

File:
«Origin of Monotheism»
(Assmann)

Moses the Egyptian

THE MEMORY OF EGYPT
IN WESTERN MONOTHEISM



Jan Assmann

HARVARD UNIVERSITY PRESS
CAMBRIDGE, MASSACHUSETTS
LONDON, ENGLAND, 1997

Conceiving the One in Ancient Egyptian Traditions



The story of Moses the Egyptian is a story of religious confrontation and the overcoming of it. The name of Moses is associated with a counter-religion that defined its identity in contradistinction to Egyptian "idolatry." Making Moses an Egyptian amounts to abolishing this defining opposition. Tracing Moses and his message back to Egypt means leaving the realm of "revealed" or "positive" religion and entering the realm of *lumen naturale*: experience, reason, tradition, and wisdom. Starting in Hellenism and continuing through modernity up to Freud, the Mosaic project was interpreted as the claim for unity: there is but one God, the invisible source of all. The counter-religious antagonism was always constructed in terms of unity and plurality. Moses and the One against Egypt and the Many. The discourse on Moses the Egyptian aimed at dismantling this barrier. It traced the idea of unity back to Egypt.

Two men stand out among those who spoke of Egyptian monotheism in the frame of this discourse. One is Ralph Cudworth, who reconstructed this monotheism as *Hen kai pan*: the "grand arcanum, that God is all things." The other is Sigmund Freud, who was the first to introduce the newly retrieved memory of an authentic Egyptian monotheism into the debate and who made Moses an adherent of this monotheistic movement. But neither of them had a first-hand knowledge of Egyptian sources. Cudworth wrote in a time when the hieroglyphs were still undeciphered and when any attempt to form an idea of ancient Egyptian religion was totally dependent on Greek and Latin (and in this respect second-hand) sources. Freud relied on a few Egyptologists without being

able to distinguish between first-rate scholars such as Breasted and phantasts such as Weigall. Moreover, he never went so far as to read carefully through the texts that were available in translation in his time, and his interest in Amarna religion was rather limited.

Therefore, two things remain for an Egyptologist to do. He should complement Freud's passing and superficial remarks on Akhenaten's religious revolution with a close reading of at least the most important text and discuss the contributions Egyptology can make concerning the counter-religious character of that monotheism. Second, he should assist Cudworth in his quest for any pre-"Trismegistick" testimonies of Egyptian theology and, however briefly, show what might be learnt in this respect from the original texts. Let me then give the last word in this debate to the Egyptians themselves.

A Counter-Religion of Nature: The Revolutionary Monotheism of Akhenaten

King Amenophis IV, who changed his name to Akhenaten or Akhen-yati¹ ("Beneficial for the Aten") and ruled Egypt for seventeen years in the middle of the fourteenth century B.C.E., is the first founder of a monotheistic counter-religion in human history.² Freud was correct in stressing this point.³

It seems evident that all founded or, to use the eighteenth-century term, "positive" religions are counter-religions. This is so because all of them had to confront and to reject a tradition. None of them was founded within a religious void. Therefore, they may be termed "secondary religions" because they always presuppose the preceding and/or parallel existence of "primary religions."⁴ We have no evidence of evolutionary steps leading from primary to secondary religions. Whenever secondary religions occur, they always seem to have been established by foundational acts such as revolution and revelation. Such positive acts often have their negative complements in rejection and persecution. "Positive" religions imply negated traditions.

The Amarna religion has many characteristics of later secondary religions, in particular some similarities to Biblical monotheism in its later stages. It is not merely antipolytheistic, but also rationalistic. I agree with Freud that the Amarna religion exhibits tendencies toward what Max Weber called the "disenchantment of the world"⁵ in its rejection of

magical practices, sacramental symbolism ("idolatry"),⁶ and mythological imagery.⁷

Secondary or counter-religions are determined and defined by the distinction they draw between themselves and primary religions. If the Amarna religion is in fact a secondary religion, it is imperative to determine the particular "defining difference" which it established between itself and the primary Egyptian religion. So far I have dealt only with the Mosaic distinction, which was expressed as the difference between Israel and Egypt. How is the distinction to be interpreted that Akhenaten drew between his new religion and the traditional one?

For the study of this defining difference we are, unfortunately, in a much less favorable situation than is the case with later secondary religions. The reason for this difficulty is that there seems to exist a necessary link between counter-religions and canonization. All counter-religions base themselves on large bodies of canonical texts. First of all, counter-religions, or secondary religions, appear in textual space, that is, in the form of textual articulation and scriptural tradition, as a specific kind of collective memory based on richly structured textual architectures, inherited and kept alive by means of elaborate techniques and institutions of interpretation. Secondary religions live in and by textual memory, which they must create and cultivate.⁸ The distinction between primary and secondary religions appears always as the distinction between nature and Scripture. Owing to its episodic character, the Amarna religion did not have time to construct such a memory. It died out with its first generation and fell into complete oblivion. Its discovery is a feat of archaeology, not of memory. We are thus reduced to a handful of hymns, actually only two hymns on which all the others depend, addressed to the new god and composed almost certainly by the king himself. They are conventionally called the "Great Hymn"⁹ and the "Shorter Hymn."¹⁰

But interpretation of the Amarna religion as a counter-religion does not rest solely on these few texts. The defining difference between the old and the new, "tradition" and "truth," is created not so much by verbal means as by practical means. The latter were indeed drastic. I have already shown how deep, and even traumatic, an impression these practical means of negation and destruction must have made on the minds of the people living at that time. The traditional cults and feasts were discontinued, the temples were closed, the names and images of the gods (above all those of Amun) were destroyed,¹¹ the capital was

transferred, a new style was introduced into language and representational art, and so forth. These radical measures of persecution and innovation show beyond any doubt that the Amarna movement viewed itself as a new religion that was absolutely incompatible with the continuation of traditional forms of religious life.

In the extant texts, the difference between the old and the new is more difficult to grasp. There is no attempt at explicit refutation of traditional concepts. This would have required mentioning them, and even that would have been deemed unacceptable. The term "gods," let alone the names of specific gods, does not appear in the Amarna texts.¹² Even a phrase like "there are no gods besides the sun disk" is inadmissible.¹³ There are no traces of "normative inversion" or other forms of explicit rejection in the extant texts. The difference is therefore only negatively marked, by not mentioning, intentionally avoiding, or replacing what traditional religion would have had to say. The difference can only be brought out by negative reasoning. This method requires a detailed knowledge of traditional religion and its forms of expression. The more precisely we know what to expect, the more accurate will be our identification of what is absent. This explains why any new insight into the essence of Amarna religion is to be gained not so much from excavations at Amarna, which until now have failed to unearth any new textual material, but from a better understanding of traditional religion.

The discovery of new texts at Thebes has led to the distinction between two antipolytheistic movements: the "New Solar Theology" starting some decades before Amarna and continuing after its fall well into the Late Period, and the "Amarna Theology," which is a radicalization of the first and found no continuation after the abandonment of the new capital. If there ever was a "school of Heliopolis" as Sigmund Freud and Thomas Mann (drawing upon contemporary Egyptology) imagined it, it must have been the transmitter of these new ideas.

It has become clear that the Amarna revolution is the peak of a much broader movement which was certainly related, as Sigmund Freud assumed, to the broadening of the Egyptian world in the course of the political events of the New Kingdom and the rise of an empire. This movement led to a "crisis of polytheism" that persisted after Amarna; far from being a mere "return to orthodoxy," it was instead a quite new form of pantheistic "summodeism," which I will briefly

consider in the second part of this chapter.¹⁴ Further, the study of Theban hymns has led to a new appraisal of the Amarna texts as well, especially of the "Great Hymn." It may, therefore, be of interest to take a closer look at this fundamental text and thereby to gain a more detailed idea of the contents of Akhenaten's counter-religion.¹⁵ The following analysis focuses on the points of contrast between Akhenaten's view and traditional theology. It is therefore inevitable that the reader will be confronted with much specialized Egyptological material. But since I am dealing here with the very first occurrence of a counter-religion and the construction of religious otherness, this excursus into Egyptology is justified.

The Text of the "Great Hymn"

FIRST SONG: THE DAILY CIRCUIT [TAGESZEITENLIED]

First Stanza: Morning—Beauty

- 1 Beautifully you rise
- 2 In heaven's lightland,
- 3 O living Aten, who allots life!
- 4 You have dawned on the eastern horizon
- 5 And have filled every land with your beauty.

Second Stanza: Noon—Dominion

- 6 You are beauteous, great, radiant,
- 7 High over every land;
- 8 Your rays embrace the lands to the limit of all you have made.
- 9 Being Re, you reach their limits
- 10 And bend them down for the son whom you love.
- 11 Though you are far, your rays are on earth;
- 12 Though one sees you, your strides are hidden.

Third Stanza: Night—Chaos

- 13 When you set in the western lightland,
- 14 Earth is in darkness
- 15 In the condition of death.

- 16 The sleepers are in [their] chambers,
- 17 Heads covered, one eye does not see the other,
- 18 Were they robbed of their goods under their heads, they don't notice it.
- 19 Every lion comes from its den,
- 20 All the serpents bite.
- 21 Darkness is a grave,
- 22 Earth is in silence:
- 23 Their creator has set in his lightland.

Fourth Stanza: Morning—Rebirth

- 24 At dawn you have risen in the lightland
- 25 And are radiant as the sundisk of daytime.
- 26 You dispel the dark, you cast your rays,
- 27 The Two Lands are in festivity daily.
- 28 Humans awake, they stand on their feet, you have roused them.
- 29 They wash and dress,
- 30 Their arms in adoration of your appearance.
- 31 The entire land sets out to work.
- 32 All beasts browse on their herbs,
- 33 Trees, herbs are sprouting;
- 34 Birds fly from their nests,
- 35 Their wings raised in adoration of your ka.
- 36 All flocks frisk on their feet,
- 37 All that fly up and alight,
- 38 They live when you dawn for them.
- 39 Ships fare north,
- 40 Fare south as well,
- 41 Every road lies open when you rise.
- 42 The fish in the river
- 43 Dart before you—
- 44 Your rays are in the midst of the sea.

SECOND SONG: CREATION

*First Stanza: The Creation of Life in the Womb**(a) The Child*

- 45 [You] who make seed grow in women,
 46 Who make water into men;
 47 Who vivify the son in his mother's womb,
 48 Who soothe him to still his tears,
 49 You nurse in the womb!
 50 You giver of breath,
 51 To nourish all that he made.
 52 When he comes from the womb
 53 To breathe, on the day of his birth,
 54 You open wide his mouth and supply his needs.

(b) The Chicken in the Egg

- 55 The chicken in the egg,
 56 It speaks in the shell;
 57 You give it breath within to sustain it.
 58 You have fixed a term for it
 59 To break out from the egg;
 60 When it comes out from the egg,
 61 To speak at its term,
 62 It already walks on its legs when it comes forth from it.

Second Stanza: Cosmic Creation—Multitude and Diversity

- 63 How many are your deeds,
 64 Though hidden from sight,
 65 O Sole God beside whom there is none!
- 66 You made the earth following your heart when you were
 alone,
 67 With people, herds, and flocks;
 68 All upon earth that walks on legs,
 69 All on high that fly on wings,
 70 The foreign lands of Syria and Nubia,
 71 The land of Egypt.

- 72 You set every man in his place, you supply his needs;
 73 Everyone has his food, his lifetime is counted.
- 74 Their tongues differ in speech,
 75 Their characters likewise;
 76 Their skins are distinct, for you distinguished the people.

Third Stanza: The Two Niles

- 77 You made the Nile in the netherworld,
 78 You bring him when you will,
 79 To nourish the people, for you made them for yourself.
 80 Lord of all, who toils for them,
 81 Lord of all lands who shines for them,
 82 Sundisk of daytime, great in glory!
- 83 All distant lands, you keep them alive:
 84 You made a heavenly Nile descend for them;
 85 He makes waves on the mountains like the sea,
 86 To drench their fields with what they need.
- 87 How efficient are your plans, O Lord of eternity!
 88 A Nile from heaven for foreign peoples
 89 And for the creatures in the desert that walk on legs,
 90 But for Egypt the Nile who comes from the netherworld.

THIRD SONG: TRANSFORMATIONS [KHEPERU]—GOD, NATURE, AND THE KING.

*First Stanza: Light—Seeing and Knowing**(a) The Seasons*

- 91 Your rays nurse all fields,
 92 When you shine, they live and grow for you.
 93 You made the seasons to foster all that you made,
 94 Winter, to cool them,
 95 Summer, that they taste you.

(b) *Kheperu in Heaven and on Earth*

- 96 You made the *sky* far to shine therein,
 97 To *see* all that you make, while you are *One*,
 98 Risen in your *form* [*kheperu*] of the living *sundisk*,
 99 Shining and radiant,
 100 Far and near.
- 101 You make millions of *forms* [*kheperu*] from yourself *alone*,
 102 Towns, villages, fields,
 103 Road and river.
 104 All eyes *behold* you upon them,
 105 When you are above the *earth* as the *disk* of daytime.

(c) *The king, the unique knower*

- 106 When you are gone there is no eye (whose eyesight you have
 created
 107 in order not to *look* upon yourself as the *sole* one of your
 creatures),
 108 But even then you are in my heart, there is no other who knows
 you,
 109 *Only* your son, *Nefer-kheperu-Re Sole-one-of-Re*,
 110 Whom you have taught your ways and your might.

Second Stanza: Time—Acting and Ruling

- 111 The earth comes into being by your hand as you made it,
 112 When you *dawn*, they live,
 113 When you *set* they die;
 114 You yourself are lifetime, one lives by you.
- 115 All eyes are on beauty until you *set*,
 116 All labor ceases when you *rest* in the west;
 117 But the *rising* one makes firm [every arm] for the king,
 118 And every leg moves since you founded the earth.
- 119 You rouse them for your son who came from your body,
 120 The king who lives by Ma'at, the lord of the two lands,
 121 *Nefer-kheperu-Re, Sole-one of Re*,
 122 The Son of Re who lives by Ma'at,

- 123 The lord of crowns, *Akhenaten*, great in his lifetime,
 124 And the great Queen whom he loves,
 125 The lady of the Two Lands *Nefertiti*,
 126 Who lives and rejuvenates
 127 For ever, eternally.¹⁶

I propose a division of this long text into three parts of approximately equal length. Beneath its surface structure as a hymn I discern the outlines of three treatises, the first on visibility, the second on creation, and the third on energy.

Visibility

The first part is a transformation of that section of a traditional hymn to the sun god that describes the daily solar circuit in its three phases of morning, noon, and evening/night (*Tageszeitenlied*).

Before analyzing this first part, let me describe how this subject is treated in a traditional solar hymn. The subject is not, as one might assume, simply the sun god, his theology or mythology, but a very complex cosmic drama (wherein the sun god simply plays the central role). The Egyptians traditionally conceived of the world not in terms of spatial structure, but in terms of action and process. In their view, the cosmos is a cyclic process.¹⁷ Its order and structure unfolds over time: in the regularity of cyclical repetition and in the vigor of reasserted cosmic life. Every morning, indeed every moment, life triumphs over the counter-acting forces of death, dissolution, and cessation. The imagery of Egyptian cosmological conceptualization dramatically unfolds into images of motion, conflict, and triumph. The cosmic drama is interpreted in biological, ethical, and political terms: it is viewed as a process of life triumphant over death and rule and justice triumphant over rebellion. Life, rule, and justice, as well as death, rebellion, and injustice, are constantly associated. The cosmic drama is interpreted by this analogical imagination in a way that reflects the fundamentals of human life: social justice and harmony, political order and authority, and individual hopes for health, prosperity, and—above all—life after death. It is this interpenetration of the cosmic, the sociopolitical, and the individual that lends this world-view and interpretation of reality the character of truth, and of natural evidence.¹⁸

In the traditional hymns to the sun, the cosmic process is represented

in a form which I have called, in German, *Tageszeitenlied*, the "song of the three times of day."¹⁹ The traditional morning stanza focuses on "life." The sun is praised as a living being, reborn, and at the same time spontaneously reemerging within the constellations of birth-giving and life-sustaining deities.

Turning to the Amarna texts, we find that these mythical images of regenerating life have been transformed into concepts of transitive-active life-giving.²⁰ The sun is the god of life who, from his own inexhaustible plenitude of life, assigns a portion to everything in existence. The term has a specifically temporal meaning. It refers to a temporally defined portion of life.²¹ The "Shorter Hymn to the Aten" is a bit more explicit about this concept of an allocation of individual lives out of the One source of cosmic life:

You are the One yet a million lives are in you,
To make them live. The sight of your rays
Is breath of life to their noses.²²

The abstract notion of time is conceived of in the concrete terms of light and air.²³ From the rays of the rising sun life is absorbed every day by all creatures. The traditional imagery of the living god—reliving and rejuvenating his life daily within the constellations of the divine world—is transformed into the concept of the life-giving god who is neither included nor embedded in divine interaction, but who confronts the world from high above and sends from there his life-giving rays into the world.²⁴ The same transformation from constellational intransitivity to confrontational transitivity applies to the second stanza, devoted to the second phase of the circuit: noon. This stanza traditionally focuses on the topic of rule. The motion of the sun over the sky is interpreted as the exercise of rule and justice. In the traditional, "constellational" view of the solar circuit, this phase assumes the form of a triumphant victory of the sun god and his companions over Apophis, a water dragon and the personification of evil on the cosmic plane. In a typically Egyptian way, this conflict is more characteristic of a lawsuit than of a physical combat.²⁵

In Akhenaten's hymn this mythical image is transformed: the rays of the sun embrace all lands and bend them to the submission of the king, a change which obviously translates an imperialistic concept of universal rule into cosmic imagery. The political significance of the noon

phase is retained. But again, instead of a relationship between heavenly and earthly, and cosmic and political action, we have the direct transitive subject-object relation between the god and the earthly political sphere. This is not just a variation on a theme, but a fundamental change which affects the central Egyptian concepts of kingship, state, and political action.

The elimination of the cosmic foe turns the traditional dualistic world-view into a monistic one. Traditionally, both the cosmic and the political processes are based upon, and shaped by, the idea of a conflict between good and evil, rule and rebellion, motion and arrest, continuity and rupture, coherence and dissolution, light and darkness, justice and injustice, and also life and death. It is a whole universe of meaning which is discarded with the elimination of the cosmic foe. The "lands" which the sun "embraces" and "bends to submission" for the king are, of course, not enemies in a political sense—they have lost their political meaning. In the light of the sun, all political boundaries disappear because the sun shines over Egyptians and non-Egyptians alike, as well as over good and evil. The abolition of the cosmic foe amounts to a depolarization of the cosmos, which is reflected in the human sphere by a depoliticalization of society.²⁶

The third stanza, devoted to the night, is perhaps the most revolutionary of all. Here, we meet with one of those negations which had a crucial importance for Freud: the negation of the netherworld, the realm of Osiris and of the dead. Traditionally, sunset and night are interpreted as the descent of the sun god into the netherworld to give life to the dead and to provide for their well-being.²⁷ Just as the idea of political welfare rests on the myth of the triumph over Apophis, the hopes for life after death rest upon the myth of the nocturnal overcoming of death. In the Amarna hymns there is scarcely any mention of the netherworldly realm of the death.²⁸ In Akhenaten's world, reality is restructured from the point of view of the human eye. In the traditional representations of the cosmic process, the observing eye was systematically excluded. The cosmic process was conveyed by the traditional mythical imagery, not from "far below," but from "within." The texts depict divine actions and constellations, and the topography of that world which no human eye has ever seen. They describe not visible reality but its inner mythical meaning. It is not just the visible, but the intelligible world that counts as reality.²⁹ In Amarna, by contrast, reality

is reduced to the visible, to the here and now of a human observer. Seen from this point of view, the night appears simply as darkness. Darkness means the absence of light, of divine presence and of life. In the night, when the sun withholds its emission of life, the world relapses into death and chaos: robbers rob, lions rove, serpents bite. There is no Egyptian text, outside Amarna, that depicts the night as divine absence.³⁰ The closest parallel to this vision of the night is found in a Biblical text, Psalm 104:20–23, where we read:

Thou makest darkness and it is night;
When all the beasts of the forest do creep forth,
The young lions roar after their prey
And seek their food from God.
The sun rises, they shrink away and lay them down in their dens.
Man goes forth to his work and to his labour until the evening.³¹

The fourth stanza depicts the reawakened life in the morning in no less than twenty-one lines. Obviously, the restriction to the visible world is to be felt not as a limitation, but as an enormous amplification and enrichment. What is striking about this stanza is its fondness for detail and its enraptured contemplation of visible reality. After four introductory lines, four more are devoted to the awakening of human beings who rise, wash, dress, and go to work. The following seven lines refer to the beasts of the earth and the sky and another six lines refer to aquatic creatures and the ships that appear alongside the fish. The same allocation of ships and fishes—as inhabitants of the sea—occurs in Psalm 104:26:

So is this great and wide sea, wherein are creeping things
Innumerable, both small and great beasts;
There go the ships, there are the dolphins,
Whom thou hast made to play therein.

Behind the minuteness of detail and the enraptured tone of devoted description one senses a peculiar theological concern. What could be the theological significance of the requickening of nature in the morning? Lines 30 and 35, which are closely parallel, give a hint. The birds greet the light with their wings as do the men with their hands. The revival of nature is one song of praise. The praise of God is no exclusive

human privilege; it is shared with all other creatures. In the corresponding stanza of the “Shorter Hymn,” human beings are totally absent:

All flowers exist, what lives and sprouts from the soil,
Grows when you shine, drunken by your sight.
All flocks jump on their feet,
The birds in their nests fly up in joy,
Their folded wings unfold in praise
Of the living Aten, their maker.³²

The returning presence of the divine, which again fills the world with light and time, is greeted and answered by the sheer reawakening of nature. Life and existence itself acquire religious meaning. To exist means to adore, to acknowledge the creative workings of light and time. The flowers which turn themselves toward the light³³ and adore God’s indwelling presence in sheer vegetative receptivity become the model of piety and devotion.³⁴ There are texts, those of seventeenth-century German Protestant mysticism, in which exactly the same concept of vegetative religiosity is found. It is expressed in words which could be translated from Amarna hymns; consider, for example, Gerhard Tersteegen’s song “Die Gegenwärtigkeit Gottes in der Natur” (“The Presence of God in Nature”) which starts with the proclamation “Gott ist gegenwärtig!” (“God is present”). In this song we read

Wie die zarten Blumen
Willig sich entfalten
Und der Sonne stille halten,
Lass mich so,
Still und froh,
Deine Strahlen fassen
Und dich wirken lassen.³⁵

But what is only a symbol and a simile in the context of Christian pietism is literally meant as reality in the context of Amarna religion. God is not “like” the rays of the sun; he “is” the rays of the sun.

 LET ME summarize my analysis of the first part. Its most striking feature is the complete or, rather, the iconoclastic abolition of mythical

imagery, in particular of the cosmic foe and the realm of the dead. The cosmic foe had given to the solar circuit the political meaning of power, rule, and justice while the *descensus* myth had given night the meaning of salvation, of life after death. Instead of meaning we are given the beauty and the richly detailed variety of the visible world as the effect of the divine light. Mythical imagery is replaced by visible reality; the mythical concept of meaning is replaced by a physical concept of function and causality.

Creation

The second part of Akhenaten's hymn is devoted to the theme of creation. Usually, this theme refers to what in traditional language is called "the first time" (*zp tpy*) which corresponds to the Hebrew *be-re-shit*, "in the beginning," the primordial time of origin. This reference is eliminated by Akhenaten, whose world-view is structured by the sensual apprehension of reality.

Visibility is in the dimension of light (or space), which the present is in the dimension of time. Past and future give way to eternal presence much in the same way as the mythical imagery of heaven and the underworld give way to the visible reality. There is no reference to primordial creation and cosmogony in the Amarna texts.³⁶ But how can the author speak of creation when he restricts himself to the present? Akhenaten's solution to this problem is as ingenious as it is innovative. Instead of cosmogony he deals with embryology. This is the subject of the first song of the second part. The second song celebrates what could be called the well-structured or well-arranged nature of the world in its present, apprehensible form.

The growth of the seed in the womb and of the chicken in the egg reveals "time" as the other aspect of that creative energy which flows from the sun into the world. The workings of time transcend the visible sphere; they are "hidden from sight" (l. 64) and closer to air than to light. Thus the notions of breath, air, and time are closely linked in this embryology.

☉ THE IDEA of a divine breath of life vivifying the embryo in the womb occurs as early as in the "Coffin Texts" of the Middle Kingdom, where it is said of Shu, the god of the air, that "he knows how to vivify the one who

is in the egg."³⁷ The hymn of Suty and Hor, the most important text of pre-Amarna "New Solar Theology," calls the sun god "Khnum and Amun of mankind."³⁸ According to traditional beliefs, Khnum is the god who forms the child in the womb, and Amun is the one who endows the child with the breath of life.³⁹ In an older hymn, Amun appears as "the one who gives air to him who is in the egg."⁴⁰ This traditional formula of emblematic concinnity is transformed in the "Great Hymn" into a whole treatise on embryology. In two stanzas it demonstrates the growth of the child in the womb and of the chicken in the egg, correlating the two parts by the symmetrically arranged key words "to vivify" (ll. 47 and 57) and "to come forth" (ll. 52 and 60). They refer to "breath" and "time" as the two forms in which the creative energy of the sun manifests itself beyond the realm of visibility.⁴¹

☉ THE SECOND song passes from micro- to macrocosmos and praises the well-arranged nature of the world, whose inhabitants are carefully divided into separate kinds living in the air, in the water, and upon the earth. Humankind is also divided into different peoples, who are set apart in respect of language, character, and color.⁴² Every kind is plentifully provided for, by the sun which shines upon them all and by the water which the sun brings forth from the earth for Egypt in the form of the Nile and for distant countries from the sky in the form of rain.⁴³

In its cosmopolitan and universalistic scope, this view of the world corresponds to the political experience of the Late Bronze Age, as had been noted by Breasted and rightly stressed by his attentive readers, such as Thomas Mann and Sigmund Freud. Now, for the first time in history, there evolved the idea of an *ecumene*, a world inhabited by many different nations stretching to the end of the earth and interconnected by political and commercial ties.⁴⁴ The very possibility of something like international law forced Egypt to give up its traditional self-image as an ordered universe surrounded by chaos and to extend the notion of a divinely ordered creation to the limits of the *ecumene*.

☉ MULTIPLICITY and order characterized the divine wisdom of creation. Two exclamations—"how many!" and "how excellent!" (or

"sophisticated")—convey these two characteristics. They recur in Psalm 104 as

How manifold are thy works!
In wisdom hast thou made them all.

If we ask for what is significantly absent—or rejected and negated—in this second part of the hymn, we find the concept of primordial time. In the same way as the first part abolishes the mythical imagery of the not-here, that is, the images of heaven and the underworld, the second part abolishes the images of the not-now: that method of mythical ontology which Kenneth Burke called "the temporizing of essence."⁴⁵ Not-here and not-now are the two dimensions of mythical imagination or image-making through which *homo interpret* bestows meaning to the universe. Again, function replaces meaning, and explanation replaces interpretation, reducing the multiplicity of visible reality to one underlying principle of cosmic energy. The mythical theme of creation is transformed into a physiological treatise on embryology and ecology, that is, an appraisal of the creative energies of the sun in its micro- and macrocosmic functions.

Kheperu: Creative and Transformative Energy

The third part of the hymn is centered on one Egyptian word, *hpr*, "to become." It is a theory of becoming. At the same time it is a treatise on the relationship between God and world. The visible world is shown to be nothing but a "becoming": a transformation⁴⁶ of God himself. The relation between God and the world is neither that of the traditional Egyptian hymns mirroring divine order and social order, nor that of Hebrew monotheism drawing a sharp distinction between creator and creation. In Amarna, God and the world are much more intimately interlocked by God's being identified as the source of energy which maintains the world by "becoming" the world, in a process of constant self-transformation.⁴⁷

In the Egyptian language, *hpr* "to become, to come into being, to develop" is the antonym of *wnn*, "to exist, to persist." *Hpr* is associated with the god Khepre, the morning sun, the principle of autogenetic energy. By contrast, *wnn* is associated with the god *Wnn-nfr*, "who exists in completion," Osiris, the god of the dead, the principle of

unalterable duration. We are confronting here the famous dichotomy of *nḥh* and *dt*, time happening and time persisting, cyclical and linear time, "imperfective" and "perfective" time.⁴⁸ It is quite consistent with the hymn's equation of the visible world with *hprw* that the god himself is called *Nḥh* in the Amarna texts. God is time (*Nḥh*), and everything unfolding, "developing" in time (*hpr*) is a transformation (*hprw*) of his essence or energy.

Lines 96–100 deal with the celestial transformation of God, the sun, while lines 101–105 deal with his terrestrial transformations.⁴⁹ These appear to be nothing other than the millionfold reality of the visible world itself: towns and villages, fields, roads, and rivers, the world of habitation and traffic. The two parts of this bipartite world are interconnected not only by the notion of "becoming"—everything, including the sun itself, emanates from God—but also by the notion of *seeing*. In the form of the sun, God *sees* millions of his earthly transformations, and he has made the sky high in order to overlook the whole earth.⁵⁰ In the same way, he can be seen by all living creatures at the same time and at an equal distance. "Every eye sees you in front of itself."⁵¹ From line 121 we learn that God creates the eyes in order that they might look on him as he looks on them, and that his look might be returned and that light might assume a communicative meaning, uniting everything existing in a common space of intervision. God and men commune in light.⁵² This interpretation of the world as a sphere not just of visibility, but of intervision, gives it a communicative character that includes a relation of response and reciprocity.

☉ BY SEEING the light, that is, God, the eye is created; therefore seeing is the sense of divine communication. The light creates everything, but in addition to this general creation it "creates eyes for every creature":

Your light makes eyes for everything that you create.⁵³

In his *Farbenlehre*, Goethe expresses a strikingly similar thought. "The eye," he writes, "owes its existence to the light": "Das Auge hat sein Dasein dem Licht zu danken. Aus gleichgiltigen tierischen Hilfsorganen ruft sich das Licht ein Organ hervor, das seinesgleichen werde,

damit das innere Licht dem äusseren entgegentrete."⁵⁴ In this context Goethe quotes his famous verse version of a passage from Plotinus, who had taken up Plato's parable of the cave and his idea of the "sunlike" eye (*helio-eides*).⁵⁵

The first song of this third part deals with the "becomings" of God in their spatial dimension of light: heaven and earth, sun and eye, connected by intervension. The second song deals with their temporal dimension. As time, the divine energy operates in the rhythm of night and day, thus in an interrupted, discontinuous mode, and exposes the creatures in their absolute dependence on light and time to an equally discontinuous mode of existence. In these verses the hymn reaches its apex of clarity and radicality:

The world becomes on your hand as you make them;
When you dawn, they live,
When you set, they die.
You yourself are lifetime; one lives by you.⁵⁶

The time which the sun produces by its rising and setting forms as close a link as the light between God and world. God and world commune in time as they commune in light. Time is divine cosmic energy *and* individual lifetime.⁵⁷ The lifetime of the individual is created by the motion of the sun just as the light is created by its radiation. But motion and radiation, and with it light, time, and life, stop during the night. The night is an interval of death.

But the theme of the third part is not the relation of God and the world; this is rather the subject of the first two parts. Here, a third entity is introduced, by which the bipolar structure of reality is extended into a tripolar one: the king.

The king is already implied in the semantics of the word *hprw*, "becoming." Almost every king of the Eighteenth Dynasty, among them Akhenaten himself, chooses as his throne name a statement about the *hprw* of the sun god. These names are statements about the visible reality which the king proclaims to be a manifestation of Re, and to be "great," "firm," "beautiful," and so on. They are statements about the god who constantly creates the world by "becoming" the world, about the world, which constantly unfolds the divine energies, and about the king, who rules over the world in its sun-created entirety. God, world,

and king are the conceptual triad on which this third part of the hymn is based.

Explicitly, the king appears first in the third song (ll. 106–110) in a sentence which is so difficult that most translators have given up trying to render it at all.⁵⁸ But I think the sense conveyed is of a striking simplicity. I translate it in the following way:

When you have gone and there is no eye, whose eyesight you
have created
In order not to be compelled to look at your[self as] the sole
one of creation,
you are in my heart.
There is no other who knows you,
Only your son Nefer-kheperu-Ra Sole-one-of-Ra,
Whom you have taught your ways and your might.⁵⁹

These lines draw a sharp distinction between seeing and knowing. Seeing is exposed to the rhythm of night and day; knowledge establishes a permanent relationship. In a world constantly alternating between life and death, presence and absence of divine energy, the heart of the king is the only point of permanence and stability.

☉ THE DISSOCIATION of seeing and knowing had already occurred in the first part of the hymn, where it is said:

Though you are far, your rays are on earth;
Though one sees you, nobody knows your "going."⁶⁰

"Going" has the connotation of "departing" or "passing away"⁶¹ and refers not only to the hiddenness of the ways of the sun to mortal eyes, but also to its disappearance from human sight during the night. Knowledge, which is limited to seeing, ceases at night. In a very fragmentary early text on a "*talatat*" from Karnak, Donald Redford has been able to decipher the following traces:

[(Aten) . . . who himself gave birth] to himself,
and no one knows the mystery of [. . .]

he [go]es where he pleases, and they know not [his] g[oi]ng . . .
[. . .] to him [?] by [?] night,
but I approach [. . .]⁶²

The text is tantalizingly mutilated, but one thing is clear: we are dealing here with the same idea of god being hidden to mortal understanding, but accessible to the king, even at night. This dissociation of seeing and knowing makes it perfectly clear that there is no meaning to visible reality. God is revealed to the eye, but concealed to the heart, except to the heart of the king.

This is the exact inversion of traditional convictions. The religion of the New Kingdom develops the notion of "taking God into one's heart" as a central idea.⁶³ This means knowledge of God, which is required of everybody. But *seeing* God is the privilege only of the dead, who are believed to meet the gods face to face in the hereafter. In Amarna, knowledge of God becomes the monopoly of the king, whereas the ability to see God is extended to everybody. Only the understanding heart of the king is also able to see, in the emission of light and time, an emission of meaning. Only for him does cosmic energy assume personal traits and does emission come to mean revelation: "you taught him your ways and your might."⁶⁴

☉ We are now able to reconstruct the initial insight or "revelation" which induced Akhenaten to abolish traditional polytheism and to found a new religion based on the idea of divine unity and uniqueness. It was the discovery that not only light, but also time is to be explained as manifestations of solar energy.⁶⁵ With this discovery, *everything* could be explained as workings, "emanations," or "becomings" of the sun. In this system, the concept of "One" has not a theological but a physical meaning: the One is the source of cosmic existence. There are no other sources besides this One, and everything can be reduced and related to it.

But a new concept of God, and a new religion, can never emerge as the result of *explanation*. What Akhenaten actually discovered, what he was probably the first to discover, and what he certainly experienced

himself as a revelation, was a concept of *nature*.⁶⁶ With regard to the Divine, his message is essentially negative: God is *nothing else than* the sun, and he is also nature.

Let me here interrupt this line of argument for a moment to consider an objection that naturally arises. Is it really true that Akhenaten's "nature" is void of meaning? The hymn has an unmistakably anthropocentric ring in its attribution of a benevolent intention to the workings of light and time, which even assume the character of loving labor:

Their Lord of all, who toils for them;
Lord of all lands, who shines for them.⁶⁷

Where there is intention, there is also meaning. The cosmic process is stripped of its anthropomorphic significance, but is nevertheless not indifferent to man. To the contrary: the less anthropomorphic its interpretation, the more anthropocentric its meaning. Man is *intended or "meant"* by that cosmic performance and he may read the signs of parental love in the cosmos. "You are the mother and father of all that you make."⁶⁸

It is true that the Amarna hymns are obsessively repetitive in stating that all the sun does it does "for them,"⁶⁹ but at the end of the "Great Hymn" all this is related to the king as the ultimate goal of creation, so that the anthropocentric perspective is transformed into a pharaocentric one in the end. It is true that the sun rises to vivify the world, but it is for the sake of the king that the sun vivifies it. The king is the one who is ultimately "meant" by the cosmic process and he is the only one for whom it has meaning. Meaning, in this world, is something between God and king, not anything shared by the people.

Yet meaning is a social phenomenon; so is religion, and so is God. Saying that meaning is only accessible to the understanding heart of the king amounts to saying that there is no meaning at all. Explanation replaces interpretation. The more there is that can be explained, the less there is to interpret. Thus we may perhaps say that, instead of founding a new religion, Akhenaten was the first to find a way out of religion. His negative revelation went far beyond the disillusionment which Warburton, Reinhold, and Schiller attributed to the last stage of

initiation. He rejected not only the polytheistic pantheon but even the theistic idea of a personal god. There is nothing but nature.

Akhenaten's explanation of the world as nature is above all an act of iconoclastic destruction: of negating its religious significance. The negativity of Akhenaten's revelation becomes clear when it is viewed against the background of traditional Egyptian religion. The traditional world is not "nature" because it is not natural. It is not natural because:

1. It cannot be left alone. Its "natural" tendency is toward chaos, entropy, dissolution, and cessation. It has to be constantly maintained by cultural efforts.

2. It is dualistic in character. Or rather, it is ambiguous and has to be constantly disambiguated by the imposition of moral distinctions. Only in the light of this moral distinction between good and evil, good and bad, just and unjust, truth and falsehood does the world become habitable and meaningful.⁷⁰

3. The moral sphere which gods and men cooperate to institute and maintain prevails over "natural" distinctions. Justice may overcome death. The forces of order which vanquish darkness, dissolution, and arrest are able to defeat illness, suffering, and death.⁷¹

4. In the light of religious interpretation the world is structured not only by intervention, but also by interlocation. The gods listen and can be spoken to. The sun god looks down from the sky, but he also hears the cries of the oppressed:

who hears the supplications of the oppressed,
whose heart inclines toward him who calls unto him,
who rescues the fearful from the hand of the violent,
who judges between the poor and the rich.⁷²

Language and interlocation construct the world as moral space.⁷³ Nature itself is amoral. Freud was astonishingly blind to this amoral aspect of Amarna religion. Instead, he stressed its strongly ethical character, which he based on an epithet of the king who called himself "living on truth/justice." But it is very important to recognize that, in the context of Amarna religion, this traditional epithet of the sun

god is transferred to the king. "Living on truth" relates not to the god-man relationship, but to the king-subject relationship. The epithet is transferred from the realm of religion to the realm of loyalism. God is no longer the embodiment of ethical demands because this idea cannot be reconciled with Akhenaten's strictly natural and heliomorphic concept.

Only by eliminating these dimensions of signification, by means of a radical demystification, demythologization, dedivinization, depolarization, depoliticalization, and demoralization is Akhenaten able to demonstrate the "natural" character of reality. It is therefore essentially negative. But it is precisely this "natural," dedivinized, and desemiotized character of the world which made Akhenaten's depiction of it—at least in some aspects—acceptable for a Biblical psalm. It remains a mystery as to how Sigmund Freud could have overlooked the fact that parts of Akhenaten's hymn found their way into Psalm 104, since this had been stressed both by Arthur Weigall and James Henry Breasted, his two Egyptological sources, and would have lent much support to his own thesis.⁷⁴

The negativity of Akhenaten's revelation finds its most poignant expression at the beginning of the last stanza in lines 111–114:

The world becomes on your hand, as you made them;
When you dawn, they live,
When you set, they die;
You yourself are lifetime, one lives by you.

The gist of this passage is the idea of the world's absolute dependence on the sun. It has no life of its own. All life comes from the sun. This is what Akhenaten's antipolytheism means. Further, it means denying the world its own sources of life, meaning, power, and order, which means for the Egyptians the world's own divinity. In this view, the world becomes disenchanted, it becomes mere "nature."

In Psalm 104:29–30 the same idea of the world's dependency on God's periodic introjection of life is reformulated as:

Thou hidest thy face: they are troubled;
Thou takest away "their" [read: thy]⁷⁵ breath: they die and return to their dust;

Thou sendest forth thy breath: they are created
And thou renewest the face of the earth.

In this case, there might be the possibility of reconstructing the way in which a passage from Akhenaten's hymn could have found its way into a Biblical psalm. In a letter which the king of Tyre, Abumilki, wrote to Akhenaten, he politely refers to the sun god, the king's father, in words which William Moran, relying on an article by Comelia Grave,⁷⁶ renders as:

... qui accorde la vie par son doux souffle
et revient avec son vent du nord.⁷⁷

It seems evident to me that the idea of God's intermittent introjection of life into the world is common both to the psalm and to the Egyptian hymn. The "sweet breath," which appears in the Bible as *ruach*, is a common Egyptian metaphor for both time and light. "The sight of your rays," we read in the "Shorter Hymn," "is the breath of life in their noses."⁷⁸

Transplanted into a Biblical context, Akhenaten's concept of nature again becomes charged with religious significance. Here, God is not reduced to cosmic energy and meaning, is not focused in a pharaocentric perspective. Pharaoh's absence makes nature again readable, namely in a theocentric light. Reading nature leads to the knowledge of the Lord and to the recognition of his glory.⁷⁹

The World as Creation and as Manifestation of God

In this section I answer the questions Ralph Cudworth addressed to Ancient Egypt three hundred years ago.⁸⁰ In his day, Egypt was not yet able to answer these questions in its own voice because the knowledge of the hieroglyphic script had been forgotten. Cudworth had to rely on interpreters of more or less dubious credibility. In our time, when the Egyptian texts have begun to be readable, Cudworth's questions have fallen into oblivion. What was it that he wanted to know about Egypt? My reconstruction of the discourse on Moses and Egypt has attempted to retrieve the memory and the relevance of these questions. Let me

now turn to the Egyptian sources and look for any passages that could have satisfied Cudworth's quest for *Hen kai pan*.

Hen kai pan is a statement about the relation between God and the world. It amounts to an equation in the same sense as Spinoza's *deus sive natura*. Statements about the relation between God and the world abound in Egyptian texts. I shall focus on those that speak of God as the "One" and shall analyze the form of relationship which they establish between the One and the world. In the seventeenth century, there were two ways of conceiving this relationship. The one which conceived of this relation in terms of creation, generation, or origination was generally deemed acceptable to orthodox Jewish or Christian theology. The other, which conceived of this relation in terms of manifestation, transformation, or emanation, was deemed heretical and was associated with terms such as pantheism, materialism, and even atheism. My thesis is that this same duality had already been present in Ramesside Egypt. It was only during the preparation of this book that I became aware that some terms which I believed I had coined to characterize the specificity of Ramesside theology, such as "cosmotheism"⁸¹ or *die Weltwerdung Gottes* ("the cosmogenesis of God"),⁸² had in fact been used in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. In Egypt, however, this duality was not antagonistic or controversial, because there was neither orthodoxy nor heresy. The two paradigms interacted and interfused in various ways without any signs of confrontation or conflict.

Time and again the Egyptian sources predicate the oneness/single-ness/uniqueness of a god. Amun-Re in particular is regarded as a solar deity who develops his all-embracing creative and life-giving efficacy in the form of the sun. In the context of traditional Amun-Re religion this unifying and centralizing view focuses on the problems of life. Further, it answers the question of where all life comes from and which forces are effective in the emergence, preservation, and continuation of life. In this tradition, the postulate of the oneness of god does not exclude the existence of other gods. In contrast to the Amarna texts, the texts referring to Amun-Re constantly mention the gods. They appear not as individuals with their own names, but collectively. As a result, they do not enter a constellation with the "one god." Instead, they are his counterparts, along with other living creatures, such as humans, animals, and even plants. In all contexts that mention the oneness of god,

the *one* god transcends the constellations and spheres of the divine world. This phenomenon might have been responsible for the Classical idea that the polytheistic structure of Egyptian religion is a sort of façade concealing a basic monotheism.

The oneness of Amun, which by no means denies the existence of the other gods, is based on the fact that he is

1. the primeval god, who existed before the entire world;
2. the creator, who transformed the world from the primeval condition into the cosmos;
3. the life god, who gives life and spirit to the world in the form of the three life-giving elements;
4. the sun god, who completes his journey alone and illuminates and guards the world with his eyes;
5. the ruler god, who exercises rule over his creation and is represented by the king on earth;
6. the ethical authority, who watches over right and wrong, the "vizier of the poor,"⁸³ the judge and savior, the lord of time, "favor,"⁸⁴ and fate;
- ★ 7. the hidden god, whose symbols, images, and names are the many gods.

It is this last aspect of Amun's Oneness that is of particular interest here because it is so closely related to the idea of esoteric monotheism and the "god of the mysteries." It plays a very prominent role in the "paradigm of manifestation." Yet the concept of hiddenness is also important in the "paradigm of creation." There, it is associated with the "self-generated" primeval god (1), who has no parents or other witnesses of his birth that know his name. The "anonymity" of this god is certainly the oldest and most prominent characteristic of his hiddenness.⁸⁵ He appears in the "Pyramid Texts" (ca. 2500 B.C.E.) as "the great god, whose name is not known."⁸⁶ The well-known myth of the Cunning of Isis, which has survived in the form of a magical spell, lends this idea of the creator and sun god as an "anonymous" primeval god the inconsistent and somewhat burlesque form typical of Egyptian stories.⁸⁷ This concept of an anonymous god, rooted in a beginning not witnessed by anyone, was adopted from solar theology by Amun-Re theology in the Ramesside period. One reason is undoubtedly the word play between the name of Amun *ḥmn* (Amun = the Hidden One) and

the epithet of the sun god *ḥmn rn.f* ("Hidden of Name"). But the main reason is that this concept of hiddenness, unlike all the others, is associated with the concept of oneness by definition:

The one who initiated the emergence at the beginning,
Amun, who emerged at the beginning, whose origin is not known,
Who was not preceded by any god.

There was no other god with him, who could say what he
looked like.

He had no mother who created his name.

He had no father to beget him or to say, "He is my flesh and
blood."⁸⁸

Who formed his own egg,

Power of secret birth, who created his beauty.

Most divine god, who came into being alone,

Every god came into being after he had begun himself.⁸⁹

You have no father who created you,⁹⁰

You were not sent into the body of a woman.

No Khnum formed [your body].

Neither your form nor nature is known.

Hearts long to know you,

People drill [into the depth], stretch [into the height] and grow
weary [in seeking you in vain]—

You are [too] great and exalted,

Firm and wide-ranging,

Strong and powerful.⁹¹

The concept of a god "whose birth is secret";⁹² "whose place of origin is not known";⁹³ whose birth is not witnessed, but (and this is crucial) who keeps the secret of his nature concealed from all who are born after him: "who formed himself and kept himself hidden from gods and humans"⁹⁴—this concept became a central theme of Ramesside theology. In the context of Amun-Re theology, which developed and privileged the paradigm of manifestation, the idea of the hiddenness and oneness of the primeval god underwent a change of meaning. The temporal relationship between preexistence and existence was transformed into an ontological one.⁹⁵ In the paradigm of manifestation, the Hidden One inhabits an ontological Beyond, but not a temporal Be-

yond. This concept of divine transcendence is most clearly expressed in Hymn 200 of the "Leiden Amun Hymn":

Secret of transformations and sparkling of appearances,
Marvelous god, rich in forms!
All gods boast of him
To make themselves greater with his beauty to the extent of his
divinity.

Re himself is united with his body.
He is the Great One in Heliopolis.
He is called Tatenen/Amun, who comes out of the primeval waters to lead the "faces."

Another of his forms is the Ogdoad.
Primeval one of the primeval ones, begetter of Re.
He completed himself as Atum, being of one body with him.
He is Universal Lord, who initiated that which exists.

His *ba*, it is said, is the one who is in heaven;
It is he, the one who is in the underworld, who rules the east.
His *ba* is in heaven, his body in the west,
His image is in southern Heliopolis and wears his diadem.

One is Amun, who keeps himself concealed from them,
Who hides himself from the gods, no one knowing his nature.
He is more remote than heaven,
He is deeper than the underworld.

None of the gods knows his true form;
His image is not unfolded in books;
Nothing certain is testified about him.

He is too secretive for his majesty to be revealed;
He is too great to be inquired after,
Too powerful to be known.

People fall down immediately for fear

That his name will be uttered knowingly or unknowingly.
There is no god able to call him by it.
He is *ba*-like, hidden of name like his secrecy.⁹⁶

The form of this magnificent hymn is comparable to that of a sonnet: its bipartite division into two unequal halves (8/8 and 7/7) is based on an antithesis of thought, a change of aspect. The first part is a piece of "affirmative theology" which describes how the god is manifested on earth in the other gods. The second part is a piece of "negative theology" which reads like a revocation of all the theological scholarship displayed and developed in the first part. The subject of this first part was not the One, but the many gods who reflect his nature in the world. Amun of Thebes also belongs there. Not only is the "one Amun" hidden "from them," he is absolutely hidden. No statement about him is possible. He is still beyond heaven and the underworld, the holy and the otherworldly regions of the world. He is hidden from the gods, who reflect his unfathomable nature in this remote sphere. He is even more hidden from humans. The scriptures give no information about him. He cannot be explained by any theory. The final stanza clearly expresses the concept of the Ineffable God and associates it with the two significant epithets "having the quality of *ba*" and "he who keeps his name hidden." The two epithets belong together. The god is called *ba* because there is no name for him. His hidden all-embracing abundance of essence cannot be apprehended. "Amun" is merely a pseudonym used to refer to the god in the cosmic sphere of manifestation. Basically, every divine name is a name of the hidden one, but the term *ba* is used when the hidden one behind the multitude of manifestations is meant. *Ba* is the key concept of the "paradigm of manifestation" as opposed to the "paradigm of creation." We translate the Egyptian term *ba* conventionally as "soul." This yields the idea that for the Egyptians the visible world has a "soul" that animates and moves it, just as it did for the Neoplatonists, who believed in the *anima mundi*. The parallel is not altogether artificial. I think that there are strong connections between the Egyptian and Platonic concepts of a cosmic "soul."

In the paradigm of manifestation, the relationship between the one and the many is "detemporalized." In "becoming" the world, God is still God. This is also what the hymn contends. The one is not regarded as the primeval god *before* the many, whose unity becomes plurality in

creation, but as the one *in* the many, a hidden power called *ba*, which assumes form in the many gods and makes them into gods. But far from being a sort of "mana" or abstract principle, it is a personal nature that transcends all knowledge and speculation.

A hymn of Ramesses III to Amun-Re does not address the god by name, but begins as follows:

I will begin to say his greatness as lord of the gods,
As *ba* with secret faces, great of majesty;
Who hides his name and conceals his image,
Whose form was not known at the beginning.⁹⁷

In the verses that follow, the hymn develops the theory of the life-giving elements, such as "light," "air," and "water," in which the god materializes in the world. This text praises Amun as a cosmic god *whose body is the world*. By praising this god as *ba* rather than with his usual name, the hymn refers to god as the *ba* of the world, the "vital principle" of the cosmos which gives life to the cosmos in the same way that the human *ba* ("soul") gives life to the individual human being.

Ba, however, is a bifocal term. It may refer not only to the invisible life-giving principle in and behind the visible world, but also to its visible manifestations. The visible world, in some of its aspects, can also be called *ba*. Thus the life-giving elements can be called God's *bas* and these can be experienced in the cosmos as the ways in which god works. Thus we read in a text:

The *ba* of Re [= the light of the sun] is throughout the entire land.⁹⁸

And in another text, known as "The Teaching of Ani," we read:

The god of this land is the sun in heaven.
He gives his *bas* in millions of forms.⁹⁹

Rameside Amun-Re theology went even further by regarding not only the light but also the totality of the energies that perform a life-giving function in the world as manifestations, or *bas*, of Amun. This idea is clearly opposed to the tenets of Amarna religion, where the concept *ba*

does not occur and the corresponding category is *kheperu*: the visible world is the *kheperu* of god, that is, it proceeds from him, but is not itself divine.

But the idea of the world being the *kheperu* of god seems closer to the paradigm of manifestation than to that of creation. It means that the world is a transformation of God. Some passages in the Amarna hymns which oppose the "One" source of life to the "millions" of transformations seem to closely anticipate Rameside pantheism:

You create millions of forms [*kheperu*] from yourself, the One,
Cities and towns
Fields, paths, and river¹⁰⁰

The million *kheperu* refer obviously to the visible world in its aspect of a space made habitable by light and constituted as a cosmos. Yet the "Shorter Hymn" opposes the One and the Millions as aspects of God himself:

You made heaven remote to rise in it
To see all that you created, you being alone
But there being millions of lives in you [for you] to make them live.¹⁰¹

Both passages implicitly reject the idea of primordial creation and replace it with the idea of continuous creation. Yet it seems evident that they clearly distinguish between creator and creation, however closely the two are related. Aten does not create form "within" but from "above"; there is a clear notion of confrontation implied in this solar symbolism of heaven and earth. In the Amarna texts the term *ba* is completely missing with reference to Aten. This confirms my belief that the paradigm of manifestation is alien to Amarna theology. It is the great innovation of post-Amarna theology.

The paradigm of manifestation and Rameside *ba* theology reach their high point in the theory of the ten *bas* of Amun, developed in a tremendous hymn. Unfortunately, of the ten cantos, each one devoted to a specific *ba*, only the first three have been preserved. But an introductory hymn names all ten of them so that the system as such is recognizable.¹⁰²

In the first five *bas* we once again find the life-giving elements. The first pair of *bas* are the sun and the moon, which can also be explained as the right and the left eyes of the cosmic god. Then come the *bas* of Shu and Osiris for air and water. The fifth *ba* is not that of Geb for earth, as one might expect, but that of Tefnut, the goddess of the flaming uraeus snake. The theological interpretation is given in the hymn. Sun and moon represent not light, but time, which also appears here as a cosmic life-giving energy. Light is attributed to the *ba* of Tefnut. The life-giving elements here are thus time, air, water, and light. When they are represented in human form, all five *bas* wear the insignia of their cosmic manifestation on their heads: sun, moon, sail, three water bowls, and torch, respectively. Up to this point we find ourselves on familiar ground, even if this pentad is otherwise not attested.¹⁰³

The second group of five *bas* takes us into theologically new territory. They represent five classes of living creatures. Hence, this theology distinguishes between cosmic and animal life. The five life-giving cosmic elements are paired with five classes of life-endowed animate creatures: human beings, quadrupeds, birds, creatures of the water, and creatures of the earth, such as snakes, scarabs, and the dead. The *ba* of human beings has human form and is called "royal ka"; the *ba* of quadrupeds is lion-headed and is called "ram of the rams"; the *ba* for birds has a human form and is called Harakhty; the *ba* of aquatic creatures has a crocodile head and is called "*ba* of those in the water"; the *ba* of terrestrial creatures has the head of a snake and is called Nehebka. The system is illustrated in the following table:

First Pentad		
<i>Ba</i>	"In his name"	Function
<i>Ba</i> in the right eye	Re of every day	Time
<i>Ba</i> in the left eye	Full moon	Time
<i>Ba</i> of Shu	Remaining in all things	Air, wind
<i>Ba</i> of Osiris	Eldest Nun	Water
<i>Ba</i> of Tefnut	The one who awakes whole	Light

Second Pentad		
Symbol	Class	"In his name"
Human	Human beings	Royal-ka
Lion	Quadrupeds	Falcon
Falcon	Birds	Harakhty
Crocodiles	Aquatic creatures	<i>Ba</i> of those in the water
Snakes	Terrestrial creatures	Nehebka

This theology understands the *bas* of God not as the visible world in itself, but as a decad of mediating powers that animate and sustain the world. Perhaps the most puzzling feature of this theology is the place assigned to the king. The king belongs to the ten *bas*; he is one of the ten worldly manifestations in the form of which the god gives life to, animates, and organizes the world. The king is indeed the divine energy responsible for human beings—not the king himself, of course, but the royal *ka* as the divine institutional principle of kingship, embodied in each king and identical with Horus.¹⁰⁴ Kingship is a cosmic energy, like light and air: the power of god that animates, takes care of, and orders the human world is manifested in it.

Not only is this theology given linguistic expression in a hymn, but it is also translated into a cult activity in the form of a ritual. This ritual is known to us from the Taharqa building next to the sacred lake in Karnak, where the wall reliefs are unfortunately very badly damaged, and from the Opet Temple in Karnak, in whose crypts a well-preserved variant has been discovered by Claude Traunecker.¹⁰⁵ The fact that the cult was performed in a crypt might indicate that it was some kind of secret cult. The hymn is also surrounded by indications of secrecy. In the Hibis temple version it bears the title "Book of the Secrets of Amun Written Down on Boards of *Nbs*-Wood."¹⁰⁶ Here, we find ourselves on the threshold of Hermeticism and the Greco-Egyptian magical papyri, which to some extent develop a similarly complex theo-cosmology.¹⁰⁷

A magical text from about the same time period as the ritual of the ten *bas* of Amun counts seven *ba*-manifestations of Amun:

The "Bes" with seven heads . . .
 He is [embodies] the *bas* of Amun-Re, lord of Karnak, chief of
 Ipet-Sut,
 The ram with sublime face, who dwells in Thebes.
 The great lion who generated by himself,
 The Great god of the beginning,
 The ruler of lands and the king of gods,
 The lord of heaven, earth, underworld, water, and mountains
 Who conceals his name from the gods,
 The giant of millions of cubits,
 The strong . . . who fixed the sky on his head,
 Of whose nose the air comes forth,
 In order to animate all noses,
 Who rises as sun, in order to illuminate the earth,
 Of whose bodily secretions the Nile flows forth in order to
 nourish every mouth . . .

This text accompanies and explains a vignette showing a strange being with seven different heads. Bes is a familiar figure in Egyptian magic. He is the god of the bed chamber who wards off the evil demons by means of his monstrous exterior. In this form, with his seven heads, he appears even more monstrous. In any event, he seems worlds apart from the sublime concept of a Supreme Being as postulated by Ramesside theology. Nevertheless, he is presented here as a universal deity embodying the seven *bas* of Amun. We have to understand both the text and the picture on two levels. What the picture shows is the level of immanence, of the seven *bas*, a combination of all the different manifestations in which the cosmogonic energy of the creator is present and operative in the world. What the text refers to is the level of transcendence, the ineffable and hidden universal god, whom, of course, no image can represent. All the epithets which the text uses refer to Amun-Re, not to Bes. Bes is identified as the combined *bas* of the Supreme God. It is Bes who is shown in the image, but it is the supreme god who is referred to in the text. And the textual passage, again, is a remarkable piece of theology.

Another vignette in this same papyrus shows a similar figure, but with nine heads instead of seven. It stands upon an oval, encircled by a snake biting its tail (*sd m r3*, Greek *ouroboros*) and containing several beasts that incorporate or symbolize evil powers: lion, hippopotamus, croco-

dile, snake, scorpion, turtle, and dog. The accompanying text describes the picture, but without giving a theological interpretation.

With nine faces on a single neck,
 a face of Bes, a face of a ram,
 a face of a hawk, a face of a crocodile,
 a face of a hippopotamus, a face of a lion, a face of a bull,
 a face of a monkey, and a face of a cat.¹⁰⁸

This figure reappears on magical stelae such as the famous Metternich stela and becomes in fact quite common during the Late Period. It is the same figure which in the Greco-Egyptian magical papyri is called *enneamorphos*, the one with nine forms.¹⁰⁹ We may be sure that this is just another rendering of the same idea: a visualization of the different forms in which the cosmogonic energy of the supreme and transcendent God is present in the world. The Egyptian pantheon is a composite form of this divine immanence. The seven *bas*, the nine shapes or the million beings are variant expressions of the same idea that God is one *and* many, one *and* all, *Hen kai pan*, as the Greek formula runs.

In the present context, the main interest of this strange figures lies in the fact that it provides the "missing link" between Ramesside theology and Greco-Egyptian religious beliefs and practices. Magic served as the most important means of transmission and continuity. The magical purpose for which this highly theological concept of God is brought to function in the two vignettes of the magical Brooklyn papyrus is as general and all-encompassing as God himself. The papyrus is designed as a general and unspecific protection against every possible form of danger. "Pantheism" proved a magically successful theory of the world.

In the Greco-Egyptian magical papyri, many theological passages display very much the same concept of a supreme god as that which we have met with in the Brooklyn papyrus, the concept of a hidden and universal supreme Being whose visible manifestation is the world:

Come to me, you from the four winds,
 God, ruler of all,
 Who has breathed spirits into men for life,
 Master of the good things in the world.
 Hear me, lord, whose name is ineffable.

The demons, hearing it, are terrified—
 The name BARBAREICH ARSEMPHEMPHROOTHOU—
 And because of hearing it the sun, the earth, are overturned;
 Hades, hearing, is shaken; rivers, sea, lakes, springs, hearing,
 are frozen;
 Rocks, hearing it, are split.
 Heaven is your head;
 Ether, body;
 Earth, feet;
 And the water around you, ocean,
 O Agathos Daimon.
 You are lord, the begetter and nourisher and increaser of all.¹¹⁰

Let me now turn to what I claim is the Egyptian equivalent of the Greek formula that so intrigued Cudworth, Lessing, and the German pre-Romantics: *Hen kai pan*. A Ramesside magical papyrus contains a short version of one of the most important Amun-Re hymns. Consequently, the hymn can be dated to the Nineteenth Dynasty, though the earliest complete surviving version occurs in the Hibis temple from the Persian period. The short version is as follows:

Hail, the One who makes himself into millions,
 Whose length and breadth are limitless!¹¹¹
 Power in readiness, who gave birth to himself,
 Uraeus with great flame;
 Great of magic with secret form,
 Secret *ba*, to whom respect is shown.

King Amun-Re may he live, be powerful and healthy, who
 came into being himself,
 Akhty, Horus of the east,
 The rising one whose radiance illuminates,
 The light that is more luminous than the gods.
 You have hidden yourself as Amun the great;
 You have withdrawn in your transformation as the sun disk.¹¹²
 Tatenen, who raises himself above the gods.

The Old Man forever young, traveling through Time,

Amun, who remains in possession of all things,
 This god who established the earth by his providence.

The first stanza deals with an aspect of the god that is of particular interest to us (as it would have been for Ralph Cudworth). This is the aspect of the hidden nameless power, for whom neither the divine name Amun(-Re) nor the description *ntr* (usually translated as "god") appear sufficient. For this reason, circumlocutions are used such as "power," "uraeus," "great of magic" and, finally, what has to be regarded as the *nomen ipsum* of this concept of God, "hidden *ba*." This stanza is quite different from the second one, which not only names the hidden god, but also emphasizes this name with cartouches and titles. There can scarcely be a clearer expression of the fact that the name too is only an aspect of the god which he uses when he exercises his rule over the world. As a nameless and secret *ba* the god is unlimited and omnipresent. The forms in which his power manifests itself are the millionfold totality.

The hymn uses a formula that appears very frequently with reference to this hidden, universal creator: "the One who makes himself into millions." The problems presented by the interpretation of this formula can be summarized as follows:

1. "The One": Does the predication of "oneness" refer to the "aloneness" of the primeval god *before* creation or to the all-oneness of God as manifested *in* creation?
2. "Who transforms himself": Does this refer to the creation at the beginning or to the continuous stream of the all from the one?
3. "Into millions": Does this refer to the millions of gods or the totality of living creation or a concept of everything (Greek *pan* / Latin *omnia*)?¹¹³

Erik Hornung has interpreted the formula in a temporal sense. He regards (1) "oneness" as the condition of the god before creation; (2) the verbs describing the creation or emergence of the many from the one as a description of primeval creation; and (3) the "millions" as the polytheistic divine world that represents existing reality.¹¹⁴

By and large, these views are supported by the texts, almost all of which refer to creation. Occasionally, the temporal relationship between oneness and allness is also expressly emphasized by the additional

statement that all gods emerged *after* the one. Therefore it is not a matter of disputing Hornung's interpretation, but of asking whether the formula, apart from its undeniable reference to creation (which introduces nothing new in Egyptian religious history), also implies a "manifestational" concept of God like that expressed by the Latin formula *una quae es omnia*. The hymn quoted above deals with the concept of God as a "hidden power" and as the source of the millionfold plurality in which he unfolds and extends into the "boundlessness."¹¹⁵ This boundlessness is not predicated of the world, but of God, to whom the hymn is addressed. Accordingly, God *is* the million into which he has transformed himself: *unus qui est omnia*. In other texts, "million" is said to be his body,¹¹⁶ his limbs,¹¹⁷ his transformation¹¹⁸ and even his name: "million of millions" is his name."¹¹⁹ By transforming himself into the millionfold reality, God has not ceased to be one. He *is* the many in that mysterious way, hidden and present at the same time, which this theology is trying to grasp by means of the *ba* concept. A common text even goes so far as to describe God as the *ba* (and not the creator) of gods and humans (that is, "the millions"):¹²⁰

The One Alone who created what is,
The illustrious *ba* of gods and humans.¹²¹

The unity of God becomes a problem only when it has to be made to harmonize with the idea (realized in polytheism) of the divinity of the world without being reduced to the before/after solution of creation theology. That is the situation in Ramesside theology. The unity of God is realized as neither preexistence nor a (counter-religious) monotheistic concept, but as latency, as a "hidden unity," in which all living plurality on earth has its origin and whose inscrutable nature can be experienced and stated only in its manifestations, the "colorful reflection" of the polytheistic divine world.

The predication "the One who makes himself into millions" means that God, by creating the world, transformed himself into (or manifested himself as) the totality of divine forces which are operative in the creation and maintenance of the world and that all of the gods are comprised in the One. It is more than probable that the corresponding predication of Isis as "the one who is all" translates and continues this form of predication. She is called *una quae es omnia* in that inscription

from Capua which was so important for Cudworth,¹²² or *mounē su ei hapasai*,¹²³ meaning that all the other goddesses are absorbed or united in her divine being. She is also called *myrionyma*, "with innumerable names," which means that all divine names are hers and that all other deities are merely aspects of her all-encompassing nature. This idea occurs also in the *Corpus Hermeticum*: all names are those of one god.¹²⁴ Giordano Bruno refers to a cabalistic tradition according to which there is an ineffable name as the first principle, "from which, second, there proceed four names, which afterwards are converted into twelve, in a straight line change into seventy-two, and obliquely and in a straight line into one hundred forty-four, and farther on are unfolded by fours and by twelves into names as innumerable as species. And likewise, according to each name (inasmuch as it befits their own language), they name one god, one angel, one intelligence, one power, who presides over one species. From this we will see that all Deity reduces itself to one source, just as all light is reduced to the first and self-illuminated source and images that are in mirrors as diverse and numerous as there are particular subjects are reduced to their source, the one formal and ideal principle."¹²⁵ I cannot help believing that this kind of speculation would have appealed very much to an Egyptian priest thinking within the paradigm of manifestation.

As Ralph Cudworth had shown, the famous proclamation "One-and-All," the manifesto of Hermeticism, has the same origin as the Isis formula *una quae es omnia*. Alchemistic and Hermetic manuscripts transmit this device through the Middle Ages into the pantheist revival in the eighteenth century.