

# Deconstruction of monotheism<sup>a</sup>

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The West can no longer call itself the West from the moment it witnesses the spread, across the entire world, of the form that could once have seemed to constitute its distinguishing features. This form entails techno-science just as much as it does the general outcomes of democracy and the rule of law, and just as much a certain kind of discourse and argumentation, which are also accompanied by a certain kind of representation in the broad sense of the word (for instance, cinema and the whole family of post-rock and post-pop musics). By this very fact, the West no longer knows itself as the keeper of a world view or a sense of the world that would go hand-in-hand with this globalisation (*its* globalisation), with the privileged role that it believed it could attach to what it had called its 'humanism'. Globalisation appears, on the contrary, for the most part, to boil down essentially to what Marx had already perfectly well identified as the production of the world market, and the meaning of this world seems to consist in nothing but the accumulation and circulation of capital, accompanied by a marked aggravation of the gap between the dominant rich and the dominated poor, as by an indefinite technical expansion, which no longer devotes itself, except very minimally, and worriedly or anxiously, to the ends of 'progress' and the improvement of the human condition. The outcome of humanism is in inhumanity: that would be a crude summation of the situation. And the West does not understand how it comes to be there. Yet, it is indeed the West that came there: it is indeed the civilisation, as it is called, built first around the Mediterranean by the Greeks and the Romans, the Jews and the Arabs that has borne its fruits. To this extent, it cannot be enough to go looking elsewhere for other forms or other values (as some would put it) that one might seek to graft onto this henceforth global body. There no longer is an elsewhere, or rather, in any case, there can no longer be an elsewhere in the former Western sense (such as the elsewhere of an East passed through the prism of orientalism, or such as the elsewhere of worlds represented as living in the 'first' immanence of myth and ritual).

Our time is thus one where it is urgent for the West—or what remains of it—to analyse its own future, to look back at and examine its provenance and its trajectory, and to question itself about the process of the breaking-down of meaning which it allows to take place.

For it is striking to observe that, within this former 'West', though it happens relatively often that we question ourselves, in order to re-evaluate these things, with respect to the Enlightenment (following the model of a continuous progression of human reason) or with respect to the will to power of the industrial and conquering nineteenth century, or then again, differently, with respect to the

West's internal dehiscences—in the direction of the Slavic and Orthodox world just as much as in the direction of the Arab and Islamic world—with their complexities and their missed opportunities, it happens that we question ourselves very little on the body of thought that will have first organised, in a formative or directive fashion, if not the West itself, at least its conditions of possibility: I mean monotheism.

We know—how could one ignore it?—that the threefold monotheism of a triple 'religion of the Book' (to which one could add on, as a reminder, the old Manicheanism) defines a Mediterraneo-European specificity—and from it flows various forms of global expansion, at least from the two younger branches, Christianity and Islam. But we too often and too readily consider that the religious dimension (or what we perhaps mistakenly believe is only 'religious') behaves, all in all, as if it were an accident in relation to the facts and the structures of civilisation. Or, to be more precise (since, of course, we all know very well what I have just said), this dimension seems to be extrinsic from the time when it is no longer the thing that, in a visible way, lends its face to the globalised West—despite the fact that, yet again, this globalisation may also be, in more ways than one, a globalisation of monotheism in one or other of its guises.

In actual fact, ever since the fanning out of modern rationality and its most recent modalities, always at least implicitly atheistic in the sense of being indifferent to the question of 'God' (whether as a matter of knowledge or of law, of aesthetics or of ethics), it may seem pointless to turn our minds to monotheism in any but a secondarised way, either by referring the question to the realm of 'private' convictions, or by the adoption of a purely historical perspective.

Yet we know—or rather, we should know, but through an active and mobilising knowledge, a knowledge that is 'deconstructive' in the way that I will attempt to articulate it—just to what extent the most salient characteristics of the modern grasping of the world, and sometimes its most visibly atheistic or atheological characteristics, can and must be analysed according to their strictly and fundamentally monotheistic provenance (thus, to put it very briefly, the universal, the law, the individual, or again, in a more subtle way, the motif of a surpassing of man and within man through an infinite transcendence). Hence a 'provenance', in this case or any other, is never simply a past: it informs the present; it ceaselessly produces its own effects. It is therefore important, perhaps, to know how monotheism—all the while it is busily reproducing itself or surviving itself (sometimes by a process of self-radicalisation) in religious figures—is the West's provenance, just as much in the globalisation, upon which all else seems to hover, as in a divine providence, namely the sombre wing of nihilism.

I will give the name, 'deconstruction of monotheism' to the operation consisting of a dismantling of the elements that constitute that thing, in order to attempt to discern, amongst them and as if behind them, set back a little from the construction, what has made their assemblage possible, and what perhaps remains for us, paradoxically, to discover and think as the beyond of monotheism in as much as it has itself been responsible for its globalisation and its atheisation.

It goes without saying that a project such as this cannot be accommodated within one presentation. Hence I will immediately limit the scope of this one. I will do so in two ways:

First, I will give a very brief and very summary preview of a point that will have to be developed separately, namely this one: in discussing monotheism, I include forthwith in its composition the Greco-Roman legacy, that is to say the philosophical and statist-juridical legacy. Judeo-Christianity could not occur without the development, during the Hellenistic era, of a tight symbiosis between Greco-Roman (self-)consciousness and the monotheistic frame of mind. The first of these two elements of the symbiosis may be characterised as an awareness of a logico-techno-juridical universality *and* as a splitting of this very awareness from the realm of a 'salvation' (a healing, a deliverance from some worldly ill) conceived as an entirely interior or private care. The second element involved in the symbiosis may be distinguished, not by the counting of a single god in the place of many, but by the fact that divine unicity correlates with a presence that can no longer offer itself in this world, but only beyond it (presence in this world being that of the 'idol', the rejection of which is doubtless the great generative and allying motif of the triple Abrahamic tradition). Between these two provenances, the hyphen might be taken to consist in the very possibility of saying 'god' in the singular, since this occurs in Plato as much as it does with the Hebrews, irrespective of the considerable differences between these two singulars.

Second, I will limit the analysis, for the moment, to that form of monotheism which has become the most European form and thus, as a result, the form which has most often accompanied the Westernisation of the world, at least until the middle of the twentieth century, that is to say, monotheism in the shape of Christianity. This also happens to be the one that I am least incapable of discussing, since it is the form of my culture as a Frenchman and as a European (which, it must be added, also implies a certain remove from Orthodox Christianity). But I do this only under two conditions, upon which I will insist:

To begin with, it is necessary to keep for later, for the next phase of the deconstructionist enterprise, those other major forms, Judaism and Islam: not so much in order to carry over from one form to another the same analytical operation but in order to keep in view, all the way through, the constant interaction, within monotheism, of its triple determination or of the plural singular that constitutes it; it will be necessary, too, in due course, elsewhere, to deconstruct this interaction, to understand what it is, in the West, that belongs to the movement via which monotheism has at least thrice redefined itself, got itself in hand, pulled itself together and displaced or transformed itself. This too is our provenance: the mêlées and the quarrels of the Jew, the Christian and the Muslim;

Next, it is essential, while following the vital lead that takes us toward Christianity, to ensure that we do not overlook the threads linking it in so many ways to Judaism and Islam—whether these are links made by correspondence, by contrast or by conflict: for this too belongs simultaneously to Christianity itself and to that which, via the vector of Christianity, must have shaped the

Westernisation of monotheism and as a result, too—profoundly complex and ambiguous—its globalisation.

Let me now, then, undertake to trace the outline of a ‘deconstruction of Christianity’. To pick up something set out at the start of this discussion, I will begin by saying that the most important thing to attend to is not the many and visible markers of Christianity that the West carries about its person, amongst which the symbol of the cross is like a summary form. The important thing is, on the contrary, that Christianity is present in the very place, and perhaps more there than anywhere, where it is no longer possible to recognise it. The sign of the cross may well adorn places and practices from which Christianity has bled away, and as we know, this is not a new thing. As against this, moreover, and by way of example, a certain conception of ‘the rights of man’ or a certain determination of the relation between politics and religion derive very directly from Christianity.

It is important, then, to identify in what ways the West is deeply Christian, in what ways Christianity is Western as if in its very purpose, and in what ways, through this Christian Westernity, an essential dimension of monotheism is put into play, quite intact. It is important to think through all of this to the extent that the Westernised world—or rather, the globalised West—experiences itself as bereft of meaning—of meaning or of value, if one wishes to place the emphasis on the latter; that it has replaced all value with the general equivalence referred to by Marx as that of ‘merchandise’. In one way, in fact, and at the risk of a gross simplification but one that is capable of getting at an essential motivating force behind monotheism’s actions, the question would take this form: what is it that links monotheism to the monovalency of the ‘general equivalence’? What secret resources maintain its ambivalence, embedded in the organising schema of the *mono*-?

By attempting to answer this question—but thereby, of course, greatly complicating the crude form that I have just given it—we can hope to achieve at least three outcomes:

- first of all, finally to make a break with the unilateral schema of a certain kind of rationalism, according to which the modern West is supposed to have gained dominion over itself in the battle against Christianity, by dragging itself out of its own obscurantism (curiously, Heidegger himself rehearsed, in his fashion, something drawn from this schema): for it is a question of grasping just how monotheism in general and Christianity in particular have engendered the West;
- but also, to block all attempts to ‘heal’ the ‘ills’ of the world today (its intense lack of meaning) through a return to Christianity in particular or religion in general: for it is a question of grasping how it is that we have already quit the religious;
- and thus, to ask ourselves all over again what might lead us, without either rejecting Christianity or returning to it, toward a point—toward a resource—buried beneath Christianity, beneath monotheism and beneath the West, and which should henceforth be brought into the light: for this point would, in short, open out upon a future for the world that would be neither Christian nor

anti-Christian, neither monotheistic nor atheistic nor polytheistic, but would very precisely open out somewhere beyond all these categories (after having made all of them possible).

I will give the name, 'deconstruction of monotheism', to the research project consisting in the dismantling and analysis of the constitutive elements of monotheism, and more directly of Christianity, thus of the West, in order to go back to (or proceed toward) the resources that might form simultaneously the buried origin and the imperceptible future of the world that calls itself 'modern'. After all, 'modern' signifies a world ever in waiting for its world's truth, a world whose own meaning is not given, is not available, is a work in progress or in promise, and perhaps beyond: a meaning that consists in not being given, and only in being promised. Now, is it not the case that the contract or the covenant based in the promise, the engagement that engages first and foremost to be engaged in it, is a characteristic of Christianity and of monotheism in general? In Christianity, the promise is simultaneously already realised and yet to come (but is this not a theme that emerges in all the monotheisms?). Such a paradoxical space, is this not one in which the presence of meaning is both guaranteed, taken for granted, *and* always withdrawn, absented in its very presence?

A world whose meaning is given in the not-to-be-it mood—not yet and, in a sense, never—is a world in which 'meaning' itself defies all received and receivable meaning. Could this challenge be the one that monotheism has set us, and the one that a deconstruction of monotheism might have to take up?

By engaging to undertake a 'deconstruction of monotheism' in the sense that I have just indicated, we will find the following thing at the very outset, something that must remain at the very centre of any subsequent analysis, and that must count as an active principle for any deconstruction of monotheism in general: Christianity is of itself, in itself, a deconstruction and an auto-deconstruction. It is also via this characteristic that it represents both the most Westernised form of monotheism—and/or the most Westernising, if one can put it that way—and a schema that we must learn to put into play for triple monotheism as a whole. Christianity, in other words, points out, in the most active way—and also the way most ruinous for itself, the most nihilistic, in certain respects—, how monotheism accommodates within itself—or better yet: more intimately within itself than itself, short of itself or beyond itself—the principle of a world without god.

For the purposes of this brief presentation, I want only to indicate, in a summary fashion, the main traits of the auto-deconstructionist characteristics of Christianity. I will identify five such characteristics:

1. The first is a characteristic inscribed in the very principle of monotheism, a characteristic whose most paradoxical development is provided by Christianity and with respect to which the relations of the three religions of the Book, in their most tense and most divided proximity, also expose the internal contradiction. I put it this way: monotheism is in truth atheism. For that matter, what makes it different from the 'polytheisms' is not to do with the number of gods. In fact, the plurality of the gods corresponds to their effective presence (in nature, in an

image, in a possessed spirit), and their effective presence corresponds to relations of power, of threat or of assistance, which religion organises via the totality of its myths and its rites. The unicity of God, on the contrary, signifies the withdrawal of God from presence and thus also from the power thereby understood. If the God of Israel is an All-Powerful God (a quality he bequeaths, in sum, to his successors), it is not in the sense of an active power in a differential relation of powers: his 'all'-powerfulness signifies that it is at his sole disposal, to be used as he sees fit, that he may withdraw it just as he may withdraw himself from it, and that he is above all alone in his power to make a covenant with man. Consequently he does not wait for sacrifices designed to capture the good will of his power, but only unconditional loyalty to his covenant—loyalty to nothing other than the 'jealous' choice that he makes of his (chosen) people, or of his faithful, or of man as such.

With the figure of Christ, it is the very renunciation of divine power and of its presence that becomes the act proper to God, and that makes of this act God's becoming-man. In this sense, the withdrawn god, the 'emptied' god according to the word of Paul, is not a god hidden at the bottom of the withdrawal or the void (*Deus absconditus*): in the place to which he has retired there is no bottom nor any hiding place. He is the god whose absence intrinsically makes its divinity, or the god whose void-of-divinity is its intrinsic truth. (One might think of Eckart's words: 'Let us pray to God to keep us clear and empty of God', or then again of Harawi imitating Hallaj: 'Nobody really bears witness to the one God "that he is one" '¹). Monotheism, in its first principles, undoes theism, that is to say the presence of power that assembles the world and guarantees its meaning. It thus makes the name of 'god' absolutely problematic—it makes it non-significant—and above all it takes away from it all power to guarantee. The Christian guarantee can only take place at the price of a category that is completely opposed to that of religious belief: the category of 'faith', which is loyalty to an absence and the certainty of this loyalty in the absence of any guarantee. In this sense, the atheist who firmly refuses all consoling or redemptive assurances is paradoxically or strangely closer to faith than the 'believer'. But this also means that the atheism that henceforth structures the Western structure, that is inherent in its mode of knowledge and of existence, is itself a Christianity realised. (This does not prevent things from being modulated very differently among various Christianities: for example, the Christianity of Latin America does not adopt the same posture at all, in this respect, as the Christianity of North America or of Europe. But the stakes are nonetheless fundamentally the same.)

2. Second auto-deconstructionist characteristic, and one flowing from the first: demythologisation. In a trajectory quite singular by comparison with all the other religions of the world (an exception must be made for Buddhism, here, not being exactly a religion, and which, for this very reason, has more than one characteristic in common with monotheism), threefold monotheism, and within it more especially Christianity, has an auto-interpretative history in which it understands itself in a less and less religious manner, in the sense that a religion implies a mythology (a story, a representation of divine actions and persons). It translates

itself in terms that are no longer those of an exemplary foundation story (Genesis, Moses, Jesus, his Resurrection, etc) but those of a symbolic order deciphered in the human condition (man's reason, his freedom, his dignity, his relations with others ...). Tendentiously, Christianity effaces all distinctive religious markers and all sacredness in favour of what Kant called a 'religion within the limits of plain reason', or again what Feuerbach articulated in saying that 'the belief in God is *man's belief in the infinity and the truth of his own essence*'.<sup>2</sup> Henceforth, the democratic ethic of the rights of man and of solidarity—along with the question of the aims to be bestowed upon this 'humanism', or that of the conquest by man of his own purpose—constitutes, when all is said and done, the enduring bedrock of Christianity.

3. Third characteristic: Christianity presents itself historically and doctrinally as a composition. That is to say, it does not simply present itself as a body of stories and messages (although it does foreground, first, 'good news' announced via an exemplary story), but expressly as a complex elaboration upon a Jewish provenance and an offshoot therefrom, but also upon Greek or Greco-Roman philosophy, as much out of the ontological as the political side of things. Moreover, Christianity also defines itself in terms of a no less complex relation to Islam, which it repels even while acknowledging co-belonging in the Abrahamic faith—and at the same time its role in the history of philosophico-theological thought. This declared historical complexity alone—declared in particular through various problematics to do with the relation between 'faith' and 'knowledge' or between 'revelation' and 'reason'—already bears the meaning of a regime distinct from the regime of a religion *stricto sensu*: as if this regime bore within itself the abiding possibility of splitting itself or of auto-interpreting itself in two distinct registers.

Moreover, the theoretical or dogmatic construction characteristic of Christianity is that of a system of thought whose centre is 'the word of God made flesh'. In this way, the dogma of the Incarnation mobilises ideas about 'nature' or 'essence' or 'hypostasis' or 'sensible presentation' in order to establish that the person of Jesus is identically that of a man and that of God in a unique manifestation. Of course, the kernel of this dogma is declared to be a 'mystery', but the mystery does not have the characteristics of a myth: it speaks to the spirit of humanity, it asks man to consider, without being able to understand it, what it is that lights him up within himself and enlightens him about himself (that is to say, yet again, it asks him about the infinite purpose of man). The point that is the Incarnation is obviously the point of absolute separation from Judaism and Islam. But it is not without its uses to observe that this point of discord is also the one where, first, the entire central question of monotheism is debated (namely: what is the covenant between God and humanity?); thus it is the point of the auto-ex-plication (of the unfolding within itself and away from itself) of monotheism, and the point where, second, each monotheism can and must find in the others something of itself (for example, the resurrection, corollary of the incarnation, also belongs to Islam, while the pardoning of sin, another corollary, comes from Judaism, and whereas, for another thing, the incarnation does not, in fact, abolish the indivisible absoluteness of the Judeo-Islamic god ...). This

divided unity of self characteristic of monotheism makes most strictly and thus also most paradoxically the unity of the unique god. One could say, with all the possible resonances, that this god splits itself—truly, atheises itself—at *the crossroads of monotheism/s*.

4. Under these conditions, Christianity is less a body of doctrine than it is itself a *subject* in relation with itself in a search for self, in a state of restlessness, a state of awaiting or a state of desiring its own identity (consider the major theme of the announcement and the wait, recurrent in the three monotheisms, paradoxically put to work in Christianity in the hoped-for event that has come to pass). This is why, just as Christianity conceives of a god in three persons whose divinity consists in the relation to itself, so too it splits itself historically at least in three (splitting of the community that must ultimately regroup itself) and so too, again, perhaps, it thus provides the logic of the threefold monotheism as a subject split from itself (religion of the Father, religion of the Son, religion of the Sacred in the Islamic sense).

The relation to self defines the subject. The structure of the subject appears as if it were the cesura between the ancient world and the Western-Christian world. (It would be useful to pause here to discuss Christianity's Greek provenance, its Augustinian, Avicennan, Cartesian, Hegelian developments, and the fact that it is the history of all the meanings and all the figures for what is called 'spirit'.) This subject is the *self* as an instance of identity, of certainty and of responsibility. But the law of its structure is that it cannot be given to itself before having itself related itself back to itself: its relation to itself—or 'the self' in general—can not but be infinite. Being infinite, on the one hand it takes on a temporal dimension (it sets about acquiring a history, past and future as dimensions of meaning and presence—or even: presence is not simply in the present tense), *and*, on the other hand, it can do nothing but slip away from itself in the last instance. This escape from self defines conjointly, in this area of thought, the life of the creator and the death of the creature. But it is thus one and the other, and one in the other or through the other, which are affected by the in-finite, in the sense of *finitude*.

5. Christianity (and once again, via this prism, monotheism) is, from its very beginning, engaged in a perpetual action (a process *and* a litigation) of auto-rectification or auto-surpassing, most often in the form of an auto-retrospection with a view to a return to a purer origin—a process to be found coming right down the years to, remarkable example that it is, Nietzsche himself, and it persists today, but it begins already between the Gospels and Paul, between Paul and John, in the origins of monasticism, and then, it goes without saying, in the various Reforms, etc. It all happens as if Christianity had developed, as no other, a simultaneous affirmation of power, of theologico-economico-political domination and exploitation, of which Rome was to be the weighty symbol as much as it was a part of the reality, *and* an opposite affirmation of relinquishment and self-abandonment for which the vanishing point would be self-evanescence. The question must then be, of course, that of the nature and structure of this self-evanescence: dialectical surpassing, nihilistic decomposition, an opening up of the ancient to the absolutely new ... In one way or another, the matter is none

other than this: how does monotheism engender itself as humanism and how does humanism confront the finitude which thus enters into history?

I will limit myself, in this presentation, to this very brief characterisation. I draw no conclusion from it. It seems to me that it points toward a train of thought without which it is impossible to seriously consider, henceforth, the question of the meaning of the world as the West bequeathes it to us—or leaves without heirs.

This train of thought amounts, at the very least (confining these remarks to a bare, schematised minimum), to this: our task is not to bring to pass a new divine realm, either in this world or another; nor is it to rediscover the immanent unity proper to a world of myth that has fallen apart in the Westernisation-monotheisation of the world; rather, our task is to think a ‘world-meaning’ in a world split from its own being-world, in an acosmic and atheological world, which is nevertheless still a ‘world’ in some fashion, still ours and that of the totality of beings, thus still a totality of possible meanings—it being understood that this particular possibility is always also, of itself, exposed to the impossible.

*Post-scriptum (February 2002):* the preceding text is a conference paper delivered in Cairo in February 2001. One year later, that is to say, one ‘September 11’ later, it calls for more than a supplement (not to mention the fact that in many respects my work on the subject has shifted, has opened up new lines of enquiry). If ‘September 11’ has made one thing clearer, it is this: the world is tearing itself apart over an unbearable division of wealth and power. This division is unbearable because it is based on no acceptable hierarchy, not of power, not of wealth. A ‘hierarchy’, etymologically speaking, signifies a sacred characteristic of principle or commandment. As against this, the world of techno-science, or the world that I place under the term *écotechnie*—that is to say, a natural milieu made entirely of human substitutes for a henceforth withdrawn ‘nature’—which is also the world of democracy, of the universal rights of a man supposed to be universal, the world of secularism or of religious, aesthetic and moral tolerance, is a world that not only prevents the foundation in a sacral regime of differences of authority and legitimacy, but it makes disparities or inequalities that openly violate its principles of equality and justice appear intolerable.

What is called either the instrumentalisation of religions, or else the diversion, the perversion or the betrayal of this or that religion (including the national theism of the United States), really does not amount to a sufficient explanation. That which is instrumentalised gives, of itself, the matter of instrumentalisation. This matter is given, in a paradoxical but obvious way, by the motives of the One: it is Unity, Unicity and Universality that are called together from all sides in the global confrontation, or rather in the world structured as a confrontation that is in no respect a ‘war of civilisations’ (since Islam is also part of the West, due to its entire history, and even if it is not exclusively that).

In its claim to reply to the total mobilisation (it is no accident if I use a formerly fascist concept) proclaimed and remote-controlled in the name of a unique God whose transcendent unicity performs an absolute *hierarchisa-*

tion (God, the paradise of the believers, the dust of all the rest—all the rest comprising also many dollars, missiles and petrol ...), the total immobilisation of the situation (global capital) invokes the name of a supposed universality whose Universal is called 'man', but in its obvious abstraction immediately entrusts itself to another God ('in God we trust', in this God who will 'bless America').

This God and that God are two figures confronted with the identical Unique when its Unicity is seized upon as an absolute Presence, solid in itself and through itself, as the pinpoint and thus invisible summit of a pyramid whose essence it *sums up* and reabsorbs. (One could say something here, and seeing as I am continuing a talk given in Cairo: the worth of the pyramids of the Pharaohs did not lie in the null point of their summits, but in the secret of life and death enshrouded in their bulk. Their worth was in a profound withdrawal into a cryptic obscurity, not in the tip of a presence erected in full view.) And it is certainly permissible to say, without being 'anti-American' (ridiculous category) that it is the Uni-fying, Unitary and Universal, also Unidimensional and finally Unilateral model (which is its internal contradiction) that has made possible the symmetrical and no less nihilistic mobilisation of a Monotheistic and no less unilateral model. Attention is finally being paid to the latter only because it has become the ideological instrument of the 'terrorism' that we have come to know. But 'terrorism' is the conjunction of despair and a certain Uni-fying will that confronts the other face of the One.

Now, what is thus lost from the very essence of monotheism in all its forms is precisely the following: that, in these forms, the 'One' of 'God' is not at all Unicity as a substantial thing, present and joined to itself: on the contrary, the unicity and the unity of this 'god' (or the divinity of this 'one') consist precisely in the fact that the One can be neither posited, presented nor figured as conjoined in itself. Be it in exile and diaspora, be it in the becoming-man and in a being-threelfold-in-itself, or be it in the infinite backing away of the one who has neither equal nor like (therefore not even unity in one of its forms), this 'god' (and in what way is it divine? how is it divine? this is what we must think through) absolutely excludes its own presentation—and we should even say: its own *mise en* value as much as its *mise en* presence.

This, the great mystics, the great believers, the great spiritual figures of the three monotheisms knew, and they knew it in exchanges and confrontations plentifully generated with the philosophers whom they faced up to even as they were foreign to them. Their thoughts, that is to say, their acts, their *ethos* or their *praxis*, await us still.

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## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Eckhart, 'De la pauvreté en esprit' ['Of poverty in spirit'], Hallaj, *Diwan* (ed) Massignon, p. 83. [Translator's note: the citations from Eckart and Hallaj are translated directly from Nancy's text; references are as supplied in the original.]

<sup>2</sup> *L'Essence du christianisme*, [The Essence of Christianity] trad. J.P.Osier, Paris, Maspero, 1968, p. 328 (reproduction 1992, Gallimard). [Translator's note: the citations from Kant and Feuerbach are translated directly from Nancy's text; references are as supplied in the original.]

<sup>a</sup> Translator's note: this article, based on a lecture delivered in Cairo in 2000, first appeared in French as 'Déconstruction du monothéisme', in the journal, *Dédale*. The post-script has been added more recently. It is translated with the author's permission.