



## Islam and the West: Two Dialectical Fantasies

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### Abstract

This article discusses two prominent and seemingly very different schools of thought about the historical relationship of the West to Islam—the first of which we might call a ‘clash of civilizations’ and the second an ‘alliance’—in order to show the common roots of both in Christian dialectics. As an example of the first school, the article focuses on Pope Benedict XVI’s 2006 Regensburg lecture on the European synthesis of ‘faith’ and ‘reason,’ with its attempt to define Islam as a religion of faith and not of reason. As an example of the second, it focuses on five centuries of European debate over the contribution of Arabic poetry to the birth of a modern and rational European poetic subjectivity. The article suggests that dialectics of inclusion and exclusion are inseparable from each other, and concludes by pointing to some contemporary political implications of this inseparability.

### Keywords

Europe, Christianity, Islam, religious polemics, Middle Ages, pluralism, Pope Benedict XVI, Arabic poetry, orientalism, occidentalism

God would never have created any, I do not say angel, but even man, whose future wickedness He foreknew, unless He had equally known to what uses in behalf of the good He could turn him, thus embellishing the course of the ages, as it were an exquisite poem set off with antitheses. For what are called antitheses are among the most elegant of the ornaments of speech [...] and indeed the languages of all nations avail themselves of the same ornaments of style. [...] As, then, these oppositions of contraries lend beauty to the language, so the beauty of the course of this world is achieved by the opposition of contraries, arranged, as it were, by an eloquence not of words, but of things. [...] “So look upon all the works of the Most High, and these are two and two, one against another.”

St. Augustine, *The City of God*, XI.18

Is [dialectic] not based at times on an interpretation of signs in nature and in history which the interpreter carefully placed there himself?

Czeslaw Milosz, *The Captive Mind*, 49

## 1. Islam and the West: Clash or Alliance?

Some two years ago, at the suggestion of the Prime Minister of Spain (seconded by Turkey), the United Nations established a new “Secretariat for the Alliance of Civilizations” with the mandate (I am quoting from the Secretariat’s concept paper) “to overcome prejudice, misconceptions, misperceptions, and polarization [...] that foment violence.” To quote that concept paper just a little bit further, the Secretariat was meant as “a call to all of those who believe in building rather than destroying, who embrace diversity as a means of progress rather than as a threat, and who believe in the dignity of humankind across religion, ethnicity, race, and culture.” The Secretariat hosted a series of working groups and then, for reasons that are unknown to me (but presumably not because its mission was accomplished), closed its doors less than a year after it opened them.

The one line I have quoted from the UN’s concept paper suffices to make clear a contradiction at the Secretariat’s very foundation: this “Alliance” of all who are for diversity and deplore polarization defines itself through a series of oppositions and exclusions. It is against those who would (apparently) rather destroy than build, strive to eliminate diversity rather than embrace it, and who do not believe in the dignity of mankind. We know, of course, who the drafters of this constitution have in mind: all followers of that rival paradigm, ‘The Clash of Civilizations.’ Such people are destroyers, eliminators, misanthropes: in short, barbarians. They are excluded from the “Alliance of Civilizations” because they are not civilized themselves. In this sense, the ‘Alliance’ is itself also already a ‘Clash,’ and a good example of Walter Benjamin’s dictum that “there is never a document of civilization that is not at the same time a document of barbarism.”<sup>1</sup>

The blitheness with which the Secretariat sailed into aporia is far from unique. On the contrary, it is characteristic of the two most popular models

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<sup>1</sup>) Walter Benjamin, “Über den Begriff der Geschichte,” thesis VII, in: Walter Benjamin, *Gesammelte Schriften*, ed. Rolf Tiedemann & Hermann Schweppenhäuser, 7 vols. (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1991), vol. 1 (“Abhandlungen”), 696. The author would like to thank Sara Lipton for her efforts to improve this article.

we have available for understanding the historical relationship between the Christian West and Islam (I will begin with Islam, but will suggest below structural analogies between Islam and Judaism in this regard). Models that posit a history of synthesis or ‘alliance’ between Islam and the West quickly reproduce the ‘clashes’ or oppositions that they pretend to overcome. But bi-polar models that insist on Islam’s exclusion from or irreducible opposition to the triumphs of Europe and the West fare no better, and not only because they have difficulty accounting for the many complex particularities of Christianity and Islam’s relationships with each other. Perhaps more important, insofar as the oppositions they insist upon are—as they so often are—the building blocks of a teleological dialectic (Christian, Hegelian, Marxist, neo-liberal, or what have you) about the course of history, the enduring persistence of those oppositions itself threatens the over-arching truth-claims of the dialectics that they were meant to sustain.<sup>2</sup>

In short, and despite their seeming political differences, to the extent that our two major modes—clash and alliance, opposition and synthesis—for understanding the Christian West’s relationship to Islam (or Judaism) are equally dialectical, they are equally fantastic. The meaning of dialectical here should become clearer in the pages that follow. By fantastic, I mean committed to ignoring the gaps between the visions they generate and the complex world. Further: these dialectical models of history are themselves the children of Church fathers impregnated by Christological syntheses and teleologies—fathers like Eusebius, Augustine, or Hegel—and therefore the more dialectical the model the more studied its lack of consciousness, and the more fantastic the visions of the past, present, and future that it produces.

This claim is both too polemical and too large to allow for the pretence of rigorous demonstration. I propose instead to pursue two representative case studies, the first an exclusion of Islam from Europe, the second an inclusion, in order to show their participation in a common dialectical fantasy. My emphasis on the dialectical here should explain what may otherwise surprise some readers: namely, that I will not include Samuel Huntington’s (in)famous “Clash of Civilizations” thesis among my example of exclusion. This thesis has provoked exceptional umbrage and much

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<sup>2</sup> In this paper my focus is on triumphant dialectical teleologies that are European and Christian, but similar critiques could be made of, for example, many forms of Islamism today.

splattering of ink, but it does not interest us here, because it is neither dialectical nor teleological, nor in the least historical.<sup>3</sup>

A brief detour can legitimate this disinterest. Huntington argued that the key conflicts confronting the world order in this and the coming generation are “civilizational,” by which he meant that they were produced, not so much by rival ideologies or economic systems as was the case during the Cold War, but by deep and long-standing differences of culture, language, and religion. He saw the “clashes” of the “Judeo-Christian” West with Islam, on the one hand, and with the “Confucian” civilization (i.e., China) on the other, as the most dangerous challenges to the current world order. But he did not pretend to explain the long history of Muslim-Christian relations, or claim that the “clashes” he sees at work in the present are the same as those that have structured previous “world orders.”<sup>4</sup> Nor do his “civilizations” represent successive stages along some evolutionary road toward truth. They all have the same goal—the power and prosperity associated with modernity—and differ only in their visions of how that power and prosperity should be distributed. Huntington seems interested in marking the strategic implications of these differences, not in making ontological discriminations between the visions. In this sense he remains what in political science is called a “realist.”

## 2. Pope Benedict XVI: The Dialectics of Exclusion

Compare this restraint, by way of contrast, with Pope Benedict XVI’s speech at the University of Regensburg September 12 of 2006, which will serve as my first example of a dialectics of exclusion.<sup>5</sup> In “Faith, Reason,

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<sup>3</sup>) Huntington’s thesis was first articulated in a “Foreign Affairs” article of 1993, and subsequently expanded into *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1996). For two of countless examples of anti-Huntingtonian arguments see Edward Said, “The Clash of Definitions: On Samuel Huntington,” in: idem, *Reflections on Exile and Other Essays* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000), 569–592. Richard Bulliet takes a different tack in *The Case for Islamo-Christian Civilization* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004).

<sup>4</sup>) When, for example, he asserted that “Islam has bloody borders” (*Clash of Civilizations*, 262), he invoked statistics about contemporary conflicts, rather than making claims about Islam’s historical propensity for violence.

<sup>5</sup>) This analysis of Pope Benedict’s address proceeds from and expands my “What Benedict Really Said. Paleologus and Us,” *The New Republic*, 10 October 2006.

and the University: Memories and Reflections” the learned pontiff asserted a long history of struggle between “rational” Christianity and “irrational” Islam, and used medieval Christian sources to characterize the violent intolerance of Muhammad and his followers. The speech triggered protests, even violence, across large parts of the Muslim world, and was condemned by an unlikely coalition that includes the deputy leader of Turkey’s governing Islamic party, the parliament of Pakistan, protesters in India, Iraq’s Sunni leadership, the top Shiite cleric of Lebanon, and the prime ministers of Indonesia and Malaysia, among many others. At the center of the storm were a few short but pregnant lines of the pope’s remarks, quoted from a “Dialogue” that the Byzantine Emperor Manuel II Paleologus claimed to have had with a learned Muslim in the winter of 1391, when he was himself a soldier fighting in the armies of the Muslim Sultan.

Show me just what Muhammad brought that was new, and there you will find things only evil and inhuman, such as his command to spread by the sword the faith he preached [...]. God is not pleased by blood [...]. Faith is born of the soul, not the body. Whoever would lead someone to faith needs the ability to speak well and reason properly, without violence and threats [...]. To convince a reasonable soul, one does not need a strong arm, or weapons of any kind, or any other means of threatening a person with death.<sup>6</sup>

In response to Muslim furor, the papal palace insisted that the line was incidental to the pope’s broader point, and that he was not endorsing the medieval emperor’s views, but simply quoting a historical text to make a historical point. On September 17, the pope himself took the extraordinary step of expressing regret, stating that his quotations from a medieval text did not express his personal thoughts, and that his address had been intended as a respectful invitation to frank and sincere dialogue. Many will be inclined to accept the pope’s clarification. And though few will say it openly, many among these will presumably see the Muslim world’s response to Benedict’s comment as a violent over-reaction that only confirms the pope’s characterization of Islam and its prophet.

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<sup>6</sup> All references to the pope’s Regensburg speech are to the version on the Vatican web site, [http://www.vatican.va/holy\\_father/benedict\\_xvi/speeches/2006/september/documents/hf\\_ben-xvi\\_spe\\_20060912\\_university-regensburg\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xvi/speeches/2006/september/documents/hf_ben-xvi_spe_20060912_university-regensburg_en.html) (accessed 16 September 2006). The current version on the site has been expanded, primarily by the addition of footnotes. There are no page divisions in the text, hence none in my citations from it.

The violence, which ranged from the burning of churches in the West Bank to the murder of a nun in Somalia, is certainly a troubling symptom of a contemporary Muslim political culture that imports far too much of its energy from the insults, whether perceived or real, of western “Zionists” and “Crusaders.” But Muslims were right to perceive hostility to Islam in the pope’s speech, and that hostility would remain even if the speech were purged of its medieval quotations. For it was not Manuel’s characterization of Muhammad’s violence or his lack of originality that was central to the pope’s arguments, but his claim about the proper relationship of faith and reason, a subject that was not incidental to the speech, but central to it, as its title makes clear. Like the medieval emperor, the pope was contending that Islam has embraced throughout its history one pole of an opposition that was meant instead to be transcended: the opposition between “Jewish” obedience to God (faith) and “Greek” philosophy (reason). Islam (according to Benedict) has always opted for “Judaism,” that is, for faith, obedience, and absolute submission to God’s law.<sup>7</sup>

It was in order to make this point that Benedict quoted Manuel—who had also, it is worth noting, in lines just beyond those with which the pope ended his citation, gone on to characterize Islam as a corrupt and particularly violent form of Judaism. Benedict then “corroborated” Paleologus’ view by referring to the teachings of the one Muslim to be found in his speech, the early twelfth-century Andalusian Ibn Hazm (systematically misspelled as Hazn in the Vatican’s first posting of the text), who claimed that God is not bound by reason. Benedict’s conclusion: because Islam commits itself entirely to faith rather than synthesizing faith with reason, it is a fanatical rather than a rational religion.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>7</sup>) Footnote 3 of the speech, added after the outbreak of the controversy and intended to absolve the pope from accusations of disrespect toward Islam, gives no ground on this essential point: “In the Muslim world, this quotation has unfortunately been taken as an expression of my personal position, thus arousing understandable indignation. I hope that the reader of my text can see immediately that this sentence does not express my personal view of the Qur’an, for which I have the respect due to the holy book of a great religion. In quoting the text of the Emperor Manuel II, I intended solely to draw out the essential relationship between faith and reason. On this point I am in agreement with Manuel II, but without endorsing his polemic.”

<sup>8</sup>) Theodore Khoury, the editor of the translation of Paleologus used by the Pope (“Manuel II Paléologue, Entretiens avec un Musulman, 7<sup>e</sup> Controverse,” *Sources Chrétiennes* n. 115 [Paris: Les Editions du Cerf, 1966], 144), also adduces Ibn Hazm as evidence for the truth of Paleologus’ indictment, and it seems to be from Khoury’s notes that the Pope’s

Many of the pope's defenders pointed out that his argument was not aimed at Muslims alone, and this is certainly true, though scarcely comforting. Within Benedict's schema it is of course Judaism that plays, as "faith," the role of fundamental antipode to Hellenistic "reason," a role in which it has served European (and particularly German) culture for several centuries. But even within Christianity Benedict found much to criticize, for the marriage of faith and reason has often been strained by attempts at what he called "dehellenization." Luther's move toward faith, for example, occasioned his attack on Catholic rationalism, and particularly on the Aristotelian theological movement we know as Scholasticism. This meant that much of Protestant Christianity became unbalanced, inclining too far away from 'Greek' reason and toward 'Jewish' faith, while the Catholic Church of the Counter-Reformation strove to safeguard the proper balance. And of course the proper Catholic synthesis was also threatened by movements inclining too far in the opposite direction, the most important of these being the triumphant 'scientific' or 'practical' reason of the Enlightenment and modernity, with its militant opposition to 'faith' in any form.

The pope's basic point is that all of these systems of thought fail to make sense of man's place in the world insofar as they fail to achieve the necessary synthesis of faith and reason. This synthesis was born in the New Testament, which "bears the imprint of the Greek spirit, which had already come to maturity as the Old Testament developed."<sup>9</sup> It was disseminated and preserved through the Catholic Church in Western Europe. Indeed for Benedict the "inner rapprochement between Biblical faith and Greek philosophical inquiry" is really a European phenomenon: "[...] Christianity, despite its origins and some significant developments in the East, finally took on its historically decisive character in Europe. We can also express this the other way around: this convergence [...] created Europe and remains the foundation of what can rightly be called Europe."

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knowledge of the Muslim scholar derives. Of course from a historian's point of view it seems absurd to attempt to confirm a fourteenth-century Orthodox Christian's characterization of Islam by citing one early twelfth-century Muslim, and even more absurd to choose Ibn Hazm, whose Zahirī school of literalist exegesis was extreme within Islam. We might as well choose the words of a Cathar scholar with which to characterize all of Christianity!

<sup>9</sup>) Note that Ratzinger is not arguing, as Kant had, that Jesus' teachings were not Jewish but Greek: occidental wisdom merely clothed in Jewish garb (see *Reflexionen Kants zur Anthropologie, Aus Kants handschriftlichen Aufzeichnungen*, ed. Benno Erdmann [Leipzig: Fues's Verlag, 1882], 213–214). Rather he is claiming, as the mature Hegel did, that the Gospels were a synthesis of the two cultures. We will briefly trace Hegel's position below.

It will not surprise anyone familiar with his thought that Pope Benedict, like Paleologus half a millennium before, understands himself as a defender of a distinctly Christian Europe against Islam: recall the then-Cardinal Ratzinger's comment to *Le Figaro* (13 August 2004) that Turkey should not be admitted to the European Union "on the grounds that it is a Muslim nation." What may be more surprising to readers in this third millennium are the oppositions through which Benedict chose to articulate Europe's distinctiveness—faith and reason, Judaism and Hellenism. If we nowadays recognize the importance of these terms in the politics of European culture, it is generally in the context of divorce rather than dialectic. (Think, for example, of the nineteenth- and twentieth-century ideological program to purify Europe's Hellenic legacy from the Hebraic with which it had become contaminated: a process that came to be known in German as *Entjudaisierung*.) But we need only open a page of Matthew Arnold's *Culture and Anarchy* in order to remember a long strand of criticism that thought of the "harmonious fusion" of the Hebraic and the Hellenic—the words are Heinrich Heine's, from 1841—as "the task of all European civilization."<sup>10</sup>

Neither the pope's defense of "Europe" against "Islam," nor the categories with which he carries out that defense (Jew and Greek, faith and reason), are so surprising, but his conclusions are nevertheless shocking. For what begins as a marriage of faith and reason brokered in the particular culture of Greco-Roman Palestine and consummated in that of Catholic Europe, climaxes in a synthesis that (according to Benedict) needs to be "integrated into all cultures." It is now universal, fundamental to "the nature of faith itself." Yet was not the bulk of "Faith, Reason, and the University" explicitly dedicated to the task of demonstrating that only European Catholicism has successfully mixed faith and reason in the *logos*, and that other religions and cultures have not? Insofar as the pope is claiming that a uniquely Catholic and European synthesis is a prerequisite

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<sup>10</sup> Matthew Arnold, *Culture and Anarchy* (London: Smith, Elder and Co., 1869). On this strand see Lionel Gossman, "Philhellenism and Antisemitism: Matthew Arnold and His German Models," *Comparative Literature* 46 (1994), 1–39. Heine's words are from "Ludwig Börne: eine Denkschrift," 94–95, cited by Gossman at p. 17. Heine's "harmonious fusion" begs, however, all questions about the violence this process focuses upon living "Hebrews" as representatives of a category that must be dialectically overcome (there were no living "Hellenes," and anyway Hellene was a less stigmatized category than Hebrew, containing little that needed to be left behind by History). I will use Hegel's example to demonstrate some of this violence below.



for every faith, he is in effect calling all cultures (including the academic one) and all religions (most pointedly Islam) to European Catholicism. The call is not full-throated, but rather muffled in “dialogue,” as befits the tolerant politics of our progressive age: “only through [this rationality of faith] do we become capable of that genuine dialogue of cultures and religions so urgently needed today.” The pope’s message is certainly not the “convert or die” of medieval crusaders, but rather “convert or be left out of the dialogue of cultures and the European Union.” We are reassured that the feast of Catholic reason is open to all: “It is to this great *logos*, to this breadth of reason, that we invite our partners in the dialogue of cultures.” But just as in those great banquets for the reconciliation of enemies that pepper the chronicles of our barbarian past, the cultural ‘others’ who accept the papal invitation had best be on their guard, lest they find their differences extinguished by poison in the cups.<sup>11</sup>

Why does the pope’s exclusion of all non-Euro-Catholic cultures from the feast of human reason seem reasonable to so many Europeans? When we are told that Islam (for example) is not a religion of “reason,” why do we not ask ourselves what such a statement might mean? (Are Muslims incapable of thinking causally? Of applying the principle of induction? Of understanding Euclidean geometry or assessing economic risk and reward?) To the extent that Benedict’s audience does not feel a need to ask these questions, it is at least in part because it shares a tendency to believe that the peaks of human reason are not reached by everyday attempts to move in the high-gravity environment of a crowded and complex world, nor even by the great leaps for freedom made by certain minds into the weightless realms of rule-bound mathematics. Reason resides rather in the overcoming of those contraries that centuries of schooling have helped us to recognize as significant.

Benedict’s Jew and Greek, faith and reason, are two sets of such contraries, but we know many others, each pair intimately related to the others: slavery

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<sup>11</sup> It may be unnecessary to note that Benedict’s “*logos*” is not the entire “breadth of reason,” but a specifically Christian form of reason that from its very first articulation in the Gospel of John 1: 1–13 was already very much concerned with identifying its ‘Jewish’ enemies. (Although the word “Jew” appears in John more than sixty times, Jews were not that gospel’s only targets. For others, see inter alia Elaine Pagels, *Beyond Belief: The Secret Gospel of Thomas* [New York: Random House, 2003]). As for my simile of deceitful banquets, I hasten to add that we find these in the annals of Islamic as well as Germanic civilizations, and indeed in many others.

and freedom, law and grace, body and soul, perishable and eternal, particular and universal, apparent and real, sign and signified, to name just a few. A venerable pedagogy has taught us to heighten these oppositions, to see chasms in the deepening shadows between them, and to build slender bridges of prophecy and dialectic across the seeming void. Because this pedagogy is so venerable and vast, we cannot comprehend its power by focusing our critical attention on only one pair of the contraries it claims to reconcile—such as Jew and Greek. Nor is it enough to explore this or that chapter in its early history—such as the efforts of those remarkable Alexandrines (Philo, Clement, and Origen) to apply Greek philosophy toward the exegesis of Hebrew scripture, or the attempts of Christian historians (like Eusebius, Ruffinus, and the young Augustine) to align the progressive triumphs of prophecy with those of imperial Rome. But for the same reason of scale, it would be equally vain to attempt to deconstruct this education by providing it with an *histoire totale* stretching from Ur or ancient Egypt to our contemporary schools of piety and philosophy. Vain and—if previous efforts are any indication—also dangerous, for such efforts often end up colonizing the past with the contraries of the present, thereby re-orienting the entire history of humankind toward future knowledge or salvation. When historians of the *longue durée* discover difference in the past, it is usually (like the pope) with synthesis afore-thought.

### 3. Hegel's Marriage of Faith and Reason: The "Consummate Religion"

We can put the difficulty in its starkest terms by focusing briefly on the most influential modern attempt at a 'total history' of the dialectic of Judaism and Hellenism, faith and reason: that of G.F.W. Hegel. Already in his early writings, such as "The Spirit of Christianity and its Fate" (1799), Hegel understood the history of reason in terms of the gradual overcoming of the oppositions created by Judaism's radical submission of the will to God.<sup>12</sup> His essay, like that of many Church historians before him, took the

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<sup>12</sup> "The Spirit of Christianity" was first published by Herman Nohl in *Hegels theologische Jugendschriften* (Tübingen: Mohr, 1907), and translated into English by T.J. Knox in *Early Theological Writings* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1948; reprint Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1975). All citations are from the Knox translation.

form of a re-narration of the entire history of revelation, beginning with the great flood of Genesis. Its first section was called “The Spirit of Judaism,” a spirit which begins with the patriarch Abraham, who abandoned family and fatherland in order to make himself “a stranger on earth, a stranger to soil and men alike,” in order to worship a distant divinity, a “perfect Object on High,” an “Ideal.”

The whole world Abraham regarded as simply his opposite. If he did not take it to be a nullity, he looked on it as sustained by the God who was alien to it. Nothing in nature was supposed to have any part in God; everything was simply under God’s mastery. [...] Moreover it was through God alone that Abraham came into a mediate relation with the world, the only kind of link with the world possible for him. His Ideal subjugated the world to him, gave him as much as he needed, and put him in security against the rest. Love alone was beyond his power [...].<sup>13</sup>

The rest of sacred history is for Hegel an attempt to overcome this rupture created by the extreme faith of Abraham and his progeny. According to his section ii—“The Sermon on the Mount Contrasted with the Mosaic Law and with Kant’s Ethics”—it is Jesus’ teaching to “love God above everything and your neighbor as yourself” that has the power to reunite faith with reason, submission to God with an immediate relation to the things of this world. Jesus wanted to “strip the laws of legality,”<sup>14</sup> to achieve freedom through a synthesis of love and law, subject and object, universal and particular. Hegel adopts Jesus’ phrase, the “fulfillment of the law,” to describe this synthesis.<sup>15</sup> Sections iii and iv of his essay (“The Moral Teachings of Jesus: Love as the Transcendence of Penal Justice and the Reconciliation of Fate,” and “The Religious Teachings of Jesus”) are devoted to expounding Jesus’ instructions—drawn largely from the Gospel of John—for how to achieve it. But section v (“The Fate of Jesus and His Church”) outlines why these teachings have never before been correctly

<sup>13</sup>) Hegel, *Early Theological Writings*, 185–187; see also pages 194, 196, 199, 202, and *passim*. Hegel’s interpretation of Abraham’s self-sufficient isolation was no doubt conditioned by his reading of Aristotle’s *Politics*, 1253a 25 ff. As for “love,” it played an important role in Hegel’s philosophy, and his frequent stress on the “lovelessness” of the Jews is therefore significant. Readers interested in exploring that significance can turn to Joseph Cohen, *Le spectre juif de Hegel* (Paris: Galilée, 2005).

<sup>14</sup>) *Ibid.*, 212.

<sup>15</sup>) “Fulfillment” = Gk. *pleroma*: 214, 253.

understood or completely implemented. Jesus addressed a people—the Jews—whose “loveless nature” had entirely alienated all “love, spirit, and life.”<sup>16</sup> In order to reach “the impure attention” of even the most receptive among them—namely, the apostles—Jesus had to adulterate his message and speak to them in terms and oppositions that they could understand, thereby perpetuating the very contraries he died to overcome.<sup>17</sup>

No evangelist managed to escape this poverty of Jewish culture, not even John, whom Hegel cites constantly as the most spiritual of them all. “However sublime the idea of God may be made [in John], there yet always remains the Jewish principle of opposing thought to reality, reason to sense; this principle involves the rending of life and a lifeless connection between God and the World.”<sup>18</sup> Hence “in all forms of the Christian religion which have been developed in the advancing fate of the ages, there lies this fundamental characteristic of opposition.” In other words, all the progress of Christianity—from the “servitude” of Catholicism to the various relationships between God and the world envisioned in different Protestant sects—has not yet sufficed to overcome the Judaism at work within it, so that until now (Hegel concludes the essay) “church and state, worship and life, piety and virtue, spiritual and worldly action, can never dissolve into one.”<sup>19</sup>

From this point on, nearly everything Hegel wrote was meant to show the way toward the overcoming of these oppositions, and to chart the process of that overcoming across human history. By writing the man-God union across all the fundamental oppositions of religion and philosophy, Hegel attempted to “sublate” all of them in the movement of the Mind and Spirit (*Geist*) over the ages. Insofar as for Hegel the dialectical evolution of human reason is itself Trinitarian, world history became a form of “imitatio Christi,” an imitation of Christ. As he put it in the *Lectures on the*

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 240–241, citing John 2: 25.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 282.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 259.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 301. Hegel makes a related point in the last section of his *Lectures on the Philosophy of History*, “The Modern Time,” where he asserts that once it becomes established, every “Ecclesiastical principle” contains within its bosom the negative principles of “slavish deference to Authority,” the “adamantine bondage” of the Spirit to what is “alien to itself,” “hypocrisy,” etc. (413). He goes on to argue, however, that some peoples are more given to this alienation than others, namely the “Romanic nations”: “Italy, Spain, Portugal, and in part France” (420).

*Philosophy of Religion*: “It is in connection with a true understanding of the death of Christ that the relation of the subject as such in this way comes into view. [...] The highest knowledge of the nature of the Idea of Spirit is contained in this thought.”<sup>20</sup>

The *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion* and the *Lectures on the Philosophy of History* were Hegel’s attempts at an *histoire totale* of human reason. As befits an author of world history, he no longer begins with Abraham, as he had in “The Spirit of Christianity,” nor focuses so relentlessly on Judaism, but makes room instead for the ancient religions of Egypt, Asia, and Africa. He now calls Judaism “the religion of sublimity,” and puts its radical subjection of the material world to an ideal God in the middle of his history, as a necessary step in the dialectical evolution of the spirit across the ages, rather than an alienation from all that is human. Nevertheless the *telos* of all this history remains the same: the synthesis of Hebrews and Hellenes into the Trinitarian reason of “the Consummate Religion,” Christianity.

And what of Islam? In the *Philosophy of History* Islam is merely the transposition of Jewish submission from a tribal God to a universal one, producing a pure “fanaticism” entirely disinterested in the world. Islam’s complete submission to the One God once made it capable of exemplary martyrdoms, conquest, and flights of poetic fancy, but its rejection of the world meant that nothing it achieved could be enduring. Its initial fanaticism spent, Islam became a religion of mere sensuality, and it was then driven back to the Asia and Africa from whence it had come, surrendering even its poetry into Goethe’s more capable hands.<sup>21</sup>

<sup>20</sup> “*Imitatio Christi*”: Compare Werner Hamacher, *Pleroma: Reading in Hegel. The Genesis and Structure of a Dialectical Hermeneutics in Hegel*, trans. from the German by Nicholas Walker & Simon Jarvis (London: The Athlone Press, 1998), 199–200, which concludes on the basis of the *Encyclopedia* and the *Philosophy of Religion*, that for Hegel “all of world history is an *imitatio Christi*.” “It is in connection [...]”: Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*, 3 vol. edition, ed./trans. Peter C. Hodgson (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), 325–326. Cf. idem, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, ed./trans. A.V. Miller (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1977), 470–478. Hegel’s attempt in the *Philosophy of Religion* to demonstrate the rational structure of all reality can also be understood as his demonstration of reality’s Trinitarian structure, since for Hegel reason was dialectical, and dialectic was Trinitarian. See, for example, Peter C. Hodgson’s “Editorial Introduction,” to the Lectures of 1827, 63.

<sup>21</sup> J. Sibree (trans.), *G.W.F. Hegel: The Philosophy of History*, trans. from the 2nd German edition (1840) (New York: Collier & Son, 1902), 355–360 (Goethe’s *West-östlicher Divan* is mentioned as the heir to Arabic poetry on p. 360).

Given Hegel's teleology, it is not surprising that Islam scarcely fits into his dialectical model of history. Coming as it did after the Christian consummation, it could play only a belated part in the evolution of the human mind and spirit. Like some lineage of australopithecines flourishing in the world of homo sapiens, Islam was a living fossil, a threatening remnant of oppositions already transcended by the spirit of the age. This was in fact its only role in the *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion* of 1824, where the Islamic "fanaticism" of faith and its dialectical antipode, the Enlightenment's fanaticism of reason, were arrayed together as exemplary enemies of the Christian synthesis: precisely the role resurrected for both science and Islam by Benedict at Regensburg.<sup>22</sup>

I have juxtaposed Benedict's lecture with Hegel's in order to highlight the logic behind the Vatican's invitation to a "dialogue of cultures." Within the pope's (and Hegel's) dialectic of faith and reason, 'faithful' Islam can only meet Europe's 'reasonable' conditions for dialogue by stepping into synthesis, thereby—in the terms of the dialectic itself—ceasing to be Islam and becoming Christianity. And what if it refuses? The historical march of the human spirit makes no provision for conscientious objectors. The Jews were for Hegel "the most despicable" (*Verworfenste*) of peoples precisely because they resisted "sublation" and supersession. They had been the first to arrive at the portals of sublimity, but had balked at passing through "the door to salvation" back into the beauty of the world. The pope is setting similar conditions for the entry of the "Sublime Port" into the dialogue of cultures (and the European Union). Is the same reproach implied should they refuse?<sup>23</sup>

<sup>22</sup> Hegel, *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*, vol. 3, 35, 242–244. These pages from the 1824 lectures were not carried over into those of 1827, which have virtually nothing to say about Islam.

<sup>23</sup> "*Verworfenste*": the term occurs both in the *Phenomenology*, p. 206; idem, *Phänomenologie des Geistes*, ed. J. Hoffmeister [Hamburg: Felix Meiner, 1952], 257) and in the *Lectures* (see Hegel, *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*, vol. 2, 15.) For debate over its meaning, compare Yirmiyahu Yovel, *Dark Riddle: Hegel, Nietzsche, and the Jews* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1998), 55, and Michael Mack, *German Idealism and the Jew* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002), 53–54. It should be clear that I do not think, as Yovel does, that because the Berlin lectures on religion "recognize Judaism's essential contributions" and "thereby, do dialectical justice to it," the mature Hegel has "overcome the principle bias of his youth" (ibid., 80). He has simply brought the place of Judaism in his dialectic into closer conformity with its place in Lutheran Christology, and thereby done "justice" to Lutheran Christianity, not to Judaism.

Of course the climax of Hegel's ecclesiology was not Catholicism (which he frequently stigmatized as excessively "slavish" and irrational, i.e., as too "Jewish") but Lutheranism, which he understood as Europe's springboard to the next stage in the human spirit's unfolding, the age of German philosophy. Benedict has turned back the dials on Hegel's dialectic, locating Europe's essential ends not in its Idealist future but in its Catholic past. The move may not do justice to Hegel's intentions, but it points to an important truth: the targets of a dialectical teleology are moveable, and it makes a great deal of difference where one places them. If in a genealogy it is the point of origin that is the crucial choice (there are, for example, very different world-views contained in the choice between Noah, Abraham, or Jacob as spiritual progenitor), the choice that matters for dialectical teleology are what contraries to recognize as significant, and where to locate their overcoming. The target need not be in the future, for the end of history may well be in the past. For the pope, for example, Catholic Christology was the key moment of synthesis for Europe. Those who—like Jews and Muslims—missed the target altogether, or who—like Protestants, and scientists—cut right through it and flew off into new contraries, have deviated from Europe's essential course.<sup>24</sup>

The pope—along with other members of our first family of dialectical fantasies about Islam and the West—set the targets so as to justify exclusion (in our example: the exclusion of Judaism and Islam from sufficient reason, of Protestantism and science from sufficient faith). We could, however, choose different targets in order to produce histories that are just as dialectical and just as teleological as Hegel's or Benedict's, but that include rather than exclude Islam within whatever syntheses they proclaim as sacred to the Occident. This is precisely the strategy of our second family of fantasies, those that claim an essential identity between Islam and the West, and seek to replace dialectical 'clash' with synthesis or 'alliance.'

#### 4. Arabic Poetry and the Dialectics of Inclusion

What are the targets favored by those who would make *The Case for Islamo-Christian Civilization* (to borrow the title of a recent attempt by Richard

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<sup>24</sup> I pick on the pope because he is a particularly articulate advocate of this type of ontologically and teleologically laden 'clash' paradigm, but I do not mean to imply that this type is exclusive to Catholicism, to Christianity, or to the West. On the contrary, there are plenty of variants within contemporary Islam, Hinduism, Judaism, and other religions, and even within secular movements ranging from neo-liberalism to anti-globalization.

Bulliet)? Since a frequent argument is that the perceived gulf between Islam and the West is itself a product of Europe and of modernity, it should not be a surprise that most of these targets lie in the ages before European hegemony. Some scholars focus on the common core of prophetic material that Christianity and Islam share as ‘Abrahamic’ religions. Others point to the importance of Arabic translations of and commentaries upon Greek scientific and philosophical texts in order to remind us, as al-Jahiz already did in the ninth century, that the Abbasid Caliphate’s claim to be the legitimate inheritor of Greek wisdom rivaled that of Byzantium.<sup>25</sup> Still others (like Bulliet) stress the similar solutions that the two faiths found to the similar problems they encountered as universalizing monotheisms that came to rule over vast polities. Finally, there are those like María Rosa Menocal, who point to specific cultural forms considered central to the emergence of European subjectivity and argue for their Arabic origins.

We will take up this last example, because the issue that interests Menocal is the same one we saw troubling Hegel in his *Philosophy of History*: Arabic poetry. It is easy for us post-moderns to forget that vernacular poetry was once the heart of many accounts of the emergence of a specifically ‘European’ subjectivity. The choice to compose in the language of the people rather than in clerical Latin, to sing of earthly beauty rather than of sacred scripture, to make romantic love the wings of the human soul’s migrations: these were understood by many (including Hegel) as key choices in Europe’s transformation from a benighted culture enslaved to faith and superstition, into one reaching once more toward human reason. Indeed almost from its origins, vernacular poetry justified itself in terms of these oppositions and their synthesis. Already in the fourteenth century Petrarch defended secular poetry against the criticism of the theologians by deriving his poetic practice from the verse traditions of ancient Greece, and aligning the methodologies of his scholastic opponents with the blind formalism of Islam and Judaism.<sup>26</sup> Over the centuries that followed an

<sup>25</sup> On al-Jahiz see Dmitri Gutas, *Greek Thought, Arabic Culture: The Graeco-Arabic Translation Movement in Baghdad and Early ‘Abbasid Society* (London: Routledge, 1998), 84–87.

<sup>26</sup> Francesco Petrarca, *Invective contra medicum*, ed. A. Bufano, in: *Opere latine di Francesco Petrarca*, vol. 2 (Turin: Unione Tip.-Ed. Torinese, 1975). For an introduction to these early defenses of vernacular poetry see Alastair J. Minnis, “The Transformation of Critical Tradition: Dante, Petrarch, and Boccaccio,” in: A.J. Minnis & A.B. Scott (eds.), *Medieval Literary Theory and Criticism, c. 1000–c. 1375*, ed. (2nd ed. Oxford: Clarendon, 1998), 373–438. On humanistic associations of certain medical traditions with Islam, see Peter Dilig,



increasingly thick line of scholarly ink traced an itinerary from the vernacular love poetry of the medieval troubadours and through Petrarch's 'humanism' before flowing on to encompass nearly every monument of European literary culture.

But what would the European subject look like if that line began, not in Provence nor in the ancient colonies of Greek Italy (as Petrarch had proposed), but in Muslim Spain? In *The Arabic Role in Medieval Literary History* (1987), Menocal argued that the emergence of rhyme (as distinct from rhythm) in the vernacular poetry of Catholic Europe, specifically in the Provençal poetry of the troubadours in Southern France, is a borrowing from the Arabic poets of Muslim al-Andalus. Hence, she suggested, a key aspect of the poetic subjectivity that Petrarch celebrated as the essence of a Christian humanist aesthetic recovered from ancient Greece and Rome was in fact neither Christian, nor European, nor Greco-Roman, but Arabic and Islamic. As she put it in an essay entitled "Pride and Prejudice in Medieval Studies: European and Oriental": "The segregation of European [...] from Arabic [...] is [...] anachronistic and [...] misleading [...]"<sup>27</sup> But for Europeans, according to Menocal, the acknowledgement of this "indebtedness" became "taboo" for both political reasons (colonialism) and psycho-aesthetic ones (which, borrowing from Harold Bloom, she termed "anxiety of influence"). Her most recent book, *The Ornament of the World*, takes up once more the theme of Arabic influence and its repression, expanding her account of Andalusian cultural interactions like the poetic one into a series of "forgotten" stories which she hopes will provide the post 9/11 world with a new way of thinking about Islam.<sup>28</sup>

It is beyond my competence to contribute to the debate about whether or not the troubadours really learned to sing in Arabic—a debate that has been ongoing, as we shall see, for some 500 years. I intend only to suggest that the cultural logic of arguments like Menocal's for the inclusion of Islam in the history of Europe is in some ways startlingly similar to the

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"Anti-Arabism in the Medicine of Humanism," in: Biancamaria Scarcia Amoretti (ed.), *La diffusione delle scienze islamiche nel Medio Evo europeo* (Rome: Accademia nazionale dei Lincei, 1987), 269–289.

<sup>27</sup> María Rosa Menocal, "Pride and Prejudice in Medieval Studies: European and Oriental," *Hispanic Review* 53 (1985), 61–78, p. 61.

<sup>28</sup> María Rosa Menocal, *The Arabic Role in Medieval Literary History: A Forgotten Heritage* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1987); *The Ornament of the World: How Muslims, Jews and Christians Created a Culture of Tolerance in Medieval Spain* (Boston: Little, Brown, 2002).

pope's, though oriented toward a very different politics. It too traces the genealogy of a cultural practice up to a moment of idealized synthesis, then moves on to trace the history of that synthesis' betrayal.<sup>29</sup> In this case the union of Latin vernacular rhythm and Arabic rhyme stands for the loving marriage of Christianity and Islam, whereas the divorce that followed, and the subsequent repression of any happy memories of married life, is blamed on Europe's infidelity to her own history.

My goal is not to diminish these important contributions to the history of medieval poetics. I want only to highlight the extent to which cultural histories of inclusion, like those of exclusion, proceed by splitting the strands of Europe's (peculiarly?) dialectical histories of identity and difference, in order to rewire them along more polarized lines.<sup>30</sup> One way to do so is simply to reiterate what Menocal and other readers of European literary histories already know: that arguments over the 'Jewishness' and 'Muslimness' of Christian vernacular poetry are as old as that poetry itself. There have always been some in those arguments who fought to segregate European poetry from a 'Jewish' or 'Islamic' poetics cast as insufficiently dialectical (e.g. Petrarch).<sup>31</sup> And there have always been others for whom Arabic (and Hebrew) letters, far from being an antithesis to the Hellenes, were in fact the key ingredient in the synthesis of a 'modern' Europe.

Giammaria Barbieri (1519–1575) provides a good example of this latter school. He began to study Provençal in 1538, inspired by his reading of a recently published edition of Dante's *De vulgari eloquentia* (1529). After

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<sup>29</sup> A different article might focus on the shared genealogical strategies of arguments for and against the participation of Islam in Europe. For all their inclusiveness, arguments like Menocal's depend on pre-Foucaultian genealogical methodologies generally associated with colonialism in contemporary cultural studies, even if in this case they escape the charge because they locate innovation outside of European hegemony. My point here is best made through a thought-experiment. What Arabist today would claim that, because the mid-twentieth-century Arabic poets who broke the monopoly of classical metrical forms and rhyme schemes did so under the influence of Shakespeare and Shelley (e.g., Nazik al-Malaika), contemporary Arabic poetry is therefore European?

<sup>30</sup> The claim that this dialectic of identity and difference is peculiarly European seems to animate Roberto M. Dainotto's *Europe (in Theory)* (Durham & London: Duke University Press, 2007).

<sup>31</sup> It is worth reiterating here that the paradigm for medieval Christian poetic theory was the "dialectic" of Trinity, Logos, and Incarnation, not of Hegelian philosophy. For a different entry into the importance of Judaism as a foil for Christian vernacular poetics see David Nirenberg, "Figures of Thought and Figures of Flesh: 'Jews' and 'Judaism' in Late Medieval Spanish Poetry and Politics," *Speculum* 81 (2006), 398–426.

years of study and tribulation (according to his biographer), Barbieri mastered the Provençal poetic tradition and was much struck by its precocious use of rhyme. The explanation he produced for this precocity explicitly contradicted Petrarch (as Bembo, Castelvetro, and others had already done) who had argued that rhyme had been practiced long before the troubadours, in the Greek poetry of ancient Sicily and other parts of *magna Grecia*. But it also disagreed with Dante, who had attributed the invention to the troubadours themselves. According to Barbieri, Sicily and Provence were both precocious in European rhyme “because they learned it from others, namely from the method of the nation of the Arabs.”<sup>32</sup> The Qur’an (as Barbieri had learned from a late medieval anti-Qur’anic polemic, the *Improbatio Alchorani*, by the missionary Ricoldo da Montecroce) already contained examples of rhymed prose (*saj’*). Barbieri also knew that even before the Qur’an, pre-Islamic Arabic poetry had often ended lines with the homophony of “one or two last letters” (as he learned from Averroes’ commentaries on Aristotle’s *Poetics*). With the help of the Hebraist Mosè Finzio, Barbieri even buttressed his arguments with examples from a number of Andalusian Hebrew treatises on the writing of poetry, whose medieval authors had been quite self-conscious of the Arabic influence on their art.<sup>33</sup>

Barbieri’s writings were not published in his lifetime, and even if they had been, they would not have met with unanimous approval. Plenty of Italians continued the Petrarchine privileging of Italian antiquity as the birthplace of poetry. French authors, meanwhile, like Joachim du Bellay in his *Deffence et illustration de la langue françoise* (1549), ridiculed Italian pretensions and claimed for Bardus V, king of the ancient Gauls, the honor of rhyme’s invention. Champions of other “nations” looked in other directions, including Teutonic “*Volk*” singers, Celtic bards, latinate clergy, or any of many other possibilities. But throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth

<sup>32</sup> Giammaria Barbieri, *Dell’origine della poesia rimata*, ed. Girolamo Tiraboschi (Modena: Società tipografica, 1790), 41. On Barbieri’s thesis see most recently Roberto M. Dainotto, “Of the Arab Origins of Modern Europe: Giammaria Barbieri, Juan Andrés, and the Origin of Rhyme,” *Comparative Literature* 58 (2006), 271–292, whose arguments I am adapting here.

<sup>33</sup> Barbieri, *Dell’origine*, 40–44. Barbieri’s mention of the writings of Jews from al-Andalus points to an important and seldom noted analogue to discussions of Arabic poetics in early modern Christian sources, because the Jews of al-Andalus were acutely aware of their poetry’s debt to Arabic poetics. On their writings see now Esperanza Alfonso, *Islamic Culture through Jewish Eyes: Al-Andalus from the 10th to the 12th Century* (London: Routledge, forthcoming).

century one can find European proponents of the Arabic origins of rhyme, ranging from the French bishop Pierre Daniel Huet in 1670, to the Jesuit Juan Andrés (1740–1817), whose eight volume history *Dell'origine, progressi e stato attuale d'ogni letteratura* (1782–1785) was devoted to disproving France's claims about the importance of its language, and suggesting Arabic (and hence Spain) as the source, not only of rhyme, but of the entire “risorgimento della moderna letteratura.”<sup>34</sup>

Of course such theories were not unopposed: precisely the opposite. Andrés' treatise, for example, was energetically rebutted at least twice by a fellow Jesuit, Esteban de Arteaga (1747–1799). In a 21 page footnote to his second rebuttal of Andrés thesis, Arteaga sought to demonstrate that much of what Andrés claimed was particular to Arabic poetry was, if not universal, then at least widespread in the poetries of many different peoples. “Therefore I conclude, using the dialectic of the lord abbot Andrés, that Provençal poetry has a Cretan-Greek-Orcadic-Danish-Norwegian-Icelandic-Scottish-Peruvian-Chinese origin.”<sup>35</sup> Yet despite the existence of such controversy, or indeed, precisely because of it, it is fair to say that the question of Europe's debts to Arabic letters was far from forgotten or repressed in the West. On the contrary, the earliest histories of modern European literature are filled with its debate.

The question was an important one, for example, in the literary circle orbiting around the exiled French noblewoman Anne-Louise Germaine Necker, Madame de Staël, in the Swiss town of Coppet. Her own *De la littérature considérée dans ses rapports avec les institutions sociales* (1800) was one of the first works to focus on the relationship between literature and social structures. Its stated goal was to observe “the progress of the human spirit” in a millennium long literary dialectic. Madame de Staël may well have known of Andrés' theories about the Arabic origins of rhyme, but she did not choose to give Islam any place in her dialectic, which was between

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<sup>34</sup> Joachim du Bellay, *Deffence et illustration de la langue françoise*, ed. Henri Chamard (Paris: M. Didier, 1997), 151. Pierre-Daniel Huet, *Traité de l'origine des romans* (Stuttgart: Metzler, 1966), p. 15. “Risorgimento”: Juan Andrés, *Dell'origine, progressi e stato attuale d'ogni letteratura*, 2nd ed., 8 vols (Parma: Stamperia reale, 1785–1822), vol. 1, p. 261. On the debate between Andrés and Arteaga see also Dainotto, “Of the Arab Origins of Modern Europe,” 280–286.

<sup>35</sup> Esteban de Arteaga, *Le rivoluzioni del teatro musicale italiano dalla sua origine fino al presente*, 2nd ed., 3 vols. (Venice: Stamperia di C. Palese, 1785), vol. 1, 168, cited by Dainotto, “Of the Arab Origins,” 284–285.

the Greeks and the Germans, the southern shores of Mediterranean Europe and the frozen forests of the north, nature and sentimental art, male and female. All these were melted together in the Middle Ages by Christianity, creating what was, according to de Staël, a uniquely European vernacular literary culture of love.<sup>36</sup>

Yet on the topic of love lyrics as on so many others, opinion in the salon was not monolithic. Sismonde de Sismondi, for example, took more seriously than Madame de Staël the suggestions of writers like Thomas Warton (whose *History of English Poetry* had appeared in 1774) and Juan Andrés that lyric poetry of love was an Islamic discovery, not a European one. Indeed in his own *De la littérature du midi de l'Europe* of 1813, Sismondi borrowed liberally from Andrés' *Dell'origine*, and granted that southern Europe had indeed imported a great deal (paper, numbers, Greek philosophy, poetic rhyme, and much else) from Islam. Even Madame de Staël's "enivrement d'amour" was, according to Sismondi, of Islamic vintage. But this influence extended only to the Romance languages and the southern climes. The modernity of Europe arose (and here Sismondi followed de Staël) out of the encounter of the German north with these southern sensibilities. So although it could be said that as a child Europe had gone to school in Arabic, she had matured dialectically into modernity. The schoolhouse, meanwhile, had remained frozen in sentiment and decayed into ruin. There was no longer any literature or science to be found "in any Arab country, nor in any country where Muslims have dominated."<sup>37</sup> With Sismondi we have arrived more or less at the same dialectical judgment that Hegel would utter some three years later in his *Lectures on the Philosophy of History*: whatever powers of invention Islamic faith might once have yielded were now in the hands of Goethe.

<sup>36</sup> *De la littérature considérée dans ses rapports avec les institutions sociales*, ed. Gérard Gengembre and Jean Goldink (Paris: Flammarion, 1991): "progress of the human spirit," 120; "Christian religion [...] has melted, so to speak, two opposed customs into one opinion," 168–169. De Staël's distinction between mimetic (Greek) and sentimental (German) poetry was very much in the air. See, by way of comparison, Friedrich Schiller's essay of 1800, "Über naive und sentimentalische Dichtung." Her view of Christianity as the synthesizing element of Europe was also shared by, among others, Novalis (Friedrich Leopold von Hardenberg), whose "Die Christenheit oder Europe: Ein Fragment" appeared in 1799.

<sup>37</sup> Sismonde de Sismondi, *De la littérature du midi de l'Europe*, 4 vols. (Paris: Treuttel et Wurtz, 1819), vol. 1, 10, 40–77. "Enivrement d'amour" is at p. 66.

## 5. The Inseparability of Exclusion and Inclusion

Of course my use of Hegel as a hinge between the history of Benedict's exclusions and of Menocal's inclusions is artificial, but I hope it helps make recognizable how much dialectical ground is shared by these two seemingly opposed fantasies of Europe's relationship to Islam. Rather than write "fantasy," I should perhaps follow Johann Gottfried von Herder (1744–1803) and use "fairy tale": "Spain was the fortunate region where the first spark of a returning culture struck Europe, which then had to adapt itself to the place and the time in which it came alive. The history of these events reads like a comforting fairy-tale." In Herder's *Märchen*, the influence of Arabic poetry on Provençal lyric shattered Latin's despotism and made possible a vernacular (and hence potentially secular) literature, "producing freedom of thought for all of Europe" and the first Enlightenment ("*die erste Aufklärung*"). "Do we not therefore owe the Provençals, and the Arabs who awakened them, a great debt?"<sup>38</sup> But if for Herder the fairy-tale was a happy one, for others, like August Wilhelm von Schlegel, it was grim. Schlegel was willing to concede that the Arabs might have invented rhyme, but insisted that they were too "cruel" to have discovered its highest use, the love lyric. Like that of Benedict or Paleologus, his was an adamant defense of Europe from any hint of Islamic influence: "Muhammad's sect never had the slightest influence on anything that constitutes the original genius of the Middle Ages."<sup>39</sup>

We could choose to collect examples of one version of this fairy tale or another, in order to make a case for a Europe engaged, either in 'anti-semitic' repression of the Islamic role in its culture (as Menéndez Pidal charged in the 1940s), or in a 'philo-semitic' celebration of its Arabic origins. Both of these approaches would miss what I think is the more important conclusion: that both exclusion and inclusion are inseparable faces of a debate over Islam that appears in tandem with the idea of Europe itself. The emergence of the one is cognitively related to the emergence of the

<sup>38</sup>) Johann Gottfried Herder, *Briefe zu Beförderung der Humanität*, Johann Gottfried Herder: *Werke* (Frankfurt/Main: Deutscher Klassiker Verlag, 1991), vol. 7, 470: "Spanien war die glückliche Gegend, wo für Europa der erste Funke einer wiederkommenden Kultur schlug, die sich denn auch nach dem Ort und der Zeit gestalten mußte, in denen sie auflebte. Die Geschichte davon lautet wie ein angenehmes Märchen." See also p. 475.

<sup>39</sup>) August Wilhelm von Schlegel, *Observations sur la langue et la littérature provençales* (Paris: Librairie grecque-latine-allemande, 1818), 67–69.

other, so much so that we might even say that the debate about Europe's relationship to Islam is both a constitutive attribute of Europe, and a distinctively European product.<sup>40</sup>

It is worth insisting upon this 'European-ness' of both versions of the fantasy, because there is a tendency to split the exclusion of Islam from its inclusion, to see only the former as a child of Europe, and to reiterate the latter as evidence of the West's repression of the importance of Islam.<sup>41</sup> This strategy, pioneered in Europe itself, has since been adopted by Muslim critics of Occidental histories. Consider the massive project, funded by the Trust for Culture of the Aga Khan and edited by Salma Khadra Jayyusi, that published two encyclopaedic volumes called *The Legacy of Muslim Spain* in 1992, on the 500th anniversary of the Christian conquest of Muslim Granada.<sup>42</sup> In both acknowledgements and foreword, its editor made the project's object clear: "What greater cause can a Muslim intellectual have at the present time than to help put the history of the illustrious Islamic civilization back in its rightful place on the map of the world?"<sup>43</sup> The project was, in other words, to re-cover (given Jayyusi's geographic

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<sup>40</sup> The literature on the development of the concept of Europe is vast. A recent work, whose chapter 4 ("Mme de Staël to Hegel: the End of French Europe") covers much of the ground retraced here is Dainotto's *Europe (in Theory)*. Although I only encountered this book after drafting this essay, I have attempted to incorporate its observations on the Coppet circle into my analysis. Among many other works, see Denys Hay, *Europe: The Emergence of an Idea* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1957); and Anthony Pagden, "Europe: Conceptualizing a Continent," in: Anthony Pagden (ed.), *The Idea of Europe: From Antiquity to the European Union* (Washington: Woodrow Wilson Centre Press, 2002), 33–54.

<sup>41</sup> Thus Menocal believes that the Arab theory of the origin of rhyme was regnant in Europe until the beginning of the nineteenth century, when it became "inconceivable" to Europeans and was repressed. See her "Pride and Prejudice," as well as her "Close Encounters in Medieval Provence: Spain's Role in the Birth of Troubadour Poetry," *Hispanic Review* 49 (1981), 43–64. This last was an extended review of Roger Boase's *The Origins and Meaning of Courtly Love: A Critical Study of European Scholarship* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1977). It may well be that, as Boase argued, the second half of the nineteenth century saw a decline in popularity for the Arab thesis, but there was never a period in which it lacked some distinguished proponent, such as Julián Ribera in the early twentieth century, or Ramón Menéndez Pidal and A.R. Nykl in the 1930s and 40s. For some additional examples, see the bibliography in Nikyl's *Hispano-Arabic Poetry and Its Relations with the Old Provençal Troubadours* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1946).

<sup>42</sup> Salma Khadra Jayyusi (ed.), *The Legacy of Muslim Spain*, 2 vols. (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1992/1994).

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, xi.

metaphor we might even say re-conquer) some of the history of civilization for Islam, at a time (1992) when Islam's "civilizing" role was being unjustly denigrated.

As Jayyusi states a little elliptically, this denigration of Islamic civilization has everything to do with the civilizational politics of the European conquest and colonization of the Muslim world:

[...] the Arabs and Muslims have all silently [...] selected al-Andalus as an ever abiding memory in their hearts. [...] All think of it as [...] an abiding witness to a great civilization that filled, with Baghdad, the civilizational semi-vacuum of earlier medieval times. Many of them, too, think of it as a lost paradise, and the persistent sense of grief at its loss has been greatly augmented by the recent loss of Palestine.<sup>44</sup>

The mention of Palestine reminds us of the present-day conflict within which much of the writing about Islamic Spain is inscribed.<sup>45</sup> It reminds us as well of the colonial logic within which the word 'civilization' is being deployed. According to that logic, civilized peoples ought not to be colonized, though they may, of course, be colonizers (remember the *mission civilisatrice*). Like many scholars, Jayyusi sees in the recovery of the "civilization" of al-Andalus an act of resistance, restitution, and de-colonization:

The old, wilful avoidance of a vast and shining historical presence of Arabs and Arabised Muslims [...] throughout the Middle Ages, who not only kept the line of human intellectuality and creativity alive, but greatly enhanced it, has, to put it in the mildest terms, been a historical crime long unrecognised. It gives me great happiness to see the increasing number of Western scholars now dedicated to the truth.<sup>46</sup>

Such a project may be morally attractive, but it has little to do with "historical truth." The idea of al-Andalus as a paradise of civilization

<sup>44</sup> Ibid., xvii.

<sup>45</sup> References to the present political situation seem irresistible to those attracted to "the wonders" of al-Andalus. Thus Georg Bossong writes in the introduction to his recent collection of poetry from al-Andalus: "Die Symbiose von arabischer und hebräischer Sprachkultur, von muslimischem und jüdischem Geist bringt Wunder hervor—ihre Konfrontation kann nur Ungeheuer gebären" (Georg Bossong [ed./trans.], *Das Wunder von al-Andalus: Die schönsten Gedichte aus dem Maurischen Spanien* [Munich: C.H. Beck, 2005]).

<sup>46</sup> Jayyusi (ed.), *The Legacy of Muslim Spain*, xix.



providing light to a darkened humanity, far from being an eternal memory of the Arabs, as Jayyusi would have it, is itself a European product. From the expulsion of the Moriscos and the chronicles of Ibn Maqqari (roughly 1610) to the beginning of the twentieth century, al-Andalus seldom appeared in Arabic letters. When it was invoked, it was not in visions of a civilized paradise of tolerant cultural exchange, but in pious wishes that it should be re-conquered from the unbelievers.<sup>47</sup>

It was only with the colonial translations of European works like Louis Viardot's two volume *Essai sur l'histoire des arabes et des maures d'Espagne* (Paris, 1833) into Turkish (Istanbul, 1863–1864, with a new edition in 1886–1887), or Chateaubriand's *Le dernier Abencerage* into Arabic (Algiers, 1864), that al-Andalus became a politically active 'memory' in Islam.<sup>48</sup> It was this memory that Ahmad Shauki, exiled from the British Mandate during World War I because of his nationalist activities, celebrated in his poems on al-Andalus; this memory that, by the end of that war, was becoming a standard part of school curricula in many areas of the Arab world; this memory that served M. Kurd Ali as evidence in 1922 that the West's claims about the Arabs' incapacity for civilization were lies: that in fact, "Arab and Islamic Spain was the schoolhouse of the Christian West."<sup>49</sup>

In short, if anyone forgot "the legacy of al-Andalus," it was Islam and not the West, as Jayyusi claimed. On the contrary, in the West that legacy had been more or less constantly cultivated from the sixteenth century to the present by those who would include Islam in countless registers of European culture: art and architecture, literature and music, history,

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<sup>47</sup> This, at least, was the conclusion of Henri Pérès, *L'Espagne vue par les voyageurs musulmans de 1610 à 1930* (Paris: Librairie d'Amérique et d'Orient, 1937). Pérès published in the same year a book that suggested the Arabic origins of troubadour poetry: *La poésie andalouse en arabe classique du XI<sup>e</sup> siècle* (Paris: Librairie d'Amérique et d'Orient, Adrien-Maisonneuve, 1937). My thanks to Sara Lipton for bringing this last to my attention.

<sup>48</sup> On these translations see Bernard Lewis' *Islam in History: Ideas, Men, and Events in the Middle East* (London: Alcovy Press, 1973), and *History: Remembered, Recovered, Invented* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1975).

<sup>49</sup> I have benefited a good deal from a similar argument made by Siegfried Kohlhammer, "Ein angenehmes Märchen': Die Wiederentdeckung und Neugestaltung des muslimischen Spanien," *Mercur: Deutsche Zeitschrift für europäisches Denken* 57 (2003), 595–608. On the recovery of the theme of al-Andalus in Arabic poetry of the early twentieth century see Yaseen Noorani, "The Lost Garden of al-Andalus: Islamic Spain and the Poetic Inversion of Colonialism," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 31 (1999), 237–254; and Pedro Martínez Montavez, *Al-Andalus, España, en la literatura arabe contemporanea: la casa del pasado* (Madrid: Editorial Mapfre, 1992).

philology, philosophy and theology, to name a few. Indeed when it comes to the recognition of al-Andalus as a key stage in the ‘dialogue of civilizations,’ the most important contribution may well be that of a historiography that would be least congenial to Jayyusi’s colonial teleology. The idea that the Muslims of Spain provided the cultural light that illuminated a darkened Europe was widespread among writers of the nineteenth century.<sup>50</sup> But it was the writers of the Haskalah, or Jewish Enlightenment, who developed the concept of a “golden age” of tolerance in which religious minorities, especially Jews, had flourished under and been educated by Andalusian Islam.<sup>51</sup> Of course they developed this concept as a polemical foil to the politics of their own time and place, just as advocates of “exclusion” or “inclusion” do today. The cultural achievements of the Arabized Jews of Sepharad helped the *Maskilim* in their arguments with their anti-assimilationist orthodox co-religionists. But above all, they held up the example of a tolerant medieval Islam against the anti-emancipationist and anti-Semitic politics of the modern Christian nations (particularly Germany and the Austro-Hungarian empire) in which they lived.

The pleasant “fairy tale” of a golden-age of inter-religious tolerance and cultural exchange in al-Andalus (modern scholarship prefers the word “myth”<sup>52</sup>) was of obvious utility to the cultural and political project of

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<sup>50</sup> On this subject see *inter alia* Michael Scholz-Hänsel, “‘Antiguedades Arabes de España’: Wie die einst vertriebenen Mauren Spanien zu einer Wiederentdeckung im 19. Jahrhundert verhelfen,” in: Gereon Sievernich & Hendrik Budde (eds.), *Europa und der Orient: 800–1900* (Berlin: Berliner Festspiele, 1989). On the shifting interest of Europe in Spanish history more generally, see Hans Hinterhäuser (ed.), *Spanien und Europa: Texte zu ihrem Verhältnis von der Aufklärung bis zur Gegenwart* (Munich: Deutscher Taschenbuch Verlag, 1979); W. Brüggemann, *Die Spanienberichte des 18. und 19. Jahrhunderts und ihre Bedeutung für die Formung und Wandlung des deutschen Spanienbildes* (Münster: Aschendorff, 1956). For Spanish scholarship on Islam see the invaluable book of James T. Monroe, *Islam and the Arabs in Spanish Scholarship (Sixteenth Century to the Present)* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1970). A more general approach to these questions can also be found in Siegfried Kohlhammer, *Die Feinde und die Freunde des Islam* (Göttingen: Steidl, 1996).

<sup>51</sup> Two caveats: first, the Christians were not numerically a minority in the first century of Muslim domination. Second, the term “golden age” was not a monopoly of Jewish writers (the Protestant Franz Delitzsch, for example, used it in his *Zur Geschichte der jüdischen Poesie* [1836]). The idea saw its greatest development, however, in Jewish historiography.

<sup>52</sup> Norman Stillman, “Myth, Countermyth, and Distortion,” *Tikkun* 6, no. 3 (May–June, 1991), 60–64. Stillman’s essay is part of a debate with Mark Cohen, whose fullest response can be found in *Under Crescent and Cross: The Jews in the Middle Ages* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994). See also Ismar Schorsch, “The Myth of Sephardic Supremacy,” *Leo Baeck Institute Year Book* 34 (1989), 47–66.

European Jews in the nineteenth century. It became a double-edged sword in the changing political and cultural context of the twentieth, when it was increasingly adopted by Arab nationalists in the face of European colonialism in general, and intensified Jewish settlement within the Mandate in particular. In 1946, on the eve of the Palestinian *Naqba* and the dawn of the State of Israel, Cecil Roth warned his fellow Jewish historians that their cultivation of this exemplary past would be used against them in the coming struggle.<sup>53</sup>

Since then both sides have sought to deploy their own versions of history against the other. And though stories of the “lost paradise” of al-Andalus have played a role in the cultural politics of some Israelis (particularly those whose families immigrated from Muslim lands), they have achieved much greater power in the hands of those who, like M. Kurd Ali in the 1920s, enlist the “tolerance” and “civilization” these stories encode on behalf of Arab nationalism or Islamism. In the words of article 31 of the Hamas Charter of 1988:

The Islamic Resistance Movement is a humanistic movement [...]. Under the wing of Islam it is possible for the followers of the three religions—Islam, Christianity, and Judaism—to coexist in peace and quiet with each other. Peace and quiet are not possible except under the wing of Islam. Past and present history are the best witness to that.<sup>54</sup>

Like Pope Benedict, the drafters of the Hamas Charter seized on one strand—albeit a very different strand—of a dialectical European story about the history of tolerance and dialogue in order to make their claims about the humanism of Islam. Their charter has brought us full circle, to the point with which I began: every “document of civilization” is also one of “barbarism,” every dialectical fantasy of inclusion is simultaneously one of exclusion as well. Insofar as both inclusion and exclusion pursue their histories of civilization, reason, love, or poetry in order to invoke the authority of the past on behalf of their own vision of the future, both are claims to power. Given the vast asymmetries in the distribution of that power in our manifestly imperfect world, it is too easy

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<sup>53</sup>) For the publication history of Roth’s essay, which first appeared in the Zionist Organization of America’s *New Palestine* on 4 October 1946, was reprinted in the 1967 *Near East Report* and repeatedly thereafter, see Cohen, *Under Crescent and Cross*, 9–10.

<sup>54</sup>) <http://www.yale.edu/lawweb/avalon/mideast/hamas.htm> (accessed 6 November 2007). For a slightly different translation see <http://www.palestinecenter.org/cpap/documents/charter.html> (accessed 6 November 2007).

to forget this. We thirst for “comforting fairy tales” of synthesis, alliance, and inclusion, thinking that these might be antidotes to the nightmarish narratives of antithesis, clash, and exclusion that we associate with the ascension to empire of the West. This essay is meant only as a reminder that the active ingredient of both nightmare and fairy tale is the same. Synthesized in soteriologies, compounded in philosophies, as soluble in Marxism, Zionism, or Islamism as in Catholicism or ‘Occidentalism,’ dialectical teleologies can be lethal in whatever form we imbibe them.

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