

The Biopolitics of Souls

Racism, Nazism, and Plato

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This essay focuses on the relationship between biopolitics and race theory. Starting from Foucault, many authors have considered totalitarian anti-Semitism as a depravity of biologism. This essay would like to challenge this all-too-simple positivist, materialist, and evolutionist picture of biopolitics in the Third Reich. It examines another “tradition” of racial theories, central to National Socialism, much closer to the revered Western philosophical tradition than Darwinism ever was. This kind of racism presents itself as the authentic heir of that “Metaphysics of Form,” which traces its roots back to classical antiquity, in particular to Plato’s work. Through the analysis of some Platonist and racist texts the essay tries to point out the ambivalences that connect some of the assumptions of our philosophical tradition to Nazi totalitarianism.

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The title of this essay is intended to be an oxymoron.¹ The term “biopolitics” is generally used to describe a “politics of the body” or, to be precise, politics for the entire body of the population. The transformation of political power into biopower has often been accompanied by the discourses on race, which, from the middle of the nineteenth century, had begun to acquire a scientific standing. Nazi totalitarianism is often considered the extreme and emblematic example of a biopolitics that legitimizes itself on the basis of racial assumptions, intimately connected to the “new sciences” of life. In this essay, I would like to challenge this all-too-simple positivist, materialist, and evolutionist picture of biopolitics in the Third Reich. My challenge emerges out of a reexamination of some “exemplary” texts of “Nazi philosophical anthropology.” While it is true that racism redefines man’s identity through a system of biological propositions, reaching out to a total control over life, it is also true that race is not always, or simply, identified with a biological and genetic heritage. Perhaps because of an anxiousness to reassuringly bracket totalitarianism as an exception of pathology and

of irrationality, research has focused almost exclusively in the direction of an aberrant political outcome of evolutionism. Insufficient attention has been paid to another “tradition” of racial theories, less intimately connected to Darwinism. This was a theory present at the beginning of the twentieth century in Germany and in France, and it was absolutely central to National Socialism. This theory was also much closer to the revered Western philosophical tradition than Darwinism ever was. It was built around the relationship between body and soul in a manner that throws into disarray the simple assumptions of evolutionism.

This kind of racism cannot be considered a simple depravity of biologism: It presents itself as the authentic heir of that “metaphysics of form” that traces its roots back to classical antiquity, in particular to Plato’s work. Shedding light on the “idealistic” and Platonic aspects of Nazism is not the same as stating that Plato is totalitarian. I do not share the Popperian view according to which Plato’s political program is in itself a totalitarian project. More generally, I am not interpreting totalitarianism, and first of all Nazism, as a necessary outcome of the Western philosophical tradition. My argument is that any attempt to establish some continuity between “our” culture and the Nazi Regime needs to be presented in a more careful and complex manner. But I will also question the thesis that Nazism constitutes a sudden break in the noble history of philosophy, according to which it simply meant the collapse of philosophical values, such as universalism, humanism, and rationalism. Through the analysis of certain Platonist and racist texts I will elucidate certain ambivalences that connect some of the assumptions of our philosophical tradition to Nazi totalitarianism.

I. Biopolitics and Totalitarianism

In the mid-1970s, Michel Foucault introduced into his analysis of power a new concept, that of biopolitics.² Through this concept he intended to designate a new configuration of relations of domination. From the end of the eighteenth century onward, political power progressively took over responsibility for the population, as a “living mass.” Biopower therefore started to distinguish itself from “traditional” sovereign power not just because of its all-inclusive nature; it also addressed directly the “productivity” of life. It no longer concentrated on the individual and his property, through the power of the law; rather it affects directly, and in a “positive” way, the biological processes of the entire population. Biopolitics thus began to address (as an object of power) life itself: birth, reproduction, illness, and death. Through

demographic statistics, and through the various techniques of population control, the life of all and one is, so to speak, “invested through and through.”

Over the last decades many authors have skillfully “managed” the heritage of Foucault’s thought.³ The premise of his thoughts (which were not always made explicit in his most well-known texts) were to be sought in a radical reexamination of what has survived of totalitarianism in our world.⁴ I believe that in many respects biopolitics, as it is understood by Foucault, represents one of the most disturbing aspects of the heritage of totalitarianism today. The relationship between human life, including its biological aspects, and political life has become so paradoxical that it can no longer be seen in a “neutral” and “innocent” way. We need to understand the various implications of the homogenizing tendency of biopolitical strategies. This tendency does not involve an actual plan, something that would imply the intentionality of an independent subject and the texture of power relationships, but it is clear that biopolitics turns out to be more effective than “traditional” sovereignty in producing a unified and compact body politic. According to Foucault and many of his followers,⁵ the theory of race in its evolutionist versions has functioned as an effective vector for a “naturalization” and “biologization” of the object of power. In the name of the preservation and healing of life, power becomes capable of carrying out an immediately political valorization and a functionalization of biology. When racism turns into “state doctrine,” it also becomes the theoretical point of reference for a practice that (to make life “productive”) is able to organize in a hierarchical manner and differentiate, to include and exclude beings from the human field, making the death of one a necessity for the life of all. The politics of race, no less than the Stalinist politics of classes, assigned some to extinction;⁶ it represents, for Foucault, the extreme and “exemplary” way in which power manages to carry out a colossal enterprise of regimentation and killing, while talking of the “law of life” and of “humanity reborn.” Foucault (who had been preceded in this aspect by Hannah Arendt) is undoubtedly responsible for refining the *topoi* of the critical literature on racism.⁷ Racism is not simply a body of ideas accepted by intellectuals, to a greater or lesser extent in bad faith, to satisfy their need for “reaction” and for scientific positivization. The problem of racist ideology should not be analyzed in terms of its doctrinal content, but rather in terms of the strength that the assumptions of race have in activating the mechanisms of power, in generating a device for producing collective identification, and in eliminating a form of alterity that has often been created ad hoc. The identitarian construction provided by the body and by biological life is in fact an extremely powerful identitarian identification, more powerful than any other kind of communitarian rhetoric.

Racism therefore represents in the first place the instrument that power (having taken over the management of life) uses to separate what must live from what must die. Through racism, power can deal with a population as a mixture of races; it can divide the species into subgroups. It can, in other words, fragment, create caesurae in the biological *continuum* that has become its new object. It can also carry out, in a new and “biological” way, the warlike imperative: “if you want to live someone must die.” “When you have a normalizing society, you have a power that is, at least superficially, in the first instance, or in the first line, a biopower, and racism is the indispensable precondition that allows someone to kill, that allows others to be killed. Once the state functions in the biopower mode, racism alone can justify the murderous function of the State.”⁸

II. The Soul of Race

By concentrating on the modalities of its functioning, Foucault does not analytically deal with the issue of why the idea of race is so effective in exalting differences and conflict, on one hand, and in nailing the individual to his collective identity, on the other. Foucault and many of his followers are interested in the impact of the new sciences on anthropological and political perspectives, but they neglect the identifying force in racial theories that the *images* (or the *forms*) implied by these theories have. It is undoubtedly correct to conclude that the “discourse” on race is a rhetoric of supremacy and conflict that redesigns the contours of belonging and order. And it is absolutely true that all theories of race are rigid in their formal definitions, and flexible in their contents, because flexibility multiplies the possibilities of their utilization. However, the relationship between biopolitics, race theories, and totalitarianism may be dealt with from an additional perspective. In the multiform archipelago of racial theories that has been on the scene since the end of the nineteenth century, one finds, next to evolutionary racism, a “morphological” racism, as it were. This is a form of racism that aims to transcend the limitations of biologism. It is much more the result of a *metaphysics of form*, rather than one of the many rivulets of social Darwinism. Both forms of racism can elaborate justifications for the domination of one race over another, and both can be anti-Semitic.

To simplify drastically, we can say that evolutionist racism uses race as an instrument for the *naturalization of social and political history*, so as to give to divisions and struggles between pure and impure human groups the force of an inevitable biological law. It asserts itself, as is well known, with the development of positivistic anthropology and with the knowledge of Mende-

lian laws that are, in turn, connected with a teleological view of history (either progressive or regressive).⁹ The “naturalization” of the enemy allows one to oppose him with the strength of a natural necessity, just as one carries out sanitary disinfections. In France, Georges Vacher de Lapouge represents evolutionary racism in its strictest and most exemplary form.¹⁰ In his writings, race, as a biological *datum*, is considered the determining factor of peoples and *therefore* of individuals. The entire range of human history is seen as a conflictual expression of these characteristics. “Spirit” itself and moral aptitudes are all interpreted as the result of a given racial heritage. It therefore turns out to be a sort of materialistic monism whose classifications must remain ductile, so as to guarantee the continuing and changing transformation of part of the *demos* into a *ghenos* (descent) and to transform *ghenos* into race.

One of the “truth effects” of this evolutionary racism, which classifies along a continuous grading the different degrees of humanity, is that of allowing the transformation of the enemy into an animal, transforming biopolitics into zoological politics.¹¹ Race, which expresses itself in somatic features, is therefore an indicator of the animal nature of man. In other words, it enables classification of the different degrees of humanity along a spectrum that includes animals and human beings. This is accompanied by the erosion of the “classical” representation of the enemy as a barbarian or savage beast, and it marks the emergence of a new kind of rhetoric, based on the scientific discourses of medicine, biology, demography, criminology, and psychopathology. The images of the parasite and of the infective agent therefore take the place of the traditional metaphors of ferocity. In other words, the struggle concerns not so much wolves and lions (bearers of a powerful and no less “dignified” enmity) but rather fleas, cockroaches, leeches, and bacteria. While the enemy as *ferum* (wild beast) must be captured or killed, the enemy as a parasite or infective agent requires instead a methodical, aseptic, and cold disinfection. While “animalization” is beastlike and emotional, biologization is detached and scientific. Persecution can therefore be organized as a planned and systematic enterprise to heal the political body. We know that the Nazi imagination is peopled by cold images in which extermination is presented as a matter of prophylaxis. Outside this medical-scientific context, according to Foucaultian and post-Foucaultian logic, genocide remains unportrayable and impracticable. It is only the biologicistic formulation that makes acceptable, in the name of the struggle for life and for survival, the separation between pure blood and infected blood, between the species to be protected and strengthened and those on the way to extinction. From this perspective, the theory of race fits in perfectly with the thousand-

year-old theme of the Jew as a parasite, thus becoming first and foremost an anti-Semitic doctrine.

However, the emphasis on the totalitarian functionality of the human biologization might inadvertently appear to provide comfort to theories that interpret totalitarianism, marked by biologicistic racism, as a sudden break in European culture and its spiritual values.¹² Despite its interesting and productive aspects, a hermeneutical approach that focuses exclusively on evolutionary theory leaves some problems unsolved. For example, there is the problem of why, if the “struggle for life” is a natural and historical law, one should need to intervene in any outcome. Furthermore, an excessive concentration on the ideological role of biological laws has led to neglecting (if not exactly ignoring) an alternative interpretative approach that is equally important. This approach concentrates on the “morphological” theories of race, and it analyzes especially the soul-body relationship that these theories assume. This last issue is one that dominates pre-Nazi and Nazi theory and that manages to influence some figures of “heretical” Italian fascism, such as Julius Evola. There is therefore another vector that emerges from the theories of race and which, together with the other one, drives twentieth-century politics to its extreme consequences, at least as far as National Socialism is concerned. This is a racism that derives from a “metaphysics of form”; a theory that refers much more to Plato than to the laws of genetics; that believes much more in the strength of a self-conscious myth than in scientific discourse; that is, a theory that knows perfectly well that the effectiveness of race lies in its mythical and “transfiguring” force.

There is no shortage of pre-Nazi and Nazi ideologues who manage to complicate the picture of the relations between biopolitics, racism, and totalitarianism. But not many scholars have recognized this point.¹³ Houston Stewart Chamberlain had already made a point of stressing that race was not an object of scientific knowledge, but rather an essence that could be reached through the power of intuition. “Those who belong to a totally pure race feel it continuously.”¹⁴ Alfred Rosenberg will express a similar position, both in *Der Mythos des XX: Jahrhunderts* and *Gestalten der Idee*.¹⁵ In this form of racism, positivist materialism is subordinated to a sort of Platonic idealism. The subordination is provided by the concept of *Weltanschauung*, which does not mean “theory,” but rather “image-intuition-idea.” In a fierce attack on Christianity, Rosenberg refuses the traditional dualism between spirit and matter, which for him is identical to the dualism between soul and body, and affirms rather a kind of monism in which soul and race are in an iron bond, almost undistinguishable from each other. If “the soul is race seen from inside,” “race is the soul seen from the outside.”¹⁶

The supreme spiritual value for a race is to achieve the perfect form of its somatic features, because this shape is nothing other than the expression of the realization of the truth of the idea, of the type, of the soul of the people. The concept of idea, of type, and of soul all relate to a notion of myth. Myth differs from a narrative reconstruction of origins in that the latter projects a temporal beginning. Rosenberg never ceases to denounce the naivety of those who believe they can return to the origins of German mythology. "The religion of Wotan is dead and must die."¹⁷ The strength of myth lies in carrying out a "shaping of the form": an identification that opposes the abstract and universal, the disembodied identity of what he calls "absolutes without limits"; in other words, the divinities of religions and the subjects of philosophy. In Rosenberg's view, Germany "today" is drawing upon the true German myth, beginning to "dream its own dreams." "Up to now," the *Volk* has never managed to achieve a mythical identity, a true and proper "form." The power of myth consists in the projection "of a dream image" with which we identify. The absolute is not outside of us; rather it is the dream in which we see ourselves. Myth must therefore manage to provide identity through a figure, a type.

Myth, soul, type, and dream are indissolubly connected. Type is in fact the realization of "incarnated" identity that has reached its form and been delineated by the dream: The type is simultaneously the model and the realization, the "idea" and the "formation" of identity. The soul, in opposition to Christian dualism, finds its freedom in the "*Gestalt*," in the figure, in the form; that is, in an incarnated configuration. In other words, the soul is free if it manages to carry, organize, and make concrete a form; if it manages to circumscribe, set a perimeter around the indeterminate in a figure, and make it visible. To adopt a more familiar philosophical lexicon, one might say in this context that the type, the soul, has the transcendental function of making a body visible, of allowing it to present itself in time and space. In the same horizon, race is the external form of a given soul. Language, by itself, despite its specificity, is insufficient to generate an identity: That pertains to *logos*. Myth, if it is not to remain something abstract, must be nourished by blood and soil, by matter and by nature. But one must note that in this case nature and matter are not the objects of a discourse that aspires to a scientific status (that is, taken as data ascertained through the objectivity of observation). Nature is now a mythical power, an Idea, a sort of impersonal force that dreams itself according to its types.

The Aryans of antiquity are the Greeks, the people who have given form to their soul, who have produced the *Darstellung* (representation) or the *Gestaltung* (configuration) of their race in the absolute delimitation of artistic form. For Rosenberg's Greek-Aryans art does not, however, have an aes-

thetic value, an end in itself: “it is an organic art that generates life.”¹⁸ Germany must repeat the Greek achievement of giving life to the political body, to the people, as a work of art, as a fully achieved form of the German soul, as an identification and realization of the racial Type. The soul of the German people realizes itself by incorporating itself in the Type, in the blood, and in the race.¹⁹

As it happens, Plato and his philosophy offer Rosenberg (but not only him) the opportunity for a mythical identification of Germany with the greatest culture that ever existed. Through the ideas of Plato one may experience the Type, which Plato himself did not succeed in creating and carrying out to its extreme consequences. Plato provides the mythical power of an idea of a political body that is achieved in a *living* work of art, to be composed not only with the material offered by language, traditions, and customs, but also with the material provided by blood and soil.

III. Plato as Guardian of the Race

This form of Platonism undoubtedly runs through the political culture of German Romanticism, but one should keep in mind the role assigned to Greek philosophical education by one of the greatest scholars of classical culture of all time, Werner Jaeger.²⁰ Although he was eventually forced to leave Nazi Germany, we find in his monumental work, *Paideia*, sinister affinities with the pre-Nazi and Nazi Platonic interpretation. In the introduction to the first edition of this book, we can find statements that emphasize the value of Platonic philosophy not as a “set of abstract ideas,” but rather as a work whose goal is living reality; more specifically, “the formation of a superior humanity . . . that can succeed in preserving and propagating its physical and moral type.”²¹ This kind of Platonic heritage is perfected in a “nationalistic” way in the context of Stefan George-Kreis. One may refer, for example, to the work of Kurt Hildebrandt, *Platon: Der Kampf des Geistes um die Macht* (1933).²² Other authors of that period, such as Bannes and Gabler, go so far as identifying directly and explicitly the ideal of the Platonic state with the Third Reich.²³ With the exception of Hildebrandt’s work, these are propagandist books devoid of any scholarly value, but they are extremely interesting as examples of the way in which a philosophical outline can be transformed and deformed so as to become a sort of “catechism” and an incentive to action.

There is one author in particular who provides us with an exemplary instance of the way in which some conceptualizations of the Western philosophical tradition were used by Nazi pseudometaphysics. I am referring here to Hans F. K. Günther. Some of Günther’s books (by no means as brutally

and mechanically propagandizing as the books of Bannes and Gabler, nor as esoteric as Rosenberg's) managed to acquire a wide audience in the immediately pre-Nazi and Nazi periods, providing a vast public with an introduction to racial theory.²⁴ Texts such as Günther's are valuable, because they seem to address the crucial question: What is human for the Third Reich? The answer provided is much simpler than those put forward by Rosenberg. Günther is also dissatisfied with any classification that merely posits at a horizontal level, so to speak, gradations between humanity and nonhumanity. He, too, argues in a "transcendental" manner, clarifying the conditions for participation in the ideal, in the Type, in the soul. The two books of Günther that almost any good National Socialist would have owned were entitled, respectively, *Humanitas* and *Platon als Hüter des Lebens*.²⁵ Darwin is barely mentioned, and his modern *auctoritates*—Vacher de Lapouge, Ammon, Galton, and Gobineau—are adapted to a peculiar "eugenic" requirement that is presented as being totally derived from Plato.

The classification of European peoples into races is not very original, and it follows the vulgate of the period, influenced by the taxonomy of Chamberlain. The main races are Nordic, Western, Oriental, Dinaric, Baltic, and Salic. These are unions of specific somatic and psychic features. The Nordic man, of course, is marked by a strong individuality, by loyalty to his group, by his abilities as a doer and producer, by the qualities of his judgment, by his *Führergeist*, and by his warrior virtues. These features assume their full relevance when contrasted with the Oriental Mediterranean race. This race—and first of all the Jewish race—is lacking in a deep and profound creativity, since it shuns work and effort; it expresses only the excitability that leads it to transgression and to lying. Once again, we find the idea that the ancient Hellenes represented the highest example of the "Nordic character," which was later corrupted through a widespread interbreeding of peoples. Plato must now act as a warning to Germany, so that it will not repeat the errors that led to the decadence of the great Greek civilization. The German people must revive, indeed bring back to life in a "still more authentic" form, the Greek original potentiality of true European culture; it must finally give shape to Platonic anthropology, politics, and philosophy.²⁶

In Günther and in these other authors (who do not match the anti-Christian violence of Rosenberg's writings), there is a clear desire to separate their Plato from the more formalistically dualist Plato (susceptible to being "Christianised"), who does not make any concessions to those "earthly bodies" in which the soul has the misfortune of landing, as narrated in *Phaedro*. For Günther the textual references to Plato are especially to Book V of *The Republic*, *The Statesman*, and *The Laws*. For the Nazi anthropologist (as we shall see) the Platonic ideal that coincides with the perfect exemplar of

human being is attainable, and at the same time “operative,” if spiritual purification coincides with a biological selection, with the choice of an elite that becomes “transparently Nordic,” and in which the blond image of divinity may be reflected.²⁷ Beauty and goodness are part of truth once they become real or “embodied.” This is the *Kalokagathia* (that is, the Greek ideal of the inextricable connection between being good and being beautiful) in which the Third Reich must take the step from idea to reality, transmitting the ideal of individual perfection into a humanity made pure and perfect by the process of selection.

These preliminary points show already how easily one may dispose of the consoling polarities of the so-called posttotalitarian humanitarianism, these polarities that oppose, in a clear-cut way, “enlightened” rationalism and “chthonic” irrationalism, idealism and nihilism, spiritualism and materialism. In fact, pseudoscientific and biologicistic attitudes very easily drift into idealism, grotesque as that may be. This racial idealism presents itself as a “metaphysics of form”, of the *Gestalt*, of the perfect identity of body and soul. In other words, “Hellenophile” racism—by no means a minority view—goes well beyond Darwinism to achieve a “monistic ontology” of the perfect identity of ideas and reality, of form and matter, to use the “classical” formulation. Race is in fact not assumed, naively or instrumentally, to be a biological and factual datum, but rather a Platonic idea that gives shape and brings order to the chaotic world of appearances. Race thus becomes a phenomenon perceived by our senses as an expression of the soul that, according to the words of *Phaedo*, is related to “the divine, immortal, rational, uniform, indissoluble and always identical to itself.”²⁸

Returning to Günther’s 1928 book on Plato, we find that everything confirms the “Nordic essence” of the Greek philosopher. Indeed, his thought, unlike the thought of Sophists, is oriented toward action. It wants to intervene effectively in the political crisis brought about by the Peloponnesian War, in which Athens and Sparta had lost the flower of their Nordic youth. True philosophy is therefore that which reestablishes order in the chaotic, democratic city and gives form once again to what is shapeless, selects purity out of the mixture of races that is the true cause of decadence. Plato knows that virtue cannot be taught; it is a matter of race.²⁹

The Nazi anthropologist is very attentive in selecting the passages from Plato’s work that justify his own thesis, according to which Plato’s “knowledge and experience have assisted him in all his educational and political projects, so in practice he has promoted all that nowadays represents the kernel of knowledge about genetics, of the science of race and racial hygiene.”³⁰ Plato, in fact, was not concerned with the life of the individual, but rather with the superior value of racial identity achieved through a process of purifi-

cation that, in Günther's philosophy, is indistinguishable from a process of cleansing.³¹ To allow the best to prosper and to suppress the worst is already for Plato the criterion that must guide political legislation.³² Günther supports his claims with a long sequence of quotations that allows him to make explicit what he takes to be the Platonic political project, by playing on the two meanings of the German term *Auslese* (election and selection), which are both synonyms of the Greek *ekloghe*. He can therefore conclude that the "ethical" objective of the *politeia* consists in the good and virtuous management of the people's life, which makes it vigorous and protect it from threats to its purity.

But what is life for Plato, according to Günther? To clarify this, one can no longer distinguish between the life of the immortal soul and the life of the mortal body. It cannot be denied that *The Republic* seems to offer a change of perspective compared to some of the earlier dialogues, where the soul-body dualism placed true life in the soul that, through philosophical *askesis*, progressively eliminated the links that connected it to the tomb-body.

Nazi Platonists' interpretation of this change is less simplistic than it may at first appear; that is, as a mere eugenic reading of Plato's work. Their reading is not entirely unconnected with the letter of Plato's text. Let us try attentively to follow Günther here. If—as *Phaedo* admits—the soul, being determined by the idea of life, must be immortal, and if, according to Nazi anthropological monism, the body, at least the Aryan body, is not to be transcended, but rather becomes the external, phenomenal, expression of interiority, of a noumenon,³³ of the soul, and if, according to Plato, the polis is "man written in capital letters," the body to be preserved will not be the individual body, but the body of the *ghenos*, the body of the race, or more precisely, the expression of the eternal soul of the race. We may start by observing that the emphasis on Plato's "monism" is used by Günther as a means of canceling, in common with all Nazi anthropology, the difference between, on one hand, the (individual body's) health-medicine connection and, on the other, the justice-politics connection. Justice and health are no longer connected in a metaphorical sense; rather their relationship becomes a literal identity: Justice is the health of the *ghenos*, and attaining the state of health is the expression of the truth of justice. As *Kallipolis* implies health, so politics implies medicine, and medicine expresses itself politically as the ability to make a people just through selection. True politics is therefore eugenics: matrimonial regulation, the treatment of infants, and the elimination of the abnormal and deformed.

Günther's monism is built on a system of dual separations and oppositions that reestablish and start a selective mechanism and that transform the selection into a true dialectical process of *askesis*, necessary for reaching the One.

Life is the firm union of body and soul, which “must prosper, maintain itself and grow,” and which can achieve its full expression only if the life of the *ghenos* (the race) prospers, maintains itself and grows—in other words, if the life of the Type prospers. The form here fixes the features of the soul and the somatic characteristics in a univocal system of correspondences.

Far from being a material, natural, and biological datum, a given, the race as a Type is an achievement, carried out through the selection that promotes the process of adaptation to the Idea, to “true life,” to the eternal life of the soul, which, as a normative ideal, extends the movement of approximation-purification toward an infinite duration. “Plato advocates for his people all kinds of selective tests, because they allow the separation of the healthy from the unworthy. The glance is always directed to totality, to descendents of the future, to the masses of young people who are as yet unborn: thus Plato, unconcerned with individual cases, acquires that imperturbability that we attribute to the necessity of nature. *Similar to nature: so accommodating to the ideal Type and so uncaring of the individual life.*”³⁴ Measured against the “total psycho-physical ideal,” whatever appears to be bad must be eliminated. This is an elimination that has the value of an ethical duty. Plato himself—Günther reassures us—encourages us not to feel any pity in killing “a soul which is naturally bad and incorrigible,” a soul which can express itself only, given its defective nature, in a weak, rotten body, because it is lustful and devoured by insatiable passions. The death sentence is therefore related to the purification of the race and to the health of the *polis*: a conception “that adheres to Greek thought as it does to Roman and Germanic thought.”³⁵

Plato’s heritage may therefore be picked up (through a blood contiguity which also is a contiguity of the spirit) only by Germany, which knows that the distinction between noble and nonnoble is not a social, educational, or class issue, but rather an opposition of pure and impure, and therefore an ontological issue.³⁶ There is no escape from the soul of the race, because nobody can escape from his own body, which is, precisely, an expression of the Type. “For the Hellenes there was nothing spiritual which did not affect the body, nothing corporeal which did not also affect the soul. This is the spirit of the Nordic race. The medieval Church has dangerously inculcated in Western man the idea that the body belongs to the domain of sin. This is the spirit of the Levantine race.”³⁷

At this point there is a problem that comes to complicate the perfect correspondence between soul, body, and type: It is that of the tall, blond, and *falsely* distinguished Jew. Günther refers to this issue, in this book and elsewhere,³⁸ but it is dealt with more extensively by a dear friend and colleague, L. F. Clauss, who, in his *Seele und Rasse*,³⁹ tries to clarify the confused exasperation of those who all too often come across human beings whose somatic

features *seem* to belong to the Nordic racial type, while in reality are not at all part of the Nordic soul. The theory of morphological racism is therefore forced to introduce an incongruent element into its metaphysics: The Jewish race ranges—with an oscillation that is often unconscious and uncontrolled—between being the bodily expression of a low, cowardly, and often evil soul, and being a mere *simulacrum*, a mere appearance that does not correspond to any idea (in short, it does not have a soul of its own). But the “operative” consequences in either case will be the same. Once again Plato shows us that “once one starts to propose a physical and spiritual model for one’s own people, one chooses, in the racial amalgam from which this *Volk* has emerged, a certain form of life and spiritual conduct to which it corresponds. By and large one will have to choose the human type—present in the racial composition of that people—that represents, for all healthy, well-oriented spirits, what is most noble, in life as in art, in past history as in the present.”⁴⁰ Every education proceeds through a form of selection.

The superior values of Hellenic culture finally become authentic the moment they are “embodied.” So the ideal of the *Kalokagathia* cannot be lowered to the level of a norm of individual behavior. National Socialist Germany will live to the end its original and authentic meaning. This is because only selection will enable “the beautiful and the good, to assume a bodily form, to become true.”⁴¹ It is the duty of the Nordic spirit, “nowadays” incarnated by the German people, to suppress, once and for all, the contradictions between body and soul, between race and people, between people and nation, to finally realize the truth of the Idea, of the Type, of the One and Eternal Soul.⁴² This is how a *Volk* is created, Günther seems to conclude. Thanks to Plato, the only state that will be able to call itself “good” will be the state that, not content with being the guardian of laws and borders, education, and prosperity, will also become guardian and creator of an increase in superior life. The life that can appropriately and finally define itself as “human,” because it participates in the idea of man, has such superior value. Hence one need not oppose oneself to humanism, as some proponents of “provincial National Socialism believe,” but rather achieve its original meaning.

IV. Becoming Human

Humanitas is the title of a booklet published in 1937 that was to become a sort of Bible or basic text of the theoretical circle inside the SS. It proposed European Union on a racial basis. This text obsessively returns to the theme of German-Hellene brotherhood, based on a common origin from Nordic stock, located in Central Europe in the Neolithic age.⁴³ The human greatness

that has developed, “thanks to an uninterrupted process of selection,”⁴⁴ starting from exemplary families in Greece and Rome is, and will always be, the ideal representative of the Nordic race. The value of *humanitas* lies in this greatness, made true and fortified by racial selection. “In the Hellenic-Roman value of *humanitas*, Indogermanic spirituality directs itself once again towards the racial ideal of the strong, noble and beautiful man.”⁴⁵

Stoicism tries to give Humanism a direction opposed to the laws of life, by pursuing high moral goals that pertain to the single, isolated man; it is indifferent to the health of the *ghenos*. Hellenism in general is a culture of “reaction,” of decadence, and of racial interbreeding: a reaction to a surrounding world that is increasingly de-Nordified and degenerate.⁴⁶ Authentic *humanitas* is progressively eroded in its noble meaning of a hymn to life by the process of de-Nordification (*Entnordung*) and degeneration. The Hellenistic-Germanic concept is aristocratic: It demands the victory of man over any lowly tendency that is in him, over any physical or hedonistic slackening. It demands firmness, contempt for utilitarian values, a sense of measure, and a sense of reserve. And to this inner dignity and nobility there corresponds a brave and proud body: the Nordic type with blue eyes and blond hair, tall and upright, a high and wide forehead with a frank and straight glance.⁴⁷

Humanitas is therefore the ideal of a Nordic purity that can always be improved; it is the Platonic ideal, and it becomes at some points in Günther’s philosophy a Kantian *noumenon*. But Nazism—unlike philosophies of the past—offers the historical possibility of “embodying” these absolutes, of phenomenizing them. Beyond all the monstrous philosophical and philological simplifications that regularly come out of Günther’s writings, there is a stringent logic in the discourse on *Humanitas* as *Kalokagathia* to be renewed. “The idea of *humanitas* corresponds to the same Indogermanic ideal of the noble man who in Hellas, in a more strictly selective context, produced the two conceptions of *eugeneia* and *kalokagathia*.” This value is lost when it is transformed into an ideal of individual perfection. The Platonic correspondence between man, soul, and polis is perverted and is debased as an empty humanistic ideal, which exalts the individual in his mediocrity, in his isolation, and in his abstractness. “The falsification of Humanism took place in the epoch of the Late Roman world: the immigrant Levantines, especially Jews, who pretended to be Hellenes and Romans, to avoid the ancient contempt of foreigners, in fact tried to pervert humanism into a doctrine of brotherhood and equality, in the name of the abstract man who does not exist.”⁴⁸ The German people have the duty to return to the German context the idea of *Humanitas*, whose values, just as those of the original Indogermans, if analyzed attentively, prove to be those of life itself, of the life which wants to assert itself and grow. True *Humanitas* “is a duty to carry out, a model to be

reached . . . an ideal of racial and marital selection, because only a conception that distinguishes between the best and the worst can preserve true ethics and ideals, an aristocratic conception . . . a conception which is the knowledge of the best blood that must be increased and of the worst blood for which one cannot wish many descendants.”⁴⁹ The lesson (*Lektion*) of Humanism is selection (*Selektion*). Günther’s small, but very widely read, treatise on *Humanitas* ends with the following statement: “*Mihi natura dedit leges a sanguine ductas* (Nature gave me laws driven by blood). These are words to be written on the tombstone of the Greek and Roman worlds; and from them meaning arises for us, as descendents of those Germanic peoples who belonged to the same race of the Hellenes.”⁵⁰

In other words, not all individuals are born human. One has to be part of true humanity: the Idea, the Soul, and the Type. True humanity does not concern all and sundry. One may be part of it through purification, striving for perfection, through selection; in short, the Platonic process of ascending toward the idea. But it is not the path that each individual soul, if provided with a rational part, can achieve in relation to the individual “body of earth” in which it has ended up. It is not the “still Socratic” Plato who appeals to the Nazis of *Gestalt* metaphysics. It is the Plato who appears to reduce the soul-body dualism. There are in fact passages, such as in Book V of *The Republic*, in *The Laws*, and in *The Statesman*, that seem to fit in well with the idea of soul and body as the two sides, respectively the inside and the outside, that together determine the Type, the Idea.⁵¹ Solidly connected, enclosed in a rigid and inevitable system of correspondences, man is in other words the expression of the soul of the race, intended Platonically as “Man written in capital letters.” This is the *Macroanthropos* who will start the ascending path of the *synagoge*, the process of approximation and of conforming to the idea, which is at the same time always and already the return to the One. This will happen through the selection of the material through which the people are made and through the purging of those bodies that are the expression of an evil soul, or of those bodies that only *simulate the Type* and that try to falsely insinuate themselves into the limbs of the great body of the race. And this is the point: Jews are by and large simulacra, that is to say impure bodies because deprived of a soul, or at best unable to participate in a soul of their own, in the soul of the *ghenos*. Jews are not simply a different Type, a different soul, of an inferior race: They are the anti-Type *par excellence*.

It is difficult to read without emotion what Emmanuel Levinas was writing in the same years in which the members of the new *Humanitas* were invoking the ideal of *Aufnordnung*, Nordification. For him, Nazism is pagan, because paganism does not consist so much in the negation of the spirit or in the ignorance of the one God. It consists more in the *Stimmung* (spiritual dis-

position, mood) of being enclosed, in situating the soul and the Gods in that world which is apparently sufficient to itself.⁵² Judaism is antipaganism, Levinas tells us, not because it believes in one God, but because the Jew cannot fail to see everywhere the traces of what is provisional, of what is different from himself.⁵³ Or once again, in *L'essence spirituelle de l'antisémitisme*,⁵⁴ he tries to point out the paradox of Hitlerism for having put Jewish conscience in a situation that is absurd and without precedent for it. This is not because of extermination—Levinas does not mention it, probably he does not yet imagine it—but for having forced the Jew, used to the disquiet of never being at home with himself, used to always escaping somewhere else, to “nail himself” body and soul to Judaism. Hitlerism had therefore transformed the destiny of being-a-Jew, of the spirit that feels itself to be always somewhere else, into a fatality from which one cannot escape. The Jew is trapped in his own Judaism through his own body.

This is a paradoxical situation, and not only for Levinas, if one thinks of the treatises and a thousand-year-old iconography that portray the Jew as the wandering individual by definition, he who, from the Roman poet Martial to Woody Allen, is portrayed as the changeable being *par excellence*. But he is “nailed” by National Socialist “idealism” precisely on this aspect: He is changeable because he is mimetic, and he is mimetic because he is duplicitous, untrustworthy, a liar, someone who takes advantage of everyone. He assumes the features of others to insinuate himself in the bodies and in the nations to which he does not belong. Here is the stereotype of the parasite as bacteria or as a virus—so as to better undermine Nordic humanity, to erode it from the inside. The supporters of the new and “original” *humanitas* make clear the reasons for this mimesis and for the nomadic existence of the spirit and of the body. The Jew is, often Platonically, a simulacrum. He is not only the expression of a corrupt, composite, impure, and lowly soul. He is the one who is *Gestaltlos* because he is *Seelenlos* (Soulless). He has no *Seelengestalt*; that is why he becomes the man of the universal abstract. He has no soul or form of his own; his body is not part of the Idea, and it is a mere appearance. In a speech that was not intended for public circulation, Himmler exhorted the SS to carry out their duty until the end. He exhorted them to fortify their soul, getting it used to the sight of dead bodies. Because these dead bodies, in reality, have always been dead bodies. They have finally reached their ontological truth.⁵⁵

Nazi “idealism” carries out a systematic enterprise of redefining humanity, partially through Plato’s texts, and it is facilitated in this by a literature of treatises that, from the French in the nineteenth century onwards had achieved high levels of rhetorical violence. The new concept of *humanitas* thus decrees the inability of a part of humanity to reach the level of being part

of the idea; in other words, to achieve reality. This is what a propaganda text published in 1942 by the SS says about the Jews: "The sub-human being, this creature of nature, with his hands, his feet, his kind of brain, with his eyes and his mouth, a creature which appears to be of the same species as the human species. But in fact he belongs to another, quite different species: a horrible creature, *the semblance of a man who has features similar to those of a man, but who is situated, because of his spirit, of his soul, below the level of an animal*. Within this creature there is a chaos of savage, unbridled passions: an unlimited will to destroy, carried out by the most primitive appetites, a shameless infamy."⁵⁶

V. Conclusion

But what then is this biopolitics, this true heart of totalitarianism, or at least of the Nazi totalitarian system? One might describe it as a form of politics dominated by the will to transform individual lives into one single life. If, as required by the metaphysics of form (a metaphysics not only present in a current of SS thought, but which came originally from further afield, and which perhaps is still with us), bodies are the mirror of the soul; and if true souls participate in a single great soul, then bodies must, through a process of approximation and purification, become one single body. It will not be enough, therefore, to transform the impure enemy into a dead body, or even to prove that that body has always been a *soma*, a tomb, a container for a lifeless soul, never present. To ensure that the body is finally fully participating in the soul of the race—the Nordic idea that sweeps through history with its mythical strength—it will be necessary to reach the eternal Aryan body, which expresses an eternal soul.

So, on one side, there is a dead body that finally expresses itself as such, that comes to terms with its lack of essence, with its being *Seelenlos* and *Gestaltlos*. On the other side, there is a great uncorrupted body that expresses a pure soul, whose health and justice imply victory over every agent of pathology and corruption. But the transcendental aspect of any corruption is change; that is to say, time. Even the glorious body of the soul of race, to be eternal, would have had to renounce change and time. In a word, it would have had to transform itself, according to the idea of the eternal life of an immortal Nordic soul, into a great and glorious corpse, finally, and only in this way, a universal body.

I am not alleging in the least that twentieth-century totalitarianism, and National Socialism in particular, sums up the essence of the West, nor even that of one of its conceptualizations of the relationship between body and

soul does this. But I do believe that it is all too comforting to believe that totalitarianism (and with it the racial theory that supports and strengthens it) is an aberrant pathology that, after having threatened the survival of Western civilization, loses entirely its viral character and disappears forever in the no-man's land from which it emerged. An analysis of Nazism certainly cannot be conceived merely as a list of accusations against our tradition of thought, but it can be conceived of as a fragment of a general deconstructive operation on our history. This history, which in some form continues today, includes a relationship between body and soul that derives from (and at the same time is the purpose of) a metaphysics of form. We must have the courage to admit this, to think "against ourselves" as the best philosophy of the twentieth century has done. And we must avoid any comforting view, recognizing that aspects, trajectories, segments of our tradition have been taken to extremes, "parodied", raped, and actually used by totalitarianism. They have therefore had, to use Foucaultian terms, truth effects. Undoubtedly it is only those thinkers who put themselves knowingly at the service of this strategy who are responsible for these consequences. Plato is not responsible, nor is German philosophy as a whole. But Günther certainly is.

Notes

1. A preliminary version of this essay was published as "Biopolitica delle anime" in *Filosofia politica* 3, 2003. I would like to thank, among others, Professor Adriana Cavarero, Professor Giuseppe Cambiano, and Professor Mario Vegetti (some of the leading Italian scholars on Platonic philosophy) for their suggestions about this new version. I am greatly indebted to Francesco Ingravalle for an exchange of ideas on National Socialist racism. I would also like to thank him for having allowed me to have access to some texts that are in practice unavailable in most libraries.

2. See M. Foucault, *Histoire de la sexualité, 1: La volonté de savoir* (Paris: Gallimard, 1976) [*The History of sexuality, volume I: An Introduction*, trans. R. Hurley (New York: Viking, 1978)]; Idem, "Il faut défendre la société" (Paris: Gallimard, 1997) [*Society must be defended*, trans. D. Macey, (London: Allen Lane, 2003)]; Idem, *Sécurité, territoire, population. Cours au Collège de France, 1977–1978* (Paris: Gallimard, 2004); Idem, *Naissance de la biopolitique. Cours au Collège de France, 1978–1979* (Paris: Gallimard, 2004).

3. F. Fehér and A. Heller, *Biopolitics* (Vienna: European Centre, 1994) was among the first contributions that readdressed the issue of biopolitics, taking Foucault as a starting point, and connecting it to the heritage of Hannah Arendt. See also A. Heller, S. Puntischer Riekman (Eds.), *Biopolitics. The Politics of the Body, Race and Nature* (Wien: European Centre, 1996). Among the many who have dealt with biopolitics from this perspective, see G. Agamben, *Homo sacer. Il potere sovrano e la nuda vita* (Torino: Einaudi, 1995); A. Brossat, *L'épreuve du désastre. Le XXe siècle et les camps* (Paris: Albin Michel, 1996); Idem, *Le corps de l'ennemi. Hyperviolence et démocratie* (Mayenne: La fabrique, 1998), Idem, *La démocratie immunitaire* (Paris: La Dispute, 2003); J. Butler *The Psychic Life of Power* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997); R. Esposito, *Immunitas. Protezione e negazione della vita* (Torino: Einaudi, 2002);

D. J. Haraway, *The Biopolitics of Postmodern Bodies: Determinations of Self in Immune System Discourse* (1989) in Haraway, *Simians, cyborgs, and women: The reinvention of nature* (New York: Routledge, 1991); G. Hottois, *Essais de philosophie bioéthique et biopolitique* (Paris: Vrin, 1999); P. Lecorps J.-B. Paturet, *Santé publique. Du biopouvoir à la démocratie* (Rennes: Editions ENSP, 1999); V. Shiva, I. Moser (eds.), *Biopolitics* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995). See also the references to biopolitics in M. Hardt and A. Negri, *Empire* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000) and in R. Bodei, *Destini personali. L'età della colonizzazione delle coscienze* (Milano: Feltrinelli, 2002).

4. Foucault emphasized on various occasions that the “so-called totalitarian experiences” were the “problem” that had started off his entire research program on power. Starting from Nazism and Stalinism, Foucault states, it has been demonstrated “without any shadow of doubt” that political power has a totalitarian vocation; that is, it tends to have a total and precise control over everything (M. Foucault, “La sécurité et l’Etat,” in Foucault, *Dits et écrits II, 1976–1988*, [Paris: Gallimard, 2001, 383]). The direction of his research was, in other words, to continue to reflect on the conditions of the possibility of a power that may address totality, in the sense of all and each of us. Totalitarianism has in fact demonstrated once and for all that political power, in its different forms, has managed to penetrate life from side to side. Contemporary political and philosophical thought should therefore address this heritage. See the extremely interesting interview which Foucault gave to S. Hasumi “Pouvoir et savoir” (1977), in Foucault, *Dits et écrits II*, p. 399. On this topic see S. Forti, (ed.), *La filosofia di fronte all'estremo* (Torino: Einaudi, 2004).

5. See in particular A. Brossat, *Le corps de l'ennemi*, and the extremely lucid chapter in P. Costa, *Il discorso della cittadinanza e la teoria della razza*, in Idem, *Civitas. Storia della cittadinanza in Europa. 3. La civiltà liberale* (Roma-Bari: Laterza, 2001), pp. 405–456, and A. Burgio, *L'invenzione delle razze. Studi su razzismo e revisionismo storico*, (Roma: Manifesto Libri, 1998).

6. Foucault, while distancing himself from liberal theories of totalitarianism, takes the term to refer to the paradox of total domination that is common to Nazism and Stalinism. On the use and on the history of the concept, see S. Forti, *Il totalitarismo* (Roma-Bari: Laterza, 2001 and 2003).

7. H. Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (1951), and in particular the part devoted to Anti-Semitism. The bibliography devoted to theories of race and to racism is extremely vast. I would like to refer at least to the work of P.-A. Taguieff, who has been working intensely over the past two decades on the deconstruction of the commonplaces of racism, but also those of a facile antiracism, which in its simple polar opposition to racism reproduces its topoi. See P.-A. Taguieff, *La force du préjugé. Essai sur le racisme et ses doubles* (Paris: Gallimard, 1987); P.-A. Taguieff, *Les fins de l'antiracisme* (Paris: Edition Michalon, 1995), which include comprehensive bibliographies on the topic. For a strictly philosophical conceptual discussion, see also the writings of K. A. Appiah contained in K. A. Appiah and A. Gutmann (eds.) *Color Conscious. The Political Morality of Race* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996); R. Bernasconi (ed.), *Race*, (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2001); B. Boxill, (ed.), *Race and Racism*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001); R. Bernasconi, S. Cook (eds.), *Race and Racism in Continental Philosophy*, (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2003); and A. David, *Racisme et antisémitisme. Essai de philosophie sur l'envers des concepts* (Paris: Ellipses, 2001).

8. Foucault, “Society Must be Defended,” p. 256: “The more inferior species die out, the more abnormal individuals are eliminated, the fewer degenerates there will be in the species as a whole, and the more I—as a species rather than individual—can live, the stronger I will be, the more vigorous I will be. I will be able to proliferate” (Foucault, “Society must be defended,” p. 255).

9. A. de Gobineau, *Essai de l'inégalité des races humaines* (1853–55) (*The Inequality of Human Races* [New York: H. Fertig, 1999]), remains a very particular case because it anticipates the future theories of race, but only on the basis of historical and archaeological reflections. His pessimistic conclusions, on the regression and the decline of superior civilizations, were to be rapidly “overtaken” by an attitude that will see in the struggle of races the possibility of a triumph of the fitter races. Darwin’s *Origin of Species* (1858) became an essential text for the biological and social sciences. Late nineteenth-century anthropology of races takes it as its starting point the theory of evolution. For a history of racial theories, see the classic study by G. L. Mosse, *Toward the Final Solution: a History of European Racism* (New York: H. Fertig, 1985) and I. Hannaford, *Race. The History of an Idea in the West* (Washington, DC: The Woodrow Wilson Center Press, 1996). Gobineau, to some extent, was instead “rediscovered” by the other “current” in racial theories.

10. G. Vacher de Lapouge, *Les sélections sociales. Cours libre de science politique* (1887) (Paris: Fontemoing, 1896); Idem, *L'Aryen. Son rôle social* (1899) (Bologna: Forni, 1977). In German-language countries the best-known authors are Ludwig Gumplowicz, *Grundriss der Sociologie* (Innsbruck: 1926); Idem, *Rasse und Staat. Eine Untersuchung über das Gesetz der Staatenbildung* (Wien: Manz, 1875), reprinted later as *Der Rassenkampf: Soziologische Untersuchungen* (Innsbruck: Wagner, 1909); Idem, *Die soziologische Staatsidee* (Graz: Leuschner & Lubensky, 1892); Gustav Ratzenhofer, *Die soziologische Erkenntnis*, (Leipzig: F. A. Brockhaus, 1898); Idem, *Soziologie. Positive Lehre von menschlichen Wechselbeziehungen* (Leipzig: Brockhaus, 1907); Ludwig Woltmann, *Politische Anthropologie: eine Untersuchung über der Einfluss der Descendenztheorie auf die Lehre von der politische Entwicklung der Völker* (Eisenach-Leipzig: Thüringische Verl.-Anst., 1903).

11. See, for example, Brossat, *Le corps de l'ennemi*, especially pp. 32–138.

12. On the various interpretations of racist totalitarianism as the collapse of European culture, see the final chapter in Forti, *Il totalitarismo*.

13. For example, G. Lukács, *Der Zerstörung der Vernunft* (Berlin: Aufbau-Verlag, 1954) (*The Destruction of Reason* [London: Merlin Press, 1980], chapter VII, part iv (on H. S. Chamberlain) recognizes the fact that in the strands that end up in Nazism, the theory of evolution played a minor role. See G. L. Mosse, *Masses and Man. Nationalist and Fascist Perceptions of Reality* (New York, 1980), especially the chapter on the mythical origins of National Socialism. For an approach that is close to my analysis, see especially, P. Lacoue-Labarthe and J.-L. Nancy, *Le mythe nazi* (La Tour-d'aigues: Éditions de l'Aube, 1991), but also the earlier book by P. Lacoue-Labarthe, *L'imitation des modernes* (Paris: Aubier-Flammarion, 1985), and Idem, *La fiction du politique. Heidegger, l'art et la politique* (Paris: C. Bourgeois, 1988).

14. Houston Stewart Chamberlain, *Die Grundlagen des 19. Jahrhunderts* (1899) (München: Bruckmann, 1940), vol. I, pp. 271–72. Chamberlain, who was Wagner's son-in-law, was born in Britain, but lived for much of his life in Germany.

He refers to Gobineau rather than to Darwin. For him it is impossible to separate the nation from the race. The race is the force that animates the single individualities and that is exalted in the figure of the hero, who expresses the best racial characteristics of a people. Belonging to a race is a fact that is incontestably evident: through intuition, which allows everyone to see one's roots, that puts the individual in contact with the deep forces that forge collective identity. Science is not indispensable, but intuition is. If race can be recognized through intuition, there is no need to have scientific proof and complicated forms of reasoning: Men who belong to a pure race never lose sight of this blood relationship. Race is a destiny from which one cannot escape, a destiny that is all the more perceptible, the purer and more immediate is the original link with the race to which he belongs. The Nordic peoples of “today” are called to revive the heritage of ancient Indo-Europeans. They must oppose “Asiatic” racial promiscuity, first of all the promis-

cuity that Judaism has brought. The main antagonist of Indo-European peoples, ancient and modern, is, in fact, the Jewish people. Jews are not as passive and inept as Negroes; they represent a threat to European civilization.

15. See A. Rosenberg, *Der Mythos des XX. Jahrhunderts*, Volume II (München: Hoheneichen Verlag, 1933 [1930]), which states that the soul is "race seen from the inside," p. 22. See also Rosenberg's *Gestalten der Idee* (München: Hoheneichen Verlag, 1936), and *Blut und Ehre* (München: Hoheneichen Verlag, 1934). Official NSDAP statements can be found in Ernst Krieck, *Völkisch—politische Anthropologie* (Leipzig: Armanen-Verlag, 1936). Similar premises can be found in Hitler's *Mein Kampf*. On the Aryan myth, L. Poliakov, *Le mythe aryen* (Paris: Calman-Lévy, 1971) (*The Aryan Myth*, trans. E. Howard [London: 1974]) is essential.

16. Rosenberg, *Der Mythos*, p. 6.

17. Rosenberg, *Der Mythos*, quotations from pp. 14, 219. J.-L. Nancy and P. Lacoue-Labarthe are among the rare "philosophers" who recognize the importance of this nonbiologicalistic version of National Socialist racism that is interested not so much in genetic and naturalistic control, but rather in reproducing Hellas, in a copy that finally creates the truth of the original. Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy rightly stress that this obsession for incarnating a type is connected with the absence of a German political identity throughout the lifetime of its modern thinkers.

18. Rosenberg, *Der Mythos*, p. 448.

19. For that matter *Mein Kampf* (München: Lehmanns Verlag, 1938 [1925–28]) states: "National Socialism is [seen] as the formation and realization of its own image, *weltanschaulich*" (p. 680); it is the creation of a world according to which the idea of the creator of form is precisely the Aryan. "The *weltanschaulich* struggle is not just any enterprise of domination: it is a world formation. . . . The Aryan will have to be much more in a world subjected and exploited by Aryans: it will have to be a world that has become Aryan. The *Weltanschauung* must incarnate itself absolutely; it therefore requires a total overturning of the entire public life according to its points of view, of its *Anschaungen*" (p. 506).

20. W. Jaeger, *Paideia. Die Formung des griechischen Menschen* (Berlin: W. de Gruyter, 1934) (*Paideia: The Ideas of Greek Culture* [New York: Oxford University Press, 1945]; see also V. Losemann, *Nationalsozialismus und Antike* (Hamburg: Hoffmann und Campe, 1977.)

21. Jaeger, *Paideia*, pp. 1–20.

22. K. Hildebrandt, *Platon. Der Kampf des Geistes um die Macht* (Berlin: Bondi, 1933).

23. Between 1932 and 1934 there are many writings which link Plato's philosophy to the National Socialist movement. The most widely read and widely circulated include the following: J. Bannes, *Hitler und Platon* (Berlin-Leipzig: de Gruyter, 1933) and Idem, *Hitlers Kampf und Platons Staat* (Berlin-Leipzig: de Gruyter, 1933); A. Gabler, *Platon und Der Führer* (Berlin-Leipzig: de Gruyter, 1934). In Italy this strand is followed by Julius Evola, *Sintesi di dottrina della razza* (Milano: Hoepli, 1938) and Idem, *Il mito del sangue* (Milano: Hoepli, 1942); it was subsequently followed up by F. Freda, *Platone. Lo Stato secondo giustizia* (Padua: Edizioni di Ar, 1996); *I lupi azzurri* (Padova: Edizioni di Ar, 2001). Also Evola sees the body as the phenomenological expression of the soul; not of the individual soul, but of the soul of the race (*stirpe*). For Evola, the supreme value for the race is the perfect form of its somatic features and of its "spiritual" aspect (which must coincide). Keeping in mind this Aryanized Plato, one may understand better Karl Popper's anti-Platonic polemic. His *Open Society and its Enemies* (1945) appears to take seriously the interpretation of Plato that these authors gave.

24. Hans K. F. Günther was defined by Adriano Romualdi (and even earlier, by Evola) as the most important theoretician of race in the twentieth century, as he who would have reformed in a solid doctrinal organism the early theories of Gobienau. He is, indeed, one of the most widely read authors of the Nazi era, and his works were destined to have extensive success and were often reprinted. In the 1920s, he published many treaties on race: *Rassenkunde des deutschen*

Volkes (München: Lehmanns Verlag, 1922), reprinted 16 times in more than 100,000 copies (and which was present in almost all German households in an abbreviated version, called the *Volksführer*; *Rassenkunde Europas* (München: Lehmanns Verlag, 1928); *Rassenkunde des Jüdischen Volk* (München: Lehmanns Verlag, 1929). On the eve of the National Socialist rise to power, Günther's work was already an organic component of the movement. He taught social anthropology at Berlin University. On the role of Günther in the "philosophy of National Socialism", see E. Voegelin, *Rasse und Staat* (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1933). On his role in the history of eugenics, see P. Weindling, *Health, Race and German Politics Between National Unification and Nazism (1870–1945)* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989).

25. H. K. F. Günther, *Platon als Hüter des Lebens* (München: Lehmanns Verlag, 1928); Idem, *Humanitas* (München: Lehmanns Verlag, 1937). These two books were reprinted, respectively, 17 and 20 times, with print runs of more than 120,000 copies.

26. Günther, *Platon als Hüter des Lebens*, pp. 3–29.

27. Günther, *Platon als Hüter des Lebens*, p. 30.

28. Plato, *Phaedo*, 78c–80c.

29. Günther, *Platon als Hüter des Lebens*, pp. 22–28. Günther translates both *ghenos* and *ethnos* always as *Rasse*.

30. Günther, *Platon als Hüter des Lebens*, p. 29. The passages quoted by Günther to support his thesis are especially *Republic*, 415: "You are all brothers, our story will tell them, all of you in the city. But when god made you, he used a mixture of gold in the creation of those of you who were fit to be rulers, which is why they are the most valuable. He used silver for those who were to be auxiliaries, and iron and bronze for the farmers and the rest of the skilled workers.

Most of the time you will father children of the same type as yourselves, but because you are all related, occasionally a silver child may be born from a golden parent, or a golden child from a silver parent, and likewise any type from any other type. The first and most important instruction god gives the rulers is that the thing that they should be is the best guardians of, the thing they should keep their most careful eye on, is the compound of these metals in the souls of children. If their own child is born with a mixture of bronze or iron in him, they must feel no kind of pity for him, but give him the position in society his nature deserves, driving him out to join the skilled workers or farmers. On the other hand, any children from those groups born with a mixture of gold or silver should be given recognition, and promoted either to the position of guardian or to that of auxiliary. There is a prophecy, god tells them, that the end of the city will come when iron or bronze becomes its guardian" (Plato, *The Republic*, trans. T. Griffith, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000). These passages confirm for Günther how Plato considered the mixture of "races" differing in inherited values to be the worst calamity for a people and for a *polis*. He then takes up *Republic*, p. 535, translating it in the following way: "Because bastards must not deal with it [philosophy], but men of pure ancestry should . . . the toughest, bravest and, to the extent it is possible, the most beautiful should be chosen. One should limit oneself to seeking individuals of a noble and virile character, but also those who have the natural qualities that correspond to the human type we require." The current English-language translation reads as follows: "We didn't want bastard, or illegitimate, philosophers taking it [philosophy] up. We wanted legitimate philosophers" (535b); "We must choose the most steadfast, the bravest and as far as possible the best-looking. In addition, not only must we look for noble and virile character; we also need people with a natural talent for this kind of education" (535a) Plato, *Republic*, p. 244.

Günther then comments on this passage in the following way: "only men of pure blood should philosophise! Plato must have acquired in some way the awareness of a reality which we, trained in racial research, have to accept as true: the fact that through the Sophists men of a Levantine nature have usurped the power of the Hellenic spirit, while the Nordic soul of Greekness died" (Günther, *Platon als Hüter des Lebens*, p. 36).

31. According to Günther and other “Nazi Platonists,” Socrates and Plato faced the democratic chaos that was ultimately due to unregulated breeding. This was the same lack of regulation that “nowadays” dominates the West, that attaches importance to the economy, to the forms of government, to social and educational systems, to “all sorts of points of view,” except that of truth: the hereditary qualities of peoples. This is a truth of which Plato was absolutely aware, so much so that in the *Republic* Socrates and Glaucon spoke of animals and how to breed them in the best manner, but in reality they were talking of how to distinguish one species from another among human beings.

32. The passages used to demonstrate Günther’s thesis include especially those contained in *Republic*, p. 459–460: “the best men should have sex with the best women as often as possible, whereas for the worst men and the worst women it should be the reverse. We should bring up the children of the best, but not the children of the worst, if the quality of our herd is to be as high as we can make it . . . The children of inferior parents, on the other hand, or of any deformed species born to the other group, will be removed from sight into some secret and hidden place, as is right” (Plato, *Republic*, pp. 157–58). And also *Laws*, p. 735b–c: “In dealing with a flock any kind, the shepherd or cowherd, or the keeper of horse or any such animals, will never attempt to look after it until he first applied to each group of animals the appropriate purge—which is to separate the sound from the unsound, and the well-bred from the ill-bred, and to send off the latter to other herds, while keeping the former under his own care; for he reckons that his labour could be fruitless and unending if it were spent on bodies and souls that nature and ill-nurture have combined to ruin, and that bring ruin on a stock which is sound and clean both in habit and body—whatever the class of beast—unless a thorough purge be made in the existing herd” (Plato, *Laws*, ed. R. G. Bury [London: Heinemann, 1951], vol. I, pp. 348–351).

33. In addition to proclaiming himself a Platonist, Günther also proclaimed himself a neo-Kantian. See H. F. K. Günther, *Mon Témoignage sur Adolf Hitler*, (Puisseaux: Editions Pardes, 1990; French translation of *Mein Eindruck von Adolf Hitler*, 1968). This was his last work before his death, on September 25, 1968 (to my knowledge, unpublished in the original). In this book he remarked that after 1933, Hitler betrayed the true Hellenic values of *humanitas*: “‘Classical’ human dignity of fundamental human values cherished by peoples of Indo-European languages—which is expressed in self-assurance, a sense of measure and of reflection—no longer mattered for Hitler. Indeed, I would say that he held these values in contempt. He was interested in swaying crowds; he expressed himself with a burning, almost oriental fanaticism. Even though he may have been appropriate for the present situation of urbanised masses, he had to adapt to this situation: how else could he have saved the German people from the mass fanaticism that Lenin had inflamed?” (Günther, *Mon Témoignage sur Adolf Hitler*, p. 40)

34. Günther, *Platon als Hüter des Lebens*, p. 70 (italics added).

35. Günther, *Platon als Hüter des Lebens*, p. 72.

36. Günther, *Platon als Hüter des Lebens*, pp. 40, ff.

37. Günther, *Platon als Hüter des Lebens*, p. 56.

38. For a detailed analysis of the Jewish race, with a Levantine character, see Günther, *Rassenkunde des Jüdischen Volk*.

39. L. F. Clauss, *Rasse und Seele, eine Einfuehrung in den Sinn der leiblichen Gestalt* (München: Lehmanns Verlag, 1933).

40. Günther, *Platon als Hüter des Lebens*, p. 80.

41. Ibidem.

42. Plato was precisely the one to have suggested to us that it is necessary to practice a selection between men who may be part of the Idea or archetype, and men who will never be able to be so, even if their bodily appearance may mislead us. Precisely as an “idealist and educator,” Plato’s thought has been a thought of selection: “a selection that prevents unregulated mixture,

but allows the expression of the idea of the complete man, in which body and soul are one thing.” The “pure conforming” is an expression of that virtue that makes up an ethical order in harmony with the cosmos. See Günther, *Platon als Hüter des Lebens*, p. 88.

43. Günther, *Humanitas*, pp. 10, ff. As is well known, this is a thesis that is widely shared during that period and that returns in many of Günther’s other books. This is the mythic-historical reconstruction of Indo-European: Indo-Europeans (or Indogermans or Aryans), originating from a region between the Rhine and the Vistula and extending north up to Oslo around 2000 B.C., who moved through the Danube valley and into Italy, Greece, and Anatolia. These peoples of course considered themselves as the dominating caste in relation to the indigenous populations of the invaded countries. From this emerged the Indo-European language: from Latin to Greek, from Germanic to ancient Indian, all related to one another. Then, over the centuries, in Greece and Italy, through interbreeding with Asian and African slaves (who represented a majority of the population by the beginning of the Roman Empire) the Indo-European stock of Northern race was replaced increasingly by Mediterranean and Levantine types, which represent the greater part of the current population of Greece and Italy.

44. Günther, *Humanitas*, p. 24.

45. Günther, *Humanitas*, p. 24.

46. “When the idea of *humanitas* was coupled, in Rome, with the Stoic conception of the world, this gave rise to the rigid scholar who remained celibate to preserve his seriousness and his severity, an ideal which in the Middle Ages and in the Modern age contributed to the extinction of many hereditary, vital and brave energies.” Günther, *Humanitas*, p. 22.

47. Günther, *Humanitas*, p. 30.

48. Günther, *Humanitas*, p. 30.

49. Günther, *Humanitas*, p. 18.

50. Günther, *Humanitas*, p. 37.

51. These interpretations appear to be discussed (polemically no less than ironically), both by P. Sloterdijk, *Regeln für den Menschenpark* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1999) and J. Laurent, *La mesure de l’humain selon Platon* (Paris: Vrin, 2002).

52. E. Levinas, “L’actualité de Maïmonide” (1935), now in Levinas, *Traces*, vol. V (1982), pp. 97–100, in which we read: “In this world—which suffices to itself, which is self-sufficient—the pagan is trapped.”

53. Levinas, “L’actualité de Maïmonide”, p. 99.

54. E. Levinas, *L’essence spirituelle de l’antisémitisme* (1938), now in Levinas, *Traces*, vol. V (1982), pp. 109–111.

55. Quoted in J. Billig, *L’Allemagne et le génocide. Plans et réalisations nazis* (Paris: Paris Editions du Centre, 1950), p. 28.

56. Text quoted in Billig, *L’Allemagne et le génocide*, p. 31 (italics added).

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