CHAPTER 7

On the Science of Discord

The "Diabolic" Idiom of French Postmodernism and the "Politics of Diversity" in America

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Introductory: The Current Fixation with "Diversity," "Heritage," "Identity," and All That

For the past three decades, exponents issued from so-defined under-represented clusters—mostly women and variously defined individuals "of color"—have visibly risen to positions of leadership and responsibility in all institutions of the USA. This development has been hailed as a most salubrious improvement in the overall makeup of civic America, and as such it therefore continues to be vigorously encouraged. The move appears to be the natural fruit of progressivism and of a not inconspicuous desire on the part of America's traditional, white and male-driven elite to make amends for its brutal past.

Such a development would indeed deserve to be so praised if only it were a genuine reflection of dramatic transformations in the fabric and in

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the conventional attitudes of American society. The crux is that dramatic change has *not* occurred, and that all such efforts to alter the complexion of America's higher administrative lineup have amounted thus far to little more than social window dressing. These are cosmetic touches topically applied to the sore of America's endemic racism with a view to extenuating the extent of its diffusion, if not to concealing the chief ill altogether.

In fact, it appears that the elite has never truly repented of anything. At most, it seemed to have regretted how so very poorly it has managed this delicate issue for so very long. But, eventually experience taught it the obvious, namely, that it would be far more practical, indeed, to endow the "others"—be they non-white, non-heterosexual, or non-Anglophone people living and toiling in the USA—with a fake sense of empowerment, which could convey the impression that the old rancor was extinguished and that yesterday's rifts, if not wholly mended, could at least be declared partially healed by a generalized state of social cease-fire. Thus it was that political correctness came into being, and could soon thereafter lean on dedicated academic structures: in the eighties and nineties, universities saw the mushrooming of so-called cultural studies, whose focus was a piercing insistence on ethnic exclusivism, and whose proximate effect was to instill in its majors a regained sense of pride in a particular cultural heritage that had been hitherto smeared by uncomprehending, truculent "white males." So it was the whites themselves who have since then busily made room on their campuses for venues where one could make a career out of lamenting such injustices daily. Sex and gender, on the other hand, came to cover another conspicuous portion of diversity's acting stage with the allotment of chairs in Women's and Queer Studies.

Historically, this peculiar evolution in the politics of higher learning happened to seal the end point of America's (and the West's) fiery season of protest, which had caused serious disturbances for the Establishment during the Johnson and Nixon administrations (1968–1974). At that time, the system experienced how daunting a cohesive mobilization of the masses could be—a mobilization for the most part undivided by clannish fences, and united by common values, such as non-violence and social justice. But by the late seventies, after it had mightily clashed with the protest movement and leveraged its internal contradictions, the State had emerged victorious from the confrontation. Several were the repercussions. On the propagandistic front, the former dissident guard, mostly made of intellectualizing Marxists, feminists, and lifestyle anarchists, was co-opted en masse by the regime to lead the new academic outfits of "cultural studies."

It seemed a fair compromise: in exchange for quiet streets unperturbed by talk of economic upheaval, the erudite leadership of the Summer of Love was assigned the curricular task of redefining the humanities in the key of political correctness. Thus was American postmodernism first assembled.

The curious aspect in this relevant episode in the history of thought was the foreign origin of the theoretical and discursive materials that were commissioned to lay the foundations of the novel architecture of American postmodernism. They were French. The main master thinker whose production, as well as presence, came to be imported was Michel Foucault (1926–1984). Foucault, who was then gliding down from the cusp of intellectual stardom in France, all of a sudden, found himself propelled to spearhead a veritable French invasion of US academe.

The centerpiece of postmodernism *à l'americaine* is "the politics of diversity," which makes a faith of the unbridgeable differences putatively existing among individuals of different cultural, sexual, and racial makeup. The academics involved in this operation employed Foucault's models to fashion an ideological system, whereby one could argue that the belief in a central notion of universal truth crumbles into a congeries of antagonistic discourses—one per cohort of choice, sociologically specified. The clash of such incompatible discursive standards implies the incommunicative existence of a galaxy of "epistemologies"—rituals of construing and of feeling the world and each other in antipathetic ways. All other compartments of postmodernism, such as the "deconstructivist" school very much present in most English departments, have been corroborating this labor *destruens*, concentrating their effort in tearing classic texts asunder with a view to isolating, say, the allegedly phallocratic and patriarchal matrices of such compositions.

The results of the habituation to such politics of acrimony over the length of a generation are before everybody's eyes: the supremacist swagger of warmongering patriotism remains solidly entrenched in the front row of US politics; America's diverse ethnic groups live ever more removed from one another; the whole of black America stands directionless and hardly less ghettoized than it was 30 years ago; and an overall indulgence in good-mannered phoniness in the workplace and elsewhere masks the speechless unease and unaffectionate gaps wrought upon the net of social relationships by the systematic enforcement of such practices. Instead of attempting to speak to one another directly, trying to establish a rapport based on affinities—bonds unmarred by concerns for racial extraction or sexual inclinations—Americans have all been given roles in a new psychodrama. The whites are scripted as self-effacing protagonists bending over backwards

to deny the solidity of their privileged status. They do so first by affirming, *disingenuously*, the equivalence of all epistemologies, eventually rushing to add even more tongue in cheek (and contradictorily) that the discourses of subjugated ethnicities are actually far earthier and good-natured than theirs. The "others," on the other hand, are given in the controlled environment of an institutional setting (at school and at work) extraordinary leeway to inveigh against the past abuses perpetrated by whites against the specific group to which they respectively belong. And so it is that we have all been brought to compete in this race that awards most points to whoever can successfully vaunt the most "diverse" pedigree, preference being undeviatingly guaranteed to lineages of annihilated, colonized, and/or enslaved ancestors. Hence the late fixation with "ethnicity," "identity," and "heritage."

Now, there is herein no intent to dispute the fact that so-called patriarchal civilizations—if ours may be classed as such at least up to World War One[1]—have been guilty of unspeakable crimes. There is no denying that, on an unsurpassed scale, Western whites have murdered, enslaved, brutalized, and subjugated peoples who were by them reputed, and eventually proven inferior in point of technological and military deftness. Equally truthful, on the other hand, is the fact that the greatest expenditure of violence for which whites have been historically responsible has been lavished on other whites. The essential question ultimately concerns the actual factors that have accounted for the advent of this modern, technicized, and savage white dominator—by and large, the very *worst* of the species. Who is he, and how did he lately come to rule the world at the center of this gigantic Anglophone information network of power-cum-commerce, which has been (bombastically) called "globalization"?

These are questions lying indeed at the root of the original (French) postmodern critique, which, without effectively answering them, derives nonetheless from this formulation of the puzzle the fundamental and adversarial categories of "disciplinarian, homogenous and bourgeois society," on the one side, and of "tragic, maniacal and rebellious life-force," on the other. This conceptual contraposition, as we shall argue shortly, was popularized by Foucault, who had originally applied it to a mono-cultural reality (France's); successively American intelligentsia would have re-adapted this antagonistic scheme into the seminal program of the politics of diversity: so the construct shifted from "police state" versus "rejects" to "disciplinarian whites" versus "rebellious minorities."

The first administration that tuned its rhetoric to the politics of diversity in organized and pervasive fashion was Bill Clinton's (1993–2000).

But it was not until Bush Jr.'s neoconservative regime (2001–2008) that the opportunism and expeditiousness of such politics came into bold relief. This was an administration that had managed to secure the active promotion of Latinos and American blacks in high posts of bureaucratic responsibility. More poignantly yet, in the early phase of the War on Terror (November 2001), the First Lady could then come to the fore and asseverate with a straight face that the ongoing military campaign in Afghanistan was motivated, no less importantly, by the legitimate mission to relieve the plight of Afghani women.[2] These, Laura Bush sentenced, had suffered for far too long the heinous abuse of a far too literal reading of the Sharia—the canon law of Islam, which was from thereon tacitly branded as the religion and worldview most inimical to the West. And to flesh out such bluster, the press organs resurrected Samuel Huntington's scenario of "the clash of civilizations." In the end, the occidentals, barely, if at all, demurred before such demagogic antics—war it was. Proof that the focus, and studied propagandistic play, on "difference" remains today at the heart of US politics may be found in a variety of reported events and social manifestations—from the presidential election of Barack Obama (2008–present)—for which much "hope" was pinned on the mere color of his skin—to the recent flurry of (white) police brutality in (black) indigent neighborhoods, by way of the presently even more prominent sex and gender diatribes pitting "progressives" versus "homophobes."

Thus far, the politics of diversity has had a doubly pernicious impact in that (1) it has weakened on the domestic front the formation of a cross-cultural movement for dissent by implicitly pitting ordinary Americans against each other along the lines of race, culture, and gender; and (2) it has reinforced divisive stereotypes (i.e., versus Islam and the Middle East) at a time when strength through unity across the world is necessary to manifest a civil but uncompromising rejection of war.

The scope of this chapter is centered on the Neo-Gnostic mythology behind the philosophical tales of Foucault's now-classic, stylized model of power/knowledge. The segment on Foucault serves as an introduction to Georges Bataille (1897–1962), the actual inspirer of all French postmodern thought. Bataille may very well be, in fact, one of the most original social scientists of the twentieth century. The unrecognition from which Bataille's extensive opus has suffered in the past 50 years is due to its fragmentariness on the one hand, and to its eclecticism on the other. From the general taxonomies, in fact, it is still difficult to infer whether the man was a writer, a poet, a pornographer, or a sociologist. Indeed, he

was all such things, as well as a makeshift hierophant and founder of an amateurish cult—known as *L'Acéphale* ("The Headless Godhead" is the notorious pictorial effigy of Bataille's *summa atheologica*)—whose liturgical aim was to revive animal and human sacrifice. In spite of all such *bizarreries*, there is little doubt that the most brilliant facet of Bataille was his insight as a social scientist. It is in this guise that he will be presented here. The particular system of thought and belief, which Bataille conceived as a discursive appendix to a somewhat improbable revival of Bacchic communion in the twentieth century, has formed, in fact, the basis of some of the most successful narratives adopted in contemporary political science to model the dynamics of conflict in a modern setting. The third section is devoted to Bataille's political economy. Conclusions follow.

Foucault's "Power/Knowledge"

Presently, Foucault has become a patron saint of American academia; his legacy hovers sovereignly over a constellation of faculties, chief among them anthropology, English and literary criticism, philosophy, political science, and, lately, even economics. He is "big," as they say. So big, indeed, that the lingo and phraseology he coined have entered the leftist mainstream so fluidly and pervasively that nowadays the vast majority of the late speakers of the postmodern argot no longer have any referential cognizance of the master himself. Repeated application over the years of certain modes of thought in the progressively vulgarized reaches of higher learning has effaced the imprint of the author. And with such a result, Foucault himself would have been satisfied, for he had mused, indeed, that "the author" is nothing more than "a functional principle" by which one selects and hews "meaning" "from the outside": a limited mouthpiece of the "unknowable without."[3]

What is "power/knowledge"? This construct was essentially distilled from Foucault's best-known book, *Discipline & Punish* (*Surveiller et punir*). Published in 1975 in France, *Discipline & Punish* is often mistaken for a manifesto/tract contra the use of torture in sovereign disciplinarian regimes. The book, in effect, is something else. It opens with the anatomical description of a regicide's dismemberment in eighteenth-century France, before ushering into a reasoned hallucination on the advent and structures of the modern carcerary institution. Foucault resumes in this work a dialectical pattern he had already tested in his fist monograph: *Madness and Civilization* of 1961 (*Folie et déraison*). Briefly stated, the

gist of such dialectics is the irreducible antagonism between two forces: the raging and raving cohort of society's rejects on the one side and the mechanized, icy rhythm of bureaucratized organization on the other. Foucault unambiguously champions the cause of the rejects—of madmen, heretics, and criminals. In his view, they are the victims, the guinea pigs of a novel, spiritual drift that has come to this earth to categorize, class, analyze, and monitor all such (human) embodiments of "alien" lifeblood—the "others," so to speak. These marginalized "others" are presently under the watch of the "clinical eye." It was as if humanity, at the dawn of modernity, had been all of a sudden invested by the cold wind of a robotic inquisition, which ever since has managed to tighten and intensify its grip on humanity's flesh and, most importantly, on the minds of individuals. Governments, academies, hospitals, and prisons to him were all institutional appendices of a diffuse "regime of power," which approached life, broadly defined, with a view to harnessing, refitting, constraining, and subduing it, if not *vampirizing* it. Foucault's critique thus proceeds on these premises to question standard categorizations such as those of "abnormality," "deviancy," "crime," or "insanity." Foucault wonders: what entitled one subject to declare another "mad?" Isn't the power to apply such labels ultimately shaped by the vantage point of the observer? It is chiefly from provocative queries such as these that Foucauldians have earned the (misleading) repute of "ethical relativists," but the object of the argumentation is another; it is subtler. It can be construed first and foremost as an attack against the stultifying mediocrity and stereotyped emptiness of modern, bourgeois life. In this sense, Foucault's analysis, as said, wrote itself as another chapter in the corpus of leftist politics. But there was a crucial aspect in this particular harangue that was not missed but most certainly downplayed by his American epigones. And this was that Foucault was not lamenting torture per se, but rather the disappearance of pre-modern, "sovereign," kingly ways of killing: he deplored the disappearance of liveried henchmen who dispensed death by tearing and stripping the flesh, disemboweling and draining the lifeblood, slowly and ritually, out of the condemned's body. What Foucault abhors is the puritanical exigency of murdering in a "humane" fashion—that is, with puritanism, as it were: hiding from view all secretions, insulating the execution venue from beastly howls, and effacing all visible expressions of disfiguring sufferance. Foucault appears to loathe the white-washing and husbanding of life's manic herds by State-sanitized asylums and state-of-the-art, technicized, and aseptic penitentiaries. These, in his mind, pervert and

desecrate fundamental life- and socio-patterns by draining them of their aboriginal *violence*. Which is to say that to kill, wage war, sacrifice and shed blood in a variety of ritualistic contexts are all "sovereign" acts that belong for Foucault in the natural order of things; therefore, to wish to alter such an order—especially behind the self-righteous façade of the Liberal State—is a "sin," a sacrilege of sorts. Clearly, this was a leftist stance that had nothing to share with the ideal of mutual cooperation—rather, the sympathetic understanding that Foucault felt for madmen and convicts was the winking entente of a camaraderie sealed in transgression.

> And a fact is yet unmistakable: in a matter of decades, the mangled body, the dismembered body – the body amputated, (…) and exposed, had disappeared. The body as a conspicuous target of penal repression has disappeared (…). In the execution-show a benumbing horror shot out of the scaffold; it enveloped both the henchman and the condemned (…). The utopia of the judiciary pudicity: to take away existence while preventing pain to transpire, to deprive of all rights without inflicting suffering, to impose sanctions bereft of sufferance (…). Double process: erasure of the spectacle, annulment of pain.[4]

But this wasn't all.

When it comes to sketching the aggregate dynamics of the dialectical clash between the mechanized reconfiguration of society and pre-modern, truculent vitality, Foucault takes a leaf from a seventies sci-fi book. Despite the alluring phraseology, the meaning suddenly became cryptic. He goes on to argue that "*the body*"—the body of the recalcitrant humanity, which has been subjected to the stringent fetters of the disciplinarian establishment—as a result of the violation finds itself "invested by power relations"; it is being "plunged into a political field."[5]

> That is to say that there may be a "knowledge" of the body which is not exactly the science of its functioning (…). This knowledge and this mastery constitute what one may call the political technology of the body.[6]

By "knowledge," Foucault intends here the collection of speech, concepts, and images spewed out by one particular manifestation of organized authority—in this case, predominantly the "discourse" of the ruling elite of the modern Liberal State. At stake and under scrutiny is "its" (the State's, the bureaucracy's) version of the truth, its accepted classifications, its particular interpretation of the idea of "order" and "propriety"—

classifications, say, which may not necessarily be truthful for everybody at one point in time and in the same location. And that is precisely the pregnant and obverse instance of the rebellious body of the criminal, which is "plunged" in the monitored cages of the sanative system, where it is dissected and sculpted. Therefore, the surgical analyst and the blackguard are the respective expressions of two different spiritual realities; each is governed by an ethos hostile to the norms of the other; they speak ungermane idioms; and they act according to antagonistic *religious* principles—or better, the desperado opposes his sinister sanctity to the "men of the Law"—to components, that is, of a hollowed-out humanity that believes in nothing. In this sense, each force may "have power," and the exercise of such power yields a regime, an articulated structure of expression and communication, which each party recognizes as its respective "truth." For Foucault, the history of thought thus appears to be a jumbled chronicle of discursive imbrications whose contorted progression is determined by confrontational, and chaotic, counter-shocks—it is a chronicle of primordial chaos versus modern routinized power.

> [Power relations] define innumerable points of accretion, loci of instability, each being a potential trigger of conflict and of struggle, which might set off an inversion, at least a transient one, of the strength ratios. The reversing of these "micropowers" does not therefore obey the law of the all-or-nothing (…). One should rather admit that power produces knowledge (…). There is no power relation without the correlative constitution of a field of knowledge, nor is there knowledge that does not constitute at the same time power relations. These relations of 'power/knowledge' should not therefore be analyzed by starting from a knowing subject who would be free or unfree with respect to the system of power.[7]

This passage captures the essence of Foucault's notion of "*power*" (*pouvoir*). It is a strange elucubration, a fiction—a good story, no doubt. According to this fabulous account, social interaction is fueled by some kind of mystical fluid, "power," which courses through the veins of collective life's institutional networks. What this power actually is and whence it comes is never said. Foucault cryptically maintains that it is a given—a seabed of conflicting relationships, which periodically culminate in visible, localized outbursts of violence ("points of accretion"). The determining feature of this depiction is the *reversibility* of the "strength ratios," which is to say that the underclass may topple the domineering elite in one of such foci of confrontation at a given time, and eventually be itself

beaten and overthrown according to no predictable pattern of political alternance. This was Marxian dialectics (1) without the universal aspiration to social justice; (2) without the proletariat—replaced in this case by the undisciplined antagonism of the "scum"; (3) without the capitalist villain, who was supplanted by the nondescript knowledge economy of disciplinarian power; and (4) without the chiliastic expectancy of a triumphant terminus to a long road of class struggle. Why this kind of polisci-fi would be championed by the Liberal intelligentsia is not difficult to understand: what more convenient "theory" to peddle in academia than one representing the vested interests of modern oligarchic systems as faceless, de-centered, and loose outfits engaged in an ineluctable, "natural" fight without issue?

In his *Two Lectures* (1977), Foucault added the final touches to his theory of power. Since he had to account in some fashion for the struggles of the world, he devised for the purpose the notion of "disqualified, subjugated knowledges," on the one hand, and "erudite discourse," on the other. The former was proposed as the broad category encompassing the talk of the people. It is folktales chanted at the periphery of the networks of power, or "popular knowledge": the testimony of madmen and assassins caught on record. But, Foucault warns, "it is far from being general common sense knowledge, (…) it is on the contrary *a particular*, *local*, *regional knowledge*, *a differential knowledge incapable of unanimity and which owes its force only to the harshness with which it is opposed by everything surrounding it*. It is through the re-appearance of these (…) disqualified knowledges, that criticism performs its work."[8] "Erudite knowledge," on the other hand, could be, say, the sophisticated syntax of the peculiarly disciplining discourse which the *École Normale* had drilled into Foucault, and which he could not forbear from using, since, alas, he knew nothing else (a fitting application of power/knowledge). "Let us call genealogy," he continues, "the union of erudite knowledge and local memories which allow us to establish a historical knowledge of struggles and to make use of this knowledge *tactically* today."[9] One eventually learns from the genealogy that "differential knowledges" are "incapable of unanimity [and] harshly opposed to anything surrounding them." Almost apologetically, Foucault justifies this last claim by adducing the fear that if we were to "disinter," "accredit and put into circulation" a particular knowledge, we would be running the risk of "re-codifying" and "re-colonizing" everything in the name of this new discovery—and that is for him a risk never worth taking.

His mantra after all is that the unity of society and the "unitary discourse" have to be destroyed.

The postmodern game is a mock "war of the knowledges." Embittered and flammable, the marginalized tribespeople of the subjugated "lores" eye one another with mutual suspicion, all of them prone always, at the least provocation, to pounce on the others, especially the most hated of such "others": their former captors—the "whites." This, in a nutshell, was the conflictive speech-game that was going to be imported in America and finessed into the talk of tribal mistrust.

> It will be no part of our concern to provide a solid and homogeneous theoretical terrain for all these dispersed genealogies, nor to descend upon them from on high with some kind of halo of theory that would unite them.[10]

At bottom, Foucault's invective commanded that we cease to ask "the labyrinthine and unanswerable question: 'who has power and what does he have in mind? What is the aim of someone possessing power? (…) Why do certain people want to dominate, [and] what is their overall strategy?'" Instead, for Foucault, we should be asking ask ourselves "how things work at the level of ongoing subjugation, at the level of those continuous and uninterrupted (…) processes which dictate our behaviors."[11]

The year was 1977, and the English translation of *Surveiller et punir* finally became available in the USA. A decade after the launch of his French stardom (in 1966), the US establishment co-opted the French *philosophe*, and booked him solid for a tour of American academe. Subsequently, the politically correct authority of Affirmative Action appropriated the notion of "subjugated knowledges," which came to be incorporated in the curricula of "diversity studies": in time, most ethnic groups and other formerly discriminated minorities could count on an academic bastion of their own. It should have been patent that such a peace offer to the "others" was mere pretense: despite the big talk, the American elite kept its physical distance from gays, minorities, and "others" in general as decidedly as ever. The appropriate recruiting institutions were staffed with middle- and upper-class whites and, to a far less extent, with non-whites who acknowledged with lukewarm reserve the overtures granted them. Thus was fomented this bunker mentality of chronically simmering hostility that characterizes America's professional environment—an armed truce, so to speak, concluded against a background of ever-growing incomprehension between all the factions—including, and especially, the "diverse" ones, which have

come not infrequently to battle one another over stakes, attention, and the financial allotment of Affirmative Action.

It is no philosophical singularity that a model as chimerical as Foucault's power/knowledge was imported with a view to framing in pseudo-scholarly code the discourse of the politics of diversity. Etymologically, a discursive tool of this sort is by definition "diabolic" (from the Greek *diabállein*, to divide; literally, "to thrust between"). In actuality, the relation is more than simply etymological. And it is not a wish to indulge in facile hyperbole that brings one to conclude as much, considering that power/knowledge—with its patently disingenuous conception of "power" relations, and the facetious postulation of "power" itself—is not at all an original fancy, but rather the modified derivative of an imaginative sociological project conceived by a man who thought himself a neo-proselyte of *Dionysus redivivus* Georges Bataille. In light of its overt mystical flavor and fictional overtones, it is indeed surprising that no systematic excavation of the roots of an artifact as popular as power/knowledge has yet been conducted in this particular direction—the derivation is blatant. That Bataille, as shall be argued shortly, chiefly wrote against Catholicism, might not be per se a fact of macroscopic relevance; his could be one of a million literary/doctrinaire diatribes that are of exclusive interest to none other than the (exiguous) parties involved. But this story is different. Its radius extends beyond a philosophical polemic against the Church; the embedding into the rhetorical palette of the world's superpower, via a French academic, of a surreal neo-Dionysian gospel is a socio-intellectual phenomenon of rare value. To the Bataillean connection we now turn.

Bataille

The inventor of it all had been religiously alert, from early on. In his youth, Georges Bataille had wanted to be a Catholic priest. But the novitiate had been short-lived: besieged by doubts and tormenting questions, he had cast overboard the unripe fruit of his early vow. Bataille had come to reason that he simply could no longer place any faith in the providential love of a God that, in a world already so inexplicable, had resolved to crucify his own son.[12] Even so, Bataille's thirst for sacredness remained unquenched. If the story of Jesus was an ingenuous fancy, then, what was one to replace it with? The problem, in its original conception, was always that of theodicy. Bataille wondered:

> How could it be that in all places, without concert, men have found themselves in agreement to pursue an enigmatic behavior; how could it be that they all have felt the need or suffered the obligation to kill living beings in a ritual fashion? (…) [The "quiet man"] must acknowledge that death, the terror of sacred ecstasy are bound to him; failing to answer [this question], all men have dwelt in ignorance as *to what they are* (…). This is the key to all human existence.[13]

In other words, how can one believe in a benevolent God ruling over a world so violently unjust? More often than not, in fact, the game rather appears to be governed by a different sort of willing entity. This willing agency has manifested itself, in history and everywhere, under a legion of guises, yet all of them so strikingly consistent as to makeup what could be construed as a spiritually self-contained being—something, so to speak, having its own "core" personality. And this self-contained "core" is something that has little to share with benevolence and "the good." Indeed, nothing in history and across cultures appears so systematically consistent as the inclusive set of all those "arts"—that is, a comprehensive *ars interfectoria*—that have been painstakingly devised to kill and inflict pain upon others, in the most excruciating manners—be it by way of war, torture, sexual violation, or, most importantly, "ritual" sacrifice (i.e., the holocaust). Whose archetypal ideas are these? God's? The Devil's? And if the Devil's, on what divine grounds was he entitled to conceive them in the first place?

Bataille: if God is therefore "the Impossible"; if God is "a pig"[14] and the universe "a spider,"[15] it follows that religious yearning ought to be axed on a system of belief different from the patriarchal set of moral commandments that have been given definitive shape under Christian orthodoxy. If the force of hatred is the fuel of so much grandiose commotion in the epic of the human race, and "if God Himself were to fail this hatred at any moment," Bataille muses, "the world would become, logical, intelligible."[16] Which is to say that the aboriginal condition of (our) existence is one of speechless violence and darkness—a darkness, a void whose abysmal horror we humans are typically prone to exorcise with cogitation with discourse—that is, with intervals of rational elucubration. Reason to Bataille is the lantern whose dim luminescence we employ to carve out of the all-encompassing blackness a circle of comfort, in the center of which we step to become cognizant of our despair. The trouble, in the end, is that we are too keen to misinterpret the respite afforded by this exiguous, sallow disk of light wherein we squat fearfully, confounding

ourselves with all manners of delusions about God's harmonious and just design for us and the world as a whole. Ours can no longer be the world of God, interrupted as it most frequently is by the challenges of the Devil. And what is one to think of all such devilish "challenges" and temptations? Are they truly challenges or are they actually injunctions to follow "nature"? Wouldn't in this case Jehovah, or Zeus, be the insufferable intruder after all? If ours, then, is no longer God's cosmos, it must be the world of a different kind of regent. A devil for sure, and an ominous one—in dream, this demon appeared to Bataille as a headless monster, a monster whom he dubbed "the Acephalous" (L'Acéphale). The situation is thus reversed: in the realm of the "Headless," it is "rational discourse" and/or the bourgeois' "God"—both of which, in fact, are made to coincide—that obnoxiously and intermittently intrudes into humanity's instinctive communion with "evil." And what is "evil" in this construction? It appears to be a dichotomous equilibration of carnage and breeding, overwhelmingly suffused, however, with a more or less pronounced sadistic indulgence in possessing and dispossessing others before disappearing altogether, all of us each and severally, in a vortex of violent and issueless annihilation. Bataille's cosmogony features an excrescence of base matter, governed by chance, which dispenses equanimously birth with one hand and devastation with the other, according to a chaotic and unprincipled (acephalous) trajectory of cyclical convulsions. This much lurks behind the divine mask of "evil."

> To say "God is evil" is not at all what one imagines. It is tender truth, it is love for death, a slip into the void, towards absence.[17]

So there is method in horror, and nothing for Bataille exemplifies the poesy of wickedness more acutely than the ceremonial rhythm of *sacrifice*, whose theme recurs obsessively throughout his entire opus. The leitmotifs of Bataille's rebellious meditation against Catholic orthodoxy revolve around the motives and urges that bring men to immolate fellow humans for the sake of propitiation—the passion and crucifixion of Christ being the quintessential representation of this worldwide, anthropological mystery—and the vast mythographic, literary, and theological tradition that all such religious effusion of blood has produced. That humans—born in sin as they effectively appear to be—have constantly betrayed a fatal attraction to the transgressive triad of blood, sex, and death is proof for Bataille that mankind is in fact aboriginally marked by the seal of "evil." No amount

of abstinence, catechism, and self-flagellation can efface what beckoned to him as the deeper, primary call of the blood orgy. Bataille feels that the sinister half of existence, although it is repeatedly aggressed, repressed, and torched by the inquisitorial arm of traditional religion, still lies bubbling in the recesses of soul and society, until it intermittently erupts through the institutional meshes of Christianized modernity. And when it does—be it in the shape of sadism, serial/mass murder, gang rape, or ethnic cleansing—the modern observer is habituated to dismiss all such phenomena as "sick," deviant, and random acts of barbarous degeneracy. But the underlying reality of such acts, thought Bataille, reached much deeper.

Practically, Bataille wished to create a philosophy, whose perverted discourse could fashion a sense of relatedness among human beings—a community—without leading them to an embrace with a superior, transcendent principle of authority—such as the indifferent, or altogether illusory, God of orthodox monotheism. This obscurely defined "project," which Bataille could never quite actualize, was to create a medium of communication and expression for a congregation of individuals, whose social exchange was to flow like energy along a network of cross-relationships. Communication is by analogy likened to the energy of "electric current" or "solar heat."[18] This is the sort of cohesive fluid, of cementing glue that binds man to man and each in turn to the high priest as they altogether draw a wide circle around the sacrificial altars of pre-Columbian civilizations—blood-simple civilizations for which Bataille felt profound fascination and attraction.[19]

On these premises, Bataille drew up his "sacred sociology." He posited the conflictual tension between the gangs of the "sacred impure" and the militias of Christian philistinism. By reversing the traditional order and positing the acephalous god as the "benevolent" alpha, Bataille bundles the notion of God and of bourgeois mediocrity into the adversarial pole, and cast the latter as the actual villain: a twist on the old Nietzschean tirade. The hordes of the "sacred impure" belong to an ancient line of custodians of a primordial creed. The ritualism of this ancient cult taps an all too human appetence for sacrificial and orgiastic violence, whereas the opponents would issue from the modern litter of the mechanized incubator operating within the structure of the novel bureaucratic State. Then, there only remains to take sides: either with the tribes of "tragedy"—criminals, iconoclasts, splendid warriors, madmen, prostitutes, apostates, and sovereign squanderers of all shades—or with the clinicians, inquisitors, executioners, accountants, and jurists of the Liberal order.

Economically speaking, the mobs of tragedy, which embody the sphere of de-cumulation and squander, live by definition to consume, dissipate, and destroy everything that the others—the hypocritical and sexuophobic custodians of thrift—accumulate, produce, and conserve. It was tales of profitless cruelty, war and sacrifice, royal splendor, emulative ostentation, and sex disjointed from procreation (eroticism) that enthralled Bataille, and inspired his concept of "loss" and of "the accursed share" (*la part maudite*). In Bataille's vision, the sun feeds the earth so abundantly, that mankind seems indeed cursed to requite this unilateral gift of solar energy by blotting out of existence any excess of life however measured: crops to scorch, temples to burn, and lives, lives galore to take—through war, crime, and natural disasters. So great indeed are the bounties of sun and earth that the potential for a hatred deep enough to destroy them all seems to become ever more limitless as the technological arts advance. It is thus that we are perennially saddled with an additional "share" of living matter that damningly begs to be snuffed out.[20]

It was meditations on Christianity itself that inspired all such insights. Bataille explained his early seduction. When Christianity was itself a movement of revolt, it attempted to suck the whole of demoniac fury into the body of the redeemer; by so doing, it sought to evoke a vision overcoming entirely the folly of cruel rage by inverting its charge—that is, from the state of perennial war to the kingdom of meekness, the celestial Eldorado of "God's Kingdom." "There is something sublime and fascinating in this dream," he wrote.[21] Christ valued "the poor, the pariahs, the foul ones"; he threw himself "into play" as the defender of criminals, indeed, allowing the authorities to treat himself like one. He thus identified with the sacred of the "left"—the impure side.[22] And he ultimately communed with God through the paroxysm of evil, which is the torturing agony on the cross. "Communication amongst beings," Bataille affirmed once more, "is ensured by evil."[23] And the final truth is that it was "humanity" itself, as the mobs of Palestine, that tormented Christ and clamored to see him die; the throng, yet again, demanded that the king-son be put to death. This, for Bataille, is the sacred unfolding of "tragedy." And tragedy, in turn, demands that we identify with the criminals, and not with the victim, however shocking and harrowing his torment may be.

> Christianity proposes [to man] to identify himself with the victim, with the slain king. It is the Christian solution that has hitherto carried the day. But this whole movement takes place in a world that is at variance with it.[24]

The savagery of the populace, which has most often been found cheering for the monster, is a phenomenon, Bataille remarked, not at all aberrant or "contrary to Christianity of the truest sort, which itself has always been a terrifying cult!" Religion, Bataille insisted, has been for most of its life violence and blood, and, as a rule, the loose body of the believers has never been truly afraid of disorders as troubling as those incarnated by serial killers, mass murderers, and like fiends. "Could not Christianity," Bataille mused, "be the exigency of crime, the exigency of a horror, which, in a sense, it needs in order to be its forgiveness?"[25] Ultimately, Bataille saw Christianity in our time as a dream besieged, with greatly diminished powers of attraction and persuasion, despite its undying worship of bloodied martyrdom and the stories of Jesus' gentle radicalism.

So, in the end, how did we get here? What has taken us from the time of the crucifixion to our era—the era, among other things, of digital bibles and nuclear holocausts? Of fundamental importance in Bataille's sacred sociology is the function of the "core" (*le noyau*). The "core" is "a set of objects, places, creeds, persons and practices having a sacred character."[26] Each people was originally bestowed its own core. It is the miming of these rites, the chanting of these particular prayers and mantras by its indigenous keepers, and in particular settings, that set in motion potent waves of collective participation. They used to emanate from this very kernel—as did "power," that is, the structure of centralized command, which wields, in full regalia, its sacred authority over the subjects.

Bataille was conceivably much attracted to warrior societies; not just the Aztecs or the cannibals of Melanesia but also, and especially, the fastuous cavaliers of the Christian middle ages. In these societies, "the core" may be observed in its integrity: it is solidly held in the hands of a caste of pontiffs-warriors.[27] Then, something of extraordinary momentum came to pass: roughly three centuries ago, an "alien formation" made its appearance. Whence it came, neither Bataille nor any other political economist has been able to say: this is the advent of modernity—of the mechanized spirit. This alien "formation" came to attack the core, and was then able to siphon off energy from the core; ever since, it has sucked up the energy it needs in order to hatch and set in motion all of its "vital" functions, which are for the most part operations of parasitical intrusion/invasion/penetration of the fleshy body of humanity. This usurpation, "this fatal alteration of the collective movement" as Bataille characterized it, has given "power" its new, contemporary visage. In other terms, there came a point in history when the old sovereign empires came to suffer the birth and encroach-

ment of the "modern States": the core was crushed.[28] The modern State came to rule through laws that were not those of erotic splendor, but of thrift and capitalistic accumulation (e.g., Marx's *Kapital* is the best known of these nineteenth-century "witness accounts" of modern power's triumphal self-assertion). For Bataille, "power" ultimately became the byword of that process that had crowded the warrior kings out of the core by diverting its life force to the exclusive and selfish advantage of a novel military and bureaucratic machine.[29] Since then, the lifeblood of humans has been progressively trapped in a grid.

And this is how things stand today: we inhabit a world covered by a power structure of technocratic direction in charge of the real economy via a network of financial appropriation. To function, such a structure taps the energy of the masses (released by the crushed core), which sloshes through the underground piping of the social edifice. Uncontrolled leaks at any one juncture of such a fluid make up the chronicle of ordinary crime in the otherwise orderly schedule of a modern State. And towering over it all, globally, is a permanent pall of jingoistic, sectarian, and idiosyncratic divisiveness.

> Not only the situation of the human being—the condition of his existence—is such as to belie his desire to identify himself with this universe, of which he is apparently but an accident: the perpetual dissension, the opposition pitting one tribe against another, a nation against another, a group against another, render man's pretension to universality derisory. [Such a dissension] has compromised the minds of men in a continual lie. Finally, is there anything more pathetic, from the standpoint of universality than to connect the latter to (…) the "ideas" and "types of existence" that only a certain number of men possess in common? Each world view, each belief and each heresy represented so many attempts to reduce [this yearning for universality] to something narrow, self-contained, particular.[30]

This passage condenses the chief ingredients of Bataille's vision: the surreal senselessness of human existence, the hatred for universalist aspirations in the key of mutual assistance and fellowship, the conservative acquiescence in an interminable state of war of all against all, and an unprincipled cosmogony. All in all, Bataille's political economy is one of the most original and richest constructions of its kind—no matter how disquieting. The reasons why academia has chosen not divulge Bataille's "romance"—especially in the USA, where intellectual practitioners have made abundant use, instead, of Foucault's rather shameless plagiarism thereof—are (1) the romance's frontal morbidity; (2) a sort of sentimen-

tal melancholia pervading it all that is no longer à la mode; and (3) that fact that Bataille's whole vision, like all insightful political economy, is the discursive elaboration of mystical/religious apprehension. In an honorable regime of political correctness, keen and not-so-subtle talk of the centeredness of power and of God and the Devil—with an overt predilection for the latter—will not be allowed in the guarded precinct of public discourse; hence the option for Foucault. The fact remains, however, that when Liberal academia celebrates, daily, the postmodern liturgy by warming up the classroom with drills of ethical relativism before plunging into the politics of diversity or any other divisive posture of this genre, it is the authority of Bataille that it is actually, and obliquely, invoking.

Conclusive Reflections

In its simplest form, the racism bred among Western whites arises as a result of a mindset that values and evaluates "peoples" and "cultures" essentially according to two criteria: technological fitness and commercial proficiency—both being ultimately at the higher service of martial supremacism. In this respect, Africa and Latin America, for example, are categorically rated by Westerners as "inferior." Gender-based discrimination and homophobia issue in part from the same seed: from the conviction that only white males (mostly of northern European heritage) can man machines; only they can truly "talk science" and thereby organize societies efficiently. It is evident that Bataille, and Foucault after him, was not speculating in a vacuum: there exists, without any doubt, a clinical apparatus designed and operated by occidental minds, which is inflexibly intolerant of "difference."

The issue nowadays is not so much one of male versus female or white versus black, but rather of the perturbing spasms of masculine brutality within the strictures of a thoroughly non-human/inhuman, yet triumphantly hyper-modern, technological apparatus of sociopolitical and military organization. The nature of the conflict has morphed to the extent that this apparatus is itself operated by men, and increasingly women, ever more de-humanized: the machines are used for the purpose of mass control—in war, as weapons, and business, as cost-/wage-cutting devices—by a co-opted, and dwindling, middle stratum of robotized technicians on behalf of an elite of hyper-modernized, yet ever-barbarous absentees. It is a situation of white man versus the machine on the one hand, further contradistinguished, on the other, by a combined sense of spiritual impo-

tence and inexpressiveness of all those "groups" which the tension aloft has perennially relegated on the defensive such as, say, women in general and non-whites. In other words, at the top, white males annihilate dissent and cannibalize other whites by means of machined weapons and weaponized machines, while the frothing, swampy mass of all those billions excluded from the power game is by the self-same apparatus, concomitantly shoved around, terrorized, and impoverished "at the periphery" according to patterns, however, that are not at all random but dictated by the marching orders of the geopolitical game. Thus, it is easy to see how the late literalized metaphor of today's "liquid" society and/or Foucault's "resistance at the margins" have come about and earned official approval: they work to negate the moral foundation of sociological analysis by leveraging the evocative power of Gnosticism's nihilistic imagery (aboriginal violence issued from a watery void), which these "postmodern" authors artfully season with a pigment of realism.

It is known: under the hyper-modern sun, the Church, for her part, has suffered a profound identity crisis. And, lately, she has not fared a great deal better on account of ongoing plutocratic connivances, sexual scandals, reprobate conservatism, pedophilia, proverbial hypocrisy, and an overarching hoariness that sets her back on several planes—economic reform and social justice above all—where she should be leading, instead. One would have imagined that such an unsightly load of disgraces should have hamstrung the institution irremediably, and yet, as a whole, she still appears, indeed with manifest difficulty, to be standing her ground for she is still a hostile target of the hyper-modern bastion. While the neoconservative wing berates her alleged "communism" in economic matters, the Liberal wing, much to the point, has (pedagogically/rhetorically) employed in the past the politics of diversity to attack the Church by characterizing its prelates as homophobic relics of a most retrograde patriarchism. This was especially the case under the papacy of Benedict XVI (2005–2013), who, feeling the heat, attempted a riposte by initiating a quintessentially academic quibble against "ethical relativism."[31] Lowering the discussion onto the plane of petty politics and the putative permissiveness of democracy, Josef Ratzinger lamented relativism's free-for-all as a tyrannizing scourge. In all evidence, by doing so, the previous pope was making shift to contrast the wave of anti-Church hostility that emanated from the US fad of Foucauldian power/knowledge, which at first blush is typically mistaken for run-of-the-mill relativism ("my knowledge', my truth vs. yours"). But, precisely because the Bataillean/Foucauldian con-

struct, as it has been expounded herein, is something entirely alien from a trifling philosophical provocation, Benedict and his advisers missed the point entirely and thereby allowed their opponents to put Catholicism even more on the defensive. In this fashion, the academic clergy of post-modernism have secured a position from which they can quite easily steal the thunder of the Church's prelates and, because they so profess such a devout respect for "diversity," they may be expected to parade themselves on a regular basis as the true and only champions of anti-racism.

Under Pope Francis, this polemic has somewhat abated; it still simmers in the background, although the contraposition to the Neocons on economic management has resumed center stage. In conclusion, it is only inasmuch as the Church pledges to stand against a conception of life's worth gauged almost exclusively by business outcomes—very much the sort of pecuniary ethos prevailing in the USA—and against any form of violence, including and especially war; it is only inasmuch as the Church, as one body embracing over a billion souls defines herself in opposition to these two particular spiritual attitudes that she may stand a chance of remaining a constant source of apprehension for the hyper-modern establishment.

Notes

1. Thereafter the mechanized physiognomy of contemporary society seems to overshadow the markedly masculine, male-driven rhythm of Western civilization.
2. Elizabeth Bumiller, "First Lady to Speak About Afghan Women," *The New York Times*, Nov. 16, 2001.
3. Michel Foucault, *The Foucault Reader* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1984), 119.
4. Michel Foucault, *Surveiller et punir*, *naissance de la prison* (Paris: Gallimard, 1975), 17, 14, 15.
5. Ibid., 28, 30.
6. Ibid., 31.
7. Ibid., 31, 32.
8. Michel Foucault, *Power/Knowledge*: *Selected Interviews & Other Writings*, *1972–1977* (*New York*: *Pantheon Books*, *1980*), , 81–2, emphasis added.
9. Ibid., 83, emphasis added.
10. Ibid., 87.
11. Ibid., 97.
12. Georges Bataille, *Oeuvres Complètes* (*OC)* (Paris: Gallimard, 1970), Vol. V, 30–31.

13. Ibid., Vol. VII, 264.
14. Ibid., Vol. III, 30.
15. Ibid., Vol. V, 51.
16. Ibid., 50, emphasis added.
17. Ibid., Vol. XI, 67.
18. Ibid., Vol. VII, 265.
19. Ibid., Vol. I, 201, and ff.
20. For a detailed discussion of Bataille's economics, see Guido G. Preparata, "Un(for)giving: Bataille, Derrida and the Postmodern Denial of the Gift," in *Catholic Social Science Review*, 13 (2008): 169–200; and Guido G. Preparata, *The Ideology of Tyranny. The Use of Neo-Gnostic Myth in American Politics* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011).
21. Bataille, OC, XX, 131.
22. Ibid., Vol. II, 344.
23. Ibid., Vol. VI, 43.
24. Ibid., Vol. II, 346.
25. Ibid., Vo. X, 281.
26. Ibid., Vol. II, 310.
27. Ibid., 341.
28. Ibid., 342–3.
29. Ibid., 342.
30. Ibid., Vol. XII, 223.
31. "Missa pro eligendo Romano Pontefice. Omelia del Cardinale Josef Ratzinger, Decano del Collegio Cardinalizio" (April 18th 2005); http://www.vatican.va/gpII/documents/homily-pro-eligendo-pontifice_20050418_it.html "Discorso di Sua Santitá Benedetto XVI ai membri della Commissione teologica internazionale" (October 5th 2007); https://w2.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/it/speeches/2007/october/documents/hf_ben-xvi_spe_20071005_cti.html