

THE BERGSONIAN BACKGROUND

A good place to start an analysis of the Bergsonian background to Kazantzakis's theism is Bergson's 1903 essay, "An Introduction to Metaphysics."¹ This work incorporates his earlier triumphs, *Time and Free Will* (1889) and *Matter and Memory* (1896), and points the way toward his later works, *Creative Evolution* (1907) and *The Two Sources of Morality and Religion* (1932). It should be noted that Kazantzakis attended Bergson's lectures in 1908, just after the publication of "An Introduction to Metaphysics" and *Creative Evolution*, and in the very period when Bergson was working out the ideas that were eventually to appear in *The Two Sources of Morality and Religion*.

The early sections of this chapter will consist in an examination of Bergson's texts. However, in the last section of the chapter I will illustrate how the Bergsonian points made in the early sections are relevant to a reading of three of Kazantzakis's works: *Freedom or Death*, *Journeying*, and *Journey to the Morea*. In chapter 2 and later chapters, I will be concerned almost exclusively with Kazantzakis's works.

An Introduction to Metaphysics

In "An Introduction to Metaphysics" Bergson argues that there is a notable defect often found in the workings of the human intellect, a defect

emphasized as well by Kazantzakis: The intellect deals with the world by means of discrete units, as though reality were fundamentally static and immobile. The intellect does this because it apprehends the world externally as a collection of things in space. Living beings, however, exist durationally, they become. Life's flow is asymmetrical and irreversible in that the past is settled, whereas at each moment one is always straining toward a future that is at least partially indeterminate, and often largely so.²

Both rationalism and empiricism are at fault in this regard. The former tries to interpret the world in light of some fixed structure of thought, whereas the latter assumes that experience is composed of static "elements" like impressions or sensations. Both schools of thought assume that the changing must be explained in terms of the permanent, and that there is more in the immutable than in the mutable. Bergson, like Kazantzakis, wavers between saying that the intellect, because of this defect, is helpful but needs to be supplemented by intuition or instinct, on the one hand, and suggesting that intellect is necessarily dissembling and should be thwarted, on the other. In this book I will argue that the former alternative is the more plausible interpretation to take regarding these two writers. In any event, Kazantzakis follows Bergson in the belief that reality, including divine reality, is better known intuitively or instinctively rather than discursively. For example, Aristotle's view of the gods as *unmoved* movers, a view that very much influenced traditional theism in the Abrahamic religions, is defective precisely because it is overly intellectual.³

Bergson is most famous for his view that there is an *élan vital* driving life, including divine life, to ever higher levels of organization. Intellect translates the *élan vital* into mechanical terms. Or better, to use an image from Bergson quoted by Kazantzakis: The vital impulse is like a jet of steam spurting continually into the air, condensing into myriad drops that fall back to the source. The drops represent the purely material aspect of the universe against which *élan vital* wages the continual warfare apotheosized by Kazantzakis. It is the summit of the jet with which Kazantzakis is often concerned and which he also divinizes. Matter, by way of contrast, is seen as devitalized life. That is, if God is not omnipotent—and this on the evidence of there being evil in the world—then there is no reason to believe that there was a creation of matter *ex nihilo*, nor is there reason to believe that there will be an apocalypse: continual struggle is the rule. (In this regard Kazantzakis is a bit like Aristotle, who saw the world as everlasting.) What is distinctive about Bergson and Kazantzakis is their concentrating on immediate experience within matter, the novelty ingredient in each fresh moment, a novelty missed or denied by mechanistic intellect.⁴

There are two quite different ways of knowing a thing, for Bergson, where the first implies that we move around the object and the second that we enter into it. The latter is what he means by "intuition." The waters are muddied a bit when he defines intuition as "intellectual sympathy," but his point quite clearly

is that persons—divine or human—can only be understood adequately from within, with a simple act of entering—whether really or vicariously—into the temporal flow of the person in question. There is a succession of states in a person, with each state containing that which precedes it and announcing that which follows. But the states are not discrete in that they extend into each other; a moment is temporally “thick.” Further, no two moments can be identical for a conscious being in that the later moment that is similar to the earlier one is different at the least because it can remember the former, as in Bergson’s example that no two experiences of listening to the “same” piece of music can really be identical.⁵

In the present book, abstract ideas will be used in my analysis of Kazantzakis, but in order to be true to both Bergson and Kazantzakis it must be admitted that, finally, an understanding of Kazantzakis’s view of God entails a simple intuition. Philosophy by its nature consists in a critique of abstractions, and for Bergson this consists in the effort to mold our abstractions and to make them as supple and mobile as possible so as to do as much justice as possible to the fleeting intuitions with which we are concerned, in this case with Kazantzakis’s intuition regarding God, or more loosely, with his concept of God. The difficulty lies in the fact that Kazantzakis himself is very often trying to reconcile contrary tendencies that can, from one angle, appear to be antagonistic and, from another, appear to be mutual correlatives, as we will see in chapter 5, which deals with Kazantzakis as a dipolar theist. This makes our conceptual task all the more difficult. I will aim at developing concepts that will facilitate an intuitive grasp of how the contrary elements in Kazantzakis’s view of God are at once opposed and reconciled.⁶

Both Bergson and Kazantzakis were exhaustively bothered by the immobility of the traditional God, a product of analysis, and they were both animated by divine mobility. Divine immobility is the extreme limit of slowing down the movement of God as one would a motion picture so as to be left with a single, static frame. Kazantzakis repeatedly attempts to speed up the frames such that the divine process be restored, a process that is best grasped through an active, indeed violent, intuition, says Bergson. What is called eternity is not the substratum for change so much as it is an abstraction away from living process. Eternity, for Bergson, is movement stripped precisely of its mobility; it is death. A life without end is perhaps better termed an everlasting or sempiternal life rather than an eternal one. Because there is a tendency in intellectual pursuits to deaden, to eternalize, to murder by dissection (to use Wordsworth’s image), it is perhaps less dangerous to extol the virtues of philosophers philosophizing than the virtues of philosophy. My Bergsonian philosophical efforts to understand Kazantzakis’s view of God in this book should be conceived on the model of various soundings, about which one feels that one has touched at greater or lesser depth the bottom of the “same” ocean, the thought of Kazantzakis on God.⁷

From Closed to Open Religion

According to Bergson, in *The Two Sources of Morality and Religion*, a book with which we will be concerned in this section of the chapter,⁸ the first function of religion is to sustain and reinforce the claims of society. In this regard religion is an outgrowth of the two main lines of evolution in animal life, of the arthropods and the vertebrates. At the end of the former is found the instinct of insects, and at the end of the latter we find human intelligence. Whereas the former is laid down by nature in an immutable way, the latter is variable in form and open to progress. Or again, bees operate by *necessity*, whereas human beings have *obligations* that only make sense if they are free to disobey them. What is natural in human beings is overlaid with what is acquired. But this point, as Kazantzakis well knew, is likely to be over-emphasized. In time of war, for example, murder and pillage are actually praiseworthy, according to some, as when Captain Mihalis murders Eminé in *Freedom or Death*. Human beings still have need of that primitive instinct that they coat with so thick a varnish. If there is to be any progress beyond primitivism, beyond parochial allegiances, it is to occur in and through God, for Kazantzakis.⁹

The saints of Christianity, the sages of Greece, the prophets of Israel, the bodhisattvas of Buddhism are those who allow human beings to be carried beyond the mechanical workings of nature; they appeal to us precisely because of their perfect aspiration, if not their perfect morality and spirituality. Recommending the spirit of renunciation is not enough; it must be *embodied* in some hero or other for it to be efficacious. Whereas the closed soul rigidly adheres to societal mores and religious beliefs, the open soul extends its concerns to all of humanity, in fact to all of the cosmos, as Kazantzakis indicates in *Spiritual Exercises*. Kazantzakis's heroes (Zorba, Captain Mihalis, Jesus, St. Francis, Fr. Yanaros, etc.) have a Bergsonian effect on us like great music: they do not put feelings into us so much as they introduce us to the feelings already there. In chapter 6 we will have occasion to explore the role of mysticism in the transition from closed to open religion, but at present it is important to at least introduce the following possibility: that the familiar observation that mystics (including Zorba, as we will see) often express themselves in terms of passionate love may be due not so much to the mystics using passionate or romantic love as their model, as to romantic love (whose origin was in the Middle Ages) or passionate love using mystical experience as a model. That is, Kazantzakis's mysticism consists in open, mystical religion "resuming" possession of its own territory, much as Bergson emphasizes.¹⁰

Given the tension between instinct (or intuition or emotion) and intellect in Bergson and Kazantzakis, it is clear which of these two has the upper hand: emotion vivifies or vitalizes the intellect. For example, it is only after

powerful emotions concerning God win people over that they then think it necessary to formulate a metaphysics. This point will have to be kept in mind as we discuss Kazantzakis's concept of God throughout the book. Those whose contagious emotions prepare the way for new concepts of God are truly religious heroes or "conquerors" for Bergson and Kazantzakis. "Progress" or "advance" for these conquerors, on Bergson's and Kazantzakis's interpretation, is indistinguishable from the spiritual enthusiasm itself, just as the struggle for political liberation is itself liberating for old Idomeneas in *Freedom or Death*. This spiritual enthusiasm allows a soul to break not only with nature (to the extent that this is possible), but also with the city's closed religion and with petty pleasures and pains. But there is nothing misanthropic about this transition from the closed to the open soul: all of the great mystics declare that they have the impression of a current passing from their souls to God and then *back again* from God to humankind.¹¹

Nonetheless, the distance between the closed and open souls themselves is vast; it is the distance between repose and movement, respectively. The problem with closed religion, in general, and with the closed soul, in particular, is that they are too easy in that they only take snapshots of a complicated process. *Ataraxia* and *apatheia*, in the Stoic or Epicurean senses of these terms, are not the goals of Kazantzakian spirituality. Rather, his goal is to have no goal *in the sense that* one should continually try to spiritualize matter even if no one else seems to care about one's efforts. And both Bergson and Kazantzakis were well aware of the fact that most people are indifferent to the struggles of spiritual heroes, perhaps because, at least initially, the visions of these heroes seem impracticable. The closed society and its religion seem fresh from the hands of nature in the automatic equilibrium contained within its borders, but the open religion ushered in by religious heroes makes it clear that the "peace" and "naturalness" of closed religion are fraudulent. Even the thick humus of centuries of closed religion, reformed by progressive waves of open religion, barely covers the bedrock of original nature. A purely instinctual society of *human* beings is impossible, as is a purely open society or a purely mystic one. Pure aspiration is an ideal limit.¹²

Religious heroes, those who have open souls ready to receive divine influence, have the ability to stir up our souls. Yet the spectacle of what religions have been in the past and are today is humiliating for human intelligence to consider, and this despite the fact that the actions of human beings are at least partly indeterminate, hence they could make the situation better. Both instinct and intelligence are means whereby raw matter is turned into its finished, spiritual state, with instinct around the fringes of intelligence and gleams of intelligence in the depths of instinct. The two activities each retain something of the other in them. But those whose instinct or intelligence is used in such a way as to forge or receive some new view of God pose a danger to societal order and closed religion, hence they are often denigrated. The very function of a

closed religion, according to Bergson, is to provide a defensive reaction against the apparently dissolvent power of mystic openness to God. I say "apparent" because it is the great religious heroes who ultimately save religion and, in a way, according to Kazantzakis, save God. Religion does not have to be mere custom.¹³

The intelligence of "primitive" peoples is not different in kind from our own; it has a tendency, like ours, to make the mistake of converting the dynamic into the static and to solidify actions into things. ("Primitive" peoples are different from us merely because they are ignorant of the things—many of which are not terribly significant—we have learned.) In stagnant societies and religions this solidification is an accomplished fact. Religion can either preserve this reification or strike individuals inwardly so as to transcend what is assumed to be final. In addition to being a defensive reaction against mystic openness, closed religion is, as Bergson notes, also a defensive reaction against the intellect's realization that death is inevitable. Unlike Bergson, however, Kazantzakis's theism does not include belief in an afterlife, hence in this regard Kazantzakis is thoroughly intellectual and not instinctual. One can well imagine, by way of contrast, according to Bergson, the primitive person looking into a pool of water and seeing "himself" detached from his tactile body and assuming that this separate self could go on living after the tactile body died. In any event, even if this is not an accurate account of the origin of the traditional view of the soul, it should be noted that this traditional view of the soul is rejected by Kazantzakis, a view that, as even Bergson admits, can lead to almost any imagined absurdity. The vital impulse itself knows very little of death; it may come into contact with the death of others, but it does not confront the inevitability of death. This is the work of intellect.¹⁴ This is why the nonintellectual Zorba thinks he should live a thousand years.

Perhaps what is most significant about the connection between Bergson and Kazantzakis on the topic of God is that Bergson both reinforced Kazantzakis's belief that most of what existed, and had for some time existed, in organized religion was, for lack of a better word, bunk, and that the very topic of God was a significant one—the most significant one!—that needed contemporary rethinking. Organized religions are important, but only to the extent that they preserve the classics in the history of religious experience that make this rethinking possible. Re-form, after all, presupposes form. That is, Bergson helped Kazantzakis avoid positivism. The origin of belief in God does not lie in fear, as the positivists suggested; rather, belief in God is a reaction against fear. There are real presences in the world that we should fear, presences that our ancestors would have thought of as ghosts, as when the ghost of Kosmas's father in *Freedom or Death* haunts his new daughter-in-law, a Jew. Or as when Bergson felt some sort of mysterious personal force that took possession of the room when he read of the outbreak of World War I.¹⁵

Kazantzakis escapes positivism not only because he takes the issue of God seriously, but also because he is only a qualified defender of progress. Progress

does occur, but along with it human beings drag with them the same basic human nature. We cannot puff ourselves up with the prejudice that suggests that we are *born* superior to our ancestors. Before anyone can theorize he or she must *live* first, as did our ancestors. Kazantzakis's constant desire simultaneously to praise the intellect as well as to put it in its place is thoroughly Bergsonian: closed religious belief is infra-intellectual and open religious belief is supra-intellectual. It is this supra-intellectual religion, present in the religious heroes of any age, that insures that God cannot be immutable. We will see in chapter 5 that the existence of divinity itself is necessary, but the actual, mutable experiences of God depend on creatures.¹⁶

At any moment there is a vast current of creative energy that is precipitated into matter, most of which comes to a stop. But the attachment to life enables some individuals to take advantage of this energy. Bergson puts the point in the following way, in words that summarize Kazantzakis's view as well:

A soul strong enough, noble enough to make this effort would not stop to ask whether the principle with which it is now in touch is the transcendent cause of all things or merely its earthly delegate. It would be content to feel itself pervaded, though retaining its own personality, by a being immeasurably mightier than itself, just as an iron is pervaded by the fire which makes it glow.¹⁷

(The fire image here should be kept in mind when we consider Kazantzakis's view of God as a *consuming* flame.) This mysticism is usually found in diluted form in most of those who believe in God, but the true mystics experience God in such an undiluted form that they are transported, at least temporarily, to another plane. They experience the passage of a spiritual current through matter to a place that it could not quite reach without the intervention of humanity. But the fact that the diluted experience of God is prevalent should not escape our notice. Most who believe in God hear "the whisper of an echo," to use Bergson's words, of God. Belief in God does not have to be a futile effort of merely going through the motions. Yet it often is an exercise in futility, as if we were parts of some ceremony with an empty chair reserved for some high dignitary. As before, however, there is some value to organized religion in that its history can provide the spark for open religion when one of its members is touched by the inwardness of the tradition, just as an indifferent schoolmaster, mechanically teaching a science developed by previous geniuses, can nonetheless awaken in a pupil the scientific vocation. The contrast between the closed and the open in religion occurs when faint echoes of the tradition are heard, not of those "mysteries" concerning which there is nothing really mystical, but of those genuine experiences of the divine had by the saints.¹⁸

The mystics can grow on each other and improve not because of any enhanced faculties on their part, but because in each new epoch they can call up the peak experiences of previous mystics to guide them, as in the history of ancient Greek mysticism from the Orphics and Pythagoreans to Plato and to Plotinus. This effort of relying on previous mystics "is of God, if it is not God himself," according to Bergson. Each mystic catches a clearer glimpse of the promised land even if he or she does not touch its soil. Kazantzakis grows out of the *dynamism* of the Hebrew prophets and the *fervor* of the Christian mystics and proselytizers, even if he is not a proselytizer himself. This dynamism and fervor is produced by being attentive to that force or presence or voice that we call "God," an attentiveness that alternately produces repose and agitation. When God acts through the soul there is a superabundance of life, a boundless impetus, and an irresistible impulse to hurl oneself into vast enterprises, all of the vital phenomena that are commonplaces in Kazantzakis's writings. This Bergsonian-Kazantzakian vitalism directs the mystic to the wider and wider circles mentioned in *Spiritual Exercises*: beyond family and race and species to the whole cosmos.¹⁹

Mysticism or open religion means nothing whatsoever to the person who has no experience (diluted or undiluted) of it. But to the person who has had such experience, religion is the cooled, crystallized effect of what was once poured white hot into the human soul. Just as there is popularization of scientific truth (how many laypersons *really* understand Einstein's or Darwin's theories?), so also in religion there is popularization of the discoveries of Jesus, St. Francis, Buddha, and others. In between the agnostic or atheist, who claim to have no experience of God, on the one hand, and the active believer, on the other, is the philosopher who intellectualizes God. The latter is often chastened by Bergson and Kazantzakis because of the attempt that some intellectuals—philosophers and theologians, especially—make to supplant religious experience and action with abstractions. But neither philosophers nor theologians necessarily commit this error. In fact, Kazantzakis himself is at times a philosopher/theologian who attempts to develop descriptions of God and of the experience of God by human beings that are more accurate than those hitherto developed.²⁰

Once again, the monumental mistake made by many philosophers and theologians is to take snapshots of change with their concepts. More precisely, this effort is not bothersome in its own right; the mistake lies in taking these snapshots for the real and the essential. Motion is then erroneously seen as agitation with a view to standing still. But duration is not a debasement of being, as I will argue in detail later, and time is not a deprivation of eternity. If there are those who see in the mystics' perception of God-in-process nothing but quackery and folly, it should also be noted that there are those for whom music is nothing but noise. The mystics experience what most of us could, with effort, experience: according to Bergson, they *unanimously* bear witness that

God needs us just as we need God. It will be one of the aims of this book to explain how this could be so, an especially important effort given Kazantzakis's often repeated claim that *we save God*.²¹

Suffering is a terrible reality, the existence of which disproves the existence of an *omnipotent* God, as Kazantzakis often illustrates, but does it disprove the existence of *God*? If God is omnipotent, then it appears that God willed, or at least permitted, innocent beings (humans or other animals) to suffer. It is actually, contra what one might expect, the atheists or agnostics who are not good empiricists. They have an *a priori* notion of God as omnipotent, from which they try to deduce the characteristics the world ought to show. When they notice that the world does not exhibit these characteristics, say when suffering crowds out joy, they conclude that there is no God. Their procedure, Bergson thinks, should be the reverse, as it was for Kazantzakis: Consult the experience of suffering in the world and then question what this might mean for belief in the greatest conceivable being-in-becoming. Is it necessarily the case that such a being would possess or delegate all power? Neither Bergson nor Kazantzakis would respond to this question in the affirmative. In effect, atheists and agnostics very often start with closed religion, where divine omnipotence is assumed without argument, and defeat it as a straw man.²²

Despite the fact that the Middle Ages (which will be treated in more detail in chapter 4) were even more ensconced within closed religion than our own era, both Bergson and Kazantzakis have a peculiar admiration for this period. In some ways the modern desire to bring about easier material conditions is admirable, but this desire often degenerates into a hedonism that is detrimental to spiritual progress. By way of contrast, both Bergson and Kazantzakis as constructive postmodernists admire medieval asceticism and the simple life, a life of simplicity that acts as a helpful antidote to the overly complex lives of many people alive today. Asceticism evokes mysticism, as we will see, in that one must train oneself to use matter properly in order to get away from it. In Bergson's words, which are also similar to those of Kazantzakis, the material universe is a machine for the making of the divine.²³

Laughter

One of the lesser read, yet nonetheless instructive, of Bergson's books is *Laughter*.²⁴ He defines laughter in general as a certain mechanical inelasticity where one would expect to find the wide-awake adaptability and the living pliability of a personal being. For example, some human faces are humorous because they seem to be always engaged in weeping, laughing, whistling, or blowing an imaginary trumpet. Likewise, there is something comical about God if this being is supposed to be completely unmoved by both the Holocaust as

well as by a group of teenage boys who proclaim their individuality while each wears a baseball hat on backwards. Exactly how can an intelligent being remain unmoved by tragedy and comedy? Or again, there is something comic about an eccentric individual who dresses in the fashion of former times (say the "roaring 20s"), just as there is something comic about a supposed divine being who bears all of the attributes of a Middle Eastern, nomadic tribe of 3,000 years ago, or of a feudal society from the thirteenth century.²⁵

Not only is God often turned into something mechanical, and hence comical, in the Abrahamic religions, but also religious leaders within these religions are often comical. Many a religious leader exhibits the professional automatism of the customs official who rushed to the aid of those on a wrecked steamer, and began by asking them if they had any goods to declare. It is easy for orthodox religious believers to become impervious to novel forms of joy or *pathos* in that they have readymade phrases to deal with every contingency. Bergson's description of the comic applies equally to the traditional view of God in the Abrahamic religions:

The rigid, the ready-made, the mechanical, in contrast with the supple, the ever-changing and the living, absentmindedness in contrast with attention, in a word, automatism in contrast with free activity, such are the defects that laughter singles out and would fain correct.²⁶

The chief cause of this rigidity, as we will see, is the neglect to look around to see alternative views of God. Kazantzakis was not neglectful in this regard.²⁷

Peter Bien is correct in noting that Bergson and William James had a great deal in common and that they both influenced Kazantzakis.²⁸ But James's influence was not due merely to his criticism of idle abstractions, but also to the fact that he bathed in an atmosphere of great spiritual currents. James was interested in the varieties of religious experience, an interest that enabled him, like Kazantzakis, to benefit from the mystic soul as we would lean out the window to feel the caress of the breeze on our cheek on a spring day, a caress that nonetheless causes an immense unrest.²⁹

In order to avoid a comic view of God one needs to realize that open religion is motivated by an attractive force rather than the impulsive one of closed religion. Further, it is crucial to notice that open religion or mysticism, as Kazantzakis well knew, is not to be identified with quietism, a preoccupation with idiosyncratic visions and voices. Rather, the mystics who interested Bergson (Saints Paul and Joan of Arc) are like those who interested Kazantzakis in the sense that they were persons whose religious experiences propelled them to act in the world in some nontrivial way.³⁰

Some Kazantzakis Texts

Bien is alert in pointing out that the best place to look for instantiation of Bergsonian themes in Kazantzakis is *The Greek Passion*, but I will reserve treatment of the relevant passage(s) from this work until chapter 6.³¹

Freedom or Death

The point I wish to make here is that almost any work of Kazantzakis is a good place to look for Bergsonian themes, such that it does not much matter where one looks. Consider one of his best novels, *Freedom or Death*. Here we see that for Kazantzakis the whole of life involves struggle and trouble; only death or a statuelike existence brings repose. Captain Mihalis cast wild glances in agitation at a statue of the Archangel Michael because of the latter's inactive existence in the face of an unjust occupation of Crete by the Turks. The reified God of traditional theism could just as well have been the target of his indignation.³²

The main character in this book, Captain Mihalis, prefers to think of God not only in process but, in Kazantzakian fashion, specifically in the process of fighting. If God is not present in the battle against the Turks it must be due to the fact that there is a war somewhere else that demands divine attention. (An omnipotent being could fight on two fronts, however.) The Cretans are tough, hence they can hold their own until God is available. For example, of the three sorts of human beings, the Cretans are in the most rugged category: some eat their eggs without the shells, some with the shells, and some (the Cretans) with the shells *and* the egg cups. Even God is afraid of those for whom death is not to be feared. Kazantzakis's suffering God is in one sense compatible with Christianity's incarnational theology, specifically with the crucifixion. But whether or not Kazantzakis violates the traditional condemnation of Patripassionism (the view that God the Father suffers) remains to be seen. In any event, Kazantzakis is comfortable with comparing the suffering of Crete with the trials of Jesus on the Cross.³³

It is not only Christianity with which Kazantzakis's view of God is in dialogue. Consider the problem mentioned in the introduction, that of trying to reconcile human freedom with divine omniscience. It is well known that within Islam it is common to try to resolve the problem by emphasizing the latter at the expense of the former. To say "It is written by Allah" is to say that there is little, if anything, a human being can do to alter what will in any event happen. It is in this light that the exchange between the Metropolitan and Pasha Effendi in *Freedom or Death* is to be understood, especially when the Pasha tries to get himself off the hook when he is on the verge of shedding blood. It should be emphasized, however, that despite certain differences of emphasis, one finds

the same problem in Judaism and Christianity as in Islam. After all, both the later St. Augustine and John Calvin (with their enormous influence on the Puritan tradition) also denigrate human freedom so as to accommodate divine omniscience.³⁴

The characters in this novel in effect have a legitimate Bergsonian question: If God is omnipotent and omniscient, how can we also say that God is full of loving kindness while innocent people suffer? Unlike many thinkers who have asked a question like this, Bergson and Kazantzakis remain not only optimistic, but heroically so. Captain Mihalis, who in some sense represents Kazantzakis's own views, does not curse his fate at least in part because he does not assume that God is responsible for it. However, if the traditional theistic view is correct, God is responsible for it. The hard-nosed nature of Kazantzakis's theism can be seen in his identification of God with Charos, whose magical voice calls to us from beyond life, and not necessarily in a gentle tone.³⁵

Journeying

Another book where Kazantzakis exhibits his Bergsonian tendencies is the recently translated *Journeying*, which details his trips to Italy, Egypt, the Sinai, Jerusalem, and Cyprus. He notes, like Bergson, the heroism of religious figures like Jesus, Mohammed, and Buddha, who, when confronted with the abyss (to be explained later), cast a bridge and cross over it. They are like shepherds who bring the human flock out of closed religion into an open one (and perhaps to a more advanced version of closed religion). Kazantzakis's own heroism, if there is such, consists in his ability to mobilize his letter-soldiers in the religious fight. It is not in victory but in the *struggle* for victory that his efforts to write well find meaning. In fact, like Captain Mihalis he believes that in the certainty that there is no reward, one's efforts obtain pride and valor.³⁶

Kazantzakian freedom consists not merely in the license to choose, but in obedience to a hyperindividual rhythm that is not in the traditional theistic sense omniscient. Hence Kazantzakis recognized that the Russian peasant, when he or she came to believe the communist trope to the effect that there is nothing higher than humanity, would not really be free and would not be willing to make sacrifices. And the religious life is a sacrificial life, for Kazantzakis, especially in our current age, which is a new medieval period, a postmodern period, as we will see in chapter 4. The goal of this sacrifice is to advance the divine cause. The means once needed to advance this cause included slavery (!), as was the case in ancient Egyptian religion. But even in ancient Egypt worship became progressively dematerialized when Aton, the god of the sun, replaced the cruder Amon. Aton was accessible to all races and to people of all intellectual abilities.³⁷

Kazantzakis's similarity to Bergson is especially evident when he notices that all of the world's great religions had their start in the East. The West has received some of these religions and nurtured, refined, and analyzed them, but

religious passion itself is an "Oriental" phenomenon. What has been criticized in this chapter as the "traditional view of God" in the Abrahamic religions is actually a particular sort of Western accretion on this basically Eastern phenomenon. As we will see, this point enables us to bridge any supposed gap between Kazantzakis's debt to "Western" religions, on the one hand, and his debt to Buddhism, on the other. That is, both Christianity and Buddhism are species of Oriental madness (in the honorific sense of the term), for Kazantzakis. Ultimately Kazantzakis is a Western-Eastern monist who believes that there is a great deal more of matter in spirit than (overly Eastern) "idealists" imagine, just as there is a great deal more of spirit in matter than (overly Western) materialists imagine.³⁸

At one point during a visit to the Sinai, Kazantzakis stipulates that it is time itself, with a rhythm like that of an undulating camel, that transubstantiates matter into spirit, a process that we will isolate in the following chapter. This divine process of transubstantiation is relentless and often destructive because Kazantzakis's God is not so much pretty as sublime:

The true God disdainfully passes over human virtues, the daughters of fear. He is the God of destruction. . . . God is the dark unknown all-probable explosive power, that breaks out even in the smallest particle of matter.³⁹

I will later try to reconcile this quotation with the view of God as the greatest conceivable being; here I wish to emphasize that the Bergsonian and Kazantzakian hero is the most perfect expression of God, of spiritualized, transubstantiated matter in any age. For Kazantzakis the hero answers the metahuman Cry, the Impossible, a response that has implications for the "sacred, lofty" meaning that should come about in the meeting of two human beings.⁴⁰

During Kazantzakis's visit to the Sinai, a tension becomes apparent in his view of God that will be with us for the remainder of this book. On the one hand, God is sometimes, for Kazantzakis as well as for Bergson, a personal being who cares for humanity (or a benevolent panentheistic presence). And, on the other, God is sometimes, for Kazantzakis if not for Bergson, an indifferent and frightful presence or the "unblooming, all-granite one." Or, as Kazantzakis puts the point, "God is a quiver *and* a gentle tear" (emphasis added). It is this harsh, Sinai version of God (the quiver) that Kazantzakis very often refers to as a consuming fire or as an enormous hand that whirls human beings about. It is Yahweh, God the Father, or Allah (Kazantzakis held out a suspicion that he was part Bedouin) that Kazantzakis very often, but not always, means by "God." But because Kazantzakis is interested in the *contemporary* face of God he refines his view as follows:

The contemporary face of the unfathomable is neither the tenderly sweet face of Jesus, that blossomed in idyllic Galilee,

*nor the face of the tribal, merciless Jehovah that was forged in the Sinaitic wilderness . . . a new face of the unfathomable. . . . It must be like the Laborer who is hungry, who works and rises up in revolt. This face must no longer be the leader of one tribe, but of the entire human race.*⁴¹ (emphasis added)

Here we can see that Jesus, on the one hand, and Yahweh/God the Father, on the other, are put on a par in that both of these are mere suggestions as to how we should think of God-in-process today. Such is Kazantzakis's Bergsonian fear of reification:⁴² "If God at one time took on the form of Dionysos, Jehovah, Christ, Ariman, and Brahmin, it is only of historical value today. His contemporary form is whatever wrenches our heart with blood and tears."⁴³

However, not even this form—the one that wrenches our heart with blood and tears—stops the divine process. This is because the period in history through which we are living, a period in which much of the dead wood in religion needs to be cleared away, is transitory. The blur is due not only to the fact that time flies, but also to the fact that at any particular time the erotic passion that accompanies the transubstantiation of matter into spirit will make exact boundaries among eroticisms toward God, ideas, and women hard to draw, as Plato also well knew in his *Symposium*. Kazantzakis asks for God's *help* (which again indicates that the violent images of God do not tell the whole story of Kazantzakis's theism) in elevating himself above even joy. It can safely be said that God, for Kazantzakis, was still fermenting.⁴⁴

One can understand the calm of some Abrahamic believers, say the calm of a Muslim who is convinced that all is in the care of an omnipotent, omniscient, and omnibenevolent Allah. But this calm is due to a false sense of security created by a problematic (Western) philosophical concept of God. At the heart of the Abrahamic religions is an Eastern restlessness, a Jewish battle to ceaselessly upset the balance that is the goal of those who have inherited from the Greeks the tendency to harmonize opposite forces. In this regard Kazantzakis's theism very much resembles Christianity in general: a peculiar combination of this Hebraic restlessness with a Greek sense of harmony. From the very start Christianity has exhibited this peculiar mixture. To the extent that Christianity pays attention to its Asian, as opposed to its Greek, roots it will preserve a hatred of all tyranny and complacency, a hatred born in the Jews as a consequence of many centuries of persecution. (Kazantzakis saw Zionism in the 1920s as a sort of complacency, analogous to that of Homer's Odysseus when he returned home.) Kazantzakis's thoroughly Bergsonian way of describing the tension here is as follows:⁴⁵

I could clearly feel the two great torrents struggling within me: the one pushes toward harmony, patience and gentleness. It functions with ease, without effort, following only

the natural order of things. You throw a stone up high and for a second you force it against its will; but quickly it joyfully falls again. You toss a thought in the air but the thought quickly tires, it becomes impatient in the empty air and falls back to earth and settles with the soil. The other force is, it would seem, contrary to nature. An unbelievable absurdity. It wants to conquer weight, abolish sleep, and, with the lash, prod the Universe upward.⁴⁶

Journey to the Morea

A third source for Kazantzakis's Bergsonism is *Journey to the Morea*, a work that details his journeys to the Greek provinces where the "dead gods" find their final refuge. Here he comes to grips with the realization that if civilization means discipline of primordial instinct, then it has value only when the disciplined instinct serves some purpose greater than any individual. In one of the most moving passages in the Kazantzakis corpus, and a neglected one at that, Kazantzakis indicates that provincial life is not only the home of the dead gods and closed religion, but is also the best place to look for religious heroes who will open religion up once again:

Spiritual and ethical *decency*, the priceless bashfulness of youth, the sacred "down" of spiritual purity, finds shelter only in the provinces. In a great city the child is born without this down, his eyes and ears are soon corrupted, and this precocious maturity deforms his soul. In the provinces, amid silent lanes, in spotless flowerpot-filled courtyards, on peaceful country strolls, in the craving of expectation and the difficulty of satisfying every aspiration, the youth finds time to desire. A great distance exists between desire and the realization of that desire, and in traversing this distance, a youth labors and stimulates his highest abilities. For a short while natural youthful elation for the higher things manages to endure, and in living for that short time it matures, is strengthened, and is less easily compromised. So, as the capitals have lost their innocence, the only remaining hope for the renewal of the Earth's virginity has taken refuge in the modest, languid and enchanting province.⁴⁷

Each of us, however, is a potential source of open religion in that the divine indwelling in each of us is protected by what Kazantzakis calls a fortress, like St. Teresa of Avila's interior castle. This divine indwelling is the last refuge of conscience, self-respect, and courage.⁴⁸

Immortality, for Kazantzakis (and here he departs from Bergson), consists in making the most, indeed making an eternity, out of the single instant at our disposal. It is in this way that each of us is a possible source for open religion even if it is great artists, in particular, who glimpse timeless, changeless symbols in the flow of everyday reality. For example, the trained eye discerns a prior movement in a fresco and even in a statue, one that reigned supreme in the works of a preceding generation and one that future generations will take: the statue, in a way, moves through and carries tradition. In an instant even a statue balances the tripartite current of time; such could also be said of any particular view of God. By concentrating on a great soul, especially in moments of historical dissolution, we can learn how to become oracles for open religion, and how to transubstantiate matter into spirit, according to Kazantzakis. By keeping in mind Heraclitus's dictum, that one cannot step twice into the same river, and by realizing that the "river" in question is within us, we can always keep alive the hope that spiritual progress is possible.⁴⁹

One religious hero whom Kazantzakis admires precisely because of his *élan vital* is Gemistos Plethon, a passionate defender of Plato who tried to show that tradition is worthy of respect, but that a living human being is not obliged to obey it blindly. This is especially true regarding traditional conceptions of God because the stakes are so great when dealing with views of ultimate reality. But Gemistos is just one among many of those who have suffered and struggled much in their lives; ephemeral things could not subdue them because of their belief in God. There is no huge gap in Kazantzakis between *élan vital* or animal-like passion, on the one hand, and religious struggle or God, on the other. Despite the fact that Kazantzakis divinizes passion (at least when passion is intent on spiritualizing matter), he nonetheless can at the same time feel guilty about passion. For example, he relates how he once was in an impressive church in Monemvasia and he opened at random a Gospel on the altar. Whether by coincidence, as is claimed in *Journey to the Morea*, or by design, so as to heighten the literary effect of this incident, Kazantzakis finds the same message St. Augustine received in his *Confessions* when he also fell upon the Bible at random: revelry and intoxication lead one away from the major concerns of life.⁵⁰ The issue in Kazantzakis is not reason versus passion or the West versus the East, but how to bring together the best in each element in these pairs.

It is one of the theses of the present book that Kazantzakis is no more opposed to intellect (or the West) than Bergson; rather he is interested in putting it in its proper place. What bothers both of them is a hegemonic intellect that crowds out (Eastern) mysticism. Western (or, more precisely, Greek) reason, as discovered by Socrates in quest of metaphysical truths, is a great advance over the idle gossip and curiosity that preceded it. The goal for both Bergsonian and Kazantzakian reason is to build on, not supplant, the warm, dark, rich substratum provided by instinct (or the mystic intuition of the "Orient"): "We can deny neither East nor West." An ostensive definition of

what Kazantzakis means by the hegemony of the intellect or of the West is when he points out a defect found among learned Germans: if given the choice between two doors, on the one written "Paradise" and on the other written "Lecture about Paradise," they would rush to the latter!⁵¹ That is, despite his Bergsonian critique of hegemonic reason, as indicated in this image concerning the fondness some have for academic lectures, Kazantzakis himself is a highly intellectual writer.

It is *because* of the fact that Kazantzakis is such an intellectual or philosophical writer that we must consider carefully what he means by the aforementioned violent images of God, images that have been treated with care in some articles by Darren Middleton and by the famous process theologian John Cobb.⁵² The key point to notice here is that Kazantzakis's Bergsonian opposition to reification of the spiritual life, and his opposition to reification of God, means that *at times* we should be shaken—forcefully shaken—out of our complacency when reification begins, when the divine film starts slowing down to the point where we can imagine it a snapshot. The "Cry" of God serves as a call forward to new possibilities, some of which may in fact strike us as terrifying. For example, in order to show "forgetfulness" of self, we might be asked to kiss a leper, as was St. Francis. Each of us, at least some of the time, and perhaps most of the time, wants to continue essentially as we are, and it is this security that is shattered by the Cry. But our response to the Cry is for the sake of some things that are good for us: life in *extremis*, heightened consciousness, expanded freedom (as defined above by Kazantzakis), and, in some cases, more extensive and more sensitive love. As Cobb emphasizes, however, the way to these often lies through the valley of the shadow of death. Bergson's God of love and Kazantzakis's dark divinity do not contradict each other; rather, they are mutually reinforcing correlatives.

The "Cry" passage from Kazantzakis treated by Cobb is important because it touches on most of the issues to be treated in the present book: transubstantiation, panexperientialism, a dipolar God in process, a love/hate relationship with traditional religion, and so forth. Hence it is worth quoting at length:

Christ's every moment is a conflict and a victory. He conquered the invincible enchantment of simple human pleasures; He conquered every temptation, continually transubstantiated flesh into spirit, and ascended. Every obstacle in His journey became an occasion for further triumph, and then a landmark of that triumph. We have a model in front of us now, a model who opens the way for us and gives us strength.

Blowing through heaven and earth, and in our hearts and the heart of every living thing, is a gigantic breath—a great Cry—which we call God. Plant life wished to continue its motionless sleep next to stagnant waters, but the Cry

leaped up within it and violently shook its roots: "Away, let go of the earth, walk!" Had the tree been able to think and judge, it would have cried, "I don't want to. What are you urging me to do! You are demanding the impossible!" But the Cry, without pity, kept shaking its roots and shouting, "Away, let go of the earth, walk!"

It shouted in this way for thousands of eons; and lo! as a result of desire and struggle, life escaped the motionless tree and was liberated.

Animals appeared—worms—making themselves at home in water and mud. "We're just fine here," they said. "We have peace and security; we're not budging!"

But the terrible Cry hammered itself pitilessly into their loins. "Leave the mud, stand up, give birth to your betters!"

"We don't want to! We can't!"

"You can't, but I can. Stand up!"

And lo! after thousands of eons, man emerged, trembling on his still unsolid legs.

The human being is a centaur; his equine hoofs are planted in the ground, but his body from breast to head is worked on and tormented by the merciless Cry. He has been fighting, again for thousands of eons, to draw himself, like a sword, out of his animalistic scabbard. He is also fighting—this is his new struggle—to draw himself out of his human scabbard. Man calls in despair, "Where can I go? I have reached the pinnacle, beyond is the abyss." And the Cry answers, "I am beyond. Stand up!" All things are centaurs. If this were not the case, the world would not rot into inertness and sterility.

As I walked hour after hour in the desert surrounding the monastery, God gradually began to liberate Himself from priests. Thenceforth, the Lord for me was this Cry.⁵³

This divine Cry is much like Whitehead's "primordial nature of God," an aspect of God that is, when considered together with God's more concrete, "consequent nature," better able than the God of traditional theism to account for the cosmic advance described by Kazantzakis in the above quotation. (This dipolar view of God will be explored in detail later in the book.) Whitehead sees the primordial nature of God in *Adventures of Ideas* as the *erōs* of the universe, the appetitive urge to realize, to as great an extent as possible, the eternal objects or possibilities (much like Plato's forms) for our world.