ANDRÉ GIDE AND THE VOICES OF REBELLION

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The Dostoevsky centenary celebration in Paris in 1921 featured, among other events, an allocution at Jacques Copeau’s Vieux-Colombier theater by André Gide, the novelist and founder in 1908 of the now-famous *Nouvelle Revue Française*. The novel in the Western World, said Gide, “à part de très rares exceptions, ne s’occupe que des relations des hommes entre eux, rapports passionnels ou intellectuels, rapports de famille, de société, de classes sociales—mais jamais, presque jamais, des rapports de l’individu avec lui-même ou avec Dieu.”

Although referring to Dostoevsky, Gide was apparently also thinking of his own endeavors. What attracted him to the Russian writer, in spite of Nietzsche’s announcement concerning God’s death, was the protagonists’ insistent dialogues with themselves, with God, and with Mammon. Gide’s books, like Dostoevsky’s, describe the battles his heroes and heroines wage with their divided selves. These struggles for identity reflect Gide’s own search for

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1“… except for very few exceptions, is concerned solely with relationships among men, relationships of passion or intellect, family or society relationships, or those of social classes—but never, almost never, with the individual’s relationship to himself or to God.” André Gide, *Dostoïevsky* (Paris: Henri Jonquières et Cie, 1928), p. 59. See W. W. Holdheim, *Theory and Practice of the Novel: A Study of André Gide* (Geneva: Droz, 1968); see also Mischa Harry Fayer, *Gide, Freedom and Dostoevsky* (Burlington, Vt.: Lane Press, 1946).
authenticity or, as he would also say, “sincerity.” “Le seul drame qui vraiment m’intéresse et que je voudrais toujours à nouveau relater, c’est le débat de tout être avec ce qui l’empêche d’être authentique, avec ce qui s’oppose à son intégrité, à son intégration.”

Varied as Gide’s fiction is, it is self-contained, even coherent, so that from Les Cahiers d’André Walter (1891), through Saül (1903), to Thésée (1946) we can chart a path stressing bondage, self-deception, spiritual blindness, and submission to authority as forms of inauthenticity that Gide dramatizes in order to move his readers toward insight, creativity, and freedom.

The contrapuntal use of bondage and freedom within Gide’s works reflects his lifelong effort to define moral good and evil. Whatever inhibits the development of man’s authentic being is evil, and whatever enhances it is good. Hence the exuberance of a book like Les Nourritures terrestres (1897), in which Gide’s persona has liberated himself from the bonds that once interfered with his development. The self, free at last to savor earthly instead of heavenly nourishment, manifests this newfound strength joyously. The opposite of this joy is sadness, dejection, and melancholy: “La mélancolie n’est que de la ferveur retombée.” We have only to read the Journal entries of 1916 accompanying the writing of Numquid et tu . . . ? to understand the meaning of this particular juxtaposition. In January and February of 1916, Gide is reading Bossuet and Pascal and praying fervently. One month later he speaks of insomnia, nervous troubles, and his extreme continence. In October 1916, he refers to a desperate struggle, the dominion of sadness, the diminution of fervor, and a feeling of despair verging on suicide and madness. He speaks of conversion, writes Numquid et tu . . . ?, makes soul-shattering entries in his Journal, and asks for God’s help, yet he is also writing Si le grain ne meurt (1920). Gide’s Catholic critics speak of duplicity. Even if we were to label a demonstration of this kind by so harsh a name it would be impossible not to see a

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2 “The only drama that really interests me and that I would like to relate again and again is the dispute of every individual with whatever prevents him from being authentic, with whatever is opposed to his integrity, to his integration” (Journal, July 3, 1930). In French: the two-volume Pléiade edition (Paris: Gallimard, 1948 and 1954). In English: the four-volume Random House edition (New York: 1947-51). The English translations that appear in this article are my own.

parallel between the crises recorded in his *Journal* and their artistic equivalents in his fiction. By October 1917, Gide has recovered from his "crisis," and by the end of November he basked in an "immense étourdissement du bonheur." Gide concludes that where God has failed, man has triumphed. It is a triumph of joy and the flesh over austerity and godliness. André Walter, the protagonist of *Les Cahiers d'André Walter*, followed an opposite path and went mad. Alissia, the heroine of *La Porte étroite* (1909), died. It is as though Gide were recording the drama of another fictional character, himself, and the *Journal* becomes another novel.

Gide spoke frequently of the need to "manifest," to make public, to show, to reveal, or to bear witness to. It is no accident that in *Le Traité du Narcisse* (1891) the author's persona says: "Nous vivons pour manifester. Les règles de la morale et de l'esthétique sont les mêmes: toute oeuvre qui ne manifeste pas est inutile et par cela même, mauvaise. Tout homme qui ne manifeste pas est inutile et mauvais." Gide's *Journal* reveals that the processes of art and the processes of living bear such a striking resemblance to each other that one is tempted to agree with Oscar Wilde: Life does perhaps imitate art.

In Gide's fiction the moral and the aesthetic points of view coincide. Each one of his works, while not exclusively a moral treatise, touches on a moral issue close to Gide. Each one is a fragment of the mosaic. While the Gidean "dialogue" is an artistic device, a juxtaposition of opposites, an aesthetic stance inherited from Goethe, its motive is Gide's desire to "manifest." The form of the dialogue is aesthetic but its content is moral.

Many critics have stressed Gide's search for integrity and revolt against external authority, but they have not always analyzed the meaning of this revolt in terms of the rebellious self which, in Gidean terms, triggers the mechanism of self-preservation—that is, the reaction of an inner, humanistic self against an outer, authoritarian voice. This striving for authenticity of the inner self against external

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4"... immense dizzying happiness" (*Journal*, November 30, 1917).
6"We live in order to manifest and bring forth. The rules of morality and aesthetics are the same: every work of art which does not manifest or bring forth is useless and therefore bad. Every man who does not manifest or bring forth is useless and bad" (Paris: Gallimard, 1958, p. 8).
imperatives raises the problem of what Gide means by “sincerity.”

This problem is complicated by the complex meaning Gide attaches to “authenticity.” First, there is a fidelity to the self that may require social duplicity. On this level we might, for instance, get the marvelous development of Stendhal’s Julien Sorel. Second, there is a fidelity to art, which may be interpreted as insincerity if a different ethic of allegiance is postulated. Gide’s Journal falls into this category. Finally, there is self-deception, based perhaps on a fidelity to social, moral, or religious values. On the surface, and because they conform, these values appear sincere, but in fact, according to Gide, they may deny basic needs. Gide placed Jacques Copeau, Henri Ghéon, Charles Du Bos, and all his other converted friends in this category: “Il n’est pas une de ces conversions où je ne découvre quelque inavouable motivation secrète: fatigue, peur, déboire, maladie, impuissance sexuelle ou sentimentale.” Gide considered every convert to Catholicism comparable to a war casualty, suffering from a spiritual trauma comparable to being gassed: “Car il n’est pas un de ces convertis dont l’esprit n’offrait quelque fissure (qu’un examen psychologique un peu subtil et approfondi permet toujours de découvrir) par où le gaz mystique pût pénétrer.”

Gide maintained that in such cases insincerity parades a mask of religion strong enough to alter the needs of the authentic self, and that the weakened self, as in the case of the Prodigal Son (Gide’s version is called Le Retour de l’Enfant prodigue), either out of fatigue or laziness or despair, submits to the comfort and reassurance of a preestablished system like the Church. The moment we fall into the straightjacket of ready-made conventions we stop being creative in our moral relationships—or moral in our creative lives, for that

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8 “There is not one of these conversions in which I do not detect some secret, unknowable motivation; fatigue, fear, disappointment, sickness, sexual or emotional impotence” (Journal, December 14, 1933).

9 “For there is not one of these converted cases whose mind did not reveal some crack (which the least subtle and careful psychological examination always detects) through which the mystical gas was able to penetrate.” Journal 1889-1939 (Paris: Gallimard, Pléiade edition, 1948), p. 1284. See Ben Stoltzfus, “The Catholic Dialogue,” Gide’s Eagles, pp. 73-125.
matter. Gide viewed authoritarianism or, more specifically, submission to it, as a disease capable of destroying the free, creative spontaneity of the self. The entire question of Gidean sincerity, then, revolves around the conflict of the authentic and free self with the inauthentic self enslaved by an a priori system. Assuming an authoritarian environment, there can be no search for the authentic self without some form of preliminary revolt.  

L'on t'a dit: la crainte de Dieu est le commencement de la sagesse; puis, Dieu absent, la crainte t'est restée pour compte. Comprends aujourd'hui que la sagesse commence où finit la crainte, qu'elle commence avec la révolte de Prométhée.

L'on t'a dit, tu t'es laissé dire, qu'il s'agissait d'abord de croire. Il s'agit d'abord de douter.

Gide insists that the beginning of wisdom is a form of Cartesian doubt. Sincerity, then, is a point of view. It is subjective (the way I see things) or objective (the way others see me). If I, like Julien Sorel, pay lip service to objective values because my secret ambition must use them temporarily in order to succeed, who is to say that my goal, once achieved, is insincere? Submission or revolt define what is good for the self, and the self either remains faithful to its needs or it succumbs. "Ils m'ont cru révolté (Claudel et Jammes) parce que je n'ai pu obtenir—ou voulu exiger—de moi cette lâche soumission qui m'eût assuré le confort."  

It is insincere, argues Gide, to submit to an authority which contradicts the needs of the authentic self. Gide concurs with his Catholic "opponents" that man cannot serve both God and

10See Theory and Practice of the Novel: A Study of André Gide, p. 15. W. W. Holdheim believes, as I do, that Gide's work must be situated within the context of his early rebellion, "since Gide's revolt is the point of departure of his entire intellectual adventure."

11"It has been said: the fear of God is the beginning of wisdom; but then, with God's disappearance, the fear remains. Today it should be understood that wisdom begins where fear ends, with the revolt of Prometheus.

It has been said, you let it be said, that it was first a question of believing. It is first a question of doubting" (Journal, December 14, 1933).  

12"They thought I was a rebel (Claudel and Jammes) because I was unable to obtain—or unwilling to demand—from myself the cowardly submission which would have ensured my comfort" (Journal, July 14, 1914). Albert Camus, the author of The Rebel, pays grateful tribute to Gide's influence in the special N.R.F. edition entitled Hommage à André Gide, 1869-1951 (Paris: Gallimard, 1951), p. 227.
Mammon—though, significantly, many of Gide's fictional characters do not know whom they are serving. In *La Symphonie pastorale* (1919) the pastor cannot distinguish between the voice of God and the voice of Mammon. His moral trauma and confusion are so great that he is compelled to write a journal in the hope that its narrative will isolate and define the tragic meaning of events that have overwhelmed him.

François Mauriac, though not as vehemently as others, attacked Gide’s “reversal” of values and criticized him severely for turning the world “upside down.”

On ne saurait avoir parié contre le christianisme avec plus de sang-froid et de raisonnement que Gide. . . . La plupart des hommes choisissent de ne pas choisir. Très peu osent décider que le mal est le bien et que le bien est le mal. Très peu osent, pour parler comme Bossuet: “renverser ce tribunal de la conscience qui condamnait tous les crimes.” Ce qu'a accompli Gide avec une tranquillité, une sérénité, une joie qui faisaient peur.¹³

For Gide, the conflicts between God and Mammon, good and evil, right and wrong, are all relative and entirely dependent on the authoritarian-humanistic dichotomy of the outer- versus the inner-directed person. The Catholics felt it incumbent upon them to attack Gide’s system of nondirective, humanistic ethics just as strongly as he was attacking their authoritarian system. Gide’s correspondence with Paul Claudel and Francis Jammes represents, basically, the confrontation of these two mutually exclusive “systems.”¹⁴

Gide was not, however, as his Catholic opponents were claiming, rejecting Christian morality.


Gide was rejecting primarily an a priori system which provided little room for personal initiative and the kind of moral re-creation compatible with each distinct individual. This is why the boy, Gide, in Si le grain ne meurt, insists so strongly that he is "not like the others." This is why the question of individuality is treated ironically in Le Prométhée mal enchainé (1899). This is why, as an amateur botanist, Gide dwells on the specificity and distinct quality of each flower or plant. Gide is almost pathologically afraid that the individuality of man will be smothered under the control of a rigid system that does not provide for some differentiation. He wants to preserve the many complexities and possibilities of being. He is not advocating moral anarchy or revolution, though it must have seemed so to many. He proposes long before Sartre that every man, insofar as he is intelligent enough to do so, act according to values which are constantly to be questioned, reevaluated, and re-created.

Gide’s authorial point of view is critical and ironic: it is critical of submission to authority; it is critical of excess; it is critical of duplicity and blindness (moral as well as spiritual); and it is critical of diseased individualism. Gide fought against the complacency and smugness of militant a priori systems.

Actually, the totality of Gide’s work is a treatise on morals. The irony in his “dialogue” with the Catholic Church is that he saw the devil working through the Church while the Church accused him of being the devil. Jean Anouilh’s treatment of Joan of Arc in L’Alouette (1953) presents a parallel study of such a conflict. The Inquisition is accusing Joan of heresy and individualism. She must recant. But in order to do so she must renounce the validity of her inner voices—in other words, deny the very essence of her being, her integrity. This she refuses to do, and she is burned because she protests against the authority of the Mother Church. Gide, too, 15

15 "I know of nothing more important in the history of humanity. I come back to it constantly and I know that there are two teachings whose virtue man will never exhaust: that of Christ, and that of ‘Greek fable.’ And that Christ’s is infinitely superior” (Journal, January 23, 1923).
would defend the authenticity of inner voices, particularly if they oppose the structure of some external monolith. But he is acutely aware that crass selfishness, as in the case of L'Immoraliste (1902), may violate the delicate balance of human relationships. He stresses the importance of reason and the reasoned evaluation of a choice, an act, or an event. In such a context his flirtation with and rejection of Communism is an example of intellect rectifying an error prompted by desire. "Je dus reconnaître mon erreur, et que c'étaient des vertus chrétiennes que j'espérais trouver dans le communisme."  

The irony of this statement is surely not unintentional, the implication being that although Christian virtues are not outdated, the Church is. "Ah! que tout irait bien si l'on avait affaire au Christ! Mais la religion, ce n'est pas le Christ; c'est le prêtre."  

Communism was indeed, as Raymond Aron has noted, the opiate of many intellectuals who, disillusioned with the forms of Western Christianity as well as capitalism, looked to Communism with unabashedly starry eyes. Gide, unlike most, was quickly disillusioned. Though he liked the Russian people he recognized that a political dictatorship tyrannized the individual as much, though in a different way, as any moral dictatorship. He spoke of Christianity as "cette incomparable école d'individualisation, où chacun est plus précieux que tous."  

That he looked toward Communism for such individualism implies that either he knew nothing about Stalinism, or, as is quite probable, he wanted to exploit the additional possibilities for "dialogue" within the political arena. By 1937 he virtually equates Communism with Fascism: "Les historiens de demain examineront comment et pourquoi, la fin s'effaçant devant les moyens, l'esprit communiste a cessé de s'opposer à l'esprit fasciste, et même de se différencier de lui."  

Gide's emphasis on ends and means is not surprising. Les
Nourritures terrestres shouts the fact that living is an end in itself, not a means leading to the future satisfactions that Communism's distant historical paradise might promise. There is too much of the amused, self-indulgent Pan in Gide to take the ponderous rhetoric of Communism seriously. Not surprisingly, he relegates Communism to a place among those evil doctrinaire systems, such as Fascism, Hitlerism, and Catholicism, which stifle either the political, the social, or the moral fiber of man. Gide insists that an unquestioning, unreasoned submission to the spiritual authority and control of the Church (Protestant or Catholic) is as dangerous as the submission to Hitlerism (Journal, July 1, 1942). While he expected much from the ideology of Marxist teachings, the harsh authoritarianism of the Stalin regime was anathema to him. It is understandable that the suppression of individual freedom in Russia for the sake of remote historical goals displeased Gide as much as the encroachments of the Church on any one person's spiritual self-determination.20

Because of the unequivocal nature of his stand, Gide has been attacked and defended with equal fervor. To his adversaries he was the incarnation of the devil, while to his defenders he was virtue personified. For those hostile to him he was a vicious and degrading influence; people who liked him proclaimed the liberating forces of his thought. One side saw him as a corrupter of youth and tradition, while the other side, comparing him to Socrates, stressed the grandeur and necessity of this corruption. Indeed, rather than accept doctrine or the status quo, and for the sake of spontaneity and freedom, Gide was forever rebelling against the gods of convention. Like Prometheus stealing the fire from Jupiter, Gide fought against authoritarian systems and values in an attempt to give man an awareness of his true human potential.

Unlike Socrates, Gide died of old age at eighty-two. There was poison, to be sure, distilled from the pens of critics like Henri Massis and Henri Béraud, but instead of hurting him, such studies as "La Confession d’André Gide" or "La Défaite d’André Gide," enhanced his literary career and helped to make his reputation. The more his opponents attacked him the more Gide thrived on their assaults. It was as though their confrontation served to sharpen the tips of his own arrows. The challenge made it possible for him to define himself more fully.

20See George Israel Brachfeld, André Gide and the Communist Temptation (Geneva: Droz, 1959).
L’étrange chose, lorsqu’on parle d’influence, que l’on ne considère presque jamais que les influences directes. L’influence par protestation est, chez certaines natures, pour le moins aussi importante; elle l’est parfois bien davantage, encore que très difficile à reconnaître le plus souvent. Ce n’est point toujours par sympathie, faiblesse et besoin d’imitation que nos caractères s’inclinent. Une nature un peu forte cède plus à la réaction qu’à l’action directe. Les opposants m’intéressent plus que les suiveurs.21

Like an athlete who thrives on competition and discipline, Gide found that “moral opposition” helped to maintain the artistic balance and tension of his work.

I do not mean to suggest that Gide always liked what was said about him. On the contrary, his pride and vision of himself as an artist, as his Journal reveals, were often piqued by the insults. “Mais Massis ne retient jamais d’un écrit que ce qui peut servir à sa thèse. C’est un des esprits les plus malhonnêtes que je connaisse, qui fait feu de tout bois lorsque c’est pour brûler autrui.”22 Inevitably, behind the attacks on Gide there lurked a moral tone, a condemnation in the name of inalienable dogma. Gide used such criticism as a springboard from which to bounce back and through which to affirm himself: “Du reste rien ne m’a, mieux que ces protestations, donné l’assurance de ma réalité, de ma valeur: ou même, et plus exactement: c’est à leur clarté seulement que j’ai commencé de m’en rendre compte.”23

Gide’s Catholic critics became one of the voices in his “dialogue.” Like Prometheus feeding his eagle, Gide cultivated one opponent after another (himself, even God), so that in the end he might slay the eagle and with each feather write a work of art.

21“The strange thing, when speaking of influence, is that one almost always considers only direct influences. Influence through protest is, in certain natures, at least as important; it is at times much more so, yet most often very difficult to recognize. It is by no means always through affection, weakness, and the need for imitation that our characters are bent. A comparatively strong nature yields more to reaction than to direct action. The opponents interest me more than the followers” (Journal 1889-1939, p. 902).

22“Massis never retains anything from a writing but what can serve his thesis. He is one of the most dishonest minds that I know, for whom everything is fuel when he wants to burn someone else” (Journal, February 11, 1941).

23“Moreover, these protests, more than anything, have given me assurance of my reality, of my value; or, even more precisely, they themselves brought these qualities in me to light” (Journal, January 30, 1931).
Nevertheless, each work of art was a part of the whole, a fragment of the mosaic whose moral purpose was to challenge external authority in order to proclaim the virtues of the inner-directed man. God, as one of the authority figures (in addition to the Church, the State, and the Family), received more than His share of Gide’s attacks. “La Foi soulève des montagnes,” said Gide, “oui: des montagnes d’absurdités.”24 The Church, understandably, attacked him for such “blasphemy.” In Numquid, in his Dostoievsky (1923), and in Les Nouvelles Nourritures (1935), Gide insisted that man’s salvation on earth did not depend on God, nor on fate, nor on an afterlife. Gide emphasized self-fulfillment through creative self-discipline. Only the sustained discipline of the inner-directed man, he argued, would effect the kind of change in human relationships which could be viewed as “progress”:

Mais l’homme ne peut-il apprendre à exiger de soi, par vertu, ce qu’il croit exigé par Dieu? Il faudrait bien pourtant qu’il y parvienne; que quelques-uns, du moins, d’abord; faute de quoi la partie serait perdue. Elle ne sera gagnée, cette étrange partie que voici que nous jouons sur terre (sans le vouloir, sans le savoir, et souvent à coeur défendant), que si c’est à la vertu que l’idée de Dieu, en se retirant, cède la place; que si c’est la vertu de l’homme, sa dignité, qui remplace et supplante Dieu. Dieu n’est plus qu’en vertu de l’homme. Et eritis sicut dei. (C’est ainsi que je veux comprendre cette vieille parole du Tentateur—lequel, ainsi que Dieu, n’a d’existence qu’en notre esprit—et voir dans cette offre, qu’on nous a dite fallacieuse, une possibilité de salut.)25

Gide believed that man could effect his own salvation without God, that God was an idea or an ideal that could be defined to suit man’s needs or goals. Consequently God is always in the process of


25 “Cannot man learn to demand of himself, through virtue, what he thinks is demanded by God? He must nevertheless manage to; at least some must, to start with; otherwise the game would be up. This strange game that we are playing on earth (unwittingly, unknowingly, and often unwillingly) will be won only if the idea of God, as it recedes, yields to virtue; only if man’s virtue and dignity supersedes and supplants God. God has ceased to exist except by virtue of man. Et eritis sicut dei. (It is thus that I wish to understand that old word of the Tempter—who, like God, exists only in our minds—and to see in this offer, which we have been told is fallacious, a possibility of salvation.)” (Ibid., p. 310).
becoming. He is in the future and His existence is entirely dependent on man: “l'homme est responsable de Dieu,” said Gide.26

Dès l'instant que j'eus compris que Dieu n'était pas encore, mais devenait, et qu'il dépendait de chacun de nous qu'il devînt, la morale, en moi, fut restaurée. Nulle impiété, nulle présomption dans cette pensée; car je me persuadais à la fois que Dieu ne s'accomplissait que par l'homme et qu'à travers lui; mais que si l'homme aboutissait à Dieu, la création, pour aboutir à l'homme, partait de Dieu; de sorte que l'on retrouvait le divin aux deux bouts, au départ comme à l'arrivée, et qu'il n'y avait eu de départ que pour en arriver à Dieu. Cette pensée bivalve me rassurait et je ne consentais plus à dissocier l'un de l'autre: Dieu créant l'homme afin d'être créé par lui; Dieu fin de l'homme; le chaos soulevé par Dieu jusqu'à l'homme, puis l'homme se soulevant ensuite jusqu'à Dieu. N'admettre que l'un: quelle crainte, quelle obligation! N'admettre que l'autre: quelle infatuation! Il ne s'agissait plus d'obéir à Dieu, mais de l'animer, de s'éprendre de lui, de l'exiger de soi par amour et de l'obtenir par vertu.27

Gide was saying, in essence, that man is capable of creating an ideal morality named God. It is less clear what Gide meant by a creation that began with God. This original God, in the natural order of things, would have to precede the second, since God is behind a creation which engenders man, who in turn creates God. The first God, a throwback perhaps to Voltaire’s deism, seems to be a naturalistic one whom Gide identifies with the universe and its creative force—God the clockmaker, who sets the world in motion.

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27"From the moment that I understood that God was not yet, but was becoming, and that he depended on each one of us for his becoming, my own moral sense was restored. No impiety, no presumption in this thought; for I was convinced that God was achieved only by man and through man at the same time; nevertheless, if man led to God, creation, in order to lead to man, started from God; so that the divine could be found at both ends, at the start and at the point of arrival, and that the start was there in order to lead man to God. This double-valved thought reassured me and I was no longer willing to dissociate one from the other: God creating man in order to be created by him; God the end of man; chaos raised up by God to man's level, and then man raising himself up to God's level. To admit only one of them: what fear, what obligation! To admit only the other: what conceit! It was no longer a matter of obeying God, but of making him come alive, of falling in love with him, of demanding him for oneself out of love and of attaining him through virtue" (Journal, June 3-7, 1942).
This motion, which Gide seems to define as evolution, finally created a being called man. The second God is created by man. Man projects a certain moral perfectibility onto the screen of future history, calls it God, and then strives to fulfill this vision of an ideal world.28

If we interpret Nietzsche’s “death of God” as meaning that there will be no future significant biological changes (evolution) in man, then in order to live again, God, envisioned as a process of human perfectibility on the moral level, has to be re-created. Biologists like Julian Huxley define this process as the future social evolution of man. Gide would have concurred. Hence Gide’s emphasis on movement and constant change. Immobility, he said, leads to moral and spiritual atrophy and, eventually, to the tyranny of dogma.

Gide objected to the stasis and complacency of faith and dogma which offered man consolation, assurance, and comfort; everything was set up to protect his laziness and to shelter the mind from effort (Journal, July 1, 1942). In 1909 he wrote his own version of Le Retour de l’Enfant Prodigue, in which the prodigal’s return is due not to faith, but to weakness, laziness, and corruption. He has squandered a fortune in pursuit of pleasure, and now, unable to adapt to the world, he seeks the security and comfort of his father’s house. He returns, confessing his failure, hoping that the youngest brother, unhindered and unfettered, will be able to make his way unaided in the difficult world beyond the walls. In Gide’s variant of the Biblical parable, the father, as in the original, is the analogue for God, the house is the Church, and faith the necessary prelude to salvation. Gide, however, turns the tables. To return to the House of the Lord is to admit failure, whereas to survive beyond the walls is a manifestation of strength, courage, independence, and self-sufficiency. The Church, says Gide, is for the weak. The world is for the strong. Faith is for those who feel inadequate. To envisage an ideal moral order called God, and to strive to create it, is for the strong.

Man’s ability to stand on his own two feet, in contrast to the prodigal’s inability to do so, is an example Gide draws on for the progression of mankind:

La petite Edith Heurong commence à marcher. Jamais encore il ne m’avait été donné d’assister à cette chose merveilleuse: les premiers pas d’un petit enfant. Soutenu jusqu’alors, voici qu’il commence à comprendre qu’il peut se tenir debout sans appui, avancer seul... L’humanité n’en est là qu’à peine, encore chancelante et prise de vertiges devant l’espace à franchir, mal équilibrée, mal servie du lait des croyances.29

Gide would have liked to see man stand alone, unaided and unafraid. It is the rebels, he says, who will save the world, if indeed the world is going to be saved. Those who submit to mental tyranny will, consciously or unconsciously, prevent man’s emancipation:

Fatigués par la lutte d’hier, les jeunes gens (et nombre de leurs aînés) cherchent et pensent trouver, dans cette soumission même, repos, assurance et confort intellectuels. Que dis-je? Ils y cherchent même une raison de vivre et se persuadent (se laissent persuader) qu’ils seront de meilleur service et assumeront leur pleine valeur, enrôlés. C’est ainsi que, sans trop s’en rendre compte, on ne s’en rendant compte que trop tard, par dévouement—ou par paresse—ils vont concourir à la défaite, à la retraite, à la déroute de l’esprit.30

Gide believed fervently that the rebels would inherit the earth, that the Kingdom of God would belong to those who doubt. Nevertheless, as a young man, up to approximately 1893, he was neither a rebel nor a doubter. During his early manhood he was trying to reconcile the strict puritan code of his mother’s Protestant teachings with the lure of an imperious sexuality. He projected this

29“Little Edith Heurong is beginning to walk. Never before have I witnessed anything so marvelous: the first steps of a small child. Having been held until now, all of a sudden it begins to understand that it can stand up without support, go forth alone... Humanity has scarcely reached this stage, still tottering, dizzied by the space yet to be covered, atilt, incompletely weaned from the milk of belief” (Journal, July 15, 1943).

30“Worn out by yesterday’s struggle, young men (and a number of their elders) look for and think that they find in this very submission rest, assurance, and intellectual comfort. Why, they even seek in it a reason for living and convince themselves (or let themselves be convinced) that they will be of better service and will be more highly valued, when enlisted to do so. Thus it is that, without quite realizing it, or realizing it only too late, through obedience or laziness they are going to contribute to the defeat, the ruin of the spirit” (Letter to Bernard Enginger, quoted in Journal 1939-1949, pp. 295-96).
moral drama onto his fictional characters who were struggling with their "consciences" in an attempt to harmonize the two sides of their split identities.

The voices of God and Mammon, like the voices of conscience with which Gide's characters are wrestling, may lead, on the one hand, away from insight or, on the other, toward an integration of self. In their search for authenticity, Gide's protagonists hear a variety of voices, including the voice of the devil, as in Saül, the internalized voice of God and religion, as in La Porte étroite, the collective voice of patriotism and society, as in Philociète (1899), and the male chauvinist voice of the father, as in Geneviève (1936). The protagonist's ability or inability to resolve the conflicts engendered by the contradictory voices coming from within and impinging from without constitutes Gide's artistic "dialogue."

In pursuing this dialogue, Gide frequently emphasizes the overlapping between life and art. Each of his books is an exaggeration of inherent possibilities which, once realized in fiction, were not duplicated in life—at least not by Gide. He has insisted that a work of art is like the flowering of a rosebud, the bringing to fruition of a desire which is then discarded in the process of creation.

While specific dramas in Gide's life seem to explain the genesis of certain works, Gide's life as a whole balances his fiction. The reasoned actions of his life counteract the "rosebuds" of his

\[\text{Que de bourgeois nous portons en nous... qui n'êcloront jamais que dans nos livres!... Mais si, par volonté, on les supprime tous, sauf un, comme il croît aussitôt, comme il grandit!... Pour créer un héros ma recette est bien simple: Prendre un des bourgeois, le mettre en pot—tut seul—on arrive bientôt à un individu admirable. Conseil: choisir de préférence (s'il est vrai qu'on puisse choisir) le bourgeois qui vous gêne le plus. On s'en défait du même coup.}^{31}\]

\[\text{How many buds we carry within us... which will blossom only in our books!... But if we willfully snuff out all but one, how quickly it will develop and grow!... My recipe for creating a hero is very simple: take one of these buds, put it in a pot—all by itself—soon you will have a marvelous individual. Advice: choose preferably (if indeed you have a choice) the bud which bothers you the most. You can rid yourself of it in the process.}^{\text{Lettre à Scheffer,}}\text{ Oeuvres Complètes, IV (Paris: Gallimard, 1932-39), pp. 616-17.}\]
characters. Gide rejected Alissa's "mistakes" in La Porte étroite just as surely as he rejected Michel's "excesses" in L'Immoraliste.

The exaggerated behavior of Michel and Alissa, the monstrous rosebuds of their personalities, are like the effects of a distorting mirror. But the distortion is moral rather than physical. In mirrors capable of making us look tall or short, fat or slim, in spite of the deformation we perceive a resemblance, and we recognize disfigurements which, although they may not be realized, are within the realm of possibility. Each one of Gide's works is a philosophical mirror, and his art, a gallery of reflections. Like the pieces of glass and the mosaic patterns of the kaleidoscope Gide talks of at some length in Si le grain ne meurt, the multiple composition shifts, blends, reforms itself, and is forever changing—a transformation that is dependent on the evolving configurations of each agglomeration. In contrast to the toy kaleidoscope the youthful André breaks deliberately in order to fathom and expose its mysteries, Gide's art will not be ruined by our dissecting it and analyzing its components.

Nevertheless, the constant metamorphoses of the colored bits of glass suggest the complexity of Gide's work and the difficulties of exegesis, particularly when his life and art overlap in such strange and unexpected ways. Moreover, Gide's insistence on an inherent duality in life and art, his frequent allusions to a state of dialogue within himself, authorize us to structure a framework of extremes within which all possibilities are relevant. Beyond the ironic humor of the farcical novel Les Caves du Vatican (1914), which Gide called a "sotie," we catch glimpses of an adult Gide, who describes himself as a little boy having fun under the watchful and annoying gaze of a Protestant minister.32

While Gide took particular pleasure in noting and recording all events, facts, and phenomena that would enhance the idea of opposition and duality, some of these are more important than others. He specifically capitalized on the possibilities for dialogue between his Catholic and Protestant backgrounds. His now-celebrated exchange with Maurice Barrès over being "rooted" or "uprooted" served in part to accentuate the conflict that Gide felt, having come from two distinct backgrounds associated with two different geographical areas in France: "Est-ce ma faute à moi si votre Dieu prit si grand soin de me faire naître entre deux étoiles,

32Journal, June 22, 1907.
fruit de deux sangs, de deux provinces et de deux confessions?" He observes, not without humor and without believing in astrology, that on November 21, his birthday, the earth leaves the influence of Scorpio to enter the phase of Sagittarius.

At other times Gide alludes to the beautiful equilibrium of French culture as the product of a history of confrontation between extremes of faith and skepticism, among them the opposition of Pascal and Montaigne and of Claudel and Valéry: "Je me sens issu de la culture française; m'y rattache de toutes les forces de mon cœur et de mon esprit. Je ne puis m'écarter de cette culture qu'en me perdant de vue et qu'en cessant de me sentir moi-même." With most of his work already written, Gide was perhaps justified, in 1943, in flattering himself so brazenly. While his Journal is peppered with egotistical references, many statements concerning his duality also stress the two main influences on French culture. A 1931 Journal entry reads as follows: "L'idéal chrétien . . . oui; mais l'idéal gréco-latin a joué dans notre formation une part (en prenant ce mot dans le sens anglais) aussi importante. Le plus étonnant, c'est que ces deux informations si différentes, on a tâché de les unir jusqu'à les confondre presque dans une même 'tradition.'"

Gide repeatedly drew his inspiration, his subject matter, his characters, and the titles of his works from Greek mythology and the Bible: Oedipus, Theseus, Philoctetes, Saul, Bathsheba, the Prodigal Son. Each one of these characters is also the title of a work. In Le Prométhée mal enchainé, instead of opposing the separate traditions, Gide blends them into one narrative whole. A Gide-Prometheus, in rebellion against God, manages to place himself at the center of the cultural opposition, thus conveying the impression that he is the living synthesis of an artistic and cultural dichotomy. This is typical

33"Is it my fault if your God took such great care to have me born under two different stars, the product of two separate races, two provinces, and two religions?" (Journal, December 2, 1929).

34"I feel I am a product of French culture, attached to it by all the forces of my heart and of my mind. I cannot distance myself from this culture without losing sight of myself, without ceasing to be myself" (Journal, February 13, 1943).

35"The Christian ideal . . . yes; but the Greco-Latin ideal has played an equally important part . . . in making us what we are. Most astonishing is that people have tried to bring together, even blend, these very different influences into one single 'tradition' " (March 17).

of Gide’s mercurial nature, the duality itself forming an aesthetic constant. However, the moment he achieves a union of opposites he uses the newfound harmony as a springboard for yet another confrontation.

On ne tracera pas aisément la trajectoire de mon esprit; sa courbe ne se révélera que dans mon style et échappera à plus d’un. Si quelqu’un, dans mon dernier écrit, pense saisir enfin ma ressemblance, qu’il se dé trompe: c’est toujours de mon dernier-né que je suis le plus différent.37

Gide deliberately cultivated this tension on all levels: creative, epistolary, and personal. He recognized how strongly he needed it and how essential it was for his work. Though the duality of his art was, for the most part, spent by the time he published Oedipe (1930), it manifested itself on a personal level in his Journal, in his relationship with his wife Madeleine, and in his continuing dialogue with his Catholic opponents, particularly with Paul Claudel, Francis Jammes, Henri Massis, and Charles Du Bos. Gide’s trips to Africa and the Soviet Union and his “dialogue” with capitalism (Voyage au Congo, 1927) and then with Communism (Retour de L’U.R.S.S., 1936) suggest that the need for living in a climate of opposing forces had shifted in his later career from the artistic to the social level.

Gide’s work, for all its diversity and variety, is a search for the authentic being that lurks behind the façade of convention and the incrustations of stereotype. Gide’s early rebellion against authoritarianism and his subsequent “dialogue” with God lead him to supplant God and replace Him with man. Initially, Prometheus steals fire from the gods in order to enlighten man, thus demonstrating that man fulfills himself in opposition to the gods. Ultimately, as Camus phrases it, rebellion transforms itself into affirmation. Affirmation, in turn, leads to authenticity. To reach an authentic state of being, man creates himself anew. But such creativity is not easy when the family, the state, the Church, dogma, and society at large stifle man’s freedom by imposing ready-made conventions. The past inhibits the free expression of the self. Gide’s Oedipus affirms joyfully the fact that he has sprung from the unknown:

37“It will not be easy to trace the trajectory of my mind; its slant will reveal itself only in my style and will frequently escape notice. If, based on my latest work, someone thinks he has at last seized my resemblance, let him beware: it is from my last born that I am always the most different” (Journal 1889-1939, p. 276).
Plus de passé, plus de modèle, rien sur quoi m'appuyer; tout à créer, patrie, ancêtres... à inventer, à découvrir. Personne à qui ressembler, que moi-même.\footnote{\ldots no longer any past, no examples to follow, nothing to lean on: I had to create, invent, and discover everything: fatherland, ancestors... No one to pattern myself after, except myself.} Oedipe, in \textit{Théâtre} (Paris: Gallimard, 1942), p. 272.

This extraordinary self-reliance, this pride, this strength, which is purely human, is brought low only by forces over which man has no control. Birth and death circumscribe man's existence. In between, man creates an authentic being only by challenging those forces that inhibit his "growth." Wisdom begins, says Gide, with the revolt of Prometheus, with his challenge to the gods; and ends, of necessity, with the deification of man. Prometheus' fire is, ultimately, man's fire; and it comes from within. It illuminates.

Can man, coming out of the allegorical cave, bear to look at these implications, at this fire's brightness, and carry through with the difficult task that lies ahead? Can existential man, who no longer believes in a Platonic ideal, create his own essence and walk on his own two feet unaided by God? Gide believes that man can and must. Gide's life and his work demonstrate that man should, whenever possible, steal God's fire and use it wisely. This "dreadful freedom," as Sartre calls it, is humanity's greatest challenge. Will man create or destroy? Man, alone, responsible only to and for Himself, can, if He so wills it, build a New Jerusalem. Oedipus' answer to the Sphinx's riddle was, and always inevitably will be, Man.

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