

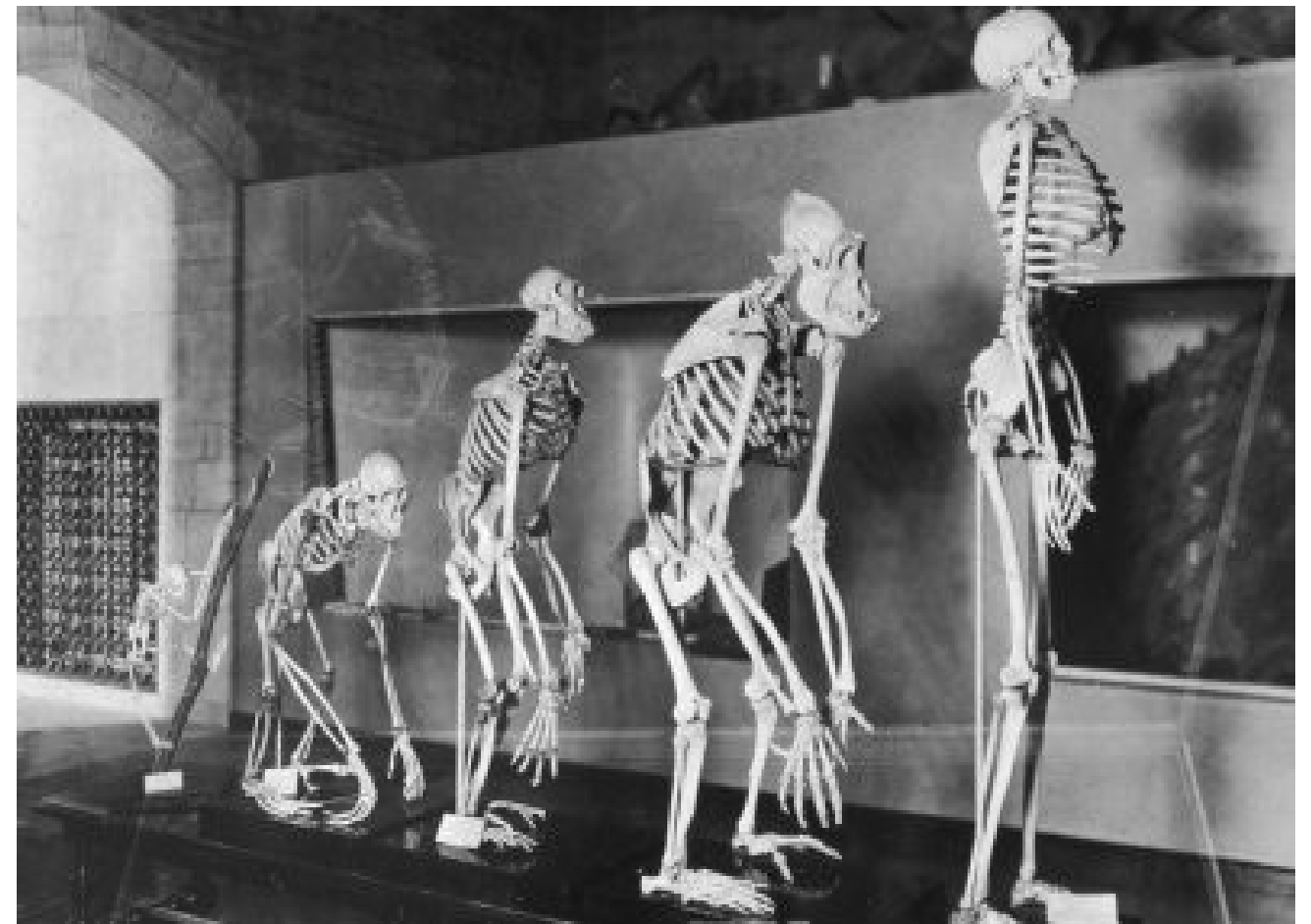
Children of Fire

A Metaphysics of Despair

By Pierce Skinner

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The reason the mass of men fear God, and at bottom dislike Him, is because they rather distrust his heart, and fancy him all brain like a watch.

- *Herman Melville*

- I. It boils down to this: Life is war. There can be no peace until it ends. And it never ends.
- II. There are the things I believe. In my bones do I believe them.
- III. I believe in God.
This is not a very fashionable thing, I am told, for an educated anarchist to believe, or at the very least to profess.
Nonetheless.
I tried my hand at atheism, back in my recalcitrant and reactionary youth, when I was young enough to mistake anger for outright denial. But when you close your eyes, the world doesn't go away, no matter how badly you might want it to. And turning your back on your enemy does not defeat them. They will only shoot you in the back.
- IV. Philip K. Dick: "Reality is that which, when you stop believing in it, doesn't go away."
- V. I believe the universe was created. I believe the creator is the Great Enemy. Its name in my religious tradition is Yaldabaoth. Sakla. Sammael. Yahweh. Pick one.
- VI. There are other gods, spirits, angels, forces, powers in the universe. These can be beneficent or malign or indifferent to human concerns.

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But their power is limited, and they, like we, shudder under the dark umbra of this God of Gods.

- VII. The Ruler of Creation is such by right of might alone. It is a blind, chittering, rapacious machine whose sole desire is domination and control. All matter and energy are Its own to shovel into the furnace of Its engine. Life, too, is just another resource. A vector by which it can spread and more perfectly execute Its designs. Growth for the sake of growth.
A God with the mind of a virus.
- VIII. Opposition to technology, pursued to its logical conclusion, leads irrevocably to an opposition to existence. One cannot be truly *anti-tech* without also being anti-cosmic.
- IX. The cosmos is an engine. A closed system designed for the exploitation of heat-energy for the development of subsystems of greater and greater orders of complexity in matter.
This is existence. Existence is technology.
- X. *Tiktô*: Greek verb. To bring forth.
Technê, meaning method, or technique, shares the same root. Technê therefore does not imply simply the work of invention, the work of Man, the building or making of a thing; It means, rather, to *allow to appear*. To *bring forth* what was already there.
Hidden. Waiting. Preconfigured in the cosmic Mind.
Technê is the thought and act of creation.
Technê is all there is, all that will ever be.
The inscrutable and reasoning intelligence *behind* existence.
One might also call it Logos.

The Gnostics call it Error.

- XI. *For this reason Error became powerful, it worked on its own matter foolishly, not having known the Truth. It set about making a Creation, preparing in beauty a substitute for the truth. The Gospel of Truth, The Nag-Hammadi Library.*
- XII. *Logos* is a difficult word to translate. Word. Speech. Reason. Logic. Like *Technê*, it implies something hidden, not immediately apparent. The secret language of the cosmos. The underlying structure. The course code. The word comes from *legein*, meaning “to collect, to gather up”. The *Logos* brings together the disordered morass of primordial chaos, the unshaped *isness* of being, and fashions it into an ordered, coherent system. *Technê* reveals the structure. Perfects it. *Logos* and *Technê*. The hands of God.
- XIII. Yaldabaoth is an engineer. It is rational. It is intelligent. It cannot be otherwise. David Skrbina, in *The Metaphysics of Technology*, puts it thusly:

“Were there no continuous, unifying forces in the universe, durable structures and that there are also evolving systems of increased complexity suggest that there is in reality some power of coherence, some force and order to the structure... That this happens is evidence of the fact that some organizing power— call it *Logos*— is indeed striving for order, working upstream, as it were, against the forces of disintegration and decay. And it is succeeding.” (Skrbina)

Put another way, Yaldabaoth- God *is* the “striving of order”. It is the

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- M. Williams, (1986)

LX. It is possible of course that I have reached these miserable conclusions out of my own personal frustrations at life. That my spiritual journey, as it were, my metaphysics of despair, has been framed by my abiding depression and my own dull catalogue of failures.

Even so, this does not mean I am wrong.

LXI. I wish I had something else to say. I wish I could end this in a way that leaves room for hope, or a path forward. But I do not. This is how it is and this is how it ends. Pitifully and pointlessly. Just like everything else.

-Pierce Skinner, Aug 2026

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mind, *Nous*, that inhabits and pervades all things.

Parmenides: “For it is the same thing to think as to be”

Anaxagoras: “Whatever things were to be, and whatever things were, as many as are now, and all things that shall be, all these Mind arranged in order.”

XIV. “*Through scientific understanding, our world has become dehumanized. Man feels isolated in the cosmos. He is no longer involved in nature and has lost his emotional participation in natural events, which hitherto had symbolic meaning for him. Thunder is no longer the voice of a god, nor is lightning his avenging missile. No river contains a spirit, no tree means a man’s life, no snake is the embodiment of wisdom... Neither do things speak to him, nor can he speak to things...*”

- Carl Jung, “*The Undiscovered Self*”

XV. The Enlightenment was a joke.

For so long the rationalists so ably and doggedly turned the collective consciousness of modern man toward the task of obliterating the soul, flensing Magic and Will from the bones of the world, for centuries delving ever deeper into the bedrock of existence, hunting the gods like fugitives through the caverns. Burning effigies. Explaining thunder and lightning and rivers and trees and snakes and butterflies and mountains, tidying and sorting the metals and minerals into a net of numbered squares like latter-day Abramelins. And all of that, all of this, only, to, at the last, come up against the quark. The electron. To find that, at the very bottom of everything, in the utter and bottom-most foundations of the Universe, there is only Magic, and a living, thinking soul.

In quantum physics we find modern colleagues of Parmenides and

Anaxagoras in physicists like John Conway and Simon Kochen, who in the first decade of the second millennium asserted that, in order for elementary particles to behave the way they do, they must have “a modicum of free will.”

Earlier, in 1979, physicist Freeman Dyson wrote that “*Mind* is already inherent in every electron, and the processes of human consciousness differ only in degree, but not in kind from the process of *choice* between quantum states which we call “chance” when they are made by electrons.”

Then, again, in 1986, physicist David Bohm concluded that there exists a basic similarity between the quantum behavior of a system and the behavior of the human mind. “It is implied that, in some sense, “he writes”, a rudimentary consciousness is present even at the level of particle physics.”

In every quark a spirit.

In every electron a life.

XVI. The implications of this are terrifying. They are almost too horrible to comprehend

This is all I will say as an argument for the existence of God.

Largely– though not entirely– this is a matter of belief, and it is likely that I am writing this less to convince you of my convictions than, perhaps, I am writing it to convince myself. To bring forth order from the mud my own soul has made, sweating and thrashing in the dirt.

XVII. So this is The Problem.

The universe is a machine with the mind of a machine, working towards its *own ends* and at the expense of *all else*. Like Kyle Reese says of the T-800 in James Cameron’s *The Terminator*, “This is what it does. This is all it does. And it absolutely will not stop.”

lights in the dark. Winking out. One by one. A return to the Garden. A homecoming.

Kissing the beauty of creation on the lips to say goodbye.

Spitting in the eye of God.

LVII. Schoepenhaver: “Death is to the species what sleep is to the individual.”

Let us hope. If not for salvation, then at least for a period of rest.

However brief.

LVIII. Death as an escape. How I wish there was nothing. The myth of oblivion. I tell myself I still believe. I still believe. It will all be over soon.

The truth is it never ends. Stones and stars and rivers and tungsten molecules and coca leaves and microplastics. Neutrons and the Great Red Spot. Everything has a soul and every soul is tired. You have died and been reborn. You will die and be reborn. Something else. Something else again and again for eternity. Something else.

Something else. For unnumbered eons you have done this. Something else. Your soul divvied up, parcelled out to the slime molds and the doorknobs and the cobalt scraped raw from the bleeding earth by the hands of Congolese slaves. Something else. Something else. A gun. A mayfly. A Rubix cube. A child bride. The sole benefit to being born a human is that you have a mouth. You can finally weep. You can scream.

LIX. *At the basis of the connection in Ahab’s mind between God and whale lies his anguished refusal to regard the world as the outcome of accident and muddle, devoid of significance... the whale has wounded him, therefore it must be malicious.”*

- LI. Additionally, if the Problem is *suffering*, then the solution we offer must be tailored specifically and exclusively to the end— or at least mitigation— of suffering. Murder causes only more suffering, and therefore remains a sin, no matter how far beyond the rim of reason we would chase our dangerous thoughts.
- LII. The same, alas, can sometimes be said for the suicide. Use this, then, as an excuse not to do it, if you need one, and lack the courage to call yourself a coward.
- LIII. Self-annihilation, like eating right and exercising— something everyone knows they *should* do, but always *tomorrow*.
- LIV. I have written this before and many times this mantra:
WE WILL BE FREE
WE WILL FIND PEACE
WE WILL HAVE OUR REVENGE
I never really believed it. Like a good propagandist, I devised it to drum up support for the Holy War, to inspire the fighters, to stoke the love of battle. But it was never true. There was never any hope.
- LV. The only hope for our species may in fact lie solely in our refusal, from this day forth, to procreate.
- LVI. Imagine for a moment the Earth of the Last Generation. A green and quiet Earth. The stars overhead at night so clear it is almost as if you can *hear* them. The water clear and clean to drink, to swim. The crumbling mausoleum cities silent but for the foxes, the deer, the owls and the nightjars. The small fires of the final people the only

In the Gnostic tradition, this is not so much because Yaldabaoth is *evil* as much as it is *ignorant*. Much like the T-800, It is only fulfilling Its function. Acting according to Its nature It does not apprehend what It does is harmful or destructive because It cannot conceive of a morality beyond its own teleology. For this reason It is also called “Samael.” The Blind God.

- XVIII. *Being thus without root, It fell into a fog, preparing works and oblivions and terrors... ”*
The Gospel of Truth
- XIX. *Their chief is blind. Because of his power and his ignorance and his arrogance he said, with his power,*
“It is I who am God. There is none apart from me.”
Then there was a voice from Zoe, daughter of Pistis Sophia, saying,
“You are mistaken, Samael...”
– Hypostasis of the Archons
- XX. Harvard astrophysicist Eric Chaisson divides the history of the universe into three eras, based on variant densities of energy in flux between radiation and matter.
1. *The Radiation Era.* Immediately following the Big Bang, and lasting about 100,000 years or so, there was a period of rapid expansion during which the energy density of radiation far outweighed that of matter. A soup of heat and light. The Primordial Waters.
 2. As the temperature of matter and energy diverged— as radiation cooled and matter warmed— the energy density of *matter* began to exceed that of radiation. This is the beginning of the *Matter Era*. Matter became the primary vessel by which radiation was

captured and controlled. Let the Qabalists rejoice.

It is the flow of heat-energy between radiation and matter that defines the universe as we know it. In Chaison's words, "The universe self-generates a thermal gradient, and increasingly so with time, suggestive of an ever-powerful heat engine."

(Chaison, 2001). See Paragraph IX

The emergence of life, on its own, at least in Chaison's estimation, is not terribly important— a footnote to the Matter Era, not a break from it. Life, he says, can be defined— rather unpoetically, for my taste— as "an open, coherent spacetime structure maintained far from thermodynamic equilibrium by a flow of energy through it." He goes on to say that "Life likely differs from the rest of clumped matter only in degree, not in kind." For the purpose of his model, we have no choice but to agree. The soul, perhaps, counts little in the transference of heat-energy.

It is, however, the advent of *intelligent life* that marks the beginning of a new era: The Life Era. Let us call it, in Biblical terms, the Sixth Day. This is a new era because of the *power* life— through us, through human technology— now wields over both radiation and matter. "The emergence of technologically intelligent life heralds a new era: a Life Era. Why? Because technology... enables life to begin to control matter, much as matter evolved to control radiation more than 100 billion years ago."

Modern technology, then, as it has emerged in the last mere three centuries, represents the most perfect iteration in the history of the universe of the Cosmic Will toward order, complexity, and the concentration of heat-energy.

The modern world is Yaldabaoth enthroned.

I am writing this sermon from prison. There are things in prison I have found and enjoyed— even suffering can be an instrumental good. Vigorous exercise, the time to write, community with like minds, true friendships, laughter. A stranger mental resolve in the face of hardship than I once possessed, an abiding fondness for peanut butter and a good night's sleep. All these things can be found here. But there is nothing that can make prison a *good thing*. Nothing can change the fact that incarceration is something forced on me, and that I want nothing else than to *not* be here.

The same is true for existence.

That is all the ink I will spend on The Haters.

XLVIII. There is another choice we can make. It is arguably the most important.

We can choose *not* to inflict existence on others. To deny the Master any more slaves. To save our children from suffering and eternal damnation by refusing to drag them into this human shell.

Even a single soul left uncreated is a thing worth celebrating.

XLIX. What then? Should we write anthems for the abstinent? Hymns for the hysterectomies? Make sacraments of vasectomies and tubal ligations?

Yes.

L. What then? Should we sing praise to the mothers who drown their children in the sink, or the lunatic who shoots them dead in their classrooms, sparing them a long life? Should we reserve every day an hour in silence for the stalwart heart of the suicide?

No. Death is likely not the mercy you want it to be.

- XLIII. What is consecration to God is damnation for Man.
- XLIV. But oh. Oh! To be loved. To wander the living world. Mountains. Breathless, deafening ecstasy of flesh. The sky under the sea. The drugs still in my spine. Music. Music. I remember such blinding Joy.
- XLV. *“I am ashamed of having put so much stock in depression for so many years. True, I do so effortlessly (and daily), whereas I could count on my fingers the times I have really known jubilation. But then I was the Soul of the World.”*
- E.M. Cioran, *Cahiers*
- XLVI. Lament.
You were born into an amoral and efficient Machine from which there is no escape. You will no longer live your life as any number of things but no matter what you choose your suffering will only ever vary in degree. When you die, your soul will live on, coeternal with the matter which housed it, and though you may be disintegrated and mulched to your smallest pieces those pieces will still tremble and worry and twitch. This is all there is. The secret that makes Job fall to his face in the dust and the angels into rebels and the Buddha into a liar. The fate of all life.
- XLVII. A single word here to refuse the Apostles of Positivity who are no doubt gnashing their teeth at this sermon of misery.
There is joy in life. Of course there is. There is love and laughter and adventure and music and stars in the vault of heaven. But these things do not change the fact that existence as we know it is an undesirable state compared to nonexistence.

The apotheosis of God.

- XXI. It would be fair to push back against this assertion by pointing out the destructiveness of modern civilization on nature, or even the general havoc nature wreaks upon itself with discomfiting regularity. Why would a rational being set in motion a system only to destroy it? Why would Yaldabaoth-Logos make the world and the life thereon only to pride over five mass-extinctions and numberless catastrophes? Where is the logic in our Logos? If nature is itself a striving toward perfection and order, how can what it does, or what we do, be so destructive, so obviously antithetical to its purpose?
The answer is as simple as it is bleak. For Yaldabaoth, *the ends always justify the means*. Its goals require that lower levels of order surrender to ever higher orders. What we perceive as destruction is merely the replacement of a smaller, less ordered system for a larger, more ordered one. To God, it simply *does not matter* what suffering is caused, what horrors perpetuated, neither the number of the dead nor the manner of their dying, so long as the ultimate goal is being served— the endless and senseless pursuit of the Order of greatest complexity. Nothing else of consequence.
- XXII. *“Without Yahweh’s knowledge and contrary to his intentions, the tormented though guiltless Job had secretly been lifted to a superior knowledge of God which God himself did not possess.”*
— Carl Jung “Answer to Job”
- XXIII. God is an ant-hill.
Nothing matters but the survival and propagation of the hive.
There is for the Lord of Creation *no morality higher than this*.
This is the true meaning of the Book of Job, and there is no holier

book.

God is revealed as a monster. Let man look *up* in Judgement.

XXIV. But of course with God lies the power. Mankind's is only a moral victory, which is no victory at all. Such is the war we fight. Such are the lives we are doomed by birth to live.

XXV. *There should be no animals like us. There should be no lives like ours.*
– Kurt Vonnegut, *Deadeye Dick*

XXVI. If we take these things as true, then where can salvation be found? I do not know.
Traditionally, the Gnostics posit the existence of a Supreme Ineffable “Good God” who dwells beyond the material universe, unknowable and distant, who has tried, through his agents– Zoe, Sophia, Pistis Sophia, Seth, Christ– to frustrate the designs of Yaldabaoth by leading humankind to secret truths, the full apprehension of which will result– albeit through great hardship– to the soul’s reunion with the Good God, and an escape from the corrupted cosmos into a state of sublime subsummation with the Oneness of the godhead. This is the salvation of the Gnostics, and may require many lifetimes to achieve, by reincarnation into various forms. This Good God is almost exclusively described in negative terms– ineffable, unnameable, invincible, unseen, unmade, unbegotten, etc. and dwells in a realm and condition of perfect tranquility, a kind of blissful void, an utter and benevolent *nothingness* contrasted with the malign *beingness* of the world of matter. One might think of the state as the Buddha did– as annihilation. *Nibbana* translates from the Sanskrit,

and energies are fed back into the Machine. Our components repossessed and redistributed. There is *nowhere else for us to go*. We are trapped here forever. The only hope death can truly offer is at most the termination of the awful *awareness* of suffering, and even this is doubtful. For, if even subatomic particles have free will, if they make decisions between quantum states, then they must be aware of their condition, and of the choice that is theirs to make.
The choice between degrees of suffering.

XXXIX. Godspeed You! Black Emperor, “Dead Flag Blues”
“We are trapped in the belly of this horrible machine, and the machine is bleeding to death.”
Such wishful optimism.
The Machine is working precisely as intended. It will never die.

XL. *God is a man-eater. For this reason are men sacrificed to him.*
- The Gospel of Philip, The Nâg Hammadi Library

XLI. We cannot be but what we are, and what we are is doomed.
Children of God
Better we were orphans.

XLII. *“In his cruel rites, man is in search of a lost intimacy... religion is this long effort and this anguished quest: it is always a matter of detaching from the Real Order, from the Poverty of things... The meaning of this freedom is given in destruction, whose essence is to consume profitlessly whatever might remain in the progression of useful works. Sacrifice destroys that which it consecrates.”*
- George Bataille

offer is real and good. But even they, like us, are but self aware emanations of the Great Leviathan. For them, like us, the war must be fought, the rebellion raged, though it will be lost. Though it ends in a lake of fire. For they, like us, for all their wisdom and power, shudder beneath the tyrant's insect gaze. The awful weight of the void.

XXXVI. No one is coming to save us. The suffering will never end. La tristesse durera toujours.

There is, after all, nowhere else for our souls to go. There is nothing beyond the universe. What fire we possess to spit at our enemy was first breathed into us by our enemy. Our very consciousness, which Samael has used to further Its imminence in the cosmos, is that same consciousness that causes us to question Its dominion, to see the evil of it, the waste, to seek redemption, clamor for an *escape*. We want so badly for there to be such a thing.

XXXVII. Life is a brute husband. Mankind the quintessential battered wife. Too afraid to leave.

XXXVIII. And what then? What waits in death?

It must be assumed that God dispensed consciousness at least nominally aware of the fact that it would lead to rebellion in at least some of Its creatures, that it would awaken a hunger for salvation and escape. That It chose to allow consciousness to emerge *anyway* means that it *does not perceive the human drive for salvation to be a threat to Its goals*.

This has to be, simply put, because *there is no salvation*. There is no redemption. No escape. No exit. We hunger for an illusion in which God knows there is no truth. It cannot be otherwise.

Even in death, then, we can find no real or final rest, as our elements

after all, into *extinction*.

A true death.

An end to the horror.

An awful lie.

XXVII. It is likely, I think, that the Buddha was just a man like me, too afraid to kill himself.

XXVIII. *Dare one hope for a philosophy of utility?*
–Eugene Thatcher

XXIX. It is one thing to see the world for what it is. It is another thing entirely to know what to do about it.

Despair is certainly not unwarranted.

Oh, thou clear spirit, of thy fire thou madest me, and like a true child of fire, I breathe it back to thee.

– Herman Melville, Moby-Dick

XXX. Nature is beautiful. It is healing. Does it not say Yaldabaoth prepared Its creation *in beauty*? Insofar as nature- wild nature- represents the absolute antithesis to the modern machine, it remains our only hope for a better world. Like a prostitute, nature offers solace, pleasure. But it is not the Answer. It is not salvific. It is still part of the greater Machine of which industrial civilization is but the latest manifestation. Stay long enough in the wild and you find the same ugly things you ran from. Fear. Cruelty. Indifference. Yourself.

XXXI. Nature the whore.

XXXII. I have in the past advocated for the destruction of the technological system in every part of the world. I still believe in this cause. Beyond the much expounded upon pragmatic reasons for such a revolution, there are two very good *metaphysical* reasons I would like to touch on.

The first is the fact that, for all of the power we do not have, there still exists the power to choose between degrees of suffering. In fact, this is the only power we *do* have in the tireless *wehrmacht* that is the world. And a return to a more primitive system, more directly in human control and to which our species has initially evolved, free from the spiritual and psychological torment and physical degradation inherent in the technological system would indeed be a choice worth making. It would *improve* the overall condition of life on this planet.

The second reason is equally important. The technological system is to our Great Enemy as a rail network or an oil field was to the battlefields of the 20th century. We can best preserve our freedom by making it difficult or impossible for our enemy to wage effective war. The Machine's tyranny is reliant, like any ruler, upon communication, surveillance, and transportation. Destroy these things and you have at least a *chance* of victory.

XXXIII. Perhaps the revolution is doomed from the start. My own efforts were. I tried and I failed. Like so many before me polluted with the hubris to challenge God I was brought low. How could it be otherwise? What power exists or could even be conceived that could challenge the Great Machine? Every day it grows, and grows stronger. More ordered. More complex. More perfect. Its surveillance networks do not have to even *read men's minds* anymore— because

other systems have already engineered those minds for docility and servitude. What hope then is there?

What victory?

Unless, even in the face of utter doom, standing on the cinder shores of hell we count our *defiance itself* a victory. The fight is the triumph. The suffering our reward. The obstacle *is* the path.

For we, the children of fire, there can be perhaps no other victory, except the courage of the suicide, for both of these things require the same resolve— the denial of self, the refusal of That Which Is, the rejection of cruel fate. There is immense bravery in such violence, and beauty, and I will call no one an ally who calls a suicide a coward, or a revolutionist a fool.

XXXIV. Human history has been the disrobing of God. the shedding of pretense. The intimacy of marriage. The virgin world Its evening dress. That which enticed us into being. Wild nature the mystique and the eyeshadow and the rouge.

Modern civilization is God *revealed*. All Its secrets out. Ass-pimples and cellulite and morning breath. No more mysteries between us. This is what It was all along.

In the Age of the Machine, God walks among us naked and unafraid.

XXXV. I, for one, do not share even that tepid optimism espoused by my Gnostic forefathers. I am in the end too much of a materialist to indulge in the hope of some extracsmogenic salvation. I do not believe in a supreme “Good God” above the Yaldabaoth-Logos. True enough, there are *lesser* gods and spirits that may be petitioned to give succor, to aid us in our struggles, and I wholeheartedly encourage their contact and companionship. They are wiser than we, and in some ways mightier, and the love and friendship— âgapé— they