

Chapter I

Satan and Apocalypse

A Renewal of Milton and Spinoza

Perhaps the most famous judgment of the political theorist, Leo Strauss, published in the Preface to the second edition of his book on Spinoza's *Tractatus*, is that Spinoza's refutation of the Mosaic authorship of the Pentateuch dissolved the deepest foundation of order and authority in the West. Spinoza was the most hated philosopher in history because he was commonly apprehended as our deepest and purest atheist, and even today we know him as the first powerful assailant of what Heidegger knew as ontotheology. Spinoza is the only great philosopher to whom Heidegger never refers, just as Spinoza is only engaged by our most radical thinkers. So, too, and despite his sacred and canonical status, Milton is perhaps our most radical theologian, and the one who most fully conjoins Biblical and systematic theology, and who without any question is our greatest Biblical or sacred poet and visionary.

Although it may appear to be impossible to conjoin or unite Milton and Spinoza, their very pairing evokes a revolutionary power that is overwhelming, and above all calls forth the possibility of a total revolutionary enactment. This is a possibility that has again and again been called forth by apocalyptic traditions, and if at this point they are widely understood to be wholly illusory, this is nonetheless an enlivening illusion, and one embodied in much of our greatest art. Spinoza is seemingly the most anti-imaginative of all thinkers, but his radical thinking ungrounds everything that is not absolutely necessary, and thus opens the way for an imaginative totality, or the very totality realized in our greatest art.

“Totality” is an alien and oppressive word to a great many, as witness the very word “totalitarian,” but Spinoza can be understood as the most ultimate opponent of such totality, and as that philosopher whose thinking is purest in this perspective. Milton, on the other hand, would appear to be that poet who is most polluted by totality, or who most embodies an alien totality, as so decisively manifest in a uniquely Miltonic Satan. Yet the conquering of that Satan is an ultimate victory otherwise impossible, just as the horror of Milton’s Hell is inseparable from the ecstasy of his Heaven, thus Milton along with Blake is a genuinely dialectical visionary. This is very rare, indeed, and is apparently limited to our very greatest art. Here, Milton can be conjoined with Shakespeare, and if that is not possible for Blake, it is the Miltonic Blake who is our greatest visionary of Satan.

Perhaps Blake is that artist who is most distant from Spinoza, which itself is illuminating of Spinoza, who can be known as our most iconoclastic thinker, and precisely thereby a Biblical thinker. If Milton appears to be the very opposite of an iconoclast, he is nonetheless the most Biblical of poets, and so Biblical indeed as to be beyond our Biblical theologians. It is fascinating that Milton has been accepted as such by so many devout Christians, thus giving Milton a sacred status shared by no other poet or visionary, and if this has occurred far more in America than in England, this is evidence of a Christian America that is otherwise invisible.

Nothing is more elusive or more baffling or more mysterious than the death of God, just as nothing so challenges biblical hermeneutics as does the Crucifixion, here ensues that absolute paradox that so fascinated Kierkegaard, and that he could know as the deepest center of Christianity. Paul is the primal theologian of the Crucifixion, and the original Paul is the apocalyptic Paul, who could celebrate the Crucifixion as the inauguration of apocalypse, a celebration fully paralleled in the Fourth Gospel. Theology was not even open to these celebrations until the twentieth century, an openness made possible by the historical realization of the death of God in the nineteenth century, one bringing Christendom to an end, an ending that was the most ultimate crisis that Christianity has ever faced.

Yet how is it possible to celebrate the death of God? Is this not the most awesome event that has ever occurred, one releasing an absolute abyss, ushering in a uniquely modern nihilism, and shattering all foundations, hence making possible the advent of the horrors of totalitarianism? Yet our primal modern prophets, Blake and Nietzsche,

do celebrate the death of God, and celebrate it as an absolute liberation, a genuine renewal of that crucifixion that realized resurrection, and Blake and Nietzsche are our primal modern enactors of resurrection, and not a resurrection of the "soul," but a resurrection of the body that is the resurrection of the Body. Here, there occurs once again a uniquely Biblical *coincidentia oppositorum*, a dialectical identity of an absolute Yes and an absolute No, as the abyss and chaos of the death of God releases apocalypse itself, an apocalypse that Nietzsche named as Eternal Recurrence and Blake named as the New Jerusalem.

Now it is important to understand a uniquely Biblical prophecy, one created by the prophetic revolution of the eighth century B.C.E., a revolution that as Nietzsche affirms in the *Genealogy of Morals* turned the world upside down, high becomes low and low becomes high, up becomes down and down becomes up, as not only is an established world absolutely uprooted, but a void is thereby created demanding an absolutely new world, as apocalypse is enacted for the first time. Second and Third Isaiah are the purest ancient prophets of apocalypse, and theirs are the prophecies that had the deepest impact on the New Testament, even as the New Testament is the most apocalyptic of all Scriptures.

Yet there then occurred one of the most ultimate of all historical transformations, as a primitive and apocalyptic Christianity was transformed into a Hellenistic and imperial Christianity, that apocalyptic Kingdom of God that Jesus had enacted and proclaimed becomes an absolutely primordial God or Godhead, one who is not breaking into the present from the future but who can be reached not by an opening to a revolutionary future but only by an absolute eternal return, an eternal return both to a primordial God and a primordial Christ. Kierkegaard was not alone in so deeply thinking that an original Christianity absolutely reversed itself, even the young Heidegger in his quest for a primal Christianity deeply believed this, as have innumerable artists and visionaries. This is the context in which there occurs a wholly new quest for Jesus, one occurring outside the Church and the Christian tradition, although it occurs in Catholic circles, too, for a radical Catholicism had been born in the Middle Ages, and most fully so in Dante.

Dante created the Christian epic, one embodied most powerfully in Dante, Milton, Blake, and Joyce, and one ever more fully apocalyptic as it evolved, just as it is ever more decisively and comprehensively

an enactment of the death of God. Here, we can most clearly see the full conjunction of apocalypse and the death of God, most cryptically and most comprehensively in *Ulysses* and *Finnegans Wake*, but most gloriously and profoundly in Blake's *Milton* and *Jerusalem*, most purely and fully in *Paradise Lost*, and most prophetically and ecstatically in the *Commedia*. If only through the Christian epic can we understand the death of God not only as an ultimate ground but as the ultimate destiny of Christianity, and one continually and ever more comprehensively enacted throughout the history of Christianity.

Hegel is the philosophical discoverer of the death of God, a discovery that revolutionizes philosophy in the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, but it is possible to give Spinoza that accolade, a Spinoza who was an even more systematic thinker than Hegel, and no less a comprehensive thinker. Perhaps it is just these qualities that make possible a discovery of the death of God, not to mention an ultimate courage with which Spinoza was profoundly blessed, a courage that might well have been the driving power of the purely abstract thinking of Spinoza. Indeed, it is truly remarkable that such an abstract thinker could have become widely known as our most blessed or holy thinker, an accolade that is unique among modern philosophers.

Nonetheless, Spinoza has been widely ignored both philosophically and theologically, perhaps because he shares with Hegel a total enactment of God or the Godhead, and yet like Hegel Spinoza is a profoundly atheistic thinker, and it is Spinoza who first unthinks God, or first unthinks what Heidegger knows as ontotheology. Commonly the medieval terms *Natura naturata* and *Natura naturans* are employed in interpreting Spinoza, but this is confusing because in their medieval context this is a distinction between the Creator and the creation, whereas for Spinoza it is a distinction between Substance and its modes, or between the Substance of God and the worldly mode of God's attributes (*Ethics* I, Proposition XXIX), and while Spinoza knows God as Substance, that substance is totality itself, a totality that is actual for us in its modes. It was not for nothing that Spinoza became the most hated philosopher in history, and Spinozism identified as a truly demonic atheism, and yet many of the wisest among us know his thinking as a fundamental source of a genuine blessedness or grace.

There is a deep continuity between Spinoza and Nietzsche, and Nietzsche is one of those who revered Spinoza, and despite the appearance of their profound opposition as ethical thinkers, there is

continuity here, too, for Spinoza knows virtue as power and evil as weakness. The seventeenth century can be known as the century of genius, a genius that in Galileo and Newton created modern science, in Descartes and Spinoza created modern philosophy, and in Shakespeare and Milton created modern poetry. Perhaps the most paradoxical of these primal figures is John Milton, a Milton who is challenged only by Shakespeare as our greatest poet, and yet a Milton who most treasured his own *Doctrina Christiana*, a great and profoundly original theological work that is almost totally ignored, and actually read only by a small body of professional Milton scholars.

There could be no clearer sign of our common ignorance of a deeper Milton, but there is now substantial scholarly agreement that the *Doctrina* is essential to a critical interpretation of *Paradise Lost*, both were written at the same time, and while the *Doctrina* is written in Latin and consists almost wholly of quotations from Scripture, it nevertheless deeply illuminates *Paradise Lost*, and perhaps most so in its understanding of creation and the Creator. For Milton is profoundly heretical in believing that the creation is not out of nothing but rather out of God Himself, God Himself is the sole source of the creation, and there is an “original matter” in God which is the source of all subsequent matter (I, 7). Moreover, the Son and the Holy Spirit are wholly subordinate to the Father in the creation, and Milton’s anti-Trinitarianism is an expression of his faith in the absolute sovereignty of the Creator, which is perhaps the first expression of such an absolute sovereignty, and it sets Milton apart from the Christian tradition.

This truly new sovereignty is decisively enacted in *Paradise Lost*, and nothing is newer in this epic than its enactment of the Creator, even Calvin’s Creator pales before this Creator, as for the first time absolute power is decisively enacted. But nothing is more revealing of *Paradise Lost* than Satan Himself, the first truly glorious Satan to be created, and one here truly paralleling that Christ who is the sole Redeemer. Here Christ and Satan become a genuine polarity, and each is essential to the other, and even essential to the ultimate acts of the other. Never before had such a vision of Satan existed, and yet Milton’s epic had such an ultimate impact that an enormous number know Satan and Heaven and Hell far more through *Paradise Lost* than through the Bible.

Such an impact is a decisive sign of a genuine epic, an impact to be found nowhere outside of epic, which is one reason why we have

so little understanding of epic, the least understood of all of our cultural expressions. Frequently we understand epic as being Biblical, as when we speak of Homer as the Bible of the Greeks, and this gives epic a revelatory character, which it is difficult to deny, and surely *Paradise Lost* has exercised a Biblical role in its impact on us. But there are no assaults on Milton as there are on Spinoza, not even assaults on him as a heretic, which he certainly is, could this be because he has given us a uniquely modern vision of God, which all of us in some sense accept or cannot wholly refuse?

Let it be said at once that this is a deeply heretical vision of God, and heretical if only because it is anti-Trinitarian, but far more deeply because this is a God who cannot be separated or dissociated from Satan, a God whose absolute sovereignty cannot be dissociated from absolute evil. Thus, this is a God revealing absolute sovereignty or absolute power itself, a power that is sheer power and power alone, and if only for that reason a power that cannot be dissociated from Satan, and is itself deeply revealing of Satan. After *Paradise Lost* there can be no responsible disbelief in Satan, but there can be responsible disbelief in God, or disbelief in that God who is inseparable from Satan. Now we can see why Milton is a genuine counterpart to Spinoza, one who illuminates Spinoza in his very vision of absolute evil, one necessitating the radical thinking and the radical affirmation of Spinoza.

Nothing is more original in Spinoza than the pure integration that he effects between mind and body or body and soul, we see the true opposite of this in *Paradise Lost*, which is just why *Paradise Lost* illuminates the *Ethics*, and allows us to see the absolute necessity of this revolutionary work. But *Paradise Lost* is likewise and equally revolutionary, and even if the overwhelming passion of this work is the very opposite of the purely abstract thinking of the *Ethics*, there may well be a *coincidentia oppositorum* occurring here, and one deeply illuminating modernity itself.

Both Milton and Spinoza are profoundly Biblical, Milton is our most Biblical poet, and the only major poet who mastered the languages of the Bible, a mastery that he commonly employed, and was never unengaged with Biblical exegesis. So, too, Spinoza is our most Biblical philosopher, whose *Tractatus* is our first modern critical interpretation of the Bible, containing the only Biblical theology given us by a major philosopher, and while expelled by his own community as a heretic, he mastered both Torah and Talmud as has no

other philosopher. Nor is such mastery alien to Spinoza the philosopher, for it underlies his radical understanding of God, perhaps the most radical of all philosophical understandings of God, as here reason and revelation are purely united as they are nowhere else. Spinoza was perhaps the first to decisively demonstrate that Moses could not possibly have written the Pentateuch, a demonstration subverting all established authority in its dissolution of the absolute authority of the Bible, and for this alone made himself the object of a passionate and virtually universal hatred.

Yet Spinoza is also deeply venerated, and venerated as is no other modern philosopher, a Spinoza who had a deep impact on modernity, and above all on German Idealism. Spinoza is also the creator of modern idealism, an idealism to be fully distinguished from ancient idealism, as manifest in the gulf between Plato and Spinoza. However, Spinoza is most innovative in his pure integration of mind and body or body and soul, an integration ending every chasm or gap between them, and thereby creating an absolutely new understanding of both mind and body. So, too, this makes possible an absolutely new understanding of God, a God who is an integral totality, truly being all in all, and all in all in both body and mind. If this is a truly new understanding of God, mind, and body, it is potentially if not actually revolutionary, and one affecting the world as a whole.

Milton's enactment of God in *Paradise Lost* is seldom recognized for its genuine uniqueness. Here is a Creator whose absolute acts fully equal His own absolute majesty and glory, no visionary had previously approached this, and if here *mysterium tremendum* eclipses *mysterium fascinans*, this would appear to evoke an absolute distance from Spinoza's God.

Indeed, can the God of Milton and the God of Spinoza have anything at all in common? Yes, each is a revolutionary enactment, and while this is all too clear in Spinoza, it is virtually unknown in Milton because his overwhelming impact has eclipsed previous enactments of God. This is inevitable in a genuine or fully epic enactment, and it is paralleled in Dante's previous epic enactment, just as it will be paralleled in the epic enactments of Blake (considered in more detail in chapter 3) and Joyce (in chapter 6).

The truth is that the uniquely Christian God has undergone an enormous transformation in its own enactment, nowhere is this clearer than in the development or evolution of the uniquely Christian epic, and there is no better exemplification of this than in the relation

between Milton and Blake. Blake profoundly renews Milton, even if this is a renewal that absolutely reverses Milton, as the Creator of *Paradise Lost* passes into the Satan of *Milton and Jerusalem*. True, very few are aware of this, but few are aware of the Christian epic as a whole, or open to its revolutionary transformations, transformations that are simultaneously theological transformations. Yet to be open to these transformations is to be open to the ultimate transformations of Christianity itself, transformations that have certainly occurred, even if they have become largely hidden from us.

Today it is difficult to understand how John Henry Newman became such an enormously controversial figure, and even was so during the Second Vatican Council, for his original understanding of the development of Christian doctrine is an ultimate challenge to Christian orthodoxy, and above all to Catholic orthodoxy's understanding of dogma itself, an absolutely eternal and unchanging dogma. Newman's own odyssey was initiated by his growing awareness of the vast distance between early Catholicism and modern Catholicism, although this recognition is simply a consequence of the modern historical consciousness, which itself has been an overwhelming challenge to Christianity. It is perfectly understandable how this radically new understanding of Christianity could have generated fundamentalism, even if it is not commonly known that this is a truly new fundamentalism, which had never existed as such before.

Fundamentalists, too, imagine that theirs is an eternal doctrine, and is simply a consequence of a literal understanding of the Bible, even if such a literal understanding did not exist before the advent of fundamentalism. It is possible to understand fundamentalism itself as a consequence of the modern realization of the death of God, one darkening all of our horizons, and calling forth an ultimate leap out of a world of darkness, a leap occurring in the advent of fundamentalism. Of course, it occurs elsewhere as well, and if all of the expressions of modernity are organically linked, there is an organic link between our atheism and our fundamentalism, and a link demonstrating that each is inseparable from the other. For our atheism is no more pure than is our fundamentalism, nor is it simply "other" than all religious enactments, for it exists in an organic relationship to all expressions of modernity.

It is Hegel who has given us our deepest understanding of the death of God, and as this is first enacted in the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, Spirit actually becomes its own opposite or "other," but does so

fully only in full modernity, when in the French Revolution it becomes Abstract Spirit or the “Bad Infinite,” and this is the form or expression of Spirit, which actually dies, and does so in an absolute self-emptying or self-negation. It could be said that a radical historical understanding is born in Hegel’s initial enactment of the death of God, for this death is only possible by way of the historical metamorphosis or transformation of Absolute Spirit, a transformation in which Spirit becomes the very opposite of itself. And it actually becomes the opposite of itself, becoming what Blake names and knows as Satan, but a Satan only born in full modernity, and born as the opposite of Christ.

This, too, is the time at which the birth of America occurs, so that in his first prophetic poem, *America*, 1793, Blake first enacts the death of God, a God here named as Urizen, a pagan name for that Creator who only realizes his consummation in his own death. Blake is the epic poet of the death of God, and all of his extraordinarily complex epic poetry can be understood as a comprehensive enactment of the death God, but here this is a universal enactment occurring everywhere whatsoever, and occurring in each and every one of us. Blake’s American counterpart is Herman Melville, whose *Moby Dick* is an American enactment of Satan, and of Blake’s Satan, a Satan who is a universal Abyss and Darkness.

It is not insignificant that abyss first purely realizes itself in the American imagination, in an America that is the first nation to be born with an apocalyptic destiny, unless this already occurs in the birth of that Russia that Hegel, in the conclusion of his lectures on the philosophy of history, could know as the twin of America. Indeed, America and Russia are both apocalyptic nations, and if in the Cold War they could engage in an ultimate war with each other, the apparent nonviolence of this war disguised a new and universal violence, and one subsequently all pervasive. So much is this the case that now violence and nonviolence have passed into each other, and above all so in that new America that seemingly so peacefully dominates the world, and dominates it by Americanizing it, an Americanization that is a new and all comprehensive passivity.

Could Milton and Spinoza be prophets of America, and not prophets in the sense of unveiling its destiny, but rather in the sense of unveiling the ultimate conditions making possible its destiny, conditions in which a pure violence and a pure passivity pass into each other? A great many Americans believe in America as the most

Christian nation in the world, but this could only be a truly new world, an apocalyptic world, and even a dark apocalyptic world. In many respects America has been a nation of prophets, and often of once-born or healthy-minded prophets, but far more deeply of dark prophets, as in most of its greater literature and art, dark prophets enacting a demonic or Satanic America. Is there a truly major American artist or writer of whom this could not be said, and is this uniquely American, one calling forth a uniquely American destiny?

One of the fundamental origins of America is commonly disguised. That is, that when the English Revolution failed or dissolved in England, this revolution was transported to America, but only transported in a new epiphany or new body, a seemingly nonrevolutionary body, yet nonetheless a truly transfiguring body, and originally an apocalyptic body. Milton was perhaps the primary prophet of the English Revolution, and as such he was transported to America with the failure of revolution in England, yet his American incarnation was largely an anonymous one, even if *Paradise Lost* is truly a sacred text in America, and one revered far more in America than in England. But if Milton has had a major impact on America, what can be said of Spinoza—that his is a largely invisible but nonetheless powerful impact, as in the advent of a deeply secular but nonetheless deeply religious nation?

Spinoza is our only purely secular and purely religious thinker, unless he is therein paralleled by Nietzsche, but thereby he has had a profound even if wholly indirect impact on America. Although an indirect impact is very difficult to demonstrate, at the very least we can sense genuine parallels between Spinoza and America, foremost among these being the full conjunction of the purely religious and the purely secular. If this occurs nowhere else in the world, it can be understood as a unique destiny of America, one fully embodied in a distinctively American literature and art, just as it is in a distinctively American religion. American religion has seemingly defied all critical understanding, in part because it is so incredibly diverse, but also because it may well be genuinely new, and thus truly other than all that we have understood as religion.

A truly secular world was first born in America, and only here did religion itself arise or develop in a truly secular world, thus profoundly affecting American religion. There are scholars who find it difficult to distinguish the religious and the secular in America, just as there are orthodox theologians who find virtually all American

religion to be heretical, or all religion in America that is distinctively American. But these distinctively American expressions of religion are in one way or another apocalyptic, as not only secularism but apocalypticism abounds in America, an apocalypticism born with the very birth of America. Is there a distinctively if not uniquely American apocalypse, one found nowhere else in the world?

The very fact that an American apocalypse is born with the advent of the first truly secular world is unquestionably significant, as is the fact that an American apocalypse cannot be dissociated from the advent of an ultimate atheism, the first such atheism in the world. Inevitably an American apocalypse occurs within the horizon of its opposite or "other," and hence cannot be dissociated from that other, an other essential to its own occurrence. If only at this crucial point, an American apocalypse is unique, and perhaps unique above all in being finally indistinguishable from its own opposite. Hence light and darkness are here truly conjoined, and even if that is true of every genuine apocalypse, here light and darkness are not only conjoined but indistinguishable, and indistinguishable here as they are perhaps nowhere else.

An American apocalypse is universal as no previous apocalypse had been, thus it is not in any way to be confined to the United States, as is clear in every American apocalyptic enactor. Indeed, a genuinely American apocalypse is so universal as to be wholly unclear as apocalypse itself, every line between apocalypse and nonapocalypse or anti-apocalypse is here seemingly erased, and even more so than it is in Hegel and Marx, although it does parallel Nietzsche. Nietzsche is perhaps the best guide to America, or to a unique America, and a uniquely American apocalypse, an apocalypse breaking all bounds, and all bounds that have historically been marked apocalypse. "Nietzsche and Apocalypse," is the focus of chapter 4.

Thus a distinctively American atheism is a strange atheism indeed, while there is certainly a pervasive atheism in America, and one even largely common as it seldom is elsewhere, yet publicly the vast majority of Americans refuse atheism, and even regard it as sacrilege. Is America immune to the death of God even if comprehensively embodying it? Has America been able to absorb the death of God in a wholly disguised form as so many truly critical Americans insist? Of course, this judgment could be made of virtually all of the industrialized world, but religion is practiced far more commonly in America than almost anywhere else, and although that could mean that

hypocrisy is more pervasive here than elsewhere, it could also mean that there is a unique polarity or dichotomy in America. These ideas are considered further in chapter 5, "America and the Death of God."

The death of God, or the modern realization of the death of God, can be understood as the most absolute realization of dichotomy itself, an absolute dichotomy between life and death, or between eternal life and eternal death. Only in the death of God does eternal death itself become absolute, or is eternal death absolutely enacted, then eternal life or resurrection is dissolved, or dissolved as a resurrection that is not itself crucifixion. All too ironically, it is the modern realization of the death of God that either ends or disables a Christian tradition that itself had wholly transformed an original Christianity, as so deeply understood by both Kierkegaard and Nietzsche. Kierkegaard himself, as a profound Hegelian, could deeply know an ending of Christianity and of existence itself that alone could make possible a renewal or resurrection of faith, a profoundly solitary faith which Kierkegaard discovered. But that discovery is only possible in a Godless world, a Godless world that is a consequence of the death of God, and only that death now makes possible a genuine faith or a genuine Christianity.

Could there be a more offensive *coincidentia oppositorum* than the actualization of the death of God as the renewal or re-creation of a wholly lost and actually genuine faith? Yet this apparently occurs, and profoundly occurs in both Blake and Hegel, just as it can be understood to occur in innumerable expressions of the late modern imagination. Indeed, it is precisely the occurrence of the deepest language of the death of God, as in Dostoyevsky, that accompanies and even is an expression of the deepest faith, and here Nietzsche poses the supreme challenge.

How odd that *The Antichrist*, enacting Nietzsche's greatest assault on God, identifies Christianity as an absolute reversal of Jesus, and then recovers that wholly lost original Jesus who is the only pure enactor of genuine compassion.

Nietzsche can know Christianity as the greatest of all historical catastrophes, one in which the Gospel of Jesus is reversed into Dysangel, and the world itself is turned upside down. Thereby Nietzsche is certainly not alone, for the modern realization of the death of God releases ultimate assaults on all established religion, and on all established values, as Nietzsche himself most deeply knew. Yet this assault is inseparable from an absolute rebirth or renewal, a

renewal that Nietzsche continually enacts, and which is even distantly paralleled in what William James would come to understand as conversion, and mass conversions occurred at the very time of the realization of the death of God. Nietzsche believed that nothing is accidental, just as everything is related to everything else, and this is above all true of the death of God, the most universal and the most powerful of all events.

Nietzsche knew this profoundly, just as Hegel did before him, and if now Hegel is being recognized theologically as he never was before, he is known as a profoundly atheistic thinker who is precisely thereby an ultimately religious or metaphysical thinker, and if Hegel and Nietzsche are the consummation of metaphysics, this could only be a theological as well as a metaphysical consummation. The truth is that both Hegel and Nietzsche are ultimate theological thinkers, and most so in their very thinking of the death of God, a death of God that is apocalypse itself, and not only apocalypse but an absolute apocalypse. The New Testament itself is renewed or reborn in this thinking of absolute apocalypse, and reborn as it had never been before, or never before in thinking itself, for it had certainly been reborn again and again in the Western imagination.

German Idealism is the first philosophy to deeply incorporate the imagination into thinking itself. Here lies a deep distance of Spinoza from this idealism, a Spinoza who could only know the imagination as a faculty truly weakening the mind. Thereby Spinoza was in continuity with philosophical tradition, a tradition that had never until German Idealism been open to the imagination, but it was only in the Romantic age that the world awakened to the imagination, or awakened to its ultimate power. So, too, it was not until German Idealism that genuine historical thinking was incorporated into philosophy, this, too, transformed philosophy, and it marks another distance between Spinoza and German Idealism. But it also marks a distance between Spinoza and Milton, a Milton who is the most historical of all poets other than Shakespeare, and whose *Paradise Lost* created the greatest of all cosmic histories.

Perhaps only a cosmic history is open to the death of God, or open to the depth of the death of God, a death of God transforming everything whatsoever, but only thereby making possible an absolute apocalypse. Never must we forget that in the cosmic history of *Paradise Lost*, the fall although an ultimate fall is also a *felix culpa* or fortunate fall, a fall making possible an ultimate redemption, which is

wholly impossible apart from absolute fall. Blake also renews Milton in his *Songs of Innocence and Experience*, wherein Innocence spontaneously transforms itself into Experience, an Experience that is wholly a fallen experience, and even thereby a realization of innocence, an innocence truly destined for experience.

Here we can understand that the death of God is a consequence of the creation itself, a creation that is not simply creation, but a creation destined for fall, and not at all in the Gnostic sense, but rather in the Biblical sense of the actuality of the world itself, an actuality inevitably enacting fall. Actuality or *Wirklichkeit* is primal in the thinking of Hegel, Nietzsche, and Heidegger. Perhaps nothing else so unites their thinking, and this is a thinking above all other thinking that is a primal enactment of an ultimate fall, and a fall apart from which no reconciliation or redemption is possible. Yet in no other thinking is redemption itself so actual as it is here, as though it is in German philosophy alone that redemption is philosophically actual, a German philosophy that can be understood as culminating in Nazism. That, too, is possible if this is ultimately a dialectical thinking, and one only able to realize itself through its own absolute opposite, which is perhaps only philosophically actual here.

Many understand German Idealism as a German expression of the French Revolution, and this was truly a revolutionary period, one epically inaugurated by *Paradise Lost*, and if nothing is more revolutionary in this epic than a radically new Satan, that Satan is a Lord in a truly polar relationship with Christ. Not only is this Satan absolutely new, but new with a majesty and glory paralleling the Christ of Glory, and even undergoing a kenotic movement when he journeys to earth, there to seduce Eve by summoning her to his own glory. Here, Milton wholly transforms the Book of Genesis and the Bible itself, and does so by his very glorification of Satan, but one absolutely necessary in the creation of a fortunate fall making possible the actual occurrence of an absolute redemption.

Milton is a great Biblical theologian, perhaps our greatest Biblical theologian, and he draws forth for the first time the full actuality of the Satan of the New Testament, a Satan absolutely unique in the history of religions, one going infinitely beyond every other figuration of evil, and only here in the history of religions is there an absolute evil. Yet this fundamental truth is not actually envisioned until Milton, and envisioned in the most glorious of all epics, and the only epic fully and comprehensively expressing absolute glory, and yet a

glory now expressed most decisively and even most purely in Satan. This is the point at which Milton is most distant from Spinoza, even infinitely distant, and yet that infinite distance illuminates both Milton and Spinoza, making possible the appearance of each in their most singular expression.

Now we can understand Spinoza as an absolutely abstract thinker, and understand Milton as an absolutely embodying poet, and it is just in the perspective of Spinoza that Milton undergoes such an epiphany, and in the perspective of Milton that Spinoza can be known as our most abstract thinker. Only in Spinoza does evil as evil wholly disappear, and only in Milton does evil as evil become absolute, or in Milton's Satan, but Milton's Satan is his most unique creation, and the one most decisively revealing himself. Spinoza himself is wholly invisible in his *Ethics*, but no poet is more fully revealed in his work than Milton, and above all so in *Paradise Lost*, which is thereby not only the very opposite of the *Ethics*, but the redemption that it calls forth would appear in this perspective to be wholly missing in the *Ethics*.

Or is this true? We might say on the contrary that the *Ethics* enacts redemption more than any other philosophical work, or does so more purely or more decisively, and it is just this that made possible its deepest impact. Could there then be a genuine *coincidentia oppositorum* between the *Ethics* and *Paradise Lost*? Each can be said to be purely religious and purely secular simultaneously, just as each can be known as inaugurating a pure religion that is purely secular or worldly, one only made possible in *Paradise Lost* by Satan, thereby making manifest how absolutely necessary Satan is in *Paradise Lost*. Is this a genuine theological breakthrough for Milton, one going beyond the Bible, but thereby making manifest an inevitable consequence of the Bible, even if it is not realized until almost two millennia after the Bible?

The paradox of the *felix culpa* opens this possibility, and if the fall is absolutely necessary for an absolute redemption, then the source of the fall is both necessary and blessed, and blessed even when it is named as Satan. Never must it be forgotten that in the mature Blake there is a *coincidentia oppositorum* between Christ and Satan, and perhaps nowhere else is Blake so profoundly a renewal of Milton, revealing a Milton wholly closed to Milton himself, but nonetheless a genuine consequence of Milton's vision, and one revealing just how radical that vision is. The truth is that every epic is genuinely

revolutionary, nothing else so distinguishes the genre of epic, a genre all too significantly closed to literary criticism and scholarship, a vacuum of which the world of scholarship is simply unaware.

It is remarkable that there is so little discussion of Satan, or serious discussion, a Satan who is seemingly wholly absent from philosophy, even if profoundly enacted but wholly disguised by Hegel. Can even Hegel here be known as being deeply repressed? Is this perhaps the great secret of Hegel, and not only of Hegel but of all of our major philosophers, philosophers who are nowhere else so distant from poets? Hegel is most unique as a thinker in his creation of an absolute negativity, a negativity that is the ultimate energy of actuality, and is the consequence of that absolute self-emptying or self-negation that itself is Absolute Spirit. This is the absolute self-negation that evolves or realizes an absolute negativity, but absolute negativity is actuality itself, and a negativity that is all in all. Many believe, even if they dare not say it, that Hegel's Absolute Spirit is indeed Satan, and surely the Catholic Church did for many centuries judge modern philosophy itself to be demonic or Satanic, and if it has withdrawn this judgment, it has done so while dissolving or suspending all language of Satan.

Why is it so difficult for us now to pronounce the name of Satan? Are we thereby not only most distant from Milton, but most distant from the Bible, or at least from the New Testament? While seldom noted, Christianity is most unique in its ultimate emphasis on Satan, and if this is only true of premodern Christianity, at no other point is modern Christianity so distant from its origin. Once again the Christian epic is deeply revealing of Christianity, an epic in which Satan is ever enlarged as this epic develops or evolves, and if Satan is here finally all in all, that is a totality that is the consequence of a genuine evolution, and a genuine evolution of Satan. How revealing that this is an evolution that is virtually never noted, as though silence is the only proper response to Satan, and this is a silence that is genuinely if not wholly observed.

Although Satan is seldom if ever associated with silence, silence is nonetheless our primary response to Satan, but a silence that speaks whenever an ultimate crisis occurs, or an ultimate breakdown and disintegration. Hence Satan has innumerable names, and innumerable sources, so numerous that a singular naming of Satan becomes virtually impossible, even if this naming occurs in our greatest epics. Here, Milton and Blake are our primary epic creators, or our primary

namers of Satan, a naming for which Milton is most renowned, although Blake's naming of Satan is most revealing, for it is the most universal of all naming of Satan, and Blake unveils Satan as our Lord and Creator. But this is certainly not a Gnostic naming of God as Satan, for in realizing the universality of Satan it realizes a wholly fallen universality, a universality that is the very body of Satan, and is so as the universality of a totally fallen world.

Once again an ultimate paradox confronts us, for here a total naming of darkness is an ultimately liberating act, as our most ultimate apocalyptic seer, William Blake, creates an absolute apocalypse in which total darkness *is* total light. Therefore, the body of Satan is finally the body of Christ, or the body of Satan is inseparable from the body of Jerusalem, and is so as totality itself, but now an absolutely liberating totality, and liberating by the absolute self-negation of Satan, a self-negation that is finally the self-emptying or self-negation of totality itself. Satan is a primal name of the ultimate ground of that fallen totality, but the absolute fall of totality is truly necessary for its absolute liberation, an absolute liberation only possible as the consequence of a total fall, a total fall more fully envisioned by Blake than by any other seer.

Spinoza can be understood as the pure opposite of Blake, a Spinoza in whom namelessness is all in all, and everything is either silent or invisible, or invisible and silent as actuality. But only thereby is pure thinking possible, a thinking without any possible object, or any possible ground, and if only thereby it is a totally pure thinking, or that Ratio that Blake named as Satan. Yet this Satan is absolutely necessary for liberation, a thinking stripping everything of its inessential ground, and doing so precisely in its own pure groundlessness, a groundlessness negating or dissolving the totality of fall. Only a pure Ratio can effect that negation, hence the absolute necessity of Ratio, and the absolute necessity of Ratio for an ultimate liberation.

Yet that is the absolute necessity of Satan for an ultimate liberation, and if Blake is the only seer who ultimately enacts this, Blake is our only seer other than Dante who realizes a truly comprehensive vision, and our only vision of the totality of Satan. Yes, Blake thereby profoundly renews Milton, but precisely thereby wholly transforms him, a transformation that is truly consistent with the ultimate movement of *Paradise Lost*, a movement that is the movement of absolute fall, a fall only reversed in the closing sections of this epic. But these are frequently judged to be the weakest poetic sections of *Paradise*

Lost, even as *Paradise Regained* is everything but paradise regained, a paradise that can never be regained as the consequence of an absolute fall, yet the final loss of that paradise is absolutely necessary for apocalypse itself, an apocalypse absolutely impossible apart from an absolute fall.

Now just as Christianity begins with apocalypse, that very apocalypse is almost immediately lost, and the Kingdom of God that Jesus enacted and proclaimed becomes virtually the opposite of itself in the uniquely Christian God, an absolute transformation deeply understood by both Blake and Nietzsche, and if only at that point Blake and Nietzsche are truly united. So it is that an originally apocalyptic Christianity becomes a wholly nonapocalyptic Christianity, and apocalypse itself is now only recovered or renewed in truly radical or revolutionary expressions, and revolution or ultimate revolution and apocalypse or absolute apocalypse become inseparable. Is this an apocalypse that once again has become wholly lost? Or is its ultimate renewal once again possible, and even possible for us? This is the focus of chapter 7 in this volume.

Now despite the fact that apocalypse is continually renewed and reenacted in the uniquely Christian epic, apocalypse remains an ultimate mystery, and perhaps our deepest mystery, unless it is unveiled in absolute idealism, and in our deepest or purest poetry and art. While it is critically established that there is a genuine correlation between Hegel and Mallarmé and Rilke, and perhaps between Hegel and Milton and Shakespeare, such correlations illuminate an absolute apocalypse, and demonstrate its actual occurrence. In fantasy, apocalypse is a supernatural event, an absolutely literal total transformation, but such fantasy must be demythologized, as it actually is in the very occurrence of apocalypse. So it is that the deepest demythologizing occurs in pure thinking and in the imagination itself, a demythologizing establishing the full actuality of apocalypse.

Many scholars believe that the delay of the parousia wholly transformed primitive Christianity, but for Bultmann and the demythologizing movement there is no such delay, for the resurrection itself is the parousia, and is so as the apocalyptic or final epiphany of the Word. Of course, this demythologizes the resurrection, but here resurrection itself is the renewal of the Word, and not of a supernatural or otherworldly Word, but rather of that Word that is actuality itself. It could be said that Hegel is the creator of demythologizing, and that such demythologizing has dominated a truly modern world, a world

in which the supernatural as such is wholly alien. Yet here it becomes truly alien by way of faith itself, a faith ending the other worldly, and doing so in its witness to the resurrection, a resurrection that is not a resurrection from the world, but far rather a resurrection or awakening to the world itself.

Here, we can apprehend the primal role of Spinoza in our world, a Spinoza who himself engaged in demythologizing, and did so far more purely than Hegel did. But we should not understand demythologizing in a literal sense, even Milton, perhaps the most mythical of all poets, profoundly engaged in demythologizing, or in demythologizing a given or established Christianity, and becoming himself an ultimate if not absolute Christian rebel. Despite all the chatter about political theology, we actually have virtually no political theology today, or none going beyond our established orthodoxies. Certainly Milton is our greatest political theologian, and how revealing that he is unknown in the theological world, but surely his work is the most challenging of all political theologies, and it is our only known theology that is a consequence of the English Revolution, that revolution that inaugurated modern revolution. Its most decisive act was the trial and execution of Charles I, one that is repeated and renewed in the French Revolution in the trial and execution of the French monarch, ultimate events that finally destroyed Monarchy itself, perhaps the most ultimate of all revolutionary acts.

How fascinating that our theologies ignore the English Revolution, just as do our philosophies and even our political science, it is as though it is a forbidden subject, although it has been treasured by British Marxists. So, too, did Marx himself treasure it, and it was essential to Marx to correlate the English and the French revolutions, so as to accept and affirm a genuinely revolutionary historical tradition. Milton surely belongs within this tradition, and Spinoza, too, for here there is a genuine correlation between Milton and Spinoza, which is indeed a correlation of all of our true revolutionaries. Yet our revolutionaries are either enactors of or witnesses to apocalypse, and to genuine apocalypse, for genuine apocalypse is inevitably revolutionary.

Once again we can see why the Christian churches moved so decisively against apocalypse, a point at which they are perhaps most ecumenical, and if this made possible the survival of Christianity, we can here see what such survival actually entails. Pascal's wager is even more ultimate than he recognized, for if one bets on God, or on the

manifest or established God, then one stands to lose apocalypse, or to lose redemption itself. Now Pascal deeply believed that to lose redemption is to be damned, and eternally damned, a damnation that cannot be reversed, and that all of us can actually taste if we allow ourselves to become open to it. Only the threat of damnation can here drive us to faith, and this is just the situation in which an ultimate wager occurs, but in the perspective of apocalypse, any such wager is inevitably a wager on eternal death.

Nietzsche is our greatest master of irony, an irony that he most deeply knew as occurring in Christianity itself, and in the depths of Christianity, a Christianity whose quest for redemption Nietzsche unveils as actually being a quest for damnation. Spinoza must have known this even if he didn't dare say it, and Milton both knew it and refused it at once, knowing it in knowing all established Christianity as a reverse or inverted Christianity, hence his refusal of all ecclesiastical Christianity, but refusing it in his own quest for redemption. Was a refusal of that quest possible before the Enlightenment? Let us remember that there was no real atheism before the Enlightenment, and while there was a refusal of damnation, it was seldom openly embodied. A genuine irony for us is that a damnation that was gradually but decisively withering away became resurrected in the twentieth century, literally resurrected in the Holocaust, and actually resurrected throughout a late modern sensibility, as reflected in our deeper literature and art.

No one could be further from knowing damnation than Spinoza, although in knowing a deep passivity he knows a full parallel to damnation, a damnation that is central in *Paradise Lost*, and yet an absolutely damned Satan is the very center of an ultimate energy in this epic. Is that a paradigm for a uniquely Western world? Certainly innumerable non-Westerners believe this, as well as numerous ultimate dissenters in the West, a world that has been a center of dissent.

Is dissent, or an ultimate dissent, essential for revolution, and is there a necessary and integral relation between dissent and revolution in the West? The West would here appear to be far distant from both the ancient and the Oriental worlds, except for Israel, and the prophetic revolution of Israel, a revolution that might well be the inaugurator of revolution itself. Although we can speak of an urban revolution and an agricultural revolution, revolutions that were integrally related to each other, these apparently occurred spontaneously and without