

original. But Adorno and Horkheimer themselves quote a modern German translation of Bacon that is far more direct and comprehensible than the English original; their version is an important source for the continuity of the whole German essay that vanishes when the text is based on the English original.

No less significant for the possibility of translating Adorno is the condition of contemporary American English. The shibboleths of its current canine vector — the “Go with it,” “In your face,” “Have it all,” “Out of here,” “Bashing” — quote a momentum that is felt in any effort to bring a line of *Dialectic of Enlightenment* into English. The sense that all that will count as contemporary speech is a punch in the mouth awakens a preference in translation for the remote and stilted, an impulse that must be parried as much as the canine. On the other hand, much of the language has been technocratically absorbed: the concept of “behavior,” for instance, which once formed a constellation with the ideas of approach, thought, attitude, and response, is the only available translation of *Verhalten* as it appears in reference to Polypheinous’s *Verhalten* — a mimetic *Verhaltensweise* — even though the English concept is now increasingly restricted to a set of elicited acts. Translating Adorno into English often means having to rely on somehow invoking archaic linguistic vestiges in words and phrases one would otherwise avoid. Academic feishization has also taken its toll: “discourse” — which once worked well for “*Rede*” — now sets the wrong spin on the concept, no matter how carefully it is fixed on the page. The new translation of the *Odysseus* essay, which follows, is a provisional start at a new translation that has had these various issues in mind and, hopefully, provides at least a draft that can be studied without the reader being fundamentally misled.

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*Odysseus or Myth and Enlightenment**

Theodor W. Adorno and Max Horkheimer

Just as the episode of the Sirens contains the entwinement of myth and rational labor, the *Odyssey* as a whole bears witness to the dialectic of enlightenment. Especially in its most ancient stratum, the epic proves to be bound to myth: the adventures have their origin in popular tradition. However, by appropriating the myths, by “organizing” them, the Homeric spirit opposes them. The habitual equation of epic and myth, which has been challenged by recent classical philology, has been shown to be a complete fraud by philosophical criticism. The two concepts diverge. They mark two phases of an historical process that can be distinguished along the seams of the Homeric editorial work. Homeric discourse creates a universality of language, it does not already presuppose it; the epic dissolves the hierarchical order of society by the exoteric form of its presentation, even — and precisely there — where it glorifies this order. To sing of Achilles’s rage and the wanderings of Odysseus is already the nostalgic stylization of what may no longer be sung. And the hero of the adventure proves to be the prototype of the bourgeois individual, whose concept originates in that coherent self-assertion the primordial model of which is rendered by the beleaguered hero. In the epic, the historical-philosophical counterpart to the novel, novelistic aspects ultimately begin to show through, and the venerable meaning-charged cosmos of the Homeric world reveals itself to be the work of ordering reason, which destroys myth precisely by means of the rational order in which it reflects myth.

* *Dialektik der Aufklärung, Gesammelte Schriften*, ed. Rolf Tiedemann (Frankfurt/Main: Suhrkamp, 1981) 3: 61-99. Translation notes are in square brackets.

The element of bourgeois enlightenment in Homer was stressed by the late romantic German interpreters of antiquity, who followed the lead of Nietzsche's early writings. Nietzsche was one of the few since Hegel who recognized the dialectic of enlightenment. He formulated its ambiguous relation to domination: "Enlightenment" should be "disseminated among the people so that the priests all become priests with guilty consciences, and the same must be done with regard to the state. That is the task of enlightenment: to make princes and statesmen unmistakably aware that everything they do is an intentional lie."¹ On the other hand, enlightenment had always been the means of the

great architects of government (Confucius in China, the *Imperium Romanum*, Napoleon, the Papacy in the age when it had turned not only to the world but to power) . . . The self-deception of the masses on this point, as for example in all democracies, is extremely useful: the diminution and malleability of people is worked for as "progress."²

In that this dual character of enlightenment is manifest as a fundamental motif in history, the concept of enlightenment — the concept of progressive thought — stretches back to the beginning of recorded history. Whereas Nietzsche's relation to enlightenment, and thus to Homer, remained ambivalent; whereas he recognized in enlightenment just as much the universal movement of sovereign spirit — of which he considered himself the consummation — as a "nihilistic" power antagonistic to life, his pre-fascist epigones retained only the second aspect and perverted it into an ideology. This ideology becomes blind praise of a blind life, subscribed to by the same praxis that suppresses everything that lives. This becomes clear in the attitude of fascist intellectuals to Homer. They sense something democratic in Homer's presentation of feudal relations and stamp it the work of seafarers and traders; they spurn the Ionian epic as an all-too rational account, as common communication. The evil eye of those who feel at one with all apparently direct domination and who proscribe all mediation, all "liberalism" at whatever level, has an element of truth. In fact, the lineages of reason, liberality, and conventionality reach much farther back than a historiography supposes that dates the concept of the burgher only from the decline of medieval feudalism. As a result of the reactionary neo-romantic identification of

the burgher even there where the older bourgeois humanism fancied a sacred and legitimating origin, world history and enlightenment were unified. The fashionable ideology that makes the liquidation of enlightenment its primary concern unwillingly pays it homage. It is compelled to recognize enlightened thought even in the most distant past. Precisely the most ancient trace of enlightenment threatens the bad conscience of the present-day archaists, for it threatens to release once again the entire process that they have undertaken to stifle, which they at the same time unconsciously advance.

However, the view of Homer as antimythological and enlightened, as an opponent of chthonic mythology, remains untrue because it is partial. In the service of repressive ideology, Rudolf Borchardt, for instance — the most important and, consequently, the most unconvincing of the esoteric representatives of German heavy industry — brings his analysis to a close much too soon. He fails to see that the primal powers that he extols already present a stage of enlightenment. By categorically denouncing the epic as a novel, he fails to perceive what epic and novel in fact have in common: domination and exploitation. What he condemns as ignoble in the epic — mediation and circulation — is only the development of that dubiously noble principle that he glorifies in myth: naked force. The purportedly authentic, archaic principle of blood and sacrifice is already marked by the bad conscience and cunning of domination, which are characteristic of that current program of national renewal that uses images of the primordial for purposes of self-advertisement. The most primitive myth already contains the element of falsehood that triumphs in the fraudulence of fascism, a deceitfulness that fascism imputes to enlightenment. No work, however, gives more eloquent testimony to the enervation of enlightenment and myth than the *Odyssey*, the fundamental text of European civilization. In Homer, epic and myth, form and subject matter do not so much diverge from each other as, rather, confront and define one another. The aesthetic dualism attests to the historical-philosophical tendency: "Apollonian Homer only continues that general human process of art to which we owe individuation."³

The myths are sedimented in the thematic layers of the *Odyssey*; however, the account given of them, the unity wrested from the diffuse legends, is at the same time the description of the flight of the individual from the mythical powers. This is already true of the *Iliad*. It records

1. Friedrich Nietzsche, *Nachlaß. Werke. Großoktavausgabe*. (Leipzig, 1904) XIV: 206.

2. Nietzsche (Leipzig, 1911) XV: 235.

3. Nietzsche (Leipzig, 1903) IX: 289.

the entwinement of prehistory and history in the anger of the mythical son of a goddess against the rational warrior-king and organizer, his undisciplined idleness, and finally, the inclusion in the battle of the victorious though doomed hero on the basis of a plight that — though mediated by mythical loyalty to Achilles's slain comrade — is no longer tribal, but national-Hellenic. The entwinement of prehistory and history is even more drastically evident in the *Odyssey* inasmuch as its form is closer to the novel of adventure. In the opposition of the surviving ego to multifarious fate the opposition of enlightenment to myth takes shape. The wandering from Troy to Ithaca is the course through the myths of a self — physically infinitely weak vis-à-vis the forces of nature — taking shape in self-consciousness. The primeval world is secularized in the space that the self measures out; the old demons populate the distant borders and the islands of the civilized Mediterranean, driven back into the crags and caverns from which they once sprang in the shudder of the beginnings of time. Indeed, the adventure bestows each place with its name and the names make possible the rational surveillance of space. The trembling, shipwrecked hero anticipates the work of the compass. At the same time his powerlessness, to which no part of the sea remains unfamiliar, implies the enervation of the powers. Indeed, under the eye of one who has come of age, the simple untruth of the myths — that, in fact, the seas are not inhabited by demons, the conjured deceptions and diffusion of inherited folk religion — becomes "folly" in contrast to the univocity of the goal of self-preservation, of the return to home and security. Taken as a whole, the adventures that Odysseus encounters are dangerous temptations that pull the self from the course of its own logic. He entrusts himself anew to each one, tries it out like an eternal novice, indeed, sometimes like a curious fool or a mime who inexhaustibly rehearses his rolls. "But where danger threatens/ that which saves from it also grows":⁴ the knowledge in which his identity consists and which enables him to survive draws its substance from the experience of the multifarious, the diverting, and disintegrating; and the knower who survives is at the same time he who entrusts himself most recklessly to mortal danger, on which he hardens and strengthens himself. This is

4. Hölderlin, "Parnos": "Wo aber Gefahr ist, wächst/Das Rettende auch." *Sämtliche Werke. Kleine Stuttgarter Ausgabe*, ed. Friedrich Beissner, 6 vols. (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1965) II: 173. [Translated by Michael Hamburger in *Friedrich Hölderlin* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1980) 479.]

the secret of the process between epic and myth: the self does not constitute the rigid antithesis to adventure; rather the self develops its rigidity in the first place through this antithesis: its unity is exclusively in the multiplicity of what this unity denies.⁵ Like the heroes of all true novels after him, Odysseus loses himself in order to find himself; the estrangement from nature that he undertakes is completed in his self-abandonment to that nature on which he measures himself in every

5. This process is clearly documented at the beginning of Book XX: Odysseus notices how at night the female servants slip away to the suitors: "His heart howled from deep within him like a courageous bitch protecting her helpless puppies howls and shows fight to a stranger. Thus Odysseus's fury howled within his chest at the thought of these shameless misdeeds. He struck his breast and punished his heart thus: 'Down; be steady. You've seen worse, that time the monstrous Cyclops savagely ate your brave friends. But you suffered it alone until a resolution led you out of the cave in which you saw in front of yourself only the dread of death!' Thus he spoke, reprimanding his heart in his heaving chest; soon his heart's composure returned, and staunchly endured. Yet he himself still rolled to and fro." (Book XX, 13-24) [Translations here of the *Odyssey* aim to match the German. Cumming's translations are good, though they have been substantially modified; Robert Fitzgerald's translation of the *Odyssey* (New York: Anchor, 1963) has also been consulted]. The subject is still not securely organized as self-identical. His emotions — his courage and heart — stir independently of the self: "At the beginning of the passage the *kradte* [heart] or the *ator* [heart] [the two words are synonymous in 17.22] howls and Odysseus strikes his chest; he strikes against his heart and addresses it. His heart pounds and thus a part of the body is acting contrary to his will. Therefore, his speech to his heart is not a rhetorical device — as when in Euripides the hand and foot are addressed because they are to move — rather the heart acts independently." Wilamowitz-Moellendorf, *Die Heimkehr des Odysseus* (Berlin: Weidmann, 1927) 189. The emotion is compared with an animal that man tames: the metaphor of the bitch belongs to the same layer of experience as does the metamorphosis of the crew members into swine. The subject, still self-divided and compelled to use force equally against nature and itself, "punishes" the heart by forcing it to be patient and denies it — with regard to the future — spontaneity in the present. Striking the breast later became a gesture of triumph: the victor expresses that his victory is always one over his own nature. This is an act of self-preservation reason: "In the first place the speaker thought of his unruly beating heart; superior to it was the *metis* [ingenuity, the power of Athena that is the model of Odysseus's capacity], which was another inner force; it is this force that saved Odysseus. Later philosophers would have contrasted it as *nus* [nous] or *logistikon* [strategical, full of intelligence] with the unreasoning parts of the soul." (Wilamowitz, *Heimkehr* 190). But the "self" — *autos* — is not at issue in this passage until verse 24, that is, after the taming of the impulse by reason has succeeded. If the choice and sequence of the words are held to carry decisive significance, then the identical "I" in Homer is to be seen as the result of the control of internal nature. This new self trembles within itself, a thing, a body, after the heart within it has been punished. In any case — as analyzed in detail by Wilamowitz — the juxtaposition of the elements of the soul, which frequently address one another, confirms the weak and ephemeral integration of the subject, whose substance is exclusively the unification of these elements.

adventure, and ironically the inexorable force that he commands triumphs in that he himself returns home an inexorable force, the judge and avenger of the legacy of the powers from which he escaped. At the Homeric stage, the identity of the self is so much a function of the non-identical, of the dissociated, unarticulated myths, that self-identity must be derived from them. The inner organization of individuality — time — is still so weak that the unity of the adventure remains external and its continuity remains a spatial change of arenas, of sites occupied by local deities to which the hero is driven by the storm. Whenever historically the self has again experienced such debilitation, or when this debility is presupposed in the reader, the narrative of life has once again slipped back into the sequence of adventures. In the image of voyaging, historical time laboriously, revocably, detaches itself from space, the irrevocable schema of all mythic time.

The instrument by which the self survives adventure, casts itself away in order to preserve itself, is cunning. The seafarer Odysseus cheats the natural deities just as does the civilized traveler of a later date who offers the natives colored beads in exchange for ivory. Odysseus in fact only occasionally appears in the role of a barterer. At these moments gifts are exchanged between host and guest. The Homeric gift stands half-way between exchange and sacrifice. Like a sacrificial offering, it is intended to make restitution for forfeited blood — either that of the stranger or of the local inhabitants vanquished by the pirates — and to seal an oath of peace. At the same time, however, the principle of equivalence is evident in the exchange of gifts: in real or symbolic terms the host receives the counter-value of his effort; the guest receives provisions that should in principle make it possible for him to return home. Even if the host receives no direct recompense for his service, he can still count on the same reception for himself or his kin: as sacrifice to the elemental gods, the gift is also rudimentary insurance against the gods. The pragmatic prerequisite for this tradition is the widespread, though dangerous voyaging of early Greece. Poseidon himself, Odysseus's elemental enemy, thinks in terms of concepts of equivalence in that he incessantly complains that Odysseus receives more gifts from his hosts in the course of his wanderings than his full share of the spoils of Troy would have been had Poseidon allowed Odysseus to carry it away unimpeded. Indeed, in Homer this form of rationalization can be traced back to the actual acts of sacrifice themselves. The magnitude of the hecatombs is calculated according to the

favor of the gods that is expected. If exchange is the secularization of sacrifice, sacrifice itself appears as the magical schema of rational exchange, a human organization for controlling the gods who are overthrown by precisely the system that honors them.⁶

The element of deception in sacrifice is the model of Odysseus's cunning, just as many of Odysseus's ruses are, so to speak, embedded in a sacrifice to the natural deities.⁷ They are outwitted by the hero just as they are outwitted by the solar deities. Odysseus's Olympian allies take advantage of Poseidon's visit to the Ethiopians — the backwoods-men who still honor him and offer him enormous sacrifices — to accompany their ward without risk. Deception is already involved in the sacrifice that Poseidon accepts with satisfaction: the limitation of the amorphous god of the sea to a specific locality, the sacred domain, at the same time limits his power; and to satiate himself on the Ethiopian oxen he must renounce venting his anger on Odysseus. All human acts of sacrifice, methodically carried out, deceive the god to whom they are offered: they subordinate him to the primacy of human purposes and dissolve his powers; the deception perpetrated on him

6. In contrast to Nietzsche's materialistic interpretation, Klages conceived the relation between sacrifice and exchange in completely magical terms: "The necessity of sacrifice concerns each and everyone, because everyone, as we have seen, receives his proper portion — the original *sum cuique* [his own] — only in that he continually gives and gives in return. At issue here is not exchange in the customary sense of the exchange of goods (which admittedly also originally receives its consecration from the concept of sacrifice), but rather from the exchange of fluids or essences by the surrender of one's own soul to the sustaining and nourishing life of the world." Ludwig Klages, *Der Geist als Widersacher der Seele*, 4 vols. (Leipzig: J.A. Barth, 1929-1933) III:2, 1409. The dual character of sacrifice, however, the magical self-surrender of the individual to the collective — in whatever fashion — and self-preservation through the technique of such magic, implies an objective contradiction that presses toward the development precisely of the rational element in sacrifice. Under the persisting magical spell, rationality, as a mode of behavior of the sacrificer, becomes cunning. Klages himself, the zealous apologist of myth and sacrifice, realized this and was compelled to make the distinction even in the ideal image of the Pelasgian age between authentic communication with nature and the lie, without however being able to derive from mythical thought itself a counterprinciple to the semblance of magical domination of nature because such semblance itself constitutes precisely the essence of myth. "It is no longer merely pagan faith alone; it is also pagan superstition when, for example, on ascending the throne the god-king must swear that he will henceforth make the sun shine and the harvest prosper." (Klages 1408)

7. This agrees with the fact that in Homer human sacrifice does not occur. The civility tendency of the epic is evident in the selection of the events reported. "With one exception . . . abomination of human sacrifice." Gilbert Murray, *The Rise of the Greek Epic* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1911) 150.

merges directly with the one perpetrated by the unbelieving priests on the believing congregation. Cunning originates in the cult. Odysseus himself performs the duties both of sacrifice and priest. By calculating his own stake, he negates the power to which he has put himself in jeopardy. Thus he repossesses his forfeited life. Yet deception, cunning and rationality by no means stand in simple antithesis to archaic sacrifice. The only change that occurs by way of Odysseus is that the element of deception in sacrifice — the element that is perhaps the innermost reason for the semblance character of myth — is raised to self-consciousness. The experience of the unreality of symbolic communication with the deity through sacrifice must be immemorably ancient. The substitution implicit in sacrifice, glorified by a chic irrationalism, cannot be separated from the dedication of the sacrificed, from the fraud of the priestly rationalization of death as the apotheosis of the chosen. Something of the fraud that exalts precisely the frail person as a bearer of divine substance has always been apparent in the self, which owes itself to the sacrifice of the present to the future. The substantiality of the self is as much semblance as is the immortality of the slaughtered. It is not an accident that many revered Odysseus as a divinity.

So long as individuals are sacrificed, so long as the antithesis of the collective and the individual is implicit in this sacrifice, so long is deception objectively a constant of sacrifice. If belief in substitution through sacrifice signifies the recollection of what is not primordial in the self but of what developed in the self in the course of the history of domination, this belief becomes untruth for the fully developed self: the self is precisely the human being to whom the magical power of substitution is no longer attributed. The establishment of the self severs that fluctuating unity with nature that the sacrifice of the self claimed to establish. Every sacrifice is a restoration belied by the historical reality in which it is undertaken. The venerable belief in sacrifice, however, is probably itself a drilled-in pattern in which the subjected repeat upon themselves the injustice that was done to them in order to make it bearable. Sacrifice does not — as the current mythologists claim — salvage direct communication, which has only just been disturbed; rather, the institution of sacrifice is the scar of an historical catastrophe, an act of force that befalls humanity and nature alike. Cunning is nothing else than the subjective development of the objective untruth of sacrifice, which cunning replaces. Perhaps this untruth was not always only untruth. At one stage⁸ of

8. This is not, certainly, the oldest stage. "[T]he practice of human sacrifice . . . is

prehistory sacrifices may have had a sort of bloody rationality that even in its own moment was scarcely distinguishable from the greed of privilege. The currently predominant theory of sacrifice traces it to the idea of a collective body, the tribe, into which the blood of the slain is to flow back as strength. While totemism was already ideology in its own time, it nevertheless marks a real situation in which the dominant form of reason required sacrifice. It is a situation of archaic deficiency in which human sacrifice and cannibalism can hardly be distinguished. The numerically augmented collective can at times only survive by eating human flesh; perhaps the pleasure of many ethnic or social groups was bound up with cannibalism in a way testified to today only by the repugnance toward human flesh. Customs of a later age, like that of the *vet sacrum*⁹ — when in times of hunger an entire age group of youths is ritually required to emigrate — clearly bear the traces of such barbaric and transfigured rationality. This rationality must have been obviously illusory long before the development of the mythical folk religions: just as the systematic hunt furnished sufficient animals for the tribe to make the consumption of tribal members superfluous, the shrewd hunters and trappers must have been bewildered by the medicinal man's command that they allow themselves to be eaten.¹⁰ The magical, collective interpretation of sacrifice — which wholly denies its rationality — is its rationalization; the enlightened claim, however, that what is today ideology was once the truth is too innocent:¹¹ the newest ideologies are only revivals of the most ancient ideologies; they reach

found much more frequently among barbarians and semi-civilised peoples than among genuine savages, and at the lowest stages of culture known to us it is hardly heard of. Among some peoples the practice has been noticed to become increasingly prevalent in the course of time," as, for example, in the Society Islands, in Polynesia, in India and among the Aztecs. "Of the Africans Mr. Winwood Reade remarks, 'The more powerful the nation, the grander the sacrifice.'" (Edward Westermarck, *The Origin and Development of the Moral Ideas*, 2nd ed., 2 vols. (London: MacMillan, 1924) I: 436-37.

9. ["Holy spring": Roman custom of dedicating in difficult times a crop — of fruit, cattle, children — to the gods.]

10. Among cannibalistic peoples, such as those of West Africa, "neither the women nor the young men [are] allowed to touch the dainty." Westermarck (Leipzig, 1909) II: 578.

11. Wilamowitz sets the *mis* in "sharp contrast" to *logos*. *Glaube der Hellenen*, 2 vols. (Berlin: Weidmannsche Buchhandlung, 1931) I: 41 ff. For him myth is a "story that one tells to oneself," a children's fable, untruth, or — effectively the same — the unprovable highest truth as in Plato. Whereas Wilamowitz is conscious of the semblance character of myths, he equates them with literature. In other words: he locates myth in significative language that has already entered into objective contradiction with its intention.

back for support behind the previously familiar ideologies to the same extent that the development of class society gives the lie to the previously sanctioned ideologies. The much-invoked irrationality of sacrifice is nothing else than an expression of the fact that the practice of sacrifice lasted longer than its own already untrue — i.e. particular — rational necessity. It is this gap between the rationality and irrationality of sacrifice that cunning exploits as a handhold. All demythologization has the form of the inevitable experience of the uselessness and superfluousness of sacrifices.

Though the irrationality of the principle of sacrifice makes it transient, it endures at the same time by the strength of its rationality. This rationality has been transformed; it has not disappeared. The self wrests itself free from dissolution in blind nature, whose claim is always reasserted by sacrifice. But precisely through this struggle the self remains bound in the nexus of the natural in so far as it is life that wants to assert itself against life. The trade-off of sacrifice for the rationality of self-preservation is exchange no less than sacrifice itself was. The self-identical self, which originates in the overcoming of sacrifice, is indeed once again an unyielding, rigidified sacrificial ritual that men and women celebrate upon themselves by setting consciousness in opposition

"Myth is first of all spoken discourse, its content is never its concern." (Wilamowitz, *Glaube*) By hypostatizing this late concept of myth, that is, by presupposing it to be the explicit contrary of reason, he succeeds — in polemic against the unnamed Bachelier, whom he derides as merely fashionable — at a decisive separation of mythology and religion (Wilamowitz, *Glaube* 5) in which myth appears not as the older, but precisely as the newer stage: "I try to trace the development, the transformations and the transition from faith to myth." (Wilamowitz, *Glaube* 1) The Greek scholar's hardened departmental arrogance blocks insight into the dialectic of myth, religion, and enlightenment: "I do not know the languages from which the currently modish words 'taboo' and 'totem', 'mana' and 'orenda' come, but I take it to be permissible to continue to concern myself with the Greeks themselves and to think in Greek terms about what is Greek." (Wilamowitz, *Glaube* 10). It is unclear how then the opinion that "the kernel of Platonic divinity lay in the most ancient layer of Hellenism" is to mesh with the view he takes over from Kirkhoff according to which the oldest kernel of the *Odyssey* is to be found in the mythical encounters of the *nostoi* [return home], just as the central concept — myth itself — goes without any adequate philosophical articulation. Nevertheless, there is real insight in his opposition to irrationalism, which glorifies myth, and in his insistence on the untruth of the myths. This aversion to primitive thought and prehistory brings all the more clearly to the surface the tension that has always existed between the deceptive word and truth. What Wilamowitz preaches the historically later myths for, i.e. their arbitrary inventions, must have already been present in the oldest myths by way of the simulacrum of sacrifice. This simulacrum is already related to precisely that Platonic divinity that Wilamowitz dates back to archaic Hellenism.

to the nexus of nature. This is evident both in the famous Nordic myth in which Odin hung himself from a tree as a sacrifice to himself and in Klages's thesis that every sacrifice is a sacrifice of god to god, which is still apparent in the monotheistically disguised form of the myth, in the Christology.¹² That layer of myth, however, in which the self appears as a sacrifice to itself, does not so much express the original form of folk religion as the assimilation of myth by civilization. In class history, the enmity of the self to sacrifice involved self-sacrifice because the price of this enmity was the denial of nature in men and women for the sake of domination over extra-human nature and over other men and women. Precisely this denial, the quintessence of all civilizing rationality, is the germ cell of the proliferating mythical irrationality: with the denial of nature in men and women, not only the *telos* of the external domination of nature, but the *telos* of men's and women's lives becomes opaque and confused. In the instant in which men and women sever the consciousness of themselves as nature, all of the aims for which they struggle to preserve themselves, social progress, the intensification of material and intellectual forces, indeed consciousness itself, are vitiated; and the enthronement of means as ends — which in late capitalism takes on the character of open insanity — is already apparent in the protohistory of subjectivity [*Urgeschichte der Subjektivität*]. The domination of the self, on which the self is based, is inevitably the destruction of the subject in whose service it is undertaken because the substance that is dominated, repressed, and dissolved by self-preservation is nothing other than that very life by which the efforts of self-preservation are exclusively defined; that very life that is to be preserved. The irrationalism of totalitarian capitalism — whose technic of satisfying needs in a reified form determined by domination, a form that makes actual satisfaction impossible and presses toward the extirpation of humanity — has its model in the hero who escapes from sacrifice by sacrificing himself. The history of civilization is the history of the introversion of sacrifice. In other words, it is the history of renunciation. He who renounces gives up more of his life than is given back to him, and more than the life that he defends. This unfolds in the context of a false society. In it each person is one too many and is deceived. Indeed, society demands that he who tries to escape from

12. The interpretation of Christianity as a pagan sacrificial religion is the basic idea of Werner Hegemann's *Der gerettete Christus* (Potsdam: G. Kiepenheuer, 1928).

universal, unequal and unjust exchange, he who would not renounce but grasp the undiminished whole, must thus lose everything, even the miserable remains that self-preservation permits him. All conceivable superfluous sacrifice is required: against sacrifice itself. Odysseus himself is a sacrifice, the self that always controls itself¹³ and in so doing neglects the life that it saves and that it recalls only as wandering. Yet Odysseus is at the same time a sacrifice for the abrogation of sacrifice. His masterful renunciation, as a struggle against myth, stands in for a society that no longer demands renunciation and domination: one that masters itself not in order to coerce itself and others, but for reconciliation.

The transformation of sacrifice into subjectivity occurs under the sign of that cunning that was always an aspect of sacrifice. The deception implicit in sacrifice becomes an element of character as the dissimulation requisite of cunning; it becomes the mutilation of the "buffered" hero himself, whose physiognomy is marked by what he subjected himself to in the aim of self-preservation. This expresses the relation between spirit and physical strength. The bearer of intellect [*Geist*] — the commander — as which the cunning Odysseus is almost always presented, is — despite all accounts of his heroic deeds — in

13. Thus, for example, when he abstains from immediately killing Polyphemus (Book IX, 302); when he lets pass his bad treatment by Antinous in order not to betray his identity (Book XVII, 460ff.). Compare also the episodes with the winds (Book X, 50ff.) and Tiresias's prophecy during the conjuration of the dead (Book XI, 105), which makes the return home dependent on the taming of the heart. Admittedly, Odysseus's restraint is not yet definitive, but rather only a deferment: the acts of revenge that he puts off are for the most part carried out later and all the more thoroughly: his patience is his forbearance. In his behavior there is still evident — to a certain degree — as a naturally originating aim that which is later concealed in the complete and imperative renunciation in order thus to acquire overpowering force, that of the subjugation of everything natural. Once this subjugation is transferred into the subject, once freed from mythically predefined content, such subjugation becomes "objective," fixedly autonomous, in contrast to every particular aim of humanity; it becomes a universal, rational law. As is already clear in Odysseus's patience, and unmistakably so after the murder of the suitors, revenge is transformed into legal procedure: precisely here the final fulfillment of mythical compulsion becomes an objective instrument of domination. Judicial prerogative is restrained revenge. In that, however, this judiciary patience is developed on the basis of something exterior to it — that is, on the longing for home — it acquires something of the human, almost of the trusting, that goes beyond the ever deferred revenge. In the fully developed bourgeois society both are annulled: along with the thought of revenge, the longing for the taboos also decays, and this amounts precisely to the enthronement of revenge, mediated as the revenge of the self on itself.

every instance physically weaker than the primitive powers with which he must contend for his life. The occasions on which the brute physical strength of the adventurer is celebrated, the match with the beggar Irus backed by the suitors and the stringing of the great bow, are sporting events. Here self-preservation and bodily strength are distinct from each other: Odysseus's athletic prowess is that of a gentleman, who — as both master and mastered — is able to train himself without practical concerns. Precisely the energy diverted from self-preservation comes to serve self-preservation: in the struggle with the flabby, greedy, and undisciplined beggar, or with indifferent sluggards, Odysseus symbolically repeats on those who lagged behind what the organized manorial nobility had actually done to them long before; thus Odysseus legitimates himself as a nobleman. When he encounters prehistoric powers, however, that are neither domesticated nor enervated, the problem is more difficult. He himself can never physically engage the exotically surviving mythical powers. Rather, he must acknowledge as given the sacrificial ceremonies in which he again and again finds himself: simply to contravene them is beyond him. Instead, he makes the ceremonies formally the preconditions of his own rational plan. This plan is always carried out, so to speak, within the terms set by the immemorably ancient judgment that underlies each sacrificial situation. The fact that the ancient sacrifice itself has meanwhile become irrational presents itself to the cleverness of the weaker as the stupidity of the ritual. The ritual is accepted, the letter of the law is scrupulously observed. But the now senseless decree contradicts itself in that its own statute more and more provides the possibility of evading it. Precisely the spirit that dominates nature constantly vindicates its superiority in the competition. All bourgeois enlightenment is unanimous in the demand of sobriety, common sense, and the accurate estimation of relations of force. The wish may not be father to the thought. This is because all power in class society is bound to the nagging consciousness of its own powerlessness vis-à-vis physical nature and its social successors, the masses. Only the consciously manipulated adaptation to nature brings it under the power of the physically weaker. The *ratio*, which represses mimesis, is not simply its opposite. It too is mimesis: mimesis of death. Subjective spirit, which cancels the ensoulment of nature, masters the residue only by imitating its rigidity and despiritualizing itself. Imitation enters the service of domination in that even man becomes an anthropomorphism for man. The schema of Odyssean

cunning is the domination of nature through such adaptation. In the estimation of relative forces, which effectively makes survival dependent on the concession of one's own defeat, virtually on death, the principle of bourgeois disillusion, the external schema for the internalization of sacrifice — renunciation — is already present *in nuce*. The man of cunning survives only at the price of his own dream, which he bargains off by demystifying himself just as he demystified the external powers. He can never have it all, he must always wait, have patience, do without; he may not eat of the lotus or the cattle of holy Hyperion, and when he steers between Scylla and Charybdis he must calculate how many of his men will be torn from his boat. He just pulls through: such is his survival; and all the fame that he himself and others bestow on him for this just confirms that the title of hero is won only by violating the urge for total, universal and undiminished happiness.

The formula of Odysseus's cunning is that split-off, instrumental spirit [*Geist*] adapts resignedly to nature, renders unto nature what is nature's, and precisely thereby deceives it. The mythic monsters under whose power he falls in every case confront him with ossified conventions, legal claims of immemorial times. Thus, to the eyes of the developed patriarchal age, the ancient folk religion appears as scattered relics: under the Olympian heaven, they have become figures of abstract fate, of senseless necessity. That it would have been impossible for Odysseus to have perhaps chosen another route than the one between Scylla and Charybdis may be rationalistically construed as the mythical transformation wrought by the superior force of the sea currents over the tiny ancient ships. But in the mythically reifying conveyance the natural relation of power and powerlessness has already taken on the character of a legal relationship. Scylla and Charybdis have title to whatever comes between their teeth, as has Circe to metamorphose the unprotected, and Polyphemus to the bodies of his guests. Every one of the mythical figures is bound to carry out the same act again and again. Each consists essentially in repetition, the miscarriage of which would be their end. All bear the lineaments of what in the punishment myths of the underworld — those of Tantalus, Sisyphus, the Danaans — was established by Olympian verdict. They are figures of compulsion: the horrible deeds that they carry out are the curse they bear. Mythical ineluctability is defined by the equivalence between the curse, the atrocity that expiates the curse, and the guilt that arises from the expiation and reproduces the curse. To date all law bears the trace

of this schema. In myth, every element of the cycle makes compensation for the previous element and thereby helps to establish the nexus of guilt as law. Odysseus opposes this situation. The self represents rational universality in opposition to the ineluctability of fate. However, because he is confronted by the entwinement of the universal and the ineluctable, his rationality necessarily takes on a limiting form, that of the exception. He must escape the confining and threatening legal relationships inscribed in every mythical figure. He satisfies the verdict in such a fashion that it loses power over him precisely by his conceding this power to the verdict. It is impossible to hear the Sirens and not succumb to them: they may not be defied. Defiance and infatuation are one and the same, and whoever defies them is necessarily lost to the myth against which he set himself. Cunning, however, is defiance that has become rational. Odysseus does not try to find another route to travel than the one that leads by the island of the Sirens. Neither does he try, for example, to rely on the superiority of his knowledge and freely listen to the temptresses, imagining that his freedom would protect him. He diminishes himself, the ship takes its predetermined, fatal course, and he realizes that however consciously distant from nature he may be, he remains at its mercy if he heeds its voice. He maintains the contract of his servitude and struggles even in his bonds on the mast to throw himself into the arms that would destroy him. But, he has found a loophole in the contract through which he may escape its law while fulfilling it. The primeval contract does not stipulate whether the passer-by must listen bound or unbound. Bonds appear for the first time in an age when prisoners are not killed on the spot. Odysseus concedes the archaic superior power of the song by — technically enlightened — having himself bound. He turns his ear toward the song of pleasure and thwarts it as death. In his bounds, this listener is drawn to the Sirens as is anyone else. Yet he has found an arrangement by which, in succumbing, he does not succumb to them. Despite the force of his desire, which reflects the power of the demi-goddesses, he is unable to command that he be freed to follow his desire because his rowing companions, their ears wax-stopped, are deaf not only to the demi-goddesses but to the desperate cries of their commander. The Sirens receive what is theirs by right, but in the primordial history of the bourgeois, it has already been neutralized as the longing of the passer-by. The epic is silent on the fate of the Sirens once the ship has disappeared. In tragedy, however, it would have been their final hour,

as it was for the Sphinx when Oedipus solved the puzzle, fulfilling its dictate and thus destroying it. For the right of the mythic figures, as the right of the stronger, depends solely on the impossibility of fulfilling its statutes. Fulfilled, it is all over for the myths right down to their most distant successor. Since the fortunate misfortune of Odysseus's encounter with the Sirens all songs have been affected, and the whole of Western music labors under the paradox of song in civilization, a paradox that nevertheless gives art-music its emotional force.

The abrogation of the contract through its literal observance transforms the historical situation of language: it begins the transition to denotation. Mythical fate, *fatum*, was one with the spoken word. The sphere of thought to which fateful decrees — immutably carried out by the mythical figures — belong, does not yet recognize the distinction of word and object. The word is to have direct power over the object; expression and intention are one. Cunning, however, consists in the exploitation of this distinction. One clings to the word in order to change the matter at hand. Thus originates consciousness of intention: in his distress Odysseus awakens to this dualism through the experience that one identical word may have various meanings. Because the name *Oudeis* [Odysseus] may designate the hero as well as "Nobody," Odysseus is able to break the spell of the name. The immutable words remain formulae for the inexorable context of nature. In magic the rigidity of words already had to come up against the rigidity of fate, which magic reflected at the same time. This already implied the antithesis between the word and that to which it was assimilated. During the Homeric period this antithesis becomes determinate. Odysseus makes the linguistic discovery of what developed bourgeois society calls formalism: the price of the perennial bindingness of words is that they distance themselves from all fulfilling content and from this distance they refer to all possible content, to "Nobody" as much as to Odysseus himself. From the formalism of mythical names and laws, which want to rule over humanity and history with the indifference of nature, nominalism emerges, the prototype of bourgeois thought. Self-preserving cunning lives off of the process that governs the relation between word and object. The two contradictory acts of Odysseus in his encounter with Polyphemous — he responds to his name and he disowns it — are indeed identical. He acknowledges his name to himself by disavowing himself as "Nobody"; he saves his life by making himself disappear. This adaptation through language to death is the schema of modern mathematics.

Cunning, as a medium of exchange — one in which everything takes place above-board, in which the contract is fulfilled and yet one party is cheated — refers back to the formation of an economic character that appears, if not in primeval mythical times, then at the latest in early antiquity: in the age-old practice of "casual barter" between otherwise closed household economies. "Surpluses are occasionally exchanged, but the main source of provisions remains self-production."¹⁴ The behavior of Odysseus the adventurer is reminiscent of that of the casual barterer. Even in the pathetic image of the beggar, Odysseus, the feudal lord, bears the trace of the oriental merchant¹⁵ who returns with unheard of wealth because for the first time, and contrary to tradition, he "embarked," stepped out of the circle of the domestic economy. In economic terms, the adventurous element of his enterprise is nothing else than the irrational aspect of his *ratio* in comparison with the dominant traditional economic form. This irrationality of the *ratio* found its expression in cunning as the adaptation of bourgeois reason to that unreason that confronted it as a superior power. The cunning solitary is already the *homo economicus* whom all rational thinkers once resembled: thus the *Odyssey* is already a *Robinsonade*. These prototypical figures of the ship-wrecked make out of their weakness — the weakness of individuality separated from the collective — their social strength. Thrown to the mercy of the sea, helplessly isolated, their isolation dictates the ruthless pursuit of their self-interest. They embody the principle of capitalist economy even before they have employed a worker; what they salvage, however, for their new enterprise glorifies the truth that the entrepreneur has always entered into competition with more than the work of his own hands. Their powerlessness vis-à-vis nature already functions as ideology for their social supremacy. In Odysseus's defenselessness vis-à-vis the crashing waves resounds the legitimation for the enrichment of the traveler at the cost of the autochthonous. This principle was established later in bourgeois economics in the concept of risk: the possibility of failure is to provide the moral grounds for profit. From the standpoint of developed exchange society and its individuals, Odysseus's adventures are nothing else than the portrayal of the risks

14. Max Weber, *Wirtschaftsgeschichte*, eds. S. Hellmann and M. Palyi, 2nd. ed. (Munich and Leipzig: Duncker and Humblot, 1924) 3.

15. Victor Berard has especially emphasized — though not without many apocryphal constructions — the Semitic element of the *Odyssey*. See "Les Phéniciens et l'Odyssee," *La résurrection d'Homère* (Paris: B. Grasset, 1930) 111 ff.

that constitute the route to success. Odysseus lives according to the age-old principle that founded bourgeois society: one may choose between being deceptive or being ruined. Deception is the mark by which the particularity of the ratio reveals itself. Absolute loneliness was thus implicit in the origins of universal socialization — as its figure was outlined by the world traveler Odysseus and the independent manufacturer Crusoe — and this loneliness becomes fully manifest at the end of the bourgeois era. Radical socialization means radical alienation. Odysseus and Crusoe are both concerned with totality: the former measures, the latter produces it. Both complete totality only in complete separation from the rest of humanity, which is encountered by them exclusively in alienated form, as enemies or as fulcrums, consistently as instruments, as things.

One of the first adventures of the *nostos* [voyage home] proper — the episode of the Lotus-eaters — clearly reaches much further back, further back even than the barbaric age of grotesque demons and sorcer-divinities. Whoever eats of the Lotus succumbs, as does one who is touched by Circe's wand or hears the song of the Sirens. But nothing ill comes of submission to the Lotus: "The Lotus-eaters did not harm the men of our company."¹⁶ The only threat is that of sinking into oblivion and the surrender of the will. The curse condemns them to nothing else than a primitive condition without work and struggle in the "fertile land":¹⁷ "All who ate the lotus, sweeter than honey, thought no more of reporting to us or of returning. Instead they wished to stay there in the company of the Lotus-eaters, picking the lotus and forgetting their homeland."¹⁸ This idyll — similar indeed to the happiness of opium, with whose help the undertrudden try to make the unbearable bearable — is beyond what self-preserving reason will permit its people. It is in fact the mere semblance of happiness, a vegetating life, as paltry as animal life. At best it is the absence of the consciousness of unhappiness. Happiness, however, contains truth within itself. For happiness is in essence a result. It unfolds in the overcoming of misery. Thus the sufferer is justified who will not suffer the Lotus-eaters. Against them he takes up their own cause, the realization of utopia through historical labor, whereas the simple lingering in the image of blessedness saps their energy. However, in that rationality — Odysseus — asserts its right, it

16. *Odyssey* Book IX, 92ff.17. *Odyssey* Book XXIII, 311.18. *Odyssey* Book XI, 94 ff.

enters coercively into the context of injustice. In its immediacy, his own action serves domination. Self-preserving reason can no more grant this happiness "at the world's bounds"¹⁹ than the more dangerous happiness of later periods. The idle are routed up and transported to the galleys: "But I forced them, weeping, back to the ships, dragged them into the capacious vessels and bound them beneath the benches."²⁰ Lotus is an oriental spice. Even today the delicate slices play a part in Chinese and Indian cookery. Perhaps the temptation ascribed to it is none other than that of regression to the phase of gathering the fruits of the earth²¹ and sea, a stage even more ancient than hunting, in brief, than any form of production. It is scarcely an accident that the epic associates the idea of the land of Cockaigne with the eating of flowers, even if they are flowers that today are no longer commonplace. The eating of flowers — a customary dessert in the near East, and familiar to European children in the form of candied violets and pastries baked in rosewater — promises a life whose reproduction would be independent from conscious self-preservation and the bliss of the satiated free of the utility of scheduled nourishment. The memory of the most distant and ancient happiness, which flashes up to the sense of taste, is still intertwined with that closest proximity of all, that of incorporation. This memory refers back to prehistory. Whatever the anguish men and women have suffered, they may conceive of no happiness that does not draw on the image of that primeval age: "And so we sailed on with heavy hearts."²²

The next figure to whom Odysseus is driven — in Homer "to be driven off course" and to "be clever" are equivalent — the Cyclops Polyphemous, bears his single cartwheel-size eye as the trace of the same primeval age: the single eye is associated directly with nose and mouth;²³ it is more primitive than the symmetry of the eyes and ears, which in the unity of two converging perceptions, is the prerequisite of

19. Jacob Burckhardt, *Griechische Kulturgeschichte*, ed. Jakob Oeri, 2nd ed., 4 vols. (Stuttgart: W. Spemann, 1898-1902) III: 95.20. *Odyssey* Book IX, 98ff.21. In Indian mythology, the lotus is the earth goddess. See Heinrich Zimmer, *Maja* (Stuttgart and Berlin: Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt, 1936) 103ff. If there is a connection with mythical tradition, out of which the Homeric *nostos* developed, then the encounter with the Lotus eaters is to be understood as a stage in the struggle with the chthonic powers.22. *Odyssey* Book IX, 105.23. According to Wilamowitz, the Cyclops are "actually animals." *Glaube* I: 14.

identification, depth, and objectivity. In comparison with the Lotus-eaters, however, Polyphemous represents a later stage, that of the barbaric age of hunters and shepherds. For Homer, the idea of barbarism is of a piece with the absence of systematic agriculture and thus of any systematic organization of labor and society governing the disposal of time. He calls the Cyclops "lawless revelers"²⁴ for they — and here civilization makes secret admission of its guilt — "trusting in the power of the immortal gods, have never planted or labored with their hands for the fruit of the earth; rather without planting and plowing their crops grow, wheat and barley, and even noble vines, heavy with the large-grape wine, and Cronion's wine feeds it."²⁵ Bounty has no need of law and the civilizational indictment of anarchy sounds almost like the denunciation of bounty: "They have neither laws nor assemblies, but dwell in caverns in the mountain rocks, there in their vaulted grottoes; and each man rules his women and children as he wishes, for no one cares about the others."²⁶ This tribal society is already patriarchal, based on the suppression of the physically weaker, though not yet organized according to the standard of fixed property and its hierarchy; and it is actually the unfederatedness of the cave dwellers and the absence of objective law that provokes Homer's accusation of mutual disregard, of savagery. All the same in a later passage the pragmatic honesty of the narrator contradicts his civilized judgment: in spite of their supposed mutual indifference his tribe comes out to help him as soon as they hear the scream of the blinded Cyclops; only Odysseus's trick with his name prevents his foolish clan from actually aiding him.²⁷ Stupidity and lawlessness are presented as identical: when Homer calls the Cyclops a "lawless-minded monster,"²⁸ this does not simply mean that Polyphemous's ideas do not respect the laws of civilization, but also that his thought is lawless, unsystematic, rhapsodic, just as he is unable to solve the bourgeois cognitive task of how his uninvited guests were able to escape the cave by clinging to the underbellies of the sheep rather than riding on them or to grasp the sophistical *double entendre* in Odysseus's name. Polyphemous, who trusts in the power of the immortals, is of course a cannibal, and it is consistent that in spite

24. *Odyssey* Book IX, 106.25. *Odyssey* 107 ff.26. *Odyssey* 112 ff.27. Cf. *Odyssey* 403 ff.28. *Odyssey* 428.

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of this trust in the gods he refuses to respect them: "You must be a fool, stranger, or have come from a long way off" — in later times fool and stranger were less conscientiously distinguished and ignorance of customs, like all foreignness, was stamped as foolishness — "and here you are telling me to fear the gods and their vengeance! Zeus Cronion and his thunder mean nothing to the Cyclops, for we are superior to them."²⁹ "Superior," Odysseus mockingly recounts. What Polyphemous meant, however, was "We are older"; the power of the solar gods is recognized, but much as a feudal lord recognizes bourgeois wealth while silently thinking himself more distinguished, without realizing that the injustice done to him is of the same stamp that he himself represents. Poseidon — close by, the god of the sea, father of Polyphemous and enemy of Odysseus — is older than Zeus — the universal, distant god of the heavens — and the feud between the folk religion of elemental forces and the logocentric religion of law is waged, effectively, on the back of the subject. Lawless Polyphemous, however, is not simply the villain he is made out to be by civilizing taboos, which cast him as a monstrous Goliath in the fairy-tale books of enlightened childhood. In the meager realm in which his self-preservation had acquired a degree of order and habit, he is not lacking in reconciling qualities. When he puts the young of his sheep and goats to their udders, this practical act involves concern for the creatures themselves; and the famous cry of the blinded Cyclops to the bellwether — whom he calls his friend and asks why this time he is the last to leave the cave, and if he perhaps pities his master in his distress — is moving, in spite of its brutal ending, to a degree equalled only by the highest point of the *Odyssey* when the returning wanderer is recognized by his old dog Argos. Neither has the giant's behavior [*Verhalten*] become objectified as character. He answers the speech of the fleeing Odysseus not simply with the expression of wild hate, but only with the refusal of the law that does not yet fully encompass him: he will not spare Odysseus and his companions "if my own heart does not compel me";³⁰ whether these words are perfidious, as Odysseus claims, is unclear. Boastfully, enraptured, the drunken Polyphemous promises Odysseus gifts,³¹ and only the idea of Odysseus as "Nobody" gives him the cruel thought of fulfilling his promise by eating the leader last — perhaps

29. *Odyssey* 273 ff.30. *Odyssey* 278.31. Cf. *Odyssey* 355 ff.

because as "Nobody" Odysseus counts as non-existent to the dull wit of the Cyclops.³² The physical brutality of the overpowering giant is his ever-shifting trustfulness. Therefore, the fulfillment of the mythical ordinance, which always does injustice to the judged, also becomes injustice to the natural power that establishes the law. Polyphemous and the other monsters whom Odysseus tricks are already models of the litigious dumb devils of the Christian age right up to Shylock and Mephistopheles. The dumbness of the giant, the substance of his barbaric brutality so long as things are going his way, becomes something superior as soon as he is toppled by one who ought to know better. Odysseus insinuates himself into Polyphemous's trust — and thus disposes over Polyphemous's right of plundering human flesh — according to the schema of cunning, which breaks the law by fulfilling it: "Take, Cyclops, and drink. Wine goes well with human flesh. Find out the excellence of the vintage brought here by the ship that carried us,"³³ recommends the bearer of culture.

The adaptation of the *ratio* to its opposite, to a level of consciousness that has still not formed a fixed identity — as is represented by the clumsy giant — is indeed brought to completion in the cunning of the name. The trick is found throughout folklore. In Greek it concerns a pun: in the self-same word the name — Odysseus — and intention — "Nobody" — separate. To modern ears, Odysseus and *Oúti*s ("Nobody") sound similar, and it is easily imagined that, in one of the dialects in which the history of the return to Ithaca was handed down, the sound of the name of the island king and "Nobody" were identical. To suppose that Odysseus counted on the blinded Polyphemous answering "Nobody" to the demand of his tribesmen for the name of the malefactor, and that this answer would hide the deed and help him who bore the guilt to escape pursuit: such a supposition is clearly rationalistic. In truth, the subject, Odysseus, repudiates his own identity, by which he is a subject, and survives by mimicry of the amorphous. He names himself "Nobody," because Polyphemous is not himself a subject, and the confusion of name and object prevents the deceived barbarian from escaping the trap: his call for retribution remains magically bound to the name of the person on whom he wants revenge, and this name condemns his call to powerlessness. For by inserting the

32. "Ultimately, his frequent foolishness could appear under the light of a still-born humor." Klages 1469.

33. *Odyssey* 347 ff.

intention in the name, Odysseus withdrew the name from the realm of magic. His self-assertion, however, is — as in every epic, as in all civilization — self-denial. Thus the self enters into precisely that coercive circle of the context of nature from which it attempts to escape through adaptation. He who for his own sake names himself "Nobody" and manipulates his assimilation to the state of nature as a means of self-assertion, falls to hubris. Cunning Odysseus has no choice: fleeing, still within the range of the giant, Odysseus not only ridicules him, but reveals to him his true name and origin. It is as if he who has always just escaped were still so under the power of the primeval world that, having once been named "Nobody," he fears that he will once again become "Nobody" if he does not re-establish his own identity by means of the magic word, which has only just been separated off from rational identity. His friends try to prevent him from foolishly admitting his cunning, but to no avail and once again in more terrible danger he only barely escapes the hurled boulders, while the assertion of his name in all likelihood calls down on him the hatred of Poseidon, who is scarcely presented as an omniscient figure. Cunning, which consists in the clever taking on the guise of stupidity, becomes stupidity as soon as the guise is surrendered. This is the dialectic of eloquence. From antiquity to fascism, Homer has been reproached for his chattering heroes and narrator. Yet Homer showed himself prophetically superior to both old and new Spartans by presenting the fate that the language of the cunning man, the middleman, brings down on himself. Speech that out-maneuvers physical force is unable to stop. Its flow is a parody of the stream of consciousness, of thought itself, whose unswerving autonomy takes on an element of idiosyncrasy — a manic quality — when in speech it enters reality as if thought and reality were homogeneous, whereas indeed it is only through its distance from reality that thought has power over it. This distance, however, is at the same time anguish. Contrary to the proverb, it is therefore intelligent tongues that are always ready to talk by the dozen. Odysseus is objectively determined by the anxiety that, if he does not ceaselessly affirm the fragile superiority of the word against force, this force will dissolve his superiority. For the word knows that it is weaker than the nature that it has deceived. He who speaks too much lets violence and injustice show through as his own principle and excites the one who inspires fear to do precisely what was constantly feared. The mythical coercion of the word in the primeval age is perpetuated in the

disaster that the enlightened word brings down on itself. *Outis*, who compulsively declares himself Odysseus, already bears the characteristics of the Jew who even in fear of death still insists on the superiority conferred on him by the fear of death, and the revenge on the middleman not only appears at the end of bourgeois society but also at its beginning as the negative utopia towards which all violence continually strives.

In contrast to the tales of escape from myth, such as that of Odysseus from the cannibal, the story of Circe's sorcery points back again to the stage of magic proper. Magic disintegrates the self that falls under its power and is thus forced to regress to an older biological species. The power that dissolves the self is once again that of oblivion; by attacking the fixed order of time, it attacks the fixed will of the subject, which is oriented by this order. Circe seduces the men into surrendering themselves to instinct; ever since, the animal form taken by the men has been associated with this surrender to instinct and Circe has been made the prototype of the hetaera. The origin of this image of Circe is Hermes's verse that attributes as self-evident the erotic initiative to her: "Thus, frightened, she will ask you to sleep with her. Do not hesitate before the goddess's bed."³⁴ Circe's signature is ambiguity, just as she alternately appears as corrupter and helper; ambiguity characterizes even her lineage, for she is the daughter of Helios and the granddaughter of Oceanos.³⁵ The elements of fire and water are undivided in her and it is this undividedness, in opposition to the primacy of a determinate aspect of nature — whether this aspect be the maternal or the patriarchal — that constitutes the essence of promiscuity, the hetaera, as appears even in the prostitute's eyes, in the moist reflected light of the moon.³⁶ The hetaera grants happiness and destroys the autonomy of the man she pleases; this is her ambiguity. But though his autonomy is destroyed she does not necessarily destroy him: she affirms an older form of life.³⁷ Like the Lotus-eaters, Circe does not injure her guests, and even those whom she has made wild animals are peaceful:

34. *Odyssey* Book X, 296 ff.

35. Cf. *Odyssey* 138 ff. Cf. also F. C. Baur, *Symbolik und Mythologie*, 2 vols. (Stuttgart: J.B. Metzler, 1824-1825) I: 47.

36. Cf. Baudelaire, *Les fleurs du mal*, "Le vin du solitaire" ["Le regard singulier d'une femme galante/Qui se glisse vers nous comme le rayon blanc/Que la lune onduleuse envoie au lac tremblant/Quand elle y veut baigner sa beauté nonchalante;"] *Oeuvres complètes* (Paris: Seuil, 1968) 110.]

37. Cf. J. A. K. Thomson, *Studies in the Odyssey* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1914) 133.

Round about there were mountain wolves and long-maned lions which she herself rendered harmless with potent drugs. They did not attack the men but stood on their hind legs, as if fawning upon them, wagging their tails like dogs who surround their master when he leaves the table, because he always brings tasty morsels with him. And so these fierce-clawed wolves and lions fawned upon my men.³⁸

The enchanted men act like wild animals who hear the music of Orpheus. The mythical command to which they succumb at the same time frees the repressed nature in them. What is recalled in their reversion to myth is itself myth. The repression of instinct, which constitutes the men as selves and separates them from the animal, was the introversion of repression in the hopelessly closed cycle of nature, the cycle which — according to an older interpretation — echoes in the name, Circe. The powerful magic, however, that reminds them of an idealized primeval age, not only changes them into animals, it at the same time produces — as in the story of the Lotus-eaters — the semblance of reconciliation, however delusive. Yet, because they were once men, the civilizational epic only knows to present what happened to them as a calamitous fall and scarcely allows a trace of their pleasure to appear. Such traces are the more emphatically cancelled, the more civilized the sacrifices themselves are.³⁹ Odysseus's companions are not, like earlier guests, transformed into sacred creatures of the wild, but rather into undean domestic animals, into swine. Perhaps remembrance of the chthonic cult of Demeter — for whom the swine was sacred — plays into the epic here.⁴⁰ Perhaps it is also the idea of the human-like anatomy of the pig and its nakedness that explains the motif: as if the Ionians maintained the same taboo against the interbreeding of like with like, such as was held by the Jews. Here one may perhaps also think of the taboo on cannibalism, for in Juvenal the taste of human flesh is constantly described as similar to swine. In any case, all later civilization has had a predilection for calling those people swine whose instinct is directed toward other pleasures than those society sanctions as fulfilling its aims. In the metamorphosis of the sailors, magic and counter-magic are bound up with herbs and wine; intoxication and awakening are bound up with the sense of smell,

38. *Odyssey* 212 ff.

39. Murray deals with "sexual expurgations" to which, in his opinion, the Homeric poems were subjected. Cf. Murray 141 ff.

40. "In general, swine are Demeter's sacrificial animals." Wilamowitz, *Glaube* II: 53.

the ever more suppressed and repressed sense, which is most closely linked to sex and memory of prehistory.⁴¹ In the image of swine, however, the pleasure of smell is already degraded to the unfree snuffling⁴² of one who has the nose to the ground and has renounced an upright posture. It is as if the seductress, in the magical ritual to which she subjects the men, repeats the ritual to which patriarchal society repeatedly subjects her. Under the pressure of civilization, women tend to adopt the civilizational judgment on women and to defame the sex. In the confrontation of enlightenment and myth, whose traces the epic preserves, the powerful seductress is at the same time already weak, obsolete, vulnerable and requires obedient animals as her escorts.⁴³ As a representative of nature in bourgeois society, woman has become an enigmatic image of irresistibility⁴⁴ and powerlessness. As such she is a mirror that reflects back to domination the vain lie, the domination of nature, which bourgeois society posits in place of reconciliation with nature.

Marriage is the middle way for settling this situation: the woman remains powerless in that her power is completely mediated by the man. Something of this arrangement is evident in the defeat of the hetaira-goddess of the *Odyssey*, whereas the fully defined marriage relation with Penelope — in literary terms a more recent layer of the epic — represents a more developed patriarchal arrangement. With Odysseus's arrival in Aiaia, the ambiguous relation of man and woman, alternating between longing and command, already takes on the form of a contractually secured exchange. Renunciation is the condition of this contract. Odysseus resists Circe's magic. Precisely on this account he obtains what her magic only deceptively promises to those who do not resist her. Odysseus sleeps with her. But first he makes her swear to the great oath of the sacred, to the Olympians. The oath is to protect the man from mutilation, from revenge for breaking the prohibition on promiscuity and for male domination, domination that — as the permanent renunciation of instinct — nevertheless symbolically carries out the self-mutilation of the man. He who resisted her, the lord, the self,

41. Cf. Freud, "Das Unbehagen in der Kultur," *Gesammelte Werke*, 18 vols. (Frankfurt/Main: S. Fischer, 1968-1978) XIV: 459, n.

42. In a note Wilamowitz surprisingly refers to the connection between the concept of snuffling and that of *neōs*, autonomously reason: "Schwyzer has very convincingly established the relation between *neōs* and snorting and snuffling." (Wilamowitz, *Heimkehr* 191.) Wilamowitz of course disputes that this etymological connection has any meaning.

43. Cf. *Odyssey* Book X, 329.

44. The consciousness of irresistibility was expressed later in the cult of Aphrodite Peithon, "whose magic tolerates no resistance." (Wilamowitz, *Glaube* II: 152.)

whom — because he can not be metamorphosed — Circe reproaches for having "an insensitive, unyielding heart" is the one to whom she subjects herself: "Put your sword away. Let us go to our bed so that joined there in sleep and love we may learn to trust one another."⁴⁵ On the pleasure she grants she sets the price that pleasure be disdained; the last hetaira proves to be the first feminine character. In the transition from legend to history, she makes a decisive contribution to bourgeois coldness. She puts into practice the prohibition on love, which later became ever more pervasive the more that love, as an ideology, had to mask the hatred of competitors. In the world of exchange he is wrong who gives more; the lover, however, always loves beyond measure. Whereas the sacrifice made is glorified, jealous eyes guard that the lover be spared no sacrifice. Precisely in love itself the lover is made to do wrong and is punished for it. The inability to master himself and others, which proves his love, is grounds enough to refuse him fulfillment. In society loneliness is reproduced and extended. The mechanism permeates even the most tender lacements of feeling, to the point that love itself, in order to find any way at all to the other, is driven to such coldness that it disintegrates in the process of its own realization. — Circe's power, which subjugates men as servants to her, becomes her servitude to him who, through renunciation, annulled subjugation. The influence over nature, which Homer attributes to her, dwindles to priestly prophecy and even to clever sagacity with regard to future difficulties of the voyage. This lives on in the caricature of female wisdom. The prophecies of the disempowered enchantress concerning the Sirens as well as Scylla and Charybdis indeed ultimately serve only masculine self-preservation.

How heavy a price was paid, however, for the establishment of ordered relations of procreation is betrayed only by the obscure verses that describe Odysseus's friends whom Circe, by order of her contractual master, changes back into humans. The passage begins: "They soon became men again, and younger than they had been, and much more handsome in appearance and noble in bearing."⁴⁶ But these men who are confirmed and strengthened in their masculinity are not happy: "Sweet-sour melancholy seized them all and the walls echoed their weeping."⁴⁷ Thus the oldest wedding hymn may have sounded, sung in accompaniment to a banquet that celebrated a rudimentary

45. *Odyssey* Book X, 329.

46. *Odyssey* Book X, 395 ff.

47. *Odyssey* Book X, 398 ff.

marriage that lasts only a year. Odysseus's marriage to Penelope has more in common with the earlier form of marriage than may be suspected. Prostitute and wife are the complementary figures of female self-alienation in the patriarchal world: the wife betrays pleasure for the fixed order of life and property, whereas the prostitute — secretly allied with the wife — once again subsumes to a relation of property what the wife's property rights have left free and sells pleasure. As much like mythical powers as bourgeois housewives, Circe like Calypso,⁴⁸ the courtesans, are presented as diligent weavers, whereas Penelope, like a prostitute, mistrustfully appraises the homecomer to determine if he is not actually only an old beggar or perhaps a god in search of adventure. The much-praised scene of Odysseus's homecoming has an obviously patrician character: "She sat there for a long time without saying a word, astonished beyond measure. At one moment, as she scrutinized his face, he seemed just like her husband; at another, his worn clothes made him unrecognizable."⁴⁹ There is no spontaneous reaction, she does not want to make a mistake, which indeed she can hardly permit given the pressure of the situation weighing on her. Irritated by this, young Telemachos, who has not yet fully adapted to his future position, nevertheless already feels himself to be man enough to rebuke his mother. The reproach of obstinacy and hardheartedness with which he charges her is precisely the same that Circe earlier raised against Odysseus. If the hetaera makes the patriarchal world her own, the monogamous wife is herself not satisfied and does not rest until she has made herself equal to the masculine character. Thus the marriage partners come to an understanding. The test to which she puts the home-comer has as content the unmovable position of the marriage bed, which the husband in his youth crafted around an olive tree as a symbol of the unity of sex and property. With touching shrewdness she speaks of this bed as if it were moveable, and angrily her husband answers her with a detailed account of his longlasting handicraft: as the prototypical bourgeois his cleverness includes a hobby. It consists of the repetition of manual labor from which, in the framework of differentiated property relations, he had necessarily long been emptied. He takes pleasure in this type of labor because the freedom to do what is — for a man in his position — superfluous, confirms for

48. Cf. Baur 49.

49. *Odyssey* Book XXIII, 93 ff.

him his power over those who must do such labor if they want to live. By this the ingenious Penelope recognizes him and flatters him with praise for his exceptional intellect. This flattery, however, in which there is certainly an element of mockery, is suddenly broken by words that seek the basis for the couple's suffering in the envy of the gods for their happiness, secured only by marriage, by "the promise of permanence".⁵⁰ "The immortals sent misery down upon us, thinking it too much that we should enjoy our youth together and then gently reach old age."⁵¹ Marriage is not only a contractual relation between the living, but also: solidarity in facing death. Reconciliation develops in marriage around subjugation, just as in history to date the human has thrived precisely and exclusively on the barbarism that is veiled by humanity. Even if what comes of the contract between the couple at the cost of great effort is only immemorial enmity, nevertheless, like Baucis and Philomen, the peacefully aging disappear together, just as the smoke of the sacrificial altar is transformed into the wholesome smoke of the fireside. Marriage is indeed part of the mythical bedrock of civilization. But its mythical hardness and fixity emerges from myth like a small island above the infinite sea.

The uttermost stop of his wanderings is no such place of refuge. It is Hades. The figures that the adventurer sees in the first conjuring of the dead are primarily those patriarchal images⁵² that were banned by the solar religion: after Odysseus's own mother, towards whom Odysseus compels himself to act with patriarchal and expedient vigor,⁵³ come the ancient heroines. The image of the mother, however, is powerless, blind and mute,⁵⁴ a delusional idea like epic narration in the moments in which it surrenders language to image. Sacrificial blood is required as a pledge of living recollection in order to give the image speech, through which it wrests itself free — however vainly and ephemerally — from mythical muteness. Only by mastering itself through the

50. Goethe, *Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre*, *Sämtliche Werke. Münchener Ausgabe*, ed. Karl Richter, 10 vols. (Munich: Hanser, 1988) V (book 1, chap. 16): 64.

51. *Odyssey* Book XXIII, 210 ff.

52. Cf. Thomson 28.

53. "I saw her and my eyes filled with tears, and my heart was moved. Yet I prevented her as well from approaching the blood before I had asked Teiresias — even though I was profoundly stirred." *Odyssey* Book XI, 87 ff.

54. "Over there I see my dead mother's soul. As though speechless, she sits by the blood and does not dare to look at her own son, or to say a single word. Tell me, Lord, how shall I go about letting her know that I am who I am?" *Odyssey* Book XI, 141 ff.

recognition of the nullity of the images does subjectivity partake in the hope that the images can only, vainly, promise. For Odysseus the promised land is not the archaic realm of images. All of the images finally release to him — as shadows in the realm of the dead — their true essence, semblance. He becomes free of them once he has recognized them as dead and with the masterful gesture of self-preservation driven them from the sacrifice. He allows exclusively those to approach it who afford him knowledge useful to his life, in which the power of myth continues to assert itself solely as imagination, transposed into spirit. The realm of the dead, in which the enervated myths assembled, is farthest from the homeland. The underworld communicates with it only through this most extreme distance. If one accepts Kirchhoff's assumption that the visit of Odysseus to Hades belongs to the oldest level of the epic, to its source in legend,⁵⁵ then it is at the same time this oldest level in which there is a tendency — as is found in the tradition of the journeys of Orpheus and Hercules to the underworld — that most definitively goes beyond myth, just as the motif of the forcing of the gates of hell, of the annulment of death constitutes the innermost cell of any antimythological thought. This antimythological element is contained in Teiresias's prophecy of the possible reconciliation with Poseidon. Carrying an oar on his shoulder, Odysseus is to wander continually until he reaches a people "who do not know the sea and never eat food seasoned with salt."⁵⁶ When another traveler meets him and tells him that he is carrying a winnowing fan on his shoulder, then Odysseus has reached the correct spot to offer a reconciling sacrifice to Poseidon. The core of the prophecy is the mistaking of the oar for a winnowing fan. The Ionians must have found it irresistibly funny. But this humor, on which reconciliation is made to depend, could not be directed toward men, but toward the offended Poseidon.⁵⁷ The misunderstanding is to make the fierce elemental god

55. "I cannot help but see the whole of Book II with the exception of a few passages . . . as a displaced fragment of the old *nostos*, and therefore as one of the oldest parts of the poem." Adolph Kirchhoff, *Die homerische Odyssee* (Berlin: Hertz, 1879) 226. — "Whatever else is original in the myth of Odysseus, the Visit to Death is." Thomson 95.
56. *Odyssey* Book XI, 122 f.

57. He was originally the "husband of the earth" (cf. Wilamowitz, *Glaube* I: 112 ff.) and only later became the god of the sea. Teiresias's prophecy perhaps alludes to his dual nature. It is conceivable that reconciliation with Poseidon through an agricultural sacrifice, far from the sea, depends on the symbolic restoration of his chthonic power. This restoration may express the agricultural expiation of the marauding expedition at sea: the cults of Poseidon and Demeter were intertwined. (Cf. Thomson 96, n.).

of the sea laugh so that in his laughter his fury would disappear. This is analogous to one of Grimm's fairy tales in which a neighbor advises a mother on how to get rid of a changeling: "She told her to carry the changeling into the kitchen, place it near the hearth, make a fire and boil water in two eggshells: that would make the changeling laugh, and if the changeling was made to laugh, then its fate was sealed."⁵⁸ Even if to this day laughter is the sign of force, the irruption of blind and obdurate nature, it also bears in itself the antithetical element: in laughter, blind nature becomes conscious of itself precisely as such and gives up its destructive force. This duality of laughter is close to that of the name and perhaps names are nothing but frozen laughter, as is still evident today in nicknames, the only names in which something of the original act of naming survives. Laughter is bound to the guilt of subjectivity, but in the suspension of law, which it announces, it also points beyond entrapment. It promises the way home. Homesickness is the origin of the adventures through which subjectivity — whose protohistory is presented by the *Odyssey* — escapes prehistory. The innermost paradox of the epic is that the concept of homeland — which the fascists want to identify with myth — is opposed to myth. Sedimented in this paradox is recollection of history, in which settledness, the precondition of all homeland, follows the nomadic age. Although the fixed order of property, which is an aspect of settledness, is the basis of alienation from which all homesickness and all longing for a lost primordial condition originates, it is nevertheless at the same time only by way of settledness and fixed property that the concept of homeland develops, that toward which all longing and all homesickness are directed. Novalis's definition, according to which all philosophy is homesickness, is true only if this homesickness is not dissolved into the phantasm of a lost golden age, but is rather homeland, nature itself, as what has been wrested free from myth. Homeland is the state of having escaped. Therefore the reproach that the Homeric legends are those that "distance themselves from the earth," is a guarantee of their truth: "They turn toward humanity."⁵⁹ The translation of the

58. Grimm, *Kinder- und Hausmärchen* (Leipzig, n.d.) 208. Closely related themes have come down from antiquity, and indeed precisely from Demeter. Once, when she "had come to Eleusis in search of her kidnapped daughter" she was "received by Dysaules and his wife Baubo, but in her deep mourning she refused both food and drink. So her hostess, Baubo, made her laugh by suddenly lifting up her dress and showing her belly." Freud, X: 399. Cf. Salomon Reinach, *Cultes, Mythes et Religions*, 5 vols. (Paris: E. Leroux, 1905-1923) IV: 115 ff.

59. Hölderlin, "Der Herbst," *Sämtliche Werke* II: 290. ["die Erde sich entfemen/ . . . Sie kehren zu der Menschheit sich."]

myths into the novel, which is accomplished in the narration of Odysseus's adventure, does not so much falsify them as pull myth into time, revealing the abyss that separates myth from homeland and reconciliation. A terrible vengeance has been wreaked on the primordial world by civilization, and through this vengeance it is identical with this primordial world, as is most gruesomely documented in Homer's account of the mutilation of Melanthius the herdsman. This account wrests itself free of vengeance not by the content of the deeds. It is self-consciousness in the moment of narration that stills terror. Discourse itself, speech in opposition to mythical song, the possibility of remembering the disaster that has occurred, is the law of Homeric escape. It is not by accident that the escaping hero is constantly reintroduced as narrator. The cold distance of narration — which expresses even the horrible as if it were meant for entertainment — at the same time allows the horror as such to appear, which in song is solemnly obfuscated as fate. Where the account comes to a halt, however, is the caesura, the transformation of the reported into something that happened long ago, and by virtue of this caesura the semblance of freedom lights up, which ever since civilization has not succeeded in extinguishing. Book twenty-two of the *Odyssey* describes the punishment to which the son of the island king subjects the traitorous maids who had reverted to prostitution. With an emotionless composure, an inhumanity rivaled only by the *impassibilité* of the great narrators of the nineteenth century, the fate of those hung is portrayed and compared with the death of birds caught in nets, expressionlessly, with that silence that crystallizes in the wake of all authentic discourse. The passage concludes by reporting that the row of bodies "kicked their feet a little while, but not for long."⁶⁰ The narrator's precision, which already radiates the frigidity of anatomy and vivisection,⁶¹ gives a novelistic depiction of the dying convulsions of the subjugated, who under the sign of law and right were thrown down into that realm from which Odysseus, the judge, escaped. As a burgher meditating on the hanging,

60. *Odyssey* Book XXII, 473.

61. Willamowitz thinks that the sentence passed on the women "is recounted by the author with satisfaction." (Willamowitz, *Heimkehr* 67.) While the authoritarian philologist enthuses over the image of the line of bird snares for capturing in a "compelling and . . . modern way, how the bodies of the hanged women dangle," (Willamowitz, *Heimkehr* 76), the pleasure is for the most part his own. Willamowitz's writings are among the most characteristic documents of the German intertwining of barbarism and culture, which is based on contemporary Philhellenism.

Homer comforts the listeners, who are actually readers, by establishing the fact that it did not last long, an instant — according to the *Odyssey* — and it was over.⁶² But after the "not for long" the inner flow of the narrative comes to a halt. The gesture of the narrator — which belies his composure — is that of a question: Not for long? By bringing the account to a halt, the gesture prevents the forgetting of the condemned and reveals the unnameable eternal torture of the second in which the maids struggled against death. No echo from the "not for long" remains except the *quo usque tandem*,⁶³ which the rhetors of a later period unwittingly profaned by encouraging themselves to be patient. Hope takes shape in the report of the atrocity, however, with the idea that it took place long ago. For the entanglement of primeval time, barbarism and culture, Homer offers the consolation that it happened long ago. Only by first becoming a novel does the epic become a fairy tale.

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62. Gilbert Murray draws attention to the consoling effort of the verse. According to his theory, scenes of torture were expurgated from Homer by a civilized censorship. The death of Melanthius and the prostitutes are remnants of these scenes (Murray 146).

63. ["How long will it last?" — Cicero]