

Cutting “God” Down to Size

Transcendence and the Feminine

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Abstract

This paper suggests that Abrahamic monotheism in the form of Judaism, Christianity and Islam has become a constraint on women seeking a feminine spirituality. The West has made an identification “religion = God” that needs to be abandoned as other types of religion become better-known. The breaking down of this assumption is shown to remove much of what is patriarchal and alienating about religion for women, while the spiritual “flat-land” of postmodernism is shown to be unhelpful. Instead a five-fold scheme of the spiritual life is presented in which monotheism stands as an equal alongside shamanism, goddess polytheism, warrior polytheism and the transcendent.

Keywords: monotheism, shamanism, polytheism, goddess, women’s spirituality, transcendent, Irigaray.

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Introduction

For a proper understanding of the spiritual life and the nature of, and possibilities for, women’s spirituality, we need a broader language of the spiritual than monotheism can provide. The very term “transcendence” illustrates this because in the Christian tradition it tends to have meaning in binary opposition to “immanence” and refers to characteristics of “God,” whereas in Eastern traditions – to the extent that translation can succeed in finding corresponding concepts – it means something closer to the “nondual” or “uni-

tive." The "God"-language of the West has created a limitation of understanding, both within religious and within secular communities, the latter inheriting the equation "religion = God" and therefore remaining ignorant of non-monotheistic religions. "God" is a construct peculiar to Abrahamic text-oriented monotheism, and it needs to be cut down to size, allowing other religious frameworks space. This means that questions of spirituality and religion need additional, equally powerful, terms to fill the gap. For women's spirituality, the issue is partly that "God" is an inevitably gendered term: monotheism constructs a male "God" served historically by a male priesthood.

Within the tradition of transpersonal psychology and its discourse of spirituality, "transcendence" is now also a term under attack, particularly by Jorge Ferrer. He suggests that the implicit adherence to Perennialism within the transpersonal tradition, creates a single conception of the goal of the spiritual life: the transcendent (in the Eastern sense of the word). Note that Perennialism is a term coined by Leibniz, popularized by Aldous Huxley, and meaning a universal spirituality. In a typically postmodernist move, Ferrer argues that the spiritual life not only has a multitude of starting points – not so controversial – but also that it has a multitude of goals: a radical proposition (Ferrer 144). In true postmodernist style, he leaves open what these goals might be, which is to some extent a welcome opening up of possibility. However, this leaves little more than a flatland of potential with no landmarks, signs, or, even worse, any powerful language that can stand its ground against the patriarchal language of the "God" traditions. Instead, if "God" is brought down from its dominant conceptual position, not to wander through a relativist flatland as one among millions, it could take its place at the table with just *four* other significant spiritualities. The equal partners proposed here are shamanism, goddess polytheism, warrior polytheism, and the unitive (transcendent).

Luce Irigaray, in her extraordinary little book *Between East and West*, says, "There exists [in India] a cohabitation between at least two epochs of History: the one in which women are goddesses, the other in which men exercise a blind power over them" (65). It is suggested here, instead, the sequence comprises *five* epochs: shamanism, goddess polytheism, warrior polytheism, monotheism, and the unitive. These will be presented as having a historical basis, but beyond that, they are also archetypes of powerfully different spiritual impulses, recapitulated within all people at all times. Like the Jungian archetypes, they are conceived of as universals, which may come into play more in one individual than another and more in one culture than another. In other words, these five "epochs" of religious manifestation are also five personal spiritual impulses, or five modalities of the spirit.

This articulation of spiritual difference through five historical modalities is not to be read as a development from a lesser, more primitive early modality to a higher, more sophisticated later modality. In other words, it is neither Hegelian, which would imply an inevitable historical vector privileging later periods or peoples, nor is it Wilberian, which

would imply a developmental psychology as assumed in the work of Ken Wilber. The discussion here of the earlier modalities of the spirit is informed by anthropology, ethnology, archaeology, and the ancient literatures, all of which disciplines are subject to new findings, methodologies, or better translations. Simone de Beauvoir, Sigmund Freud, and Carl Jung, to take some examples from the first half of the twentieth century, were profoundly influenced by the anthropology of their day, making many assumptions that would now be discredited by later developments in the discipline. Voltaire, writing in the eighteenth century, was even more constrained by anthropology at its birth. Similarly, some of the approximate dates given here, or even possibly some of the major transitions alluded to, may well have to be revised in the future. However, the modalities of spirit that we are exploring in this historical fashion are not so dependent on the detail of history, but rather on how these modalities are archetypally present in our psyches today. We know that contemporary Western city-dwellers actively take up ancient religious practices (neoshamanism or neopaganism, for example) or adopt Eastern unitive traditions (Yoga, neo-Advaita, or Zen, for example). The flourishing nature of these adoptions illustrates the ability of people to respond at a very deep level to modalities of the spirit that are remote in time or place from their contemporary setting.

The Five Stages of Religion

Here five stages in religion are introduced as an idealized "photofit" composite of world spiritual history, though the complete sequence does not in fact exactly take place anywhere in the world: it is more a psychogeography of the spiritual. These religious stages are can be shown diagrammatically:

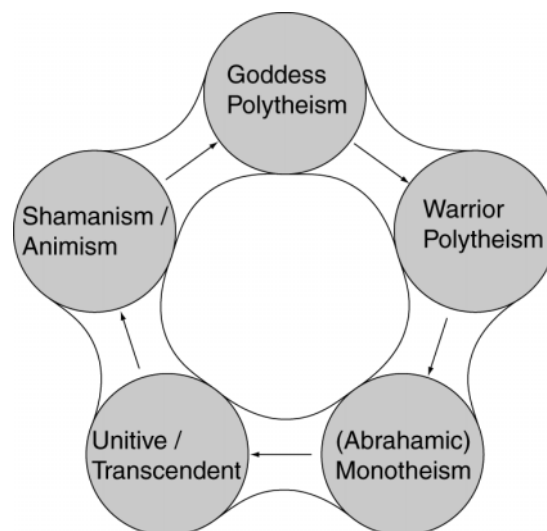


Fig. 1. Five religious stages

The diagram has been drawn with curved lines to suggest that the boundaries between the five modalities are fluid, even where, in the case of monotheism, it strenuously re-

sists other modalities of the spirit. Arrows have been drawn to indicate the historic progression, with one exception: the arrow from the unitive/transcendent to the shamanic/animist, which appears to point backward in time, and will be discussed later.

Shamanism/Animism

The shamanic/animistic category represents a modality of the spirit that appears to have emerged with humankind itself. No early hominid traces seem to have been found without evidence of shamanistic practices, which include artefacts – such as fetishes and totems – for rites that revolve around Nature and "spirits." The shamanic worldview is predicated on a perception of Nature as imbued with spirit, wherein the elements of Nature, such as rocks, mountains, trees, rivers, animals, and skies, are inhabited by spirits and daily life is also filled with the presence of the spirits of the ancestors. This "spirit world" is both beyond the so-called material world and, at the same time, intimately entwined within it; they are not separable in shamanism. Some scholars believe that there is a meaningful distinction between animism and shamanism in that the latter is served by a functionary or specialist called a shaman, whereas the former is not. For our purposes, this distinction is of little use because both animism and shamanism, as they are generally understood, are grounded in the same spiritual interiority of the spirit world. In an animistic culture, there would surely exist individuals whose gift for entering into the spirit world was more developed than others and who would naturally take on roles of intercession and healing, though perhaps not culturally formalized in the way that shamans are. Conversely, in a shamanic culture it is inconceivable that the rest of the group would not mostly share the worldview and spiritual abilities of the shaman, at least in a nascent form. Hence, we will from here on use the term "shamanic" to cover both animist and shamanic spiritualities, though we are referring more to an inner orientation or sensibility than to outward ritual or practice.

The shaman, who can equally be male or female (as shown in traditions as far apart as in Siberia and South America), is required to mediate between the group and the spirits as the functionary of this religion; conversely, he or she makes the world sacred through the practice of ritual. Shamanism is associated with hunter-gatherer cultures, and though it is understood as the universal ur-religion of mankind (proposed, for example, by Mircea Eliade in his seminal work *Shamanism: Archaic Techniques of Ecstasy*), the word "shaman" itself comes via Russian from the Tungus people of Siberia (or it may have its root in Sanskrit). We are fortunate that shamanism has survived at the margins since the earliest of times, generally driven to unfertile or inhospitable territories by later agricultural societies. Hence, in mountains, deserts, or polar regions, shamanic cultures persist to this day (though increasingly ravaged by their contact with the industrial world) whose practices and beliefs can be studied.

A form of neoshamanism has recently emerged, particularly in the United States, as people with little previous interest in religion take up shamanic practices under modern teachers or guides. The writings of anthropologist and cult author Carlos Castaneda and the work of transpersonal psychologist Stansilav Grof have been significant in this revival. Michael Harner, author of the classical work *The Way of the Shaman*, comments in the tenth-anniversary edition on a "shamanic renaissance": "During the last decade, however, shamanism has returned to human life with startling strength, even to urban strongholds of Western 'civilisation', such as New York and Vienna There is another public, however, rapidly-growing and now numbering in the thousands in the United States and abroad, that has taken up shamanism and made it part of personal daily life" (xi). Shamanic peoples often display a certain gender fluidity and gender balance, despite the roles of men as predominantly hunters and women as predominantly gatherers. Males of shamanic cultures often look feminine by modern Western standards, while females may not have our contemporary exaggerated femininity. Neither do these men and women have the individualistic or egotistic natures of Western people; perhaps this has led to the widespread but absurd notion that shamanic peoples have a less developed personal consciousness. A better way to understand a defining characteristic of shamanic peoples is as *self-effacing*. Good portrayals in contemporary culture are to be found in the character played by Chief Dan George in Clint Eastwood's film *The Outlaw Josie Wales* (1976), Old Lodge Skins in the film *Little Big Man* (1970), or in the character of Dersu Uzula in the film of the same name by Ikuru Kurusawa (1975). Well-known Native American actor Gary Farmer plays "Nobody" in Jim Jarmusch's film *Dead Man* (1995), vividly conveying the humility at the heart of the Native American way of life and what is arrogant in that of the white man.

Goddess Polytheism

If "shamanism" is a contested term, then anything to do with "goddess" is doubly so. There is in fact a genuine difficulty in the discussion ahead: shamanism has survived in the margins, has been extensively studied, and so is at least in principle recoverable as an ancient practice. But goddess religions – to the extent that we now posit their existence – were systematically eradicated by later modalities of the spirit *and had nowhere to go*. There is growing evidence from archaeology that Goddess cultures replaced shamanic hunter-gatherer cultures in all parts of the world bar the marginal lands around the period of the late Neolithic and early Bronze Ages (Shlain 35). But the inter-iority of this modality of the spirit is more problematic and less recoverable than the shamanic because there is no surviving unbroken tradition. Instead, there is a modern revival, led by radical scholars, such as Starhawk, along with women from all walks of life, who seek to imaginatively reconstruct this spirituality. It is the archaeological evidence and the modern revival taken *together* that make the case for Goddess Polytheism as a major modality of the spirit.

In spiritual terms, we can identify two stages in the transition from hunter-gatherer cultures to agrarian ones: first, to "goddess polytheism" and then to "warrior polytheism." Both involve an increasing process of abstraction in the conception of spirits or deities. The hunter-gatherer way of life existed for possibly some three million years, and, as a first approximation at least, we can associate the shamanic modality of spirit with that way of life. The implication is clear: shamanism must be deeply rooted in the human psyche if it were present over such huge timescales. Hunter-gatherer societies in general seem to have been nonsexist and relatively nonviolent, comprising family groups of about eighty to a hundred individuals, all well known to each other. Some seven thousand years ago, two new skills emerged: that of animal husbandry and that of agriculture. Whether as horticulture (small-scale agriculture) or as agriculture proper, the new way of life spread rapidly and pushed the older hunter-gatherer lifestyle to the margins, along with its central spiritual form: shamanism. Baring and Cashford suggest that we can broadly associate goddess polytheism with small-scale horticultural communities of the late Neolithic and early Bronze Age, and warrior polytheism with large-scale agriculture and societies of the later Bronze and Iron Age (416).

The growing scholarship on goddess religions is led by feminist archaeologists and thinkers, whose role as feminists in this is to uncover the layers of patriarchal prejudice that have clouded the disciplines of archaeology, anthropology, and history up to very recently. For example, the huge quantities of goddess figures unearthed in archaeological sites all round the world were routinely dismissed as products of "fertility cults" by male (Christian) academics. Merlin Stone's *When God Was a Woman* is an early but superb account of the endemic and often subtly propagated male prejudice in these matters. Once the same data are looked at from the recognition that goddess religions were not marginal cults, but central to thousands of years of human history, a radically different picture emerges. We can say that the word "cult" is a quick way to dismiss anything non-Christian and the word "fertility" a quick way to dismiss anything nonmasculine; hence, "fertility cult" conveys total contempt in the mind of the male (white) Christian. The work of Marija Gimbutas, Anne Baring and Jules Cashford, and Starhawk (born Miriam Simos) are seminal in this field, while author Leonard Shlain contributes radical proposals about the marginalization of goddess spiritualities because of *writing*.

In the period of goddess polytheism, the discrete, specific, and localized spirits of the shamanic world took their first steps into abstraction as gods and goddesses of early horticultural life. These deities were propitiated perhaps in a different way than in shamanic culture. As less specific spirits and more abstracted deities, the spiritual response to them would have changed, perhaps quite dramatically (Hillman xxi). The shamanic mode of "storytelling" becomes a polytheistic mode of "myth:" a transition from an animistic engagement with living spirits to a mythic engagement with psychic entities. It may also be the case that goddess spiritualities were more centered on human-human relationships than human-animal relationships. We have emphasized the *polytheism* in

goddess spirituality: This is to counter the Western cultural impetus to merely transpose a male monotheism into a female monotheism, a single "God" into a single "Goddess."

Scholars such as Leonard Shlain and Marija Gimbutas now believe that the entire Greek mythology can be understood as arising from the transition from a goddess culture to a patriarchal polytheism, undertaken at the time when oral traditions were first transcribed in the new Semitic alphabet (Shlain 120). Possibly the best illustration of this transition in contemporary culture is to be found in the film *Medea* (1969) loosely adapted by Pier Paolo Pasolini from the play by Euripides, featuring the opera singer Maria Callas in the lead role (her only film appearance). Medea represents for Pasolini the transition from matrilineal, goddess cultures to patrilineal male warrior cultures as she returns with Jason, whose mission it was to steal her golden fleece. Pasolini captures the moment of transition as the Argonauts land in Corinth on a simple raft. Medea cannot understand how the men treat the land of their birth: they do not call to the ancient deities, propitiate the nature spirits of earth and stone; they merely tread on the land as *property*. She is overcome and then rants at them, full of passion and foreboding: "This place will sink because it has no foundations. You do not call god's blessings on your tents. You speak not to god. You do not seek the centre; you do not mark the centre. Look for a tree, a post, a stone."

Once on the soil, which is now to be her new homeland, she runs in despair through the grasses, wailing: "Speak to me Earth, let me hear your voice, I have forgotten your voice. Speak to me Sun. Where must I stand to hear your voice? Speak to me Earth. Speak to me Sun. Are you losing your way, never to return again? Grass, speak to me. Stone, speak to me. Earth, where is your meaning? Where can I find you again?"

To monotheists, steeped in the Old Testament proscription against idolatry, and the wider and endemic scorn within the Old Testament toward the older Nature religions, Medea is merely a pagan among pagans: what is her objection to the paganism of the warriors who take her home? But to those whose spiritual antennae are attuned to the differences between shamanism, goddess polytheism, and warrior polytheism, her anguish has a clear and obvious source: the new, patriarchal polytheism is abandoning Nature and substituting instead more abstract "gods"—those whose interest is only in the narrowly human and the warlike at that. Later in the film, Pasolini makes clear the extent of Medea's spiritual tragedy:

Centaur: Despite all your schemes and interpretations, his influence causes you to love Medea.

Jason: Love Medea?

Centaur: Yes. Also you pity her. *You understand her spiritual catastrophe.* A woman of an ancient world, confused in a world which ignores her beliefs. She experienced the opposite of a conversion and has never recovered.

Jason: What use is this knowledge to me?

Centaur: None. It is a reality.

Pasolini both understands Medea's "spiritual catastrophe" — and it stands for the spiritual catastrophe of all women as they came under the subjugation of patriarchal tradition — and makes it clear that Jason is utterly uninterested. It is a reality of Medea's life, not his.

In this context, then, it is of interest to turn to Irigaray's concept of the "aboriginal feminine," as discussed in *Between East and West*. This is a most useful term, though it needs a little elaboration in the context of the epochal spiritualities proposed here. Irigaray had found in India, at the time of her 1984 trip, signs indicating that an ancient feminine spirituality survived alongside later patriarchal religion, particularly in the south (this is the remnant of the original Dravidian culture driven southward by the invading Aryans of the north). Effectively, India allows us to see today a palimpsest of the historical transition that took place in ancient Greece and so effectively dramatized for us in Pasolini's *Medea*. But what Irigaray practiced in India and brought back with her to the West was Yoga, a spiritual tradition as ancient in epochal terms as Medea but exclusively located within the unitive/transcendent modality of the spirit. Hence, she is quite right to question the apparent genderlessness of Yoga as a discipline and a teaching of transcendence.

Warrior Polytheism

As large-scale agriculture developed out of small-scale horticulture, methods of creating surplus came into being through the cultivation, drying, and storage of grain: This became the first form of wealth and wages. Eventually, this led to the emergence of the city-state and created a radically new way of life over the small-scale horticultural community. Complex social and economic patterns emerged that allowed a class of society to live removed from the immediate production of food. At the same time, there had evolved a new sphere of male human activity: warfare. Leonard Shlain believes that the Neolithic and early Bronze Age period from approximately ten thousand to five thousand years ago seems to have been dominated by women, with little militarism or central authority, but the male hunting instinct seems to have been transforming itself during this time into the instinct for war (Shlain 33). Perhaps as crops required defending, not just from wild animals but also from other tribes, defensive and then offensive patterns of aggression developed. With economic surplus and the development of settlements into cities, a military caste came into being, and with it what we are calling "warrior polytheism." Society became stratified in a way that was impossible during the epochs of hunter-gatherer and Goddess societies, leading also to a new priestly caste. The shaman might be called the "priest" or "priestess" of the shamanic way of life, but his or her powers were in healing and in shamanic flight: The new priesthood became guardians instead of great temples and therefore also of wealth and power.

Warrior polytheism continues the proliferation of deities, along with the tendency to anthropomorphism as opposed to the taking on of animal characteristics within shamanism which we could term, in contrast, "zoomorphism" or "therianthropy." but in the patriarchal pantheon, the female deities were demoted or forgotten in favor of new male ones. (They were literally "written out" of history.) Ancient Greece provides us with a good example of how the new deities were considered to be as quarrelsome as the humans of war-ridden human city-states. The key issue here however is the shift from a female-dominated culture and religion to a male-dominated culture and religion: from matriarchy to patriarchy. The flowering of goddess cultures between seven thousand and five thousand years ago was brought to an abrupt end in the Mediterranean world at least, and historians and anthropologists have argued over the causes for more than a century. (In India, as Irigaray saw, there are still vivid traces of the earlier modalities of the spirit.) What brought patriarchy into being is of interest generally, but in terms of religion, the shift was nothing short of a revolution. Shamanic spirituality was equally male and female; Goddess Polytheism was female dominated; but all later religion became male dominated. Shlain considers Engels's theory that the growing concept of property favored patriarchy but refutes it on the basis of many property-based goddess cultures. Shlain suggests instead that patriarchy arose with *writing* and in its most radical form with the linked inventions of the alphabet and monotheism. He bases this on his understanding of the brain (he is a neurosurgeon by profession) and, in particular, on the division of functions between the left and right hemispheres (Shlain 23).

Agriculture led to the stratification of society and to the division between those who worked on the land (and who probably retained their shamanistic practices) and the city-dwellers, who began to live at one remove from nature. The city-dwellers needed more symbolic thinking to deal with the increased social, technical, and political complexities of their lives, and, hence, the process of increased abstraction was necessary. One of the qualities of polytheism is the tendency, possibly inherited from its shamanic roots, to be localized; that is, for gods to belong to regions. Hence, the Romans, in administering their conquests, acknowledged the local gods and allowed their worship as long as the gods of Rome, particularly the Emperor, were included. (The Jews were a notable exception in the Empire, refusing to cooperate with this.) In fact, the gods in different cultures were rarely so different as to be unrecognizable. Caesar, for example, had no difficulty in finding the Roman equivalents to the deities he discovered in conquered Gaul. (This is a process referred to by an early meaning of the word *syncretism*.)

To contemplate what a warrior polytheistic modality of the spirit might feel like, we can turn to the early Roman, Greek, Mayan, or Hindu cultures and enter imaginatively into the life of those early city-states. It is a world of myth making, a mythology that holds within it a great departure from shamanic storytelling: It is *heroic* and, in its Greek form, also *Oedipal*. The shaman is amorphous and self-effacing (also androgyne), whereas the polytheism of the city-state serves its principal activity: warfare. Of course, when the heroic emerges onto the world stage, so does the hubristic: success and failure enter the

vocabulary in a way unknown to shamanic and goddess cultures. Tragedy is born with "civilization," articulated in the Greek myth of Oedipus, as the inevitable competitiveness of the son with the father. When Freud took this story to be a universal of the human mind, he was operating only within the Western inheritance of Greek warrior polytheism. The Far East arrived at its patriarchy in a rather different way: The Chinese mind would not have made a drama out of Oedipus's killing of his father and marriage to his mother, both unintended. "Such things happen in the realm between heaven and earth," is a more likely response. (Interestingly, Pasolini also chose to make a film out of the story of Oedipus: perhaps as a homosexual he was much interested in the origins of Western masculinities.)

Although much of the modern mind is born out the polytheistic context, including its rejection of the shamanic, our Western cultural heritage of monotheism makes polytheism seem like a distant form of consciousness for us. Psychologist James Hillman has recognized this and the psychological need for an essential component of polytheism: its pluralism. He suggests that the psyche, instead of striving to some imaginary unity in the image of the single "God," should celebrate its multiplicity of impulse in terms of the "gods," plural, as a better reflection of the polyvalence of the human mind (Hillman 30).

Monotheism

When considering Abrahamic monotheism as a modality of spirit, among other equal epochal forms, it is perhaps useful to point out the following: It is geographically unique, arising in the Middle East and nowhere else in the world (it is hence an anomaly on the world stage of religions); it evolved from warrior polytheism, not goddess polytheism; it is associated with a horrifically violent rejection of earlier epochal forms; it is patriarchal; it is associated with the invention of the (Semitic) alphabet; its "God" is not localized, and it becomes a religion uniquely associated with the written word (giving rise to "language mysticism").

Monotheism retains the idea of "God" as a being, a supreme being, analogous with just one of the previous gods but somehow incorporating the separate characteristics of all of them. Anthropomorphism, that is, the tendency to project human qualities onto the polytheistic gods, is fiercely resisted in Judaic monotheism, with its prohibition on speaking the name of "God," and the denial of attributes to him. However, it is not surprising that a single "God" becomes anthropomorphized in the popular mind, however much this tendency is resisted, and this problem is central to the history of monotheism. Judaic, Christian, and Islamic monotheisms are intolerant of other gods, but in other cultures, a pseudomonotheism has not excluded polytheism. Brahman, for example, the "God" of the Hindus, is worshiped through a plethora of other deities who are understood to represent one or more of his divine aspects. Hence, we cannot say that Hinduism is exclusively monotheistic or exclusively polytheistic. In fact, Westerners have read their Judeo-

Christian "God" into Brahman in a quite inappropriate way. Similarly, Jesuit missionaries in China persuaded themselves that the Chinese "heaven" was the equivalent to the Christian "God," though their fellow-missionaries, the Franciscans, thought otherwise and finally convinced the Pope to come down against the Jesuits (Paper 5).

The idea of monotheism seems to have emerged in four possible locations: in fourteenth century BCE Egypt with Akhenaton; in Northern Africa (Barnet); in Persia (modern-day Iran) as Zoroastrianism in the sixth century BCE; and in Israel, as an ongoing process of change that may have been influenced by the Egyptian and Persian examples. Although Egyptian monotheism was rapidly overturned, and Zoroastrianism became a tiny religion on the world stage, it was Judaic monotheism that has had the most impact on the world, through its influence on Christianity and Islam.

The Transcendent/Unitive

In the final development of the religious life, monotheism becomes a transcendent or unitive religion, represented for example by Buddhism and the concept of *nirvana*. However, there is no simple example of a monotheistic religion developing into a transcendent one; for example, in the case of Christianity and Islam, the mystics who entered into this form of the spiritual life were generally persecuted. Meister Eckhart is an example in Christianity who was condemned by the Inquisition, though he died before any punishment could be inflicted, while Mansur (Al-Hallaj) is an example in Islam who suffered a horrible martyrdom. In both cases, the problem for their mainstream religions was that their understanding of "God" had gone beyond the notion of a separate being: their unitive experiences calling for a language of personal transcendence foreign to monotheism. The position of the mystics in the Judaic tradition is more complex, in that they tended to avoid personal declarations of union, and in any case, any popular anthropomorphism of "God" was balanced by its continual denial in the writings of Judaic scholars (Scholem 63). As a result, the "transcendent" is generally the most difficult component of the spiritual life to describe, particularly in the West. The term "unitive" is equally good but not as familiar. The East has the well-known concept of "enlightenment" (or *nirvana*, *moksha*, or liberation), which describes the goal of the transcendent religionist and a transcendent religion. It is "unitive" in the sense of "not-two" (as in Zen and Advaita formulations) but not conceived as union with "God."

If read in a literal developmental sense, these five stages do not map onto the religious history of the world in any simple way. It is clear that by at least 2,600 BCE all five stages had already emerged onto the religious world scene, though our historical knowledge of this, and earlier periods, is rather sketchy. In both the Mediterranean and Indian cultures of that period, we find evidence that all five strands — shamanism, goddess polytheism, warrior polytheism, monotheism, and the unitive/transcendent — were present and to one degree or another *available*. This means that individuals, depending

on their circumstances and mobility, were able to draw on the support for different types of spiritual life. The extraordinary richness of the spiritual life around the Mediterranean at the time of Christ, for example, shows how all five types were present among the different cultures and social strata. This is well documented in *The Jesus Mysteries* by Timothy Freke and Peter Gandy. In India, too, by the time of the Buddha, there was a similar spread of religious practice, and in the ancient Vedas and Upanishads, we find a recognition that is central to the discussion here: each individual tends to gravitate toward the spiritual life that suits them. More than this, each individual has a spiritual impulse and temperament that aligns itself within these categories and has a *right* to adhere to them without interference. Such a right was never part of the Christian history of the West.

That an individual has a *right* to pursue the spiritual life appropriate to them was of course never enshrined in the ancient world either in law (human rights are a recent development), or very often in opportunity (economic and geographical mobility was limited). Nevertheless, those who devoted themselves to the spiritual life in the ancient world often traveled large distances to seek out the teachings they could not find locally, and a large part of ancient discourse resulted from such travelers bringing back new teachings (Pythagoras being a good example, or Solon in Plato's *Timaeus*). This is of course quite obscured from the secular Western mind so shaped by Christianity. By denigrating all the spiritual traditions previous to Christianity as "pagan," a monolithic and exclusive understanding of early religion held sway. The hostility toward shamanic and goddess spiritualities also came from the Greek inheritance, though, in this case, it is more a question of a prejudice against those people living in the countryside and working the land and against women. The legacy of this prejudice is still highly visible in the United States and the United Kingdom and in the productions of mainstream Western culture.

The transcendent needs a little more explanation at this point. We have implied that it would develop out of monotheism, and we see many examples of the transcendent impulse in Christian and Sufi mystics. In the transcendent spiritual experience, "God" as "other" gives way to a state of union or identity and, hence, ceases to be thought of as a "being," even as a "supreme being," rather as simply the "being" at the core of the mystic's identity (Eckhart is a good example of this). In Buddhism, there is no concept of "God" to start with, just the extinguishing of the separate sense of self ("not two" in the formulation of some Zen traditions). It is not possible in a brief overview to develop this very difficult idea fully, but we leave it for now with two remaining comments. First, that the Christian mainstream did not easily tolerate the transcendent, any more than it did signs of "paganism." Second, to counter the simplistic notion that there is a linear spiritual trajectory through the five types of spiritual life, we might look at the example of Tibetan Buddhism. It is the result of the integration of a shamanic religion (the Bon tradition of Tibet) and the incoming Buddhist teachings of transcendence. The two live side by side and create a spectrum of spiritual teachings that support a wide range of spiri-

tual temperaments, an example again of spiritual pluralism within a single tradition. We have characterized Christianity as monolithic, but it is not completely homogeneous, rather the permitted range of spiritual expression is narrow compared with Tibetan Buddhism, for example, and even narrower when laid side by side with Hinduism.

The arrows drawn in our diagram from shamanism to goddess polytheism and so on can be read as implying a developmental sequence or even an inevitable sequence. This is not the intention: it just so happens that elements of this sequence can be found everywhere in history. But we have drawn a final arrow from the transcendent back to the shamanic, partly to counter any sense of inevitable historical development and partly to highlight how the shamanic and the transcendent so easily coexist in the East. Tibetan Buddhism is one example, while the coexistence of Zen and Shinto in Japan is another. The arrow linking the unitive or transcendent with shamanism also suggests an *engaged* enlightenment: a Buddha who turns again to the world.

Conclusions

To recapitulate: while the five religious modalities can be seen to form a historical development, this sequence tends to privilege one form over another. A better use of the distinctions between these forms is to understand them as expressions of five different types of spiritual impulse, as archetypes that are universally present. These impulses may arise in individuals with no regard to history or the prevailing religious form, often leading to a *spiritual dislocation* between individual and culture.

This fivefold schematic allows us to place monotheism in a global and epochal perspective. Although monotheism is a significant modality of the spirit and can be understood as an experiment in spirituality that has created much of value, it has actively denied the other four modalities: in particular, it denies the feminine. However, when the monotheistic "God" is cut down to one-fifth of its claim and takes its seat at the table with the other modalities, it can be a good partner. For the survival of the planet, we need to actively explore those modalities of the spirit that are nonpatriarchal, nonheroic, and that actively elevate the feminine and a profound relationship with the natural world.

We can illustrate these points by considering Irigaray's call, both in her chapter in this volume, and in her book *Between East and West*, to identify a "culture of two subjects" – male and female. She says, "Each subject requires a different manner of becoming divine," perhaps corresponding to the two epochal spiritualities that she detected in India (Irigaray 65). This idea in itself represents a complete revolution, particularly for the West: It represents a spiritual pluralism denied for millennia. But the scheme presented here cuts the corpus in a different way by suggesting *five* different epochal spiritualities, not in the first instance distinguished through gender difference. Irigaray suggests two, Jorge Ferrer suggests an infinity, and this chapter suggests five. Let us see how

this works in an issue raised by Irigaray in the specific context of the Yoga tradition. She found herself acknowledging its apparent openness to women but quickly discovered: "Because of this lack of cultivation of sexual identity, the most irreducible site of reciprocity, reciprocity often seems absent to me in the milieu of yoga" (66). Rather than just understanding Yoga as a patriarchal spirituality, the fivefold scheme presented here quickly locates it in the unitive/transcendent epochal form. Its core text is the *Yoga Sūtras of Patanjali*, which, as Irigaray has picked up on, is disinterested in the question of sexual identity. It also has as its core directive the "cessation of the mind" – a very difficult concept for the West – which can be translated as a "restriction of the fluctuations of consciousness" (Feuerstein 26). For Irigaray, this manifested itself in the instruction from her Indian male Yoga teacher "not to think." Such a teacher is rather unlikely to understand the Western feminist tradition, which leaps on such an exhortation as a patriarchal move to suppress the female. Irigaray muses on this exhortation: "This [Yoga] tradition seems to me to possess a subtlety that demands, on the contrary, a real aptitude for thought" (Irigaray 67). Certainly, the Yoga tradition contains this contradiction, but ultimately, it is a discipline of transcendence that requires cessation of modifications of the mind (or fluctuations of consciousness). These modifications ultimately include all discursive thought and gender. Hence, the Yoga tradition, however modified for the West, cannot meet Irigaray's need for a "manner of becoming divine" for the feminine, particularly because of her emphasis on the *relational*. The unitive/transcendent is precisely an epochal or archetypal spirituality in which the relational ceases. So, in our scheme, Irigaray would need to turn to the other four principal modalities of the spirit to discover where the appropriate relational spirituality might lie. In shamanism, this relationality is mediated through the spirit world, and is ancestor and Nature centered. In goddess polytheism, this relationality is propitiative but locates relationship more within the human world. In warrior polytheism, relations are mostly between men and male gods; divinization is in the context of conquest. And in monotheism, the core relationship is between self and the "wholly other": "God" (Otto 25).

To be restricted to only one modality of spirit by the accident of birth was a specific tragedy of the West. This is now overcome in the multivalency of our postmodern world. Irigaray's search for spiritualities that serve a "culture of two subjects" is one expression of this spiritual pluralism, Ferrer's infinity of goals another. The scheme presented here cuts down the "God" religion of the West to take its place along four other major epochal or archetypal forms: each represents a major clustering of spiritual wisdom, of means of divinization, of modalities of the spirit. The "accomplished interiority," which Irigaray elsewhere suggests should be the goal of the spiritual life (37), may well even be achieved by a systematic exploration of all five. Perhaps even in a single day, the human spirit needs to move between these different spiritualities, as it does between different relationalities. One does not live in the pocket of one's sexual partner; one does not spend all day with the ancestors, or in Nature; one does not devote all one's energies to conquest or horticulture; one does not even need "God" all day long: a time for the cessation of *all* mentation is also needed. Eckhart showed that most vividly (159).

But such an easy pluralism may be a long way off for a society still struggling to shake off the habits of thought formed by patriarchal monotheism. When the centaur told Jason that Medea had undergone a spiritual catastrophe and the "opposite of a conversion," he is perhaps speaking to a majority of women today: women are still to some degree traumatized by the indifference of the world of Jason to their spiritual needs. The very different kind of work pursued by Luce Irigaray – emerging from postmodernist thought – and that of Starhawk – often dismissed as "New Age" – both require that the patriarchal "God" sit down at the table and hear the voices of other spiritualities, other relationalities. The establishment of the "aboriginal feminine" or goddess modality of spirit is an essential first step, but a more ambitious goal is to see women reclaim all modalities of the spirit. The shamanic anyway belongs equally to men and women, while warrior polytheism represents a conquestal mode of divinization that women may need to draw on as much as men. (All *great* art, reform, construction, and exploration need a spirituality of courage and risk taking.) Monotheism as a relationship with a "wholly other" is likewise a relational spirituality as potentially cornucopian to the female spirit as the male. Finally, the transcendent modality of the spirit requires that gender as a "modification of the mind" is suspended altogether in ecstatic absorption (or enstatic as Feuerstein prefers it). Why should women (or men, for that matter) be deprived of any of these modalities of the spirit?

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