From Darkness to Light:
A Philosophical Musing on
the Hanukkah Myth,
the Return of the Goddess,
and the End of Religion

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[Int]he mythic imagery of the Bible bears a message of its own that
can not always be the one verbalized in the discourse of the text.
For this book is a carrier of symbols borrowed from the deep
past, which is of many tongues.

Joseph Campbell, The Masks of God

Introduction
As a rule, religious traditions are loath to acknowledge that
their most precious cargo are often either secondhand goods
dredged up from the vast thrift shop of the human psyche, or
even outright stolen property. What for conservative tradition-
alisms must be venerated as eternal, god-given truths, stories,
and symbols are in fact the inspired creations of the visionary
geniuses of the human race. However, these geniuses do more
than plumb the wondrous and dangerous abyssal depths of
their own inward visionary experiences. As true artists of the
soul, they are not too proud to eat out when the cupboard at
home proves to be bare of essential spiritual nourishment. Art,
after all, must come first; social pride is at best a distant second.
Meanings will be begged, borrowed, or lifted from other (often
eral) traditions and given new interpretations. Not surprisingly,
the fevered imaginings and baroque inventions of these wild
men and women frequently do not jibe with the staid orthodox
of the orthodox. The aficionados of order prefer their
religion served up pure and simple. And therein is set in motion
the inner tension that at once drives and strains religious tradi-
tions—even to the breaking point.
Hanukkah is a minor holiday on the Jewish calendar. The story does not even appear in the Hebrew Bible/Old Testament. Yet, because it exhibits in a profound and interesting way such conflicting tendencies, I regard it not only as an important window on the Jewish tradition as a whole, but also as a platform for launching a critical analysis of the very idea of a religious tradition. For even as the story of Hanukkah in its original form celebrates a particular historical event in which the purity of the tradition was restored and reaffirmed, the subsequent development of that story tacitly expresses a movement away from standard notions of orthodoxy and purity and toward the very same heterodox ideas of universality and syncretism that stand condemned by the overt message of the myth.

At the risk of sounding apocalyptic, here a serious note of caution is in order. As G. W. F. Hegel warned, by the time a form of human consciousness becomes intelligible to the philosophical mind—with its dry, gray theories—that form is a spent force, a gray-haired, decrepit old coot doddering and drooling his way through the final dark passage into the black hole of history, from which there is no return: "When philosophy paints its grey in grey, then has a shape of life grown old. By philosophy's grey in grey it cannot be rejuvenated but only understood. The owl of Minerva spreads its wings only with the falling of the dusk" (Knox 13). Gray times call for gray theories.

Reflection is the quintessential Monday morning quarterback; understanding is and must be a retrospective affair. Pity the poor philosopher, who is so easily confused with the undertaker! Paradoxically, a genuine philosophy of religion is therefore possible if and only if religion (at least as it has been known
and either hated or loved heretofore) is essentially over and done with, finis. Although I do not explicitly argue for this broader eschatological thesis within the confines of the present essay, I take it that the argument offered herein may offer an illustration of its essential truth.

Part 1 discusses some of the basic historical facts of the Hanukkah myth and my personal encounters with it. Part 2 examines the connections between the key concepts of "syncretism," "purity," and "tradition." This analysis leads, in Part 3, to a consideration of the nature and significance of what I am calling those "heterodox" mythological motifs, the archetypes of fire and light. In Part 4, I expand my discussion of heterodoxy by addressing the delicate moral and intellectual issues surrounding the philosophical critique of religion—including the thorny questions of anti-Semitism and religious bigotry.

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Part 1: Miracle in the Temple

Hanukkah (literally: "dedication"), known as the Festival of Lights, is celebrated for eight days beginning on the evening of the twenty-fifth day of the Hebrew month of Kislev. It is a minor commemorative celebration of postbiblical, apocryphal origin. What the holiday commemorates is the military victory of the Hebrews over their Greek Syrian overlords in 167 BCE and the resanctification of the Jerusalem Temple, which had been defiled by the Syrians when they built an altar to Zeus-Jupiter in the Holy of Holies and sacrificed swine to the one who "thunders on high" (Hesiod 37). In the course of the Hebrews' purification ceremony, a miracle occurred when consecrated lamp oil that was only supposed to last for only one day instead burned for eight days.

Thus Hanukkah celebrates the Jewish rejection of Hellenism: the victory, as it were, not only of Yahweh over Zeus, but of Moses over Aristotle. The narrative in the Apocryphal texts of First and Second Maccabees (c. 140 and 110 BCE, respectively) describe the great military victory of the Maccabean family, led by Mattathias and his son Judah Maccabee (macab = hammer, so literally, Judah the Hammer) over Antiochus Epiphanes, the king of Greek Syria and ruler of Israel, and his general Lysias. Antiochus was a descendant of Seleucus, the Macedonian general in the army of Alexander the Great who had assumed control of Syria upon Alexander's untimely death in 323 BCE. And Alexander had been the star pupil of none other than Aristotle himself.

The conflict between the Maccabees and the Seleucids was essentially religious in nature. As the apocryphal text informs us, "Then the king [Antiochus] wrote to his whole kingdom that all should be one people, and that each should give up his customs" (1 Macc. 1:41). This notion of "oneness," of a common human nature in which each and every member of the species fully shares, is a quintessentially Greek idea. Socrates had defined the essence of humanity in terms of the individual's capacity for self-inquiry. For him, the unexamined life was simply not worth living for a human being. On the other hand, Aristotle claimed that to be human is to be a social animal (zoon politikon).

These two rival definitions, representing the twin poles of Greek thinking on this matter, illustrate the tension within the Greek mind between the values of individuality and those of community. Socrates, the lone who refrained from participating in public life on the advice of his daimon (guardian angel), was executed by the Athenians because he refused to cater to the mob. The gregarious Alexander prudently followed his teacher Aristotle and led the mob (demos) rather than allow himself to be ruled (kratos) by it.

For Socrates' direct successors in the Stoic school of philosophy, the idea of a universal human nature became inseparable from that of a universal religion that would honor individual differences. Stoic thinkers such as Cleanth the Assos (331-233 BCE) and Zeno of Citium (336-264 BCE) developed Socrates' original criticism of the old Olympian cult and those who literally believed "that there really is war among the gods, and terrible enmities and battles, and other such things as are told by the poets" (Plato 10). Eschewing such literalism, the Stoics interpreted the gods as alternative metaphorical expressions of the one great cosmic mystery. This led to a comparative or syncretistic approach to the gods of different peoples, whereby "a figure like Aphrodite could be equated with the Babylonian Astarte or the Egyptian Isis" (von Franz 1985: 39).

In theory, then, the Greek conception of "oneness" did not exclude a diversity of its mythic expressions, for the ultimate one is the unnameable cosmic mystery. The various gods
are merely manifestations of its nameable qualities, as Athena incarnated wisdom and Ares represented war. But these same qualities could acquire different names in different places. The name of the rose did not matter, whereas Judaic oneness did, in both theory and practice, exclude such alternative expressions. The central prayer of Judaism, and virtually the only metaphysical statement in all the liturgy, is the Sh'ma: “Hear O Israel! the Lord our God, the Lord is One” (Deut. 6.4). This ultimate One has a definite name and address and an extensive history of relations with His people, and He does not like to be associated, let alone equated with any other deities: “I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage. You shall have no other gods before me. You shall not make for yourself a graven image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is on the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth; you shall not bow down to them or serve them; for I the LORD your God am a jealous God” (Deut. 5.6–9). Thus the straw that broke the camel’s back, so to speak, for the party of the Maccabees was Antiochus’s equation of Lord Zeus with Lord Yahweh and the insulting violation of the Levitical taboo against the unholy swine.

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Although standard textbooks on world religions are apt to offer such disclaimers as, “[t]he observance of the [Hanukkah] festival, however, is built not upon the military victory as such” (Parrinder 410), the apocryphal texts wax poetic mainly in their descriptions of martial violence, as in the following passage exalting Judah Maccabee:

He extended the glory of his people,
Like a giant he put on his
breastplate; he girded on his armor of war and
waged battles,
protecting the host by his sword.
He was like a lion in his deeds,
like a lion’s cub roaring for
prey. (1 Macc. 3.3–4)

Judah was a bold incarnation of the archetypal hero,
displaying the manly virtues of the warrior—a Jewish John

Wayne. (During my early years, an autographed photo of Wayne—a still from Hondo, my favorite of his movies—occupied a place of honor on my nightstand.) And in the mind of a young Jewish boy like myself, growing up in the late 1960s, the mythical figure of Judah Maccabee was easily conflated with a real-life hero: General Moshe Dayan, the swashbuckling, eye-patch-sporting architect of the Israeli victory in the Six Day (“Lightning”) War. It was clear that the Jews were not going to be pushed around anymore: we were good and tough. How tough? And how tough is good?

I drew the line when I found myself in a debate with the cantor at my synagogue. He passionately defended Meir Kahane, a rabbi from New York who had founded the Jewish Defense League, an organization whose members used baseball bats to beat up people who were perceived to be threatening to Jews. I objected not only to Kahane’s vigilantism, but also to his self-created persona: the hostile, militant, self-righteous Jew. The cantor said that I was both naive and wrong. Wrong I was, but not in the way that he supposed, for the line between reactive militarism and reactionary militarism is razor thin.

Kahane later emigrated to Israel, where he founded a political party whose platform advocated the forcible expulsion of all Arabs from “Greater Israel,” a territory claimed by fanatics that includes land occupied in the Six Day War (and more). After Kahane himself was fatally gunned down by an Arab extremist, his party’s line inspired a fanatical Jewish settler to massacre unarmed Palestinian Arabs, and another young Jewish zealot to assassinate peacemaking Israeli Prime Minister (and former general) Yitzhak Rabin, who had the sheer audacity to suggest that “The Bible is not a land deed.” A recent article in a national news magazine entitled “The Religious Wars” predicts a full-blown civil war in Israel between secularists and the ultra-Orthodox haredim (literally: “those who fear [their God]?!”). One influential haredi rabbi publicly “proclaimed that violators of Sabbath laws ‘will be killed!’” (Beyer 33). And where will the violence end?

In the postmodern world of proliferating power centers, each with its own nuclear, biological, and chemical arsenals, the worship of war and its emotional charges, fear and anger, is suicidal madness. Violence as exemplified and romanticized by the old patriarchal models of kings as gods and God as king of kings, the one true chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, is
necessarily passed. The imperative of sheer survival prescribes the rejection of these moldy icons. Yet there is no denying that the imagery of war is a key part of the Hanukkah myth. To offer a bowdlerized version of the story that avoids the hard questions raised by the celebration of an outdated and dangerous form of macho heroism is a cheap ploy, the mark of a moral and intellectual cowardice that cannot be indulged.

Nevertheless, the hero archetype—although a potent and stimulating brew to be sure—was not for me the primary attractor in the Hanukkah story. That honor belonged to the miraculous menorah. So when I began the research for this essay, my first impulse was to dig out my childhood Hanukkah storybook. I immediately turned to the dog-eared section entitled “Miracle in the Temple” and reread the familiar paragraphs:

With great joy the Maccabees marched, singing, to Jerusalem. And they went work on the Temple. The gates were burnt down; they built new ones. Inside, there was a Greek idol named [Zeus] Jupiter; they threw it out. There was an altar on which the Greeks had offered sacrifices to their idols. The Maccabees broke it into little pieces, and built a new one out of whole stones. Everywhere they cleaned and scrubbed and polished, until the Temple glistened again, pure white and gold. They couldn’t get back the things which Antiochus had taken, and so they made new ones: There was a new golden altar for burning incense. And there was a brand-new menorah to light every day.

On the twenty-fifth day of the month of Kislev, the Temple was ready again to be the house of God. The Maccabees and all the people of Israel came early in the morning, when the shining sun was still new in the sky. They wanted to see everything going on in the Temple just the way it used to be. How happy they were! How they laughed, and sang to thank God that all was right again.

The time came for the kohen gadol (the high priest) to light the menorah inside. But he didn’t go inside. “Why don’t you light the menorah?” someone asked him. “I must have pure olive oil which no heathen has made unclean,” he replied. “Don’t you have any?” He shook his head: “There is none at all.”

“Well,” they asked him, “where could we find some?”

“I don’t know,” he replied. “We used to prepare a lot at one time. Then we poured it into little jars. Each jar held enough oil to burn one day. Then we sealed every jar tight. We would have to find a jar like that, with the seal unbroken. But none of us have been here for three years. Do you think we can find such a jar after three years?”

“We will search,” the people shouted. And they searched. They looked everywhere around the Temple, in every old pile, under every piece of rubble. And they found one jar—enough pure oil to burn one day. That day the menorah was lit, and the people were happy.

“Tell me,” said Judah the Maccabeus to the kohen gadol, “how long will it take us to get new olive oil?”

“The nearest place where we can get it is the city of Tekoa. If you send a good rider with a swift horse, he can go and come back in eight days.”

“Very well,” said Judah. “We will send a rider at once. But until he comes back, the menorah cannot be lit again. What a pity.”

What Judah didn’t know was that the little bit of oil was going to burn for eight days—until the rider came back with fresh oil. Every day the kohen gadol went in to see the menorah—and the flames still burned brightly. He went out and told the people, and the news spread: It was a miracle! God granted His people a miracle! The menorah would not go out for eight long days, until they had new oil.

My, but those people were happy! (Wengrov 40–43)

Now I recalled that my childhood pleasure in reading these paragraphs celebrating religious purity was hardly unalloyed, for the character of Zeus, so unceremoniously trashed in the first few sentences above, was already familiar to me from another beloved gift from my childhood: Ingrí D’Aulaire and Edgar Parin D’Aulaire’s _Book of Greek Myths_. That Zeus was no dull idol or stock heathen villain. He was larger than life, a god of many moods and deeds, the Lord of Olympus. Hence I could not muster the requisite feelings of ethnic pride, righteous indignation, and dismissiveness toward “mere infidels.”

But the miraculous menorah and the candle-lighting rituals of my own childhood menorah was another story: for there was true, fairy-tale magic. Indeed, the glow of lights of all kinds (including the forbidden Christmas lights of the neighbors) kindled my fascination. Mysterious, enchanting beauty—not crude brawn—was the real attraction.
Which is why, in the course of my research for this essay, I made (for me, at any rate) an astonishing discovery: The menorah miracle was not part of the original story.

The rather straightforward chronicle of First Maccabees, written by a Palestinian Jew from Jerusalem some twenty-five years after the actual historical event of the rededication of the temple, records no such miracle. The text merely states that the victorious Maccabees “made new holy vessels, and brought the lampstand [menorah], the altar of incense, and the table into the temple. Then they burned incense on the altar and lighted the lamps on the lampstand, and these gave light in the temple” (1 Macc. 4.48–50).

Second Maccabees, an abridgment of a work written by a Jew named Jason of Cyrene, was composed some fifty-seven years after the victory of the Maccabees (c. 110 BCE) The editor, working perhaps ten years later, added some verses of his own, including a letter to Jews in Egypt exhorting them to keep the Hanukkah holiday. So, clearly, Hanukkah was already being celebrated during the first century BCE. Yet, despite the fact that Jason and his editor heavily favor explanations of historical events that, in the words of the editors of the Apocrypha, invoke “miraculous interventions from heaven” (May and Metzger 221), there is no mention of any miraculous oil in the climactic scene. The text simply says, “They purified the sanctuary, and made another altar of sacrifice; then, striking fire out of flint, they offered sacrifices, after a lapse of two years, and they burned incense and lighted lamps and set out the bread of the Presence” (2 Macc. 10.3).

All the standard works of reference mentioned the same fact in passing: the menorah miracle was a “legend” found only in the Talmud—specifically, the Gemara (tractate Shabbat 21b), which is the later rabbinical commentary added to the Mishnah. The authoritative Babylonian Talmud was completed c. 525 CE (the Palestinian Talmud achieved its final form c. 400 CE). Given that there is no mention of any miracle in the accounts of the Jewish historian Josephus (37–100 CE) (Strassfeld 162), and since the Mishnah was composed sometime after 135 CE, the menorah miracle must have been invented by the rabbis sometime between the late second and early sixth centuries, the very centuries that saw the rise and codification of Christianity. Thus the menorah legend, superimposed on the earlier historical narrative of the temple restoration, is a creature of the same bubbling, cacophonous culture cauldron of Hellenistic and Near Eastern mystery cults that gave birth to a New World myth.

If the anomalous event of the miraculous oil had actually occurred in 167 BCE, surely it would have been recorded in the earliest written (apocryphal) accounts in order to support the religious interpretation of the Maccabees as enforcers of a divine justice. Why, then, did the rabbis see fit to add just this legend to the history of Hanukkah at precisely this particular moment? Did the newly evolving Christian mythology play a role?

As Joseph Campbell has observed, a legend is a highly unstable compound:

[Myths are] religious recitations conceived of as symbolic of the play of eternity in time [. . .] Legends [. . .] are reviews of a traditional history (or of episodes from such a history) so rendered as to permit mythological symbolism to inform human event and circumstance. Whereas myths present in pictorial form cosmogonic and ontological intuitions, legends refer to the more immediate life and setting of the given society. Something of the religious power of myth may be regarded as effective in legend, in which case the native narrator must be careful concerning the circumstances of his recitation, lest the power break astray. (1969: 16)

What exactly did this potentially dangerous incursion of eternity (in the form of archetypal images of fire and light) into the field of historical time mean for the development of Judaism in the early centuries of the first Christian millennium? In order to address this question, the nature of the religious quest for purity must be considered.

Part 2: From “Order” to “Disorder” (and Back Again)
The themes of purity and defilement are absolutely central to the Hanukkah myth. What was at stake for the Maccabees was not merely the violations of specific rules, such as the Levitical taboo against eating swine (bear in mind that sacrifices, especially to the Greeks, were occasions for feasting) or the Deuteronomic prohibition against worshipping other gods—as undeniably important as these were. Rather, it was the purity of the tradition as such—its very existence—that was threatened by the Greek Syrians and their many pro-Hellenic Hebrew sympathizers. Thus, in order to grasp the real signifi-
cause of the Maccabees' revolt, the traditional concept of "purity" needs to be clarified.

Using the abominations of Leviticus as her point of departure, the anthropologist Mary Douglas asks, What do diverse and apparently unrelated prohibitions such as the injunction not to eat rock badgers or hares or swine and the forbidden sexual relationships of incest and bestiality have in common? She points to such passages as Leviticus 19.19 as containing the essential clues: "You shall keep my statutes. You shall not let your cattle breed with a different kind; you shall not sow your field with two kinds of seed; nor shall there come upon you a garment of cloth made by two kinds of stuff" (cited in Douglas 53).

The traditionalist idea of purity or holiness, Douglas observes, is all about resisting confusion between classes of things, or keeping separate that which should be kept separate. Hybrids, anomalies, freaks, and other ambiguous border crossers such as camels, hares, and incestuous males blur or disrupt fixed schemes of classification, and are abhorred for that very reason. They introduce chaos into a divinely appointed cosmic order:

For I believe that ideas about separating, purifying, demarcating, and punishing transgressions have as their main function to impose system on an inherently undifferentiated experience. It is only by exaggerating the difference between within and without, above and below, male and female, whole and against, that a semblance of order is created. (Douglas 4; italics added)

Douglas suggests that it is nearly impossible for the modern mind to grasp the impact of the ambiguous and anomalous on the "primitive" mentality:

"Now what are the characteristic marks of the sea-anemone," George Eliot muses, "which entitle it to be removed from the hands of the botanist and placed in those of the zoologist?"

For us ambiguous species merely provoke essays to elegant reflections. For Leviticus the rock badger or Syrian hyrax is unclean and abominable. Certainly it is an anomaly all right. It looks like an earless rabbit, has teeth like a rhino and the small hoofs of its toes seem to relate it to the elephant. But its existence does not threaten to bring the structure of our culture tumbling around our ears. Now that we have recognized and assimilated our common descent with apes nothing can happen in the field of animal taxonomy to rouse our concern. This is one reason why cosmic pollution is [. . .] difficult for us to understand. (73)

In other words, the difference between "the primitive" and "us" (at least some, though by no means all of us) can be summed up in one word: Darwin. Eliot (whose first "big" novel, The Mill on the Floss, was published in 1860—within a year of Charles Darwin's The Origin of Species) may have felt comfortable enough to wax poetic about "ambiguous species" because she herself was an oddity: a woman with a male pen name who regarded herself in a marriage to a man (George Henry Lewes) whom she never officially married. But what Darwin had shown—if he had shown anything at all—is that without the (apparently) random freaks of nature, we would all still be swimming around sucking plankton in the earth's primordial seas. As far as the biological process of evolution is concerned, the anomaly—the category bustier, the rule breaker—is where all the action is. No novelty, no process. Or, in postmodern terms, chaos has its own peculiar intimations of order. But what about the social and intellectual freaks (like Eliot)? What is their role in the evolution of ideas?

As Thomas S. Kuhn argued, the conceptual and social evolution of science has been punctuated by a series of major conceptual and theoretical cataclysms that might be called "paradigm shifts" (Kuhn 111–35). In such shifts, what Douglas described in terms of the idea of religious purity as the "imposed system" of order breaks down precisely because its idea of unity is revealed as being too simplistic to account for the inherent complexities and anomalies of experience, which were either ignored or suppressed. A few creative, open-minded scientists will take such "outlaw" experiences seriously, rather than marginalizing them as mere oddities (as most scientists still do today, for example, with the phenomena studied by parapsychology). They show that the imposed order was not welcome after all, that the "coherence" of the old view was being purchased at the high cost of cutting out key bits of reality. This is the self-mutilating disease diagnosed by the philosopher R. G. Collingwood as the ersatz, procrustean unity of "the plucked-out eye and the lopped-off limb" (1924: 38).

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It should now be clear why Antiochus's erection of a shrine to Zeus posed such a dire threat to the purists' image of Judaism. The king's claim was not that Yahweh was a false god, or that the Hebrews should pay homage to Zeus in addition to Yahweh; the claim was rather that the Hebrews had already been worshipping Zeus all along but didn't know it, because Zeus and Yahweh were essentially one and the same deity, albeit with two different names and pedigrees. Such an admission would have required a paradigm shift.

Syncretism, unabashedly and playfully mercurial, is a shape-shifter that challenges the very foundations of the traditional idea of purity with its rigid, fixed categories by deliberately introducing what are, from the puritan's standpoint, utter "confusions" and sheer ambiguities, for the syncretist suggests that that which seems radically separate—perhaps even absolutely "other"—really is related at some deeper, more profoundly mysterious level that includes yet transcends the realm of nature. The syncretist invites us to refrain from (again, in Douglas's words) "exaggerating the differences" in order to perceive the similarities, the hidden connections and affinities between things. Then, what at first blush seemed only chaotic and meaningless will at last take on new significance.

The all-pervasive syncretist mentality of late antiquity has been elegantly portrayed by Elaine Pagels in her discussion of emperor worship in Rome:

Belief that the emperors embodied divine powers reflected the way traditionally minded Romans already perceived the gods. For traditional religion in the Roman Empire had always held that the elemental forces of the universe—what we call natural forces—are, in fact, divine forces. The sun's energy, thunder and lightning, as well as the internal forces of passion, manifested themselves respectively in the forms of the gods Apollo, Jupiter, and Venus. Social and political experiences of power, too, could be interpreted as manifestations of those same elemental forces. Yet the much-debated question of whether educated pagans "believed in" the gods or the emperor's divinity is anachronistic, as the classicist Simon Price has pointed out. Many educated pagans, like many of the empire's provincial subjects, participated in sacrifice to the gods or the emperor's genius as a way of demonstrating their proper relationship to the "powers that be," both human and divine. No intelligent person, the sophisticated pagan might have explained, actually worshipped images of the gods, or worshipped living emperors; instead, the gods' images—and the images of the emperors themselves—provided an accessible focus for revering the cosmic forces they represented. (Pagels 41)

Judaism could not regard Yahweh as "an accessible focus," that is, as a useful lens through which the inherent divinity of the natural forces (and the cosmic mystery beyond them) could be viewed with appreciation and awe. For biblical monotheism, nature is a mere artifact created by God, but not itself worthy of worship—only of dominion. Nature and God are absolutely separate forms of being, as are God and humankind. The syncretistic fusion of the social, psychological, and cosmic manifestations of the elemental and trans elemental (metaphysical) forces would be perceived by the religious puritan as a confusion: a wild, monstrous, abominable hybrid or—to use the parlance of recent philosophy—an unfortunate "category mistake."

Fortunately, the actual history of religions can serve as an emergency antidote to the Puritans' poisonous image of their own special tradition as a priceless pristine jewel, a never-changing, hermetically sealed repository of a truth and salvation (or enlightenment and liberation) that is otherwise unavailable, for there is no such animal—never has been and never will be. "Purity" in and of religious traditions alike is a chimera. To cite a very pertinent example: The patient and painstaking historical research of Gershom Scholem has revealed something of the rather checkered semiotic past of the magen David ("shield of David"), the six-pointed star that is today universally recognized as the special symbol of Judaism. But it was not always so.

Scholem notes that a hexagram appears side by side with a pentagram and a swastika on a frieze at the synagogue of Capernaum that dates from the second or third century CE. "There is no reason," he writes, "to assume that it was used for any purposes other than decorative" (362). Whether the symbol had any more than a merely decorative purpose or not, it is an inescapable fact (far too complex to document here) that hexagrams, pentagrams, and swastikas appear spontaneously in the ancient religious art of numerous peoples all over the world. Whatever the hexagram expressed (following Scholem here, the sheer love of symmetrical form, or perhaps some other, hidden
metaphysical meaning), that significance could hardly have been unique to the Hebrews.

The first, strictly ornamental phase came to an end in the Middle Ages, when the symbol assumed the character of a magical talisman, a carrier and transmitter of divine power. Although Scholem acknowledges that this transformation and elevation of the magen David may have had specifically Jewish sources, a close reading of his text suggests another, startling but more likely source of this momentous metamorphosis:

In Arab sources the hexagram, along with other geometrical ornaments, was widely used under the designation “seal of Solomon,” a term which was also taken over by many Jewish groups. This name connects the hexagram with the Jewish people, possibly Jewish-Christian magic, such as the Greek magical work The Testament of Solomon. [...] In Arabic magic the “seal of Solomon” was widely used, but at first it was used in Jewish circles was restricted to relatively rare cases. Even then, the hexagram and pentagram were easily interchangeable and the name applied to both figures. [...] The notion of a “shield of David” with magical powers was originally unconnected with the sign [the hexagram]. It is difficult to say whether the notion arose in Islam, where the Koran sees David as the first to make protective arms, or from the inner traditions of Jewish magic. (Scholem 363-65)

It may be difficult to say not because of where the abundant historical evidence points, but rather what the “political correctness” of the religious purity police demands. Nevertheless, it seems fairly clear from Scholem’s own investigation that the first essential transformation of the hexagram is the result of the visionary inspirations of—all things—Islamic Arabs (and perhaps that of Christians, too). It was thanks to their efforts that the symbol acquired a psychological “charge” that would later make it available as an object of mystery and power for Jews. But even into the nineteenth century, Scholem observes, the menorah (the regular seven-branched rather than the special eight-branched Hanukkah menorah) was by far the most popular image in the Jewish mind associated with Judaism.

The status of the symbol changed dramatically in the nineteenth century, when the magen David began to appear more widely, for example, as a marker in cemeteries denoting the Jewish sections, its usage spreading from central Europe outward to western and eastern Europe, and from there to the precincts of Oriental Jewry (including Palestine). This process culminated in 1948 when the magen David became the official emblem of the new Israeli state, appearing on the national (previously Zionist) flag.

And what, exactly, fueled this second major stage in the evolution of the magen David—not to mention its extensive geographical migration from Europe to the Middle East and beyond? Scholem writes:

The prime motive behind the wide diffusion of the sign in the nineteenth century was the desire to imitate Christianity. The Jews looked for a striking and simple sign which would symbolize Judaism in the same way as the cross symbolizes Christianity. This led to the ascendancy of the magen David in official use, on ritual objects, and in many other ways. (Scholem 367-68)

Jews (especially those living in the long shadow of the Holocaust) have grown used to the idea that Judaism is in part shaped by its responses to outside persecution. But the scholarship of Gershom Scholem points to a debt of a far more positive and profound kind to the “other”—even the most despised other. For it turns out that Judaism is not an eternal truth engraved on stone tablets by the finger of God, but rather an ongoing creative process, a living, evolving organism with a semipermeable membrane, acquiring essential nutrients from its environment—namely, the generally human psyche and all its local cultural variations. To say the least, Judaism would not be what it is without Christianity and Islam (and the same could be said of them). But is it enough to say that?

The puritan or separatist mentality, by insisting on clinging to its fixed categories and concepts, its “eternal verities” and shopping lists of forbidden fruits, elects to “opt out” of process—the march of world history, the evolution of consciousness, or whatever one chooses to call it. Yet, it is impossible to buy an exemption: everyone is subject to the draft of history. Douglas herself hastens to admit that the puritan’s desire to hold fast to certain structures and rules of behavior does not stem the flood tide of historical change:
I do not wish to suggest that the primitive cultures in which these ideas of contagion flourish are rigid, hide-bound and stagnant. No one knows how old are the ideas of purity and impurity in any non-literate culture: to members they must seem timeless and unchanging. But there is every reason to believe that they are sensitive to change. The same impulse to impose order which brings them into existence can be supposed to be continually modifying or enriching them. (4–5; italics added)

But almost immediately following, Douglas adds a crucially important qualifier:

The native of any culture naturally thinks of himself as receiving passively his ideas of power and danger in the universe, discounting any minor modifications he himself may have contributed. In the same way we think of ourselves as passively receiving our native language and discount our responsibility for shifts it undergoes in our lifetime. (5)

The key question, however, is whether religion can consciously choose to own its responsibility for its own creativity and thereby reject the false image of passively receiving divinely given, “timeless and unchanging” truth. This is an epistemological and indeed a moral problem of the first order. No religious tradition can possibly remove itself from the flux of the historical process and contact with the “other.” But what religion can do is resist becoming fully aware of its participation in the process, or in Douglas’ words, to “discount” that participation by insisting that its own creative contributions are restricted to the margins, and that its essential core (thank God) remains absolutely fixed, stable, and pure. “We are,” writes that old puritan Martin Luther, “subject to God’s working by mere passive necessity” (cited in Dillenberger 193). And perhaps even more to the point, “Scripture makes the straightforward affirmation that the Trinity, the Incarnation and the unpardonable sin are facts. There is nothing obscure or ambiguous about that” (Luther, cited in Dillenberger 174). Discounting is clearly the order of the day.

For example, the Catholic Church may safely rescind a minor edict about not eating meat on Fridays without drastically undermining its own authority. But could it alter its position on abortion, birth control, or priestly celibacy without

igniting the fatal rebellion of its own in-house puritans, who would demand that such God-given imperatives not be marred by human hands? Similarly, fundamentalist Protestants rail against “pagan” intrusions into an originally “pure” Christianity by banning that old Druidic import, the Christmas tree, from their yuletide festivities. Could these same puritans so easily afford to expunge from their Bible those “pagan” terms of Greek philosophy, “substance” (ousia) and “person” (hypostasis), that enabled the early Christians to conceive of the Holy Trinity (Owen 53–67)? When the Southern Baptist convention issued its refusal to attend the 1993 Parliament on World Religions in Chicago, the reason given was a puritan’s delight. As reported in the San Francisco Examiner, the group’s statement read, in part, “We are not seeking new religious insights beyond the Bible [nor are we] eager to pool our energies with groups with whom we differ” (Sabini and Allen 23).

Every traditional religion is a mangy mutt masquerading as a snooty purebred. Religions are invertebrate social climbers, pretentious grasppers whose ultimate ambitions can be summarized in that refrain from the old Tears for Fears pop tune: “Everybody wants to rule the world.” Or at least everyone wants to be Right (which is really the same thing). What fuels this aggressive self-righteousness that leads to “holy” wars, book burnings, fatwas, the killing of physicians in cold blood? The belief in one’s own cause as a singularly pure and noble venture. Soren Kierkegaard says somewhere that “purity of heart is to will one thing.” But this notion of wholeness as an uncomplicated, undifferentiated simplicity is sheer—and dangerous—fantasy.

When the religious mind succumbs to the temptation to disguise from itself the subtleties and complexities of its own experience of historical time and the creative processes therein, it falls victim to what Collingwood labeled the “corruption of consciousness,” what Plato called “the lie in the soul” (Collingwood 1958: 217). For Collingwood, self-deception is “corrupt” because he, like Socrates, held that the true and proper aim of consciousness—including, by extension, Jewish consciousness, Greek consciousness, Christian consciousness—is to seek truth by attending to, and reflecting on, the entirety of its experience. When consciousness allows itself to be distracted from the formidable and perhaps intimidating Delphic injunction to “know thyself,” it collides in a perversion of its own most natural function.
But whenever some element in experience is disowned by consciousness, that other element in experience upon which attention is fixed, and which consciousness claims as its own, becomes a sham. In itself, it does genuinely belong to the consciousness that claims it; in saying "This is how I feel," consciousness is telling the truth; but the disowned element, with its corresponding statement "And that is how I do not feel," infects this truth with error. The picture which consciousness has painted of its own experience is not only a selected picture (that is, a true one so far as it goes), it is a bowdlerized picture, or one whose omissions are falsifications. (Collingwood 1958: 218)

Although he was a severe critic of Sigmund Freud and Carl Jung for their insistence that a purely psychological examination of the origin or practical consequences of religious beliefs could be made in the absence of an evaluation of the metaphysical truth of those beliefs, Collingwood complimented psychoanalysis on its attention to the destructive role that self-deception generally plays in human life. To him, the corruption of consciousness was "the true radix malorum" (Collingwood 1958: 285), that is, the root of all evil. And he saw the selective attention paid by the religious consciousness to the full breadth and depth of its own experience as a prime cause of the evils for which it has been responsible throughout the ages.

Quoting Lucretius's famous epigram, tantum religio potuit suadere malorum ("How much evil has flowed from religion"), Collingwood catalogued "all the crimes done in the name of religion, the human sacrifices, the persecutions, the horrors of religious warfare, the corrupt connivance at wickedness, the torture inflicted on simple minds by the fear of hell" (1916: 22). On his own theory, these evils must be diagnosed as evidence of an avoidance of some outlaw element of experience that is then disowned and ascribed to "others," upon whom violence—annihilation even—may be safely visited.

Following Collingwood's analysis, the immediate question becomes this: If indeed the Maccabean religious consciousness was "corrupt" (in Collingwood's specific sense), then what facets of its own historical experience in later antiquity were being disowned? What precisely were the Hebrew puritans attempting to eradicate in themselves when they made holy war upon the external threat of Antiochus's edict? And—perhaps most important of all—did they succeed in their purge?

I argue that they failed, and that this failure was complex. My suggestion is that the emergence within the Talmud itself of the mythic themes of fire and light is strong testimony to this failure—testimony that I shall shortly rehearse in more detail in Part 3. But before I do, I must first address yet a further dimension of the conflict between the puritan and syncretist mentalities.

In the history of religion, the playful, open, reflective attitude toward myth characteristic of syncretism has been difficult to sustain, and inevitably yields to a more sober, serious, closed-minded approach. This formula of alternating opposed tendencies has been noted and variously described by numerous students of religion.

In Joseph Campbell's narrative vocabulary of the hero myth, the adventurous hero leaves the cozy confines of the cultural compound for points yonder (and the safety of ordinary ego consciousness for the treacherous depths of the collective unconscious) in order to obtain a new, saving visionary insight into the nature of reality, then returns to the world in order to share those insights and found new institutions. Thus the lone rebel visionary—Moses, Buddha, Mohammed, Jesus, Luther, whoever—becomes the pillar of the new establishment. So constant was this cyclical pattern that Campbell used the image of the circle to illustrate it and named it "the nuclear unit of the monomyth" of the human race (1949: 30).

Likewise, Douglas noted a "contrast between interior will and exterior enactment" that she saw as necessarily universal: "[O]f its very nature any religion must swing between these two poles. There must be a move from internal to external religious life, if a new religion endure even a decade after its first revolutionary fervor. And finally, the hardening of the external crust becomes a scandal and provokes new revolutions" (60).

So it is that syncretism has always been a merely transitional phase that falls between the death of the old religious consciousness and the birth of the new. But even the "new" religious consciousness has always represented a reversion to some general type well-known from the past. Fluidity gives way to solidity, play to work, symbolic to literal, inner mystical to outer ritual, philosophy to fundamentalism. The late Marie-Louise von Franz believed that this movement expressed "a general psychological law: The statement of the new truth reveals the previous conceptions as 'projections' and tries to draw them into the psychic inner world, and at the same time ...
it announces a new myth, which now passes for the finally discovered 'absolute' truth" (1985: 38–39, italics in original). That is to say, the development of the religious consciousness—heretofore at least—has depended upon someone throwing up their hands at last in exasperation with the cry, "Your gods may be metaphors or tools or windows or whatever, but my god—He's the real thing!"

This "general psychological law" was in full force when out of the playground of Hellenistic syncretism of late antiquity strode a muscular Christianity that proclaimed that it was replacing mythological fantasy with hard historical fact: "For we did not follow cleverly devised myths when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of his majesty" (2 Pet. 1:16). When some sixteen centuries later an even more musclebound science overthrew Christianity and all the religious pretenders to the throne of knowledge, it, too, made the claim that, once and for all, mere myth and superstition were being replaced by the cold, hard facts of nature. To this day, most scientists are reluctant to regard their theories as anything less than literally true representations of a reality that exists "out there," independent of the observer. As Kuhn pointed out, every episode of scientific revolution in which every old truth is put into question is followed by an extended period of what he called "normal" science in which the newly established revolutionary paradigm becomes the unquestioned basis of the next phase of scientific research—at least until the next time. And so it goes, around and around.

However, as the saying goes, laws are made to be broken. For why shouldn't we aspire to retain the creative and playful spirit of inquiry at all times? Why settle for a newly packaged mythological fundamentalism? If the historical pattern of the past is now so crystal clear, we may have arrived at that fortuitous Hegelian moment when Minerva's owl can at last take flight, and the new religious consciousness that is being incubated in the rowdy nursery of today's ubiquitous New Age syncretism (Fox 228–44; Adler 24–38; Grosso 146–48) can evolve into a genuinely new form of religion rather than simply a new instance of a very ancient—utterly decrepit—form. Perhaps, if we are especially lucid, we may become fortunate participant-observers in the momentous process of the evolution of the very laws of historical evolution themselves (Rosen 29–43).

My somewhat dramatic suggestion amounts to this: that nothing less than the future of religion rides on an understanding of the Maccabean revolt against the Seleucids. If it is then asked, "To what specific features of its immediate experience was the puritan patriarchy of the Maccabees willfully blind or inattentive?" one need only consider the genesis of the problem in order to find the solution: "And to Adam he said, 'Because you have listened to the voice of your wife, and have eaten of the tree of which I commanded you. 'You shall not eat of it,' cursed is the ground because of you; in toil you shall eat of it all the days of your life [. . .] you are dust, and to dust you shall return' " (Gen. 3:17–19).

The syncretist impulse is none other than the despised voice of the goddess Eve, crying out against the exaggerated differences between male and female (and all the other categories) required by the puritan-masculine fantasy of order. By making war on the external enemy of the Seleucids, the Maccabees sought to silence the call from the depths of their own souls for a deeper harmony, unity, and connectedness. Christianity would subsequently coopt that same call and buy the patriarchy precious time (two thousand years of procrastination, at last count) by giving over to the world (and the elemental forces that truly govern it) the last of the Hebrew patriarchs, a long-haired male savior who spoke the more typically feminine language of peace, love, and understanding. But neither the Christian strategies of sacrifice and subterfuge nor the Jewish mechanisms of rejection and repression can hope to succeed in the long run. Eve is finding her own voice at last and must be reckoned with, in her own terms, if the history of religion is not to lapse back into that perpetual groaning nightmare from which humanity must fight to awake.

This day of reckoning has long been in the making.

Part 3: The Mother of the Sun Rises
The primary ritual of the Hanukkah holiday is the lighting of the special menorah, which has nine branches instead of the seven branches of the daily menorah that stands on the bimah (dais) of the synagogue. Each of the eight candles commemorates one of the eight days that the oil miraculously burned, and one candle is lit at sundown (the beginning of the new day is the lunar ascendency) for each successive day, in addition to the
candle for the previous day. The ninth candle, called the sham-mash, stands in a prominent place on the menorah, usually higher than the other candles and in the center (or else off to the side, even in front of the rest). The shammas is lit first, then it is used to light the other candle(s); yet it is not extinguished once it has performed this service. This is because one is not supposed to use the menorah for ordinary (secular) purposes of illumination. The light is strictly meant to be the focus of a meditation on the divine miracle. Yet if one should accidentally find oneself seeing with the aid of the menorah light, the still burning shammas provides a dispensation—you were using it, not the other candles, to see.

I can still recall gazing, almost hypnotized, into the image of the red, blue, green, yellow, and white candles burning in the menorah of my childhood, the brightly colored wax dripping in great globs down the sides of the candelabrum. The fascination with fire and light is undeniably primordial; it touches something deep and abiding in the human psyche. If ever there were a genuine candidate for the office of Jungian archetype, it would have to be these motifs, found not only in the myths but in the actual experiences of mystics, prophets, and visionaries the world over.

In Judaism there is Moses and the burning bush. The Greeks had Prometheus, who stole the fire from Zeus and gave it to humanity. Socrates the philosopher claimed that he was only doing the bidding of the god at the oracle of Delphi, who was none other than the sun god, Phoebus Apollo. Socrates's Stoic successors sang hymns to the divine Mind Fire that they said created and permeated the cosmos. In Christianity, the Holy Spirit descended upon the Apostles at Pentecost as lapping "tongues of fire" (Acts 2:3). In commemoration of a revelatory experience, the seventeenth-century philosopher, mathematician, and Catholic mystic Blaise Pascal had a piece of parchment sewn into the lining of his coat on which the word FIRE was inscribed in prominent lettering.

According to The Tibetan Book of the Dead, the first experience of the deceased in the next world is of absolute reality and truth, which is described as the Clear Light (Evans-Wentz 91). And the accounts of those contemporary voyagers to Shakespeare's "undiscovered country"—that is, people who have undergone a so-called near-death experience (NDE)—are chock full of references to encounters with splendid light and even a being of light (BOL). The following firsthand account is typical of this genre: "I just seemed to be surrounded by a velvet blackness. [...] And then, sort of at the periphery of the velvet blackness, there was a brilliant golden light. And I don't remember feeling frightened at all, just perfectly at peace and perfectly comfortable, as if this is where I should be" (Ring 57).

Visionary experiences of fire and light are frequently accompanied by two features suggestive of a "mystical" phenomenon: the inability to put the experience into words ( ineffability), and the sense that one has been introduced to a vast, perhaps infinite, storehouse of cosmic knowledge (illumination). These features are prominently mentioned throughout Cosmic Consciousness, the now classic 1901 survey of mystical experience authored by the Canadian psychiatrist Richard Maurice Bucke, MD. He described (in the third person) his own life-altering experience, which occurred during a brief ride home in a hansom after an evening of reading the poetry of William Wordsworth and Walt Whitman with friends:

His mind, deeply under the influence of the ideas, images and emotions called up by the reading and talk of the evening, was calm and peaceful. He was in a state of passive enjoyment. All at once, without warning of any kind, he found himself wrapped around, as it were, by a flame-colored cloud. For an instant he thought of fire, some sudden conflagration in the great city; the next, he knew that the light was within himself. Directly afterwards came upon him a sense of exultation, of immense joyousness, accompanied or immediately followed by an intellectual illumination quite impossible to describe. (9–10)

The key features of the mystical experience of the light—including ineffability and illumination—are virtually uniform across time and space. Scholem has pointed out that in the later Jewish mysticism of Kabbalah, God in his unknowable aspect is referred to as Ein-Sof Aur: The Limitless Light. As one of the Kabbalists put it: "Ein-Sof is not His proper name, but a word
which signifies his complete concealment. [ . . . ] And it is not right to say 'Ein-Sof, blessed be He [ . . . ] because He cannot be blessed by our lips” (Schollem 90). Compare this with the verse from the Kena Upanishad:

There the eye goes not;
Speech goes not, nor the mind.
We know not, we understand not
How one would teach it. (Hume 335)

and one from the Tao Te Ching of Lao Tzu:

The Tao that can be told
is not the eternal Tao.
The name that can be named
is not the constant Name. (Lao Tzu 57)

From the standpoint of Jewish orthodoxy—and certainly from the perspective of a fighting Maccabee—the later Kabbalistic identification of the light/fire with an unnameable divine source directly experienced by the individual verges on apostasy, for the relationship of this mystery to the named masculine personification of deity worshipped in the temple becomes exceedingly problematic. As noted earlier, it was precisely reference to such a “higher mystery” that made Hellenistic syncretism possible. Yet these are the very notes that are playing, ever so softly, as the background music to the menorah legend.

Moreover, a careful reading of the various descriptions of this mystical experience is highly suggestive—if not yet conclusive proof—of my own hypothesis. The constantly repeated refrain of encountering a warm, loving, peaceful, welcoming atmosphere or presence reminiscent of “coming home” (a phrase often repeated in the NDE literature) compares favorably, not with a reunion with a rather stern, judgmental father figure, but rather with the all-accepting embrace of mother love. In the words of the I Ching, “The earth in its devotion carries all things, good and evil, without exception” (Wilhelm 13). Such a passage suggests that instead of reading (in the usual masculine way) the mystical experience as a “spiritual” elevation above the “lowly” earthly complex of “body-mind-psyché,” one might regard the ineffable illumination reported by experiencers of the light as the shock of being (re)introduced to an instinctive (mineral, vegetable, animal) and therefore wordless way of knowing that is at once before, during, and after all words have ever been spoken.

Speaking of animals, there is an animal image used in the earlier cited apocryphal text of First Maccabees, Judah himself is compared with the lion: “He was like a lion in his deeds, like a lion’s cub roaring for prey” (1 Macc. 3.4). Typically the male lion is identified with the solar disc (its mane = the rays of the sun). Here, of course, the solar power is being equated with the manly virtues of the warrior, so this would seem to slow my building case for identifying the fire/light with the goddess principle. Or does it?

Historically, the solar lion in the Near East was not always associated with the masculine principle; this was an innovation brought about by the invasions of patriarchal herding peoples from the Syro-Arabian desert, beginning as early as 3500 BCE and culminating in the establishment of the kingdoms of Sargon of Agade (c. 2350 BCE) and Hammurabi of Babylon (c. 1728–1686 BCE; Campbell 1964: 72–73). Campbell places the transformation of the lion image within a wider, “extremely interesting, mythologically confusing development (known as solarization), whereby the entire symbolic system of the earlier age is to be reversed, with the moon and lunar bull assigned to the mythic sphere of the female, and the lion, the solar principle, to the male” (1964: 75). According to him, the lion was earlier associated with the goddess in her “negative, killing, sacrificial aspect” (1964: 70). And despite the official cultic image of “the (masculine) lion of Judah,” the primordial identification of the lion with the goddess persisted in the popular religious imagination of the Hebrews until fairly late. In The Hebrew Goddess, Raphael Patai included a photograph of a lion-faced statue of the Canaanite goddess Astarte (worshipped by the Biblical Hebrews, like the goddess Asherah, against Yahweh’s direct orders) that dates anywhere from 2000 to 600 BCE (Patai 59). But there is more.

With the later talmudic legend of the miraculous menorah comes the custom of including a ninth candle, the shammash,
which occupies a prominent place on the candelabrum—a prominence explained as a consequence of its purely secular role. But what if just the opposite were true? What if the shamshu were secretly a divine presence? Shamash is the name of an ancient Babylonian deity—the sun god. And Shamash, according to the Assyriologist A. Léo Oppenheim, enjoyed a “unique position” in the pantheon: “Not only was he the sun god but the judge of heaven and earth, and in this capacity he was concerned with the protection of the poor and the wronged and gave oracles intended to guide and protect mankind. He is not involved in crude mythological situations; even in myths he acts as judge and arbiter” (195–96).

By “crude mythological situations” I take it that Oppenheim means not only wars and such but also the sexcapades of a Zeus—the very things about the Greek myths that so appalled Socrates (especially when they were taken literally). Shamash is a highly sober deity. His concern with justice is especially striking, reminiscent (or perhaps anticipatory would be more historically accurate) as it is of Yahweh. According to legend, it was from Shamash that Hammurabi received the divine commission to write his law-book (Pritchard 138)—a relationship that may indeed have served as the model for Moses and Yahweh (as the burning bush). For it must be remembered not only that the Hebrews were captives in Babylonia for some fifty-seven years (586–39 BCE), but also that the major version of the Talmud was produced in the Jewish centers of learning in Babylonia. If the shamshu was indeed a silent nod to Shamash, then enacting the role of judge would explain the special position accorded to the shamshu on the Hanukkah menorah.

But Shamash in any case was an activist. Patricia Monaghan observes that most of the solar deities of the Near East were, in fact, female (279; cf. Stone 44–45, 96)—at least prior to the process of solarization. The native Canaanite solar deity was female. Called the “torch of the gods,” her name was Shapash. Monaghan writes: “In the Ugaritic Epic of Baal, this goddess retrieves the fertility-god’s plaything from the underworld, an allegory of the return of moisture and growth to the earth’s surface, of the annual defeat of drought” (279).

Intrigued by this discovery, I turned to the Epic of Baal. There, sure enough, is the regeneratrix Shapash (or Shapsh)

being rewarded with a governing place among the gods by Baal in grateful recognition of her heroic deed:

She’ll eat the bread of honor,
She’ll drink the wine of favor.

Shapsh shall govern the gathered ones,
Shapsh shall govern the divine ones.

... gods ... mortals,
... Kolthar thy fellow,
Even Khosis thine intimate.

(Pritchard 115)

Was the shamshu not only an echo of Shamash, but also a beard for (the earlier and indigenous) Shapash? Like most things having to do with the Middle East, the story of the relationship between the candle, the god, and the goddess is rather labyrinthine. But I shall do my best to follow the winding thread and disentangle it for the reader.

Patai notes that the Ugaritic myths were written (c. 1300 BCE) in a language that was “quite close” to biblical Hebrew, and also that the Hebrews typically used Akkadian, Sumerian, and Canaanite names for deities interchangeably, in a kind of sloppy syncretism (Patai 37). Hence “Shapash” would not have sounded foreign to Hebrew ears, and could easily have become associated (or confused) with the Babylonian Shamash.

This would explain the otherwise curious statement by Ellen Frankel that “[t]he [native] inhabitants of ancient Palestine worshiped the ancient sun god ‘Shamash’” (Frankel and Teutsch 166). Though not mentioning Shapash by name, Frankel acknowledges something of this gender-bending background: “Sometimes [the sun] has been regarded as a male deity, source of strength and wisdom; other times as female, source of wisdom and life; sometimes these roles have been merged or shared” (Frankel and Teutsch 166). But to the orthodox, the sun is no deity. As Frankel also observes, sun worship was explicitly forbidden in the Torah (Deut. 4.19), and subsequently eradicated with martial force by the Hebrew King Josiah in his bloody campaign to purify Temple worship in 621 BCE (2 Kings 21.3–5; 23.11). It is recorded in 2 Kings that Josiah also destroyed the statues of the goddess (ashe oth). Were these statues
of Shapash? Were the twin heresies of sun and goddess worship connected? Patai shows that "considerable segments" of the Hebrew nation worshipped the Canaanite mother-goddess Asherah down to the Babylonian exile (51). How could her daughter Shapash have been a stranger?

Yet another key piece of the puzzle is provided by Frankel, who records the interesting linguistic fact that the "Palestinian" sun god Shamash is the source of the Hebrew word for sun, shemes (166). In fact, the same consonant root in Hebrew (although with different diacritical markings) is shared by shemes (sun), shammash (sexton), and the verb shimmayash, which my Hebrew dictionary defines as "to serve, minister, officiate at; function" (Ben-Yehuda 300)—a clear linguistic sign of family resemblance. The shammash is thus the service candle—the sexton—on the Hanukkah menorah. But if the divine figure of Shamash/Shapash was indeed so deeply embedded in the popular religious consciousness (if not the collective unconscious) of the Hebrews that it gave them their very word for sun, then how did the exalted Queen-turned-King of the Sun ever become connected with the humble, modest sexton?

The answer to that question lies precisely in the ineradicable power of the worship of her/his majesty the sun—and also in the very mythology of the Bible. Frankel suggests that it was during later Hellenistic times (when the Maccabees were about to make war upon the Seleucids) that "sun worship returned in a new form under the influence of Hellenism" (166). Some Hellenized Jews wore amulets that equated God with Helios; figures of Helios in his chariot even began to show up on synagogue floor mosaics.

Whereas the Maccabees took to the sword as a remedy for such heresy, the rabbis took to the pen: "The rabbis, sensitive to the immense attraction that the sun exerted on the popular imagination, provided an alternative 'mythology' to draw the people back to Jewish monotheism. [. . . They] claimed that the sun bows down daily to God" (Frankel and Teutsch 166). In a typical mythological ploy, the old deity—the one who was served—is transposed into a humble servant, a (prime) minister of the one and only Sovereign, Lord Yahweh. And so the royal Shapash/Shamash/shemes is reduced to the adjunct, the useful shammash, a word that is interestingly trans-

lated by Michael Strassfeld as "helper" (167). Yet who—before, after, and above all—is the paradigmatic helper?

Then the LORD God said, "It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper fit for him." So out of the ground the LORD God formed every beast of the field and every bird of the air [. . .] but for the man there was not found a helper fit for him. So the LORD God caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man, and while he slept took one of his ribs and closed up its place with flesh; and the rib which the LORD God had taken from the man he made into a woman and brought her to the man. (Gen. 2:18–22)

Eve, the sublimated and subordinated goddess: Was she truly the shammash? The nine candles themselves provided a clue. In the storybook version of Hanukkah I read as a child, the sanctified oil miraculously lasted for eight days because a rider had to go fetch more oil in a distant town. And 8 + 1 (shammash) = 9. This explanation sounded hokey to me, a rationalization covering either ignorance or a secret significance. I knew that numbers in myths often have a deeper meaning; they are spiritual symbols and not mere counters.

As von Franz observes, numbers have both a quantitative (or utilitarian) and a qualitative (or archetypal) aspect (1980:68–73). The qualitative aspect is measured by the intellect, and is what modern mathematics is concerned with. The qualitative aspect, on the other hand, is measured by rational thinking, but by what Jung called the "feeling function"—in other words, the heart. Unfortunately, she adds, the West so overemphasizes quantitative values and utilitarian purposes that the felt sense of the qualitative dimension of number has been lost. Numbers no longer speak directly to the psyche.

What might they have said to the talmudic rabbis who had revised the Hanukkah myth? According to Strassfeld, Hanukkah was established as an eight-day holiday because it was modeled on Sukkot, which is also eight days. But that merely begs the real question: Why eight? His suggestion is that since the number seven represents time (the days of the week), then 7 + 1 is equivalent to "beyond time," that is to say, to eternity (Strassfeld 169). Which would make 7 + 1 + 1 = what? What is beyond eternity?

I had to admit that the number nine didn’t "speak" to me (or rather, I couldn’t hear its voice). Luckily, it didn’t have to: I
recalled that someone else had already done the work. From my bookshelves I pulled out Campbell's lengthy essay, "The Mystery Number of the Goddess," which contains an extended numerological analysis (one far too serpentine and sophisticated to present here) that establishes beyond doubt that "all numbers of the Great Goddess [are] born, so to say, out of 9" (1991: 123).

His conclusion is essentially harmonious with the esoteric numerological system worked out by the sixteenth century student of Kabbalah (and Pythagorean number mysticism) Cornelius Agrippa, in which nine is identified as the number of the Muses and the celestial spheres, marking it as the greatest of all primary numbers and the symbol of achievements possessing a universal character and significance (Spence 262–63; Gibson and Gibson 236–37). Nine is the number of the Goddess as creatrix and inspirer of creativity. What is "beyond" the eternal eight of heavenly transcendence is an eternal power immanent in the very earth upon which humans live and move and have their being.

Then, too the container of the virtually inextinguishable fuel (the oil of olives, that drupaceous fruit of the earth) is a highly suggestive reminder of the Goddess in her guise as the ever-nurturing, all-regenerating Great Mother, the matrix of all forms:

The motif [derived from an infantile fantasy [of the mother breast]] of the inexhaustible dish, symbolizing the perpetual life-giving, form-building powers of the universal source, is a fairy-tale counterpart of the mythological image of the cornucopian banquet of the gods. [...] They are [...] the liquor, the milk, the food, the fire, the grace, of indestructible life. Such imagery can be readily interpreted as primarily, even though perhaps not ultimately, psychological. (Campbell 1949: 173)

She is both the fire and the fuel. Indeed, before she was dismembered by the patriarchy, the Goddess was identified with both sun and moon, light and dark, as the giver and taker of life. One prime symbol uniting these two functions was none other than Minerva's Owl.

Marija Gimbutas reports that carvings and figurines of the Eye Goddess, which can be traced back to c. 3500 BCE at Tel Brak in Syria, have been found as far back as the fifth millennium BCE in the megalithic cultures of western Europe (54–55). Found principally on sepulchral artifacts, the Eye (or Bird) Goddess is identified by "her characteristically owlish appearance" (54).

The owl, with its round, piercing eyes, and concentrically radiating feathers, suggests the piercing rays of the solar disc; its extraordinary visual powers (in the dark) are symbolic of the all-seeing wisdom of the goddess. A nocturnal hunter, the owl is also a lunar creature, fully at home in death's dark den. December, the month that belongs to death, also offers the first rays of hope:

Human death was thought to be similar to nature's death in winter, when the sun's power is weakest and the days are short and nights long. It is not surprising to discover that many West European tomb shrines have been constructed so that the entrances align with the winter solstice. [...] The winter solstice marks the time when the days start to become longer and life begins again. [...] In megalithic symbolic art, we see the link between the time-measuring symbols of solar cycles and the symbols of Her regenerative power, and between sundials and Divine Eyes, symbols of the life-source and rebirth. [...] An English herbal of the 12th century [...] includes a prayer to the Goddess. The prayer addresses the Deity with these words: "Divine Goddess Mother Nature, who generatest all things and bringest forth anew the sun which thou hast given to the nations; Guardian of sky and sea and of all Gods and powers; through thy influence all nature is hushed and sinks to sleep. [...] Again, when it pleases thee, thou sendest forth the glad day light and nurtures life with thine eternal surety; and when the spirit of man passes, to thee it returns. Thou indeed art rightly named Great Mother of the Gods. [...]" She is here the same Regeneratrix—Ana, Ankou, Holle, also addressed as "Mother of the Gods." Surely this prayer embodies a memory of a once omnipotent goddess who had the power to regenerate the sun. German Holle regenerates the sun, and she is herself the sun, addressed as "The Mother of all Life" and "The Great Healer." (211)

The "once omnipotent goddess," the sun and mother of the sun, was everywhere attempting to regenerate herself in late Hellenistic times on up through the final collapse of the old Roman Empire. This demise was marked by the failed attempt, in the third century, by the Emperor Decius—praised
by Edward Gibbon as one of “the brightest examples of ancient virtue” (136)—to restore by martial force the moribund worship of Zeus-Jupiter, “in the prosecution of his general design,” writes the historian, “to restore the purity of Roman manners” (286). (Why is the tiresome claim of puritan fundamentalists everywhere and everywhen that without their god, morality as such is doomed?) Decius’s sole achievement was to put into place the machinery of political repression that would later be used by the Christian Empire to secure “consensus.”

In patriarchal Persia (recall the masculine Babylonian solar deity, Shamash), the resurgent goddess’s influence was captured in the orbit of the warrior archetype and emerged reborn (after her radical transsexual surgery) as Mithras, slaughterer of the Great Bull, “the unconquered and unconquerable sun (sol invictus), [who] symbolized the courage, success, and confidence of the soldier” (Smart 281). Alas, to add insult to injury, the Mithraic mystery cult was strictly a men’s club; no women needed apply. Also from Persia came the cult of the prophet Mani (215–76 CE), whose masculine Lord of Light abhorred mere flesh and disdained Mother Nature, whom he regarded as hopelessly evil, a tool of Dark Satan. The best that the Light could achieve was escape from its dark prison.

Only in Egypt did the goddess get a fair hearing. The Metamorphoses was a semi-fictional religious story written by Lucius Apuleius of Madaura (c. second century CE), and gives us some insight into the workings of the Isis cult, a syncretistic mélange of Egyptian and Greek motifs. The hero of the novel (also named Lucius) is transformed into an ass because of his ignorance of the goddess; but it is she who brings him through a series of trials and adventures to the point of spiritual rebirth. In the climactic scene of the narrative, Lucius becomes an initiate of Isis (one of whose titles is “Mother of the Sun”):

In the ceremonies, Lucius perceived the brightness of the sun at midnight, a hint that solar elements from the Egyptian tradition were incorporated in the initiation. He approached the gods above and those below. He was crowned on a throne beside Isis—a symbol of his deification and his restoration from darkness to light and from death to a new life. (Smart 280)

* * *

In an attempt to give new life to the original patriarchal war-story of Hanukkah as chronicled in the Apocrypha, the later talmudists (like their Christian contemporaries and counterparts, who were busy grafting the Christmas holiday onto old pagan solstice celebrations) were literally playing with fire, trying to capture lightning in a bottle. By invoking the goddess into the temple, a tacit admission was being made that the Maccabees were wrong, in a way, after all. But this could never be consciously acknowledged. To do so would upend the tradition. The bottle would explode.

The usual remark regarding Hanukkah and Christmas alike is that beneath their thin monotheistic veneer the vibrant heart of ancient pagan rituals still beats. This is true to a point. Yet it is a bit too glib, and may serve to distract us from the bigger picture, the larger story. For something was aborted partially back in late antiquity that must now be carried to term. What does it mean for us living at the midnight of the second millennium that the goddess is today fighting her way back into the mythic consciousness in a way that does upend the old traditions? For surely the fact that the only serious life left in all the world religions belongs to puritan fundamentalists (like poor old emperor Decius) is a sure sign that those decrepit old cults are passing away. It’s time for all the old gods (and saviors, avatars, and gurus) to pack it in and start collecting their pensions. But does this mean that the goddess has really returned? Or is there more to her current splash than a mere comeback?

Part 4: Minerva’s Owl Flies At Last

And yet, one cannot help feeling that there is something forced and finally unconvincing about all the manly moral attitudes of the shining righteous deities, whether of the biblical or of the Greco-Roman schools; for, in revenge or compensation, the ultimate life, and therewith spiritual depth and interest, of the myths in which they figure continues to rest with the dark presences of the cursed yet groved earth, which, though defeated and subdued, are with their powers never totally absorbed. A residue of mystery remains to them; and this, throughout the history of the West, has ever lurked within, and emanated from, the archaic symbols of the later, “higher” systems—as though speaking silently, to say, “But do you not hear the deeper song?”

Joseph Campbell, The Masks of God
Separations change people; time and distance inevitably leave their indelible mark. Even star-crossed lovers ultimately faithful to their vows of reunion can't help but be transformed, not only by the pain of their separation but also by the poignant memory of how it was before the absence and the keen anticipation of how it might be, together again in the future. One's very awareness of something seems to be happening "again" is itself an element in the second situation that did not exist in the first. This, I think, is the reason why Collingwood argued that there really is no such thing as history merely repeating itself (1924: 55). Consciousness cannot help creating novelty, for every act of awareness injects a new variable, a fresh ingredient, into the mix.

Eve's "return" is thus not a simple affair; there are lots of complications. It is not enough to revere the inherent divinity of the despoiled earth and the (endangered) physical body. Nor is it enough to recover the visionary, imaginative, and psychic experiences that have been despised, marginalized, and (even lately) commercialized by a patriarchy that fears genuine creativity as a threat to its continued dominion. These are important aspects, to be sure, but not the most important. The key is not the letter but the spirit; and without that, all of the environmental concerns, holistic health crusades, workshops on the soul, and dances around the bonfire will deteriorate very quickly into a new, but already tedious and exhausted, dogma. The return of the goddess does not require the performance of specific rituals, and has absolutely nothing to do with the creation of a new mythology that will, once again, be taken literally as the "finally discovered 'absolute' truth."

But her return has everything to do with finally bringing to maturity the inner growth that was cut short when Eve was unceremoniously expelled from Eden. What must be incarnated is the spirit of inquiry that led Eve to question the rules Yahweh had set down as absolutes and go for the forbidden fruits. "What would it be like to be a god?" was Eve's question. (Adam, a born organization man, simply went along for the ride so as not to stand out in a crowd.) Eve's feelings of curiosity, her capacity for wonder, her ability to say "no"—in short, the very qualities either condemned as original sin or deprecated and stigmatized as womanish vices—are the necessary virtues of the mature, woman-consciousness, which can and must incorporate the capacity for rational thinking. Yet it is an unprecedented form of thinking, one so unrelenting in its awareness of itself and its relationship to the infinite mystery of being/becoming that it will not accept any obstacle in the way of the natural—yes, cosmic—dictate of consciousness: Know thyself!

This knowing is not, however, to be mistaken for the abstract knowledge of the purely masculine logos as it has developed—or, I say, metastasized?—over the past two thousand years or more. The logos of the reborn goddess is firmly grounded in a direct and ongoing experience of the essential interconnectedness of all things, the ecology of the cosmic process, the kinship of all species. Which is another way of saying that what is needed is a logos of the heart and mind in complete partnership, interpenetrating yet complementing each other, together yet distinct. Anyone who doubts this should consult a little-known essay by that twentieth-century apostle of science, Bertrand Russell, entitled "The Expanding Mental Universe."

In that 1959 essay (which originally appeared in the old Saturday Evening Post), Russell did not conceal his anxiety that the present scientific civilization was on the verge of self-ruination if it did not find a way to give people a direct experience of cosmic consciousness. What is needed, he confessed, is not new (and certainly not ancient, outdated) ethical rules, or new laws, or new social programs; but a new feeling for life based on a vision of cosmic unity such as "[s]ears and poets have long had [...] knowledge alone is not enough" (397). But this vision challenges the ways in which most of us have been carving up (and homogenizing) self-experience.

It should come as no surprise, then, that when people's deepest beliefs and dearest values are questioned, all sorts of hostile responses will be evoked. The established religious traditions will not take kindly to forced retirement, even if that is what is called for by the situation. What is called for today is nothing less than a thoroughgoing critique of the very idea of the sacred, that idea shared by all of the traditions, in one form or another. As social philosophers Joel Kramer and Diana Alstade state in their indispensable work, The Guru Papers: Masks of Authoritarian Power,

Because the power of traditional religions comes from furnishing unchallengeable answers about the unknown, they are inherently authoritarian. Religions deflect examination by ordaining faith and belief to be sacred, while maintaining
that no ordinary person can know enough to take issue with the beliefs they put forth. A further hindrance to the intelligent examination of religious tradition is the social taboo against doing so. We do not question people's right to believe what they will. But the concept of religious tolerance is commonly extended to include not criticizing others' beliefs. This is partially because beliefs that are non-rational are not subject to rational examination. This may be true about the contents of a belief, but is not true about what effects operating out of a given belief have on the world. If a belief that sends children to war with the promise of a special paradise cannot be challenged as harmful, that concept of tolerance is for us intolerable. [...]Indeed, the very act of making sacred certain actions, institutions, or ways of being is authoritarian, as it ensures that there can be no questioning. The potential for great abuse is inherent in any ideology closed to reason, feedback, or change based on changing circumstances. (36–37; italics added)

Alstad and Kramer are surely correct: every organized human evil, from sexism to racism to anti-Semitism, has attempted to shield itself in the protective cloak of an invulnerable ideology that deflects rational criticism, whether by "insiders" or "outsiders." But the idea of giving any set of beliefs or practices a blanket grant of immunity from critical inquiry has been shown, time and again, to be preposterous. Still, how can one distinguish between the legitimately intolerant critic of religion—even the thoroughgoing critic that I have posited as the ideal—and the illegitimately intolerant religious bigot?

Although Alstad and Kramer neglect to mention it, one of the strongest taboos is the rule against criticizing one's own tradition. When all is said and done, one is expected to be loyal to one's own special group. Those who balk are viewed with suspicion or as outright betrayers of the cause. Yet I believe that this taboo must be broken. The stakes for the human species and the planet are too high for misplaced notions of loyalty to govern. Even the existence of anti-Semitism (of which I have experienced plenty in my own life) does not justify placing Judaism (or monotheism in general) beyond criticism or questioning, either by Jews or non-Jews. The arguments and findings will have to stand or fall on their intrinsic merits and can be judged accordingly, independently of the personal motives and feelings of their respective champions (which may always remain murky in any case).

But if the suggestion by the defenders of tradition is that that any truly profound criticism of (their) religion must necessarily be based on feelings of bigotry (or self-hatred), then this is merely another ruse for obtaining a magical cloak of invulnerability for one's preferred view; for such criticism could then be automatically dismissed and discounted as self-refuting. However, one is not necessarily irrational for criticizing or rejecting biblical monotheism in one or all of its versions. One can refuse to accept the authority of tradition politely but firmly, without malice and with good reason. In any event, hatred in any of its unfortunately enduring forms will never be defeated by going backwards and circling the wagons to defend to the death the old ways. Just the opposite is true.

Here I can only speak from personal experience. When I was about eleven years old (in the late 1960s), a close (non-Jewish) friend stunned me with a question: "Is it true," he asked, "that the Jews killed Christ?" While there was no hint of hostility in the questioner, the question itself seethed with hatred. I felt as if I had been transported to the middle of a vast open field sewn with hidden land mines, and that with one false move—boom!—I would be blown to atoms. Stunned, I managed to splutter out something like, "Well, no. It was the Romans who did that." After all, I'd seen movies like Ben-Hur. But I felt both hurt and confused. Why would he say that? Little did I know then that his awful question would turn out to be, for me, fortunate indeed.

It was only many years later that I learned the source of my friend's inquiry. I happened to be reading a book on religion (originally published in 1966, and obviously written before the conclusion of the events to which the author refers) by philosopher Antony Flew, when I stumbled across the following paragraph:

Again, one hopes that in the end the Second Vatican Council will bring itself to defy the diplomatic pressures of Arab Islam by formally acquitting the Jewish nation of the odd but incendiary offence of deicide. But if we are thus able to hail a belated repudiation of this indictment against a whole people we must not forget either how belated it will be nor
how much damage was done by the earlier acceptance of the same idea. (Flew 186)

With a little further digging on my part, I discovered that the Second Vatican Council (1962–65), under the leadership of Pope John XXIII, had indeed expunged from the liturgy a reference to the Jews as “the killers of Christ.” But this had been taught as a matter of course to every young Catholic schoolchild, such as my good non-Jewish friend. As Flew notes, by then the horse was already well out of the barn.

But at the time of my friend’s inquiry, I knew nothing of all this. And I was too hurt and embarrassed to tell my parents. After the initial shock passed, however, I was motivated to do something I’d never done before: to get hold of a copy of the New Testament and actually read it. Then I learned that the simplistic lie implied by my friend’s question would have to be replaced by a far more complex truth. Of course, Jesus himself, his mother, his apostles, and his followers were Jews; but he did have Jewish enemies who criticized him and who doubtless did shed tears at his passing. And Judas, his own apostle, betrayed him. The Roman authorities who tried, convicted, and crucified him were directly responsible for his death. Yet, I could not hate the Romans. I had always been fascinated by ancient history. To me, the Romans were real people. Surely not every Roman—even every Roman authority—had been weak, unjust, and corrupt?

My reading of the New Testament had another important result: I gained a deep respect for Jesus. I admired his iconoclasm and his concern for justice. Although I did not accept any special claims to divine status made on his behalf, I appreciated the beauty and value in the Gospel narratives—just as I had experienced the beauty of certain Hebrew prayers and the value of the Jewish passion for universal justice that I had imbibed from my parents. I yearned to learn more, not only about Christianity, but about other religions, too. My earlier experience with Greek mythology was being reiterated.

These ecumenical sensitivities and interests were not always convenient, however. When in the company of fellow Jews who used derogatory words like goy or goyim, I would secretly wince. Those ugly words landed like kicks to my stomach: they made me physically nauseous. And then there was the time that my Hebrew school instructor blew her stack—thankfully, not at me.

Mrs. Stern (not her real name) was leading the class in a Bible discussion. One of my classmates raised her hand to ask a question: “Mrs. Stern, why is it that we celebrate the Sabbath on Saturday and the Christians celebrate it on Sunday?” I was curious about this myself, so I looked forward to the response. Almost instantly, however, Mrs. Stern’s face became deeply flushed and her eyes popped wide. She slammed her fleshy fist down on the teacher’s desk, landing with a loud “thump.” “I’m not here to teach you Christianity!” she bellowed. My classmate, properly chastised, lowered her head. She asked no more questions of this kind. We had all learned our lesson: no more comparisons around here!

Virtually all of the social conditioning in contemporary America that passes for “education” is a form of what Collingwood termed “the corruption of consciousness,” since children are taught both by design and by habit to overlook and ignore certain crucial facets of their personal and collective experience (past and present). Many subtle, complex interconnections and affinities, and numerous contradictions and complications, are washed away in the onslaught of cookie-cutter stereotypes like “the Jews,” “the Romans,” “the goyim.” And what is the source of this insidious stereotyping? One need look no further than the traditional idea of purity that most of us have inherited from our religious traditions, which functions, as the anthropologist Mary Douglas informs us, by “exaggerating the difference[s]” between he and she, us and them, ours and theirs. The monster of religious bigotry is none other than the creation of religion. And as Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley taught us, the revenge of the monster is always visited upon its creator.

The “uneducated” (untutored, uncorrupted) mind naturally reaches out toward the universal; not the abstract universal of empty, bloodless concepts, but the concrete universal, the common ground of the human experience upon which every member of the species must stand—or perish—together; that is to say, to Mother Earth. As I recently heard one of the Lakota keepers of Native American wisdom, Ed McGaa (Eagle Man), say in a radio interview, “There is no second planet.” Or as President Lyndon Johnson once said, in his inimitable Texas style: “Don’t spit in the soup; we’ve all got to eat.”

* * *

Finally, an old story that is worth retelling:
Once upon a time, Lord Jupiter was gazing down from the heights of Mount Olympus when his eyes settled on a fair "country nymph" (Ovid 36): athletic Callisto, with whom he became immediately smitten. After tricking the young maiden into an act of lovemaking, the issue nine months later (that magic number again) was a boy named Arcas. When Hera (that patriarchal nightmare of the vengeful bitch-goddess) found out about the affair, she could not contain her fury. So she transformed the beautiful nymph into a lumbering bear.

Sixteen years passed. The teenager Arcas, never knowing his mother, was off on the hunt—"loaded for bear," as they say. With his javelin at the ready, he at last spied his prey: a great furry she-bear. He did not recognize that it was his own mother he was about to kill. "He aimed his javelin to strike her dead," writes the poet (Ovid 39). But before Arcas could commit the crime, Lord Jupiter swooped up both mother and son from the earth and into the heavens, where they were set forever together as neighboring stars: the Great Bear (Ursa Major) and Little Bear (Ursa Minor) constellations. The darkness of near matricide had been transmuted magically into the starry light of the universe [a catastrophe—WGD].

Today, humanity is once again poised to strike down the goddess, Mother Earth, whose divinity conveniently goes unrecognized by the patriarchal powers that be. The only difference is that the callow youth Arcas is now a crusted, aging (but still ignorant) tyrant-king, and his aim is not so true. But there will be no deus ex machina to save humanity from itself this time around. Zeus/Jupiter has retired to the nursing home for gods. As for poor, old, befuddled Yahweh, he thought himself rid of Eve once and for all, but he had expelled her from the Garden of Her Own Majesty. The only important question is, Will she be recognized in time? Will Minerva's owl take flight at last?

Notes
An earlier version of this paper (under a different title) was presented at the December 1994 meeting of the Philosophy Discussion Group at The College of Staten Island of the City University of New York. The author thanks the members of the group for their comments, especially Daniel Kramer (son of famed Assyriologist Samuel Noah Kramer) for admitting that even as a child he, too, had identified with the universalism of the Greeks over the puritanical rationalism of the Maccabees. Steven M. Rosen provided a number of helpful suggestions and reflections along the way. I am also indebted to William Dow and the other editors of Mythosphere for their extremely useful criticisms of an earlier draft.


2. In A Voice of Her Own, Marlene Schwab cites Maxine Woodman's poignant statement: "Women, in particular, have lost their voices [...] both metaphorically and literally. The voice tends to come from the throat because we're afraid to breathe deeper. We're afraid to hit the pain" (302).

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