



EUROCENTRISM

Samir Amin

SECOND EDITION

Eurocentrism

Eurocentrism

Modernity, Religion, and Democracy

A Critique of Eurocentrism and Culturalism

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Preface

In this work, I propose a critique of what can be called “culturalism.” I define culturalism as an apparently coherent and holistic theory based on the hypothesis that there are cultural invariants able to persist through and beyond possible transformations in economic, social, and political systems. Cultural specificity, then, becomes the main driving force of inevitably quite different historical trajectories.

Modernity arose in Europe, beginning in the Renaissance, as a break with the “traditional” culture, which had, until then, been dominated by an ideology that I have called “tributary” (in reference to the tributary mode of production of which feudalism is a particular variant). Modernity is constructed on the principle that human beings, individually and collectively (i.e., societies), make their own history. Up until that time, in Europe and elsewhere, responsibility for history was attributed to God or supernatural forces. From that point on, reason is combined with emancipation under modernity, thus opening the way to democracy (which is modern by definition). The latter implies secularism, the separation of religion and the state, and on that basis, politics is reformed.

Modernity is the product of nascent capitalism and develops in close association with the worldwide expansion of the latter. The specific logic of the fundamental laws that govern the expansion of capi-

talism leads to a growing inequality and asymmetry on a global level. The societies at the peripheries are trapped in the impossibility of catching up with and becoming like the societies of the centers, today the triad of the United States, Europe, and Japan. In turn, this distortion affects modernity, as it exists in the capitalist world, so that it assumes a truncated form in the periphery. The culture of capitalism is formed and develops by internalizing the requirements of this asymmetric reality. Universalist claims are systematically combined with culturalist arguments, in this case Eurocentric ones, which invalidate the possible significance of the former.

Inevitably, modernity compelled a reinterpretation of religious beliefs, making them compatible with its main principle, that human beings can and must make their own history. Eurocentric culturalism maintained that it was the religious revisions, and particularly the Protestant Reformation, that were the prime cause of the social transformation that led to modernity. My position is precisely the opposite of these theories, particularly the one proposed by Max Weber. Religious reinterpretations were, on the contrary, more the product of the necessities of the social transformation than their cause. They were not any less important, whether they facilitated or retarded change on one particular evolutionary path or another.

Today, modernity is in crisis because the contradictions of globalized capitalism, unfolding in real societies, have become such that capitalism puts human civilization itself in danger. Capitalism has had its day. The destructive dimension that its development always included now prevails by far over the constructive one that characterized the progressive role it fulfilled in history.

The crisis of modernity is itself the sign of the obsolescence of the system. Bourgeois ideology, which originally had a universalist ambition, has renounced that ambition and substituted the post-modernist discourse of irreducible "cultural specificities" (in its crude form, the inevitable clash of cultures). As opposed to this discourse, I suggest that we begin with a view of modernity as a still incomplete process, which will only be able to go beyond the mortal crisis it is now undergoing through the reinvention of universal val-

ues. This implies the economic, social, and political reconstruction of all societies in the world.

In *The Liberal Virus: Permanent War and the Americanization of the World*, I emphasized the extreme form taken by the ideology of contemporary capitalism, what I called the “liberal virus.”¹ The latter reduces the content of social organization to two and only two principles: liberty (mainly viewed as freedom of private enterprise) and property. This reduction, which I analyze as being the product of the involution to which the ideology of modernity was subject in the historical formation of culture in the United States, is at the heart of the tragic impasse that threatens to imprison civilization. Will European societies, whose more subtle political culture allows for dialectical conflict between the economic and the political, and the societies of the South, major victims of the pauperization associated with the accumulation of capital, be able to take up these challenges? Or will they rather submit passively to the Americanization of the world with its trail of permanent wars and genocides?

Nearly twenty years ago, I proposed a systematic critique of the Eurocentric deformation in the dominant worldview, its past and its future. I think the theses and analyses offered in *Eurocentrism* are still valuable and even more relevant today than they were earlier.² Hence, that book is reproduced here almost entirely in its original form, save for the preface and the last few pages of the first edition, which focused on topics of little interest for the contemporary reader. I have attempted to strengthen the theses proposed in *Eurocentrism* with the analysis developed in the first chapter of this book.³

PART ONE

Modernity and Religious Interpretations

I. MODERNITY

Reason and Emancipation

There are two periods in history that have had a decisive impact on the formation of the modern world. The first of these periods involves the birth of modernity. It is the period of the Enlightenment, the European seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, which is also, fortuitously, the period of the birth of capitalism. I will summarize their significance in the following two propositions.

The first concerns the definition of modernity, which is the claim that human beings, individually and collectively, can and must make their own history. This marks a break with the dominant philosophy of all previous societies, both in Europe and elsewhere, based on the principle that God, having created the universe and mankind, is the “legislator” of last resort. The ethical principles based on this divine legislation are, naturally, formulated by historical transcendental religions or philosophies, thereby opening the door to various interpretations through which constantly changing social realities are expressed. Reason is often, but not always, invoked to serve these interpretations, but then it remains subject to the duty of reconciling faith and reason. Under modernity, people are freed from this obligation, without necessarily losing interest in the question of faith. The

new claim closes one chapter, but opens another with its own problems: the freedom which human beings give themselves must be defined in its turn. History, while it no longer operates as a force outside of humanity, must be explained by other laws. The discovery of these laws is the object of a new set of sciences focused on humanity and society. The formation of these sciences now becomes both possible and necessary. Reason is called on, once again, in the search for the objective determinants of the development of societies. The new freedom which modern humanity gives itself, therefore, remains subject to the constraints of what is thought to constitute the logic of social reproduction and the dynamics of the transformation of societies.

The second concerns the bourgeois character of modernity as expressed by the thinking of the Enlightenment. The emergence of capitalism and the emergence of modernity constitute two facets of one and the same reality.

Enlightenment thought offers us a concept of reason that is inextricably associated with that of emancipation. Yet, the emancipation in question is defined and limited by what capitalism requires and allows. The view expressed by the Enlightenment, nevertheless, proposes a concept of emancipating reason that claims to be transhistorical, whereas an examination of what it, in fact, is will demonstrate its strongly historical nature.

Adam Smith offers the most systematic fundamental expression of this view. Unfortunately, he describes it as "utilitarianism," a questionable term, but understandable within the tradition of British empiricism. In this view of the human world, society is conceived as a collection of individuals, a view that breaks with the tradition of the estates in the Ancien Régime. It is, therefore, indisputably an ideology that liberates the individual, again one of the dimensions of modernity. This individual, moreover, is naturally endowed with reason. The social order which must guarantee the triumph of this emancipating reason, and thus the happiness of human beings, is pictured as a system of "good institutions," to use the term in use up to now in American social thought. This system, in turn, is based on the separa-

tion of the political domain from the economic domain in social life. The “good institutions,” which must ensure the management of political life through reason, are those of a democracy that guarantees the liberty and legal equality of individuals. In the management of economic life, reason demands that contractual freedom (in other words, the market) be the basis of the relations of exchange and of the organization of the division of labor between the individuals of which society is formed. The healthy working of the economy requires, in turn, the protection of property, henceforth considered a sacrosanct value in a “good society.”

Emancipating reason is expressed in the classical triplet: liberty, equality, and property. This slogan was adopted in the early revolutions of the United Provinces and the English Glorious Revolution of 1688, before being adopted more systematically by the American Revolution and then by the French Revolution in its first phase.

The constituent elements of this triplet are considered to be naturally and harmoniously complementary to each other. Up until now, the claim that the “market” equals “democracy” has remained a cornerstone of bourgeois ideology. The continual conflict between those in favor of extending democratic rights to all citizens, men and women, bourgeois and proletarians, propertied or propertyless, and the unconditional defenders of the market is straight away excluded from the debate.

Adam Smith and other proponents of Enlightenment thought certainly had an inkling that the “good society,” which they considered to be rational and liberating for all time, might encounter some difficulties. But they skated rapidly over these. The invisible hand that guarantees the triumph of reason in the management of economic life too often appears as an “unpredictable” hand, thereby throwing into question the ability of human beings to truly make their own history as modernity claims. The guarantee of liberty, equality, and property implies that the visible fist of the State must complete the work of the invisible hand of the market.

The emancipating reason of the Enlightenment does not preclude but, on the contrary, implies that room be made for an ethical princi-

ple. Here, reason is not instrumental, but inseparable from the liberating objectives and means whose fundamental ethical elements are epitomized in the classical triplet referred to above. The ethics associated with the thinking of the Enlightenment may or may not be of religious inspiration. God is present for those who credit him with being the cause of the need for emancipation to which human beings aspire. He disappears when this aspiration is only seen to be natural. The difference is slight.

The contemporary version of bourgeois emancipating reason, John Rawls' egalitarian liberalism, made fashionable by an insistent media popularization, provides nothing new because it remains prisoner of the liberty, equality, and property triplet. Challenged by the conflict between liberty and equality, which the unequal division of property necessarily implies, so-called egalitarian liberalism is only very moderately egalitarian. Inequality is accepted and legitimized by a feat of acrobatics, which borrows its pseudo concept of "endowments" from popular economics. Egalitarian liberalism offers a highly platitudinous observation: individuals (society being the sum of individuals) are endowed with diverse standings in life (some are powerful heads of enterprise, others have nothing). These unequal endowments, nevertheless, remain legitimate as long as they are the product, inherited obviously, of the work and the savings of ancestors. So one is asked to go back in history to the mythical day of the original social contract made between equals, who later became unequal because they really desired it, as evidenced by the inequality of the sacrifices to which they consented. I do not think that this way of avoiding the questions of the specificity of capitalism even deserves to be considered elegant.

But if falsely egalitarian liberalism is offered insistently as an ideological alternative to the disarray of present day society, it is because the front of the stage is no longer occupied by utilitarianism (from which so-called egalitarian liberalism is scarcely distinguishable), but by the excess represented by rightwing libertarian ideology (the extreme Right in fact). This ideology substitutes the couplet of liberty and property for the Enlightenment's triplet, definitively abandoning

the idea of giving equality the status of a fundamental value. Friedrich von Hayek's version of this new extreme rightwing ideological formula revives that of its inventors, the nineteenth-century liberals (Claude Frédéric Bastiat and others) who are at the root of this excess, starting as they did from a clear aversion to the Enlightenment.

In the right-wing libertarian version, ethics disappear because human beings, if they make their history properly, are authorized to make it by behaving as if they were in the jungle: they are not responsible for the consequences of their acts, in particular any inequalities they intensify, which are even welcome. Yet, without responsibility there can be no ethics. It matters little then that some, many even, of these right-wing libertarians claim to be Christian believers. Their religion is, in reality, amoral and tends even to become a simple social convention, hardly more than the expression of a singular community. This is perhaps a possible interpretation of religion, but it remains questionable to say the least.

The second decisive period opens with Marx's criticism of the Enlightenment's bourgeois emancipating reason. This criticism begins a new chapter of modernity, which I call modernity critical of modernity. Emancipating reason cannot ignore this second moment of its development, or more accurately the beginning of its reconstruction. After Marx, social thinking can no longer be what it was before. What I wrote above about the criticism of the Enlightenment's emancipating reason could certainly not have been written without Marx. Marx is inescapable.

Emancipating reason can no longer include its analyses and propositions under the triplet of liberty, equality, and property. Having sized up the insoluble conflict between the possession of capitalist property and the development of equality between human beings, emancipating reason can only delete the third term of the triplet and substitute for it the term fraternity (which is stronger than "solidarity," a term proposed by some today). Fraternity, obviously, implies the abolition of capitalist property which is necessarily that of a few, a minority, the real dominating and exploiting bourgeois class, and which deprives the others, the majority, of access to the conditions of

an equality worthy of the name. Fraternity implies, then, substituting a form of social property, exercised by and on behalf of the whole social body, for the exclusive and excluding form of capitalist property. Social integration would, thus, operate through democracy, a prerequisite not only for the management of political life in the narrow sense of the term, but also for the management of social property. Integration through democracy would be substituted for the partial and naturally unequal integration carried out within the limits of respect for capitalist property relations.

As everyone knows well, Marx did not invent the slogan “liberty, equality, and fraternity.” The French Revolution, like all great revolutions, was ahead of its time and projected itself far ahead of its immediate demands. It was both a bourgeois revolution (and it later achieved stability on this basis) and a more advanced breakthrough, a popular revolution, and can be interpreted today as starting the socialist criticism of the bourgeois system. In a similar fashion, the two other great revolutions of modern times—the Russian and the Chinese—envisaged a communist society far ahead of the immediate demands and possibilities of their societies.

The popular property the French Revolution thought it could and must guarantee was that of millions of peasants and craftsmen. It declared that the market it protected must be authentically open and competitive, excluding monopolies and the profits they produced. But this popular property was already being threatened both on its right and on its left. On its right, it was threatened by the bourgeoisie, composed of the big entrepreneurs and capitalists, and symbolized by the famous “two hundred families” that owned the Bank of France. On its left, it was threatened by all the disinherited of the towns (insecure proletarians and paupers) and the country (poor and landless peasants). The convulsions of the French Revolution occupy the whole of the nineteenth century up to the very end, at which point the Republic was stabilized. It adopted the Revolution’s slogan, but after having crushed the Paris Commune and emptied the term fraternity of its original content, replacing it with what can be expressed by the notion of belonging to the national community.

All the ambiguities, contradictions, and divergent interpretations of French ideology make up the framework of this history, up to the present day. It is these ambiguities that a brutal return to the formula that guarantees the supremacy and security of bourgeois property is seeking to get rid of today.

Bourgeois reason restored and placed back on its feet is not, and can no longer be, liberating. Moreover, it stands on only two feet: liberty and property. Henceforth, Bastiat and von Hayek, who show their open antipathy to any idea of giving the slightest importance to equality, are the real representatives of a degenerate reason, one which is foreign to the Enlightenment conception. As long as this bourgeois reason, reduced to liberty and property, is the reason of American ideology, the retreat from and the abolition in thought of the French Revolution, and, of course, the Russian and the Chinese Revolutions, are nothing other than the expression of what is really meant by the Americanization of the world.

This bourgeois reason, henceforth shorn of any liberating ambition, inevitably becomes instrumental, narrow, hollow, and irresponsible. It is, thus, without an ethical basis. The full expression of this non-emancipating reason is deployed in the field of economics, defined by its inventors and defenders as a pure science ("pure economics"). I will very briefly mention here the criticisms that can be made of this truncated rationality. First, the fact that it never succeeds in establishing by logically consistent arguments, in the broadest sense of the term, the correctness of its fundamental proposition: that the free market produces a general optimum equilibrium. Second, that it persists in refusing to reflect on the reasons for its failure, which stem from its unreal conception of society, reduced to the sum of the individuals composing it. On the contrary, it attempts to escape from the confusion in which it finds itself by strengthening its initial axiom (the individual constitutes the exclusive cell of which society is constituted) by inventing the famous "expectations." But their integration into the economic reasoning aggravates the chaos and only leads to one possible conclusion: that the market moves from disequilibrium to disequilibrium without ever tending to equilibrium (a conclusion reached by

Marx and Keynes long ago). The idea of the social optimum disappears in turn. That is no problem: pure economics gives up this ambition without which, however, the emancipation of the human being, the good of the Enlightenment and Adam Smith, loses its meaning. The human being is declared irresponsible like the market through which he expresses himself. The cynics of pure economics dare to think and say exactly that, and they should be thanked for their courage. It matters little that the market can produce three billion "useless" human beings and a growing number of poor in the richest countries. It is, it seems, "rational." Reason, which is destroying the alienated and excluded human being, nature, and entire societies (meaning human cultures), gives up being liberating and becomes a demolition company.

Other defenders of bourgeois reason hesitate to join the camp of cynicism and Americanization that characterizes the real world system. So-called egalitarian liberalism, to which I referred above, attempts to save something from the wreckage. This current of contemporary bourgeois thought, symbolized by Rawls and which some even think can be described as leftwing, ignores Marx and is actually prior to him in theoretical terms. Its failure is stinging, as is shown by its retreat into the chaos of the theory of unequal endowments of individuals, which obliges it to go back to day one of the original social contract.

I do not know if the culturalist opponents of the real world and its evolutionary trends, understood as Americanization by some and Westernization by others, can be described as rational. Confronted by the threat of Americanization, some defend unique "cultural values," without throwing into question the general trends of the system, as if reality could be sliced like a salami, in order to keep a morsel for tomorrow. Others, having previously confused capitalism and the West and then forgotten the decisive reality of the former and replaced it with the gratuitous and false assertion of an eternal "West," think they can transfer the confrontation from the terrain of a constantly changing social reality to the heaven of an imaginary transhistorical cultural universe.

The heterodox mix of this hodgepodge—the pure economics of imaginary markets, falsely egalitarian liberalism, and transhistorical culturalist imaginings—pompously sets itself up as new thinking, so-called postmodernist thinking. Since the bourgeois modernist critique has been watered down and reason has given up its emancipatory role, has contemporary bourgeois thought become anything then but a system that has seen better days?

This is a dangerous situation, and the danger is enhanced by adherence to the principle of irresponsibility. It is dangerous because the system has reached a stage characterized by the monstrous power of its destructive capacities. As I said above, the system is capable of destroying human beings, nature, and whole societies. Emancipating reason must reply to this challenge.

The concept of reason, thus, implies more than the development of a set of mental procedures that make it possible to improve the understanding of the relations between objects and phenomena. The understanding of these relations also applies to their degree of necessity, which is absolute, or almost so, only in extremely ordinary situations of little significance. The development of science, i.e., knowing more but also, and especially, knowing the limits of what is known, makes it possible to establish the level of freedom available to human action, define the possible and effective alternatives, recognize that there is uncertainty (there are few absolute certainties), and, as far as possible, assess the available leeway.

This set of procedures does not in itself constitute reason, even if many researchers in the so-called natural or human sciences can, as a first approximation, not only rely on them (it is necessary), but also be satisfied with them. All living beings, and particularly the higher animals, implement methods of action and make choices during their lives which exhibit to a certain degree this type of understanding, i.e., the understanding of relations, at least in its initial stage.

Reason demands more. Emancipation presupposes responsibility, without which the choices between different possibilities have neither significance nor meaning. Whoever says responsibility also says

ethics, the principles of which cannot be dispensed with in any thinking that aspires to be scientific.

The principles of the ethics in question can be those that atheistic universalist humanism has inspired, from the Enlightenment and even before to Marxism and up to the present. But they can just as well be those of a deist universalist humanism—even a religious one in the sense that it falls into a particular religious tradition, be it Christian or another. It is highly probable that these streams converge towards the same great river. The example which comes immediately to mind is that of the liberation theologians. I interpret them as believers for whom being Christian is not to stop at Christ but to go forward from him. Other religious interpretations (Islamic, Buddhist, and others) or non-Western (in the sense that their ancestor is not the Hellenism common to the people of the Christian and Muslim worlds) philosophic interpretations could very well arise in the construction of a common future for all of humanity. It is in this sense, and in this sense only, that so-called cultural diversity (in the absence of a better term) should, more than being “respected” (as opposed to “tolerated,” a pejorative term—something which is not liked is “tolerated”), be developed in all its potential richness. I distinguish this diversity, turned towards the construction of the future in the tradition of emancipating reason, from the false diversity of specific cultural traditions inherited from the past, which the culturalists make into transhistorical invariants (which they are not) and then hang on to them neurotically.

The challenge with which emancipating reason is confronted today is to invent effective means that may enable us to progress towards well defined ends, advance in the direction of liberation from market alienation, move away from practices which destroy the potential of nature and life, and focus on the abolition of gigantic so-called development (material) disparities inevitably produced by the polarizing expansion of global capitalism.

For me, Marxism is the effective instrument which makes it possible both to analyze the challenges and define the strategies that are capable of changing the world in the directions specified here, provided also that we recognize that Marx only initiated the thinking and the

action in this area. In other words, we define ourselves as starting from Marx and not as stopping with him.

The questions to be settled, in theory and practice, are complex. Their complexity does not allow any unilateral solution, which ignores the conflicts between the different constituent elements of the challenge. I will choose one example, because it seems to me to constitute the major dimension of the challenge on the global scale. The gigantic contrast between the center and the periphery which capitalism has constructed must be deconstructed. That will certainly require some development of the productive forces in the peripheries of the system, which, it must be recognized, runs the risk of relegating the other dimensions of emancipation to secondary importance. The contradiction lies in reality. Some people hope to surmount it by abolishing one of its terms. They persist in ignoring 80 percent of humanity, are satisfied with saying that they must first go through the capitalist stage, without taking into account that the polarization immanent to this system will never allow them to catch up. They ignore all the other dimensions of emancipation to the exclusive advantage of the prior development of the productive forces. Emancipating reason, in its living Marxist formulation, among others, must be able to combine the two contradictory terms of the challenge.

II. MODERNITY AND RELIGIOUS INTERPRETATIONS

The Flexibility of Religious Interpretations

Modernity is based on the demand for the emancipation of human beings, starting from their liberation from the shackles of social determination in its earlier traditional forms. This liberation calls for giving up the dominant forms of legitimating power in the family, in the communities within which ways of life and production are organized, and in the state, traditionally based on a metaphysics, generally of religious expression. It, therefore, implies the separation of the state and religion, a radical secularization, which is the condition for the development of modern forms of politics.

Will secularization abolish religious belief? Some Enlightenment philosophers, who placed religion in the realm of absurd superstitions, thought and hoped so. This perception of the religious phenomenon found a favorable ground for expansion in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries among the working classes that were attaining political consciousness, if only because the working-class Left (and the organic intellectuals who expressed its ideologies) came up against the conservative choices of all the organized Christian religious hierar-

chies—Catholic, Protestant, or Orthodox. Anti-clericalism definitely became synonymous with opposition to religion, and, because of this, gained ground all over Europe, naturally in different degrees depending on the circumstances of the evolution of the ideological, political, and social struggles. French society, in particular, was among the most receptive to the new anti-clericalism and atheism, for reasons which stem from the legacy of its Revolution's radical character. Soviet ideology took over this fundamental atheism and integrated it into its conception of dialectical materialism.

Nevertheless, another reading can be made of Marx. The often cited phrase—"religion is the opium of the people"—is truncated. What follows this remark lets it be understood that human beings need opium, because they are metaphysical animals who cannot avoid asking themselves questions about the meaning of life. They give what answers they can, either adopting those offered by religion or inventing new ones, or else they avoid worrying about them.

In any case, religions are part of the picture of reality and even constitute an important dimension of it. It is, therefore, important to analyze their social function, and in our modern world their articulation with what currently constitutes modernity: capitalism, democracy, and secularism. In what follows, I will try to do this for the three so-called religions of the Book. It will be seen that the religions in question have been subject to successive interpretations, which have enabled them to survive, adapt to gigantic social transformations, and even participate in those transformations.

The success of Christianity, which participated in the rise of modernity in Europe, has given rise to a flourishing of "theories" which do not convince me. The most common, which has become a sort of generally accepted common ground that arouses not the slightest bit of critical questioning, is that Christianity bore within itself this exceptional evolution. The "genius of Christianity" is, thus, reconstructed as one of the myths, alongside others, such as the Greek ancestor and Indo-European racism, from which the "European miracle" is explained (i.e., the fact that modernity was invented there and not elsewhere). The most extremist ideologies of this Eurocentrism

adopt an idealist theory of history according to which capitalism is the product of this development in religious interpretation.

The most extreme of the extremists reserve this creator genius of capitalist modernity for the Protestant Reformation. The famous thesis of Max Weber can be recognized here. It is even less convincing, in my opinion, than what I call the Christianophilia of Eurocentrism.

The arguments Weber advances, in this respect, are confused, despite their apparent precision. They are, moreover, perfectly reversible, analogous to those previously advanced to explain the backwardness of China in terms of Confucianism, then fifty years later to explain the take-off of that country in terms of the same Confucianism! Superficial historians have explained the success of the Arab civilization of the Middle Ages by way of Islam, while contemporary journalists, even more superficially, explain the stagnation of the Arab world by the same Islam. Culturalism has no possible univocal response to any of these great historical challenges. In fact, it has too many, because it can prove any formulation and its opposite.

As a counterpoint to these key ideas, which are false, but which ground the dominant world ideology, I propose the following theses:

1. Modernization, secularism, and democracy are not the products of an evolution (or revolution) of religious interpretations. On the contrary, these interpretations have adjusted more or less happily to the necessities of the former. This adjustment was not the privilege of Protestantism. It operated in the Catholic world, in another manner certainly, but no less effectively. In any case, it created a new religious spirit freed from dogmas.
2. In this sense, the Reformation was not the condition for the flowering of capitalism, even if Weber's thesis is widely accepted in the societies it flatters (Protestant Europe). The Reformation was not even the most radical form of the ideological rupture with the European past and its "feudal" ideologies, among others its earlier interpretation of Christianity. It was, on the contrary, its primitive and confused form.

3. There was a “reformation by the dominant classes,” which resulted in the creation of national Churches (Anglican, Lutheran) controlled by these classes and implementing the compromise among the emerging bourgeoisie, the monarchy, and the great rural land owners, brushing aside the threat of the working classes and the peasantry who were systematically repressed. This reactionary compromise—which Luther represented and Marx and Engels analyzed as such—enabled the bourgeoisie of the countries in question to avoid what happened in France: a radical revolution. So, the secularism produced in this model has remained tentative up until now. The retreat of the Catholic idea of universality, represented by the establishment of national Churches, carried out a single function: to establish the monarchy more firmly and strengthen its role as an arbiter between the forces of the Ancien Régime and those represented by the rising bourgeoisie. This strengthened nationalism and delayed the advance of the new forms of universalism that socialist internationalism would later propose.
4. But there were also reform movements that took hold of the lower classes, the victims of the social transformations caused by the emergence of capitalism. These movements, which reproduced old forms of struggle (the millenarianism of the Middle Ages), were not ahead of their time, but behind it in relation to its demands. The dominated classes had to wait for the French Revolution, with its popular secular and radical democratic mobilization, and then socialism before they could learn to express themselves effectively in the new conditions. The Protestant sects in question lived on fundamentalist-type illusions. They created fertile ground for the endless reproduction of “sects” with apocalyptic visions that can be seen, today, flourishing in the United States.
5. There were not only “positive” adjustments, with the renovated religious interpretation opening up prospects for social transfor-

mation. There were also involutions, the religious interpretation becoming in its turn an obstacle to social progress. I will give as an example some forms of North American Protestantism.

6. Positive or negative adjustments are not the monopoly of Christianity. Islam has experienced positive adjustments in the past and at present is experiencing an involution analogous in many respects to that of the American Protestant sects in question. This is true of Judaism, as well. And I would add (as the reader will find explained later in this book) that this concerns the great Asian ideologies and religions as well.
7. The fact that these adjustments can be positive or negative argues in favor of an interpretation of historical materialism based on the concept of "under-determination." I mean by this that each of the various levels of reality (economic, political, ideological) contains its own internal logic, and because of this the complementary nature of their evolution, which is necessary to ensure the overall coherence of a system, does not define in advance a given direction for a particular evolution.

*Judaism, Christianity, Islam:
One or Three Religious Metaphysics?*

The three above mentioned religions claim that they are monotheistic and are proud of it. They even claim that they are the only ones of this kind and for that reason scorn all other religions that are supposedly unable to conceive of God as an unique, abstract, and universal divinity, and consequently are "primitive" and "inferior."

Furthermore, the three religions claim the exclusivity of having been "revealed" by God. Yet this is also, of course, the case for any other religion. The revelation of God and the sacred quality of the religion are thence synonymous. The distinction between the religions based on the Book and the others should then be regarded as ideological arrogance.

The kinship between the three religions based on the Book is an historical fact. The three religions have a book of faith in common, the Bible of the Jews (what the Christians call the Old Testament), although this Bible appears with very distinctive features in the Jewish and the Muslim religion, each religion claiming of course that only its version is the right one, that is to say, the one which has been truly "revealed." Catholics and Protestants, however, accept the Jewish versions of the Bible, the former the corpus of the Jews of the Diaspora, the latter the one of the Jews of Jerusalem. This kinship could very well be explained, in a matter of fact, by the proximity of the birthplace of the three religions. Jesus Christ lived in Palestine among the Jewish community of the country. Islam was born in a nearby country that was influenced by the faith of the Jews and the Christians and challenged by them, especially by the Christianity of the civilized countries, which nearly encircled them, from Byzantium to Ethiopia.

In itself this kinship *a priori* neither precludes nor implies the basic unity of the metaphysics of these religions. In order to answer this question, we will have to consider the significance of the common stem of these religions, whether it is fundamental or just casual. How has it influenced the metaphysical choices and the social lives of the groups of peoples that share these three religions?

All peoples on this Earth explain their creation and their place in it by a mythology. At the beginning, all of them take on the role of the "chosen people" whose mythology is the one and only true explanation of the creation. Their gods are, therefore, the only real ones; all other people are mistaken or have been misled. At the very beginning, all gods are seen as different and as being the specific representation of one people. Nevertheless, even at an early stage in history, there were lucid thinkers who properly contextualized those mythological accounts of creation and the specificity of those gods. An initial healthy reaction was to accept the plurality of the various revelations of truth through religion (each people believes in its own truth, but it is the same truth expressed in different languages) and, thence, to accept the equivalence between the different gods. This reaction encouraged a syncretic approach as found, for instance, in the Roman

Empire, which brought together peoples from various origins, just as we can see in contemporary Africa. Moreover, it is increasingly accepted that mythologies have substantially borrowed from each other. The advances in archaeology, history, and exegesis have led to the discovery of so called root-mythologies, like the one that tells the story of the Flood in the Middle East or the story of Gilgamesh.

Therefore, the Jews are not the only people who proclaim to be chosen. All of them have done so. Do the Jews still believe in their chosen status? I strongly doubt it. In the social reality of our time, the vast majority of the Jews, even those who are true believers, know that they are but ordinary human beings, even though, because of the Diaspora, Jews have been inclined, in order to survive, to emphasize their specificity, i.e., their religious persuasion. But they are by no means the only people who have done that.

Even so, our modern society has made some progress over the last two thousands years or so, even though, in some circles, the very idea of progress should be trashed! Many fellow human beings, even though they maintain a strong commitment to their faith, have to some extent relativized their religious convictions. They are probably more “tolerant” not only in their everyday behavior but also, and this is distinctly more important, in their deep respect for the beliefs of others.

As a result of this progress, the mythologies dealing with creation have been undermined. They are no longer articles of faith like they were earlier. Many fellow citizens of the earth, who, again, have not given up their faith, have come to terms with the idea that those mythologies are no more than that, and are to be considered as stories with an educational purpose, even though, or precisely because, they are deemed to have been inspired by a divinity. Therefore, the Bible of the three religions of the Book or the mythology of the Bororo or Dogons are set on the same footing: their role is to be a “sacred text” in which the belief of one or more peoples are rooted.

On the other hand, monotheism is by itself a strictly theological idea. To say that there is only one God does not amount to much. It is not obvious nor is it obviously untrue. Monotheism is probably more widely accepted than the followers of the deep formal cleavage

between monotheistic religions and those religions they call polytheistic would believe. Many of those who are “accused” of polytheism actually classify their divinities hierarchically and often reduce them to diverse expressions of the same supernatural force. Looking at it more closely, it should be realized that those who were called idolaters were in reality animists. This description should rehabilitate them in the eyes of the monotheists, since it is the same supernatural force behind the plurality of its expressions.

Furthermore, it may be asked whether those who proclaim themselves to be monotheists are in fact such. All religions, including Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, refer to supernatural forces other than God, such as angels, demons, jinns, and so on. They proclaim that some human beings are inspired by the Deity, saints or prophets who have propagated the word of God. The three religions of the Book counterbalance God with Satan, even though they confer more power to the former. Before and after the religions of the Book, the same dualistic conception of the supernatural prevailed, such as in Zoroastrianism and Manichaeism. In Christianity, the one God in three persons (Father, Son, and Holy Spirit) is mysterious, leads to the debate between Monophysite Christians and others, and nuances the concept of monotheism. How is it possible, then, to distinguish the Word of God from those of His Son or His Prophets? From a metaphysical point of view, they are one and the same thing.

No doubt these three religions of the Book have emphasized the monotheistic characteristic more than other religions, just as they have introduced a certain form of rationality into other aspects of their constitutive ethical and organizational components. One is then tempted to draw a parallel between this religious evolution and the evolution of the societies of the ancient Middle East, which led them to give up the tribal organization and create a state superstructure. But if this mutual adaptation of social base and religious institution is plausible, it is not, historically speaking, the only one possible. Other societies that were no less advanced followed other ways: in China a nonreligious metaphysic, Confucianism, was adopted and in India, Hinduism allowed the people to invent a variety of religious forms.

Though it may appear shocking to some, I would like to add that the three religions in question, just like others, matured at times when the temptations of syncretism were great. Some scholars have discovered that those religions borrowed from others: Christianity borrowed from the religion of ancient Egypt, Judaism borrowed from the beliefs of the ancient Orient (Baal and others), and Islam did the same with beliefs extant in the Arabian peninsula. If you delve deeper into those religions, in matters regarding rites, alimentary taboos, and other such articles of faith, the borrowing is even more blatant. But no person of faith will find those facts shocking: for him or her, they would only prove that God has inspired human beings during the whole course of their history, even before a particular religious persuasion was revealed.

Among the three religions of the Book, the proximity between Judaism and Islam is the most obvious. Specialists in religion have argued, with good reason, that Islam is to a large extent an Arabization of Judaism. Not only because its precepts, its law and its rites are largely similar to those of Judaism but also, and this is more important, because Islam shares with Judaism a common view of the relationship between society and religion. The Arabization of Judaism started before the delivery of the message of the prophet of Islam. In history, as well as in the Koran, you can find mention of those Hanifs who recognized Abraham without declaring themselves to be Jews. In this respect, Islam has presented itself as the religion revealed to humanity from the very beginning in as much as it was revealed to Adam himself. Islam must, then, always have existed even before God spoke through the Prophet Mohammed. It was either forgotten or misunderstood by some peoples (polytheism) or only partially understood by the others (Jews and Christians).

It is easier, then, to understand the importance that Muslims, or some of them, give to a strange debate. There are many writings, not regarded as heretical by the authorities who proclaim themselves to be "the" keepers of Islam, that attempt to prove that Abraham was not a Jew but an Arab. This demonstration presents itself as scientific, based on archaeological findings in Mesopotamia, linguistics, and the

etymology of names. For those who read the Bible as one mythology among others, this question has neither meaning nor significance. You cannot “correct” a mythology; you do not look for the real figure that hides behind its mythological representation.

Thus, it is easier to understand why, from the perspective of the thesis of the Arabization of Judaism (or Islamization of Judaism), Islam does not refer to the Bible of the Jews as such. It is revised and corrected.

Islam appeared concomitant with the political unification of the Arabian Peninsula, and a number of Arab historians have derived from that fact that monotheism, which replaced the plurality of tribal deities, was the vehicle for the formation of the Arab nation, since recognizing the same God meant also submitting to the same political power. Of course, the Arabs already knew Christian and Jewish monotheism. Had they opted for Christianity, they would have run the risk of becoming dependent on Byzantium, which dominated the region and was their major fear. Opting for a form of Judaism liberated them from that risk, Judaism not being associated with any state power. The temptation was strong for the Arabs to make a singular reading of Judaism and then appropriate it by refusing to see it as the religion of a particular Semitic people, the Hebrews, proclaiming it instead as the religion revealed to their Arab (also Semitic) ancestors.

Moreover, the historical circumstances under which Christianity and Islam grew were very different. All of the dogmas of Islam were formed inside a homogenous circle, the Arab tribes of Mecca and Medina. Consequently, it had to inevitably bear the marks of this origin, to the point that it was uncertain at the beginning whether it would become a universalist religion. At the beginning of the Arab conquest beyond the peninsula, the dominant tendency among the Arabs was to reserve Islam for themselves and allow the conquered peoples to keep their own religions. If this practice had gone on, Islam would have remained an exclusively Arab religion. However two circumstances opened Islam to universalist ambitions: first, large segments of the conquered nations converted to Islam and second, the Arabs welcomed these conversions. Christianity, in contrast, devel-

oped in the cosmopolitan world of the Roman Empire where a Hellenistic culture prevailed. Furthermore, its development was slow. It was, therefore, marked from the very beginning by a multicultural and multiethnic environment that strongly favored its universalism.

Is monotheism really a wonderful advance in the history of thought, a qualitative progress? There are plenty of cunning minds (but when you say cunning, you could as well say ill-intentioned or malign, inspired by the Devil) who draw a parallel between this unique God (who is represented in the popular imagination, if not in the purified vision of the learned, as an old man with a white beard, a symbol of wisdom and authority) and the patriarch of the patriarchal system, the autocrat of the power systems. In this imagery, which adequately reflects what is actually experienced, it is obvious that the wise old male is closer to God than a woman or a youth. This is a projection into heaven that legitimizes the patriarchal order and autocracy which prevails on earth. In addition, the elimination of female deities, always important in nonmonotheist religions, only accentuates patriarchal domination. Those cunning minds will add that this only and all powerful God deprives them, poor bastards, of all power. For with numerous Gods, competing and fighting with each other, you may call for help from the one who is best provided to help you and, in the Greek manner, thumb your nose at the one who is bothering you! Is it a coincidence that Greek democracy is polytheistic? Is it a coincidence, as well, that in the areas which will later be dominated by the major religions—Christianity and Islam in this case—this democracy disappears? But it may be objected that the authority that adopts a nonreligious metaphysic in China and a religious pluralism in India was also nothing but autocratic.

Religion and Society: The Risk of Theocracy

Religions are not only metaphysics. They are major expressions of social reality as well. Metaphysics and social functions mix and determine each other in a continuing historical dialectic. The possible specificities of their metaphysical expression are, hence, difficult to

separate from those connected to the major features of the social systems of which they are a part and which they influence.

For those willing to answer the question mentioned above—that is, whether the three major religions of the Book are basically one or multiple—it may be useful to analyze their respective conceptions of historical time. Judaism believes in the end of time. When the Messiah comes, who will organize His Kingdom on the earth, eternity will begin and time will end. The man of faith does not believe that human strivings can bring about this just world before the end of time. That is why some Jews reject the state of Israel. However, the Messiah has not yet come, so we are still awaiting the end of time.

Islam has adopted a completely different stance on this major issue. The Prophet has, indeed, organized on this earth, in Medina, a just society. To this extent, and although he himself has been called the Prophet, the last one, and there will not be any Prophet after him, this Prophet may be considered to be what the Jews call the Messiah for he is the one who establishes the Realm of God on this earth. I am aware that this interpretation of Islam and of the time of the Prophet is not the only one that prevails among Muslims. Many Muslims, and not just a minority of them, who would like to be regarded as learned, have never said, and do not say now, that the structure of Medinan society should be reinstated. They argue that from this era, now gone forever, one can only draw general lessons, moral values, examples, and inspiration. Nothing more. There is one obvious reason for that: the Prophet is not here anymore and nobody has the authority to replace him. The problem, then, is to adapt those principles to the changing realities of time. A large space opens up for debate, for various opinions. This relativistic view of Islam has, in fact, prevailed in the real history of Muslims. But it is only a concept, which can be rejected. Just as truthful might be the converse idea, in which the social organization established at the time of the Prophet is the only valid one, ends history, and should for this reason also be hung onto and reproduced or reinstated if society has drifted away from it. This interpretation may be called fundamentalism since it calls for returning to the sources. It exists and has always existed. Many, today, advo-

cate it. But it comes to center stage, is vital or seems to be vital, only in particular circumstances which should be then closely scrutinized. The main issue is that this conception of religion places the future in the past. The end of time began fifteen centuries ago and history stopped at this moment. What may have happened since then, in real history, is of little or no importance since this history does not provide Muslims who agree with this view of their religion any lesson worth heeding.

Christianity has adopted a third view of this question of the end of time, a view which separates it from Islam and Judaism and endows it with its specificity both as a metaphysical interpretation of the world and as a force that participates in shaping social reality. But to bring out this difference, I must proceed to the analysis of the social reality in question.

Judaism is not only an abstract form of monotheism. It also organized an historical society, the society of Jews in Palestine, and then, in part, inspired and organized the Jewish communities of the Diaspora. The real history of the Jews in Palestine is not well known, considerably less than the history of the other communities of the region. This is, perhaps, because those communities were stronger and more advanced and left more traces, written and otherwise. But what is certainly known is that Judaism created a precise law, detailed in the extreme. This was not only a set of general principles, such as the tables of Moses, which were, it seems, inspired by others, but also a whole set of rules which completely control the individual, the family, and social life of the Jews. These laws regulate everything in the field of personal rights, matrimony, divorce, filiation, and inheritance. All of these laws are an integral part of the religion, of the sacred, and are hence difficult, if not impossible, to modify. These laws and rules complement the no less precise criminal laws, which set brutal, if not savage in contemporary eyes, retribution for some crimes (stoning adulterous women, for instance) and are considered sacred. Furthermore, a dense net of rites regulates the whole of social life: circumcision, formal prohibition of working on the Sabbath, and extensive alimentary prohibitions, among many others.

Perhaps this all-embracing formalism regarding law, rules, and rituals has been instrumental in preserving the Jews of the Diaspora from being “contaminated” or assimilated by other cultures, or converted to other forms of religion. It may also be one of the reasons for the hostility directed towards them (but explanation is by no means an excuse!).

What is certain, however, is that such a strongly social concept of religion does not allow a secular concept of society to develop. It produces only a theocratic concept of power, which the Jews were able to preserve only because they were living in the Diaspora. For, owing to this conception, political power does not have to produce laws; it exists to apply the laws that God has established once and for all. Nowadays, one tends to call theocratic those forms of power that operate through a religious caste which claims it has a monopoly on power because it is the only one that knows the laws that should be applied, whether this caste is called synod, church, or anything else, or even has no name at all. This reduction is unfortunate: theocracy means power of God. In practice, then, it means the power of those who speak in His Name. Theocracy is opposed to modernity, if by that one refers to the basic concept of modern democracy, that human beings may establish freely their laws and are, therefore, responsible for their own history.

The Jewish law is not, it seems, very explicit regarding the organization of the power structure, public law as we say now. Contrary to the more evolved states of the region—such as the Egypt of the Pharaohs, Achaemenid and later Sassanid Iran, the Mesopotamian countries, Greece, and Rome which worked out very detailed models for the political and administrative structure of society (and it matters little in this respect whether those societies were democratic or not)—the Jews remained confined to more rudimentary forms of political organization in which the powers of kings or judges are imprecise. But this very vagueness is one more argument in favor of theocracy. The power of God does not trouble with precise forms.

Long forgotten among the Jews, owing to the Diaspora, this natural propensity for theocracy had to emerge once again in the frame-

work of the contemporary Jewish state. Only those who do not want to see Judaism as a social organization with a religious basis will be surprised.

In all those respects, Islam offers a rigorous parallel with Judaism. Islam regulates, in exactly the same manner, in details, and in its holy text, all the aspects of individual law. It does the same as regards the penal code, as harsh and formal as the penal code of the Jews (once more the similarity is perfect, even down to the provisions: thus, adulteresses should be stoned). It provides for the same rituals, circumcision, alimentary prohibitions, and prayer at fixed times (it does not matter when) in a unique, repetitious form (which excludes any personalization). Therefore, one is dealing with a body of rules and practices that hold society together tightly and leave little or no space to innovation or imagination. It matters little, here, that all this might have appeared or might still appear insufficient for the most demanding believers. In historical Islam, Sufism opens its doors to them and makes possible the development of nonritualized mysticism.

Yet, Jews and Muslims are, like others, practical people. They need a business law to complement personal laws. Thus, they borrowed it from the surrounding environment, adapted to the requirements of the time. Muslims gave an Islamic tinge to the practices and laws they discovered in the civilized area they conquered; on this level, Islamic law translates, sometimes literally, Byzantine law. They gave it a sacred Islamic clothing, but it is only clothing.

Muslims, like Jews, do not have a sophisticated public law. This is not regarded as a handicap, for the same reason as among the Jews. Yet, it was necessary to fill up this gap and they did it by inventing the Caliphate (which is posterior to the Islam of the Prophet) and by introducing Byzantine and Sassanid administrative institutions. The conceptual vagueness surrounding supreme power, which it is impossible to define as it lies only in the hand of God, will therefore never make it possible to go beyond pure and simple autocracy in practice.

Autocracy and theocracy go hand in hand. For who can speak in the name of God, if not to make the law (nobody is entitled to do that), but to enforce the law, whether it exists or not? The Caliph or his rep-

representative, the Sultan, will do that without further ado. And the people will regard him as "the shadow of God on Earth," although the doctors of the law are sometimes wary of saying so.

In this respect, power in Islamic countries has been and still is theocratic even though in practical terms this feature is toned down by the fact that it is not wielded by a special caste of religious men. The states where Muslims live cannot be understood as anything other than Islamic states. In order to change that understanding in the Islamic countries that chose to become secular states, Turkey and the former Soviet Central Asia, it was necessary officially and forcibly to break with Islam. Perhaps those countries will return to the Islamic norm, but that is another story.

At this level, contemporary political Islam is not innovative. It only goes further, and it would like to transform these "soft" theocratic states, contaminated by the surrounding modernity, into theocratic states in the strong sense of the word. That is to say, they would like to give total and absolute power to a religious caste, almost a Church, like in Iran or al-Azhar in Egypt, which would have a monopoly on the right to speak in the name of "the" religion, "the" law (of God), and purge social practice of everything that, in their eyes, is not authentically Islamic, in the law and in the rites. If that caste cannot impose itself as the sole holder of Islamic legitimacy, then anybody, such as heads of clans or of other groups, can pretend to have that legitimacy. That means permanent civil war, like in Afghanistan.

I had already written this text when I read Israel Shahak's critique of the Jewish religion.¹ This book will convince the reader of the extraordinary similarity between Judaism and Islam, which share a common conception of theocracy as the only legitimate form of political power. The reasons Shahak gives for the rebirth of Jewish fundamentalism in Israel can be applied word for word to Islamic fundamentalism. But obviously the two religions can also, one would hope, be interpreted differently, though not without difficulty.

At its beginnings, Christianity avoided theocracy. Subsequently, it drifted towards theocracy and then moved away from it again.

At the time of its foundation, Christianity does not seem to break with Jewish tradition as far as the end of time is concerned. The declaration of the Last Judgment and the second coming of the Messiah certainly has eschatological dimensions, which were strongly emphasized in texts, such as the Apocalypse. Moreover, this is certainly the reason why there have been numerous messianic and millenarian movements in the history of Christianity.

Yet, because of the very nature of its message, Christianity is actually a radical break from Judaism. This break is fundamental since what is so dramatically expressed in the history of Christ is clear: the Kingdom of God is not on this earth and never will be. The reason the Son of God was defeated on the Earth and crucified is obviously because it was never the intention of God (the Father) to establish His Kingdom on this Earth, where justice and happiness would reign forever. But if God refuses to take on responsibility for settling human problems, it falls to human beings themselves to assume this responsibility. There is no longer an end of time and Christ does not proclaim it as coming, now or in the future. But, in this case, He is not the Messiah as announced by the Jews and they were right not to recognize Him as such. The message of Christ may, then, be interpreted as a summons to human beings to be the actors of their own history. If they act properly, that is, if they let themselves be inspired by the moral values which he enacted in his life and death, they will come closer to God in whose image they have been created. This is the interpretation that eventually prevailed and has given to modern Christianity its specific features based on a reading of the Gospels that enables us to imagine the future as the encounter between history as made by human beings and divine intervention. The very idea of the end of time, as brought about by an intervention from outside history, has vanished.

The break extends to the whole area that was until then under the sway of the holy law. Undoubtedly, Christ takes care to proclaim that he has not come to this earth to upset the Law (of the Jews). This is in accordance with his core message: he has not come to replace ancient laws by better ones. It is up to human beings to call these laws into

question. Christ himself sets an example by attacking one of the harshest and most formal criminal laws, i.e., the stoning of adulterous wives. When he says “those who have never sinned should throw the first stone,” he opens the door to debate. What if this law was not just, what if its only purpose was to hide the hypocrisy of the real sinners? In fact, Christians are going to give up Jewish laws and rituals: circumcision disappears and the rules of personal law are diversified, insofar as the expansion of Christianity outside of the Jewish world proper adapts itself to different laws and statutes. A Christian law, which anyway does not exist, is not substituted for the latter. Also, alimentary prohibitions lose their power.

On the level of dogma, Christianity behaves the same way. It does not break openly with Judaism, since it accepts the same sacred text: the Bible. But it adopts the Jewish Bible without discussion; it is neither reread nor corrected. By doing so, Christianity comes close to voiding its significance. Instead, it juxtaposes other sacred texts of its own making, the Gospels. Now, the morality proposed in the Gospels (love for fellow human beings, mercy, forgiveness, justice) is considerably different from that inspired by the Old Testament. Additionally, the Gospels do not offer anything precise enough to encourage any sort of positive legislation concerning personal status or criminal law. From this point of view, those texts contrast strongly with the Torah or the Koran.

Legitimate power and God (“Render unto Caesar what belongs to Caesar”) can no longer be confused. But this precept becomes untenable when, after three centuries of having persecuted Christianity, the ruling powers switch sides and become Christians. But even before, when Christians secretly founded churches to defend their faith and still later, when the Emperor himself became the armed protector of Christianity, a new law is worked out, a law which claims to be Christian, primarily on the level of personal rights. What is a Christian family? This concept had to be defined. It will take time, there will be setbacks, and a final agreement will never be reached. This is because earlier laws and customs, different from place to place, are accepted. Slowly, however, those new laws will be recognized as sacred: the Catholic canon laws, which are different for the Western and Eastern

Catholic Churches, and the legal forms of the different Orthodox and Protestant Churches are the result of this slow process.

As far as the organization of the power structure is concerned, the relationship between politics and religion, the same fluctuations and evolution towards sanctification can be observed. The churches, which had been created after the model of clandestine political parties (as we would say today), continue as such after Christians have taken up power. Although they had been democratic, be it only to be close to their followers, they lose this characteristic. They integrate themselves into the power structure and distance themselves, if necessary, from the believers who, from now on, are controlled for the benefit of the political authorities. The political power, for its part, does not allow itself to be subjugated to the churches. It keeps its own rules of dynastic succession. It institutionalizes the requirements of the new system, which is feudal in the Romano-barbarian Western part and imperial in the Byzantine Eastern part of the former Roman Empire, and subjects the churches as much as possible to its own requirements. The merger between those two institutions proceeds further, however, and just like the Caliph, the Lord or the King become more or less sanctified persons.

The Christian world becomes a kind of soft theocracy led by a coalition of priests and secular people, who do not hesitate to proclaim themselves to be as Christian as the priests. The same has happened in the Islamic world. But when, in the Christian world, the bourgeois revolution begins to question the concept of the eternity of the social order, which allegedly is founded on immutable Christian principles, when this revolution opens the doors to modernity and invents the new democracy, however limited its implementation, and when the Enlightenment declares that men (not women at this time!) are the main actors of their history and must choose their laws, the defenders of the old order, in the name of Christianity, denounce this mad ambition of liberating and emancipating humanity. It is, then, easy to understand how Joseph de Maistre, in Restoration France, can rant against democracy as an absurdity, a dangerous and criminal dream because God alone is the lawmaker. God produced the laws

that humans are to implement, without needing to invent new ones. The Ayatollah Khomeini or the Sheikh al-Azhar could just as well have written those lines! It is of no importance that, at the time when Maistre is writing, at the beginning of the nineteenth century, nobody knew anymore exactly what those laws were that God established for the Christians. Were they represented by the tables of Moses? Or, more prosaically, were they to be found in all of those not very Christian Roman, German, and Slavic traditions that are at the core of those European and allegedly Christian societies?

When Maistre is writing, however, it is too late. European societies have gotten used to making their laws themselves, without necessarily referring to Christian principles, though the latter are referred to here and there, but without strictness or great conviction. Anyway, those societies are now confronted with new demands, and, thus, an objective need to act. The theocratic risk is gone for good.

*The Reformation: the Ambiguous Expression of
Christianity's Adaptation to Modernity*

The Reformation is an extremely complex movement both in its doctrinal religious dimensions and in the scope of the social transformations that accompanied it. It developed in parts of Europe that were quite different from one another, from some of the most advanced centers of nascent capitalism (the Dutch Republic and England) to backward regions (Germany and Scandinavia). It is dangerous, in these conditions, to speak of Protestantism in the singular.

On the dogmatic level, all the great reformers called for a return to sources and, among other things, in this spirit, rehabilitated the Old Testament, which Catholicism and Orthodoxy had marginalized. It developed above the idea that Christianity had, in effect, been constituted not in continuity with Judaism but as a rupture with it. The current use of the term Judeo-Christian, popularized by the expansion of a particular Protestant discourse (specific to the United States for the most part), implies a reversal in how the relations between these two monotheistic religions are viewed, to which the Catholics (but still not

yet the Orthodox) have belatedly rallied, though more through political opportunism than out of conviction.

The call for a return to sources is a method that is almost always found in movements that identify themselves with religion. But in itself it means almost nothing, since the interpretation of the sources in question is always decisive. In the Reformation, the fragments of ideologies and value systems expressed on this religious ground retain all the hallmarks of primitive forms of reaction to the growing capitalist challenge. Certain aspects of the Renaissance had gone even further (Machiavelli is one of the most eloquent witnesses of this). But the Renaissance developed mainly in Catholic territory (Italy). The management of some Italian cities as real commercial companies controlled by a syndicate of the richest shareholders (Venice is their prototype) represented a more clear-cut relationship with the first forms of capitalism than the relationship between Protestantism and capitalism was to be. Later, the Enlightenment, which developed in Catholic countries (France) as well as in other Protestant countries (England, Netherlands, and Germany) was situated more in the secular tradition of the Renaissance than in that of the religious reformation. Finally, the radical character of the French Revolution gave secularism its full force, deliberately leaving the terrain of religious re-interpretations to place itself on that of modern politics, which is largely its invention.

It can then be understood that, depending on historical circumstances, the Reformation could have ended either in the establishment of national churches, serving the compromise among the monarchy, the Ancien Régime, and emergent upper middle class, or in the retreat of the dominated classes into sects with apocalyptic visions.

Catholicism, far more rigid when confronted with the challenge of modern times, thanks to its hierarchical structure, also ended up opening itself to the re-interpretation of dogmas, with no less remarkable results in the end. I am not surprised, in these conditions, that the new progress in religious interpretation, specifically the progress represented by Liberation Theology, has found fertile ground for reflection among Catholics rather than among Protestants. Obviously, Weber's thesis is not of much value!

There is also a fine example of involution in the religious interpretation associated with the Reformation. The Protestant sects, which were obliged to emigrate from eighteenth century England, had developed a very particular interpretation of Christianity, which was not shared by either the Catholics or the Orthodox, nor even—at least not to the same degree of extremism—by the majority of European Protestants, including of course the Anglicans, dominant in the ruling class of England.

The particular form of Protestantism established in New England has had a strong influence on American ideology up until the present day. It was the means by which the new American society embarked on the conquest of the continent, legitimating it in terms drawn from the Bible (the violent conquest by Israel of the promised land repeated *ad nauseam* in North American discourse). Afterwards, the United States extended its project, ordered by God, to the entire planet because the American people consider themselves to be the “chosen people”—synonymous in practice with *Herrenvolk*, to adopt the parallel Nazi terminology. We are really at this point today. That is why American imperialism (and not the Empire) is destined to be even more savage than its predecessors. The latter did not claim to be engaged in a divine mission, at least to the same degree.

In any event, whether it is a case of Catholic or Protestant societies, one school or another, I do not grant the religious interpretation a determinant and independent role in the organization and functioning of the real dominant power. The past does not, by force of circumstance, become an atavistic transmission. History transforms peoples and religious interpretations, even when they persist in apparently ancient and fixed forms, and even when they are themselves subjected to changes in their articulation with other dimensions of social reality.

It is because the subsequent paths of Europe, on the one hand, and the United States, on the other, have been different that, Catholic or Protestant, European societies and United States society have divergent political cultures today. Political culture is the product of history envisaged over the long term, which is, of course, always particular to each country. On this level, the history of the United States is marked

by particularities which contrast with those characterizing history on the European continent: the founding of New England by extremist Protestant sects, the genocide of the Indians, the enslavement of blacks, and the development of "communitarianism" in connection with successive waves of immigration in the nineteenth century.

The American Revolution, so appreciated by many of the 1789 revolutionaries and today praised more than ever, was only a limited war of independence without social significance. In their revolt against the British monarchy, the American colonists wanted to transform nothing in economic and social relations and sought only to no longer have to share their profits with the ruling class of the mother country. They wanted the power for themselves, not to do anything different from what they were doing during the colonial period, but to continue doing the same thing with greater determination and profit. Their objectives were above all the pursuit of westward expansion, which implied, among other things, the genocide of the Indians. The continuation of slavery was also not questioned. The great leaders of the American Revolution were almost all slave owners and their prejudices in this respect were unshakeable.

Successive waves of immigration also played a role in the strengthening of American ideology. The immigrants were certainly not responsible for the misery and oppression that caused their departure. On the contrary, they were victims of it. But circumstances led them to abandon the collective struggle to change the common conditions of their classes or groups in their own country, in favor of adhering to the ideology of individual success in the host country. This adherence was encouraged by the American system, which suited it perfectly. It delayed the development of class consciousness, which, scarcely had it started to develop, had to face a new wave of immigrants that prevented its political crystallization. But simultaneously, immigration encouraged the communitarianization of American society, because individual success does not exclude strong integration into a community of origin (the Irish, the Italians, and others), without which individual isolation could become unbearable. Yet, here again the strengthening of this dimension of identity, which the American sys-

tem uses and encourages, is done at the expense of class consciousness and the education of the citizen. While in Paris the people got ready to assault the heavens (here I refer to the 1871 Commune), in the United States gangs formed by successive generations of poor immigrants killed each other, manipulated in a perfectly cynical way by the ruling classes.

Protestant Europe—England, Germany, the Netherlands, and Scandinavia—shared in the beginning some fragments of an ideology similar to that of the United States, conveyed by the return to the Bible, although certainly in attenuated forms, without comparison to the extreme forms of the sects that emigrated to New England. But in the countries in question, the working class succeeded in developing a clear-cut class consciousness, which the successive waves of immigration had prevented in the United States. The emergence of workers parties made the difference. In Europe, they were the driving force behind combining liberal ideology with other value systems that are not only foreign to that ideology, but even conflict with it. These combinations naturally had their particular histories, which were different from one country and one time to another. But they preserved the autonomy of the political sphere in the face of the dominant economic sphere

In the United States, there is no workers' party and there never has been. The communitarian ideologies were not and are not a substitute for a working-class socialist ideology, even the most radical of them in the black community. By definition, communitarianism is part and parcel of the context of widespread racism, which it fights on its own ground, but nothing more.

The combination specific to the historical formation of American society, a dominant biblical religious ideology and the absence of a workers' party, ultimately produced a still unparalleled situation, in which a *de facto* single party, the party of capital, holds the reigns. Today, American democracy is the advanced model of what I call low intensity democracy. It operates on the basis of a total separation between the management of political life, based on the practice of electoral democracy, and that of economic life, ruled by the laws of

capital accumulation. What is more, this separation is not subject to radical questioning, but is rather part of what is called the general consensus. But this separation destroys all the creative potential of political democracy. It castrates representative institutions, making them impotent when facing the market, whose dictates are accepted without question.

By contrast, in Europe, the state has been (and can become again) the necessary site for the confrontation of social interests. It has thereby encouraged the historical compromises that give meaning and real significance to democratic practice. If the state is not constrained to fulfill this function by class struggles and political struggles that remain independent from the exclusive processes of capital accumulation, then democracy becomes a derisory practice, which it is in the United States.

American ideology, like all ideologies, is worn away by time. During the “calm” periods of history, marked by strong economic growth accompanied by social spin-offs, the pressure the ruling class exerts on its people weakens. From time to time, then, according to the needs of the moment, this ruling class re-inflates American ideology by means which are always the same: an enemy (always external, American society being decreed good by definition) is designated (the Evil Empire, the Axis of Evil) allowing the “total mobilization” of all means to annihilate it. Yesterday, it was communism, which made it possible, by means of McCarthyism, to carry out the Cold War and subordinate Europe (forgotten by pro-Americans). Today, it is “terrorism,” an obvious pretext, which prepares the ground for acceptance of the true project of the ruling class: ensuring military control of the planet.

But let us not be mistaken. It is not the fundamentalist ideology with religious pretensions that is in the driver’s seat and imposes its logic on the real holders of power, i.e., capital and its servants in the state. It is capital alone that makes all the decisions that suit it, and then mobilizes this ideology into its service. The means used—unparalleled systematic disinformation—are then effective, isolating critical minds, subjecting them to permanent, unbearable blackmail. In this

way, the government is able to manipulate without difficulty an “opinion” maintained in its foolishness.

*From the Old Debate of Reconciling Faith and Reason
to the Modern Debate of Secularizing Social Power*

To proclaim that God is the supreme lawmaker is a beautiful theory but not very practical. Muslims and Christians experienced that in their respective areas of influence.

Highly civilized societies of the Muslim or European Middle Ages came up against a major problem: how to reconcile faith, or more precisely their religion, which is the foundation of the legitimacy of political power, and reason, which they need on a daily basis, not only to solve the petty technical problems of everyday life but also to make new laws and rules in response to new needs.

Muslims, Christians, and Jews of the Diaspora resolved this problem in the same way: they employed Aristotelian scholastic methods, which are not Jewish, Christian, or Islamic, but Greek (!), and with brilliant results. The avant-gardists—Ibn Rushd among the Muslims, Saint Thomas Aquinas among the Christians, and Maimonides among the Jews in Islamic lands—went even further. They knew how to relativize dogmas, interpret the holy texts as necessary, compensate for their inadequacies, and substitute images of the educational example for textual reading. The most daring ones were often condemned as heretics, which was the case with Ibn Rushd, by the conservative interpreters at the service of the established authorities. European society developed, in fact, according to the precepts recommended by these avant-gardists, while the Muslim world, because it refused to do so, entered a period of decline from which it has not yet recovered. Al-Ghazali, the spokesperson of Islamic conservatism and the enemy of Ibn Rushd, has become the definitive reference in all matters up to this day for the “revolutionary” Ayatollahs of Iran as well as for the conservatives of al-Azhar or Saudi Arabia.

Beginning in the Renaissance, but especially since the Enlightenment, the European-Christian West has left behind the old

debate in order to launch a new one. The issue is no longer to reconcile faith and reason, but reason and emancipation. Reason has become independent. It does not deny to faith its own field of activity, but it is no longer interested in it. Henceforth, the task is to legitimize the new needs: the liberty of the individual and the emancipation of society, which takes up the risk of inventing its laws and making its own future. Modernity resides precisely in that qualitative rupture with the past.

This new vision well and truly implies secularism, i.e., the abandonment of any reference to religion or to any other meta-social force in the debate about laws. Some bourgeois societies have gone further in this direction than others, according to circumstances. The more radical the bourgeois revolution has been, the stronger is the assertion of secularism. The more the bourgeoisie has made a compromise with the forces of the old regime, the less pronounced is its secularism.

Modern Christianity has adapted to that profound social transformation. It had to re-interpret itself from top to bottom, giving up its ambition to impose its law, accepting that it would have to command the souls of believers in freedom and competition with its adversaries. This was a beneficial practice because modern Christians discovered the tenuousness of the laws attributed to God by their ancestors. Modern Christianity has become a religion without dogmas.

Whatever might have been the advances produced by the attempts to reconcile faith and reason, it is nonetheless necessary to recognize their limits. Indeed, the advances among the Muslims and the Jews were stuck in the old problematic and were finally defeated in favor of a return to original orthodoxy. In the Western Christian world, on the other hand, these very advances perhaps prepared, not necessarily consciously, their own surpassing.

How can one attempt to explain this failure among some and success among the others, who would go on to become the inventors of modernity? The materialist tradition in history grants priority to social development and assumes that religions, in their quality as an ideological instance, end up reinterpreting themselves to satisfy the

demands of a changing reality. This working hypothesis is certainly more productive than its opposite, according to which religions constitute dogmatic wholes, given once and for all, with invariant transhistorical characteristics. This second hypothesis, which has currently taken center stage, prevents any reflection on the general movement of the history of humanity taken as a whole and is trapped in the assertion of the irreducible difference among cultures.

But the materialist hypothesis does not exclude consideration of the reasons why some evolutions of religious thought paved the way for the development of modernity in some places and not in others. The religious instance, like any other instance constituting social reality (the ideological, political, and economic) develops and changes in terms of its own logic. The logic of each of these instances can, thus, facilitate the parallel evolution of all the instances, ensuring the acceleration of social change, or enter into conflict with one another and block any social change. In that case, which instance will prevail? That is impossible to predict. It is in this under-determination that the liberty of societies resides, where the choices (subjecting a particular instance to the logic imposed by the development of another) make real history. This last consideration and the hypothesis of under-determination will, perhaps, permit us to move forward in responding to the question posed here.²

Judaism and Islam have constituted themselves historically by the claim that God is the true ruler of society. The principle of *hakimiyya*, [Allah alone is lawgiver] reintroduced by the Muslim fundamentalists of our age, does nothing but reaffirm this principle, with the most extreme force, in order to draw all possible conclusions from it. In addition, Judaism and Islam give their original Holy Scripture, the Torah and the Koran, the strongest possible interpretation: not a word is superfluous. Men of religion in both cases have always expressed the strongest reservations about any kind of translation of the text from Hebrew and Arabic, respectively. The Jewish and Muslim people are the peoples of the exegesis. The Talmud among the Jews and the *fiqh* among the Muslims do not have an equivalent in the reading of the Gospels.

This double Judeo-Islamic principle undoubtedly explains many of the visible aspects of Jewish and Muslim societies. The sacred texts can be read as collections of laws, or even as constitutions (Saudi Arabia proclaims that the Koran is the political constitution of the State) that regulate all the details of everyday life (personal law, criminal law, civil law, and the liturgies) and invite the believer to “renounce his own will in order to submit himself totally to God’s will.”

The reconciliation between faith and reason develops within the limits imposed by this double principle, with the Muslim Ibn Rushd as much as with his Jewish contemporary, Maimonides. In both cases, the traditionalist reaction prevailed, with the return to the *Kalam* in al-Ashari and al-Ghazali and the Talmudic exegesis recommended by Judah Halevi. In both cases, it is proclaimed that certainty resides in revelation and not in reason. Contributing to the stagnation, and later the decline of Muslim societies, this miscarriage of religious reform has to, inevitably, end in the accentuation of the formalistic and ritualistic interpretation of the religion. The compensation for such a form of impoverishment was found in both cases in the development of mystic sects, Muslim Sufis and Jewish Kabbalists, who, by the way, largely borrowed their methods from traditions originating in India.

In the end, Christianity has turned out to be more flexible and, as a result, confinement within the horizon of the reconciliation between faith and reason could be broken, perhaps, in part at least, for the reasons outlined above: because Christianity did not propose to establish the Kingdom of God on Earth and because the Gospels did not erect a positive system of laws. It is also possible to understand the following paradox: even though the Catholic Church was strongly organized and had an official authority which could impose its interpretation of the religion, it did not stand up to the attacks of the new problematic that separated reason and faith. Christianity had to adapt to the new emancipatory conception of reason. The absence of such an authority in Islam, after the Prophet, and in Judaism, after the destruction of the Second Temple and the dispersion of the Sanhedrin, did not hinder the preservation of the original orthodoxy.

The Jews of the Diaspora on European soil could not but be affected by these radical transformations in society and the new conceptions about the relationship between society and religion. Moses Mendelssohn attempted, in the eighteenth century, to undertake this step and make a revolution in Judaism analogous to the one in which Christian society was engaged. By interpreting the Torah freely, no longer as obligatory laws, but only as a source of inspiration from which each person can take what he wants, Mendelssohn committed himself to the secularization of society. The very evolution of European society contributed to this assimilation of the Jews, whose "nation" was declared dead by the French Revolution, which recognized only citizens, though possibly of the Jewish confession. From there the risk was great that Jewishness would gradually disappear in the indifference that the Jewish bourgeoisie of Western and Central Europe shared with the rest of its class, including its fractions of Christian believers.

Persistent anti-Semitism, for all sorts of religious or simply political reasons, especially in Eastern Europe, did not allow the Reform to triumph in Judaism as it did in the populations of Christian origin. A counter-reformation was then developed in the ghettos, taking on the shape of Hassidism, which allowed the Jews to find a compensation for their inferior status by accepting their humiliation for the love of God.

The culture of the modern world is no longer "Christian," and it is not "Judeo-Christian," as it is called in the contemporary media. That last expression, by the way, makes no sense. How then can its frequent usage be explained? Christian Europe was strongly anti-Jewish (one could not say anti-Semitic because the reference to a pseudo "race" had replaced religion only in the late nineteenth century). Later, after anti-Semitism led to the horrors of Nazism, Europe, in grasping the scale of its crime, adopted the expression "Judeo-Christian," in a sympathetic and laudable effort to eradicate its anti-Semitism. It would have been more convincing to recognize directly the decisive contributions of so many "Jewish" thinkers to the progress of Europe. The quotation marks are used here simply because modern culture is neither Christian nor Judeo-Christian: it is bourgeois.

Reason moves from the field dominated by the old debate (the reconciliation of faith, or a religion, and reason) to situate itself on a terrain that ignores religion. Modern thinkers, then, are fundamentally neither Christian nor Jewish, they are bourgeois, or beyond that, socialist, although they might be of Christian or Jewish origin. Bourgeois civilization is not the creation of Christianity or Judeo-Christianity. On the contrary, it is Christianity and the Judaism of the Jews of Western Europe that adapted to bourgeois civilization. We are waiting for Islam to make this transformation. This is the condition for the Muslim peoples to participate in making the world and not exclude themselves.

III. POLITICAL ISLAM

Islam and Theocracy

Modernity is based on the principle that human beings create their own history, individually and collectively, and, as a result, they have the right to innovate and disregard tradition. Proclaiming this principle meant breaking with the fundamental principle that governed all the premodern societies, including, of course, feudal and Christian Europe. Modernity was born with this proclamation. Europe has unquestionably made the leap. The Muslim world does not seem to have done so. Why? Can it do so? What conditions are necessary?

The history of Islam's origins is far better known than that of other religions. The statements and actions of the Prophet Muhammad, collected by his companions, have made it possible to create a biography (*al-Sira al-Nabawiyya*, the biography of the Prophet) that is unquestionably accurate, except for a few details, particularly concerning statements about miraculous events that are found in all religious texts, without exception.

As opposed to other religions, Islam was formed in a brief historical period, twenty years, in a single, unpretentious place, between Mecca and Medina, in the western part of the Arabian Peninsula. Thus, it is possible to read, in the biography of the Prophet, both what

defines this religion as such and the conception of the organization of human society that it proposes.

The main part of the religious dogma is simple and in practice limited to the affirmation of monotheism in its absolute form, as in Judaism. "There is no God but God," an affirmation that is expressed in opposition to the polytheism (the term and the concept are modern) of the religions of that era in the ancient Orient and the Arabian Peninsula. Of course, the meaning and the content of that affirmation can be disputed since Satan also exists in the dogma of the three monotheisms. Certainly, it is only Muslims who add to this affirmation that "Muhammad is his Prophet." The Arabic term *tawhid*, which defines the affirmation, is fundamental in Islamic discourse in every era.

The monotheist affirmation is supplemented by a whole set of beliefs concerning the intervention of this single God in the creation of the world and humanity that are no different from those recorded in the Jewish Bible, even if this record is "corrected" by the Koran. More important is the place that Islam gives to the Prophets, which is essentially the same as in Judaism: a long series of interventions inspired by the single God, reminding the people (in this case, the Jewish people) of the absolute nature of monotheism, which has been called into question by the erring ways of the people concerned. Muhammad's prophecy fits into this tradition perfectly, even though Judaism would deny it this distinction. In the same way, Judaism sees Christ only as an impostor, while Islam sees him as a Prophet. It is significant that Muhammad proclaims himself to be the last of the Prophets who will have no successors.

The theological dimension of Islam, formed in a short moment of history, can be summarized by this affirmation of absolute monotheism and, in this sense, can be interpreted as an "Arab Judaism." However, it breaks with Judaism on an essential point. Muhammad expresses this difference with undeniable clarity: the Jewish prophets address only their own people, the Jewish people, while Islam addresses all of humanity. It is likely that the companions of the Prophet in the first Islam of Medina, all Arabs solidly anchored in

their own society and widely ignorant of the surrounding world, did not, at this time, recognize all of the potential significance of Islam's universalist pretensions. In any case, the rapid conquest of a good part of the Byzantine Christian Orient and Sassanid Iran in the following years strengthened Islam's universalist vocation.

Islam as it was organized in Medina cannot be reduced to its religious dogma alone. It organized the society in this city, or at least participated in this organization. Thus, to specify what Islam did and did not do in Medina is of decisive importance.

The fact is that Islam hardly transformed the society in which it established itself. It preserved all of the social relations of Arab society in that era. It modified nothing in the forms of organizing labor and property, nothing concerning the prevalence of tribal and clan relations, and nothing in the legitimacy of the established authorities. On the eve of his death, the Prophet called on believers to obey the political authorities. This is the equivalent of the Christian "render unto Caesar what belongs to Caesar." The Muslim Arab society of Medina is no different from the "polytheist" Arab society of Mecca. Islam is certainly experienced as a religious revolution. However, it is certainly not a social revolution, which undoubtedly was not on the agenda for the Arabian Peninsula at that time.

Certainly, the assertion of the dominance of the community of believers was significant, in the end, for the erosion of tribal and clan practices. Still, it is clear that this substitution was only effective where conditions necessitated it, in particular where, in the conquered territories, the tribe and clan had well and truly been surpassed by history.

Should this harsh judgment be qualified by considering the reforms that Islam introduced in certain areas of social life, in particular those concerning the family, relations between the sexes, inheritance, some prohibitions (alcohol, usury), and the codification of punishment? Hardly. The model proposed by Islam did not involve any major break. It remained entirely part of the tradition of patriarchal authority and the submission of women. If one wanted to, one could debate whether or not a particular reform that it introduced attenuated the patriarchal practice, which it did not question. On the whole,

Islam did not produce decisive advances in this area. It is part of a long historical evolution that cannot be interpreted as continuous progress in the direction of women's emancipation, but, on the contrary, as a long regression in human history represented by class societies from ancient times to modern capitalist times. The same thing could be said about Christianity and probably other important stages in the cultural evolution of humanity, illustrated by Hinduism or Confucianism.

In sum, then, Islam did not propose a new model of social organization. It is part of the reality of the social organization of its era, like Christianity, Hinduism or Confucianism. It does not have, anymore than Christianity or other religions, its own social project. It was certainly a religious revolution, but not a social revolution.

This characteristic accounts for the rest of its history. After the conquest of Mecca, Islam was adopted by the whole Arab society of the Arabian Peninsula. This was to the immediate and total benefit of the ruling classes of this society, in particular the political chieftan-ships that had been the Prophet's opponents, Abu Sufian and the Umayyads. The Caliphate that was established was, thus, their Caliphate, the assertion of their social authority. The ambiguities about the nature of this authority during the years of the Medina Caliphates (Abu Bakr, Umar, Uthman, and Ali) were quickly cleared up by the victory of the Umayyads and the conquest of Syria, Egypt, Iraq, and Iran.

Ali Abdel-Razek, in his sensational work *Islam and the Principles of Government*, published in 1925, applauds the abolition of the Caliphate and invites Muslims to interpret Islam as a religion and not as a system of government. His argument is based on the "Render unto Caesar" claim, which characterized the Islam of Medina, and calls the Caliphate, which confuses different types of authority, a later invention, which it is. Abdel Razek was condemned as impious by al-Azhar.

Moreover, the fact that Islam is a religion and not a social project was the condition of its historical success. As a religion, it is capable of adapting to and superimposing itself on societies that are different from the one in which it was born.

Islam was an integral part of the changes, both the advances and the setbacks, of the societies that make up the Muslim world, without being itself the driving force behind these changes. In this sense, it is not itself responsible for the first four centuries of its history (the brilliant centuries) or the decadence of the later centuries. It participated in and adapted to the historical changes.

This experience is not different from what has occurred in the Christian world. Though Christianity is unquestionably a religious revolution, it is not a social revolution. This is true whether Christianity is reduced to a monotheist affirmation similar to the one found in Judaism and Islam or is viewed as the crystallization of a new and different theology that represents a rupture with Judaism (which is my point of view). The expansion of Christianity occurs along with the transformation in social relations found in the three different regions making up the Christian world (the Roman West, the Byzantine East, and barbarian Europe beyond the borders of the Empire), but it is not the driving force. Here again, Christianity is not responsible for the initial, dismal centuries of its history in the West (remember the destructive effects of the barbarian invasions) or the Renaissance that began in the Italian cities beginning in the twelfth century (remember the effects of the resumption of trade that enriched these cities). This conclusion in no way means that Christianity was not simultaneously, in the beginning, an active participant in revolts of the oppressed, and indeed, in a certain way, an expression of these revolts.

The relation that religion, whether it be Islam or Christianity, has had with the societies in which it was established, its treatment of freedom of thought, the successive moments of relative tolerance of philosophy (in this instance, the philosophy inherited from Greek and Hellenistic Antiquity), and the moments of violent repression of philosophy, all merit more extensive examination. George Tarabishi has dealt with this question in a brilliant fashion and has highlighted the immanent tendency of the religious interpretation to impose its unilateral dominance over thought.³

If Christianity and Islam were only religious revolutions, how can their triumph be explained? Was it governed by an implacable inter-

nal logic that called for the rationalization of the conception of the divine?

I have proposed another hypothesis concerning this major question that I believe is in agreement with the logic of historical materialism. I interpret the long period of history from 500 B. C. E. (the era of Zoraster and Confucius) through Hellenism (beginning from 300 B. C. E.) and the birth of Christianity to 600 C. E. (the birth of Islam) as being a long revolution in the course of which the old forms of social organization based on kinship within small communities were permanently replaced by a group of social organizations based on the dominance of the political power of the state, which I have called "tributary" formations. This reading of history relativizes the rupture between Antiquity and the Middle Ages produced by the later Eurocentric ideology. The legitimacy of submitting to these new powers of the state required, for its reproduction, that the societies concerned accept an adequate ideological form. The "great religions" responded perfectly to this requirement.

The success of Islam in Arabia can also be explained by the fact that it responded perfectly to the need to unify the tribes of the peninsula, surrounded by powerful adversaries and potential conquerors (Byzantium, Iran, and Abyssinia), by substituting a single God for local divinities. If Islam had remained confined to the peninsula, it would hardly have been more than that: an expression of the unity of the "Arab people," similar to Judaism as representative of the "Jewish people" (the twelve tribes). Since circumstances made it possible to expand outside of Arabia, Islam's potential universal mission found the means for its fulfillment. Its success, then, can be explained by the general hypothesis of the tributary revolution.

The association between tributary forms of social organization and the prevalence of a religion with a universal calling gave legitimacy to the political authorities, which was a necessity for the reproduction of the society. Is this synonymous with theocracy or even totalitarianism? Not at all, in my opinion.

Let us begin with the Islam of Medina. The Prophet Muhammad undoubtedly enjoyed considerable authority, like all prophets by defi-

dition (if he had not had this authority, he would not have been a prophet!). This was a “charismatic” power, to use a term from modern political language. However, this power was not absolute, because Muhammad accepted the full legitimacy of all the authorities that guaranteed the reproduction of the social system as it was.

Now let us shift our focus to the Islam of the Caliphates and the states that resulted from its break up and compare the forms of this power to those characterizing the Orthodox Byzantine Empire and the crumbling Roman Catholic West. There are certainly differences and specific particularities to each of the regions and successive eras of this premodern history. Yet, there are also major points of convergence.

In every region, adherence to the religion was inseparable from the conceptualization of legitimate authority. Neither a Christian nor a Muslim of the Medieval era would have been able to think otherwise. Individual atheists (*kuffars* in Arabic) have always existed, here and there, but they have always been only exceptions without social influence in their era, persecution generally being their fate.

However, such adherence is not synonymous with theocracy. The authorities that managed the societies in question can never be reduced to religious leaders. Of course, the latter certainly existed, since the success of tributary ideology required that religion not be left to individual conviction, but that it be expressed through organized churches, which were always present even when religious discourse pretended otherwise, as in Islam or Protestantism. These religious leaders (the *ulema* among Muslims), who were always men since there was no place for women in such positions during this time period, had the responsibility to see that the “true religion” was respected (i.e., that it was adequate to the requirements for the reproduction of the tributary social system). For this purpose, the ruling class, or the hegemonic bloc, to use a contemporary term, always included some religious leaders.

For this reason, some Orientalists say that Muslim civilization is a civilization of *fiqh* (the Arabic term for theological and legal science). Yet one could, in the same way, reduce Christian civilization to being only the history of churches, popes, and patriarchs. This is obviously

a caricatured view of reality. Reducing ancient societies, which are premodern in the sense that we have given to modernity above, to theocracies contributes nothing to understanding the nature of the societies in question in all their complexity. Nevertheless, modern Europeans put forward this description during the Enlightenment in their polemic with the dictatorship of religion (in this case, Christianity) characteristic of the Ancien Régime, which they called obscurantism.

For my part, I propose to use the term theocracy with more circumspection. In my restrictive definition, theocracy implies the exercise of a monopoly of political power by religious leaders in the name of the religion. This was not the case for the Christian and Muslim tributary systems of premodern times, but it is the case for the project of contemporary political Islam.

The hegemonic bloc of tributary societies is always composite. Its central core is formed by the “masters of the land” (i.e., the landowners) who, at a stage of development that is still almost exclusively rural and agricultural, control the extraction of the surplus from the labor of the peasantry through various legal forms. Associated with them are political leaders, both royal and seigniorial, and religious leaders. The bloc can include, in certain circumstances, segments from the wealthiest people involved in trade. Reducing this composite reality to theocratic power, regardless of the violence committed in the exercise of religious authority, does not appear to me at all justified.

The regimes in question are certainly not democratic, which is a modern concept. Are they, for all that, totalitarian? I also reject this description. The concept of totalitarianism is itself a false concept, invented in the contemporary era for the purpose of confining social analysis and critique within the horizon of so-called liberal, democratic, and insurmountable (the “end of history”) capitalism. The move here is to confine the choice to that between liberal capitalism or totalitarianism and by that means preclude both radicalizing the critique of capitalism and defining the choice as being between capitalism and socialism. Undoubtedly, the critique of the experiences of undemocratic really existing socialism is necessary if one wants to move forward

in the critique of capitalism and the definition of the necessary practices to construct the socialist alternative. However, the sterile concept of totalitarianism is of no use in making this critique. Such a critique is based on other considerations that the propagandists of liberalism ignore in principle. In the same way, the false concept of totalitarianism is of no help in understanding ancient tributary societies.

Europe completely broke with the characteristic forms of tributary power that it had in common with the Muslim world, China, and India. Major steps mark the history of this rupture: the Renaissance, the Enlightenment, and the French Revolution. This rupture, not evolution, is expressed by the claim that human beings make their own history, individually and collectively, which makes it possible to conceptualize democracy. In turn, this claim, through which modernity is defined, implies a separation between religion and political power, in other words, secularism.

Why and how did this rupture happen in Europe? I have proposed hypotheses on this subject that are opposed to the idealist theses, such as Weber's, which argue that religious reform, like Protestantism, is the cause of the transformation and the rupture, a transformation sometimes viewed as having become possible because of the specificity of Christianity. As opposed to this, I advance the idea that it is changes resulting from the growth of new relations of production, in this case the birth of capitalism, which require the revision of religious concepts. Within this framework, it is possible to situate the diversity in the range of religious movements of the era, divided between currents that responded to the demands of a growing capitalism (Protestantism and, in a similar manner, revisions to Roman Catholicism) and currents through which the victims of nascent capitalism responded to these changes (such responses were more often nostalgic than revolutionary).

The European Renaissance and the Arab Nahda

The moment at which Europe began the break with its past is known as the Renaissance. It had nothing to do with a rebirth; it was simply

a question of birth. The term “Renaissance,” which the Europeans themselves gave to this moment of their history, is thus misleading. It is the product of an ideological construction that claims Greco-Roman Antiquity to have been familiar with the principle of modernity, which was subsequently buried in the Middle Ages (the “middle” between ancient modernity and new modernity) by religious obscurantism. This is a mythical view of Antiquity. It is, in turn, the foundation for Eurocentrism: Europe claims to go back to its past, return to the sources (hence, the Renaissance), whereas in fact it is making a break with its own history. The European Renaissance was the product of an internal social process, the solution to contradictions in the Europe of that era by the invention of capitalism.

Today, undoubtedly aided by what is fashionable in intellectual circles, this concept of the rupture made by the Enlightenment is called into question. Christian Europe, so dear to the clear-headed reactionaries of the European Union (and to some who are less clear-headed), is premodern Europe, before and not after the Enlightenment. Those who invoke this image clearly show that capitalism has entered into the period of its decline.

Why has the Muslim world not accomplished this break, up till now at least? On this issue, the Eurocentric perspective has tried to explain it as the consequence of the specificities of Islam. Contemporary political Islam has also taken up this discourse, which is why I call it “inverse Eurocentrism.” My analysis in this area departs radically from these modes of thought. Reversing the terms of causality, I place the deformations of peripheral capitalism, which is the expression of the globalized expansion of capitalism, as the cause of the impasse in the ideological revolution.

What the Arabs, in imitation of the European phenomenon, have called their Renaissance, the *Nahda* of the nineteenth century, was not a renaissance. It was the reaction to an external shock. Europe, made powerful and into a worldwide conqueror by the transformation into modernity, had an ambiguous effect on the Arab world. Europe was admired and, at the same time, rejected because of the arrogance of its conquest. The Arab Renaissance, i.e., rebirth, took the term itself lit-

erally. It was thought that if, like the Europeans had done (which the latter themselves said they had done), the Arabs returned to their sources, they would regain their lost grandeur. The *Nahda* did not understand the nature of the modernity that lay behind the power of Europe.

This is not the place to go over the various aspects and moments in the development of the *Nahda*. I will make do with saying briefly that the *Nahda* did not carry out the necessary ruptures with tradition, which is the definition of modernity.

In the construction of their “renaissance,” the Europeans placed their origin, even if it were mythological, before Christianity, in ancient Greece. This invention helped them to put the religious dimension of their specificity in perspective. The Arabs, on the other hand, in their similar construction, placed their origin in Islam. In this process, they had to erase from their heritage the contributions made by the civilizations of the ancient Orient, treated as *jahiliya*, i.e., as irreligious times.

Thus, it is easy to understand why the *Nahda* did not grasp the meaning of secularism, the separation between the religious and the political. This is the condition that makes it possible for politics to become the arena of free innovation, hence of democracy in the modern sense. The *Nahda* believed that it is possible to substitute a reinterpretation of religion purged of its obscurantist aspects. To this day, Arab societies are poorly equipped to understand that secularism is not a Western specificity, but a requirement for modernity. The *Nahda* did not understand the meaning of democracy, properly understood as the right to break with tradition. It thus remained prisoner of the concepts of the autocratic state. It hoped for a “just” despot (*al-mustabid al-adel*), not even an “enlightened” one. The difference is significant. The *Nahda* did not understand that modernity also gives rise to women’s aspirations for liberation, the possibility to exercise their right to innovate and break with tradition. The *Nahda* reduced modernity, in fact, to the immediate appearance of what it produces: technical progress. This intentionally simplified presentation does not mean that I am unaware of the contradictions in the *Nahda* or that some of the avant-garde thinkers did not have a consciousness of the

real challenges of modernity, such as Kassem Amin concerning the importance of women's liberation, Ali Abdel Razek concerning secularism, and Kawakibi concerning democracy. But none of these openings had any follow through. On the contrary, Arab society reacted by refusing to pursue the paths that had been indicated. The *Nahda* did not assume any distance from religion but, on the contrary, enclosed itself in religious discourse, beginning with al-Afghani himself. The gradual degradation of this discourse is well known, its step-by-step return to conventional, everyday Islam, exemplified in the persons of Muhammad Abdu and then Rashid Rida (father of the original ideology of the Muslim Brotherhood). In the end, it gave way to the rantings of the Pakistani Mawdudi, the inventor (after the British Orientalists) of political Islam. Thus, the *Nahda* is not the moment of the birth of modernity in the Arab world; rather, it is the moment of its failure.

Since Arab societies have not yet entered into modernity, although they are faced with the challenge everyday, the Arab people still widely accept the principles of autocratic power. The latter retains or loses its legitimacy on grounds other than the nonrecognition of the principle of democracy. If it is capable of resisting imperialist aggression, or of giving the impression of doing so, if it is able to offer a visible improvement in the material conditions of life for most, if not all, then autocratic power, perhaps as an enlightened despotism, gains the popular support that guarantees its existence. Also, because Arab societies have not entered into modernity, the brutal rhetorical rejection of the latter, flaunted as the exclusive ideological focus at the center of the Islamist project, can find a powerful and favorable echo.

Unable to deal with the damage caused by the integration of the Arab and Muslim countries into the world capitalist system as dominated peripheries, the autocratic powers of the recent past and present have gradually lost their legitimacy. The emergence of political Islam, the confusion in political conflicts, but also the reemergence of social struggles are all evidence of this.

The movement of the contemporary Muslim world in the direction of political Islam should not be treated lightly. It is offered as an

alternative while rejecting the choice between capitalism and socialism, both of which are considered to be strictly Western options and consequently foreign to Muslims. Instead, it proclaims: "Islam is the solution." Those who respond to the challenge by making alliances with political Islam—either against autocratic regimes or for short-term tactical and political reasons—are not truly cognizant of the huge danger.

In premodern Arab societies autocratic authority derived its legitimacy from tradition, a tradition that can be a national and religious monarchy, as in Morocco, or a tribal monarchy, as in Saudi Arabia. The other form of this tradition, as found in the Ottoman Empire that was dominant over most of the Arab world, from Algeria to Iraq, is what I call the power of the Mamluks. This is a complex system that combines the personalized power of soldiers (either somewhat hierarchical and centralized or, on the contrary, dispersed), merchants, and religious leaders. These were men, not women, since the latter were obviously excluded from the exercise of any responsibilities. The three parts of this organization are not simply juxtaposed: they are actually merged into a single structure of power.

The Mamluks were soldiers who drew their legitimacy from a particular conception in Islam that emphasizes the contrast between *Dar al-Salaam* (the Muslim world, the world subjected to the rules of peaceful administration) and *Dar al-Harb* (lands outside of the Muslim world, the place for carrying out *jihad* or "holy war"). It is not accidental that conquering Turks created this military concept of political management, first the Seljuks followed by the Ottomans, who called themselves *Ghazi*, i.e., conquerors and colonizers. They were, of course, both conquerors and colonizers of Byzantine Anatolia. It is not by chance that the Mamluk system was constructed beginning in the era of Saladin, liberator of the territory occupied until then by the Crusaders. Contemporary populist and nationalist authorities always evoke Saladin with respectful admiration, without ever considering or even lightly touching on the ravages of the system that began with him. After the end of the Crusades, the Arab world, which had by then become Turko-Arab, entered into a process of military feudalization

and turned in on itself. This was a regression that ended the brilliant civilization of the first centuries of the Caliphate. At the same time, Europe began to move out of feudalism, getting ready to make the leap into modernity and begin the conquest of the world.

In return for acting as the protectors of Islam, the Mamluks allowed religious leaders to have a monopoly of control over the interpretation of dogmas, justice carried out in their name, and the moral policing of society. Reduced to its purely conventional social dimension, i.e., respect for significant rites alone, religion was completely exploited by the autocratic power of the military.

Economic life was subjected to the moods of the military-political authorities. The peasantry was, whenever possible, subjected directly to the exploitation of this ruling class and an unstable system of private property. The principle of private property is unquestionably regarded as sacred by the founding texts of Islam. Profits from trade were no less subjected to these conditions.

The Mamluk ruling class naturally aspired to the dispersion of its autocratic power. Formally subject to the Sultan-Caliph, the Mamluks benefited from the distance, then quite far, that separated them from the capital, Istanbul. In order personally to retain all the real power in their share of the territory. In places where the tradition of state centralization had a long history, as in Egypt, the attempts to control the whole military corps succeeded. Muhammad Ali established his centralized power by massacring the Mamluks, after which he reconstituted a military-landowning aristocracy from then on entirely subjected to his personal power. The Beys of Tunis attempted to do the same thing, on a more modest scale. The Deys of Algiers never succeeded in doing so. The Ottoman sultan, in turn, followed the same path, thereby integrating his Turkish, Kurdish, and Armenian provinces of Anatolia and the Arab provinces of historical Syria and Iraq into a "modernized" power.

Undoubtedly, the Mamluk autocratic model had to contend with numerous and diverse realities that always defined its real limits. Peasant communities that took refuge in fortified mountainous areas (Kabyles, Maronites, Druzes, Alawites), Sufi brotherhoods almost

everywhere, and tribal groups forced the dominant authorities to compromise and tolerate the undefeated. The contrast in Morocco between *bled al-makhzan* (land of the government) and *bled al-siba* (Berber mountainous areas) is of a similar nature.

Was this modernization in itself or simply the modernization of autocracy? Was this enlightened despotism or just plain despotism? Fluctuations and variations are found within this spectrum of possibilities. The continuation of political currents asserting an Islamic identity, including the emergence of contemporary political Islam, are found within the framework of this ongoing evolution, incapable of decisively surpassing the Mamluk model.

Contemporary Political Islam

The fatal error is to believe that the emergence of self-identified Islamic political movements that have the capability of mobilizing large masses of people is the inevitable result of the irruption onto the scene of culturally and politically backward people unable to understand any language other than a quasi-atavistic obscurantism. This error arises from a discourse founded on the prejudice that only the West could invent modernity, while the Muslim people are trapped in an immutable tradition that makes them incapable of understanding the significance of necessary change.

The emergence of movements that assert an Islamic identity is, in fact, the expression of a violent revolt against the destructive effects of really existing capitalism and the unfinished, truncated, and deceptive modernity that goes along with it. It is the expression of a perfectly legitimate revolt against a system that has nothing to offer to the people in question.

The discourse of the Islam proposed as an alternative to capitalist modernity, to which historical socialisms are likened without qualification, is entirely political in nature and not at all theological. Its description as fundamentalist, which is how it is often labeled, corresponds to nothing in this discourse. Moreover, the term "fundamentalist" hardly ever appears in the discourse, except among some con-

temporary Muslim intellectuals who use this term in addressing Western public opinion more than their own people.

The harbingers of this “Islamic renaissance” are not interested in theology and never make reference to the important texts that discuss it. What they understand by Islam appears to be only a conventional and social version of the religion, reduced to formal and complete respect for ritual practice. This Islam could be defined as a community to which one belongs because of one’s heritage, like ethnicity, and not an intimate and strong personal conviction. This is a matter only of asserting a collective identity and nothing more. As a result, importance is given to external signs, such as dress and other things. In the Arab world, all of these movements are called “political Islam,” which is certainly more accurate.

As far as Egypt is concerned, however, the Mamluk mode of administration and social reproduction had been called into question beginning with Muhammad Ali and later by the penetration of imperialist capitalism. The transformation, which was either slow or rapid, depending on the time period, developed in the direction of secularism, a separation between religion (without calling in question the status of religious leaders) and political authority. Secularism was asserted more in everyday life and behavior than through systematic discourse. This secularism was also associated with embryonic democratic practice, and a tolerance of freedom of thought, even if the forms of power did not adopt the values of modern democracy. It was actually associated more with the attitudes of an enlightened despotism on the part of the governing authorities than with a move towards democracy. From the Khedive Ismail in Egypt to Atatürk in Turkey, as well as the Shah of Iran and even the so-called communist regime in Afghanistan, examples of this slow evolution, which appeared at the time as irreversible, are not lacking. Democratic openings took place, here and there, culminating with the 1919 revolution in Egypt.

Today, we see, apparently, a return to an almost perfect Mamluk model. The army, with or without “para-democratic” disguise, holds supreme power. Religious leaders are reestablished in positions of authority for the ideological management of society, positions that

they had gradually lost earlier. These regimes proceed systematically to the “re-Islamization of the state and society,” abrogate the modest secular advances, and place religion in charge of education, justice, and the media. A comprador bourgeoisie, a subaltern participant in globalized capitalism, today forms the third element, yesterday represented by merchants.

How can this incredible regression be explained? Some are tempted to do so by invoking the specificities of Islam, which would allow nothing else to happen. My explanation is entirely different.

The failure of the *Nahda*, to which I referred above, is behind this regression. However, this initial analysis must be supplemented by a critical examination of the national populist regimes that dominated the scene in the period after Second World War.

The status of the periphery in the world capitalist system results in the impotence of the national bourgeoisie, which is incapable of leading a bourgeois democratic revolution and abandons the cause of democratic modernity because it fears the emergence of demands from the working classes. This peripheral status, and the autocracy that went along with it, is an additional handicap for the organization of the working and peasant classes. This handicap was, however, surmounted in China, but obviously not in the Arab world and other regions of the world.

The inability of the main modern classes to settle the question of power through their struggles or their compromises opened the way to *coups d'état* and popular nationalism, which rapidly exhausted its potential to transform society in the direction required, i.e., the assertion of independence from the dominant world system. Here, I have emphasized the negation of democracy and of the autonomy of the working classes, anti-communism (despite alliances with the Soviet Union), and the beginnings of the re-Islamization of the state and society. Nasserism violently suppressed the two poles around which political life had been organized in Egypt: the liberal bourgeois pole, at best moderately democratic, and the communist popular pole. The depoliticization represented by this double suppression created a void that political Islam has filled, prepared by the initial Islamization of the

state and society undertaken by Nasserism in order to erect a barrier against communism.

The emergence of contemporary political Islam takes place within the framework of the resurgence of the Mamluk model. Political Islam does not call into question the hegemonic bloc formed by the military, the religious leaders, and the comprador bourgeoisie. Its sole reason for claiming the leadership is the prospect of setting up a truly theocratic government. The vicissitudes of the tumultuous relations between Sudanese political Islam (led by Hassan Tourabi) and the army (itself Islamized and represented by Omar al-Bashir) illustrates this conflict for supreme power claimed by the two partners.

In Egypt, the same conflict occurs, in discreet forms, between the Muslim Brotherhood and the regime. In this conflict, the religious leadership advances only a single demand: the application of *Sharia* law. It claims that it alone is able to implement it totally and rigorously. Again, remember that the military regimes in power are already committed to doing this very thing, even if they are not willing to go all the way, particularly concerning the system of punishments, fearing that the application of these medieval punishments would be repugnant to national and international opinion, and the second-class status of non-Muslim citizens. Also, it should be remembered that *Sharia* is in no way an obstacle to the practice of market relations and respect for the status of private property, both necessary for the functioning of capitalism. It offers no method for organizing the government and public administration that is capable of meeting the requirements of the modern world. In this area, the *Sharia* is indifferent to democracy and has never called into question the autocratic forms of power.

Orientalists, in the service of British power in India, invented modern political Islam before Mawdudi, a Pakistani, took it up. The aim was to prove that faithful Muslims are not authorized to live in a state that is not Islamic, and thereby anticipate the partition of India, because Islam does not countenance the possibility for a separation between the state and religion. The Orientalists in question failed to observe that the English of the thirteenth century would not have been able to imagine their existence outside of Christianity!

Abul Ala al-Mawdudi returned to the idea that power emanates from God and from God alone, rejecting the notion that citizens have the right to make legislation. The only responsibility of the state is to apply the law that has been defined once and for all (the *Sharia*). Joseph de Maistre had already written similar things, accusing the French Revolution of the crime of having invented modern democracy and the emancipation of the individual.

Political Islam objects to the concept of emancipatory modernity and rejects the very principle of democracy, the right for society to construct its own future through the freedom that it gives itself to legislate. Political Islam claims that the *Shura* is the Islamic form of democracy, which it is not, since it is captive to the prohibition against innovation (*ibda*). The *Shura* is only one of many forms of consultation that can be found in all premodern, pre-democratic societies. Certainly, the inevitable interpretation of principles demanded by life has sometimes been the means for real transformations that are required by new necessities. However, it remains the case that, by its very principle, i.e., the rejection of the right to break with the past, the *Shura* is trapped in an impasse, since the modern struggle is for social and democratic change. The supposed parallel between the Islamic parties (radical or moderate, they all adhere to the same “antimodernist” principles in the name of the supposed specificity of Islam) and the Christian Democratic parties of modern Europe has absolutely no validity, although U.S. media and diplomacy constantly allude to such a parallel in order to justify U.S. support for possible Islamist regimes. Christian democracy is part of modernity. It accepts the fundamental concept of democracy as well as the importance of secularism. Political Islam rejects modernity, at the same time proclaiming it without even understanding its meaning.

This version of Islam does not deserve to be called “modern.” The arguments in support of this view by the advocates of dialogue are nothing but platitudes, such as noting the use of cassettes by propagandists and the observation that political Islam recruits among the educated strata, engineers, for example! The discourse of political Islam barely goes beyond Wahhabi Islam, which rejects everything

that the interaction between historical Islam and Greek philosophy had created in its time. It is content with trotting out the unimaginative writings of the most reactionary theologian of the Middle Ages, Ibn Taymiyyah.⁴ Although some of his followers describe this interpretation as returning to the sources (perhaps even to the Islam of the Prophet's time), in reality it is only a return to concepts in force for two hundred years, coming from a society arrested in its development for several centuries.

Contemporary political Islam is not the product of a reaction to the supposed abuses of secularism, as is said too often, unfortunately. No Muslim society of modern times, except in the defunct Soviet Union, has ever been truly secular, still less stricken by the impudence of some aggressive atheist government. The semi-modern states of Kemalist Turkey, Nasserist Egypt, and Baathist Syria and Iraq were satisfied to subjugate the religious leaders (as often done before) with the aim of compelling them to recognize a discourse intended solely to legitimate the political choices of the leadership. The beginnings of a secular idea existed only in some critical intellectual circles. It had very little hold over the state. The latter, carried away by its nationalist project, sometimes backed away from this idea, as shown by the disturbing change begun even in Nasser's time of implementing a break with the policy that the Wafd had adopted in 1919. The explanation for this move is, perhaps, obvious. Having rejected democracy, the regimes substituted the homogeneity of the community, the growing danger of which is clearly visible in the declining democracies of the contemporary West.

Political Islam proposes to perfect a development already largely initiated in the countries concerned, aiming to reestablish a simple conservative theocratic order combined with a Mamluk-type political authority. The reference to this military caste—which ruled until two hundred years ago, placed itself above any law (by pretending to recognize only the *Sharia*), monopolized the profits from economic activity, and agreed, in the name of realism, to be integrated in a subaltern position into the capitalist globalization of the time—immediately comes to mind for anyone who observes the declining post-

nationalist regimes of the region as well as the new, supposedly Islamic regimes, their twin brothers.

There is, from this basic point of view, hardly any difference between the so-called radical currents of political Islam and those that try to give themselves a moderate appearance. The project of both currents is identical. The programs of all the movements that claim to adhere to political Islam, from Morocco to Pakistan, whether they are considered “moderates” (like the Muslim Brotherhood) or “extremists,” or even “terrorists,” are all entirely the same. Their own published texts, and they should be read before talking about them, attest to this.

They all have the objective of setting up a theocracy in the fullest sense of the term. They object to all democracy, since Allah alone is authorized to legislate and human governments have no other function than to apply the divine law, the *Sharia*, which is assumed to respond to every problem in every area. Who then will interpret this divine law that established the “reign” of God (*hakimiya lillah*)? Only religious leaders are equipped to do that (*wilaya al-faqih*). Thus, they alone who must exercise all authority, religious and political. It is difficult to imagine a society without some form of legal regulation over the practices necessary for life. If, as political Islam proposes, one objects to an elected legislator doing that, then only “judges” who, through the practice of analogical reasoning, extend the *Sharia* to new areas can carry this out. A government of “judges” alone, as practiced in Somalia with the Islamic Courts regime, is truly the ultimate form of political Islam.

At the same time, all these programs prohibit the state from interfering in economic life, which must be completely subject to the rules of market relations, and which are lawful in the *Sharia*. Thus, the programs leave the real power of the propertied classes intact, prohibiting any attack on property, which is considered sacred, or wealth, regardless of how substantial or unequally distributed it is. All the practices of capitalism are considered legal, except for loans with interest (a prohibition that the Islamic banks have gotten around with no difficulty). On the other hand, socialism, even in the moderate reformist variety,

is always irreligious. President Bush could not have said it better. Comparing political Islam to fascism is not forced because it is a matter of making the disadvantaged classes accept their exploitation and oppression.

The religious parties are united in their final objective and differ only on the tactical question of how to achieve that objective. The moderates, such as the Muslim Brotherhood, advocate infiltrating the existing state structures. They are not crazy. In fact, a program such as theirs, which conceives of no other form of power than a violently autocratic one, in no way bothers the established dictatorships, since the armies on which they rely are already strongly Islamized. It does not bother the comprador bourgeoisie either because they have been won over to Islamism and anti-democracy! In fact, it is the current regimes that are preparing the way for a theocratic dictatorship, because if the Islamists have succeeded in controlling civil society, this is with the active complicity of governments. At the same time, the autocratic state intervenes with extreme violence against popular social movements (strikes, for example), prohibits progressive forces from taking any form of action (immediately called communist agitation), and prohibits the independent organization of unions and peasant cooperatives.

In these conditions, to accept the coming to power of so-called moderate Islamists by electoral means, as suggested by some Western democrats, is to fall into a trap. The only democratic demand that should be defended is the right of the working classes and progressive forces to organize and act. They alone can erect a barrier against Islamic fascism.

The conclusion is obvious: the project of contemporary political Islam is empty. It does not have the social dimension necessary to give legitimacy to the transformations required in response to the challenges of contemporary capitalism and the havoc it creates in its peripheries, including the Arab and Muslim world. It is a conservative project, completely acceptable to the capitalist world order.

This conclusion is completely predictable for anyone who knows how to read the history of Islam, particularly the moment of its initial

formation in Medina. Contemporary political Islam invites people to return to the sources and invokes, in this regard, the original Medina model. It is easy to understand that an emotional appeal of this type can elicit a powerful response among believers. However, that should not cause us to forget that, at Medina, the Prophet did not call into question the social and political organization of Arabia of that era. In the same way, a government founded on contemporary political Islam would not call into question capitalist relations in general or the specific forms in the countries of the periphery of globalized capitalism. The ideologues of political Islam admit to this very thing, moreover, in an apparently naïve manner, when they refuse to discuss capitalism (that is not the question, they claim) so as to situate the debate on the terrain of the Islamization of society.

There are diverse models for the articulation of political Islam with civilian or military autocracies and the comprador bourgeoisies that dominate local economic life. They are always the same in the essentials, however. Saudi Arabia and Pakistan are the places where these models originated. It is the Pakistani model that was subsequently adopted by everyone. The smallest details have been borrowed, even up to the point of being a caricature, such as clothing styles, which are not Arab.

In Saudi Arabia, the merger of the dominant tribal class gathered around the king with the religious leaders has barely changed since the Islamization of the Arabian Peninsula. Wahhabism has strengthened the archaic side of the theocratic formulation, but without calling the monarchy and tribalism into question. The later integration of the kingdom into the modern world due to the discovery and extraction of petroleum has in itself changed nothing. Undoubtedly, some would say, urbanization over recent decades has given rise to the formation of a new middle class, which sometimes shows signs of discontent. I am tempted to conclude that, given the advantages this class gains from the way the country is included in the global economic order, it is hardly more than a fragment of the comprador bloc.

In Pakistan, British imperialism had succeeded in setting up from the beginning a regime that combined military autocracy, religious

authority, and a comprador business class. Nothing has changed since. By taking up the theses of imperial Orientalism, Mawdudi rendered an immense service, beyond the break up of the Indian subcontinent, which was the primary objective. Pakistan was, with Saudi Arabia, behind the Islamic Conference (OIC), created in 1957 to quash the hope generated by the Bandung Conference of 1955 and break the unity of the Asian and African people by separating out Muslims.⁵ The Islamic Conference still exists, but who remembers its origins? In Egypt, Sayyid Qutb, the ideologue of the Muslim Brotherhood during the 1950s and 1960s, introduced Mawdudi's ramblings and took on the latter's theses wholesale, which he believed were the perfect and definitive formulation of the theocratic project. This same model was adopted gradually from Morocco to Indonesia. Is this an advance? This is a project that invites the people concerned to leave history, as Fawzy Mansour has written, and which provides credibility to the views of the reactionary Orientalist and Islamophobe, Bernard Lewis. According to the latter, Believers are inevitably condemned to be won over to this project because it is the true Islam!

The Islamic Republic of Iran appears to be an openly theocratic regime. Supreme power is granted to the Shiite religious institution, organized into a quasi-Church. However, here also, despite the concrete historical conditions that presided over the seizure of power by the Ayatollahs (which gave rise to hopes or inspired illusions, however you want to view it), the Islamic Republic has not called into question the domination of fundamental capitalist relations. The proliferation of commercial companies jointly managed by religious leaders and, depending on circumstances, *bazaris* (the merchant bourgeoisie) or technocrats does not call into question the peripheral capitalist form of the mode of production and the form of its insertion into the world order.

The case of Iran is not an exception to the rule, despite the confusions surrounding the causes of its success, due to the coincidence between the growth of the Islamist movement and the struggle against the Shah's dictatorship, which was socially retrograde and politically

pro-American. Initially, the eccentric behavior of the theocratic government was compensated for by its anti-imperialist rhetoric, from which it derived its legitimacy and which gave it growing popularity beyond the frontiers of Iran. Because of this, it has been forgotten that these same Mullahs were on the side of the Shah and the CIA when Mosaddeq was overthrown! However, the regime rapidly began to demonstrate that it was incapable of rising to the challenge of innovative economic and social development. The "dictatorship of the turbans" (the religious leaders), which had taken over from the "caps" (i.e., the military and technocrats), as is said in Iran, ended in an enormous deterioration in the economic institutions of the country. Iran, which boasted about becoming another Korea, today is part of the group of countries in the "fourth world." The insensitivity of the hardliners in the government to the social problems confronting the working classes is the cause of the coming to power of the self-described reformers, who are certainly capable of attenuating the harshness of the theocratic dictatorship, but without renouncing its main principle, inscribed in the constitution (*wilaya al-faqih*), upon which its monopoly over the government is based. Ultimately, that government will be led to renounce its anti-imperialist posturing in order to be integrated into the ordinary comprador world of peripheral capitalism. In Iran, the system of political Islam is at an impasse. The political and social struggles which the Iranian people has openly begun will one day or another have to lead to the rejection of the very principle of *wilaya al-faqih*, which places the corporate body of religious leaders above all the institutions of political and civil society. That is the condition of their success.

Certainly, for geopolitical reasons, Iran is in conflict with Washington's project for military control of the planet and, as a result, its national resistance must be taken into account. However, this fact must not obscure the clearheaded analysis that must be made of the nature of Iran's political and social regime.

Political Islam is, in the end, nothing more than an adaptation to the subaltern status of comprador capitalism. Its supposed moderate form is, consequently, probably the principal danger threatening the

people involved. The violence of the radicals has no other purpose than to destabilize the state in order to make possible the establishment of a new comprador government. The diplomacy of the Triad (United States, Europe, and Japan) countries, lined up behind the United States, offers conscious support to this solution to the problem in complete consistency with the desire to impose a globalized liberal order on behalf of dominant capital.

The two discourses of global liberal capitalism and political Islam are not in conflict with one another, but, on the contrary, perfectly complementary. The ideology of American-style communitarianism, which is fashionably popularized today, eliminates social consciousness and struggle and replaces them with supposed collective identities, which are indifferent to such things. This ideology is, thus, used in capital's strategy of domination because it transfers struggles from real social contradictions to the world of the so-called cultural imagination, which is transhistorical and absolute. Political Islam is precisely a communitarianism.

The G7 governments, especially the United States, know exactly what they are doing when they offer support for political Islam. They did so in Afghanistan, describing the Islamists as "freedom fighters" (!) against the horrible dictatorship of communism, which was in fact nothing more than an enlightened, modernist, and national populist despotism that had the audacity to open the schools to girls. They continue to do so from Egypt to Algeria. They have attempted to replace the Baathist dictatorship in Iraq with friendly Islamists. They know that the power of political Islam has the virtue, for them, of rendering the people powerless and, consequently, ensuring their comprador status.

With its characteristic cynicism, the American establishment knows how to derive additional benefits from political Islam. The deviations of political Islamic regimes, such as the Taliban (which, by the way, are not deviations but well and truly follow from the principles of their project), can be exploited each time that imperialism decides it is useful to intervene, brutally if necessary. The savagery attributed to the people who are the primary victims of political Islam

facilitates the growth of Islamophobia. That, in turn, makes it easier to accept the prospect of an increasingly polarized capitalist expansion.

The only political movements claiming to follow Islam that are unreservedly condemned by the G7 are those that are involved in anti-imperialist struggles, due to local conjunctures: Hezbollah in Lebanon and Hamas in Palestine. This is not an accident.

Will the Muslim world be able to get out of the impasse in which contemporary political Islam has trapped it? Islam, like other religions, is not necessarily incapable of making a reinterpretation that would make it possible to support the required social transformation in the face of the challenge of dominant, imperialist capitalism.

Christian Liberation Theology is an example of a possible evolution in this direction. Still, it should be pointed out that the Christians in question chose to enter completely into social struggles on the side of the working classes and support their social demands (which lie outside the religious domain) right up to the revolutionary advances to which these struggles led in Latin America. The liberation theologians believe that they, through their interpretation of their religion, have the duty to support necessary progressive social transformation. They do not seek to force the people whom they support to subscribe beforehand to their theological interpretation. Their discourse and their practice are focused on participating in social struggles. They support these struggles by demonstrating in practice that their Christian conviction is not only compatible with the development and radicalization of their acts, but even more that Christianity, as they understand it, demands it.

Is a similar development possible in the Muslim world? The affirmative response I give to this question is based not only on recalling examples from the distant past (the Qarmatians, for example), but even more from noting that an attempt in this direction was made by the Sudanese Mahmud Taha.⁶

In his questioning of the lived Islam of the contemporary era, Taha distinguishes the Meccan period of the Prophet Muhammad's preaching from the Medina period. In Mecca, the Prophet is unarmed. He gains followers more from the dispossessed classes than from among

the affluent, but he is fought by all of the ruling classes. As a result, his message emphasizes the moral values upon which his religious preaching is based and provides potential legitimacy to social transformation in favor of the dispossessed. According to Taha, this preaching implies the abolition of slavery and all forms of social oppression, in particular those of which women are the victims. In Medina, the setting in which Muhammad's preaching occurs is quite different. Here, the Prophet makes an alliance with the ruling classes who rallied to Islam. He runs the society with the agreement of these classes and, as a result, his preaching loses its social content and is limited to the religious domain.

Knowing exactly what the Prophet did and did not do in Medina immediately calls to mind a comparison with the acts of the Jewish Prophets. The analogy is striking. The Prophet behaves, just like the Jewish Prophets, as a man of the state: he represses, weakens centers of resistance, maneuvers, liquidates tenacious opponents (the Jews in particular), and makes war. Taha is not offended by that and justifies this choice because, according to him, the triumph of the true religion was dependent on this. But he also concludes that Islam was not permanently established with the conversion of the whole Arabian Peninsula and the death of the Prophet. Islam has to assess what the Medina compromises mean: social reality limits, in each epoch, its potential emancipatory impact. The positions defended in Medina have to be placed into perspective not only in order to guard against giving them a definitive character, but also to carry on the work begun in Mecca and make it possible for Islam to surpass the Medina compromises, such as tolerance for slavery and the inferior status of women. In order to accomplish this today, it is necessary to support the struggles of the oppressed working classes. As one can see, this is truly a Muslim theology of liberation.

The parallel between the formation of Islam and the formation of Christianity makes it possible to better bring out the profound analogy between the two theologies of liberation. Christianity was formed over a considerably long period of time. For three centuries, the Christians formed a sort of clandestine revolutionary party against the

authorities of the Roman Empire. The analogy between the contemporary Church and the Communist parties of the modern era has already been made.

Then, when the ruling classes of the Empire were won over to the new religion, the status of the Church changed. It became a partner in the system of power. One could say that the “Meccan period” of Christianity extended over three centuries before the beginning of its “Medina period.” Christian Liberation Theology calls for undertaking the emancipatory mission of the first three centuries of Christianity and, as a result, breaks with the compromises of the Christian Empire.

Christian liberation theologians can pursue their work, despite their condemnation by the highest authorities of the Church. They benefit from the secularism that is dominant in Europe and Latin America. Mahmud Taha did not have this opportunity. The religion offered by contemporary Islam is, to be specific, the opponent of any theology of liberation. Political Islam calls for submission, not emancipation. That is why Taha was condemned to death and executed by the government in Khartoum. No party in the Islamic movement, radical or moderate, has claimed Taha. He has been defended by none of the intellectuals who proclaim an Islamic renaissance or even just express the desire to have a dialogue with these movements.

Should we then, on the basis of these considerations, conclude that the reinterpretation of religion is the preliminary condition for the Muslim world to get out of the impasse? In other words, is it necessary first to fight to achieve the resumption of *ijtihad*? This Arab word defines the right to interpret Islam and, as is well known, the *bab al-ijtihad* (the door to *ijtihad*) was closed ten centuries ago by the authorities.

I don't believe so. I propose rather to reverse the priority of the terms, to put effort first into the struggles of the working classes on the basis of their immediate demands of a social, and not religious, nature. It is through concrete social struggles that the real terms of the choice, between submitting to barbarous, imperialist capitalism or struggling for twenty-first century socialism, will arise in the consciousnesses of

the actors. As a result, the Islamist option, which eliminates this choice, will appear for what it is: an adaptation to the submission to capitalism. This is the only means to advance and create the conditions that will make it possible to fight against political Islam (which already lines up, on every occasion, with the ruling classes against the exploited) and, at the same time, open the door again to *ijtihad*.

Historical Materialism and Marxism

The preceding analyses, like those that follow, are inspired by a conception of historical materialism whose salient points I believe it necessary to indicate here, if only because they depart from the dominant conceptions prevalent in historical Marxism.

Marxism is not a scientific analysis of the operation of capitalist markets. It is both far more and something other than that. To reduce it to a political economy of capitalism is to remain on the terrain of (bourgeois) economism. Vulgar economism proposes to discover the laws that govern the functioning of markets. "Pure" economics believes that it has discovered these laws and, what is more, concludes that the markets in question are self-regulating in so far as they are deregulated, i.e., left free from all administrative fetters, which are artificial by nature. This pure economics is not interested in actually existing capitalism, which is a total system, economic, social, and political, but studies the laws of an imaginary capitalism that has nothing to do with reality.

Marx endeavors to do something else. He poses other questions, in the first place, concerning the specificity of capitalism as a stage of historical development. In this effort, he places commodity fetishism (economic alienation) at the heart of the specificity of capitalism. The result of this alienation is that capitalist society is directly controlled by the economic, the instance that is not only determinant in the last analysis, but in capitalism is also dominant. Consequently, the laws that govern this economy appear to function as objective laws that are external to society, like laws of nature. This is not the case in earlier systems, since the dominant instance in those cases is not the economic.

The concept of value is the expression of the alienation specific to capitalism. The pragmatic critique of Marx's theory of value, which points out that prices are different from values and that the rate of profit calculated in prices is inevitably different from the rate calculated in value terms, concludes that the Marxist theory of value is false. However, this critique does not understand the question that Marx poses. The difference between the two rates of profit is necessary. Without that difference, the exploitation of labor by capital would be transparent (as are forms of exploitation prior to capitalism) and capitalism would not be capitalism, defined precisely by the opacification of this reality. This is the condition for the economic laws to appear as laws of nature. The law of value not only governs the reproduction of the capitalist economic system, it also governs all aspects of social life in this system. The market economy becomes the market society.

Furthermore, Marx does not advance the (false) hypothesis of a general equilibrium the tendency of which the market would disclose. On the contrary, for Marx, markets (and thus capitalist markets) are unstable by nature. The system moves from disequilibrium to disequilibrium without ever tending towards any sort of equilibrium.

Thus, it is necessary to explain each of these moments of successive disequilibria. In order to do that, one cannot avoid taking into consideration social relations of force, i.e., class struggles, forms of the domination of capital, and the hegemonic alliances that this domination concretely implies, hence politics. It is these relations and the changes that affect them (in other words, social adjustments) that make the history of really existing capitalism. Economics and politics are inseparable. Pure economics is a myth. There is no historical determinism (economic or otherwise) prior to history. The future is unpredictable because it is made by social conflicts.

Marx's project is not an economics; it is an historical materialism.

Is it possible to analyze really existing capitalism as a group of capitalist formations that may be more or less advanced, depending on the circumstances, but moving in the same direction or does it straight-away have to be considered as a worldwide whole that is characterized by complexity and polarization? Marx and Engels provide no clear-

cut answer to this question. Their writings can be interpreted in such a way as to suggest that the global expansion of capitalism would end up homogenizing the world or making it uniform. In other words, the backward countries would be able to catch-up to and, in the end, resemble the most advanced countries. This interpretation is certainly possible since there are texts to support it. Moreover, it clarifies Marx's error, which is to underestimate (even ignore) the polarization immanent to the global expansion of capitalism. A more careful reading of Marx, however, leads to a more nuanced conclusion.

Marx combines an immanent tendency to social polarization with the fundamental logic that governs the accumulation of capital. This tendency to polarization is continually countered by the social struggles that define the context within which accumulation occurs. The dialectical relation between the tendency to polarization and reactions against this tendency has nothing in common with the method of ordinary economics, i.e., the search for the general equilibrium spontaneously and naturally produced by the market. It is poles apart.

What is observed in reality? On the one hand, the tendency towards pauperization and polarization is not obvious if the central countries of the global capitalist system (20 percent of the system's total population) are considered over the long run. This observation is the main argument against Marxism: "You see, Marx's predictions have been contradicted by history." However, if the world capitalist system is considered as a whole, then the polarization is more than obvious, it is unquestionable.

A theoretical conclusion should be drawn from these twin observations: that in capitalism (as is so often the case with complex systems) the whole (the world) determines the parts (the nations) and not the reverse. The whole is not the sum of its parts but their combination. From that, it should be concluded that polarization is immanent to global capitalism and, consequently, the less developed countries are not on the path that will lead them to catch-up with the most advanced capitalist countries.

This conclusion persuades us to continue the work Marx began, to complete and strengthen it by paying more attention to the global

character of the system, bringing out its characteristics and tendencies. In order to do that, it is necessary to go beyond the “law of value” as understood within the context of the capitalist mode of production and grasped at its highest level of abstraction. We must specify its real form of existence as the “law of globalized value.” That implies, in turn, an attentive analysis of the successive phases of the development of global capitalism and their particularities, after which the specific successive forms of the law of globalized value can be examined.

Such was and remains the challenge to which historical (i.e., subsequent to Marx) Marxism must respond. Has it done this? There was and still is much resistance to doing so because of the tendency towards Eurocentrism, which is strong in Western Marxism. That tendency leads to a refusal to grant imperialism all of the decisive importance that it has in really existing capitalism. The Marxism of the Second International (including Karl Kautsky) was pro-imperialist and consequently encouraged an interpretation of Marx that is linear, evolutionist, and semi-positivist. Lenin, followed by Mao, opened the way to go further. In Lenin, this occurred with the theory of the weakest link: the (global) socialist revolution begins in the peripheries (in this case, Russia), but must be followed quickly by socialist revolutions in the centers. Since this expectation was disappointed by subsequent events, hopes were transferred to other peripheries (after Baku in 1920).⁷ This expectation was confirmed by the success of the Chinese Revolution.

But then new questions are posed: what can be done in the backward peripheries that break (or want to break) with capitalism? Build socialism in a single country?

The question and the challenge remain unresolved: the polarization immanent to really existing capitalism places revolt or revolution for the majority of the people who live in the periphery of the system (the 80 percent of humanity forgotten by bourgeois ideology and, to a large extent, by Western Marxism) on the agenda and hinders radicalization in the centers. That implies a new view of what I call the “long transition from global capitalism to global socialism.” This is not the

view of the Eurocentric First and Second Internationals or the view of the Third International (socialism in one country).

The challenge remains because the historical Marxism of the governments established following the revolutions made in its name became well and truly Marxisms of legitimation. Undoubtedly, the term is dangerous and ambiguous. Any organic ideology is necessarily "legitimizing" even if it remains a critical reflection on reality. The reality that it legitimates should be uncovered: what did historical Marxism suppose was its object of thought? What were its theses and proclaimed objectives? Did it legitimate what it claimed? Or did it, indeed, legitimate something else that should be recognized?

Stalinist Soviet Marxism was certainly a form of ideological legitimation for the practice of the ruling class of the Soviet Union and particularly its international policy. In this practice, the real reasons for the choices made, whether good or bad, were largely hidden by the ideological discourse.

Some historical Marxisms in the Third World, after the Second World War, also fulfilled legitimating functions for the choices and policies of the governments that I call national-populist and anti-imperialist. How did they do this, why, in what terms, to what point, and what were the long-term consequences? These questions remain to be discussed calmly, avoiding approval or condemnation determined in advance. It should also be noted that some of these contemporary Third World Marxisms were formed on the basis of the, sometimes strong, critique of the national-populist systems, even when they were anti-imperialist. From there, the critique naturally led to a further critique of the Marxism of the Soviet state.

Historical materialism is not an economic determinism. The concept of overdetermination proceeds directly from the structuralist concept of social systems. It suggests, at least implicitly if not explicitly, that the determinisms that operate at the same time in the different instances of social reality are convergent because they all contribute simultaneously to the reproduction of the system, its adaptation to the requirements of its evolution, and the crisis that necessitates its surpassing. Economic determinism and the determinisms that govern the

political, ideological, and cultural realms all converge and, consequently, “overdetermine” the movement. Thus, if a transformation has become necessary economically, it is also necessary politically, ideologically, and culturally, and vice versa. Further, if one accepts that the economic is determinant in the last instance, overdetermination can easily lead to an economistic reading of history in which the other instances adjust themselves to the demands of the economic. This is not my understanding of historical materialism for two reasons.

First, I do not believe that it is correct to pose the question of the relations among the different instances in analogous terms for all stages of history. The autonomy of the economic instance is specific to capitalism, whereas in the tributary systems it is subordinated to the political instance, as I pointed out above.

Second, my understanding of historical materialism is completely incompatible with structuralism and the concept of overdetermination. In my view, each of the instances is governed by its own specific logic. The status of each is either determinant in the last instance (the economic) or dominant (the political in tributary systems, the economic in capitalism, the cultural in the communist future). The logic of each instance is autonomous from the logic in each of the others and not necessarily, still less spontaneously, complementary to them. Hence, the instances are frequently in conflict and, *a priori*, it is not possible to predict which will win out over the others. In my opinion, Marx completely analyzed the economic logic of capitalism (accumulation) as its dominant character, that is, the channels through which the economic generally succeeds in asserting its dominance over the logics of the political, ideological, and cultural. I have said, on the other hand, that neither Marx nor historical Marxisms have offered analyses as powerful concerning the logics of the other instances, and I do not think that any progress has been made in these areas outside of Marxism.

The specific logic of each instance is expressed by a particular determinism. The conflict among these determinisms gives history a distinctive degree of uncertainty and, hence, distinguishes it from areas governed by the laws of nature. Neither the history of societies

nor that of individuals is programmed. Freedom is precisely defined by this conflict between the logics of the different instances, which makes it possible to choose among various alternatives. Hence, in opposition to the concept of overdetermination, I propose the concept of under-determination.

Does this mean that societies are chaotic and irrational? Not at all; they are always orderly and rational in the sense that the conflict between the different logics of the instances (the under-determination) always finds a solution through the subjection of some logics to others. However, this solution is but one among several possible solutions. Social, political, ideological, and cultural struggles thus shape societies by imposing one choice of order and rationality over other ones.

PART TWO

Central and Peripheral Tributary Cultures

I. INTRODUCTION

1.

Capitalism has produced a decisive break in world history, whose reach extends beyond the simple, albeit prodigious, progress of productive forces it has achieved. Indeed, capitalism has overturned the structure of relationships among different aspects of social life (economic organization, political order, the content and function of ideologies) and has refashioned them on qualitatively new foundations.

In all earlier social systems, the economic phenomenon is transparent. By this I mean that the destination of that which is produced is immediately visible: The major part of production is directly consumed by the producers themselves. Moreover, the surplus levied by the ruling classes assumes the form of rents and various fees, often in kind or in labor: in short, the form of a tribute, whose deduction does not escape the immediate perception of those who shoulder its burden. Market exchange and wage labor are, of course, not entirely absent, but they remain limited in their range and marginal in their social and economic scope. Under these conditions, the economic phenomenon remains too simple—that is to say, too immediately apprehensible—to give rise to a “science of economics” elucidating its mysteries. Science becomes necessary to explain an area of reality only when laws that are not directly visible operate behind the immediate-

ly apparent facts: that is, only when this area has become opaque due to the laws which govern its movement.

The reproduction of pre-capitalist social systems rests upon the stability of power (which is the basic concept defining the domain of the political) and of an ideology that endows it with legitimacy. In other words, politico-ideological authority (the "superstructure") is dominant at this point. The mystery that must be elucidated in order to understand the genesis, reproduction, and evolution of these societies and of the contradictions within which they operate is to be found in the area of the politico-ideological, not in the realm of the economic. In other words, what we need here is a genuine theory of culture, capable of accounting for the functioning of social power.

Capitalism inverts the order of the relationships between the realm of the economic and the politico-ideological superstructure. The newly developed economic life is no longer transparent, due to the generalization of the market: Not only does the near totality of the social product take the form of goods whose final destination escapes the control of the producer, but the labor force itself, in its predominant wage-earning form, becomes commodified. For this reason, the levy on the surplus takes the form of profits, profits which are always aleatory (they only materialize under certain conditions in the manufacturing of the product), while the exploitation of labor is obscured by the legal equivalence which defines the buying and selling of the wage-labor force. Henceforth, economic laws operate in the reproduction of the system as hidden objective forces. This mystified economic authority, now dominant, constitutes a domain which, hereafter, invites scientific analysis. And the content as well as the social function of power and ideology acquire, in this reproduction, new characteristics that are qualitatively different from those by which social power was defined in earlier societies. Any theory of culture must take into consideration this new, inverted relation under capitalism of the economic and the politico-ideological.

There is, therefore, no symmetry between these two domains in pre-capitalist and capitalist societies. In this context, the vulgar Marxist doctrine according to which power is the expression of class

domination and ideology the articulation of the requirements for the exercise of that domination is of little use for understanding reality. Although true at the highest level of abstraction, this theory obscures the qualitative difference discussed above, namely the reversal of relations between the two instances, economic and politico-ideological. This doctrine cannot therefore constitute a point of departure for a theory of the political and the cultural.

Having chosen to underscore this crucial reversal from the beginning, I have thought it necessary to give the same name to all pre-capitalist systems. To refer to them all as incidences of the tributary mode of production seems to me most suitable, because the term emphasizes the transparent character of economic exploitation in these societies. Let me observe that I am only considering here the advanced pre-capitalist societies (in which classes and state are clearly crystallized), and not the societies of the earlier stage (in which classes and state are not yet definitively crystallized), which I refer to as examples of the communal mode of production. Obviously, each tributary society has its own specific characteristics, which taken together present an almost infinite variety. But, beyond this variety, tributary societies form a single family characterized by the same arrangement of economy and superstructure.

2.

Our instruments for the theoretical analysis of social reality, however, remain rather imperfect.

This social reality, considered in its totality, has three dimensions: economic, political, and cultural. The economy probably constitutes the best-known dimension of social reality. Bourgeois economics has forged instruments for its analysis and, with a greater or lesser degree of success, for the management of capitalist society. Historical materialism has gone further in depth and often successfully casts light upon the nature and scope of the social struggles that underlie economic choices.

The domain of power and the political is considerably less well known, and the eclecticism of the various theories that have been pro-

posed reflects the feeble mastery of this area of reality. American functionalist political economy, as well as its older or more recent component parts (geopolitics, systems analysis, and so on), even if sometimes effective in immediate action, share a conceptual poverty that negates any pretense they may have of holding the status of critical theory. Here, as well, historical materialism has proposed a hypothesis with respect to the organic relationship between material base and political superstructure, which, if interpreted in a non-dogmatic manner, can be useful. Nevertheless, Marxism has not conceptualized the question of power and the political (the modes of domination) in the same way that it has the economic (the modes of production). The proposals that have been made in this direction, for example by Freudian Marxism, though undoubtedly interesting for having called attention to certain neglected aspects of the problem, have not yet produced a fruitful general conceptual system. The field of the political remains, therefore, practically fallow.

It is not by chance that “The Fetishism of Commodities” is the title of section 4 of the first chapter of Volume One of *Capital*. Marx intends to reveal the secret of capitalist society, the logic that causes it to present itself as being directly under the control of the economy, which occupies the center stage of society and, in its unfolding, determines the other dimensions of society, which appear to have to adjust themselves to its demands. Economic alienation, thus, constitutes the essential content of the ideology of capitalism. Pre-capitalist class societies are, by contrast, controlled by the political, to whose constraints the other aspects of social reality—among others, economic life—seem to have to submit. If, therefore, one were to write the theory of the tributary mode of production, the title of the work would have to be *Power*, instead of *Capital* for the capitalist mode, and the title of the first chapter “The Fetishism of Power” instead of “The Fetishism of Commodities.”

But such a work has not been written, nor is there anything analogous to the precise analysis that, like clockwork, describes the economic functioning of capitalism. Marxism has not produced a theory of the political for pre-capitalist society (or, indeed, a general the-

ory of the political) as it has produced a theory of the capitalist economy. At best, there have been concrete analyses of the functioning of the political/economic relationship in particular capitalist societies (in Marx's political writings, for example, especially those devoted to the vicissitudes of France), analyses that highlight the degree of autonomy the political enjoys in these societies and the conflict that can arise as a result between the logic of power and the logic of capitalist administration.

As for the cultural dimension, it remains mysterious and unknown; empirical observation of cultural phenomena (religion, for example) has not produced, up until now, anything more than some intuitive essays. This is why the treatment of the cultural dimensions of history remains imbued with traces of culturalism, meaning a tendency to treat cultural characteristics as transhistorical constants. Thus, there is no generally accepted definition of the domain of culture, for the definition depends on the underlying theory of social dynamics that one adopts. For this reason, depending on whether the goal is to discover the common dynamics of the social evolution of all peoples, or whether, on the contrary, this search is abandoned, the emphasis will be placed either on the characteristics that are analogous and common to the various, apparently different cultures, or on the particular and the specific.

Finally, the structural relationship of these three dimensions of the social reality remains almost unknown, apart from *a posteriori* explanations and highly general abstractions (like the affirmation of determination "in the last instance" by the material base). As long as there are not any important advances in this domain, all discussion will remain hindered by emotional reactions and romantic visions.

What I propose in this work is not to develop a theory of power and culture capable of filling in the aforementioned gaps; rather, I have only the ambition of contributing to the construction of a paradigm freed from culturalist distortion.

3.

To recognize, from the outset, the diversity of human cultures is only to state a truism, which can obscure the conceptual difficulty of grasping the nature and scope of the problem. For where are the boundaries in space and time of a particular culture? On what bases may its singularity be defined? For example, is it possible to speak today of a European culture encompassing the West as a whole, in spite of linguistic differences? If the answer is yes, should that European culture also include Eastern Europe, in spite of its different political and social regime; Latin America, in spite of its underdevelopment; or Japan, in spite of its non-European historical roots? Is it possible to speak of a single culture encompassing the Arab or Arab-Islamic world, or sub-Saharan Africa, or India? Or must these broad categories be abandoned in favor of observing the specificities of their component subgroups? But then where does one draw the line in the unending divisions and subdivisions of provincial singularity? And what is the pertinence of the differences observed; what capacity do they have for explaining social change?

On the other hand, it is possible to emphasize the common characteristics shared by different societies at the same general stage of development and, from this base, define a communal and a tributary culture, just as I have identified a communal and a tributary stage. It is then possible to situate specific components within the framework of these general categories. My hypothesis is that all tributary cultures are based upon the preeminence of the metaphysical aspiration, by which I mean the search for absolute truth. This religious or quasi-religious character of the dominant ideology of tributary societies responds to an essential requirement of the social reproduction of these societies. By contrast, the culture of capitalism is founded upon the renunciation of this metaphysical aspiration in favor of a search for partial truths. Simultaneously, the ideology peculiar to the new society acquires a dominant economistic content necessary for the social reproduction of capitalism. By "economism," I mean that economic laws are considered as objective laws imposing themselves on society

as forces of nature, or, in other words, as forces outside of the social relationships peculiar to capitalism.

This shifting of the center of gravity of the dominant ideology from the sphere of what I call metaphysical alienation (or religious alienation, or even alienation from nature) to the sphere of market alienation (peculiar to economism) constitutes the core of the cultural revolution that ensures the passage from the tributary period to the Age of Capital. This revolution certainly does not suppress metaphysical aspirations or religion. But it adapts religion to the new world, relying on religion's inherent flexibility, and represses it outside of the field of the legitimation of the social order. The cultural revolution of capitalism always includes, as a result, a particular side effect: It is also a religious revolution, a revolution in the interpretation of religion.

But that is not all. In tributary societies, as in capitalist ones, I propose to distinguish the completed central forms from the uncompleted peripheral ones. The criterion that defines the terms of the center/periphery contrast, one of the keys of the analysis, is derived from the dominant sphere characteristic of each of the two successive social systems. In capitalism the center/periphery contrast is defined, therefore, in economic terms: at one end are the dominating, completed capitalist societies; at the other end are the dominated, unfinished, backward capitalist societies. Economic domination (and its complement, economic dependence) is the product of the worldwide expansion of actually existing capitalism. On the other hand, the central and peripheral forms of tributary society are not defined in economic terms—even less so in terms of economic domination and dependence—but are characterized by the finished or unfinished degree of state formation and ideological expression. Thus, feudal European society seems for this reason to exemplify the peripheral form of the tributary mode. The disappearance of the centralized state in feudal Europe in favor of a dispersal of social power is the most striking manifestation of this peripheral character. At the level of ideology and culture, the contrast between central tributary societies and peripheral tributary ones is marked by significant differences.

History seems to show that peripheral tributary societies experienced less difficulty than central tributary societies in advancing in the capitalist direction. This greater flexibility of the less advanced societies seems to us to be central to the theory of unequal development.

The first part of the text that follows treats these propositions concerning tributary culture in its central and peripheral forms. These reflections are developed from the starting point of a comparison between Christian feudal Europe and the Arab-Islamic East. The general validity of the hypothesis will be demonstrated by the fruitfulness of extending it into other fields, notably the Chinese and Confucian world.

4.

In imposing itself on a worldwide scale, capitalism has created a twofold demand for universalism: first, at the level of the scientific analysis of society, that is to say, at the level of the discovery of universal laws that govern all societies; and second, at the level of the elaboration of a universal human project allowing the supersession of the historical limits of capitalism itself.

What are these historical limits? The answer depends on the understanding that one has of capitalism itself. Two stances are possible. One can focus on that which defines capitalism at its highest level of abstraction—namely, the capital/labor contradiction—and define the historical limits of capitalist society by the boundaries imposed by its characteristic economic laws. This point of view inevitably inspires a “stagist” vision of the evolution of society: the backward (peripheral) capitalist societies must catch-up with the advanced societies before they can, in turn, confront the challenge of possibly (or even perhaps necessarily) bypassing their limits. On the other hand, one may place more emphasis in one’s analysis on what I propose to call “actually existing capitalism,” by which I mean a system that, in its actual worldwide expansion, has generated a center/periphery polarization impossible to overcome within the framework of capitalism itself. From this perspective, another charac-

teristic of unequal development is revealed: namely, that the calling into question of the capitalist mode of social organization is more deeply felt as an objective necessity at the periphery of the system than at its center.

Does the ideology produced by capitalism in these conditions allow a response to these challenges? Or rather, in its real historical development, has it only produced a truncated universalism incapable of resolving the problems engendered by its own expansion? What are the elements from which one might begin to conceptualize a truly universalist cultural project? Such are the questions that I propose to examine in the second part of the text.

5.

The European culture that conquered the world fashioned itself in the course of a history that unfolded in two distinct time periods. Up until the Renaissance, Europe belonged to a regional tributary system that included Europeans and Arabs, Christians and Muslims. But the greater part of Europe at that time was located at the periphery of this regional system, whose center was situated around the eastern end of the Mediterranean basin. This Mediterranean system prefigures to some extent the subsequent capitalist world system. From the Renaissance on, the capitalist world system shifts its center toward the shores of the Atlantic, while the Mediterranean region becomes, in turn, the periphery. The new European culture reconstructs itself around a myth that creates an opposition between an alleged European geographical continuity and the world to the south of the Mediterranean, which forms the new center/periphery boundary. The whole of Eurocentrism lies in this mythic construct.

In this chapter, I propose to recount the stages of the formulation of tributary ideology in the Euro-Arab region. Then, I will extract the characteristics that, in my opinion, define this ideology in both its central and peripheral forms. Finally, I will examine the validity of the proposed theory of tributary culture in the light of its extension to other cultural areas.

II. THE FORMATION OF TRIBUTARY IDEOLOGY IN THE MEDITERRANEAN REGION

The Ancient World

The Age of Antiquity is in fact a plural reality; it is, therefore, more appropriate to speak of the "Ages" of Antiquity. On a map of the region, those zones in which there appears a marked development of the productive forces, allowing for the clear crystallization of the state and social classes, are isolated from each other. In this manner, over the course of a few millennia, Egypt, Mesopotamia, and then Persia and Greece are constituted in relative isolation (an isolation which is more marked in the most ancient periods and the most precocious civilizations of the Nile and Mesopotamian valleys, and less so for Greece, which is formed in the course of the last millennium preceding the Christian era). These civilizations are islands in the ocean of the still widespread, dominant barbarity: that is to say, in a world still characterized by the predominance of the communal mode of production (as opposed to the tributary mode that typifies the civilizations in question).

Each of these more developed civilizations has its own structure and particular characteristics. The search for a common denominator at the level of their systems of ideas could, therefore, seem to be virtually impossible. Nevertheless, thanks to the distance of time, it is pos-

sible to isolate some common traits belonging to the long period of pre-Hellenistic history, traits which contrast with the characteristics of the thought and ideological formation of the medieval era.

Firstly, these traits are common to all of the peoples in the region under examination, whether they be barbarian (Celts, Germans, Slavs, Berbers, Arabs) or civilized (Egyptians, Assyrians and Babylonians, Phoenicians, Hittites, Persians, Greeks). In other words, there is no marked qualitative distance, at this level, between the modes of thought of communal societies and those of tributary societies during their first stage. There are, of course, more or less significant quantitative differences, and even some partial qualitative breakthroughs, to which I will return later.

Secondly, there exists at this stage an empirical scientific practice, but hardly any scientific thinking. Empirical practice—in the areas of agriculture, animal husbandry, navigation, construction, and handicrafts (textiles, pottery, metallurgy)—is as old as humanity itself. Of course, this activity is in direct relationship with the development of the productive forces, of which it is both cause and effect as part of an intimate dialectical relationship. But for quite a long period, these practices do not necessarily imply any abstract scientific systemization. Obviously, the practice of borrowing between societies is also current practice at the time.

Thirdly, the widespread practice of elaborating mythologies dealing with the formation of the universe, humankind (and especially the people to whom the mythology speaks), and the social order (division of labor, organization of the family, various powers, and so on) remains marked by the territory of its origin. There is no claim to universality. Neither is there any coherent systematic relationship between the mythologies in question and empirical practice. The juxtaposition of distinct forms of knowledge—those I would term scientific because they are developed through empirical practice, and those that I would refrain from designating in this way—characterizes the mode of thought of the ancient world. However developed any one civilization may be with respect to others (as defined by a higher level of productive forces, the development of the state and writing), these mytholo-

gies are equivalent: the myth of Osiris and Isis; Greek, Celtic, or other myths (and one might add, by extrapolation, African or Indo-American mythologies); and the Bible. No hierarchical classification of them makes any sense at all. Moreover, the fact that certain of these mythologies (such as the Bible) have survived from antiquity and have been integrated into medieval thought and ideology does not mean that they have any superior intrinsic value.

Fourthly, social thought—which obviously exists in these societies—has neither scientific pretensions, nor even any awareness that society might be an object of a reflection that, in my opinion, could be qualified as being scientific. Social thought justifies the existing order, understood as eternal, and that is all. Any idea of progress is excluded.

Nevertheless, in spite of the general nature of these shared traits, it is also necessary to mention the breakthroughs that, from time to time, prefigure later ideological constructs and modes of thought. I will mention four of these.

Before any other people, the Egyptians introduce the concept of eternal life and immanent moral justice, opening the way for humanist universalism. Everywhere else, including pre-Hellenistic Greece, the status of what one will later call the “soul” and the fate of the human being after death remain uncertain and vague. The spirits of the dead are feared for their malevolent power of intervention in the world of the living. In this light, one can clearly see the degree of progress represented by the invention of the “immortal soul” and the idea of individual rewards and punishment, founded on a universal morality that scrutinizes the motives and intentions of human actions. It matters little that, nowadays, immortality and divine justice are only considered acts of religious faith, and no longer as points of fact, or much less as scientifically established facts. The universalist moral breakthrough of the Egyptians is the keystone of subsequent human thought. It takes several centuries, however, before this Egyptian invention becomes a commonplace. We will see an example of this later on with respect to the debates between Christianity and Islam concerning Hell and Paradise, individual responsibility and determinism, and the foundations of belief.

Egypt's real contribution lies in this breakthrough and not, as is so often claimed, in the invention of monotheism by Akhenaten. For the universalist concept of immanent justice is compatible with all forms of religious belief, pantheist as well as enlightened, including, for example, Hindu religious thought in all its richness. On the other hand, the concept of monotheism, which will impose itself in this region of the world (and nowhere else), perhaps in part because it responds to a paralogical simplification, is in fact the product of the absolutism of power in Egyptian civilization, more advanced than any other tributary society. It is, therefore, not surprising that this principle comes to constitute one of the keystones of the tributary ideological construct of the region during medieval times. But it must be pointed out that the exportation of the monotheist principle to peoples less advanced along the road of tributary development has not proven fruitful. Judaism was founded, as is well known, upon this borrowing. This has not prevented it from remaining primitive in its essential foundations: Judaism has remained a religion without any universalist aspiration (it is exclusively that of the "chosen people"), marked by a mythological attachment (the Bible) and, to some extent, lacking a concept of immanent justice as developed as that of the Egyptians. Later on, Judaism, benefiting from the advances made first by Hellenism (in the time of Philo), then by Islam (notably in Andalusia), and later by Christian and, finally, modern capitalist Europe, reinterpreted its beliefs in a less restricted sense.¹

Greece produced an explosion in the fields of scientific abstraction, the philosophy of nature, and social thought whose adoption only occurred later, during the medieval period. Empiricist practice—as old as humankind itself—finally came to pose questions of the human mind that required a more systematic effort of abstraction. The birth of astronomy, calculus, and mathematics represents the first wave of this practice, followed by the fields of chemistry and physics. After Mesopotamian astronomy and Egyptian calculus, Greek mathematics constitutes a qualitative leap forward which, enriched by the Arabs, will only be surpassed in modern times. Ahead of the needs of empiricist practice, mathematics develops by turning inward and nurturing

itself upon its own substance and, therefore, inspires the first chapters of logic. But precisely because its relationship with the enrichment of empiricist practice still remains a tenuous one, its drift toward the realm of mythic relationships is difficult to avoid.

The joining of the new mathematics and the new logic on the one hand and empiricist practice on the other inspired the development of a philosophy of nature with the potential vocation of replacing mythologies of creation. Here, I do mean philosophy of nature and not metaphysics. The former characterizes the breakthrough of pre-Hellenistic Greek philosophy; the latter becomes synonymous with philosophy during the medieval period before losing its monopoly once again in modern times. The philosophy of nature is an attempt at abstraction that makes it possible to grant coherence to the whole of knowledge through the search for the general laws which govern nature. In this sense, as Marx and Engels keenly felt, the philosophy of nature is essentially materialist: It seeks to explain the world by the world itself. Undoubtedly, this search for general laws remains marked by the limits of relative, real knowledge; the progress from classical mechanistic philosophy to the modern philosophies of nature is only quantitative.

The key breakthrough in the philosophy of nature posits the existence of an eternal universe in permanent motion (from Heraclitus, 540–480 B.C.E., until the atomism of Democritus, 460–364 B.C.E.). The reconciliation of this principle with medieval religious beliefs (Hellenistic, Christian, and Islamic) does not take place without some difficulty, as we shall see later on.

Greek social thought does not really produce any truly remarkable breakthroughs. In fact, in the area of social thought, it will not be until the appearance of ibn Khaldun that one may begin to speak of a scientific concept of history. Concurrently, Greece borrowed numerous things from other cultures, most notably Egypt. Its technological borrowings were decisive in the flourishing of its civilization. Egypt's moral universalism, however, made no inroads until the time of Socrates and Plato.

The breakthroughs that take place in these various domains remain unintegrated into a global vision and without any strong links

between them. Hellenistic, and later Christian and Islamic, metaphysics will accomplish this synthesis, of which only a few scattered elements are available at the end of the golden age of Classical Greece.

I will not put on the same level the breakthroughs made in Mesopotamia or those transported from India by way of the Persians. I only mention them because they will find their place in the subsequent medieval construct.

Mesopotamia furnished, first of all, an astronomy that—however descriptive it might have been—was nonetheless largely accurate and produced as a result of rigorous observation. This heritage, rediscovered during the Hellenistic period, was developed later on, notably by the Arabs, and then of course in modern times. But this is not where the essential point of my interest lies. The Chaldeans also produced a general mythology of the universe in which the stars are situated with respect to—and above—what was later called the sublunary world. From this mythology, vaguely linked to their scientific astronomy, they derived an astrology. It is this same mythology and the astrology derived from it that subsequently find their place in the general medieval construct.

It is not my purpose, here, to examine the evolution of thought to the east of the Indus, its scientific contributions, its mythologies, the elaboration of its pantheism, its morality, and its global conception of life. But it must be noted that here as well a breakthrough in the direction of the conceptualization of the soul was also produced, and, it seems, rather early on. This development was intimately linked to a specific philosophy that invites the individual to experience detachment from the constraints of nature in order to realize the plenitude of knowledge and happiness. Its call to asceticism, as a means of liberation, crossed the borders of India and entered the East and then the West from the earliest stages of the formation of medieval civilization. From the Hellenistic period onward, the call to asceticism came to penetrate Eastern and Western thought and to flourish in the later forms of Christianity and Islam. For this reason, and because this conception will later be integrated into the medieval construct, it is necessary to mention it here.

In conclusion, what takes place in this area as a whole over this long period of time is, in fact, the slow constitution of the tributary ideological construct, that is to say, the construction of an overall world-view (in the sense of *Weltanschauung*) that meets the fundamental requirements for the reproduction of the tributary mode, irrespective of its specific forms.

The transparency of the relationships of exploitation in these societies demands that the ideological play a predominant role and be regarded as sacred. Earlier communal relationships did not require such coherence from their ideological constructs; that is why the barbarian forms of ancient thought juxtapose empiricism, mythology of nature, and mythology of society without any problem. The passage to the tributary form demands a greater degree of coherence and the integration of the elements of abstract knowledge into a global metaphysics. It is not until the modern age that the mystification of social relationships, peculiar to capitalism, can overthrow the domination of this sacred ideology and replace it with the rule of the economic. Simultaneously, this new economic rule, which will only be desecrated with the abolition of capitalism, creates the conditions that allow for the renunciation of the aspiration for a universalizing metaphysics.

In the course of the construction of tributary ideology, which comes to flourish throughout the medieval period, Ancient Egypt holds a particular place. For the core of this ideology is already present in the accomplishments of Egypt, which passes from a moral science with a potential for universalism that functions as the justifier of the social order, to an all-encompassing metaphysics that furnishes Hellenism, and later Islam and Christianity, with their point of departure, as the thinkers of the period themselves recognized.

Medieval scholastic metaphysics in its four successive forms—Hellenistic, Eastern Christian, Islamic, and Western Christian—constitutes the ideology *par excellence* of the tributary mode of production. Without broaching the forms assumed by this tributary ideology in the other regions of the world (China, India, and so on), it is possible to assert that, beyond the originality of their specific manifestations, these forms respond to the fundamental need of tributary reproduction.

By contrast, the ideology of the communal modes, spanning the long transition from primitive communism to the development of class and state society, is of a qualitatively different nature. Here, the essential content of the ideology is in a strict relationship of extreme dependency on nature (a result of the weak development of the productive forces) and the still embryonic character of the classes and the state. Communal ideology is an ideology of nature: The human being and society are assimilated to other expressions of nature (animals, plants, environment), and are conceptualized as such. The predominance of kinship relations, in both the organization of social reality and the conception of relationships to nature, undergoes an evolution in both form and content from primitive communism to the communal societies, an evolution that lies outside of the scope of the analysis presented here. The Age of Antiquity constitutes the last chapter of this evolution, a kind of transition to the tributary stage. Hence, the primitive aspects of this Age of Antiquity that are seen in the vestiges of communal ideology. There should be no cause for amazement that the breakthroughs in the direction of the tributary ideological construct are realized in Egypt, which is already a completed tributary society on the social level.

The tableau of the thought of the ancient East proposed here emphasizes the singularity of the contribution made by each of the regions in this part of the world. This singularity does not exclude the kinship of these diverse cultures, which all belong to the same stage of general societal development. Just as the societies of the region are capable of exchanging products and techniques on the material level, so they undertake equally intense exchanges at the level of ideas. Obviously the singularity of the particular contributions noted here only becomes meaningful with respect to the subsequent construction of medieval metaphysics, which integrates these contributions in its general synthesis. In this ongoing process of construction, one cannot establish any opposition between Greek thought (in order to make it the ancestor of modern European thought) and "Oriental" thought (from which Greece would be excluded). The opposition Greece = the West / Egypt, Mesopotamia, Persia = the East is itself a later artifi-

cial construct of Eurocentrism. For the boundary in the region separates the backward North African and European West from the advanced East; and the geographic unities constituting Europe, Africa, and Asia have no importance on the level of the history of civilization, even if Eurocentrism in its reading of the past has projected onto the past the modern North-South line of demarcation passing through the Mediterranean.

General Characteristics of Medieval Ideology

The constitution of Alexander's empire opens a genuinely new era for the entire region, for it brings to a definitive end the relative isolation of its different peoples and opens up the prospect for their possible subsequent unification. Until that time, attempts at conquest had only been sporadic, short-lived adventures without any lasting effect. Egypt only conquered the borderlands of contiguous western Asia in order to strengthen its defenses against barbaric nomads. The Assyrian and Persian expansions were neither strong enough nor durable enough to accomplish what Hellenism would realize: the unification of the ruling classes and of culture.

Hellenistic unification is, first of all, limited to the Orient: from Greece and Egypt to Persia. But it comprises all of the civilizations of the region as well as the more or less barbarian enclaves that, though progressively weakened, had separated these civilized groups from each other. The subsequent formation of the Roman Empire did not contribute anything really new to the Hellenistic Orient, though it did transport elements of its civilization and culture back to the Italian, Celtic, Berber, and finally Germanic West.

This unification brought to a definitive end the quasi-absolute independence of the states and peoples of the vast region that later became the Euro-Arab world (or the Euro-Christian and Arab-Islamic worlds). Not in the sense that any single state or a few "great states" have dominated the region as a whole at any one given time. Rather, political fragmentation or, more modestly stated, the break up of empire, on the basis of which the modern European and Arab states

were later formed, no longer precluded the possibility of belonging to a single unique area of culture, just as a density of exchanges on the material and spiritual level became permanent.

One world or two? For a millennium, the split is vertical and separates the more civilized Orient (marked by the founding of the Byzantine Empire) from the semi-barbarous West. During the millennium and a half that follows, the split shifts so as to separate the North—Christian Europe—from the South—the Arab, Turkish, and Persian Islamic world. In Europe, civilization gradually wins over the peoples of the North and East; to the south of the Mediterranean, Islamic culture gains ground in the Maghreb. Christianity and Islam are, thus, both heirs of Hellenism and remain, for this reason, twin siblings, even if they have been, at certain moments, relentless adversaries. It is probably only in modern times—when Europe, from the Renaissance onward, takes off on the road toward capitalism—that the Mediterranean boundary line forms between what will crystallize as the center and periphery of the new worldwide and all-inclusive system. From then on, the Euro-Islamic medieval world ceases to exist as a unique cultural area and splits into two worlds that are, henceforth, unequal: Europe no longer has anything to learn from the peoples to the south of the Mediterranean. As far as Egypt is concerned, Hellenistic unification puts an end to its earlier decisive role in the history of the region. Egypt is, henceforth, a province in a larger whole. The country is subjected to a relatively subordinate status (in the Byzantine Empire, during the first three centuries following the *Hijra*, and then during the seventeenth and eighteenth century Ottoman Empire), until it becomes the center of gravity of the region (during the Ptolemaic, Fatimite, and Mamluk periods, and later with the renascent Arab nation of the beginning of the nineteenth century). But Egypt is no longer confined in the “splendid isolation” that radiated across three millennia of its ancient history.

Now this Hellenistic, then Christian and Arab-Islamic unification had some profound and lasting effects. First of all, at the level of the development of productive forces, this unification obviously facilitated the transfer of technical advances and scientific knowledge and did

so notably by extending them among peoples who are still barbaric. Moreover, this transfer occurred at the level of social organization, political forms, linguistic, cultural and religious communications, and philosophical ideas. The sense of relativity produced by the intensity of these relationships created a new kind of malaise, in the face of which local religions gradually lost their hold. The syncretisms of the Hellenistic period, thus, prepare the ground for Christianity and Islam, the bearers and sowers of a new universalist message. The social crisis, which so frequently is used to describe the end of the Roman Empire, rather than being a crisis in the mode of production (although it is also in part the crisis of the predominant slave system in Greece and in Rome), was above all the product of this general and complex questioning.

The medieval construct unfolds in three time periods: a Hellenistic period (approximately three centuries B.C.E.); a Christian period, first appearing in the East (from the first until the seventh century of the Christian era) and then, much later, in the West (starting in the twelfth century); and finally, an Islamic period (from the seventh until the twelfth century). The core of this construct goes back, as we will see, to the Hellenistic period. Neoplatonism serves as the base for the constitution of the first Christian scholasticism (in the East), an Islamic scholasticism, and finally the second Christian scholasticism (in the West), which was greatly imbued with Islamic thought. Undoubtedly, each of these periods has its own specific traits and its particular interpretations; but, in my opinion, the common characteristics far outweigh the differences. In fact, it is their common, shared opposition to the characteristics of ancient thought that makes it possible to speak of medieval thought in a general manner.

The fundamental characteristic of medieval thought is the triumph of metaphysics, henceforth considered synonymous with philosophy (or wisdom). This trait is to be found in Hellenism, as well as in subsequent Islamic and Christian scholasticism.

Metaphysics proposes to discover the ultimate principle governing the universe in its totality: namely, absolute truth. It is not interested in partial truths established by means of particular sciences; or, more

precisely, it is only interested in them to the extent that these partial truths can contribute to the discovery of the final principles governing the universe. Of course, every religion is by definition a form of metaphysics. But the inverse is not true. For religion is founded on sacred texts, whereas one may conceive of a secular metaphysics, free from all revelation. Indeed, as the Islamic and Christian scholastics note, metaphysics claims to discover absolute truth solely through the use of deductive reason, whereas religion possesses in this regard revealed texts. The entire enterprise of Islamic and Christian metaphysics will consist in seeking to establish that there is no conflict between the use of this deductive reason and the content of the revealed texts (on the condition, of course, that one interprets these texts correctly).

The triumph of the metaphysical preoccupation entails, obviously, grave consequences for thought. Does this preoccupation devalue specialized scientific research and technical empiricism? In theory, it does. Still, it is necessary to qualify the statement. For Hellenistic civilization, to take an example, was marked by important progress in astronomy and medicine, just as Arab-Islamic civilization was; the latter pushed, moreover, even farther ahead in the fields of mathematics and chemistry. Finally, particular scientific fields of inquiry satisfactorily resisted the triumph of the metaphysicians; indeed, they could even be stimulated by the hope of enriching metaphysics through scientific discoveries. As for empiricism, which has been until very recently practically the sole foundation for the progress of the productive forces, it goes quietly along without worrying about intellectual powers that by and large hold it in contempt.

What the new metaphysics—which will crystallize into scholasticism—calls human reason is, in fact, exclusively deductive reason. Because of this, it often loses itself in the construction *ad infinitum* of syllogisms in which it is often difficult to distinguish between the paralogical and the logical. But what earlier empirical practice had already discovered (without necessarily being able to articulate), and what modern thought comes to formulate, is that scientific knowledge proceeds as much from induction as deduction. Medieval scholasticism, because of its contempt for practical application, remains

superbly ignorant of scientific induction, although by the force of circumstances certain scientific practices, notably medicine, always employed inductive reasoning. Whatever may have been the advances made by Christian and Islamic scholasticism, they never went beyond this reduction of human reason to its single deductive dimension. Contemporary Arab thought has still not escaped from it; thus, the paralogisms and analogy that are so frequent in the practice of reasoning in all fields.

And yet, the triumph of metaphysics constitutes a permanent invitation to the creation of a cosmogony, a general construct that claims to account for the formation of the celestial universe, terrestrial nature, human and animal life, and even society. It goes without saying that the elements of scientific knowledge, always relative, do not allow the attainment of “definitive perfection” as cosmogony claims to do. The elements of cosmogony are, therefore, artificially fixed by a sweeping appeal to the imaginary, indeed to the illogical. Moreover, when they serve to reinforce or even complete religious visions, cosmogonies run the great risk of producing intolerance and even anti-scientific fanaticism. In Christian Europe, even more so than in the land of Islam, people have been burned at the stake for refusing to embrace the cosmogony of the day and its supposedly definitively established truths.

Undoubtedly, the appeal of cosmogony—and of metaphysics—is common to all ages and did not wait for the medieval period to make itself felt. Moreover, it outlives medieval scholasticism. For the line between the philosophy of nature, which is modestly satisfied with the generalized expression at a given time of acquired scientific knowledge, and metaphysics, which claims to include everything in one sweeping gesture, is not always as easy to trace as it might theoretically appear to be. Thus, the aspiration for the formulation of general laws governing all of nature and society can lead one to slip on the slope of cosmogony, without necessarily being aware of it: witness Engels’ *The Dialectics of Nature* and Soviet “dia-mat” (dialectical materialism).

Metaphysics is the ideology *par excellence* of the tributary mode of production. The cosmogony that it inspires justifies the social order in

a world where inequality of wealth and power has transparent origins. The acceptance and the reproduction of the system, therefore, require that the ideological order not be the object of any possible dispute; for this reason, the ideological order must also be made sacred. As a result, metaphysics becomes a major handicap to the maturation of scientific social reflection.

But, however attractive or clever the construct that it generates may be, metaphysics always leaves an aftertaste of dissatisfaction. The reason for this, it seems, is that metaphysics proposes the impossible: the discovery, through the use of reason, of the final causes of the world. One quickly finds the limits of the power of reason; from then on, it is a question of faith. All religious minds, including Christians and Muslims, end by renouncing the exclusivity of reason in order to allow for divine inspirations, intuition, and feelings. Whether they are the complements of reason or substitutes for it, these means of recourse reinforce, if necessary, the dogma and the social practices that power claims to justify by their use.

Religious metaphysics has always been practiced in various versions. Without a doubt, particularly throughout the medieval period, there is a primitive practice of religion reduced to its ritual formalization, destined for the common people. Concurrently, the intellectual elite uses as its source of authority figurative interpretations that move away from the letter of the texts. Sometimes these interpretations lead along the downward path of the search for meanings "hidden" behind the transparency of the text. There are some examples of this in Arab-Islamic thought, but one finds the same thing in medieval Christian thought. It is a permanent tendency engendered by the metaphysical mind and its search for the absolute. This quest often entails abuses that become obstacles to the progress of knowledge, as when attempts are made to integrate more or less developed scientific fields into the metaphysical construct: astronomy, thus, becomes astrology, and mathematics the object of parascientific esotericism.

Charlatanism is, therefore, never far away. Moreover, the inevitable social struggles are transferred onto the field of metaphysics and of religion when it is associated with metaphysics. Here again, the popu-

lar revolts in Eastern and Western Christendom and in medieval Islam offer profound examples. Each is based upon an interpretation of metaphysics and the sacred texts which contradicts that of the ruling classes.

It is this metaphysical spirit that characterizes the entire medieval period: a search for the absolute, which takes precedence over different preoccupations that in ancient times were infinitely less unified by this aspiration than they are in the medieval scholasticisms. The philosophy of nature of the first Greeks—that “spontaneous materialism” of science and praxis, as Marx and Engels called it—gives way to a total reconstruction of the world, one that is fatally imaginary, as can be foreseen.

But it seems to me that all of the elements of the metaphysical triumph exist as of the Hellenistic period. Already toward the end of the Classical Greek period, the crisis of ancient thought began. The realization of the relativity of beliefs and a need for universalism caused Socrates (469–399 B.C.E.) and Plato (428–347 B.C.E.) to remain aloof toward particular mythologies. The shortcomings of these mythologies, with respect to their concepts of the individual, the soul and its possible immortality, and ethics and immanent justice, invited skepticism. They also created a malaise. This Socrates believed could be overcome by recourse to human reason alone, capable in his account of discovering truth, even in the domains of the absolute. Plato was familiar with Egypt, having spent time there, and had a deep appreciation of the moral advance allowed by the Egyptian belief in the immortality of the soul.

At the same time, a need appeared for a cosmogony with universalist pretensions (because it is deduced from reasoning alone) to take the place of the multiple mythologies. Aristotle (384–322 B.C.E.) attempted to satisfy the new need by his classification of the components of the universe, from the stars to the sublunary world, a universe largely borrowed from the Chaldean astrological tradition.

All the elements of later metaphysics, or nearly all of them, are combined to allow the Neoplatonic synthesis of Hellenism. Plotinus (205–270 C.E.)—an Egyptian, it must be noted—produces the com-

pleted form of this synthesis. This completed expression combines, it seems to me, four groups of propositions that define the core of medieval metaphysics.

First, Plotinus affirms the predominance of the new metaphysical preoccupation: the search for absolute truth, ultimate principles, and the *raison d'être* of life and the universe. Out of this he distills the core of philosophy: wisdom. Simultaneously he affirms that this truth may be discovered through the exclusive use of deductive reason, without any recourse to particular mythologies that, after all, do not constitute sacred texts in the proper sense of the term.

Secondly, Plotinus believes that this absolute truth necessarily implies the recognition of the existence of the individualized and immortal soul, the object and subject of moral actions, by its nature universal.

Third, he calls for the completion of the search for truth through dialectical reason by means of the practice of asceticism. Coming from distant India, by way of the Persians, during the time of Alexander, this appeal to intuitive feeling could have cast doubt on the unlimited power attributed to human reason. Plotinus, however, treats it as a complement: by allowing the soul to free itself of the constraints of the body and the world, ascetic practice purifies and reinforces the lucidity of reason. This is idealist reasoning in the extreme, diametrically opposed to the spontaneous materialism of the sciences and productive practice, according to which the confrontation with reality and the concrete effort of action on nature provide the means for improving knowledge and refining the use of reason. Some of the Neoplatonists borrow this Hindu concept and go so far as to borrow some of its characteristic forms of expression, such as metempsychosis.

Fourth, Plotinus gives in to the penchant for a cosmogonic construct, accepting the one inherited from the Chaldean tradition. Neoplatonism even goes so far as to adopt some of this cosmogony's particular traits, such as endowing the stars of the universe with superior souls, capable of action in the sublunary world and thus in human destinies. All of the astrology that has survived until this day is con-

tained, in its basic principle and even in its details, in this proposition of Neoplatonism.

Does this grandiose synthesis constitute a step forward or a step backward with respect to ancient thought? Undoubtedly, it is both the one and the other, depending on the viewpoint that one adopts.

Three of its most important characteristics will be pointed out here.

The first characteristic: thought accedes fully to a universalist humanism that transcends the mythologies and the specifics of peoples. Morality, the individual, and the immortal soul constitute the foundations of this humanism. The ground is, thus, prepared for the success of religions with a universalist vocation: Christianity and Islam.

The second characteristic: the triumph of the metaphysical spirit, affirmed in all of its dimensions, defines the mind of scholasticism and the exclusively deductive use that it makes of human reason. Considered today, from a distance, scholasticism seems to have made a largely sterile use of the capabilities of reason. Paralogism and reasoning by analogy replace the rigor imposed by the empirical confrontation with reality peculiar to the scientific search for necessarily particular and relative aspects of knowledge. The contempt for these particular and relative aspects of knowledge, in favor of metaphysical pretension, as well as the contempt for empiricism and control over nature, inspire gigantic and virtually foundationless cosmogonic constructs. Graver still is the fact that the scholastic mind tends to make indisputable truths of these constructs, truths that the ruling powers try to impose by force, in contempt of the value of tolerance and the demands of scientific curiosity.

The third characteristic: the Hellenistic expression of this initial formulation of medieval scholasticism is secular, in the sense that it is the exclusive product of propositions that neither rely on sacred revelations for their support nor seek to confirm such revelations. In this sense, secular Hellenistic metaphysics is moderate, open to contradiction and conflict of expression. Later, when this metaphysics becomes the complement of the revealed religions (Christianity and Islam), it is

marked by the necessity to confront sacred texts (while allowing itself, it is true, a margin of interpretation). Scholastic metaphysics becomes hardened for this reason.

Hellenism was the ideology of the ruling classes, and the dominant ideology of the ancient East for at least three centuries, and it lived beyond its prime in Eastern Christianity during the six centuries that followed, surviving in unpolished form in the West from the Roman period onward. Despite this fact, Christianity imposed itself in the region. For if the well-to-do and educated classes found satisfaction in the Neoplatonic formulation, the popular classes, who felt the same need to go beyond local mythologies, awaited their deliverance from a revelation that demonstrated, once again, its power to mobilize energies. This expectation of a messiah was reinforced by the multiple dimensions of the general societal crisis, dimensions which account for the extreme complexity of the phenomenon and of the internal conflicts that it generated.

Still, in its confrontation with Hellenism, Christianity encountered exactly the same problems that Islam would later experience.

First, it was necessary to reconcile beliefs that had become sacred, and the texts upon which these beliefs were based, with reason, fundamental to the Neoplatonic construct. In order to do so, the way had to be opened for a figurative, as opposed to literal, interpretation of the texts. Of course, this opening brought about a new chapter in theological debates, and a proliferation of quarrels, which could well serve the numerous social interests (classes, peoples, powers, and so on) then in conflict.

On the other hand, Hellenistic metaphysics lent itself to a religious reinterpretation, both in a Christian and, later, Islamic context, particularly with respect to the essential matters of immortality of the soul and immanent morality. Reflection about individual responsibility and free will, always in potential conflict with divine omnipotence, and on the nature of the intervention of this power in the world, led in a short time to two solutions that came practically to define the new religious belief: unlimited individual moral responsibility, combined with the demand that the believer have a deep-seated conviction going beyond

formal submission to religious rites; and a recognition that creation does not exclude the regulation of the universe by an order of laws which can be discovered by scientific reason and, consequently, the granting of exceptional status to the miracle (divine intervention outside of these laws).

The debates concerning the relationship between the universe and creation remained more open and came to naught. For if certain intellectual interpretations admitted the eternity of the world, coexisting with that of God, others, closer to popular belief, placed greater value on the literal text of Genesis. The cosmogonic constructs were the object of interminable, and to our eyes, fairly sterile debates.

Circumstances established a close relationship between the new religious form, Judaic monotheism, and the messianic expectation. These circumstances have less importance than is generally attributed to them. Nevertheless, in a short time, it was necessary to reconcile the realization of the messianic expectation with monotheistic dogma. In a situation peculiar to Christianity, the new theology was confronted with the question of the nature of Christ (divine and human) and of divine qualities. Here, again, the schools clashed incessantly with each other.

Egypt's contribution to the formation of the new Christian world was decisive.² History teaches us that, in most cases, new religions are imposed by force of foreign conquest or by the will of the state and the ruling classes. The Christianization of Egypt was, however, exceptional, in that it was the exclusive product of a movement internal to Egyptian society. The richness of Christian thought in Egypt results from this confrontation with both the established powers and pagan Hellenism. Far from rejecting this erudite and subtle culture, Coptic Egypt integrates it into the new religion. The central question preoccupying the philosophers of Alexandria, whether or not they are Christian (though the non-Christian ones lived in a predominately Christianized milieu), is the reconciliation of reason and faith. Plotinus, Ammonius Saccas, Origen, Valentinus, Clement, and Dedemos are the great names that history has retained as the founders of gnostic philosophy. This philosophy produces an

authoritative synthesis of reason and faith—the perfected form of tributary ideology—and its arguments are later taken up again by the Mu'tazilites.

The Egyptian synthesis proposes to classify individuals into three categories: the Gnostic elite, for whom divine inspiration comes to complete their mastery of reason; the popular masses, little preoccupied with the demands of the mind, and whose interpretation of religion remains as a result primitive and formalistic; and, finally, an intermediate class capable of reconciling reason and faith, even though it rejects divine inspiration. This hierarchical division, natural for an advanced class society, had the obvious advantage of giving the thinking elite great freedom in the interpretation of dogmas; the same situation occurs in the great age of Islam, but not in the Christian West before the Renaissance. Later, I shall show how Islam, when confronted with the same problems, arrived at identical answers.

The first millennium of the medieval era (from 300 B.C.E. to 600 C.E.) was neither poor nor sterile, despite contemporary judgments with respect to metaphysics and Hellenistic and later Eastern Christian scholasticism. Islamic metaphysics and scholasticism continue its work in the course of the first five centuries following the *Hijra* (from 700 to 1200 C.E.).³ During this first medieval millennium, the University of Alexandria, from Ptolemy to Plotinus and until the last years of Coptic Egypt, was probably the most active center of thought in this part of the world, not only in the field of metaphysics, but also in the field of sciences, particularly astronomy and medicine, in which remarkable advances were made. The Christian expansion multiplies these intellectual centers, which included Haran in Syria, notable because its intellectual production was one of the sources for Islamic metaphysics. Of course, the innumerable power struggles also fed the schools and quarrels of the six centuries of Eastern Christianity, opposing—among other things—the imperial ambitions of Byzantium to local interests (primarily Egyptian and Syrian). Once again, there is nothing dramatically different here from that which takes place over the course of the following five Umayyad and Abbasid centuries.⁴

*Medieval Metaphysics: The Developed Arab-Islamic Version
and the Peripheral Western Version*

Barely a few decades after its appearance, Islam was confronted, as a result of its conquest of the East, with a group of major challenges to which it responded brilliantly.⁵

Islam was established on precise sacred texts, to an even more pronounced degree than Christianity, whose Gospels, in comparison with the Koran and the Sunna (the collection of the statements and deeds of the Prophet—the *Hadiths*), remain fairly vague. The Muslims immediately draw up a code of laws—*Sharia*—that, without necessarily regulating in advance all aspects of social life, furnish a good number of its principles and, in certain areas, precise rules. The faith by itself is, in the interpretation of the first Muslims of Arabia, probably crude, just as these first adherents are themselves in their social and cultural life. Proof of this is provided *a posteriori* by the effort necessary to adapt the faith to the peoples of the civilized East as they are gradually Islamized.

The Muslim state finds itself, almost from one day to the next, the master of the Hellenized and Christian East. The challenge is enormous at all levels: at the level of scientific and technical knowledge (and the development of the productive forces), far beyond the level attained by the Arab nomads; at that of the complexity of social, administrative, and political relationships in the millennial state organizations of the region; at the level of Hellenistic-Christian culture, which as we have seen in the preceding pages, had elaborated an all-encompassing metaphysics and scholasticism, inspired by universalist humanism, a subtle conceptualization of belief and morality, and a reconciliation with scientific reason. But the challenge was also great at the level of the highly pronounced diversity in this region—diversity of popular realities, their linguistic and literary expressions, and the practices and beliefs that they transmit. At the same time, Persia, which had only been superficially Hellenized (quite unlike Egypt, Syria, and Mesopotamia), remained outside of Eastern Christendom—in close contact with its Christian neighbors

on the one hand, but also open, to a more pronounced degree, to India. The university of Jundishapur, which also comes to play an important role in the elaboration of Islamic scholasticism, bears witness to the special status of Islamized Iran. Perhaps this difference even provides one of the keys to the mystery of this striking opposition between the Arabization of Mesopotamia, Syria, and Egypt (and later the Maghreb) and the survival of Persian to the east of the Zagros.

It was necessary to reconcile the new faith and its sacred texts with the material, political, and intellectual demands of these Hellenized-Christian and Persian worlds. This required a veritable cultural revolution, which Islam successfully brought about.

Let us note here that what the Arabs call "Greek culture" is in fact the culture of Hellenism, an already Christianized Hellenism. They remained completely ignorant of pre-Hellenistic classical Greek philosophy; they only became acquainted with Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle through Plotinus.

The Arab-Muslims immediately comprehended—we will later see by what means—that they could reconcile Hellenistic scholasticism and the new faith exactly as the Eastern Christians had done, by posing the same questions and answering them in the same way.

The story of the process of the construction of Islamic scholasticism, from the Mu'tazilite discourse (the *Kalam*) of the third century of the *Hijra* to ibn-Rushd, the culminating point and end of this development in the sixth century of the *Hijra*, merits retelling.

The discourse of the Mu'tazilites departs precisely from a critique of the primitive interpretation of the first Muslims, as unacceptable to the new converts as it was to the new ruling class and the Arab-Persian-Islamic intellectual elite. It is worth mentioning here, at least, the major questions contained in this discourse.

It begins, modestly, by rejecting formalized submission to ritual as the sufficient constituent element of religious conviction. It accepts the principle of an immanent divine justice that scrutinizes the conscience, a response to a contemporary debate concerning the responsibility of the individual for sin. This leads it immediately to pose the

question of free will and divine power. Supporters of free will (*al-qadaria*, the will) oppose the partisans of divine determinism (*al-jabaria*, *ai-tassir*, divine determination) with divergent interpretations of the sacred texts. The question of free will, in turn, challenges the reigning idea of divine power. The Mu'tazilites opt for the Hellenistic solution: God operates by means of laws of nature (*namous al-sababia*) that he has established, and, not concerning himself with details (*al-jouziyat*), is loath to have recourse to miracles. By this means they affirmed the absence of conflict between reason and revelation, since the laws of nature can be discovered through the use of reason.

Gradually, the way was opened for the figurative interpretation of sacred texts. Such an interpretation was already necessary in order to reconcile the concepts of free will and of physical laws regulating the world with the concept of divine omnipotence. The problem of interpreting the meaning of the attributes of the Creator, described in anthropomorphic terms in the texts, gave rise to an opposition between partisans of the letter of sacred texts (*al-tashbih*) and the supporters of an interpretation purified of literal forms (*al-tanzih*). In the same spirit, the letter of the dogma of the resurrection of the body was rejected and replaced by the notion of a gathering of the souls (*hashr al-ajsad*). The figurative interpretation also permits a certain distance to be maintained, where necessary, with respect to the law (the *Sharia*), despite its apparently precise prescriptions. For the Koran itself, even though it is the word of God, was "created." As we would say today, it is dated and addresses the people of a certain time and place. Thus, while always being inspired by its principles, one must adapt its precepts to changing conditions. For many, this view was all but sacrilegious.

The question of creation was at the heart of these debates, which went as far as it was possible to go within the ambit of metaphysical thought. In affirming the eternity of the world, coexistent with that of the Creator, these thinkers espoused the theses of Hellenistic metaphysics, reducing the account of creation to a myth destined only to convince the mob. Many found this view still closer to sacrilege.

The *Kalam* opened the way to philosophy, conceived of as metaphysics—that is, as the search for absolute truth. Al-Kindi, the first philosopher to write in Arabic (d. 873 C.E., 260 A.H.) remains prudent, recognizing the coexistence of varied paths to truth: the senses, sufficient for apprehending nature through the empirical experience; (deductive) reason, which flourishes in mathematics; and divine inspiration, the only means for gaining access to superior knowledge of the absolute. He does not posit conflict between these three paths, but, on the contrary, asserts their complementarity, on the grounds that God has given the senses and reason to humankind. Al-Farabi (d. 950 C.E., 339 A.H.), in grappling with the central question of the laws of nature (*namous al-sababia*), integrates Chaldean cosmogony into the new Islamic metaphysics. Ibn Sina (d. 1037 C.E., 428 A.H.) adopts this cosmogonic perspective as well, while reinforcing it with the concept of the eternity of the universe, coexistent with that of God.

Ibn Rushd, also known as Averroes (d. 1198 C.E., 595 A.H.) produced a sort of synthesis of Islamic metaphysics in the course of his polemic against the adversaries of reason, a *summa* that was later taken up almost intact by Christian scholasticism in the West. In all domains—free will, causality, the figurative interpretation of texts—ibn Rushd placed himself in the avant-garde of Arab-Islamic thought. Did he go so far as to think that rational truths—whose independence with respect to revealed truth he proclaimed in his theory of “twofold truth”—could enter into conflict, if not with faith, at least with dogma? On these grounds, he was condemned by Muslims and, later, by the Christian heirs of his scholasticism. Did he even go so far as to cast doubt on the excesses of cosmogony? The question remains controversial. The fact that he did not treat cosmogony in his polemic may be interpreted as a rejection. But this seems unlikely to me, simply because it was accepted by everyone, including the adversaries to whom he replied (most notably al-Ghazzali, d. 1111 C.E., 505 A.H.), and because in a polemical work it is not necessary to address theses accepted by both sides.

In another area, however, ibn Rushd did push the limits of the possible, generating the most violent controversies by directly calling social interests into question through a challenge to the interpretation

of the law (the *Sharia*). By calling for a circumstantial vision of the law, he opened the way for a possible separation between the state (and law) and religion. But this incipient "Protestant Revolution" in Islam, if it can be spoken of it in such terms, did not have any effect. Ibn Rushd was condemned and his books burned.

Indeed, this Islamic scholastic metaphysical construct—twin sibling of the Hellenistic and Christian constructs, the dominant ideology in the most enlightened sectors of the Arab-Persian-Islamic world during its best periods, and at times even supported by the Caliph's power (as during the time of al-Mamoun, 813-833 C.E., 198-219 H.)—never had a moment of true, unchallenged triumph. The bold conclusions of the *Kalam* were quickly rejected, and ibn Safouan reaffirmed the pre-eminence of a destiny determined in all respects by divine power, thereby opening the way for a crude, yet always popular fatalism. From al-Asari (d. 935 C.E., 324 H.) and his followers until the triumph of al-Ghazzali, who came to be recognized during the following eight centuries as "the proof of Islam" (*bauja al-islam*), the partisans of the letter of the texts made their position prevail and even won the ruling power over to their cause, beginning with the reign of Caliph al-Moutawakil (847 C.E., 231 A.H.).

The argument that was used against rational scholasticism was made to order: reason is not sufficient and cannot lead to the sought-after absolute truth. Intuition, the heart, and divine inspiration cannot be replaced. The discovery of the limits of the power of reason could have led to a renewed questioning of metaphysics and its doomed project for arriving at absolute knowledge, but this did not happen. Renewed questioning of rational metaphysics did not lead forward (indeed, not until the European Renaissance did this forward movement begin), but rather backward, through the affirmation of a nonrational metaphysics. The result was an appeal to the techniques of asceticism, of Hindu origin, thereby inspiring the development of Sufism, the very expression of the failure of the Hellenistic-Islamic metaphysical construct.

For Sufism, henceforth, loudly proclaimed its skepticism with regard to reason. But it preserved the earlier preoccupation with

absolute knowledge, granting it more importance than any partial knowledge, to a degree greater than at any previous time. The organization of brotherhoods (generally secret); the pursuit of practices that produce ecstatic states (*al-samar*)—rhythmic chants, sometimes drugs, and even alcohol; the adoption of the principle of blind obedience to the sheik of the group: All of this finally disturbed the ruling classes, conservative, though moderate, and jealous of centers of influence that eluded their grasp. Indeed, they would have to be naïve not to suspect that this type of social reconstruction would necessarily become engaged in the multiple social and political conflicts of the time, either on its own account, or through manipulation. The punishment that the greatest Sufi thinker, al-Halladj, suffered in 922 C.E., 309 H., bears witness to this hostility of the elites toward Sufism.⁶

Islam, thus, unfolded over some five centuries in varied directions, which may be classified into three groupings.

The first includes a moral and rational metaphysics with universalizing aspirations, benefiting from a Hellenistic inspiration. The twin sibling of Christian scholastic metaphysics, this type of metaphysics carries out a similar reconciliation of various preoccupations: the concern with an individualized and universalist morality, the problem of confidence in deductive reason, and the question of respect for sacred texts. This reconciliation also spreads into other areas, allowing the absorption of the social, economic, administrative, and political heritage of the civilized East. It is founded largely upon the use of the formal logic of language, though it does not avoid paralogism and analogy. This trait also permits it to be joined with a totalizing cosmogony (with its inevitable astrological slippings) and, at the same time, to have recourse to asceticism, if only in moderate doses. Within this general overall framework, this form of Islam allows a certain diversity of opinions and actions, creating an atmosphere unequalled in medieval times, an atmosphere relatively conducive to progress in both particular sciences and social life. This interpretation is largely that of the enlightened spheres of society—though it is not truly and fully welcomed by those in power.

For power must be mindful of what it is: the power of exploitative ruling classes. It prefers to govern the still uncouth masses, who are generally, though not always, content with simple interpretations, hardly preoccupied with philosophy and the reconciliation of reason and faith, and disposed to live according to literally construed texts and formalized ritual. This kind of religious practice, furthermore, is reconcilable with the maintenance of varied popular practices, ranging from the cult of the saints to astrology, clairvoyance, and even sorcery. In various writings, published in Arabic, I have tried to characterize the nature of the social and political struggles that shook the medieval Arab-Islamic world. Without going back over the details of my argument, I think it is possible to identify two types of conflict. There is the latent, permanent conflict between the people and authority, which bears all the characteristics of the class struggle characteristic of tributary societies. The people (peasants and small craftspeople) suffer the permanent oppression and exploitation typical of all tributary societies. They submit to it, for strategic reasons or for the well-being of their soul; but sometimes they revolt under the standard of a revolutionary interpretation of religion—neither rationalizing scholasticism nor straightforward submission to formal rites. Movements like the Karmations of the ninth century C.E. undertake a critique of the law of *Sharia* in order to put forth an interpretation that justifies their aspirations for equality and justice. The analogy with popular struggles against authority in other tributary systems, from medieval and Old Regime Europe to China, is obvious. But there are also conflicts within the tributary ruling class, among its professional groups or the various regional interests that it represents. These conflicts generally occupy center stage and generate wars and struggles over power.

The debates surrounding Islamic scholasticism hinge on these different kinds of conflicts and find their reflection in social thought, expressed either directly or through the prisms of literary, poetic, artistic, erudite, or popular forms. A few examples will illustrate this proposition.

In the tenth century, the Brothers of Purity (*Ikhwan al-Sifa*) undoubtedly express popular dissatisfaction with the authority of the

Caliph. They propose a reform that simultaneously guarantees happiness on earth (equality and justice, social solidarity) and access to eternity beyond (claiming that a moral exercise of authority is the condition for popular morality). A nostalgia for earlier times feeds their aspiration to restore the theocracy of the Rashidian Caliphs (the first four Caliphs), embellished, as always, with the status of a "golden age." The ambiguity of the call for a return to origins appears here in all its clarity. It is at one and the same time the expression of a project for the transformation of a reality deemed unbearable and a call for a return to past practices as the means for transformation. This call has as its foundation the absence of scientific social thought, without which it is impossible to understand the true nature of social reality. Indeed, it is not until modern times that human thought comes to the point of posing questions related to the organization of society in a manner that goes beyond simple moral debate.

Arab-Islamic social thought remains restricted to moral debate, just as social thought does in the other tributary societies, from pre-capitalist Europe to China. A good example is Farabi's project for an ideal city (*al-Madina al-Fadila*). Like his predecessor, Hassan al-Basri (d. 728 C.E., 111 A.H.), Farabi believes that evil does not result from imperfections of the law (in this context, the *Sharia*), but from the shortcomings of those responsible for applying it. This is, indeed, an impoverished analysis.

The examples could be multiplied. Arab-Islamic social thought remains imprisoned by the objective conditions of tributary society. It goes around in circles, sometimes colliding against the wall of rationalizing scholasticism, and sometimes running into the wall of formalist submission; sometimes it gets caught in the impasse of ascetic flight. All of these detours may coexist in the works of the same individual, as in the case of the poet Abu al-Ala al-Ma'ari (d. 1057 C.E., 449 A.H.), who sometimes displays confidence in reason, only to fall into fatalistic determinism or ascetic withdrawal later on.

Without a doubt, in spite of the objective limitations they face, the people of the period are as intelligent as their successors. They are, therefore, capable of experiencing malaise as a result of the impasse of

tributary thought and of expressing, if necessary, a skepticism that prefigures a possible advance beyond it. But they do not go any farther.

Ibn Khaldun (d. 1406 C.E., 808 A.H.) is unquestionably the exception; his advances in the direction of a scientific social thought are unequalled before him and unsurpassed until the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The impulse is there: Society is subject to nature-like laws (*namous al-sababia*), and it only remains to discover them. But the conceptual tools that ibn Khaldun has at his disposal do not permit him to do so. The vague geographical determinations and the cycle of generations he produces, inspired by a social parapsychology, hardly lead to anything more than a vision of eternal return and of endless and unprogressive repetition. This result was perfectly acceptable to the actor-observer of the ruling classes, become skeptic, that ibn Kaldun was; but it certainly could not nourish a truly transformative social force.

It is perhaps possible to summarize the advances made by medieval Arab-Islamic society and their limits in the few statements that follow.

First, the Arabization and Islamization of this region created the conditions for a vast society unified in language, culture, and religion, providing an objective base for the progress of the forces of production and, thus, for the rise of a state founded upon the tributary mode of production. The great revolution that Islam accomplished in its first age of splendor was precisely to have adapted itself to the demands of this state construct. Without this revolution, the civilized East would probably never have been Islamized and the passing of the Arabs would have been marked only by destruction, as was the case with the passing of the Mongols. Those who are nostalgic about early Islam, the period of the Prophet and the first four Caliphs, refuse to understand that Islam's success came only at this price.

In the vast state, social, and cultural reconstruction of the East and the Maghreb, rational Islamic Hellenistic scholasticism filled essential functions, even though it never received true support from the ruling powers. There would be no point in enumerating all of the areas in which important progress was made: practically all of the sciences,

beginning with astronomy and mathematics (the zero and decimal notation, trigonometry, and algebra are all invented), and including medicine and chemistry (which advances from alchemy to scientific chemistry). Similar advances are made in the techniques of production and in the development of the forces of production, notably through the extension of irrigation methods, as well as in the arts and letters. In all of these fields, and in the field of philosophical and social thought (within which there is an exceptional breakthrough in the direction of a social science), these brilliant moments in the rise of this new civilization take place in an environment in which diversity, controversy, open-mindedness, and even skepticism are both tolerated and welcomed.

Secondly, the primary ideological construct in this new society is a form of medieval thought, characterized—like all medieval thought—by the predominance of metaphysical preoccupations (the search for supreme knowledge), bolstered by a religious belief in need of reinforcement and even proof. Here, I depart from the major contemporary Arab writers on this question (primarily Hussein Méroué and Tayeb el-Tizini). These authors base their analysis on a supposed conflict between materialism and idealism in Arab-Islamic philosophy, which they claim reflects the conflict between progressive capitalist tendencies and reactionary feudal forces. I will not repeat my comments on these propositions here. Let me simply point out that the contrast between materialism and idealism is less decisive than the popular version of Marxism suggests; and that the existence of elements of spontaneous materialism in the sciences, such as the doctrine of the eternity of matter, does not cancel out the fundamentally idealist character of all metaphysics.

An analysis of Arab-Islamic philosophy in terms of the conflict between feudalism and capitalism, furthermore, is simply baseless. On the contrary, the rise of this form of medieval scholasticism was an expression of the need to adapt Islam to a tributary system extending over a vast integrated space, while the resistance to it expressed the opposition of various social groups that had been victims of its rise. Among these were, unquestionably, those forces that represented the

declining older ways of life and cultivated a nostalgia for the past, but also the popular forces, permanent victims of any prosperity founded on exploitation and oppression. Any "left"/"right" classification of their ideas must bear in mind the ambiguities of this popular resistance, which is expressed not in terms of a rational metaphysics, but through its rejection.

This hypothesis concerning the nature of Arab-Islamic thought has the advantage of providing an explanation for the seemingly curious fact that the brilliant rise of this civilization in the first centuries after the *hijra* was followed by centuries of stagnation. This phenomenon is exactly the inverse of the key event in the history of the European West, the Renaissance, which opened the way for capitalist development. Arab-Islamic thought was established through a confrontation between the new ruling powers and the societies of the civilized East, the result of tributary reconstruction on a vast scale. Once the new tributary state was established and the process of Arabization and Islamization had advanced sufficiently, this confrontation could no longer contribute anything beneficial to the now-consolidated society. Arab-Islamic thought went peacefully to sleep.

This example illustrates another facet of unequal development. The progress of thought is associated with situations of confrontation and disequilibrium. Periods of stable equilibrium are periods of stagnation in thought. The flourishing of thought during the first centuries of Islam has, therefore, no relation to a supposed nascent capitalism. On the contrary, it is precisely the absence of capitalist development that explains the subsequent torpor of Arab-Islamic thought.

Third, medieval Islamic scholasticism inspired to a great extent the rebirth of Christian scholasticism in the West. In the West, semi-barbaric until the eleventh century and, for this reason, incapable of assimilating Hellenistic and Eastern Christian scholasticism (which disappeared as a result of Islamization), the objective conditions that develop from the eleventh and twelfth centuries on impose a transition from the primitive stages of the tributary mode, marked by feudal fragmentation and a dispersal of power, to the advanced form represented by absolute monarchy.

During this period, the Christian West is thus ready to comprehend the full significance of Islamic scholasticism, which it adopts, without the slightest uneasiness, virtually unchanged.

The debates between the Mu'tazilites and Asarism, and in particular the *summa* that ibn Rushd (Averroes) composed in his polemic against al-Ghazzali, were read with passion and interest by Thomas Aquinas (1225–1274) and his successors as part of the revival of Christian scholasticism, which reproduces the same debates by means of the same arguments.⁷ During the same period, Andalusian Judaism was emerging from its primitive stage and developing, under the guidance of Maimonides (d.1204 C.E., 601 H.), a metaphysical construct indistinguishable from the Islamic model. The West, through the mediation of the Islamic metaphysical construct, thus discovered Hellenistic thought. It is only later, with the exile of the Greeks of Constantinople to Rome, after their city's fall in 1453, that the West begins to learn that Hellenistic thought was preceded by that of Classical Greece, whose very existence was unknown until that time.

The preceding exposition has intentionally emphasized Islamic metaphysics. This is for two reasons. First, Arab-Islamic thought is little known and poorly understood in the West, and, indeed, often distorted by the Eurocentric bias built into the opposition between Islam and Christianity. Secondly, and most importantly, this account has demonstrated how Islamic metaphysics completed the work of Hellenism and Eastern Christianity and perfected the tributary ideology of the region. In contrast to this model, it will be possible to judge the poverty of Western Christianity's version of metaphysics, which is only a pale, unrefined, and incomplete (peripheral) reflection of this tributary ideology.

There are three stages in the history of Christian thought in the West: (1) the fourth and fifth centuries, which mark the end of the Late Roman Empire in the West; (2) the six centuries of the Dark Ages, from the sixth to the eleventh centuries; and (3) the scholastic revival of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries.

During the first of these periods, Christian metaphysics, developed in the East, spreads in the West in simplified form. In the writings of the

Egyptian Origen, in his *Contra Celsum*, a refined expression of the fundamental preoccupation of the time is found: the reconciliation of reason and revelation and of the discourse of Greek rationality and the humanist morality of the Gospels. In this text, free will and immortality of the soul are founded as much upon reason as they are upon revelation. Moreover, Origen defends the autonomy of the church from the state, calling this autonomy an essential condition for the protection of thought against the vicissitudes of power (today—if such an extrapolation is not too extreme—we would speak of the separation of civil society and the state as an essential condition for the protection of democracy). Simultaneously, Origen integrates and advocates the techniques of asceticism, later adopted by Egyptian monastics such as Saint Pachomius and Saint Anthony. At the same time as these fundamental debates are taking place, a number of Eastern thinkers—Athanasius, Arius, Cyril, Nestorius—develop a theology out of the controversies surrounding the nature of Christ (divine or human).

In the West, nothing comparable occurs. The contributions of Saint Jerome and Saint Ambrose are limited to a few epistles reminding the emperor and powerful lords of their duties, epistles whose banal content bears witness to an absence of interest in the question of the reconciliation of reason and faith. The North African Saint Augustine, rightly considered the most sophisticated mind in the West, defends the letter of the texts concerning creation and refuses to admit the philosophical concept of the eternity of matter, which stands at the heart of any reconciliation of reason and faith. If Saint Augustine comes to take a prominent place in the Western canon, it is probably and primarily because the Reformation found an eloquent defense for its revolt against the papacy in his plea for the separation of church and state. It is, nevertheless, the case that the argument on which Saint Augustine bases his plea—an assertion that the designs of Providence are unknowable—comes out of the tradition of Eastern Christianity. Indeed, Western Christianity is to Eastern Christianity what Rome is to Greece.

There is nothing, or almost nothing, of note in the six centuries that follow. Kings, nobility, and even a large number of clergy are, like their

subjects, illiterate. Their form of Christianity is, therefore, based almost exclusively on formal rites and superstition. The exception represented by the ninth-century Irishman Johannes Scotus Eriugena, who treats the thesis concerning the reconciliation of reason and revelation and accepts the principle of free will, bears witness to the fact that in his island, which at his time had not yet suffered the waves of barbaric invasions, the study of the doctrines of the East had not been abandoned.

Western medieval scholasticism takes shape beginning in the twelfth century, not by chance in regions in contact with the Islamic world: Arab Andalusia and the Sicily of Frederick II. It shares certain characteristics with its Islamic source of inspiration: an unlimited reliance on syllogism and formal logic, an appreciable indifference to facts and science in general, and an appeal to reason confirm conclusions fixed in advance by revelation (principally the existence of God). But whereas the perfected metaphysics of the Islamic avant-garde purifies these conclusions of their textual dross, retaining only the abstract principle of immortality of the soul (rejecting the literal interpretation of creation, as we have seen above), Western scholasticism remains at an inferior level. Even Saint Thomas Aquinas, the most advanced mind of his age, does not go as far in his *Summa contra Gentiles* as ibn Rushd (Averroes), whose conclusions he rejects as too daring and potentially threatening for the faith.

But this poverty of Western scholasticism is precisely what gave Europe its advantage. Necessarily leaving a greater sense of dissatisfaction than Islam's refined version, Western scholasticism could offer only slight resistance to the assaults of empiricism, in which Roger Bacon, restoring the importance of experience over the dialectics of scholastic syllogism, initiates a process of development independent of metaphysical discourse. Historians of the Crusades know how much the Arabs were scandalized by Frankish practices: Their "justice" founded on superstition (the ordeals) could not withstand comparison with the subtlety of the *Sharia*.⁸ This is often forgotten today, when the *Sharia* is characterized as medieval: It was easier to get rid of a body of "law" as primitive as the Frankish one, than it was to go beyond the erudite casuistry of Muslim law.

Thus, the triumph of Christian scholastic metaphysics in the West only lasted a short time. Hardly three centuries passed before the objective conditions were ripe for surpassing the tributary dimensions of society. With the Renaissance, beginning in the sixteenth century, the way was simultaneously prepared for capitalist development and a reexamination of the system of medieval thought. The parallel should be noted: European feudalism, the peripheral form of the tributary mode, gave rise to a peripheral version of tributary ideology; Islamic metaphysics, heir to Hellenism and Eastern Christianity, constituted the fully developed expression of the ideology.

The paradigm that I have suggested inspires the following conclusions:

First, the break between the Age of Antiquity and the medieval era is not to be found where conventional Eurocentric history places it, that is, at the end of the Western Roman Empire in the first centuries of the Christian era. I situate this division much earlier, during the time of Alexander the Great, at the moment of the Hellenistic unification of the East (335 B.C.E.). The medieval era, therefore, includes the Hellenistic (including Roman), Byzantine, Islamic (including Ottoman), and Western Christian (feudal) worlds.

The choice of the conventional division at the end of the Roman Empire betrays a deeply rooted preconception that the Christian era marks a qualitative decisive break in world history, when in fact it does not. The break is certainly important for Europe, because it corresponds to the gradual passage from the age of Celtic, Germanic, and Slavic barbarism to organized class society, here in its feudal form. Yet, it is not significant for the Byzantine and Islamic East. Its use in this context is Eurocentric and improper. The same holds true, *mutatis mutandis*, for the break represented by the *Hijra*. It obviously does not have the same meaning for the Islamized East—Egypt and Persia—as it does for the Arabian Peninsula.

Secondly, the transition from antiquity to the medieval era does not correspond to any important transformation of the dominant mode of production, such as, for example, a passage from slavery to feudalism.

Third, the proposed division therefore belongs to the domain of the history of ideas and ideological formations. This proposition is the logical consequence of the preceding one. In a certain way, this break is thus relative. My thesis is that the elaboration of the ideology of the long tributary period begins slowly in the civilized Orient (or, to be more precise, in the civilized "Orient") and gradually takes shape in a more coherent, more consistent, and, to a certain extent, definitive fashion beginning in the Hellenistic period. It, thus, passes through successive or coexistent forms as it crystallizes: Hellenistic, Byzantine, Islamic, and Western Christian.

Fourth, the transition from the medieval period to the modern age really corresponds to the passage to the capitalist mode of production. The status of religion within the system of ideas, as well as that of science, philosophy, and social ethics, becomes the object of radical reinterpretation.

III. TRIBUTARY CULTURE IN OTHER REGIONS OF THE PRE-CAPITALIST WORLD

Is the thesis outlined above concerning the central and peripheral forms of tributary culture applicable solely to the Euro-Arab-Islamic region of the world?

The Afro-Asiatic world is the non-Western, non-Christian world *par excellence*. It is also diverse, having Confucian, Taoist, Buddhist, Hindu, Islamic, and animist roots. Here, religion defined the great cultural regions in the periods preceding the modern expansion of capitalism. In comparison with this cultural plurality, the ethnic categories that nineteenth-century European anthropology and historiography tried to impose, such as the Indo-European/Semite opposition, do not carry any real weight.

If Orientalist Eurocentrism has fabricated *ex nihilo* the myth of the "Orient," this myth cannot be countered with a corresponding, inverted Afro-Asianist myth, but only with specific and concrete analyses of each of the sociocultural areas in the two continents. We must also avoid the two stumbling blocks of affirming immutable "traits" (of Confucianism, Islam, and so on), which easily lead to the trap of culturalism and nationalism, and of developing fragile judgments from these characteristics. To take just one example, Confucianism—formerly considered to be the cause of China's backwardness—has

become in recent years the explanation for its economic take-off as well as for the Japanese and Korean "miracles."

In what follows, I will not pretend to analyze the formation of tributary ideology in each of the cultural areas enumerated. I only wish to show, on the basis of the Confucian example, the extent to which the hypothesis I have derived from Euro-Arab-Islamic history can be fruitful.

1.

Confucianism, with its great systemic character, is the fully developed ideology of a fully developed tributary society, China. It is a lay philosophy, not a religion, although it has a religious undertone in that it attributes the character of a permanent human necessity to social hierarchy, following from an implicit sociopsychology that today may seem banal. The finished character of this ideology, in conjunction with the fully developed nature of the corresponding tributary mode of production, explains the great resistance it made to change (just as is the case in the West today with the ideology of economic alienation). For China to go beyond Confucianism, it has been necessary for it to go beyond the capitalist stage by means of a socialist revolution, until finally, beginning with the Cultural Revolution, this ideology could begin to lose ground.

Japan, the only non-European area of advanced capitalism, provides an exceptional field of study for a necessarily non-Eurocentric analysis of the relationships between ideology and base in social transformation.

Many contradictory remarks are made about Japan: it has lost its national character and preserved only a hollow shell or, on the contrary, it has juxtaposed or even integrated its own system of values (paternalism in enterprise, for example) with the demands of the law of profit. In fact, it can be argued that Japan advanced directly to the fully developed ideology of capitalism, with its characteristic form of market alienation, because it did not undergo the transitional phase of bourgeois individualism through which Europe passed during the Christian Reformation.

Capitalist Japan replaced an incomplete tributary society, feudal in nature. The ideology of this society was in part borrowed from China, the center of the regional civilization, though the unfinished character of the Japanese tributary system prevented it from adopting China's entire ideological construct. The relative success of Buddhism in Japan is a proof of this incomplete character of the Japanese tributary system. Buddhism, a reaction to Hinduism, is analogous to the Semitic religions in its doctrines concerning the separation of humankind and nature. But Buddhism failed in India and never managed to make a mark on Chinese ideology. Only in Japan did it succeed. However, the elements of pre-capitalist Japanese ideology, because they were non-European, were more difficult to integrate successfully into the new capitalist ideology. Japanese capitalist ideology rejuvenated above all the strictly Chinese elements of the earlier tributary ideology, as the advanced capitalist mode of production rejoined the tributary mode, the transparency of the levy on surplus reappearing with the centralization of capital.

Michio Morishima has effectively elucidated the peripheral character of the Japanese Confucianism of the *Tokugawa Bakufu*, which parallels Japanese feudalism, itself a peripheral form of the tributary mode.⁹ While Chinese Confucianism, with its stress on goodness and humanism, gave rise to a civil imperial bureaucracy, the Japanese version, based upon a loyalty understood as submission to the orders of superiors, facilitated the development of a feudal military bureaucracy that became nationalistic in the modern age, just as the capitalist labor market became the modern version of a "loyalty market," in Morishima's apt phrase.

One of the remarkable elements of Confucianism is, as I have noted, its civil and nonreligious character, which makes it not unlike Hellenism. Hellenism, however, gave way to religious formulations, both Christian and Islamic, because they better satisfied popular metaphysical aspirations. In China, this religious need was expressed through peasant Taoism, a form of shamanism that provided "recipes" for acting on supernatural forces. The enlightened ruling class, however, made it a point of honor not to follow these practices: If super-

natural forces exist, which is understood to be the case, the perfect Confucian must abandon the vain ambition of attempting to manipulate them. Confucianism is, thus indeed, a metaphysics, in the sense that it does not call into question the existence of supernatural forces; but with its sober nobility, it is a metaphysics of a type rarely equaled. While the Hellenistic and religious formulations succeed each other in time in the Euro-Arab region, they coexist in China, each having its own public: for the elites there is a nonreligious formulation, for the people a religious one. This characteristic has perhaps been an additional factor in the flexibility and, hence, longevity of the tributary cultural system in the region. But it has also, perhaps, been a factor in the relative openness of these societies to foreign contributions (Western science in Japan, Marxism in China), which were not forced to clash with rigid religious beliefs. In China, the complementary pairing of Confucianism and Taoism operated with the smoothness characteristic of a finished tributary civilization. In Japan, the Confucian element—reduced to obedience to hierarchy—fused with Shintoism, a somewhat simplified Japanese version of Taoism, in which the deified emperor stands at the pinnacle of the hierarchy of power, symbolizing supernatural forces. The crudeness of this construct necessarily left a feeling of great dissatisfaction, which accounts for the success of Buddhist humanism among the popular masses.

The structural relationship between China and Japan—constituting a center/periphery relationship analogous to that of East and West in the Mediterranean region, as much at the level of modes of production (Japanese feudalism corresponding to that of barbarian Europe) as at the level of ideology—has produced the same “miracle” witnessed in the Mediterranean region: the rapid maturation of capitalist development at the periphery of the system. To my mind, this parallel development constitutes definitive proof of the value of seeking universal laws that transcend local particularities. It also proves that the hypothesis of unequal development has indisputable fecundity and usefulness in this domain. If this hypothesis is accepted and employed, all Eurocentric visions of European uniqueness collapse.

Another circumstance invites us to pursue our analysis of the cultural dimension further. The entire Confucian cultural area has advanced either to capitalism, with seeming success (in Japan, South Korea, and Taiwan), or to so-called socialist revolution (China, North Korea, and Vietnam). In contrast, in the other cultural areas of Asia and Africa—the Hindu, Buddhist, Islamic, and animist worlds—despite analogous and at times even more favorable objective conditions, neither self-contained capitalist development nor revolution seems to be the order of the day. From this we should not conclude that the dominant ideologies in these areas, notably Islam and Hinduism, constitute absolute barriers to the crystallization of an effective and revolutionary response to the historical challenges these societies face. Islam, among other ideologies, has proven itself as flexible as its rival twin, Christianity; an Islamic “bourgeois revolution” is both necessary and possible, even though the concrete circumstances of the region’s contemporary history have not allowed it so far.

Nevertheless, it is appropriate to ask whether or not Confucianism presented any relative advantages that can account for the rapid and positive evolution of the region. The civil character of Confucian ideology seems to represent one such advantage. As a result of it, Confucian societies knew only two social realities—the family on the microsocial level and the nation on the macrosocial plane—and, therefore, only two legitimate loyalties: familial devotion and service to the state. In a world where response to the challenge of unequal capitalist expansion requires a popular national revolution and initiative at the base, this is perhaps also an advantage. By comparison, one has only to think of the fluctuating character of Arab-Islamic revolts, oscillating between the poles of Arab nationalism and Islamic fundamentalism, or of the debilitating fragmentation caused by religious conflicts and ethnic affiliations.

2.

Buddhism produces a quasi-secular metaphysics, analogous in many respects to Confucian and Hellenistic metaphysics. Hellenism, in fact, was inspired by Buddhist thought, encountered in Afghanistan. The

Buddha is in effect only a sage, drawing his knowledge by his own effort from within himself; he does not claim to be an inspired prophet. Moreover, like Confucius and the secular Hellenistic philosophers, the Buddha doubts that such a category of inspired beings can be taken seriously. He, therefore, concludes that humanity must elaborate its own morality without recourse to revelation, deriving its wisdom from the wisdom of human beings.

The conclusions that the Buddha reaches have the same fundamental content as those that define tributary metaphysics. The morality Buddhism proposes is universal in scope, addressing all of humanity, standing above the various religious faiths, which are not of great importance since the search for God is illusory and supernatural forces will necessarily remain unknowable. The enormous tolerance that these propositions imply is to the credit of Buddhist thought, contrasting sharply with the outbursts of fanatical fever that the so-called revealed religions frequently inspire. Furthermore, in Confucian fashion, the Buddhist morality of the "golden mean" assures respect for a conservative-reformist social order, necessary for the reproduction of tributary society.

Agnosticism in the realm of the divine does not preclude recognizing an individualized, eternal, responsible soul. In Buddhist thought, this conclusion results from the logic of sage human reflection. Born in the Hindu world, Buddhism borrowed the Hindu belief in metempsychosis. Simultaneously, the elitism characteristic of tributary ideology produced a doctrine that greatly resembles Egyptian gnosticism. Human beings are classified into two groups: "monks," capable of practicing the morality of the golden mean and of reconciling reason and metaphysical wisdom, and "commoners," content with a weakened version of social morality.

It is interesting to note that Buddhism, after having rallied vast Asiatic areas in India and China to its philosophy, ended up in retreat in these two societies. In India, Hinduism, having presented itself as a true religion, has repressed Buddhist interpretations, however respectful of local liturgies they may be (albeit with a shade of elitist contempt). This retreat of Buddhism might be compared with that of Hellenism, which was battered by Christianity. In China, the waning

of Buddhism might perhaps be explained by its close proximity to Confucianism, which benefited from having been produced by the national culture. This double ebbing of Buddhism in India and China has been accompanied by a shift in the interpretation of Buddhism, which has come to have the status of a quasi-religion in the regions where it has survived, from Tibet to the Southeast Asia. Its fate may serve as an example of the difficulty faced by any secular metaphysics.

PART THREE

The Culture of Capitalism

I. INTRODUCTION

1.

With the Renaissance begins the twofold radical transformation that shapes the modern world: the crystallization of capitalist society in Europe and the European conquest of the world. These are two dimensions of the same development, and theories that separate them in order to privilege one over the other are not only insufficient and distorting but also, frankly, unscientific. The new world is freed from the domination of metaphysics at the same time as the material foundations for capitalist society are laid. In this way, the cultural revolution of the modern world opens the way for an explosion of scientific progress and its systematic use in the service of the development of the forces of production, and for the formation of a secularized society that can successfully carry the democratic aspiration to its conclusion. Simultaneously, Europe becomes conscious of the universal scope of its civilization, henceforth capable of conquering the world.

This new world is, for the first time in the long history of humanity, progressively unified by the fundamental rules of the capitalist economic system and founded upon the domination of private enterprise, wage labor, and free trade. It is also distinguished by the ration-

al character of the decisions that direct not only the new enterprises but also the policies of states and of groups. These latter no longer shape their choices by the earlier exclusive logic of power but rather by economic interest, henceforth the single decisive principle. The new rationality calls for the democratic management of society and the supremacy of reason and gives rise, by force of conquest, to a unification of aspirations for a certain type of consumption and organization in social life.

In its cultural dimension, this revolution imposes itself in every domain of thought and social life, including the area of religion, whose mission is reinterpreted in conformity with the demands of the new society. Does this religious revolution not show that metaphysical belief is potentially plastic and that it is not a transhistorical cultural constant? Or rather, as some think, did only Christianity possess this flexibility?

Undoubtedly, the aspiration for rationality and universalism is not the product of the modern world. Not only has rationality always accompanied human action, but the universal concept of the human being, transcending the limits of his or her collective membership (in a race, a people, a gender, a social class) had already been produced by the great tributary ideologies, as we have seen. However, despite this, universalism had remained only a potential before the development of European capitalism, because no society had succeeded in imposing itself and its values on a worldwide scale.

For the Renaissance is not only the moment of the break with tributary ideology. It is also the point of departure for the conquest of the world by capitalist Europe. It is no coincidence that 1492 marks both the discovery of the New World and the beginnings of the Renaissance. If the period of the Renaissance marks a qualitative break in the history of humanity, it is precisely because, from that time on, Europeans become conscious of the idea that the conquest of the world by their civilization is henceforth a possible objective. They, therefore, develop a sense of absolute superiority, even if the actual submission of other peoples to Europe has not yet taken place. Europeans draw up the first true maps of the planet. They know of all

the peoples who inhabit it, and they are the only ones to have this advantage. They know that even if a particular empire still has the military means to defend itself, they will ultimately be able to develop more powerful capabilities. From this moment on, and not before, Eurocentrism crystallizes.

We now know that the social formation that develops in Europe at this time is new, and that it is a capitalist system. We also know that this new mode of economic and social organization exhibited a conquering dynamism greatly disproportionate to that of all earlier societies. Unquestionably, the embryonic forms of capitalism (private enterprise, market exchange, and free wage labor) had existed for a long time in the Mediterranean, particularly in the Arab-Islamic and Italian regions. The Mediterranean system, which I discussed in the first part of this work, formed, in a certain way, the prehistory of the capitalist world system. Nevertheless, this Mediterranean system did not make the qualitative leap forward to a completed capitalist form. On the contrary, the driving forces of development emigrate from the shores of the Mediterranean toward the peripheral regions of the European Atlantic northwest, thereby crossing the divide that separates the prehistory of capitalism from its later flourishing. The capitalist world system is, therefore, fashioned around the Atlantic, marginalizing, in turn, the old Mediterranean center.

In a certain way, then, capitalism as a potential world system did not exist until there existed a consciousness of its conquering power. In the thirteenth century, Venice was already organized along capitalist lines. But the Venetian merchants did not understand their society in these terms, and they also did not even suspect that their system was capable of conquering the world. During the Crusades, Christians and Muslims each believed themselves to be the keepers of the superior religious faith, but at this stage of their evolution, as evidence has proven, neither one was capable of imposing its global vision on the other. That is why the judgments of the Christians, at the time of the Crusades, are no more "Eurocentric" than those of the Muslims are "Islamocentric." Dante relegated Mohammed to Hell, but this was not a sign of a Eurocentric conception of the world, contrary to what

Edward Said has suggested.¹ It is only a case of banal provincialism, which is something quite different, because it is symmetrical in the minds of the two opposing parties.

Maxime Rodinson has shown the difference that separates the medieval European vision of Islam—a vision woven from ignorance and fear, but not expressing any feeling of intrinsic European superiority, notwithstanding its view of the superiority of its own religious belief—from the Eurocentric arrogance of modern times.² Eurocentrism is much more than a banal manifestation of this type: It implies a theory of world history and, departing from it, a global political project.

Things begin to change with the Renaissance because a new consciousness forms in the European mind. It does not matter that at this stage, and for a long time to come, this consciousness is not the one we have today: namely, that the basis for European superiority and for its conquest of the world lies in the capitalist mode of organization of its society. At the time of their ascent, the Europeans did not understand their new reality in this way. One might say that they did not know they were building capitalism. At the time, Europeans attributed their superiority to other things: to their “Europeanness,” their Christian faith, or their rediscovered Greek ancestry—which is not by chance rediscovered at this point. Eurocentrism in its entirety had already developed. In other words, the appearance of the Eurocentric dimension of modern ideology preceded the crystallization of the other dimensions that define capitalism.

The subsequent unfolding of the history of the capitalist conquest of the world showed that this conquest was not going to bring about a homogenization of the societies of the planet on the basis of the European model. On the contrary, this conquest progressively created a growing polarization at the heart of the system, crystallizing the capitalist world into fully developed centers and peripheries incapable of closing the ever widening gap, and making this contradiction within actually existing capitalism—a contradiction insurmountable within the framework of the capitalist system—the major and most explosive contradiction of our time.

2.

The new world is capitalist: it defines and recognizes itself according to the characteristics of this mode of production. But the dominant ideology that it generates cannot be organized around a lucid recognition of this nature without risking the loss of its legitimizing function. To admit the capitalist nature of the new system would be to admit that it has real, historical limits, which it will one day confront, and to underscore its internal contradictions. A dominant ideology must remove this type of destructive doubt from its field of vision. It must succeed in affirming itself as a system founded on eternal truths with a transhistorical vocation.

The dominant ideology of the new world, therefore, fulfills three complementary and indissolubly linked functions. First, this ideology obscures the essential nature of the capitalist mode of production. Indeed, it replaces a lucid awareness of the economic alienation on which the reproduction of capitalist society is founded with a discourse of transhistorical, instrumental rationality.

Secondly, the ideology deforms the vision of the historical genesis of capitalism, by refusing to consider this genesis from the perspective of a search for general laws of the evolution of human society; instead, it replaces this search with a twofold mythic construct. On the one hand, it amplifies the uniqueness of so-called European history, while, on the other hand, it endows the history of other peoples with opposing "unique" traits. In this way, it succeeds in concluding that the miracle of capitalism could only have been a European one.

Thirdly, the dominant ideology refuses to link the fundamental characteristics of actually existing capitalism—that is, the center/periphery polarization, inseparable from the system itself—to capitalism's worldwide process of reproduction. Here, capitalist ideology gets off cheaply by simply refusing to take the world as a unit of analysis, thus allowing it to attribute inequalities among its constituent national components to exclusively internal causes. In so doing, it confirms its own preconception regarding the specific, transhistorical characteristics of different peoples.

In this way, the dominant ideology legitimates at one and the same time the existence of capitalism as a social system and the worldwide inequality that accompanies it. This European ideology is constructed in stages from the Renaissance through the Enlightenment up until the nineteenth century by the invention of the eternal truths required for this legitimation. The “Christianophile” myth, the myth of Greek ancestry, and the artificial, antithetical construct of Orientalism define the new European and Eurocentric culturalism, thereby condemning it irremediably to consort with its damned soul: ineradicable racism.

Marxism is constituted as part of a contradictory movement that is at once the continuation of the philosophy of the Enlightenment and a break with this philosophy. To its credit, it successfully demystifies the fundamental economism of the dominant ideology, to such an extent that after Marx it is no longer possible to think the way people did before him. But Marxism encounters limits that it always finds difficult to surmount: it inherits a certain evolutionist perspective that prevents it from tearing down the Eurocentric veil of the bourgeois evolutionism against which it revolts. This is the case because the real historical challenge confronting actually existing capitalism remains poorly understood. In its polarizing worldwide expansion, capitalism has proposed a homogenization of the world that it cannot achieve.

The impasse is total from this point on. The contemporary world reacts to the challenge by a desperate evasion, in a twofold culturalist involution, Eurocentric and provincial in the West, and “inverted Eurocentric” in the Third World. More than ever, the need for a universalism capable of meeting the challenge makes a critical examination of both of these modes of thought necessary.

II. THE DECLINE OF METAPHYSICS AND THE REINTERPRETATION OF RELIGION

1.

The Renaissance breaks with medieval thought. Modern thought distinguishes itself from that of the medieval period by renouncing the dominant metaphysical preoccupation. The importance of partial truths is systematically valorized, while the pursuit of absolute knowledge is left to amateurs. As a result, scientific research in the different domains of the knowable universe is stimulated, and because this research necessarily involves the submission of facts to empirical testing, the break between science and technology becomes relative. Simultaneously, modern science recognizes the decisive value of inductive reasoning, thereby putting an end to the errors of a reason confined strictly to deduction. It is easy now to see the relationship between this revision of intellectual priorities and the demands of the development of the forces of production in the nascent capitalist system. The earlier definition of philosophy, which, since Hellenism, had made philosophy synonymous with metaphysics, gives way to one that is inclusive and even eclectic, encompassing any reflection that is the least bit general: reflections concerning either the systems of logic that govern known phenomena or their reflections in our ways of rea-

soning, or the systems of aesthetic or moral value, or even the systems derived (however improperly) from social evolutions, such as the philosophy of history.

The reason for the eclecticism of these juxtapositions cannot be found only in the opportunism of the nascent bourgeoisie, whose conciliatory spirit toward the established authorities—the absolute monarchy and the church—is well known. There is also the fact that the scholastic metaphysical construct had integrated moral preoccupation with the yearning for cosmogonic knowledge. These are two profound, permanent tendencies, immanent to the human condition and consequently ineradicable. Undoubtedly, a few simplifications in the nineteenth century, the era of a triumphant bourgeoisie that no longer feared either its past masters or even the forces of the future, sought to erase moral preoccupations. American functionalism quickly moved to reduce them to banal and immediate expressions of social needs, objects of “scientific” analysis from which individuals should be “liberated” (or is it manipulated?) through “education.” As for cosmogonies, which always provoke a smile, the task of maintaining that heritage has been left to the astrologers (who, of course, have never lost their job).

European Enlightenment philosophy defined the essential framework for the ideology of the European capitalist world. This philosophy is founded on a tradition of mechanistic materialism that posits chains of causal determinations. Principal among these is that science and technology determine by their autonomous progress the advance of all spheres of social life. Class struggle is removed from history and replaced by a mechanistic determination that imposes itself as an external force, a law of nature. This crude materialism, often opposed to idealism, is in fact its twin: these two ideologies are the two sides of the same coin. The claim that God (Providence) guides humanity on the road of progress or that science fulfills this function amounts to the same thing: conscious, non-alienated people, along with social classes, disappear from the scene.

For this reason, this materialism often has religious expression (witness the Freemasons or belief in the Supreme Being). It is also

why the two ideologies reconcile themselves without any problem: in the United States, crass materialism determines social behavior (and its “scientific” explanation), while religious idealism survives intact in the American soul. Bourgeois social science has never gone beyond this crass materialism, because it is necessary for the reproduction of the alienation that allows the exploitation of labor by capital. It leads necessarily to the domination of market values, which penetrate all aspects of social life and subject them to their logic. Science, technology, and organization as ideologies find their place here. At the same time, this philosophy pushes to the limit of absurdity its affirmation of a separation—in fact, opposition—between humankind and nature. It is, on this level, the direct opposite of Hinduism, if Hinduism is defined by the stress it places on the unity of humankind and nature. Bourgeois materialism opens the way to treating nature as a thing, even to destroying it, thereby threatening the very survival of humanity, as ecology is beginning to show us.

The autonomy of civil society is the first characteristic of the new modern world. This autonomy is founded on the separation of political authority and economic life, made opaque by the generalization of market relationships. It constitutes the qualitative difference between the new capitalist mode and all precapitalist formations. The concepts of autonomous political life, modern democracy, and social science result from this autonomy of civil society. For the first time, society appears to be governed by laws outside of human or royal will. The evidence for this is most immediately apparent at the level of economic relationships. From now on, the attempt to discover social laws is no longer, as it was until the time of ibn Khaldun and Montesquieu, the product of a disinterested curiosity; it is a matter of urgent necessity for the management of capitalism. It is, therefore, not by chance that the new social science is constructed on the base of this all-pervasive economics.

Secularism is the direct consequence of this new autonomy of civil society, for entire areas of social life are, henceforth, conceivable independently of one another. The need to satisfy metaphysical yearnings is left to individual conscience, and religion loses its status as a force

of formal constraint. Contrary to a widespread Eurocentric preconception, however, secularism is not peculiar to Christian society, which demanded its liberation from the heavy yoke of the church. Nor is it the result of the conflict between the "national" state and a church with a universal vocation. For during the Reformation, the church is in fact "national" in its various forms—Anglican, Lutheran, and so forth. Nevertheless, the new fusion of church and state does not produce a new theocracy, but rather, one might say, a religious secularism. Secularism, even though the reactionary ecclesiastical forces fought it, did not root out belief. It even, perhaps, reinforced it in the long run, by freeing it of its formalist and mythological straightjackets. Christians of our time, whether or not they are intellectuals, have no problem accepting that humankind descended from apes and not from Adam and Eve.

The areas of natural science also enjoy a new autonomy, an obvious result of the weakening of metaphysical beliefs. The impulse to unify the various fields of knowledge in an all-encompassing cosmogony diminishes to the point that it becomes repugnant to scientific minds. Philosophy, once more a philosophy of nature, is content to produce a synthesis of the knowledge of the moment, a synthesis that is, therefore, always relative and provisional. Of course, the temptation to move from the relative to the absolute, nevertheless, continues to do some damage here and there. The most advanced sciences of the moment, those that are most revolutionary in their propositions, upsetting old opinions or creating pronounced material progress, tend to be imperialist, annexing more fragile areas of knowledge. Thus, mechanics, the theory of Darwin, and the discovery of the atom are hastily linked to, respectively, medicine, politics, and economic life.

The new society is not, for all of that, paradise gained. Human anxiety can no more be cured by a vague positivist scientism than it could be by cosmogony or rationalizing metaphysics. Moreover, the new society remains a class society, a society marked by continual exploitation and oppression. The yearning for another society—for Utopia, as it is called—fuses with the ever-present moral preoccupation.

2.

While modern ideology frees itself from the dictatorship of metaphysics, it does not as a result suppress religious needs. The importance of metaphysical concerns (men and women being, we might say, “metaphysical animals”) requires that we examine the interaction between the existence of religion, the expression of this preoccupation, and social evolution. Such an examination must depart from a perspective other than that of theology, which considers the claims of religious dogma as the immutable, defining characteristics of religion. Religions are, in fact, ideologically flexible and open to historical change.

Religions regulate two sets of problems: relations between people and nature, and relationships among people. Religions, therefore, have a double nature, for they are at once an expression of a transhistorical human alienation and a means for legitimizing social orders shaped by historical conditions.

Different religions treat the relationship between humankind and nature in different ways, claiming either that it is a human vocation to dominate nature, or that humanity is an integral part of nature. There is a risk of making absolute judgments if too much emphasis is placed on this aspect of religion, as if this single trait constituted the essential determinant of the social evolution of religion. From this error derive the sharp, cutting judgments that have been made about Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, Confucianism, Taoism, and animism, claims that certain religious conceptions were openings to progress and others obstacles. Experience shows the vanity of these judgments, which can always be inverted.

In fact, the plasticity of religions and the possibility of adapting them in ways that allow them to justify differing relationships among people invite us to ponder the fact that ideologies formed at one moment in history can subsequently acquire vocations very different from those of their origins. To this extent, religions are transhistorical, for they can readily outlast the social conditions of their birth.

For this reason, to assert that Christianity, Islam, or Confucianism is the ideology of feudalism or the tributary mode, for example, is to

make a fundamental error. These religions, in one particular interpretation, may play or have played such a role; but they may also function as ideologies of capitalism, as Christianity has in fact done through a reinterpretation of its mission.

In this domain, Eurocentrism rests upon teleology: namely, that the entire history of Europe necessarily led to the blossoming of capitalism to the extent that Christianity, regarded as a European religion, was more favorable than other religions to the flourishing of the individual and the exercise of his or her capacity to dominate nature. The corresponding claim is that Islam, Hinduism, or Confucianism, for example, constituted obstacles to the social change necessary for capitalist development. Their plasticity is, therefore, denied, either because it is reserved solely for Christianity, or even because it is believed that Christianity carried the seeds of capitalist advancement within it from the beginning.

It is necessary, therefore, to reexamine, within the framework of analysis I have proposed, the revolution that Christianity has realized, one that cannot be qualified as a "bourgeois revolution." Certainly, in responding to metaphysical needs, religious faith transcends social systems. But religion is also the concrete social product of the conditions that preside over its birth. Progressive forces, which accept or even call for social change, emphasize the first of these aspects (whenever they also seek to save beliefs) and relativize the second through the free interpretation of sacred texts. Christianity, confronted with the birth of modern thought, underwent this revolution and separated itself from medieval scholasticism.

In fact, the formation of the ideology of capitalism went through different stages: the first was the adaptation of Christianity, notably by means of the Reformation. But this transformation only represented a first step, limited to certain regions of the European cultural area. Because capitalism developed early in England, its bourgeois revolution took on a religious, and therefore particularly alienated, form. Masters of the real world, the English bourgeoisie did not feel the need to develop a philosophy. They contented themselves with empiricism, which complemented their crude materialism; nothing more was

needed to ensure the development of the forces of production. English political economy had this empiricism as its counterpart, functioning in place of a philosophy. However, Protestantism did not play the same role on the European continent as it did in England, because the development of capitalism was not sufficiently advanced there. The second wave of the formation of capitalist ideology had, as a result, a more directly philosophical and political cast. Neither Protestantism nor Catholicism functioned as the specific ideology of capitalism.

In fact, it was quite some time before the ideology specific to capitalism detached itself from the earlier forms that had allowed the passage to capitalism. Economic alienation is its primary content, whose characteristic expression—supply and demand as external forces regulating society—exemplifies its mystified and mystifying nature. Once the ideology of capitalism reaches this stage of development, it abandons its earlier forms or empties them of their content.

Let me add a few comments to these observations concerning the potential flexibility of religions, departing from the historical experience of Christianity and its relationship with European society.

First observation: my thesis is not Weber's, but the thesis of a Weber stood on his feet, to borrow Marx's famous observation regarding Hegel. Weber considers capitalism to be the product of Protestantism. I am suggesting quite the opposite: that society, transformed by the nascent capitalist relationships of production, was forced to call the tributary ideological construct, the construct of medieval scholasticism, into question. It was, therefore, real social change that brought about transformation in the field of ideas, creating the conditions for the appearance of the ideas of the Renaissance and modern philosophy as it imposed a readjustment of religious belief—not the reverse. It took two or three centuries before the new dominant ideology crystallized, the period of transition from mercantilism to fully developed capitalism, extending from the sixteenth to the nineteenth century. The decisive step is the development of English political economy, at the moment when the Industrial Revolution and the French Revolution brought about the triumph of bourgeois power and the beginnings of the generalization of wage

labor. The center of gravity shifts from metaphysics to economics, and economism becomes the content of the dominant ideology. Does not the person in the street believe, today more so than ever, that his or her fate depends on these laws of supply and demand, which determine prices, employment, and all the rest, just as Providence did in earlier times?

Second observation: the religious revolution takes place on its own terms. It is not the reasoned expression of an adaptation to new times, and even less the work of cynical and clever prophets. Luther calls for a return to the source. That is to say, he interprets medieval scholasticism as a “deviation” (a term that is always dear to ideological debate). He does not propose to go beyond this scholasticism, but to erase it in order to restore the purity (mythic) of its origins. This ambiguity in the religious revolution is not peculiar to the case in question. The nature of the metaphysical need to which religious belief responds always implies this distorted form of adaptation of religious belief to the demands of the times. At the same time, the ambiguity of the bourgeois revolution at the level of real society—a revolution that dethrones the tributary power and appeals to the people for help in doing so, but only in order to exploit them more efficiently in the new capitalist order—entails the stormy coexistence of the “bourgeois Reformation” and so-called heresies.

Third observation: today, we are perhaps witnessing the beginning of a second revolution in Christianity. The growing influence of the texts and beliefs of liberation theology seems to be an adaptation of Christianity to the socialist world of tomorrow. It is not by chance that this theology of liberation has been most successful in the Christian peripheries of the contemporary worlds—in Latin America, in the Philippines—and not in its advanced centers.

III. THE CONSTRUCTION OF EUROCENTRIC CULTURE

I.

Modern ideology was not constructed in the abstract ether of the pure capitalist mode of production. In fact, consciousness of the capitalist nature of the modern world came relatively late, as a result of the labor and socialist movements and their critique of nineteenth-century social organization, culminating in Marxism. At the moment when this consciousness emerged, modern ideology already had three centuries of history behind it, from the Renaissance through the Enlightenment. It had, therefore, expressed itself as a particularly European, rationalist, and secular ideology, while claiming a worldwide scope. The socialist critique, far from forcing bourgeois ideology to take a better measure of its historical scope and social content, led it, beginning in the nineteenth century, to strengthen its culturalist side. The Eurocentric dimension of the dominant ideology was placed even more in relief.

This dominant culture invented an eternal West, unique since the moment of its origin. This arbitrary and mythic construct had as its counterpart an equally artificial conception of the Other (the Orient), likewise constructed on mythic foundations. The product of this

Eurocentric vision is the well-known version of Western history—a progression from Ancient Greece to Rome to feudal Christian Europe to capitalist Europe—one of the most popular of received ideas. Elementary school books and popular opinion are as or even more important in the creation and diffusion of this construct as the most erudite theses developed to justify the ancestry of European culture and civilization.

This construct, like the analogous Orientalist construct: (1) removes Ancient Greece from the very milieu in which it unfolded and developed—the Orient—in order to annex Hellenism to Europe arbitrarily; (2) retains the mark of racism, the fundamental basis on which European cultural unity was constructed; (3) interprets Christianity, also annexed arbitrarily to Europe, as the principal factor in the maintenance of European cultural unity, conforming to an unscientific vision of religious phenomena; and (4) concurrently constructs a vision of the Near East and the more distant Orient on the same racist foundation, again employing an immutable vision of religion.

These four elements combined in different ways at different times. Eurocentrism is not, properly speaking, a social theory, which integrates various elements into a global and coherent vision of society and history. It is rather a prejudice that distorts social theories. It draws from its storehouse of components, retaining one or rejecting another according to the ideological needs of the moment. For example, for a long time the European bourgeoisie was distrustful—even contemptuous—of Christianity, and, because of this, amplified the myth of Greece. In what follows, I will examine the four constituent elements of the Eurocentric construct, showing how emphasis has been placed on different elements.

2.

The myth of Greek ancestry performs an essential function in the Eurocentric construct. It is an emotional claim, artificially constructed in order to evade the real question—why capitalism appeared in Europe before it did elsewhere—by replacing it, amidst a panoply of

false answers, with the idea that the Greek heritage predisposed Europe to rationality. In this myth, Greece was the mother of rational philosophy, while the Orient never succeeded in going beyond metaphysics.

The history of so-called Western thought and philosophy (which presupposes the existence of other, diametrically opposed thoughts and philosophies, which it calls Oriental) always begins with Ancient Greece. Emphasis is placed on the variety and conflicts of the philosophical schools, the development of thought free from religious constraints, humanism, and the triumph of reason—all without any reference to the Orient, whose contribution to Hellenic thought is considered to be nonexistent. According to this view of history, these qualities of Greek thought are taken over by European thought beginning in the Renaissance and come of age in the modern philosophies. The two thousand or so years separating Greek antiquity from the European Renaissance are treated as a long and hazy period of transition in which no one is able to go beyond Ancient Greek thought. Christianity, which is established and conquers Europe during this transition, appears at first as a not very philosophical form of ethics, entangled for a long time in dogmatic quarrels hardly conducive to the development of the mind. It continues with these limitations, until, with the development of scholasticism in the later Middle Ages, it assimilates the newly rediscovered Aristotelianism and, with the Renaissance and Reformation, frees itself from its origins, liberating civil society from the monopoly of religion on thought. Arab-Islamic philosophy is treated in this account as if it had no other function than to transmit the Greek heritage to the Renaissance world. Moreover, Islam, in this dominant vision, could not have gone beyond the Hellenic heritage; even if it had attempted to do so, it would have failed badly.

This construct, whose origins go back to the Renaissance, filled an essential ideological function in the formation of the honest, upright bourgeois citizen, freed from the religious prejudice of the Middle Ages. At the Sorbonne, as at Cambridge, successive generations of the bourgeois elite were nourished on respect for Pericles, a respect that

was even reproduced in elementary school texts. Today this emphasis on Greek ancestry is no longer as strong. Perhaps this is because the fully developed capitalist system has acquired such self-confidence that it can, henceforth, do without this kind of constructed legitimacy.

The construct in question is entirely mythic. Martin Bernal has demonstrated this by retracing the history of what he calls the “fabrication of Ancient Greece.”³ He recalls that the Ancient Greeks were quite conscious that they belonged to the cultural area of the ancient Orient. Not only did they recognize what they had learned from the Egyptians and the Phoenicians, but they also did not see themselves as the “anti-Orient” which Eurocentrism portrays them as being. On the contrary, the Greeks claimed that they had Egyptian ancestors—who were perhaps mythical, though that is beside the point. Bernal shows that the nineteenth-century “Hellenomania” was inspired by the racism of the Romantic movement, whose architects were, moreover, often the same people whom Edward Said cites as the creators of Orientalism. Bernal illustrates how the impulse to remove Ancient Greece from its Levantine context forced linguists into some dubious acrobatics. In fact, up to half of the Greek language was borrowed from the Egyptian and the Phoenician tongues. But linguistics invented a mysterious “Proto-Aryan” language to take the place of this borrowing, thereby safeguarding a myth dear to Eurocentrism, that of the “Aryan purity” of Greece.

The North-South split, running through the Mediterranean—which only replaced the East-West division at a late date, as we have seen—is, therefore, falsely projected backward. This error sometimes yields amusing results. Carthage is a Phoenician city: it is, thus, classified as “Oriental” and the rivalry between Rome and Carthage is said to prefigure the conquest of the “Maghreban Orient” by imperialist Europe—a curious contradiction in terms since *Maghreb* in Arabic means “West.” From the works of apologists for the French colonial conquest to the speeches of Mussolini to the textbooks still in use throughout Europe, this North-South cleavage is presented as permanent, self-evident, and inscribed in geography (and therefore—by implicit false deduction—in history). The annexation of Greece by

Europe—first declared by the artists and thinkers of the Renaissance, then forgotten during the two subsequent centuries of Ottoman expansion, and declared anew by Byron and Hugo at the moment when the rising imperial powers began to divide their spoils—continues to this day with the decision of the contemporary European Community to make Athens the “cultural capital” of Europe. It is amusing to note that this homage comes at the very moment when, due to the effects of the Common Market, the last vestiges of Hellenic identity are in the process of being effaced by the endless waves of tourists, the bearers of homogenizing American mass culture.

To point out this false annexation is not to reduce by one iota the importance of the “Greek miracle” in the philosophy of nature or its spontaneous materialism. However, it should be pointed out that this advance was the product of Greece’s backwardness, which allowed it to make the transition from the communal mode to the tributary one successfully. Marx, whose intuition was often very keen, and well in advance of his time, attributed our sympathy for Greek antiquity to the fact that it recalls our childhood (the childhood of all humanity, not just of Europe); Engels never failed to express an analogous sympathy not only for the “barbarians” of the West but also for the Iroquois and other native peoples of North America, reminders of our even more distant infancy. Later, many anthropologists—European but not Eurocentric—experienced the same feeling for other so-called primitive peoples, undoubtedly for the same reason.

3.

The Renaissance is separated from Classical Greece by fifteen centuries of medieval history. How and on what basis is it possible, under these circumstances, to claim continuity in European culture? The nineteenth century invented the racist hypothesis for this purpose. By borrowing the methods of classification of animal species and of Darwinism and transposing them from Linnaeus, Cuvier, and Darwin to Gobineau and Renan, the human “races” were said to inherit innate characteristics that transcend social evolutions. These

psychological predispositions were presented as more or less the major source of divergent social evolutions. Linguistics, a new science in formation at that time, found its inspiration for the classification of languages in the methods of the biological sciences and associated the supposedly unique characters of peoples with the characteristics of their languages.

The resulting opposition between Indo-European and Semitic (Hebrew and Arab) languages, pompously elevated to a scientifically established and indisputable dogma, constitutes one of the best examples of the lucubrations required for the construction of Eurocentrism. The examples could be multiplied: assertions concerning the innate taste for liberty and free and logical cast of mind of one group, contrasted with the predisposition to servility and the lack of rigor of another, and so forth; or Renan's claims about the "monstrous and backward" character of Semitic languages, opposed to the "perfection" of the European ones. From these premises, Eurocentrism directly deduced the contrast between Oriental philosophies, exclusively directed toward the search for the absolute, and the humanist and scientific philosophies of the West (Ancient Greece and Modern Europe).

The conclusions of the racist thesis were also transposed into the domain of religion. For Christianity, after all, like Islam and other religions, is based on a search for the absolute. Moreover, Christianity was born among Orientals before it conquered the West. It thus becomes necessary to propose subtle, yet allegedly fundamental, differences that make it possible to speak of the essences of Christianity and Islam, beyond their historical expressions and transformations, as if these religions had permanent qualities that transcend history. It is amusing to point to the extent to which these so-called intrinsic characters of peoples are associated with various preconceived ideas that change with the fashion of the day. In the nineteenth century, the alleged inferiority of Semitic Orientals is based on their so-called exuberant sexuality (an association subsequently transferred to black peoples). Today, with the help of psychoanalysis, the same defects of Orientals are attributed to a particularly strong sexual repression! In

this particular case, the old European anti-Semitic prejudice was given the appearance of scientific seriousness by combining Jews and Arabs in a single category.

This racist contrast between Europe and the Semitic Orient was continued with a series of analogous theses, based on the same model of reasoning, that posited similar oppositions between the Europeans and other non-European peoples (blacks and Asiatics). However, the Indo-European foundation, located at the level of linguistics, was being undermined. Indians, for example, scorned because they are underdeveloped and conquered, speak Indo-European languages. Gradually a progression was made from genetic racism (that is to say, based on biology) to a geographic racism (explained by acquired and transmissible traits produced by the geographic milieu). This geographic determinism, widely accepted by politicians, individuals in authority, and popular opinion, has no scientific value whatsoever. Visiting Europe in the fourteenth century, a Europe that was still backward with respect to the Islamic world, the Arab traveler ibn Battuta—not knowing that the course of history would so thoroughly prove him wrong—simply attributed this lag to the inhospitable European climate! The inverse argument obviously has no greater value.

Judgments of this type, which attribute more or less permanent characteristics to a people or group of peoples and consider them to be pertinent elements for explaining their condition and evolution, always proceed from the same superficial method, which consists in drawing totalizing conclusions from single details. Their force depends largely on the detail chosen, which, when it is true and widely recognized, inspires a sweeping conclusion. A more serious analysis must be based on other grounds. The question must first be inverted: Is the alleged defining trait the cause or consequence of historical evolution?

Then, the degree of pertinence of the phenomenon in question must be considered, for it might only be the simple form of expression of a more complex and flexible reality.

This mode of reasoning is not limited exclusively to Eurocentrism. Innumerable discourses on the character of the French, the English,

or the Germans have been constructed in this same manner, outside of time and social development. "European" identity, constructed to distinguish it from the identity of "Others," leads almost necessarily to a search for these European traits among Europeans themselves. Each nation is defined by its closeness or distance from a model type. Lord Cromer speaks for the entire British intellectual and ruling class when he proclaims—as if there were evidence to support the judgment—that the English and the Germans (in that order) are more "European" than, and hence obviously superior to, the French and other Latins, as well as the "semi-Asiatic" Russians. Hitler does little more than reverse the order of priority between the English and the Germans, retaining the rest of the discourse.

The most primitive form of the racist line is somewhat discredited these days. Genetic racism claims that biological traits, sometimes called "racial" characteristics, are the source of cultural diversity and create a hierarchy within that diversity. From the nineteenth century until the rise of Hitler, Europe was steeped in such inanities, even in its educated milieu. But a diluted form of racism persists, assigning durable trans-social effects to conditioning by geography and ecology. More diluted still is cultural racism, which holds that the individuals, whatever their origins, are malleable and, therefore, capable of assimilating another culture: the black child raised in France becomes French.

4.

Recent developments since the Second World War have helped reinforce a sense of common European identity and reduced the emphasis that was previously placed on contrasts between European nations. Simultaneously, racism, especially of the genetic sort, has lost the scientific prestige that it previously had in cultured circles. Europe needed to find a new basis for its collective identity. Europe's predominantly Christian character offered a way out of this double crisis of European nationalism and racism. To my mind, the Christian revival of our period is, at least in part, an unconscious response to this situation.

But in order for Christianity to become the foundation of European identity, a sweeping, totalizing and historical interpretation had to be developed, stressing its alleged timeless characteristics and opposing it to other religions and philosophies, such as Islam and Hinduism. The theoretical presupposition had to be made that these characteristics were pertinent, in the sense that they could constitute the basis for an explanation of social evolutions.

This choice of Christianity as the basis of Europeanness obviously posed some thorny questions for social theory in general and the Eurocentric construct in particular. Since Christianity was not born on the banks of the Loire or the Rhine, it was necessary to assimilate its original form—which was Oriental, owing to the milieu in which it was established—to Eurocentric teleology. The Holy Family and the Egyptian and Syrian Church Fathers had to be made European. Non-Christian Ancient Greece also had to be assimilated into this lineage, by accentuating an alleged contrast between Greece and the ancient Orient and inventing commonalities between these civilized Greeks and the still barbaric Europeans. The core of genetic racism, therefore, remains. But above all, the uniqueness of Christianity had to be magnified and adorned with particular and exclusive virtues that, by simple teleology, account for the superiority of the West and its conquest of other peoples. The Eurocentric construct was, thus, founded on the same interpretation of religion used by all religious fundamentalisms.

Simultaneously, the West sees itself as Promethean *par excellence*, in contrast with other civilizations. Faced with the threat of an untamed nature, primitive humanity had two choices: Blend into nature or deny it. Hinduism, for example, chose the first attitude, which renders human impotence tolerable by reducing humankind to a part of nature. In contrast, Judaism and its later Christian and Islamic heirs proclaimed the original separation of humankind and nature; the superiority of humankind, made in the image of God; and the submission of nature, soulless and reduced to the object of human action. This thesis had the potential to develop into a systematic quest for the domestication of nature; but, at the first stage of development

of the Semitic religions, it only formed an ideal and, with no real means for acting on nature, an appeal is made instead to a protecting God. Christianity also faced this decisive choice, all the more so because it developed in the heart of a advanced, complex society in crisis, leading it to develop the second dimension of religion. The same is true for Islam, especially once it has the responsibility of organizing a new empire.

The West's claim contains a grain of truth, since capitalist civilization is obviously Promethean. But Prometheus was Greek, not Christian. The Eurocentric, so-called Judeo-Christian thesis glosses over what I have tried to highlight, that in the Hellenistic synthesis the Greek contribution is situated precisely at this level. The philosophy of nature calls for action upon nature, in contrast with metaphysics, which inspires a passive attitude of reflection. From this point of view, Christian or Islamic metaphysics is not fundamentally different from the metaphysics of Hinduism, for example. The Egyptian contribution to the Hellenistic construct (in its successive versions up to and including Islam) lies in the accent it places on the moral responsibility of individuals. Christianity is more marked, in a certain respect, by this last contribution, which it develops within universalist ethics stressing the love for human beings and God, than it is by Hellenistic Prometheanism, which is forgotten in the long feudal transition period in the Christian West and does not genuinely reappear until the Renaissance. In Islam, on the other hand, because Arab-Islamic civilization at its height is more advanced than the civilization of Western feudalism, the two contributions remain balanced.

One last remark concerning the ideological veil through which Europe sees itself: Christianity, by which Europe defines itself, is, like Hellenism and Islam, Oriental in origin. But the West has appropriated it, to the point that, in the popular imagination, the Holy Family is blond. It does not matter. This appropriation is not only perfectly legitimate, but has even shown itself to be fruitful. Corresponding to the peripheral character of the European feudal mode of production, this peripheral, appropriated version of Christianity has revealed itself to be remarkably flexible, allowing a rapid passage to the capitalist stage.

5.

“Orientalism” is not the sum of the works of Western specialists and scholars who have studied non-European societies. This clarification is necessary to avoid misunderstandings and quarrels. This term refers to the ideological construction of a mythical Orient, whose characteristics are treated as immutable traits defined in simple opposition to the characteristics of the Occidental world. The image of this opposite is an essential element of Eurocentrism. Edward Said has demonstrated the influence and dominance of this construct. The precision of his argument frees us from having to reproduce its details here.⁴

Once it became capitalist and developed the power to conquer, Europe granted itself the right to represent others—notably the Orient—and even to judge them. This right is not in itself objectionable, except from a provincial standpoint. It is even necessary to go further. The Orient was incapable of representing itself with the same force that Europeans, armed with bourgeois thought, could. The Chinese of the Confucian Empire and the Arabs of the Abbasid Caliphate, like the Europeans of the Middle Ages, could analyze their own society only with the conceptual tools at their disposal, tools defined and limited by their own development.

But the representation that capitalist Europe constructs of others is, in turn, limited by the nature of capitalist development. This development was polarizing; it transformed Europe (along with North America and Japan) into the centers of the system and reduced other regions to the status of peripherals. European representations of others remain marked by this polarization, and in fact serve as a means of justifying it. Orientalism merits reproach for the simple reason that it produced false judgments. The first task for anyone who wishes to construct a genuine universalism is to detect, these errors in order to determine their origins.

The critique of Orientalism that Edward Said has produced has the fault of not having gone far enough in certain respects, and having gone too far in others. Not far enough to the extent that Said is con-

tent with denouncing Eurocentric prejudice without positively proposing another system of explanation for facts which must be accounted for. Too far, to the extent that he suggests that the vision of Europeans was already Eurocentric in the Middle Ages. This error by Said, which Maxime Rodinson has corrected by distinguishing earlier European visions of the Islamic Orient from those of the triumphant Eurocentrism of the nineteenth century, illustrates the danger of applying the concept of Eurocentrism too freely. It also shows that Said has not freed himself entirely from provincialism, leading Sadek Jalal el-Azm to qualify his analysis as "inverted Orientalism."⁵

Complementary to the right of Europeans to analyze others is the equal right of others to analyze the West. The universal right to analyze and critique entails dangers, to be sure, whose risk must nevertheless be assumed. There is the danger of being mistaken, due to ignorance or conceptual shortcomings. But there is also the danger of not knowing how to take the exact measure of the various sensibilities engaged by any given statement and, as a consequence, the danger of becoming involved in false debates where vigorous polemics mask a mutual lack of understanding and impede the advancement of ideas.

Propositions concerning the cultural dimension of social reality lend themselves to this type of danger. There is always the risk of colliding with convictions situated on, for example, the terrain of religious beliefs. If the goal is to advance the project of universalism, this risk must be accepted. It is a right and a duty to analyze texts, whether or not they are considered sacred, and to examine the interpretations that different societies have made of those texts. It is a right and a duty to explore analogies and differences, suggest origins and inspirations, and to point out evolutions. I am persuaded that no one's faith will be shaken as a result. By definition, faith answers needs to which science cannot respond.

Said, for example, cites with disapproval a European Orientalist who compared Islam to the Christian Arian heresy.⁶ The analysis of religions used by the social sciences is not the same as that employed by theology, even comparative theology. The question is whether a given comparison is plausible and well argued or erroneous. It must

be considered at the level of science, which considers religion to be a social fact. In his study on Shiism and Sufism, the Egyptian and practicing Muslim Kamel Mustapha el-Chibi analyzes, without any discomfort, the inter-penetrations of Islam, Christianity, and the other religions of the Orient.⁷ To the extent that he denies the right to make this kind of comparison, Said falls, in my opinion, into the error of provincialism.

6.

In imposing itself on a worldwide scale, capitalism, born in Europe, created a demand for universalism as much at the level of scientific analysis of society as at the level of elaboration of a human project capable of transcending its historical limits. Are the dominant ideology and culture produced by capitalism capable of responding to this challenge? To answer this question, it is obviously necessary at the outset to discover the axioms and theorems on which this ideology is founded and to uncover their corollaries in every domain of social thought—from the conceptions of the contemporary world system that it inspires (underdevelopment and strategies of development) to its visions of world history—just as it is necessary to understand fully the historical limits and contradictions of the system.

The dominant ideology and culture of the capitalist system cannot be reduced solely to Eurocentrism. It is only one dimension of the prevailing ideology, though one that has developed like an invasive cancer suppressing the essential force—that is to say, economism—in the hidden recesses of the corpulent body it has produced. It has replaced rational explanations of history with partial pseudo-theories, patched together and even self-contradictory at times, but which nevertheless function admirably in the construction of a myth that reassures Europeans, ridding their subconscious of any complex about their responsibilities.

But if Eurocentrism does not have, strictly speaking, the status of a theory, neither is it simply the sum of the prejudices, errors, and blunders of Westerners with respect to other peoples. If that were the case,

it would only be one of the banal forms of ethnocentrism shared by all peoples at all times. Ignorance and mistrust of others, even chauvinism and xenophobia, testify to nothing more than the limits of the evolution of all societies that have existed until now.

The Eurocentric distortion that marks the dominant capitalist culture negates the universalist ambition on which that culture claims to be founded. As has been noted, Eurocentrism is a relatively modern construct. Bourgeois Enlightenment culture had asserted itself not only out of universalist aspirations but also as a counterbalance to the universalist ambitions of Christianity.

The culture of the Enlightenment had no particular sympathy for the Christian Middle Ages, a period it qualified as obscurantist. Its praise for rediscovered Greco-Roman antiquity was, at least in part, intended not so much as a means of constructing a new sense of European identity, but as a way of denouncing the obscurantism of the Christian church. But Enlightenment culture confronted a real contradiction that it could not overcome by its own means. For it was self-evident that nascent capitalism, which had produced Enlightenment culture, had unfolded in Europe. Moreover, this embryonic new world was in fact superior, both materially and in many other aspects, to earlier societies, both in its own territory (feudal Europe) and in other regions of the world (the neighboring Islamic Orient and the more distant Orients, which had just been discovered). The culture of the Enlightenment was unable to reconcile the fact of this superiority with its universalist ambition. On the contrary, it gradually drifted toward racism as an explanation for the contrast between it and other cultures. At the same time, it had little success in harmonizing its original European cosmopolitanism with the nationalist conflicts on which the crystallization of European capitalism came to be based. The culture of the Enlightenment thus drifted, beginning in the nineteenth century, in nationalistic directions, impoverished in comparison with its earlier cosmopolitanism.

Thus, the social theory produced by capitalism gradually reached the conclusion that the history of Europe was exceptional, not in the sense that the modern world (that is to say, capitalism) was constitut-

ed there, which in itself is an undeniable fact, but because it could not have been born elsewhere. This being the case, capitalism in its Western model formed the superior prototype of social organization, a model that could be reproduced in other societies that have not had the good fortune of having initiated this superior form on the condition that these societies free themselves of the obstacles posed by their particular cultural traits, which were deemed responsible for their backwardness.

The prevailing capitalist ideology thinks that this view restores the earlier universalist aspirations of Christianity, against which it had revolted in an earlier time. For Christianity, like Islam, Buddhism, and a few other religions, had been nurtured on a universalist yearning. These religions hold that the human being is by nature a creature whose vocation is identical from one individual to another. By an act of deep-seated conviction, anyone can become a human being of the highest quality, regardless of his or her origins and material and social situation. Undoubtedly, religious societies have not always functioned according to this principle of universalism: Social hypocrisy (justifying inequality) and intolerant fanaticism with regard to other religions and nonbelievers, or simply nonconformists, have been and remain the most frequent rule. But let us stay at the level of principles. The universalist aspirations of Christianity and capitalism, Europeans believed, could unite in the common expression of Western Christian civilization.

Eurocentrism is, like all dominant social phenomena, easy to grasp in the multiplicity of its daily manifestations but difficult to define precisely. Its manifestations, like those of other prevailing social phenomena, are expressed in the most varied of areas: day-to-day relationships between individuals, political information and opinion, general views concerning society and culture, social science. These expressions are sometimes violent, leading all the way to racism, and sometimes subtle. They express themselves in the idiom of popular opinion as well as in the erudite languages of specialists on politics, the Third World, economics, history, theology, and all the formulations of social science. I will, therefore, begin with this set of common ideas and opinions

transmitted by the media, on which a broad consensus exists in the West, in order to summarize the Eurocentric vision.

The European West is not only the world of material wealth and power, including military might; it is also the site of the triumph of the scientific spirit, rationality, and practical efficiency, just as it is the world of tolerance, diversity of opinions, respect for human rights and democracy, concern for equality—at least the equality of rights and opportunities—and social justice. It is the best of the worlds that have been known up until this time. This first thesis, which simply repeats facts which are in themselves hardly debatable, is reinforced by the corollary thesis that other societies—the socialist East and the underdeveloped South—have nothing better to offer on any of the levels mentioned (wealth, democracy, or even social justice). On the contrary, these societies can only progress to the extent that they imitate the West. And this is what they are doing, in any case, even if they are doing it slowly and imperfectly, because of elements of resistance based on outmoded dogmatisms (like Marxism) or anachronistic motivations (like tribalism or religious fundamentalism).

Consequently, it becomes impossible to contemplate any other future for the world than its progressive Europeanization. For the most optimistic, this Europeanization, which is simply the diffusion of a superior model, functions as a necessary law, imposed by the force of circumstances. The conquest of the planet by Europe is thus justified, to the extent that it has roused other peoples from their fatal lethargy. For others, non-European peoples have an alternative choice: either they can accept Europeanization and internalize its demands, or, if they decide against it, they will lead themselves to an impasse that inevitably leads to their decline. The progressive Westernization of the world is nothing more than the expression of the triumph of the humanist universalism invented by Europe.

The Westernization of the world would impose on everyone the adoption of the recipes for European superiority: free enterprise and the market, secularism, and pluralist electoral democracy. It should be noted that this prescription assumes the superiority of the capitalist system, as well as this system's capacity to respond, if not to every pos-

sible challenge in the realm of the absolute, at least to all potential demands on the conceivable horizon of the future. Marxism and the socialist regimes that it has inspired are only avatars of history, brief detours in the forward march toward Westernization and capitalism.

Under these circumstances, the European West has little to learn from others. The most decisive evolutions, destined to shape the future of humanity, continue to have their origin in West, from scientific and technological progress to social advances like the recognition of the equality of men and women, from concern with ecology to the critique of the fragmented organization of labor. The tumultuous events that shake the rest of the world—socialist revolutions, anti-imperialist wars of liberation—are, despite the more radical appearance of the ambitions that nourish them, less decisive for the future than the progress being made almost imperceptibly in the West. These tumultuous events are only the vicissitudes through which the peoples concerned have been compelled to pass in order to attempt to correct their backwardness.

The composite picture of Eurocentrism presented here is, by force of circumstances, simplistic, since it only retains the common denominator of varied and sometimes contradictory opinions.

The political Left and Right in the West, for example, claim to have, if not radically different conceptions of economic efficiency, social justice, and democracy, at least widely divergent views of the means necessary for progress in these areas. These differences nevertheless remain inscribed in the general framework that has been described here.

This vision of the world rests on two axioms that have not always been correctly described, and which are both erroneous in their principal formulations. The first is that internal factors peculiar to each society are decisive for their comparative evolution. The second is that the Western model of developed capitalism can be generalized to the entire planet.

No one contests the self-evident fact that worldwide capitalist expansion has been accompanied by a flagrant inequality among its partners. But is this the result of a series of accidents due, for the most

part, to various detrimental internal factors that have slowed the process of catching-up? Or is this inequality the product of capitalist expansion itself and impossible to surpass within the framework of this system?

The prevailing opinion is, in fact, that this inequality is only the result of a series of accidents, and that, consequently, the polarization between centers and peripheries can be resolved within the framework of capitalism. This opinion finds expression in the claim that people are responsible for their own condition. Is it not obvious that this simple and comfortable affirmation is analogous to the bourgeois invocation of the responsibility of individuals, designed to attribute the fate of the proletariat to his or her own deficiencies, disregarding objective social conditions?

At this point, generalizations are no longer sufficient for the development of social theory. Here, two social theories and explanations of history collide which have been presented as being different, even contradictory. Nevertheless, despite this apparent divergence, we again find the Eurocentric consensus at work. For example, everyone knows that per capita income is fifteen times higher in the West than in the Third World. Bourgeois social theories and the dominant versions of Marxism interpret this fact in the same way, concluding that the productivity of labor in the West is fifteen times greater on average than at the periphery. This commonly held opinion, shared by the general public, is greatly mistaken and leads to fallacious conclusions.⁸

This consensus rests on the axiom that the achievements of different partners in the world system depend principally on internal factors that are favorable or unfavorable to their development within the world system, as if it were possible for backward societies to catch-up as soon as their internal factors evolved in a more propitious direction. As if integration into the world system had not rendered the internal factors unfavorable, when in fact the linkage of external factors and internal factors generally operates in a negative way, accounting for polarization of centers and peripheries. It is claimed, for example, that the West's progress was the result of class struggles, which imposed a

less unequal distribution of national income and democracy. This proposition is certainly true, if somewhat out of style, given the success of right-wing ideology in asserting that inequality was the driving force of progress. But a second proposition cannot be derived from the first: namely, that the development of similar struggles at the periphery would bring about the same result. For the international class alliances by means of which capital rules on a global scale make the development of progressive internal class alliances, particularly those of the type that allowed European society to advance, extremely difficult and improbable.

In reality, internal factors take on a decisive role in societal evolution only when a peripheralized society can free itself through delinking from the domination of international value. This implies the breakup of the transnational alliance through which the subordinated local comprador classes submit to the demands of international capital. As long as this delinking does not take place, it is futile to speak of the decisive role of internal factors, which is nothing more than a potential, and artificial to separate these factors from worldwide factors, which remain dominant.

The dominant ideology under consideration does not only propose a vision of the world. It is also a political project on a global scale: a project of homogenization through imitation and catching up.

But this project is impossible. Is not the proof of this impossibility contained in the popular opinion that the extension of the Western way of life and consumption to the nearly seven billion human inhabitants of the planet would run against absolute obstacles, ecological among others? What is the point, then, in exhorting others, "do as we do," if it is obvious from the start that it is impossible? Common sense is sufficient proof that it is impossible to imagine a world of five to ten billion people benefiting from comparable high standards of living without gigantic transformations at every level and in every region of the globe, the West included. My purpose is not to characterize the necessary mode of organization of this ideal homogenized world, as socialist, for example. Let us simply acknowledge that such a world could not be managed the way it is at the present time.

Within the framework of Eurocentrism's impossible project, the ideology of the market—with its democratic complement, assumed to be almost a given—has become a veritable theology, bordering on the grotesque. For the progressive unification of the commodities and capital markets alone, without being accompanied by gigantic migrations of populations, has absolutely no chance of equalizing the economic conditions in which different peoples live. Four centuries of history of capitalist expansion have already demonstrated this fact. The last thirty years—during which the ideology of development, founded on the fundamental hypotheses of Eurocentrism, has inspired redoubled efforts to efface what it considered to be the negative effects of colonization—have not brought about even the smallest reduction in the North-South gap.

Eurocentrism has quite simply ignored the fact that the demographic explosion of Europe, caused, like the analogous explosion in the Third World, by capitalist transformation, was accompanied by massive emigration to the Americas and a few other regions of the world. Without this massive emigration, Europe would have had to undertake its agricultural and industrial revolutions in conditions of demographic pressure analogous to those in the Third World today: the number of people of European ancestry living outside of Europe is currently twice the size of the population of the migrants' countries of origin. The litany of the market cure, invoked at every turn, comes to a dead halt here. To suggest that in a henceforth unified world, human beings, like commodities and capital, should be at home everywhere is quite simply unacceptable. The most fanatical partisans of the market suddenly find at this point an argument for the protectionism that they fustigate elsewhere as a matter of principle.

Is it necessary to moderate our indictment? Negative external factors are not always ignored. Within left-wing ideological currents in the West, it is recognized that the colonization which accompanied the European expansion favored European progress. If a few extremists only see the "civilizing role of colonization," that does not mean that this opinion is common to all of Western thought. Not everyone

denies the brutality and devastating effects of the slave trade and the massacre of the American indigenous peoples. It is, nevertheless, the case that the dominant currents of Western social thought stress the internal transformations of European society and are content to note that identical transformations were not realized elsewhere, placing the blame almost exclusively on factors internal to these non-European societies.

The recognition of the role of colonialism in the unequal development of capitalism is not enough. For, despite this recognition, the dominant view is based on a refusal to accept the principle that the contradiction between the centers and the peripheries constitutes the fundamental contradiction of the modern world. Certainly, until 1914 the world system was built on the basis of a polarization between the centers and peripheries that was accepted *de facto* at the time. Since then, this polarization is no longer accepted as such. Socialist revolutions and the successful independence struggles in former colonies are proof of this change.

To the extent that modern media places the aspiration for a better fate than that which is reserved for them in the system within the reach of all peoples, frustration mounts each day, making this contrast the most explosive contradiction of our world. Those who stubbornly refuse to call into question the system that fosters this contrast and frustration are simply burying their heads in the sand. The world of "economists," who administer our societies as they go about the business of "managing the world economy," is part of this artificial world. For the problem is not one of management, but resides in the objective necessity for a reform of the world system; failing this, the only way out is through the worst barbarity, the genocide of entire peoples or a worldwide conflagration. I, therefore, charge Eurocentrism with an inability to see anything other than the lives of those who are comfortably installed in the modern world. Modern culture claims to be founded on humanist universalism. In fact, in its Eurocentric version, it negates any such universalism. Eurocentrism has brought with it the destruction of peoples and civilizations that have resisted its spread. In this sense, Nazism, far from being an aberration, always remains a

latent possibility, for it is only the extreme formulation of the theses of Eurocentrism. If there ever were an impasse, it is that in which Eurocentrism encloses contemporary humanity.

The dream of progress within the context of a single world economy remains impossible. That is why, in the conclusion of *Class and Nation*, in arguing that the centers/peripheries contradiction, immanent to actually existing capitalism, is insurmountable within the framework of this system, I suggested that the reconstruction of an egalitarian world would require a long transition in order to break up the world economy. Proposing an analogy with the Roman Empire, I argued that—just as the centralization of tribute on a wide scale throughout the Empire became an obstacle to a process that required feudal fragmentation, the condition for the subsequent recentralization on capitalist foundations—the capitalist centralization of surplus has today become the obstacle to the progress of peoples who are its victims. Delinking, understood in this context, is the only reasonable response to the challenge. Therefore, socialist experiments and the efforts of Third World countries must be analyzed and appraised in some other way than by the yardstick of Eurocentrism. The soothing discourse that declares, “they could have done as we (Westerners) did; they did not, it is their fault,” eliminates from the outset the real problems encountered by the peoples who are victims of capitalist expansion.

The Eurocentric dimension of the dominant ideology constitutes a veritable paradigm of Western social science which, as Thomas Kuhn observes about all paradigms, is internalized to the point that it most often operates without anyone noticing it.⁹ This is why many specialists, historians, and intellectuals can reject particular expressions of the Eurocentric construct without being embarrassed by the incoherence of the overall vision that results. Some will agree that Greece does not form the cradle of Europe; others, that Christian universalism is not different from that of other religions; still others will refuse to let themselves be locked in the Occident/Orient dichotomy. I do not contest this nor harbor any intention of making a collective judgment. I am only claiming that if the general laws governing the

evolution of all segments of humanity are not clarified, the way is left open for the false Eurocentric ideas.

This paradigm must, therefore, be contrasted with another, which, founded on explicit hypotheses derived from general social laws, simultaneously accounts for the precocious advance of Europe and the challenges that face the contemporary world as a result of this advance. This goal will undoubtedly seem ambitious to some, even if I am not attempting to propose a complete formulation of a system to replace the current one. I simply hope that the reflections proposed here will constitute a useful contribution to the elaboration of a universalism liberated from the limits of Eurocentrism.

Resistance to the critique of Eurocentrism is always extreme, for we are here entering the realm of the taboo. The calling into question of the Eurocentric dimension of the dominant ideology is more difficult to accept even than a critical challenge to its economic dimension. For the critique of Eurocentrism directly calls into question the position of the comfortable classes of this world.

This resistance is made in multiple ways. Among them is the conceptual vulgarization to which I have alluded. But there is also the recourse to an alleged realism, since, in effect, the socialist East never did and the underdeveloped South has yet succeeded in proposing a better model of society and sometimes even give the impression of abandoning such an attempt in favor of rallying to the Western model. The shock provoked by this apparent adherence to the Western model has been all the greater since it has come after a long period in which Stalinism and Maoism each gave the impression that they had found the definitive answer to the question of the construction of socialism. The search for another road than the capitalist one is therefore, apparently, Utopian. Allow me to suggest that the Utopians are, on the contrary, those who obstinately pursue an objective—the Europeanization of the world—that is clearly impossible. Delinking is in fact the only realistic course of action. It is necessary to recognize, however, what this course entails and what hardships it imposes over the long phase of transition that it requires. It also must be understood that delinking hinges on equally necessary change in the West, as part of a total

reconstruction on a global scale. In other words, patience is required, as well as a vision that extends over a much longer term than that implicitly presented by the media.

IV. MARXISM AND THE CHALLENGE OF ACTUALLY EXISTING CAPITALISM

1.

It is good form in the West today to bury Marx. Alas, those who proclaim the death of Marxism, far from surpassing its contributions to the understanding of the world, have simply shifted into reverse gear in order to return, without the slightest critical spirit, to the comfortable fold of the constructs that legitimate capitalism. We have seen the fragility of these Eurocentric constructs, as well as the frailty of the mechanistic Enlightenment materialism that underlies them. These constructs, pre-Marxist as well as post-Marxist (such as so-called neo-classical bourgeois economics), elude the essential question of the nature of the economic alienation that defines capitalism. The core of Marx's contribution is precisely this fundamental critique of the capitalist mode of production.

But the core is not the whole. The project of historical materialism is also to reinterpret world history in light of a general theory of social evolution and to open the way for transcending capitalism by means of an efficacious political strategy.

It is here that the real conflict between ideologies lies. On the one hand, we have a dominant culture that seeks to legitimize capitalism,

proposes a mythical explanation of the birth of capitalism, and perpetuates itself by means of a conservative political project, accepting the world “as it is” (along with the North/South polarization that characterizes it). On the other hand, we have a still incomplete search for another culture, capable of serving as the basis for a social order that can surmount the contradictions that capitalism has never overcome and can never resolve.

Marxism was founded on an awareness of the historical limits of the culture of the Enlightenment in relation to its real social content: namely, the rationalization of the national, European, and global capitalist project. It is for this reason that the tools developed by Marxism have the potential capacity to surpass the contradictions over which the Enlightenment *philosophes* stumbled. Nevertheless, actually existing Marxism was formed both out of and against the Enlightenment, and as a result, is marked by this origin and remains an unfinished construct.

It is necessary to go beyond the construct proposed by Marx and, to a great extent, dogmatized by the dominant currents of actual Marxism. But in order to do so without throwing the baby out with the bath water, it is essential to determine the deficiencies of classical Marxism in two key areas: its explanations of world history and the strategic vision it has of transcending capitalism.

2.

Marxism did, indeed, advance a new explanation of the genesis of capitalism, which appealed neither to race nor to Christianity but based itself on the concepts of mode of production, base and superstructure, forces of production, and relations of production. In contrast to bourgeois eclecticism, Marxism gives a central place to the question of universal social dynamics and, at the same time, proposes a total method that links the different elements of social reality (the material base and the political and ideological superstructures). However, this double property of Marxist theory, while it gives Marxism its power, also constitutes a threat to its development. With the help of natural laziness,

the temptation to find definitive answers to everything in it is great. Critique and enrichment of the theory give way to dogmatism. Limited by the knowledge available at his time, Marx developed a series of propositions that could suggest either the generality or the specificity of the succession from Greco-Roman slavery to feudalism to capitalism. What was known in the middle of the nineteenth century about non-European peoples? Not much. And for this reason, Marx was careful about making hasty generalizations. As is well known, he declares that the slavery-feudalism-capitalism succession is peculiar to Europe. And he leaves his manuscripts dealing with the "Asiatic mode of production" in an unsystematic state, showing them to be incomplete reflections. Despite these precautions, Marxism succumbed to the temptation to extrapolate from the European example in order to fashion a universal model.

Therefore, despite Marx's precautions, Marxism yielded to the influences of the dominant culture and remained in the bosom of Eurocentrism. For a Eurocentric interpretation of Marxism, destroying its universalist scope, is not only a possibility: it exists, and is perhaps even the dominant interpretation. This Eurocentric version of Marxism is notably expressed in the famous thesis of the Asiatic mode of production and the two roads: the European road, open and leading to capitalism, and the Asian road, which is blocked. It also has a related, inverted expression. In claiming the universality of the succession primitive communism-slavery-feudalism-capitalism-socialism (Stalin's theory of the five stages), the European model is applied to the entire planet, forcing everyone into an iron corset, condemned, and rightly so, by its adversaries.

But it seems to me that it is possible to break the impasse of Eurocentrism, common to both the dominant bourgeois culture and vulgar Marxism. The thesis of unequal development, applied to the birth of capitalism, proposed to do so by suggesting that European feudalism, a peripheral form of the tributary mode, benefited from a greater flexibility that allowed the rapid success of European capitalist development. This thesis shows that at the level of the material base, constituted by the relationships of production, the feudal form was

only a peripheral—primitive—form of the tributary model. In the preceding pages, I have examined this same relationship at the level of culture and ideology, finding the peripheral tributary form in Europe and the central tributary form in the Arab-Islamic Orient. The method applied equally well to other regions of the world, notably China and Japan. The productiveness of this method shows that it, indeed, indicates the path to follow in order to escape from the impasse of Eurocentrism.

3.

The idea that Marx developed concerning the strategy for transcending capitalism is closely related to his conception of the worldwide expansion of capitalism.

Here, Marx shared the excessive optimism of his time. He believed that capitalist expansion was irresistible and that it would rapidly suppress all vestiges of earlier modes of production, as well as the social, cultural, and political forms associated with them; in a word, that this expansion would homogenize global society on the basis of a generalized social polarization (*bourgeoisie/proletariat*), similar from one country to the next. This belief explains his vision of a worldwide workers' revolution and his hope for proletarian internationalism. Indeed, Marx envisioned the so-called socialist transition to a classless society (communism) as a relatively brief stage, which could be perfectly mastered by the working classes.

Actually existing capitalism is nothing like this vision. The global expansion of capitalism has never made it its task to homogenize the planet. On the contrary, this expansion created a new polarization, subjecting social forms prior to capitalism at the periphery of the system to the demands of the reproduction of capital in the central formations. Reproducing and deepening this polarization stage by stage in its worldwide expansion, capitalism placed a revolution on the agenda that was not the world proletarian revolution: the revolution of the peoples who were victims of this expansion. This is a second expression of unequal development. The demand for a reexamination of

capitalism, as was the case in the past for the tributary social forms, is expressed more intensely at the peripheries of the capitalist system than at its advanced centers.

In opposition to the unsatisfying eclecticism of bourgeois theory, the concept of international value could serve as the key concept of a non-Eurocentric universalist paradigm able to account for this immanent contradiction of capitalism. In effect, the concept of international value explains the double polarization that characterizes capitalism: on the one hand in the unequal distribution of income on the world scale and on the other by the growing inequality in the distribution of income within the peripheral societies. This double aspect of national and social polarization is the real form of expression of the law of the accumulation of capital on the world scale. This polarization creates the conditions for the massive reproduction of capital at the global level, by reproducing the material conditions that allow for the functioning of the transnational class alliances that bind the peripheral ruling classes to imperialism. Simultaneously, it reproduces qualitatively different social and political conditions at the centers and the peripheries. In the former case, this polarization brings about, as a result of the auto-centered character of the economy, an increase in the revenues from labor parallel to that of productivity, thereby assuring the continued functioning of the political consensus around electoral democracy. At the peripheries, this polarization separates the evolution of revenues from labor from the progress of productivity, thereby making democracy impossible. The transfer of value associated with this process of accumulation is made opaque by the price structure, which derives from the law of international value.

These conceptualizations remain widely rejected, a testimony, in my opinion, to the force of Eurocentric prejudice. For to concede the fecundity of these theses is to accept that development must take place by means of a rupture with everything that submission to the law of international value implies; in other words, it implies delinking. To accept this is to admit that development within the world capitalist system remains, for the peoples of the periphery, at an impasse.

V. THE CULTURALIST EVASION: PROVINCIALISM AND FUNDAMENTALISM

The dominant vision of history is based on one fundamental proposition: the irreducibility of historical developments—and particularly of cultures, which are said to transcend the material evolutions of different societies—to reason. The exceptional case presented by the European trajectory only confirms this general proposition.

The irreducibility of historical trajectories may be expressed either by an avowed refusal to define general laws of social evolution that are valid for humanity as a whole, or by an idealist construct—like the Eurocentric one—that opposes Occident and Orient in absolute and permanent terms. Dominant Western historiography has oscillated between these two attitudes, which have the same implications, since both effectively legitimize the status quo. Historical materialism can potentially serve as a means of escape from the impasse, provided that it is liberated from the distortions of Eurocentrism.

We are not yet at that stage. Our era is characterized by culturalist evasions as much in the West, where they take the form of praise for provincialism, as in the Third World, where they are expressed by the wave of fundamentalisms.

1.

There are, in effect, two ways of approaching history. For some, emphasis should be placed on the concrete and the specific and, consequently, on the diversity of historical courses. Each history, according to this view, is unique and irreducible to any general schema. This basic option, quite naturally, allows a diversity of analyses, explanations, and points of view. Depending on the authors and the case under examination, a given change can be attributed to an economic, political, or ideological cause or even to an outside influence. In this vision, skepticism is the rule, and the mistrust of general constructs is great.

But there have always also been thinkers preoccupied with another order of questions, articulated around a central axis: are there any general tendencies that govern the evolution of all societies, give a direction to their movements, and therefore make it possible to speak of world history?

The philosophy of history is the antithesis of historical science; it departs from preconceived general theses, attempting to force reality into a rigid corset, determined *a priori*. This corset can be one of various kinds: a scientific or materialistic thesis of progress imposing itself and its demands; the antithesis of the eternal return and the cycle of civilizations; a thesis concerning the challenges a society is forced to meet or before which it succumbs; and even a thesis of Providence intervening to lead its chosen people to realize its destiny.

History, therefore, persists as a site of fundamental and permanent debate over the means of discerning the general beyond the specific. But is this not the case with all scientific thought, which tries to go beyond the multiplicity of concrete immediate appearances in order to discover less obvious and more abstract principles?

Instead of endlessly opposing the results of limited and precise historical research and the philosophy of history, let us observe that the dominant modern historical reflections have developed in a long cycle composed of two waves, successively favorable and unfavorable to the search for the general beyond the particular.

The nineteenth century certainly gave predominance to the philosophical impulse in history. Europe's discovery of itself and its power, its conquest of the planet, the permanent revolution in the forces of production that capitalism brought about, the new freedom of thought, openly rejecting all taboos: all of this created a general atmosphere of optimism. It is not astonishing, given these circumstances, that nineteenth-century Europe produced all of the philosophies of history from which we still draw today, in close association with the two great movements of the time: namely, nationalism and the social movement. The former found its moral justification by invoking the "mission" of the people to which it was addressed. In this way, modern racism was introduced, in its singular (pan-Aryan) and plural (British, French, and Germanic nationalist) forms. The social movement yielded Marxism. In varying degrees, all of these forms of thought were nourished on the scientism of the century, the almost naïve expression of a religious faith in progress. This faith was assimilated into universalism, without calling into question the capitalist and European content that it transmitted. Europe was the model for everything, and the idea of calling into question its civilizing mission could only seem preposterous.

Then, the pendulum returned. Fascism and world war; revolutions carried out in the name of socialism and the disappointed hopes of those who had expected the realization of the golden age; the horrors of the colonial wars, followed by the sometimes disquieting difficulties of the African and Asian powers after independence; and the nuclear arms race and the specter of annihilation it has inspired. All of these developments shook the unshakeable faiths of the nineteenth century.

In their place appeared a belief in the multiplicity of ways of evolution and a call for the right to difference. Specificity seemed to triumph over supposed general laws of evolution, both as an object of analysis and as a demand. The universalist aspiration became the object of both scientific and moral distrust.

The result was an inability to produce anything more than impressionistic histories and a nurturing of simplistic philosophies of

history. By default, there is nothing left but a fragmented history and a triumph of provincialism.

2.

The provincial reaction is not exclusive to Westerners. Capitalist ideology remains dominant on the world scale. This reaction, therefore, finds expression at the periphery of the system as well, where it appears in the inverted forms of non-European nationalist culturalisms. There, too, it is an ineffective response to the challenge at hand.

If humanity only poses itself problems that it can solve, as Marx claims, this by no means implies that the solutions come immediately and without pain. On the contrary, the history of humankind is the story of its painful combat to transcend the contradictions arising from its own development. I, therefore, reject the infantile optimism of American positivism and conclude that success—that is, the capacity to find the objectively necessary solution—is not guaranteed for everyone at every moment. History is filled with the corpses of societies that did not succeed in time. The impasses resulting from the rejection of Eurocentric and imperialist universalism by means of simple negation—the affirmation of a society's own cultural specificity—bear witness to this danger of failure. These impasses have their own history and their concrete genesis, woven by the intersection of causes unfolding in different domains of social reality. I will give a brief illustration, departing from the critique of Islamic fundamentalism.

How has the Arab-Islamic world, peacefully dozing since the completion of its tributary and metaphysical construct, reacted to the double challenge of Occidental material superiority—which translates into imperialism and colonization—and the new world of modern ideas?

The Arab-Islamic world is confronted today with a two-fold task: to liberate itself from imperialist domination and commit itself to a path of popular and national development (based on an authority other than that of the privileged bourgeois classes, who will only main-

tain its integration in the world capitalist system), thereby opening itself up to an active participation in a global socialist transformation; and, at the same time, to reconsider the system of thought it has inherited from its medieval period. We know, alas, that it has not yet truly entered the road toward its economic, social, and political liberation, in spite of the achievements of the national liberation movements and the partial victories over imperialism. But is it at least engaged in a reexamination of the system of thought associated with its historical decline?

Since the beginning of the nineteenth century, more precisely since the reign of Mohammed Ali in Egypt, there has been an awareness of this twofold requirement for survival in the face of the challenge of the modern world. The misfortune is that until now the classes and powers responsible for the destiny of the Arab world have thought it was possible to liberate themselves from Western domination by imitating the bourgeois path of European development, both at the level of material and social organization and, at least in part, at the level of ideas.

Mohammed Ali believed he could separate material modernization (undertaken by borrowing its technological elements) from calling ideology into question, which he judged to be dangerous, because it would have associated the Egyptian bourgeoisie with a power whose exclusive control he wanted to maintain. He, thus, opted for a "moderate conservative Islam," more formalist than preoccupied with responding to new challenges. The cultural dualism that has characterized Egypt ever since (and whose analogues can be found in many regions of the contemporary Third World) has its roots in this choice.

The *Nahda* (rebirth) was a movement that brought with it the possibility of total reexamination of the prevailing ideology.¹⁰ It cannot be reduced to its religious dimension, roused up successively by Jamal al-Din al-Afghani (1838-1897), Mohammed Abduh (1849-1905), and Rashid Rida (1865-1925). Its contributions to modernization in other domains of civil life are by no means small, including renovation of the language (without which Arabic would not have adapted to the new culture as it has), a critique of customs (particularly in the area of

the status of women, in which the critiques of Qasim Amin, who died in 1908, have remained unequaled until the present time), a rewriting of law, and a critique of political forms (the challenge to “Oriental despotism”). Nevertheless, it is true that all of these advances, at one moment or another, collide with the question of the reform of religious interpretation.

The discourse of the *Nahda* in this latter domain was both timid and ambiguous. It called for purification by means of a return to origins. So be it: Protestantism did the same. But the content that Protestantism gave to this “purification” (which did not in fact reestablish the mythic state of its origins) meshed perfectly with the future under construction. On the other hand, the discourse of the *Nahda* gave virtually no positive content to the reform it called for. Its nationalist and anti-imperialist tone, certainly justified, could not compensate for this lack, which was probably nothing more than a reflection on the level of ideas of the weaknesses of the nascent bourgeoisie. The *Nahda* had no awareness of the necessity of overturning the metaphysical cast of mind. It stayed locked in the framework of the metaphysical construct, without ever realizing that the significance of this construct had been transcended forever. Thus, the very concept of secularism remained alien to the movement. The *Nahda*, perhaps, announced from afar a necessary religious revolution, but it did not begin it. This failure was followed necessarily by decline and even regression, from Rashid Rida to the Muslim Brotherhood and contemporary fundamentalism.

The liberal bourgeoisie, which occupied center stage in the first half of this century, remained timorous, for obvious reasons having to do with the characteristics of peripheral capitalism. It was, therefore, content with this cultural dualism. It was so to such a point that even bourgeois discourse could seem like national treason (for it borrows, in appearance at least, “everything” from the West, in contempt of the Islamic heritage) or even a double game (the claim that the bourgeoisie only “pretends” to remain Muslim). It would be unreasonable to expect anything more from the bourgeoisie. Nevertheless, while the popular forces had not yet achieved autonomy, either at the level of

social and political struggle or of the elaboration of a project for society, the liberal bourgeoisie did bring about—chaotically—a few scattered fragments of modernization (in law, by modernizing the *Sharia*; in political forms; in education). There were even some bold breakthroughs, like the praise for secularism made by Ali Abderrazek, rejoicing over the occasion of the abolition of the Caliphate in 1924. But these breakthroughs are short-lived.

The failure of the liberal bourgeoisie's project, at the levels of real liberation and of development, is the origin of Nasserism. As a result, Nasserism contained the potential of going further by becoming a popular national movement of renewal. But it did not do so, either in the conceptualization and carrying out of its social and political project or at the level of thought. As for its political dimension, just as Mohammed Ali had wanted to construct capitalism without relying on the bourgeoisie, Nasser gradually came to the point of wanting "socialism" without daring to entrust the people with the responsibility for its construction. Here again, the same dualism of the earlier period remains.

The failure of this most recent attempt—a material failure, above all, but one in which overt aggression of the West has a good share of responsibility—leads to the current crisis. This crisis, therefore, results from the failure of the Left, meaning the ensemble of forces capable of finding a popular and national way out of the impasse. The void has been brutally filled by the fundamentalist project—a symptom of the crisis, not a response to it.

For fundamentalism feeds on the medieval metaphysical vision, in its most miserably impoverished version, at best that of al-Ghazzali and more accurately that of the Sufis during the most lackluster moments of Arab decadence. The ideology of the movement is, from the outset, founded on a contempt for human reason; and its genuine hate for the creations of Islam in its period of grandeur—the rationalist metaphysical construct—as expressed by Sayyid Qutb (1903–1966) is more than disturbing. The fundamentalists, thus, give priority to an extremely formalist attachment to rituals, to the letter of sacred texts, notably the *Sharia*, and to superficial manifestations of

identity (dress, and so forth). The most banal reactionary prejudices are valorized (even if they are in conflict with more progressive interpretations from the past!), as in the case of the status of women. Ignorance is cloaked in the backward-looking myth of a golden age, preceding what is described as the “great deviation,” by which is meant the construction of the Umayyad state following the Abbasid era, to which Islam and the Arab world are, however, indebted for their subsequent historical achievements. The golden age in question—left completely vague—is not linked to any coherent social project whatsoever and, as a consequence, the most flagrant contradictions are accepted in daily life (the West is rejected in its entirety, for example, but its technology is accepted without difficulty). These inconsistencies and the unawareness of even the possibility of self-contradiction find their expression in repetitive writings, locked in the most insipid moralization. This is the case with the famous “Islamic political economy,” which merely copies (more inaccurately than accurately) the weakest form of Western neoclassical economics. At the same time, in their organizational practices, the fundamentalists repudiate all democratic forms, even the most elementary ones, proclaiming the value of blind obedience to the Imam in the worst Sufistic tradition.

Numerous Arab intellectuals have brought merciless charges against this fundamentalism. They have uncovered its hidden motivations—neurotic attitudes systematically produced by peripheral capitalism, particularly among the popular strata of the petty bourgeoisie—and have unveiled its political ambiguities and ties with Saudi-American “petro-Islam.” In this way, they have explained the success of Wahhabism, which in other circumstances would not have passed beyond the horizon of the Central Arabian oasis.¹¹ In the same way, it has been possible to account for the support that the West had contributed to a movement that suits its purposes (support which has been hypocritically denied), owing to the incredible weakening of the Arab world it has produced through an explosion of its internal conflicts, mainly sectarian quarrels, and disputes over organizational allegiances.

The reason for the impasse is that modernity requires an abandonment of metaphysics. The failure to recognize this leads to a false construction of the question of cultural identity and a confused debate in which "identity" (and "heritage") are placed in absolute contrast with "modernization," viewed as synonymous with "Westernization."

This view treats the identity of peoples as immutable, disregarding the facts: the Arab-Islamic character (or better, characters) was transformed over the course of time, just like the character of Euro-Christians and others. Instead, an artificial, unchanging Euro-Christian identity is invented and contrasted with Arab-Islamic identity. The result is the nonsensical propositions of Sayyid Qutb concerning secularism. According to Qutb, secularism is specifically Christian, while the alleged uniqueness of Islam is, on the contrary, that it knows no distinction between religion and society (*din wa dunia*). It escapes Qutb that this was also the case in medieval Europe, which, for the same reasons as medieval Islam, did not separate religion from society. Ignorance permits a lot. Identity is in effect reduced to its religious dimension, and as this dimension is conceived as an immutable absolute, and the simple deduction is made that the personality of peoples is itself unchanging.

I have argued that Christianity and Islam carried out a first revolution with full success. This revolution allowed both Christianity, initially a religion of popular revolt, and Islam, created on the margins of the civilized Orient, to form the central axis of a rationalist metaphysical construct conforming to the needs of an advanced tributary society. At this time, the character of these religions is so similar that it is, indeed, difficult to qualify ibn Rushd as Muslim, Maimonides as Jewish, and Thomas Aquinas as Christian. They are of the same intellectual period, understand one another, critique each other, and learn from one another wholeheartedly.

But Christianity carried out a second, bourgeois revolution and may, perhaps, be in the midst of a third. Islam is still far from making the revolution it needs. Far from calling for it, the fundamentalists are working hard to postpone it, a service for which the West is grateful.

There is certainly a way out of the impasse. But it requires more than a battle on the intellectual front alone. First, the struggle out from the real impasse at the levels of social, economic, and political practices must begin. I even believe that this transformation of the real world would bring *ipso facto* a collapse of the illusions of this impoverished metaphysics. During the rise of Nasserism, fundamentalism was unthinkable. Nevertheless, the transformation of the real world also requires giving attention to a task that, because of a shortsighted opportunism, has often been ignored: namely, the transcending of the medieval mode of thought, from which the Arab-Islamic world has yet to emerge. In this domain as in others, there can be an advantage to backwardness. Just as in the area of material activity the Third World has access to modern technologies, without having had to pass through all of the stages necessary to develop them, in the domain of thought, we are already acquainted not only with Western bourgeois thought but also with the germ of its fundamental critique, whose universal potential it is our task to develop. The real affirmation of the identity of the Arab people, like that of the other peoples of the Third World, lies on this road.

The impasse of contemporary Islamic fundamentalism is not the only one of its type. On the contrary, all signs point to analogous culturalist reactions elsewhere, from India to black Africa. In every case, it seems to me that nationalist culturalist retreat proceeds from the same method, the method of Eurocentrism: the affirmation of irreducible unique traits that determine the course of history, or more exactly the course of individual, incommensurable histories. These fundamentalisms are no different from Eurocentric fundamentalism, which itself tends to take the form of Christian neo-fundamentalism. On the contrary, they are only its reflection, its negative complement.

VI. FOR A TRULY UNIVERSAL CULTURE

1.

Substituting a new paradigm for the one on which Eurocentrism is based is a difficult, long-term task. It requires a theory of the political and a theory of culture, complementing the theory of economics, as well as a theory of their interaction. These theories are still sorely lacking, as much in bourgeois thought as in constructs of Marxist inspiration, paralyzed by a refusal to continue a task that Marx only began.

In this reconstruction, the importance of developing an analysis of culture and its function in historical development is equaled only by the difficulty of the task. Its importance derives from the fact that the dominant bourgeois mainstream in the social sciences was initially founded on an overtly culturalist philosophy of history, and then, when this philosophy gradually lost its strength of conviction, took refuge in agnosticism, refusing any search for the general beyond the specific and, thus, remaining under the spell of culturalism. Vulgar Marxist theories are not fundamentally different. The thesis of the so-called two roads tries unsuccessfully to reconcile the concepts of historical materialism with Eurocentric prejudice about the exceptional nature of European history; while the thesis of the “five stages” avoids the difficulty by minimizing specific traits to the point of artificially

reducing the diversity of different historical paths to the mechanical repetition of the European schema.

But what could replace culturalist theory? The entire difficulty lies here, in the blatantly obvious inadequacies of scientific knowledge of society. I do not intend to propose a complete and coherent construct capable of answering all the questions in this domain; I have only the more modest ambition of pointing out a few of the elements that such a construct must integrate into its problematic.

2.

The reconstruction of social theory along truly universalist lines must have as its base a theory of actually existing capitalism, centered on the principal contradiction generated by the worldwide expansion of this system.

This contradiction could be defined in the following way: the integration of all of the societies of our planet into the world capitalist system has created the objective conditions for universalization. However, the tendency toward homogenization, produced by the universalizing force of the ideology of commodities, that underlies capitalist development is hindered by the very conditions of unequal accumulation. The material base of the tendency toward homogenization is the continuous extension of markets, in breadth as well as in depth. The commodity and capital markets gradually extend to the entire world and progressively take hold of all aspects of social life. The labor force, at first limited in its migrations by different social, linguistic, and legal handicaps, tends to acquire international mobility.

Cultural life being the mode of organization for the utilization of use-values, the homogenization of these values by their submission to a generalized exchange-value tends to homogenize culture itself. The tendency toward homogenization is the necessary consequence not of the development of the forces of production, but of the capitalist content of this development. For the progress of the forces of production in pre-capitalist societies did not imply the submission of use-value to exchange-value and, hence, was accompanied by a diversity of

paths and methods of development. The capitalist mode implies the predominance of exchange-value and, hence, standardization. Capitalism's tendency to homogenize functions with an almost irresistible force at the levels of industrial techniques of production, trends in consumption, lifestyle, and so on, with an attenuated power in the domains of ideology and politics. It has much less influence over language usage.

What position should be taken toward this tendency toward standardization? The historically irreversible, like the Gallicization of Occitania or the adoption of Coca-Cola by the Cuban people, cannot be regretted forever. But the question arises with respect to the future. Should the tendency of capitalism toward standardization be welcomed, the way progress of the forces of production is welcomed? Should it be defended, or at least never actively opposed, keeping in mind the reactionary character of the nineteenth-century movements that sought to destroy machinery? Is the only cause for regret that this process operates through the prism of class and is, as a result, ineffective? Should we conclude that socialism will move in the same direction, only more quickly and less painfully?

There have always been two co-existing responses to this question. In the first half of his life, Marx adopted a laudatory tone when describing the progress of the forces of production, the achievements of the bourgeoisie, and the tendency toward standardization that liberates people from the limited horizons of the village. But gradually doubts crept in, and the tone of his later writings is more varied. The dominant wing of the labor movement eulogized the "universal civilization" under construction. A belief in the fusion of cultures (and even of languages) predominated in the Second International: think of Esperanto. This naïve cosmopolitanism, effectively disproven by World War I, reappeared after the Second World War, when Americanization came to be seen as synonymous with progress or, at the very least, modernization.

However, any fundamental critique of capitalism requires a reappraisal of this mode of consumption and life, a product of the capitalist mode of production. Such a critique is not, moreover, as utopian as

is often believed: the malaise from which Western civilization suffers is ample testimony. For in fact, the tendency toward standardization implies a reinforcement of the adjustment of the superstructure to the demands of the capitalist infrastructure. This tendency diminishes the contradictions that drive the system forward and is, therefore, reactionary. Spontaneous resistance to this standardization, thus, expresses a refusal to submit to the relationships of exploitation that underlie it.

Moreover, this tendency toward standardization collides with the limits imposed by unequal accumulation. This unequal accumulation accelerates tendencies toward homogenization at the center, while it practically destroys them for the great mass of people at the periphery, who are unable to gain access to the modern mode of consumption, reserved for a small minority. For these people, who are often deprived of the elementary means of basic survival, the result is not simply malaise, but tragedy. Actually existing capitalism has, therefore, become a handicap to the progress of the forces of production on the world scale. For the mode of accumulation that it imposes on the periphery excludes the possibility of the periphery catching-up. This is the major reason why capitalism has been objectively transcended on the world scale.

Nevertheless, whatever opinion one may have of this model of society and its internal contradictions, it retains great force. It has a powerful attraction in the West and Japan, not only for the ruling classes, but also for the workers, testifying to the hegemony of capitalist ideology over the society as a whole. The bourgeoisies of the Third World know no other goal; they imitate the Western model of consumption, while the schools in these countries reproduce the models of organization of labor that accompany Western technologies. But the peoples of the periphery have been victims of this expanding process of the homogenization of aspirations and values. The prodigious intensification of communication by the media, now global in scope, has both quantitatively and qualitatively modified the contradiction generated by the unequal expansion of capitalism. Yearning for access to Western models of consumption has come to penetrate large num-

bers of the popular masses. At the same time, capitalism has revealed itself to be ever more incapable of satisfying this yearning. Societies that have liberated themselves from submission to the demands of the global expansion of capitalism must deal with this new contradiction, which is only one expression of the conflict between the socialist and capitalist tendencies.

The impasse is, therefore not only ideological. It is real, the impasse of capitalism, and incapable of completing the work that it has placed on the agenda of history. The crisis of social thought, in its principal dimension, is above all a crisis of bourgeois thought, which refuses to recognize that capitalism is not the "end of history," the definitive and eternal expression of rationality. But this crisis is also an expression of the limits of Marxism, which, underestimating the dimensions of the inequality immanent in the worldwide expansion of capitalism, has devised a strategy of a socialist response to these contradictions that has proven to be impossible.

In order to truly understand this contradiction, the most explosive contradiction capitalism has engendered, the centers/peripheries polarization must be placed at the heart of the analysis and not at its margin.

But after a whole series of concessions, the forces of the Left and of socialism in the West have finally given up on giving the imperialist dimension of capitalist expansion the central place that it must occupy both in critical analysis and in the development of progressive strategies. In so doing, they have been won over to bourgeois ideology in its most essential aspects: Eurocentrism and economism.

The very term imperialism has been placed under prohibition, having been judged to be unscientific. Considerable contortions are required to replace it with a more "objective" term like "international capital" or "transnational capital." As if the world were fashioned purely by economic laws, expressions of the technical demands of the reproduction of capital. As if the state and politics, diplomacy and armies had disappeared from the scene! Imperialism is precisely an amalgamation of the requirements and laws for the reproduction of

capital; the social, national, and international alliances that underlie them; and the political strategies employed by these alliances.

It is therefore indispensable to center the analysis of the contemporary world on unequal development and imperialism. Then, and only then, does it become possible to devise a strategy for a transition beyond capitalism. The obstacle is disengaging oneself from the world system as it is in reality. This obstacle is even greater for the societies of the developed center than it is for those of the periphery. And therein lies the definitive implication of imperialism. The developed central societies, because both their social composition and the advantages they enjoy from access to the natural resources of the globe are based on imperialist surpluses, have difficulty seeing the need for an overall reorganization of the world. A popular, anti-imperialist alliance capable of reversing majority opinion is as a result more difficult to construct in the developed areas of the world. In the societies of the periphery, on the other hand, disengagement from the capitalist world system is the condition for a development of the forces of production sufficient to meet the needs and demands of the majority. This fundamental difference explains why all the breaches in the capitalist system have been made from the periphery of the system. The societies of the periphery, which are entering the period of "post-capitalism" through strategies that I prefer to qualify as popular and national rather than socialist, are constrained to tackle all of the difficulties that delinking implies.

3.

The principal contradiction of capitalism has, thus, placed an anti-capitalist revolution on the agenda—a revolution that is anti-capitalist because it is necessarily directed against capitalism as it is lived by those who endure its tragic consequences. But before that revolution can occur, it is necessary to finish the task that capitalism could not, and cannot, complete.

Some of these problems are not new, but rather have confronted the Russian and Chinese revolutions from the beginning. But these

problems must be discussed in the light of the lessons of history, which implies something quite different from the sweeping Eurocentric judgment that socialism is bankrupt and the only alternative is a return to capitalism.¹² The same may be said, *mutatis mutandis*, for any discussion of the lessons to be drawn from the radical movement of national liberation, which reached its apogee during the Bandung Era from 1955 until 1975.¹³

Without a doubt, the so-called socialist societies (which are better qualified as “popular national” societies) have not solved the problem. This is quite simply because the popular national transition will necessarily be considerably longer than anyone had imagined, since it is faced with the task of developing the forces of production in a permanent struggle with the logic of world capitalist expansion and on the basis of conflicting internal social relationships (what I have called the dialectic of three tendencies: socialist, local capitalist, and statist). In societies that have successfully made a popular national revolution (usually termed a “socialist revolution”), the dialectic of internal factors once again takes on a decisive role. Unquestionably, because the complexity of post-capitalist society had not been fully grasped, the Soviet experiment—such as it is—exercised a strong attraction over the peoples of the periphery for some forty years. The Maoist critique of this experiment also had considerable influence for approximately fifteen years.

Today, a better awareness of the real dimension of the challenge has already brought less naïve enthusiasm and more circumspection concerning definitive prescriptions for development. There has been, in fact, progress in both practice and in thought, a crisis in the positive sense of the term and not a failure that would prefigure capitulation and a return to normalcy, that is, a reinsertion into the logic of worldwide capitalist expansion. The discouragement that has overtaken the forces of socialism in the West, who find in the situation of the “socialist” countries an alibi for their own weaknesses, has its source elsewhere, in the depths of the Western societies themselves. As long as it does not have a lucid understanding of the ravages of Eurocentrism, Western socialism will remain at a standstill.

For the peoples of the periphery, there is no other choice than that which has been the key to these so-called socialist revolutions. Certainly, things have changed greatly since 1917 or 1949. The conditions for new popular national advances in the contemporary Third World do not allow the simple reproduction of earlier approaches, sketched out in advance by a few prescriptions. In this sense, the thought and practice inspired by Marxism retain their universal vocation and their Afro-Asiatic vocation even more. In this sense, the so-called socialist counter-model, despite its current limits, retains a growing force of attraction for the countries of the periphery. The revolts against the system, from the Philippines to Korea and Brazil, passing through Iran and the Arab world, despite ambiguities and even impasses in their expression at this first stage of their development, announce other national popular advances. The skeptics, prisoners of Eurocentrism, not only had not conceived of these explosions, but had also declared their impossibility.

4.

The current situation suggests an analogy with the long Hellenistic transition. In the conclusion of *Class and Nation*, we analyzed this latter transition in terms of “decadence” as opposed to “revolutionary consciousness” and suggested that the break-up of the tributary centralization of surplus and its replacement by the feudal dispersal of power, far from representing a negative step backwards, was the condition for the subsequent rapid maturation of capitalist centralization. Today, the liberation from the capitalist system by means of delinking constitutes in the same way the condition for the subsequent recomposition of a new universalism. On the cultural level, this three-phase dialectical movement from the false universalism of capitalist Eurocentrism to the affirmation of popular national development to the recomposition of a superior socialist universalism is accompanied by the need for delinking.

The analogy can be extended into the cultural domain. Hellenism created a universalism (regional, of course, and not global) at the level

of the ruling classes of the ancient Orient. This universalism, although truncated by its class content and, therefore, unacceptable to the popular masses (who, thus, took refuge in the Christian and Muslim religions and in peasant provincialisms), foreshadowed in certain aspects the universalism developed by capitalism. This is one of the reasons that the Renaissance turned to Hellenism for inspiration. Today, is not capitalist universalism, in spite of its Eurocentric limitations, the expression of the universal culture of the ruling classes? Does not its popular version, degraded for mass use—the more or less opulent consumerism of the West and its miserable counterpart in the Third World—simultaneously generate a strong attraction and an impasse, due to the frustration it provokes? While there has been a nationalist culturalist rejection of Eurocentric universalism, at the same time, elements of a future, superior socialist universalism are crystallizing. If this crystallization progresses rapidly enough, the empty phase of negative culturalist affirmation will be shortened.

5.

Because we are right in the middle of this barren phase, the stakes are considerable. The moral and political crisis of our time does not spare the opulent societies. Eurocentrism is in crisis, despite the robust, healthy appearance of the prejudices it nurtures. Anxiety in the face of a challenge recognized as insurmountable and the risk of catastrophe it brings with it have fostered a revival of the irrational, ranging from the renewed popularity of astrology to neo-fascist alignments. Thus, as is often the case, the reaction to a new challenge is, in its first phase, more negative than positive. The Eurocentric universalism of capitalism is not critiqued in order to allow the construction of a new universalism; all aspirations for universalism are rejected in favor of a right to difference (in this context, differences of cultures and forms of social organization) invoked as a means of evading the real problem.

Under these circumstances, two seemingly opposed, yet actually symmetrical, literatures have been developed. At one pole are the literatures of religious fundamentalisms of every kind—Islamic, Hindu,

Jewish (rarely mentioned, but it of course exists), Christian—and of provincialisms which extol the supposed superiority of folklore, all of them founded on the hypothesis of the incommensurability of different cultures. At the other pole is the insipid revival of bourgeois praise for capitalist society, completely unconscious of its fundamental Eurocentrism.

The cultural critique of Eurocentrism and the inverted Eurocentrisms must go beyond this dialogue of the deaf. Is it possible to envision political evolutions here and there that are likely to favor a better dialogue and the advancement beyond capitalism toward universal socialism? The responsibility of the Left and of socialism is precisely to conceive of this and to act to make it possible.

Eurocentrism is a powerful factor in the opposite sense. Prejudice against the Third World, very much in favor today, contributes to the general shift to the right. Certain elements of the socialist movement in the West reject this shift, of course. But they do so most often in order to take refuge in another, no less Eurocentric, discourse, the discourse of traditional trade unionism, according to which only the mature (read European) working classes can be the bearers of the socialist future. This is an impotent discourse, in contradiction with the most obvious teachings of history.

For the peoples of the periphery the inevitable choice is between a national popular democratic advance or a backward-looking culturalist impasse. Undoubtedly, if the West, instead of standing in the way of progressive social transformations at the periphery, were to support these transformations, the element of “nationalism” contained in the project of delinking would be reduced accordingly. But this hypothesis amounts to hardly more than a pious wish. The fact is that the West has been to date the bitter adversary of any advance in this direction.

To acknowledge this as realistic and factual is to recognize that the initiative for the transformation of the world falls to the peoples of the periphery. It is they who, by disengaging themselves from world development, can force the peoples of the West to become aware of the real challenge. This is an observation that, since 1917, nothing has come to invalidate. But it is also to admit that the long march of popular

national democracy will remain bumpy, filled with inevitable conflicts and unequal advances and setbacks.

The relatively negative judgment I have made concerning the West does not exclude the possibility of change here as well. By opening the debate on other forms of development in the West and the favorable consequences it could have for the evolution of the South, I have tried to insist on the responsibilities of the Western Left as well as the possibilities that are offered to it. A lucid awareness of the destructiveness of Eurocentrism is, in this case, a prerequisite for change.

On the other hand, the universalist ambition has nurtured left-wing ideologies, and from the outset the bourgeois left has forged the concepts of progress, reason, law, and justice. Moreover, the critique of Eurocentric capitalism is not without its echo at the center. No Great Wall separates the center from the periphery in the world system. Were not Mao, Che, and Fanon heroes of the progressive young people of the West at one time?

Obedience to the logic of the world economy demands in effect that a police force assume responsibility for repressing the revolts of the peoples of the periphery, who are victims of the system, and for averting the danger from new revolutionary advances that have the prospect of reconstructing a socialism for the twenty-first century. This function cannot be filled by any country other than the United States. The construction of a European neo-imperialism, relieving America from its guard duty, remains an impossible dream for the conceivable future. The Atlanticism that this pure capitalist logic thus implies inevitably reduces the European role to staying within the strict limits of commercial competition between Europe, Japan, and the United States, without aspiring for any kind of cultural, ideological, political, and military autonomy. In these circumstances, the European project is reduced to nothing more than the European wing of the Atlanticist project dominated by the United States.

In response to this poor outlook, in which a weakened European construction would remain threatened with collapse at any moment, can Europe contribute to the building of a truly polycentric world in every sense of the term, that is to say, a world respectful of different

social and economic paths of development? Such a new international order could open the way in Europe itself to social advances impossible to achieve within the strict logic of competitiveness alone. In other words, it could permit the beginning of breakthroughs in the direction of the extension of non-market social spaces, the only path for socialist progress in the West. Different relationships between the North and the South could, thus, be promoted in a context conducive to the objectively necessary popular national transition in the Third World. This option of “European nonalignment”—the form of delinking appropriate to this region of the world—is the only means for checking an otherwise almost inevitable decline.¹³ Here, I mean by decline the renunciation of a mobilizing and credible progressive social project in favor of day-to-day adjustment to outside forces.

The choice remains: true universalism that is necessarily socialist or Eurocentric capitalist barbarism. Socialism is at the end of this long tunnel. Let us understand by this a society that has resolved the legacy of the unequal development inherent to capitalism and has simultaneously given all human beings on the planet a better mastery of their social development. This society will be superior to ours only if it is worldwide, and only if it establishes a genuine universalism, based on the contributions of everyone, Westerners as well as those whose historical course has been different. It is obvious that the long road which remains to be traveled in order to realize this goal prohibits the formulation of definitive judgments on strategies and stages to pass through. Political and ideological confrontations, like those that opposed “revolutionaries” and “social democrats” in their time, are nothing more than the vicissitudes of this long struggle. It is clear that the nature of this human society cannot be predicted.

The future is still open. It is still to be lived.

PART FOUR

Towards a Non-Eurocentric View of History
and a Non-Eurocentric Social Theory

The process of systematically locating the Eurocentric deformations in dominant ideologies and social theories, retracing their genesis and bringing out their weaknesses is not sufficient. An outmoded paradigm disappears only on the condition that another paradigm, freed from the errors of the first, is positively expressed. With this thought in mind, I will propose here two components of this reconstruction that are indispensable in my opinion.

The first (sections 1 to 5) is the hypothesis of unequal development as an explanation of the early birth of capitalism in the feudal formations of Europe, considered as a peripheral form of tributary society. This hypothesis frees social theory from the deformation inherent in the Eurocentric view of history because of the universalism of its propositions concerning the laws of evolution on which it is based.

The second (section 6) is the hypothesis of the globalization of value as an explanation of the dynamics of really existing capitalism, which simultaneously reproduces a tendency towards the homogenization of the world and the polarization that makes the former impossible. This hypothesis frees us from the deformation inherent in the Eurocentric view of the contemporary world and makes possible a productive reinterpretation of the system's crises and the initial advances beyond capitalism.

I. THE TRIBUTARY MODE OF PRODUCTION: THE UNIVERSAL FORM OF ADVANCED PRE-CAPITALIST SOCIETIES

An ongoing debate is taking place between different schools of historians: can we speak of pre-capitalist society (limiting ourselves here solely to advanced societies, based on a clearly recognizable state organization) in the singular? Or must we content ourselves with describing and analyzing the different concrete variants of the societies in question? Can we consider feudalism as a general form preceding capitalism, not just in Europe (and in Japan) but found elsewhere in a similar form? Or are the differences here of kind and not only of form?

My position in this debate is summarized by the title of this section: the form that I call tributary is the general form of all advanced pre-capitalist societies, of which feudalism is only a particular species. As will be seen in the development of the argument, this conceptualization makes it possible to resolve the question of unequal development in the birth of capitalism and get out of the Eurocentric impasse.

In the history proposed here, there are only three consecutive stages of a universal nature: the community stage, the long transition from primitive communism; the tributary stage, which characterizes all developed pre-capitalist societies; and capitalism, which has

become a world system. The tributary stage is the history of all civilizations based on the following characteristics: (1) a significant development of the productive forces—i.e., a sedentary agriculture which can ensure more than mere survival, a substantial and reliable surplus, non-agricultural (artisanal) activities using technical know-how and various tools (except machines); (2) developed unproductive activities corresponding to the size of this surplus; (3) a division into social classes based on this economic foundation; and (4) a developed state that goes beyond the confines of village existence.

This stage presents the following aspects: (1) it includes a great variety of forms; (2) beyond this variety, it has common characteristics, since the extraction of surplus labor is always controlled by the dominance of the superstructure within the context of an economy governed by use-value; (3) the fundamental mode is the tributary mode; (4) the feudal mode is a variant of this; (5) the so-called slavery mode appears as an exception, most often interstitial and in connection with market relations; (6) the complexity of the formations of this stage implies, beyond the immediate relations of production, relations of internal and external exchange, which gives rise to the question of market relations and requires the concept of a system of social formations; and (7) this stage is not stagnant but, on the contrary, is characterized by a considerable development of the productive forces on the basis of tributary relations of production operating within formations understood in their complexity.

Capitalism is not a necessary stage for the sole reason that it already exists on a world scale. In fact, all tributary societies must necessarily call into question the relations of production on the basis of which they had developed and invent new relations, alone capable of allowing a subsequent development of productive forces. Capitalism was not destined to be only a European phenomenon. However, Europe, having invented it first, subsequently began interfering with the normal evolution of other continents. What needs to be explained, then, is not only how capitalism was invented in Europe but why it appeared there at a relatively early stage and why elsewhere, in more advanced tributary societies, its appearance was delayed for so long.

The transitional periods between one stage and another can be distinguished from necessary stages by the fact that the factors of change prevail over the factors of reproduction. Certainly, reproduction in all necessary stages is far from excluding all contradictions. Otherwise, it would not be possible to understand why a necessary stage is not eternal. However, in the necessary stages, the class struggle tends to be integrated into reproduction. For example, in capitalism, the class struggle tends, at least at the center, to be reduced to its economic dimension and consequently becomes an element of the system's functioning. In transition periods, however, it develops to become the motor of history.

All of the necessary stages give the impression of being unchanging. On this level, there is no difference between Europe and Asia and even between the past and the present. All societies of the tributary stage appear unchanging. What Marx says about Asia is applicable just as much to feudal European society. Undoubtedly, capitalism, in contrast to societies of the second stage, presents the appearance of being in constant change due to its fundamental economic law. However, this continual revolution in the productive forces entails an equally continual adaptation of the relations of production, which gives rise to the feeling that the system cannot ultimately be surpassed.

This summary raises some essential questions concerning the method of historical materialism. Generally, it is accepted that a mode of production is defined by a specific combination of the relations of production and the productive forces. There is a tendency to reduce this concept to the status of the producer, the slave, serf, and wage-worker, for example. However, wage labor precedes capitalism by several millennia and it is not possible to reduce the latter to the spread of wage labor. In fact, the capitalist mode combines wage labor with a certain level of development of the productive forces. Likewise, the presence of productive slaves is not sufficient to define a so-called slavery mode of production, if it is not combined with a precise state of the productive forces.

An exhaustive list of the types of labor encountered in the history of class societies cannot be limited to the three modes of dependent

labor, i.e., slavery, serfdom, and wage labor. As a result, Eurocentric Marxists were ultimately forced to invent a fourth type, a producer who belongs to a community (specifically an “Asiatic” one) that is subjected to the state (generalized slavery). The problem is that this fourth mode does not exist. What does exist and, moreover, is much more frequently encountered than slavery or serfdom, is the labor of the small producer (peasant), neither completely free and market oriented nor strictly enclosed in communal property, but nevertheless subjected to tributary extraction. It is, thus, necessary to give a name to this type, and I do not see anything more appropriate than the tributary mode.

If the generalization of Stalin’s five stages is false, just like the “two camps” thesis, then should all attempts at theory be given up? The significance of my hypothesis is the emphasis on the profound similarities that characterize the important pre-capitalist class societies. Why are corporations found in Florence, Paris, Baghdad, Cairo, Fez, Canton, and Calcutta? Why is the Sun King reminiscent of the Chinese emperor? Why is lending with interest prohibited in various places? Is this not evidence that contradictions that characterize these societies are of the same kind?

What then are the common characteristics of all the pre-capitalist societies described as tributary? The immediate appearance reveals the immense variety of the social organizations that exist in this long period of history. Under these conditions, is it scientific to attribute to them a common denominator?

Here, the Marxist tradition is contradictory. Academic Marxism has endeavored to emphasize specificity, sometimes to the point of giving up using the same term to describe societies belonging to different cultural areas, for example, reserving the term feudal for Europe (plus the Japanese exception) and refusing to use it in reference to Asia. In the opposite direction, the tradition of militant Marxism has always used an inclusive terminology, for example, describing as feudal all obviously less advanced large societies. Both could claim to adhere to Marx, if Marxology could settle the question. Thus, it can be observed that Marx used the term feudal with a general connotation that was

completely understood by his contemporaries and covered at least all of European history, from the barbarian invasions to the English and French bourgeois revolutions. His view of feudalism was not that of the later bourgeois historians who, because of qualifications, reduced the applicability of feudalism to the area between the Loire and the Rhine over a period of four centuries. However, Marx also invented the term Asiatic mode of production and, sometimes in unpublished writings, such as the *Grundrisse*, took up particular theses from Montesquieu, Bernier, and others, which claim to oppose Asian permanence to the rapidly changing history of Europe. Animated debates have regularly opposed the upholders of these two positions. Generally speaking, the dominant tendency in the Euro-American academic world emphasizes the exceptional character of European history.

The possible search for unity, beyond diversity, is applicable only to societies having a comparable level of development of the productive forces. With this in mind, one can propose for consideration three stages in the development of the productive forces to which correspond three types of relations of production.

At the first stage, the surplus is too small to allow more than the beginnings of class and state formation. It would, thus, be absurd to mix together under the same rubric lineage, clan, and tribal formations, on the one side, and state formations, on the other. However, this is what the thesis that the Asiatic mode is the transition to class societies tries to do. How can China, which produced as much iron in the eleventh century as Europe did in the eighteenth and had five cities of more than a million inhabitants, be placed at the beginning of class society while Europe, at the same level of development of the productive forces, was on the eve of the Industrial Revolution? In this first stage, the weak level of development and lineage, clan, and tribal relations are inextricably linked. It is these relations that make possible the beginning of the development of the productive forces beyond the primitive communist phase (the passage to sedentary agriculture) and, at the same time, block their continued development after a certain point. Where such relations occur, the level of the productive

forces is necessarily low; where they are not found, the level is higher. The forms of property that are found at this first stage exhibit common fundamental traits. It is always a matter of community property; the usage of which is regulated as a function of kinship systems that govern the dominant instance.

At the second stage, the level of development of the productive forces makes possible and requires the state, that is, the surpassing of kinship, which could subsist only when subject to another rationality. The forms of property at this second stage allow the dominant class to control access to agricultural land and, as a result, levy a tribute on the peasant producers. This situation is dominated by an ideology, which always assumes the same form: state religion or quasi-religion.

The third stage represents the higher level of productive forces characteristic of capitalism. This level implies capitalist property. At one pole, the bourgeoisie has a monopoly of control over the means of production, which are no longer mainly the land, but machines, tools, and factories. At the other pole, there is free wage labor. The extraction of the surplus (here, surplus value) is made by means of economic exchange, i.e., by the sale of labor-power. In practical terms, the development of agriculture beyond a certain point required machines and fertilizers, i.e., industry, hence capitalism. Capitalism began in the agriculture of the transition, then developed elsewhere before returning to agriculture to take it over.

These are very general and abstract definitions of the three forms of property: community (of the land), tributary (of the land) and capitalist (of the means of production other than the land). The emphasis is on the content of the property, understood as social control, and not on its legal and ideological forms. Each form of property necessarily corresponds to a stage in the development of the productive forces. At the first stage, the organization of production does not go beyond the lineage or the village. At the second stage, it is mainly regulated at the level of a more or less large state, but always larger than the village. The circulation of the surplus takes into account the importance of the specialized artisans, unproductive functions, the state, cities, trade, and so on. A higher level of development required a more widespread

market, the capitalist market. At this level of abstraction, each stage corresponds to a universal requirement

The first characteristic of the mode of production exhibited by the second stage of the development of the productive forces is that the extraction of the surplus product is obtained by non-economic means, since the producer is not separated from the means of production. This particular characteristic of the first class-based mode of production is in contrast with the communitarian mode that precedes it. In the latter, an exploiting class does not appropriate the surplus product. Rather, it is centralized by a ruling group for collective use or redistributed in accordance with the requirements of reproduction. The confusion between relations of cooperation and domination, on the one hand, and relations of exploitation, on the other, which is explained by the concern to combat the naïve simplifications that assimilate the communitarian mode with an idyllic primitive communism, is the cause of the absence of any distinction between the surplus product used collectively and the surplus product appropriated by an exploiting class. The extraction of the surplus product is, thus, like a tribute paid to the exploiting class. That is precisely why I have proposed to call it the tributary mode.

The second characteristic of the tributary mode is that the essential organization of production is based on use-value and not on exchange-value. The product retained by the producer is itself directly use-value intended for consumption, mostly for self-consumption. But the product extracted by the exploiting class is for it also directly use-value. Hence, the essence of the tributary mode is to set up a natural economy, without exchanges, though not without transfers (the tribute is one) and redistributions.

The conjunction of the extraction of the surplus by non-economic means and the dominance of use-value necessarily calls for consideration of the phenomenon of alienation. Two interpretations of historical materialism have confronted each other since the beginning. One reduces the method in practice to a linear economic determinism. In this view, the development of the productive forces engenders from itself the necessary adjustment of the relations of production

through social revolutions. The historical necessity of those revolutions is discovered by their actors. Then, the political and ideological superstructure is transformed to reflect the requirements for the reproduction of the relations of production. The other interpretation emphasizes the double dialectic of the productive forces and the relations of production, on the one hand, and the relations of production and the superstructure, on the other.

The first interpretation assimilates the laws of social evolution to those that govern nature. This interpretation continues the task set by Enlightenment philosophy and is the radical bourgeois interpretation of Marxism. The second interpretation contrasts the objective character of the laws of nature to the mixed objective-subjective character of the laws of society.

The first interpretation ignores alienation, or rather extends it to the entire history of humanity. Alienation is then a product of a human nature that transcends the history of social systems. Its roots are in anthropology, i.e., in the permanent relation of humanity to nature. History is made by force of circumstance. Human beings (or classes) naïvely believe that they make history. Their margin of apparent freedom is narrow, so strong is the determinism of technical progress. The second interpretation includes a distinction between two levels of alienation. There is the alienation resulting from the permanent relation between humanity and nature, which transcends social modes and defines human nature in its permanent dimension. It does not intervene directly in the evolution of social history. This is anthropological alienation. The other type of alienation forms the content of the ideological superstructure of societies. This is social alienation.

In attempting to specify the successive contents of this social alienation, the conclusion is reached that all pre-capitalist class-based social systems are characterized by the same social alienation, which could be called alienation in nature. The characteristics of the latter result, on the one hand, from the transparency of the economic relations of exploitation and, on the other hand, from the limited degree of control over nature corresponding to the level of development of the productive forces. Social alienation must necessarily take an

absolute, religious character, the condition for the dominant place that ideology occupies in social reproduction. In contrast, the social alienation of capitalism is based on both the opaqueness of market relations and a qualitatively more advanced degree of control over nature. Market alienation, thus, substitutes the economy for nature as the external force determining social evolution. The struggle to abolish exploitation and classes implies liberation from economic determinism. Communism should put an end to social alienation without, for all that, eliminating anthropological alienation. There are certainly non-monetary or even monetary exchanges in all tributary formations. But these exchanges are only incidentally market exchanges, that is, they are not based on exchange-value (the law of value), but on use-value (comparative utilities). Exchange in tributary formations is subjected to the fundamental law of the tributary mode just as, *mutatis mutandis*, landed property is subjected, in capitalism, to the fundamental law of capitalist accumulation.

The extraction of a tribute can never be obtained solely through the exercise of violence; it requires a certain social consensus. That is what Marx means by the observation that the ideology of the dominant class is the dominant ideology of the society. In the tributary mode, this ideology is expressed by great metaphysical systems: Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, and Confucianism. It functions here in aid of the extraction of the surplus, whereas in the communitarian mode it is the dominant ideology of kinship that functions in aid of the reproduction of relations of cooperation and domination, but not exploitation. Moreover, provincial or local religions are characteristic of the communitarian modes and the dominance of kinship systems, in contrast to the state religions characteristic of the tributary mode.

The dominance of the superstructure is the first consequence of the dominance of use-value at the level of the economic base, but the processes active in the superstructure affect, in turn, the class struggle in the tributary mode. In general, the exploited class does not fight for the total suppression of exploitation but only to keep it within the reasonable limits required for the reproduction of economic life at a level

of development of the productive forces implied by the collective use of the surplus product. This is related to the idea of the emperor appointed by heaven. In the West, the absolute monarch was sometimes allied with the peasantry against the feudal lords. Of course, this situation excludes neither the class struggle nor developments in the direction of totally abolishing exploitation. Peasant communisms can be detected everywhere: in Europe, the Muslim world, and China. Generally, the class struggle here is expressed through a challenge to ideology on its own terrain: in Christianity, Albigensian, and Protestant heresies opposed to the state churches; Shiism or Qarmatian communism opposed to Sunni Islam; Taoism opposed to Confucianism.

The third characteristic of the tributary mode is its appearance of stability, and even permanence, not in the least limited to Asia, of course. In reality, this misleading appearance occurs because of the contrast with capitalism. Based on exchange-value, the fundamental law inherent to capitalism is located on the level of the economic base. Competition between capitalists gives rise to the necessity for accumulation, i.e., the continual revolutionizing of the productive forces. The tributary mode, based on use-value, has no similar internal necessity operating at the level of its economic base.

However, tributary societies are not unchanging. They achieved remarkable progress in the development of their productive forces in Egypt, China, Japan, India and South Asia, the Arab and Persian East, North Africa and Sudan, Zimbabwe, pre-Columbian societies and Mediterranean or feudal Europe. But such progress does not imply a qualitative change in the relations of production. In the same way, the United States of 1980 and England of 1780 correspond to two extreme moments in the development of the productive forces on the basis of the same capitalist relations. New relations of production arise to overcome a blockage caused by the resistance of old relations and, thus, allow a new development.

The class struggle between the peasant producers and the tributary exploiting class takes up the entire history of the tributary formations in Asia, Africa, and Latin America as well as in Europe.

However, there is an essential difference between this struggle and that between proletarians and the bourgeoisie in capitalism. The latter could very well end by the victory of the proletariat and the establishment of a society without classes. The former could never end by a peasant victory. Each victory snatched by the peasantry in fact weakened the tributary exploiting class to the advantage of a rising third class, the bourgeoisie, which emerged partly along side the peasantry, from merchant capital, and partly within the peasantry, whose liberation, even if only partial, opened the way to internal differentiation. The class struggle is still, in the tributary mode, the motor of history, since it constitutes the contradiction through which this mode could be surpassed. The search for a larger surplus by the tributary class is certainly not an internal economic law similar to the pursuit of capitalist profit, but, under the impetus of peasant struggles, compels the tributary class and the peasants to improve the methods of production.

The class struggle also explains, at least in part, the foreign policy of the tributary class. The latter seeks to compensate for what it loses inside its own society through an expansionism that allows it to subject other peoples and substitute them for the internally exploited classes. Feudal wars proceed from this logic. It has even happened that a tributary class has succeeded in mobilizing the people to this type of adventure. There is a parallel here with the dependence of foreign policy on the internal class struggle in capitalism, even if the law of capitalist accumulation is different in nature. This parallel continues with imperialism, in an alliance of the bourgeoisie and the proletariat of a country directed towards the outside, as Marx and Engels had foreseen for England.

Before examining the specificities of different tributary formations, a series of theoretical questions concerning the relations of exchange and circulation should be elucidated.

In reality, an autonomous simple commodity mode of production does not exist. The conceptual definition of this mode, which does not imply an exploiting class, but only small, specialized producers who own their means of production and exchange their product

according to the law of value, clearly indicates its particular epistemological status.

Marx had already drawn attention to the necessary conditions for exchange to take place in accordance with the law of value: exchange must be systematic, not occasional; competitive, not monopolistic; and large enough to allow the adjustment of supply and demand, not marginal. This is not the general case for exchanges in so-called primitive societies studied by anthropology. Likewise, in tributary formations, characterized by the absence of a widespread market in the means of production and the presence of widespread self-subsistence, exchange takes place in general in accordance with the so-called neo-classical theory of value rather than the law of value, which is specifically applicable, in its transformed form, to capitalism.

Much confusion exists in the debates around the question of whether or not exchange in pre-capitalist societies dissolves the existing relations of production. It should never be forgotten that the law of the tributary mode dominates exchange, which only bears a fraction of the surplus. All historical studies concerning the relative and comparative importance of trade, mercantile organizations, urban centers, and so forth, while not being pointless, do not answer the essential questions. The fact that no tributary economy has ever been "natural" proves nothing for or against the thesis of the dissolving power of market relations.

I do not underestimate the importance of market relations. I have often emphasized their role in Arab social formations and shown that they have had, in return, a decisive effect on the tributary mode, securing its expansion in Iraq, for example, during the Abbasid era. Their existence, in fact, requires an examination of the relations between tributary societies, just as one would not examine central and peripheral capitalisms in isolation from one another. Hence, it is necessary to analyze the dialectical relations between internal and external forces in the history of tributary societies and, particularly, in the passage to capitalism.

II. EUROPEAN FEUDALISM: PERIPHERAL TRIBUTARY MODE

The feudal mode presents all the characteristics of the tributary mode in general. However, it also presents, at least at the beginning, the following characteristics: the organization of production within the framework of a domain, involving rent in labor, and the lord's exercise of political and judicial prerogatives, which results in political decentralization. These characteristics reflect the origin of the feudal formation in the barbarian invasions, i.e., people who remained at the stage of class formation when they took over a more advanced society. The feudal mode is simply a primitive, incomplete tributary mode.

Feudalism does not result from slavery. Their temporal succession is an illusion. Instead, it reproduces the general law relative to the passage from a classless society to a class society; after the communitarian stage comes the tributary stage. Besides, Japanese feudalism came from the communitarian stage without ever going through slavery.

It is a recognized fact that the barbarians were at the communitarian stage. Are the Slav, German, and Indian versions of such communities so different from those known since then: Inca, Aztec, Maya, Malagasy, pre-Islamic Arab, and more than a hundred African examples? Is it just by chance that, in moving from the communitarian to the tributary stage, the Germanic peoples abandoned their local reli-

gions and adopted a religion of empire, Christianity? Is it an accident that the same thing happened in Africa with Islamization?

Feudal property is not radically different from tributary property. It is a primitive species of the latter, the specificity of which is due to the weak and decentralized character of political power. To oppose the state's eminent domain over the land in Asia to so-called private seigniorial property is to mix up the true and the false. The eminent domain of the state operates at the superstructural level as justification for taxes, but not at the level of the technical organization of production. In European feudalism, the eminent domain of the Christian God (the earth must be cultivated, the peasants have a right to access it, and so on) functions in the same way in a weakened version, corresponding to the rudimentary character of the state. Also, as far as progress of the productive forces is concerned, the original political decentralization will give way to centralization. The European absolute monarchies will become more like the developed tributary forms. The primitive feudal form evolves gradually towards the advanced tributary form.

The incomplete character of the feudal mode occurs in the absence of centralization of the surplus, in connection with the fragmentation of political authority, and on this basis the European feudal mode evolved in the direction of a tributary mode, with the establishment of absolute monarchies. The direction of this evolution does not exclude the possibility of actual regressions from advanced tributary modes to feudal fragmentation, which occurred in various places. The centralization of the surplus implies, in fact, both the actual preeminence of a central power and the relatively advanced marketization of at least this surplus. Circumstances could cause both factors to regress, sometimes in connection with one another. The feudalization of Arab formations is an example. This took place, moreover, in connection with the gradual establishment of the domination of nascent European capitalism over the whole world system of mercantilism and illustrates my thesis that the potential appearance of an Arab capitalism was stopped by the growth of European capitalism. In some ways, the feudal mode is, thus, sometimes also a decadent tributary mode.

The contrast between the central, developed tributary mode and the undeveloped character of the peripheral feudal mode is, consequently, not the same as the contrast between the center and periphery in the capitalist system. Due to the dominance of ideology in tributary formations, it is within the framework of ideology that the developed or undeveloped character of the mode on which these formations are based appears.

In my book *Class and Nation*, I offer an analysis of the formation of European feudalism from Oriental and Mediterranean Antiquity. The Hellenistic and Roman imperial formations constituted the beginnings of imperial tributary structures. However, the Roman Empire collapsed before completing the transition. Three systems were reconstructed on its ruins: the Christian West, Byzantium, and the Arab-Islamic state. The latter two were, without a doubt, much further advanced than the Roman Empire in constructing a tributary formation. This evolution has left traces still visible today in the Arab world, while the Christian West is still marked by the primitive societies of barbarian Europe.

The feudal mode was a distinguishing feature of the entire Christian West, but it did not develop in a similar manner throughout the region. There were three subregions. The most developed region was Italy and the areas that are known today as Occitania (Spain was under the control of the Muslims). Feudal forms were not widespread in this region because they encountered a solidly based older heritage, particularly in the cities, which were of significant size. The second region (northern France, England, Holland, western and southern Germany and Bohemia) was moderately developed. It is here that the capitalist transition found its most favorable terrain. To the east and north (eastern Germany, Scandinavia, Hungary, Poland, and Russia), the original level of development was quite low, because of the closeness of the pre-tributary community. Feudalism appeared here later in specific forms connected with, on the one hand, the ways in which these regions were integrated into the European whole (the Hanseatic cities, Scandinavia, Prussia, and Poland) and, on the other, the development of relations of external domination (the Turkish occupation of

Hungary, the Mongol occupation of Russia and the Teutonic occupation of the Baltic regions).

In all forms of the tributary mode, as we have seen, ideology is the dominant instance in the sense that social reproduction takes place directly within this context. In the developed tributary mode, this ideology becomes an ideology of the state. Thus, the superstructure is perfectly suitable for the relations of production. On the contrary, in the feudal mode, ideology, here Catholicism, does not function as a state ideology. Not that Christianity was opposed to fulfilling that function. Under the Roman Empire, Christianity had become a state ideology and it did so again in Byzantium, precisely in the areas closest to the fully developed mode. But in the West, Catholicism came up against the fragmentation of the tributary class and peasant resistance, a vestige of the ideology of the original communitarian societies. The independent organization of the Church reflected this less perfect fit between the superstructure and the relations of production, which created a more propitious, and more flexible, terrain for later changes in and adjustments to the requirements for transformation of the relations of production. These adjustments led either to a modification of the ideological content of the religion (Protestantism) or its elevation to a state ideology (in its Gallican or Anglican form, for example), as proclaimed by royal absolutism in the mercantilist transition period.

The persistence of external and internal market relations prevents us from reducing feudal Europe to a juxtaposition of fiefs characterized by a subsistence economy. Europe was structured by long distance trade with the Byzantine and Arab regions and, beyond that, with monsoon Asia and black Africa, as well as by the continuation of internal European trade and local trade. That is clearly shown by the coexistence of predominantly rural, less urbanized zones and areas of concentrated commercial and artisanal activity. Italy, with its market and artisanal cities (Venice, Florence, Pisa, and Genoa), southern Germany and the Hanseatic cities occupy positions in medieval Christendom that cannot be understood without taking these market relations into account. These regions, Italy in particular, hosted not

only the most developed productive forces (factories), but also the embryo of early capitalist relations.

European feudalism, then, is a specific form of the more general tributary mode. This specificity exists in connection with the primitive, incomplete, peripheral character of the feudal form. Later, we will see how the other obvious particularities of feudal Europe (autonomy of the cities, peasant freedoms, political interaction between the absolute monarchies, and the class struggle) can also be inferred from this primitive and incomplete character and how, far from being a handicap, this backwardness was the major asset of Europe in its relations with other regions of the world that were paradoxically handicapped by their more advanced state. If the opposing theses appear to me to be manifestations of Eurocentrism, this is because they search for European specificity, not in this backwardness, but in mythological directions.

The specificity of feudalism should be contrasted with the specificities of other important tributary civilizations. The specificities of Arab civilization I dealt with in *The Arab Nation*. Certain developments of the Ottoman Empire, in the Balkan part, offer striking parallels.

Each tributary society presents a particular appearance, but all can be analyzed with the same concepts of the tributary mode of production and the class opposition between tributary exploiters and exploited peasant producers. An example is provided by the caste system in India. This concept, a reflection of Hindu ideology, which functions here as an ideology of the state in the exercise of its absolutist dominance, masks social reality: the tributary appropriation of the land by the exploiters (warriors of the Kshatriya caste and the priestly caste of Brahmins), the exploitation of the Sudra, and the redistribution of the tribute among the supporters of the exploiters (the Jajmani system). It has been shown that the Indian castes only have an existence at the ideological level, while a tributary regime of exploitation operates in reality. The Chinese gentry exploitation system and the accompanying Confucian ideology certainly have their particularities, but on the fundamental level of the class struggle between exploiters and exploited and its dynamic, the similarity is striking. This is also true for the Arab

and Ottoman Muslim Orient to the point that the articulation between the fundamental tributary relations and market relations operates in the same manner: formation of merchant-warrior classes, private appropriation of the land, and so forth.

III. MERCANTILISM AND THE TRANSITION TO CAPITALISM: UNEQUAL DEVELOPMENT, KEY TO THE MIRACLE OF EUROPEAN PARTICULARITY

The period that extends from the Renaissance, in the sixteenth century, to the industrial revolution, at the dawn of the nineteenth century, is clearly a transitional period from feudalism to capitalism. I do not intend here to go over the different propositions that have been advanced to explain the gradual formation of European capitalism. I only propose to show how the incomplete character of the European feudal mode explains the rapidity of this development.

The literature on the era of European mercantilism is rich and detailed, and we should be glad of that. Transition periods are really by nature quite varied. There are no general laws for transitions like there are for stable stages of a specific mode. A transition is analyzed *a posteriori* in a concrete conjunction specific to the mode that is undergoing the transition.

Analysis of the mercantilist transition demands that the respective roles of the breakup of the feudal relations of production and the development of the mercantile Atlantic economy during the birth of capitalism be assessed. We are thus referred to the necessity for a comprehensive theory of the mercantilist system. This theory should make explicit the movement of forces that make the birth of capitalism inevitable. It must, at the same time, take into account the inequalities

and asymmetries that develop in the course of this period between Europe and its colonies, dependencies, and overseas partners as much as within Europe itself.

Trying to determine if the mercantilist period is feudal or capitalist makes no sense. The true question is: what classes are present, how are the struggles and alliances between them organized, how are the economic struggles of these classes, their ideological expressions, and their effects on political power articulated?

It is obvious that this period is a transitional one, where feudal and capitalist relations coexist. The feudal nature of political power clearly shows that the dominant character of society remains feudal in England until the revolutions of the seventeenth century, in France until 1789, and in Germany and Italy until the completion of their unity in the nineteenth century. However, there is a danger of falling into formalism if the rupture entailed by the bourgeois revolution is understood in an absolute sense. The class struggle opposing feudal to bourgeois begins before and continues after this rupture, intervenes in the organization of power and modifies its substance. Cromwell's revolution is followed by a restoration, then a gradual and incomplete second revolution occurs, followed peacefully by the expansion of the electorate in 1832. The French Revolution, which culminates in 1793, is followed by a long restoration. The 1848 revolution is part bourgeois and part proletarian, though already in 1793 the embryonic proletarian movement had pointed beyond the bourgeois revolution, and is followed by a second restoration. The unification of Germany and that of Italy are hardly revolutions, but they create the conditions for extraordinary social changes. Does the abolition of serfdom in 1861 in Russia mark a bourgeois rupture? What about February 1917?

Hence, the feudal reaction does not suffice to describe absolutist power in the West as feudal. There is, at the same time, a development of a free peasantry, the beginning of differentiation of capitalist classes within that peasantry (yeomen and agricultural workers), expansion of manufacturing, and differentiation within the artisanal industry that is freed from the constraints of the guild system.

The dominant Eurocentric thesis, beyond the various forms it assumes, always emphasizes characteristics considered to be specific to Europe, such as the autonomy of cities and the expansion of internal and external market relations. Unquestionably, the cities of feudal society just like the countryside, and for the same reason, are not controlled to any great extent by central authorities. At the beginning, that control is almost nonexistent. However, as feudalism advances towards its tributary form, the absolute monarchy reduces this autonomy. The urban phenomenon is not specific to European feudalism. Moreover, it is older than European feudalism. Classical Antiquity is urban *par excellence*. Are these cities autonomous? Less than they appear to be. On the one hand, these are cities of landowners. On the other, insofar as they expand from the direct and indirect effects of large-scale trade, their domination over distant and foreign rural areas, from the indirect exploitation of which they benefit, remains precarious because it occurs only through trade and shifting alliances. The Arab cities were in a nearly similar situation. As for the very large Chinese cities, they are part of a developed and advanced tributary mode in which they reflect the complexity of the abundant secondary distributions of the surplus (flourishing artisan production and factories). However, like the Arab cities, they are under the effective control of the central tributary power. In the Arab world, when this tributary power is weakened, the cities decline. In contrast, Japanese cities are originally large and autonomous, for the same reason as in the West: the weakness of the central feudal power. However, they will regress because the absence of external expansion, from which European cities benefit, forces the Japanese mercantile class, despite its freedom of movement, to turn towards the countryside and invest in buying land and usury.

The essential feature is clearly visible across the variety of appearances. The stimulating force of older feudal cities (where the guilds are the dominant force over political authorities) or the newer ones (where neither the guilds nor the political authorities are dominant) is due to the weakness of the central government. When the latter begins to assert itself in the absolute monarchies, feudal relations have already largely begun to fall apart, even in the countryside.

This breakdown is due to the fragmentation of feudal power. As a result, the class struggle quickly transcends the confines of the manorial economy. Small farms are established, initially subjected to rent in kind, then later money rent. This transformation eases the burden of the tribute, quickens the pace of peasant accumulation, and initiates differentiation within the peasantry. When the feudal class reacts and attempts, by means of the absolute monarchy, to stop the liberation of the peasantry, serfdom has long since disappeared, the peasantry is already differentiated, and the market is in the process of developing.

The dialectic between the two ways of progressing to capitalism is based on this essential foundation. On one side, there is the establishment of factories and the putting-out system, controlled by merchant capital based on long-distance trade. On the other, there is the creation of small industrial companies by the "kulak" stratum of the peasantry. There are contradictions, sometimes significant ones, between these two paths, particularly when the large bourgeoisie has rallied to the feudal monarchy in exchange for protections. They take advantage of those protections in the competitive struggle with the fragmented bourgeoisie of the towns and country.

The transition is by nature quite varied. Since there are no general laws, the same immediate causes can seem to give rise to opposite effects. Italy suffered from the early appearance of embryonic capitalist relations and Spain from its hold over America while, in France and England, the absolutist feudal state was formed to compensate for the end of serfdom and was strengthened by growing urbanization. In the East, absolutism emerged in the absence of urbanization and was the means to establish a serfdom necessitated by the less advanced productive forces and the lack of space.

The rapidity with which Europe passed from feudalism to capitalism (three centuries) is not a mystery that calls for recourse to some explanation based on the specificity of European peoples or cultures. It is explained simply by the advantage gained from the backwardness of feudal Europe.

Each mode of production is characterized by contradictions and specific laws of development. The feudal mode, as a species of the

large family of tributary modes, is characterized by the same fundamental contradiction (peasant producers versus an exploiting tributary class) as all the other species of this mode. The greater flexibility resulting from the undeveloped character of the feudal mode leads to the more rapid appearance of an embryonic capitalist mode within feudal relations. There are three classes present during the mercantilist period: peasants, feudal lords, and bourgeoisie. The triangular class struggle involves a shifting alliance of two against one. The struggle of the peasants against the feudal lords leads to differentiation within the peasantry and either the development of a small agrarian capitalism or to the adaptation of feudalism to an agrarian capitalism of large landowners. The struggle of the urban bourgeois merchants against the feudal lords is structured around the previous struggle and leads to the development of factories. The bourgeoisie tends to split into an upper part, which seeks a compromise (royal protection for factories and merchant companies, ennoblement, and seigniorial rights), and a lower part, which is forced to become more radical.

The tendency for the feudal fragmentation of power to evolve towards absolutism is based on these basic struggles. Depending on the relative strength of each group, this evolution occurs quickly in various forms or fails. Consequently, the government acquires a certain autonomy, and hence a certain ambiguity, to which Marx and Engels called attention. If the formation of centralized states does not block the evolution towards capitalism but, on the contrary, quickens it, this is due to a heightened class struggle. When the tributary mode in Europe takes on its developed form with the absolute monarchies, the contradictions of the new classes (based in agrarian capitalism and manufacturing capitalism) are already too advanced to slow down their development in any significant manner. In connection with these specific combinations, it is necessary to analyze the development of the international division of labor among the regions of mercantilist Europe and between some of these regions and the overseas peripheries they create. It is also necessary to analyze in this way the substance of the important ideological currents (Reform, Renaissance, and Enlightenment philosophy) that are, to various degrees, combina-

tions of a large bourgeois component, a petit bourgeois one (agrarian or artisanal), a peasant one, and sometimes even an embryonic proletarian one. England is the prototype of the mercantilist center. It is not only a trading country, but a manufacturing one as well. It strictly controls its imports in order to strengthen its autonomous development. It is not autarkic; it is an expanding power. The true religion of this state is not Protestantism, but nationalism, as demonstrated by Anglicanism.

At the end of the period, a world characterized by a new kind of unequal development emerges, different from the unequal development of earlier eras: the unequal development of the mercantilist period. In 1800, there are capitalist centers and peripheries, primarily shaped by the emergence of the former. Among the capitalist centers, only England and, to a lesser degree, France are developed.

The analysis of tributary society proposed above has been deliberately reduced to an essential outline, defined by the mode of production. That sufficed to bring out the common characteristics of the different forms of the tributary mode and set out their pertinent specificities (particularly concerning European feudalism). That, in turn, was sufficient to isolate the essential traits of the dynamic common to these societies, i.e., the similarity in the class struggles displayed by all of them and the objective necessity for the capitalist surpassing of their contradictions. In this way, and this way only, can one be freed from the dominant Eurocentrism.

However, when we reach the analysis of the concrete transition from the tributary mode to capitalism, it is no longer possible to limit ourselves to this outline. That is why we introduce at this stage the two concepts of social formation and system of social formations. This is not the place to examine these concepts and their use in practice. I will only state here that a social formation is a complex whole organized around a dominant mode and a system of formations exists when the relations between several formations (particularly through market exchanges) are significant enough to modify the conditions of development internal to the formations in question. Class oppositions and alliances in one formation significantly affect oppositions and alliances

in another, either in a more or less symmetrical and equal manner (then the formations that make up the system can be considered autonomous) or in an asymmetrical manner (then one can speak of centers and peripheries). The world capitalist system is a developed example of the latter model. It is not the only one, however. I have offered on various occasions analyses carried out on the level of the whole system that make it possible to get out of the impasses of an analysis restricted to formations taken in isolation from one another. In this context, I particularly want to indicate my analysis of the ancient Orient (Hellenistic and Roman) and the Arab world. Later, we will see that the phenomenon of slavery, far from constituting a necessary, universal stage, owes its development to certain particularities characteristic of the functioning of mercantile systems.

The concept of system brings consideration of market relations (long-distance trade) back into the analysis. The importance of these relations is too often neglected while paying exclusive attention to market relations internal to a formation. The reciprocal influence between internal and external market relations is often decisive for understanding the dynamics of the internal transformation of a formation. My propositions were, at an earlier time, very poorly received by the majority of Western Marxists. Dogmatism prevented them from going beyond the analysis of the mode of production and the class relations and relations of exploitation that characterize it. The term "circulationist deviation" (i.e., attributing to circulation the capacity to generate value which, as we all know, can have no source other than production) was then uttered in a doctrinal tone. Most of these critics discovered twenty years later the importance of the concept of system. However, throwing out the baby with the bath water, they then believed it necessary purely and simply to abandon Marxism. If their reaction had been less dismissive, perhaps they would have been capable of comprehending right away that the introduction of the concept of system fit in perfectly well with the development of historical materialism.

Eurocentrism is confined to considering only the European mercantilist transition to capitalism. Examination of analogous develop-

ments underway elsewhere is not even considered once the question has been settled *a priori* by the thesis that the Asiatic mode of production blocks further development. A less partial examination of the history of some other societies provides strong indications that capitalism was also paving a way for itself when subjection to European imperialism stopped its progress.

Ramkrishna Mukherjee and Amiya Kumar Bagchi¹ have offered a history of the beginnings of an autonomous capitalist development in India, supplemented by a history of its systematic destruction by British colonization. These works, to which I refer the reader, should put a definitive end to Marx's celebrated, and unfortunate, comment on the British undertaking in India.

A second example is Egyptian mercantilism.² Arab, particularly Egyptian, communism has carried on a lively debate on this topic, which, unfortunately, is only known by readers of Arabic. Egyptian historiography presents all the factors which show that the Mamluk system had begun to change before Bonaparte's expedition and displayed all the characteristics of a possible transition to capitalism: (1) development of internal market relations (in connection with external relations); (2) private appropriation of the land (in the Delta) and proletarianization; (3) development of wage-earners and factories; (4) triangular political relations among the state tributary class (Mamluk), rural bourgeoisie (kulaks) and mercantile class, and the people (peasant and urban), which brings to mind the triangular relations of the absolute monarchy with the bourgeoisie and the people in Europe; and (5) beginnings of an ideological debate within Islam in many respects similar to that which had motivated the Protestant Reformation in Christianity. I have suggested that Bonaparte's expedition was part of the competition between European mercantilism (in this context, French) and the Egyptian mercantilism of the era. I also have offered an analysis of the contradictions and limits of the mercantilist system constructed by Muhammad Ali during the first half of the nineteenth century (similar in many respects to the Meiji transition in Japan) and broken up by European intervention in 1840.

The debate continues on the specific dynamics of the Egyptian transition, its contradictions and limitations, and the conjunction between these and the external conflict with emerging capitalism in Europe. Fawzy Mansour has endeavored to specify the reasons for the slow progress towards capitalism in Egyptian mercantilism. He attributes this in particular to the continual interventions of the (tributary) government, reducing the margin of autonomy for the new economic powers built on mercantile wealth and private appropriation of the land.

This type of conflict is inherent in all mercantilist transitions throughout the world. Everywhere, tributary government attempted in the same way to limit the growth of an autonomous capitalist economic power. This was the policy of the absolutist monarchies in Europe. The difference in the situations arises from the fact that when these monarchies were formed, after the fashion of the fully developed tributary governments in place much earlier elsewhere, it was already too late. European mercantilism actually appeared after long centuries of feudalism, characterized by the weakness of central authority, which had allowed the formation of various types of bourgeois autonomy (cities, guilds, and private property). The absolute monarchy, unable to destroy the new capitalist social forces completely, was forced to ally itself with those forces in exchange for the latter's political submission and their support against the autonomy of the feudal lords. This was an effective strategy in the short term, since it supported absolutist authority for two to three centuries. However, it ultimately ruined its inventors because the gradual strengthening of capitalist relations within the framework of royal protection ultimately undermined the monarchies. The nascent bourgeoisie threw off the constraints and imposed their political authority freed from the constraints of the Ancien Régime. Elsewhere, in China or in the Ottoman East, the much older tributary state tradition was expressed with such force that it slowed a movement that was, nevertheless, inevitable in many respects.

With the removal of Eurocentric prejudices, the comparison between the mercantilist transitions begun in all advanced tributary

societies immediately suggests the thesis of unequal development, which can be formulated in the following terms: at the center of a system, that is, where the relations of production are more firmly entrenched, the development of the productive forces governed by these relations strengthens the cohesion of the whole system, while in the periphery, the inadequate development of the productive forces provides more flexibility, which explains the earlier revolutionary outcome. Recalling that every change is determined in the last instance by the economic base, this thesis is an extension of the principles of historical materialism, not their negation.

IV. EUROCENTRISM AND THE DEBATE OVER SLAVERY

One of the most widespread ideas, in scholarly circles as well as in popular opinion, is that the historical sequence from slave to serf to free individual describes a development of universal validity. For Marxists, with this sequence in mind, slavery was then a necessary stage that can be explained by the internal dynamics of the society (any society) at a certain stage of the development of the productive forces.

Unquestionably, the proposed sequence is attractive because it corroborates the philosophical idea of continuous progress. It can be acknowledged that the status of the free wageworker (and citizen) is less disagreeable than the status of the serf (who, all the same, has some rights, notably access to the land on which he lives), which is better than the status of the slave.

The problem is that there is no trace of this supposedly necessary slavery stage in the historical trajectories of numerous peoples who succeeded in developing the productive forces and a civilization that was anything but primitive, such as Egypt and China. On the other hand, it is well known that the societies of ancient Greece and Rome, which Europeans try to convince themselves are their cultural ancestors, were based on the labor of slaves.

Faced with this difficulty, Eurocentrism responds in two apparently contradictory manners. Some persist in affirming, against the evi-

dence, the universality of the slave mode of production. Others, acknowledging its geographically limited extent, make the best of a bad situation. For them, slavery is limited to a specifically and exclusively European historical path: Greco-Roman slavery, European feudalism, and Western capitalism. This is the glorious path of progress, although just for Europe, to which is opposed the dead end of those societies that avoided slavery. Unfortunately, it should be noted that European feudalism did not develop where slavery was widespread, on the shores of the Mediterranean, but in the barbarian forests of the North. The slavery-feudal sequence only makes sense if it is decreed that Greeks, Romans, and Europeans are one and the same people who then would have experienced as such the two successive stages. With one stroke, Greece is annexed to the West. However, that is done through tautological reasoning: Greece is the birthplace of slavery, slavery precedes (in Europe, which includes Greece) feudalism, thus Greece belongs to Europe. Consequently, the link between Greece and the ancient Orient (Egypt, Mesopotamia, Syria, and Persia) is broken. Greece is even opposed to the Orient (democratic European Athens, although slaveholding, against obviously barbaric Asiatic Persia), just as Christianity and Islam will be opposed to one another (forgetting that Christianity is originally from the Orient) and the Greek child to the Ottoman despot. This is, in fact, a legend fabricated in the nineteenth century.

The Greco-Roman exception is the origin of a series of major confusions. The publication of the *Grundrisse* gave rise to an explosion of Marxological work. The more erudite this work was, the further it moved away from Marxism. According to Tokei and his students, two paths are available to develop out of the primitive community. The first is the path taken by Asia: the communities remained and a despotic state was superimposed on them. The communities still remained owners of the land. The producers organized into families had an insecure hold over the land. This path was a dead end, which blocked the development of the productive forces and reduced the history of Asia to the immutable repetition of the same superficial scenario. The other path involved the dissolution of the community and the affirmation of

individual private property in the land. It gave rise to an initial radical division of the society into classes, since those who had lost their agricultural property were reduced to slavery. From that developed the Greek miracle and subsequently its extension to the Roman Empire. Then came the transformation of slavery into serfdom and the exceptional formation of feudalism. Seigniorial property, still private, favored the development of the contradictions (autonomy of the cities and peasants struggling for private peasant property) that gave rise to capitalism. This was the path of continual change and incessant progress. This was Europe's path, the origins of which thus go back to ancient Greece. In this unique path, slavery occupies a decisive place in starting the whole process. From that results the chronological classification of the supposed Asiatic (blocked), ancient, feudal, and capitalist modes, with the last three being in a necessary sequence.

This is not a scientific theory. The factual elements on which it is based are skimpy and questionable. Yet, they are not imaginary creations because they find their place without difficulty in the sequence that moves from communitarian systems to tributary systems outlined above. The theory is a Eurocentric teleology that arises *a posteriori* due to the capitalist development of Europe, which implies basically that no other society could succeed in reaching capitalism by itself. If all that were true, then one should conclude that the laws of historical materialism only apply to the West and draw the idealist Hegelian conclusion that the history of the West corresponds to the realization of reason. This supposed Marxism agrees with the cultural nationalism of the ideologues who, in the contemporary Third World, reject Marxism because it is not applicable to their specific societies! Eurocentrism, product of imperialist ideology disguised as Marxism, at one extreme, and culturalist nationalism, at the other, are two sides of the same coin.

Let us return to the other Eurocentric tradition, universalist in appearance, since it makes slavery into a necessary stage and thus a general one.

No one will be too surprised to discover among these ideas manifestations of the official dogmatism of the Soviet Union, China, and

others, anxious to prove that their Scythian or Han ancestors, just like all peoples, Incas or Egyptians, have passed through this slavery stage. The proof is, of course, provided by a citation drawn from a sacred text and spiced up with some archeological discoveries which, since they do not mean very much in and of themselves, present the advantage of being able to be interpreted in just the right way.

However, it would be wrong to suppose that this approach is exclusively a product of the socialist world. The West also has its Eurocentric Marxists. In order to establish the general applicability of the slavery mode of production, come Hell or high water, there is frequent recourse to the subterfuge that confuses slavery as a mode of production with inequality in personal status. The latter is obviously a general phenomenon, in communitarian societies as much as in tributary societies. This makes it possible, through a semantic shift, to translate a thousand terms with different connotations, expressed in various languages and referring to quite different facts, by the same word "slavery," and with that the trick is accomplished! In reality, the inequality in question refers most often to political organization and not to the exploitation of labor. Thus, there are sometimes "slaves" in communitarian societies without a connection to any sort of exploitation of labor, which is in principle excluded or, at the most, exists only in embryo, just as there are unequal statuses in the political organization of all tributary systems, such as the estates in the Ancien Régime, castes, or servants of the state (the Mamluks, for example), which do not refer directly to the exploitation of labor.

All observers of true slave societies, ones that exploit the productive labor of slaves, have remarked on the exceptional character of this mode of predatory exploitation. Slaves reproduce only with difficulty, and it is difficult to reduce a native population to slavery. Thus, slavery presupposes that the society that lives by it carries out raids outside its own territory. It dies out when the possibility of such raids ceases (which is what happened, in particular, at the end of the great pro-slavery century of the Roman Empire). In other words, slavery cannot be understood by means of an analysis focused exclusively on what occurs inside the society in question. The concept of a system of

formations must be introduced into the analysis, some being the societies of the slaveholders and others the societies where the hunt occurs. That is why slavery appears most often in connection with extensive external market relations that permit the purchase of slaves. The armed bands that engage in the hunt for human beings, and the unstable type of society that they set up, would hardly exist without a market outlet for their product. This type of society does not form a necessary stage in itself. It is an appendage of a dynamic that largely escapes it.

Observe the curious coexistence between slavery and extensive market relations in classical antiquity, lower Iraq, and America. The existence of market production is uncommon in the pre-capitalist world. The areas where slavery dominated, then, cannot be understood by themselves. They are only parts of much larger wholes. Athenian slavery can only be explained if the Greek cities are integrated into the environment in which they carried on trade. Their specializations exist within a context that included the Orient, where slavery did not penetrate. In the Roman West, slavery was limited to the coastal zones, where the product could be marketed. Transportation costs prevented its extension to Gaul and Spain, proof of its connection with trade. America had no separate existence since it was the periphery of mercantilist Europe. That is also why slavery is associated with the most varied levels of development of the productive forces, from Greco-Roman Antiquity, to nineteenth century capitalism in the United States and Brazil! How could a necessary stage be found in combination with such different levels of development of the productive forces?

V. EUROCENTRISM IN THE THEORY OF THE NATION

Eurocentrism is expressed in practically all areas of social thought. Here, I will choose one of these, the theory of the nation, because of the significant political conclusions that result.

Social reality is not limited just to modes of production, social formations, systems of formations, the state, and social classes. Even if it is acknowledged that these are, in the last analysis, the essential core of global reality, the latter also includes a wide variety of nations, ethnic groups, family structures, linguistic or religious communities, and all other forms of life that have a real existence and occupy a place in human consciousness. All of these must be included in a theory that articulates them with one another. Eliminating these realities from the field of analysis, unfortunately, as some Marxist dogmatists frequently do under the pretext that these realities are masks hiding the fundamental realities of class, impoverishes historical materialism and makes it powerless in the struggle to transform reality. There is no reason to conclude that the conflict between the “fundamental forces” is always in the forefront of history. In numerous circumstances, those fundamental forces act only indirectly. The immediate confrontations are the result of other so-called non-fundamental forces. The task of historical materialism is precisely to offer a method capable of articulating all of these realities. In so doing, it is opposed to bourgeois

eclecticism that, in making each of these realities autonomous, refuses to arrange them into an organized whole according to some principle of necessity.

The distinctive feature of Eurocentrism is either to view the particular European way of articulating nation, state, and classes as a model that reveals the specificity of the European spirit (and, therefore, a model for others to follow, if they can) or the expression of a general law that will be inevitably reproduced elsewhere, even if delayed.

In the European experience, the formation of what are today called nations is closely linked with the crystallization of a state and the centralized circulation at this level of a specifically capitalist surplus (unification of the market, including markets for labor and capital). This double link is entirely attributable to the fact that feudalism, as an incompletely developed form of the tributary mode, is characterized by the fragmentation of power and the tributary surplus in its feudal form. The minor portion of the surplus that takes on market form circulates in an area that includes all of Christian Europe, the Muslim Orient, and, through the latter as intermediary, more distant regions. The other portion of the product that takes on market form (a portion of subsistence), also small, is exchanged on local markets serving a limited area. The intermediate level, what today is called the national market, does not exist. The development of capitalism is going to be based on this level by, at one pole, uniting the local markets through an enlargement of the marketable portion of the product and, at the other pole, subjecting distant markets (which becomes "foreign trade") to the requirements of constructing the national market. In order to do that, capitalism needed the state, which organizes these operations, and a middle space that corresponds to the material conditions of the time in terms of optimal population in sufficient densities, transportation, and means of defense. The nation was the outcome of this evolution.

The Stalinist theory of the nation, conceived as the specific outcome of capitalist development, is nothing more than an abstract and general expression of this real European experience. In that respect, it is well and truly Eurocentric. However, this theory is not specifically

Stalinist. Marx, Engels, and Lenin also espoused this theory, as did the Second International and the Austro-Marxists. It is also implicit in revolutionary bourgeois theory (the French Revolution that "creates the Nation," German and Italian unity). In sum, it is still the dominant theory.

An examination of advanced tributary societies, particularly China and Egypt, and a closer look at Arab history leads us to replace the narrow Eurocentric concept of the nation with a more universal one. A concept of the nation can be defined in contrast with that of the ethnic group, both involving a linguistic community, according to whether or not there is centralization at the level of the state and, through its intervention, centralization of the surplus. Thus, the nation cannot be separated from the analysis of the state, without there being any superposition between state and nation.

On this basis, a systematic search for the nation through history can be proposed. The nation appears clearly in two places: (1) in developed tributary societies where the tribute is centralized by the state, the tributary class being part of the state (China or Egypt), in contrast to relatively undeveloped tributary societies (such as the European feudal societies) where the tribute remains fragmented; and (2) in capitalism where the competition of capitals (with the resulting equalization of profits rates) and the mobility of labor are managed by state intervention (legislation, the monetary system, and state economic policy). The Eurocentric deformation of the common concept of the nation is explained by the inherent conditions of Europe (i.e., the absence of nations during the feudal era and the concomitant birth of the nation and capitalism).

The concept of the nation appears clearly in developed societies, whether tributary (China or Egypt) or capitalist (the European nations of central capitalism). In undeveloped, peripheral modes of production, the ethnic social reality is too vague to be called national. This is the case in feudal Europe because the feudal is only an undeveloped tributary mode. This is also true of contemporary capitalist peripheries. Likewise, the coincidence between society and nation often disappears in transition periods.

One more step needs to be taken in this analysis. The history of the European experience reveals two other important facts: (1) the nation does not potentially preexist its creation; and (2) the model of the coincidence between state and nation is only an ideal model, imperfectly realized, and this model does not correspond to any requirement of capitalism.

Nationalist ideology has its foundation in the myth of a nation that preexists its constitution into a state. Reality shows that conglomerations of peasant peoples are for a long time more provincial than national (the imposition of the language that will become national is a slow process) and the bourgeoisie of the feudal and Ancien Régime periods is often more cosmopolitan (at ease in all of Christian Europe, dividing its loyalties according to its financial interests, political allegiances, and religious convictions) than national in the modern sense of the term. The role of the state in the construction of the nation has always been decisive.

However, this ideology has become a force that, through its own autonomy, has changed the course of history. Discussion of the Austro-Marxist theses shows that this ideology inspired political attitudes in conflict with the requirements of capitalist development. Transferred from its place of origin (Western Europe) to the east and south, into the Austro-Hungarian, Russian, Ottoman, and Arab regions, nationalist ideology ended up causing the break up of some whole regions. These regions could have formed the basis for a more coherent capitalist development than that which adapted itself to the limitations of state fragmentation founded on the Renaissance or the invention of nations.

VI. ACTUALLY EXISTING CAPITALISM AND THE GLOBALIZATION OF VALUE

From the moment Rudolf Bahro proposed the expression “actually existing socialism,” it has experienced a well-known fate: it is used by socialism’s detractors (who impute to socialism all the negative phenomena of the regimes that bear this name) as much as by the late defenders of these regimes (who claim that, despite everything, they remained socialist, i.e., the balance was positive overall). On the other hand, the idea of speaking of “actually existing capitalism” never arises. Capitalism in popular opinion, and we will see the same thing in scholarly analyses, is the North America and Western Europe of the television serial *Dallas*, the welfare state, and democracy. The millions of abandoned children in Brazil, famine in the Sahel, the bloody dictatorships of Africa, slavery in the mines of South Africa, and the exhaustion of young girls on the assembly lines of the electronics factories in Korea and elsewhere, all of that is not truly capitalism, but only the vestiges of the previous society. Worse yet, these are non-European forms of capitalism, and it is incumbent on the people concerned to get rid of them so that they can enjoy the same advantages as Westerners. In one form or another, it is a question of one stage in a line of development that homogenizes the world in Europe’s image.

World capitalism appears in forms that, on the face of it, everyone knows. However, it needs to be reexamined, if only briefly, in order to

outline its true nature and reveal the deformations caused by the Eurocentric view.

The first characteristic is inequality on the world scale, marked by income gaps between one country and another. The ratio is roughly on the order of fifteen for the developed capitalist countries to one for the countries of the Third World. The second characteristic is that the inequality in the internal, national distribution of income is considerably more pronounced in peripheral societies than in the societies of the center. Thus, 25 percent of the population has 10 percent of the income in the center and 5 percent in the periphery; 50 percent of the population has 25 percent of the income in the center and 10 percent in the periphery; and 75 percent of the population has 50 percent of the income in the center and 33 percent in the periphery.

Moreover, it should be noted that the various curves illustrating income distribution for all of the developed countries are grouped together in a tight cluster around their average, which clearly demonstrates the fact that Western societies are today very similar to one another in their everyday reality. On the other hand, the curves illustrating income distribution in the Third World are distributed in a much looser cluster, but, with only rare exceptions, the distribution is still more unequal than in the center.³

How are these facts interpreted and explained in the dominant currents of social thought? First, it is simply supposed that the difference in average incomes is the reflection of a difference in the productivities of labor of roughly the same scale. In other words, the productivity of labor in the developed countries is fifteen times greater than the average in the Third World. It is not only the general public and bourgeois economists who have this opinion; Marxist economists of the dominant current also share it.

Second, it is argued that the apparent differences in the global structure of the internal distribution of income, in fact, hide inverse levels of the exploitation of labor. I shall explain what that means in some analyses based on Marxist concepts. The number of workers actively employed in all of the developed capitalist economies is on the order of four hundred million individuals while the increase in the

incomes of labor (roughly, the wages) represents half of total income. In other words, the relation of surplus labor (the incomes of the owner and the company) to necessary labor, which measures the degree of the exploitation of labor, is on the order of 100 percent. On the other hand, for all of the capitalist Third World (which accounts for some 1,200 million active workers), the incomes of labor (wages and the incomes of small, independent producers, peasants, and artisans) total around two-thirds of total income. Here, then, the relation of surplus labor to necessary labor would be only 66 percent. Although the incomes of workers in the periphery are largely less than those in the center, the exploitation of labor is more intense in the developed countries. As one can see, this presentation of the facts upholds the idea that the intensity of the exploitation of labor increases with capitalist development and, consequently, also supports the thesis of the socialist mission of the proletariat of the developed countries. Inequality in the distribution of income, more pronounced in the periphery, results from a group of other reasons, among them a stronger hierarchy in wages, a more unequal distribution of landed property in most of the countries, a more marked gap between cities and rural areas, and a higher proportion of marginalized and impoverished masses crammed together into the megalopolises of the Third World.

Third, it is most often assumed that the general tendency of evolution is towards the gradual reduction of inequality. In this view, the situation of the contemporary periphery is simply that of a still incomplete transition towards capitalist development. Some, however, less optimistic, argue that there is no underlying law specific to the distribution of income. Distribution is only the empirical result of diverse economic and social facts whose convergent or divergent movements possess their own autonomy. It is possible to give this proposition a Marxist form by saying that the distribution depends on the class struggle in all of its national and international complexity. The capitalist system is capable of adapting to all of these situations.

The concept of globalized value will allow us to understand in what way the idea that differences in labor productivity explain the gaps in income distribution on a world scale is not only naïve but also

simply evades the true problem, which is the hidden transfer of value in the structure of prices.

Certainly, for the bourgeois economist, prices are the only economic reality. The income of each class corresponds to its contribution to production, the productivity of each factor of production being measured by its production, apart from imperfections in competition. Marxism denounces the tautological character of this reasoning, which immediately eliminates the concept of exploitation. However, curiously, Eurocentric Marxism refuses to analyze the system comprehensively in accordance with the fundamental principle of Marxism itself and, like vulgar economics, separates the analysis of exploitation at the center from analysis of exploitation at the periphery. Both draw the same conclusion, which is only a paraphrase of what the figures themselves directly say.

This way of viewing things systematically hides the system's unity. In fact, the prices in which the incomes are counted are an immediate empirical category resulting from the addition of the real remuneration of labor permitted by its conditions of exploitation and a profit calculated around a certain level (or several). Now, it is not possible to deduce comparative productivities by comparing incomes (wages + profits). The opposite needs to be done: begin with the comparative analysis of the conditions of labor that define the productivities being compared and the rates of surplus labor extraction. The tendency towards equilibrium in rates of profit are superimposed on the various combinations of remuneration of labor and its productivity, which vary due to the conditions of exploitation.

In fact, behind the direct and naïve commentary on the empirical data, there is a methodological hypothesis, which is certainly unknown in the popular image of the contemporary world, but which can be made quite clear in the dominant economic theories. The hypothesis is that the social structure of each national formation that is a component of the world system explains both the level of labor productivity in this formation and the income distribution among the various social classes that make up the society. Thus, the world is conceptualized first as a set of juxtaposed national formations, while their

interrelation and reciprocal influence are introduced after the fact, in the best of cases.

The concept of globalized value contextualizes the meaning of the immediate empirical data. It allows us to understand why, if labor productivities are indeed unequal from one county to another, the measure of this inequality by distributed incomes is mistaken. Going beyond superficial appearances to the root of the problem, it provides an explanatory framework that makes it possible to specify the interaction of internal and external factors, thereby taking into account the specificities of peripheral capitalism. Hence, the globalization of value explains why and how the polarity between the center and periphery is immanent to capitalism.

To discuss the law of value, to define the ways in which it works, is above all to analyze the relations between the objective conditions of social reproduction (i.e., the economic conditions that define the necessary overall equilibria between wages and consumption, profit, savings and investment, and so on) and the so-called subjective conditions (i.e., the class struggle). To say that there is a dialectical relation between these two factors is to say, on the one hand, that people make their own history within an objectively determined context and, on the other, that the actions of people modify this context itself.⁵

The second volume of *Capital* offers what appears to be a pure economic demonstration. Marx seeks, in effect, to demonstrate that accumulation is possible in a pure capitalist system (the capitalist mode of production and nothing but it) and determine the technical conditions for a dynamic equilibrium. In this formal framework, it is established that a dynamic equilibrium requires a growth in wages that is determined in a proportion that is a combination of the indices of the sectoral growth of productivity.

The schema of expanded reproduction, thus, appears to reveal the existence of precise economic laws, which are necessary for everyone. In summary, volume 2 shows that in pre-capitalist modes, where exploitation is transparent, reproduction implies the direct intervention of the superstructure; in the capitalist mode, social reproduction appears at first as economic reproduction. The schemas of expanded

reproduction illustrate the fundamental law that the value of labor-power is not independent of the level of development of the productive forces. The value of labor-power must rise as the productive forces are developed.

Up to this point, nothing has been said about the class struggle. How should the latter be taken into consideration and incorporated into the system of social determinations?

First perspective: the class struggle for dividing up the product is subordinated to economic laws. At best, it can only reveal the objectively necessary rate of equilibrium. It occupies, in this context, a position similar to the "invisible hand" of bourgeois economics. The language of the "universal harmony" of social interests is replaced by language referring to the "objective necessities of progress." This is an economistic reduction of Marxism. Economic laws exist that are objective necessities independent of the class struggle.

Second perspective: as a reaction to this type of analysis, the supremacy of the class struggle is proclaimed, which occupies center stage. Wages do not follow from the objective laws of expanded reproduction; they result directly from confrontation between classes. Accumulation adapts, if it can, to the result of this struggle. If it cannot do so, the system enters into crisis, and that is all there is to it.

Hence, it is necessary to grasp the dialectical relation between objective economic necessity and the intervention of social struggles. But in what context is this grasped?

This analysis can be carried out in three different ways. The first way is within the context of the abstract discourse on the capitalist mode of production. The second is within the concrete context of a national social formation. The characteristics of which can be established: (1) the level of development of the productive forces and the productivity of labor; and (2) the class structure and the alliances and conflicts among the classes. This national social formation is considered to be the fundamental unit of analysis. The third way is to operate directly at the level of the world system considered as the real fundamental unit of analysis. The national formations are only components of this system.

The discourse of academic Marxology is situated in the first context, Eurocentrism in the second, and the one that I propose in the third. In the latter, preeminence is given to globalized values over the national forms of the latter. This is also the case with globalized class alliances and conflicts. National alliances and conflicts are subordinated to the constraints defined by the former.

The globalization of value, an expression of the globalization of the productive system, implies, then, that labor-power has only one value for the whole world system. While this value must be placed in relation to the level of development of the productive forces, this level is the one that characterizes the world productive system as a whole and not the different national productive systems, which, because of the globalization of the system, gradually lose their effective existence. However, labor-power has different prices, particularly from one country to another. These prices depend on the political and social conditions specific to each national social formation. They can be lower since the reproduction of labor-power is partially assured by a transfer of value from non-capitalist small production for the market and from non-market production. The much higher quantity of non-capitalist market labor (rural producers) and non-market labor (subsistence and household economies) in the periphery entails a transfer of value from the periphery where it is generated to the dominant center.

The concept of the preeminence of globalized values allows us to make sense of a major, uncontested fact concerning the differences in the remunerations of labor: the latter (wages and the incomes of small producers) are not only, for the most part, less at the periphery than they are at the center, but also they are less in a considerably greater proportion than the gap between the compared productivities. In other words, the concept of globalized value takes into account the differential exploitation of labor by capital at the center and the periphery of the system and gives it a political meaning. Despite the apparently weaker rate of exploitation, measured by the current system of prices and incomes, in the periphery than the center, labor is more exploited in the former since the gap in the wages of labor is greater than the gap in productivities.

We are now equipped to go beyond the immediate empirical realities since we can compare the level of labor's incomes to the level of productivities. It is acknowledged that: (1) the productivities of labor in the industries of the periphery are comparable to those in similar branches of industry in the center; (2) in agriculture, by contrast, the productivity is ten times less in the periphery (this is the commonly accepted estimate); and (3) in the service sector, productivity represents in the periphery a third of what it is at the center for similar activities. Without entering here into the details of reconstructing the system of correspondence between globalized values and resulting prices, it is possible to estimate that, in these conditions the transfer of value from the periphery towards the center was on the order of four hundred billion dollars in 1980. This is an invisible transfer of value since it is hidden in the very structure of world prices. This is not a question of visible transfers, be it as profits exported by foreign capital, interest on foreign debt (which, as is well known, has become gigantic), or capital exported by local comprador bourgeoisies. Multiplied by four or five since 1980, these gigantic transfers express the magnitude of the pillage of the Third World made possible by globalized liberalism.

This transfer of value increases the real incomes of the middle strata and the bourgeoisie of the imperialist countries. Without this transfer, the relation of surplus labor to necessary labor would be only 60 percent instead of 100 percent at the center. As for the rate of exploitation in the periphery, it is 180 percent in real terms, whereas it only appears to be 66 percent. The differences are considerable, as can be seen: the ratios defining the respective rates of exploitation of labor at the center and periphery are simply reversed.

Eurocentrism rejects the very idea that there can be a transfer of value from one social formation to another. Marx, in his time, had already responded to this blindness by exclaiming: these gentlemen do not understand how one people can exploit another. They do not even understand how one class exploits another.

How does this over-exploitation, which makes possible the production of this transferred value, function? What are its conse-

quences? To respond to these questions, the world system as a whole must be taken as the basic unit of analysis. Social classes are the subjects of history whose confrontations and alliances on the world scale determine: (1) the rate of surplus value on the world scale and its respective rates (which are different) at the center and periphery; (2) the surplus labor extracted in the dependent non-capitalist modes; (3) the structure of prices and world commodities by which this surplus value is redistributed (and, in particular, divided between imperialist capital and dependent bourgeoisies); (4) real wages at the level of their world average and their averages at the center and periphery; (5) the volume of rents for non-capitalist classes (notably at the periphery); (6) the trade balance between center and periphery; and (7) the flows of commodities and capital (and hence of the rates of exchange).

These class alliances and oppositions, occurring at the global level (national alliances and conflicts, thus, being subordinate to the former), reproduce the distortions in the structure of development based on the unequal division of labor. They reproduce the material conditions that "make the internal factor unfavorable" at the periphery by ruining the hope of crystallizing progressive social forces like those that allowed workers at the center to undertake their economic class struggles in more favorable conditions, which made possible the parallel growth of incomes and productivity over a long period of time. At the same time, however, these conditions create a favorable terrain for the political illusions of bourgeois ideology, which has become, consequently, hegemonic over the workers of the centers. It is these ideological expressions that reproduce Eurocentric ideological hegemony. An example of this is inter-class national solidarities based on recognition of the decisive importance of securing sources for the supply of the raw materials that are necessary for the regular growth of the centers.

The concept of the globalization of value also allows us to reconsider the question of the dominant tendency in the historical evolution of the distribution of income within the capitalist system. The concrete history of accumulation in the developed capitalist centers is relatively well known. Beyond local variations, it is possible to formulate a generalization along the following lines. The peasant revolution

often opens the capitalist era. So long as this revolution is radical, it reduces rural inequality. This change is detrimental to the feudal lords, but, at the same time, impoverishes a minority of poor peasants driven to the cities and overseas emigration. Workers' wages are set, at the beginning, at a low level determined by the income of poor peasants. They tend to rise, after a period of stagnation (and even deterioration), when the expulsion of landless peasants slows down. From this moment (around 1860), workers' wages and the real incomes of middle peasants tend to increase together, in connection with the increase in productivity. There is even a tendency towards equality between the average wage and peasant income, although this tendency is not necessarily noticeable at each step of the accumulation (that depends on the structure of the hegemonic class alliances). At a later stage of capitalism, there can be a social-democratic tendency to reduce inequality. However, this happens in connection with imperialism, insofar as a favorable position in the international division of labor facilitates social redistribution.

In order to justify its optimistic hypothesis that the periphery is on the way to catching up with the center (or can do so), Eurocentrism is forced to assume that the same social alliances that made possible the distribution of the benefits from progress and social homogenization in the center are reproduced (or can be) in the development of the periphery. Arthur Lewis' classic thesis on the dualism of societies "in transition towards development," just like the Latin American *desarrollismo* of the fifties, offer the same argument.⁵ Inequality is the—temporary—price of poverty. The underlying hypothesis is that the external factor, integration into the globalized economic system, is fundamentally favorable. This chance for development will be seized more or less quickly according to the internal conditions that characterize the various societies of the Third World.

The facts, i.e., that a growing (not diminishing) inequality characterizes the periphery as it develops, give the lie to this forced optimism. It is, indeed, the law of capital accumulation on the world scale that controls this complementary opposition between structures. In order to understand this, it is necessary to return to pro-

ductive structures. If, in fact, the allocation of different rare resources (skilled labor and capital) is connected to the final consumption of different strata of the population classified according to levels of income, it is revealed that, at the center, these resources are allocated to the consumption of each stratum in proportions that are akin to the share of each of these strata in consumption. At the periphery, however, they are allocated to the consumption of the wealthiest strata in greater proportions than the share of their consumption in total consumption. This distortion in distribution to the benefit of the higher strata is stronger the more the distribution is unequal. The productive system of the peripheral countries is not the reproduction of the one the center had at an earlier stage of its development. These systems differ qualitatively. The more advanced peripheral capitalist development is, the more prominent is the distortion and the more unequal the income distribution.⁶ The system, unified in its overall expansion, reproduces the differentiation, i.e., the polarization between the center and periphery. The law of value operates, not at the level of capitalist formations considered in isolation, but on the global level. This divergence in the evolution of income distribution, due not to circumstances, but to the fundamental law of accumulation on a world scale, entails fundamental social and political consequences.

The hard core of Eurocentric prejudice was shown quite clearly on the occasion of the debate on "unequal exchange." Whatever the inadequacies of Arghiri Emmanuel's argument, it had the advantage of posing the question by beginning with the wise observation that there was no Marxist theory of international trade. However, in order to propose a theory of world trade consistent with the fundamentals of Marxism (i.e., value), it was necessary to leave behind a narrow Marxism locked into the unendingly repetitive analysis of the capitalist mode of production alone in order to dare to conceive the law of value as operating on the level of the world capitalist system. It was necessary to break with the Eurocentric reduction and use Marxism's entire universalist potential. Now, Ricardo's comparative advantages were, indeed, useful: they made it possible to justify the international

order and paternalism with regard to the periphery. That is why Emmanuel's thesis made such a commotion.

Analysis of the system on the basis of globalized value makes it possible to restore unequal exchange to its proper place. Unequal exchange, as it can be grasped empirically on the basis of given prices, reveals only the visible part of the iceberg. The major portion of the inequality is hidden in the very structure of the prices. In addition, the scope of the polarization within the world capitalist system, should not be reduced to its measurable economic dimension, be it apparent (unequal exchange) or hidden (transfers of value). Beyond that, there are advantages for the countries of the center, such as access to the natural resources of the whole planet, rents from the technological monopoly, and a favorable international division of labor (permitting full employment in times of prosperity and the development of middle classes).

It goes without saying that Eurocentrism can only be deaf to any proposition that aims at revising the contemporary worldview around the concept of globalized value. However, social science must, all the same, reconcile its discourse on "inevitable external constraints," the "interdependence of nations," and the like with its hypothesis of the preeminence of "internal factors" which, in fact, marginalizes the dimension represented by globalization.

This impossible reconciliation collapses into a series of equivocations where the fragility of the argument is worthy of the triviality of the facts referred to. For example, the fact that there are many societies in the periphery, all different from one another, is used as an excuse in order to conclude that it makes no sense to speak of the periphery as a singular entity. This argument is currently experiencing a revival of popularity and there are countless articles and books asserting the collapse and end of the Third World. There is nothing original in this view. The periphery has always been, by definition, made up of multiple and diverse societies, defined in the negative, i.e., those regions of the system which are not the centers. The adjustment of the peripheries to the requirements of global accumulation, thus, takes place in multiple ways. Not only do the functions fulfilled by the periphery

change from one phase to another in the evolution of the global system, but, at each of these phases, diverse functions are filled by different peripheries. There are also, at each stage of this evolution, the rejected who are useless to the system. The capitalist system remains, and this is what Eurocentrism cannot accept, a destructive system whose program necessarily implies the marginalization of regions of the periphery that have become useless for the exploitation of capital at a given stage of its development. The Brazilian northeast and the Antilles, formerly the principal periphery (and therefore wealthy) during the mercantilist stage, were devastated in such a way that they have not yet recovered to this day. A large part of Africa, where the people were decimated by the slave trade associated with mercantilism and the land destroyed by colonial and neocolonial pillage, is today in the process of being marginalized in the same way. The recent discovery of the fourth world by Western development specialists comes a little late. Thirty years ago, André Gunder Frank and I came up with two scenarios for getting out of the current crisis (called 1984A and 1984B), one anticipating restructuring of the periphery and the other anticipating marginalization. We concluded that, depending on the regions in question and the development of the struggles in each area, both of the scenarios would be borne out!⁷

It is also possible to use the excuse that the globalization of value is still not complete in order to conclude that value remains mainly defined within the context of national social formations. That globalization is only a tendency of the system, that it has a history of gradual formation, and that it was not constituted with one stroke of a magic wand at the beginning of capitalism four or five centuries ago are only obvious trivialities. Moving beyond these obvious facts, it should be noted that the tendency towards globalization is strongly apparent from the beginning (the mercantilist era) and that it already to a great extent forms the main aspect of the dialectical and contradictory national/world unit. As a result, it is necessary to analyze the phases through which the ever-changing world system has passed, beginning mainly with the adjustment of capitalism to the class struggle grasped on the global, not exclusively national, level. Eurocentrism, in con-

trast, explains the evolution of the system solely by the techno-economic processes of the centers, and, if necessary, by the adjustment of capitalism to the class struggle in the centers. What happens in the periphery is, thus, relegated to the status of being a purely decorative addition.

In contrast with these rather adroit equivocations designed to evade thorny questions, analysis of the polarization that is characteristic of the world capitalist system puts the state at the center of its considerations.

The economies of central capitalism are autocentric. By that is meant that they are organized around a determinate connection between the production of capital goods and the production of consumption goods. It is understood that foreign relations are subject to the requirements of this determinate articulation. Consequently, in this context, labor's pay can follow the progress of productivity. Further, the foreign relations of the autocentric centers, which are not in any way autarkic, but expansionist and aggressive, make it possible to accelerate the growth of apparent productivity through transfers of value to their benefit. In contrast, accumulation at the periphery is shaped from the beginning by the requirements of accumulation in the center. Continual adjustment defines peripheral accumulation. This formulation of the center/periphery contrast allows us to avoid the false problems of the economy of underdevelopment, such as specialization in primary production, which was only a form of peripheralization at a given stage, or the contrast between external market and internal market. Peripheral accumulation is also based on expansion of the internal market, but this does not depend on the primary articulation between production of capital goods and production for mass consumption and, as a result, is structured in a way that accentuates social inequality in the internal distribution of income.

The construction of an autocentric economy at one pole and adjustment to the world economy at the other are not the result of the operation of simple "economic laws" functioning in a politically empty space. On the contrary, the role of the state here is decisive.

In the central capitalist societies, the presence of the state is strongly expressed through its control over accumulation. However, this

presence is not directly experienced; it is even removed from the ideological image that the system has of itself so that civil society and economic life can be put at the forefront, as if they existed and functioned without the state. In contrast, in the societies of peripheral capitalism, civil society is stunted. Economic life is weak and appears as an appendage to the exercise of state functions, which directly and visibly occupy center stage. However, this is only an illusion because here the state is in reality weak, in contrast to the truly strong states in the developed centers. Simultaneously, economic life is reduced to being only a process of adjustment to the requirements of accumulation at the center.

In sum, the decisive qualitative criterion that makes possible the classification of the societies of the world capitalist system into centers and peripheries is the nature of the state. The societies of central capitalism are characterized by the crystallization of a national bourgeois state. Its essential function, beyond simply maintaining the domination of capital, is precisely to control the conditions of accumulation through the national control that it exercises over the reproduction of the labor force, the market, centralization of the surplus, natural resources, and technology. The state here fulfills the conditions that make possible autocentric accumulation and the dependence of foreign relations on the logic of that accumulation. In contrast, the peripheral state, which fulfills like all states the function of maintaining the internal domination of certain classes, does not control local accumulation. It is thus, objectively, an instrument for the adjustment of the local society to the requirements of globalized accumulation, the tendencies of which are determined by the requirements of the center. This difference makes it possible to understand why the central state is a strong state (and when it becomes democratic in the bourgeois sense of the term, that is an additional expression of this strength), while the peripheral state is a weak state (and that is why access to true bourgeois democratization is, in practice, prohibited and why the existence of civil society is necessarily limited). To state it another way: the formation of the national bourgeois state in some places conflicts with its formation elsewhere, or, again, the underdevelopment of

some is the result of the development of others. Yet, it should be made clear here that this proposition is not symmetrical and reversible; I have not stated that its opposite (i.e., the development of some is the result of the underdevelopment of others) is true. This observation is too often passed over in silence, and the confusion that is then made between my proposition and its contrary are the origin of serious misunderstandings and sterile controversies.

Therefore, what are the historical conditions that favored the formation of the national bourgeois state in some places while they are an obstacle to the reproduction of this model elsewhere? History shows us that, in the centers, the formation of the new hegemonic bourgeois power involved broad alliances between this new dominant class and other classes: small peasant landholders or large landowners, depending on the situation, and small bourgeois traders and artisans. These alliances were necessary in order to deal with the threat to the social order represented by the rising working class, which was revolutionary at this stage, as nineteenth century European history illustrates, from English Chartism (1840s) to the Paris Commune (1871). In turn, these forms of bourgeois hegemony entailed social and economic policies that began the homogenization of society by protecting the income of rural inhabitants and middle urban strata. In the following phase, beginning towards the end of the nineteenth century, bourgeois hegemony was extended to a stable working class, which is still characteristic of central capitalism today.

The means by which social consensus becomes widespread combines Fordism, the dominant form of organizing the mechanized labor process that carries out mass production, and social-democratic (or Keynesian) policy concerning wages, which ensures an expanding outlet for this mass production. This consensus does not rule out class struggle; but the latter tends to be limited to struggles over the economic distribution of earnings and moves away from questioning the overall organization of society, thereby making possible the functioning of the electoral democracy that we know so well.

The subordinate positions occupied by the peripheries in the world system make these forms of a gradual widening of overall social

integration improbable. Bourgeoisies appearing late on the scene encounter major difficulties when they seek to expand their internal class alliances. Initially, the center/periphery dichotomy is based on an alliance between dominant central capital and traditional dominant rural classes in the peripheries (feudal or latifundist). Latin America, which achieved its independence at the beginning of the nineteenth century specifically through these latifundist classes, today pays the price bequeathed to it by this alliance between dominant capital and landowning oligarchies. In Asia and Africa, colonialism worked even more brutally in the same way, intensifying the backwardness of these two continents in relation to Latin America. Later, in the contemporary era, when bourgeois states resulting from the national liberation struggles are formed and the local latifundist governments are overthrown, incipient industrialization is incorporated into a world system that is disadvantageous to the expansion of its local social base. Here, Fordism is not connected with worker-oriented social democracy. The outlet for the new industrial production is focused more on demand from the expanding middle classes. The constraints of modern technology, the adoption of which is required in order to remain competitive, calls for massive imports of equipment, expertise, and capital that must be paid for by agreeing to pay industrial labor at much lower rates in order to be able to export. I could go on and on pointing to developments that support my thesis by demonstrating that every mechanism of the world economy, or almost every one, is an obstacle to social progress at the periphery of the system. For example, the heterogeneity of sectoral productivities, which is rightly emphasized in the description of underdevelopment, creates and reproduces possibilities for economic rent that ruin the possibility for social homogenization. In addition, the antagonism between centers and peripheries does not result only from economic and social mechanisms, the influence of the state and world politics being neutral. Looking at the nineteenth century, one cannot refrain from observing that Great Britain, then the hegemonic power, undertook, by all means, to hinder the rise of autonomous centers. In Europe, however, the military relations resulting from the European balance of power established in 1815

limited its means. In contrast, its control of the oceans allowed it to intervene effectively in the Orient, Asia, and South America. The European coalition organized by England against Egypt in 1840 was decisive in the failure of the capitalist modernization of this country. It was the same for South America where the alliance between British capital and the latifundist oligarchy made other theoretically possible (and sometimes even attempted) progressive social alliances considerably more uncertain.

Have things changed? Some actually maintain that the political conditions that had prevented the formation of new national bourgeois states no longer exist in the contemporary world. The West can no longer prevent Third World states from developing in its image and asserting themselves as equal partners in the world system. To prove that, it suffices to take note of progress achieved in the semi-peripheries or newly industrialized countries. Their existence demonstrates that peripheralization is not fatal. Moreover, when it does occur, it is for reasons pertaining mainly to internal factors, and it is possible, despite any existing external obstacles, to develop new centers.

There is no doubt that, in society as in life, intermediate cases always exist, or apparently it is so. That fact in itself would be difficult to contest. However, this is not the real issue. The world capitalist system is driven by a strong tendency towards polarization, just as in the capitalist mode of production the tendency is towards polarization between the two fundamental classes, the bourgeoisie and proletariat. The crystallization of centers and peripheries does not exclude the emergence of semi-peripheries, similar to the middle classes engendered by the concrete process of capitalist accumulation. The exclusion of these ongoing possibilities would imply an absurd, static vision. It would be as if the centers/peripheries polarization magically appeared in its entirety from the beginning, whereas it is precisely the result of the concrete movement of the world system.

At the same time, the emergence of the semi-peripheries reveals the true nature of the dialectic that governs the movement. Specifically, there is a convergence or conflict between internal factors, favorable or unfavorable as the case may be, and the external factor, always unfav-

vorable and even increasingly more difficult to overcome. For example, it is obvious that, despite its backwardness, Germany succeeded in catching up to and surpassing England in a few decades in the nineteenth century. How much time would Brazil need to catch up to and surpass the United States? Is this prospect even conceivable in the visible future? When it is said that Brazil could develop itself and even become a center of the first order, who could doubt it? If Brazil had a social revolution, quite new prospects would open up for sure. But that is not the question. Rather it is to know if the Brazilian bourgeoisie can undertake reforms of this magnitude and if, failing that, the most violent social oppositions could be gradually corrected by a purely capitalist development. In fact, it has not been established that the semi-peripheries in question are effectively and successfully building national bourgeois states that are capable of controlling internal accumulation and subjecting their foreign relations to that process, i.e., escaping the strong constraints of adjusting to the demands of world expansion.

In these conditions, it is preferable to describe what some call the "emerging countries" as true peripheries corresponding to the current stage of global capitalist expansion. The others, the fourth world, are not the real peripheries of today but those which, corresponding to the requirements of yesterday's global system, are today on the way to destruction.

Now, it is said that the project of constructing an autocentric national economy has become anachronistic since the nation-state is itself in the process of a weakening even in the centers. It would then be necessary to demonstrate that the societies of the emerging countries are on the way to becoming more like those of the already existing centers, within the overall prospect of a uniform capitalist world supposedly in formation. This demonstration is neither made nor is it feasible, in as much as the social developments underway for the foreseeable future are different from one place to another. Once again, analysis of the real contradictions and their specific dynamic is replaced by an *a priori* vision of a harmony that has overcome these contradictions. It is, thus, assumed that the

problem has been resolved; that is the type of unacceptable reasoning in question here.

The problem could actually be resolved, that is, the center/periphery opposition eliminated, within the framework of capitalism (defined by the rule of the globalized market in products and capital) on condition that all the frontiers be open to unlimited immigration of workers! On this condition only, the globalized market of commodities, capital, and labor-power could theoretically standardize economic and social conditions on the planetary level. It is more than obvious that this hypothesis is unacceptable for the societies that make up the world as it is, and to remain within the context of this hypothesis is to leave the field of politics and enter the realm of fiction.

The old internationalism of the workers' movement was based on the illusion of a rapid homogenization of worldwide labor conditions through the global expansion of capitalism. This view was unable to withstand the test of history. Since an internationalism of the people was eliminated, the field was open for an internationalism of capital that operates freely at the level of the world system and defines its own strategies for dividing people and workers. Solidarity among the latter can be constructed, if the utopia of an immediate abolition of nations and borders is rejected, only on the basis of mutual support for national popular strategies for delinking from the world system.

Conclusion

The elaboration of a political economy of capitalism on the basis of globalized value restores decisive importance to the reality of the system's globalization. Far from being a new phenomenon, as it is currently fashionable to believe, globalization has always been part of the expansion of actually existing capitalism from the beginning. Analyzing the system from the perspective of globalized value makes it possible to give the opposition between centers and peripheries its proper place in the process of identifying the challenge with which the world's people are confronted. It also allows us to clarify the specific characteristics belonging to each of the stages in the development of

this inherently imperialist system and, consequently, to precisely identify the nature of the contemporary challenges. It is, thus, the first condition for elaborating effective strategies in the struggle for humanity's emancipation.

To say more about strategies for constructing a positive alternative is not the subject of this work. I will say only that all problems must be analyzed from this perspective, whether it be a question of China, today's main emerging power, Europe, fettered by the current liberal and Atlanticist project, or the countries of the South, mired in anachronistic culturalist choices. I refer the reader to my work *Beyond U.S. Hegemony? Assessing the Prospects for a Multipolar World*.⁸ I will add that the anti-globalization movement is confronted with a major challenge; the solution of which can only be part of a socialist alternative (twenty-first century socialism). I also refer the reader to my plea for a people's internationalism. The emergence of this type of internationalism is the condition for replacing the truncated, imperialist, and unsupportable universalism of the capitalist project, which is fatally Eurocentric and culturalist, with a higher universalism, one that matches the creative spirit of all the peoples of the planet.⁹ Modernity, religion, and democracy will only find their proper place within the prospect for general emancipation.

NOTES

PREFACE

1. Samir Amin, *The Liberal Virus: Permanent War and the Americanization of the World* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2004).
2. Samir Amin, *Eurocentrism* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1989).
3. The first edition of *Eurocentrism* published by Monthly Review Press did not include the last chapter of the first French edition. That chapter is included here for the first time as Chapter Four, in addition to the new preface and new first chapter of the revised French edition.—Trans.

PART 1: MODERNITY AND RELIGIOUS INTERPRETATIONS

1. Israel Shahak, *Jewish History, Jewish Religion: The Weight of Three Thousand Years* (London: Pluto Press, 2004).
2. I have developed this concept of “under-determination” in history in *Spectres of Capitalism: A Critique of Intellectual Fashions* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1998), Chapter 3.
3. George Tarabishi, *The Trajectory of Philosophy in the Christian and Islamic Countries* (Beirut: Dar al-Saqi, 1998), in Arabic.
4. Taqi ad-Din Ahmad ibn Taymiyyah (1263–1328) sought the return of Islam to its sources, the Koran and the Sunna.—Trans.
5. Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC). This is an organization of fifty-eight Islamic states promoting Muslim solidarity in economic, social, and political affairs.—Trans.
6. The Qarmatians were a millenarian offshoot of the Ismaili sect of Shia Islam. They were active from 880 to 1080 and established a utopian republic in eastern Arabia and Bahrain, with an ideology based on equality, reason, and tolerance.—Trans.
7. The First Congress of the Peoples of the East was held in Baku in 1920.—Trans.

PART 2: CENTRAL AND PERIPHERAL TRIBUTARY CULTURES

1. The philosopher Philo (30 B.C.E.–45 C.E.) was a key mediating figure between Hellenism and both Christianity and Neoplatonism.—Ed.
2. See Mourad Kamel, *The Civilization of Coptic Egypt* (Cairo: 1961), in Arabic.
3. The Muslim era dates from the Hijra, the forced journey of Mohammed from Mecca to Medina in 622 C.E. Dates in the Muslim calendar refer to this starting point.—Ed.
4. The Umayyad was the first dynasty of the Islamic Empire, founded in 661 C.E. It was succeeded by the Abbasid dynasty, 750–1258 C.E.—Ed.
5. I will not burden the text with references to the stages of development of Arab-Islamic thought. The works (in Arabic) of Hussein Méroué, Tayeb el-Tizini, and Yatzi may serve here as the essential source of these references. The debates organized in recent years around the works of Méroué and el-Tizini are also present in my mind. My perspective has been elaborated in various works in Arabic: Samir Amin, *The Crisis of Arab Society* (Cairo: 1985); *Post-Capitalism* (Beirut: 1987); and *Concerning the Crisis of Contemporary Arab*

Ideology, (al-Fikr al-Arabi, n. 45, 1987).

6. Accused of being a heretic, al-Halladj was brutally tortured and executed.—Ed.
7. The debates between the Mu'tazilites and the Asharites centered on the question of free will and the determination of good and evil. Asharites adhered to the theology of al-Hasan al-Ashari (874–936 C.E.), believing that human reason was incapable of determining good and evil.—Ed.
8. Without “oath-helpers” to vouch for them, those accused of crimes could only prove their innocence by surviving “ordeals” such as one-on-one combat or immersion in water with bound arms and legs.—Ed.
9. Michio Morishima, *Capitalisme et Confucianisme* (Paris: Flammarion, 1987). The *bakufu* is the feudal military system which dominated Japan throughout the dynasty of the Tokugawa Shoguns, during the five centuries preceding the Meiji restoration of the 1860s.

PART 3: THE CULTURE OF CAPITALISM

1. Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Pantheon, 1978). I have made numerous borrowings from his work in the course of my text: his critique of Renan on the question of Semitic languages; the evidence he presents of Orientalist claims regarding Oriental sexuality; his argument concerning the practice of making sweeping conclusions from single details; and the racist quotation from Lord Cromer.
2. Maxime Rodinson, *Europe and the Mystique of Islam* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1987). See also Jean-Jacques Waardenburg, *L'Islam dans le miroir de l'Occident* (The Hague: Mouton, 1963); Bernard Lewis, *The Muslim Discovery of Europe* (New York: W.W. Norton and Co., 1982); and Bernard Lewis, *Semites and Anti-Semites* (New York: W.W. Norton and Co., 1986).
3. Martin Bernal, *Black Athena: The Afroasiatic Roots of Classical Civilization. Vol. 1: The Fabrication of Ancient Greece 1785–1985* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1987).
4. See Said, *Orientalism*.
5. Sadek Jalal el-Azm, *Orientalism and Inverted Orientalism* (Beirut: 1981), in Arabic. 6. Said, *Orientalism*, 62–63.
7. Kamel Mustapha el-Chibi, *Shiism and Sufism* (Beirut and Cairo: 1982), in Arabic.
8. For further discussion of the fallacious character of the discourse on underdevelopment, see my observations in *Class and Nation, Historically and in the Current Crisis* (New York and London: Monthly Review Press, 1980), 131–248; *The Law of Value and Historical Materialism* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1978), 19–36, 57–82, and 107–125; and *Delinking* (London: Zed Books, 1990).
9. Thomas Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970).
10. The history of the *Nahda* and the analysis of its works have given rise to an abundant literature. A good summary is provided by George Antonius in *Le Reveil arabe* (Paris: 1946). Among the best critical works on fundamentalism are Farag Foda, *Before the Fall* (Cairo 1983), in Arabic; Fouad Zakatia, *Reason and Illusion* (Cairo: 1985), in Arabic; Hussein Ahmad Amin, *Guide du musulman malheureux* (Cairo: 1987). See also my critique of Sayyid Qutb in Samir

Amin, *The Crisis of Arab Society* (Cairo: 1985), in Arabic.

11. The Wahhabi was a puritanical reform movement begun by Mohammed ibn Abd al Wahhab (1703–1787), which was adopted by the Saud tribe and later became the official religion of Saudi Arabia.—Ed.
12. For my views on the national popular transition see *Delinking*, as well as “L’Etat et le développement,” *Socialism in the World* 58 (1987).
13. See Samir Amin, *Bandoung, trente ans apres* (Cairo: UNU, 1985).
14. See CEDETIM, *Le Non-alignement* (Paris: La Découverte, 1985).

PART 4: TOWARDS A NON-EUROCENTRIC VIEW OF HISTORY AND A NON-EUROCENTRIC SOCIAL THEORY

1. Ramkrishna Mukherjee, *The Rise and Fall of the East India Company* (New York: Monthly Review Press: 1974); Amiya Kumar Bagchi, *Perilous Passage* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2006).
2. I have contributed my own analyses on this question in several books and articles published in Arabic, particularly: *The Crisis of Arab Society* (Cairo: 1985); *After Capitalism* (Beirut: 1987); and “Reflections on the crisis of contemporary Arab thought,” *Al Fikr al-Arabi*, no. 45 (1987). Also refer to the article, in Arabic, by Fawzy Mansour, “The Blocking of Capitalism in Egyptian History,” *Qadaia Fikria*, no. 2 (1986). Also see “Contradiction in the Capitalist Development of Egypt,” *Monthly Review*, no. 4 (1984).
3. See Samir Amin, *Class and Nation, Historically and in the Current Crisis* (New York: Monthly Review Press: 1980). For a more precise account of the calculations behind the results presented here, the Lorenz curves and the Gini coefficients, the reader should see *Delinking: Towards a Polycentric World* (London: Zed Press, 1990), chapter 3.
4. For additional information about globalized value and the concept of delinking, see my *Class and Nation*, chapters 6-8; *The Law of Value and Historical Materialism* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1978), chapters 5-6 and conclusion; *L’Échange inégale et la loi de la valeur* (Paris: Anthropos, 1973); *The Future of Maoism* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1983), first part; *Delinking*; and “L’État et le développement,” in *Socialism in the World* 58 (1987).
5. For a critique of the dominant current in the theory of development, represented mainly by Arthur Lewis’ *The Theory of Economic Growth* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1963) and *desarrollismo*, see Samir Amin, *Delinking*, chapters 1 and 4.
6. The Arab world is a good example. See Samir Amin, *L’Économie arabe contemporaine* (Paris: Minuit, 1980).
7. Samir Amin and A. G. Frank, “Let’s Not Wait for 1984,” in A. G. Frank, *Reflections on the World Economic Crisis* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1981).
8. Samir Amin, *Beyond U.S. Hegemony? Assessing the Prospects for a Multipolar World* (London: Zed Press, 2006).
9. Samir Amin, *The World We Wish to See: Revolutionary Objectives for the Twenty-First Century* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2008).

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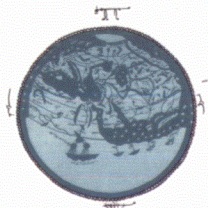
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Cover illustration: Close-up of artist's rendering of a zonal world map, produced by the Arab cartographer al-Idrisi in 1154. The map shows the centrality of the regions influenced by Islam, placing a shrunken Europe on the periphery of the Mediterranean world.

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