The Heretical Imperative

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Modernity as the Universalization of Heresy

THE NATIONAL AIRLINE of Indonesia calls itself by the name of Garuda, the mythological bird of the Ramayana. The name, which is emblazoned on its airplanes, is appropriate. The traveler flying over the Indonesian archipelago with its myriad islands may well feel himself to be borne on the wings of the original Garuda. Which makes him too a quasi-mythological being, a god perhaps, or at least a demigod, soaring through the sky with unimaginable speed and served by machines of unimaginable power. Down below are the mere mortals, in their small villages and fields. They look up and they watch the gods fly by. Occasionally the traveler will touch down among them, but even then he rarely mingles with them. He has important business in the big cities. Or he may stay a weekend on Bali, once called the island of the gods, during which he can easily spend the equivalent of the annual per capita income of Indonesia.

The jet traveler in the Third World is a pretty good meta-

phor of modernity. He moves on the same planet as those villagers, and yet he moves in an altogether different world. His space is measured in thousands of miles, theirs by the distance a bullock cart can go. His time is expressed in the controlled precision of airline schedules, theirs by the seasons of nature and of the human body. He moves with breathtaking speed; they move in the slow rhythms set long ago by tradition. His life hurls itself into an open future; theirs moves in careful connection with the ancestral past. He has vast power, physical as well as social, more or less at his command; they have very little of either. And, while he is not a god in that he is mortal, his life-span will very likely be much longer than theirs. Seen in the perspective of such villagers, modernity is the advent of a new world of mythological potency. Modernization, then, is the juxtaposition of this new world over the old worlds of traditional man—a cataclysmic and unprecedented event in human history.

But the jet traveler differs from the villager in another very important way. It is not only that he is so much more privileged and powerful. It is also that he has so *many more choices*. In that too, of course, gods and demigods used to differ from mere mortals. The jet traveler carries these choices on his person in symbolic form. He can change his air ticket and fly to Singapore instead of Manila. He can convert his travelers' checks into this currency or that. His passport and his credit card open a multiplicity of doors. All these travel choices, however, represent only a small slice of an enormously larger array of choices that are part of the taken-for-granted fabric of modern life. To be sure, a Javanese villager also makes choices, and, anthropologically speaking, the capacity to choose is intrinsic to human being. Also to be sure, not all modern men have the same range of choices; thus an upper-middle-class New Yorker may choose to have his vacation in Asia, while his working-class

neighbor chooses to get on a bus and visit his cousin in Boston. Still, compared to anyone in a premodern society, both have a range of choices which, for most of history, would have been in the realm of mythological fantasy—choices of occupation, of place of residence, of marriage, of the number of one's children, in the manner of passing one's leisure time, in the acquisition of material goods. All these are choices, and very important ones to most people, in the external arrangements of life. But there are other choices too, choices that deeply touch the inner world of individuals—choices of what is now commonly called "life-style," moral and ideological choices, and, last but not least, religious choices.

The Modern Situation

Modernity as a near-inconceivable expansion of the area of human life open to choices—that is the central theme of this book; or, rather, the central theme is the elaboration of the implications of this situation for religion. This theme, needless to say, cannot be argued at the hand of metaphors, however apt they may be. It must be elaborated systematically; in the course of such elaboration, a certain painstaking quality will at times be unavoidable.

Marion Levy has rather pithily defined the measure of modernization as "the ratio of inanimate to animate sources of power."[1] One may not be altogether satisfied with this definition (and, incidentally, Levy has elaborated on it in enormous detail in a number of books), but it has the merit of pointing clearly to two aspects of the matter: One, that modernity (which, within the context of this definition, would be a situation in which a *high* ratio of inanimate to animate sources of power prevails) is not an either/or affair but rather comes in

different degrees. And, two, that the essential factor in the process of modernization, and *ipso facto* the core of modernity (which is the product of the modernization process), is technological. Both of these aspects are very important. Historians, for example, always like to point out to social scientists that this or the other phenomenon in the contemporary world has its parallel in previous periods of history. It is, indeed, intellectually salutary to be aware of historical precedents and even to recognize that one's own situation is not altogether unheard-of in some of its characteristics. But at the same time one must not allow oneself to be trapped into a perspective in which there is nothing ever new in history—in which, in the last resort, no changes can be perceived. Levy's way of defining modernization makes one look upon it, so to speak, in a statistical manner: Modernity is an aggregate of traits; these traits appear in history in different frequency distributions. Also, although these traits cover a wide range of human concerns (economic, political, social, and indeed psychological), the prime causal force that aggregates them is technological. In other words, the juxtaposition of airplane and bullock cart in the previous metaphor is not a gratuitous one.

If one follows a phenomenon far enough back in time, one invariably comes on a variety of causal factors. It follows that what appears as a prime causal force in one period of history was itself the product of other causes, some of them possibly of a very different character. Thus the technology that has transformed the conditions of human life for the last few centuries did not fall from heaven at the beginning of the era now called modern. It has often been asked why it was in Europe at a particular moment that the scientific knowledge that had been "lying around" for centuries was, almost suddenly, transmuted into a technological revolution. Why not in ancient Greece? Or, for that matter, in India or China? Needless to say, there

are different theories about this. These cannot be pursued here. Suffice it to say that there is no intention here of assuming some sort of technological determinism. On the contrary, it is stipulated that the technological revolution of recent history must be understood as the result of a confluence of multiple and heterogeneous causes. Thus modernity, in the form known today, was *also* caused by other specifically European phenomena—such as the capitalist market economy, the bureaucratic nation-state, the pluralistic metropolis, and the complex ideological configurations produced by the Renaissance and the Reformation. Nevertheless, the one singly most important transforming force was then, at the beginning, and continues today to be technology.

Human life and thought is always situated in history. One may then say that anyone living and thinking today is *in the situation of modernity*; depending on the country or societal sector at issue, one may modify this by saying that one lives and thinks in a situation characterized by this or that degree of modernization. This may at first appear as a banal statement, but its implications are not banal at all. What needs to be clarified is the notion of *situation*. It means, first of all, that an individual's existence takes place under certain external conditions—in this case, under the conditions brought about by a certain technology, certain economic and political arrangements, and so forth. But it also means that there is an internalization of at least some of these conditions—in this case, conditions that can be summed up by saying that a contemporary individual finds himself afflicted or blessed by the aggregate of psychological and cognitive structures commonly called *modern consciousness*. Put differently, the situation of contemporary life and thought is shaped not only by the external forces of modernity but by the forces of modern consciousness shaping the inner world of individuals. One of the

most important areas of analysis is precisely this relation between the external and the internal aspects of modernity.[2]

Such a relation eminently prevails in the case of technology. Thus, for example, an individual in contemporary America is in a situation in which he frequently communicates with others by telephone. The telephone, in the most obvious way, is an external fact in the individual's life; indeed, it is a material fact, embodied in innumerable physical objects, one or more of which may clutter up the individual's house. Equally obviously, this external fact shapes many aspects of the individual's everyday life. Thus he can utilize his telephone, and the enormously complicated and powerful machinery to which it is linked (including underwater cables between continents and communications satellites orbiting the earth) to carry on a trivial conversation with a friend vacationing in Indonesia. But that is not the whole story. An individual who uses the telephone must know how to handle this particular piece of machinery. This is a skill, which after a while becomes a habit—an external habit, a bit of learned behavior. But the use of the telephone also means learning certain ways of thinking—internal habits, as it were. It means to think in numbers, to absorb a considerably complex framework of cognitive abstractions (such as the network of area codes covering North America), to have some notion of what could go wrong with the machinery (even if one must call on an expert for repairs). Anyone who has ever used the telephone in a Third World country knows that none of these things can be taken for granted. But there is more yet. To use the telephone habitually also means to learn a specific style of dealing with others—a style marked by impersonality, precision, and (at least in this country) a certain superficial civility. The key question is this: Do these internal habits *carry over* into other areas of life, such as nontele-

phonic relations with other persons? The answer is almost certainly yes. The problem is: Just how, and to what extent?

The example of the telephone can be replicated over the whole spectrum of the technological apparatus of contemporary life. In consequence, the question can be enormously enlarged: Does contemporary technological consciousness carry over into other areas of life? Put differently: Does contemporary man have a technological mentality that corresponds to the technological forces that shape his life externally? Again, the answer is almost certainly yes. The problem of the quality and the degree of this correspondence is far from solved. *Mutatis mutandis*, similar questions may be asked with regard to the other external facets of modernity: Is there a capitalist mentality corresponding to the capitalist market economy? Is there a bureaucratic mind corresponding to bureaucratic institutions? And so on.

Needless to say, the details of this vast problem are beyond the scope of this book. The point of the foregoing considerations is simply to bring out a simple but exceedingly important empirical fact: *Modern consciousness is part and parcel of the situation in which the contemporary individual finds himself.* Put differently, anyone today is not only situated in the modern world but is also situated within the structures of modern consciousness. Thus modern consciousness is given, is a datum, for contemporary thought. It is, if one prefers, an empirical a priori.

But now something else must be added immediately, to avoid a fatal misunderstanding: *To say that modern consciousness is an individual's situation is not to say that his experience and thought must irrevocably remain within the boundaries of this situation.* In other words, to understand the sociohistorical situatedness of human life and thought is not necessarily a deterministic understanding. If it were so, inciden-

tally, social change would be probably impossible. *Homo sapiens* is a situated being, but also a being forever driven to transcend his situation. Certainly, individuals differ in their capacity to transcend the situation into which the accident of birth has thrown them: There are a thousand dull conformists for every Socrates. Also, different sociohistorical situations entail different probabilities that an individual will transcend the boundaries of his situation: Athens was a more probable location for a Socrates than a starving village in the mountains of Thrace. Still, the principle remains that the situation in which the individual finds himself is the *starting point* of his life and thought; the *end point* of either is not inexorably predetermined, even if it may be predicted with a measure of probability.[3]

If one understands modern consciousness in this way, a number of important consequences follow. Most important of all, modern consciousness, even though it is recognized as the situation in which the contemporary thinker finds himself and with which he must reckon at least as his starting point, loses its quality of taken-for-granted superiority. Modern consciousness is one of many historically available forms of consciousness. It has specific characteristics, brought about and maintained by specific sociohistorical forces. It is changing and, like all human constructions in history, will eventually disappear or be transmuted into something quite different. Put simply, modern consciousness is a fact, but not necessarily one before which one must stand in awe. Of course modern man tends to think of himself and of his thoughts as the climax of evolution to date. In this he is no different from just about any preceding variety of the species. But there is no compelling reason why his claims should be given more weight than all the earlier ones. These claims themselves can be understood as the outcome of empirically given forces (such as the mind-boggling achieve-

ments of recent technology, which have something like a built-in megalomanic factor). The disciplines of history and of the social sciences can put modern consciousness in such a proper empirical perspective. This perspective, of course, does not yet provide a basis for deciding whether this or that claim of modern consciousness is finally valid or not. What it does provide is an attitude of soberness in which these claims can be assessed. Put differently, the empirical understanding of modern consciousness does not and cannot answer the philosophical questions as to the truth claims of modern man, but it is a highly useful prelude for this philosophical enterprise.

Thus, for example, it has been asserted that modern man is incapable of mythological thought—that is, of a perspective in which the universe is permeated by various divine or otherwise metahuman interventions. Let it be stipulated for the moment that this assertion is correct, at least in a statistical sense: The average middle-class American, upon having a vision of a demon, is more likely to call a psychiatrist than an exorcist. This probability is empirically available, and it can be explained in terms of the empirical determinants of this individual's situation. The intervention of demons in human life is a possibility excluded from the definitions of reality that have dominated this individual's socialization and education, and it is also excluded from the reality that is posited by the major institutions that surround him every day. In other words, there is no mystery about his probable reaction. Furthermore, the particular definitions of reality that govern his situation can be explained, in principle, by the history within which his own biography is but an episode; it could well be, for instance, that the role of technology in that history is one explanatory factor. So far, so good. The question remains: Are there demons? And, if so, did one sneak into Cleveland last night? The empirical finding that this individual, in his time and place, cannot con-

ceive of the possibility is no answer to these questions. It is, after all, possible that the individual who cannot conceive of demons is making a big mistake. Extending this observation, it is possible that modern consciousness, while expanding man's awareness of some aspects of the universe, has made him lose sight of other aspects that are equally real.

Modern consciousness, for reasons that will be further elaborated in a moment, has a powerfully relativizing effect on all worldviews. To a large extent, the history of Western thought over the last few centuries has been one long effort to cope with the vertigo of relativity induced by modernization. Different analysts may opt for different proof texts for the start of all this. A pretty good one would be Pascal's statement that what is truth on one side of the Pyrenees is error on the other. As this insight became more widespread and more profound, the question as to who is right as between the two sides of the Pyrenees attained a particular urgency, which is one of the foremost characteristics of recent Western thought. An empirical understanding of the situation making for this cannot deliver anyone from the vertigo of relativity. It may even, for a while, increase the vertigo. Yet it also points to a way out—by relativizing the relativizing processes. Modernity is then perceived as a great relativizing caldron. But modernity itself is a relative phenomenon; it is one moment in the historical movements of human consciousness—not its pinnacle, or its culmination, or its end.

There have been two antithetical attitudes toward modernity from the beginning. The one has been an exaltation of modernity, celebrating it in terms of the idea of progress or some comparably optimistic view of history. The other has been to bemoan modernity as a vast degeneration, a fall from grace, even a dehumanizing event. The attitude suggested by the above considerations is different from either of these antitheses.

It is neither a celebration nor a lament over modernity; thus is neither "progressive" nor "reactionary." Modernity is a historical phenomenon like any other. As such, it is inevitably a mixture of admirable and deplorable features. And very likely it is also a mixture of truths and errors. It may be well to keep this attitude in mind throughout the following argument.

From Fate to Choice

Modern consciousness, like modernity in its external aspects, is an exceedingly complex aggregate of elements. Some of these are so closely connected with the institutions that form the core of modernity that it is difficult if not impossible to "think them away"—that is, to conceive of modern consciousness without these elements. For example, it is very hard to imagine a modern society without the sort of consciousness that makes telephonic communication feasible. Some other elements of modern consciousness are clearly not of this type. Rather, they are accidents of history that can be "thought away" without much trouble—such as, for example, the fact that the English language (and with it, of course, its freight of semantic and even poetic accouterments) has become the major vehicle of international communications in much of the world.[4] Now, one of the elements of modern consciousness that is very hard indeed to "think away" is the one already mentioned—the multiplication of options. Put differently, *modern consciousness entails a movement from fate to choice.*

Premodern man lived in what was, for the most part, a world of fate. This is so, of course, in the most obvious sense that a wide array of choices opened up by modern technology did not exist for him. Instead of a wide range of electrically powered tools, for instance, the premodern putterer-around-the-house

had but one single tool—say, the stone hammer handed down ceremonially from father to son, either that very same hammer or another shaped in exactly the same way. Instead of a wide range of clothing styles, for another instance, the individual had one single style, which was predetermined by the materials and the tailoring techniques available as well as by tradition. This last phrase, however, introduces another factor, which, while related to the technological possibilities, already goes beyond the technological area proper. Thus an individual in a premodern society would have been unlikely to vary his style in clothing even if such an option were suddenly opened up to him by this or that historical accident. This fact is precisely what tradition is all about: One employs this tool, for a particular purpose, and no other. One dresses in this particular way, and in no other. A traditional society is one in which the great part of human activity is governed by such clear-cut prescriptions. Whatever else may be the problems of a traditional society, ambivalence is not one of them.

As modernity impinges on a traditional society, this world of fate is shaken, often quickly and dramatically. This process can still be observed in many places in the Third World today. No more dramatic case exists than that of birth control. For all the centuries of history prior to the advent of modern contraceptive techniques, sexuality and pregnancy were linked together in a relation of fate. To be sure, one could avoid pregnancy by avoiding sex, and there were various rudimentary techniques to prevent conception. But none of these could properly be called control. If not fate, then it was fortune that ruled in this area of life. Modern contraception, for the first time, has made pregnancy or nonpregnancy a matter of deliberate and reasonably reliable decision for millions of individuals. In the most elementary way (and few things are as elemental

as those that affect one's own body) what before was fate has now become a choice. The difficulties of birth-control campaigns in many Third World countries, incidentally, can probably be explained to a considerable degree by the difficulty traditional people have in grasping this truly Promethean transformation. The birth-control advocate trying to propagate this or that contraceptive technique in a traditional village is not just peddling an interesting new gadget. Rather, he is suggesting that the villagers rise in rebellion against what has been destiny from times immemorial—and use their own bodies as instruments in this rebellion!

Sociologically speaking, premodern societies are marked by the fact that their institutions have a very high degree of taken-for-granted certainty. This is not to say that this certainty is total; if it were, there would never have been any social change. But the degree of certainty, when compared to that in a modern society, is very high indeed. What was said before about the material techniques of life can also be said about the widest range of institutional arrangements: This is how things are done, and not in any other way. This is how one marries (and whom); this is how one raises children, makes one's livelihood, exercises power, goes to war—and in no other way. And, since human beings derive their identity from what they do, this is who one is—and one could not be anyone or anything else. In any human society there is a connection between the network of institutions and the, so to speak, available repertoire of identities. In a traditional society this connection is very much closer than in a modern society. What is more, traditional institutions and identities are taken for granted, certain, almost as objective as the facts of nature. In other words, both society and self are experienced as fate.

In human experience, an objective fact is one about which

the individual has no choice, or, somewhat more precisely, which narrowly determines his choices. Gravity is an inexorable law of the objective world, and this fact cannot be ignored, "thought away," chosen to be nonexistent. To build a house beneath a hanging rock is to expose it to this objective facticity. If and when the rock begins to fall, the individual can try to run away, but the falling rock itself is an objective fact of the universe which, even if he curses it, he must accept. Premodern institutions and identities are objective in an analogous manner, in terms of how they are experienced. Their objectivity too is rocklike, and they "fall upon" the individual as fate or fortune decrees. To be born in this village is to live "under" these institutions, which "overhang" all of life from cradle to grave. And it means to live as a human being with highly profiled characteristics, which too are objectively given and recognized as such by others as well as by oneself.

This experience of objectivity is pretheoretical—that is, it precedes any systematic reflection about it. Quite simply, it is part and parcel of the fabric of ordinary, everyday living. But human beings do reflect, or at least some of them do. It is not surprising that in premodern societies the fate that is experienced in ordinary life also appears on the theoretical level. Put differently, *what is experienced as necessary is also interpreted as necessary*. These interpretations may take very different forms. In traditional societies most of them are rooted in mythology: The world is what it is because the gods have so decreed it. But the interpretations may also go beyond the mythological form and take on the quality of sophisticated speculation. The unfolding of the Greek notion of fate, *moira*, over several centuries of maturing thought is a fascinating instance of this.[5] Whatever their form, these interpretations ground the objective reality of social experience in an alleged

objectivity of the cosmos. In this manner they provide an ultimate legitimation of the experienced necessities: What is must be, and it could be no other.[6]

The process by which modernity disrupts these worlds of fate is of key importance for the present argument and should therefore be elaborated in further detail. It is not possible to do this here with regard to the question whether technological proliferation per se has this effect, though enough has already been said to indicate that there is *some* connection between having different tools and different courses of action to choose from.[7] It is the proliferation of institutional choices that must be considered here. Modernity enormously complicates the institutional network of a society. The basic cause of this is the enormous complication of the division of labor, but the implications go far beyond the technological and economic areas of life first affected by this. *Modernity pluralizes.* Where there used to be one or two institutions, there now are fifty. Institutions, however, can best be understood as programs for human activity. Thus, what happens is that where there used to be one or two programs in a particular area of human life, there now are fifty. Not all of these new programs open up possibilities of individual choice. The fact that a contemporary citizen may now have to pay five different sets of taxes, while the subject of a traditional ruler only had to pay one tax, can hardly be looked upon as an opening up of options. But *some* of this institutional proliferation does have this consequence, and it is very important to understand that.

Take the area of sexual relations as a rather basic instance of this. A traditional society is almost invariably marked by a firm and quite narrow institutionalization of this area of human life: This is how things are done, and within this particular set of possible partners, and deviance from this pattern is severely

sanctioned (assuming that deviance is conceivable and takes place at all). Modern societies in the West, and in America more than elsewhere, have seen a steady expansion of the range of accepted alternatives to the traditional pattern—in ever-widening tolerance of marriage beyond limited groups and in the definition of roles within the marriage relationship, as well as ever-widening tolerance of sexual relations before and outside marriage. The recent phenomena of the feminist and gay movements are thus an intensification of a considerably older trend of pluralization: A male individual now may not only marry a woman outside his racial, ethnic, religious, or class group, and he may not only enter into novel householding and child-rearing arrangements with his working wife, but he may choose to set up a permanent and open sexual relationship with another man. These recent movements, especially the last one, have introduced a sociologically very revealing term—that of "sexual life-style." Thus even sexuality can now be experienced as an arena of individual choices. All one has to do to grasp the dramatic change this entails is to try and explain to, say, an Indonesian—even a Western-educated intellectual—what Americans mean when they speak of "sexual life-styles"! The outcome of such an effort is likely to be not disapproval or revulsion but puzzlement if not sheer incomprehension. Nor is it at all clear that the pluralization of possible and socially acceptable courses of action in this area of life has reached an end. The recent developments in sex-change surgery suggest the possibility of even more radical choices: A woman may now choose not just a male role but a male body.[8] Again, the impact of this proliferation of possible programs for the individual can be summed up in the same formula: What previously was fate now becomes a set of choices. Or: Destiny is transformed into decision. And, again, this multiplication of choices is experienced on the pretheoretical level, by innumerable ordinary

people with little or no interest in systematic reflection. Inevitably, though, this empirical situation calls out for interpretation—and *ipso facto* for systematic questioning of what used to be taken for granted as fate.

A Plurality of Worldviews

Thus the institutional pluralization that marks modernity affects not only human actions but also human consciousness: Modern man finds himself confronted not only by multiple options of possible courses of action but also by multiple options of possible ways of thinking about the world. In the fully modernized situation (of which contemporary America may be taken as the paradigm thus far) this means that the individual may choose his *Weltanschauung* very much as he chooses most other aspects of his private existence. In other words, there comes to be a smooth continuity between consumer choices in different areas of life—a preference for this brand of automobile as against another, for this sexual life-style as against another, and finally a decision to settle for a particular "religious preference." The truly mind-boggling implications of this last phrase, so common in ordinary American parlance, will be taken up shortly. For the moment, suffice it to say that there is a direct and sociologically analyzable link between the institutional and the cognitive transformations brought on by modernity.

This link can be put in more precise terms: *Modernity pluralizes both institutions and plausibility structures*. The last phrase represents a central concept for an understanding of the relationship between society and consciousness.[9] For the present purpose, its import can be stated quite simply. With the possible exception of a few areas of direct personal experience,

human beings require social confirmation for their beliefs about reality. Thus the individual probably does not require others to convince him that he has a toothache, but he does require such social support for the whole range of his moral beliefs. Put differently, physical pain imposes its own plausibility without any social mediations, while morality requires particular social circumstances in order to become and remain plausible to the individual. It is precisely these social circumstances that constitute the plausibility structure for the morality at issue. For example, moral values of honor, courage, and loyalty are commonly characteristic of military institutions. As long as an individual is within such an institutional context, it is very likely that these values will be plausible to him in an unquestioned and taken-for-granted manner. If, however, this individual should find himself transposed into a quite different institutional context (say, there is no more need for many soldiers in his particular society, and he is forced by economic necessity to take up a civilian occupation), then it is very likely that he will begin to question the military values. Such a loss of plausibility is also the result of social processes—indeed, of the same kind of social processes that previously established and maintained the plausibility of the martial virtues. In the earlier situation other human beings provided social support for one set of moral values, as in the later situation social support is given to different moral values. Biographically, the individual may be seen as having migrated from one plausibility structure to another.

It follows from this that there is a direct relation between the cohesion of institutions and the subjective cohesiveness of beliefs, values, and worldviews. In a social situation in which everyone with whom the individual has significant ties is a soldier, it is not surprising that the soldier's view of the world, with all that this implies, will be massively plausible. Con-

versely, it is very difficult to be a soldier in a social situation where this makes little or no sense to everyone else. It may be added that this relation between social context and consciousness is not absolute. There are always exceptions—deviants or mavericks, individuals who maintain a view of the world and of themselves even in the absence of social support. These exceptions are always interesting, but they do not falsify the sociological generalization that human beliefs and values depend upon specific plausibility structures. In other words, this generalization is probabilistic—but the probability is very high indeed.

It further follows that the institutional pluralization of modernity had to carry in its wake a fragmentation and *ipso facto* a weakening of every conceivable belief and value dependent upon social support. The typical situation in which the individual finds himself in a traditional society is one where there are highly reliable plausibility structures. Conversely, modern societies are characterized by unstable, incohesive, unreliable plausibility structures. Put differently, in the modern situation certainty is hard to come by. It cannot be stressed enough that this fact is rooted in pretheoretical experience—that is, in ordinary, everyday social life. This experience is common to the proverbial man in the street and to the intellectual who spins out elaborate theories about the universe. The built-in uncertainty is common to both as well. This basic sociological insight is crucial for an understanding of the competition between worldviews and the resultant crisis of belief that has been characteristic of modernity.

The modern individual, then, lives in a world of choice, in sharp contrast with the world of fate inhabited by traditional man. He must choose in innumerable situations of everyday life, but this necessity of choosing reaches into the areas of beliefs, values, and worldviews. To decide, however, means to

reflect. The modern individual must stop and pause where premodern men could act in unreflective spontaneity. Quite simply, the modern individual must engage in more deliberate thinking—*not* because he is more intelligent, *not* because he is on some sort of higher level of consciousness, *but* because his social situation forces him to this. He encounters the necessity to choose, and *ipso facto* the necessity of pausing to reflect before choosing, on various levels of life. Ordinary, everyday life is full of choices, from the most trivial choices between competing consumer commodities to far-reaching alternatives in lifestyle. Biography too is a sequence of choices, many if not most of them new to modernity—choices of educational and occupational careers, of marriage partners and "styles" of marriage, of alternative patterns of child-rearing, of a near-infinite variety of voluntary associations, of social and political commitments. These latter typically involve the individual in societal choices, some of them of vast scope—choices between alternative political programs for society as a whole, choices between "alternative futures" of every kind. In a historically unprecedented manner the modern individual plans his own life and that of his family, as modern societies plan their collective future. And, to repeat, this necessity to choose bridges the pretheoretical and theoretical levels of experience.

A further consequence of this situation, and a most curious one, has been a new measure of complexity in the individual's experience of himself: Modernization has brought with it a strong accentuation of the subjective side of human existence; indeed, it may be said that modernization and subjectivization are cognate processes.[10] This has often been remarked upon as far as theoretical thought, especially philosophy, is concerned. Thus, Western philosophy since Descartes has been characterized as a turning toward subjectivity. Epistemology, of course, expresses this by asking over and over again the ques-

tion "What can I know?" It is very important to understand that this question not only is asked by philosophers but, under certain circumstances, becomes an urgent concern for the ordinary man in the street. Modernity produces such circumstances. But even under more reliable conditions human beings must have available some sort of answer to this question, if only because every new generation of children asks it in one way or another—and the adults must be in a position to reply. In a society with stable, coherent plausibility structures the answers can be given in a tone of great assurance. That is, the socially defined reality has a very high degree of objectivity: "This is what the world is like; it is this and no other; it could not be any different; so stop asking silly questions." It is precisely this type of objectivity that comes to be eroded by the forces of modernization. In consequence, the answers to the perennial human question "What can I know?" become uncertain, hesitating, anxious. Yet the individual must have some answers, because he must have some sort of meaningful order to live in and live by. If answers are not provided objectively by his society, he is compelled to turn *inward*, toward his own subjectivity, to dredge up from there whatever certainties he can manage. This inward turning is subjectivization, a process that embraces both Descartes and the man-in-the-street who is puzzled about the proper course of action in this or that area of everyday life.

If this point is understood, it should not be surprising that modern Western culture has been marked by an ever-increasing attention to subjectivity. Philosophy is only one small part of this. There is modern literature (the novel is the prime example here), modern art, and, last but not least, the astronomic proliferation of modern psychologies and psychotherapies. All of these, however, are manifestations of subjectivization on the level of theoretical thought. All of them are rooted in prethe-

oretical experience—fundamentally, in the experience that the socially defined universe can no longer be relied upon. Indeed, speaking of modern philosophy, one can put this by saying that the aforementioned social situation is its necessary plausibility structure. The same can be said of modern literature, art, and psychology (and, not so incidentally, of modern sociology). And all of this is very much connected with the transition from fate to choice: The taken-for-granted manner in which premodern institutions ordered human life is eroded. What previously was self-evident fact now becomes an occasion to choose. Fate does not require reflection; the individual who is compelled to make choices is also compelled to stop and think. The more choices, the more reflection. The individual who reflects inevitably becomes more conscious of himself. That is, he turns his attention from the objectively given outside world to his own subjectivity. As he does this, two things happen simultaneously: The outside world becomes more questionable, and his own inner world becomes more complex. Both of these things are unmistakable features of modern man.

A Very Nervous Prometheus

This modern man, as he undergoes the world-shattering movement from fate to choice, easily impresses one as a Promethean figure. Often enough, especially since the Enlightenment, he has so impressed himself. It is all the more important to see that he is a very nervous Prometheus. For the transition from fate to choice is experienced in a highly ambivalent manner. On the one hand, it is a great liberation; on the other hand, it is anxiety, alienation, even terror. One naturally thinks here first of some of the great thinkers of modernity—

Kierkegaard, or Nietzsche, or Dostoyevsky. But the ambivalence of liberation and alienation is experienced by countless human beings who have never read a book (let alone written one). Every Third World city today is full of such people. On the one hand, modernity attracts them like a powerful magnet, with its promises of new freedom, new possibilities of life and of self-realization. Needless to say, these promises are not always fulfilled, but modernity is in fact experienced as liberation—from the narrow confines of tradition, of poverty, of the bonds of clan and tribe. On the other hand, a very high price is exacted for this liberation. The individual comes to experience himself as being *alone* in a way that is unthinkable in traditional society—deprived of the firm solidarity of his collectivity, uncertain of the norms by which his life is to be governed, finally uncertain of who or what he is. An African villager cast adrift in the tumultuous world of, say, Lagos or Nairobi will hardly have heard of modern European philosophy. Yet he will be able to testify, in the living reality of his existence if not in words, what it means to be "condemned to freedom." Philosophers may argue whether this phrase of Sartre's is an adequate formulation of the human condition; the sociologist must say that it admirably sums up the condition of *modern* man; the sociologist can add that only under modern social circumstances could such a philosophical proposition have attained widespread plausibility.

Liberation and alienation are inextricably connected, reverse sides of the same coin of modernity.[11] To want the first without the second is one of the recurring fantasies of the modern revolutionary imagination; to perceive the second without the first is the Achilles' heel of virtually all conservative viewpoints. Yet one must beware lest one exaggerate the alienated desperation of most modern individuals. It is simply not true that most

people live in a state of prolonged *Angst*; Camus was right
against Sartre on this point, and in retrospect one suspects that
in the same way Bishop Mynster was right against Kierkegaard,
as Jacob Burckhardt was against Nietzsche. Most people man-
age somehow. Some continue to live in and by the remnants of
traditional structures; others have succeeded in constructing
various new arrangements that afford a measure of certainty;
others again just keep themselves very busy. The point then is
definitely *not* that modern men are all do-it-yourself existen-
tialists, tottering on the brink of an abyss of despair. Rather,
the point is that the business of "arranging oneself in the uni-
verse" (the phrase, freely translated, is by Ernst Bloch) has
become considerably more difficult than in a traditional society.
For some, of course, it has become impossibly difficult, but
their case should not be generalized. All the same, even this
more moderated, non-Kierkegaardian description of the mod-
ern condition should make clear that the latter is something of
a *novum* in history. Nor is it necessary, in order to grasp the
implications of this, to assert that the modern situation is *to-
tally* unprecedented. There are some parallels to other periods
when previously taken-for-granted orders were shaken, as for ex-
ample in the Hellenistic period. It is likely, however, that never
before was the pluralization of meanings and values experi-
enced as massively by as many people. The reason for this, of
course, must be sought in modern technology: The sense of rel-
ativity too can be mass-communicated.

The alienating aspect of modernity has, from the beginning,
brought forth nostalgias for a restored world of order, meaning,
and solidarity. One way of stating this is that modernization
and countermodernization are always cognate processes.[12] The
yearning for deliverance from the alienations of modernity may
take quite different forms. Its more straightforward form is the

one commonly called "reactionary." This is expressed theoret-
ically in ideologies that look to the past for meaning while they
perceive the present as a state of degeneration; the expression
of these ideologies in sociopolitical praxis is in attempts (typi-
cally Quixotic) to restore structures that preceded modernity.
But there is also a so-called "progressive" form of this redemp-
tive yearning. Here the present is also perceived as dehuman-
ized and intolerable, but the restored world is not sought in the
past but rather is projected into the future. This form of coun-
termodernity is typical of modern revolutionary ideologies and
movements. Marxism is the prototypical case, and its great at-
tractiveness cannot be understood apart from its affinity for
countermodern nostalgias.

Is the movement from fate to choice irreversible? In princi-
ple, nothing historical is irreversible. But it is very difficult to
see how, given the necessary technological foundations of sus-
taining life for numbers such as now inhabit the earth, this
movement could be reversed very easily. There is a built-in plu-
rality and *ipso facto* a built-in instability to the institutional ar-
rangements necessitated by this situation. There is, however,
one very important exception to this statement: the modern to-
talitarian state. Its central goal is the restoration of a premod-
ern order of stable meanings and firm collective solidarity.
The paradox is that, in seeking this goal, it employs the most
modern means of communication and control—means that are,
in and of themselves, alienating in their effect. Modern totali-
tarianism is a very recent phenomenon; even if defined most
broadly, it is only some fifty years old. It is too early to say
whether the experiment has failed. It is not too early to say
that its empirical success would be a human tragedy of unprec-
edented scope. Of all possible "solutions" to the discontents of
modernity this one, surely, is not one in which to invest hope

for humanity. It follows that, in rejecting the totalitarian possibility of a new world of fate, one will have to find ways of coping with the world of choice.

The Heretical Imperative

It will be clear by now that religion is by no means the only area of experience and thought affected by the transition from fate to choice. Morality, for one, is crucially affected, as are all institutions (notably political ones) that lay claim to any kind of moral authority. But the modern situation of religion will remain inadequately explained unless its relation to the aforementioned transition is understood.

The impact of modernity on religion is commonly seen in terms of the process of secularization, which can be described simply as one in which religion loses it hold on the level both of institutions and of human consciousness. This is not the place to review the by-now immense literature on the causes, character, and historical course of secularization.[13] But one point should be made here: At the very least, there is a close connection between secularization and the pluralization of plausibility structures described above. Nor are the reasons for this hard to understand. A religious worldview, just like any other body of interpretations of reality, is dependent upon social support. The more unified and reliable this support is, the more these interpretations of reality will be firmly established in consciousness. The typical premodern society creates conditions under which religion has, for the individual, the quality of objective certainty; modern society, by contrast, undermines this certainty, deobjectivates it by robbing it of its taken-for-granted status, *ipso facto* subjectivizes religion. And this change, of course, is directly related to the transition from

fate to choice: The premodern individual was linked to his gods in the same inexorable destiny that dominated most of the rest of his existence; modern man is faced with the necessity of choosing between gods, a plurality of which are socially available to him. If the typical condition of premodern man is one of religious certainty, it follows that that of modern man is one of religious doubt. Needless to say, this difference is not absolute. There were premodern individuals who struggled with religious doubt, as there are people today with unshaken religious convictions. The difference is one of, so to speak, frequency distributions. The frequency of religious uncertainty in the modern situation, however, is so drastically greater that it is valid to embody it within a notion of typicality. Whatever other causes there may be for modern secularization, it should be clear that the pluralizing process has had secularizing effects in and of itself.

The English word "heresy" comes from the Greek verb *hairein*, which means "to choose." A *hairesis* originally meant, quite simply, the taking of a choice. A derived meaning is that of an opinion. In the New Testament, as in the Pauline epistles, the word already has a specifically religious connotation—that of a faction or party within the wider religious community; the rallying principle of such a faction or party is the particular religious opinion that its members have chosen. Thus, in Galatians 5:20 the apostle Paul lists "party spirit" (*hairesis*) along with such evils as strife, selfishness, envy, and drunkenness among the "works of the flesh." In the later development of Christian ecclesiastical institutions, of course, the term acquired much more specific theological and legal meanings. Its etymology remains sharply illuminating.

For this notion of heresy to have any meaning at all, there was presupposed the authority of a religious tradition. Only with regard to such an authority could one take a heretical atti-

tude. The heretic denied this authority, refused to accept the tradition *in toto*. Instead, he picked and chose from the contents of the tradition, and from these pickings and choosings constructed his own deviant opinion. One may suppose that this possibility of heresy has always existed in human communities, as one may suppose that there have always been rebels and innovators. And, surely, those who represented the authority of a tradition must always have been troubled by the possibility. Yet the social context of this phenomenon has changed radically with the coming of modernity: *In premodern situations there is a world of religious certainty, occasionally ruptured by heretical deviations. By contrast, the modern situation is a world of religious uncertainty, occasionally staved off by more or less precarious constructions of religious affirmation.* Indeed, one could put this change even more sharply: *For premodern man, heresy is a possibility—usually a rather remote one; for modern man, heresy typically becomes a necessity.* Or again, *modernity creates a new situation in which picking and choosing becomes an imperative.*

Now, suddenly, heresy no longer stands out against a clear background of authoritative tradition. The background has become dim or even disappeared. As long as that background was still there, individuals had the possibility of *not* picking and choosing—they could simply surrender to the taken-for-granted consensus that surrounded them on all sides, and that is what most individuals did. But now this possibility itself becomes dim or disappears: How can one surrender to a consensus that is socially unavailable? Any affirmation must first create the consensus, even if this can only be done in some small quasi-sectarian community. In other words, individuals now *must* pick and choose. Having done so, it is very difficult to forget the fact. There remains the memory of the deliberate construction of a community of consent, and with this a haunting

sense of the *constructedness* of that which the community affirms. Inevitably, the affirmations will be fragile and this fragility will not be very far from consciousness.

An example may serve here; it is perhaps the most important example in the modern Western world—that of Jewish emancipation. In the situation of the ghetto, as in the *shtetl* of eastern Europe, it would have been absurd to say that an individual *chose* to be a Jew. To be Jewish was a taken-for-granted given of the individual's existence, ongoingly reaffirmed with ringing certainty by everyone in the individual's milieu (including the non-Jews in that milieu). There was the theoretical possibility of conversion to Christianity, but the social pressures against this were so strong that it was realized in very few cases. There were, to be sure, different versions of being Jewish, and even the possibility of being a rather poor specimen of a Jew, but none of these really touched the massive objective and subjective reality of being a Jew. The coming of emancipation changed all this. For more and more individuals it became a viable project to step outside the Jewish community. Suddenly, to be Jewish emerged as one choice among others. Ethnicity internally and anti-Semitism externally served to brake this development, but it went quite far in central and western Europe in the nineteenth century. The fullest development was reached in America in the twentieth century. Today, within the pluralistic dynamic of American society, there must be very few individuals indeed for whom being Jewish has the quality of a taken-for-granted fact.

Yet those who affirm an orthodox or even a moderately orthodox version of Jewish identity continue to define the latter as such a fact. Their problem is that they must affirm it in the face of empirical evidence to the contrary. The orthodox precisely defines Jewish identity as destiny, while the social experience of the individual reveals it as an ongoing choice. This dis-

sonance between definition and experience is at the core of every orthodoxy in the modern world (the Jewish case is just a particularly clear case of a much more general phenomenon): The orthodox defines himself as living in a tradition; it is of the very nature of tradition to be taken for granted; this taken-for-grantedness, however, is continually falsified by the experience of living in a modern society. The orthodox must then present to himself as fate what he knows empirically to be a choice. This is a difficult feat. It goes far to explain the attraction of such movements as that of Lubavitcher Hassidism, which constructs an artificial *shtetl* for its followers. The difference from the old *shtetl* is, quite simply, this: All the individual has to do to get out of his alleged Jewish destiny is to walk out and take the subway. Outside, waiting, is the emporium of life-styles, identities, and religious preferences that constitutes American pluralism. It is hard to believe that this empirical fact can be altogether pushed out of consciousness by an individual reared in America, even if his conversion to a neotraditional existence has been intensely fervent. That existence, consequently, has a fragility that is totally alien to a genuinely traditional community.

The weight of the peculiarly American phrase "religious preference" may now have become apparent. It contains within itself the whole crisis into which pluralism has plunged religion. It points to a built-in condition of cognitive dissonance—and to the heretical imperative as a root phenomenon of modernity.

To sum up the argument thus far: Modernity multiplies choices and concomitantly reduces the scope of what is experienced as destiny. In the matter of religion, as indeed in other areas of human life and thought, this means that the modern individual is faced not just with the opportunity but with the necessity to make choices as to his beliefs. This fact constitutes the heretical imperative in the contemporary situation. Thus

heresy, once the occupation of marginal and eccentric types, has become a much more general condition; indeed, heresy has become universalized.

The rest of this book will discuss the implications of this situation, in terms both of understanding it and of using it as a point of departure for constructive religious reflection. It should be clear from the beginning that confronting the heretical imperative has not been easy for the religious mind—not for the mind of the simple believer, nor for that of the most sophisticated theologian. On all levels of sophistication one may observe a spectrum of reactions, ranging from a total rejection of the new situation to a total embrace of it. Later chapters will spell out the difficulties of both rejection and embrace. It may be an oversimplification to say that the history of Christian theology in the modern West has been the drama of this confrontation with the heretical imperative, but it is probably not too much of an oversimplification. Judaism in the modern West has undergone the same confrontation in a somewhat different form, due, of course, to the distinctive relation of religion to the social position of the Jews in a predominantly Christian culture. Today, as modernization has become a worldwide phenomenon no longer restricted to its Western matrix, the confrontation with the heretical imperative has also become worldwide. It can be observed in the most sophisticated discussions at, say, Buddhist centers of learning or at centuries-old Muslim universities—but also in the homespun advice being given to illiterate villagers by religious functionaries barely able to read their holy scriptures. If nothing else, this has given all the religions in the world a commonality of condition that must have an effect on their self-understanding—and should have an effect on their relations with each other. That point will also be taken up again later.

2

Religion: Experience, Tradition, Reflection

WHEN THE EXTERNAL (that is, socially available) authority of tradition declines, individuals are forced to become more reflective, to ask themselves the question of what they really know and what they only imagined themselves to know in the old days when the tradition was still strong. Such reflection, just about inevitably, will further compel individuals to turn to their own experience: Man is an empirical animal (if one prefers, an *anima naturaliter scientifica*) to the extent that his own direct experience is always the most convincing evidence of the reality of anything. The individual, say, believes in X. As long as all people around him, including the "reality experts" of his society, ongoingly affirm the same X, his belief is carried easily, spontaneously, by this social consensus. This is no longer possible when the consensus begins to disintegrate, when competing "reality experts" appear on the scene. Sooner or later, then, the individual will have to ask himself, "But do I *really* believe in X? Or could it be that X has been an illusion all

along?" And then will come the other question: "Just what has been *my own experience* of X?"

This cognitive dynamics pertains, in principle, to any belief —or, more precisely, to any belief that goes beyond the immediate self-authentication of a toothache. In the preceding chapter the argument was made that it pertains with particular sharpness to the area of religious beliefs, and that modernity has produced a built-in crisis for religion in consequence of this dynamics. It follows that the modern situation, with its weakened hold of religious tradition over the consciousness of individuals, must lead to much more deliberate reflection about the character and the evidential status of religious experience. This is, in fact, what has happened—first in the Western cultural matrix of modernity (and with special virulence in Protestantism, which, of all religious complexes, has had the most intimate relation to modernity), and then throughout the world in the wake of the modernization process. To say, then, that the weakening of tradition *must* lead to a new attention to experience is not just a theoretical proposition. Rather, it serves to explain what has actually taken place.

It seems obvious, though, that the term "experience" requires clarification at this point in the argument: *Whose* experience is at issue here? And *what* is supposedly experienced? Such clarification is the purpose of this chapter.

Now an important distinction must be made immediately— that between the individuals whom Max Weber so aptly called the "religious virtuosi" and everyone else. There are individuals, mystics and the like, who claim to have had direct personal experience of religious realities. One may say that, for such individuals, religious beliefs *are* as immediately self-authenticating as the experience of a toothache. They may indeed reflect about their own experience, and some of the great mystics have also been great thinkers. What they will reflect

about, though, is unlikely to be the *reality* of their religious experiences but rather the *relation* of these experiences to all sorts of other things (including the tradition they find in their social milieu). The rest of humanity is in a more complicated situation. Those who are not "religious virtuosi" have had, at best, fugitive and intimational experiences in this area, and most of their religious beliefs are grounded in a socially mediated tradition. Yet they also have a certain advantage: Not having had the kind of experience that leads to an undeniable conviction of reality, they can with some detachment look for evidence in the accounts of those who claim to have had such experience. In other words, they have the advantage of the dentist over his patient in any effort to undertake a comprehensive investigation of the phenomenon "toothache."

Let it be assumed, then, that the present argument proceeds within such a situation. That is, neither author nor reader is assumed to have had the kind of experiences that produce a never-to-be-denied-again sense of reality. (One may add, incidentally, that if either author or reader, let alone both, could claim such experiences, the argument would be either impossible or unnecessary!) The reflective process of an individual in this situation can be formulated as follows: "I have not seen the gods; they have not spoken to me; neither have I experienced the divine within myself. I must begin my thinking about religion with the acknowledgment that this fact precludes any affirmations that are unquestionable, undeniably real, or absolutely certain. I have indeed had intimations, intuitions, of the gods in my own experience, and I will reflect about these to see what evidential value they may have. I have also been shaped in my thinking about religion by the tradition or traditions that have dominated my social milieu; what is more, there are specific experiences that have been mediated by this tradition or these traditions. Thus, for example, some of my intimations

of the gods have taken place in the course of my participation in rituals of my own tradition or even of other traditions that I have encountered during my life. As I reflect about religion, I will take the traditional affirmations and any experiences linked to them as possible evidence. Furthermore, I have available to me accounts and reports of those who have claimed to have seen the gods, to have been addressed by them, or to have had direct experience of the divine. These accounts and reports also constitute possible evidence. In acknowledging my situation of uncertainty, I find myself compelled to be both skeptical and selective in dealing with the evidence. If I retain this attitude, I must be open to the possibility that my quest will end in the same uncertainty in which it began as well as to the possibility that, perhaps surprisingly, it will end in certainty."

Such an attitude, of course, is by no means unique to the present moment in history; the reasons why it is singularly appropriate to this moment have already been given. But another point should be stressed: What is just about unique in the modern situation is the *sheer availability* of the aforementioned accounts and reports of the multiform religious experience of mankind. Certainly this is the case in America. An individual willing to spend, say, some two hundred dollars can walk into any better bookstore in this country and purchase a collection of paperback books containing good translations, with commentary, of most of the key writings of the world's great religions. If the individual is in a metropolitan area or near a large university, it is likely that, in addition to reading the books he has purchased, he will find groups that actually adhere to these religious beliefs or academic courses that deal with them more or less competently. Such a situation has never existed in history before. It provides a great opportunity for following up the above-described attitude toward the evidence of other people's religious experiences and traditions. It is also, of

course, part and parcel of what has previously been designated the heretical imperative of the contemporary situation: An individual can, of course, refrain from buying all these paperbacks and avoid contact with the variegated religious expressions available in his social environment—but that too would be a choice on his part.

The concern of this book is to explore the possibilities of passing from this situation to positive religious affirmations, to statements about the world that can plausibly be prefaced by the words "I believe." This project proposes that the heretical imperative can be turned from an obstacle to an aid both to religious faith and to reflection about it. The project, of course, is in itself an act of reflection: This book is an argument, an exercise in religious thought, *not* a confessional document or a guide to religious experience. It is all the more important to keep in mind that religion is not primarily a matter of reflection or of theorizing. At the heart of the religious phenomenon is prereflective, pretheoretical experience. What must be done now is to look more closely at the character of this experience.

Many Realities

If the religious phenomenon is approached in the empirical attitude just described, it is clear that it will, at the very least initially, appear as a *human* phenomenon. That is, if the intention is to locate what is commonly called religious experience within a wider spectrum of human experiences, then, at least while this inquiry is being undertaken, all metahuman explanations of the phenomenon must be bracketed, put aside. Such an inquiry by no means implies that metahuman explanations are ruled out a priori, or that the individual undertaking the inquiry confesses himself an atheist, but only that for the moment

he respects the limits of this kind of inquiry. All of this can be summed up by saying that the method employed here belongs to the phenomenology of religion; for the present purpose, the term "phenomenology" may be understood quite simply as a method that investigates a phenomenon in terms of the manner in which it appears in human experience, without immediately raising the question of its ultimate status in reality.[1]

Reality is not experienced as one unified whole. Rather, human beings experience reality as containing zones or strata with greatly differing qualities. This fundamental fact is what Alfred Schutz called the experience of multiple realities.[2] For instance, the individual experiences one zone of reality when dreaming, a quite different zone while awake. For another instance, there is a zone of reality one enters in intense aesthetic experience (say, "getting lost" in listening to a piece of music), and this zone is quite different from the reality of ordinary, everyday activities. Now, there is one reality that has a privileged character in consciousness, and it is precisely the reality of being wide awake in ordinary, everyday life. That is, this reality is experienced as *more real*, and as more real *most of the time*, as compared with other experienced realities (such as those of dreams or of losing oneself in music). For this reason Schutz called it the paramount reality. The other realities, as seen from its standpoint, appear as some sort of enclaves into which consciousness moves and from which it returns to the "real world" of everyday life. Schutz accordingly called these other realities finite provinces of meaning; he also used a term coined by William James, that of subuniverses.

The paramount reality, then, is reality as it is experienced when one is wide awake and engaged in the activities that one normally identifies with ordinary, everyday life. Now, this is also the reality one shares most easily with other people. The

individual coinhabits it with large numbers of other human beings, who ongoingly confirm its existence and its major characteristics. Indeed, it is this ongoing social confirmation that goes far in explaining its paramount status in consciousness; repeating a phrase used in the preceding chapter, it is this reality that has the strongest plausibility structure (as against, say, the reality of dreams or musical experience).

These are not abstruse theoretical considerations but rather are explications of very common experiences. Suppose one falls asleep—perhaps while working at one's desk—and has a vivid dream. The reality of the dream begins to pale as soon as one returns to a wakeful state, and one is then conscious of having temporarily left the mundane reality of everyday life. That mundane reality remains the point of departure and orientation, and when one comes back to it, this return is commonly described as "coming back to reality"—that is, precisely, coming back to the paramount reality. Thus, from the standpoint of the paramount reality, other realities are experienced as alien zones, enclaves, or "holes" within it. To say this, again, is not making a theoretical statement about the ultimate constitution of being. Perhaps, who knows, this mundane reality may ultimately turn out to be an illusion. In the meantime, however, it is experienced in this particular way, most of the time and (to use another Jamesian term) with the strongest accent of reality.

The central paradox of the paramount reality is that it is *both* massively real (*realissimum*) *and* very precarious. The former characteristic is due to the massive character of the supporting social confirmation (virtually everyone one encounters shares it), the latter to the fact that these supporting social processes are inherently fragile and easily interrupted—as, indeed, by the simple accident of falling asleep. Schutz puts this rather nicely by saying that the accent of reality of ordinary, ev-

eryday life pertains "until further notice." Put differently, the paramount reality is easily ruptured. As soon as that happens, it is immediately relativized and the individual then finds himself in a quite different world (which, by the way, is exactly how he is likely to describe the occurrence).

Most of the time, then, the individual is conscious of being situated in the massively real world of ordinary, everyday life, along with most other human beings of his acquaintance (the few lunatics or other eccentrics he may know are unlikely to disturb this consciousness). But the individual also experiences ruptures in this mundane reality; these ruptures are experienced as limits or boundaries of the paramount reality. They are of quite different sorts: Some are clearly based on physiological processes—such as dreams, the borderline states between sleep and wakefulness, intense physical sensations (painful or pleasurable), hallucinatory experiences (such as those caused by drugs). The paramount reality, however, may also be ruptured in experiences that seem to lack any physiological basis—such as the experiences of theoretical abstraction (as when the world "dissolves" in the abstractions of theoretical physics or pure mathematics), aesthetic experience, or the experience of the comic. As he undergoes such an experience of rupture, the individual suddenly finds himself as standing outside the mundane world, which now appears to him as flawed, absurd, or even illusionary. Its accent of reality suddenly diminishes or vanishes. Thus all these rupturing experiences are ecstatic in character, in the literal sense of *ekstasis*, of "standing outside" the ordinary world. This ecstatic quality belongs to a dream as it does to the subuniverse of a joke, to all experiences of "being lost to the world"—be it in an orgasm, or in Mozart's music, or in the intoxicating abstractions of quantum theory.

From within the experience of any one of these ecstatic ruptures, the ordinary world not only is relativized but is now seen

to have a previously unperceived quality. This could be described by the German term *Doppelbödigkeit*; the term derives from the theater and literally means "having a double floor." The ordinary world, previously perceived as massive and cohesive, is now seen as being tenuously put together, like a stage-set made of cardboard, full of holes, easily collapsed into unreality. Furthermore, behind the newly revealed holes in the fabric of this world appears *another reality*. One now understands that this other reality has been there all along—on "another floor," as it were. In other words, the experience of *Doppelbödigkeit* not only reveals an unfamiliar new reality but throws a new light on the familiar reality of ordinary experience.[3]

One can have this experience in very different degrees. There are mild shocks to the reality of the ordinary world that can be dismissed rather easily: "This was just a bad dream"; or, "I only feel this way because of my damn toothache"; or, "Oh, I see, you were only joking." But there are also severe jolts to the paramount reality, with consequences in consciousness that remain even after one has returned to the world of ordinary, everyday life: "I will never be able to forget what the world was like when I took LSD"; or, "Since my mid-thirties I have developed a sense of humor that makes me see life in a very different way"; or, "Life has never been the same for me since the death of my mother." Moreover, there are different avenues by which an individual arrives at experiences of reality-rupture. Some individuals try to get there through deliberate efforts—by taking drugs, for example, or by cultivating certain types of aesthetic experience, or even by embarking on a physical adventure (climbing Mount Everest, say) with the express purpose of changing one's sense of life. Other experiences of reality-rupture are involuntary. Experiences of illness or death are rarely sought after, but the development of a sense of

humor in mid-life may take one by surprise too. What all these experiences have in common is that they open up realities that are, literally, "beyond this world"—beyond, that is, the world of ordinary, everyday existence. In principle, every such "other reality" can be described, although any attempt at description suffers from the fact that language has its roots in mundane experience. This is why all "other realities," from a toothache to Mozart's music, are "difficult to talk about" (and, of course, virtually impossible to talk about with someone who has not had a similar experience).

Religion as Experience

None of the aforementioned experiences of reality-rupture would commonly be called religious. The omission has been deliberate, for the purpose of the present argument is to *locate* those experiences commonly called religious within a broader spectrum of human experiences. Empirically speaking, what is commonly called religion involves an aggregate of human attitudes, beliefs, and actions in the face of two types of experience —the experience of the supernatural and the experience of the sacred. The character of these two experiences must now be clarified.

The experience of the supernatural is one specific "other reality" of the kind just described.[4] From the standpoint of ordinary reality, of course, it too has the quality of a finite province of meaning from which one "returns to reality"—returns, that is, to the world of ordinary, everyday life. A crucial aspect of the supernatural, as against other finite provinces of meaning, is its radical quality. The reality of this experience, the world of the supernatural, is radically, overwhelmingly *other*. What is encountered is a complete world set over against the world of

mundane experience. What is more, when seen in the perspective of this other world, the world of ordinary experience is now seen as a sort of *antechamber*. The status of enclave, or finite province of meaning, is thus radically transposed: The supernatural is now no longer an enclave within the ordinary world; rather, the supernatural looms over, "haunts," even envelopes the ordinary world. There now emerges the conviction that the other reality opened up by the experience is the true *realissimum*, is ultimate reality, by comparison with which ordinary reality pales into insignificance.

It must be strongly emphasized that the experience of the supernatural opens up the vista of a cohesive and comprehensive world. This other world is perceived as having been there all along, though it was not previously perceived, and it forces itself upon consciousness as an undeniable reality, as a force bidding one to enter it. The world of the supernatural is perceived as being "out there," as having an irresistible reality that is independent of one's own will, and it is this massively objective character that contests the old reality status of the ordinary world.

The radical quality of the experience of the supernatural is further manifested by its inner organization. There is the sense of startling and totally certain insights. The image of a sudden passage from darkness to light recurs in the accounts of the experience. Within the experience the categories of ordinary existence are transformed, especially the categories of space and time. Recurringly the supernatural is conceived of as being located in a different dimension of space or of time. In terms of spatial symbols, it may be located "up above," as against the "here below" of earthly existence.[5] In terms of temporal symbols, it may be located in a different time, as biblical language distinguishes between "this aeon" and "the aeon that is to come."[6] There may well be important consequences to the

choice between spatial and temporal symbols in this context (as biblical scholars have often insisted). But for the present purpose that choice is not decisive. *Either* form of symbolic expression points to the same underlying experience—one in which the categories of ordinary reality are radically contested, exploded, *aufgehoben*.

The experience of the supernatural also transforms the perception of both self and others. Within the experience one encounters oneself in a radically new and putatively ultimate manner, in a disclosure of one's "true self." This inevitably implies a different perception of other human beings and one's relationship to them. Very often this involves a sense of intense connection or love. Finally, the experience often (not always) entails encounters with other beings that are not accessible in ordinary reality. These may be the "true selves" of other human beings or of animals, or the "souls" of the dead, or supernatural beings with no embodiments in the ordinary world. In other words, the other world disclosed in the experience of the supernatural is often an *inhabited* world, and the encounter with these "inhabitants" will in these instances be an important aspect of the experience.

It will be clear from the foregoing that the history of religion must serve as the principal source for a description of the experience of the supernatural. It is all the more important to stress that this experience is *not* coextensive with the phenomenon of religion, or for that matter with what is commonly called mysticism. A brief word on definitions is necessary here. Religion, for the present purpose, may be defined as a human attitude that conceives of the cosmos (including the supernatural) as a sacred order.[7] The components of this definition could, of course, be elaborated upon at great length, but this is not the place to do so. What should be stressed here, though, is that the category of the sacred is central to this definition—to the

point, indeed, that religion could also be defined more simply as a human attitude in the face of the sacred. This latter category, however, is not necessarily linked to the supernatural. Thus human beings have taken on attitudes that can properly be described as religious (as in rituals, emotional responses, and cognitive beliefs) toward definitely mundane entities conceived by them to be sacred—such as various social entities, from the clan to the nation-state. Conversely, it is possible for human beings to confront supernatural experiences in a definitely nonreligious attitude, in a profane rather than sacred mode—such as has always been the case with magicians and is the case today with researchers in parapsychology. The supernatural and the sacred are kindred phenomena, and historically it may be assumed that the latter experience is rooted in the former. But it is very important to keep the two apart analytically. One way of conceiving their relationship is to think of the supernatural and the sacred as two overlapping, but not coinciding, circles of human experience.

Mysticism is, again, an important source for accounts of the experience of the supernatural—but it is not the only one. Mysticism may be defined as an avenue to the supernatural by means of immersion in the putative "depths" of an individual's own consciousness.[8] Put differently, the mystic encounters the supernatural within himself, as a reality that coincides with the innermost recesses of his own self. There are, however, experiences of the supernatural that are quite different—to wit, experiences within which the supernatural is encountered as external to and possibly even antagonistic to the self or the consciousness of the individual. A good case can be made that mysticism has always been a marginal phenomenon in the religious traditions derived from the Bible. Although there have been eruptions of mysticism in these traditions, Judaism, Christianity, and Islam are *au fond* nonmystical religions, in

which the sacred is encountered by the individual outside rather than within himself.[9] Conversely, there are forms of mysticism that do not involve a religious attitude at all.[10] Mysticism too, then, may be perceived as a phenomenon that intersects with, but is not to be equated with, the experience of the sacred.

The classical description of the experience of the sacred is the one by Rudolf Otto, and there is no need to elaborate on it here.[11] But two central and somewhat paradoxical characteristics should be emphasized here: The sacred is experienced as being utterly other (*totaliter aliter*); at the same time, it is experienced as being of immense and indeed redemptive significance for human beings. Both the metahuman otherness and the human significance of the sacred are intrinsic to its experience; yet these two characteristics inevitably stand in a certain tension with each other. This tension probably underlies what Otto calls the *mysterium fascinans* of the sacred, which leads to a curious ambivalence in the religious attitude—an ambivalence of attraction and flight, of being drawn to the sacred and wanting to escape it. Seen from the standpoint of the individual, the sacred is something emphatically other than himself, yet at the same time affirming him at the very center of his being and integrating him within the order of the cosmos. Mysticism, incidentally, is the most radical solution of this ambivalence, as when the latter is denied in an affirmation of the ultimate unity of self and cosmos. But even this solution is not easily attained, as the world literature of mysticism amply demonstrates.

In sum: Both the supernatural and the sacred are specific human experiences, capable of being described (within certain limitations of language) and delineated against other types of experience. Both can especially be delineated against the reality of ordinary, everyday life. Indeed, essential to both is a

rupture between this mundane reality and the other realities to which the experiences of the supernatural and the sacred appear to provide an opening. It further appears that the experience of the supernatural is the more fundamental of the two. Originally, the sacred was a manifestation within the reality of the supernatural. But even when the sacred is detached from its original supernatural matrix, a more than faint echo of the latter seems to remain. Thus even modern man, insofar as he has been "emancipated" from the supernatural, is capable of standing in such awe of mundane entities conceived as sacred (such as, for example, the nation-state, or the revolutionary movement, or even science) that the reality of ordinary life seems to him to have been breached.

Religion as Tradition

It thus cannot be emphasized strongly enough that at the core of the phenomenon of religion is a set of highly distinctive experiences. Subsuming what has been said above about the supernatural and the sacred under the common term of "religious experience," it is this latter from which all religion originally derives. Religious experience, however, is not universally and equally distributed among human beings. What is more, even such individuals as have had this experience, with its sense of overpowering certainty, find it very difficult to sustain its subjective reality over time. Religious experience, in consequence, comes to be embodied in traditions, which mediate it to those who have not had it themselves and which institutionalize it for them as well as for those who had.

The embodiment of human experiences in traditions and institutions, of course, is by no means peculiar to religion. On the contrary, it is a general feature of human existence, with-

out which social life would not be possible.[12] The special character of religious experience, however, creates a number of problems. Foremost among these is the root fact that religious experience breaches the reality of ordinary life, while all traditions and institutions are structures *within* the reality of ordinary life. Inevitably, this translation of the experienced contents from one reality to another tends to distort. The translator begins to stammer, or to paraphrase, to leave things out or to add them. His predicament is that of the poet among bureaucrats, or of one who wants to tell of his love at a business meeting. This problem would be there even if the translator had no ulterior motive beyond wanting to tell his experience to those who have not had it. In this case, though, there are ulterior motives of a very specific sort—namely, the motives of those who have acquired a vested interest in the credibility and the authority of the tradition that embodies the translation.

Religious experience posits its own authority, be it in the majesty of the divine address in religions of revelation, or in the overwhelming inner sense of reality of the mystic. As the experience comes to be embodied in a tradition, the authority comes to be transferred to the latter. Indeed, the very quality of sacredness is transferred from that which was experienced *then* (God, gods, or whatever other supernatural entities) in another reality to what is experienced *now* in the mundane reality of ordinary life. In this manner there appear sacred rituals, sacred books, sacred institutions, and sacred functionaries of these institutions. The unutterable is now uttered—and it is *routinely* uttered. The sacred has become a habitual experience; the supernatural has, as it were, become "naturalized." Once religious experience becomes an institutionalized fact within normal social life, its plausibility is sustained by the same processes that keep plausible any other experience. These

processes are, essentially, those of social consensus and social control: The experience is credible because everyone says it is so or acts as if it were, and because various degrees of unpleasantness are imposed on those who would deny it. This obviously constitutes a vast shift in the location of the experience in the individual's consciousness. Thus, for instance, Muhammad accepted the truth of the Koran because it came to him in thunderous voices whose reality was undeniable, in the so-called Night of Glory: "We revealed the Koran on the Night of Qadr [Glory]. Would that you knew what the Night of Qadr is like! Better is the Night of Qadr than a thousand months. On that night the angels and the Spirit by their Lord's leave come down with His decrees. That night is peace, till break of day."[13] Leave aside here the question of how Muhammad himself sustained the reality of that experience in his own mind after the day broke and the voices were silent. But what about the ordinary Muslim today, some thirteen hundred years later? Or, for that matter, the ordinary Muslim a hundred or even ten years later? Angelic visitations were rare even then, and they have become notoriously rare in the meantime. Yet there is no great mystery about the question: The ordinary Muslim today, and for centuries now, accepts the truth of the Koran because he lives in a social milieu in which this acceptance is a routine fact of social life. Empirically speaking, the authority of the Koran and of the entire Muslim tradition now rests on this social foundation.

These considerations could easily be understood as implying a radical anti-institutionalism, according to which all of social life is dismissed as fraud or fiction.[14] That would be a misunderstanding, both in general and with reference to religion in society. The insertion of the supramundane into mundane reality inevitably distorts it, but only by virtue of this distortion can even a faint echo of the original experience be retained

amid the humdrum noises of everyday life. The question could be put this way: *How can the nocturnal voices of the angels be remembered in the sobering daytime of ordinary life?* The entire history of religion gives an unambiguous answer: *By incorporating the memory in traditions claiming social authority.* Needless to say, this makes the memory fragile, vulnerable to social change, specifically vulnerable to such changes as weaken the authority of the tradition. But there is no other way for the insights of religious experience to survive in time—or, to use religious language, to survive during those stretches of time when the angels are silent.

A religious tradition, with whatever institutions have grown up around it, exists as a fact in ordinary, everyday reality. It mediates the experience of another reality, both to those who have never had it and to those who have but who are ever in danger of forgetting it. Every tradition is a collective memory.[15] Religious tradition is a collective memory of those moments in which the reality of another world broke into the paramount reality of everyday life. But the tradition not only mediates the religious experience; it also *domesticates* it. By its very nature, religious experience is a standing threat to social order—not just in the sense of this or that sociopolitical status quo but in the more basic sense of the business of living. Religious experience radically relativizes, if it does not devalue altogether, the ordinary concerns of human life. When the angels speak, the business of living pales into insignificance, even irreality. If the angels spoke all the time, the business of living would probably stop completely. No society could survive in the fixed posture of encountering the supernatural. In order for society to survive (and this means, for human beings to go on living), the encounters must be limited, controlled, circumscribed. This domestication of religious experience is one of the most fundamental social as well as psychological functions of religious

institutions. Thus religious tradition is also a defense mechanism of the paramount reality, guarding its boundaries against the threat of being overrun by the incursions of the supernatural.

Religious tradition keeps at bay those nights of glory that might otherwise engulf all of life. Whatever else it is, religious experience is dangerous. Its dangers are reduced and routinized by means of institutionalization. Religious ritual, for example, assigns the encounters with sacred reality to certain times and places, and puts them under the control of typically prudent functionaries. By the same token, religious ritual liberates the rest of life from the burden of having to undergo these encounters. The individual, thanks to religious ritual, can now go about his ordinary business—making love, making war, making a living, and so on—without being constantly interrupted by messengers from another world. Looking at the matter in this way makes understandable the Latin root of the very word "religion," which is *relegere*—"to be careful." Religious tradition is the careful management of an exceedingly dangerous human experience.[16] In the same process of domestication, the sacred qualities of the experience can be transposed to nonsupernatural entities—first to the religious institutions themselves, subsequently to other institutions (such as the state, the nation, and so forth).

Any human experience that is to be communicated to others and preserved over time must be expressed in symbols.[17] Religious experience is no exception. As soon as the content of such experience is communicated in language, it is included (or, if one prefers, imprisoned) in a specific body of symbolism that has a history and a social location. Thus the Arabic language of the Koran did not (at least as far as the empirical historian or social scientist can determine) fall down from heaven. Rather, it had a particular history, which decisively

shaped its character and its capacity to symbolize experience. Muhammad too, as a human being, was shaped by this language, as he was shaped by his location in a particular social context (of region, class, clan, and so forth). With the very first account of his experience, then, the multiple effects of his use of the Arabic language crucially affected the communication process. This does *not* mean that the symbolic apparatus available to Muhammad totally determined his ability to recount his experience. On the contrary, by all the evidence Muhammad was a master of language, maximally adapting the existing language to the requirements of his communication, so that indeed the Koran became in its own right a major influence on the development of the Arabic language. Nevertheless, one can be certain that, even if one assumes that Muhammad's core experience was beyond all human time and place, its communication would have been greatly different if, instead of Arabic, it had taken place in Sanskrit or in Chinese. This assumption can be put more precisely by saying that the relation between religious experience and the symbolic apparatus by means of which it is communicated (and embodied in a tradition) is dialectical—that is, the religious experience and the symbolic apparatus mutually determine each other.

This essentially simple fact, once grasped, precludes one-sided interpretations of the process of religious communication. On the one hand, it precludes the view (as still held, for instance, by orthodox Muslims) that a religious message can totally overpower the body of symbolism by which it is communicated. Put differently, "literal inspiration" is impossible, if for no other reason, because the language of any religious tradition is a *human* language—the product of a human history and the carrier of a vast assemblage of human memories, most of which have nothing whatever to do with religion. On the other hand, though, the same fact precludes the opposite view

that religious experience is *nothing but* a reflection of this particular history. This view, of course, is the one that has been expressed in Feuerbach's notion of "projection," which then became of immense importance in its developments by Marx and Freud. It has a very useful kernel of validity: Precisely because religious experience is embodied in human symbols, it can be perceived as a vast symbolization, *ipso facto* "projecting" all the human experiences (including experiences of power relations and of sexuality) that historically produced the symbolic apparatus in question. But that is only looking at one side of the phenomenon. As Muhammad told about the angels, he "projected" the Arabic language, with its full freight of sociohistorical meanings, into the sky. But he did so only because what happened first was his experience that, out of that sky, a totally different reality *projected itself* into the mundane reality in which he, along with everyone else, spoke Arabic. Put differently: *Religion can be understood as a human projection because it is communicated in human symbols. But this very communication is motivated by an experience in which a metahuman reality is injected into human life.*

An important part of any religious tradition is the development of theoretical reflection. This may take the form of the erection of theoretical edifices of vast scope and sophistication, as in the so-called great world religions; or the reflection may be embodied in relatively unsophisticated bodies of myths, legends, or maxims. Quite apart from the root anthropological fact that man is a reflective animal, apparently compelled by his own inner nature to reflect about his experience, a religious tradition·must develop reflective thought because of the social requirement of legitimation: Each new generation must have explained to it why things are the way they are in the tradition.[18] As the tradition continues in time, then, there grows with it a body of more or less authoritative accounts and inter-

pretations of the original experience (no matter whether it is codified in sacred scriptures or not). It is essential for the task of understanding religion that this aggregate of theoretical reflection be distinguished from the original experience that gave rise to it. Anyone with any degree of acquaintance with religious scholarship knows that this is never easy and sometimes impossible. A classical case of this difficulty is the so-called quest for the historical Jesus, the problem of uncovering what "really took place" in Galilee and Jerusalem during those days—that is, the problem of uncovering the empirical core as against the overlay of later Christian interpretations (which of course, already suffuse every page of the New Testament accounts). All the same, the distinction between religious experience and religious reflection is crucial. Otherwise, one of two errors occurs: Either the inevitably distortive effect of reflection is overlooked, or the study of religion becomes a history of theories or "ideas."

To sum up the immediately preceding considerations, the embodiment of religious experience in traditions and the development of theoretical reflection about the original experience must be understood both as inevitable and as inevitably distortive. This is a difficulty; but it is also an opportunity, for it opens up the possibility of going back, as far as possible, to the core of the experience itself. This is particularly important for anyone using the modern intellectual disciplines of history and the social sciences for his understanding of religion. These disciplines are deeply relativizing in their effect—a tradition is understood as the product of multiple historical causes, a theology as the outcome of this or that socioeconomic conflict, and so on. More than once, during the last two hundred years or so of scholarship on religion, the religious phenomenon actually seemed to disappear beneath these relativizations. It is all the more useful to recall that religious experience is a constant in

human history. In the words of the Koran once more: "There is no nation that has not been warned by an apostle."[19] Beyond all the relativities of history and of mundane reality as such, it is this core experience, in its various forms, that must constitute the final objective of any inquiry into the religious phenomenon. This objective can never be fully attained, both because of the nature of the empirical evidence and because of the inquirer's own location within specific sociohistorical relativities. The objective can, at best, be approximated. This should not be an alibi for not even trying.

Once More: The Modern Situation

For reasons discussed in some detail in the preceding chapter, the modern situation is not conducive to the plausibility of religious authority. The modern situation, with its closely related aspects of pluralism and secularization, thus puts what may be called cognitive pressure on the religious thinker. Insofar as the secular worldview of modernity dominates his social context, the religious thinker is pressured to softpedal if not to abandon altogether the supernatural elements of his tradition. In this, of course, he is by no means alone; he shares these pressures with all modern men—intellectuals and nonintellectuals, those still adhering to a religious tradition and those who no longer do so. The evidence is not conclusive as to what this means for religious experience as such—that is, for experience as it predates reflection about it. Two hypotheses are possible: One, that modern men have such experience not at all, or at any rate much less frequently than used to be the case in earlier times. Or, two, that modern men have such experience as much as men have ever had it, but that, because of the delegitimation of the experience by the prevailing worldview,

they hide or deny it (the denial, of course, could be to themselves as well as to others). Whichever hypothesis one deems more probable, it is clear that neither religious experience nor religious reflection can take place in the modern situation with the ease that was possible in earlier periods of history.

In view of the universality and centrality of religious experience in all preceding epochs of history, it is also clear that this suppression or denial has had cataclysmic effects. These have been eloquently caught in Nietzsche's phrase "the death of God," and, as he put it, a world in which God has died has become colder. This coldness has psychological as well as social costs. In Nietzsche's words: "How have we been able to drink up the sea? Who gave us the sponge, with which to erase the horizon? What did we do, when we loosened the earth from its sun? Where does she move now? Where do we move? Away from all suns? Do we not fall perpetually? Forward, sideways, backward, in all directions? Is there still an above and a below? Do we not wander through an infinite nothingness? Are we not haunted by empty space? Has it not become colder?"[20] Needless to say, most modern men have not experienced this disappearance of the divine as violently. For every Nietzsche or Dostoyevsky there are a thousand more or less well-adjusted agnostics, more or less *Angst*-ridden atheists.

All the same, modern man is more alone in the world as a result of the disappearance/denial of religious experience. And modern institutions and societies are also more "alone"—in the sense of being bereft of the reliable legitimations that have always been provided by the sacred symbols derived from religious experience. In consequence, the history of secularization has also been one of displacements and resurgences of these sacred symbols. Because man finds it very difficult to be alone in the cosmos either as an individual or in collectivities, sacredness has been transposed from supernatural to mundane

referents. Thus, for example, secular Arab nationalism has been endowed with a sacredness that is no longer plausible in its original Muslim context. But there have also been violent reactions against the repressive secularity of the modern world, in a variety of reaffirmations of religious authority. Thus the Muslim world has been the scene to this day of a score or more of powerful revival movements, reasserting the authority of Islam in the face of all its contemporary challenges. It is not feasible in this book to pursue the sociological and social-psychological implications of either the displacements or the resurgences of religious experience in the modern world, but these phenomena should at least be kept in mind. They too are part of the social context of the contemporary religious thinker.

Assorted Protestant Miseries

Whether or not one agrees with Max Weber's view of the crucial role of the Protestant Reformation and its consequences in the formation of the modern world, one will almost certainly have to agree that, historical causality apart, Protestantism has confronted modernity more massively and for a longer period than any other religious tradition. If Weber was indeed correct, then this special relationship is only what one would expect, since in that case Protestantism was one of the prime shapers of what is now known as modernity. If Weber was wrong or only partially right, then one could look upon the relationship as a curious historical accident, by virtue of which Protestantism happened to develop in those parts of the Western world in which forces of modernity such as capitalism and the industrial revolution made their deepest inroads into society and culture. To the extent that Protestantism has had a special

relationship to modernity, it also has had such a relationship to secularization. Thus, throughout the nineteenth century, much of Protestant theology was an ongoing confrontation with various forms of secular thought and secular consciousness. To cite but the most spectacular aspect of this confrontation, it was Protestantism that gave birth to modern biblical scholarship, thus producing the historically unheard-of case of scholars officially accredited as representatives of a religious tradition turning a sharply critical cognitive apparatus against the sacred scriptures of that same tradition. There is a quality of intellectual heroism in this. But be this as it may, no other religious tradition has experienced the challenge of modern secularity in the same degree. Thus, in the same nineteenth century, the general stance of Roman Catholicism toward modern secularity was one of (perhaps just as heroic) defiance. Only in this century, and most especially since the Second Vatican Council, has a comparable confrontation occurred within the Roman Catholic community. Not surprisingly, some of these recent events have appeared as a kind of "Protestantization," with large numbers of Roman Catholic theologians going through the cognitive miseries long familiar to their Protestant confreres.

It follows that the history of Protestant theology is a paradigm for the confrontation of a religious tradition with modernity. Needless to say, this is not necessarily a positive statement. Others can learn from the Protestant paradigm, not necessarily by imitating or reiterating it. The paradigmatic character of Protestantism is the only reason why the discussion of theological options to follow in this book will concentrate on Protestant examples. In other words, if modernity is a cognitive condition, then Protestants have struggled with it for a long time, and the spectacle of this struggle is instructive for others entering into the same condition. In this sense, and in

this sense only, one might even adopt Paul Tillich's phrase "the Protestant era" to designate the modern period in the history of religion.

It also follows from this, incidentally, that the American situation, with its highly peculiar pluralism, constitutes a paradigm within the paradigm. Talcott Parsons has called America the "lead society."[21] This description is by no means to be understood as patriotic boastfulness; it simply indicates that specific modernization forces have gone further in America than anywhere else—and pluralism so above all. In America there has been a conjuncture of pluralization, "Protestantization," and secularization, leading to the distinctively American innovation of the "denomination"—a socioreligious entity which, as Richard Niebuhr showed, has come to accept more or less gracefully its coexistence with others in a pluralistic situation. John Murray Cuddihy has only recently demonstrated most persuasively how this American situation has "Protestantized" both Catholics and Jews in a process that, often enough, has had the character of a theological ordeal.[22]

It is interesting in this connection to look at the case of Eastern Orthodoxy in America. The number of Orthodox Christians in America is roughly the same as that of Jews. Yet Orthodoxy, unlike Judaism, has remained virtually invisible to others on the American scene, so that Will Herberg, in his by-now classic study of the American religious "triple melting pot," could describe the latter simply in terms of "Protestant, Catholic, Jew," completely ignoring the Orthodox presence.[23] The reasons for this, of course, are not far to seek. While American Jews have decisively broken out of ethnic "containment," American Orthodox have until very recently remained within a number of ethnic enclaves (Greek, Slavic, and so on). By the same token, they have thus far escaped the subversive effects of "Protestantization." But this is changing now. In

1970 the Orthodox Church in America was formed out of what used to be a branch of the Russian Orthodox Church. In Orthodox ecclesiastical terms, this was nothing all that extraordinary—a proclamation of "autocephaly" by yet another national Orthodox body. In fact, the change has revolutionary implications, for there now exists, for the first time in America, an Orthodox church that is no longer defined ethnically, that uses English as its liturgical language, and that is a self-consciously pan-Orthodox presence on the American religious scene. One can only speculate at this point what will happen to these Orthodox Christians, as they move, with their icons and vestments, onto the centerstage of American religion. One will be on safe ground if one assumes that they will encounter there what their predecessors, from Puritans to Jews, have encountered—pluralization and *ipso facto* the existential as well as cognitive dilemmas of the Protestant paradigm.

But, as has been argued in the preceding chapter, pluralization is today a worldwide phenomenon, a concomitant (though not always simultaneously so) of the wider process of modernization. Thus every religious tradition, Western as well as non-Western, must sooner or later confront it—and *ipso facto* confront the assorted miseries of the Protestant experience. One may recall here with some irony the triumphalist universalism of the great Protestant missionary outreach of the nineteenth century, when the world was to be evangelized "from Greenland's icy mountains to India's coral strand" (in the words of Reginald Heber's famous missionary hymn). History is the record of unintended consequences. In a paradoxical way the world has indeed become "Protestant," though the brave missionaries that sailed out from Europe and America with this hymn on their lips would hardly recognize it as such. Thus K. Sivaraman, in a meeting on interreligious dialogue organized by the all-too-Protestant World Council of Churches,

could speak for "India's coral strand" in these words: "The Hindu in the role of a spokesman and advocate of his religious tradition . . . finds himself facing two different tasks: he has to define and defend the pattern of the faith that he 'represents,' a task in which his 'present' appears little more than his cherished past; he has also to participate in the very process of mediating his past in another process, one in which his past yields imperceptibly to the inescapable presence of the present."[24] "Protestant" language indeed! The situation becomes even more ironic as one observes that Hinduism, along with other non-Western religions, is now energetically returning the compliment of the Protestant missionary outreach—evangelizing Christians and Jews, from California's icy mountains to Long Island's not-so-coral strands. The Protestant disease has become a planetary epidemic.

Three Options for Religious Thought

Three basic options present themselves for religious thought in the pluralistic situation. They will be called here the deductive, reductive, and inductive options, and most of the rest of this book will be devoted to exploring them. But one point should be made immediately: The aforementioned options are typological, and there is no presumption that the typology is exhaustive or that it fits every theological expression on the scene. Now, a good case can be made that anyone who invents yet another typology to fit theologies into should be summarily banished from every decent conversation on these matters— and especially if the typology is threefold and has catchy names! The regrettable fact is that nobody trying to make sense of modern theology (or, for that matter, any other area of intellectual endeavor in which there have been large num-

bers of different expressions) can *fail* to attempt some sort of typification; otherwise the sheer diversity and complexity of the phenomenon will frustrate any effort at understanding. Once one starts producing typologies, they might as well be threefold and have names that can be remembered. All this is just another way of saying that Max Weber's caveat on what he called "ideal types" applies here: No typology exists as such in the world; it is always an intellectual construct. Thus it can never be found in pure form, and there will always be cases that do not fit into it. But this does not matter. The typology will be useful to the extent that it helps to discriminate between empirically available cases, and in consequence to make possible both understanding and explanation. The usefulness of the typology, then, can be established only as it is actually applied, and the antitypologist is hereby requested to control his irritation for the moment.

The deductive option is to reassert the authority of a religious tradition in the face of modern secularity. The tradition thus having been restored to the status of a datum, of something given a priori, it is then possible to deduce religious affirmations from it at least more or less as was the norm in premodern times. As will be elaborated in the next chapter, there are different ways to make such a reassertion of traditional authority. Whatever the way, the individual who takes this option experiences himself as responding to a religious reality that is sovereignly independent of the relativizations of his own sociohistorical situation. In a Christian context (it would be the same in a Jewish or Muslim one), he confronts once more the majestic authority that derives from the words "*Deus dixit*"—God speaking once more through the scriptures and the ongoing proclamation of their message, thus continuing to speak to contemporary men as he spoke to the prophets and messengers to whom he revealed himself when the tradition

began. The deductive option has the cognitive advantage of once more providing religious reflection with objective criteria of validity. The major disadvantage is the difficulty of sustaining the subjective plausibility of such a procedure in the modern situation.

The reductive option is to reinterpret the tradition in terms of modern secularity, which in turn is taken to be a compelling necessity of participating in modern consciousness. There are, of course, degrees of doing this. Thus, for instance, anyone using methods of modern historical scholarship is secularizing the tradition by this very fact, since these scholarly tools are themselves the products of a modern secular consciousness. The reductive option, however, is marked by something more radical than the employment of this or that modern intellectual tool. It is, as it were, an exchange of authorities: The authority of modern thought or consciousness is substituted for the authority of the tradition, the *Deus dixit* of old replaced by an equally insistent *Homo modernus dixit*. In other words, modern consciousness and its alleged categories become the only criteria of validity for religious reflection. These criteria are also given an objective status, insofar as those who take this option tend to have very definite ideas as to what is and what is not "permissible" to say for a modern man. Taking this option opens up a cognitive program, by which affirmations derived from the tradition are systematically translated into terms "permissible" within the framework of modern secularity. The major advantage of this option is that it reduces cognitive dissonance, or seems to do so. The major disadvantage is that the tradition, with all its religious contents, tends to disappear or dissolve in the process of secularizing translation.

The inductive option is to turn to experience as the ground of all religious affirmations—one's own experience, to whatever extent this is possible, and the experience embodied in a partic-

ular range of traditions. This range may be of varying breadth —limited minimally to one's own tradition, or expanded maximally to include the fullest available record of human religious history. In any case, induction means here that religious traditions are understood as bodies of evidence concerning religious experience and the insights deriving from experience. Implied in this option is a deliberately empirical attitude, a weighing and assessing frame of mind—not necessarily cool and dispassionate, but unwilling to impose closure on the quest for religious truth by invoking any authority whatever—not the authority of this or that traditional *Deux dixit*, but also not the authority of modern thought or consciousness. The advantage of this option is its open-mindedness and the freshness that usually comes from a nonauthoritarian approach to questions of truth. The disadvantage, needless to say, is that open-mindedness tends to be linked to open-endedness, and this frustrates the deep religious hunger for certainty. The substitution of hypothesis for proclamation is profoundly uncongenial to the religious temperament.

Despite this disadvantage (one, as will be argued later, that need not be lethal), this book is based on the conviction that the third option is the only one that promises both to face and to overcome the challenges of the modern situation. This contention too, of course, will have to be elaborated. But it should be clear now why the elaboration in this chapter of the relations between religious experience, tradition, and reflection was necessary. The inductive option cannot even be considered unless these distinctions are made. The relativizations of modernity are irresistible if religion is taken as nothing but a body of theoretical propositions. In that event, the exchange of one plausibility structure for another must necessarily be followed by an exchange of cognitive authorities. Or, if one prefers, secular dogmatics takes over where traditional religious dogma is no

longer plausible. The distinctions made in this chapter, on the other hand, make possible a different avenue of questioning, a search for the experience that lies behind or beneath this or that religious tradition, this or that body of theoretical propositions produced by religious reflection. The inductive option entails the taking of a deliberately naïve attitude before the accounts of human experiences in this area, trying as far as possible, and without dogmatic prejudices, to grasp the core contents of these experiences. The inductive option is, in this sense, phenomenological. Its naïveté is the same that Husserl suggested in his famous marching order for philosophers: "*Zurück zu den Sachen!*"—loosely translated as "Back to things as they are!"[25]

The inductive option is rooted in the modern situation and its heretical imperative. Indeed, it is the fullest acceptance of that imperative. But it is not part of the option to elevate modernity to the status of a new authority, and it is this absolutely fundamental point that distinguishes it from the reductive option. The experiences of modernity are part of the evidence too—no more, no less. The attitude toward modernity, then, is one neither of condemnation nor of celebration. If anything, it is one of detachment. This attitude provides some safeguards both against reactionary nostalgia and against revolutionary overenthusiasm. It is not a terribly easy attitude. All too often the inductive approach ends in reductionism, or alternatively its frustrations lead to surrender to the old certainties. Yet it affords a quite distinctive experience of inner liberation (which is perhaps itself to be located on the margins of religious experience proper).

The turn from authority to experience as the focus of religious thought is, of course, by no means new. It has been the hallmark of Protestant theological liberalism at least since Friedrich Schleiermacher. It is not necessary to approve every aspect of Schleiermacher's thought in order to admire the dar-

ing with which he executed this turn. Nor is it necessary to go along with every twist in the long history of this school of thought in order to identify with its basic intention. In identifying with the inductive option, however, this book is also identified with the basic intention of Protestant theological liberalism—without any apology at all. It should be recalled here once more, though, what was said above about the Protestant paradigm. To the same extent that modernity has become a general context for religious reflection, the Protestant efforts to cope with modernity are of general interest. The inductive option, while it has been a central motif of Protestant theological liberalism, is certainly not an option limited to Protestants. Just as the restoration of traditional authority and secularization are options for Catholics, Jews, Muslims, Buddhists, and any other groups that have entered the modern world (or, more accurately, on whom the modern world has descended), the Protestant cognitive exercises in the face of modernity will show themselves to be highly relevant for anyone concerned with the modern predicament of religion. To paraphrase Pius XI, "Today we are all Protestants." This statement is no ethnocentric boast. It is a threat, a lament, but also a hesitant expression of hope.