

The Shadows of God

*If Gods combine against Man Setting their Dominion above
The Human Form Divine. Thrown down from their high Station
In the Eternal heavens of the Human Imagination: buried beneath
In dark oblivion with incessant pangs ages on ages
In Enmity & war first weakened then in stern repentance
They must renew their brightness & their disorganized functions
Again reorganize till they assume the image of the human
Cooperating in the bliss of Man obeying his Will
Servants to the Infinite and Eternal of the Human form
WILLIAM BLAKE, from *The Four Zoas**

IN the well-known words of St Paul from the book of *Ephesians*, ‘We wrestle not against flesh and blood but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places.’ These principalities and powers, in my opinion, can be legitimately seen as elements of the system of the Antichrist, a system which ‘constellates’ only at the end of the aeon, but which is virtually present all throughout ‘fallen’ human history, as when Paul speaks of ‘the god of this world [who] hath blinded the eyes of them that believe not’ (2 Cor. 4:4). The ‘god of this world’ is obviously Satan, but Satan in his particular aspect as the patron of ‘worldliness’, of the organized social and mass psychological system created by the human ego in rebellion against God. The Antichrist *per se* represents the establishment of this system in its terminal form for this aeon via the breakthrough of sub-human, ‘infra-psychic’ forces into human history, just as Christ—and Muhammad, and the Buddha, and the Hindu Avatars—represent the breakthrough of Divine Wisdom and Love.

For many of the early Christians, the Roman Empire represented, for obvious reasons, the system of Antichrist. The Roman Emperor was worshipped as a god at one time, at least in the provinces, and the Number of the Beast, 666, is often solved as a numerical reference to the emperor Nero. The central grievance of the Jewish Zealots, the anti-Roman guerrilla terrorists of Jesus’ time, was that to require that the Jews pay taxes to Rome was an act of emperor-worship and thus a blasphemy against God,

especially since the Roman denarius in which the tax was to be paid bore an image of the emperor, and so was technically an idol in the eyes of many Jews, who, like the Muslims in later centuries, prohibited the making of any image of Yahweh, and considered any deity who could be visually represented as inherently false. That Jesus was on one level sympathetic to the Zealots, though he was certainly not a political revolutionary—any more than he was a collaborator with Rome—is shown by the fact that he criticized every known Jewish sect of his time—Pharisees, Sadducees, Scribes, and Herodians—except the Zealots and the Essenes, and numbered one Simon the Zealot among his disciples, though we can't be sure whether 'Zealot' refers to Simon's affiliation or only his character.

In the *Apocalypse*, the central symbol of the Antichrist is the Beast, who acts as an agent of the Dragon (Satan). Upon the Beast rides the Whore, whose name is Mystery, Babylon the Great. The seven heads of the Beast, which are seven kings, are also seven mountains upon which she sits, like the seven mountains of Rome. And so, on one level, the Beast is the Roman Empire, compared by the writer of the book to the Babylonian captivity of the Jews. This identification of the Beast with Rome has led certain Protestant sects to see it as a symbol of the Roman Catholic Church—an attribution which would be partly justified only in the case of the complete apostasy of Catholicism, which, in my opinion, cannot be assumed to have happened even now.

The Dragon of the *Apocalypse*, identified with Satan, represents a perverted *spiritual* order. Based on this Satanic order is the perverted *social* order of the Beast. And the Whore of Babylon, who rides the Beast—that is, who both guides it and is carried along by it—is the perverted *psychic* order of the latter days. The seven heads of the Beast, who are seven kings with whom Babylon consorts and seven mountains upon which she reigns, symbolize—among other things—the seven major faculties of the soul, which in antiquity were represented by the seven planets: the Moon, fertility and sub-conscious emotion; Mercury, thought, cunning and the ability to deal with information; Venus, love, sexuality and relatedness; the Sun, intellect, the spiritual center of the soul and source of its life; Mars, will and aggression; Jupiter, leadership ability and philosophical intelligence; Saturn, long-term planning ability, mystical knowledge and the wisdom of old age. If the Beast and the Whore 'occupy' the seven provinces of the soul, this indicates that the regime of Antichrist has

conquered and perverted all these aspects of human life, both socially and psychologically, a perversion which is represented in Catholic theology by the seven deadly sins. According to Martin Lings, in his article ‘The Seven Deadly Sins in the Light of the Symbolism of Number’, ‘*superbia* (pride) is related to the Sun, *avaritia* (avarice) to Saturn, *luxuria* (lust) to Venus, *invidia* (envy) to Mercury, *gula* (gluttony) to Jupiter, *ira* (anger) to Mars, and *accidia* (sloth) to the Moon.’ The power of the Beast over the human soul is symbolized by the ‘mark of the Beast’—who in this case is actually, according to the *Apocalypse*, a second Beast, servant of the first, identified as the False Prophet—which is placed either upon the right hand or upon the forehead. The mark upon the right hand symbolizes power over the will, and that upon the forehead power over the intelligence: when the intelligence is darkened, the will is overpowered as well, since it must now follow error instead of Truth.

The regime of Antichrist, then, operates on three levels, which are the three ontological levels of the human being: the material level, including both the socio-historical realm and the human body; the psychic level, embracing both the conscious and the sub-conscious mind; and the spiritual level, which though it cannot ultimately be perverted, since it is Divine, can be obscured by the powers of darkness, and also *counterfeited*, according to the principle that ‘Satan is the ape of God’.

The Beast, who is Antichrist, is thus the counterfeit of Christ, a perverse and distorted version of the image of God within us. Under his regime, all the powers and qualities of the human form, considered as God’s central act of Self-revelation in this world (‘who has seen me has seen the Father’ said Jesus, speaking as the Divine Archetype of Humanity) are aped by demonic forces: wisdom, love, miracles of healing and control over natural forces, and even the resurrection of the body, all will be enacted in counterfeit, ‘so as to lead astray, if possible, even the elect.’

Evangelical Christians tend to concentrate on predictions relating to how the system of Antichrist will appear in future history and society. This is a valid and important level upon which to view the matter, though we have to be careful not to interpret scripture too narrowly, since an event recounted in a densely-symbolic text like the *Apocalypse* may appear in history as several different events, or trends, happening at various times. My intent, however, is to concentrate more on the psychic and metaphysical aspects of ‘the darkness of this world’, including that level of things where

the unconscious mind interacts with society, the realm where the powers of darkness appear as *unconscious belief-systems and social mores*.

A spiritually degenerate society rules its members not only by police-state tactics, or by influencing them to consciously believe false doctrines, but also by indoctrinating them to adopt certain beliefs *unconsciously*, beliefs that will have all the more power over them by this very unconsciousness, since they are never brought into the light of day where they can be critically evaluated. An evil society will inculcate these beliefs deliberately, through various sorts of propaganda, indoctrination, and mind-control. On the other hand, the rulers of the society in question will in some ways be just as unconscious as the population they indoctrinate. While they may consciously lie to the people on questions of fact, nonetheless they take the *fundamental* beliefs they disseminate absolutely for granted, and are therefore unconscious of them. The deepest lies—the unconscious social mores and the false conceptions of God on which they are based—appear to our rulers simply as the nature of things. Because they believe in them implicitly, they need never become aware of them *as beliefs*. If you want to delude others, it is best to begin by deluding yourself; that way none can question your ‘sincerity’.

These beliefs act like possessing demons, controlling the psyche from within, and punishing any move of thought, feeling or intuition which is at odds with their view of reality, most often through feelings of shame, fear, uncontrollable anger, frigid pride, or deep depression, all of which will be temptations to the same fundamental sin, the sin of despair. (This is not to say that all such feelings are demonic attacks. There is also a healthy shame which protects us from shameful acts, a healthy fear which defends us from physical and spiritual danger, a healthy anger at evil or injustice, a healthy ‘pride’ which takes the form of self-respect or veneration of the worthy, and a healthy sorrow which appears as compassion, or remorse.) Furthermore, what is an unconscious false belief on the psychological level *is precisely a devil* on the psychic or spiritual level. In the parable of Jesus’ exorcism of the lone demoniac, the demons which possess him give their name as ‘legion’, which is an obvious reference not only to the Roman military occupation of Judea, but also to the possession of the Jewish soul, via ‘internalized oppression’, by the unconscious social mores of the Roman imperium.

The devils who ‘administer’ the false belief-systems in question are not to be compared with those who tempt us to personal self-indulgence, to lust, for example, or sloth, or anger. They are more on the order of fallen cherubim, great spiritual intelligences who have turned against God. They are demons of the intellect, not demons of the will. When St Paul speaks of ‘principalities and powers’ who are ‘the rulers of the darkness of this world’, these are the beings he is referring to.

On a certain level, these fallen cherubim constitute an articulate system of error, a direct counterfeit of the divine or celestial *pleroma* which appears in the *Apocalypse* as the Throne of the Lamb surrounded by the four Living Creatures, the seven Lamps, the twenty-four Elders, etc. The symbolic meaning of these figures may never be precisely known (though it clearly was at one time); it is enough to say, in this context, that they represent God’s first, spiritual creation, prior to the material universe, though they are ‘prior’ more in the spiritual than the temporal sense, since the first creation is eternal in relation to our temporal, material one, not simply ‘prior’ to it in time.

After meditating for many years on these subjects, I believe I have gained a certain amount of insight into what C. S. Lewis jocularly named, in his *Screwtape Letters*, the ‘Lowerarchy’—the system of infernal domination of collective human society, not simply of individual human beings—and most particularly into the level represented by the number *four*, which would appear to be the Satanic counterfeit of the Four Living Creatures. I have been deeply influenced in these meditations by the ‘prophetic books’ of William Blake, *The Four Zoas*, *Milton*, and *Jerusalem*—themselves influenced by the Hebrew Kabbalah—where in obscure and flaming visionary language he analyses the Fall and Redemption of Man in terms of the fall of the four central faculties of the human soul, the Four Zoas or Living Creatures, and their redemption by Christ, who is the eternal spiritual Intellect. My intent here is certainly not to create an alternate theology, but merely to throw a poetic and metaphorical light on certain psychic consequences of the fall of man, which, according to traditional authorities, as well as to the fairly obvious meaning of the book of *Genesis*, includes both the perversion of the will and the darkening of the Intellect.

The fall of man, seen in intellectual terms, begins as a primal misunderstanding of the true nature of God. All else follows from this, since a failure to understand Who God really is distorts our picture of every

other thing, person, situation, or level of being. Where the intellect is darkened by spiritual ignorance, it can reveal to us only shadows of the Truth, false objects which the will is attracted to because of their partial resemblance to the Truth they hide, in the course of which it becomes weakened and distorted, until it can no longer will the Good—even if, by the Grace of God, the darkness of the Intellect were to be lifted for a moment, and that Good revealed.

A shadow requires three things: a source of light, an opaque object, and a field where the shadow falls. If the light is God, the opaque object, the ego, and the field where the shadow falls, the universe, then the shadows of the ego, projected by the Light of God, are false beliefs, which appear to that ego not as its own shadows, nor even as beliefs, but as the literal nature of reality: the shadows of God.

The ego, by definition, does not know itself. It tries to convince us that we can become unique and original if we submit to its magic. It forgets that egotism actually stereotypes us, makes us dreadfully predictable, because human egos, at root, are much alike. Our deepest fears and desires, of which the ego is composed, are very few and very common.

God is the only Reality, the sole object, and subject, of all knowledge. But when primal fear and desire, which are the seed-form of the ego, separate subject from object, so that the perceiving subject is apparently no longer God—as in Reality it always is, since only God, in the last analysis, is Witness of His own manifestation—then limited and conditioned views of Reality are born, held within the minds of limited and conditioned subjects. From one point of view, these limited views, and the limited subjects who perceive them, are the creative manifestation of God in space and time; from another, they are God's shadows, His veils. When these shadows become thick, and their darkness intense, it appears as if God were absent from His creation. It is into these places and times of the apparent 'death of God' that God sends the prophets, saviors and avatars who found and renew the great wisdom traditions.

Looked at in one way, false beliefs are nothing but illusions; to take them too seriously is to grant them more reality than they deserve. But to the degree that false beliefs are actually believed, especially on the collective level, they produce real effects, not only on the psychic plane, but on the social, physiological and environmental ones as well. Illusion—whose moral name is evil—is essentially a privation, a lack. One can never

make complete sense of it because, as a ‘hole’ in reality rather than a reality in its own right, it is fundamentally absurd. However, a condition such as starvation is also a ‘mere’ lack, a lack of food; but its consequences are far from illusory. In the same way, false beliefs, and the demonic powers who administrate them, have real effects, which we ignore at our peril. The ‘principalities and powers’, then, can be considered as fundamental *misperceptions of the nature of God* by the deepest, most hidden layers of the human ego—which, from another perspective, is entirely composed of these misconceptions. In other words, they are *idols*, false gods like the Golden Calf destroyed by Moses, or the pagan idols swept out of the Kaaba by the Prophet Muhammad (upon whom be peace).

Conceive of the most fundamental and universal idols, the primal shadows of God, as four: the idolatry of *Law*, the idolatry of *Fate*, the idolatry of *Chaos*, and the idolatry of *Self*. These are the primordial elementals of the human ego, the analysis of the darkened order of perception created by the fall of man, the ‘rulers of the darkness of this world’. To the darkened perception of the self-worshipping ego they appear as powers in their own right, and also—since they are in perpetual conflict—as real alternatives. But in reality they are in perpetual collusion to prevent us from seeing any light of Truth beyond the tragic and ironic alternatives they propose. And far from being independent self-existing powers, they are nothing at root but the emblems of our fundamental recoil from the incandescent Glory of God, projected, like the shadows in Plato’s cave, on the landscape of the psyche, and thence on nature and society. Yet from another perspective, they are, precisely, demons, spiritual powers in rebellion against God. We can solve this apparent paradox if we realize that it is only the ego’s alienation from God which opens it to the influence of such demonic forces, who are in a similar state of alienation, and that the origin of such alienation in both cases is ignorance or delusion. The deluded ego worships itself instead of God—whether in arrogance or in despair—and the forms which this self-worship takes are the forms of demonic powers. Practically speaking, we must admit both that these powers are in deliberate, active opposition to God and the spiritual life, and that they themselves are deluded, even as they attempt, with infernal cunning, to delude us. In other words, their power is entirely negative, being based on ignorance alone, which is why they are called ‘powers of darkness’. And though it will always be necessary, given our fallen condition, to struggle

with them will-against-will, it is only the dispersal of the shadows of ignorance, in the light of the Divine Intellect, which finally breaks their power.

Idolatry of Law

God is a lawgiver. The Torah, the Laws of Manu, the Islamic *shari'at* were given to humanity not as an arbitrary imposition of tyrannical rules, but as mercy—which is why ancient peoples looked on lawgiving kings and sages as among the supreme benefactors of the race. Given that humanity had fallen from Eden, from the direct perception of Divine Reality, law became a necessity. A sacred law is an expression of the true shape of the human culture, and ultimately the Human Form, to which that law applies. By the divine act of lawgiving, God creates a given culture in space and time: not through an arbitrary decree, but through His vision of that culture as an eternal facet of the Divine Humanity within His own nature. To command, ‘you shall not kill, you shall not steal, you shall not commit adultery, you shall not forget to acknowledge the Divine Source of your life’ is like ordering us not to cut off our arms or put out our eyes. As a safeguard of our integral humanity, the sacred law is beholden to that humanity. It is cut to fit us; we are not, as in the myth of the bed of Procrustes, mutilated to fit it. As Jesus said, ‘the Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath.’ Revealed law is necessary because we find ourselves within time, and so need a vehicle whereby eternal principles can be applied to changing situations.

The very sacredness of revealed law, however, makes it vulnerable to the growth of idolatry. We forget that it was given to protect us, and begin to use it as a tool in the service of the collective ego, a weapon against the Image of God within us. God is Absolute, and the eternal principles are absolute relative to cosmic manifestation, but when our sense of absoluteness is displaced by being identified with contingent situations, idolatry is born. And the essence of the *idolatry of Law* is that we impose it blindly, mechanically, without regard for the actual shape of the situations it was created to regulate, or the true nature of the people it was written to protect. Every truly sacred law is not merely a set of duties and prohibitions, but an expression in the moral realm of eternal, metaphysical principles. ‘Keep holy the Lord’s Day,’ for example, refers, on an esoteric level, to the Eternal Present as God’s resting-place, and ‘Thou shalt not covet thy neighbor’s wife’ to what the Hindus call *svadharma*, one’s unique spiritual duty and destiny—symbolized by a man’s wife, the image of his

soul—which cannot be exchanged, and which no other can fulfil: ‘Better one’s own *dharma*, no matter how poorly performed, than the *dharma* of another, no matter how well.’ These eternal principles do not exist behind the letter of the law alone, but equally behind the face of the human situation the law must confront and regulate. But when this is forgotten, when law is applied *indiscriminately* rather than impartially, it is transformed into a bloody idol, demanding, like the pagan god Moloch in the Old Testament, the sacrifice of our children (esoterically speaking, our creativity) and, like the Aztec war-god Huitzilopochtli, our still-beating hearts (the Image of God within us). Prescribing the same remedy for all seems impartial, yet nothing is more destructive, precisely as if a physician were to prescribe penicillin or insulin to every patient indiscriminately, to avoid the work of diagnosis and the humbling realization that he or she does not already know the precise nature of the disease. As Blake said, ‘One law for the Lion and the Ox is oppression.’ When the certainty derived from an understanding of eternal principles is used as an excuse for failing to engage with real people and actual situations in the work of discernment, the *idolatry of Law* is in full force.

The false religion of Law is best represented by the legalism of the Abrahamic religions, when it expands beyond its legitimate bounds and denies Mercy. A great deal of Jesus’ ministry was directed against this idolatry, represented in the Gospels by the Scribes and Pharisees. The idolatry of Law includes either the false doctrine that God’s law is greater than God, that He is a slave to it rather than its Creator, or the allied error—held by the more extreme Asharites within Islam—that His Will is arbitrary, and thus takes precedence over even His Nature, as if God could will to be whatever he wants, even if it be something other than God. This second error, however, could better be described as a synthesis of the idolatry of Law and the idolatry of Selfhood (see below) since it sees God as a kind of rebel—a rebel against Himself. When this spirit of legalism is expressed socially, it becomes a tyrannical police state, most likely (at least in these days) protecting an economic monopoly which impoverishes the masses and excludes them from participation in the life of the nation and/or world, and which protects its own power through various forms of propaganda, mind-control and state terror. Expressed psychologically, it becomes the rigid, authoritarian character, filled with frigid pride, which represses and

dominates its own thoughts, feelings, sensations and perceptions as brutally as any dictator dominates the unfortunate populace.

Idolatry of Fate

God is the nature of things. A recognition of the nature of things, which the Chinese call Tao, the Hindus *rta*, and the ancient Egyptians *maat*, the manifestation of necessary Being in the cosmic order, is the basis of contemplative spirituality. The way things naturally are, the realm of natural law, manifests as appropriateness, beauty and inevitability; through it we can contemplate the Divine Names or Platonic Ideas, the eternal archetypes within the mind of God.

Contemplation is like space. Empty in itself, it shows us the pattern whereby things are related to one another outside time, *sub specie aeternitatis*. Law enters time, and so manifests as speech and spoken scripture; contemplation, being of the nature of space, is better symbolized by the Hindu mandala, the sacred calligraphy of the Koran, or the Eastern Orthodox icon. But when pure contemplation is darkened, when the primordial receptivity of the soul is lost, then *Fate* is born. We can no longer contemplate the eternal pattern of things; consequently the Always So is transformed into the fated, the hopelessly inevitable. The still surface of the lake of contemplation is disturbed by time—not the creative time of sacred law, but time as conditioned by the fear of what might happen in the future now that we can no longer see the shape of what always is. Under the regime of Fate, vertical causality—the sense that everything happens by virtue of God’s eternal will for this particular moment—is veiled, and replaced by horizontal causality. Past causes are now seen as the origin of future events, but since the roots of the past are hidden, the shape of the future is hidden as well. Events are unpredictable because their causes are veiled in mystery; by the same token, they are inevitable.

The pre-Socratic philosopher Heraclitus said ‘character is fate,’ an oracular statement that can be taken in two different ways. In the words of the Prophet Muhammad (upon whom be peace), ‘he who knows himself knows his Lord.’ This means that if one can see oneself with the perfect objectivity of the Divine Self or Witness within the human soul, one will know that little ‘me’ out there as a projection into space and time of a specific archetype within the mind of God—and so fate holds no surprises. All happenings are seen as perfectly appropriate to the shape of the self to which they happen; God’s will for a particular individual within a particular

moment is indistinguishable from that person's will for himself, since the two are one. On the other hand, if character is unconscious—which it usually is, no matter how much psychological introspection we do or how much feedback we get from others, since we can only know who we really are in the objective light of God—then it is projected into the world of events as a mysterious fate which we can't escape, no matter what we do. The same things keep happening, over and over again, and all our attempts to escape them only seem to quicken the pace of their pursuit. The Greek tragedies, with their sense of the 'fatal flaw', are the best illustrations we have in literature of this darker side of Heraclitus' saying.

These obsessively repetitive events continue to happen because of the kind of fundamental forgetfulness which the Greeks called *amnesia*, and the Muslims *ghaflah*—the forgetfulness of the Divine Witness within us, which leads to a general inability to pay attention, as well as to an ignorance of our essential character and real needs. We keep asking for things, forgetting that we've done so, and then reacting with shock when our unconscious wishes come true. If we were aware of the wishes hidden within us, then we could distinguish between *essential* and *imposed* character, between the accidental wishes implanted in us by circumstances or other people's agendas, and the essential wishes that are inseparable from who we are in the mind of God. The first kind of wish can never really be fulfilled; the second kind is fulfilled already, in a higher world—a world which, paradoxically, can only be unveiled to us through our struggle to find and fulfill our true wishes in this imperfect world, where that fulfillment can never be complete, or, even if momentarily it seems complete, can never last.

Until we awaken from our amnesia, we are under the regime of Fate. Every time something 'fatal' happens, we are appalled to realize that we haven't escaped the curse even yet. And as each twist of fate which has sprung at us out of the mysterious future passes into the hidden past, it adds to the store of apparent *karma* by which the mysterious 'past' seems to be the origin of the hidden 'future'. Just as our body can become addicted to certain drugs, our destiny can become addicted to certain events. If an eternal archetype or character in the mind of God is veiled by the darkening of the individual mind, or the mind of society as a whole, it becomes the center of a karmic cycle or 'vicious circle', something which Blake called 'the circle of destiny'. When the Stoic philosophers tried to absolutize natural cycles in the doctrine of the 'eternal return', which maintained that

all events endlessly recur in exactly the same way to exactly the same people through vast and unending cycles of time, they were erecting the 'circle of destiny' into an idol, like the Greek Fates, or the Roman goddess Fortuna who used to be worshipped by spinning the familiar 'wheel of fortune'. In so doing they were reacting to an alienation from the sense of eternity which was prevalent in classical antiquity. St Augustine, in *The City of God*, criticizes this doctrine, implying that the belief in a circle of destiny is actually based on a circular argument, since (I would add) if the premises upon which an argument is based are not seen as axiomatic, and thus eternal in relation to the motion of the argument, that motion becomes circular. Those who remember God in eternity know all events as eternally present. Those who forget God become like 'moving white dots' (Blake) between a forgotten past dominated by nostalgia and a mysterious future ruled by fear. They live in a world where forgetfulness of the past is compulsory, and where all who forget the past are condemned to repeat it.

The false religion of Fate manifests either as a cult of the cycles of nature, as in the negative and mechanistic aspects of the Mesopotamian star-worship from which *astrology* is derived (which is not in all cases fatalistic, since it can sometimes approach a vision of the eternal archetypes) or the Calvinist denial of free will based on a false doctrine of predestination, which sees God's eternal will for the individual as something other than the sum total of the individual's own decisions, whereas in reality God's 'foreknowledge' of our decisions does not cause them, but is simply His vision of them *sub specie aeternitatis*. Expressed in psychological and social terms, this Fate-worship becomes a largely-unconscious 'zodiac' of *social typology*—of imposed rather than essential character—where the unconscious social mores determine the individual's fate via society's expectations for him, which progressively become his own expectations for himself. As the idolatry of Law is pride, so the idolatry of Fate is fear. [NOTE: The best concentrated analysis of the Fate Idol I've ever encountered is the story 'The Lottery in Babylon', by Jorge Luis Borges.]

Idolatry of Chaos

God is infinite life. The vast profusion of the 'ten-thousand things' eternally overflows into manifestation out of the Divine Infinity. God sends sacred laws, but He is greater than they. He manifests as the cosmic order, but He is not limited by it. There are no barriers in God to the infinite radiation of His Being, and this is His perfect freedom, a freedom which does not begin to be exhausted by universe after universe, bursting with life.

But we cannot act as God does. We are contingent, He is Absolute. He is beyond form, while we are bound to the forms in which He has created us. He absolutely transcends us. But when we forget this, when His transcendence is veiled and we see only His immanence in the world visible to our senses, and then *identify* with it, we start to believe that the path to freedom lies through formlessness and dissipation. Since we've lost the vision of how form emanates from what is *above* form, we seek the divine Infinity in what is *below* form, in a Dionysian intoxication which ends as it did with King Pentheus in Euripides' *The Bacchae*. Pentheus, king of Thebes, despises the new cult of Dionysus (or Bacchus, god of wine, perhaps also of the psychedelic mushroom *amanita muscaria*) which has invaded Greece, and been taken up by women—the *bacchantes*—who dance ecstatically, and tear living animals apart in their frenzy. Dionysus assumes the guise of a suspicious underworld type, is arrested and brought to the palace. There he offers to tell Pentheus where he can view the Bacchic revelers in their secret forest sanctuary. Pentheus, voyeuristically fascinated, takes him up on his offer, goes out to spy on the *bacchantes*, and is torn limb from limb by his own mother, Agave, who in her frenzy mistakes him for an animal. Euripides is saying here that to seek the divine life in what is below form, by idealizing and worshipping one's animal nature, is to be torn to pieces by our mother, who is material nature; *mater* = matter. This is the idolatry of *Chaos*.

The false religion of Chaos is the Dionysian, which includes various kinds of political, social and moral anarchism; those forms of false mysticism which identify God with formlessness instead of supra-formal Essence, and higher consciousness, in a simple-minded way, with intoxication; and those forms of psychotherapy which make release from constriction, inhibition and character-armor the central factor. Those who,

like Pentheus, are narrow-mindedly 'civilized' rather than broadly cultured, will often seek this kind of release in a return to the simplicity of Nature, conceived of as a maternal paradise of safety, self-indulgence, ease and irresponsibility—forgetting that, for example, no African Bushman or Australian Aborigine could survive for a single day without a greater degree of endurance, courage, and vigilance than most city-dwellers will ever possess. If the dominant emotion of Fate is fear, the dominant emotion of Chaos is shame.

Idolatry of Selfhood

God is the Absolute Subject, the *atman*, the transcendent and immanent Self, the *imago dei* within each of us. By virtue of this *atman*, we are, at the deepest level of our being, both unique and universal. The Self within us is pure, impersonal, universal Being, without attributes; according to some metaphysicians, including Frithjof Schuon, it is better described as Beyond Being, given that it can never be an object of consciousness subject to definition, since ‘the eye cannot see itself’. But because God is unique as well as universal, this Self is also the principle of our unique human integrity, the way in which we are not simply humanity in the abstract, but actual human beings, commanded by God to be precisely ourselves, no greater, no less, and no other. And yet this uniqueness is also universal, since it is shared by all human beings, and in fact by all things. Self as the principle of uniqueness is not other than Self as the principle of pure Being, as when God, speaking to Moses in *Exodus*, names Himself as ‘I Am That I Am’: My unique Essence is not other than My pure Being; it is My unique Essence to *be* pure Being.

And what God can say of Himself, we can also say, certainly not of our limited human personalities, but of the God, the *atman*, within us. In St Paul’s words: ‘It is not I who live, but Christ lives in me.’

But when uniqueness is separated from being, it loses its universality. This is just what happens when we ascribe uniqueness to ourselves alone while denying it to others. This is the *idolatry of Self*. When we worship our own separate selfhood as if it were God, we start to believe that self-willed isolation is the road to integrity, and that, in Sartre’s words, ‘hell is other people.’ Consequently we can only relate comfortably to others if we see them as subordinates—that is, as lesser parts of ourselves. This is the irony of self-worship. Seeking unity and integrity through isolation and dominance, we gradually become filled with the ghosts of all the relationships we have denied and betrayed. Our quest for individuality (‘undividedness’) at all costs results only in fragmentation. We ourselves become ‘the lonely crowd’.

The false religion of Selfhood is Prometheanism, which includes all forms of *hubris*: the solipsistic, New Age belief that ‘I create my own reality’ (the truth being more on the order of ‘I create my own illusion’); the

idea that spiritual development is a kind of exploit or heroic achievement to be gloried in; the sense that the individual can only gain integrity and significance by breaking the law and rebelling against the mores; and the driving will of Western, and by now global, society to conquer nature, deny God, and remold human life according to the most demented ‘idealism’ imaginable, even at the risk of destroying both humanity and the earth. If Law is ruled by pride, Fate by fear, and Chaos by shame, Selfhood is ruled by anger.

These four idols—Law, Fate, Chaos, and Selfhood—are an analysis of the fallen order of perception known in Christian theology as ‘this world’. They do not operate in isolation. Tyrannical and mechanistic Law takes on the aspect of mysterious Fate. Ignorance of the law is no excuse, we are told, and yet who can ever know that law in its entirety? And Fate, in reality, is not the operation of being-in-itself, but of an established, though hidden, order of things, an artificial system, an idolatrous Law. Tyrannical Law imposed on the individual produces the self-willed rebel, and so Law reinforces Selfhood. Imposed on society or nature, it produces Chaos. And both Rebellion and Chaos make necessary ever-more tyrannical, blind and mechanistic Law. In the name of the war on drugs, we destroy civil rights. In the name of wildlands management, we burn Yellowstone National Park. But the more blindly we try to impose order on nature and society, the more chaos and rebellion we create.

Fate imposed on the individual promotes Selfhood, since to be self-willed, and suffer the consequences, seems inevitable, while the only way of possessing individual integrity seems to be to submit to one’s Fate: ‘a man’s got to do what a man’s got to do,’ even if—or *especially* if—the results are fatal. And Fate imposed on society produces Chaos. If a whole generation of adolescents believe that they are fated to fail, drug-taking and dissipation seem the only way out, and society dissolves. So both the self-willed individual fated to die—like the Irish hero Cuchulainn who was chosen, empowered, exalted, and doomed by the Goddess Morrigan—and the chaotic individual destined to degradation and madness, are servants of Fate. The chaotic individual is susceptible to shame in the face of those more fortunate individuals upon whom Fate seems to smile; and these fortunate sons and daughters must maintain their high position in the court of Fate by casting shame upon those who are vulnerable to it, in an attempt to avoid an adverse fate by forcing others to live it out. So while Law

manifests as explicit rules, Fate often wears the mask of unconscious social morality. If we are the 'right kind of person', society welcomes us; if we are the 'wrong kind', even though our actions are impeccable, we lose. And if we try to free ourselves from this enforced moral typology, the only alternatives seem to be to violently rebel, or else to embrace the very shame society imposes upon us, and overcome its stigma by reveling in it. But to revel in shame is only to descend into Chaos, while to rebel against Fate is to sacrifice oneself to it. Cuchulainn fought against the Goddess to whom he owed his prowess, and was destroyed: he rebelled against his fate, and therefore met it.

So we can see that both submission to and rebellion against these idols only grants them a reality they do not in fact possess, thereby increasing their power. To submit to false Law is ultimately to be forced to commit the very crimes which that Law punishes, just as to worship a false moral uprightness is to place oneself under a false shame. In the words of Blake, 'Prisons are built with stones of [false] Law/Brothels with bricks of [false] Religion.' And to rebel against Law is to finally *become* it, as in the well-known fate of the successful revolutionary who replaces one tyranny with another. Furthermore, to become Law is to ultimately fall under the power of Fate, as when the established system grows beyond the control of those administering it, and descends into Chaos. To submit to Chaos in a deluded search for peace, as in the case of alcoholism or drug addiction, is to fall under both the shame of Fate and the punishment of Law, and to expose oneself to the wilful impulses of the separate fragments or 'complexes' of one's soul, which are part of Selfhood, thus making that soul vulnerable as well to the violent and wilful Selfhoods of others. A person who is violently out of control attracts the violence of other people; a woman who has been drugged is in danger of being raped. And when the soul makes this wilfulness its own in hopes of defending itself, when it aggressively asserts itself in an attempt to overcome Chaos, or to defend itself against other people's aggression, Law is always there to pass sentence. Likewise those who rebel against the shame of Chaos by trying to be 'the right kind of people' in the eyes of a degenerate society, who seek the moral blessing of the system of 'this world' in an attempt to get Fate on their side, will find themselves shamefully compromised. Passing from Fate to Law, they will become agents of the very system of oppression they once sought to

oppose, of that tyrannical establishment whose blind, mechanistic Law created Chaos in the first place.

It should be obvious, then, that 'this world' provides no way out, because no single worldly idol can give us shelter from, or power against, the others. They are in collusion, and their function is to prevent us from glimpsing any Reality outside the hopeless terms they lay down.

But why are the primal idols four in number? Is this just a convenient way of looking at things, or is there a deeper structure underlying this fourness? In a way, both statements are true. The mysteries of the Divine Nature, Its relationship to Its creative manifestation, and Its distortion by the human ego, can never be perfectly defined or systematized, mathematically or otherwise. And yet, in the process of contemplating these mysteries, certain forms arise, which are more suggestive of the 'deep things of God' than anything our material or psychic consciousness can perceive or create. From tradition to tradition, from moment to moment of spiritual insight, the forms which appear are always similar but never identical, thereby demonstrating both that God is perfectly concrete, infinitely real and absolutely unique, and that His ultimate Essence is completely beyond conception.

See it like this: The subject/object mode of perception in which we find ourselves immersed, where 'I' am a human subject, and 'that out there' a world, is a projection, on a lower level, of God's mirror-like Self-understanding within the depths of His own nature. Hidden within my perceiving human subjectivity is the Divine Subject, God as the eternal Witness of all the worlds. Hidden behind the 'world out there' is the Divine Object, the face of God eternally present behind the forms and events of our lives. Thus the dyad 'God and His Self-knowledge' is the archetype of the dyad 'me and my world', making four in all.

When the Divine Subject is veiled, its Divine Object is transformed from a perfect reflection of that Witness into a mysterious world with a 'will of its own'—the world of Fate. Simultaneously, the Subject becomes conditioned by its attempt to make sense of that mysterious world—in other words, to impose Law upon it from without, rather than seeing the harmonious pattern within it—and is finally obscured. All that remains of it is the idol of Selfhood, an ego-bound, self-identified human subjectivity, attempting to impose its own will upon a 'world out there', which, since it is conditioned and obscured by that very fallen subjectivity, must appear as

a meaningless Chaos, as in Heisenberg's view of random indeterminacy as the fundamental principle of the material world. In other words, as consciousness falls from the level of Divine Self-understanding to the level of human egotism, idols are generated, which fill the void left by the (apparent) withdrawal of the Presence of God.

From one point of view, these four idols are the satanic counterfeits—the ego-based distortions—of what in the Hebrew Kabbalah are called 'the four worlds', which are related to the Four Living Creatures (Hebrew *hayoth*) that appear both in the vision of Ezekiel and the *Apocalypse* of St John. From the standpoint of the four worlds, the descent from Divine Subject to human ego is not a 'fall' but a progressive manifestation of God which never fundamentally departs from the Divine Nature. Leo Schaya, in *The Universal Meaning of the Kabbalah*, describes these worlds in the following terms, as the 'esoteric anatomy' of Man considered as 'the image and likeness of God':

The revelatory, creative and redemptive light of the divine Being is, so to speak, 'refracted' through the causal 'prism' of his aspects, the *Sephiroth*, into the indefinite multitude and variety of universal manifestation. The immense hierarchy of onto-cosmological degrees, with all they contain, is established by this 'refraction' of the divine light; these degrees are recapitulated in the four 'worlds' (*olamim*), namely' *olam ha'atsiluth*, the transcendent 'world of emanation' which is that of the *Sephiroth*; *olam haberiyah*, the ideal or spiritual 'world of creation', filled with the divine immanence (*Shekinah*) alone; *olam ha'yetsirah*, the subtle 'world of formation' inhabited by angels, genii and souls; and *olam ha'asiyah*, the sensory and corporeal 'world made of fact'. (p26)

Man is the most perfect image of universal reality in the whole of creation; he is the 'incarnated' recapitulation of all the cosmic degrees and of their divine archetypes . . . he represents the most evident symbol of the ten *Sephiroth*, and his integral personality embraces all the worlds: his pure and uncreated being is identified with the Sephirothic 'world of emanation' . . . his spirit, with the prototypical 'world of creation' . . . his soul with the subtle 'world of formation' . . . his body, with the sensory 'world of fact'. (p70)

The ‘world of emanation’ is related to the Divine Subject; it is the archetype of sacred law—the ten *Sephiroth* being the prototypes of the Ten Commandments. The ‘world of creation’ is related to the Divine Object; it is the archetype of wisdom and contemplation. The ‘world of formation’ is related to the subtle form of the cosmos as the object of the individual human subject; it is the archetype of universal life-energy, of the perceived world considered as the *shakti*, or radiant self-manifesting energy, of that subject, by virtue of the Divine Subject hidden within it. The ‘world of fact’ is related to the uniqueness of the human person. It is the archetype of the human subject itself, as represented by the human body, the most concrete fact of our experience. The idolatry of Law is thus the counterfeit of the world of emanation; the idolatry of Fate, of the world of creation; the idolatry of Chaos, of the world of formation; the idolatry of Selfhood, of the world of fact.

But what is the way out of the system of this fallen world? The true and sufficient answer to this question is: to plumb the depth and fulfill the conditions of any one of the great religions or wisdom traditions, which were sent by God to save us from our fallen, or forgetful, or ignorant human condition. And the specifically intellectual or *jñanic* answer—within the context of one of these traditions, sincerely embraced and fully lived—is: not to struggle with the shapes of idolatrous illusion, not to rebel against or seek power from the shadows of God, but simply to *see* them, and, thereby, to see through them. Behind Fate is pure contemplation, whose symbols include the Buddhist Prajnaparamita, the White Buffalo Cow Woman of the Lakota, and the Judeo-Christian Holy Wisdom. Behind Law is the prophetic function which Blake called the Imagination, by which eternal principles forever renew their covenant with the unique moments of our lives. Behind Chaos is *shakti*, the universal power of the Absolute, the ‘spirit of God’ which ‘moved on the face of the waters’, and which, in its redemptive mode, is the cosmic attraction of all things back to their single transcendent Source. And behind Selfhood is the unseen Seer, the One Self of All within the human heart. As we awake to these four aspects of the Divine, these ‘four living creatures’—by God’s grace, and by our own full and willing cooperation with it—the abstract separative ego is dissolved in the light of the One Reality.

But to return to our main subject: how does this system of idolatry, and the fallen world based upon it, relate to the Antichrist? If we take Antichrist

to be an individual, we can see the four primal idols as a kind of analysis of his character. In other words, we can expect Antichrist, and the system he administers, to be simultaneously the most authoritarian, the most rebellious, the most chaotic, and the most fatalistic one imaginable. (To the degree that Antichrist is the 'ape of Christ', however, his character as the quintessence of idolatry will be hidden from the people. His fatalism will tend to appear to them as certainty and assurance, his chaos as freedom and spontaneity, his rebelliousness as courage and integrity, and his authoritarianism as the aura of divine right.)

All four of these elements, in one degree or another, appear in the character of Adolph Hitler, who can certainly be described as a precursor to the Antichrist. His authoritarianism is obvious, since he created an iron police state over most of Europe. But he was also a rebel, a 'socialist' revolutionary, who overturned the hereditary power of the German nobility and the landowning *junkers*. His appeal to the generation of his time was a call to 'rebellion' against real or imagined authority: the Versailles treaty, the Weimar Republic, the Jews. And yet his language, and ultimately his actions, were fatalistic. In *Mein Kampf* he appealed to such 'gods' as 'nature' and 'destiny' to support the contention that his *Reich* was destined to last a thousand years (making it, incidentally, a satanic counterfeit of the Christian millennium). He placed great reliance on astrologers and other prognosticators. And late in the war, with Germany in full retreat, when he could have cut his losses both militarily and politically in many ways, he chose to look at Germany's defeat in fatalistic terms. Rather than recognizing it as a serious but not terminal setback for the nation, he saw it as a *Götterdämmerung*, an inevitable and apocalyptic cataclysm. Far from trying to avoid this fate, he demonstrated the depth of his fate-worship by ultimately siding with it, and doing all he could to make it as destructive as possible. He ordered Germany's vital remaining food stores and industrial plants destroyed, and even flooded the Berlin underground, killing thousands of German citizens who had taken refuge there against the invading Red Army. And apart from the chaos created by his authoritarianism, rebelliousness and fatalism, he also incorporated chaotic self-indulgence into his party program, as in the 'Strength through Joy' movement within the Hitler Youth, where sexual promiscuity was made nearly compulsory. Furthermore, his erratic decision-making late in the war,

to take only one of many possible examples, demonstrated the fundamental chaos of his character.

But we don't always need to turn to Hitler to understand the system of the Antichrist, though he will always be a highly valuable case-in-point. What about present day global society? Dictatorial regimes, religious and ethnic terrorism, a multinational economic order which enriches the few and impoverishes the masses, multinational criminal cartels which massively profit from this state of affairs, widespread moral degeneracy which calls into being repressive moral codes and attitudes, the natural environment descending into chaos, threatening our food and oxygen supplies, spawning new diseases, various proposals to turn the human body, via genetic engineering, bionics, psychopharmacology and electronic mind-control, into a bio-technological robot in order to control this social and biological chaos, if not the ultimate fantasy of 'up-loading' human consciousness into sophisticated computers and so dispensing with the body entirely—this is the state of the world we live in. And so those who want to pinpoint the exact year and month the Antichrist will appear may be missing the point: in a sense, he is here already. And even if he is destined to appear at one point as a single individual, as evangelical Christians, traditional Muslims, and Traditionalist writers (notably René Guénon and Martin Lings) all predict, nonetheless we can not conveniently isolate him within that individual form and that historical period. He is everywhere and at all times in the fallen order of human history, because, in essence, he is nothing but the human ego in rebellion against God. He has been virtually present in the human soul, and its social expression, ever since Adam and Eve ate the apple.

In the '60s it was generally true that those with a liberal or left-wing background would tend to see political or economic tyranny (Law) and repressive, compulsive morality (Fate) as the ultimate evils, whereas people with a right-wing, conservative background would be more likely to view as absolute the evils of violent revolution and/or criminal activity (Selfhood) and moral degeneracy (Chaos). This assessment is still accurate to a great degree. However, it has been equally true since at least the late '70s—if not the '30s—that 'politically correct' liberals will identify with certain established governmental policies which conservatives view as tyrannical; and now that the radical anti-government torch has been passed from the leftist revolutionaries to the right-wing secessionist militias, many

conservatives, both radical and moderate, perceive the government as singling them out for persecution. But in any case, *I cannot stress strongly enough* that these partial views, true as they may be in their own sphere, are totally insufficient to define the social manifestation of the spiritual evil we are here calling the Antichrist. Infernal evil can use *any* set of social mores and any political or economic system to build its power, since one of its ploys is to set up insoluble conflicts based on falsely-defined alternatives. In other words, it draws the sides wrong, so that, for example, ‘liberals’ who think that they believe in the sanctity of life as an absolute, opposing all war and defending even the worst mass murderer against the death penalty, will find themselves supporting doctor-assisted suicide, deaf to all stories of its abuse (as well as to the understanding that it is an abuse in itself), while ‘conservatives’ who vociferously oppose the use of illegal drugs will take somebody like Ollie North as their hero, deaf to all evidence that he may have participated in cocaine smuggling to help fund the secret Contra war. And once the conflict of good against evil is falsely defined, then all the courage and idealism in the world only goes to strengthen the evil and erode the good. Infernal forces set right against left, Jews against Muslims, women against men in such a way that their respective positions become so narrowly conceived that damage is done and darkness spread no matter which side one takes—a situation which led W.B. Yeats, in his poem ‘The Second Coming’ which prophesies the advent of the Antichrist, to describe the latter days as a time in which ‘the best lack all conviction, while the worst are filled with passionate intensity.’ This is not to say, of course, that some social systems are not better than others, and that we are not sometimes called upon to take sides in social conflicts. Not all perceived oppositions are demonic delusions; to believe so is a delusion in itself. But unless we have a broad enough view of the nature of collective evil—which is nothing but the outer expression of the power of the human ego, and the infernal forces which that ego invokes, to pervert and appropriate *anything it can imagine*—then we will never understand the system of the Antichrist, and may consequently find ourselves unintentionally paying tribute to it, even (or especially!) in the very act of opposing it. It is true that Jesus said, ‘I come not to bring peace but a sword’—but he also said ‘resist not evil,’ and ‘sit thou at my right hand, while I make thine enemy thy footstool.’

The Traditionalist School is nothing if not conservative, since its theory of history is based on the ‘entropic’ degeneration of man and society from an original Golden Age. But I myself reached its threshold by moving through, and hopefully beyond, the liberal counterculture and the world of leftist politics, and I certainly haven’t repudiated all the values I learned in that ambiguous arena. Nonetheless, like Christopher Lasch in *The True and Only Heaven*, I’ve had (at the very least) to separate the values of ‘democracy’ from those of ‘progress’. According to the story told in Plato’s *Republic* of the degeneration of human society over the course of the aeon, first comes ‘aristocracy’, which Martin Lings identifies with theocracy; this is rule by the ‘best’, the spiritual intellectuals, in Hindu terms the *Brahmin* caste. Next ‘timocracy’ appears, rule by those of noble character, the king and his courtiers, the *Kshatriya* caste. Next comes ‘oligarchy’, rule by an ill-defined class of powerful individuals—perhaps the rich, given that Plato’s other name for oligarchy is ‘plutocracy’. After oligarchy comes ‘democracy’, rule by the people. And last comes ‘tyranny’, rule by dictators and demagogues. Therefore, according to this view, even though we may lament that we are no longer ruled by wise philosophers and kings (to the degree that we ever were)—remembering that the ‘throne’ itself could be a good thing, in times when the institution was spiritually alive, even if a particular king abused his authority and so was justified in being deposed—the fact that we are now in the phase of democracy means that we must hold the line here as long as possible, whatever democracy’s shortcomings, since the only alternative, according to Plato, is tyranny. And this tyranny—authoritarian, rebellious, chaotic and fatalistic—will be the socio-political expression (the Beast) of the mass cultural and psychic disposition of the end times (the Whore), which is the reflection of a counterfeit, and thus satanic, spiritual order (the Dragon). This is one possible rendition, and I believe it is a useful one, of the system of Antichrist.

But we must be careful never to assume that whatever most repels us and seems most evil to us must be the regime of the Antichrist. In worldly terms—and ‘the world’ has struck its roots deep in the souls of most of us—the Antichrist will look like a good proposition. He will attract us by making a perverted appeal to what is best in us. He will not only seize power; he will also appropriate values. In the Shiite Muslim account, the Mahdi—the Islamic ‘messiah’, sometimes identified with Elias, who will appear before the Second Coming of Jesus—will wear a yellow turban, and

the servants of the Antichrist green ones. This is strange, since the color yellow in Islam usually symbolizes weakness, as in Western folk-symbolism it stands for either cowardice or infectious disease. But green is the color of Paradise—specifically, in some systems, of the Paradise of the perfection of the Divine Immanence, which comes after the blackness of the transcendent, unknowable Divine Essence, and thus represents the highest stage of realization. So in the regime of Antichrist, as René Guénon predicted, the significance of spiritual symbolism will be inverted. As it says in 2 Cor. 11:14, ‘Satan himself is transformed into an angel of light.’