason that all Jews are visual, and visionary. And that they see everything. As if instantly. And from a single glance, they scour, they instantly cover surfaces.

Perhaps a deeper and as it were richer entry is reserved for the one who cannot read (he hears and understands me well) and perhaps a third dimension is granted to the one who is not visual. Regardless, the introduction of this interval, or rather the consideration of this interval separating the two, has truly enormous consequences in the social category to which we are referring, and which is perhaps the only of importance: the Catholic, or rather let us start from the other end, the Jew is a man who has been reading since the beginning, the Protestant is a man who has been reading since Calvin,<sup>26</sup> the Catholic is a man who has been reading since Ferry.<sup>27</sup>

At this point, as I do not wish to limit our discussion only to Descartes, it is necessary to attempt to grasp hold of and examine some of the consequences of this categorization. The consequences seem to me infinite. No one perhaps can feel it as

---

<sup>26</sup> John Calvin was a sixteenth-century French theologian active during the Reformation.

<sup>27</sup> Jules Ferry was a nineteenth-century French statesmen responsible for a series of laws enacted between 1881 and 1882 that established free, compulsory, secular education for all French youth up to the age of 13.

much as I do. When I am in the presence of Pécaut,<sup>28</sup> I am in the presence of a man who has been reading since Calvin. When I am in the presence of Mr. Benda, I am in the presence of a man who has been reading since the beginning. When I am in the presence of myself, I am in the presence of a man who has been reading since my mother and I.

When I am in the presence of Pécaut, I am in the presence of a man who has been reading since the sixteenth century. When I am in the presence of Mr. Benda (and perhaps of Mr. Bergson), I am in the presence of a man who has been reading for centuries upon centuries. When I am in the presence of myself, I am in the presence of a man who has been reading since 1880. (See *L'Argent*, *L'Argent suite*, and especially Mr. Naudy's *cahier*).<sup>29</sup>

Or if you prefer, the Jew has been literate since the beginning, the Protestant since Calvin, the Catholic since Ferry.

Or if you prefer, the Jew has been *lettered* since the beginning, the Protestant since Calvin, the Catholic since Ferry.

Seeing all this, the Catholic turns back in search of his own past. Whichever path he takes, he is *unlettered* by the second generation. Neither his ancestors of the Bourbonnais, nor those perhaps of the Marche, nor those of the Loire Valley and the

---

<sup>28</sup> Pierre-Félix Pécaut was the son of the founder of the l'École Normale Supérieure of Fontenay-aux-Roses. A professor of philosophy, he was also a subscriber to the *Cahiers de la Quinzaine* and occasionally frequented Péguy's boutique (*Pléiade* fn.).

<sup>29</sup> Péguy alludes to two of his own essays, *L'Argent* and *L'Argent suite*, both of which appeared in 1913. The final reference is to an article by Théodore Naudy from a 1913 issue of the *Cahiers* entitled "Post 1880—Primary Education and What It Should Be" (*Pléiade* fn.).

first hillsides of the Orléans forest, neither of his grandfathers, neither of his grandmothers could read or write.<sup>30</sup> Their counting was all in their head. (That is to say they counted better than you and I). The Catholic, the Frenchman, the peasant turns back towards his race, and whichever path he takes he collides, right after his father, right after his mother, with this four-wide front of illiteracy. Neither his grandfather nor his grandmother on his father's side; neither his grandfather, nor his grandmother on his mother's side. He approaches from another angle. Neither of his two grandfathers, nor his two grandmothers. He approaches from yet another angle. Neither the lineage of his father, nor the lineage of his mother. He would be hard pressed to go much further back. Being poor and French, Catholic and peasant, he has no family papers. His family papers are the local parish registers. No single family stands out in this countless ancestry. No *tenure*<sup>31</sup> to be found in this long race. Nothing that could be traced within the papers of notaries. They never possessed a thing. Poor and of the people, they left to Jews, Protestants, and bourgeois Catholics, the right to a documented genealogy.

The man lingers, he considers at length this categorization of the world and this categorization of the world appears to him new. Together on one side, all the Jews, all the Protestants, all the nobility and the bourgeois Catholics (nobility of the sword, and the robe, and by appointment, country squires, gentlemen farmers, all

---

<sup>30</sup> Péguy's paternal grandparents were both from the Orléanais region of central France. Péguy's maternal grandmother was from the Bourbonnais region, also in central France. His maternal grandfather's history was unknown (*Pléiade* fn.).

<sup>31</sup> The term *tenure* refers here to the possession of land under feudal law (*Pléiade* fn.).

proprietors of battles, of appointments, of lands), all of whom have their family papers and as it were their titles of propriety, -- and on the other, he who never had a thing, being both Catholic and poor, he who never was anything, in his home, he whose family papers are the parish registers, he whose titles of propriety are the parish registers, and he who until judgment day will only ever be recorded in the parish registers.

He stops a while here. He can see a great divide, within the world. On one side, the notary (in all his forms), and on the other these meager parish registers. On one side, the notary, that is the civil registrar, the mayor, the county magistrate, that is the court clerk. That is to say also the exchange broker. And the stockbroker and the outside broker. And the general ledger of public debt. (And the entries of the lending houses). On the other, these meager parish registers.

That is to say, on one side, the entirety of historical records. On the other, these meager parish registers.

That is to say, on one side, the entirety of temporal records. On the other, these meager parish registers. In other words, the records of baptisms.

The man turns back towards his race and just past his father and his mother, coming towards him, he sees this four-person front and then just past, just behind, he sees nothing but an immense mass and a countless race, and just after, just behind, he can make out nothing. Why not say it, he sinks proudly into this anonymity.

Anonymity is his family name. Anonymity is his immense patronymy.<sup>32</sup> The more common is the land, the more he wants to grow out of this land. The more impenetrable is the night, the more he wants to emerge from this darkness. The more common is the race, the greater is his secret joy and it must be said his secret pride in being a man of this race. He is the same man with regard to his taste for his race as he is in his taste for everything. He is the same man to have never been clothed but in a common fabric, to have never written but on a common paper, to have never sat down but at a common table. And this taste for the common and the poor, which amongst our rich is the most awful of crimes, the most shameful indecency, being the most monstrous lot one can have in life, the most criminal and the greatest insignificance, the most fraudulent imitation and that justly will never be forgiven, — is for the poor the most sober decency. What is for the rich the most coarse and perverse invention of pride and perversity (Tolstoy)<sup>33</sup>, is for the poor the most simple decency. Thus, our man wants nothing more but to be a tree in this immense forest, a single grain in this immense harvest.

A citizen of the common type, a Christian of the common species.

The citizen of the village; the Christian of the local parish.

And a sinner of the most common type.

---

<sup>32</sup> Péguy's neologism here combines the French words for anonymity and surname.

<sup>33</sup> André Suares had published an article in a 1911 issue of the *Cahiers* entitled *Tolstoï vivant*; recall that following a period of intense moral crisis, Count Tolstoy renounced his worldly possessions and took up working the land (*Pléiade* fn.).

He looks towards his race and as in the passage through the Red Sea,<sup>34</sup> where a wall of water hid the enormous ocean suspended behind it, in the same way this four-person wall, his two grandfathers, his two grandmothers, hides from him the silence of a countless race. It is like a wall in the ocean itself. And just as one knows nothing of this enormous mass behind the wall, except that it is water, so too one knows nothing of this immense race that is behind this four-person wall, except that it is Christianity.

And he sinks joyfully into this vast anonymity.

He looks toward his race. This wall appears before him, this four-person wall, this wall of illiteracy, this row of four appears before him as a wall of silence. And he climbs back up and he plunges not only with joy into this vast anonymity. He sinks in with a secret joy. But he sinks in as well with a type of accomplishment, of coronation, of fullness of humility. And might he not also sink in with a coronation and a fullness of pride. And more still perhaps with who knows what kind of relish and what success and what fullness of annihilation.

When he is tired, and he always is, he says to himself that the peasant too is forever sore; and that he does not work any less because of it; and that he only works better because of it. This is not only a consolation, it is a theory. He invented this theory, that one works better that is when one is a little tired. And as he is always

---

<sup>34</sup> Péguy refers to the biblical account found in Exodus 14:21-22.

extremely tired, he lacks expertise in regards to being just a little tired. And he is completely lacking in regards to the other comparison, which is to know what someone might be and do who was not the least bit tired. He has expounded at length upon his theory. He claims that the morning's fatigue is the inheritance of the prior day's work passed on to the following day, that this residue of fatigue in the morning is the envoy of fatigue and work from the prior day sent into the fatigue and work of the following day, and that it is like a sour ferment, like leaven from the prior day that will make today's bread rise. It is a lovely theory, for tired people. He claims that the peasant, that the valet, wake every morning with broken backs, stiff legs, and aches that make them swear in the Lord's name, but that they get up all the same and by noon no longer even give it a thought. (What strips a bit of strength from his comparison, is that by noon, he still gives it a good deal of thought). Such is his theory of fatigue and of work. He has many theories. Yet, and this is to his credit, with so many theories he nevertheless works, and works a lot. And he nevertheless produces, and produces a lot. And when he works, and when he produces, one never notices that he has theories. He has this theory that the remainder of fatigue from the day prior is what maintains, from one day to another, overnight, the continuity of the work.

When he is truly tired, his mental apparatus refuses him all service. (As with everyone, yet his pride wants it to be much greater and so to speak much more eminently the case with others.) His writing apparatus fails him first, his writing

machine, and fails him utterly, all that one learns reading Janet,<sup>35</sup> his machine for generating written forms, his visual images and motor apparatuses. He wants to see in this a just ransom linked to the fact his grandfathers could neither read nor write. His race has not yet had time to get accustomed. Nor have the visual images had time to enter into his memory. Nor have the motor apparatuses had time to enter into his hand. He is the first of his race to write. Why be surprised that his race, through him, does not yet know how to write, or at least not very well. That it has such frequent and so many flaws in the writing. So many breakdowns. So many errors. They are the misfirings of a machine lacking smoothness, lacking reflexes, lacking training, and that was only set in motion a generation or two prior. But the more egregious these errors, the more awful this ransom, the more precious no doubt will be the good whose ransom is this machine, and this good will be precisely to have come out of this race, to immerse oneself directly within a race still plunged wholly in the secret of not knowing how to read, in the silence and the darkness of having never held a pen in its hand.

*To take up this pen to write*, this solemn phrase from the mythical soldier appears to him full of a mysterious meaning. *My dear parents, I take up this pen to write you in order to tell you that the captain...* He glimpses in these words a daunting meaning. For once past his father, whom he never even knew, and past his mother, no one of his race ever took up a pen to write. And even the handwriting of

---

<sup>35</sup> Péguy's reference here is to Pierre Janet, medical doctor and author of the 1898 work *Neuroses and Obsessions*. His dissertation at the École Normale Supérieure was entitled *Psychological Automatism* (*Pléiade* fn.).

his mother is so awkward, so clumsy, so common and so heavy-handed, so little refined. He is the first, as if alone. Himself so clumsy. And so little accustomed. With his fat, clumsy fingers with all their deformities from the cold of his youth.

This pen, his own proper instrument, seems to him a dangerous instrument. He has discovered it to be a dangerous instrument. But there are compensations. When it is working well, when the mechanisms are in place, when he is writing, he does not find it to be a dangerous instrument. When it no longer works, when the mechanisms are in pieces, when he finds himself listless before his ordinary paper, he can tell himself that it is all very good to not know how to write, to be a mechanism in pieces, because it is a testament to the absence of habit. (Habit being, in this system, the most dangerous, and the only really dangerous enemy.) A testament to being new.

Within writing, and proper to it, there is a process of hardening. Within print, and proper to it, there is a process of growing old. The days in which he cannot work, the man says to himself that it is proof that by the newness of his intellectual race he escapes this hardening, this growing old. That this is proof that he is not a being accustomed to this.

Whatever one writes (and this would be another question), in writing itself there is a hardening. Whatever one has printed (and this would be another question), in print there is a growing old and a vulgarity. (The vulgar, in this system, being the opposite of the common.) (The vulgar belongs to the crowd, the common on the

contrary to the people.<sup>36</sup>) The days in which it goes well, our man does like everyone else. He writes and prints. The days in which it goes poorly, he recalls that writing and printing are the first steps towards the hardening and ageing of death.

Whatever one writes, there is a hardening in writing that can never be softened. Whatever one has printed, there is in print a stagnation of memory that no deletion could ever erase. It is too well-beaten of a path. (Even so there would be a nice set of tracks left behind.) One has walked too much along this route. (Even so there would be victorious armies.) When man was ash and dust, his very nothingness itself was grand. His very nothingness itself was beautiful. It was still of the earth. And even when he was of mud, his very lowness itself was grand. This mud was still silt of the earth.<sup>37</sup> The hollow spots in the road were themselves still of the earth and the tracks along the road were like a plowed furrow. Our poor modern memories are no longer made of anything but pavement. And such congestion from dragging behind us everywhere our baggage of memories.

There is a stiffening in inscription, there is a hardening in writing; and there is not only a hardness in print: there are the countless layered hardenings of countless printed materials. Every modern man is a wretched newspaper. And not even a wretched newspaper from a single day. From just one day. But he is like a wretched old newspaper from some day past upon which one has printed on the very same

---

<sup>36</sup> Péguy echoes here a line from Victor Hugo: “Ah! The people are above, but the crowd is below” (*Pléiade* fn.).

<sup>37</sup> The seventeenth-century theologian Lemaistre de Sacy translated Genesis 2:7 thus: “And the Lord God formed man of the silt of the earth” (*Pléiade* fn.).

paper the news of each new morning. Thus, our modern memories are never anything but poor tattered memories, poor trampled memories.

The illiterate man of ancient times read from the book of nature itself. Or rather he was of this book, he was the very book of creation. Throughout the entirety of ancient times, the literate man was a man of books and he himself was one or perhaps a few books. The modern man is a newspaper, and not only a *single* newspaper, but our poor modern memories are wretched trampled-upon papers upon which one prints, without changing the paper, the news of each new day. And we are no longer anything but this hideous trampling of letters.

Our ancestors were white sheets of paper and the very flax fiber itself that one used to make the paper. The literate were books. Us moderns are no longer anything but smudged slip sheets between newspaper pages.

Seized by a type of deep fear before his own profession and before what this profession has become and before what has become of mankind in his time, the man turns back towards his race no longer even with this secret joy, no longer even with this secret pride, but with a fearful, a timid gratitude at having at least somewhat escaped this degradation, that is at having for so long totally escaped it in the past of his own race. And he has the impression that what he gains from all that is nothing less than this: to have only recently emerged from his creator's hands.

In the shadows and silence of the unlettered soul, what then is this profound virtue; and even more what is this profound grace. Is it not the very virtue and the

grace that comes to disarm one in the night? Is it not the very grace that comes to calm one in the night. Are all letters not luminous announcements? Are letters not always a bank of footlights. Are letters not always alternatives. Are all letters not luminous signboards and luminous publicity apparatuses and are all letters not always just fill-ins. Are letters not always that which riddles and which breaks up and which shatters the night.

Cannot all letters be traced back to these strings of print that stand out in the night on those monstrous pieces of advertising. The man turns back towards his race, towards that long, untroubled night. As this silence and this darkness are closer to creation itself. As they alone are noble. As they alone are close to creation. All of the rest is business. All the rest is clutter. All the rest is letters.

The man turns back towards the uncountable, towards the tacit, towards the immense ocean of his silent race. What a reserve. (And what has he done with it.) What a secret treasure. (Yet has he not squandered it.) But even more what a mysterious expanse. Like these oceans that spread out from latitude to latitude, in the same way the first silence, everywhere else broken, prolonged itself from age to age in the silence and the unknowing ignorance of the soul. And this silent race is the only echo left for us to perceive of the first silence of creation.

Silence of prayer and silence of commitment, silence of rest and silence of work itself, silence of the seventh day but silence of the first six days as well;<sup>38</sup> the voice of God alone; silence of pain and silence of death; silence of worship; silence of

---

<sup>38</sup> Péguy refers here to the biblical account in Genesis 1 and 2:1-3 (*Pléiade* fn.).

contemplation and of the offering; silence of meditation and of mourning; silence of solitude; silence of poverty; silence of rising up and of falling back, in this immense parliament of the modern world the man listens to the immense silence of his race. Why does everyone chatter so, and what do they say. Why does everyone write so, and what do they publish. The man remains quiet. The man plunges again into the silence of his race and each time he resurfaces he finds the last trace left for us to grasp of the eternal silence<sup>39</sup> of the first creation.

As every man of this time and worthy of the name of man, as every man of this time ashamed of his time, proud of his race, turning his back to an entire world, the man turns back towards his race. What remains of it in the world?<sup>40</sup> What remains of it outside of himself; and within him what remains of it. He turns back, he at least wants to dip again into the memory he has of it. Past his mother, past his father, whom he never even knew, this wall, this wall of silence, this four-wide row of illiteracy. And a voice rises up to him from the depths of time: *The letter kills*.

*Littera occidit. Littera necat.*<sup>41</sup> Like so many others he knew this watchword yet he did not know that it was a warning against murder. He used to repeat this

---

<sup>39</sup> Péguy's phrase here recalls Pascal's formula: "The eternal silence of these infinite spaces frightens me" (*Pléiade* fn.).

<sup>40</sup> Péguy's use of question marks is sporadic—a practice that, to a large degree, is reproduced in this translation.

<sup>41</sup> Latin: The letter kills. The letter kills. Recall Paul's warning in 2 Corinthians 3:6: "For the letter kills, but the spirit gives life" (*Pléiade* fn.).

watchword and he did not see that it was a warning against murder. He did not take literally this reprimand. He did not follow to the letter this warning against the letter.

This promise that the letter was an instrument of murder and maybe only the instrument of murder.

And that within the letter lay the very machinery of death.

And as if escaped from an immense danger, he considers his ancestors who had no knowledge of the letter. A phrase from his grandmother, forgotten for forty years, comes back to him suddenly: *I do not know my alphabet, or: I never learned my letters, or They never taught me my letters*, she would say a little ashamed (or moved by what secret pride); because at the same time she considered herself as somewhat (and even a good deal) of a curiosity, of a rarity, of a being from another time. (She did not understand how right she was. She was strikingly from another time.) She was extremely intelligent. She saw very well what was going on around her. She saw very well the rise of primary education. She saw very well that everyone was heading off to school.

*I never was in school*, she would say; or preferably:

*They never sent me to school*. Sometimes she would explain:

*At that age, I was working*. Or preferably:

*At that age, everyone was working*.

I would like to know if there is an age, today, in which everyone works; and at what age everyone works.

She had not been to school, but she had been to catechism.

She used to always say:

*We did not even know what a school was.*

She used to always say:

*I cannot even read the names of streets.*

She used to always say:

*I cannot read the paper.*

*The newspaper*, the greatest invention since the creation of the world and certainly since the creation of the soul, because it hits upon, it goes to the very constitution of the soul itself. The newspaper, second creation. Spiritual. Or rather the beginning, the point of origin of decreation. Spiritual.

The point of origin of a second creation. Or rather the point of origin of a degradation, of a deformation, of an alteration that together constitute the beginning of the decreation. Or at least of the decreation of eminent creation, of essential creation, of principal creation, of the profound creation that is spiritual creation. And in it, by it, of others too. And here let us be sure to understand one another.

I am convinced that there are good and bad newspapers. I am especially convinced that there are bad ones. And there are those that are good and bad. In varying proportions. I admit that there is an entire range of gradations. I admit that we are establishing a table of values. And indeed, what I am saying is that it is not this table of values that interests me.

It is the very category itself that happens to be this table of values.

I am convinced that there is good and bad printed material. And perhaps a lot of in-between. I am convinced that there is a good and a bad press; and perhaps a lot of in-between. What is good is that the good press is sometimes bad and perhaps often; and that the bad press is never good. It is always the same system of irreversibility and of continued degradation. One always loses. One never wins. And what I am saying is that bad newspapers do infinitely more harm from being newspapers than from being bad, that bad press does infinitely more harm from being press than from being bad. And it is here at last that we meet up again with our Bergson: a bad, ready-made idea is infinitely more pernicious from being ready-made than from being bad; a false, ready-made idea is infinitely more false from being ready-made than being false.

In this sense, the invention of the newspaper is that, without a doubt, which defined an era, that which marked one of the most important dates since the beginning of the world and this date is precisely that of the beginning of the decreation. There is something even worse than having a thought that is bad. And that is to have a thought that is ready-made. There is something even worse than having a

soul that is bad and even of developing a bad soul oneself. And that is to have a soul that is ready-made. There is something even worse than having a soul that is perverse. And that is to have a soul that is deadened by habit.

One has seen the incredible workings of grace and the incredible blessings of grace penetrate a bad soul and even a perverse soul and one has seen saved what appeared lost. But one has not seen penetrated that which was varnished, one has not seen entered that which was impermeable, one has not seen quenched a soul that was hardened by habit.

The healing and the winning and the saving qualities of grace are marvelous and one has seen redeemed and one has seen saved that which was (as if) lost.<sup>42</sup> But the worst sufferings, but the most base acts, wickedness and crime, and sin itself are often the cracks in man's armor, the breaks by which grace can penetrate the armored hardness of man. But this inorganic shield of habit deflects everything, and upon it every sword is blunted.

Or if you prefer, in the workings of spirit the worst sufferings, base acts, crimes, villainies, and sins themselves are precisely the fulcrum by which the levers of grace raise one up. It is through them that grace operates. Through them it finds that point that exists in every sinner. Through them it applies its pressure upon this painful point. One has seen saved the most hardened of criminals. Through their very crime itself. By the workings of grace upon the fulcrum of their crime. One has not

---

<sup>42</sup> Allusion to the parable of the lost sheep in Matthew 18:12-14 and Luke 15:4-7 (*Pléiade* fn.).

seen those most hardened by habit saved through their habit, because habit is precisely that which has no fulcrum.

One can do many things. One cannot wet a fabric that is made to not be wet. One can add as much water as one likes, because here it is not a question of quantity, it is a question of contact. It is not a question of adding more. It is a question of whether it takes or whether it does not take. It is a question of whether it enters or whether it does not enter into a certain contact. It is this mysterious phenomenon that one calls wetness. The quantity here is unimportant. One has left the realm of hydrostatic physics. And one has stepped into a physics of the utterly wet,<sup>43</sup> into a molecular and globular physics, into that which determines the curvature and the formation of the globular unit, of the drop. When a surface is oily, water will not take to it. It will not take to it anymore if one adds a lot of water than if one does not. Its not-taking-to-it is absolute. Wetness cannot establish itself. A certain contact known as wetness, a certain entering into contact with the utterly wet cannot establish itself. And it is not a question of quantity because, the utterly wet having failed to take place, this entering into contact having failed to establish itself, every second drop that appears is like a first drop. It is like the first drop. It is (with regards to the utterly wet) the first. It is not any further along than the first. For a physics of quantity, of weight, of volume, of hydrostatics to take place, the first drop has to have already done something, to which the second drop comes then to add its substance. To get a

---

<sup>43</sup> Péguy uses the term *mouillature* here—a neologism suggesting the state or quality of being completely soaked or wet.

weight of one kilogram, you can clean out all the pharmacists in town and then amuse yourself by adding one at a time all these stolen milligram slivers of weight to the trays of all the high-precision scales you can find. You will have managed to weigh something. What am I saying—you will already have managed this from the beginning, from the first milligram. You are in a physics of weight, as the second milligram no longer finds the situation so distinct. It does not find the whole thing. There is a type of beginning in the first milligram. The second can only add itself to this. And the same for the rest, all of them, however many they may be. And however many it may take.

Whereas when it comes to the phenomenon of the utterly wet, and to the physics of the utterly wet, there is never any beginning. You can pour a million drops of water, successively or all at once, onto an oily surface. Every second drop that is added will find a distinct situation. Every second drop that is added will find a situation that is whole. Every second drop that is added will find a situation that is fresh. Every second drop that is added is (like) a first, comes to it (like) a first. Every second drop that is added finds that one should start. And that it cannot start.

Every second drop that is added finds that one should create.

A phenomenon comparable in nature and I would say of the same order takes place in the deliverance of grace. Or rather I will say: this difference, this deep division that exists between an ordinary physics and a physics of the utterly wet and which makes it so that one can always weigh yet not always wet something, this divide not only continues on but even deepens in moving from the properly physical

in nature to the spiritual in nature, and to what I will call a spiritual matter and a spiritual physics. There are some spiritual phenomenons that behave according to a physics of weight and there are some spiritual phenomenons that behave according to a physics of the utterly wet.

One has seen many things. But there are some fruits that have a fuzz to keep them from getting wet. And at the moment the skies can rain. *Rorate, caeli, desuper.*<sup>44</sup>

As long as one is in a physics of weight, of quantity, the abundance of grace flows like an abundance. It even flows, one could say, like a hydrostatic abundance, like an abundance that is hydrostatic in order. It soaks, it bathes, it penetrates. Every man with some experience of grace, in himself, in his neighbor, is familiar with these irresistible infusions, these impenetrable penetrations, these invincible victories. But when one enters into a physics of the utterly wet, into a physics of wetness, nothing is anything, nothing amounts anymore to anything, the laws of causality no longer hold sway, especially the laws of physical causality, because the little bit of hold needed for a cause to have its effect, so that an effect clings to its cause, so that a cause hangs onto its effect, so that a cause in a word impacts its effect, because this little bit of hold, this little bit of connection, which is nothing, but is everything, which is nothing, but is an indispensable nothing, does not take place, does not work, does not play out, does not occur. Because all the theories of causality, and the most

---

<sup>44</sup> Allusion to Isaiah 45:8: “Rain down, you heavens, from above; and let the skies pour down righteousness” (*Pléiade* fn.).

deterministic, can try all they want. In order to move from cause to effect one always needs a certain uncoupling, or if you prefer a certain grabbing hold, a starting up, a positioning of the pulley, before it will work. The most abstruse metaphysics of physical determinism, the most exhaustive metaphysics of causality and, if you prefer, of efficacy still lack, in order to be truly exhaustive, this little bit of a hold that is unavoidable (that they cannot avoid and that reality cannot avoid), just as in the same way an atomistic materialist metaphysics lacked a certain hold for their atoms to grasp onto and thus lacked a *clinamen*.<sup>45</sup>

In ordinary physics or, if you prefer, in the original physics, in the physics of weight and of hydrostatics, this hold always plays itself out, and through it causation itself. In the physics of the utterly wet in contrast, in the physics of wetness (and it is the same as the physics of the curvature and balance of liquid surfaces, and of the formation of drops and droplets, and of atmospheres, and of dispersions, and of colloidal solutions, and perhaps of other solutions), this hold, and through it causation itself, does not always play out. One always has a weight. One is not always subject to wetness. Or if you prefer, everyone has a weight but not everyone is subject to wetness. One is always weighable but one is not always soakable. One can always be weighed. One cannot always be penetrated.

---

<sup>45</sup> Latin: variously translated as swerve, inclination, or disposition. Péguy refers here to principles from Epicurus' atomistic theory, which sought to explain the unpredictable behavior of atoms in their capacity to constitute the universe (*Pléiade* fn.).

From this come so many misses (as the misses themselves are indeed caused and come), from this come so many inconsistencies we can observe in the operation of grace, and that in scoring unexpected victories in the souls of the most hardened sinners it often remains without effect with the most respectable people, on the most respectable people. It is precisely that the most respectable people, or simply respectable people, or really those we call such, and who like to call themselves such, do not have any flaws in their armor. They are not wounded. Their moral covering constantly intact, it has given them a hardened and faultless body armor. They can offer no opening that a terrible injury, an inescapable suffering, an overwhelming remorse, a badly-sutured wound, a mortal trepidation, an underlying anxiety, a secret resentment, a perpetually hidden failure, a forever-tender scar might create in them. They cannot offer this opening that sin creates so that grace itself may enter. Since they are not wounded, they are no longer vulnerable. As they are lacking nothing, they cannot receive anything. As they are lacking nothing, they cannot receive what is everything. God's charity cannot dress the wounds of he who has none. It was because a man had fallen that the good Samaritan gathered him up.<sup>46</sup> It was because Jesus' face was dirty that Veronica wiped it with a towel. Yet, he who does not fall can never be gathered up; and he who is not dirty cannot be wiped clean.

---

<sup>46</sup> Allusion to the biblical account found in Luke 10:25-37 (*Pléiade* fn.)

“Respectable people” do not bath<sup>47</sup> in God’s grace.

It is a question of molecular and globular physics. What we call the moral is a coating that renders man impermeable to grace. This is why grace acts upon the most extreme criminals and lifts up the most miserable of sinners. By beginning to penetrate them, by being able to penetrate and enter them. And that is why those dearest to us, if covered unfortunately with a moral coating, remain unassailable to grace, impregnable. In contacting them, grace cannot penetrate them. This epidermal covering.

They are impenetrable, in all ways, absolutely, because they are coated, because this wetness cannot get beyond the epidermal coating, because they are impenetrable to the beginning of the utterly wet, to its surface, which is the origin and the surface of penetration.

A soaking liquid, a soaking agent either wets one or it does not. It cannot wet one more or less. It wets one or does not. It is not a question of more or less. It is a question of all or nothing. It is a question of beginning or of not beginning. And then to have begun or not to have begun.

An acid either eats into one or it does not; either attacks one or does not. A lot of sulfuric acid will not do anything that a little sulfuric acid will not do.

---

<sup>47</sup> The French term *mouiller* that Péguy uses here can mean “to make wet” or “to moor” a ship or vessel. This sentence thus suggests both to bath as well as to seek shelter in God’s grace.

It is not a question of quantity. It is a question of entry or of not entering.

That is why nothing is as contrary to what goes (a little shamefully) by the name of religion as what goes by the name of the moral. The moral coats man against the entry of grace.

And nothing is so foolish (because nothing is quite so Louis-Philippe and so Mr. Thiers<sup>48</sup>) as to group together in this way religion and the moral. Nothing is so naive. On the contrary, one can almost say that everything that is won over by grace is won over from and at the expense of the moral. And that everything that is taken over by what is called the moral, everything that is included in what we call the moral is in this respect covered by this coating that we have described as impenetrable to grace.

(It is the same sickness to group together property and the family. As if it were not primarily the modern regime of property and the modern taste for this regime and this property in the modern world that is responsible for the destruction and devastation of the family and race. It is indeed the same confusion, the same false convergence and binding together. The moral is a property, a regime and certainly a

---

<sup>48</sup> Péguy's first reference here is to Louis-Philippe, king of France from 1830 to 1848. Known as the "bourgeois monarch" and "citizen king," he drew his support from the upper bourgeoisie until being forced to abdicate during the February Revolution of 1848. Adolphe Thiers was the first president of France's Third Republic, from 1871 to 1873.

taste for property. The moral makes us owners of our own measly virtues. Grace makes us a family and a race. Grace makes us sons of God and brothers of Christ.<sup>49)</sup>

It is indeed what they used to say, during those centuries of French grandeur, it is indeed what our elders and our forefathers would say, it is indeed what one used to say when one knew how to speak French, when one used to say that grace touches the hearts of men. Which also thereby implies that when it does not reach and it does not penetrate them, it does not touch them. That it does not establish contact. This is the very formula one finds in *Polyeuctus*.<sup>50</sup> It is thus the definitive formula. And it would be pointless to try and find another. And it would be pointless to try and find one better. I have often said that *Polyeuctus* is the greatest and most perfect work that we shall ever see. Because not only is it perfect: it is perfect in every way, and it is fertile in every race, and it gives in every sense. And it is filled with all abundance. And it is without fear and *yet* beyond reproach.<sup>51</sup> And it is beyond reproach and *yet* without fear. It thus achieves, without a hint of difficulty, without a hint of effort, with no sign of effort, the rarest combination, the rarest convergence that it is possible for a work to bring about. It is a work of nature together with a work of grace. It is a work of interior life together with one of public life. It is a work of spiritual life together with civic life. It is war and peace. And it is one and the other war and one

---

<sup>49</sup> Allusion to Romans 8:14,16-17 (*Pléiade* fn.).

<sup>50</sup> Péguy alludes here to a line from Pierre Corneille's play: "This God touches hearts when least one thinks of him" (*Pléiade* fn.).

<sup>51</sup> Allusion to Pierre Terrail, Chevalier de Bayard, fifteenth-century knight renowned for being "without fear and beyond reproach" (*Pléiade* fn.).

and the other peace. The Scythians and sin. Enemies and the Enemy. In fleeing, the Dacians brought along his crime. It is all of man and all of the City. Man and Rome. The world and the city-man. The orb and the urb.<sup>52</sup> All distress and all triumph. And it is also the whole of ancient philosophy. All of good sense grappling with the entirety of grace (and as he showed so well that of all things in the world it is indeed good sense that is the most impenetrable to grace). And also the whole secret legation that came out of antiquity into our own. Because it is well lacking in respect for false gods, but it lacks no respect for those who respected their false gods, and it lacks no respect for those who adored their false gods and who were nourished by the wisdom of antiquity. In this way, the Christian world would reject Jupiter but in no way reject Virgil. In this way, the Christian world would reject Zeus but would not reject Plato, nor Homer, nor perhaps even quite Aristotle. —And again in the figure of Polyeuctus, in all simplicity and I would almost say deliciously, Rome and the province: *Son-in-law to the governor of the entire province*.<sup>53</sup> —And this work is as perfect, as beyond reproach, as undeniable, as impeccable in theology as it is in poetry. It is itself a work that is without sin.

*This God TOUCHES hearts when least one thinks of him*: this is the formula we find in *Polyeuctus*. It is the very formula we find in that biting into, that we find in the attack, in the attainment, and in the penetration of grace. But it implies, if you

---

<sup>52</sup> Rough transposition of the Latin phrase *urbi et orbi* (the city [of Rome] and the world). This also refers to Papal pronouncements issued from the Vatican to Rome and to the entire world (*Pléiade* fn.).

<sup>53</sup> *Polyeuctus*, Act 4, Scene 3, line 1176 (*Pléiade* fn.).

prefer, that he who ponders it, who makes a habit of pondering it, who is covered with this coating of habit is also he who offers the least opening and so speak the least chance for grace to take hold.

I do not want to push this verse of Corneille too far. I do not want to push its meaning too far. It is not a theological proposition. There are many theological propositions in *Polyeuctus*, all of them impeccable in their force and phrasing. This verse is not one of them. It is markedly something different, and calls for a specific form of attention. It is something put forth from history or rather from the chronicling of grace. It is a proposition that is a monument, a recognition, a memorial and monumental proposition showing what happens, what takes place in the reality and workings of grace. I mean in both senses, of the way we use it, of the use we make of grace and especially of the work it does on us. For me, I find these propositions of memory, these propositions of recognition of what happens in real life infinitely more meaningful than a purely theoretical proposition. A type of proposition like this, drawn from history, a monument, a recognition, a proposition amassing those bits and pieces of real life, of a life taking place, is, in comparison to a purely theoretical proposition, what a Napoleonic campaign is to a course back at military school.

But let us get back to the text itself. Once there, let us get back into the text itself, into its fully poetic, tragic, and theological vein of meaning. We will see just how wholeheartedly it agrees with us.

Polyeuctus

*Lord, from your goodness I must obtain this;  
She has too many virtues to not be a Christian:  
With so many merits it pleased you to make her,  
For her then not to know you and not to love you,  
And to live in Hades as an unfortunate slave,  
And under its sad yoke to die as she was born.*

Pauline

*You poor soul, what do you say? And dare desire?*

Polyeuctus

*What with all my life I wish to obtain.*

Pauline

*Or else...?*

Polyeuctus

*It is in vain that one sets up defense:  
This God touches hearts when least one thinks of him.  
This blessed moment has not yet come;  
It will, but the hour and time I cannot know.<sup>54</sup>*

I do not wish to analyze these verses. And I especially do not wish to put them into prose. I do not wish to comment upon them. As much as anyone, I know that

---

<sup>54</sup> *Polyeuctus*, Act 4, Scene 3, lines 1267-78 (translation mine).

poetry and prose are two different beings without any communication between the two, and that to say the same thing in prose and in verse is to not say the same thing at all. And that in verse, one finds a virtue and a destination proper to it. All I wish to retain from this admirable poetry is that God takes man so to speak unawares. But what becomes of he who is without any unawareness.

God takes man against his defenses. But what becomes of he who does not set up any defenses.

Notice that Corneille's subject here is the opposite of our own. Or rather our subject is the opposite and the supplement to that of Corneille. Corneille's subject is the story of Polyeuctus. It is the story of a martyr and a saint. It is the flowering of grace and the fruit that comes from sacrifice. Our unfortunate subject is, in contrast and as supplement, the story of all that is not Polyeuctus. The story of what is not a saint and what is not a martyr. And I would especially say the story of what is not even a sinner.

Corneille shows us how grace works, how it surprises, how it seizes, how it penetrates one. Our subject today is unfortunately how it does not work, how it does not penetrate.

And so, Corneille triumphs. But we do not triumph.

Corneille triumphs. If it is a question of considering the ravages of grace, everything is wondrous. And everything will be wonderment. It carries away those who are for it. Perhaps even more it carries away those who are against it. But those

who are neither for it nor against it. The innumerable herd of the neutral. The countless neutrality of the lukewarm.

It carries away those who are on guard. But those who do not even set up guard.

It carries away those who set up defenses. But those who do not even set up a defense.

And to the angel of the church of the Laodiceans write, “These are the words of the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the beginning of the creation of God: ‘I know your works, that you are neither cold nor hot. I could wish you were cold or hot. So then, because you are lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will vomit you out of My mouth.’”<sup>55</sup>

Corneille’s subject is itself gracious. It is about showing how grace operates. Our unfortunate subject, on the contrary and as supplement, is ingracious. It is disgracious. It is unfortunately about showing how grace does not operate.

As long as one is on the side of grace, it is only wonderment and awe. Unfortunately, the question remains why everything is not on the side of grace.

I am well aware, believe me, of what a low move it is to propose to analyze and comment upon a work like *Polyeuctus*, and to try to lay out a miserable set and

---

<sup>55</sup> Revelations 3:14-16. In Péguy’s essay, this biblical passage appears first in French, followed by a version in Latin.

inventory of supplementary comparisons. But given the situation in which we now find ourselves, it is necessary that we proceed with this lowly undertaking. The problem we set before ourselves is the problem of the historian himself. And it is less that of theologian than, if I may say, that of the historian of theological matters. (The theologian being, in the framework we have thus established, rather the theoretician of theological matters).

I ask your pardon and myself pardon for proposing to analyze, to comment upon, and to supplement this incomparable work. At the point at which we now find ourselves, this lowly undertaking has become unavoidable.

Corneille chose the best part. I do not only mean his genius, which was a gift and himself a blessing unique within the history of the world. I mean the material upon which he would apply his his genius.

Corneille chose the best part. He took an entire world before the first eruption of grace. Or rather he created for himself *this* world (as it is always the same one). The same one always serves this purpose, the same material, time (and even in this sense duration) having only one dimension, such that there is no second dimension by which, and according to which, properly historical action could flow elsewhere. Such that it is necessary for spirit to always work upon the same material, and always bring about the same world.

Corneille created for himself the springtime of grace. And even this first dawn of spring that exceeds in hope spring itself and which is like an advanced taste of eternal life. Like an anticipation of celestial happiness. He left us not with the

melancholy of autumn and its fallen leaves, but with the deadwood of our own ingratitude.

He created for himself this first eruption of grace's blossoming in the world. He created for himself this world before the first eruption of grace, and he had only to depict for us this wondrous eruption in all its forms. He had only to show us these incredible movements. But our lowness and our wretched fate forces us to examine the limits and indeed the lack of grace.

Corneille took the world, if I may say, before the beginnings of grace. He thus had everything to gain. And nothing to lose. He could only win. But at a certain moment, that still remains to be determined precisely, both in time and in place, at this certain moment began an unfortunate second era in which we could win or lose.

A miserable, meager era, that of our own, and which is the era of actionism<sup>56</sup> itself.

And of limitation.

And which has become permanent.

Which amounts to saying very simply that grace itself, as entering into the world, as introducing itself into the world, as taking effect in the world, was not exempt, did not shy away from the general conditions of man and the world and that for grace as well and for the Christian revolution it is the beginning that was the most beautiful. For the Christian revolution as well, there was a dawn...

---

<sup>56</sup> Péguy uses the term *militation* here. If not entirely a neologism it appears to be of a highly unusual and rare usage and suggests both a sense of action and activism or campaigning for a cause.

...And the first sun upon the first morning.<sup>57</sup>

Which amounts to saying that this is another face of the mystery of the incarnation. *Et homo factus est.*<sup>58</sup> In the same way that Jesus was truly and literally made man, in the same way that he was made man honestly and without cheating, thus truly and literally, by a parallel and joint movement, and perhaps an inclusive one, by an incarnation, we can say, both parallel and joint and perhaps and no doubt inclusive, so too grace was honestly and without cheating made temporal and historical, and honestly it entered into the general conditions of man and the world, and amongst all these into the dominant conditions and into those in which all the others perhaps collect and which are the conditions of memory and with them the conditions of the hardening of habit. Of the mucking and clogging up of habit.

However, if Bergson's philosophy was the first in the history of the world that was for memory (and through it for history) at the core of the problem, if Bergson's philosophy was the first in the history of the world that proceeded directly and centrally and by a process that has all the traits of a direct and immediate process of genius, if it is the first to proceed axially to matter and memory as to two terms and two poles rapidly liberated from the most profound difficulties, who could not see, who could not then see, who could not begin to see, from this new angle, what an

---

<sup>57</sup> Line from Péguy's long religious poem *Eve* (Pléiade fn.).

<sup>58</sup> Latin: ... and was made man. Allusion to the Nicene Creed, profession of faith recited by believers during Sunday mass (Pléiade fn.).

immense direction Bergson's philosophy, for the first time in the history of the world, provided to us on the profound difficulties, on the central and axial difficulties of this problem of grace, which no doubt is itself the most profound of Christian problems.

With this problem of grace, Corneille created for himself, Corneille reserved for himself grace itself, and he left us unfortunately only with disgrace. He gave himself that portion that was grace and only left us unfortunately with that supplementary portion, which by definition could only be disgrace. For himself he claimed the wondrous workings of grace, he left us only disgrace and the numerous ingritudes of the counter-workings and limitations within the workings of grace. To himself he gave the efficient, for us he left only the deficient. He created for himself the efficacious, and left us only the failures.

He created for himself the sap and the flower and the coming into bud. He left us with merely the ingratitude of figuring out how all of that would end in becoming nothing but deadwood.

Now, deadwood is a material that is extremely well worn, it is a material that has arrived at the limit of its use. As well as a material replete with its own memories and the residue of its vegetative memories.

And in a Bergsonian system (I do not say the Bergsonian system; I do not wish to engage our mentor in these flows that I see), the death of a being is precisely its filling up with habit, its filling up with memory, that is to say its growing full with age. And thus, its filling up with sclerosis and all types of hardening.

(I mean, on one hand, material and temporal death; and on the other, I mean, within this material death, death not that is accidental (that is by disease, accidental), which is (accidental death) mechanical in the sense that it is always the result of a fault in the machinery, but death so to speak that is essential, normal, by growing old essentially and normally.)

And so in a Bergsonian system (I do not say the Bergsonian system), this death that is material, temporal, normal and not irregular, essential so to speak and not accidental, regular and not abnormal, physiological and not mechanical, this usual death of a being, this well-worn death takes place when a material being is filled full with its habits, full with its memories, full with the hardening of its habits and its memories, when all of its material being is taken over by habit, by memory, by this hardening, when all of its material being is *busy* with habit, with memory, with this hardening, when no longer even a single atom of its material being is left for the new, which is life itself.

In this sense and within this system, this so to speak essential death of a being is reached when this being attains his limit of habit, his limit of memory, his limit of hardening in his habit and his memory. In other words, and as one might expect, death is the limit reached in the dulling of one's life.

Or what amounts to the same thing, it is the limit reached in growing old.

It is this that constitutes deadwood. Death is the limit reached in the filling up of memory, of the filling up of habit, of the filling up of hardening, growing old, dulling.

When all of one's matter is consecrated to memory, there is death.

When all the matter of one's being, all the matter of which one may dispose, is designated for memory (for habits, growing old, hardening, dulling), when there is no longer a single atom of matter free, then one has attained this limit that is death.

(Material and physiological death.)

(And thereby again do we perceive this profound link, this triply profound linking of freedom with grace and with life. And that there is a freely-given, unconditional quality to all three. And that determinism (to the extent that it is thinkable), (and I do not take it upon myself to think it), (and that A makes B without ceasing to be A and without becoming B, which itself is not A, *is no longer A*), and that physical and metaphysical determinism is perhaps merely the law of residues. Of what is incessantly coming down.

Determinism (to the extent that it is thinkable) would thus be the law of immense waste.

(And if it is not thinkable by a living form of thought, by a thinking being, it is precisely because perhaps it is the law of what is no longer within the realm of the living, what is no longer within being, what is waste.)

A being that dies is a being that has reached this point, this limit, of being completely invaded, completed occupied by its waste, by the immense waste of its memory.

Dust and debris, the immense debris of its habits.

Deadwood is wood that is extremely well worn. A dead soul is likewise a soul that has been extremely well worn by habit.

Deadwood is wood that has been worn to the limit of its use. A dead soul is likewise a soul that has been worn to the limit of its use.

And it is well worth noting that spiritual death, that the death of the soul is traditionally represented in the language of the Church as the result (we could also say as the limit) of a process of hardening. One should avoid seeing in this simply a metaphor. Besides, there is never any metaphor. When one speaks of that final hardening and unrepentance,<sup>59</sup> one must indeed understand this as a very real phenomenon of the induration of the soul, which thus becomes a type of deadwood. It is a spiritual incrustation, a protective covering of habit, which thenceforth keeps the soul from contact with the utter wetness of grace.

All spiritual matter so to speak, all the matter of the soul is then appointed to the protective covering of habit, consecrated to this covering of habit, consumed by habit in order to be, in order to become this covering.

This is truly a degeneration and even a physiological degeneration. This coating not only covers. Not only is it a coating. But when this coating sinks in, it goes all the way to the heart. And then all that remains is covering. It is truly a degeneration of the tissue. The heart itself becomes a covering.

---

<sup>59</sup> Allusion to Romans 2:5: But because of your hard and unrepentant heart, you are storing up wrath against yourself for the day of God's wrath, when his righteous judgment will be revealed (Pléiade fn.).

This covering is all there is, and there is no longer anything beneath to be covered.

One knows that saying old men have and that for my part I find truly admirable. — What a shame, they would say, that one must die. (They were thinking only of their physical death, because men capable of a saying so lovely and profoundly innocent obviously carried no trace of that hardening of the soul that ends in spiritual death.) — What a shame, (they would say), that one must renounce life.

*All this time I was just beginning to get the hang of it.*

They did not know how right they were. It is precisely because they *completed* this getting-the-hang-of-it that they arrived at the completion that is death.

Yet, how many others want simply to quibble over each letter of the law. The letter kills. For me, how can one not already see, while awaiting perhaps so many other aspects, how can one not see a deep kinship, a mysterious harmony in the depth of thought, how can one not see a parallel method and process of deepening in both the traditional teaching of the Church, which say that spiritual death is the result of a hardening, and these profound theories of memory and habit, which one finds in the ground-breaking discoveries of Bergson's thought.

Yet, how many others want simply to quibble miserably over the details. One day we will explain it all perhaps. For today I only want to see what I see. I see that Christian thinking, expressed in one of the oldest and most traditional teachings of the Church, along with Bergson's thinking, expressed everywhere throughout the work of our master, and especially in *Matter and Memory (Essay on the relation of body and*

*spirit*), and in *Essay on the Immediate Data of Consciousness*, proceed by an approach so similar and parallel, and penetrated to the core of the truths of spirit through such a parallel and related process of deepening, that we could only enter into the full intelligence of this ancient teaching of the Church by arming ourselves fully with the sensitivity and insight of Bergson's philosophical thought and method.

Yes, the Church and the Church's teachings have always said that spiritual death was the result of a hardening and that the final impenitence was truly a final hardening. But who does not see that the full meaning of this teaching, and not just its full meaning but its extreme rigor and exactitude, who does not see that this teaching had lost the full content of its meaning, who does not see that the full content of its meaning would not appear, (and consequently had never yet appeared in the history of the world), except for those enlightened by the brilliance of Bergson's philosophy.

Yes, the Church and the Church's teachings have always said that spiritual death, that the death of the soul, was the result of a final hardening. But just what is, deep down at its core, this process of hardening. What, in a metaphysical sense, is sclerosis. And, in the same way, what is a final hardening. What does it consist of exactly. How is it essentially and precisely lethal. In what way is it a path that leads inescapably towards death, the one true path to death, and the only true death, these are the questions whose answers have eluded us prior to equipping ourselves with the deep wisdom of Bergson's insights, these are the answers for which we searched without success prior to equipping ourselves with the deep wisdom of Bergson's insights.

Yes, the Church and the Church's teachings have always said that spiritual death was the result of a hardening. But what this hardening itself was, what it consisted of, what this hardening of being itself was, it was only with Bergson's insights that we were for the first time able to go deeply into the matter. It was precisely Bergson's thought that lit the way for us.

Because it was necessary that Bergson's thought enter into time, necessary that Bergson's thought enter into the history of the world, and that the metaphysical truths of matter, of memory, of habit, of growing old, of hardening be at last penetrated to their core, so that this profound link between memory, habit, growing old, and the hardening of death be illuminated and penetrated to its core.

Thanks to Bergson and thanks to Bergson's thought and insights, when we speak of matter and memory and of the link between matter and memory, when we speak of habit, of growing old, of hardening, we at last know what it is we are speaking about, we know it precisely, we know it to its core; and in this and by this way, we have come to know the mechanisms that lead one to spiritual death; and in this and by this way, we have come to know the mechanisms of this numbing of life, this dulling work of habit, which renders, which ends up by making a soul impenetrable to the infusions of grace.

This is to say that in this and by this way we have come to know the mechanisms of this limitation of grace, or at least of the action of grace, which has thus become, which constitutes at present the object of our unfortunate study.

Because deadwood is a material entirely invaded by the *ready-made*, entirely occupied, entirely dedicated to the ready-made, entirely devoured by the ready-made, entirely consumed so to speak by this invasion of the ready-made. Entirely callused, entirely mummified; filled-full with its habit and filled-full with its memory. It is a material that has arrived at the final limit on this path of growing dulled to life. It is a material whose entire matter has little by little been attained by this process of growing old. It is a material whose entire suppleness has little by little been devoured by this stiffening, whose entire being has little by little been rendered sclerotic by this hardening. It is a material with not an atom of space remaining, not an atom of its matter remaining, for the *in-the-making*. For making this in-the-making. And therefore, it no longer makes and it no longer becomes.

In the same way, a dead soul is a soul entirely invaded by the *ready-made*, entirely occupied, entirely dedicated to the ready-made, entirely devoured by the ready-made, entirely consumed so to speak by this invasion of the ready-made. Entirely callused, entirely mummified; filled-full with the residual, filled-full with its debris; filled-full with its habit and with its memory. It is a soul that has arrived at the limit of this becoming-dulled to life. It is a soul whose entire matter so to speak, whose entire spiritual matter, has little by little been attained by this process of growing old. It is a soul whose entire suppleness has little by little been devoured by this stiffening, whose entire being has little by little been made sclerotic by this hardening. It is a soul entirely invaded by this crusting over of habit, by the encrustation of its memory. It is a soul with not an atom of space remaining, not an

atom of its spiritual matter remaining, for the *in-the-making*. For making this in-the-making. And therefore, it no longer makes; it no longer becomes. No longer is there a single atom free for this. And here we find once more, we return again to this profound bond existing between grace and freedom, between the gracious and the free, the irrevocable mutual exigency of grace and freedom.

Deadwood is a material filled to the limit with the residual; a dead soul is a soul filled to the limit with the residual.

Deadwood is a material worn to the extreme limit of its use. A dead soul is a soul worn to the extreme limit of its use.

Deadwood is a material that has retained far too much organic matter. A dead soul is a soul that has retained far too much organic and psychological matter.

Deadwood is a material that has reached the extreme limit of its functioning. A dead soul is a soul that has reached the extreme limit of its functioning.

Deadwood is a material stuffed beyond full with its own past. A dead soul is a soul stuffed beyond full with its own past.

Deadwood is a material filled-full with the residual. A dead soul is a soul filled-full with the residual.

Within this system, the newly-sprouted seedling is at the extreme end in the opposite direction. The seedling is what contains the extreme minimum of the residual; what is least given up to the *ready-made*, what contains within it the extreme minimum of habit and of memory.

And it is the same with regards to the growing-old, the growing-stiff, the growing-hard, and the growing-dull; always it contains the extreme minimum.

And it is the same, but in the extreme opposite direction, with regards to freedom, to play, to suppleness, and to grace; always it contains the maximum of these.

The seedling is that which is the least worn out by habit. It is there where matter is the least taken up, the least given over to memory and to habit.

The seedling is there where matter is the least dedicated to memory.

It is there where its records are at a minimum, where there are the least *memories*.

The least red tape, the least bureaucracy.

Or alternatively, it is that which is the closest to creation; that which is the most *recent*, in the sense of the original Latin *recens*.<sup>60</sup> It is that which is the most fresh. The most recently come into the world, the most nearly removed from the hands of God.

Deadwood is that where the maximum of matter is dedicated to memory.

For memory and habit are the harbingers of death.

Because they bring about this process of aging, of stiffening, of hardening, which are the very expressions of the dulling of life unto death.

Deadwood is that which has been completely invaded by its records, by the accumulation of its *memories*.

---

<sup>60</sup> *Recens*: fresh, what has just come out (Pléiade fn.).

Deadwood is a material that has been organically invaded, swollen to the limit, with this invasion of its organic memories.

Deadwood is a material that has succumbed under the accumulated weight of its records; of its bureaucracy.

Or alternatively, it is that which is the furthest removed from creation; the least recent; the least fresh. The least recently come into the world, the furthest removed from the hands of God.

A dead soul is a soul in which the maximum of (spiritual) matter is dedicated to memory.

For memory and habit are just as much the harbingers of this type of death.

A dead soul is a soul that has been totally invaded by its records, by the accumulation of its *memories*.

It is a soul that has been organically and psychologically invaded, swollen to the limit, with the invasion of its organic and psychological memories.

It is a soul where not a single atom of space remains; for freedom and conjointly for grace.

It is a soul where not a single atom remains unfilled.

It is a soul where not a single atom of (spiritual) matter remains open for freedom and conjointly for grace.

A dead soul is a soul that has succumbed under the accumulated weight of its records; under its bureaucracy.

And ultimately it is a soul that is the furthest removed from creation; the least recent; the least fresh, the furthest along in its decreation. The least recently come into the world, the furthest removed from the hands of God.

And when one says that the Church has received eternal promises, which come together in an ever-lasting promise, one must clearly understand by this that it has received the promise that it will never succumb under the weight of its own growing-old, under its own hardening, under its own stiffening, under its own habit, or under its own memory.

That it will never become deadwood, nor a dead soul; that it will never reach that final point of becoming numb to life, which is death.

That it will never succumb to the weight of its files or its history.

That its *memories* will never crush the life from it.

That it will never succumb under the accumulated weight of its files, under the stiffness of its bureaucracy.

And that its saints will always redound to its glory.

Here appears under a new day, here springs forth, here and yet again at this crossroads comes forth the full sense and strength and principal destiny of this virtue that we have named the little child of hope.<sup>61</sup> She is in her essence the counter to habit. And thus, she is diametrically and axially and centrally counter to death itself. She is the source and the seed. She is the springing forth and she is grace. She is the

---

<sup>61</sup> Allusion to Péguy's *Le Porche du mystère de la deuxième vertu* (Pléiade fn.).

heart of freedom. She is the virtue of the new and the virtue of the young. And it is not without reason that she is one of the Theological virtues and even the princess of these Theological virtues, and it is not without reason that she is at the very center of these Theological virtues, because without her Faith would simply slide off this covering of habit; and without her Charity would simply slide off this covering of habit.

And it is Hope in particular that will guarantee that the Church avoids succumbing under the weight of its own mechanism.

Thus, springs forth in the full light of day the sense and the strength and the vocation and, so to speak, the virtue of that which we have named the little child of Hope. She is the source of life, because she is the one who is constantly undoing habit. She is the seed. Of spiritual birth in every form. She is the source and the bursting forth of grace, because she is the one who constantly uncovers this fatal covering of habit. And it is not without reason that she is one of the Theological virtues. Because she is the princesse-child of these Theological virtues. And she is the heir apparent and daughter of France. And it is not without reason that she walks in the center between her two big sisters and that her two big sisters offer her their hand. But they do not offer her their hand in the way one thinks. Because she is small one thinks she has need of others. To walk. But, quite the contrary, it is the others who have need of her. And who are quite happy to offer her their hand. To walk. Because without her Faith would have taken on the habits of the world, and without her

Charity would have taken on the habits of the poor. And thus without her Faith and without her Charity would have each, apart and on their own, taken on the very habit of God himself.

It is she to whom is given the task of starting anew, as habit is given the task of finishing off beings. Both material and spiritual beings. She is essentially and diametrically counter to habit in all its forms, as she is counter to all processes of deadening unto death. To her is given the task of constantly undoing habit. To her is given the task of constantly taking apart the mechanisms of habit. To her is given the task of introducing everywhere new beginnings, as habit introduces everywhere only endings and death. To her is given the task of introducing everywhere fresh bodies, as habit introduces everywhere only mechanisms. To her is given the task of introducing new beginnings of beginnings, beginnings of beings, as habit introduces everywhere beginnings, or rather the beginnings, or rather the countless and still always the same beginning of the end.

She is the principle, this child is the principle of recreation, as habit is the principle of decreation.

She makes, as habit unmakes.

She introduces everywhere and always the countless forms of creation.

She is the ever-young agent of creation and of grace. She is thus the most direct and present agent of God.

She introduces everywhere entries and winnings, entries into creation, as habit introduces everywhere exits and funerals.

To her is given the task in a word, and here we meet up once more with our Descartes, to her is given the task of service in assuring a continued creation.<sup>62</sup>

Her two sisters have their own proper objects, but without her, who has no specific object, the objects proper to her two sisters would slowly flatten out under the dulling pressure of habit.

She has no proper object of her own precisely because her object is all of life. It is the entirety of the Creator's creation. It is both world and God together. To her is give the task of applying to everything, (and surely not to God but to everything that comes to us from God and to the little that we give back in return to God), a certain, specific treatment of which she alone has the secret and that is the treatment of renewal, of perpetual renewal, and constant reintroduction of the virtue of creation.

Thus, she cannot be defined by her object, (by a single object), but by a certain treatment that she applies and that she alone applies to the whole of objects.

Faith has an object proper to it, which is belief. Charity has an object proper to it, which is love. But without this little child of Hope, Faith would become habituated to belief, to the world, to God. And without this little child of Hope, Charity would become habituated to love, to the poor, to God.

It is through Hope that all of the rest remains open to beginning anew. From this comes her unique place amongst all the virtues. At the baptism of the world, the angels and man received their names and their portions, and the world was divided up

---

<sup>62</sup> Péguy refers here to Descartes' notion of "continued creation," which he conceived as the mechanism by which the natural, material world is maintained in a suspended state of existence following God's original creation of it.

between Cardinal and Theological virtues. Only one of these received nothing, apart from being the one to watch over all the others.

Only one received nothing, apart from being the one without whom all the others would be nothing.

Only one received nothing, apart from being the one without whom all the others would rot away.

Only one received nothing, apart from being the one without whom grace itself would *grow old* in the world.

And one can almost say that this child who has no one domain, who has no one portion, and who provides for the domains of all the others and who alone can provide it must be said for their needs, for that one deep and lasting need amongst all others, which is to not perish, and to not fall into the numbing processes of the dulling of life through habit, it must be said that this child virtue, that this *Innocent*,<sup>63</sup> that this child of Hope provides us here and in herself with an example and, one must add, a model of absolute charity.

(I would like to open a short parenthetical remark here, and rest assured, it is a parenthesis that I fully intend to conclude. I will conclude it all too shortly). That the battle raging around the person of Mr. Bergson and the Bergsonian revolution has reached such a furious pitch is well to be understood. But that this furious battle has

---

<sup>63</sup> Allusion to Péguy's *Mystère des saints Innocents* (Pléiade fn.).

been conducted in such a wrongheaded manner, well this leaves little to be understood.

That this battle has been so fierce in nature, well it is thus that new thought is generally welcomed by the world. That this battle has been so often nasty in nature, that I fully grant as well: it is thus that goodness is generally welcomed by the world.

But that this battle should be conducted in such a wrongheaded manner, I admit that this remains a difficult task for me to fully understand.<sup>64</sup>

Here again, it is necessary to distinguish. Mr. Bergson has many enemies that one could understand as falling perfectly within the order of things and many enemies that one could not ever understand as falling within the order of things. He has both forward enemies and backwards enemies.

That all the positivists should wage battle against this man who has forever undone the bindings of positivism, this is a battle that is forthright, that is honest, and that rises up to meet one's adversary head on.

That all the materialists should wage battle, and even with all their might, against this man who has forever undone the bindings of materialism, I declare that to be their duty. They wage a battle that is forthright, that is honest, and that rises up to meet one's adversary head on.

That the determinists should wage battle, and relentlessly, against this man who has forever undone the bindings of determinism, I would even go so far as to say

---

<sup>64</sup> Echo of a passage from a letter Péguy addressed to Bergson on March 2, 1914 (Pléiade fn.).

that in a certain sense they are merely fulfilling their duty. Since they have been charged with being determinists and defending this thesis, and holding firm to this position. They wage a battle that is forthright, honest, and head on.

But that the man who reintroduced freedom into the world should find aligned against him, and to such an extent, those politicians of freedom,<sup>65</sup> that the man who wrested France away from the grip of German intellectual servitude should find aligned against him, and to such an extent, those politicians of a so-called French policy, that the man who reintroduced spiritual life in the world should find aligned against him, and to such an extent, those politicians of spiritual life, all this is what I call an inversion, and a mystery, and a deliberate scandal, and a backwards battle, or rather a triply backwards battle. This is what could never be understood if we were not aware that we are living precisely a moment of diametrical inversion of our political parties, and further if we were not aware that our political parties are diametrically contrary to all mysticisms of which they yet claim to be their continuation. Nothing is as contrary to all the mysticisms of freedom as those politicians of freedom. Nothing is as contrary to all French mysticisms than those politicians of French policy. Nothing is as contrary to all the mysticisms of spiritual life than those politicians of spiritual life.

Yet I admit that I am not surprised that those French politicians of spiritual life so quickly succeeded in getting Mr. Bergson's thought officially condemned by

---

<sup>65</sup> Péguy is thinking here of the Socialists, and particularly of their leader Jean Jaurès (Pléiade fn.).

Roman bureaucracy. It was entirely natural that a bureaucracy, whichever it might be, be forewarned against a philosophy, against a form of thought which rose up the most diametrically, as we have just seen, which confronted most diametrically all the processes of habit, of growing old, of growing numb, of bureaucracy, and of death.

I do not want to enter incidentally into such a serious debate. I do not want to enter it obliquely. Those skew bridges with oblique arcs are admirable works of art, especially for railways, for viaducts, and when they are made of stone, and thus have the form of a Roman arch. Nevertheless, we will not be building any such forms as these today. In another essay, if I can, and in beginning from the very beginning, I will one day open, I myself will introduce for discussion this great debate. Today, Mr. Bergson has two races of enemies, or how should I say, two classes of enemies; or rather two continents, two classes of enemies. He has against him all those enemies of the Old World. I mean belonging to the Old World. And he has against him all those enemies of the New World. I mean emerged from the New World, belonging to the New World. He has against him all those enemies of the Old Continent. And he has against him all those enemies of the New Continent. He has against him all the enemies that he deserves. And he has those that he does not deserve. He has those that he made. And he has those that he unmade. He has his forthright enemies. And he has his counter-right enemies (or wrong-headed).

He has against him his enemies and the friends of his enemies. This is right.  
And yet.

He has against him his enemies and the enemies of his enemies. But he does not have for him the friends of his enemies. The age-old principle of irreversibility is still at work here. And also at work in this system is the principle that one always loses and never wins.

In short, he has against him everyone. Here is a sign of his greatness.

He does not even have for him all those friends of his friends. Because enmity always eats away at friendship. And friendship never eats away at enmity. And hatred, and jealousy, and pride always win.

He has against him all those that he has lost. And he has against him all those that he has saved. One surely knows little of the world if one fails to understand that those who play second fiddle are unfailingly the most bitter in their attacks. The quickest to spread disease and venom. The fullest of malice and self-content. The quickest to assure themselves and to condemn others.

He has against him all those that he has ruined. He has against him those who owe him everything. One surely knows little about humanity if one fails to see that those who have had to play second fiddle to him will surely never forgive him this.

The man who undid the bindings of materialism has against him the entire party of materialists. This is good. This is right.

The man who undid the bindings of determinism has against him the entire party of determinists. This is good. This is right.

The man who thus undid the bindings of atheism has against him the entire party of atheists. This is good. This is right.

And in a word the man who undid the bindings of a false intellectualism has against him the entire scientific party. This is good. This is right.

But the man who reintroduced freedom into the world has against him the entire Radical party.<sup>66</sup>

The man who wrested French thought from the grip of German servitude has against him the Action française party.<sup>67</sup>

The man who reintroduced spiritual life has against him the party of the faithful.

Here is thus the triple assault that one must outflank. Here is the triple scandal that one should call attention to, and perhaps purify. Here at least is the triple attack, within our borders, the triple betrayal, the triple double-cross, (the triple ingratitude), that one must analyze a moment, shed light upon, study, classify, and perhaps dismantle.

I am not a polemicist. Today, I have been merely following a thought. And it has indeed led us far. Mr. Bergson has not been given the task of being a Catholic. He

---

<sup>66</sup> In the wake of the Dreyfus Affair, the Radical Party joined with the Socialists to form the *Bloc des gauches* headed by Émile Combes. They pursued a staunch anti-clerical policy resulting in the 1905 law officially separating Church and State, which thus ushered in a new era of state secularism in France.

<sup>67</sup> L'Action française was a right-wing political group led by Charles Maurras, which espoused a doctrine of integral nationalism based upon a return to classical aesthetics, to the monarchy, and to a central role of the Church in French society. Widely supported by Catholics, it would be condemned by the papacy in 1926. A newspaper bearing the same name would promote a party line of vehement anti-Semitic, anti-German, and anti-republican sentiment.

is not even charged with drafting an Apostles' Creed.<sup>68</sup> Nor is he charged with formulating a theory of grace. And he is not charged either with having discovered this second form of Hope to have come into the world.<sup>69</sup> But I have just shown, and really without meaning to do so, that the theory of grace and its bursting forth, hermetically contained within this theory of man's freedom in relation to his ceasing to be alive, and the theory of hope in relation to his growing old do not fully reveal themselves in their exactitude except for a humanity that has passed through the insights of Bergson's thought. And I will go further. I will say all I have in mind here, for: if God was truly served within his Church today, (one serves him truly, but with such a truly meager service), he would perhaps have no need of recalling, when he wished to bring forth his grace in thought, that there still remains, and that he still has within his hand the people of his first servants.<sup>70</sup>

It is precisely this renewed youth of the world and this people of a renewed hope and this countless novelty and this universal breaking from habit that Corneille had to show us, or rather that he undertook to show us, or rather that he charged himself with showing us. Just how he succeeded here, perhaps one already knows. But I am not at all sure that one fully knows enough. I see so many marvels in *Polyeuctus*, and of such perfection, and so many riches, that I never know if everyone

---

<sup>68</sup> The Apostles' Creed is the oldest profession of faith known to Christians, established by the Roman Church of the second century (Pléiade fn.).

<sup>69</sup> Christian hope, born into the world with Jesus' coming, followed upon the essentially messianic earlier form of Jewish hope (Pléiade fn.).

<sup>70</sup> Recall that Bergson is Jewish, and thus of the people of God's first servants.

also sees all of these. I would like grow old enough to one day be able to set down just a sampling of the elements that I see in this work. I would like to give myself over to this childness desire of surrounding with commentaries a work that has no need of them. (Both because it is a text, and moreover because it is *Polyeuctus*.) I would rather like to show proof of such innocence myself than clutter with explanations a work that, being already overflowing, has the least need of explanations. (They say these contradictions are the essence of love, so too this awkwardness, this task of speaking when one should remain quiet.) I have tried today only to take note of his intention and perhaps to distinguish it from ours, to set it apart from the meager aims that remain for us to pursue.

Corneille made for himself this world, this people of hope, this invention of the new, this innovation of newness. He made for himself this childhood and this youthfulness. As if a reflection of the climate of that original garden. He made for himself this dawn and this first light, and this beginning of all other beginnings. He left for us the morning, and the afternoon, and the evening, and the long day. He left for us the evening and the slow growing old of evening. And the slow growing old of middle age, worse even perhaps than the growing old of old age. And this we can say now, those of us who have been formed under the guidance of Bergson's discipline, now that humanity has passed through the insights of Bergson's thought, and now that we have thanks to Bergson the resources of a new language, we can say that Corneille made himself grace itself. And left us only with habit. He made for himself a world of grace. And he left for us only a world of habit.

He made for himself a Roman world unhabituated to God, and the immense and incredible ravages of grace within this world without habit. He left to us a world habituated unto God and the incredible failures of grace's inability to take hold within a world worn out by habit.

When one has come in whatever small way to know grace, when one has acquired a bit of experience with it, be it only historical, be it only say literary, one knows the problem is not in the workings of grace, in its action. It is in its inaction. It is in the limitations that come upon it. More simply one wonders if it still acts. But one no longer asks why, or how, or where it acts. One no longer has but a single question. Why it does not act always and everywhere.

This type of false sense of shame that unfortunately tends to strike Catholics, this servile obedience, this nasty deference, this perceived sense of failure makes them always think only of finding alibis and proofs. (And what they call their proofs are generally but excuses.) (They are forever pleading guilty.) Yet it is the proofs of others that one should demand. I would indeed like to see them, these proofs of the others.

For anyone who has any idea of what grace truly is, the true problem has nothing to do with grace. The true problem has to do with disgrace and with ingratitude.

That is to say, the limitations and the inaction and the failures in the ability of grace to take hold.

It is like with the famous proofs for the existence of God. For any head with even an ounce of philosophical stuffing, the true problem has to do not with the fully-filled but with the empty, with the void, or rather with the voids. The true problem has to do not with God but, if I may say, with the limitations and, I would even go so far as to say, with the shortcomings in relation to God.

In the world and in man, there are two limitations and so to speak two shortcomings in relation to God. Two limitations in the workings of God. Two limitations, two shortcomings (in the workings) of grace. Or rather the will of God has created, has created for itself, two limitations and so to speak two shortcomings: the first is man's freedom in the natural order of life, the other is the force of habit in the slow process of the dulling of life unto death.

Habit is not only a stranger. Which supplants reason within us. And a crafty homemaker. Who is quick to set up home within us.<sup>71</sup> It is one of two essential pieces in the mechanism and in the structuring of man. As long as man is free of habit, as long as he is fresh and spiritually young, man's freedom articulates seamlessly with grace to bring about eternal life and salvation. The result of this free, exact play of forces is salvation and eternal life. Habit is what clogs up this play. Everything that it gains hold of in the way of novelty and of man's freedom it thus does so at the expense of grace and in preparing this dulling of life unto death. This coating covering entirely man's freedom, this coating of growing old prevents this free play

---

<sup>71</sup> Nearly direct transcription of several lines from Alphonse Lemerre's poem "L'Habitude" (Pléiade fn.).

of freedom upon grace and likewise prevents, and all the more so, grace from *gaining a hold* on freedom.

(In all forms of thought, in all philosophies, the true problem always concerns the failures or rather the failure. It is for this reason that we have the problem of evil, but we do not have the problem of good. It is not the problem of good but rather the problem of evil that gradually makes its way through all philosophies and which allows one (like a universal reagent) little by little to classify all philosophies according to the stance they take, according to the various circumstances they employ in trying to make sense of this problem.)

(The problem here never concerns what is. It concerns what is not, what is lacking.)

Corneille placed himself before these deficiencies themselves, before even the beginning of these deficiencies. He gave himself the budding out and the seedling, this living branching into being, God's immense germination within the Roman world. He left us what must come in the wake. He left us what would later follow all this. He left us the deadwood and dead soul.

He gave himself this immense wave of life. He left us the silt and the mud, which are the memory of the wave.

He gave himself the surging forth of an immense tide. He left us with the ebbing, the withdrawal, the silty deposits of the estuary.

Let us pursue our thought here to its conclusion. He took that which was easiest, the most ready. (One indeed understands what I mean by this.) He took, he made for himself, he brought about precisely that which had no need of explanations. He left us with that which had need of explanations. Let us say: he took for subject the martyr's path of surrender to God's grace.

One should not, however, believe that he did not see there was a problem here nor understand just where it lay. Or rather where it was going to be. He saw all too well that there would be limits, that there were already limitations. He even saw two in particular, and he put them forth as two terms at the culmination of his work. He put forth these two terms at the limit of his horizon. He placed these two terms at the frontier of his work. He saw all too well, he understood, he put forth that there would be a limit, that there was already the limitation represented by Severus, and he put forth that there was already the limitation represented by Felix.<sup>72</sup>

Let us recognize and salute here the great loyalty, the great purity of genius. Let us recognize here and salute, amongst all others, the great loyalty of Corneille. This great lawyer, who pleaded so many times and who pleaded so many causes, retained throughout his life a certain loyalty of youth and of grace, a certain innate and incredible innocence. And which he himself seemed determined never to

---

<sup>72</sup> In *Polyeuctus*, Severus is a Roman knight of noble birth and character. Polyeuctus, anticipating his martyrdom, offers to surrender his wife Pauline to Severus. Felix is the Roman governor of Armenia, and father of Pauline. Both father and daughter, who labor throughout the play to convince Polyeuctus to renounce his faith, will eventually convert to Christianity following his death.

overcome. This strength is the very mark of genius. And it is the mark itself of strength to consent to these rules of honor.

Not to say that he was not at times, how should I say, a bit cunning in some of those arguments found in his plays. But here again it is through a type of loyalty, of innocence in pleading one's case, which makes it so that every thesis in question be pleaded to the full and with all the resources one can muster as a member of the Bar. Once finished pleading his case, an immense loyalty takes hold of him once more, his native loyalty, and it should not be said a childish loyalty but the loyalty of a young man, and even more of a man young in every sense, the very loyalty of the work itself and of genius, and of fecundity, the same loyalty moreover that will allow no thesis to be put forward either in man or in the world but that it shall be pleaded and debated to the fullest and with all the resources of being. He knows that in these great debates one's nobility on the battlefield is of far more importance than to whom happens to go the victory, and that the nobleman who may be in the wrong is far more right the vile man who happens to be in the right. He knows that in these great disputes of force, the nobility of the debate is of more importance than the pronouncement of victory. He knows that it is a struggle concerning God. And that above all else, the conditions in which it is conducted must be pure, and that these conditions must be respected. And that it is up to us to assure that these conditions are pure, and that it is up to us to assure that these conditions are respected. Yet, the outcome of the victory has nothing to do with us; and that God alone decides the outcome of this struggle.

Let us say it once more, this infinite care for fairness, this profound attention to justice and so to speak to an equitable partition is the mark of strength and furthermore the very mark of genius. Of a man who knows very well that he will do all he wishes and that in doing so his genius will never refuse him a thing. It is only the small, the crippled, the vile, the weak who look to mark the cards for their benefit. A lofty sentiment of the game's nobility keeps strength and genius from ever succumbing to these lowly temptations. Weakness is forever seeking a way to win out over God. Strength and genius, however, do not even seek to win. They want only to present to God, in their strength and in their fullness, they want only to offer, in their beauty, (in the loyal force of a beauty that is so to speak naked), these two or three great theses in the thought of man that are still, (be they even contrary to their own ends), two or three of the greatest pieces in the whole of creation. After all this, the judgment falls not to man. *Nolite judicare*.<sup>73</sup> The decision falls solely to God.

Such is the depth of thought in genius. And we come back here to what I have already written about in my prior *Note sur M. Bergson et la philosophie bergsonienne*.<sup>74</sup> With such matters, it is not so much a question of winning. It is a question of having fought well. For it is this, to fight well, that ultimately falls to us. Victory, however, is not for us to decide. The weakling who beats up another

---

<sup>73</sup> Latin: "Judge not..." From Matthew 7:1: "Judge not, that ye be not judged" (Pléiade fn.).

<sup>74</sup> Recall that Péguy had intended these two essays as parts of a larger whole treating the question of the revolutionary qualities of Bergson's thought and method as conceived in relation to Descartes' own radically new philosophical method several centuries prior.

weakling, one slightly weaker than oneself, has accomplished nothing. But a great form of thought which rises up to meet another great form of thought, here is what makes the heart of God rejoice.

In such matters, (and perhaps only in such matters), a vile form of victory is nothing compared to a noble form of defeat, and a weak form of victory is nothing compared to a strong form of victory.

The weakling who beats up one yet more weak, what does it get you. But a great form of thought which rises up to meet another great form of thought, what a magnificent offering.

It is greatness, it is beauty, it is the nobility of struggle that is everything in the eyes of the one for whom this struggle is waged. In the view of the one for whom it is waged. And together, these constitute the purity of this struggle. And together, these constitute the loyalty of this struggle. A fidelity to the rules of the game.

This fidelity to the rules of the game is not simply a type of formal fidelity. And it is the very essence of fidelity that it holds firm and that every fidelity is a fidelity of substance.

Fidelity to the rules of the game is the supreme form of decency; and the most primary, and indispensable, and simple form of decency, when one thinks of and before whom one is playing this game.

We come back here to what I have already discussed in my prior essay on Bergson. It is not a question of the Earth's seasons being interchanged nor even that they be in themselves interchangeable. It is not a question of spring becoming fall and

summer going and blending itself into winter. It is a question of spring being fully young and fully new and fully spring. It is a question of fall being its own fully melancholic, fall self. And it is a question of summer being its own harsh and stinging and fully summer self. And it is a question of winter being its own brutal and simple and fully winter self.

And it is not a question of wheat bursting forth from the vine and grapes shooting up in what were formerly wheat fields. It is not a question of grains of wheat showing up in the clusters of grapes on the vine or grapes turning up in ears of wheat. It is not a question of reaping the vineyards and hand-picking the wheat harvest. It is a question of proceeding directly and I would say separately. It is a question of doing one's work directly and I would say separately.

In such matters, to mix things up is the worst impiety. As it is the most base form of infidelity. It is simply a question of the wheat harvest being of wheat and the grape harvest being indeed of grapes. One must, my God how simple it truly all would be if there were not this host of commentators and footnote writers, one must simply make sure that it is indeed the wheat harvest that one reaps and the grape harvest that one picks.

It is necessary that each and every harvest be pure, and separated from all others. It is the wheat that must go under the millstone and the grapes that must go into the wine press. What matters is that these fruits of the earth not be contaminated. What matters is that they be brought loyally and separately to be placed at the feet of the Creator.

Such is the profound piety and unshakeable fidelity of genius. Genius itself is a fruit of the earth. Or perhaps is rather not that which is charged with bringing in the fruits of the earth. What does it matter if you tell me that a wheat reaper might have won out against a grape harvester. What could that possibly mean. And what could it mean that a wheat harvest won out over a grape harvest. Why mix up the two. Why this impiety. Rather that each makes his own harvest, that with which he has been charged. Rather that each bring in what it is he has been charged with bringing in. I have no interest in even hearing or knowing of one wheat reaper winning out over another, of one one grape harvester winning out over another.

These great forms of thought like Platonic thought, like Cartesian thought, like Bergsonian thought, what else are they but fruits of the earth, and certainly not of the least delicious varieties, for whomever has a soul inclined for such thoughtful riches, and further I will say for whomever *is* a thinking soul. These great philosophies, what else are they but the harvests of thought. These great systems of thought, what else are they but our storerooms and our granaries. And when one says that they divide up and share out the world amongst themselves, what does this mean but that our harvests are divided up and shared out between these storerooms and granaries. And most importantly that each bring in that which he is charged with bringing in. That each be that and whom one indeed needs to be. That in the grape storerooms one does not store away the wheat harvest. And that in the granaries one does not bring in for storage the grape harvest. Rather that each variety be produced in its fullest and most exact form. That each variety of thought be produced in its

most beautiful form. That each variety of thought be harvested in its fullness, ἐν ἄκμῃ, at its most fullest and perfect level of ripening. And that he who has found the sickle be charged with bringing in the wheat. And that he who has found the dialectic be charged with bringing in the idea. And that he who has found the pruning knife be charged with bringing in the grapes. And that he who has found intuition be charged with bringing in duration. And that one should never reap with a pruning knife. And one should never go at the grape harvest with a sickle nor a scythe. The greatest reaper in all the world will find nothing to reap amongst grapevines. And the greatest grape harvester in all the world will find nothing to bring in amongst the sheafs of wheat. When you ask me whether it is the sickle or the pruning knife which is best of all instruments for the harvest, βελτιον ὄργανον. For me it depends entirely on which harvest. Speak to me rather of the eternal granaries.

And Christian thought and if I may so name it Christian philosophy and the Christian system and Christianity, what are all these in a sense but fruits of the earth. *Fructus ventris*.<sup>75</sup> The most beautiful of course and the most eminent. But always of the earth. Because if they were not of the earth then the Incarnation could not have been both faithful and complete. Yet it was, both the one and the other.

Such is the immense exactitude and justice and fidelity of poetic genius. And such should be the great exactitude and justice and fidelity of philosophical genius.

---

<sup>75</sup> Latin: The fruit of [your] womb. See the biblical passage in Luke 1:42: “Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb,” which is taken up in the *Ave Maria* (Pléiade fn.).

And is there not in a sense a poetic genius within thought. These great philosophical theses that divide up and share out the world are in no way different because in reality they divide up the world into a variety of disciplines. And do not appear at all to be in conflict when they are simply extrinsic to each other. From this comes the extreme attention for example of a Corneille to always present these theses in the fullest form of their exactitude and strength. What an abyss, and unbridgeable one, there is between the patriotism of the Horatii and the patriotism of the Curiatii. An entire humanity stands between them. But each of them are presented in the complete fullness of their exactitude and in the complete fullness of their race. And it is only when we reach this sumptuous deliberation of Cinna that the respective advantages and disadvantages of a popular form of government versus the monarchy are presented by laying both out in a symmetrically faithful and symmetrically complete manner.<sup>76</sup>

In this system of thought, the struggle itself takes precedence over any victory, and even death is nothing when won through the correctness of one's conduct in battle. It is a system that is extremely well known, the oldest and the most foreign to the modern world. It is not only the system of loyalty. It is the system of heroism. And it is the system of honor. It is entirely collected within the code of the duel (provided one takes it seriously), and it is no coincidence that a duel is the centerpiece, the keystone within the arched conceptual framework of *Le Cid*.<sup>77</sup> Just as

---

<sup>76</sup> Reference to Corneille's plays *Horace* and *Cinna*.

<sup>77</sup> Reference to another of Corneille's tragedies, involving a duel between Don Rodrigo and the Count de Gormas.

it is not by chance, but by a type of eminent application of this triply same development that traces its way through *Le Cid*, *Horace*, and *Cinna* to *Polyeuctus*, a development that I have already discussed in a prior essay,<sup>78</sup> that a prodigious spiritual duel and several magnificent duels of courtly honor are the keystones within the immense and entirely pure architecture of *Polyeuctus*. In this system, (in this system of thought and in this system of action), the duel is a clash, a perpetual confrontation of values. In a duel of arms, each of the two adversaries shows himself in his exactitude and in his fullness. In a duel of forms of thought, which is also a duel of arms, each thesis shows itself in its exactitude and in its fullness. The world's honor and beauty do not require that Rodrigo kill the Count de Gormas. Rather they consist precisely in the fact that these two come together to fight each other. Whomever might be, or whomever must be the winner, provided that they both fight, as long as they both fight, there will be no failure to uphold the code. God can look upon the world and not find it to be too revolting. What is important to them, to each of these two adversaries, to the world, and to God, is only, (and not as one would be first tempted to say), is only that the duel take place, and naturally that it take place within its proper forms. That there then be a winner and loser, that is of no importance. These have nothing to do with any failure to uphold the code. These have to do only with the event itself.

---

<sup>78</sup> Reference to a prior *Cahier* from October of 1910, *Victor-Marie, comte Hugo* (Pléiade fn.).

The slain Count de Gormas satisfies this code as much as the living Rodrigo. A great struggle, and in regards to thought a great debate, this here is what truly matters. God has been well served. God can look upon all this. He is an expert in all this. He can look upon the world and upon man. And the rest is simply the events themselves.

Life and death (temporal that is) are merely what comes. And what goes.

It is the chivalrous system of thought, and specifically French chivalry. One often speaks of war as an immense duel, of a duel between peoples, and conversely one often speaks of a duel as a war, a war so to speak downsized and simplified, of a war between individuals. One speaks of war as a duel carried out on a large scale and of a duel as war carried out on a small scale. It is indeed a thorough mixing-up of the two. Many historical mysteries, and amongst the most important, would perhaps be cleared up, many obstacles would fall away if one would simply take the trouble to distinguish between these two races of war, which have perhaps nothing in common with each other. I would not even say that the age-old struggle for life split itself into two races, of which one is the struggle for honor, and the other the struggle for power. I will not even go so far as to attribute to each of these two races of war a common origin. I will say: there are two races of war that together have perhaps nothing in common and that have been constantly tangled-up and untangled throughout history. The one in fact derives from the duel, and the other does not at all. The one is an extension of the duel, literally a duel between peoples, (or as in *Horace*, (yet it all amounts to the same thing), a duel between individuals delegated by their own

people). There is a race of war that is a struggle for honor and there is an entirely other race of war that is a struggle for domination. The first of these derives from the duel. It is the duel itself. The second of these is not, nor does it derive from it. It is even everything that could be most foreign to the duel, to a code, to honor. But it is not at all foreign to heroism.

There is a race of war that in being for honor is yet still for the eternal. And there is a race of war that being for domination is entirely for the temporal.

There is a race of war in which it is the battle that matters, and there is a race of war in which it is victory.

There is a race of war in which a dishonorable victory, (for example a victory through betrayal), is infinitely worse, (and of which the very idea is unbearable), than an honorable defeat, (that is to say a defeat suffered, and I would say obtained through a loyal struggle).

And there is a race of war where, on the contrary, one's success justifies all else, a race of war in which one could not even formulate the idea that there could be such a thing as a dishonorable war, provided one wins, a race of war in which one could not even formulate the idea that there could be such a thing as a dishonorable victory.

There is a race of war in which everything tends toward the beauty of the struggle, and there is a race of war in which everything tends toward the pronouncement of victory.

There is one in which everything tends toward an articulation and one in which everything tends toward a ruling.

There is one in which everything tends toward the setting forth of a problem and one in which everything tends toward the solution.

There is one in which everything tends toward a position and another in which everything tends toward a decision.

There is one in which everything tends toward chivalry and one in which everything tends toward empire.

These two races of war have been more or less bound up and unbound, mixed up and sorted out, woven together and untwisted within military history and within political history. They have been more or less combined, miscombined, uncombined at different points throughout the entire history of man and of the world. Many mysteries would be cleared up, many difficulties would fall away if they were not always confused, (and here again how right is Bergson, how absolute is language, (and how utterly nothing should it be), how difficult is it to distinguish between two races that are yet absolutely foreign to each other, once they have been mixed up within history under the same name), if from one end of history to the other one only took the pains to distinguish between these two races, to divide up what in reality is already divided. In Homer, struggle, and subsequently war, is a long series of duels. The general combat is simply the sum collection of individual clashes. And on both sides, one awaits the outcome of the general victory as the result of so many singular clashes. It was then that Odysseus stepped in, and with a single blow skewed the

entire system; because not only did he contrive to introduce within the city a phony, wooden horse: in this very way he contrived to replace a system of struggle with a system of victory, with a single blow he substituted a system of winning for a system of struggle, a system of empire for a system of individual combat. In this regard, and with a single blow, and from this very first blow, Odysseus was already a Roman amongst the Greeks. He was already no longer the man who praised himself and his noble combat. He was already the man who remained quiet and who won.

He was already no longer the man who put himself forward and who put himself on the line. He was the man who imposed his will and who became master of himself and who thus become master of the world.

He was already a consul. He was no longer a noble warrior, a horseman, a man in his chariot whose axle was his fate, and for whom a broken axle would send him plummeting to his death on a dusty battlefield.<sup>79</sup> He was already a man on foot, a foot soldier, *pedes*,<sup>80</sup> and now of this race for whom the horseman was nothing but a mounted infantryman.

For us moderns who in placing ourselves solely at the stage of history that is the modern age, in looking back from these days where we now are towards those days of the past, in looking back from this vantage point that we now occupy upon the long history of these two races of war, a history that stretches back tirelessly and continuously for century upon century of our world's history, one could say without

---

<sup>79</sup> Allusion to Lewis Wallace's *Ben Hur*, a popular American historical novel published in 1880 and that was translated into French in 1902 (Pléiade fn.).

<sup>80</sup> Latin: feet.

too much deforming reality that the one race of war, the chivalric and noble one, is, within our own history, of Celtic origin and that the other is of Roman origin. And on a second level one could perhaps say that the first race is of Christian origin and that the second perhaps of imperial origin.

*Duellum, bellum*, it is the same word. *Duellum* is the form starting with *du*, which one finds in *duo*, and *bellum* is the form starting with *b*, which gives us *bis*.<sup>81</sup> And the form with *du* is itself the same as the form with *b*, because *b* is the *v* one finds in *dv*, which is the same as *du*. And this is not simply a riddle. *Duellum, dvellum, bellum*. As Bréal and Bailly<sup>82</sup> note, “*Duellum* is still used, along with *bellum*, by writers of the classical period. Horace, *Ep. I, II.7. Graecia barbariae lento collisa duello*.<sup>83</sup> Idem. *Odes III, XIV.18. Et cadum Marsi memorem duelli*.<sup>84</sup> The changing of *duellum* into *bellum* (the *v* having changed into *b* and the initial *d* having been dropped) is the same as the change one sees of *duonus* into *bonus*.<sup>85</sup> The proper name of *Duilius* likewise became *Bilius*. However, in *perduellio*<sup>86</sup> the *d* remained: note the particular meaning of this word, which is applied to the crime of lese-majesty; *per* is likely the pejorative prefix that one sees in *perjurium, perdere, perire*.<sup>87</sup> — It is the same with the change of *dv* into *bis*; in Greek, it is the *v* that has

---

<sup>81</sup> Latin: Duel (*duellum*), war (*bellum*).

<sup>82</sup> Péguy again refers here to the dictionary of Latin etymology *Leçons et mots*, Hachette, 1906, and in particular to the article entitled “Duo” (pp. 72-3) (Pléiade fn.).

<sup>83</sup> Latin: Greece crushed by the barbarism of war/duel.

<sup>84</sup> Latin: And a jar that recalls the Martian duel/war.

<sup>85</sup> Latin: good.

<sup>86</sup> Latin: *perduellio*, the term used in Roman law for the capital offense of treason.

<sup>87</sup> Latin: perjury, to lose, to perish.

disappeared to yield δίς for δυίς.<sup>88</sup>” And in the article entitled “Derivations,” they had likewise observed: “They split into two series of derivations, those of *du* (*dualis*, *duellum*), and those of *b* that had changed from *du* into *dv-* and *b-* (*b-is*, *b-ellum*).” And they later add: “An ancient derivation of the word for the number ‘two’ is the prefix *dis-* (see this word).” So that when we say the words *discern*, *dissolve*, *distinguish*, *dissect*, we are indeed saying resolve into two, cut into two. And *dissection* is the same word as *dichotomie*.

*Duellum, duo; bellum, bis.* War is what one does when there are two of us. But when there are two of us, one measures oneself within this system. When there are two of us, thinks the Roman, I dominate.

Everything is a putting forward within the noble system of chivalry. Everything is a domination within the system of the Romans. Everything is a summoning within the chivalrous system. And everything is a conquest within the Roman system. Everything is a conquest for the empire.

In the chivalrous system, it is a question of the measuring of values. In the system of empire, it is a question of the obtaining and stabilizing results.

For us moderns, here in France the one is Celtic and the other is Roman. The one is feudal and the other imperial. The one is Christian and the other is Roman. The French have excelled in the one and the Germans have sometimes succeeded in the other and the Japanese appear to have excelled in the one and succeeded in the other.

---

<sup>88</sup> Greek: encore/another.

One can say that in the modern world the French are still the leading and perhaps the only representatives of the race of chivalry, (thus rigorously defined), and that the Germans are the imminent and perhaps the only representatives of the race of domination. And it is for this reason that we are not mistaken in believing that the French resistance to German encroachment concerns an entire world. And that an entire world would indeed perish with us. And that this would be the world of freedom itself. And thus would it also be the world of grace itself.

Never would Germany be able to make another France. It is a question of race. Never would it be able to remake freedom and grace. Always would it only make more empire and domination.

When the French say that they carved out a colonial empire for themselves, one must not believe them. They are propagating liberties. When Napoleon claims he had found an immense empire, one must not believe him. He was propagating liberties. *Let us watch over the safety of the Empire.*<sup>89</sup> This “empire” was a system of liberties. This has indeed become apparent ever since. All of those who tried to reign in the empire have spent the last one hundred and fifty years failing to attain even a fraction of those liberties the “empire” unwittingly brought along with it in the very iron of its lances, in the mess halls for its soldiers.

What is marvelous is that with their entire apparatus of empire the Germans have done no more in this regard than us, in the current wretched disorder of our

---

<sup>89</sup> Reference to a line from one of the earliest patriotic songs (1791) of the French Revolution (Pléiade fn.).

freedom. There must be somewhere within this unfortunate freedom of ours a great secret. A virtue. A grace. A marvelous force. An(other) order.

I do not say that we are better than others. We are a race. And they are a certain other race. We are men. (We are sinners.) We are not always good masters. We are always bad dominators.

We who suffers all despots, especially when they are from the people, we are, of a race, of men of freedom. This is a good that is unique, and uniquely precious. The Germans, who went for centuries without building their empire, and who were only able to build it up again upon the ruins of our own, and this some forty-four years ago, are, of a race, and have always been, of men of empire. The Holy Roman German Empire.

And it is again for this reason that no true philosophy of freedom, nor even any truly free form of thought has ever been able to take root in Germany. What they call freedom, we call a respectful servitude. Just as what they call socialism we refer to as the tepid center-left.

And what they call revolutionary is what we would here call a good conservatism.

And it is again for this reason that a philosophy like Bergson's philosophy, essentially liberal and libertarian, and not only in its system but in its heartbeat and in its race, could only be born in French and in French soil and French culture. French liberty only could present this scenario, which would become Bergsonian freedom.

And it is also for this reason that in every way it is most opposite to German thought. (I mean Bergsonian thought and Bergsonian freedom.)

When one sees the immense apparatus of empire, it as if the entire universe will be crushed by it. What folly to fight other than to win. And how the one who measures himself must appear as the prey for the one who thinks only of dominating.

When one sees the immense apparatus of empire towering before one, when one compares these two races of war, that which compares and that which dominates, that which struggles and that which wins; when one measures these two systems, that which measures and measures itself and that which dominates, and on one side these immense headquarters of command, and on the other so much disorder, one is convinced that domination has long since exterminated liberty. And that he who dominates has long since dominated he who measures (himself). And that he who wins has long since defeated he who struggles against. How could it not be so. It is simple math. The strength that the other expends in measuring himself he no longer has for dominating. The strength that he exerts in struggling against he no longer has for winning. The strength that he expends in being just he no longer has for being strong. He is mathematically diminished just this much. And he who wages battle from a sense of honor in a world in which everyone else is waging war for their life, how could he not, and for so long now, and really all along, be erased from the face of the Earth.

This is obviously a problem. And I will say that it is a mystery. In fact, he who measures himself has sometimes been found to be greater. And he has sometimes

dominated. He who struggles against has sometimes defeated he who wins. He who aimed to be just has sometimes been found to be the stronger. Empire has sometimes crushed freedom. By her own means, freedom has constantly worked upon empire.

How could he who wasted his time and his strength in forming himself hold out against he who thinks only of striking. The fact is simply that he did hold out and that the first race of war has never been exterminated by the second, and the first system of the world, which is the system of comparison, has never been exterminated by the second system, which is the system of extermination. There must be something within freedom, within justice, (and perhaps within truth), a secret strength, a vigor all its own, a bursting forth, a hope, in short, a grace and a secret purpose. Throughout time these two races of war have been mixed up and sorted out, throughout time they have been bound together and unbound, throughout time these two systems have bitten into and released each other without it being said that one ever eliminated the other. And even in modern times...

One must not, in modern times, allow the muddled political and parliamentary demagoguery surrounding freedom, justice, and truth to confuse us and cause us to underestimate these noble virtues. One must not allow these distorting eloquences to degrade us either. If one were forced to renounce all the world's and all of man's values as politicians have undertaken to seize and exploit them, there would have long been nothing left. There is a freedom, a justice, and a truth that are a part of parliamentary political platforms. But there is a freedom, a justice, and a truth that I would call theological and that work in conjunction with the theological virtues.

There is truth...But let us begin with the first. There is this freedom of man that is an essential component of the workings of salvation and which articulates seamlessly with the freely offered nature of grace. (God wants to be loved freely). There is this justice of which it is written: *Beati qui esuriunt et sitiunt justitiam: quoniam ipsi saturabuntur*. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst after justice: for they shall be filled.<sup>90</sup> There is this justice of which it is written: *Beati qui persecutionem patiuntur propter justitiam: quoniam ipsorum est regnum caelorum*. Blessed are those who suffer persecution for justice's sake: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.<sup>91</sup> And there is this truth of which it is written: *Ego sum via, veritas, et vita*. I am the way, the truth, and the life.<sup>92</sup> When I have thus for the last ten years seen professional "Christians" who have no shortage of sarcasm for the most essential of their virtues because these virtues had been fraudulently stolen away by their opponents to be doctored and transplanted onto political platforms throughout the modern parliamentary system, I am entitled to say, and I am compelled to say, that these wretched, so-called Christians are the first dupes and no doubt the lowest and perhaps most miserable of victims of their modern parliamentary opponents. Because they disavow their own virtues and these dearest daughters of Jesus Christ and they forget the three Gospels and they forget the seven Beatitudes<sup>93</sup> and they forget the very

---

<sup>90</sup> Matthew 5:6. Péguy gives first the Latin and then the French version for each of the three biblical passages in this paragraph.

<sup>91</sup> Matthew 5:10.

<sup>92</sup> John 14:6.

<sup>93</sup> Péguy refers here to the three Synoptic Gospels (Matthew, Mark, and Luke) and to seven rather than eight Beatitudes, as he knows the importance of the number seven

teachings themselves of Jesus Christ and they disregard and they spurn and they disavow all this under the pretense that these three evangelical virtues had been hijacked and stripped of their original qualities by frauds and by counterfeiters. And on that account, nothing of value remained for them.

Because within this system of thought it is not a question of merely winning. It is not at all even a question of winning. It is a question of replacing. It is not a question of one empire crushing another empire. It is a question of a certain lamp not being put out and, as it was likewise said, of a certain light not being put under a basket.<sup>94</sup> It is not a question of Berlin crushing Paris, it is a question of Berlin replacing Paris. And they are not close to doing this, and not only are they not close but these hapless and these dim-witted and these thankless and these graceless dolts do not appear at all to be on the path, and do not appear at all to be called to do so, and do not appear at all to be privy to those secrets required for so great a grace.

In the eternal debate of those who are winners and those who are fashioned, we do not know if they are destined to be winners. But we see all too well that they are not destined to be fashioned.

---

in Matthew's Gospel and no doubt considers the second Beatitude as a gloss on the first (Pléiade fn.).

<sup>94</sup> Matthew 5:15.

“A people,” as Halévy said so magnificently,<sup>95</sup> “does not pass by as a herd does, their development is not uniform, blindly determined by the sole play of forces and causes; another influence presses upon them, animates them, chooses certain of them and requires them to work in its service. These chosen people, who does not know them? From Jerusalem to Paris (Athens, Rome, Florence all mark out this path), a single spiritual motion passes throughout the whole of humanity, a long, sacred lifting-up that reaches out to the slow and low races, fills them with wonder, irritates them, and, whether they like it or not, lifts them up. France is the latest of these chosen people. It is indeed thus that a Michelet, that a Hugo understands France’s history and its mission. Their patriotism is no less absolute...<sup>96</sup> If it appears less harsh and exclusive in its forms, less strained, less on-guard against the foreign, it is because it came to maturity in days that were more glorious, or, to use a simpler word, happier.

“Let us try to understand her state today, our homeland stricken and threatened. A serious movement, entirely contrary to her genius, has arisen next to her, threatening to overrun her. This movement, material in nature, is to the benefit of a brutal and disciplined people, bent under the weight of their machines and their regulations, a dismal and base multitude, massively opposed to the human aspirations of the old world, of Christian and humanist Europe, of the old Europe that France

---

<sup>95</sup> Daniel Halévy had published *Quelques nouveaux maîtres* in May of 1914 in the *Cahiers du Centre*. His text treats the thought and work of Romain Rolland, André Suarès, Paul Claudel, and Charles Péguy (Pléiade fn.).

<sup>96</sup> The ellipsis here in Halévy’s text is inserted by Péguy, who thus leaves out the words: “than that of Péguy” (Pléiade fn.).

carried within itself. And this France is here, weakened by a loss of blood, slowed by regrets over past reckless mistakes, disarmed by the destruction of the very order in which it grew up. She has slumped; yet she retains a prestige over this new people, superior in number and in strength; she remains lofty with the full nobility of her defeated attempts. She still carries a sacred duty, she remains the most devoted, the most inventive, and if any nation must inherit from her, the least one can say is that this nation will have a long wait to do so.”

“The Christian follows a master who took upon himself a heavy burden; he does not make any claims to vain forms of domination or to temporal forms of greatness; he is the laboring man of creation. Providence has placed him here and this load has fallen to him to carry: he does it to his best and boasts no merit in doing so. Thus, when on the morning of the battle the brigades wake and arm themselves in the mist, each takes up its post and awaits the day. They have only to wait and be ready. Then fate chooses one amongst them all and puts them at the center of the battle. It did not deserve it: honor had been decided upon for it. And the other brigades, its comrades, while they fight, feel in some obscure way that elsewhere the battle is more true, death more in demand, the sacrifice more useful, and the outcome decisive. For them, there is a slackening amidst their effort; there is none of this for those at the center; and it is clear that they are in battle; they sense the glances, the cries shouted in their direction, and the thought of their leaders for them. Amidst these looks, these shouts, these thoughts, their bruised and decimated troop fights on with a courage

greater than its own mere courage, resists with a strength that is greater than its own mere strength. That morning it was the same as the others, neither more nor less brave; and this evening it is different. It has passed through a trial, it emerges from the fire. It is, it remains different, marked in the eyes of all by the noble grace of battle. Fate has brought this about: heroism has entered them. Such is the Christian: a being amongst beings, and just alike the most humble. But he fights for the whole of nature, the powers above take hope in his effort, he has been chosen and from this comes his ever-greater strength.<sup>97</sup>

It is the same debate that has been taking place for so long, to know what it is a king should be. It is the entire debate of the Ancient Regime, and it is the entire story of the history of France. To know what man it is that a king would be. If he would be the first of all barons; or the first of all masters. The entire history of France, the entire history of the Ancient Regime is likewise the history of a long process of linking and unlinking, which is always only one specific instance, and one important instance, of the other. Everywhere, and for so long, if not always, these two ideas have battled and perhaps rather struggled against one another, these two ideas have been bound up and unbound, mixed together and sorted out, combined and split apart, distinguished between and conflated again, the one that the king would be the first of all barons, the other that the king would be the first of all masters. The one that the king would be the first when it comes to measuring, when it comes to nobility

---

<sup>97</sup> These two passages come from Halévy's chapter on Péguy (Pléiade fn.).

and to chivalry. The other that the king would the first when it comes to winning, when it comes to ruling and to dominating. One understands nothing of Joinville's remarkable chronicles if one fails to take into account first of all that the holy king was a French baron, Saint Louis of Poissy and the rest of us can perhaps say Saint Louis of Paris, baron of the Ile-de-France and of the Paris region, prince of barons, prince of knights.<sup>98</sup> One understands nothing of the trial of Joan of Arc if one fails to keep present in one's mind that the king that she thought she found at Chinon, and the king that she thought she helped crown at Reims, the king of France in other words, was and would be a king of baronage and of chivalry, a king of crusades and of Christianity.<sup>99</sup> And in this life of Joan of Arc, which is the most beautiful of all lives and the greatest and the most noble and absolutely and especially the most pure at least in six or seven orders and according to six or seven ways of examining it and from six or seven points of view, it can perhaps be said that the greatest secret distress of this life and its most painful point and its tragic catastrophe was that she thought she had found a king and instead she found something else. She thought she had helped crown a king and instead she helped crown something else. She thought she

---

<sup>98</sup> Jean de Joinville was a thirteenth and fourteenth-century author, famous for his *Life of St Louis*, a chronicle detailing the reign of Louis IX and his role in leading the Seventh Crusade. Poissy was the birthplace of Saint Louis and would become a suburb of modern Paris.

<sup>99</sup> Charles VII established his court at Chinon during the Hundred Years' War. It was there that the young Joan of Arc is said to have sought him out and convinced him of her divine mission. She would leave Chinon armed with troops and go on to defeat the English army at Orleans, leading to Charles' official coronation in the French city of Reims. After Joan's subsequent capture at Compiègne, Charles is said to have made no effort to save her, and she would be burned to death by the English in Rouen in 1431.

had found a king of baronage and of chivalry, a king of grace and of nobility, a king of crusades and of Christianity. And instead she discovered a king of mere business and a king of brokering affairs.

There has been a lot said regarding the ingratitude of her king towards her. It was not only the deep and fundamental ingratitude of this man towards a rescuer and towards a savior. It was not only this deep ingratitude so to speak of a certain nature. It was not only and moreover a deep ingratitude of character. It was not only and moreover the deep and arrogant ingratitude and the unforgivable resentment of the rich man towards the poor one and the powerful man towards the destitute one to whom he owes something and indeed everything. It was not only and moreover the deep ingratitude of race of this family that supplied the most well-known ingritudes in all of history, and in a word, it was not only the beginning of the notorious (Bourbon and) Orleanist ingratitude. It was not only, if I forget some, the collection of mortal, of everyday ingritudes. A more serious misunderstanding yet stood between and set apart the king of France from the greatest saint in the history of France and of the world. She had sought out a king crowned in chivalry. And she found instead one crowned in dealings. She had sought out a king crowned with justice. And she found instead one crowned with pitiful scheming. She had sought out a king crowned by war. And she found instead one crowned by quavering. She had sought out a king crowned by grace. And instead she found a pathetic negotiator.

She had sought out a Christian king. And she found only a king steeped in hesitations.

She had sought out the greatest of kings, that is to say a king in the order of measure, of the race of measure. And she found only a king of miserable accounting.

She had sought out the king of France. And she found only a miserable bean counter.

She had sought out a king crowned in mystique and she found only a king crowned in politics and a politician. And surrounded by what a base multitude of politicians of the Church and politicians of the State.

People for whom Reims itself and the consecration and the holy ampulla and the Holy Spirit were but components of a larger political intrigue.

She had sought out a court and an army and she found only the paperwork of bureaucracy (in scrolls of parchment, but paperwork all the same). She found only paperwork and bureaucracy.

She had sought out an ancient royal house and already she found a modern king. Such was the gulf that constituted this misunderstanding, the gulf of disenchantment, the gulf of distress that with her profound and clear political intelligence, of which she gave so much proof elsewhere, such was the gulf of graciousness that she measured instantly. She had sought out the royal house of France and she found only those shabby offices, the offices of State. She had sought out men of arms and she found only a wretched group of jurists. She had sought out a second Saint Louis. And she found only a second Philippe the Fair.<sup>100</sup>

---

<sup>100</sup> Philip IV (the Fair) was king of France from 1285 to 1314. He was the grandson of the legendary French king Saint Louis, to whom Péguy disfavorably compares him, along with Charles VII.

What more striking example could one choose from this long war waged between the two races of war, linking, unlinking, and from this long debate carried out over the two races of kings, (if this word race is not inherently ambiguous here), than to ponder the fact that the hideous Philip the Fair was indeed the grandson of the great Saint Louis. One needed the space and the interval of only one generation for the stalk of Saint Louis to push out this modern offshoot and for the race of Saint Louis to become the race of Philip the Fair and for the sons of Saint Louis, as this chaplain put it, to become the sons of Philip the Fair.

When one compares one of those wars of Saint Louis, his war against the English, with one of those wars of Philip the Fair, the distance separating the two becomes clear. It is unbelievable to think that Saint Louis was indeed the grandfather of Philip the Fair. And that the two of them almost overlapped each other. And that when Saint Louis was dying at Tunis Philip the Fair, (if I can call him such), was two years old. And finally, it is incredible to think that when Joinville was writing as an old man that Philip the Fair was already some twenty years into his reign. And that it was this very time in which Guillaume de Nogaret, chancellor of France, was making his trip to Anagni. And that the terrible Trial of the Templars was about to explode.<sup>101</sup>

---

<sup>101</sup> In 1303 and as the culmination of a long-standing anti-papal royal policy, chancellor Guillaume de Nogaret was sent to Anagni by Philip the Fair in order to arrest Pope Boniface VIII. In 1307, members of the Knights Templars, a religious military order closely associated with royal and papal finance, were arrested on the chancellor's orders (despite the protestations of Pope Clement V) and accused of heresy (Pléiade fn.).

Let us compare one of those wars of Saint Louis, his war with the English, in the Charentes, with one of those wars of Philip the Fair. A war of Saint Louis is a just war. A treaty of Saint Louis is a just treaty. Such is Christian war, forasmuch as these two words must indeed go together. A just war, in the absence of a just peace, and in order to bring about a just peace. And the Crusade itself is a just war.

A war of Philip the Fair, a modern war is a profitable war, or supposedly profitable, or at least a war expected to be profitable. And this dividing up goes a long way and it has lasted a long time and he had a most unfortunate inspiration for it, but really, he was continuing (however poorly) an ancient and obscure tradition, this king who wanted for peace to be made, (and according who wanted war to have been waged), not as merchants, but as a king.

As long as the kingship had remained within the Ancient Regime, as long as it had remained the kingship of Saint Louis, it was invincible; and it was eternal. As long as it had remained within the order of measure, it was the greatest. As long as it had remained within the order of its force, it was indestructible. But the moment it entered into the modern world it had to inevitably find someone and something more modern than itself. And such is the punishment for the one who betrays his own order. That in the new order for which he betrayed his own he finds someone always who is more of this new order than he is. Within the new order into which he enters, or at least in the new order in which he wants to enter he finds someone always who is himself there and essentially so, someone accordingly who is master there and who will defeat him there. Whereas he, the defector and the traitor, can neither be at home

there nor be himself there, nor be master there nor defeat others there. And likewise, he who betrays his order for disorder, in the disorder into which he enters he knows nothing and he thus always finds his master there. When the French Revolution cut the head off the kingship, it did not decapitate the kingship. It cut off nothing more than the head of the modern.

It was the modern that decapitated another of its own kind.

From the moment that the kingship made itself into a merchant it had to necessarily run up against someone and something more business-minded than itself. And the moment it made itself philosophical it had to inevitably run up against others more philosophical than itself. And this was justice. One must be what one is, and here we find once more this idea that has been underlying this entire essay and which has not for a moment left us. It is better to be the one who is indeed himself within even the lowest order than to be the one who is not himself within a supposedly higher order. It is better even to be the one who is himself within disorder than to be the one who is not himself within any other order. When the Revolution cut off the head of the kingship, it was not a new regime that decapitated the old regime. It was a new regime that decapitated another new regime. It was an openly avowed new regime that decapitated a disreputable new regime. It was a more successful type of modern that decapitated a less successful type of modern. It was a type of modern indeed itself and indeed at home that decapitated a foreign type of modern, a newly arrived parvenu type of modern. It was a more competent type of modern that decapitated a less competent type of modern.

It was not these sons of commoners that decapitated a son of Saint Louis. These sons of commoners would have never decapitated a son of Saint Louis. These sons of commoners would have no more decapitated a son of Saint Louis than they would have decapitated Saint Louis himself. It was those sons of Philip the Fair who cut off the head of another son of Philip the Fair. It was a bunch of jurists who decapitated another jurist. It was a bunch of law clerks who decapitated another clerk. And one can say and one must say: It was those sons of Philip the Fair who were better arrived who thus cut off the head of a son of Philip the Fair who was less well arrived.

When one goes into a wolf's lair one should expect to be bitten. And when one goes amongst fools one should expect to be fooled. If the kingship had remained loyal to itself, everyone would have remained loyal to it. But how does one stay loyal to one who betrays himself and who fails to remain loyal to himself and to his own institution.

Joan of Arc had sought out the leader of a people and she found only the head of a group of schemers. She had sought out a king and she found only a collection of courtiers. And all this is what had to be paid for that famous 21<sup>st</sup> of January now long past.<sup>102</sup>

The one who betrays his race, his being, his proper institution, where then could any form of respect grab hold of him. Where could any sense of loyalty attach itself.

---

<sup>102</sup> The date of the execution of Louis XVI in the year 1793 (Pléiade fn.).

And today if one presented us with a king who was in the category of Saint Louis everyone would be with him. If one presented us with a king who was a faithful king of baronage everyone would be with him. If one presented us with a king who was a king of chivalry all men of heart would be with him. If one presented us with a king who was a king of politics, all thinking men would be with him. But instead one presents us with a king who is the puppet of parliamentarians.

And who will always be defeated within an order that is not his own.

And where they will always outmaneuver him.

Saint Louis, Philip the Fair, what a tragic rapprochement. Was there ever a more climactic confrontation. Thus, when the holy king was dying at Tunis, from his bout with dysentery, it was this nurseling of two years who was the son of his own son, born at Fontainebleau, the man of his race and the one who would in his own turn ascend the throne, as the old stories say, who would take his place at the head of the royal house of France. The flower of saintliness, the most modern of kings. The flower of integrity, the counterfeiter king.<sup>103</sup> And when as an old man Joinville, seneschal of Champagne, was writing this book, which is like a Gospel of the kingdom of France, one had already been in the modern world for some twenty years, at least in the sense that one was already some twenty years into the reign of this most dreadfully modern of kings.

---

<sup>103</sup> Grave financial difficulties pushed Philip IV to employ a host of dangerous expedients during his reign, including tampering with the currency (Pléiade fn.).

What a lesson this is for us, who moan constantly about having come into the world in these modern times and who find that living now is hard. And that it is tough going. Well it has always been tough going. And as for living, things have never been easy. Twenty years after the death of Saint Louis it was already tough going in France. And while Saint Louis was in the Holy Land, it was scarcely easy going in France, (as Joinville amply details). And when Joan of Arc arrived at Chinon, do you think she found everything running smoothly. A few months later she helped crown at Reims a king who was not even of the sacred order.

She had thought she was finding a king of the French parishes. And she found only a king of diplomats.

In tennis, one can, by a single point or rather by a single stroke, lose a match, and the outcome of twenty matches, and the world championship even. And thus which might we say is better: to win by a point in a match and in a tournament in which every player is strong, or to win by twenty games in a tournament in which all the other players are weak. Such are the two systems of thought, such are the two races of war, such are the two standards of measure, measurement and victory and, one can add, what is right and what is done. Let us go even further, across to the other side. Let us go beyond the decision over what is done. Let us go beyond the event itself. Which is better: to win a match in which all the other players are weak, or to lose a match in which all the players are strong; to win a weak match or to lose a strong match. To win in a game of baseness or to lose in a game of nobility. That is to

say: Are we to be responsible for winning no matter what, and no matter what price; or are we to be responsible for maintaining a certain level of engagement; and of engagement in battle; and thus, of a certain engagement with the world itself. And not only of maintaining it but of bringing it up, or back up, however low we might presently be. This is to say: are we to be responsible for being victorious or for being noble. And for maintaining within the world a certain level of nobility. Everyman who is of a certain race will opt for this theory, for this system of thought of noble engagement.

Or rather he will not opt for it. He is already well ahead of this system and of this race.

As long as French is spoken, Corneille will remain the poet of this form of noble engagement. Of the system and of the race in which each life and every action and every form of conduct is an exercise and an application of this form of noble engagement. As long as French is spoken and even longer perhaps as long as French is read and is the third classical language, Corneille will be both the theoretician and the philosopher as much as the poet of this noble engagement. I say theoretician and philosopher because never has a poet, to the extent that he has, been so blessed in this regard, never has a poet succeed as he has in including within the poetic, and without infringing upon the rules of poetic form, the developments and the very workings of thought itself. No one has been as exacting, as rigorous, as fortunate in the depths and

the perspectives and the developments of thought while at the same time remaining a poet and utterly himself and firm and content within the constraints of poetic form. And not only within the tragic form where one thinks it easier and in which it seems perhaps more appropriately aligned, but just as much within the comedic form itself, which is even more telling, with its far fewer formal constraints. The same secret tenderness and the same nobility and same ardent, firm youthfulness that animates and raises up and bursts forth in *Le Cid* likewise animates and raises up and bursts forth in *Le menteur*. It is the very same poet and the same being and the same grandeur on two parallel planes. It is the same play and the same poetic quality on two conjoined planes. And this comedy indeed proves more, precisely because it is comedic in nature. It is the same play played out twice, once on the plane of the tragic and once on the plane of the comic, and never before had one seen so clearly just how much the tragic and the comic are indeed two parallel, conjoined planes of the same art, classic, of the same being, of the same men, of the same time. And it is marvelous to consider how *Le menteur* is not a comedy concerned with the Liar, nor with lying, nor with lies. And how uniquely it is a comedy concerned with honor and with love (and with chance as well to some extent).<sup>104</sup>

*Le menteur* is a comedy concerned with honor and with love just as *Le Cid* is a tragedy and *Horace* is a tragedy concerned with honor and love and as *Cinna* is a

---

<sup>104</sup> Péguy alludes here to Pierre de Marivaux's *The Game of Love and Chance* (Pléiade fn.).

tragedy concerned with power and as *Polyeuctus* is a tragedy concerned with faith (and secondly with love).

Because it is indeed necessary that we understand each other when we say, (along with Corneille's contemporaries and with Corneille himself), (yet he was for himself a rather poor contemporary), that each of Corneille's tragedies presents a conflict between passion and duty, a conflict that always ends in the triumph of duty. Thus, it was that he himself spoke and he agreed with his critics here, but he was a person entirely lacking in pride, a pride entirely warranted, and who defended his work poorly before his critics, and who defended his genius poorly before his contemporaries, and who surrendered his arms, and who willingly condescended to speak as they did regarding his work. When he declared, like these others, and perhaps even before these others, that his tragedy was, that it represented a conflict between duty and passion, and when he suggested and even when he stated that duty triumphed and must always triumph over passion, and when he suggested and even when he stated that duty is a greatness and a nobility and that passion is a weakness and indeed a baseness, he was taking care to be a man of his time and to speak the language of others in this sense. He was doing his utmost to speak the language of his century. And of all of his century. In short, he was doing his utmost to speak in a Cartesian way.

And even sincerely, for he was lacking in pride, to be Cartesian himself.

However, it is indeed to understand him poorly, both inexactly and incorrectly, to imagine his genius and his oeuvre solely as the arena of a conflict

between duty and passion, a conflict in which duty, grandeur, and nobility triumph in the end over passion, weakness, and baseness. I will say this is a conception more in line with Hugo's, antithetical. That is entirely arbitrary, artificial, mechanical, and inflexible. And it is to understand him even more poorly, that is to say truly horrendously, if one gives to these words duty and weakness the same sense that the moralists do.

The reality, here again, here always, is much more striking and profound. One would have a hard time making us believe that the love of Chimene and the love of Rodrigo are indeed weaknesses, (and the love of Pauline for that matter), and one would have an even harder time making us believe that these constitute a baseness. In truth, the conflict in Corneille is not a conflict between a duty, thus conceived as lofty, and a passion in turn conceived as low or base. It is a tragic struggle, (and at times comic, although we have seen just how much these are of the same family), between one type of grandeur and another type of grandeur, between one type of nobility and another type of nobility, between honor and love.

On the one hand, it has nothing to do with morality, this fabrication. It is infinitely more and infinitely other: it is honor. And on the other hand, it has nothing to do with passion, this weakness. It is infinitely more and infinitely other: it is love.

Let us go further, let us enter, let us penetrate even more deeply. This tragic struggle, (and also this comic struggle), is not a struggle of contrast and it is not a struggle of inequality. It is not a mismatched struggle. It is not an uneven struggle. It does not take place, it does not occur between displaced moments of grandeur,

between grandeurs not of the same order, because this nobility is of the same order as that nobility, and this grandeur is of the same order as that grandeur.

The uneven would be the Preface of *Cromwell*.<sup>105</sup> Tragic while also comic, (but these are really the same), Corneille's poetry is essentially on par. It is essentially even. And in this sense, it is essentially a poetry of noble engagement.

The uneven, the displaced, the at-odds, this is Romanticism itself, the very secret of Romanticism. And it is not a very clever secret. It is quite a poor secret. It is a secret both mechanical and inflexible in nature. The beautiful secret, the deep secret of the Classical, (and at no other time or place is it as beautiful nor does it attain such profound depths as in Corneille), the secret of the Classical and above all of the Cornelian is this quality of being on par and of being comparable, it is this quality of being loyal so that all worlds and all beings are thus on a par therein.

No doubt this is the struggle (tragic, and also comic, always equally poetic), no doubt this is the struggle between honor and love. But it is a struggle that is essentially on par and more than on par, it is a struggle that is earnest throughout and interpenetrating. Mutually linked. Mutually penetrating. Because, and here we reach the depths of the secret itself, that secret point of the poetry and of the genius of Corneille: honor is cherished by love itself, love is honored by honor itself.

Honor is yet a form of love and love is yet a form of honor.

---

<sup>105</sup> Allusion to Victor Hugo's 1827 play, whose preface would become a type of artistic manifesto for the Romantics. Hugo proposed that they model their work not upon the formal rigor of Classical playwrights like Corneille and Racine but instead upon the perceived freedom and creativity of the English writer William Shakespeare.

One understands nothing of the tragic and of the comic and of the poetry of Corneille if one only wishes to see in them a conflict that is so to speak intellectual and bookish, between duty understood in the sense of the moralists and passion likewise understood in the sense of the moralists. It is infinitely other, infinitely more serious and more real, this struggle and at the same time the unlinking and at the same time the linking. There is no doubt that in Corneille honor is cherished by love, in particular in *Le Cid*, where it breaks out with a force, and that love is honored by honor, in particular in *Le Cid*, where it explodes into view. Honor is thus not simply esteemed or meanly cherished with a meager respect and a paltry morally inspired love, if there even is such a love as this, nor is love honored or rather sullied with a meager and bookish sentiment of the moral and the immoral. In *Le Cid*, all this instead breaks out with force, where all this youth, the most beautiful and the most youthful youth that one has ever rendered in poetry, cherishes honor with a passion and as a passion, and honors love fully and as an honor. It is for this reason that honor and love are forever present the one in the other, the other in the one. It is for this reason that honor and love are constantly interpenetrating, mutually penetrating. It is for this reason as well that they are able to constantly struggle against each other and to face up to one another in this noble engagement.

One must never believe a poet in what he says about his work, Corneille even less so than others. Because of this complete lack of pride, a lack even greater than with the others, and then because of this immense and admirable innocence. For him, more than all others, one must pay attention to what he did, and not to what it is he

said he did. He said that he portrayed the conflict between duty and passion. But what he really did was to show us the immense struggle, the immense process of linking and unlinking taking place between honor and love.

*Love is a pleasure, honor is a duty.*<sup>106</sup> Do not believe it. Love, (I mean in his system of thought, in his system of feeling, in his poetry, and in his system of life), love is an honor, and honor itself is cherished. Or rather I will say that for these admirable young people, next to whom all else seems old, next to whom all else seems wrinkled, love is a pleasure and honor is too and honor with it is a pleasure. Or rather love is a pleasure and together with honor is the same love and the same pleasure. They love everything, in their youth, they cherish everything with love, and honor more so than anything. And they honor everything, fully with honor, and love more so than anything. The long and steady elegiac swaying of what I will call the half-stanzas of *Le Cid*, that is of this admirable dialogue, of these admirable couplets alternating between Chimene and Rodrigo, the sole vestige perhaps in the whole of modern poetry that carries with it an echo of Antiquity's purity, and that pays us back amply, and that has carried forward into the modern world the alternating movement of certain half-choruses from ancient tragedy and certain half-dialogues between the characters and chorus leader and the chorus itself and one or the two half-choruses, this admirable and perfect movement between half-stanzas, (and it would be perhaps better to say double stanzas), more profound yet and more pure and less rigged out than the movement of stanzas proper, is not the least bit mechanical in its movement

---

<sup>106</sup> Line spoken by Don Diego, Rodrigo's father, in *Le Cid* (3.6.1059) (Pléiade fn.).

between duty and passion, nor is it external. It is not a movement linking a same to another, or rather another to another, necessarily abrupt and visible in nature. It is a movement secret in nature, painful, blessed, miserable, fortunate, a return and another return, a silent swaying between a same and a same, between this honor and love known as honor and this love and honor known as love.

*We have but one honor. There are many mistresses,*<sup>107</sup> says the elderly Don Diego. Yet, the idea that Rodrigo embodies, the idea of Corneille himself, their system of being and their system of thought is first, that we have but one honor; second, that we have but one mistress; third, that it is the same unique quality that unites these two as one.

Their idea, their system of thought, is that both love and honor share the same, unique destination.

One must reread *Le Cid*. Or rather one must read it for the first time, and ourselves too but in a new, unhabituated way. The love that Chimene and Rodrigo have for honor is one of the most profound elements nourishing their own love. And their own love is a deep source of nourishment and continual offering that they give to honor. And the honor that they return to love in turn nourishes their own love.

One must reread *Le Cid*. One must see just how much honor is surrounded, just how much honor becomes an object of love and an object of tenderness. And one must see just how much love is an object of honor.

---

<sup>107</sup> *Le Cid* (3.6.1058)

It is in this sense, and not in the sense of the critics and historians, nor in the sense of Corneille the critic, examiner, and historian, that it must be said that *Le Cid* is the tragedy concerning honor and love and that *Le Menteur* is the parallel and corresponding comedy concerning honor and love. It is in this sense that it is necessary to say, and only in this sense that one can say that *Le Cid* is a heroic tragedy and in a parallel and related vein that *Le Menteur* is a heroic comedy. In comparison to *Le Menteur* all of Molière's comedies (and yet he is the greatest comic genius to ever appear in the world) are bourgeois comedies. I am not speaking of *Les Plaideurs*,<sup>108</sup> which in comparison to these others is but a bitter, curt, and bad little secondary-school comedy, produced to be staged the day of the distribution of prizes.

It is in this sense, in the sense of honor and love functioning mutually as a source of nourishment the one for the other, with both of the same race, of the same nobility, and of the same family. And with both respectively the object of similar forms of appreciation. It is in this sense that *Le Cid* is the tragedy of noble engagement just as *Le Menteur* is in a parallel and related vein the comedy of noble engagement.

All is honor and all is love in Corneille and all is loyal, noble confrontation and beautiful, fair play. Above all else, so that nothing be distorted. So that this immense, unceasing battle be waged in complete equality. So that neither side be favored. So too that neither side be fraudulently diminished. For the contrary of

---

<sup>108</sup> *Les Plaideurs* (1668), the sole comedy attempted by Jean Racine, was inspired by Aristophanes' *The Wasps* (Pléiade fn.).

Corneille and what he represents and aims for and attains entirely is not weakness, it is fraud. Here is the sole enemy, and the shameful object to be banished alone. But then a banishment that is complete.

It is thus that one can trace throughout the immense oeuvre of Corneille this perpetual confrontation, this constant comparison, the constant measuring up of beings and of lives, of figures and of theses. God himself is upright in this sense and before him even God's own thesis would not be favored in any way. The most admirable and greatest quality in *Polyeuctus* is thus certainly the complete and total absence of pious fraud, and of a detestable, fraudulent devotion.

It is the poetry of comparison, and of perfect comparison. God himself will be compared, as all others; faithfully, as all others; he will be compared to all false gods. And he will be found to be better in that one, just quantity, which is infinity, and in nothing else. And within the composition of this infinity, if I may say, there is not a single atom of the fraudulent that enters its makeup.

Such is the poetry of Corneille. An immense and unceasingly faithful form of comparison. An immense and unceasing comparison of beauty. An immense and unceasing comparison of grace and of force. The struggle between Rodrigo and the Count broadened out to include everyone. And even God himself. God's own struggle broadened out to include God himself. And God will be in no way favored there. That is, he will receive no additional help there, no fraudulent benefit, no additional advantage than, if I may say, his own natural advantages, which are the advantages of his own nature and grace. It will not be he who is afraid of failing to measure up. In

his struggles. In his comparisons. It will not be God who will look to add proofs of his own existence.

Who will try to layer it on, as do our theologians.

It will not be God who will be afraid of not being good enough as he is.

Such is the dazzling and unique beauty of *Polyeuctus*. It is not merely that thought bursts forth fully intact within the poetry itself and that thought's propositions remain fully intact even with these lines of verse. It is that this saint and this martyr and God himself receive not a bit of fraudulent enhancement therein. Corneille puts in nothing more than what is necessary.

Here is the dazzling and unique beauty of *Polyeuctus*. It is this magnificent stripping bare of the saint, of the martyr, and of God. It is this magnificent act of disarming and laying bare. No mantle of virtue, of our meager virtues. Simply the Theological virtues alone. No mantle of our false virtues. No magical mantle to cloth one. Those partisans of the noble cause receive no fraudulent armament, no additional weaponry. It is truly rare that the partisans of a noble cause fail to receive some form of marvelous weaponry, that is a weaponry that is fraudulent. That is to say, it is indeed rare that the partisans of a noble cause be without any fear whatsoever.

One should analyze, one should return once again to the dazzling and unique beauty of *Polyeuctus*. It is not a simple piling up proofs. It is not a simple storing up

of goods. It is not a work with leaks one seeks to plug. It knows that the nave<sup>109</sup> of Saint Peter contains no faults.

It does not look to seal up gaps. It is a work that knows that it has none.

It is the complete stripping bare and totally disarming action of grace. Yet it knows its limits. It is not perhaps in the tradition of theologians. But it is in the line and in the race and in the tradition of the saints and martyrs. And it is in the line and in the race of Jesus Christ. *Misereor super turbam*.<sup>110</sup> It never scorns the world. It governs itself by the sole action of its mercy. It never knocks down the world so that it can be raised up again. And in this it differs considerably from a certain tendency in Pascal. It gives to the temporal its just due. And in a word, it gives to Caesar what is Caesar's.<sup>111</sup> Here again it never seeks to cheat. It takes fully to heart this teaching of Jesus.

Those who take their distance from the world, those who raise themselves up from the world, who move away from a world they knock down lower, achieve no elevation at all. They stay at the same height. And the elevation they believe themselves to have achieved is a counter-elevation, an abasement that they have performed upon the world, an abasement of the world itself. Their elevation is one below the common point of departure. This is what they measure.

---

<sup>109</sup> The French term *nef*, which Péguy employs here, can refer both to the nave of a church and the vessel of a ship, thus allowing Péguy to develop at length his analogy between a leaky ship and Saint Peter's Church in Paris, and more globally of the Catholic Church at large.

<sup>110</sup> Latin: "I have compassion on the crowd" from Mark 8:2 (Pléiade fn.).

<sup>111</sup> Matthew 22:21 (Pléiade fn.).

They measure the height from which they have knocked the world down and not the height to which they have raised themselves up.

Those who truly raise themselves up, those who achieve a true elevation are those who leave the world as it is, and from there rise up, from there move to a greater elevation.

It is a question of relative movement versus absolute movement. There is an absolute form of ascent, which is a true ascent, and there is a relative form of ascent, which cannot be an ascent, and may even be a descent. The world and man are at a certain height, are endowed with a certain common height that I will call their initial height, the height of their point of departure or rather of their level of departure. It is then a question of knowing who rises and who falls. The man who knocks the world down and thus rises up from a world he has knocked down may have the illusion that he has risen absolutely, that he has achieved an absolute elevation. This cannot be so if he himself does not rise absolutely. If he himself does not rise absolutely, he may rise relatively and all the while remain at the same absolute level and even descend from this absolute level. But the man who leaves the world as it is and from this level raises himself up, this man is sure to achieve an elevation.

We come upon here, we seize in the very act itself this error of calculation, which is the most frequent and naturally the most serious. It is simply not enough to knock down the temporal in order to elevate oneself within the category of the eternal. It is not enough to knock down nature in order to elevate oneself within the category of grace. It is not enough to knock down the world in order to elevate

oneself within the category of God. And it is possible that this operation<sup>112</sup> has nothing even to do with this and is infinitely other.

This error of calculation, the most frequent, perhaps because it is the most convenient, and the most serious, since it is almost an error in the meaning of the linguistic signs themselves in the use of the word *more* and of the word *less* and thus concerns the very bases and data and conditions of calculation itself and the very workings of this operation, this initial and even preliminary error of calculation is the collection of those bits constituting the scheme underlying this error of global calculation made by the party of the pious. Because they do not have the strength (and the grace) to be firmly of nature they believe instead that they are of grace. Because they have no temporal courage they believe instead that they have entered into the wisdom of the eternal. Because they do not have the courage to be of the world they believe instead that they are of God. Because they do not have the courage to enter into any of the parties of mankind they believe instead that they are of the party of God. Because they are in no way of man, they believe instead that they are of God. Because they love no human person, they believe instead that they love God.

But Jesus Christ himself was of man.

From this party of the pious, and from ever falling into this party of the pious, Corneille was marvelously and completely kept, by an unrivalled grace, throughout

---

<sup>112</sup> Péguy's use of the French term *opération*, which can suggest both mathematical processes (such as addition and subtraction) as well as the workings of God's grace, carries a certain amount of ambiguity in this passage and which he plays upon to tease out and explore these two particular, related connotations.

the whole of *Polyeuctus*. Nowhere, and in no way, was this incomparable work ever a pious work, nowhere does it bear any trace or even the suspicion of a trace of that lack of warmth or of the impurities of a pious style. And nowhere does it bear any trace of this error of calculation that is at the heart of the sterility found within the party of the pious.

Just as he was kept from all pious language, so too and just as importantly was Corneille saved from this error of calculation that is at the heart of the party of the pious. And in this he was particularly saved by the system of thought of loyal struggle and of equality in comparison.

In this development that I have pointed out prior, in this triple development and culmination running from *Le Cid*, *Horace*, and *Cinna* (and one should almost add *Le Menteur*) up to *Polyeuctus* and throughout *Polyeuctus* (*Polyeuctus* and *Le Menteur* are from the same year<sup>113</sup>), what was carried forward, what was brought to the fore amidst so much other movement was the system of thought of loyal struggle and of facing off on equal terms. In this unceasing struggle, in this universal putting forth and facing off equally, no one will be favored. No one being. No one thesis. Not even God.

Not the saint; not the martyr; not God.

Not man.

Not faith; not grace; not God.

---

<sup>113</sup> Péguy refers to the first public staging of each of these plays, which likely occurred in the same year of 1643 (Pléiade fn.).

No one will be diminished so that others may appear greater. Everyone will be present in his full grandeur and those who will be great will in turn be even greater.

No one will be diminished in order to clear the way for another's ascent. And God will make his way just the same. By the strength of his own merits.

This is perhaps the most beautiful thing about *Polyeuctus*. It is essentially a Christianity of the local parish. The very portrait of good health. With not a bit of ascetic fanaticism. With nothing of the monstrous to it. With nothing to it that is not French and chivalrous. Grace raises itself to its full, noble height above nature without nature being fraudulently lowered in any way. The height of its temperature is not the result of having lowered its point of zero. It is the climate itself that changes and not the position of the meteorology office, the weather *station*. It is the temperature itself that goes up and not the thermometer that is lowered. The eternal raises itself to its full, noble height above the temporal and without the temporal being at all lowered. The saint, the martyr raises himself to his full, noble height above man and without man being at all lowered. God raises himself to his full, noble height above the world and without the world being in any way lowered. No one will receive any fraudulent benefit, no one (and it is shameful to even have to say it), no one and not even God himself.

No one will be fake. And I am ashamed to even have to say it, no one and not even God himself.

From this comes the immense and profound humanity of *Polyeuctus*, the tremendous goodness and depth of tenderness. Wherein one is never forced to love

God at the expense of one's neighbor. And where one never wins one's salvation at the expense of one's neighbor. And in this way this immense and excellent tragedy is double in nature, a sacred tragedy and a profane tragedy, and with this excellence of the sacred tragedy over the profane tragedy in no way produced fraudulently.

The very grandeur and flowering radiance of the sacred tragedy within *Polyeuctus* conceals from us not only the grandeur and flowering and humanity but also almost the very existence itself of the profane tragedy that is there beneath. We are all like that princess who wanted to compare Racine to Corneille and who in order to balance out *Berenice* chose for comparison *Titus and Berenice*.<sup>114</sup> We are all crushed by literature's history. We are all worn thin. So too have we grown accustomed to it. We do not see that Corneille's great profane tragedies (with the exception of *Le Cid*, because to be honest it is not a profane tragedy, it is a type of sacred tragedy of honor and of love (and of youth), and more precisely a sacred tragedy concerning just what honor and love retain of the sacred during the time of youth), historians and all others thus habituated, we do not see that Corneille's great profane tragedy, comparable (and incomparable), the profane tragedy from that very age of Titus and Berenice is again *Polyeuctus*; it is the profane tragedy that runs beneath the sacred in *Polyeuctus*, or rather it is the profane tragedy upon which rests and from which rises up the great sacred tragedy of *Polyeuctus*. The match for Titus and Berenice (and for Antiochus) is not Titus and it is not Berenice. It is Pauline and

---

<sup>114</sup> Péguy refers here to Henrietta of England, wife of Philippe I, Duke of Orléans (Pléiade fn.).

Severus (and again Polyuctus). For here is the pure tragedy of a profane love fully and purely of that time, melancholy and without cure, or rather here is the pure, full, melancholy, incurable, age-old profane tragedy of love.

It is one of the worst errors that one can make to believe that Severus is a character of secondary importance. Within *Polyuctus*, there is no level of secondary importance. There is a primary level of importance that is the level of humanity. And above this there is another level which is that of the sacred. The grandeur of the sacred is never obtained by diminishing the level of man and of the world. There is not a primary level of the sacred and then behind somewhere, a secondary and diminished level of the profane. There is a primary level that is the level of the human and the profane. And above this there is another level which is that of the sacred.

If there were not within *Polyuctus* this sacred tragedy of an incomparable and indeed entirely unique quality, then the profane tragedy we likewise have in *Polyuctus* would seem to us the fullest and purest and most time-honored and most profound and, if I may say with it, the most graceful and most serious and most sacred profane tragedy of love and of honor that we have in existence. But what must indeed be the grandeur of this sacred tragedy for it to thus mask entirely the existence of this other. And what can one say of the poetry, which in the space of five acts is able to completely superimpose this sacred world upon a profane one.

It is thus we can say that Severus is in no way sacrificed to something greater, is in no way diminished in his importance. He is one of the most beautiful Romans we have ever seen portrayed. For he too is presented in his exactitude and in his

complete fullness. Serious, honest, and honorable, grave and accomplished, cultivated, in no way lacking, humane and consummately skilled, good, disabused, noble, fearless, and of an incurable melancholy, he is there to remind us of that which fools alone are ignorant: that pagan Antiquity, that the humanity of the pagan, ancient world was itself a temple of purity.

And that it did not have the gods that it deserved.

That is to say that it did not have its own *proper* gods.

It is the opposite of us who have a God that we do not deserve.

One can say that the ancient world did not have the gods that it deserved.

The Christian world had just the God it deserved; its God.

The modern world still has a God, but one it already no longer deserves.

Just like the ancient world, we do not have a God proper to us, but in a sense opposite theirs.

The world has gone out of sync with God in a direction opposite theirs.

And the Christian world alone was just, supported closely by God; balanced out by God.

And again, from this we see this noble attitude and conduct of Polyeuctus towards Severus. There is no doubt that he holds him in unique esteem. He does not treat him merely as a gentleman, an honest man, a noble warrior, and a man of good company. He has an affection and a respect for him, a type of loyalty whose origins would be extremely obscure and deep within the realm of feeling, and whose more

avowed origins are far more apparent and clear. A struggle of honor engages these two men and Polyuctus considers himself bound by honor to not back down before this great Stoic.

It is not by chance but for good reason that Pascal judged Stoicism and a certain Epicurean Scepticism as the two primary systems and poles of thought within the ancient world from a Christian point of view that is; (and in particular from the point of view of the lack of the Christian); as the two poles taken together that represented the philosophy and wisdom of Antiquity; and the forms of pagan and profane thought in the ancient world. As the two systems and poles of thought of humanity itself, that is to say of a humanity not yet graced with Christianity, purely profane and if I may say secular, of a humanity reduced to its own proper forces, and considered independently from the introduction and subsequent superimposing of Christianity upon it. And that he considered Stoicism as the system and pole of thought of the heroic and the sacred within a profane world and Scepticism or at least this certain Epicurean Scepticism as the pole of weakness and the profane within a profane world. He saw very well that in all the ancient world Stoicism was that alone which was comparable and, so to speak, that which could hold out against the Christian. That which could stand up to such a form of confrontation. He saw all too well that in the whole of the ancient world Stoicism alone was worthy. That it alone could present its qualities in comparison. That it alone could offer proof, and that from it alone had come forth in the ancient world that which could match up to what

in the Christian world would be the saints and martyrs: heroes and perhaps one should also say martyrs.

If one can consider, as I believe one can, the city-state of Antiquity as a figure itself, as a temporal prefiguration of the City of God, there is no doubt that within this representation and this parallelism it was Stoicism that provided, and that alone could provide, in the ancient world, what would later correspond to the saints and martyrs, that which alone would one day appear in the saints and martyrs: heroes and perhaps one should also say martyrs.

I do not like at all this expression, secular saints. It is a mistress of error and confusion.<sup>115</sup> But reduced to the level of a figure itself, and understood at this level, it is profound and real and true. There was indeed within the ancient world a certain bastion, there was indeed within the philosophy and wisdom of antiquity a certain citadel, there was indeed within the secular world and the profane world a certain sacred element and Pascal saw all too well that it was Stoicism that had been charged with providing this sacred element, of furnishing that which would be matched one day by the saint and the martyr, that alone which could foreshadow secularly, which could temporally prefigure the saint and the martyr: the hero and already perhaps the martyr.

Like all truly great Christians, Pascal refrained from looking down upon Antiquity. He knew very well what Rome and Greece had once been. And the

---

<sup>115</sup> Recalls Pascal's description of the imagination as "this mistress of error and falseness" (Pléiade fn.).

philosophy and wisdom of Antiquity. And an entire secular and profane system of thought. And even a science. And a temporal prefiguring of something greater. He knew very well what had once been the city-state of Antiquity. And going, as he always did, straight to the heart of the matter, going straight away, as a geometrician, to the *maxima*, he saw that Stoicism had provided, had been charged with providing the peak of ancient grandeur *sub specie*,<sup>116</sup> from the point of view of Christian grandeur, the peak of all nature from the point of view of the receiving of grace, the peak of the heroic (and of the martyr) from the point of view of the saint and martyr, the peak of mankind without God from the point of view of God, the peak of an entire world without God from the point of view of God.

It is in this same sense that Severus is himself a Stoic, and also in this same sense that Polyeuctus appreciates, honors, and it must be said that he admires him. He does not merely love him, he is not simply attached to him by reasons that are obscurely and deeply buried in the emotions, by an obscure type of sentiment, by an obscure and deep loyalty that simply carries over. Or out of mere confidence in him. He does not love him simply out of Christian charity. He does not love him merely out of the benevolence and philanthropy of the ancient and pagan and philanthropic and Greek world of this time. And the philosophical world. He loves him as a noble partner, and he sees in him his own figure reflected back.

---

<sup>116</sup> Short for the Latin *sub specie aeternitatis*: from the perspective of eternity. This expression comes from Spinoza's *Ethics* and occurs rather frequently in Péguy's oeuvre (Pléiade fn.).

It is a spiritual form of love and it is an admiration of skillful capability. That is to say it is very close to being a clear predilection. What temptation must there be, for he who is great within his own right and order, to admire, and perhaps to love amongst all others he who is the greatest in another order and most of all perhaps he who is the greatest in the opposing order. Polyeuctus admires Severus as a man of skill; because his Christian grandeur is founded upon a going beyond rather than an ignorance of the grandeur and severity of pagan Antiquity. He knows that false gods are nothing. But he knows too that those who worship false gods are not simply nothing. He knows that false gods are simply of wood and stone. *Of wood, of marble, or of gold, whatever you wish.*<sup>117</sup> But he knows also that those who worship false gods are of man and of the world; and of the soul. And he jostles, a bit roughly, those false gods. But he treats Severus with an infinite consideration.

A consideration itself enveloped in infinite regret and a limitless melancholy. Yet, Severus presents at the same time a limit. He is the one who will not simply be taken.

Polyeuctus measures Severus. As his own sanctity is founded upon a going beyond rather than an ignorance of the heroism of Antiquity. And his proper martyrdom is founded upon a going beyond rather than an ignorance of the martyrdom of Antiquity. And his God is founded upon a going beyond rather than an ignorance of and a certain scorn for the world.

---

<sup>117</sup> Line from *Polyeuctus* (4.3.1218) (Pléiade fn.).

Polyeuctus' system of thought does not require that God neglect, and ignore, and scorn his own creation, the world fashioned by his own hands. (In this again it is exactly opposite of what one finds in the pious system of thought).

From this comes the true humanity of Polyeuctus, this firm yet fluid tenderness, that increases all the more as it enters into this experience of martyrdom. He does not merely admire Severus, he does not only love him. It is more:

He feels and laments Severus' absence.

And far from his humanity opposing his holiness here (as in the atheist system and in a parallel and related sense in the pious system), on the contrary one has the impression, one sees that so great is his saintliness that, arising out of humanity itself and founded upon this humanity, it in turn comes back so that now it is this very holiness that nourishes humanity in its own right. Such are the true forms of saintliness and it is by this measure that one can recognize them. They are full, they overflow, they always have more than enough. The holier it is, the better, and by this very fact, it indeed is. The more one is martyred, the more, and by this very fact, one is indeed human. The goodness, the humanity, the security, the smile, and the abandonment of those who know that what they win is for their fellow men.

A type of good-heartedness, familiar in nature. And some unknown quality in the heroic that almost joins with the comic. That is to say, the true French military heroism.

Thus, here they are, he and Severus. Not merely as two rivals, in the vulgar sense of the word. Not even as two emulators, in the sense of modern competition. But as two great combatants. It is always God's combat. And it is God's combat between the one who is for him and the one who is not for him. And the mindset of Polyeuctus is that he who is for God is at least as good as the one who is not for God.

Each will defend his cause in its complete fullness and exactitude. Each will put himself forward in his complete fullness and exactitude. And the mindset of Polyeuctus is that he who puts himself forward for God does so at least no worse than he who does not put himself forward for God.

Polyeuctus sees Severus before him as a noble combatant and as a noble partner worth of himself. And for himself, it is indeed the very least that he should be worthy of the other.

Polyeuctus sees Severus before him as in combat, as in comparison with himself. It is indeed the very least that both sides of this comparison be worthy of each other. And this is necessary for the combat itself, for the comparison itself to be worthy of God who looks on. And of this crown of other saints and prior martyrs who, surrounding God, look on as well.

Before such witnesses, before such a true judge of combat, how could one ever offer a false effort, how could one ever deliver a fraudulent form of combat.

Before such expertise, how could one ever deliver a combat that fails.

For such a collection of spectators, how could one ever offer up a distorted performance, a fixed performance, how could one present a fraudulent performance.

For such a collection of judges, before such a true assessor of combat, before he who sees all, before he who measures even the unmeasurable, before such a field judge, before such a just mestre de camp how could one fail to offer a true form of combat, how could one not present a legitimate comparison.

It is necessary for Polyuctus, it is necessary that before God, that is within the most secret of hideaways within one's soul and being, that the combat be entirely honest, that the comparison be completely on par.

Could one possibly imagine a disciple of God offering even the hint of a fraudulent thought before one who is not a disciple of God.

For Polyuctus, Severus is a noble Roman soldier and Polyuctus himself is a noble Christian soldier. The law of chivalry, the fidelity to chivalry will thus govern every struggle, regulate every comparison. Could one possibly even imagine in a combat of chivalry, in a comparison of chivalry between a disciple of chivalry and one who is not a disciple that the disciple of chivalry would be he who fails to uphold the laws of chivalry, his fidelity to chivalry.

Polyuctus thus announces in the third century and in Corneille he brings together and sums up and magnificently presents the system of thought, the incorruptible rule that throughout the long centuries of Christianity has governed for

Christians the relation of the Christian to the non-Christian. It is the rule, it is the system of thought of the just war, of the faithful combat, of the comparison on par.

This rule bursts forth, as one would expect, in the Crusades. In the time of Polyuctus, the Christian could not be in any way inferior to the pagan even in terms of pagan honor. In the time of the Crusades, the Christian could not be inferior to the infidel, nor could Christian chivalry be in any way defeated by Arab “chivalry” even in terms of this infidel honor. From this comes this comparison of honor, this constant jousting of courtly honor that is quickly established during the Crusades between every man of Frankish chivalry and every man of Muslim “chivalry.”

And all of this goes into the immense general rule of never seeking to scandalize and imperil others. *Nolite scandalizare*.<sup>118</sup> For the same reason that one does not imperil the souls of children,<sup>119</sup> for the same reason one must not imperil the souls of infidels and pagans. They too are ignorant; and thus, in a certain sense innocent and in a certain sense children, because they know not the true God and therefore they cannot offend him and consequently they cannot sin like us. They do not have this terrible privilege of (being able to) sin that we have. This is the entire system of Polyuctus and without mentioning a Godefroy de Bouillon<sup>120</sup> it is also the system of Saint Louis.

---

<sup>118</sup> Latin: do not offend. The phrasing here recalls the earlier biblical passage: *Nolite judicare* (do not judge) (Pléiade fn.).

<sup>119</sup> Matthew 18:6-7, Mark 9:42 (Pléiade fn.).

<sup>120</sup> Hero of the Crusades of 1096 to Constantinople. He would eventually be elected king of Jerusalem after the successful siege of the city (Pléiade fn.).

It is the entire system of measure and of thought of Polyuctus. When the Christian is in the presence of the pagan, when the Christian enters into comparison with the pagan, (and he is always in the presence of the pagan, he always enters into comparison with the pagan), it is not enough for the Christian to win out within himself and for himself and in his system of measure and thought. It is not even enough, if I may say, that he wins out for God. And before God. It is necessary that he also prevail for the other. It is necessary that he also prevail within the system of the other. Polyuctus will be satisfied with nothing less. It is necessary that he win out as well within the system of honor of the other. And as he *laments* Severus' absence, it is necessary, he wants that Severus also lament his absence. As he laments that Severus is not Christian, it is necessary, he wants that Severus too lament that Polyuctus did not remain pagan. This regret for Polyuctus, within the heart of Severus, is the sole truly vulnerable point that exists within his heart, let us not forget, as it is the sole point of recourse that we have against habit (and here again we find the irreversible acquisitions of Bergson's language and thought). (For we could scarcely push this analysis of the Christian heart to its fullest if Bergson as well had not come prior to help us along). Severus is man habituated to everything; and consequently, who is incapable of bathing in the grace of God; and upon whom grace has no point to grab hold. Severus is a man habituated to everything and especially to everything pagan and therefore upon whom the Christian has no point to grab hold, apart from the fact he is not habituated to this, that he is not made up on this point and

one sees all too well he can never do so: that a man like Polyeuctus should himself become a Christian.

Here is that point of the inhabitual and it is the sole point of this nature that we have. He wants all the world to be Christian. He has become habituated to the entire world being Christian. He is not habituated to the fact that Polyeuctus is Christian.

It is for him a type of scandal (within his system) and this point of scandal is also the sole point of the inhabitual and thus the sole truly vulnerable point that we have. It is the sole point of openness and of entry and of penetration. It the sole point by which we may ever hope for grace to flow into us.

It is thus also our sole point of hope.

And here again we find that diametric opposition that exists between hope and habit.

It is truly a scandal in reverse, a scandal in the right sense. The scandal being precisely this, consisting precisely of the following: a breach in habit, a point, a break constituted by the insertion of the inhabitual.

A scandal in reverse, a scandal in the right sense is thus one of the very forms itself, and one of the most frequent and most essential forms of the bursting forth of grace.

If habit is what introduces this hardening of life unto death, this scandal in reverse, this scandal in the right sense is what breaks up this hardening, being so too what breaks up habit.

Thus, this scandal in reverse, this scandal in the right sense, is at once the point of bursting forth of grace itself and the point of penetration kept open for who knows what later introduction of grace to one day flow in.

It is not enough for Polyuctus to prevail over Severus in fact. It is not enough that he prevail in honor over Severus, in spiritual reality, and in himself, and before himself, and before the other saints, and before the martyrs preceding him, and before Nearchus and before God.<sup>121</sup> He again wants, and it is again necessary, that he prevail (in honor) over Severus, before Severus himself, and within Severus' very own system. It is necessary that Severus carry with him this wound in his side, it is necessary that he be marked by this disquiet and retain this point in memory, this intrusion of the inhabital and this point of scandal arising from Polyuctus becoming a Christian and from the fact he has been defeated in honor by a Christian.

Because if every point of disquiet coincides with an intrusion of the inhabital it is because the surfaces of tranquility and of habit themselves meet in perfect coincidence.

Every point of the inhabital is also a point of disquiet. Every plane of habit is also a plane of tranquility.

However, Severus can only account for himself within his very own system of accounting. Severus can only measure himself within his very own system of

---

<sup>121</sup> Saint Nearchus was a Roman army officer and friend of Polyuctus. He is said to be responsible for inspiring Polyuctus' conversion to Christianity. He would later be martyred as well.

measure. Otherwise, he would himself be converted, he would be Christian, and he would himself be with Polyeuctus instead of standing across from him, and the problem would no longer pose itself as such.

He would no longer be in comparison with Polyeuctus. He would be in communion with him and the problem would need never pose itself.

Yet, one knows well that it will not be in Corneille's nature to ever skirt a problem, or to dress up the facts themselves. Or to cover up in any way a problem. Everything keeps him from this, at once his genius, which we have discussed, and his intelligence, which we have likewise detailed, and his system of fidelity, which is the very same of which we are now speaking.

In order for the comparison to not be fixed, in order for the difficulty to not be fraudulently avoided, in order for the problem to remain and to be presented in its complete fullness and exactitude, it is necessary for Severus to be completely and simply himself and to avoid deviating in any way from his very own system. Either from his system of thought or from his system of measure.

And thus, in order for Severus to be touched and to carry with him this disquiet and this memory, this intrusion of the inhabitual and this scandal, in order that he be marked by this breach in some way, in order that he be moved in some way by this contact Polyeuctus must not simply overcome Severus before God, he must prevail over him before Severus himself.

Let us say it outright: the measures of God, the calculations of God count nothing for Severus. Otherwise, he would indeed be Christian himself.

The system of God counts nothing for Severus. It is Severus' own system and his system alone that counts for him.

And thus, it is not enough that Polyuctus prevail (in honor, in grandeur) within this system of accounting proper to God, he must rather prevail in that system of accounting proper to Severus himself.

That is if he wants Severus to carry with him this new sense of insecurity.

It is not enough that Polyuctus prevail within this system of God, it is necessary that he prevail within Severus' own system.

This is what I have said, I believe, in *The Portico of the Mystery of the Second Virtue* and in *The Mystery of the Holy Innocents*, that he who loves enters into a dependence upon the one who is loved and that thus God himself enters into a dependence upon he who wants to prevail in his love.<sup>122</sup>

When the good shepherd sets off in search of the lost sheep, he enters into a dependence upon this lost sheep and one can say that in order to find it he must be guided by it and in accordance with its wanderings.

He who searches enters into a dependence upon the one sought after.

He who seeks to prevail enters into a dependence upon the one to be won over.

---

<sup>122</sup> *The Portico of the Mystery of the Second Virtue* appeared in a *Cahier* from October 22, 1911 (Pléiade fn.).

Thus, not only does Polyeuctus enter into a dependence upon Severus, but God himself enters into a dependence upon Severus. Because Severus must not come out of this untouched in some way.

Severus must not come out of this without being wounded in a certain sense. In a word, Severus must not come out of all this in the same state in which it entered.

And not only them but the entire Christian world. It is necessary that every Christian enter in this way into a dependence upon the pagan world, because the pagan world must not come out of this untouched and without being wounded in a certain sense. The pagan world must not come out of all this in the same state in which it entered.

It is not enough that Polyeuctus' very being prevail in itself and before itself and before God. It is necessary that Polyeuctus' *image* prevail within the mind of Severus. Severus cannot know Polyeuctus himself. He cannot know Polyeuctus' being. Otherwise, he would himself be Christian. Because to know in this sense is to know in communion. He can only know a certain image of Polyeuctus. That which he has. And this is a pagan image. Polyeuctus is extremely careful that this (pagan) image of him be a noble image and an image of grandeur and an image of honor, and that it be, both for and within Severus, the image of he who overcame him in honor and even in a pagan honor. It is at Severus' very own game that Polyeuctus must prevail. Because Severus understands nothing of the other game. And in order for him

to indeed realize that Polyeuctus wins and that Polyeuctus prevails, it must be within his system of play that Polyeuctus wins and that Polyeuctus prevails.

It is the system and it is the very theory of the image. No security of conscience, however complete, will suffice for Polyeuctus. It is not enough that he be sure of himself, *consciuis sui*,<sup>123</sup> and that he be entirely correct for himself. It is not enough even that he be sure of God, that is to say sure of the judgment that God passes upon him and of the knowledge that God has of him. It is also necessary that he be sure of a far less firm and perfect judgment as it is nonetheless a judgment of honor. And it is also necessary that he be sure of a more inexact, imperfect, and transposed knowledge as it is nonetheless a knowledge of honor. It is not enough for him to be entirely correct for himself. It is not enough even for him to be entirely correct with God. It is also necessary that he be correct with the one before him, who has no knowledge of all this, because he is nonetheless a man of honor.

It is not enough that, in his adoration and his martyrdom, he give to God the whole of his being. It is also necessary that in conversation, (as well as in adoration and martyrdom), that he communicate of himself a certain image to this noble pagan.

It is not enough that he give everything in the Christian domain. It is also necessary that in the pagan domain he give something else, an image.

It is a unique situation. The more no longer suffices. One must instead add to this something of the less.

---

<sup>123</sup> Latin: self-conscious.

It is not enough that he prevail for God, with perhaps his knowledge of it all. It is necessary that he add to this, that he prevail as well for this other, who is simply a man of honor.

To a knowledge that is absolute he must add something. To a knowledge that is perfect he must add something. What. An imperfect knowledge, an inexact knowledge, a less firm knowledge, the noble understanding that this pagan, this man of honor, will have of him.

It is not enough that the Christian world simply reveal its being and give everything of its love and its being before God. It is also necessary that it communicate a certain noble image of itself to the pagan world.

This is the system and the politics of Saint Louis. What is most beautiful in Joinville's account, (but do we ever truly know what is most beautiful), is perhaps the infinite care that Saint Louis takes with the sultan of Egypt so that he would have a noble idea of just what it was and meant to be the king of France. It was not enough to simply be king of France for the common people of France and for the French barons. And it was not enough for him to simply be the great Saint Louis before God. It was also necessary that he be the king of France before this Egyptian sultan and that he be the great Saint Louis before these infidels.

And especially that these Muslims never go believing that the French barons served their God any less well than they served their own.

It was not enough that the true God be served in his fullness and his exactitude in one's adoration, in one's sacrifice, and in one's martyrdom. It was also necessary that these followers of this false God, (they worshiped Muhammad), not for a moment entertain the thought that Muhammad was in any way better served.

This is again the system of the idea one communicates of oneself. It is again the theory of the image. It was necessary that these infidels retain a certain image of what it was and meant to be a French baron and of what the word of a French baron meant. It was necessary that this Egyptian sultan retain a certain image of the king of France and it was necessary even that he retain a certain image of Saint Louis.

In a word, one must as a French baron take care to not imperil the souls of infidels. The king of France must not imperil the soul of the sultan of Egypt.

(I say the adoration and martyrdom of Saint Louis because I do not believe that one should quarrel over his martyrdom. He died during the Crusade and he died from illness and from suffering and Joinville defends him all too well in this regard.)

It was not enough that Saint Louis simply be Saint Louis for the noble Joinville. It was also necessary that he be this for those chroniclers and witnesses in the Muslim world.

This is the system and this is the politics of Joan of Arc. In the same way that Polyeuctus understood that the struggle he engaged himself in against Severus and before Severus was both a martyrdom and a struggle of honor, in the same way that Saint Louis understood that his Crusade was both a Crusade and a struggle of honor, so too Joan of Arc understood that the just war she was about to wage was a struggle of honor and a struggle for God and a struggle of chivalry, (and certainly the lead-up to a Crusade, the return to a Crusade). It was not enough that she had been sent by God and that she had to account to God alone, directly. It was not enough that she was entirely correct with God and before God. She wanted and needed as well to be entirely correct with the enemy and before the enemy.

From this comes her summons to the English, an extremely important act and one that should not be considered as a declaration of war but rather as a declaration of honor of war. It was not enough that she simply present herself equipped with a mandate from God, invested with this urgent mandate. It was necessary that this mandate be communicated within the rules and these rules are the rules of honor and of noble combat. Even sent as she was by God, she humbly solicits the English king as a judgment of God. If war comes out of this it is necessary that the war she will wage is a just war. If tomorrow morning war is to be embarked upon, it is necessary that this battle be conducted as a battle of honor, a battle of chivalrous engagement, a struggle for God, a battle of God's judgment. And this summons is in no way an ultimatum or rather it is not an ultimatum such as one gets with diplomats or the laws

of war. It is a formal and chivalrous notice before the engagement in an honorable combat.

If it was simply up to her each war would take the form of an immense struggle for God, and the outcome of each war would be an immense judgment of God. The old French proverb: *Each for himself, God for all* is not merely a proverb, it is an adage. And one understands it quite poorly and indeed backwards when one tries to make of it a type of justification or an explanation or a declaration of egoism. On the contrary, it is the very expression of noble struggle. It is the rule of engagement of fair comparison. It is the very expression of God's judgment. Each defends his cause to the fullest and in its exactitude, each pushes his luck as much as he can, without fault, for God presides over the whole of the struggle.

What is perhaps most beautiful in Quicherat's *Trial of Joan of Arc* is this summons to the king of England: *King of England, and you, Duke of Bedford...*

King of England, and you, Duke of Bedford, who call yourself regent of the Kingdom of France; you, Guillaume de la Poule, Count of Sulford; Jehan, Lord of Talebot; and you, Thomas, Lord of Escalles, who call yourselves lieutenants of the aforementioned Duke of Bedford, account for yourselves before the King of Heaven...<sup>124</sup>

---

<sup>124</sup> Jules Quicherat's *Trial of Joan of Arc* was published in 1841 and included Joan's letter of March 22, 1429, summoning the king of England to repent and depart in peace from Orléans (Pléiade fn.).

Saintliness itself is temporal. It is subject to the seasons and the weather. It is subject to the ages of life. If nothing is as beautiful as youthful genius and if nothing in the works and in the whole career of genius equals the early firmness of youth, nothing and not even the most profound experiences, and not even the fullness of maturity, and not even the disinterest for worldly concerns that comes with old age, what then to say of the parallel experience of youthful saintliness, what then to say of this parallel form of saintliness. I do not believe anything is as beautiful in the *Trial* as this first summons to the king of England, and to you who call yourself regent, and to you who call yourselves lieutenants. Nothing but youth and firmness. An assurance without equal. It is the assurance of God himself. A perfectly pure line of thought. A line of calling in its full, and firm, and entire purity. The invention of life itself and the invention of war and the invention of honor and the invention of God. An innovation without limits. Nothing of the withered, nothing of the labored, nothing of the deliberate. The very source of honor itself. An admirable ease and a freedom in full blossom. No effort and so to speak no merit. A sunrise of grandeur and of strength. A dawning of saintliness. The simple setting forth of initiative. The first movement towards a calling. The first move towards one's mission. The first step in a procession.

Nothing of the withered. Not even this withering that marks the greatest of saints as a sign of having lived and of having been a man and of having experienced the ingratitude of men and of having, who knows, experienced even one's own ingratitude (excluding some). Nothing of this withering that is the mark of time itself

and that wrinkles the greatest of men, with this one condition: that they continue on, that they go forward. That they continue their constant path towards the completion of the final meeting. Nothing of this withering that is the very mark, the inscription of the accumulation of memory, the mark of the registering of memories themselves and even those not accumulated. Nothing of the withered, nothing of the residual, nothing of the remembered. Nothing of this residual withering that is the constant product of the simple exercise of memory itself.

Nothing of this wrinkling upon the soul that is the constant product of the most sensible, most meager, most noble, and most simple exercise of the integral process of memory.

Nothing of this withering left behind by all that goes by in life and provided and on the one condition that it continues. Nothing of this withering that saintliness itself leaves behind when it occurs, (because it too cannot possibly avoid being itself an experience). And that trials by definition leave behind. And that martyrdom itself leaves behind.

Nothing of this residue that is the trace of memory.

Nothing of the withered and since one must always come back to this, *nothing of the habituated*.

Youth itself, that is to say the zero point of memory, the zero point of withering, the zero point of habit.

A complete state of grace. And a grace completely new. And if I may say so a grace that is youthful. Because eternity itself is in the temporal. And there are new

forms of grace and forms of grace that would as if aged. Or if you prefer a complete state of hope.

Nothing of this withering that makes it so that men of the same age resemble each other far more than they resemble themselves at different ages throughout their own lives. And that makes it so that the executioner and the martyr of forty years of age appear far more as brothers than either do to the man they were at twenty years of age.

Nothing of this withering that makes it so that a man never returns home to the house of his father the same as he had left it. And that makes it so that Jesus himself was not the same man at the end of his third year of service as he was at the beginning of his first. And that makes it so that he was not the same man that night in the Garden of Gethsemane as he was the day he first left the house of his father.

*Account for yourselves before the King of Heaven...* This is the very expression of a singular struggle. She was thus for God in a struggle for God, that is to say in a battle steadfastly waged before God in order to provoke a judgment from God. This paper, (yes, yes, Mr. Scholar, it was a parchment), this document she dictated to the clerks and that she had delivered was not an ultimatum of war, it was not even a warning, it was a type of pastoral letter.

Or rather it was a mandate. It is the very mandate she herself had received and that she simply had passed on, that she simply had communicated to the English. This child was simply God's messenger. As God has but a limited personnel, it was necessary in this battle that she be both his follower and his herald.

One knows how she was received. She found the English (and the Burgundians) and it must be said the French, and the Sorbonne and the king of England and it must be said the king of France and the Church of England and it must be said the Church of France to be more deaf and closed off to the voice of God, more stubbornly rebellious to God than Saint Louis had indeed found the infidels in Egypt to be. And this is one of the reasons she was the greatest saint and martyr. It should perhaps be said that she was a saint to the second degree and that she was a martyr to the second degree. Because it was in the bosom of Christianity that she found her place of calling, her place of resistance, her place of struggle, her place of honor, her place of saintliness, her place of martyrdom. She was like a soldier who would fight not only at the frontier but whose own home was an immense, a universal frontier. In comparison, Saint Louis had only to deal with infidels.

One can say that Saint Louis had around him a people of faith and that he was battling against an infidel people who were rather a people of counter-faith. On the contrary, Joan of Arc had to answer and pursue her calling and had to accomplish her mission amongst a faithless people, amidst an inveterately faithless people, in the middle of a people who had *habitually* fallen into a state of faithlessness. None were completely faithful to her to the very end. She was abandoned and renounced just as Christ had been. And amongst those who had for a time been faithful to her, (if indeed these words *to be faithful for a time* have any meaning at all), there were only ever the common people. Those common people of the army, and the common people

of the Church, and the common people of the people. Monks, soldiers, burghers. Never prelates, nor, needless to say, barons. Nor any king. She had to pursue her calling as a Christian and a martyr and a saint against the French and against Christians themselves. For she found faithlessness established in the very heart of France, in the very heart of Christianity. She had to prevail over this long line of habit. She had to stand up to this long line of memory. This is what I call being a saint and martyr two times over. This is what I call a trial to the second degree, a saintliness, a martyrdom to the second degree. Completely free and unburdened by habit she had to stand up to and prevail over this long line of habit. Completely free and unburdened by memory she had to stand up to and prevail over this long line of memory.

To wage war against the enemy, to be pursued by the enemy, I do not say this is nothing, but really this is just the first degree. To have to wage war against one's brother, to be pursued by those of one's very own spiritual race, here is the second degree of earthly trials, here is a redoubling of what it means to suffer the trials of this world.

To depart, to wage war at the frontier, this is well enough. But to have to wage war in the heart of one's own home, to suffer the ravages in one's own heart, what a redoubling of this same trial.

This difference and this redoubling, this distance between the two is so important that one can indeed say that it cuts war itself in two, that it divides the victory into two categories: the category of wars waged and of battles fought and of

the victories won at the frontier and the category of wars waged and of battles fought and of the unfortunate victories won at the center. To fight against the enemy or to fight against oneself. Everything is fortunate in a certain sense in this first category and in a certain sense everything is unfortunate in the second. And defeat in the first category has a taste that is less bitter than victory in the second. However disastrous might be a war against one's enemy, it always falls within the category of a certain good fortune. But the more victorious one is in the war against oneself, the more also that it hurts and indeed injures one, the more it sinks deeper within the category of a certain misfortune. A defeat in the first category, a defeat against the foreigner can never go so far as to reduce to zero one's own regard for a certain, grave sense of fortune. But victory in the second category, in the war against one's own self is a victory that adds to and that carries one infinitely deeper into a sense of misfortune.

Every undertaking of foreign war, every form of war along the frontier, every action of war against the enemy is in a certain sense, even when disastrous, provided it saves one's honor, provided that it is conducted and waged in its fullness, and exactitude, and complete strength, is an undertaking that is blessed by fortune; by its very nature it falls within, and even in defeat, and even when disastrous, and even in death, a certain category of being fortunate. In comparison, everything is misfortune in the second category. Every undertaking of civil war, every form of war in one's heart and in one's center, every action of war against one's own people enters, even before its birth, into a certain category of disaster and into a certain category of misfortune. Even should it be innocent a hundred times over, it is never innocent just

once. Even should it be honorable a hundred times over it is always against honor itself. And even should it be pure it is nevertheless impure. The most unfortunate undertaking of foreign war, provided that it truly saves one's honor, (and provided that it is not, as is so often the case, a pretense and an *alibi*, and that one does not say *to save one's honor* so as to be comfortably exempt from actually saving victory itself), is an undertaking blessed by fortune. The most fortunate undertaking of civil war is an undertaking of misfortune and of sorrow. The most impure hands engaged in foreign war are more pure than the purest hands engaged in civil war. Within the most supposedly fortunate actions of civil war there remains a certain taint of distress, of debauchery, that one never finds even in the most misfortunate actions of foreign war. It is literally an inversion. More so even than a perversion.

If such is the case in civil war and in foreign war in regards to territorial and political matters, what then can one say regarding spiritual matters. Here too there is a frontier and a center. (The center is Rome.) Here too there is an enemy and one's own home. Here too there will thus be, in this sense, two categories of war: and in regards to spiritual matters foreign war, even when it is disastrous, falls nevertheless within the category of being fortunate. But civil war, in regards to spiritual matters, even should it be victorious, and the more indeed it is victorious, falls into the category of sorrow and of an immense regret and within the category of being an unfortunate war.

(Jesus had both, superimposed upon or rather joined together, having to deal with both the Jews and the Romans, with his own race and with the foreign race, with Caiaphas and with Pilate, with the rabble and with the soldiers.)

More fortunate in comparison, Polyuctus had simply to deal with the ancient world and here again is one of the reasons *Polyuctus* falls entirely within the category of good fortune, which is the same category as that of grace. Like Saint Louis, he had only to fight along the frontiers (both spiritual and temporal). Like Saint Louis, he had only to fight against the enemy. Like Saint Louis his undertakings in spiritual war were only ever his undertaking of the Crusade. Like Saint Louis, he had only ever to undertake this Crusade. What can one say then about this youth who came to Orléans convinced that it was but the point of departure for a general reconciliation between Christianity and the Crusade, for a taking up again and a renewed honoring of the Crusade and who found instead that this alone would be the sole Crusade she would ever undertake. What can one say if not that in this yet again she embodied what I will say fully one day: that is the closest imitation of Jesus Christ that has ever been.

More fortunate in comparison, Polyuctus had simply to deal with Severus and more fortunate too Corneille had simply to deal with the youth of the world. I mean the youth of the Christian world, which is what I have also called the youth of grace. He had only to occupy himself with this birth of the world, which was spiritually like a renewal of the first paradise. It is for this reason that *Polyuctus* is a work that remains firmly within the category of good fortune, within the category of being blessed by fortune. And within the category of honor. And within the category

of grace. And it is for this reason that it is necessary to group together Polyeuctus and Saint Louis, Corneille and Joinville, on one side and on the other Joan of Arc and Jesus. And it is for this reason that one must say that it was Joan of Arc who embodied the most faithful and the closest imitation of Jesus Christ that has ever been.

There are also a variety of spiritual races and the world is vast enough to contain within it saints from different spiritual races. I have identified two of these races here, of which there is a vast separation between them. On the one hand, Polyeuctus and Saint Louis, were so lavished with grace that they never suffered otherwise or elsewhere than within the category of being fortunate, and they never ceased to suffer within this category of being blessed by fortune. On the other hand, Joan of Arc and Jesus were so lavished with a grace of another kind, with a sort of grace of disgrace, that they suffered as well and they pursued their suffering even within the category of misfortune.

Because every foreign war remains firmly within the category of grace. But in every act of civil war there remains a point of disgrace proper to it.

And every foreign war remains firmly within the category of honor. But in every act of civil war there remains a point of dishonor proper to it.

And it is again the case here that even the most innocent amongst them is never truly innocent. And that the purest of hands amongst them are never truly pure. And that the least criminal amongst them is nevertheless criminal in this case and

drags behind him a dreadful sense of memory, and of melancholy, and of an immense regret worse than any remorse.

Such that one wonders whether a true sense of remorse would not indeed be preferable to all this.

Whatever Polyuctus suffers, his suffering is direct if I may say, and however extreme it may be, it is still simple. It takes but one path and this path is a good one. It does not turn back upon itself. Or within itself. His suffering pours forth. It is effusive. It is wholesome and and it is holy. It falls within the category of good fortune, of honor, and of grace. His suffering is neither monstrous, nor terrible, nor inverted. His suffering, his saintliness, his martyrdom is not the least controverted.

In a parallel vein, whatever Saint Louis suffers he suffers it only at the hands of infidels. He suffers it only at the frontier. He suffers it only with the enemy and from the enemy. He is in no way surrounded by traitors. No more than Polyuctus is he betrayed, nor renounced. He must leave his home and go away to find suffering, war, sickness, prison, death, insults, and martyrdom. He finds none of this established in the very heart of France. His war is not at Orléans. His capture is not at Compiègne. His imprisonment and martyrdom is not at Rouen. His enemies, his executioners, his jailers are not Christians. His traitors and betrayers are neither Christian nor French. Because he has no traitors. He has only enemies. And here is

what separates him from Joan, here one finds this essential and monstrous difference between the two.

He has to fight merely against the adversary. He never fights in the least against himself and his own people. He must go away to Egypt, he must go away to Tunis to find what this youth was confronted with in the space between Étampes, the Somme, and the Lower Seine.<sup>125</sup> He must simply bring the Crusade to the infidel. What can one say then of this youth confronted with this monstrous Crusade to be undertaken in the very heart of France itself. And all this a mere one hundred and sixty years later.

Rosetta, Damietta, Memphis, and the Nile, here are the names of difficult battles throughout history. But she, the city in which she was herself to fall, was our own city of Paris.

This is forever the difference between the extrinsic and the intrinsic. Thus, Jesus found at hand two or three small hills or elevated places, the Mount of Beatitudes, *ascendit in montem*,<sup>126</sup> the Mount of Olives, and the Mount of Calvary. And Herod had looked for him amongst his kinsmen. And Judas found him amongst his group of disciples.

---

<sup>125</sup> Péguy's geographical references here recall Paris, Compiègne, and Rouen (Pléiade fn.).

<sup>126</sup> Latin: he went up the mountain (Matthew 5:1) (Pléiade fn.).

He had no need to request an audience with Herod. Nor with Judas. And he had no need to go seek out Caiaphas. Because one would drag him there before him. And he had no need to go seek out Pilate. Because one would drag him there before him. And he had no need to ask where it was Calvary was located.

These saints of the first category, Poyeuctus, Saint Louis, are so firmly within the category of being fortunate and within the category of being blessed by grace that one could almost say that, really, they are already no longer a part of the Church Militant. They are already of the Church Triumphant. Their militation<sup>127</sup> is already a triumph. They are so firmly within the victory that one can say they are no longer within the battle. They are within glory, in the literal sense of this term, in the sense one always gives it in theology.<sup>128</sup> I do not believe there exists a work within the whole of the world that is as heavenly as that of the *Life of Saint Louis* and of *Poyeuctus*. An astounding grace, entirely unique, a more-than-eminent grace, beyond any rank, beyond any place, beyond any offering was given to Corneille and to Joinville. I do not believe there exists a work within the whole of the world as heavenly as the *Life of Saint Louis*, as *Poyeuctus*, that succeeds in giving the very *atmosphere* of paradise itself, that provides us with the very breath of heaven.

---

<sup>127</sup> Péguy coins the neologism *militation* here, a term suggesting perhaps both militancy and action.

<sup>128</sup> In the Bible (Ezekiel 9:3, 10:4, 43:2-5; John 2:11, 11:40) this term (glory) refers to the literal manifestation of God's presence (Pléiade fn.).

I do not believe that in the entire world there exists a work that so anticipates, that so stands out, and in a certain sense that so goes beyond and even breaks away.

From the Earth itself.

Entirely different are the Gospels and entirely different is the *Trial of Joan of Arc*, which are in the thick of the struggle, in the fullness of their militation, in the entirety of the Earth and I would add in the fullness and exactitude of incarnation.

Thus, Polyeuctus walks alongside Saint Louis and Joan of Arc walks alongside Jesus. Nothing in Polyeuctus, nothing in Saint Louis recalls the agony of the Mount of Olives and the abandonment and what must indeed be called the doubt of *Father, let this cup pass from me*, and the dreadful *Father, why have you abandoned me?*<sup>129</sup> Yet everything in the imprisonment and the agony and the death of Joan of Arc is an echo, a reflection, a reminder, everything here is a faithfulness to the trial, the agony, and the death of Jesus.

Thus, Polyeuctus walks alongside Joinville and it is the most beautiful of processions. But here Joan of Arc walks alongside Jesus. And whose heart would not be moved by this painful procession.

Thus, also the Virgin is the House of Gold and Ivory Tower and Tower of David and Ark of the Covenant and Morning Star and Gate to Heaven.<sup>130</sup> But whose heart would not be moved by our Lady of the Seven Sorrows.

---

<sup>129</sup> Allusions to the biblical accounts found in Matthew 26:39 and 27:46.

<sup>130</sup> These metaphors are drawn from the collection of litanies dedicated to the Virgin Mary, which take up terms from several books of the Bible including: Song of Songs 7:4 (Ivory Tower), Exodus 25:10-22 (Ark of the Covenant), and Revelations 22:16 (Morning Star) (Pléiade fn.).

Thus, Polyeuctus walks alongside Saint Louis and it is a lovely procession. But Joan of Arc walks alongside Jesus. And whose heart would not be moved by this painful procession.

Polyeuctus walks alongside Saint Louis and here is a prince and a king and thus a royal procession. But Joan of Arc walks alongside Jesus and who would not stop to hail this procession of the poor.

Polyeuctus walks alongside Saint Louis and it is God's feast itself. But Joan of Arc walks alongside Jesus and it too is a grand procession.

Corneille walks alongside Joinville, the *Trial of Joan of Arc* walks alongside the Gospels. Polyeuctus walks alongside Saint Louis, Joan of Arc walks alongside Jesus.

There are saints that I will call saints of blessedness and, so to speak, of anticipation. And there are saints of militation that one could call saints of misery and of suffering, and almost saints of bitterness and of ingratitude. The first of these may be the most beautiful and the most grand. But Jesus is more properly the leader and the model for this latter group.

(In this category of classification. Because there is an entirely other category of classification in which, quite on the contrary, Polyeuctus walks alongside Jesus and Joan of Arc alongside Saint Louis. And this makes two beautiful processions. Crossing each other. In this second category of classification Polyeuctus walks alongside Jesus in that neither had a part in any temporal form of government, and

Joan of Arc walks alongside Saint Louis in that both had either a partial or a full part within a temporal form of government. And were thus either king of France or a stand-in for his royal power, the lieutenant of the king of France, separated by a distance of a mere one hundred and fifty years in time. Polyeuctus walks alongside Jesus in that neither participated in Caesar's world. Joan of Arc walks alongside Saint Louis in that both did participate in Caesar's world, and both were the inheritors of Caesar and of the terrifying responsibility Caesar possessed.

Polyeuctus walks alongside Jesus in that both were more than happy to give back to Caesar what was Caesar's.<sup>131</sup> Joan of Arc walks alongside Saint Louis in that neither would be satisfied with anything less than being Caesar themselves. And so it is *Polyeuctus* that walks alongside the Gospels and the *Trial of Joan of Arc* that walks alongside the *Life of Saint Louis*.

Such is this second category of classification, which I will call the category of the temporal, or of Caesar. (Our first category being the category of blessedness.) Within this second category of classification, it is Corneille who walks alongside Matthew, Mark, and Luke.

And within this first category of classification it was some Church notary of the diocese and court of justice at Rouen who without knowing it, unaware, ignored, known, unknown, walked alongside Matthew, Mark, and Luke. It was this poor, unfortunate man, a mere clerk, highly serious, extremely learned, a first-rate notary, (the *Trial of Joan of Arc* show all this), this unenlightened attendant to the greatest

---

<sup>131</sup> Allusion to Jesus' teaching in Matthew 22:21 (Pléiade fn.).

form of saintliness this world has seen, *doctus, peritus, caecus*,<sup>132</sup> who played the role, but in the opposing sense, from the opposite side, of Matthew, of Mark, and of Luke. It was this poor, unfortunate man who was the evangelist, a blind evangelist, and an evangelist in the opposing sense. It would be as if we had received the Gospel of Jesus Christ from the hand of one of Caiaphas' court clerks and by the *notarius*, by the man charged with taking down notes at Pontius Pilate's personal audiences.

And within this immense cathedral of souls there is room for so many other categories of classification. There is room for countless others capable of crossing each other and forming processions and dividing up into new processions like the innumerable ribs in the vaulting of this nave. Because saintliness itself is a limitless cathedral. And there is more of a luminous soaring up in the nave, but there is also more shadow in the side aisles and almost a type of silencing of light itself there. When light itself is quieted, there is then shadow. And there are all those pressed into the choir. (All those forms of saintliness, of faithfulness.) But the doorman himself is perhaps even more important a person. And there are saints aligned with many of the arcs, because they are the keystones. And they hold sway over so many of these vaulted arches and portions of arches. And there are many lines running through, parallel and perpendicular. And there are several planes. There are even many planes. But there is only one center. And a single stone that is at the center. And a single altar that is at the center.

---

<sup>132</sup> Latin: learned, skilled, blind (Pléiade fn.).

Matthew, Mark, and Luke were the notaries for Jesus. Joinville was the notary for Saint Louis. Corneille made himself the notary for Polyeuctus. And the notary for Joan of Arc was the poor, unfortunate clerk, the notary of his very accusers.

She was so perfectly poor that she had no choice but to make use of the notary of her judges and of her accusers.

She was so perfectly abandoned that she had no way of being recorded but by the hand of the notary of her own judges and accusers.

I see a third category of classification, which is that of categorizing according to the exercise of one's will. Many saints, and maybe most, a very large number of saints had to go to a lot of trouble in order to exercise their own will upon the world. The others, (these are mine), never even thought to do so, (never even had to give it a thought), God having instead exercised his will through them. Within this third category of classification Polyeuctus is a saint who exercised little of his own will, and perhaps even none, Joan of Arc is a saint who exercised none of her own will, Jesus is a saint who exercised little of his own will and perhaps even none.

(By exercise I mean here a self-exercising (in the sense of self-respect) an exercise of self, in order to distinguish it from an exercising by God. An exercising that comes from the one exerting, in order to distinguish it from an exercising coming from God.)

In this sense, Polyeuctus is a saint who exercised little of his own will and perhaps even none. What he offers straight away in the form of exercising a will is

death. Or rather the sole form of will he proposed to exercise was immediately death. And even this he did not propose for himself. It is a form of grace that he received, an instant crowning of grace:

*From the first breeze it conducts me to port.*

*Straight from my baptism it sends me to death.*<sup>133</sup>

*It conducts me, it sends me*, it is not only out of a sense of deference that he entrusts God with the whole of this *exercising*. But because it is indeed good thus. And it is in this way that it comes upon him. And comes upon him immediately. It is a grace that comes upon him. And that comes upon him instantly. He thus has his martyrdom close at hand.

And in this same sense Joan of Arc is also a saint who exercised little of her own will and it must be said really none and perhaps one day I will explain this point at more length. Her long calling, her long undertaking was from God, came entirely and purely from God, was completely given to her, was completely measured out from God. She did not introduce even a shadow of her own will in all of this. She had something quite different to do instead. It was more than enough to *stand firm* and to deal with this will that was exercised upon her by God. On the contrary, all of her efforts, her lofty undertakings, her mystical duty, her knowledge, and her guidance

---

<sup>133</sup> *Polyeuctus* (4.3.1229-30) (Pléiade fn.).

were geared at maintaining as well as she could her own proper strength in order to respond to the demands and to the exertions commanded by God. In this she would not have too much. Nor would she ever have enough. But what a series of exertions this will be. What she will have to occupy herself with is war, victory, a crowning, defeat, capture, prison, a trial, death, and the leadership and salvation of an entire people.

It is nothing but war and immense military training manoeuvres. One can struggle mightily in such manoeuvres, and suffer terribly, and perish, and die in a ditch from a heatstroke. It is death all the same. And yet it is not at all the same thing to have fallen one day along the heights of Morsbronn.<sup>134</sup>

Thus, within this saintliness of Joan of Arc one must sweep away the idea of any proper exercise of her own will, these paltry undertakings of man, just as she was to sweep clean the porch before her door: in order to allow the exercise of God's will to fully enter in.

She would have been a bad housekeeper. She would have been an unfaithful, thrifty housekeeper if she had diverted even the slightest bit of her strength for the pathetic undertaking of her own individual exercise of will. It is good to perform these immense manoeuvres. And one must indeed do them as well as possible. But

---

<sup>134</sup> Allusion to the Battle of Reichshoffen, August 6, 1870, which saw the defeat of the French under Marshal MacMahon and the heroic charge of the French cavalry (Pléiade fn.).

what can one say about he who would like desperately to do his twenty-one days starting from the day upon which war is declared. And who once arrived at Coulommiers would wish to go out every morning for twenty-one days to Montanglaust,<sup>135</sup> (where one could just as easily die as anywhere else), rather than embark on the third day for Nancy and beyond.

She would have been a faithless servant if she had not maintained untouched her meager life and if she had not strictly saved the little strength she had as a creature so that the thumb of God could in turn fashion this material.<sup>136</sup>

Within this third category of classification one can say that Jesus is a saint who exercised very little of his own will and perhaps none. Because one must not think of Jesus as a *summum* of *summums*<sup>137</sup> and as a *maximum* of *maxima* within every category of classification and within every category of saintliness. He did not weigh in in every classification. He did not weigh in in every category. Thus, the very center of the central nave in no way falls within the lines of the side aisles.

Jesus is the greatest of all saints, the prince and the first of all saints. But he is not the greatest of saints in the same way one is a mathematical or even a physical *maximum*. He is not the greatest saint by means of a physical summation, by a

---

<sup>135</sup> Reference to the training grounds at Coulommiers, garrison for the 276<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment to which Péguy was assigned (Pléiade fn.).

<sup>136</sup> Allusion to Exodus 8:19 and Luke 11:20, which speak of the “finger of God” (Pléiade fn.).

<sup>137</sup> Latin: summit of summits.

*maximum* accumulation, by operation of a mathematical summation. He is a living person, he has a distinctive face, of which the Gospels give us a precise portrait.

He is a single person, of two natures: he is man, and he is God. If one considers him starting from the head and moving down, in the order of metaphysical deduction, and also in the order of historical events, in a word if one considers him in the order of reality it must be said: He is God, and he is man. (And even he became man. He was made man. *Et homo factus est.*<sup>138</sup>) But if one considers him in the order of understanding, if one considers him in the order of access to us, in the order of access for us in starting from us, (that is to say in essence if one considers him in the order of the Gospels), one must say: He is man; and he is God.

Yet, when we say that God is holy and when we say that man, (and even Jesus Christ), is holy, we understand this word and I would add these two words in two very different senses. When we say of God that he is holy, or three times holy,<sup>139</sup> by this we mean that God is without reserve and without limitation the seat of every divine perfection. That is to say of all metaphysical perfections, of all absolute perfections. In this sense, God is truly an absolute, an absolute being, a metaphysical *summum, maximum, and optimum.*

But when we say, whenever we say that a man is holy, be it even Jesus Christ, we do not mean that he is without reserve and without limitation the seat of all perfections, if one can call them thus, the seat of all virtues of mankind itself. Because

---

<sup>138</sup> Latin: And he was made man (from the Apostles' Creed) (Pléiade fn.).

<sup>139</sup> Allusion to the *Sanctus* hymn sung during Mass as well as to the "Holy, holy, holy" of Isaiah 6:3 and of Revelations 4:8 (Pléiade fn.).

reserve and limitation are a very part of man. Especially limitation within time and space. And limitation within the categories of classification.

One must always remember, as I have said, that Jesus Christ took on the incarnation in its fullness and its exactitude. Without any limitation or reserve. Without the least fraudulent prudence or precaution. He became a man amongst men. He became a saint amongst saints. He thus took on the reserve and limitation that are necessarily a part of man. In particular, the limitations of time and space. And the limitations within the categories of classification.

As a man and as a saint he was thus in no way a physical or mathematical *summum* or *maximum*. Rather he was organic, he was a man, he was a saint, he was a distinct person, a historical figure of which the Gospels have given us an excellent portrait.

He is thus a man like and amongst all others, (the first). He is a saint like and amongst all others, (the first).

If Jesus the man and saint had been a mathematical and so to speak physical *summum* and *maximum* of mankind's virtues, we would have little need of the Gospels. Because we would have no need of a portrait. And we would have no need of a narrative account. Because a *summum* and a *maximum* are not things one can paint, are not things one can narrate. They are not things one can represent. They are things one calculates. They are things that come together in an absolute point of

perfection. *Non evenit neque devenit.*<sup>140</sup> *Caeli enarrant GLORIAM Dei.*<sup>141</sup> But they do not *tell the story* of God himself.

Jesus was one man amongst all the others and who left them their own distinctness. He was a saint amongst all the others and who left them their own distinctness.

He was distinct, individual, he was a person. He was not everyone all at once. He was faithfully and fully *a* man and *a* saint. He was not at all times nor at all places all at once. Thus, he in no way occupied, he in no way took over every category of classification.

He took his place amongst men, he took his place amongst saints. He took his place at their head, but he took his place nonetheless.

We place him at the head, but at the head of us and amongst us.

He is first amongst the stars in the heavens of saintliness. But the first star is that which shines the brightest, which shines first, not that which takes on the brilliance and the material form and so to speak the person and the being of all the others.

The first star is that which shines forth first with the same brilliance, with a brilliance of the same order. It shines forth with the first and very same brilliance. But it lets others shine forth for themselves.

---

<sup>140</sup> Latin: [they] neither come about nor become (in Vulgar Latin) (Pléiade fn.).

<sup>141</sup> Latin: The heavens declare the glory of God (from Psalms 19:1) (Pléiade fn.).

Thus, the king is first amongst and at the head of his barons, amongst and at the head of the common people. He is of his barons and he is the first of them. He is of his people and he is the first of them. He is not everyone all at once. He does not take on everyone. He leaves them their own distinctness.

Thus, Jesus is not everyone all at once. He does not take on everyone. He leaves them their own distinctness.

He left to Saint Louis the duty to show just what it meant to be the king of France and a great saint upon the throne, and he left to Joan of Arc the chance to show just what it meant to be a great saint at the head of an army.

One can say that the story and the figure of Jesus as a man and as a saint was metaphysically incalculable, as everything proper to man is. Because man's freedom, which is the greatest of all God's inventions, was at play for him as a man, and I would add that it played for him amongst everyone a preeminent role. One could hardly imagine that this freedom, which is the very core of man, and God's most beautiful creation within man, and the most irrevocable, and the most necessary, since it alone articulates perfectly with the freely offered nature of grace, that this freedom would be fettered in one man alone and that this should be Jesus.

It is by the full exercise of his freedom and of his will, it is by the full exercise of his free will that he made himself man, that he became man: *et homo factus est*. It is by the full exercise of his freedom that he took upon himself to be man, and thus it is by the full exercise of his infinite freedom as God that he took upon himself the freedom of man. It is by the full exercise of his freedom as Creator that he took upon

himself this created freedom. Every event of his life and his martyrdom and his death was freely consented to, voluntary, willed. Up to the very final moment he was free to not die for the salvation of the world. All of his life including up to the final moment *he was free to not fulfill the prophecies.*

It is for this reason that we had need of the Gospels. Here again Jesus had no desire to be extraordinary as a saint. He was an ordinary saint, the first in order, but in an order all the same. He had need of his notaries and chroniclers. He had need of the Gospels and that the Gospels should be just as Polyuctus had need of Corneille, as Saint Louis had need of Joinville, as Joan of Arc had need of that poor, unfortunate clerk who recorded the questions and the answers. (And when I say that poor, unfortunate clerk I am positioning myself from our point of view, because he undoubtedly was an extremely good clerk, well regarded, and who had a good position.) (He was an extremely good clerk and extremely well appointed.)

In this too Jesus wanted simply to be an ordinary saint, a man, a saint like the others and amongst the others. It was his wish that he have need of his witnesses, of his martyrs, of his notaries, of writers. He had no desire to be confirmed and remembered by means of a constant stream of miracles. By means of a permanent miracle. He had no desire to call upon any other means apart from those of man and of the stories and memory of man. He had need of *records*. It was his wish that he have need of scribes and bailiffs, like his saints, and of the entire judicial and historical apparatus. He wished to provide material for this entire judicial and historical apparatus. He wished to be this material and to be the object of a trial and

even of two, of a civil trial and of a religious trial. Of a trial of the Church and of a trial of the State. He wished to be this material and to be the object for exegetes and for historians, the material, the object, the victim of historical criticism. He wished to provide material for the exegete, for the historian, for the critic. He delivered himself over to the exegete, to the historian, to the critic just as he delivered himself over to the soldiers, to the other judges, to the other mobs. He delivered himself to those who brandished ferules just as he delivered himself to those who brandished rods and whips. It was the same tradition. It was the same delivery. He delivered himself to controversy just as he delivered himself to other insults. And the historians yell and shout at him both dead and alive just as the scribes and the court clerks would yell and shout at him there silent amongst them. If he had shied away from criticism and controversy, if he had avoided the exegetes, the critics, the historians, if his story had been taken out of the hands of the historian, if his memory had not entered into the general conditions, into the organic conditions of the memory of man, he would not have been a man like all others. And the incarnation would not have been complete and faithful. And one must always come back to this point.

For the incarnation to be full and whole, for it to be faithful, for it to be neither restricted nor fraudulent it was necessary that his story be a story of man, entrusted to the historian, and that his memory be a memory of man, conserved in its flawed, human fullness. In a word, it was necessary that his very story and memory themselves be incarnated.

It was necessary that his memory and his story be quarrelled over. That they be delivered over to the same vulgar humanity. It is the same exposition, of the same victim to the same executioners.

The incarnation would not have been complete, it would have instead been reluctant if in the following centuries, if in the whole of temporal eternity, it had not been delivered over, in story and in memory, to the same interrogation.

Throughout time it was necessary that, for the same category of men, and before the same category of men, there be forever the same man, fully man, entirely man, followed, laid bare, more than interrogated, pursued.

This is one of the aspects of the mystery of the incarnation.

For Jesus to be man, it was necessary that his very memory and that his story be the material and the object not of a miracle but rather of a form of permanent trial.

It was necessary that he survive just as he had lived. And it was necessary that he survive just as he had died. And it was necessary that he be temporally eternal just as he had lived and just as he had died.

It was necessary in a word that the life of Jesus be the life of a saint. And that it be laid bare to our old friend Babut as a simple Saint Martin.<sup>142</sup>

---

<sup>142</sup> Reference to Ernest Charles Babut's *Saint Martin of Tours* (Pléiade fn.).

At the head of the lives of all saints. Or the life of the first of all saints. A saint's life at the head of all others, but a saint's life all the same, like all others and amongst all the others.

And the Gospels are an inspired work; and a sacred book. In this is found their divine nature if I may say. But in their human nature they come to the fore and are of the same order of testimony and inscription, of commemoration and recording as the *Trial of Joan of Arc*, *Polyeuctus*, and Joinville's chronicles.

The Gospels are in large part the *Trials* of Jesus Christ.

If the *life* of Jesus had been simply the automatic realization, the mechanical accomplishment, and the methodical coronation of the prophecies we would have no need of the Gospels and Jesus himself would have had no need of them.

The Gospels stand as royalty at the head of the *Trial of Joan of Arc*, of *Polyeuctus*, and of Joinville.

Just as Jesus stands as royalty at the head of Joan of Arc, of Polyeuctus, and of Joinville.

The Gospels are for Jesus what the *Trial of Joan of Arc* were for Joan of Arc, what *Polyeuctus* was for Polyeuctus, and what *Joinville* was for Saint Louis.

Matthew, Mark, and Luke were for Jesus what that notary was for Joan of Arc, what Corneille was for Polyuctus, and what Joinville was for Saint Louis.

If Jesus had confirmed the prophecies by means of a type of automatic deduction, by a mechanical deduction, by a deduction that was purely and strictly deterministic, that is to say if Jesus had been determined and a determinist, that is to say if he had carried out his work within the frame and within the system of modern determinism, we would have no need of the Gospels. And he would have had no need of the Gospels. The prophecies alone would have been sufficient for him. And they would have been sufficient for us as well.

But he did not fulfill them as an automaton nor automatically, he did not produce them as a machine nor mechanically, he did not develop them nor cause them to play out as a determinist nor as a modern, he instead fulfilled them freely and as a man. He fulfilled them no doubt uniquely and eminently, but uniquely and eminently within the shared kingdom of freely offered grace and freedom.

In a word, it was in the order of man and in the order of the event; the movement from prophecy to Gospels was in the order of man and in the order of the event, and in no way in the order of logical, mathematical, physical, and supposedly scientific deduction, in no way in the determinist or modern order.

In a word, *the Gospels are not the prophecies rendered in a past tense*, transported as is, transported in whole, transported wholesale from the future into the past by the ministry of the present. It was not for Jesus and it was not enough simply

that Jesus move these prophecies, that he transport them, within time, that he render them into pasts. It was necessary that he achieve their realization, that he fulfill them.

The Gospels (or rather the material, the subject of the Gospels) were not only what becomes of the prophecies, they were the realization of the prophecies.

They were not simply past prophecies, they were prophecies fulfilled, that is filled full.

Not everything comes down to a simple change in time. And it is not simply a question of transforming time. It is not simply a question of changing the future into the future perfect. The prophecies are not simply a future and the Gospels are not simply a future perfect, a future rendered in a past tense. The prophecies are an announcement (and the Annunciation can precisely be considered as the last of all prophecies) and the Gospels are the consecration of this announcement.

And not simply a recording. Not simply the recording of what had been announced.

The prophecies are a long promise. The Gospels are not the recording of this promise. They are the consecration of the keeping of this promise. And at the very most one could say the recording of the keeping of this promise.

The Gospels are a fulfillment, a filling-full, a bringing into abundance of the prophecies. And not simply their enacting.

And this unique link that exists between the promise and the *keeping* of this promise is precisely the link that exists between Jesus and the prophets, between the

Gospels and the prophecies. It is not simply a linking in time. Take all the prophecies where they are in the future and put them into the past. From them you can make a tale, a narrative, an account, a story, a memory, and you still will not have come close to what the Gospels are. There is infinitely more in the future perfect than within the simple future. You can put the prophecies in past perfect and in the simple past, and you still will not have come close to what the Gospels are.

The Gospels are a bringing into fullness.

And not only is the link between the promise and the keeping of this promise not a simple linking in time, but it is not a simple causal link either. Not only does the bringing to bear of time upon it fail to exhaust this link, but also it is not exhausted by the coming of the determinative and decisive causation.

The keeping of the promise is not simply what comes later and moreover it is not simply what is caused.

The keeping of the promise is not simply what comes after and the promise is not simply what comes before. The keeping is not simply a replacement for what came before. The promise is not simply a cause and the keeping is not an effect. Just as the announcement is the announcement, the promise is the promise and the keeping is the keeping.

They are specific and proper to themselves.<sup>143</sup>

---

<sup>143</sup> This term *proper* indicates in Aristotle a superficial but determining characteristic of an object. Thus, Rabelais writes that “to laugh is proper to man” (*Gargantua*, “To the Reader”) (Pléiade fn.).

Thus, the linking of the promise to its keeping is not simply a chronological linking, and moreover it is not simply a causal linking, but rather it is a specific and proper linking.

Yet it is this very bond that serves to link the Gospels to the prophecies, and Jesus to the prophets.

The Annunciation can be thought of as the last of all prophecies and as the limit of all prophecy (and as the final term of the final point before the very beginning of its realisation). And it is not simply that prophecy which is most imminent. One can say that it is also the most lofty and the most essential of all prophecies. Just as Jesus was the final and the most lofty of all prophets, in the very same way the Annunciation is the final and the most lofty of all prophecies. It comes directly from God, by means of an angel, who is nothing more than a minister and a herald. It no longer comes from a prophet who is a man. And within the sequence it is truly that wonderful point where upon the promise is established the link to the keeping of this promise.

Thus, the Annunciation is a unique time within mystical history and within spiritual history. It is a culminating moment. It is a unique moment and as a specific moment, a punctual one. It marks the end of an entire world and the beginning of yet another. The end of the first mystical world and the beginning of another. And during one of those long, lovely days of June when there is almost no night, when there is almost no darkness, when the day stretches out its hand to a new day, there is a

moment when it is the last point of that day and at the same time the first point of a new dawn.

It is the last point of the promise and at the same time the very first point of the keeping of this promise.

It is the final point of yesterday and at the same time the first point of tomorrow.

It is the final point of the past and at the same time and in the same present moment the first point of an immense future.

In the order of the prophecies, in the sequence of the past, in the category of the promise and of the announcement, the Annunciation is indeed the last and the most lofty and the highest. It is immediate. And of all the ways of being announced, this form of greeting is that which indeed is more than tangential and more than immediate. Because one is already there. And in the order of the keeping of the promise, in the sequence of the concluded past, in the category of the Gospels, in the sequence of the past become present and future, it is the first point of dawn and the first point of presence. And even further and within this future itself it is the starting point, at the center and as if deep within this future, it is the point of departure for so many *Ave Maria*, the first point of the bow of the first vessel of this countless fleet, and of all those prayers Saint Louis must have said, and of all those prayers that Joan of Arc must have said.

In Latin and in French.

(And by a noble type of likeness the starting point in addition for countless *Salve Regina*.)

And just as a point and a peak and a pinnacle are narrow and finely tapered and have nothing of the width of their base, thus this broad promise, begun for a whole new world, made for an entire people, would in secret and in shadows result in a humble child, the flower and coronation of an entire race, the flower and coronation of everybody. This prophecy that had been upon the throne with David and Solomon, that had been open to an entire people, made public for everyone, proclaimed for an entire race, would result in a secret summit, a single flower, and a coronation of silence and of shadows. It would end up being a greeting confided to a single and humble daughter and by the ministry of a single angel. And an entire people had waited for Christ in a time in which he was not to come. But no one was waiting any longer when he was now going to come.

This greeting that was supposed to fill up the world was instead brought to a world reduced to a point of secrecy and to a single point of confidentiality.

In every royal house a new birth is awaited by an entire race, counted upon by an entire people. But in a single royal house the announcement of a king was a mere point of greeting, a secret and confided communication.

By means of a phenomenon of spiritual generation similar to phenomenons of physical generation and embodied within phenomenons of physical generation, and in the same way that a physical being cannot give rise to another physical being except by way of a certain point of being, by a center of race and a point of germination, thus

this spiritual and mystical being that appeared in the people of Moses could not give rise to that expression of spiritual and mystical being that would appear in the people of Jesus except by way of a secret point of passage, by way of a particular confidence, and by way of a specific point of mystical and spiritual germination.

The most immense of all cedars cannot give rise to another cedar, a cedar that would be even more immense, it cannot give rise to its own immense inheritor except by way of a specific point of being and of race that is not even the fruit of the cedar itself but rather the seedling that is within the fruit.

The most communal of all cedars cannot give rise to another cedar, a cedar that would be even more communal, it cannot give rise to its own communal inheritor except by way of a specific point of secrecy and of confidence that is not even the secret of the fruit itself but rather the secret of the seedling that is within the fruit.

Thus, that immense mystique of Israel had covered an entire people and this immense mystique of Jesus was to cover the entire world. But the one could not give rise to the other except by way of a specific point of being and of spiritual generation.

By way of a specific point of being and of mystical generation.

That immense and communal race of Israel could not give rise to this immense and communal and universal Christian race except in passing through a specific point of mystical secrecy, of spiritual confidence.

Thus, two immense worlds could only come into contact with each other by way of their peaks, the one turned over upon the other.

It is the theorem of angles in opposition to the summit.

An immense past could not give rise to an even more immense and universal future except by way of specific point of fecundity, by a specific point capable of generating the present.

A communal past could not give rise to an even more communal and universal future except by way of specific point of secrecy of the present.

The being of Moses could not give rise to the being of Jesus except in passing through a specific point of being.

The people of Moses could not give rise to the people of Jesus except by way of specific point of the people.

The immense prophecies could not give rise to the immense and universal Gospels except by way of a specific point that would bring them into contact and would be both the most lofty of prophecies and the dawn of the Gospels. And this point was precisely the point of this announcement made to Mary.<sup>144</sup>

Because when it comes to matters of this kind, when it comes to events and to promises, it is not enough that the day merely succeeds the day and the effect succeeds the cause and the event succeeds the announcement and the keeping succeeds the promise. It is yet necessary that all these both proceed from and are born from them.

---

<sup>144</sup> Allusion to Paul Claudel's play *The Announcement Made to Mary*, which debuted December 22, 1912 (Pléiade fn.).

The ministry of the present is not simply a ministry of date and time. It is not simply a chronological ministry.

The present is a specific point of its own proper nature. It is a point of nature and a point of thought.

The ministry of the present is not simply to watch as things pass by. It is to make them pass into being.

The ministry of the present is not simply to watch things as they age. It is to make them come of age.

It is not simply the spectator who watch time pass by. It is the center and the very agent itself at the point of the passage of time.

The point of passage is already at the same time the point of what has passed.

The present is not inert. It is not simply a spectator and witness. It is a point with its own proper nature and everything passes through this point and even Jesus himself, being man and temporal, passed through it, and the coming, the happening, the emergence of Jesus out of Moses, of the new law out of the old law, of the Christian world out of the ancient world, of grace out of nature, of the Gospels out of the prophecies, none of this can be fully assessed or fully grasped, nor fully understood, except for he who has come to terms with the singular coming, happening, and emergence of the future out of the past through the ministry of the present. What was truly free and proper to this experience of coming, and of emerging was likewise at the source of what was truly singular and proper to the

passing into being of this simple announcement, and to the keeping of this simple promise.

But I ask you at present which philosophy has for the first time in the history of the world brought our attention to what is truly proper to being itself and to the articulation of the present. Which philosophy if not the philosophy of Bergson. Which form of thought, for the first time in the history of thought itself, if not the thought of Bergson. Which philosophy, which form of thought not only first attracted our attention but first set out in advance of all others. Who saw that there lay the secret of the problem, that there lay the undoing of the mechanism itself, that there lay the undoing of determinism, that there lay the undoing of materialism. Who saw that at this point lay the secret to the entire struggle. And that as long as one considered the present as a simple date in time, like any other, amongst all others, after so many others, before so many others, one would continue to consider the present as today's past, as the immediate past, as the instantly past, as the limit of the past's up-to-here, as the boundary marking off the past's up-to-here, as the most recent and the most instant and the most at-the-limit of what has been recorded, or remaining itself caught up in the stiff bindings of determinism, of materialism, and of mechanism. Because one was taking the present backwards. One was taking this point in the present from the other side. Because one was taking it as the final line registered, one was taking it as the final point reached, as the final point of inscription. Rather than it being the first point not yet entered into, not yet decided, that point still in the process of being

reached, of being inscribed, the line in flight that one writes and inscribes. It is the point that does not yet have its shoulders bound up in the mummifications of the past.

Rather than considering the present in itself, rather than considering the present as present, in reality one was occupying oneself with a past present, a frozen and fixed present, an arrested, inscribed present, a present already determined.

A historical present.

Rather than considering this secret point that is the present, one was already occupying oneself with a history of the present, a memory of the present, that is to say one was focusing upon what the present would look like once it had become past. One was focusing upon what the inscription would be once it had become inscribed. And already thinking that it was arrested, that it was inscribed. One was focusing upon what life would be once it had become deadened. And already thinking that it was dead. One was focusing upon the present, one was focusing upon what freedom would be once it had been bound, once it had become bound. And already believing that it was bound.

But one did not say that it was bound because one had bound it. One said that it had come into the world like that. Since one had found it this way. One said that it had come into the world bound.

One did not say that the inscription was inscribed because one had inscribed it. One said that it had come into the world like that. Since one found it this way. One said that it had come into the world inscribed.

One did not say that life was dead because one had killed it. One said that it had come into the world like that. Since one found it this way. One said that life came into the world dead.

One did not say that freedom appeared to be bound because it was oneself who had gone over, because one had placed oneself at the other end of this bond, and that thus one was seeing it through this bond. One said that it *was* bound.

One did not say that the inscription appeared to be inscribed because it was oneself who had passed over to the other side of what was inscribed and that thus one was seeing it through its already having been inscribed. One said that it *was* inscribed.

One did not say that life was dead because it was oneself who had gone over to the other side, to death, and that thus one was seeing it, life, through death itself. One said, without knowing it, without knowing what it was one was saying, that it *was* dead. Because, all the while continuing to call it life, one was already speaking of it as something dead, one was already seeing it as something dead.

Rather than considering freedom, life, the present in that instant before entering into the eternal prison of the past, one was considering it right after, in the instant after it had just signed its name into the prison registers. And one said that it was a serf, and that it was a prisoner, and that it was locked up.

One believed that by going fast, that by pushing ahead one could with perfect impunity substitute a just recently passed for the present itself; and speak of a just recently passed as if it were the present itself; that one would see nothing amiss in all

this; that it would all come down to the same thing; that by pushing ahead quickly none of this would even been noticed. That by hurrying along one would arrive at the same time that one had left. That the interval would not exist. That freedom's last moment outside and the prisoner's first step within the prison, that freedom advancing through the prison door and the prisoner himself just signing his name in the register, that basically these were the same individual being and consequently and by a type of slippage that these were obviously and absolutely the same being.

And there was only being and reality that said otherwise, that this was not the same being.

It is always the same intellectual temptation, the same temptation beckoning one to the same type of slippage, to the same type of deep intellectual laziness. And since it is the past that retains, and especially since it is the past alone that retains, and as one believes that to retain is know better, and indeed since one believes that to retain is to hold on (better) and that to retain is to know better, it is thus always to the past that one looks.

Only we believe that if we grasp hold of its vast thickness, and the whole of its thickness, that it is indeed the past we then possess, whereas if we thin it out enough at the edge that butts up against the future, we end up with the present. We obtain the present.

That is to say: one believes that by taking hold of memory in its entire thickness that one thus ends up with history, but that by thinning it out enough at the

edge of where it comes into being, where it has just been born, one obtains again the present and the knowledge of the present.

That is to say: one believes that by taking hold of servitude in its entire thickness one indeed obtains determinism, but by thinning it out enough along that edge where it comes into being, where it has just been born, one obtains again freedom.

In this way, one ends up with a present that is a mere sliver of the past, at the very limit of the past. (At its limit as present, at its limit with the future).

One ends up with a knowledge of the present that is a mere sliver of history.

One ends up with a form of freedom that is a mere sliver of servitude.

Rather than the present being what is not yet passed, knowledge of the present being what is not yet history, and freedom, the free being what is not yet locked up.

The present is not the historical cut down to a minimal form of thickness. It is what is not historical at all.

The present is not what has been locked up for only a short time and whittled down in thickness (temporally, penally). It is what has not been locked up at all.

It is what is of an entirely other nature, of an entirely other type of being than the historical, of another being than the inscribed, of another being than the locked away.

And they, is it any wonder they should then think of these slivers of the past as indeed past, of these slivers of history as indeed history, of these slivers of servitude as indeed what is locked away, determined.

But perhaps it was this they wanted all along.

This is the terrible danger, this is the terrible authority of the past. For it alone maintains the registers. And since everyone has need of records, it is to the past always that one turns. It alone produces records. And it deals in them. And everyone loses his head and runs to the past to ask for some.

For it is the senior official in charge of all records. And since everyone believes that all knowledge and all understanding come in the form of records, one hurries in the direction of history's recordings.

It is here one arrives at the very heart of the sophism. On one hand, there can be neither records nor history except in the past. On the other hand, one posits, (more or less explicitly), that all knowledge and all understanding come in the form of records and history. After that one speaks of a knowledge and an understanding of the present.

And by this one means the very same knowledge and the very same understanding.

And thus, one implicitly equates the present with the past.

Is it any wonder then that one thinks of it as past.

But perhaps it was this that in some obscure way they more or less wanted all along.

Because this confusion of the present with the past, this reduction of the present to the past was the glue that served to hold in place determinism, materialism, and intellectualism.

And not only that. Not only are the records of the past indeed records, but they are permanent records. So all this need for rest and for quiet and for an end to all talk, which comes from fatigue and which is more properly called laziness and especially intellectual laziness, this need for the official, and the verified, and the authenticated, and the formally and duly recorded, the massive need for documentation and, on a further level, the massive need for officially stamped documents, all of this is in the service of this fraudulent substitution, and of this confusion, and of this reduction.

*To be left in peace*, the official slogan for all forms of civic and intellectual cowardice. So long as the present is present, so long as life is alive, so long as freedom is free it is bothersome, it wages war. One speaks of it; and it is necessary to speak of it. It is the very moment to do so. If only the present were past, then everything subsides.

One no longer hears talk of it.

And deep down it is what everyone wants.

To be left in peace.

This is the great temptation beckoning one to intellectual laziness, and to what one calls good sense, and to what one calls prudence. And to blessed thrift and to holy savings. And especially to morality, which always profits.

And which is also that which always wins out.

In order to truly understand what has happened one must think again of that old rule of moral conduct that one used to make so much of in our school days, *that*

*one must never put off until tomorrow what one can do today.* This was the rule of good sense, and of prudence, and of the good governance of self. This was the ideal rule. Something of the very essence of Franklin himself. You remember, Benjamin Franklin, who was said to be simple, the great hero, the great man of our primary school teachers, the greatest man ever according to them, the one true sage and scholar and the sole man of morals and true role model.

The one man put forth to imitate in every way.

In him one found, in him was gathered everything there was to know, and everything there was to say, and everything to do, and everything to imitate.

He was the ideal man.

And this rule was perhaps the ideal rule, *that one should never put off until tomorrow what one can do today.* It was the most ideal of those rules that were supposed to produce the ideal man and the ideal child. In the same way that the savings book was the ideal symbol and ideal instrument and the ideal book of that most ideal of institutions.

Because the savings book was the ideal institution and central institution and the pillar of the temple and that which summed up everything. That which was most Franklin.

And this rule and this savings book came in reality from the same mindset, which was to put aside money or time for tomorrow, rather than employing them calmly to create something today.

Then, in the same way that we as a people today are slowly perishing from our thrift and from our savings book, so too are we perishing intellectually from this rule that is a form of intellectual thrift and savings.

A moral rule of thrift in our work itself and in our daily schedule, a parallel and joint institution modeled on the rule of economic savings and thrift. The same institution expressed in two forms.

This was the great rule of our secular teachers. So too was it the great rule of our religious teachers. Because, as I have said in *L'Argent*, they had the same rules.<sup>145</sup>

And they had a shared moral code. And they were the same men.

Only if our secular teachers saw nothing amiss in this, our religious teachers could have seen and did not see that this wonderful rule, that this celebrated and exemplary rule of conduct went directly against perhaps the most profound and against the most proven of all evangelical rules and against the most important of rules ever given to man: *that each day has enough trouble of its own, cuique diei malitia sua*.<sup>146</sup>

Because if each day has trouble enough of its own, why take on today the trouble of tomorrow, why take on today the work of tomorrow, why take on today the wickedness of tomorrow.

---

<sup>145</sup> Reference to Péguy's *cahier* from February 16, 1913 (Pléiade fn.).

<sup>146</sup> Matthew 6:34: "Do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own" (Pléiade fn.).

Thus, our good teachers did not calculate or calculated poorly, and of a secret, common accord they taught this practical rule, (practical for schoolmasters), which makes children sensible and nations infertile.

Neither the ones nor the others figured out that it makes nations infertile. And our religious teachers did not work out that it was opposed and the most diametrically contrary to perhaps the most necessary and to the most simultaneously and affectionately distributed of rules found in the whole of the Gospels. To the rule that was perhaps fullest in compassion, to the rule most thoroughly bathed in mercy.

And that perhaps one should not think of tomorrow.

It is this same (intellectual) laziness, and this same prudence, and this same anticipation, and this same good sense (and this same taste for savings) that served to hold in place determinism, and materialism, and intellectualism. Because the savings of time is just as dangerous, being just as fraudulent, as the savings of money. It is just as inherently and profoundly infertile. It is just as inherently and profoundly false. *To pull ahead*, to lag behind, what utter falsehoods. To be on time, here is the only real truth.

How much more would I prefer this maxim of Mr. Benda, *that one should never take on for that day itself what one can do the following day*. How true is this

expression, how Christian and how apt; and how intelligently Bergsonian is our colleague here.

And really only here?

One has heavily criticized Mr. Bergson for his ideas on the fluid, the mobile, and what has less precisely and less accurately been called, being less Bergsonian and itself already too fixed in place, by the name of mobility. But the question is not to know whether it is practical or if it is not convenient. The question is to know if this indeed is what the real is like.

In reality, this entire need to firmly make up one's mind is an urge for idleness and the very expression of intellectual laziness. More than anything they want to be left in peace. More than anything they want to remain sedentary. This same temptation towards laziness, this same fatigue, this same need for tomorrow's peace of mind that makes them all bureaucrats is the very same need that also makes them intellectuals. In the same way that they spend their time trying to get appointed to various chairs within the university, not because one teaches from them, but because one sits *upon* them, so too do they want more than anything that their philosophy, their system of thought, their system of knowledge be there where they are seated.

What they call the proper ordering of thought, is precisely the peace of mind of the thinker.

Only it would be necessary to know if it was the knowable that was created for the convenience of the knower or rather if it is the knower who must adapt himself to the knowledge of the knowable.

And more generally if the world was created for the convenience of man.

It is not a question of knowing whether it is agreeable that the present should be fluid, it is a question of knowing if it truly is fluid in nature.

When they make their demands for stability, and statutes, what they call good sense, what they call science, what they call knowledge and what they call methodology, it is the peace of the sensible, it is the tranquility of the scholar, and the proper maintenance of the career of the knower that they are calling for. What they call scientific method is the method behind their own establishment.

What they call scientific progress is the progress of their own careers.

What they call security, stability, establishment is precisely the security, stability, and establishment of their own careers.

They are sedentary bureaucrats in search of peace and quiet and thus they have a philosophy of stability, a philosophy for the sedentary, for those wanting peace of mind, for bureaucrats.

Their system of thought, their mental mechanism, and their intellectual machinery is one of sedentary bureaucrats wanting only peace and quiet. And everything they oppose us with, this enormous need to firm up their gains, this massive quest to firmly make up their minds once and for all, this noble act of setting

up of structures and lovely statutes, these are merely rationale for sedentary bureaucrats who desire only peace of mind, and who are plunged safely into good careers, and who seek nothing but tranquility.

This is the same nonsense through and through that circulates, and the same distortions, and the same confusion, and the same form of fraudulent substitution, in psychology and in metaphysics, in morality and in economics. That one think of tomorrow. Our death. In psychology and in metaphysics this means, having passed through the present we consider only the moment after, the after-being, out of need for assurance and tranquility, and thus we see, we look upon the present as a recent past, as a just past, but as a past all the same. And we see it as bound, recorded, dead. It is the death of life and freedom. We see the being of the present as the being of the just past (of the recently past). In our moral conduct, we think only of the tranquility of tomorrow, rather than undertaking the work of today. In regards to the economy we are in the process of bringing about, and entirely for the sake of tomorrow's peace of mind, the destruction of an entire race.

In psychology, in metaphysics we sacrifice the true present, the real present to the instant just past, to the being of the just past, and in this way, we reduce the true present and true being to a state of the past. In moral matters, we sacrifice today to tomorrow. In economic matters, we sacrifice an entire race to tomorrow's peace of mind.

It has always to do with the system of retirement. It is always the same system of rest, of peace of mind, of a definitive, funereal consolidation.

They think of nothing but their retirement, that is of the pension they will one day get from the government, no longer for doing anything, but for having done something (here again we see the same veering off course of time and chronology, this same dropping down a notch, this same transfer of the present into the past). Their dream, if one may speak of it in this way, is an ideal form of government, a form of government as hospital, an immense, definitive, funereal resting place, without worries, without thoughts, without race.

An immense old people's home.

A rest home for the retired.

Their entire life is nothing for them but a slow progress towards this retirement, a preparation for this retirement, a justification of this retirement. Just as the Christian prepares himself for his eventual death, the modern man prepares himself for his eventual retirement. But in order to enjoy it, as they say.

They would like also to prepare the whole world for this retirement. Their whole thought is to coax the human mind into a state of taking its retirement and of enjoying this retirement. Or, as they still say, of *reaching* one's retirement.

This is the general mentality, it is a mentality of retirees and pensioners. The entire question unfortunately is to know whether the human mind is indeed a

pensioner, a sedentary bureaucrat, a professor, and if it is at home in this form of government as hospital.

And if the world is destined to become an immense old people's home.

To think of retirement is the very limit and the maximum possible way of thinking of tomorrow. To sacrifice everything to retirement is the very limit and the maximum possible way of sacrificing today to tomorrow. It is its supreme and most developed form. It is the very form itself of all this, and since it is a question of establishment, it is so to speak the definitive form. It is death's maxim and the ultimate expression of the desire for tranquility.

In a similar matter, economics becomes a type of magnification of this moral code, and this moral code in turn is like a codification of certain aspects of psychology and metaphysics. This monstrous need for tranquility that surges up from the barren infertility of an entire people, from the complete destruction of an entire race is but a magnification on an enormous scale of this monstrously familiar need for moral tranquility, which pushes us to always think of the following day and to sacrifice today to tomorrow, and this familiar moral need is nothing in itself but the codification of this monstrous need for tranquility that in psychology and metaphysics makes us constantly sacrifice the present to the moment of the just-past.

What takes place in psychology and in metaphysics becomes codified in morality and magnified in economics.

What takes place in psychology and in metaphysics materializes in the form of a moral code and is blown up in economic matters.

Thus, we see within economics that which we could just as well see in morality, and in psychology, and in metaphysics, if only we had better eyes. Yet it is far more magnified in economic matters: namely that this tranquility, which is the ultimate goal of all intellectuals, and that to which all modern individuals pledge allegiance, is fundamentally a principle of infertility. It is always the race that pays the price. In order to have peace and quiet tomorrow, we have no children today. But this image of the abdication and destruction of a race, when projected onto a scale much larger, and one much less polished, when magnified at the level of economic and civic life, is merely the image of the shared moral, intellectual, psychological, and metaphysical life of a nation. In order to have peace and quiet tomorrow, today we take on good sense, foresight, and barrenness. In order to have peace and quiet the moment just after, we turn the present into a time of good sense, of foresight, of infertility, a dead and funeral time, a time past.

Second, we see in economic matters, in civic matters, on the level of government, what we could just as easily see in moral matters, in psychology, in metaphysics, on the level of the soul and on the level of being, if only we had better eyes: namely that tranquility, which is the ultimate goal of all intellectuals, and that to which all modern individuals pledge allegiance, is fundamentally a principle of

servitude. It is always freedom that pays the price. It is always money that is the master. In order to have peace and quiet tomorrow, (and peace is obtained only through money), we abandon, we sell off our freedom today. In order to have a guaranteed retirement, (that is to say guaranteed money for when one is old) one does not say, one does not put down in writing what one thinks, that which one has to say and has to write, what everyone knows, yet what no one dares say or put down in writing. In order to have peace and quiet in one's old age, today one cannot be a free man. The entire modern world is a world that thinks only of its eventual old age.

Rather than thinking of these young days that are the days of this race. And of the race to come.

And out of all this comes this universal barrenness and this universal servitude.

But this economic and civic servitude is merely the enlargement, the magnification, the transfer, the projection onto the plane of economic and civic matters, onto the plane of the people and of the state, of a moral and intellectual, a psychological and metaphysical servitude. In the same way we sacrifice in economic matters the productivity and freedom of our entire working careers for the guarantee of a government-assured retirement, so too do we sacrifice in moral matters the productivity and freedom of today for the tranquility of tomorrow, so too do we sacrifice in psychological and metaphysical matters the productivity and the freedom and the fluidity and the presence and the glorious instability of the present for the tranquility of that moment coming just after.

Then we arbitrarily and fraudulently transport ourselves to this moment just after so that, the present having now become past, we can feel at peace there as if in the past.

Such is the mechanism, such is the secret of this forward-looking, of this fraudulent form of substitution. And it is this very act of fraud that is at the center, concealed deep within all the immense forms of intellectual and modern fraud taking place in metaphysics, in morality, in economic and in civic matters. Given how comfortable one is in the past, since it being past one sees it as definitive and unable to be undone, it is forever a question of turning the present itself, in all its fluidity, in all its productivity, in all its freedom, into a past. For this to occur, we must transport ourselves to the moment immediately following, instantaneously following, to the moment just after, and from there we look upon the present, where one still is, as a tranquil past.

As past that is sterile and as a past that is bound.

In this system of the modern world one always wants to draw one's pay from both sides, to accumulate the most contradictory and the most incompatible of advantages. To adopt at will, and for one's own base needs, the most contradictory of situations, and the most irreconcilable. One wants all very well to be in the present, one is indeed forced to be there, and one sees no way in which it could be otherwise.

Yet at the same time one wants to be in the future so that one's present might become a past.

Once it is past, one calms down.

More than anything we want to enjoy the full benefits of this sterile tranquility, of this servile tranquility, of this dead and funereal tranquility.

The modern and intellectual world will do all it can, (and indeed has done all it could), in order to avoid productivity, freedom, and life, in order to escape this present moment that is productive, free, alive. It has done all it could to avoid the fluidity and presence of the present moment itself.

When the Bergsonian revolution thus installed itself at the very heart and in the secret depths of the present it thereby and by this very fact installed itself at the very heart and in the secret depths of this mechanism of baseness, and of sterility, and of servitude, and of death for an entire world. It took root in the very heart and in the secret depths of morality and of economics, of civic life and of metaphysics, and by the same action with which it installed itself at the very heart of our psychology.

By dismantling this forward-looking machinery installed in the present, it likewise dismantled every form of mechanism, and all of materialism, and all of determinism, and all of intellectualism.

In breaking apart, in blowing up time within this point of presence, within this point of the present, by saving so to speak and by keeping intact the presence of the present, it has exploded all of time, which was the rod of mechanism, and the rod of materialism, and the rod of determinism and of intellectualism.

The long, straight rod of our servitude.

That is to say the Bergsonian revolution is everywhere, and that it is itself everywhere present. Installed at the very heart of the present it not only holds sway

over our psychology. By this same process, by a corresponding process of projection and magnification it holds sway over all productivity, freedom, life, and *presence* in moral and economic matters, and in civic and metaphysical matters.

That is to say it is the Bergsonian revolution that has along the entire line of battle destroyed intellectual and modern sterility, servitude, and death. *Per totam aciem*,<sup>147</sup> along the entire line of battle and by a single and same action, by an instantaneous action it has destroyed all of materialism, all of determinism, all of mechanism, all of intellectualism.

That is to say that it is present everywhere. It alone has broken the seals and it has broken every seal. It alone has freed us; and it has freed us from every servitude. Everywhere it has rediscovered the present. Everywhere it has reestablished, reintegrated the presence of the present. Everywhere it has reinstalled this point of presence of the present. A single undoing made possible this immense, this universal liberation. Because a single point of machinery had established and was holding in place this universal servitude.

Everywhere it has taught us once again to put off until tomorrow. This is the very wisdom of life itself. It is freedom, good health, a sense of measure, and it is productivity. It is a being in its proper measure, and it is a soul that is fresh. To put off until tomorrow the worries of tomorrow. To put off until tomorrow the tranquility of tomorrow. To not wish to be tranquil in advance. To not look forward to tomorrow.

---

<sup>147</sup> Latin: along the whole line.

To put off until old-age the worries of old-age. To put off until old-age the tranquility of old-age. To not sacrifice today and the freedom and the productivity of today for the tranquility of tomorrow. To not sacrifice one's entire life and the freedom and the productivity of an entire life for the tranquility of old-age. To not sacrifice one's entire world for the artificial, anticipated, fraudulent ageing of this world.

To not grow old today: it ages enough already as it is. To not make life itself old: it ages enough already as it is. To not push an entire world into old-age: it ages enough already as it is.

Here is the moral, and the economic, and the civic lesson in all this. To not abandon today in favor of tomorrow. To not abandon an entire life in favor of old age. To not abandon an entire world in favor of a growing-old.

He who puts aside, who *saves up* money for his old age is prodigal through and through, and poorly so. Because he employs, he gives up his freedom, his productivity, which are the true goods in life. He sells them off, and what he puts aside is precisely the cost of this transaction.

Thus, an entire people can employ its freedom, give up its productivity, sell off its race, all to buy into the government's system of annuities. But when there are no longer a people or a race, where will that leave the government.

And similarly, in our psychology and metaphysics, to not enlist, to not abandon the present, which is the locus of being, and the locus of freedom, and the locus of life, and the locus of productivity. To not make it into a preemptive past, a

premature tranquility, a rest in times of effort, a holiday in times of work, a retirement in times of activity, a stopping in times of movement, a peace in times of war, a death in times of life. To not sell off the present--the fluidity, the freedom, the productivity of the present in order to put aside for the moment just after the little one obtains. To not save up, to not scrimp on the present.

One always says save up, to set aside. But one should ask to set aside what. Here it is necessary to call upon the theory of money and the mathematicians will understand me before I even begin to say a word. Money being within the transaction of purchase the counterpart of what it serves to buy, every transaction with money is contraindicated and contraindicative, every transaction with money is counterpoised, every transaction with money is a counter-transaction, a transaction opposite of, contrary to the corresponding action of the object. He who sets aside money is the squanderer of that which he has sold in order to get this money. The miser is prodigal. He alone is prodigal, truly prodigal. He who is miserly with money is prodigal with what it is he sold in order to get this money. He is profligate and prodigal with his soul, which he has sold for nothing, for money.

And on the contrary, it is the charitable man who is the true miser and who piles up goods, I have said this plenty in the language of poetry. And it is the miser who is extravagant. And it is the extravagant who is miserly.

This is the most profound of all the teachings found in the Gospels, that most everywhere present in the Gospels, and certainly that for which Jesus evidently cared most.<sup>148</sup>

We are so thoroughly under the reign of money, it is so much the Antichrist and the master present everywhere in the modern world that we presuppose (casually, by convention) its name within our speech. Within our expressions. When we fail to give a name, we know it is it we are speaking of. When we fail to say otherwise, we know it is there. When we fail to say a word, that's it.

Whenever we fail to give a name, it is it that we designate. Whenever we fail to fully disclose, it is it we are disclosing.

Whenever we think, it is it that we think upon.

We say: economize, save up, set aside as if these were absolute actions. They are ready-made expressions and do not mean to economize, save up, and set aside just anything. They mean to economize, save up, and set aside money, that is the counter-object, the counter-value.

Only if were to pronounce it from one end to the other, if we were to say the entire expression, if we were to say to economize money, to save up money, to set aside money, we would at least be somewhat forewarned, we would at least know somewhat what we were saying. And what we were talking about. Yet, more than anything it is necessary to avoid knowing at all what it is one is saying. So, we employ these neutral verbs, and make no mistake. Being neutral they have an air of

---

<sup>148</sup> See for example Luke 12:16-21 and 33-34 (Pléiade fn.).

virtue about them. And in this way, they serve to cover up greed of the most sordid nature.

He who sets aside, absolutely, and who has a virtuous air about him, he who economizes, absolutely, he who saves up, absolutely, he who thus sacrifices the present for the future and seeks to push an entire world into retirement does not store up strength for a later time, he stores up for a later time that for which he has exchanged his strength.

It is as opposite, as contrary within general accounting as the entries for *debits* and *credits* on the two pages of an accounting book.

He stores up goods, as they say. No, he stores up that for which he has sold his material goods.

It is a counter-accumulation, the amassing of a counter-treasure. *You shall not store up* treasures for yourselves here on Earth.<sup>149</sup>

We say it innocent enough. We employ innocent and seemingly virtuous verbs. And because we omit the direct object, because we do not give any thought to whether the implied direct object is a thing, or strength, or money, which is a counter-object and a counter-force, these supposedly virtuous verbs in reality conceal acts of villainy and the most sordid greed.

It is one of those meaningless little errors, almost entirely verbal and grammatical, almost entirely one of vocabulary, that pervert an entire world.

---

<sup>149</sup> Matthew 6:19 (Pléiade fn.).

It is one of those little abuses of language, which look like nothing, whose mechanism is extremely simple, and which corrupt an entire world.

And one must recall here everything our teacher Bergson has written and constantly said regarding the uses and abuses of language. And thus, we find our teacher everywhere, not only in those serious realms and in the depths of thought but at every instant within the modes<sup>150</sup> and within the working of everyday life.

Thus, this hardening introduced by money, which has taken over all of modern society, this immense state of corruption, this universal replacing of supple strength with the rigidity of money has its economic, civic, moral, psychological, and metaphysical point of origin in the hardening of the present, in this ossification, in this mummification of the present that has produced all of materialism and intellectualism and determinism and mechanism. Everything has come about, all of this immense and universal corruption has come from this action of setting aside and from this little savings book. All of it has come out of this spirit of savings that constantly pushes us to set aside the present. And it turns out the best way of setting it aside was to push it right into the past.

The prior moment thus seemed the safest bet.

They are so proud of all their little savings books. What a sad little collection they make though.

---

<sup>150</sup> The term *mode*, which refers to ways or states of being, is opposed in Spinoza's *Ethics* to *attributes*, which constitute the essence of a substance (Pléiade fn.).

Not only do they brag about them but they are constantly holding them up everywhere as an example and as a model. They are indeed the pride of moralists. And their chief form of support and their great fall-back argument. They do not see that quite the contrary they are the confirmation and the repository of this corruption of an entire people. And the daily entries made by an entire people in their official savings books are simply the money they have received for selling out their race.

This entire process has its point of origin, this entire shift consisted at first in this act of hardening, of rigidifying this specific point of the present moment. As long as it remained supple, free, living, liberated, gracious, productive it could not be recorded in their accounts. It would not lend itself to calculation. It could in no way be inscribed within this system of corruption. Once hardened, rigidified, once it had become a hardened moment in the past, once it had become a bound and lifeless point in the past, a dead point, a point of servitude, a costly point and a point of disgrace and of sterility then they could start to put it down within their system of accounts. It thenceforth lent itself to calculation. It became part of this same order of measurement and of the same nature as their hardened, rigidified form of money. It could now become an item within this same order, itself a comparable unit, an item that could enter as a unit into every transaction within this immense system. It could at last be fully registered within this immense and total system of corruption.

As long as the present remained supple, it was not monetizable, comparable, saleable, corruptible. But once hardened, once fixed in time, it became all this. What is proper to a unit of measurement is that it is fixed.

As long as the present remained present, one could not bring it into the world of commerce, it was not negotiable. Once past, I should say once they had turned it into the past, once it had become a calculable result it became negotiable, it could then enter into the world of commerce.

One can only pile up money. It became a unit of size and scale of the same nature and the same order.

When one thus gives grammar-school kids their first savings book (rather than a copy of the Gospels), one is doing truly and diametrically the opposite of what one used to do when one would give them the Gospels, one gives them what is diametrically contrary to what one used to give them when one would give them the Gospels.

It is not a few books of debauchery that occupy in the modern world that secret point of resistance that the Gospels do within the Christian world. It is not a few books of depravity that are the antithesis of the Gospels, the secret point most diametrically contrary to the secret point of the Gospels: rather the secret point of resistance of the modern world, that which in the modern world is the antithesis of the Gospels, the secret point most diametrically opposed to the secret point of the Gospels in the Christian world, that which in the modern world is what the Gospels are in the Christian world, is not a handful of debauched and depraved books (none would have that force), but rather the savings book.

Books of debauchery are never really clever. They are never really strong. They have been around forever. The savings book, (in all its forms, and especially in its very own form), is that invention proper to the modern world.

Books of debauchery could only ever produce sinners. The savings book produced the modern.

We are perishing from this hardening, from this glut of good sense, and from this greed. Greed has without a doubt become the principle sin. It is at the heart of the modern world. Money is at the heart of the modern world. It is everywhere within it. Both at the heart and everywhere else it is master.

It is the savings books that clashes most directly with the Gospels. It alone is strong enough. Is it not the opposite of debauchery and seemingly of sin. Is it not honor and virtue in the official sense. Is it not honor and virtue in the officially recorded sense. Is it not the symbol and the handbook of the most perfect virtue. Is it not the very foundation for the institution of the family.

No, it is the first wedge driven into its stock, the symbol and the handbook and the first instrument of rigidification, of hardening unto death, of the desiccation of the family and of the race.

Both the arid barrenness of the heart and that of the race, which are the two immense and awful modern inventions, the two principal modern forms of the devastation of the world itself, that is to say both the spiritual barrenness and the temporal and physical barrenness come from this same point of origin, from this same

point of desiccation and of hardening and of rigidification that for the modern world began precisely with the desiccation and rigidification of the present.

Everything came out of this. Everything proceeded from this. Because if the civic, the economic, and the moral are not the magnification and the enlargement of the psychological and the metaphysical, if they are not their projection onto a larger and less polished plane, it is only because they proceed directly from them.

Everything comes out of this. Everything proceeds from this point of the present. All economic, civic, moral, and metaphysical matters operate according to the manner in which they treat this point that is the present. Immediately from this do they get their initial sense of direction. And are they themselves determined. They will be able to more or less prosper, they will be able to more or less flower, each in their own way. But the direction that they take is determined and thus they themselves are determined in relation to this initial point of origin.

Tell me how you treat the present and I will tell you what kind of philosophy you are.<sup>151</sup>

They will then be able to more or less succeed, each in their own way. But it is out of this initial point that they are sorted.

And once departed from this point there is no starting over. If you bind the present, then everything is bound. If you keep the present free, only then can other forms of freedom in turn be accommodated.

---

<sup>151</sup> Allusion to the proverb: “Tell me who your companions are, and I will tell you who you are” (Pléiade fn.).

Or provided for.

If you sterilize the present, then everything is sterile, everything is empty. If you keep the present productive, only then can other forms of productivity in turn be accommodated. Or provided for.

Out of this come all possible paths and he who has entered onto a path can no longer leave it. He can go more or less far on this path, but he cannot change his path. *Mutare viam*.<sup>152</sup> He has committed himself. He can more or less succeed in the path he takes. But it is this path that he must follow to the end.

If you corrupt the present. If you rigidify this supple point of the present in order to make it into a stiff point, a lifeless unit, a unit entirely the same as a rigid, lifeless unit of money, and thus comparable, and thus exchangeable with it, then everything is corrupted and the world just as soon with it, the entire world falls into the realm of commerce.

From this point of the present, from this point of rigidification and of hardening unto death, from this point of greed and of corruption have come all forms of greed and corruption. Because greed and corruption are conjoined. They are bound together. One has a tendency to believe that greed is a type of constriction and corruption a dissolution. This is just appearance. And a false appearance. And a fraudulent appearance. Nothing is so hardened (or rigid) and so dessicated of heart (and of race) as are the corrupt and the dissolute. And the miser, what would he be

---

<sup>152</sup> Latin: Change the way.

able to pile up, if he had not sold something, (apart from his soul), if he was not always engaged in selling something. That is, what could he amass, what could he pile up, if he was not incessantly corrupt.

Otherwise, where would his money come from. To be a miser. To accumulate.

If he was not always engaged as the seller of something.

And again, we thus see that the greed and corruption of the modern world on one hand and on the other its materialism and its mechanism and its determinism and its intellectualism are themselves bound together. They are different manifestations but they are in no way manifestations foreign to one another. And they are manifestations that are barely separated from one another. They proceed both the ones and the others, they come all of them from this same point of hardening that is the hardening of the present. The former take place within the order of the heart, the latter within the order of thought. But what would a thought be without any heart. And what would a heart be without the radiant clarity of thought.

Greed is a hardening of the heart that comes from this hardening of the present. Corruption, which has the appearance of a slackening and of a dissolution, and which is in fact a slackening of mores and a dissolution of rule, or if you prefer a slackening of rule and a dissolution of mores, comes in reality from a certain preliminary hardening, from a certain fundamental hardening. It can only play out, it can only come into being because certain elements that were once supple, free, living, productive, non-interchangeable, non-homogeneous, non-exchangeable, non-buy-

and-sellable, not countable or calculable, and non-corruptible have become, have been made rigid, servile, inert, dead, sterile, and as a result interchangeable, homogenous, comparable, exchangeable, buy-and-sellable, countable and calculable, corrupt.

When all points of value have become fixed and rigid, it is then that the liquefaction of corruption can go forward.

In this way, the liquefaction of the cadaver can only begin once the living cells (those points of life) have been bound together in the hardening of death.

As long as these cells remain souple, as long as they remain free, living, productive, non-interchangeable, and non-corrupted, as long as they continue to bath in the liquid of life they are not yet ready for the hardening and the liquefaction of death that follows. It is only when they have become rigid, inert, dead, unproductive, and so to speak interchangeable, that is to say corrupted, that they become at the same time ready for the liquefaction of death.

As long as these elements remain supple and *present* they are not yet ready for the liquefaction of death. It is necessary that they initially be made inert and stiff. It is necessary that they initially and organically be made past.

It is necessary that the hardening of death have preceded the liquefaction of death, and in this way liquefaction is a phenomenon born out of hardening.

In the same way, it is necessary that a certain hardening have preceded the liquefaction of corruption, and thus corruption is a phenomenon born out of hardening.

It is necessary that a certain hardening have preceded the slackening of rule and the dissolution of mores.

Both the slackening of rule and the dissolution of mores are a phenomenon born out of hardening.

And the liquefaction of the modern world is a phenomenon born out of hardening.

This slackening, this dissolution, this liquefaction, are indeed a result of certain supple and thus non-monetizable, not countable, not calculable, non-measurable elements having instead become stiff, habituated, countable, measurable, calculable, and thus monetizable units.

Everything having to do with buying and selling, everything that has to do with commercial forms of exchange, everything that is corrupt has its root in this process of valuation. Every form of valuation, commercial and otherwise, is a form of measurement. Everything that has to do with measurement is rigid and stiff.

The meter is fundamentally and by definition a form of inflexibility.

When certain points of scale and of value, when certain points of dignity, (social, moral, economic, civic, psychological, metaphysical), when certain points of presence and of suppleness have become stiff, and certain points of the present have become past, when they have become deadened, when they have become mere points and objects of measurement, then greed and corruption can begin to go forward conjointly. They now have, both of them, their material and their instrument. This point of measurement is their point of support as well as their point of departure.

The one can hoard up and the other can waste away, it is one and the same.

The one can pile up and the other can dissolve away. It is always the same operation.

The one can heap up and the other can break apart. It is always the same question of buying and selling.

The one can pack in and the other can share out. It is always the same process of valuation and measurement.

The one can sort out and the other can unsettle, the one can compel and the other can seemingly release. It is always the same operation of hardening.

It is always a form of trade, I mean a putting into circulation, into the world of commerce. It all comes down to this question. What is marketable? And what is not marketable? It all comes down to knowing what in a certain world can be sold and traded and what cannot. A given world, (the ancient world, the Christian world, the pagan world), (the modern world), each and every world will be judged by what it considered to be marketable and what was not.

All the degradation of the modern world, that is to say all the low-price obsession of the modern world, all of its cost-cutting cheapness comes from the fact that the modern world has opened up to the market certain values that the ancient world and the Christian world never allowed to be bought or sold.

It is a universalizing of this market logic that has brought about this universal form of degradation.

But this universalizing of the market itself arises out of an initial point of universal hardening.

The present, in its very essence, was not something that could be bought or sold. Yet if one kept it out of the market then all the rest remained closed off to its forms of buying and selling. It was the initial point of hindrance, the original point of hindrance. So, in order to make the present marketable, one simply put it into the past. And just as soon then one could turn over all the rest to the workings of the market.

And they did not leave a thing behind.

It was only the present that had stood in the way.

To buy and sell one must be able to count. To be able to count one needs a unit of measurement. That is to say one needs a fixed measure of scale and size that does not vary in any way. That is to say one needs a reliable point of stiffness.

By its very essence the present was incapable of being this point of stiffness. It was incapable of being this fixed point of measure that does not vary. It was incapable of being bought and sold.

And not being marketable it blocked all other forms of marketing, because it was at the point of origin of all other forms of buying and selling. It was the initial door through which one had to pass.

It is for that reason that one made it into the past. Instantaneously after, all other forms of buying and selling opened up.

It is not by chance that the modern world is on one hand a world of greed and corruption and on the other a world of mechanism, of intellectualism, of determinism, of materialism, and of associationism. The two groups are themselves bound together. Both the one and the other arise, in heart and in mind, out of this same point of hardening of the present.

The head is not so foreign to the heart, and it is again intellectuals who, having no heart themselves, invented the idea that the head is a stranger to the heart. This is what I have said in another form in a prior essay *Note sur M. Bergson et la philosophie bergsonienne*. There is a moving quality inherent to thought and there is a brilliance and clarity within the workings of the heart. There is even a moving quality within reason itself. There is a poignant atmosphere inherent to the workings of thought and an atmosphere of knowledge within the heart.

Greed and corruption are a form of intellectualism and materialism and mechanism and determinism and associationism of the heart. Intellectualism and materialism and mechanism and determinism and associationism are forms of greed and of corruption of thought. These two groups of attributes of the modern world, (and it will escape no one that I use attribute here in a more or less Spinozist sense), are not only bound together but arise both of them out of this same point of hardening of the present. Within this germ of the present, within this initial source point were found both the freedom of heart and the freedom of thought, the productivity of heart and the productivity of thought. An identical and then parallel movement of the same origin, (in precisely the sense that Spinozist attributes arise from a same origin and

then become indefinitely parallel to one another), an identical, dual movement, arising from the same point of origin, and in turn becoming parallel, took place within these two conjoined groups, within that of the heart and that of the head. Greed and corruption thus proceeded to bind all the way down to present all basic freedoms and all fundamental productivity of the heart. Intellectualism, materialism, determinism, mechanism, associationism proceeded to bind all the way down to the present all basic freedoms and all fundamental productivity of thought. In an initial and so to speak isolated moment of hardening each of these two groups managed to choose that form of hardening uniquely cut out for them and that they would need going forward. The present was so thoroughly the key to every situation and the command center and the decision point for the entire battle that simply by binding it, by bringing about its hardening one instantly opened up and made possible for all the rest to be bound and hardened in turn. Out of this single, initial point of binding, out of this single, initial point of hardening, each of these two groups was then able as it were to bring about all the other subsequent forms of binding and hardening that came down to them.

Thus, the world proceeded, (I mean the modern world), some by calculation, others, no doubt more numerous, quite inadvertently. Because it is a question really of knowing whether man is just bad or if he is instead just weak and stupid. And in any case just lazy and careless. They thought they were looking at the present. But they were looking at the most recent past. And they thought they were dealing with the present, but they were dealing with the recording of the present. The present's history.

The present's memory. The present's force of habit. A beginning of the past. A point of beginning of the past. A point of beginning of history. A point of beginning of memory. A point of beginning of habit. They thought they were contemplating the event they were documenting, but they were contemplating another, a same, a falsely same event that they had documented.

And that was able to go on a long time. And that was able to go on forever. Indefatigable reality would try endlessly to produce the present. And this tireless recording, this tireless history, this tireless memory, this tireless force of habit would again and again turn it into the past.

Here one sees all too well, and yet in another sense, that habit is literally a second nature. It has as much strength and as it were command over things as nature itself. All the while that reality and that nature are busy causing the present to well up into existence, history and memory and habit are tirelessly at work turning it into the past.

Like a beautiful river that has been diverted to feed a canal and that one has forced to flow over a spillway. All it took was to lay out the canal and to build the spillway once and for all. From that moment forward everything that the source produces is channeled through the canal and made to pass over the spillway. One knows very well that it is not the canal that produces it and that the spillway simply takes it in. One knows this, yet one no longer gives it a thought. One is used to it. One sees only the canal that is full and the spillway that pours forth water. And because it

pours forth water one believes in some vague way, one believes in a customary way that it is producing all this.

All the small trickles of water from the source, all these tiny rivulets that flowed freely from this source have now become and are no longer anything but these immense and regular and horizontal and calculable sheets of water that flow inexhaustibly over and through the spillway. And one no longer gives a thought to the source nor to the tiny streams of water originating from it. One no longer sees anything but these immense sheets of water and this immense flow and this immense spillway.

It is the spillway that now seems to be producing it all. And the more the source produces, the more the spillway takes on the appearance of producing it all. The more the source produces for the river, the fuller the canal gets.

Thus, once a certain mechanism of thought is established, once a certain path of canal is laid out and a dam erected, everything that the present then produces, everything that the source of the present causes to well up is instantly captured. And the more the present produces, the fuller this canal and this reservoir of memory, of history, and of habit become in turn. The more the present produces, the more it all passes over this immense spillway and the more this spillway itself appears immense.

All it takes is for a certain mechanism to be established just once. And then it will be in place once and for all. Forever the same mechanism of pouring-out. It is a channeling. It is an emptying into the reservoir. This is the primary, initial, and fundamental mechanism of the modern world. The modern world brings about an

immense and total emptying-out of the present. An instantaneous channeling. Into the flows of history, of memory, and of habit. Or rather an instantaneously anticipated channeling.

All it takes is for a certain mechanism to be put in place. Through this immense channel of stiffening, over this immense bar of its spillway, the modern world works at the immense and total emptying-out of the present.

An instantaneous emptying.

Or rather instantaneously anticipated.

All that remains are these glossy, calculable flows of water, these immense immobile layers, these horizontal dimensions, these stiff channels, these regulations, these quadrangular equivalencies.

(No more of this jumble, of this bother, and of this wretched worry of the source.)

(No more of this wretched uncertainty.)

(And above all none of this uncertain poverty.)

What does it matter then whether the present produces in such abundance; what does it matter if the present is inexhaustible. Once a certain mechanism is in place, the more the present produces the more one steals from it, the more it gives the more one takes in from it, the more it provides the more one empties it out. The more it produces the more one captures from it. One overcomes it through its own

workings, and through its very own productivity. It can exhaust itself now. Or it can remain inexhaustible. If it fails to produce it dies of its own barrenness. If it produces one overcomes it by this very productivity, and it dies. One takes its productivity and turns it against it. Whether dead and stagnant or flowing with life, water always amounts to the same thing here. And the casket will always be fitted to the corpse, (to the being destined for it).

Such is the initial, such is the central importance of mechanisms. A lever less than a meter in length can steer a train for thousands of kilometers. An electrical switch controls whether one sends out layers of light or layers of darkness.

Thus, a certain switch in the modern world served to incessantly and instantaneously bring about a universal switchover. Out of layers of the present it instantaneously made layers of the past. Out of layers of freedom it instantaneously made layers of servitude. Out of layers of productivity it instantaneously made layers of sterility and of death.

Alternatively, it is like an immense and universal parasitism. (And here we come again to what we have indicated so often prior, that the modern world is also essentially a parasite. It derives its strength, or its appearance of strength, entirely from the systems it attacks, from those worlds it has set about to destroy.)

The more this being feeds itself, the more the parasite grows fat. The more this being provides for itself, the more the parasite profits. The more this being nourishes itself, the more it is nourishing.

For the parasite.

Thus, the more the present brings forth, the more is diverted and stored away. It is like a peasant whose entire production would go to the tax on his land once a certain parasitic mechanism, a certain mechanism of taxation had been put in place.

Thus, once a certain parasitic mechanism is in place, everything that comes out of the present is no longer of benefit except for the storing up of memory, everything that comes out of reality is no longer of benefit except for the storing up of history, and everything that comes out of nature is no longer of benefit except for the storing away of habits.

It is not surprising after all this that habit is truly a second nature and that it seems to have the same strength and the same force of command as nature itself. It is the opposite that would indeed be surprising. A mechanism of diverting, a mechanism of emptying out, a parasitic mechanism was once put in place. Now everything nature brings forth benefits habit.

Nature is a great defenseless being. Especially against this form of mechanism. One can even say in this sense that nature is a great innocent being.

All it took was for a mechanism of emptying out to once be put in place. And now reality's riches pour forth entirely into the coffers of intellectualism.

Why be surprised then that the strength of habit equals that of nature: it is the same strength, diverted, rerouted. Why be surprised that habit's force of command equals that of nature: it is the same command, diverted, rerouted.

A simple switch brought about this miracle: that this strength and command of life itself was transformed, and that it became instead a strength (so to speak) and a command of death.

And it is thus that habit and death appear to possess a strength and force of command.

And that what is less appears to have more, and that what is essentially negative appears to be positive; and that what amounts to nothing appears to have value.

All that was needed was a certain mechanism of switchover, all it took was a certain mechanism of switching the signs to be put in place.

But likewise, it simply took, in this same way all that was needed was for a certain mechanism to be removed for this immense apparatus to then collapse. All that was needed was one man and a screwdriver. But he needed to know which screw had to be removed.

Just one man saw this. Just one man figured it out.

Claiming that the *date* of the present will in the near future be, will become a *date* of the past, under the guise that tomorrow today's date will indeed be yesterday's date, one believed that the present itself, that the present's very being was what in the near future would become simply a moment of the past. And that this idea contained everything there was to know about the present, about the present's very being, and that it gave us a complete and absolute understanding of the present. And therefore, (since it was the same being), that it was hardly worth the bother to put in so much effort to get to know the present, since one would come to know it soon enough, without struggle, right after, just as soon as it had passed.

Everything comes back to this. To this point, for in this deferring, in this initial laziness lies the secret to everything that follows. One realized vaguely, dimly that the present is indeed difficult to know. And so they said to themselves: it is not worth the bother to go to such lengths. (One is always repeating that it is not worth the bother to go to such lengths.) Soon enough it will be past. And then we will grasp hold of it with all the tools that history has provided us for grasping and understanding the past.

Everything comes back to this. To this slippage. To this slippage one kept repeating over and over. To this perpetual slippage taking place.

The sciences of historical understanding have made such immense progress over the past hundred years, and perhaps since the very beginning, that they have become like an immense factory. For crushing and grinding up the past. They are,

with all due respect, a veritable factory of preservation. They have their techniques, their boilers, their tubing. They have their storehouses. All they need really.

They are in actuality a cold-storage plant.

Because they cannot preserve it all without the cold.

(As soon as warmth creeps back in, life would be able to return.)

Whereby they are constantly providing various mechanisms of security, certainty, and tranquility that are not for sale in the establishments across the way.

(The establishments across the way are just us now: (faith), theology, philosophy, metaphysics, morality, civics, economy, poetry, fine arts, and music; reality, in a word.)

Since this reality is so difficult to know, they thought somewhat dimly, since it is such a hassle, why not wait (just a little). In a moment, it will all be recorded. And then we will have it all filed away in the warehouses of history.

It will even be better that way. And much less messy. It will no longer have its troublesome coating to deal with.

*Today*, they thought, is like a bad child; a misbehaving child. And who knows what he is up to. He will cause nothing but trouble. Let's just wait a day. Once tomorrow comes, he will be yesterday's news. And if we ever have need of him we can just go look under the file labelled yesterdays at the National Library.

It was all so tempting. All one had to do was wait a tiny bit. And everything was taken care of by itself. Today, this day causes nothing but misery. But tomorrow, yesterday will no longer bother a soul.

Thus, one believed one was looking upon the present. But it was only ever the shadow of the present one was seeing. And one believed one was speaking about the present. But it was only ever the shadow of the present one was discussing.

A man appeared. And instantaneously he saw where his plateau of Pratzen lay.<sup>153</sup> Instantly he saw the key to the entire situation, to his positioning for this lengthy battle that lay ahead.

Instantly he saw that this entire battle hinged upon a single mechanism and that by simply disabling this mechanism he possessed the key to the entire battle.

He understood that it was necessary instantly to take up position in the very heart and secret depths of the present; that there lay the secret and the key to success. And that after, one must resist being driven out of the present at all cost. That one could not budge an inch on this. And that one must guard against every form of laziness. That one could not permit the least form of slippage here, for however minor it seemed it would determine everything to come.

History will one day say that this manoeuvre on Bergson's part was exactly the same manoeuvre taken by Napoleon. To insert yourself right at the very center of the enemy, and then to beat him thoroughly on all sides and in every direction.

---

<sup>153</sup> Reference to the plateau occupied by Napoleon on the eve of the Battle of Austerlitz, offering him a strategic advantage in the subsequent battle (Pléiade fn.).

To instantly occupy the very center of the battle, to find its secret, its key, its secret point of strategy and positioning; and then to resist all efforts to drive you out, to refuse to fall back under any circumstances.

One man alone saw that the present is not simply the extreme edge of the past as it borders upon what is most recent, but rather the extreme edge of the future as it borders upon presence itself. One man alone saw that today is not simply the tomorrow of yesterday, but rather the day-before of tomorrow. One man alone saw that today is not simply the first day of a long interment but rather the last day of activity not yet dead.

And that the present is not simply the successor to yesterday but rather its inheritor. And that today is the inheritor of yesterday and not simply its chronological successor.

He showed that one must not believe today's date is all there is to know about today, nor that the present's date is all there is to know about the present's being.

And to not think one has exhausted all there is to know about today by simply giving its date, (especially as a date in the past, a date viewed from tomorrow's date). And to not think one has exhausted all there is to know about the present when one has exhausted its date (especially as a date in the past, a date viewed from tomorrow's date).

He showed that the calendar did not exhaust all there is to know about the year whose date is on its cover. And that for this year's calendar itself, one does not

say all there is to know about this year when one proclaims that next year it will be last year's calendar.

And that it is necessary to grasp hold of and to understand the present in the present itself, and to not wait a short while, because it is precisely this short while which makes it so that what one has is indeed no longer the present.

That the present has a specific being that is proper to it. And that to wait around in order to know it better, to come to know it more comfortably, is already to make it undergo that sole deformation that truly matters.

It is to distort its very being, that which truly makes it the present. That which makes it unlike anything else. In particular the numerous receptacles of the past, even the most recent.

And that one must never think to oneself: Just wait a little. Because it is precisely this little that ends up being too much.

And he showed that the plant, collected, dried, and preserved in the herbarium, is no longer the same plant. And that the creature tucked away under the specimen glass is no longer the same creature.

And that it was never a question of being calm and comfortable in order to come to know reality but rather of being open to knowing.

And that greed and corruption, intellectualism and savings, materialism, mechanism, determinism, and associationism, all these are good for calendars but perhaps not so good for the year whose date is on its cover.

For the year underneath it.

He showed that the present is the present, and not simply and not even in a certain sense what shortly will be past. That today is today, with its own proper being, and not simply and not even in a certain sense what tomorrow will be yesterday.

That the present is the present. That it is not a future perfect, a median term between the future and the past, between the later and the prior.

That the present is not a geometric median, a geometric and mechanical and physical bisector between the future and the past, but is the present.

And likewise, that it is not a combination of two ingredients, which would be the future and the past. That it is not a mixture that has a little of each, a bit of the future and a bit of the past. But that it is the present.

That it is not a future already a little passed. Nor a past already or still a little to come. That it is the present, its own proper moment, with a specific being, and in no way a mixture nor a combination.

In no way, a future daubed with the markings of the past. In no way a past lightly mopped over by the future.

In no way a compromise, a combination, nor an arrangement between the fundamental irresolution of the future and the total entombment of the past. But a specific and proper passage between the two.

And that it is neither on the one hand a setting up nor on the other a taking stock. Neither a bisector between the two, nor a mixture or a combination of both of them.

And that to tell oneself in relation to the present: let's wait awhile to get to know it, is to try to understand what is before you by what is not.

And to try to know the present by what it will be when it is past is to relinquish the very being one seeks to know, it is to turn it over in advance to the mourners and the undertakers.

When one thus gives schoolkids their first savings book it is for good reason. Because one is giving them their handbook for the modern world, a handbook for attaining the peace and tranquility of the modern world. That is a certification in its greed and corruption within the order of the heart. And within the order of the mind, which is really not so far off, a certification in its materialism and intellectualism, a certification in its determinism and associationism and mechanism.

And within the two orders together a certification in its stiffening and its money.

It is for good reason that these savings books are presented with such ceremony and as a symbol and as a coronation and as a ceremonial storage case for being and as a receptacle for the law. Just as the Gospels represent the gathering together of the whole of Christian thought, so too the savings book represents the textual symbol and the gathering together of the whole of modern thought. It alone is strong enough to stand up to the Gospels, because it is the book of money, which is the Antichrist.

How innocent and harmless all lawlessness and debauchery seem in comparison to this false virtue, this false rule, this false law. Within all avowed forms of disorder there is always some point of weakness that fails to hold up, that fails to even pose a threat. It is after other things entirely and need only be left alone to go about its tomfoolery. It is quite happy to amuse itself in its corner. One need not worry about it ever trying to substitute itself for the law. It knows very well what it can and cannot do. But both modern greed and corruption, which go by the name of savings and thrift, as well as these modern forms of stiffening and hardening, which go by the name of intellectualism and determinism and materialism and associationism and mechanism, these are dangerous in an entirely different sense. Because they are fraudulently stiff. And they are fraudulently hardened. And because laws are in general stiff and harsh, one believes that what is stiff is necessarily a law. Thus, the entire stiffening of the modern world is so to speak allowed to put itself forward as law. And it does not hesitate to do so. For it too is a constraint. It too is inflexible and strict. It too is a difficulty. It too is a restraint. Therefore, it too perhaps is a law.

Nothing is as dangerous as this form of hardening, nothing is as dangerous as this type of stiffening. Lawlessness, debauchery, mischief, simple failings, these have never been serious candidates for regulating things. They can only introduce irregularities. What is dangerous, what is deceptive, is this false form of regulation, this false regularity, this false rule.

Because it too compels one. It can thus present itself as a candidate for establishing a moral code complete with obligations and sanctions. It too has something of an air of merit and dignity about it. It appears to be of the same order as the law itself. It is thus permitted, it is in some sense even qualified to attempt to substitute itself for the law. It is not lacking here. It puts itself forward with an entire apparatus.

Those that are far removed from any sense of order or clearly in opposition to order can do no harm to it beyond a certain point. But that which is an imitation and a counterfeiting of order can indeed hope to one day substitute itself for order. (It is in this sense that it has always been said that the Antichrist would come in the form of a false Christ.<sup>154</sup>)

The savings bank, in its apparatus of rigor and obligation, in its strictness, in its administration and bureaucracy, in its compulsion and its apparatus of constraint, in its seriousness, in its appearance of sacrifice itself, in its prefectural framework, in its civic and governmental apparatus, in its cold and insidious authority, (paternal moreover), in its grave and quadrangular rigidity, was alone strong enough to stand up to the Gospels.

And it is thus that an entire people not only brings about the destruction of its race, but even finds nothing at all wrong with it, because it all takes place within a stiff framework.

Within a stiff moral code.

---

<sup>154</sup> Reference to Paul's warning in II Thessalonians 2:4 (Pléiade fn.).

I had said in my prior essay *Note sur M. Bergson* that a supple moral code is infinitely more strict, and more demanding, and more true than a stiff moral code. One must add that both moral and immoral codes of conduct, when they are stiff, and when they really get going, are infinitely more dangerous than any immoral code that is truly supple. Because, being stiff, one takes them for laws.

And thus, an entire people is so busy preparing tomorrow's tranquility that it brings about the destruction of its own being, and in doing so buries it each moment in a definitive, unreachable past.

An entire people is so busy preparing its future tranquility that it destroys its being tomorrow in order to bring about a peace that in each new today can only ever be the peace of yesterday.

When he took apart this immense battle, when he undid this immense apparatus, when he dismantled this immense mechanism of inhumation and death, when he wrenched us away from our enslavement to the past, to the barrenness of a dead-time, when he placed us again back into the exact moment of the present, when he returned us right to this very point, neither a bit ahead, nor a bit behind, when he thus took up position at the very center and secret depths of the struggle, when he once again settled us in this position, within this position of the present, by this and entirely through all this Mr. Bergson reintroduced us within a Christian situation and position, within the only situation and the only position truly Christian, he literally pushed us to rediscover this point of Christianity, this point of view, this point of life,

and this point of Christian being. Because he placed us back within the uncertain, the transitory, the stripped-bare that is properly the condition of man.

Our young apologists, our pillars and supporters of the Church, our catechizing catechumens, our feeble intellectual Sorbonne Catholics would concede at most that Mr. Bergson might have long ago been of some use, in prior times, in the time of Spencer,<sup>155</sup> but of a type of preliminary, preparatory, and prerequisite utility, a specifically negative utility. They will again concede that he might have served to clear out on the one hand the greed and corruption and on the other the materialism and the intellectualism, the determinism and the associationism, the stiffening and the mechanism of the modern world. Purely negative actions, that had as their goal, and that clearly had as their purpose, and that obviously could only have as their result to create an open space that would then be left to our young heroes.

I do not wish to enter in an incidental way into so serious a debate. I am little versed when it comes to civil wars. I have spent my entire life fighting along the frontiers. Along intellectual and along spiritual frontiers. And also, along economic and civic frontiers, along the frontiers of poverty in their relation to the kingdoms of money. It is no fault of mine if I have not fought along still other frontiers. I am very little in the know concerning those immense wars waged behind office doors and in

---

<sup>155</sup> Initially drawn to Herbert Spencer's vitalist philosophy, Bergson would in *L'Evolution créatrice* critique the former's incapacity to truly understand life's ever-evolving quality of movement due to his inability to place himself within the experience of its concrete duration (Pléiade fn.).

the bureaux located on Vaugirard Street and Saint-Dominique Street.<sup>156</sup> I follow nothing of what goes on in these locations. I have waged war on strongholds and in the open country. I admit to having somewhat of a contempt for offices. I know all too well that it is soldiers who do the fighting while those in the offices look on. I know too that it is soldiers who do the winning and those in the offices who do the losing. I am an old soldier, second class. Every rank I have been given above this has only served to pervert this underlying, fundamental quality.

I would like to create a specific journal issue that I would entitle: *Mr. Bergson and the Catholics*. It would be very brief, this issue. But firm and supple, full and quiet; one of those issues printed in italics with size 10 font. I realize unfortunately that I could not truly create this issue, under this title, discussing this topic, and say what I have to say, and especially to say what would need to be said, without entering into the territory of the Confessions, and perhaps into the domain of confession itself. And it is perhaps a bit early to enter into the territory of the Confessions, and a confession perhaps does not concern the public.

Before I begin my story, simple traveler that I have been, miserable veteran of all these wars, let us thus hear what our young officers back at headquarters have to tell. Their plans are surely magnificent, with their newly earned stripes on their sleeves.

---

<sup>156</sup> The Catholic University of Paris was located on Vaugirard Street, and the Bureau of the Minister of War on Saint-Dominique Street (Pléiade fn.).

It is all very simple, they say, (or they think). We concede that Bergson cleared out the modern world. We clear out Bergson. Now only we remain.

One asks them for a bit more detail. First off, is that not ingratitude on their part.

What need have we of gratitude, they say. God is ungrateful.

(This is a literal quote. One of these youngsters lectured me six or seven years back on this very point that God is ungrateful and that he breaks the instruments of which he once made use. And that God and these youngsters are roughly similar.<sup>157</sup>)

One asks them for bit more clarification.

Yes, they say, Bergson got rid of intellectualism and materialism, mechanism and associationism, determinism and in sum atheism. He was wrong by the way to get rid of intellectualism. We get rid out Bergson. Now only we remain.

Richelieu, Mazarin were petty political schemers next to these youth of ours. And to hear them talk, Vaugirard Street is capable of becoming so powerful that it will one day grow all the way to Servandoni Street.<sup>158</sup> I would, however, like to say a word or two without entering into the confidential or into the domain of confession, staying with what is well-known, publishable, public.

---

<sup>157</sup> Péguy had, in the winter of 1907, confided to Jacques Maritain the secret of his newfound faith (Pléiade fn.).

<sup>158</sup> The Catholic University of Paris was located at 74 Vaugirard Street. The Paris association of Protestant students, which, thanks to Pastor Roberty, was a subscriber to the *Cahiers*, had its headquarters at 46 Vaugirard Street, just next to Servandoni Street (Pléiade fn.).

My first remark will be in response to what they have said and my second remark will be concerning my own proper position.

And to speak along with them the language of the institution my first remark will be on the negative aspect of the Bergsonian revolution and my second remark will be on its positive aspect.

What they concede is that Bergsonian thought, that the Bergsonian revolution was of use, but in a negative sense, that it served to clear out a certain space that for them is the location of this battle.

They concede that Bergsonian thought, that the Bergsonian revolution served to negate. What needed to be negated.

Bergson, they say, (although not nearly so well), served some use in pushing aside the modern world. We push aside Bergson. Now only we remain.

Bergson eliminated the modern. We eliminate Bergson. Now only we remain.

We, that is scholasticism.

Their story is all too simple. Once, they say, there was the modern world. Bergson came along and got rid of the modern world. We come and get rid of Bergson. Now only we remain.

The modern world is no more, since Bergson got rid of it. And Bergson is no more, since we got rid of Bergson.

Let us just say though that this remarkable mechanism of theirs is a laboratory mechanism, and is in no way a mechanism of the world. It is a display mechanism

one would expect to find at the World's Fair, it is in no way a mechanism of labor nor of the workshop. This little sleight of hand is nothing but a sleight of hand. This form of reasoning is nothing but a rationalization, and all of it is child's play and nothing but a quaint form of childishness.

This shuttered conception of the world, this conception of total change, of sudden, definitive change is a cinematic and kaleidoscopic conception of the world. The dramas of the world are not so easily broken down. The matter is much more dense, its forces more endlessly resurgent, its moments less divisible.

Let us just say that they are not nearly Bergsonian enough and their conception of the world is not a sufficiently Bergsonian conception. Because there are also Bergsonian conceptions and Bergsonism itself does not at all consist of impeding the workings of thought. It consists of continuously modeling them upon the reality constantly in question in each new moment.

Their conception is not sufficiently a Bergsonian conception. For they have, sincerely enough perhaps, a static conception of all this, an historical conception and a geographical conception. They imagine, sincerely enough I believe, the locus of struggle for the domination of the world as a location that is purely spatial and in no way reactive or responsive. Within this spatial location there are various spatial blocks, purely inert, that have or perhaps have not been arranged, that one brings in, that one carries away, that can be shifted around, that take up a certain amount of space and not any other. And so within this open space there was once the block of the modern world. And just one. Bergson came along. He moved aside the block of

the modern world, that is to say: he carried away the block of the modern world and he brought in the Bergsonian block. Now we, they thought, we move aside the Bergsonian block, that is to say: we carry away the Bergsonian block and we bring in the Scholastic block.

So, for starters, there is no more block of the modern world, since Bergson took it away; and secondly, there is no more Bergsonian block, since we took it away; and thirdly, now only our block remains, now there is only the Scholastic block.

Let us just say that this is a domino players' conception of the world. The modern world put down a double-six. Bergson put down a six-blank. They put down a double-blank. And yet this domino players' conception is for a game where one would continually be removing the old tiles each time a new one is put down. So that there would only ever be a single domino tile in play.

Permit us just to say this one thing. It is a purely childish conception. And an entirely didactic one. This house of cards of theirs. With their paper cutouts like those sold in bookshops and paper stores. In little ready-made cubes. It is all ready-made. It is itself a conception that is entirely materialist and intellectualist and associationist and mechanistic and voluminous. It is also a determinist conception. That is to say it is a modern conception that they apply to this double displacement, or rather to the idea they have of this double displacement, of this double elimination: displacement of the modern world by Bergson, displacement of Bergson by themselves; elimination of the modern world by Bergson, elimination of Bergson by themselves. They do not see the world through a Bergsonian lense, this is well understood, but they do not see

it through a Christian one either: they see the world through modern eyes. They do not think within a Bergsonian framework, nor do they think within a Christian one either: they think through a modern one.

They imagine through a modern framework the trebled interplay between the modern, the Bergsonian, and the Christian. They depict in a modern way their displacement of the modern and their displacement of the Bergsonian. And they frame in a modern way their establishment of the Bergsonian and their ensuing establishment of the Christian.

But their idea of Christian is not truly a Christian but a modern one. And their form of thought is not a Christian one, but a modern form of thought. And their Scholasticism is a form of Christian theology locked within the framework of an Aristotelian network and consequently a modern one as well.

(Aristotle being perhaps the sole thinker of Antiquity who was modern, and I mean modern in the sense we see all around us today, and of the kind that after him would only come into existence some nineteen centuries *after* Jesus Christ.)

(The sole figure of Antiquity to have shed the wisdom and in particular the intelligence of Antiquity and to have donned instead, (and entirely as the first to do so), the unintelligence of the modern.)

(And it was this figure they specifically endeavored to seek out.)

When they say and I will add when they believe that the modern world has been displaced once and for all, it is as if I were to say I am going to sweep my front steps once and for all, or that I am going to sit down and eat dinner once and for all,

or that I am going to put together and publish this *cahier* once and for all, or that I am going to attend Mass once and for all, or that I am going to confess my sins once and for all. They are forever mixing together and confusing things. They constantly mistake what is nourishing and life-giving for their mere recording and historical registering. They are deeply, fundamentally modern in this way.

They are not Christian, I mean they are not Christian deep down, in their bones. They constantly lose sight of this precariousness that for the Christian is man's truest, most profound condition; they lose sight of this profound vulnerability; and that in life one must be forever starting anew.

They are entrenched in tranquility, in contentment: in the modern.

They too are busy with their savings: with what is at the core of the modern. They put down in their savings book their various systems just as others put down their savings for the day. They believe themselves to thus be at peace. And that one need only wait and then reap the interest from what one has put aside.

What they call Christian is a Christian system thought out in modern form, a system borrowed from the Christian then transferred, reproduced, fixed in place within the network of relations of the modern world.

They constantly mistake history for the present happening, the map for the terrain itself, geography for the world.

Permit us to say just this one thing: All of that is not nearly so simple, nor so empty, nor so dead. All of that *is here*. The immense spaces of the field of battle for the domination of the world are not empty and these immense worlds are not mere

systems or blocks. They are immense forces and counter-forces, terrific weights and counterweights. They are immense, antagonistic forces that push and that press and that throw their weight against one another. A coiled spring is not the same thing as one that has lost its coil. A spring that is held back is not the same as one that no longer works. And even a spring that is stuck is not the same as one that is finally spent.

These immense masses and these immense forces and these immense worlds are here. Their pushing, their pressing, and their weighing upon and against one another are always present, only coiled, held back, ready to spring. Always in place, always ready to begin again and to occupy the field of battle.

Always ready to begin once more their conquest and domination of the world.

It is an eternal struggle and battle. And an eternal precariousness. Nothing one gains is acquired eternally. And this is the very condition of man. And the most profound condition of the Christian.

The idea of an eternal acquisition, the idea of an acquisition that would be definitive and no longer contested is what is most contrary to Christian thought. The idea of an eternal and definitive domination that would no longer be fought against is what is most contrary to man's destiny, within the system of Christian thought.

These immense worlds are very much present. And they will not be laid away to rest.

One must be careful, always, and here more than elsewhere, here more than ever, to avoid confusing law and fact, or as one says theory and practice. I apologize for repeating here such self-evident, simple things. But these are what one most easily loses sight of.

It is entirely true that in philosophy there are certain systems that one has rendered indefensible: they will thus be defended, and they will even be the most well defended.

Believe me: they will be supported and defended more than the others.

One has made them indefensible to reason, but one has not made them indefensible to power, to the powers that be.

One has made them indefensible to genuine philosophy. They will thus be defended by the schools, by the State, (which have not yet been separated), by the Sorbonne, by the bureaux, by the various powers, by the government, by all of the temporal order. And perhaps too by professors of philosophy.

One has made them indefensible for Plato and for Epictetus: they will be defended by Caesar.

By the political parties. By the people's parties. By the parliamentary masses.

It is a mistake, and what is more, it is pure madness, and what is more, it is pure stupidity to believe that all it takes is for an idea to be made indefensible, once and for all, for one to no longer hear any talk of it. On the contrary, it is then that one begins to discuss it; and that it begins to come into its own.

One has made this idea indefensible: it will thus be defended.<sup>159</sup>

One has made this position untenable: it will thus be held onto.<sup>160</sup>

These young Catholics of ours are thus wrong to believe and they are wrong to count upon the idea that all it took was for Mr. Bergson to make uninhabitable, once and for all, and unsupportable and indefensible and untenable materialism and intellectualism and determinism and associationism and mechanism. He made them uninhabitable for us. But what does this mean, us. He made them uninhabitable for the philosopher. But what does this mean, the philosopher. He did not make them uninhabitable for the world. He did not make them uninhabitable for those who wish to inhabit them all the same.

He very well could have rendered uninhabitable the entire system of thought of the modern world. But what would that have mattered to it, this modern world, since precisely it scorns all thought It is no less there. It is no less completely present. And it continues nonetheless to exercise its awful pressure.

It is not a question of convincing, it is a question of defeating and even a question of not being defeated oneself or rather of not being crushed.

And not only of not being defeated once and for all, but of not being defeated for all time.

And not only of not being crushed once and for all, but of not being crushed for all time.

---

<sup>159</sup> The term *défendue* means both defended and forbidden in French.

<sup>160</sup> Again, Péguy plays on the numerous connotations of the term *tenue*: kept, maintained, required, responsible, held in check.

That is to say this preliminary distinction between the negative and positive aspects is itself intellectual, on such matters, and perhaps on all matters, and that such a distinction is useless, arbitrary, and ultimately ineffective. It may possess some value for the convenience of language. It has no value for the philosopher.

We have but one Earth to divide between us. We have but one Earth to take issue over. We have but one Earth to fight for. We have only one temporal realm and we have only one time. We have but one war to fight and we can, all of us and always, only ever wage this one battle. In a word, we are in a tight spot. And the intellectuals and the theoreticians of the numerous systems, and especially the Catholics, continue to talk as if we had all the space and time in the world. And as if all these spaces were still free. When it is the opposite. There is very little free space. And perhaps none.

Everything that is taken by one side is lost by the other. And not only that but this is unstoppable, and one can almost say that everything that is lost by one side is immediately and automatically taken over by the other.

In a closed system and in a system in which both sides exercise a mutual pressure against one another there is no such thing as an absolute positive and there is no such thing as an absolute negative. The negative is the negative of the positive and the positive is the negative of the negative.

It is not simply a question of a tottering wall that one could firm up and straighten out once and for all and if necessary that one could rebuild. It is a question

of a tottering wall that one holds up with one's own hand, and that one can only hold up with one's hand, (such are the rules of the game). Because, during the time that I am holding up this wall with my hand, neither the wall nor my hand moves, neither the wall nor my hand goes up or down, neither this wall nor my hand wins or loses, and one can in no way say that by holding up a wall with one's own hand one has occupied a position.

And in particular one cannot claim to have now brought about an established situation, where nothing further remains to be done. And where everything is now settled. Not only are there things that remain to be done. But one is always doing just this. Whether by hand, or by shoulder, when I hold up a tottering wall, during this entire time my hand, my shoulder is working. And the wall is at work too. By its very weight pushing back against me.

Nothing is as false, nothing is as intellectual, nothing is as arbitrary as this modern idea, and within it the idea of certain of our young Catholics that by merely supporting a tottering wall with one's hand one brings about an established fact, a static and stable situation, to which one has no further need then of attending. A state of affairs that can be recorded and indeed is. What I am saying is that one must always attend to this. One must always attend to the wall. And one must always attend to one's own hand. If one stops doing so then the wall will (again) fall.

Materialism has indeed become unsupportable. Yet materialism supports itself all too well. It is in power.

Materialism has become indefensible. Yet the materialist defends himself all too well. And he even goes on the attack. And even gains possession of new ground. And even occupies further realms. Because he is in power.

Materialism as an idea can no longer be maintained. Yet the materialist maintains himself all too well. And he even maintains us in his grip. Because he is in power.

This immense pressing, this immense pushing, this immense pressure and oppression of the modern world weighs upon us. If the hand that holds up a world begins to tire or if it relaxes its force, if it becomes inattentive or faulty in any way, then we fall back again into that atmosphere of intellectual oppression of twenty-five or thirty years ago.<sup>161</sup>

It is thus at this moment that certain of our young Catholics have begun playing at politics.

I do not wish to enter incidentally into this immense dispute between Mr. Bergson and these Catholics. It would be necessary to combine this dispute between

---

<sup>161</sup> Péguy refers here to the intellectual oppression experienced by the generation that grew up under the influence of Ernest Renan and Hippolyte Taine. Péguy considers this oppressively scientific and positivist era to have ended with the publication of Bergson's *Essai sur les données immédiates de la conscience* in 1889 (Pléiade fn.).

Mr. Bergson and the Radicals<sup>162</sup> with the dispute between Mr. Bergson and the Action Française. All that I can say today is that the attitude of certain of our young Catholics towards Mr. Bergson is essentially a political attitude and that this sleight of hand whose framework we have outlined above is a marvelous invention straight out of politics.

Yet, one knows very well just what this type of marvelous political invention really amounts to.

When a hand is supporting a tottering wall, one cannot simply record an entry, or substitute a historical record in place of where one's hand is supporting the wall. (So that there would then no longer be anything to worry about). To support is not the same thing as to build. And to support is certainly not the same thing as to inscribe. To speak the language of bookkeeping, it is not a business deal that is *done* and *recorded*. It is a deal that is constantly being negotiated in the present, and that at every moment is continually unfolding. In reality, at every moment the hand is continually supporting the wall. And indeed, at every moment the wall is continually falling. Each and every faltering of the hand means further ground gained in this falling.

(And here again it seems we cannot advance a single step without arming ourselves, without equipping ourselves with a Bergsonian language, without taking

---

<sup>162</sup> Péguy designates as “Radicals” here positivist thinkers like Julien Benda and René Berthelot, whose work had denigrated Bergson by referring to him as a “simple schoolteacher of philosophy” (Pléiade fn.).

upon ourselves a Bergsonian apparatus, without furnishing ourselves with a Bergsonian instrument of thought.)

Similarly, with these immense and constant forces pushing against one another and that divide up the world, with these universal and tireless forces that weigh upon one another, the entire world is at every moment pushing upon us, the entire world is at every moment weighing upon us. This is the very condition of the world and of man. Each and every faltering of pressure on one end is ground gained for the counter-pressure. Each moment of inattention for one side is ground gained for the other.

It is thus not enough to say that historically one force was overpowered, that one block of weight was countered by another, and then to record an entry that it was thus definitively overcome. Rather it is necessary that the counter-force be constant, because the force weighing upon it is constant.

The moment one stops pushing back, this force rushes back in. The moment one stops counteracting this force, this weight surges back against us.

No locksmith or mechanism of any kind can help with this.

Certain of our young Catholics have told themselves: Bergson cleared out materialism. We clear out Bergson. Now only we remain.

I'm sorry, but no. Bergson cleared out materialism in law and in theory; he did so as a form of intellectual and mental justice. He did so in truth. And in reality too. He did not clear it out in politics and he did not clear it out as a form of worldly power.

He did not clear it out of government.

And he did not clear out the modern world from the world at large, nor from the modern world in particular.

All he did was to oppose to the terrible pressure of the modern world an equal and opposite form of counter-pressure. This counter-pressure could turn out to be victorious. On one condition: that not a single spiritual force fail to stand firm and uphold its part in supporting this counter-pressure.

I have been saying this for some time now. There is such a thing called the modern world. This modern world has brought about certain conditions for humanity, that are so entirely new and so absolutely unprecedented, that everything we have come to know throughout history, everything we have learned from prior generations, can no longer be of service to us now, nor can it help advance our understanding of the world in which we live. There are no precedents. For the first time in the history of the world all spiritual powers have together been driven back, not by the various material powers as a whole but by a single form of material power, which is the power of money. And to be precise it must even be said that: for the first time in the history of the world all spiritual powers together and by the same action and all other material powers together and by a single, self-same action have been driven back by a single form of material power, which is the power of money. For the first time in the history of the world all spiritual powers together and all other material powers together, both by a single action that is the exact same action, have been driven into retreat across the entire face of the Earth. And like an immense line they have fallen

back along the entire length of this line. For the first time in the history of the world money has become master without limitation or restraint.

For the first time in the history of the world money stands alone face to face with spirit. (And it stands alone face to face with all other substance as well).

For the first time in the history of the world money stands alone face to face with God.

It has gathered up within itself everything that was poisonous within the temporal realm, and now it is done. By some awful unknown doing, by some unknown mechanistic aberration, by some displacement, by some type of malfunction, by some monstrous mechanical loss of direction what should have served simply to aid in exchanging goods has completely invaded the values within the act of exchanging itself.

One cannot simply say then that within the modern world its system of values has been shaken up a bit. One must instead say that this system of values has been destroyed, since the apparatus of measurement and exchange and valuation has completely invaded the values that it was supposed to help in measuring, exchanging, and evaluating.

The instrument has become the material and the object and the world itself.

It is a cataclysm as utterly unprecedented, it is an event as utterly monstrous, it is a phenomenon as utterly fraudulent as if the calendar were to try to transform itself into the very year, the actual year, (and indeed this is something of what takes place in history); and as if the clock were to attempt to start actually *being* time itself; and

as if the measuring tape with its centimeters were to endeavor to turn itself into the world it measured; and as if numbers themselves with their arithmetic were to play at actually being the very world they counted.

Out of all this comes the immense prostitution of the modern world. It does not come from lasciviousness. It is not even fit to do so. It comes from money. It comes from this universal system of interchangeability.

And in particular from this greed and from this corruption that we have already seen, which were two particular cases, (and perhaps and often the same case), of this universal interchangeability.

The modern world is not universally prostitutional out of lasciviousness. It is entirely incapable of being so. It is universally prostitutional because it is universally interchangeable.

Its baseness and depravity were not procured by its money. But rather because it had reduced everything to money it then discovered that everything was now baseness and depravity.

I will speak a language that is uncouth. I will say: for the first time in the history of the world money is now master of the priest just as it is master of the philosopher. It is master of the minister just as it is master of the rabbi. And it is master of the poet just as it is master of the sculptor and of the painter.

The modern world has created an entirely new situation, *nova ab integro*.<sup>163</sup> Money is master of the statesman just as it is master of the businessman. And it is master of the magistrate just as it is master of the average citizen. And it is master of the State just as it is master of the school. And it is master over what is public just as it is master of what is private.

And it is master over justice much more profoundly than it is master over injustice. And it is master over virtue much more profoundly than it is master over vice.

It is master over morality much more profoundly than it is master over immorality.

This universal greed of the modern world does not come out of softness but rather it comes from a form of stiffness, which is the stiffness and rigidity of money. In the same way that we have completely redefined the rigid quality of firmness, so too must we redefine the supple quality of softness. In the same way that supple moral codes are more just, and more strict, and more demanding than rigid moral codes, so too are rigid immoral codes more dangerous, more fraudulent, and more corrupt than supple immoral codes.

Within these conditions, I am saying this frankly, within the universal disaster and within this unprecedented disequilibrium, within this immense distress and within

---

<sup>163</sup> Latin: a new cycle.

this monstrous malfunctioning, within this disorder that never before had been seen in the history of the world, I consider as criminal and posturing any form of politics that tends to divide spirit against itself and to turn it around upon itself, any form of politics that tends to divide our spiritual forces.<sup>164</sup>

Because there will be no other spiritual forces that will triumph. It will always be money.

Everything that one takes from spirit, everything that one steals away from one form of spirit, it is not another form of spirit but rather money that profits from it.

And one contributes all the more to this terrible weight of the modern world, to this disaster and this disequilibrium, to this immense distress and this malfunctioning; and to this universal disorder.

Everything that one steals away from one form of spiritual force, *whichever it may be*, everything that one takes from it, everything that one confiscates, everything that one removes from this spiritual force, it is money that profits.

I have said so twenty times: the struggle (and it is a fight to the death), this fight, this struggle is not between the Christian world and that of Antiquity. (And in the ancient world I naturally put all the diverse worlds of the philosophers.) The struggle is between the modern world on one hand, and on the other all the other worlds combined. And in particular between the modern world on one hand, and on the other the ancient world and the Christian world together.

---

<sup>164</sup> Perhaps an allusion to Matthew 12:25: “Every kingdom divided against itself will be brought to ruin” (Pléiade fn.).

The point of dispute of the ancient world, (in which I put the various worlds of the philosophers), is the same as the point of dispute for the Christian world. Their protest is the same. *Their destinies are linked.* Their fortunes are joined together. The burden of expulsion, of destruction, and of oppression is the same. *It is spirituality that is hounded and pursued in both.* And it is money that does the pursuing in both and that seeks to drive out all spirituality.

The struggle is not between this or that other world and the modern world. The struggle is between all other worlds combined and the modern world.

All other worlds (aside from the modern world) have been worlds of some form of spirituality. The modern world alone, being the world of money, is a world of complete and absolute materiality.

Thus, the modern world does not simply stand in opposition to this or that other world. It stands in opposition, it clashes with all the other worlds combined and through a single and self-same action.

Philosophy is the servant of theology, this is well understood. (Mary is indeed the servant of the Lord.<sup>165</sup>) But the servant must not quarrel with her mistress and the mistress must not rebuke the servant. A stranger will come, who will quickly make them see eye to eye.

When the creditor comes, (the debt-holder, the universal creditor is money), and when he has had the house put up for sale, where will the servant then find her humble kitchen, and where will the mistress then find her salon and her dining room.

---

<sup>165</sup> See Mary's proclamation in Luke 1:38: "I am the Lord's servant" (Pléiade fn.).

Where will the servant then find her pantry, and where will the mistress then find her private chapel and the cradle for her children.

The faithful servant thus must not rise up against her mistress and the loyal mistress must not come down upon her servant. A man will come, harsh like one has never seen, who will reduce them both to a shared state of baseness and to a common servitude.

The faithful servant must not undertake to gain any type of victory over her mistress and the loyal mistress must not seek to gain any type of victory over her servant. A man, a victor, will come, harsh and triumphant like one has never, and who will reduce them both to a same, common state of disaster.

The servant must not quarrel with the mistress and the mistress must not seek out disputes with the servant. A man will come, who will impose a peace between them more harsh than disaster itself.

When this man has come, when this master has arrived there; when this stranger has had the house put up for sale; when the bailiff has put up the fliers announcing the sale of estate; when the table and beds have been sold off to the highest bidder; when both the headstone and the cradle have been taken away; when then only the master remains; when then only money remains: where then will the servant be; and where then will the mistress be.

The distrust with which one hounds and pursues philosophy is the same as the distrust with which one pursues theology; and inversely, and one could say reciprocally. The hatred with which one pursues and hounds philosophy is the same as the hatred with which one pursues and hounds theology. And vice versa and reciprocally. It is always metaphysics and thought that is hounded and pursued, and spirituality and freedom and productivity.

When the furniture has been put on the auction block, is it not the same disgrace that falls upon the servant as falls upon the mistress.

Is it not the same disaster, and the same death, and the same despair.

The struggle, (and it is an expiable conflict, a struggle to the death), is between money and everything that still possesses some form of spiritual being, *whatever it may be*. The servant will be driven out together with the mistress, with the same eviction and in the same action. Philosophy will be driven out together with theology, with the same action and in the same pursuit.<sup>166</sup> Everywhere it is the same disgrace, and the same scorn, and the same derision. Because we now have a master the likes of which has never before been seen.

Everywhere it is thought that is targeted, and metaphysics, and freedom, and productivity. It is the soul itself that one aims to cut down to size once and for all.

It is spirituality in all its forms and in all its being that one wants to downsize.

---

<sup>166</sup> Péguy employs here, as he does elsewhere in this writing, the antiquated term *pourchas*, which he borrows from Joinville's *History of Saint Louis* (Pléiade fn.).

Amidst these conditions, I consider as insidious and criminal, as fraudulent and dangerous, as pernicious and treacherous, any form of politics that seeks to dispose of the spiritual. Because everything one takes over from the spiritual, in whatever form this may be, it is always money, and it is always the modern world that profits. Whatever one steals away from the spiritual, in whatever form it may be, it is always money, and it is always the modern world that profits.

This is in no way an imaginary struggle and it is no way a theoretical struggle we are discussing here. And neither is it a struggle in which we will have *plenty of time*. There is only one time, and there is only one battlefield. One must win or lose today and right here. It is a temporal battle and it is a material battle. Because it is a battle waged for the temporal and the material. And it is a battle waged on one side by the temporal and the material. The temporal and the material are thus the terrain of battle, its object, and one of two parties engaged there. When the eternal wages war against the temporal, it must indeed be in the form of a temporal war. When the spiritual wages war against the material, it must indeed be in the form of a material war. It is thus a tightly fought battle. Not a single point in time, not a single point in space is wasted. Whatever is won over from the one side come at the expense of the other. And inversely and reciprocally. It is for this reason that it makes no sense to speak of positive and negative aspects here. Everything is engaged with and up against everything else. Everything counts. Every negative, which negates a positive, which works *against* a positive, is instantaneously at work *for* a *contrary* positive, it

instantaneously affirms a contrary positive, it is itself instantaneously a contrary positive.

There can be no positive and negative, (yet again, but this is really not what concerns us), except within a system in which empty space exists. Within a system that is full and complete every negative is in reality a contrary positive.

And consequently, within a system that is full there is never such a thing as a definitive and lasting negative. Every negative is in reality a contrapositive, a contrary positive, fully engaged in this system, in the same way as all the others, and that comes and goes perpetually in its own time.

This is in no way a theoretical battle, in which there is time, and in which there is place. It is a battle that is real. Every form of pressure and counterpressure, every form of force and weight is in perpetual contact and is met with a perpetual counterforce and a perpetual counterweight here. It is a closed field of battle, entirely self-contained. And even internally closed and self-contained. A closed space, a closed time. It is a terrestrial struggle and an earthly one. And a struggle even for the dirt and mud.

Amidst these immense forces everything is either advancing or falling back. Always. The idea that a mere argument would have *fixed* in place once and for all one of these advances or retreats is not only absurd. It is an idea, and it is a ploy that is childishly Machiavellian.

The moment the hand fails to support it, the wall falls. The moment a weight fails to weigh upon it, the counterweight gains ground.

The struggle is no way between the hero and the righteous man, it is in no way between the wise man and the saint. It is between money, alone on one side, and together on the other the hero and the righteous man and the wise man and the saint. It is between money and spirituality in all its forms.

Within these cramped conditions of fullness, within these conditions of struggle in which not a single atom of matter remains free, in which not an ounce of force is wasted, make no mistake, and every other calculation here is illusory: everything that is lost from Bergsonian thought will be instantly and continuously (re)gained by materialism and mechanism and determinism and intellectualism and associationism.

Everything that is lost from philosophy will be gained not by theology, but instead regained by money.

Everything that is lost from the wise man will be gained not by the martyr or the saint, but instead regained by money.

Everything that is lost from the philosopher will be gained not by the righteous man, but instead regained by money.

Within a struggle so entirely exact, so exactly entire, there is no imprecision, no empty space, no hollowness. Neither is there any deceit. Simply opposing forces in full flight and that give their all and that ask for nothing more. An immense and brutal simplicity. Mass against mass. Force against force. Power against power. Heavy artillery. Frontlines surging against opposing frontlines. Firing lines that decimate opposing firing lines.

Every ridge is occupied just as soon as it is abandoned. Every piece of land taken just as soon as it is vacated. Every new position is both gained and lost simultaneously. There is neither space nor time for the tricks and ploys of our little schemers.

Our young whippersnappers cannot hide behind their creative schemes. Bergson, and no one else, freed us from this metaphysics of the modern world that attempted to pass itself off as a physics. Everything that is lost by Bergson will again be taken over, and instantaneously, by this same modern metaphysics, by this false and fraudulent physics, which masquerades with all the innocence and limitations and supposed relativities of a true physics, and which in reality is the metaphysics of materialism itself, and of determinism and mechanism and associationism and intellectualism.

Amidst these immense weights and counterweights there is no room for diplomatic balancing acts. No room for the scales of pharmacists. It is these very forces themselves that throw their weight about and that give their all and that make an impact. And one sees all too well what weight they possess by the impact one sees them make. One has no need to place them on the scale, one has no need to transport them, duly and calculatingly, onto the tray of a scale in order to recognize their presence there before one and to know what weight they possess. One feels their weight, one experiences it directly, and thus one understands their force.

Our youngsters must not get too carried away. Everything that is lost by Bergson will be gained not by Saint Thomas, but instead regained by Spencer.

And they will remain exactly what they have been so many times prior in the history of the world, they will remain spectators and onlookers and the victims of their own scheme and the ones so to speak left out in the cold.

And by the efforts and care of our various doctors, the Radicals, along with their domination in intellectual and governmental matters, will live to see many more fine days.

There will also be many more fine days for materialism and mechanism, for determinism and intellectualism, for associationism and Spencer.

I have nothing in particular against Spencer. He was an upright, decent man. Neither do I have anything against Saint Thomas. But really for the principles and positions we hold we need the names that go with them.

Everything that is taken away from Bergson will go to Spencer and not to Saint Thomas.

And once again Saint Thomas will be left with nothing. He will have no one. And he will find himself just like he was and just like things were twenty-five or thirty years ago, before Bergson's arrival: a great saint from the past, a great Church doctor of the past, a great theologian of the past.<sup>167</sup> Respected, revered, venerated.

---

<sup>167</sup> Péguy reminds us here that the revival of Scholasticism within the Church can be traced to Pope Leo XIII's encyclical *Aeterni Patris* (1879), which called for a return to the study of the philosophical thought of Saint Thomas (the "Angelic Doctor") (Pléiade fn.).

With no hold upon the present, with no point of entry, with nothing of this bite that is an entirely unique phenomenon, without that piercing quality, which is all that ultimately counts and that we have begun to study precisely by making use of the Bergsonian apparatus and instruments of thought.

(A great Church doctor, highly regarded, esteemed, enshrined; inventoried. Interred.)

Assayed and largely exhausted.

“Yes, of course,” they respond. “But one simply had to put Bergson on the Index. It was the only way of preventing him from being read in the seminaries. One had begun to read him in the seminaries. And he was making their heads spin, all those young men. They were reading Bergson instead of reading the Church Fathers. They were reading Bergson instead of studying their theology. And well you know what the Index really is. It is simply a... Really it is just a list which, a list that, a list one is forced to... And it is quite easy to get the authorization. And ultimately it is merely a list that one must... The Index, ultimately, is an indication.”

“Excuse me, but if I may interrupt, none of this makes sense: because the whole point is that I do not at all understand what the Index is. And let me say once more that I do not wish to enter incidentally into this immense dispute taking place between Mr. Bergson and certain of our young Catholics. I even suspect that one

cannot enter into this dispute without immediately getting into the realm of confession and of the secrets of the heart. I may perhaps go there, but if do so I will go there deliberately. Today I wish only to speak of what is public and open and what one might call of the parish. Here and now I am thinking more of the pulpit than the confession box. Let us say we are in the announcement of a future marriage. In the publication of marriage bans.

“Firstly, I admit that it’s true I do not really understand just what the Index is. And as it were I do not so to speak know it all. And the reason is quite simple. Deep down I really only know what was in my catechism; when I was little. In my catechism, there was the Good Lord, creation, the Holy Scriptures; the Blessed Virgin, the angels, the saints; the liturgical calendar, the feast days; prayer and the sacraments; the heavenly virtues; the Apostles’ Creed; the last end of man (which at the time appeared a mighty long way off), (and I really only believed in it so to speak as a point of reference), (one had plenty of time to discuss it later); and the seven deadly sins. There was nothing about the Index. But there was everything else, the walls of Jericho, Jonas and the whale, Joshua, Judith, Jesus, Daniel and the lion’s den. (And ever since whenever I meet a Daniel, and whenever I think of a Daniel, my dear Delafarge, and you, my young Daniel André,<sup>168</sup> I always picture that image from my little book of Biblical stories with Daniel behind the bars there in the lion’s den. The king came to see what was happening inside. And what a surprise he was in for, this

---

<sup>168</sup> Péguy refers here first to his friend and contributor to the *Cahiers* and second to the son of Emile André, Péguy’s family doctor during their time at Orsay and Lozère (Pléiade fn.).

king. There was Daniel, with his foot resting casually on the back of one of these lions. With a nonchalance, I could hardly muster with even a modest Newfoundland dog.) (And I know the reason why.<sup>169</sup>) There was also the Holy Spirit in the form of a dove, which you could not mix up with the dove from Noah's Ark. And there was the Good Lord, and God the Father in the form of a triangle. But there was nothing on the Index. Our catechism was made for little chaps and not for us grownups.

“I used to imagine the virtues as the three beautiful children of Mary and the seven deadly sins as types of scowling, ugly old men, like notaries. But I never imagined anything like the Index, because there was nothing like it in this world of mine.

“And to this day I still cannot picture it, because it was never a part of my youth and past.

“I knew very well what the difference was between a venial sin and a mortal sin. But I had no idea at all what the Index was, because it was not a part of my world.

“There was Adam and Eve, but there was nothing at all about the Index.”

“But if we were to talk to you about it today,” they proposed, “maybe you could start to get some idea of it.”

“I'm really not all that intelligent.”

“Regardless, if we were to speak with you about it...”

“Perhaps you'd be kind enough to talk of other things.”

---

<sup>169</sup> Péguy had a fear of dogs, which dated back to this childhood (Pléiade fn.).

“Maybe you could start to get an image of it.”

“One only imagines up to the age of twelve, you know. Once past this age, one no longer imagines anything. Once past the age of twelve, one is no longer a poet.

“Whatever I had not imagined by the morning of my first communion, I would never be able to imagine.”

“We could perhaps try and explain to you...”

“Be wary of me. I am old. I am hard-headed. I am Beauceron.”<sup>170</sup>

“We could perhaps try and introduce you to...”

“Don’t fool yourselves. I’m past the age where one can be introduced to new things.”

“We could perhaps try to teach you about...”

“Whatever I did not know by the morning of my first communion, I would never be capable of knowing.”

“We could perhaps try to make you understand...”

“You know, I’m not really all that interested in understanding. I am not an intellectual. I prefer obeying more than I do understanding. It is less tiring. And it is also more in line with my nature.”

“One could perhaps try...to get you to understand...”

“I prefer obedience. It is like a well-kept house.”

“One could perhaps...try...”

---

<sup>170</sup> La Beauce was the region of Peguy’s youth.

“I like being obedient. It makes for a lovely, full day.”

“Really, this index is like a series of signposts.”

“Chartres, 41 kilometers.”

“When you take a certain road, it is important that there be signposts along the way.”

“You’ve found my weak spot. Nothing is as beautiful as one of those lovely flat roads in la Beauce.”

“Now you see.”

“Yes, when you start talking to me of roads, I begin to give in.”

“It was about time.”

“Provided it *is* a road that is perfectly straight and perfectly flat, and with the trees in a perfect line.”

“We agree.”

“And with the telegraph poles all in a straight line.”

“Yes, of course.”

“And the telegraph wires running perfectly parallel to each other.”

“There we have it.”

“Perfectly balanced on both sides.”

“Yes, that too.”

“I don’t mean the gutters, the ditches, and the roadsides. I mean all of it like in a parade.”

“As square and proper as a billiard table.”

“And with the kilometer markers.”

“Now you are getting it.”

“And with the hectometer markers.”

“That is exactly what I meant.”

“Those beautiful mathematical markers are perfection itself. The big kilometer markers and the little hectometer markers. That’s a well-marked-out road for you. The big kilometer markers are like plump housewives that one has lined up along the side of the road. And the little markers, the ones marking out a hundred meters, are like their little daughters who have been lost along the way. It makes you think of the story of Petit Poucet,<sup>171</sup> (another story I learned well before the age of eleven or twelve).

“It’s almost like the Ogre came by, or Petit Poucet, and they left behind these big white stones to help them find their way back.”

“You must be confused. The Ogre, who was a giant, was quite capable of placing these enormous stones there, but he could not possibly have done so, as he already knew all the paths in the area. And Petit Poucet, who did not know the route home, and who kept tossing out white stones to mark the way, so as to remember the path he had been taken along, was a dwarf, and thus naturally could only have thrown down little stones. Your hypothesis is inadmissible, because it is based upon a mixed-up version of the facts.”

---

<sup>171</sup> *Le Petit Poucet* is a popular French fairytale about a small boy who, when abandoned by his parents in the woods, makes use of his intelligence and cunning to escape danger and save himself and his six brothers.

“Thank you for pointing this out.”

“Perhaps even upon a contradiction.”

“You are too kind.”

“Besides, the text of the story of Petit Poucet has not yet been definitively established. The different manuscripts present a number of variations.”

“My goodness.”

“With entirely different lessons.”

“God help us.”

“And there has yet to be published a good critical edition of this work.”

“What will become of us.”

“However, it appears one has established that Petit Poucet cut across the woods and did not in fact follow a specific road.”

“So...”

“So, he most certainly could not have left behind the kilometer markers. And it is quite improbable that he would have spaced them out so precisely.”

“I was going to say this. These immense national highways are like long ribbons, like necklaces undone and rolled out, like rosaries strung across the land. Marking the land. Linear necklaces, rosary itineraries. The kilometer markers are like plump pearls, the hectometer markers are like tiny pearls. The kilometer markers are

the big beads on the rosary, the hectometer markers are the little beads. And that makes for decades and decades of an immense rosary.”<sup>172</sup>

“These are our milestones, my child. The roads made by the Romans were marked out with these, and their god Terminus resided in and protected these boundary markers.”

“These immense, beautiful, white, metric markers, my Father, new and brilliantly white, or marked by the gradual weathering of time, are the very embodiment of mathematics and of perfection and of exactitude. They are their breadth and number. They are their just count and measure. Together they are the whole of arithmetic and together they are the entirety of geometry.

“Geometric in their (sculpted) form, in their alignment, and because they define the path of a line. Arithmetical because they themselves are both a discrete unit(y)<sup>173</sup> and a collection that can be counted.

“The entire problem of the human mind is what unfurls itself along the length of this road, Father. As it is the entire problem of the continuous and the discontinuous. Of space and of the single point. Of geometry and of arithmetic. (And of their mysterious consistency.) (And of their mysterious symmetry.) Of the

---

<sup>172</sup> A decade of the rosary consists of ten Hail Marys, one for each small bead. Each set of Hail Marys is preceded by the Lord’s Prayer, said on the first large bead, and followed by the Glory Be, said on the final large bead.

<sup>173</sup> The French term *unité* can mean both “unit” and “unity.” Péguy plays upon this fundamental ambiguity at numerous points throughout the following passage. I have thus translated *unité* as “unit(y).”

measured and of the counted. As these markers stand there, Father, interspersed along this route, they thus present a great mystery to man.

“The continuous, the discontinuous. The age-old mystery to which man is constantly led back. These discontinuous markers punctuate this line’s path, and the road itself continues. Everything is there. Or alternatively let us say these markers are atoms. And now we enter into the mystery of physics. And over the last twenty thousand years, man’s thought has not strayed a bit from this mystery. It is still the same mystery of the land surveyor. Ten stakes held in the hand can measure a route of infinite length. All that’s needed is that they be properly aligned, and each planted in the right place, and that they continually start over again and again. These stakes too punctuate a line. These stakes too mark its path and can be counted. Because I have no need to tell you that before becoming the material or rather the instrument of a metaphor that today has lost all meaning, these stakes were originally the tools of the land surveyor. And when one used to say: to stake something out, that meant to put down surveyor’s stakes.

“They are just little metal rods, pointed on one end, with a ring on the other. You stick the pointed end in the ground. You can connect them by running a length of string through the rings. They are extremely handy.

“When you line them up and you measure them out and you plant them in the ground, this is what is known as staking something out. When you finish your work, (everyone finishes for the day), all you need to do is slip them on a length of string, or

the surveyor's chain itself, and you can carry them back home. You thus carry home for the night the problem of the continuous and discontinuous.

“You carry it home, but you don't solve it.

“To measure a hectometer for example you need eleven stakes: two big, heavy stakes at the ends to mark out the hundred meters and nine little stakes for every ten meters along the length in the middle.

“And again, it is the mystery of the unit(y) of count and the unit(y) of measure.

“And it is the problem of the meter and of that which is metered.

“And it is the problem of what is metered and of the very decimeters and centimeters and millimeters themselves. When the child says: I took home my *centimeters*, to mean: I took home my little ruler from school, a ruler that is divided into decimeters and centimeters and millimeters, he hits in a striking way upon this age-old problem.

“And further it is the problem of the double nature of the unit(y): the metaphysical and dialectical Unity and the simple unit of arithmetic. The unit that makes for numbers, quite simply, and that repeats, (to make (up) a number), and that can be counted, and the other One, the grand Unity that is. And that cannot be repeated, because it is eminently unique. And precisely One.

“They say that geometry originally came out of the practice of the land surveyor. It is not the only thing to have come out of this. As arithmetic, itself, also came out of it. Of land surveying. And since it was the same area, the same bit of land

that the surveyor counted and measured, out this came this mysterious (false) coincidence between the continuous and the discontinuous, this mysterious, false symmetry and consistency between arithmetic and geometry.<sup>174</sup>

“When the corporal used to tell us: number one, how many steps are there between the edge of the stones here at the water pump and the orderly room over there, he was bringing to our attention a very serious problem. It is what one called the calibration of steps and the assessment of distances. Why calibration. It is just like when one calibrates a meter based upon the standard meter that is preserved in the Archives, (but not the archives of Mr. Langlois<sup>175</sup>). Father, (I am not your corporal), but how many kilometer markers are there between two hectometer markers?”

“You are trying to get me to say that there are ten, because a kilometer is equal to ten hectometers. But I am every bit as clever as you, and I know very well that there are only nine of them, because you must not count the one at the very end.”

“Well, you are mistaken, Father, there aren’t any at all, because it’s the hectometer markers that are between the kilometer markers and not the kilometers makers that are between the hectometer markers. And one can see clearly, Father, that in your day the priests, the pastors, the rabbis, and the schoolmasters did not do much

---

<sup>174</sup> Bergson had treated this very question in his 1888 work *Essai sur les données immédiates de la conscience* (Pléiade fn.).

<sup>175</sup> Charles-Victor Langlois was a historian and professor at the Sorbonne. In an article published in 1911, Langlois severely critiqued Péguy’s *Oeuvres choisies* as well as his recent conversion to Catholicism, both of which he suggested were motivated by material rather than spiritual interest. Péguy responded in 1913 with *L’Argent* and *L’Argent suite* in which he attacked Langlois and other Sorbonne intellectuals for imposing their historicist and sociological methodologies upon the study of literature and the humanities in general.

travelling, if I may say, with your back packed.<sup>176</sup> Forgive me father, for this is a stupid joke they used to play back in the barracks on all the new recruits. And rest assured, Father, they even played this joke at the École Polytechnique on the great Poincaré,<sup>177</sup> and the greatest mathematician of perhaps the last few centuries fell for it like a child.

“And again, it is the problem of fullness and the void or of fullness and emptiness, and the world has not progressed a bit on this matter since the time of Empedocles and Pythagoras. Nor since the time of Thales and Zeno of Elea.

“This question of the continuous and discontinuous is so serious, Father, that I used to have an acquaintance, a friend even,<sup>178</sup> a serious and metaphysical thinker, who used to say: It makes one wonder if there are not really two worlds, one inside the other, and two creations overlaying or rather coinciding with one another, the one a continuous creation and the other a discontinuous creation, and two Gods, (so he said), one God of continuous creation and one God of discontinuous creation.

“In any case, all this is what you find, Father, along the length of a road.

---

<sup>176</sup> Péguy alludes here to Joris-Karl Huysmans' 1880 story "Backpack," a semi-autobiographical account of Huysmans' experience as a soldier, including a lengthy bout with dysentery, during the Franco-Prussian War. The text is full of scatological humor, including its memorable final scene.

<sup>177</sup> Allusion to the great French mathematician, physicist, and philosopher Henri Poincaré.

<sup>178</sup> Péguy is perhaps referring here to Marcel Baudouin, a close friend of his youth, who died in 1896. *Marcel, premier dialogue de la cité harmonieuse* (1898) testifies to the role their conversations played in helping shape Péguy's early thought (Pléiade fn.).

“On one of these roads where we so often used to sing that there is but one God, but that there are two Testaments.

“This is indeed the problem that one encounters all along the length of a road. It is not at all innocent, a road.”

“So then, my child, you will admit that these markers, these signposts, are indispensable for a road.”

“You must excuse me, Father. We were almost in agreement. Ask me to say a signpost is beautiful. Ask me to say it is useful. But do not ask me to say it is indispensable. (I mean only those on roads.)

“Thus, instead ask me to say a signpost is beautiful, and that a kilometer marker is beautiful. And that a road is a specific apparatus in which it is necessary, *for its beauty*, for its order, for its apparatus, that there be signposts and kilometer markers. Have me say they are a part of it. Integral. Constitutive. That they are part of the road’s very being. That a road without signposts and kilometer markers would not be coherent. That it would not be consistent. That ultimately it would not be a road at all. Tell me all this, Father.

“Tell me that a road is a specific development, a certain extensity.<sup>179</sup> Speak the language of philosophy to me. Or even the language of the school. I will not shy away. Tell me that a road is a certain assembly and that this assembly would be

---

<sup>179</sup> *Extensité* is a neologism in French seemingly based off the forms *extension* and *intensity* (Pléiade fn.).

incomplete, that it would be lacking its most essential and proper character if it were to be without these signposts and kilometer markers.

“Tell me, Father, ask to say a signpost is indeed beautiful, and that it is a part of a larger whole, and that it is part of the very character of this whole. Ask me to say it is indispensable. In this sense here. This will be more sound than asking me to say it is indispensable in the sense of its utility.

“Tell me, Father, have me say these signposts and kilometer markers are the very structure itself of a road and its internal organization and even its essence. You see here I am speaking the language of the school. Let us borrow from the language of other schools. Have me say that they are its style; and its class. And something of its *raison d’être*. And let us even speak a Leibnizian language. Have me say that they are its sufficient reason.<sup>180</sup> And that a road is nothing at all if it is not a direction and a distance. Ask me to say, I will be quite happy to do so, that a man who imagines a road without signposts and without kilometer markers is a man who has no idea of anything. Who is neither painter nor poet. Neither philosopher nor metaphysician. Absolutely nothing.

“And that a man who makes his living on roads is nothing if he is not a body in movement; a mass and a speed.

“And that the very idea of conceiving of a road without its backbone and without its directive and without its axis, a road not structured upon its signposts and

---

<sup>180</sup> Leibniz’s principle of sufficient reason argues that for every contingent truth or fact that exists in the world there must be an explanation or reason as to how it came be.

its kilometer markers is the idea of a man who knows nothing, of a man who has neither head nor heart; neither reason nor practice. Nor wisdom. Of a man without manners.

“Of a man who knows nothing of that about which he speaks.

“(There are also little piles of stones and sand perfectly worn down to the form of quadrangular pyramids, along the roadsides. Or more precisely in the form of rectangular pyramids. These piles of stone and sand are unmistakably metric. But they are not found everywhere. They are intermittent markers. Interestingly enough, they are found only in those districts where they are going to redo the road. By redo, I mean to resurface it.)

“Thus, you have had me say, Monseigneur,<sup>181</sup> and even without this prompting I would have perhaps said that these signposts and kilometer markers are necessary, that they are necessary for a road or rather in a road, at the heart of a road, along the axis of a road.

“You have had me say that they are necessary. But there is an entire abyss between that and having me say that they are indeed useful.”

“What do you mean, my child, that these metric indications are not useful.”

---

<sup>181</sup> Péguy is perhaps thinking here of Monseigneur Batiffol, chaplain at the Collège Sainte-Barbe, where Péguy studied from 1893 to 1894 prior to entering the École Normale Supérieure. Péguy would remain in close contact with Batiffol long after leaving the school. Batiffol's *L'Eucharistie* (1905) was placed on the Index in 1907 and later removed in 1913 when a new and revised edition of this work was published (Pléiade fn.).

“Well, if you have me say that they are, Monseigneur, it will be quite out of obedience that I do so. And there is yet another abyss between saying it and making me believe it. And you can see it would call for even more obedience on my part to do so.”

“What do you mean, my child, that these metric indications are not indispensable.”

“Within the order of usefulness, Monseigneur. I see very well that you have never really walked along a road. If I am in Dourdan, or even if I am in Orsay, or even if I am in Lozère, or even if I am in Bourg-la-Reine,<sup>182</sup> or even if I am in Paris, on the street of the Sorbonne, I am quite capable of making my way to Chartres without consulting any signposts or even looking at the kilometer markers.”

“Good heavens, you know the way.”

“One always does. I mean that there is always someone who knows it for you. Say I am going there for the very first time. As long as there are farmers in the fields and loafers on their doorsteps watching you pass by while pretending to be chatting about something else, and who look you over without ever fully looking at you, as long as there are blacksmiths in these villages busy shoeing horses along the way, I am quite capable, with a bit of manners, of making my way anywhere.”

“It is a long way.”

“One manages. ‘Excuse me, sir, is this indeed the road to Chartres.’”

---

<sup>182</sup> Péguy enumerates here his successive places of residence: Orsay (specifically Saint-Clair), beginning in July of 1899; Lozère, beginning in January of 1908; and Bourg-la-Reine, beginning in August of 1913 (Pléiade fn.).

“Yes, sir. Only once you get past Saint-Cyr make sure you don’t go right.’

“(In truth, he is mistaken. You can turn right as much as you like. For in that whole area, every road leads sooner or later to Chartres.) ‘Excuse me, sir, how much further is it to Chartres?’

“You’ve got a good six leagues to go.’

“They count in leagues. The league has something more supple about it than the kilometer. Something more energetic, more rural, more earthy. And it is a part of the language we heard all throughout our youth. The league was the itinerary unit(y) of our youth. It was the itinerary unit(y) of Old France. It is not rigid like the kilometer. One has not said all there is to know about it when one says nowadays that a league equals four kilometers. A league is perhaps equal to four kilometers. But it is worth infinitely more. Because it is equal to an entire world of memory. An antiquity without limits. A profound and supple land and people.

“The league also comes out of and is a part of a profound and supple morality.

“These good people give directions that are themselves a bit supple, as you can well understand, and sometimes delightfully fanciful. But do you really believe those stiff metric markers don’t also give directions that are just as fanciful, yet unpleasantly so. Do you really believe there is no imprecision in their stiffness. One can count the times in which the three categories of markers you find along a road all agree with one another. Or rather one cannot count them. Because you will never find any. But perhaps you do not know, Father, the three categories of signs that one finds along a road.”

“I am just surprised to hear you, my child, speak at all of categories.”

“Father, we are all too familiar with other types of categories. We know all too well the categories of rigidity and stiffness. And these possess nothing of the exacting and demanding nature of suppleness.”

“Not only does it seem, my child, that I know nothing of the exacting and demanding nature of suppleness but neither do I understand the categories of rigidity and stiffness. Because I confess I do not know the three categories of rigid, metric indicators that one finds along a road. I am only aware of two, the signposts and kilometer markers.”

“There are three categories, Father. Because there are also the little blue signs that you encounter both as you enter into and as you come out of a village, a hamlet, a community, or even an urban center.”

“The way in and the way out are the same thing. For you can enter into or go out of a village at either of its two ends. The roads can be taken in either of their directions, as one wishes.”

“You mean to say that they are reversible. I can assure you, however, that it is not at all the same thing to enter into Chartres as it is to come back from it. And that villages are not the same when entered from one direction as when entered from the other. And that roads are not the same when taken in one direction as when taken in the other. But this will perhaps lead us away from our main point. We had just hit upon these lovely blue signs that you encounter as you come into and as you go out of villages, built into the walls of houses, or embedded in the last garden wall. These

signs certainly have nothing to do with identification, because they are never in agreement with the signposts or kilometers along the road, which are themselves...All this is simply to say, Father, that there is often a good deal of imprecision to be found within their stiffness. Thus, we have three categories of rigid classification, of metric classification along the same road. And if we were to follow them all we would be forced to believe that this road itself is not the same road, and that it is indeed three different roads. And they would, (these categories), send us back to the question of the one and the same, and of the same and the other, just as in Antiquity.

“Believe me, Father, (and here his voice took on a grave tone and melancholic distance), (a tone, despite himself, full of distance and depth), (he paused a moment before going on), I have traveled it myself, the road to Chartres. Let me tell you that what it means to go to Chartres is not to follow these kilometer markers, nor these signposts.”

“Then what is it, my child.”

“Father, it is to come upon the old wooden cross, dilapidated and covered with moss, that stands at the corners of the roads along the way. Sometimes it bears the figure of Christ upon it, and thus forms what we call a crucifix, this Christ fixed upon a cross. And sometimes it bears nothing at all, so simple is it thus. Sometimes it bears an inscription, often worn away. And sometimes it does not even bear this.

“And of course, one has no need of an inscription to know what it is.

“However, when you are able to make one out, there is never anything metric about it. This cross seems completely unaware that it stands at the corner of this or that road, as opposed to such and such another. It is there, somewhere in the world. Seemingly knowing that it is always the same world.

“And the few words that it bears upon it, generally in Latin, evoke an entirely other journey.”

The priest registered these words and their impact. He remained silent for a long time, as if he too was pursuing his own grave, melancholic thoughts. Already far-off. Then he smiled, for he loved this child, who was half rebel yet completely obedient, of a faithfulness without limit, and of an unfailing strength and solidity.

“So then,” he said, “*to look upon the signs at the corners of crossroads?*”<sup>183</sup>

“We have arrived here at last, Monseigneur, and we have reached our own destination point, and the completion of our journey. We will finally see just what it means to be truly Catholic.”

He looked at me surprised.

“But this calls for,” (I continued), “a certain... a certain discretion and delicacy.”

(He made a sign as if to indicate he suspected as much.)

---

<sup>183</sup> This verse appears in Péguy’s 1913 poem *La Tapisserie de Notre Dame* (Pléiade fn.).

“Particularly since,” I continued, “we are entering here into an entirely foreign domain.”

“...”

“No, it is not the domain of Catholicism that is foreign. We are entering here,” I continued, “into an unknown realm, into a foreign domain, which is precisely the domain of joy. A hundred times less known, a hundred times more foreign, a hundred times less our very selves than the kingdoms of suffering and pain. A hundred times more profound I believe and a hundred times more fertile. Happy are those who one day have some idea of it. When one thus walks along a road, it is a joy, a mysterious and profound phenomenon, to read the indications there on the signposts. One knows very well where one is going. One knows very well the road one is passing along. One knows very well where one is. *Ubi, quo, unde, qua*.<sup>184</sup> All the same, one goes to the side of the road and looks at the signpost. It feels good. It is part of the joy of the road. Now explain that.”

“Well, the Catholic is a man who knows very well he is on the right spiritual path and yet who feels the need to check in with the road signs.”

“Or rather he feels the joy, a profound joy, in checking in with the road signs.

“When one has a group of friends, Monseigneur, like I have, made up of Protestants and Jews, one quickly realizes, one understands that none of them can

---

<sup>184</sup> These are the four interrogative adjectives relative to location in Latin: *where*, *whither* (where to), *whence* (where from), *by what way?* (Pléiade fn.).

imagine what it is to be Catholic.<sup>185</sup> And Protestants are even further removed and more incapable of doing so than Jews. They believe they know, and that they understand what it is, and that they thus stand in opposition to it, and combat it. In reality, not only is it unknown to them, but they do not even understand it, nor do they see it, nor can they imagine what it is. This properly sort of freely-offered quality that there is in being Catholic. And we touch here upon a chief point of difference, upon a point that highlights this difference, and upon a point that Protestants fail to see as being essential to what it is to be Catholic. Protestants are men who make their own signposts themselves. And they have each and every one of them their own proper signposts. And not only do they make their own signposts but they are constantly justifying them and themselves for doing so.

“The Catholic, on the contrary, (try as I might to be understood, Catholics alone will understand this), the Catholic is a young boy who strikes out upon the road and finds it all too right and proper those signposts that he encounters and that have been put up for everyone. And not only that, but these signposts there for everyone, he need not even consult them to know his way. He is all too familiar with his route, he knows it, he sees it, he does like everyone, he follows like everyone. One sees the road before one. He checks in with the signposts to experience a certain joy that is precisely the ritual joy of the road itself, to fulfill a certain rite, which is the rite of passage along the road itself.

---

<sup>185</sup> Compare for example these words from Péguy’s Jewish friend Bernard Lazare: “The Christian stands before the Jew as before an unknown world” (Pléiade fn.).

“A joy proper to and part of its ritual, non-interchangeable and unknown to anyone who is not Catholic, a joy of rites and of community, a joy of the local parish.

“And one the non-Catholic cannot even imagine, cannot even begin to think upon.

“A proper, ritual joy, incommunicable to all others.

“A joy of the useless, the freely-given, the unnecessary.

“The only joy.

“All others are mere negotiations.

“Here is the profound, (the sole, irrevocable), incommunicability that separates the Catholic from all others (perhaps a bit less so from the Jew, however). The Catholic follows the world. All the while Protestants are busy putting up, each of them, their own signposts.

“The Catholic makes use of those already there. He knows there is a whole world of engineers, of roadmenders, of supervisors continually at work upon our roads and bridges. Supervisor, what a wonderful word. One cannot know if they supervise the path of the road itself or simply the work of those under their direction.

“The Catholic checks in with signposts simply to check in with them. The Protestant [...]”<sup>186</sup>

---

<sup>186</sup> The order for general mobilization, which went out on August 1, 1914, forced Péguy to break off composition here of what would be his final work. He would die slightly more than a month later, at the age of 41, on September 5, 1914 (Pléiade fn.).